

## Prologue-

Life is not a fickle thing, it's as tangible as you can make it. Though, sometimes, when you try to grasp it too tight, to make it too tangible, it slips through your fingers, it escapes, like fine sand. This is wholly one of those times. Like it or not, the 'between a rock in a hard place' scenario has encapsulated me entirely. Today I die, the last few grains of 'sand' are slipping away and I have little control over what happens next. So, either I die of disease, I die as a "unreliable or uninteresting assistant", or I die in this experiment. This time, this one time, I had a chance to make something different, hopefully to my advantage. The risk was great, but the gains are greater, at best I would be free of this poison in my blood, however, the effects of this process will likely be extreme, I know what the doctor has prepared and it's not a minor change, but, my conviction to survival is stronger. Before the trigger is pulled, the lever thrown, the switch flipped, there are some details I'm sure you would like to know. Who is this 'doctor'? Who is speaking? What led to this ultimatum? Well, let's start simple I guess...

I am a kitsune, yea one those magical fox folk, don't make that face, I'm used to the prejudices enough, anyway, we can shapeshift, use foxfire, etc. As you can assume, I'm not some special snowflake, people hate kitsune for our aloof nature and abilities, all of which usually ends up with me specifically catching distrustful glances and a general sense of distrust or just flat out ambiguous resentment for being different by the 'normal' folk. I learned early on it's easier to blend in and play human than the alternative, also, it makes my job easier when you aren't inherently distrusted because... well, because. In retrospect, this probably corroborates the distrust but, at this point, that's not even remotely my concern. So, let's just assume I'm human since I don't shift out of the form unless absolutely required. I consider myself a daggerspell; a stealthy, skilled, blade wielder, with a twist of arcana. Strong magic, subtle strikes, and a careful application of unique abilities overall, rounds out my resume.

Life in the Pathfinder Guild is pretty easy. Especially for "targeted removal of problematic individuals", they commission you, give you a target, and generally ask for anonymity. Easy. There are the occasional dungeon dives or party quests but overall I prefer to go alone. It makes things easier, well, until you contract some incurable disease. Magic can only go so far apparently; divine, arcane, whatever disease I have, it's part of me in a way that magic can no longer help. It's been three years since the problems started, and if I were a commoner, I would likely be dead already.

Wealth carried me only so far, and after my money ran out, I got desperate... I started working outside of the pathfinders and my apt for being able to get where I should not, be unseen, and general cleverness have kept me alive until now. Today, I've found myself at the edge of sanity, working for this "mad" doctor, and trust me when I say that "mad" is a 'very' benign description. However, I am out of options, I've tried everything else I can fathom and this raving lunatic of a wizard is my last chance at survival as far as I can tell. I just hope that at the end of the day, I can walk away with the least being my mind intact, hopefully my mind uncompromised, and at best, nothing worse for wear.

Going further back, the last year or so has led me to dabble in some pretty dark and convoluted stuff at the doctor's behest. I've seen others like me fall into his hands; other

alchemists, mages, wizards, students, professors, you name it, but I've never seen them walk away. I don't believe the doctor will allow me too either, not if it's within his power, which seems immeasurable. It wasn't until recently that I re-revealed my kitsune heritage, and since, he's been quite... interested in me particularly, which has never boded well for those individuals. Funny how a minor detail suddenly means life or death. The doctor's effective practice is a bit forceful by nature; try the experiment until it works... then, maybe, throw in some new variables here and there when they are convenient or interesting, mostly, otherwise try-fail-try again. This wouldn't be so problematic if there weren't living creatures, sometimes people under the proverbial knife. It's shaken my faith and sanity, but my conviction to survival is greater, what are these people to me, I will survive, I am stronger, I Will escape.

Two weeks ago before the last dregs of my capability wore thin, the doctor utilized me to capture what he called "the most exciting material ever", a young phoenix. I dread what is in-store for the holy creature, but I already assume the worst. The conditions the normal "materials" are kept in is abhorrent, reinforced stone prisons surrounded by layers of anti-magical fields, left on the edge of life until the doctor finds time to "utilize them". Personally, I know I don't have much time left, the elixirs the doctor formulated to keep my symptoms in check have stopped being effective. In days I will likely be unable to walk, in a week even less, which means I have to escape now, though I know not how.

Two days ago with a bit of luck and the greatest test of my skills I have ever demonstrated, I found the doctor's notes on the upcoming experiment. To my greatest dread, yet highest resolution, He had decided to use me in his upcoming experiment. He was still stuck on his amalgamation trend, trying to fuse multiple creatures into a "pinnacle of evolution" utilizing his alchemic and arcane arts. The past trials have yielded poor results, and by poor, I mean bloody chunks of smoking or disfigured remains completely unrecognizable from the source creatures, which has likely fueled the doctor's recent admiration in the phoenix. So, knowing my fate, and a bit of insight of my own, I stole the most recent chimeric recipe and called in every favor I was owed from the cohorts I was afforded at my time working for Geroe. With the help of two of the highest ranked alchemists in the doctors team, No, I will not disclose their names, anyway, they gave me a recommendation. The eve of the event, I showed the doctor the recommendation with a shifter at the center of the amalgamation magic and he lost it. He's been whispering to himself and cackling since, I was hoping for a reward in the form of further formulated medications to keep me alive at least until something more "effective" had been tested as far as the amalgamations were concerned, however, I already know that he has something else in mind.

The day of the event, last evening I found the doctor's plan to utilize me at the center, likely his only shifter "material" on staff... and, to make matters worse, I was caught doing so. I suppose when I delivered the insight to utilize a shifter, he had likely already decided on me. I fear I have the worst idea of what was soon to be in-store for me.

Mechanical golems strip me of my gear, firstly my weapons, Koruken my black blade, then my strand of magical pearls. As the constructs rip the clothing from my humanoid form, I can feel the resonance of Koruken, my black blade rippling in agitation, its voice ringing in my ears. It took everything in my power just to think of my own mortality and moreso, my commitment, this

would be my only way out. So to survive, here I was, strapped to this slab of stone, stripped of my weapons, pride and clothes...

The first preparations were started in the standard method. Mechanized golems drawing the dweomer lines, inscribing the runes and circles in sand deposited on the smooth floor. The sand varied in color and contained a slurry of precious and semi-precious materials. It sparkled between blue-green to bloody red, and wrapped around the room in winding circles and lines, checkered script in various arcane languages twined around them. Then, second, the golems brought in containers and vials of various stabilizing or enhancement materials. Dragon blood, demon horn, angel feathers, you name it, it's likely somewhere around here, focusing some aspect or element. A large clear etched pylon of glasslike clear crystal quartz hung from the ceiling, it was the focus of the system, it channeled the aetheric energies and mana into and through the entire process. Several smaller quartz crystals were fixed in place, one to the north, three to the east, three to the west. ...The next few hours dragged on before; strapped as I was to the stone. When the golems finally finished the scripts, a disconcerting silence fell over the room, the rasp of my breath and pounding of my heart was a highlight to my fleeting mortality. Hours past, maybe days, could have been minutes, I had no sense of reference other than my own decaying state of mind and body. As such, I could only count as I drifted in and out of sleep twice.

I awoke to a building cacophony of noise, the squeaking of wheels, the growling and murmuring of beasts, and the building apprehensive dread that it was finally time. Torches lit the room all at once as the doctor escorted in the 'materials'. My heart fluttered in both panic and weakness. Nausea crippled me, though I couldn't tell if it was the panic or the symptoms of my condition that caused it.

"It is time to cure you" the doctor shouted gleefully as he magically bound the first creature to be wheeled past him, gesturing his hand up, whispering a few arcane words then, magically lifting a long black bodied snake-like serpent, coiled as it was into position over the first crystal. There was a canvas cover tied over its large spade shaped head, it's long arm-length tongue darted out constantly. It was easily thrice as long as I was tall and with a flick of the doctor's wrist, the crystal above the scaled creature glowed white hot and the snake hovered in place, locked in its prison by the spell, coiling defensively in restrained blindness.

"You see, you have solved the problem! Of course the hosting interpolation of organisms would create a feedback loop. But, a shifter would insulate that, they are fluid like water, your form can change" the doctor rambled excitedly.

"Hey doc, I don't suppose we could run this once before with another shifter before we try to cure me, huh?" I asked weakly. I knew it was futile to ask but hey, can't blame a fox for trying. He giggled moving the second creature, a large feline shape into place. It was easily twice the size of a large cat with a dark spotted pattern and several long appendages hanging from its head limply, almost like long whiskers; this creature looked sedated, that was interesting... Geroe generally preferred them "as lively as possible". It must be some creature he would have issues controlling with brute force, my mind wandered and came up empty.

"No, no-no-no, you are being rewarded. This is it! It 'must' work this time, and you will be cured, and you..." he said, as the crystal over the second creature flared into light, locking the creature into place. He approached close before continuing, and dropped his voice to a

whisper, "...you, don't have the time for delays." He whisked away back to the door again, another feline shape, this one awkward and just as large as the second floated into place, its fur as dark as night; multiple limbs lashed about inside its undersized containment, tentacle like limbs folded back, fangs bared; it was a displacer. Any pathfinder knew this creature.

"You're all mucked up inside, and for your trouble in catching it, and for solving my problem..." he moved the displacer-beast into its containment, it growled and roared spectacularly in protest the sound reverberating within the stone chamber. My ears rang in resistance as the third crystal flashed into brilliance. The fourth creature was wheeled in on a flat cart, no bars, completely incapacitated, but I didn't need to try and see. Brilliant orange and red feathers adorned the bird twice my size.

"...I shall cure you. The magic of the phoenix, the purity of it shall cleanse you!" He finished, lowering the phoenix over the last of the four circles, the crystal above it igniting in light respectively. It hovered listlessly appearing almost dead if not for the inaudible rise and fall of its chest. The doctor swirled out laughing maniacally. The next part is the part I dreaded most of all. After a few long minutes the center crystal flickered once, twice then started to slowly glow in light. Every time there was a muffled scream, some human, some not, the crystal would light further. This is where I assumed all those the doctor had determined "uninteresting" ended up, he was draining the life of others to fuel this machination. It would have made my fur stand on end, but I had to deal with goosebumps instead. An odd realization occurred to me, maybe it was better to be under the crystal than in it, and with apathy I smiled as the light grew within the crystal until it was as bright as the others, small arcs of aetheric energy began leaping between the connections of the crystals as the stored mana reached critical levels.

The door slid shut and I knew it was time. The trigger was behind me, on the other side of a thick glass wall. The displacer growled again. I shut my eyes. Silence hung for a long moment but I knew what would happen, he would read the incantations, and trigger the process. Seconds later, with a crack of light and sound everything went black.

-----Start-----

The doctor shook with fury.

<No. Everything was right, it had to be.> He smashed his left arm down in unbridled anguish and anger, telekinetic energy crushing the nearby golem like it was made of aluminum foil. The other side of the glass was a mess; blood and gore was everywhere, decorating the room and the doctor's viewing window with a fractal of death. A mass of flesh and bone in the middle twitched lifelessly, it had no discernable shape, yet was almost feral in appearance, but wings, tentacles, arms and legs all bent and connected oddly, flesh was warped in a gruesome arcane disaster. Other organic detritus was dispersed in a fashion having exploded from all four of the foci spread around the room. Sand, once ruby red was now black and smoked lightly adding an acrid acidic scent to the smell of the charred remains. The doctor stormed out defeated. Automatons immediately started the cleanup of the lab, cleaving the larger bits of the corpses into manageable pieces and storing them in the nearby refuse cart to be disposed of. Once full, the cart was wheeled away by two basic clay golems out of the facility and away.

Large quantities of rotting flesh decorated the marsh here, supplied by the other failed experiments; this one was no different. The golems emptied the cart quickly unloading both large and small chunks of flesh one after the other, and once done, turned to return to the facility. After completing their task, the automatons made it five steps from the discarded remains when a fireball exploded, vaporizing the fragile clay golems, the wooden cart, and any other discarded refuse within a forty foot radius.

A sharp inhale and a gasping cough followed by a low growling groan which was exhaled by the now living and breathing reincarnation that existed in the stead of the miscellaneous parts that remained after the failed amalgamation process. Cracking his eyes open yielded a fuzzy and indistinct view of what was the smoldering blackened mud and horizon of dead trees and reedy growth of the swamp. The back of his eyes hurt, and a tingling phantom limb pain assaulted his senses as the visual world spun with vertigo. Everything was blurry and overly bright even with the sun hidden behind the clouds, he had to clasp his eyes shut in discomfort. The air smelled of smoke, cloying rot, musty mold, and stagnant water. Sound was indistinct and muffled, as if cotton was stuffed in his ears with a lingering ringing echoing in all directions. Odd weights and sensations that didn't make sense was the first feeling that was alerting. <What happened?> He asked to himself. He reached backward to memories and produced nothing. No memory of what happened, reaching further yielded nothing before that, and further led to nothing before even that. A heavy stone of fear formed in his already unsteady gut with the realization of having no recollections about himself, yet, he could recall facts, details, general knowledge of things, the ability to define things... but nothing specific to himself. He had no name, no history, and his first feeling was fear.

Rolling over was an experience. <What is... wings?> he thought with confusion as the appendages rested awkwardly under his side as he tried to roll from his side onto his back and failed, giving up futilely. Lacking his primary senses, he relied on touch reaching up to his face yielded another mystery of sensations as things felt misplaced, but he couldn't remember why it didn't feel right or even define what 'right' was. He thought, <Catlike features, scales in places, long ears, whiskers, unnatural appendages at his shoulders beyond even the wings, a second set of arms?> None of this was normal. In the darkness of his squinted eyes, other blobs of nonsensical color impeded his vision. With frustration he ignored it and continued his inventory; working legs, cat-like claws, a tongue that was longer than normal and bifurcated, teeth that felt alien to his alien tongue. His eyes eventually came into focus, along with hearing and equilibrium. Standing was awkward at first, balance felt significantly different, he had to take several steadying steps in order to avoid falling backward. He learned that he had to lean forward slightly and utilize his tail far more effectively to offset the increased weight behind him with the wings and the tentacle-like appendages and thicker tail. Once he was on his feet, hunger followed the experience of standing, however dizziness and a feeling of uneasiness followed... Skulking away and finding shelter felt instinctually more relevant than a meal.

A few kilometers of walking thinned the swamp into higher flatlands and eventually forest. Within the trees was a copse that was well hidden, it would work temporarily. An hour of self-exploration ensued. By the time night had fallen, it was time to hunt. Darkness was no obstacle, to him it was as clear as day even in the shadows of the trees. He could see in a grayscale hue in darkness but there was still color in the depth of the grey but color that didn't

originate from light, but heat. Four thermoreceptive pits near his nose augmented his sight. He had discovered them during his self discovery and planned to make use of them.

As he prowled out of his copse, he noticed another sense he couldn't quite place, almost like a presence of awareness of one's surroundings. He could feel the leaves move in the wind, he could feel his movement through the air. A hungry curiosity of a primal sensation awoke in him, and he stalked through the trees silently.

Within minutes he was moving down a game trail following the gamey scent of some form of prey toward a river that flowed in the direction he had come, water he thought was a good thing, but that thought was fleeting and lost to the focus and instinct of the hunt. With silent footsteps and impossibly long minutes of slowly prowling down the trail he finally caught sight of his prey. A corvid under the boughs of a large fir tree, he knew, based on the shimmering heat profile. With anticipation and focus he heard the softest rustle of movement, he could smell the creature, he could feel its breath. Creeping to five meters (15') and he felt the instinctive trigger fire, the prey had noticed him and darted out of its hide. Without thought he leapt forward, everything moving instinctually; the long sinewy appendages on his back lashed out, latching onto the creature as his upper body followed, claws flayed, maw wide. His claws and teeth sank into what he now knew the corvid to be, a resting elk cow, and the hot metallic taste of blood coated his tongue. The animal bleated and struggled for nearly a minute before falling limp, still struggling to breathe, and after the next minute, the breathing ceased. With the intoxicating adrenaline of the hunt coursing through him, his conscious thought was like fighting a river of instinct, any simple thought or idea felt ephemeral and irrelevant. Fighting himself from tearing into the fresh kill, he stopped and distanced himself, blood dripping from his mouth and claws, it soaked and matted the fur of his arms and face. A tool felt necessary to properly dress and prepare the carcass, yet he had none, and the smell of the blood was overpowering, intoxicating even; the taste still lingered on his tongue. <Do I cook the meat?>, he mentally asked himself. He knew of the value of fire, but had no immediate ability to start one. The moment of consideration dragged on and impatience and apprehension set in. A feeling of disgust and animalistic association met his decision to consume the carcass in its current state. It felt unnatural to eat the meat raw and unworked, however the instincts that drove him there revelled in the experience. Tearing the skin and fur away was simple which was followed by tearing muscular flesh from the flanks and back of the animal and swallowing clawfuls of meat. After several mouthfuls an odd smell caught his attention. It was bitter and pungent, the source was thick blood that had seeped from a stab wound just below where his tentacles had hooked onto the creature's flank. It permeated the other regions of flesh where his other tentacles had attached as well. Intrigued and worried, He examined a tentacle and after unfurling its length in his claws, it shed no light on the scenario; there was no barb on the pads large enough to cause a puncture so deep. The spines were short, no longer than an inch at the longest and fine, like the spines on a urchin or quills on a porcupine. The longer, sharper more dangerous spines folded down, but with conscious thought he could pull them up just like a cat bearing it's claws which provided them with surprising rigidity. The edges of the tentacle's pad were covered in the finest of the barbs, they were rough to the touch but didn't break the skin, and could grasp light objects much like a gecko's foot. That was when he noticed the puncture was below where the pad had attached, which would correspond to the base of his

tentacle. He examined the thick fleshy region where the tentacle started to broaden into the spiked pad; a small crease in the fur-covered flesh revealed the secret. <A sting>, he thought, <that's unnatural, what manner of monster am I?> he thought, but then panic set in, the liquid must be venom, and he had just been consuming clawful after clawful of the meat. If it were venom, his life could be at risk, but within a moment, and some critical thought; <most venom is neutralized by the acid of the stomach, let's hope that is the case here>. He waited for several long minutes and when no symptoms presented themselves, continued his meal, this time, more scrupulously; avoiding regions of the bitter, envenomed meat.

Once he had satiated himself on the elk, which remained in tatters, he left it for the wolves that had happened upon him during his meal. When they challenged him for his kill, he responded in kind, rearing up and roaring his defense, flaring his wings and brandishing his tentacles threateningly. The pack had numbers but their instincts were sharp and knew not to engage with a creature such as this. They harried him from the flanks a few times but after a few threatening swipes from His tentacles the hungry dogs retreated to a safe distance and paced impatiently. They waited for their chance and tore into the remains once it was safe. From the shadows in the distance, He watched, waited, and within the first five minutes of gorging on the remains, the alpha sloughed away and fell over, paralyzed. He continued to watch, the other wolves followed suit, they shook slightly then fell still on their side, but continued breathing, their eyes wide, panicked. After nearly an hour of watching, the first two wolves shuddered into death their listless bodies dulling in color as their corpses lost the residual heat of life. However the rest of the pack had started to recover slightly. The canids had already voided the contents of their stomachs and after a few long hours were twitching weakly but alive. <So then it is also a poison...> he thought, seeing the results of His venom at work and feeling fearful at the unanticipated secondary effect it had on the dogs. It was informative yet terrifying and to rid himself of the feeling He snuck away, back toward the river. He reeked of dried blood and wanted to wash Himself of the smell and feeling of death.

Wondering what other secrets had been tucked away in his body, He shook the water from his fur violently, and stalked upstream following the bank of the river. Clumsily juggling rocks between His paws became a sort of game of practice, trying to develop further conscious control over the additional limbs. He would need space and hills to try his wings, they were big and bulky, the feathers were an iridescent black-red and smooth as his fur with a particular rigidity. His thick tail tapered into a feathered end where the feathers bunched up into a tight end but could be spread into a fan-like shape to maneuver.

So much about this situation was odd, however after satiating himself, and having time to sort out the situation. There were deductions he could make, the idea of tools and clothing being natural gave him presence of mind to know that his self-awareness was sapient. He couldn't recall the knowledge of a creature similar to himself in any capacity, so his physical body was a mystery. Magic was his only go-to answer, however was he the victim or had something gone wrong with a spell he or a companion had wrought? The only clue he could think of to make any connections or find an answer would be to return to the marsh, the place of his awakening; the idea of it still triggered a feeling of uneasiness. One mystery at a time He decided. <Once I can physically fight and fly, once I can control and utilize this body, then it would be time for the answers> he thought with conviction.

Two days of work had yielded a rough ability to fly clumsily and several facts that surprised him; He healed much faster than He thought was normal, and He had fundamental magical abilities that manifested naturally. The magical abilities were simple, but effective, likely due to some magical inheritance or influence however they were also minor; the ability to spark a small fire, heal some minor wounds, etc. Additionally, He noticed that wielding a weapon felt awkward, and writing was natural with any of his paws, not any singular left or right one, though the script was sloppy and yet it looked unrefined like the body remembered it but the hand did not.

That aside, He had grown accustomed to his additional limbs naturally, using them quickly became second nature and all it took was a bit of diligence and practice. With the challenge of discovering his abilities completed, He set out to discover himself, His name, who He was, and that meant returning to the marshes.

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The dank cloying scent of rotting flesh and foliage was overpowering, flies and vermin crawled over the masses of decaying detritus. The brackish water and soft, sticky mud coalesced and stuck to his foot-paws. Three days had passed since his awakening in the scorched mud nearby, and he progressed slowly, carefully, attentively. <This area would be rife with scavengers looking to defend their territories, and proceeding stealthily could save some troublesome encounters>, he thought. The many mangled and stunted trees would make flying about in the area difficult, if not impossible for the amateur flier, not to mention the loud wing beats defeating any semblance of attempted stealth. Snakes swam out of sight quickly, sometimes hissing their warnings before disappearing below the murky waters. A crocodile or two floated in the deeper waters, with full, bloated midsections from the provided smorgasbord. A few long minutes through the more dense region of the swamp thinned into the raised dirt road utilized by the golems. Two troughs were worn into the dirt by cart tracks, he followed the tracks to the exact place of his awakening. The remains of the clay golems, the scorched, dried mud and shattered wooden cart still remained. Dark dried blood stained the splintered wood of the cart.

He quietly examined the debris, deducing his arrival in the swamp to be death and being discarded as a would-be corpse; but what had led to those circumstances still remained a mystery. It felt risky but following the tracks would be the fastest and most applicable method to finding the answer. It should also lead to the person that had attempted to “corpsify” him in the first place. Waiting until night, he prowled over the makeshift road for several hours, until it finally broke through into a large fortress-like building. Smoke bellowed from a few chutes, rolling into the night air and blocking the moonlight effectively. It reeked of wood, laced with chemicals and magic in a pungent way. No animal calls could be heard, as if even nature avoided this place. Movement could be seen beyond the open-aired windows, shadows moving in the torch or candle-lit hallways. As he approached there was a new oddity; lines of light wrapping and warping over the structure itself, however the light did not cast a shadow, nor did it illuminate. The lines coalesced and bent in various colors, overlapping in some areas, and were more prominent in others. Doorways and window frames seemed to have the greatest concentrations and glowed like otherworldly portals.



<Magic>, he assumed; <dweomers of spells rendered in the visual spectrum>. The purposes of these spells were impossible to grasp, he would need a working knowledge of the magics used to create the spells or a point of reference, neither of which he could recall or was in possession of. The next course of action he determined would be straightforward, wait until an individual could be 'obtained', then glean as much information from them as possible.

As daybreak neared, activity about the building increased. A lone figure cloaked in black stalked away from the large reinforced front doors that slid shut quietly behind them. Watching patiently, He watched the figure follow the makeshift road away from the fortress. Stalking silently from the overgrowth, He prowled to keep up with the figure until the road curved out of sight of the fortress. The figure moved steadily yet with a swift pace, there were awkward movements about its hood and robe hinting at some unnatural or inhuman figure. This did little to stay the hunter's determination, he would have his answers.

Leaping clear of the vegetation, and with two powerful wingbeats slinging him forward, He pounced upon the cloaked figure. Tentacles and claws lashing out, sinking deep through the cloth and into the leather beneath. Taking little time to consider a fight, almost autonomically, the stings of his tentacles pierced his potential foe for a quick incapacitation. Seconds later, trying to stay out of eyesight as long as possible, he quickly dragged the trembling humanoid into the brush of the treeline and out of sight of any potential passerby.

The following moment a dagger flashed out from behind the figure's cloak, drawing a deep bloody line across His wrist severing several tendons. His other claw held the figure in place as they struggled against his grasp. Growling deeply, he redoubled his grip on the cloak, and tripped the figure with a vengeful swipe of his tail. The figure landed roughly with an effeminate gasp. Looming over the figure, He raised and brandished his tentacles menacingly, looking at the figure under the cloth for the first time.

She was slender, and her strength did not match her size. Silver scales scattered the sparse light around her eyes and neck. Her silver eyes stared at Him with a seething vengeful gaze. She tried to whip around and onto her feet acrobatically, yet only made it halfway, tumbling to the ground, His venom having sapped too much of her strength. She moaned again, trembling, failing to form words. Stepping back and lowering his guard, He squatted over her, his large stature dwarfing the humanoid. He waited a long minute until he was sure she was incapacitated before leisurely throwing her over his shoulder. She never broke her needle like, seething gaze. He folded his wings around the upper part of her body that rested on the back side of his shoulder, limiting her ability to see anything but the ground directly beneath them.

After three hours of walking, He had found the river that fed the swamp downstream. He lightly slid the female from his shoulder, placing her down with her back against a tree. She still trembled slightly, her eyes glanced to her bag resting at her thigh then locked right back into that hateful gaze. He rolled his eyes, and stooped to a squat near her.

"The venom is not deadly except in large doses, I have questions for you, and if you answer them amicably then you will hasten your freedom." He said to her gently. "We can wait until you are well enough to speak, however", he brandished the claws in his recently wounded paw, looking at them amusingly as if to show her how little damage she had done, "I will not tolerate the weaving of magic, or attempted escapes. Blink if you understand, twice if you will

comply". If she could blink daggers into existence she would have, her head loosely supported to the side made the two exaggerated blinks seem almost sarcastic. "Good" He continued, "Rest, you should be able to speak in the next few hours". He gently maneuvered her into a more comfortable position, pulling her hood back into a makeshift pillow of bunched up cloth. He made notice of horns rising from above her temples sweeping back over lightly frilled ears.

<She has a draconic heritage>, He mentally remarked, <that could be dangerous.> He sat across from her in the wooded area, resting his back against a white birch and watched her quizzically, probing his scattered knowledge and fragmented memories. With a sensation of vertigo, his vision flashed with disconnected, disorienting lights; He saw an unfamiliar hand and unfamiliar sensation, the hand glowed in golden light, and the previously still humanoid figure in the shadow stirred. The sensation felt powerful and warm, like warm water flowing upstream out of the glowing hand. A dark sword flashed into view cleaving into the rising figure, followed by the feeling of fiery rage, his vision glowed hot before flashing into more disconnected images, feelings. A fiery pain burst into life behind his eyes. Opening His eyes, and rubbing his temples, He exhaled with a long sigh, the pain receded reluctantly as he ground his teeth in frustration. <Patience>, he reminded himself, <she must have something, anything I could use.>

He repeated his mental exercises again and again, hoping to glean something, while he waited. Shadows, sensations, feelings, all of the information he could glean just provoked more questions. By nightfall, the dragonoid's trembling had stopped and her breathing was steady and slow. He moved next to her quietly and lightly struck the back of her hand with a single claw while she 'supposedly' slept. Her arm jerked involuntarily. He squatted next to her placing his chin in his hands, resting his lower set of paws in his lap. His tail twitched, and he smiled, entertained.

"Are you still willing to comply?" He asked. She stirred hesitantly, rotating her head to look at him.

"It would be difficult to deceive you, you are no mere beast. A-ask your questions." She replied with a slur.

"I seek to know who and what I am. I shall tell you what I know. Perchance you could fill in any gaps, or provide insight. Interrupt at any time... I have no personal recollections aside from fragments, feelings, sensations before I awoke in the swamp north-east of here. When I regained consciousness, I was in a shallow crater, surrounded by scalded mud, the remains of a pair of clay servitors, and fragments of other corpses in various stages of decomposition." He paused for a moment before continuing, "from there I sought out shelter, food and water. In the next two days I had developed enough control over the limbs of this body to eat, fly, and hunt. I followed that up with a basic investigation of where I woke up in the swamp, which lead me to the building that you exited from. As I made a point to demonstrate earlier, I heal quickly, and have this monstrous form. I remember facts and knowledge, languages, and geography, but I do not know how or where I came to learn this information. What can you tell me?" He finished.

"Does the name Doctor Geroe mean anything to you?" She asked.

"It does not." He replied.

She sighed, and steadied herself mentally, <It couldn't be Kitsu's amalgamation, could it? That would mean Geroe succeeded.> "How about Korun'e Kitsugaken?" She continued.

"It does not." He answered.

"That building belongs to a crazed and genius alchemist and sorcerer named Doctor Geroe. He has fortified himself on this island for years conducting illicit and immoral research at the expense of many humanoid and magical subjects. It would be a safe assumption you are a product of that research. The doctor has been very distant and short-tempered in the last three days. I would assume his assumption regarding the failure of the experiment that likely brought about your creation is the cause. Though it concerns me, if I'm right, that means that while the doctor may not be aware, the amalgamation procedure succeeded." She explained.

"Amalgamation procedure?" He prompted.

"A process to create a chimeric creature with certain specifications. He has been attempting complex attempts at this for the last several years. As far as I had known, there had never been a successful attempt..." She answered.

"...shapeshifter." He interrupted.

"What?" she asked.

"Shapeshifter. That word jumps out at me" He answered. "I can't explain it to you, but while you were describing the process, it was an involuntary thought."

She gasped. "Oh, Oh no..." She tried to sit up. "You're sure you have no recollection of the name Korun'e or Kitsugaken?" She asked with suppressed excitement, reaching out to touch him. "I only ask because that kitsune I would guess was utilized in the process of your amalgamation. He was a very... apt shapeshifter and accomplished magus. I knew him well." She finished touching his leg lightly.

"The name does not carry any meaning to me." He responded, "though, you mentioned one of what I assume to be multiple sources of my chimeric nature. Do you know of the others?"

"No, I only assume Korun'e due to his recent behavior over the past weeks, and his sudden disappearance in conjunction with your sudden appearance. It would be unlikely that a chimeric creature like you could have originated from elsewhere only to end up in the northern marshes. While I have little interaction with Doctor Geroe's specimens, I could guess that a displacer beast and serpent were likely used, whatever other component has... The phoenix..." She realized aloud, "The doctor had a phoenix, that would explain almost everything. The process did fail, and the phoenix's reincarnation magic brought about your creation. That also explains Geroe's aggravation, losing or 'wasting' such a precious creature in a failure would definitely test his patience."

"The idea that I am, part reptile, part bird, part cat-monster, part kitsune unsettles me. I didn't choose this..."

"Korun'e did." She replied. "He had an incurable disease and as a final option chose to work with Geroe to evade death for as long as possible. In you, it seems he found immortality, though it may not be as he intended"

"...indeed." He replied solemnly. "I am sorry for your loss. You have answered everything I had hoped to learn. You have my gratitude."

"What will you do now?" She asked, weakly sitting forward, worried.

"Dwell on this. I have learned much and must quell my inner turmoil before I act." He answered.

“Work with me...” She offered. “You have more to learn about your history, and I want to see if there truly is no shred of Korun’e that remains in that monstrous skull of yours.”

He growled lowly at the remark. “Do not be presumptuous. Though, there is truth in what you say. I could idle here for years and not find any insight, inversely there could be a stroke of inspiration, though unlikely.” He sighed, “what do you have in mind?”

“Subterfuge. Work with me to undermine Doctor Geroe, simultaneously you can discover his secrets regarding your creation...” She offered.

“Would not me being present create an opportunity for this doctor to learn about his misunderstanding and re-engage with this dangerous line of research?”

“Not if you were to shapeshift.” She said wittily, raising a scaled brow.

“You imply that because you believe this kitsune, this Korun’e Kitsugaken, is a part of me, I have inherited their ability to shapeshift.” He asked.

“I do” She said challengingly.

“And how do you suppose I would actualize this belief?” He rebutted.

“The same way I intend to see if you can ‘actualize’ the abilities of the phoenix, and displacer, trial and error.” She responded flatly.

“I feared as much” He responded. “What do I call you?” he asked.

“Nirah” She responded, “and you?”

“I have no name that I can recall” he replied.

“How about Korun’e? Or Kitsu?”

“I am not your lost friend.”

“Then... how about thirteen?”

“Thirteen?”

“It’s how many limbs you have, four arms, four tentacles, two wings, two legs, and a tail. Thirteen.”

“Crude but effective I suppose.”

The next few days pass quickly for the pair. Nirah had to take two days to fully recover from Thirteen’s venom and Thirteen had to discover the dormant abilities locked away within his body. Nirah had him start with fire, it was an elemental force and would hopefully spark the dormant phoenix magic locked away. It went terrible, aside from his ability to be naturally immune to flames, he could not manifest any magical ability relevant to fire or those generally available to a phoenix aside from sparking small fires. Next was displacement, and Thirteen adapted quickly to the skill. He could fold light effectively making him appear five feet away from his true location, though the image could not interact with physical objects.

When Nirah was finally on her feet again, the only tricks Thirteen could not perform was manifesting his Phoenix abilities and shapeshifting. Nirah had attempted on several occasions to try and test Thirteen’s recollection of Korun’e’s arcana or martial abilities, but aside from some vague habits and knowledges he could not recall the magics or abilities. The specific knowledges Thirteen did demonstrate though only further vindicated Nirah’s belief of Korun’e’s persistence in Thirteen’s persona.

On the morning of the third day, in the crude camp Thirteen and Nirah, mostly Nirah, had established, Nirah had started packing up.

“Thirteen,” she began, “I’m finally well enough to return to my mission. You must come with me.”

Thirteen stood up from his usual resting place; against the smooth bark of a large birch tree. His large stature dwarfed the dragoness, and in two strides was in front of the dragonoid, he squatted and replied; “I have had time to ruminate on this situation. You are correct. I must apologize, my actions have been motivated more by my primal and instinctual behaviors than I had realized. You have helped me more than I could have hoped. I will follow you. I must also apologize for my less than gentle greeting.” he finished, resting a heavy paw on her shoulder.

“I won’t let you forget that you owe me for not only tackling me and clawing me up, but poisoning me as well, you’re lucky I’ve been so helpful” She remarked snidely.

Thirteen rolls his eyes exaggeratingly and with a growl, responded, “So what are we to do?” he asked, changing the subject.

“First we must travel to the city Novaro, there, I will meet with the mayor and perform a small task for Geroe. Once that’s done, I have some deliverables for the constable and merchant’s guild. And finally, some wetwork, there’s a group of people from the mainland prying around the town, I need to make them disappear.”

“How far is the establishment?” Thirteen asked.

Nirah shuffled with her pack for a few moments, revealing a wide furled parchment worn with age. She unrolled it and set it on the dirt between ferns, weighting the document with small rocks. “We are here” she said pointing at a wooded region. “We need to get here” she continued, pointing at a small symbol resembling a town. “I would guess about two days on foot, three if we take our time. If you hadn’t wrecked me with your venom, this would be an easy trip. Geroe gave me a week to finish this task, which now that I think about it is going to be a problem...” she trailed off, suddenly grim. Thirteen eyed her figure, she still trembled, but was petite and overall couldn’t weigh more than 65 kilos (~150lbs). She caught his glance and flushed, asking, “What?”

“We fly.” Thirteen said simply putting his chin in his upper claws, resting his lower claws in his lap, and slowly unfurling his wings. The black feathered wings cast a wide shadow; even halfway unfurled they further expressed Thirteen’s size compared to the human-sized dragoness.

“Look-at-me-mister-monstrous-flying-cat-thing-saying-we-fly-like-it’s-so-obvious” Nirah mocked. “You are not exactly a bird Thirteen, people will see you, and that would not be smart!” she rebuked.

“We leave at night.” he retorted flatly.

“That’s... ugh.” Nirah rolled her eyes and sighed, “...that will work, you’re right.”

Thirteen grinned, his tail twitched in amusement at her frustration.

She eyed his tail and sparkling eyes, “You are insufferable, you know that?” she scoffed. “That gives us all day to prepare. You kept watch last night, get your rest while I pack up” she concluded rolling up the map and walking back through the camp. Thirteen nodded and sauntered off to find a sunny grassy bed for the day.

As afternoon crept into evening, Nirah had packed her things and rested easily while she waited for Thirteen to return. She had started a small campfire in the corner and it burned lazily. She watched the coals burn steadily, flickering with a red-orange iridescence. She lazily closed

her eyes, nodding off for a moment. She started awake again, blinking a few times before slowly nodding off again.

Taking this opportunity to instigate some fun, Thirteen prowled into camp and took up his signature sitting position, squatting, chin in claws, lower claws on lap, grin on his face, inches from Nirah's. Thirteen counted her breaths, and at twenty she started awake again, eye to eye with the black chimera inches from her. Her mind froze in panic but her body tried to move, she got halfway to her dagger still slowed as she was recovering from the effects of Thirteen's venom, before the realization of the scenario broke through the panic. Thirteen laughed heartily, sticking his forked tongue out at Nirah. She glared knives at him, her dagger still gripped white-knuckled in her fist. She threw it to the ground in a tantrum.

"You are the worst!" she shouted.

"You would be dead" Thirteen replied, standing. She grabbed her knife and returned it to its sheath under her cloak.

"You're lucky I didn't stab you"

"Your tiny knife can do no lasting harm to me" he finished, looking at the sunset. She glared at him, grabbing her pack.

"So, how are we doing this?"

"I am not sure. I have never flown with another and my breadth of experience in the subject in general is... poor, it will be a learning experience."

"Considering I am the one at risk here, can we run this once or twice before risking my life?" Nirah asked.

That statement sparked something familiar in Thirteen, a fleeting memory. He tried grasping it, and bring it into focus. As he tried to hold onto it, it slid through his grasp like smoke. "What did you just say?" He asked, hoping to rekindle the memory.

"If you could give me a ride or two closer to the ground before we take the trip." She answered.

"No, what did you JUST say, word for word." He answered getting anxious.

"If we could run this once or twice before risking my life?" She asked, "Why?"

The second iteration didn't re-ignite the memory and to Thirteen's dismay, the fleeting memory had faded. "Nothing, just imagining things..." he trailed off. Shaking his head and looking back at Nirah he asked, "Would you rather me hold you, or you hold me?"

She paused a moment, "You should hold me, you have twice the appendages, and greater strength. If you have to land quickly or maneuver, it will give you greater control." Thirteen nods and steps up behind her, grabbing her shoulders and waist tightly.

"Claws may be necessary for the rough bits, be sure to engage your core abdominal muscles tightly. Ready?" He asked, unfurling his full seven meter wingspan (~25').

"Ready" Nirah trembled, tightening up her abs and crossing her arms over her chest.

Thirteen lifted her up and held her close to his scaled chest, crossing his arms across her breast and waist, bent his knees and with three powerful wing beats, was over the treetops.

Nirah clenched tightly, shutting her eyes. The first powerful downbeat pushed her stomach to her feet and popped her ears. The second didn't feel nearly as terrible, and the third was bearable. By the fourth and fifth wingbeats, Thirteen had gained enough altitude to more gently rise and glide. Nirah opened her eyes and her world spun, almost panicked, she looked

down at small trees about the size of her thumb. She squirmed uncomfortably in Thirteen's grasp, gasping for air, her feet tingling in anxiety.

Feeling Nirah's panic, Thirteen locked his wings and dropped down toward the ground in a gentle glide. He reduced speed easily, and with a powerful downstroke landed, releasing the dragoness. She fell to the ground heavily and collapsed into a heap, her legs lacking the strength to hold her upright. Thirteen chuckled folding his wings with a ruffle, "You fear heights."

Nirah didn't respond, taking deep breaths to steady herself.

"There is irony in the descendant of a dragon being so fearful of their ancestors domain. Will you be able to suffer through the flight? It will take half of the night."

"We must if we are to make it..." she glared up at Thirteen. "That was, not a pleasant experience. If you weren't holding me so tight, I would likely have fallen." She speculated.

"I would not have let you fall" Thirteen replied. "If you trust me to carry you, then I promise that you shall only touch the ground when I will it, not earlier, nor later."

"Reassurances aside at least we know it's possible" Nirah sighed.

An hour later, as soon as the horizon had consumed the sun and its final dregs of light, Thirteen and Nirah were nearly ready.

"Do you have any loose cotton or wax" Thirteen asked Nirah.

"Some string and wax, yea" she answered, taking it from her knapsack and handing it to Thirteen.

"Good, this will help you." he said, shaping the wax around the string into a pair of soft pellets at the end of 60cm (~2') of string. "Put this in your ears, it will mute the wind and the pressure of the wingbeats" he gestured with claws, handing her the clump of wax and string back, along with the contraption.

"Thanks?" she said quizzically, returning the materials to her bag and carefully putting the wax into her ears, resting the string across the back of her neck.

"Ready?" Thirteen asked, a few decibels louder to accommodate Nirah's reduced hearing. She nodded and took position, eyes closed and arms crossed. This time she faced his chest instead of away. She felt Thirteen's strong grip as he lifted her into his chest, his fur was soft and scales were smooth as polished glass, for a moment she felt his warmth and heartbeat and then the dreaded lurch of g-forces as he dragged her into the air. This time, she kept her eyes closed. The night air was brisk against her skin and scales especially with the wind, the cold didn't bother her, it never had, however, the powerful grasp and warmth of Thirteen all around her introduced her to a new sensation. She couldn't stop herself from blushing and buried her face into the gap between her cloak and Thirteen.

She furrowed her brow, <How did I get myself into such a crazy position. I'm being carried by one of Geroe's monstrosities. Sure, he may not have had a chance to warp his mind, and sure I think Korun'e was part of the amalgamation, but it's still a monster. Right? He seems confused and is still trying to figure out who he really is, yet I trust him enough to carry me. This is crazy. His personality is a bit rough, and he struggles with the primal components of his creation, but his touch is warm and he's brutally honest and genuine. Am I falling for him?! No. This is just a fancy, the first time in a long time I have had someone I could reach out to... that I would trust...> she thought to herself, all the while rising and falling with the gentle beat of

Thirteen's wings. She struggled with her own thoughts before it faded into the comfort of Thirteen's warm embrace and the cool breeze of flight, lulling her into a restful sleep.

Thirteen focused on stabilizing his flight in the first few moments. After a few seconds to adjust his attitude and altitude he noticed the tumultuous feelings of Nirah. Confusion, loss, yet excitement, and a tentative trust seemed to echo from the bundle of cloak and leather in Thirteen's arms. He focused on it for a moment before the emotions seemed to fade from focus and he had to bring his attention back to the flight. Following the moonlit road was simple enough for Thirteen, yet distracting enough to prevent him from trying to pry further into what he felt earlier from Nirah. She had relaxed into his arms after the first hour making it easier for him to focus on navigation and surveying for threats and her resonating feelings quieter. By mid-flight, a thick layer of clouds had obscured the moon shadowing Thirteen's presence further with no starlight for him to obscure from the ground. After four hours of following the road, Thirteen's flight muscles started to burn in protest. He was not accustomed to long flights like this and he worried if he would have the stamina to make it in one trip. He counted his wing beats, maintaining a strong rhythm of ascent before a slow gliding descent to recover some strength. An hour later in near desperation Thirteen finally caught sight of sparks of light, along with the scent of wood smoke. With a sigh of relief between panting breaths he started to descend, gliding inline with the road about five kilometers out of the town. He squeezed Nirah tightly twice to wake her. She startled awake and looked over her shoulder, getting her bearings. Seeing the town and realizing she had slept nearly the whole way surprised her, realizing the blind trust she had just expressed reignited the conflicting thoughts she was having prior to her nap. She blushed and bit her lip as Thirteen aligned with the road and glided roughly down, struggling with enough of a downbeat to level out. His wings locked up in exhaustion and he came in too fast, tripped and tumbled, folding himself around Nirah and coming to a rough stop as a ball of tentacles, feathers and fur. He slowly uncurled with a groan, releasing Nirah.

"Sorry", he panted. Nirah crawled off of Thirteen's prone form and got to her feet, uninjured. Thirteen still flat on his back, slowly sat up and rolled his stiff neck, his lower arms propping him up. "What now" he asked between heavy breaths, his upper arms rubbing his neck and flight muscles. His wings hung limply at his sides like a wide carpet of feathers.

"I head into town, you conceal yourself in the forest until I come to find you" she answered, pulling the wax from her ears and discarding it in the grass where she noticed and picked up a long feather dislodged from Thirteen's landing. She spun it in her hand, it was as long as her forearm and rigid as a board despite its light weight. She tucked it into her pouch quickly, while Thirteen got his legs under him and stood, trying to get his wings tucked in through his exhaustion. As soon as she finished speaking, Thirteen glared at her.

"That was not the arrangement. You asked me to follow you, now you leave me in the forest like some animal?" he growled.

"No, that's not what I... Look, you are the walking definition of conspicuous. The city is crawling with Geroe's servitors and spies, which will undoubtedly report any sighting of you. Also, you are an animal... well more animal than not!" she responded.



"I will not ferry you around like some form of exotic transportation then be parked in some out-of-sight location while you cavort about the destinations." Thirteen growled in response.

"That's not the point!" Nirah shouted.

"That is most certainly what is happening!" Thirteen argued. Nirah sighed heavily.

"Can you shapeshift? You tried it back at the camp right?" She asked sternly.

"My attempts were not successful." Thirteen answered in a low tone.

"Do you want to be seen, reported, and eventually overwhelmed and brought to Dr. Geroe?" she continued.

"No." Thirteen answered.

"Then 'you' have a predicament. I will be at the Lofty Lamb Inn. If I don't see you by noon, I'll be back here to check on you. Until then, I wish you luck on your continued attempts at discovering your innate shifting abilities." She said with finality, turning and marching emotionally down the road.

Thirteen growled and stomped into the woods in-kind.

Two hours of noisily rummaging through underbrush, saplings and ivy, Thirteen gave up trying to hunt. He couldn't hold his wings high enough to stop them from dragging across the forest floor, his wing-arms still shaking in exhaustion. A low groan of hunger emanated from his midsection, further aggravating his already foul mood. He picked up a large half-rotted trunk of wood and hurled it into the waxing light. Awkwardly motivated by Nirah's taunts and having settled on his lack of stamina preventing any potential of hunting for the rest of the light-less morning, Thirteen sat in a low burrow filled with dry leaves. They crackled under his weight as he crossed his legs and relaxed his wings, letting them fall to his sides. He took a few deep breaths and thought: <How does one shapeshift? What are the rules, where are the directions? Transmutation. The magic is transmutative, so it would be based on sculpting or manipulating the ectoplasm of the aether. Take one substance... turn it into ectoplasm, then convert that into the desired substance. The problem is the law of conservation of matter. If the goal is to convert my matter into new matter... no, this is temporary, place my matter into the aether, and use ectoplasm from the aether to create the substitute, simultaneously. That follows the laws, I exchange myself for the ectoplasm and back freely. So, the theory is sound, however, I'm not casting a spell, this ability should be innate, reflexive, muscular. Perhaps somewhere in between focus and reflex.>

A pair of hours float by with some degree of success for Thirteen. His intelligence and presence of mind allow him to quickly and easily access the aether to start the process, however the form he attempts to take is unstable and forces him to quickly release the ability. It wasn't until about 11AM that he finally succeeded, with several minor quirks. He had longer than average ears, appearing to be almost a half elf with a angular yet feral cat-like visage, he stood tall for a human, and aside from the top of his head, had no hair. The hair he did have was jet black and stood up rowdily almost like an impromptu mane down the back of his head to his shoulders. His tongue was long and had a very minor bifurcation, along with longer than average canines.

With a triumphant shout Thirteen jumped up and started running for the road, upon which he made two very fast recollections as his head fell over his feet. One, humans do not have a tail for balance and heavy wings that you have to counterbalance against. Two, humans don't have internal genitalia. With those new experiences in mind, a groan of discomfort, and a minute to recover, he was back up and on his way, more carefully balancing his stride this time.

Thirteen waited in the underbrush near where he landed that morning, waiting for Nirah. It was close to her promised rendezvous time and it wouldn't be prudent to try and catch her on the road in case she took another path. A wagon drawn by a pair of draft horses squeaked by... Thirteen bit his lip at the sight of the animals. With a low grumble Thirteen's naked midsection again protested its emptiness, it having been four days since his last serious meal. His recent flight had taken more out of him than he anticipated, he was getting irritable and anxious for Nirah. The wagon rolled out of sight eventually, over the hour other sporadic general traffic pattered by also unaware.

The sun eventually crested the sky and no less than an hour later, Nirah came cantering down the road on horseback.

<Finally>, Thirteen thought. She approached the treeline and tied her horse to the trees next to the grass away from the roughly cobbled road. It lazily tore from the long unkempt berm between the trees and road. She passed the treeline and gazed around her steely eyes piercing the low light of the forest canopy.

"Over here" Thirteen whispered. Nirah whipped in his direction a bit startled and plodded along through the ferns and leaves. As she approached, Thirteen stepped out still in his humanoid form. Nirah immediately did a 180 degree turn and covered her face.

"I completely forgot about clothes!" she exclaimed, "I am so sorry!"

"What? Why?" Thirteen asked bewildered, having revealed himself from his hiding spot and was standing in clear view. She turned and while attempting to avert her eyes tossed him her cloak, her silvery cheeks flushed.

"Put this around your waist, cover your... sensitive bits." she stammered. Thirteen complied, tying the cloth around his waist in a form of half-robe.

"The societal requirement to adorn clothing, all to fit in?" Thirteen asked.

"Something like that, naked men are not especially common in cities, not normal ones anyway." She answered turning back to look at him more closely.

"You did not react so elusively to my normal lack of adornment" Thirteen observed aloud.

"You normally aren't so... revealing" she answered gesturing at his waist.

"...Indeed not" he answered, "So it is more out of concealment than adornment." he concluded before switching gears. "I am famished and I have met your requirement for access to this settlement."

"You have, though you look a little rough around the edges, I expected a much more tempered and human looking... human" she responded, "but that's not the point, I'll have to get you some clothes of your own when we get back to town".

"What of sustenance, these trees are barren of prey, likely hunted thoroughly by the residents of the city." Thirteen asked eyeing the horse impatiently. Nirah followed his glare.

“You cannot eat my horse! I would be out twenty five gold for the deposit, I’m just borrowing it.” She remanded. “Look we can get you food at town, but clothes first, I don’t want to be ushering about some half naked feral looking male with the folks thinking your some kind of escort.”

“Escort? I do not understand the context” Thirteen queried innocently. Nirah buried her face in her hand.

“It’s a term referring to a male who exchanges sex for coin.” she answered.

“And that is undesirable?” Thirteen probed. Nirah scoffed in frustration.

“Comon let’s just go.” She said with a tone of finality, while turning and untying her horse. “I can’t believe I asked for this...” she said under her breath. Thirteen felt her irritation, shrugged and followed, keeping his mouth shut.

The road to Novaro was easy work for the pair as Nirah walked next to the horse with Thirteen atop the animal.

“I have a hard time grasping the fact that I am riding on a potential meal” he said flatly.

Nirah rolled her eyes and scowled, “You remember your story right? The guards are sure to ask as I just left town only a pair of hours or so ago.” she asked looking for affirmation.

“I was accosted on the road, my horse and things were stolen, you saved me.” Thirteen answered melodramatically. “The attackers were hooded, and bore no uniform or identifiable clothing except for one who wore an ocean blue tunic and carried a large tome” he finished. Nirah nodded, accepting his recount of the agreed up story.

The city approached steadily and as expected, a pair of guards were posted outside the gate with a handful among the parapets armed with bows. They gestured a summons to Nirah, who followed the request plainly.

“If I recall, you left from this gate less than two hours ago...” the guard said, unfurling his parchment. He found the entry he was looking for, “Nirah Nightenblade. Who is this... and what business do you have returning?”

“I found this individual a few kilometers out of town, beaten, naked, and unconscious. He can tell you what happened.” Nirah answered looking up to Thirteen.

“I was assailed by a crew of five ruffians my lord! Four of the hooligans came at me with saps, beating me senseless. They were the foulest of sorts. They took everything, everything! Down to even my undergarments. I was left for dead or worse at the hands of some wildlife perhaps! This lass here saved my life.” Thirteen embellished with flair.

The guards and Nirah all raised an eyebrow, obviously misjudging the feral look of Thirteen. “That is most troublesome, could you identify these individuals?” the guard asked.

“They were most prepared my lord, they wore deep hoods and wore the simplest of clothing, with the exception of one, the one in the back wore a fine ocean blue tunic as pure as the sky, with a large gilded leather tome chained to his belt.”

“I understand” the guard said, “What do you hope to accomplish in Novaro in response to this... assault?”

“To alert the constable of course, and...” Thirteen started before Nirah cut him off.

“...he requires rest, I plan to take him back to the Lofty Lamb where I have a room. He’s been through quite an ordeal and I would like to get him dressed and the report filed

immediately” Nirah insisted.

“Of course, of course...” the guard responded, “I’ll just need his name and how long he will be in town, mister...?”

Thirteen’s stomach dropped, he didn’t think of a name for himself and ‘Thirteen’ is no human name! After a slight pause, “Kitsu, Kitsu Korugaken” Thirteen said with tired sigh, as if telling the story had taken every ounce of strength he had. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Nirah bite her lower lip and seemingly felt her guilt and sorrow.

“You are free to go with the condition of reporting this to the constable before sundown.” the guard said, stepping aside and gesturing the gate up. With a loud ratcheting, the metal bars of the gate slowly slid upward, allowing Nirah and Thirteen passage.

“That was preposterous” Thirteen said aloud once they were out of earshot of the gatekeepers.

Nirah giggled as he finished. “The way you speak hardly does your animalistic appearance justice. You sound like a court mage or lore weaver, not like the barbarian or rogue one would assume you for. It shouldn’t be a problem, it may work to our advantage if you can keep the townsfolk on their heels.” Thirteen grinned back, revealing those almost vampiric canines.

“You’re good at bluffing. It totally reversed that guards assumption of you, from miscreant to highborn.” Nirah continued.

“Let us find these coverings. I grow impatient.” Thirteen responded, with a low grumble from his stomach punctuating the point. Nirah led him to the city center, down a block and outside a wooden building, it had two floors, the bottom had large open shutters revealing bolts of cloth of many colors, the top had open windows and drapery idling in the breeze. A wooden sign creaked next to the short path to the door, it had no words and was simply carved with a bolt of cloth, a needle and a thimble.

Nirah tied up the horse and helped Thirteen dismount. He nimbly let himself down, landing on his bare feet. He had to consciously think about keeping his heels on the ground, it didn’t feel natural to walk so flatly, and his calves protested when he didn’t. Nirah led him into the shop where a young girl dressed in a large lacy gown came up to Nirah.

“Welcome! Welcome! Welcome to Novaro’s only tailor shop, the Kneeling Needle.” She waved her hands encouragingly. While scrutinizing her customers, she turned to Nirah, obviously the customer here. “My name is Macy, what can I do for you today?” she asked.

“I’m simply the coin bearer, he is your customer.” she remarked flatly, as if she were a bodyguard. That put a scowl all over Macy’s face as she turned to Thirteen.

“Good day ma’dam” Thirteen said with a bow, “I am Kitsu Korugaken, and by the worst of luck I have found myself in a crisis!” he embellished, again using elegant inflections and a verbose vocabulary. “Simply look at what an abominable wardrobe I have been reduced to!” he finished with a dexterous spin. “My elegant coverings did not survive the attack on my life and I was only fortunate enough to retain the latter only with Nirah’s tremendous aptitudes.”

“I must say Mister Kitsu, I beg the humblest of apologies, I was not anticipatin’ you to be so highborn with how you’re dressed an’ all.” Macy responded.

"I am afraid I am well adapted to the prejudice my visage provokes. I only hope that others like yourself are wise enough to overcome my .feral appearances" Thirteen said, preying on her guilt. Nirah had to struggle not to laugh out loud, the corners of her mouth twitching in amusement. "Now that we have introduced ourselves, It is down to business and barter Miss Macy. I shall browse for a few moments and once I have settled on my selections, Nirah will be prompt in fetching you."

"Yes, yes, please look around Mister Kitsu, let me know when you're ready." Macy said.

"Is the tailor in today Misses Macy" Nirah asked, "We would require these items expedited if possible."

"He is, though we do have a waiting list. I could slip an item or two in for a few extra coin, if it's within reason miss" she answered.

"Very well." Nirah finished turning back to Thirteen who was already puttering around the store, looking at various articles of clothing and bolts of cloth.

After a few moments of feigned browsing Thirteen approached Nirah and whispered to her, "If I have to... change, these adornments will be quite... restrictive, even if the magic resizes them to fit. They were not designed for a large stature or additional limbs, and especially not wings or tails".

"Normally, transmutative abilities meld clothing into the new shape. Your scenario seems reversed. Better safe than sorry, something easy to put on and easy to take off or loose fitting. An open half-shirt and kilt perhaps, with sandals, or a simple enchantment." Nirah replied.

"You are more experienced with this" Thirteen admitted.

Nirah called Macy over and Thirteen watched as she explained the specifications to the seamstress. A black cotton kilt trimmed with dyed leather and silver, and a black leather tabard with a black cotton halfrobe with silver clasps, and a pair of sandals.

"No closed toe shoes or boots? We have the finest leathers!" Macy protested.

"Your feet are your roots to the world Misses Macy." Thirteen exclaimed, "without them, how would you connect to the world Apsu has created. The sand, the dirt, the grass, the mud? Sandals will suffice."

Nirah finished paying Macy after some brief haggling. Macy grabbed Thirteen by the arm and escorted him to the back for his measurements.

"You're going to have to lose that... waist-wrap Mister Kitsu." Macy remarked, grabbing a measuring string, struggling to find a word for Thirteen's impromptu clothing.

"Of course Miss Macy" Thirteen responded, untying the cloth and holding it in his left hand. She turned and with a professional demeanor started to measure Thirteens waist, height and torso, keeping her eyes above his waist.

"You can borrow these until your order is finished this evening." She said, handing Thirteen a pair of laceless shoes, loose cotton slacks and a linen shirt. Thirteen nodded and with a gentle hand, Thirteen returned her cloak with a smile, "Your adornment with my appreciation." Nirah took it and clasped it around her neck like before. Thirteen continued, "may we proceed to lodging wherein there is a hearty meal?"

“Yes, yes, let’s go. Sometimes you really are endearing, other times not so much.”  
Nirah said scoldingly.

The Lofty Lamb was one of the finest establishments in Novaro. It boasted five stories, three of which contained various rooms for rent at various price points. It also offered bathing rooms, feather beds, and quilted blankets. They even kept a novice sorcerer on retainer to ensure the absence of any and all pests. Thirteen was already entranced by the smell of marinating meat, baking bread, and simmering soup as they approached.

“You’re going to have a bath after you eat. Speaking of which... How much are we talking here.” Nirah demanded then asked.

“The volume of my appetite?” Thirteen asked.

“Yea”

“I estimate half a cow, excluding detritus like skin, bones, and choice internal organs”

“What?!” Nirah stopped flabbergasted, “That ‘is’ like a horse!”

“Indeed, I fail to see the surprise...” Thirteen responded confused, “I mentioned that on two occasions”.

“How often?”

“The last time I ate was four days ago, I am famished.”

“Can you eat cooked meat? Bread, fruits or vegetables?”

“I do not know, though I would assume I am omnivorous, however, I do have a specific inclination for meat”

“Hell, this is going to scare the cook to death. I’ll order you a bath while they prepare the food, it will likely take a while.” Nirah sighed, tying off the rented horse. Thirteen followed her into the elegant establishment. A large polished steel serving bar along with what looked like hundreds of bottles of liquors, ales, and wines decorated the entire back of the room. The walls were lacquered teak or elm decorated with the taxidermied heads of various fauna. A large granite fireplace was alight with a small wood fire warming the hearth. Across from the fireplace was a spacious lounge with large cushioned chairs and ottomans surrounded by bookshelves. There were several patrons in the lounge puffing on tobacco or exotic leaves stuffed in pipes. The exotic smell tingled in Thirteen’s nose. A human pair, flirted quietly in the corner by the bar. A well dressed barmaid waved at Nirah and Thirteen from across the room and from the corner a female greeter dressed in an apron and short skirt with soft leather boots stepped forward.

“Welcome back to the Lofty Lamb Madam Nirah” the greeter welcomed warmly, “are you off to your room or shall we get something started for you?” she asked looking at Thirteen and back to Nirah.

Catching the greeters intentions Nirah blushed, “Uh, no, yes. I,” she stammered, “I need a bath prepared for this one and I will have a large order for the cook, is the gazebo available for the evening?” Nirah finally managed to ask.

The greeter smiled at her ability to trip up Nirah, “The gazebo has not yet been reserved, is there an occasion?”

“An evening with some associates, I would like to introduce them to Kitsu here. There will be some sensitive discussions and privacy would be preferred if possible.”

“As expected Miss Nirah, I will speak with the manager and reserve your use of the gazebo this evening, with one bath for Ser Kitsu here, and your order for the cook ma’am?”

“Three bottles of port, two loaves of bread, one sourdough, one fine-wheat. A whole roast pig, lamb or equivalent, a pot of your house soup, a pan of potatoes and vegetables, roasted or baked.”

“It will be several hours for an order of this magnitude without pre-coordination. Would you please follow me, I’m sure the cook would like to speak with you directly ma’am” the greeter said with a frown. Nirah and Thirteen followed the hostess downstairs and past the washrooms into the kitchen. Thirteen had to actively not drool over the choir of appetizing scents that sang to him from the far room.

The greeter waved down the head chef, who plodded over to her heavily. The kitchen boomed with activity, at least 8 other chefs were running about, preparing for the evening dinner rush.

“What’s the problem Trisha?” the chef asked, looking at Nirah expecting a complaint.

“Mr. Lou, this patron would like to special order a platter for her gazebo reservation this evening?”

“Oh? That’s all?” Lou laughed, “and here I thought you were coming to complain about something.”

“If you’re able sir, I have a significant order, and I will compensate you for the trouble expressly” Nirah chimed meekly, appealing to the large man’s personality.

“Of course, It’s not a problem, right guys?!” he boomed into the kitchen.

“Yes Chef” the kitchen chimed unanimously.

“Let’s hear it then lass, what will you be needing” Lou continued. Nirah recited her list off again, and with every set of items the chef’s brow furrowed a bit deeper. “That’s quite an order for you lass, expecting eight to ten are you?”

Nirah nodded, “Short notice I’m afraid, otherwise I would have been sure to schedule this days in advance. You’re the best establishment in the city, I’ve been a patron here for ages, I wouldn’t dare turn my business elsewhere.”

“Indeed” Lou huffed. “I can make it happen, would you be able to compromise on several smaller cuts of meat? The large roast is the most challenging.”

“I would prefer the former, but I would be willing to compromise on the condition of the selection of meats be assorted.”

“Easily done miss, thanks for your understanding. Let me get my notepad and write in the order. It should be ready in about two hours.”

“I would like it set before the party arrives, there are friends of mine who prefer a specific level of secrecy, which would exclude service from servers and staff until I give permission.”

“Easily done miss. We’ll let you know when it’s ready.” Lou finished nodding at Trisha and turned back, shouting orders to his knights of cuisine waging war on their culinary battlefield.

“I will be out on business until the food is prepared, please escort Mr. Kitsu here to my room when he is finished bathing.” Nirah ordered.

“As you say miss.” Trisha complied. She gestured Thirteen down the hall to the baths. Large polished stones fit together seamlessly forming a deep watertight hole in the ground. A

metal latch at the bottom covered a drain that sluiced out of the building. Above the natural tub was a pair of metal pipes that originated from the ceiling, one dripped water sporadically onto the stone floor. Both had large handles attached. There were three of these rooms, with several glass bottles on a rack. In the dressing area was another large lever that sat parallel to the kitchen. Trisha heaved on the lever and with the creaking of wood, gears started shifting into motion.

“The water is heated through the smokestack of the kitchen stove. Natural spring water is sluiced in, and onto a water wheel which pumps water through the heating pipes. Once heated, the water can be drained into the tub. The water will take a few seconds to heat, go ahead and open the drain at the bottom of the stone basin. Thirteen stepped into the basin and rotated the metal cover, then retreated. Trisha opened up the right valve and water poured into the basin. It slowly rose in temperature until it was steaming. She sealed the valve again and motioned for Thirteen to close the drain. He did so and jumped back out. She began filling the basin with the hot water.

“This saves us the difficulty of bucketing in and out the water for personal bathing. It's really quite ingenious. A crew of dwarven workers custom built this solution for the manager here.” Trisha explained before asking, “How do you like your water?”

Understanding the scenario, Thirteen replied, “As hot as you can make it”

“Are you sure sir? It may be several minutes before it will be cool enough to enjoy.” She asked. Thirteen assured her. When the basin had finished filling, she provided a clothing hanger and towel for Thirteen, and pointed out the various soaps filling the glass bottles in the corner. She closed the door and left leaving Thirteen to his first hot bath.

Nirah wandered around town, lost in thought. <Thirteen is going to break my purse at this rate, 200 gold isn't a terrible amount for all this, but still... I am having fun at least. I guess I'll go file that report to the constable, can't be having a warrant out for 'Kitsu' for not filing the report.> She giggled at her own comment, along with a feeling of longing. <If Korun'e is really in there, what would spark the memory? What did he always hold dear?>

She continued walking and thought deeply for a moment, considering all the times she saw, talked with, or worked with Korun'e. That's when the realization hit her.

“That stupid black sword” she said aloud, excited.

She walked steadily to the constables while the sun started to set, lost in thought around Korun'e's black sword and how to get it into Thirteens claws.

Nirah returned to the inn about half an hour after sundown. The dining area and lounge was packed. There wasn't a single open seat and several patrons even stood around the bar, waiting for an open seat. During her cursory glance around the lobby, Nirah spotted thirteen with a book in his hands, likely pulled from a nearby shelf and sitting in one of the poofy den chairs. She walked up and leaned against his seat.

“I'm beat...” She sighed, “Any word on the food?” she asked turning to thirteen. Thirteen looked over the top of the book and shook his head, studying Nirah. “I filed the report at the constable's, I was sure it was detailed enough to seem legit, but vague enough that it will likely



get filed and stored after a brief investigation.” Thirteen closed the gold trimmed tome, resting it in his lap, waiting for Nirah to continue. “What?” Nirah asked in response to his resting gaze.

“You have my gratitude” Thirteen responded, “I thought you had more to say. The water closets and amenities at this establishment are quite refined, I am told the work of dwarves. The bath was quite... lovely.”

Nirah giggled in response, before her own stomach cramped in protest. “I suppose I can check on the progress of the...” Nirah started before being stopped.

“Meal?” Trisha finished for Nirah walking up to the pair, “Set and ready for your guests. You will not be disturbed until you open the window light at the top of the gazebo.”

Nirah thanked Trisha before looking to Thirteen, who was storing the borrowed book back in its original shelf on the wall. She waited for him then walked together to the gazebo.

Nirah and Thirteen walked up the path to the gazebo in the garden. It's orange tiled roof visible through the short trees and shrubbery, framed by the bright orange and yellow sunset that accented the rustic wooden colors. An array of scents assaulted the hungry pair, and Thirteen hurried his pace excitedly. The pair rounded the garden and saw the interior of the Gazebo set; polished bronze tableware and utensils stacked and ready for serving, along with glass cups, and an array of cast iron pots, pans and dishes full to bursting with food. Thirteen visually stalked his potential prey with a voracious appetite, Nirah took a simple inventory.

“Now, Thirteen, there's two conditions.” Nirah started. “You have to use utensils properly, and save some for me.”

Thirteen sighed, “I feared as such... however, the request is a small forfeiture for the wealth to be gained.”

The table was round and large enough to seat eight to ten around its circumference. Nirah opted for the left side, and Thirteen sat across from her. Thirteen took a plate and a fork and went straight for what could only be defined as a small mountain of cooked, smoked, and broiled meats. Fitting as much as he could onto his small plate, he sat down and looked at Nirah pleadingly. She picked up one of the bottles of port and uncorked it, pouring herself and Thirteen a full glass goblet full. She walked over to his side of the table, set his down, slowly walked back to her side, drawing out her pace to annoy Thirteen.

“You can use your hands once it's on your plate, but not before.” she succumbed. Thirteen grinned from ear to ear and tore into the veal, mutton, steak, and chicken with only that one smiling moment of hesitation. Nirah sipped her wine before taking a single plates worth of samples for herself, leaving the rest for her monstrous companion.

After the first few large helpings of meat and bread were consumed by Thirteen he slowed his pace from a ravenous sprint to a steady grind, choosing to actually taste the food. The twilight had retreated into night and Nirah had finished her plate and sat back nursing her goblet, watching Thirteen work through the large feast dish by dish. He drained the first goblet of his wine in a single go, his face considering it only after it was gone. He quickly uncorked the second bottle and set it next to his cup, then continued his ministrations on the remaining half of the food. The second bottle went, along with the entire pitcher of water, and by the time the third bottle was drained, only scraps and crumbs remained.

With a sigh of contentment Thirteen finally leaned back and mopped his hands and face with a napkin. "You have my unconditional partnership for our upcoming endeavours Nirah, as well as my gratitude. I have treated you poorly yet you take time to treat me to such luxuries. I am shamed by my previous actions." Thirteen sighed. Nirah giggled.

"Sure you say that after you single handedly and unashamedly ate everything in front of you." She scorned reaching across the table at the last bottle of port, only to find it empty, "...and drank everything too, what a glutton." she chided. Thirteen grimaced, sinking into further embarrassment. "Im joking you loon, relax a bit." She sighed, moving to his side of the table and sitting next to him. "I like to think I was good friends with Korun'e, before... you know..." she said trailing off into reminiscence. Thirteen didn't say anything, feeling cornered. "He was always so distant, like he was afraid to connect or commit to a relationship." she explained.

"He likely feared commitment with his mortality being in such sharp focus" Thirteen offered.

"That makes a lot of sense; trying to avoid hurting others..." Nirah replied, "He was so independent... prideful even. His sickness forced him into Geroe's hands. Hands I hope to break away from..." Nirah sighed. "We have a long day tomorrow, let's get some rest."

Nirah patted his leg endearingly and stood, opening the lantern shade on the roof of the gazebo while Thirteen slid out of seating. He followed Nirah back to the inn through the garden. They met Trishia halfway along with two other kitchen-hands.

"Was everything good enough for you and your companions Miss Nirah?" Trisha asked politely stopping in the path.

"It was wonderful Trisha, give the chef my thanks" Nirah answered with Thirteen in tow as she continued to the inn. The moon had risen at this point and the den of the inn was quieting down for the evening, several patrons still frequented the lounge and bar, however the more boisterous dinner activities had already concluded. Nirah and Thirteen passed through without an encounter, climbed two flights of stairs and walked down a wide hallway. The floor was clean polished wood, with only three doors, one to the left, one to the right, and one at the far end of the hallway. Nirah un-pocketed a single brass key and unlocked the door at the far end of the hall. She moved into the dark room and illuminated an oil lantern with the flick of a lighting mechanism. Unsure of how to proceed, Thirteen waited awkwardly at the doorframe, awaiting instruction. Nirah moved to a second room and lit a second lantern there, as well as removing her boots, bag, cloak and leather tunic. She turned back into the entry-room expecting to see Thirteen, anxiety leapt into her throat when she didn't so she called out, "Thirteen?"

"Yes?" he asked from the hall, still hovering awkwardly outside the room.

"What are you doing out there?" Nirah asked, confused and relieved that he hadn't disappeared or something worse.

"Waiting" he replied.

"For what?" Nirah responded.

"You." Thirteen answered. Nirah walked over to him and looked at him quizzically.

"What?" Nirah asked still confused.

"I am unsure if your silence earlier was inferred to mean entry to your quarters" Thirteen answered.

Nirah put her face into her hand in disbelief, "You're very naive sometimes... Of course you're welcome." She sighed.

"I am hardly a week old if your assumption of my creation is true" Thirteen defended. Nirah groaned in response, turned and entered the inn-room again.

The space was small but well furnished, the entry-room had a couch and seat along with a coffee table and basin, a pair of rooms were connected one to the left, the other to the right. Nirah had already lit the lantern in the right room, a bed chamber could be seen through the crack in the door. The other door was closed. Nirah collapsed on the couch and watched as Thirteen took off the leather shoes he was loaned by the tailor, then moved and took a rigid seat in the cushioned chair across from her.

"You're... Ugh..." she groaned again. "Stay here." she said, slipping out of the room. Thirteen relaxed a little, and took inventory of the room, looking for escape routes and memorizing the spatial dimensions of the room habitually. He caught himself doing it, <What a curious habit...>, he mentally noted. Less than three minutes later, Thirteen heard what he knew to be Nirah's footsteps approach the door. She opened it and stepped through with the clink of glassware. She set a pair of glass cups and a wax sealed bottle filled with amber liquid on the table.

"You can see in the dark yes?" Nirah asked. Thirteen nodded, raising an eyebrow. She walked into the bedchamber and shuttered the lantern, then did the same in the entry-room, returning the rooms to near-darkness. The only sources of light was the scarce illumination provided by the lanterns lighting the roads outside and the sign of the inn.

Nirah's eyes flickered in the dim lighting as she turned to Thirteen, "It should be safe to change into something 'more comfortable'" Nirah said, emphasizing the last two words. Thirteen understood her statement but glanced up at the two and a half meter ceilings and ample furnishings and determined it to be a less-than-comfortable exchange.

"It would be obtrusive. I am able to remain without difficulty." Thirteen offered.

"Suit yourself." She responded and cracked the wax seal on the bottle while extracting the cork. She poured the liquid into the pair of cups, a malted heady aroma filled the room quickly. She slid a cup across the table to Thirteen and took the other for herself. "Drink" she ordered, pointing at his cup. Thirteen complied, downing the contents of the cup. The liquor hit his throat and burned, he wasn't expecting it but it was already past the point of no return. He hardly got it down before coughing through the unexpected burning. Nirah laughed heartily.

"Hah! You really are naive!" She chided, "don't worry, it will warm you up, and maybe put some hair on your..." she trailed off, realizing he can't grow hair on a scaled chest, at least in his true form. "This is good stuff, but sip it, and keep it on the back of your tongue" she instructed, pouring him another half glass. Thirteen wiped the tears from his eyes and swallowed nervously before following her instructions. He followed her instructions this time, and sipped lightly at the liquor. It still burned but not nearly as overwhelmingly, the aftertaste blossomed into a colorful medley of flavors and a warm sensation filled his stomach.

"So tomorrow, we only have two things, get your clothing and dispatch the meddlers which we still need to find. I don't think we should engage until the late evening regardless, so we have the day to track them down really. I know you could use the rest after being awake for almost forty hours now." Nirah shared.

"I am fatigued." Thirteen admitted, rubbing the side of his torso under his arm unconsciously attempting to massage the flight-muscles of his true form. Nirah caught the motion and smiled.

"You are normally nocturnal right?" Nirah asked.

"Indeed" Thirteen answered.

"Will you be okay to sleep through the night?" Nirah offered.

Thirteen shook his head, "I have no intention to intrude on your routine. A safe corner or cushion is adequate regardless of the situation, lest you forget, yesterday I was sleeping on grass and rock."

Nirah bit her lip, "The bed is large enough to share..." she insisted. "If your staying like that" she added quickly gesturing at his body. Thirteen sensed some ulterior motive but succumbed.

"If you insist." He shrugged. Nirah finished her cup and set it down on the table, then quietly opened the door and stepped into the side room. There was some splashing of water and a few moments later she emerged and walked across to the bedroom.

"Coming?" she asked. Thirteen finished his cup and followed her. Once inside, she unbelted her padded breeches and tunic, dropping them to the floor. Only thin linen undergarments hid her scaled loins from view, however her pert bosom was unclad. She slid under the quilted blanket and waited for Thirteen. Following the leader, he undressed and slid under the covers. The bed was softer than he expected, and the linens of the sheets less coarse than the linen of his loaned clothing.

Thirteen's mind whirred with exhaustion and the edges of inebriation. Nirah looked at Thirteen expectantly her eyes reflecting the dim light of the dark room like a cats. Thirteen closed his eyes and relaxed, falling asleep almost immediately. Nirah bit her lip and watched him for a few minutes before closing her own eyes and falling asleep feeling almost disappointed.

A roosters crow at dawn roused the two. Nirah had rolled next to Thirteen in the night and had curled her tail around his leg, and awoke resting on him. He looked down at her, she up at him and she immediately rolled across the bed and got up, covering her bosom from the light.

"S, sorry" she stammered, throwing on her shirt and breeches.

"For what?" Thirteen asked.

"Nothing!" Nirah scowled, remembering the night before. <Oh Tiamat! If he wasn't so naive, something could have actually happened! What was I thinking drinking like I was?!> She thought to herself blushing.

Nirah's emotional tension caught Thirteen's attention. He looked over at her curious at what had worked her up and noticed the way the dawn light flickered off her silver scales, throwing reflective lights around the room. He also noticed how petite she actually was, only about 172cm(67") to his 185cm(72") in human form or even his 3m(9'9") normal height. She turned around, saw him, caught him ogling and blushed further with a noticeable vulnerability. Thirteen thought <she always seems more imposing with the cloak and armor.>

“Get dressed if you’re coming to breakfast” Nirah commanded, trying to escape the awkwardness of the situation.

“I would like to rest further if that is amicable?” Thirteen asked.

“Suit yourself” Nirah responded. Thirteen rolled onto his stomach and buried his face into the blankets. She slipped out of the room and into the washroom before slipping on her boots, grabbing Thirteen’s borrowed clothing and heading out for the day.

Thirteen awoke to Nirah returning with a bunch of noise. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and glanced out the windows, tracking the light of day to determine the time to be roughly afternoon. He stretched and yawned heartily as Nirah dropped a series of packages, cases, belts, weapons and her heavy bag onto the bed. She immediately moved across the room and shuttered the windows.

“Sleep well?” she asked incredulously.

“Very” Thirteen responded with another stretching yawn.

“I got some other gear for you, try it on and make sure that when you revert to your true form, the magic affects it normally.”

“As you wish” Thirteen complied, rolling out of bed and waiting for Nirah to unscramble the packages. She blushed, trying to look away from Thirteen’s naked figure while she worked out his kilt, cloak, sandals, knife, belt-pack and leg-sheath. Thirteen diligently donned the clothing, and once fully geared, looked presentable, though in need of a haircut.

“You look foreign, but not outlandishly so, simply from a warmer climate. Hold on.” She said rushing out of the room.

<Hold on...? To what?> Thirteen thought to himself curiously as she rushed out. She returned with a small bowl of water and a brush, and styled his hair in a more subtle way for it to be less mane-like and more swept back. It did a stunning job at making him appear more tempered and less feral.

“Now change, see how your magic affects the items.” Nirah commanded. Thirteen complied by slipping off the sandals and sitting. With a relaxed breath he released the pliant ethereal magic holding his humanoid shape together and let his normal shape re-assert itself in the material realm. Within seconds, the ectoplasm of the aether sloughed away revealing black fur, feathers, scales, and the rest of Thirteen’s normal anatomy. The magic had phased his clothing into the astral plane where his human form was constructed.

“Good. Polymorphic spells usually either transmute mundane items to match size changes between similar forms or shunts them.” Nirah said. “They fit well, you have my continued gratitude.” Thirteen said, “though, this small knife, what is it to accomplish. Surely my claws can do better?” he asked, unsheathing what was a dagger and now appeared to be a broad shortsword with the increase in size.

“If you were in a position where shifting into your chimeric form would be revealed to the public, but you had to defend yourself, what would you do it with?” Nirah challenged.

“I see the process of thought you are following” Thirteen admitted, “a worthwhile precaution”.

Nirah nodded and stepped up to him to help him adjust some minor fittings. As she was doing so, Thirteen held up a paw and focused, and with a minor arcane glow, folded his wings back into the aether.

"That will help" Thirteen admitted, "while they are useful for movement and intimidation, they are not effective in tight spaces like this."

"I think they are beautiful" Nirah said.

"So says a dragonkin with acrophobia" Thirteen joked.

"So you do have a sense of humor!" Nirah giggled.

"Only when something is humorous" Thirteen retorted.

"Oh har har" Nirah conceded, tightening the leg strap for Thirteen's boot-knife.

"Were you able to determine the location where we are to find the individuals that you spoke of earlier?" Thirteen asked, changing the subject.

"I was, though, I may have raised enough suspicion that they will be expecting me" She answered.

"Elaborate" Thirteen said.

"I caught sight of a supplier in the market selling goods to a known member of the group, I followed him. I caught sight of them using a barn on the outskirts of town as a makeshift camp. I stumbled into one of their patrols, but I was able to shake them before returning to town."

"Time is now a precarious resource. They will relocate." Thirteen observed.

"Most likely, or fortify, they have been operating here for several days now" Nirah responded.

"What prey would think it wise to pretend to be a predator?" Thirteen asked.

"Prey that think they are the predators" Nirah answered.

"Yet they are hunted, and know they are hunted" Thirteen responded.

"What would you do?" Nirah asked.

Thirteen thought for a second, "Run, hide, distance myself to learn more about my pursuer and determine if they are indeed a predator, or overconfident prey. It is foolish to idle."

"Either way..." Nirah responds, "...like you said, time is now a factor, if they run, they gain ground, if they fortify, they can further reinforce."

"Do you have a plan?" Thirteen asks.

"You're my trump card. I'm going to do what I do best. There's likely at least ten of them."

"I do not appreciate the depth of this strategy" Thirteen scowled.

"Yea, well, we need to minimize your visibility, especially during daylight hours." Nirah responded.

"I shall follow your lead" Thirteen ceded.

"Good, then change back to your human form and we'll get moving" Nirah said, stepping away from Thirteen. Thirteen focused, glowed for a moment and shifted back into his human form, strapped on his sandals and followed Nirah.

The trip to the outskirts of town took enough time to draw the day from noon well into evening. Nirah led Thirteen over to the forested undergrowth about half a kilometer(.3mi) from

the barn. Several human figures milled around the structure with purpose, one drawing water from the well, others patrolling the road.

"They fortified" Nirah announced.

"Indeed" Thirteen agreed.

"We wait for dusk" Nirah strategized, "we both have the advantage, especially if we can extinguish the torches."

"Longbowmen in the loft. I spot at least two" Thirteen added.

"You can see that far?" Nirah asked looking at him incredulously.

"They appear to be elvish" Thirteen answered.

"Damn. Keen sighted devils." Nirah swore. "Plan doesn't change. I'm going to sneak around and see if I can gain a vantage from that embankment there" Nirah said, pointing to a tall hill and copse of underbrush about 2 kilometers away.

"At which time should I activate the 'trump card'?" Thirteen asked.

"If you see me captured, fighting in the open, or two hundred breaths after the sun has set."

"As you say" Thirteen agreed.

"Shadows be with you" Nirah chanted and blitzed off into the underbrush deeper into the trees. Her statement echoed in Thirteen with a sensation of familiarity or of a forgotten memory. He grasped for it and the harder he focused on the feeling, the further it slipped away. Frustrated, he clasped his fist and punched the soft dirt, <That is the third occurrence of this phenomena, I am not inclined to believe this is a purely statistical scenario. There must be merit to Nirah's conjecture.>

Sunset approached slowly, Thirteen watched the human figures mill about lazily from his vantage point near the treeline. As the sun dipped lower and lower into the horizon, the humans lit large fires around the barn, illuminating their positions and the outlying area.

"Such simple prey" Thirteen thought aloud as he waited for some change to show that Nirah had engaged the humans. Another hour passed before Thirteen caught sight of her. She was less than ten meters outside their camp, on the broad side of the barn hidden from the peering eyes of the archers posted in the lofts. Thirteen leaned forward eyes wide, watching her, intently focused. She threw a stone, distracting one of the patrols, who moved to investigate. As soon as he was around the corner, a dagger flew out of the darkness and the human fell over with a quiet thump. This led the other patrol to investigate, who ended up like the first as soon as he turned the corner of the barn. A few seconds later, as Nirah ran up to the side of the barn and peered around the corner. A large bright magical flare shot into the air, and four patrolmen burst from the barn, just around the corner from Nirah. She dashed away, one of the guards spotting her and taking chase into the fields after her, the three other in tow. Thirteen stood up and tried to see into the fields without success. He waited for several agonizingly long minutes before a blue robed figure exited the barn just as two bloodied figures dragged a third from the fields. Thirteen couldn't tell if it was Nirah taken prisoner, wounded or a casualty from the enemy side being taken back for treatment. He watched the robed figure carefully and caught the silver glitter of Nirah's scales as they dragged her into the barn.

Clearing his mind and surrounding himself in the aether, Thirteen shedded his false ectoplasmic form for his true form, wings and all. Two solid strides and a wingbeat took him past the treeline first then into the air like a black feathered rocket. <Shadows be damned...> he thought as his powerful wingbeats thundered into the evening sky dragging him above the barn. Seconds crawled by as the wind roared in his ears and against his whiskers. Mentally preparing himself, he performed a wingover and pulled his wings in tight, throwing his arms around his head and tentacles and fell toward the roof of the barn. The leather shirt and kilt flapping wildly in the wind, his tail feathers flayed steering him slightly off-center of the barn roof. With a crashing explosion of wood and wings Thirteen collided with the roof of the barn, smashing through the aged wood easily, placing himself right above the widest area of the barn. He pushed out with one powerful wingbeat, throwing hay and debris in every direction before landing on a knee with a powerful thud and caving several planks of the wooden floor beneath him.

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A shout rang out from the elvish archer in the loft watching the black creature leap from the treeline and into the air. He watched it travel over the barn and then with a graceful flip, dive for it. "It's going to fly-by!" the archer warned. Less than a half a minute later, Thirteen had smashed through the loft throwing the entire building into disarray. The two wounded footmen had secured Nirah to a support frame of the building with rope along with the blue robed mage who now turned to face the new threat. Thirteen roared a challenge to the defenders, getting onto his feet and brandishing his claws and tentacles threateningly.

The first to get their feet under them was a spearman who charged at Thirteen with his weapon. Thirteen's tentacles got to him first, the first sweeping his feet from under him and the second stabbing him in the gut with the dagger-like sting. The second and third kept their distance after watching their comrade fall nigh instantly. The archers came up next, each nocked arrows and fired, arrows sinking into Thirteen's scaled hide. He growled in pain and flickered for a moment, appearing to teleport a few feet to the side. He charged the far archer, his displaced form leaping on the elf and quickly flayed the poor soul alive, four invisible claws tearing through the soft leather armor and into the elven flesh beneath. The sight was actually quite harrowing, the image of Thirteen's form tearing into mid-air while the elf a meter away is ripped into bloody ribbons.

The elf's soon-to-be corpse fell into a crumpled mess, blood covering the image of Thirteen as the real blood which momentarily hung in the air faded from view. The three other footmen from patrols in the area moved in to engage looking very closely at the ground around them and keeping an eye on the displaced image of Thirteen. They knew illusion magic when they saw it. The mage eyed Thirteen hungrily and pulled out a dangerous looking wooden implement that glowed powerfully with magic. The two wounded footmen earlier moved close enough to Thirteen's position to harrie him with their spears without directly engaging him or his reaching tentacles. The archer fired another volley of arrows, one of the two hitting their mark in midair, the other skidding across the barn's floor. It faded from view and appeared on the image of Thirteen's torso. Thirteen roared another challenge and bowled right past the two footmen straight for the mage. He knocked one out of the way easily but the second luckily landed a deep cut on Thirteen's thigh. As Thirteen approached the mage, a bright flash illuminated the



barn, and a crack of thunder rung in his ears as he felt immense pressure engulf him. Thirteen fought for a moment before losing the mental battle and blacked out.

Thirteen came to strung up in the barn with chains and ropes around all of his limbs. He shook violently rattling the chains about noisily.

“Ah, you’re quite a resilient monster” the mage remarked from across the barn upon noticing Thirteen had regained consciousness pointing at the arrows still penetrating his torso.

“Release me and my comrade!” Thirteen demanded.

“Oh ho! It speaks!” the mage exclaimed, “You mean this lump of meat?” the mage responded poking Nirah roughly with his staff. Thirteen narrowed his eyes at the human that was provoking him. “I think not, she cost me three of my men. As for you, you are our prize for the mainland. Proof of the monstrosities this Island has lurking about for the pathfinder society” the mage cackled. “You, prepare to depart,” he said pointing at the nearest guard, “we have what we came for. Once we’re ready, I’ll put the monster under once more to get him chained up for transport.” the mage explained to the footman nearby.

“As you say M’lord. What shall we do with this other one?” he asked gesturing to Nirah.

“Dispose of it” he answered matter of factly.

“As you say.” the footman answered.

Thirteen struggled against his bonds, testing the length, width, breadth, strength, and resiliency of each. They were reinforced against the iron-bound wood bolted to the foundation of the barn. The mage was smart and Thirteen couldn’t get the leverage to break any of his bindings with brute force. There was a blur of activity as Thirteen continued to struggle against his bonds desperately trying to save Nirah. Blood trickled down his wrists as the iron shackles cut through the fur and skin of his wrists and ground against his bones. The wounds started to heal and were forced open again, and again. He roared in frustration shaking the building with his continued attempts. Panic set in as horses were drawn and dressed. The lone footman grabbed his spear and warily walked over to Nirah keeping a close eye on Thirteen. Nirah had finally started to come too with all the noise Thirteen was creating. She lazily blinked into wakefulness to see the footman raise the spear over his shoulder ready to impale her through the chest. She threw a hand up in a momentary act of self-preservation.

Thirteen roared again in panicked desperation as he saw the spear cut through Nirah’s torso and sink into the wood beneath her. Fear was replaced by anger, a fiery red hot fury that bubbled up from the deepest part of Thirteen’s persona. It flooded him, consumed him, he stopped thinking or remembering and reverted into feelings, urges, emotion... instinct.

A thunderous explosion radiated from the center of the barn. The chimera dropped to his feet wreathed in orange fire. His eyes held only a bright flickering orange hunger as he set them upon the footman who had been blown to his feet by the explosion. The fiery monster dashed across the barn and with merciless precision smashed a yellow-orange fire wreathed claw through the footman’s chest and heart. Boiling blood dripped from the chimera’s claw which held the soldier’s burning, still beating heart. With a gesture of disgust he crushed it and dropped it next to the gurgling, spasming soon-to-be corpse of the soldier. The chimera turned to face the rest of the prey, scuttling about to find out what was happening in the barn. As he

stalked to the door he instinctively bent the light of the barn around himself, displacing his image almost two meters away.

The mage turned on his horse with his staff readied, and re-approached the barn. As he came around the corner with the archer and others, they saw the flickering form of the fiery chimera; wings, claws, tentacles alight with orange fire and the vicious, hungering eyes that saw them. The previous arrow that had found its mark by had already burned to bits and the iron arrowhead plopped to the ground glowing a hot dull red having been pushed out of the wound by the monstrosities' regenerative healing. The archer knocked an arrow and fired, but it flew through the illusionary image harmlessly. The iron shackles that did survive the explosion still hung around the chimera's wrists and ankles which glowed a dull angry red like the arrowhead and rattled noisily with every step.

By the time the mage was in position, the chimera accelerated to three great strides and leapt on the center footman, his displaced image appeared to leap on the left soldier which flinched and fell to the ground. The center fell under the full assault of his fiery claws, the footman on the right fell immediately after from a pair of invisible tentacle attacks while the one on the left, appearing to be tangled up in the displaced image of Thirteen got to his feet and attempted to flee. Thirteen snagged him with the pads of his two left tentacles and dragged him back toward him. Moments later, the center guard gurgled into his death throes as Thirteen ripped his neck out with his teeth. The left footman had his chest crushed under Thirteen's heavy footpaw, and the right had fallen to the ground envenomed and convulsing in paralytic spasms.

Thirteen then faced the mage with animalistic hunger. He dropped his displacement and faced the mage fully. The mage, now alone but confident, let his spell loose with a flourish of arcane power. As it rolled toward Thirteen and collided with the chimera, it contacted his fiery aura and with a momentary clash of magic, slid harmlessly off the chimera's magical aura. Seeing the result of his magic fail and realizing he didn't have time to safely cast another, he turned his horse to flee. Thirteen responded with a deft whip of a tentacle catching a solid grip on the mage's clothing and ripped him from his saddle and onto the ground. With a slow, deliberate revenge, the chimera placed his fiery foot-paw over the mage's chest and doubled the strength of his aura while slowly crushing the mages ribcage as the fiery aura surrounding him burned the man alive. By the time the mage had lost consciousness, only bone and charred flesh was visible around his upper body, the rest of his limbs covered in second and third degree burns. A loud crash pulled the chimera's attention away from his tortuous activities and back to the barn. His fiery explosion had damaged the structure of the barn and his aura had caused several hay fires earlier. The barn was collapsing. A tentative thought of realization pulled him from his instincts, <Nirah!> he thought. A few strong strides took him into the fiery building. The flames licked at him harmlessly but the smoke burned his lungs and stung his eyes. He saw her, still impaled on the spear, collapsed near the ground. He rushed over, snapped the wood of the spear like a toothpick, went to lift her up still penetrated by the short length of spear and stopped for a second before picking her up. He looked at his fiery claws and paused, feeling the magic of the aura around him. With significant trouble he forcefully quenched his aura so as to not burn her. He gently lifted her, feeling the bloody wetness on his pawpads soaking through her cloak. He made a few long wing-assisted jumps into the cool

night air away from the burning building and set Nirah down. His throat tightened up as he checked if she was breathing or if she had a heartbeat. The spear had impaled her below the lung, but through the gut, potentially hitting a kidney or the liver. Blood dripped from around the spear shaft still piercing her.

She drew no breath but had a faint heartbeat, the spear must have cut or damaged her diaphragm. Thirteen immediately went for her bag but... they had taken it from her, it was back at the barn. Panicked, he set her down and scoured for options. He needed healing magic. Now. <Phoenix's have healing magic!> He realized, but how to use it? He focused on his aura, the dim fiery aura that surrounded him, the feelings and emotions associated with it. He set a claw over the wound and willed it to close, wished it to close. Using the same feeling as the minor magic he had used near the marshes, but forcing more power through it using his fiery magic as fuel. The memory of when he first saw Nirah's draconic heritage, the unfamiliar hand and feelings jumped out at him. He emulated the gesture and sensations and with effort, a gold glow ignited over the wound, and with a soft, golden fire like appearance seared around the shaft of the spear. Thirteen pulled out the pointed shaft from Nirah's back as the healing fire burned the wound away leaving swollen peachy, silvery scaled skin in its wake. Anxiety and excitement welled up in Thirteen. He had done it... Right? He wondered to himself. He focused the healing magic further, forcing the cleansing fire through Nirah's body, isolating the bleeding, the burns from the barn and any internal wounds. The magic started to exhaust Thirteen quickly, consuming his stamina at a ravenous pace. As Thirteen's strength wavered and his vision began to narrow, Nirah's eyes fluttered into consciousness. Thirteen released the magic with a few deep breaths and held Nirah with his lower claws, falling back onto his upper elbows in exhaustion, panting deeply.

"I shall return momentarily, I must find your bag before it is consumed by the fire." Thirteen explained, setting Nirah down and jumping into the air weakly, exhausted. He beat his orange trimmed wings against the night air thrusting him a few feet above the ground with each long stride to the barn. It was nearly a raging inferno inside at this point, he cautiously entered, the end Nirah had been restrained was completely consumed by fire. Several rafters and supports had already collapsed. Thirteen checked the footmen, archers and mage and found the bag tied to one of the horses saddles. The horses fled at the sight of him while keeping a safe distance from the fiery barn. Thirteen took the time to pull the bodies of the unconscious, dead, or paralyzed footmen and mage into a line away from the inferno. He channeled his energy to shift into human form to rope in the horses. It took a few minutes and once he had, he still felt the fiery orange aura licking around his body harmlessly. Quenching it again, Thirteen caught the horse with Nirah's bag and tied it off on a fencepost next to the footmen and mage. He caught one of the other horses before he got impatient and left the other four to wander. He tied the second next to the first and after taking a few steps away from the animals to not spook them, he shifted into his chimeric form and hurried back to Nirah. He landed heavily looking to Nirah with anxiety.

"Are you okay?" he asked between panting breaths.

"You're like a scary angel flying around like that" Nirah said awestruck.

"Don't try to flatter me" Thirteen responded.

“Why not, I got impaled. An angel saved me. That doesn’t happen everyday.” Nirah joked with a weak cough.

“Can you walk?” he asked.

“I think so” she answered, rolling to her feet and swaying unsteadily and leaning on Thirteen, “Yea. Can you fly?”

“No, healing your wound consumed nearly all of my strength.” Thirteen answered, “I require a few minutes to rest, we can find time enough for that within the shelter of the trees. Your belongings are near the barn with the bodies of the footmen and mage.” Thirteen replied.

Thirteen helped Nirah to the treeline, safe from the eyes of any villagers that may try to extinguish the abandoned barn. They took a solid hour to rest before Thirteen and Nirah were stable enough to chance walking back into town, that was after Thirteen was able to completely suppress the orange glow of his fiery aura. Nirah’s armor was cut and torn in several areas not to mention the gaping hole where the spear pierced it.

After that hour of rest, the two returned to the now collapsed and burning remains of the barn. Nirah and Thirteen took time to gather any clues and valuables the footmen and mage had left. The few soldiers who had survived due to the grace of being paralyzed and not shredded, skewered or crushed, shook helplessly as they eyed Thirteen and Nirah with panic. Nirah looked at them, then to the mage, then to Thirteen.

“You didn’t kill them all?” Nirah asked surprised.

“They were incapacitated, it did not seem applicable at that moment to take time to deliver a coup de grace [finishing blow] to each one” Thirteen answered. Nirah sighed and knelt down next to the survivors. She unsheathed a dagger and with a precise slash opened a lethal gash in their necks.

“My orders were to ensure no survivors” she sighed. Thirteen nodded, helping her to her feet. Together the two tied up the salvaged gear on the second horse. Nirah mounted the horse with her bag and gestured for Thirteen to join her on the other. Thirteen looked at her nervously and shook his head in defiance.

“Look, I’ll lead your horse, just get into human form and get on the stupid thing” she commanded. Thirteen growled in apprehension but shifted into human form anyway. He walked over to the animal and clumsily straddled the saddle, nearly falling off during the endeavour. Nirah walked her horse parallel to the fence to untie Thirteen’s, then fastened those reigns to the back of her saddle. She led her horse to the road at a slow canter dragging Thirteen’s along behind her leaving the barn and corpses behind them.

The disguised Thirteen and Nirah made it back to town after sunrise but before the bulk of traffic started bustling about the town. They drew a few concerned glances, but they waved it off. They moved quietly to the inn, and tied off the two new horses. She motioned over the stableboy, who ran up to her politely.

“Yes Miss?” he asked, his curly golden locks bouncing with his curt bow.

“I need these horses watered and stabled, and please take my previous horse to the city stables and collect my deposit, have the innkeep credit it to the cost of my stay.” Nirah ordered.

“Yes Miss!” the boy said excitedly bowing again. Nirah smiled and tossed him a silver for the effort. The boy beamed at his tip, grinning from ear to ear as he untied the horses and held them while Nirah and Thirteen secured their gear from them. The pair carried their parcels to

Nirah's room and deposited them, then with a shared glance they proceeded to the basement to bathe. Thirteen's true form was covered in scalded blood, soot, and detritus, luckily the basins were large enough to accommodate several individuals or one Thirteen sized individual, not to mention the hot water invigorated the weary chimera.

"Thirteen?" Nirah asked from across the wooden privacy divider between basins.

"I am Kitsu in this establishment Nirah" Thirteen chided, neck deep in his basin, black fur flowing in the eddies of steaming water.

"Right... Sorry, nevermind." Nirah sighed, sinking into her bath.

Thirteen exited his washroom disguised, first after dressing in his cleaned shirt and kilt and second, ensuring that any evidence of his monstrous form bathing there was discarded. He proceeded up to the lounge and found Trisha.

"Miss Nirah would like two breakfast platters delivered to her room when possible please" Thirteen asked Trisha.

"Absolutely Ser Kitsu" Trisha responded walking down to the kitchens and Thirteen walked up to the third floor room. He opened the door and started taking inventory of the recently acquired goods. The staff was of particular interest but there was also a spellbook, a pair of magical accessories, a wand, a pair of scrolls, a whole belt of potions, and a set of two magical daggers. Thirteen was studying the magical patterns of the goods spread across the floor when Nirah walked in dressed in her spare casual linens. She looked at Thirteen then at the goods, took a brief inventory, then looked back at Thirteen solemnly. <Keep it together Nirah. Don't you dare fall apart in front of him.> She chided herself. She bit her lip then smiled.

"Quite a haul, that staff looks like quite a find" Nirah observed.

Thirteen looked up at Nirah, a paused for a moment, his eyes shining emotionally. "I lost control, I let it all go when I saw you impaled" Thirteen admitted, "I killed them and I'm not sorry. I feel no remorse or guilt and I feel like that should be wrong. I murdered them, in fury, and anger, and revenge, and no matter how I look at it I know it's supposed to be wrong or inhuman, but all I can see is prey, they were my prey, they were weaker, they were wrong." Thirteen stammered losing his detached demeanor.

"Hey..." Nirah started.

"I Am a monster, an Animal..." Thirteen admitted with emphasis.

"Yes. You are. But so were the men you killed." Nirah said straightforwardly. "You killed them. But you didn't kill them all. I was there too. You didn't kill me. You may be a chimera created by a monstrous man in a monstrous experiment. You may look like a monster, you may think like a monster sometimes. But, right now, you are 'my' monster." Nirah admitted, kneeling down next to him and hugging his limp form. "Monsters don't have friends, and they sure don't try to kill themselves trying to save those friends".

"...and also with you" Thirteen reminisced with a stroke of connectedness.

Nirah paused confused for a moment at the lack of context, "What?" she asked.

"The shadows be with you..." Thirteen started. Nirah covered her mouth. "It sparked another sensation of reminiscence. It ends with, 'and also with you...'" he finished.

Nirah started shaking, tears welled up in her eyes, "I knew it... I just knew it!" she exclaimed.

“This Korun’e may be a part of me Nirah. There are too many commonalities to be coincidence. You are likely to be correct but, I don’t know what it will take to dredge those memories to the surface in a way that won’t break or change me. I am afraid. I am afraid for you. I am afraid for who I am now. What will awakening those memories do to me? Who will I become then? Who am I now?” Thirteen whispered emotionally.

“You’re my dark angel” Nirah whispered. “I loved Korun’e and I never told him, now here you are, a living incarnation of him or... a part of him... or whatever! I get a second chance! That’s lifetimes more than most people get, even if we have to do some work to get you back on your feet. I saw you ya’know...” she stammered, tears flowing down her cheeks. “I was conscious after he impaled me and I saw you, I thought you were to be my angel of death. A fiery four armed angel wreathed in the brightest flames, cleansing all that he touches, a white halo blinding those who look up to his face. The one to bring me to Pharama. But it all went black. Then I saw you again, not as brilliant, but just as angelic, holding me close to you, pouring your strength into me. Ain’t this some bullshit...” Nirah gasped, hiccuping through tears, “My old crush is now a monstrosity created by my worst enemy.” she laughed through tears.

“I cannot promise you the outcome you hope for Nirah. You seem the best bet for recovering the memories of my past lives, thus I follow you. I cannot promise that I will reciprocate your feelings for Korun’e should we unlock his memories within me.”

“You are impossible Thirteen. I just said I never told Korun’e I loved him. I love you!” Nirah exclaimed.

Thirteen opened and closed his mouth several times in shock. “I literally assaulted you a week ago, held you against your will, coerced you, and since then you’ve known me for a week, wherein you insinuated I am naive, impossible, insufferable, childlike, the worst, monstrous, and most recently angelic only after I killed eight people.” Thirteen said matter of factly.

“Glad to know someone is keeping track. What are you trying to say?” Nirah asked.

“That I ‘am’ a monster, even by your own words and not worthy of something as pure or noble as love.” Thirteen answered looking down at his crossed legs.

“Then I have that choice” Nirah said, lifting Thirteen’s human chin and leaning in for a kiss.

“Room Service!” Trisha nearly shouted while knocking outside the door of Nirah’s rented room. Nirah clenched her jaw in irritation looking into Thirteen’s eyes. She spun, rubbing the wetness from her face and dusted her clothes and answered the door.

“Trisha, thanks so much!” Nirah exclaimed a bit more excitedly than she should have. Her eyes still puffy from the tears.

“You’re two breakfast platters ma’am.” Trisha presented a bit taken-aback by Nirah’s overly-excited response.

“Of course. Thanks so much.” Nirah said calming down and taking the two bronze dishes into the entry-room and setting them on the table. Thirteen bit his lip and averted his eyes from Nirah’s, thankful for the timing to have interrupted her at that moment. He felt confused and scared with Nirah’s most recent revelation. Trisha bowed and closed the door.

Nirah’s gaze went straight for Thirteen, seeing his evasiveness, she relaxed.

“Let’s eat at least you loon” she chided, “You have to be hungry.”

Thirteen stood up and instead of sitting across from her, sat next to her on the small couch. "I will not promise that I can reciprocate something as fickle or human as love at this time, but I shall compromise with companionship. I am glad I was able to prevent your death." Thirteen admitted, "and your assumption is accurate, apparently detonating a barn to splinters and healing a half-dead companion is 'especially' famishing".

"When you say things like that, you sound just like him. Korun'e that is..." Nirah says with a sigh, lifting the jammed bread from her platter and nibbling on it lost in thought.

Thirteen chose not to respond, instead, pouring himself a heavy glass of the amber liquor from the day prior and in a roll of his wrist, emptying the glass. Nirah looked over to him concerned.

He took the bottle again and poured another glass, looked at Nirah and said, "To your continued life." She looked up at him and giggled weakly. With a light sip he sits next to Nirah and looks to her, "You have been under the thumb of this Doctor for a significant amount of time, unable to trust or leverage even your minute freedoms. Then I come along, this re-incarnated friend of yours, and while the introductions could have been... improved upon, you immediately chose to confide in me. Since then the relationship has been entirely you providing for me, up until this morning. I gave back, and I hope to keep giving back. You have been an invaluable resource and dare say a good friend. However, I'm afraid. I am not a knight in shining armor, I struggle with morality and my instincts drive me more than my knowledge. Most importantly, I am me, with my own goals in mind, and that me is transient. Tomorrow I could wake up and the phoenix or serpent could awaken within me and consume my current sense of self. I do not want to hurt you, or abandon you, so if you choose to pursue your heart, that is your prerogative. I can only inform you of the risks. I do care for you beyond the idea of you helping me reclaim my memories, but it may not last." he finishes, taking another long sip on his glass.

"So the race is on" Nirah responds. "We awaken Korun'e first."

"If dominance is even ordered by priority..." Thirteen rebuttes.

"Eat your food before it gets cold" Nirah chides him, returning to her reminiscence of Korun'e's sword. Thirteen complies, cleaning both his and half of Nirah's platters.

"I would like to retire for the rest of the day Nirah" Thirteen says after breakfast and half the bottle of liquor.

Drawn out of her inner thoughts by his comment, she focuses back on reality and asks, "Sorry, I wasn't listening, what did you say?"

"I would like to lie down and rest for the remainder of the day" he repeated.

"Oh, yea, of course. Before you do, what did you discern from the loot?" Nirah asked. Thirteen rattled off a list of magical auras and schools describing the basic magical theory for each piece. "Do you wish to keep any of them for yourself?" she asked before letting him retire.

"I don't understand?" Thirteen asked.

"Do you want any of these items for yourself?" Nirah repeated.

"Why?" Thirteen asked.

"To use?" Nirah asked like it was the stupidest question ever.

"Oh, I had not perceived it in that manner. No, they are yours to do with whatever you please" Thirteen answered.

Nirah furrowed her brow and deflected, "You look tired, get to bed, I'll fence all these, and prep for the next leg of our trip."

Thirteen dropped his kilt and leather shirt at the foot of the bed and collapsed onto the blankets, exhausted. Nirah packed up the loot into her pack and left for the market taking the opportunity to catch a glance at Thirteen. On her way out she paid her outstanding tab to the innkeep, making sure the stableboy had finished his errand. She also was careful in letting them know she was going to stay another night and that 'Kitsu' was still occupying her room. The total neared almost twenty platinum and was largely due to Thirteen's evening meal two days prior, which Nirah determined, was totally worth it.

She took the white mare she had procured from earlier to the small Mages Guild first to liquidate the most valuable assets there and then would fence the rest at the other dealers around the market.

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"Thirteen..." Nirah coaxed. "Thirteen." she continued. He rustled and rolled over, looking at Nirah groggily, blinking the sleep from his eyes.

"Huh?" was his simple response.

"It's been almost twelve hours, its evening" She whispered.

"Oh, more sleep then." Thirteen said dropping back onto the pillow.

"You're not hungry?" Nirah baited.

Thirteen opened his eyes, "I could eat" he admitted.

"Good, why don't you dress and prepare for dinner?" Nirah recommended. Thirteen rolled his neck and stretched heartily, rolling out of bed and belting on his kilt and throwing the simple half shirt over his head. He spent half a minute in the washroom, brushing his wild mane into a more tempered but still mane-like ensemble. He slipped on his sandals and proceeded to the lounge. There Nirah waited at a set table dressed in a elegant slip. Too recently-awoken, Thirteen sat across from her groggily. A server approached Nirah and awaited an order.

"A pot of coffee and two cups" Nirah requested.

"A pot miss?" the server asked incredulously.

"My date has a dwarvish fortitude." she explained.

"Of course Miss, a pot right away, would you like the Varisian blend or roasted Osirioni style?" he asked before leaving?

"Whichever you feel complements the servings better" she offered

"Very well Miss." the server said, descending into the kitchen.

"What's this all about..." Thirteen asked groggily.

"Fifty Thousand Gold" Nirah replied quietly, accenting every word.

"Which means?" Thirteen continued, confused.

"Right. That staff you ...commandeered from that mage was worth fifty thousand" she responded.

"...and that's a lot?" Thirteen asked.

"Enough to stay at this inn for half a year with your dietary needs in mind" Nirah answered.

"That's good?" Thirteen asked.

"It could afford a literal mountain of goats, like twenty thousand goats." she answered.



“That... is a large quantity of goats.” Thirteen grasped, “what of the rest of it”

“Average, but still worthwhile.” Nirah answered, “I got you this with it.” She says, producing a silver crystalline pendulum attached to a gold chain. “It’s an amulet that has been enchanted to ensure any natural melee strike hits harder and more accurately” she explains.

“All of my ...attacks are natural” Thirteen accurately observes, being discrete.

“Precisely” she follows, stepping out of her seat and placing the silver crystal amulet around Thirteen’s neck and securing the clasp. “It suits you” she comments judgingly, before taking her seat again.

“You have my gratitude” Thirteen answers, rolling the smooth crystal between his fingers.

“For what? Buying you a trinket? You earned that with your own strength, I just sold the stuff you got, and bought that with some of the earnings.” Nirah chided.

“The thought then.” Thirteen counters, “I gave you all the material wealth I liberated from the individuals dispatched yesterday”.

“You’re welcome I suppose.” Nirah smiled. She watched Thirteen quietly, as he squirmed uncomfortably under her gaze.

The server returned with the pot and cups on a tray. He expertly set and poured each of them a cup, leaving the pot on the table and provided a wooden board decoratively loaded with cheeses, fruits, and meats.

“Thank you” Nirah offered as the server departed. Thirteen was already forking cheese and sausage onto his small plate. Nirah made no protest and watched, sipping the freshly poured coffee. A few long quiet minutes of companionship passed as Thirteen nibbled on the charcuterie platter under Nirah’s gaze.

“What are you thinking?” Thirteen asked her, breaking the silence.

“More feeling than thinking, just enjoying the moment” Nirah answered.

Unimpressed with his attempt to start a conversation Thirteen tried again, “How did your other errands go today?”

“Uh,” Nirah paused then answered, “quick mostly. I sold the goods and made it back to the inn by mid-day. I laid down for a few hours rest and woke up about an hour before I roused you.”

“I failed to notice” Thirteen admitted.

“I was purposefully sneaky” Nirah said, comforting him.

“This... appearance,” Thirteen says, again being discrete, “does not have the acuteness of senses I normally have. It’s very limiting which is... uncomfortable sometimes”

“That makes sense” Nirah admits, “The doctor didn’t hold back when he developed your ‘recipe’.”

“Perhaps not.” Thirteen sighed. The server returned for the second course, removing the charcuterie-board, along with Nirah and Thirteen’s plates, and replaced them with a pair of bowls containing a thick soup and spoons. Thirteen stirred his soup quietly, lost in thought.

“Tonight I want to go over the plan I have with you” Nirah offered, coaxing Thirteen back to reality. “It’s a little out of the way but I have a good feeling about it.”

“Oh?” Thirteen queried, prompting Nirah to elaborate.

“I want to pursue some of Korun’e’s effects. Specifically his black katana.”

"Black katana...?" Thirteen wondered, the image conjuring a fleeting but familiar thought, <Koruken?> he thought and paused for a moment, unsure of the meaning or value of the word.

"Yea, Korun'e always had it with him, it was like an extra limb for him just about"

"I see" said Thirteen his eyes dropping back to his soup.

"Try this" Nirah said gesturing at his coffee. Thirteen looked at the innocent chocolate-brown concoction in the white china cup and shrugged.

"Is there a trick to this one?" He asked before engaging, having learned his lesson from the liquor. Nirah giggled and shook her head, sipping the hot coffee while continuing to watch him endearingly. Thirteen emulated Nirah and sipped the beverage carefully. It was bitter and sweet, like a creamy espresso.

"This potion is a bit odd, why the bitterness?" Thirteen asked.

"It contains the straining of roasted beans which stimulate the body" Nirah answered. Thirteen hummed at her answer and finished his small cup in a mouthful. He wasn't partial to the drink, but didn't want to admit it that it wasn't to his taste either.

The rest of the meal consisted of Nirah trying to re-engage with Thirteen who answered briefly or intermittently and kept reverting to his quiet and disconnected self as he mechanically consumed the food set before him. Once the two were behind the closed doors of Nirah's room again, Nirah had experienced enough of that.

Thirteen was sitting on the small couch looking at the floor when Nirah sat next to him and put a hand on his leg concerned.

"Is everything okay?" Nirah asked.

"I'm scared" Thirteen admitted.

"Of what?" Nirah pried, "What could stand against you and survive unscathed?"

"Myself..." Thirteen answered, "I can feel the same primal instinct that was awakened yesterday night pressing down on me like a heavy blanket. I feel like it's going to consume me. I'm drowning in my own consciousness Nirah" he looked to her pleadingly.

"Do you have to consciously control it, or is it just like... there?" Nirah asked, concerned.

"It's just, there, in my chest, burning..." Thirteen said, placing his hand over his breast. "...I thought it would go away, but it's still there."

"When you lost control, how did you come back?" Nirah asked.

"The barn started collapsing, I heard a part of it fall and I glanced toward it out of instinct. I visualized the interior of the building and the constituent parts that must have collapsed and I saw the footmen and you in there still impaled. That realization pulled me back into control." Thirteen explained.

"Why?" Nirah asked.

"I suppose it's not in my animalistic nature to jump into a burning building to save a friend" Thirteen explained.

Nirah sighed, <This isn't good, I need to get him out of this funk. A good distraction. Nirah bit her lip and thought about it for a second. Am I really going to court him? I love him, but... Hell with it.> She decided. "Well, how about a distraction then?"

**// Reader Warning: Smutty as hell text follows reveal at your own risk. SRSLY!**

Nirah spun to kneel in front of Thirteen, put her hands on his face and before he had a chance to fight her, she wrapped her lips over his. Thirteen reflexively pulled away, but she held on following his retreat, using the opportunity to crawl up onto and straddle his lap. After the panic resided and realizing he wasn't going to escape from the kiss without giving it a lasting moment, Thirteen saw it through. Nirah sighed into him and slipped her draconian tongue into his mouth. After that lasting moment, Nirah broke the kiss and looked into his emerald eyes still holding his face.

"You're going to do this, I want it and you need it." She commanded, re-attaching herself to Thirteen's lips. He provided no further resistance and awkwardly placed his hands on her thighs unsure of what to do with them. The second kiss lasted for several long seconds. Nirah grabbed his hands and placed one on her back the other on her bosom. She curled her tail around his leg affectionately as she ran her hands through his hair. Eventually Thirteen's hands started exploring on their own accord having been given unspoken permission. Slowly Thirteen caressed his way up Nirah's shirt to the smooth cool flesh beneath, there he massaged her breast gently, she broke the kiss with another sigh and stood up, dragging him to the bedroom.

"You're sure you want this?" Thirteen nagged as he was dragged from the entry-room. Nirah closed the door behind them and pushed him onto the bed and slid off her shirt and breeches. She prowled after him in her panties, a sexual hunger in her steel eyes. She crawled over him on the bed and he couldn't help trying to feel small as he became Nirah's prey. Emboldened by Thirteen's timidity, she loomed over him and unfastened the belt securing his kilt. With a firm tug she pulled down on the garment loosely bound around Thirteen's waist, dragging it down to his knees and revealing his cock. She eyed it in anticipation, however, during her scrutiny she noticed the way it laid between his legs was a bit flat. She finished liberating him of his kilt and slid her hands up his inner thighs and around his member. She stroked it tenderly with one hand and felt for his jewels with the other. When her hand brushed against folds of skin instead she paused confused. Thirteen knew his secret was bound to be discovered and left her to guess but avoided eye contact with her, his face flushed with embarrassment.

"Wait..." she said bewildered as Thirteen's length hardened in her hand as she further probed Thirteen's loins. "Where are your...?" she asked confusedly. Thirteen didn't answer. She peeked under his erect member while simultaneously probing where his balls should be. What she felt and saw instead was a rounded labia hiding a hooded vagina. She prodded it and felt his moist anticipation and finally came to the realization of his true anatomy.

"You're... you have... both?!" she asked just as surprised as she was confused. He nodded timidly. "Huh." she said still holding his erection in her hand.

"Is... that a problem?" Thirteen embarrassedly asked.

"As long as this part works" she said sensually, migrating her hands to his abs and chest, dragging her claws gently over his skin. Nirah lowered herself onto his abs, purposely positioning his cock under her tail and between her cheeks. She leaned in and kissed him again, dragging her claws against the skin of his chest and up to his shoulders where she rolled the half shirt off his chest and down his arms. She leaned into him after unclothing him and forced him to lie back down as she continued to kiss and touch him until his cock started to press into the base of her tail at it's full 26cm(10") size. She sighed in anticipation as he

pressed into her tail anxiously, rolling his hips with his building need of her. He felt her hunger and desire, he could smell her body and need, cool and metallic yet hot and sweet. Instinct started to flood his mind as his cock throbbed against her clothed rump. He visualized grasping her and ravaging her, taking her and making her his own, filling her with his seed until she was a mewling mess. His cock practically drooled pre at that thought and his untouched cunt ached in empathy of his would be victim, but he staved it off, letting her lead their dance. But not without taking some initiative. He sensually placed his hands on her waist and filled his palms with her covered butt. He relaxed and slid his hands from her waist to her breasts, cupping her modest size and finally breaking her from the kiss. She gasped at his warm touch and leaned back pressing his cock against the base of her tail as she did so. She poked at a few of the pink fleshy marks on his chest where he had been punctured by the arrows of the fight earlier. "Do they hurt?" she asked with a whisper.

"No" he answered as he continued to caress her. She leaned back in and continued kissing him and started sliding the tip of her tail along the length of his cock and near his cunt teasingly. He continued to follow her lead, holding back his instinctual desire to take charge and cease this teasing. As if on queue, she broke from the kiss and grabbed his shoulders and rolled, dragging him on top of her with surprising strength. He kneeled over her, as she slipped her panties down and pulled them the rest of the way off with her tail. She sat up and pushed Thirteen back until he was sitting on his feet, his cock bobbing out in front of him, almost pleadingly. Nirah pulled herself from under him and leaned over to give his cock a long wet lick before wrapping her mouth around him and pushing his length to the back of her throat. She could smell his musky need and though not as strong in his human form, the warm scent of his fur. He moaned quietly at the sensation as she lifted her head to straddle him with her legs. Without taking her hands off his body, she guided her wet snatch onto his waiting cock. Her scaled mound consumed him hungrily, devouring most of his length. They shared a gasp as she noticed how thick and hot he was while he felt how tight and cool she was. As she continued to slide down his length, nearing his hilt, she winced a bit as he pushed against her cervix reminding her how out of practice she was. Ignoring the pain and revelling in the subtle pleasure, she started to slowly slide up and down, each time taking a few more millimeters until he was fully hilted. Each descent felt exhilarating, feeling his hot thick shaft thunder inside her with each of his heartbeats. The ascent was stimulating, feeling him drag against her, fighting her retreat. Thirteen started matching her rhythm almost naturally as she fell into a predictable pattern so she rolled him on top again and let him take over. She wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled his head down next to hers.

"Think you can handle it from here?" she taunted with a whisper. His immediate reaction was a return of that instinctual need to show her he was in charge, to force her to bend to his power, to fill her with his offspring, instead, he started with a slow and cautious pace, experiencing the sensations for the first time before gradually building up the tempo. She held him close and moaned sensually at his tender approach. As he increased his rhythm, he adjusted his angle slightly providing a few more millimeters of length and pushing upward enough to rub Nirah just the right way. She nearly screamed in surprise at the subtle change and pulled Thirteen into a tight hug with force, biting down on his shoulder to stifle her scream. Thirteen was taken aback for a moment and paused for a second, making sure she was okay

before finding the leverage to execute that angle again. Again Nirah clenched up as Thirteen slowly pushed into that spot again and again. Within moments he felt her ecstasy like a building bolt of lightning as she trembled under him approaching orgasm. Thirteen gave her one more solid thrust and she peaked, clamping down his cock with surprising strength, waves of contractions rolling up and down his length. He kept up his tempo through her orgasm, feeling his gut tighten in anticipation to his building pleasure as well. She groaned with every thrust, shaking as she rode the ecstasy for multiple seconds, punctuated by his continued penetration. She relaxed into a puddle under him as her orgasm ended. He continued to thrust anyway, adding more power and speed as his thighs wetly smacked against hers. Without warning, he felt a light pressure exploring the underside of his cock as Nirah's tail found purchase and slithered in unexpectedly. Unprepared for the assault and the sudden stimulation, he orgasmed on the spot, slamming his cock as far into Nirah's as it could reach with involuntary thrusts. Simultaneously the walls of his cunt clasped down powerfully, sealing itself around Nirah's scaled tail in powerful contractions. She pulled him in tighter with her legs hooked behind his thighs as he bucked against her, pouring his seed into her. It was gloriously hot and she could feel each spurt rolling up his length before shooting into her. She counted them, one, two, three... He groaned through the waves of ecstasy as he pumped more into her than she could contain, the seconds dragged on before his climax finished. By his tenth deposit, Nirah could feel his virility overflowing and rolling down onto her tail and the bed beneath her. He collapsed onto her heavily for a moment's respite from the powerful muscular contractions of his orgasm.

"God damn" Nirah said, trying to look down at the mess he had made. He took a few deep breaths and after a minor adjustment, started thrusting into her again. She moaned in surprise.

"Again?" Nirah asked, awestruck.

"Am I not supposed to?" Thirteen breathed, extending the strokes of his ministrations, each one pushing globs out of her oozing cave.

"No, you can. It's just- Ughh -not common." she answered punctuating her response with a deep moan. Nirah started burrowing her tail deeper into Thirteen, moving the tip about inside exploratively. Thirteen was already clenched around it from the previous contractions but he responded to her ministrations all the same. He bit down on her shoulder gently as he continued thrusting into her. She moaned, holding onto him kissing his neck between thrusts. Thirteen held her tightly as he fell into powerful thrusts realizing he was in fact in control. He thought about flipping her over and taking her like an animal but with her tail lodged in him firmly he rejected the idea. Instead he focused on fucking her brains out, feeling her ecstasy and trying to find her sensitive spots. He had to make her want him, to need him, to come back begging for him. He experimented for several moments, adjusting his tempo, his power, his depth before he struck her just right. A powerful thrust at a high angle. She nearly screamed again, and Thirteen could feel her tightening up around his cock instantly in response as she approached her second orgasm, coaxing him to speed up, pumping into her faster and harder until she was a mewling huffing animal under him.

"Oh fuck, f-fuck me, Thirteen, fuck, give it to me, give it all to me!" she ordered as she peaked, pulling him against her tightly. Thirteen did as he was commanded as her walls clamped down on him again milking him for his seed, this time forcing him to explode with her.

Her tail still flicked about inside of him, doubling his pleasure. Nirah's powerful contractions milked his cock as he slammed it into her. She latched her legs around him again as his own vaginal contractions sealed itself again as the gushing waves of his orgasm flooded into Nirah. This time their orgasms ran longer as they helplessly thrust against each other for almost a quarter of a minute, the entire while he continued to fill Nirah's already saturated snatch. When the crescendo finally ended, a sizeable puddle had formed around the pair's connection, soaking into the quilt. Nirah rubbed her abdomen in surprise of the truly impressive virility that Thirteen had demonstrated. He waited a few long moments before pulling out of the mess that he had made. As he did, a minor flood drained from Nirah. His member hung semi-erect brooding over the disaster it had caused, dripping further contributions onto the blanket. Nirah tried to withdraw her tail but found Thirteen's vaginal hold unyielding. She tried a little more firmly, and Thirteen winced in pain.

"Ow." he admitted, reaching down and grabbing her lodged tail.

"Sorry, it's stuck." Nirah admitted.

"Give me a moment..." Thirteen gasped.

"Why is it so tight?" Nirah asked, confused as to what purpose the strong contraction served.

"I wouldn't know..." Thirteen answered just as puzzled.

"I wonder if it's to better connect with a partner or protect yourself during intercourse..." she wondered, "...how wierd".

"Reminder, still a monster here. I would surmise that mixed genders were used in the amalgamation process resulting in this mixup." Thirteen reminded, gesturing at his nethers.

"I'll say, your virility is monstrous enough" she observed, sitting up and assessing the damage. With a grunt he finally dislodged Nirah's tail, fingering his snatch uncomfortably as he felt the tickle of his internal hood adjusting to once again cover the inside of his cunt. She rolled the quilt up and set it on the floor after using it to mop what she could off her tail, thighs, and legs. She walked into the washroom and grabbed a pair of robes.

"Want to share a bath after that?" Nirah asked, offering him a robe. He took it and wrapped himself in it, grabbing the quilt and following her down to the basins in the basement. She started filling a bath for them, ensuring it was hot enough for Thirteen but cool enough for her. Once the basin was full, she stepped in after losing her robe. Thirteen did the same.

"That was quite refreshing, Thirteen, thanks." she admitted.

"The pleasure was mine" Thirteen replied, "It did help me get my mind off some things, and onto others"

"I'm curious, how many times can you go back to back?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, this is my first experience with copulation" Thirteen answered.

"What does it look like when you're normal?" she asked, gesturing toward his thighs.

Thirteen thought it would be easier to show her than explain, so he channeled out of his human form. Water spilled into the overflow drains as his large form displaced the water. The fur of his limbs swayed in the water as he seated himself in the water, barely reaching up to his chest. Nirah waded up to him and ran her fingers through his fur and down his scaled chest, toward his genital slit. With little coaxing, his pair of monstrous cocks poked out, engorging in size. They were tapered and had several ridges along the sides and barbs that decorated the tip heavily, a



knot hid itself at the base of each member waiting for a partner to join with. They were vertically spaced, the upper reaching a length of 37cm(14.5”), the lower 36cm(14”). Nirah played with them as they filled with Thirteen’s blood, each of his twin heartbeats causing them to twitch slightly as they reached erection.

“Now this is monstrous! You even have two...” Nirah admitted, grasping one with each of her hands, they felt so heavy and powerful as his heartbeats reverberated into her palms. She looked up at Thirteen, “May I?” she asked. Unsure of what she was planning or asking for permission to do, Thirteen just shrugged. She smiled wickedly and grabbed his lower cock, and guided it into her stretched snatch. The tapered head slipped in readily, growing in resistance quickly as she lowered herself on the flared head. She sank down slowly, feeling his girth fill her to capacity almost instantly. She had to focus on taking as much of his length as she could limited by his sheer size, by 28cm(11”) she hit her absolute limit. He wasn’t even close to hilted and she could feel his bestial cock pressing against her cervix heavily, begging for entry. It ached with protest at the intrusion, while the rest of her cunt screamed at the girth she had forced into it. She placed her hand to her abdomen and felt his length under her scaled hide pressing into her. Having taken two-thirds of his length, she was determined to push the envelope, she was the descendant of a dragon and felt it came with certain expectations. She started slowly rising and falling up and down on his lower member, standing on his soft thighs for balance while simultaneously stroking his upper cock with both hands. She couldn’t help but imagine that this is what beating off a horse would be like, she couldn’t even fully wrap her hands around his width. Moreover, the sensations that his ridges and barbs caused in her were way more stimulating that she would have guessed, tickling, grasping and dragging against her slick walls. She moaned quietly through the discomfort, forcing herself further down Thirteen’s rod, by 30cm(12”) he could feel how hard she was pushing herself as tight as her snatch was around his pulsing cock. Having hit her initial limit, she stopped forcing herself and increased her tempo from a slow rise and fall to a steady piston. She focused her ministrations on his upper member while steadily pounding on his lower one. The huge slab of meat thundered in her cunt with both of Thirteen’s heartbeats, rocking Nirah to her core. Thirteen helped her by supporting her weight in his large upper claws while he held the base of his members with his lower claws. He growled in pleasure as she bobbed up and down on him and started to shake from the building pleasure. Feeling her tighten further around his lower rod, he grasped the base of his knots tightly as they threatened to engorge with his orgasm. Nirah at the edge of her own orgasm, slammed herself down on his cock with as much momentum as she could muster, impaling herself with all she dared to throw into it. She screamed internally as her cervix painfully crumbled under the pressure swallowing the head of Thirteen’s member tightly as her own orgasm exploded. Unexpecting her to slam on him the way she did, and the way she sank another two centimeters on his cock and lodged her cervix around the barbed head of his cock was all Thirteen could handle. He had to mentally hold Nirah still or risk hurting her further as he thrust against her out of impulse as he climaxed. He grasped his knots tightly as they engorged, further stimulating him, Nirah roughly stroked the upper member as she quivered in her own throes of pleasure, planting herself on his lower member as Thirteen’s eruption began. His hips bucked impulsively as he pumped half a liter out of his two cocks. It shot in thick sticky ropes from his top member and filled Nirah’s sealed womb in bursts with

every thrust of his hips. Nirah kept stroking him through the torrent as she got faceful, breastful, and painted the stones around them with his powerful bursts. She could feel every pump of his cock inside of her forcing more of his hot seed into her womb, extending her own orgasmic pleasure as her womb filled to capacity with his virility. After nearly twenty seconds the pair had finally calmed down.

“That was amazing” Nirah gasped, white ropes dripping from her face into the bathwater. Thirteen helped lift Nirah off his still hard cock, the spines on the head of it grasping into Nirah’s cervix painfully. They both winced and stopped. She rubbed her bloated belly impressed at the outcome of Thirteen’s true ejaculative quantity. She tried again, slowly rising off Thirteen’s cock, but once again his still hard member resisted her, grasping at her cervix painfully. He moaned in involuntary pleasure. Her attempts at egress rubbed the erect spines on Thirteen’s member just right sending shivers of pleasure through the chimera’s sensitive cock. His pricks twitched as she struggled further, sinking back down on the lower member again. He fidgeted in ticklish pleasure. Nirah, started to panic and squirmed pulling against him again, and again. On her fifth attempt, the sensation was too much for Thirteen and he went off again. Caught by surprise he held Nirah still while he stroked his own upper member and poured more seed into the bath and Nirah’s womb. She wasn’t ready for his second orgasm and froze, feeling her belly distend further and further with more and more seed was forced into her tightly sealed womb. As Thirteen’s short surprise climax ended, Nirah tried to lift off him again and with a painful pop, she was free of his spined tip. With a nervous sigh, Nirah lifted herself completely free of Thirteen’s member and pushed on her stomach nervously, causing a deluge of semen to leak into the bath.

“That was scary!” she admitted. Thirteen breathed heavily, the second orgasm knocking the wind out of him. Both of his cocks still stood at full mast, the knots at their bases still fully engorged. “How long do they stay like that?” Nirah asked him, pointing at Thirteen’s cocks.

“I don’t know. That was crazy” he admitted. He thought about how bad he could ruin her in his normal form, quite sure that the physical damage could be lasting if not permanent.

“God that was quite the filling, I wasn’t expecting all that.” she gasped, washing the initial orgasm worth of semen from her face, hair and chest. Thirteen followed suit but had considerably less on him than Nirah and within the next few minutes both were clean again using copious amounts of the provided soaps and having to change out the water once to do so. Thirteen helped clean the mess he made, rinsing the stones off and ensuring there was no mess for other patrons or the maids. His cocks were still at half mast and his knots still fully engorged even twenty minutes after the second orgasm. He poked at them irritably.

“This is annoying” he declared.

“Those are quite the sight” Nirah observed, “I wouldn’t want to try experiencing those, they would split me in half.”

“Whatever, I’m just going to change back.” Thirteen declared irritated at his biology, channeling mana into the aether to change into his human form. A few moments later, he was surprised to find out that his human hair was still wet. He towed it off and re-robed himself and Nirah. They drained the bath and went upstairs quietly as it was close to midnight at this point. On their way up Nirah asked the night-shift greeter for another quilt to replace the soiled one consciously making an effort not to reveal the building fiery discomfort in her loins. They



brought it out and handed it to Nirah happily. Once upstairs, the pair laid out the quilt, Nirah dressed in her undergarments again and the two laid down to sleep.

**// END SMUT**

The next morning Thirteen found himself being spooned by Nirah... again. He yawned and stretched, prompting Nirah to wake up. She rolled off Thirteen and sat up, her hair askew and a groggy look on her face. She blinked the sleep from her eyes and yawned.

"Morning" she said aloud, looking at Thirteen.

"Yes, it is." he said back. She blinked confused for a second and rolled her eyes realizing the idiom had gone over his head.

"No, I meant good morning" she groaned.

"Oh, to you as well" Thirteen answered, getting out from under the sheets and putting on his kilt and shirt. Nirah went to do the same and winced at how sore she still was, her thighs and insides burning in rejection of the abuse they had been dealt. That would be something worth remembering Nirah noted; last night and how crazy it was, and how much crazier it may still get.

"So what is the situation now? What is the plan?" Thirteen asks, watching Nirah dress.

"Ugh! I completely forgot to discuss that with you last night!" Nirah laughed.

"There were other... priorities" Thirteen said jokingly.

"I'm going to take you back to the lab where you accosted me and inprocess you as a new assistant working under me. I've already forged the documents of your arrival and stay here at Novaro. Out of the three, that lab is the smallest and is used almost exclusively for transmutative and necromantic experimentation. Once we're in we need to go to the small armory there. Korun'e's old katana is likely to be there." Nirah explained strapping on her gear and armor.

"You're confident this sword will help?" Thirteen asked.

"I am." Nirah nodded, throwing her bag over her shoulder and clasping the cloak over her shoulders.

"Very well, though I am apprehensive, I feel as though this plan has a high element of risk." Thirteen sighed.

"The doctor probably isn't even at that lab, he's only there when he's actually performing the experiments, he spends all his time at the main facility to the north." Nirah explained.

"Probably?" Thirteen asked incredulously, cocking an eyebrow at Nirah.

"Yea, probably" Nirah reassured. Thirteen shrugged, giving up on the discussion's direction. "You ready to go?" she asked.

"Ready as I'll ever be" Thirteen answered, fastening the knapsack Nirah got him to the back of his belt.

"Then let's go!" Nirah smiled, turning and leaving the room. Thirteen followed her downstairs, once there she walked up to the server at the bar.

The server walked up to her and asked, "Here for breakfast Miss?"

"No, but I would like to request four days worth of non-perishables and three days worth of perishables for two to include water for three horses." she asked, looked over at Thirteen and added, "as well as the equivalent of half a pig worth of meat in whatever the kitchen has available cooked or uncooked."

“Right away” the server said, turning and heading to the pantry and kitchen in the basement. After several minutes he returned with two bulging burlap sacks, a small cask, and a pair of whole smoked mutton legs tied together with a length of string. “Are you checking out this morning Miss Nirah?” the server asked handing her the two sacks and cask while wrapping the smoked meat in a waxy cloth.

“I am” Nirah answered as she unbelted her purse preparing to count out coins.

“Forty gold, nine silver for the stay and supplies” the server prompted. Nirah counted out fifty two gold coins in two stacks and handed each to the server. He counted them twice and nodded.

“Your patronage is most welcome Miss Nirah, we hope to see you again soon. You as well Ser Kitsu” the server bowed and unlocked the lockbox to store the procured coinage. Nirah nodded and grabbed the two sacks leaving Thirteen to handle the cask and meat. She walked out the back door to the stable and found their pair of horses. She set the bags down and started to tack and saddle her horse, going slowly so Thirteen could follow along. Half an hour later both her white quarter and Thirteen’s black friesian were tacked and saddled with their respective loads secured to the saddles.

“I’ll give you some lessons on how to ride while we’re on the road” Nirah offered as she mounted her mare. Thirteen mounted his friesian and nodded, as she grabbed the reins of his horse and trotted out of the stable and onto the city road. They had reached the city gates by mid-morning. She trotted up to the checkpoint at the gate and up to the guard occupying it.

“Name and duration of stay?” the guard asked.

“Nirah Nightenblade and Kitsu Korugaken. Three days.” she answered. The guard scribbled the information on his parchment.

“Will you be returning?” the guard continued.

“Not in the foreseeable future but there is a possibility” Nirah replied. The guard scratched down some more notes, looked up to them and nodded them through. The gate ground its way up high enough to allow the two through and slid shut behind them. They continued down the road and eventually out of sight of Novaro.

“Was this mutton for me?” Thirteen asked eyeing the paper packages secured to his saddle.

“It was, I doubt three days of provisions would be enough to see you through the trip” Nirah answered. She didn’t hear a reply and turned to look at Thirteen. He had already ripped open one of the parcels and was stuffing the first leg to his face with the other still tied to his saddle. Nirah laughed and shook her head, turning back to the road.

//PageBreak//

The road curved and the trees of the forest eventually broke into rolling hills stuttered with trees and underbrush. They crossed a pair of bridges and then turned north toward the mountains. By evening the road ran parallel to a wide slow river where Nirah led them off the road into a grassy knoll. She slid off her horse and helped Thirteen down from his. As he hit the ground his legs buckled under him. He winced and wobbled, trying to find his balance. Nirah helped him find his feet and took his horse.

“Is this normal?” Thirteen asked trying to steady his shaking legs, getting his feet back under him.

“For new riders, yes. You’ll get used to it, though you won’t envy me in the morning.” she smiled. Thirteen raised an eyebrow and proceeded to sit in the short grass to stretch his sore muscles. Nirah staked the horses down to let them graze and rest overnight. She opened her pack and produced a tent and pair of bedrolls as well as an oil lantern. Thirteen watched and noticed the magical aura folded around her bag, explaining its extra dimensional properties. She set it all to the side and started assembling the small tent. Thirteen watched unsure of how to help.

By sundown the tent was assembled with the bedrolls and packs safely tucked inside. Nirah opened one of the burlap sacks and found the perishable provisions. She stacked a day’s worth of rations on two wooden plates and handed one to Thirteen along with a waterskin. The two ate in silent companionship. Thirteen finished his plate quickly and went outside to clean his plate in the grass.

**//Warning: more spoozy adult text follows:**

The night air was crisp and only a sliver of a moon hovered over the sporadic cloud cover. He stretched and looked out into the night sky his hair blowing in the evening breeze. He heard Nirah also exit the tent shortly after. She stood next to him and looked out over the river and road, and up to the moon. There was a sense of anxiety or looming fear emanating from the half dragon, and Thirteen turned to consider her for a moment. When he did, Nirah came up behind him and hugged him, burying her face in his back. He paused, confused for a moment, allowing her embrace. With a deep sigh, she released him and he turned to look at her face. She took the opportunity to stretch to the top of her toes and wrap her arms around his neck and kiss him. He allowed her affection as she pulled him down and wrapped a leg around his, pushing him off balance. He fell backward into the grass with her on top of him. She released her hold and continued kissing him as she unbuttoned her bottoms and ripped them off her legs. Thirteen held her as she multi-tasked her clothes off while gently slipping her long tongue past Thirteen’s lips. Surprised at the intrusion, he allowed her to probe his mouth and intimately roll her tongue along his own, coaxing him to follow her retreat back into her mouth. He complied and she sighed into him following her ministrations as she reached down and unbelted his kilt. It rolled off his waist as she, with her recently obtained experience with Thirteen’s unique biology slid her hands between his legs, along his thickening length and dipping her fingers into his cunt, past his fleshy hood and against the sensitive upper region where his g-spot and prostate intersected. He quivered like clay under the new experience and was instantly erect. She let him breathe as she broke the wet kiss and moved her mouth to his neck and shoulders, licking his clavicle sensually. Thirteen could barely process thought as his vaginal walls and cock quivered in simultaneous excitement at the overwhelming sensations overloading his brain. He groaned aloud and clenched Nirah’s thighs tightly as she added a third finger to caress the depths of his moistening cunt. With a low moan and a tight contraction of his vaginal walls Thirteen orgasmed powerfully, Nirah was prepared and leaned back, angling his cock to the side and downwind as it pulsed forcefully throwing long ropes of his seed harmlessly into the grass. At the ministrations of Nirah’s left hand, Thirteen’s pussy quaked in simultaneous response, releasing a torrent of his watery lubricant with every pulse of his shaft. This dragged on for several seconds until

Nirah was honestly concerned for Thirteen as he continued to pump ejaculate from both organs until both the kilt beneath him and the grass next to him were respectively saturated. Finally catching his breath at the end of his monstrously long crescendo, Thirteen literally collapsed. Taking deep breaths he glanced up at Nirah who gently pulled her left hand free of him and handled his throbbing member gently, catching the dollops of fluid that still trickled down his cock in the aftermath of his orgasm. "I don't have words for that" Thirteen sighed, falling back into the grass again.

"I'm almost jealous" Nirah said, looking at the combined mess she had prompted, still handling the sticky globules that continued to pulse from Thirteen's still erect member. "Think you can go again?" she asked.

"I need a minute after that one" he responded meekly, "just to catch my breath...".

She giggled and pulled the kilt from under him with her left hand and tossed it back near the tent. Her right hand still held his cock firmly as she squatted over him and slowly inserted it into her hot wet muff. Thirteen visibly squirmed at the stimulation but offered no protest. She grinned evilly and hilted him in one slow deliberate motion ignoring the pain of protest at being stretched when she was still sore. She sat on him patiently, his entire length twitching meekly inside of her. After a long minute she began to rock her hips lightly back and forth, rousting Thirteen's cock from its respite. It thundered powerfully inside of her and she coaxed him back into action. The light rocking became a small pumping motion as she pulsed a few centimeters up and down increasing the movement and stimulation. Thirteen allowed her to work him, waiting for her to let him take control. She increased the pumping to a slow pistoning, drawing half his length out of her pussy and into the cool night air before sliding down and enveloping it again. With a slow and deliberate acceleration, the pumping soon evolved into a long powerful pounding, with every rise and fall the slapping of skin and squelching of moist friction filled the night air. Nirah literally bounced off Thirteen's hips, hilding his full length then pulling nearly off only to hilt him again and with that careful precise motion, she increased her tempo, railing herself against him, accelerating until she was going as hard and fast as she could maintain. She clenched roughly as she maxed out her speed, pounding Thirteens cock faster than she could breathe. Thirteen reached up to steady her as he felt her cunt tighten around him, signaling her coming orgasm. After three full thrusts, she slammed down and peaked, milking his cock as powerful muscular contractions pulsed up and down Thirteen's length. Feeling his partner orgasm and the powerful sensations of Nirah's pussy along his length dragged Thirteen to his own orgasm. He quivered beneath her as his cock again fired load after load of seed into Nirah. Together they rode the waves of pleasure until they both finished, resting roughly against each other. They stayed that way for several long minutes. They didn't move until Thirteen's erection started to falter and the once warm fluids within Nirah began to drool out and down. She pulled herself free gently, trying to encapsulate as much of the mess within her as possible until she was free of Thirteen. Once clear, she walked back to the tent and returned with a waterskin and a few loose pieces of cloth. Thirteen sat up and scooped the residual mess from his loins and wiped it on a clean tuft of grass. Nirah tossed him a damp rag and he wiped his hands and loins with it, cleaning off any other excess as Nirah did the same. She grabbed her pants and undergarments that she had taken off earlier and re-donned them. Thirteen got up and walked over to the tent and examined the damage done to his kilt. The cotton was sopping

wet on one side but should dry out without much problem. He fastened it to one of the tent supports to let it air out overnight. Nirah watched him while taking the rest of her leathers and top off, folding them readily.

**//END SPOOGE**

“Ready?” Nirah asked, gesturing toward the tent. Thirteen nodded and followed her in. She shuttered the oil lamp and crawled onto her bedroll. Thirteen rolled his bedroll up, took off his vest and glowed briefly, shifting into his large chimeric form which filled up the majority of space in the small tent but still fit him with enough room for Nirah.

“I can sleep like this outside if you like?” he asked before lying down.

“No, I can see how this can work.” Nirah answered as she opened the bedroll forming a padded blanket. She patted it with a gesture, “I get to be the little spoon this time” she smiled.

“What does that mean?” Thirteen asked as he sat next to Nirah.

“You get to cradle me like a princess and keep me warm and safe” she said sarcastically with a grin. Nirah grabbed him and pulled his head down to the bedroll and had him get comfortable on his side. She then inserted herself with her back against his scaled torso, her butt against his groin, her head under his chin. She twirled her tail around his affectionately and she leaned against his chest.

“So warm” she remarked. Thirteen draped his left arms over her, a claw over her belly, the other over her bosom and pulled her in tightly. He grabbed and pulled the bedroll like a pillow over his upper right arm and let Nirah use his lower left arm like her pillow. With a deep breath and a thought, he ignited the fiery aura within him at a low intensity, causing the orange-red coal-like colors to flicker over his claws, paws, and wings as he folded a wing over Nirah and his own head. The cool air of the tent quickly lost its edge and was replaced with a comfortable warmth. Nirah touched Thirteen’s wings gently, tracing the fiery colorations in his feathers. Thirteen watched as she stared at the iridescent hues that danced across his plumage and fur.

“Beautiful” Nirah whispered, “I could get use to treatment like this” she said further burrowing herself into the fur of Thirteen’s embrace. Thirteen shuffled one last time to get comfortable and closed his eyes. Nirah however, continued to look into the endless depth of Thirteen’s fiery adornment for a few long minutes until her eyelids grew heavy and she drifted into warm restful sleep.

Thirteen awoke first, lifting his wing and yawning. The better part of the morning was already over and he gently cradled Nirah into wakefulness. She woke with a start at his movement and looked around weary-eyed before wiping the drool from her face and looking at Thirteen. She rubbed her face and yawned into a stretch before slumping back over tiredly. Thirteen watched her and glanced at his dampened lower arm, saturated with dragon drool.

“I think that was some of the best sleep I have ever had” she remarked.

“I can tell” Thirteen replied glancing back at his arm before sitting up and struggling to fold his wing properly in the confined space. His flight feathers kept catching on the flap or Nirah or the bedrolls or apparently any other thing that existed in the tent and after a few frustrating seconds he lost his patience and just shifted into human form. Nirah laughed at his situation and solution having already gotten a faceful of feathers once.

“We should get on the road” Nirah observed noticing how much of the morning had already slipped by. “How do your legs feel?” Nirah asked remembering how sore she was the day after her first long ride.

“No problems at all, why?” Thirteen answered looking up. Nirah furrowed her brow, but then she remembered how ridiculously fast Thirteen recovered from injuries.

“Must be nice” she said seething jealousy. “Wish I didn’t have to deal with scars and pain and stuff...” she trailed off.

“I still feel pain. I just heal fast... We are going back to see the doctor, maybe he can turn you into a chimera like me.” Thirteen jokes. Nirah scoffed in response.

“But in reality, we can always ditch the horses and fly by night, it would make better time.” Thirteen remarked, opening the tent-flap and fetching his kilt. It was dry enough and he belted it on and adjusted the small pack attached to the belt just over the small of his back. Nirah slipped on her breeches and shirt before donning her leathers after which she rolled up the bedrolls and found the two plates they had left out the night before. She dipped back into the tent and pulled out another plate of fruit, cheese and soft bread for a quick breakfast before departing. She brought the two plates out and handed one to Thirteen. He took it politely and pointed at the area where the two had played the night before. Nirah smirked at the tangled mess of grass stuck together with long cobweb like strands near the trampled area Thirteen had laid in. Thirteen broke the bread apart and put the hunk of cheese between the pieces before taking a mouthful.

“Do you think you can make the trip in one evening?” Nirah asked, entertaining the idea of flying under Thirteen again.

“Can you bring out that map again?” Thirteen asked through his full mouth. Nirah nodded, setting her plate on the grass and slipping into the tent, she pulled the map from her bag and laid it out on the grass. Thirteen scrutinized it and nodded.

“Yea, most likely in a few hours. We made the trip in nearly one night before, we’ve made decent distance, I figure four hours with this headwind” Thirteen remarked, “though that is assuming I’m not carrying the full load of provisions” he observed looking back at the tent before shoving another mouthful of bread into his mouth.

“It’s a good fallback plan, I think it would draw attention coming back from town without a horse or traveling provisions. Especially with two people.” Nirah thought aloud nibbling on some grapes.

“I see your point” Thirteen remarked. The two finished their plates, scrubbed them off and packed them back in Nirah’s bag. Thirteen finished his waterskin and refilled it with the cask on his horse. Nirah packed the two bedrolls into her bag and set the two sacks outside the tent and started breaking it down. It folded and collapsed quickly under her practiced hand while Thirteen pulled up the stakes that reinforced the rods. Nirah packed away the poles and fabric as well as the stakes and cord retrieved by Thirteen in the leather case before also tucking it away in her extra dimensional bag. Thirteen untethered the horses and brought Nirah’s up next to the sacks, holding the horses still while she belted the burlap bundles to the saddle of her horse. She lifted her shoulder bag over her shoulder and finally pulled on her cloak and mounted her horse. Thirteen did the same, following her lead, as they left their campsite behind them and trotted back to the road.

Nirah started instructing Thirteen on controlling his feresian while they rode, showing him how to steer with his knees and the reigns as well as starting a gallop and slowing the horse down. He adopted the skills quickly and was able to lead his horse without assistance by mid-day. After Thirteen could steer his horse without problems, Nirah began to drill him on questions the doctor's servitors and assistants might ask him and how he should respond, as well as the general layout of the facility, room by room. This passed the time quickly for the pair as they made good distance, heading further north and finally northeast as dusk approached. Thirteen's head spun with the amount of information Nirah had poured into him, but he managed to retain it, rehearsing it a few times before tucking it away in the back of his mind.

"We should look to camp again soon, night is falling" Nirah recommended looking back at Thirteen who nodded in consent. There were few clearings in this stretch of road as the trees nearly bordered the road. By nightfall, the pair had yet to find a suitable campsite and continued pressing forward.

"I'll fly and look from above" Thirteen offered. Nirah voiced her consent and waited for Thirteen to dismount. She took the reins of his feresian and started trotting forward to give Thirteen some distance to avoid spooking the horses when Thirteen shifted. He disappeared into the darkness of the nearly moonless night with a thunder of wingbeats breaking from the treeline and into the sky. Nirah lost sight of him in the sparse moonlight even as keen-eyed as she was, he was black against a black background, perfect camouflage. She kept her eyes forward and waited for him to either circle around or meet her ahead. Instead she saw him ignite his aura in the distance, appearing almost like a collection of drifting campfire embers floating back down to earth. She brought the horses to a gallop and followed the road to where she saw him land. She could see his orange glow through a thick copse of brush. She dismounted her mare and led them through the brush carefully and into a protected clearing of mossy ferns and long grass. It would have been completely hidden from the road if not for Thirteen's orange aura.

When Thirteen saw Nirah coaxing the horses through the bushes, he immediately channeled back into human form and moved to greet her and help her with the horses.

"How is this?" Thirteen offered.

"Should work just fine" Nirah smiled. She gave Thirteen the reins to her horse and the stake to secure them for the night. She pulled out the tent when Thirteen called out to her.

"Let's not worry about that tonight, just the bedrolls" he suggested. Nirah nodded and did as he asked. She also got a pair of plates and another meal for each of them from their perishable rations. Once done she was sure to unbelt both sacks and tuck them into her shoulder bag. They were too close to the woods to risk leaving food about, especially on their horses, it could lure a bear or worse into their makeshift camp.

She unrolled and unfolded the padded bedroll, laying it out for Thirteen and her, leaving the other rolled as Thirteen had done yesterday. Thirteen walked over to Nirah and glanced back at the horses who chewed on the ferns contentedly in the darkness. He sat down and shifted quietly. He took the now tiny plate from her and made short work of the snack sized meal. He laid on his back, against his wings, looking up at the night sky while Nirah finished her meal. She finished quickly, hurrying herself. She took the two plates and tucked them into her bag. She doffed her gear laying it out beside the bedroll and crawled up next to Thirteen in her

linens. He took off his half-shirt that shrunk back to normal size as soon as it left his claw but left his kilt on. He pulled her into the same embrace as yesterday but left his aura quenched, afraid of it making too much light. He folded a wing over Nirah but left his own head uncovered this time, ensuring the senses of his nose, ears, and whiskers were unhindered. He closed his eyes as she petted his arms affectionately, rubbing her claws through his fur.

"I love you Thirteen" she sighed, shifting deeper into his arms and curling her tail around his. Thirteen squeezed her against him in response, growling a deep rumbling purr.

At the break of dawn, Thirteen awoke to birdsong and dew covered feathers. The tiny droplets of water coated his wing like gemstones and he involuntarily shook himself like a bird much to Nirah's surprise. She nearly leapt from his grasp as he shook, dagger already in hand, eyes wide and scanning for hostiles. Thirteen looked at her wide eyed.

"Ah, uh, sorry, that was a reflex, I woke up coated in dewdrops and reflexively shook myself. Where did you even get that dagger?" Thirteen asked explaining what happened. Nirah dropped her guard and collapsed back onto the bedroll, slapping him with the flat of her blade.

"Don't do that! My heart is still going nearly a meter a second!" She sighed, "I thought you were under attack or something"

"Nope, just drying off" he replied sitting up and blinking a few times in the bright morning light. He donned his half-shirt and shifted before he stood to check on the horses. They nickered at his approach. He rubbed his feresian's snout and untethered the cask from the saddle. He unclasped the lid and set it on the ground for the horses to drink from. Nirah groaned from the bedroll, finally sitting up and sheathing the dagger back in her leathers. She started strapping them on before rolling up the bedroll. Thirteen went to assist and together they were packed and on the road in less than half an hour with the minimalistic camp.

"We should make the complex by just after midday" Nirah observed.

"Are there any final preparations we should make?" Thirteen asked nervously.

"Let's go over some of the information we talked about yesterday" Nirah sighed.

Thirteen answered the questions she drilled him on with minor problem. The only mistakes were minor and mostly semantic. By mid-morning Nirah had exhausted her battery of questions and felt confident that everything should actually go okay. Thirteen asked her a few follow up questions that she answered with the best of her knowledge but after that the two shared a silent ride for almost half an hour, starting to feel the weight of apprehension looming over them.

Thirteen wanted to break the brooding mood and with the potential life-threatening experience looming ahead of him got him thinking, so he asked, "Do you think, anatomically it's possible that you could conceive?"

"Why are you worried?" Nirah asked, slowing her horse to trot next to his.

"I just wonder if it would even possible given my unique physiology" he wondered aloud.

"I am half dragon, so I would say anything could be possible" she admitted. "What brought this up?"

"Our last few days together" Thirteen answered.

"I can see your point" she admitted, "what about the animal half of you?" she probed.

"How do you mean?" Thirteen asked.



“Like how difficult would it be to resist if certain stimuli were provided” she clarified.

“Good question, like when I experience my first estrous?” he asked to further clarify.

“Sure. Good example.” She replied.

“To be honest, I’m terrified of that circumstance, doubly so from the consequences of the outcome” Thirteen admitted.

“That’s very human” Nirah responded reassuringly, “The thought of losing yourself in a wave of instinct or reflexive behavior would scare me to.”

“What about you?” Thirteen asked.

“Regarding?” Nirah asked, confused at what he was asking.

“Conceiving, you didn’t give me your opinion, you simply acknowledged mine” Thirteen responded.

Nirah thought for a moment, “Yea, I would try it. Not right now. But in some magical far off future where the doctor is dead and you have your memories and everything is perfect.” She answered with a grin.

“Even with the risks?” Thirteen asked with a worried scowl.

“Dragons are well known for their ability to procreate with just about anything living, I doubt you are an exception” she smiled then thought for a moment, “But I see your concern, your a chimera of like five different species, I doubt you would have the ability to procreate with anything but something like a dragon. So I guess you’re stuck with me!” Nirah beamed trying to cheer him up.

“Indeed” Thirteen sighed, but appreciated Nirah’s gesture with a grin. On the topic another thought struck Thirteen. “Do you have siblings?” he asked. Nirah shook her head.

“I’m sure I have some full-blooded dragon relatives, but not directly related that I am aware of” she answered.

“Was it your sire or dam?” Thirteen asked.

“My father was the dragon. He left after my mom conceived. She died in childbirth, I was orphaned and due to my ‘uniqueness’ never adopted. Few humans are willing to try and raise a half-dragon. I wasn’t into my adolescence until I was thirty. I saw three generations of kids come through the orphanage. So I ran away around forty years ago, I was recruited by the doctor about two years ago. His honeyed words and the promise of a place to belong were quite tempting for me. Needless to say, I later regretted that decision. I’ve seen enough to know that once the doctor has his hooks in you, it’s best to stay useful, appear innocent, and whatever you do; don’t touch the hooks.”

“Has anyone ever escaped?” Thirteen asked. Nirah turned at pointed right at him.

“You’re...err Koun’e was the only one I’ve ever known to escape” she answered.

“Didn’t “I” have to die to escape?” Thirteen asked himself aloud.

“Tomatoes to potatoes for a phoenix I think” she said solemnly, “and here I am marching you right back to him. Hopefully we can sneak you in under the radar long enough to get what we came to get without the doctor discovering your identity” she sighed. Thirteen nodded quietly.

“I just hope it’s worth it” Nirah said after a few long seconds.

“It will be” Thirteen promised trying to reassure Nirah. Nirah looked at him for a moment before smiling.

"I'm supposed to be the optimistic one" Nirah remarked.

"I am not required to be entirely pragmatic" Thirteen quipped, "especially so if the purpose is to make you feel better" he finished, sticking the tip of his tongue past his lips at her in defiance.

"You better watch yourself mister" Nirah threatened turning her attention back to the road.

"Or what? Are you going to deprive me of an opportunity to further taunt you?" Thirteen challenged.

"Taunt me? Please." Nirah dismissed his challenge sarcastically, "The only thing I could deprive you of is a solid chance at what you're looking for. So keep testing me fur face"

"I know you have a solid stake in enlisting my assistance especially so if and when I regain Korun'e's memories and experience. It may provide insight on how to free you from the doctor, so don't pretend this is an act of charity. Also, fur face? Really? Is that the best retort you can muster?" Thirteen countered.

"You'll see the best I got when I dish it out. A professional never tips her hand early" Nirah explained.

"Says the 'lizard face'" Thirteen provoked. Nirah's tail twitched in irritation but she held her tongue. Thirteen wiggled in his saddle in satisfaction at having the last word of their verbal competition.

The sun crested its peak in the sky and the landscape shifted into the familiar dark faunaless forest. An hour after they crossed the last bridge and the familiar bend where Thirteen first pounced upon Nirah came into view. Thirteen slowed his horse to a stop at the corner and reminisced for a moment appreciating the culmination of events that had unfolded. Nirah stopped her horse a few meters ahead and gave him a quiet moment. Without a word Thirteen turned and trotted to catch up getting into character, the real game was about to begin and the stakes were as high as they could be, they had to be all-in. Success meant everything, failure would be worse than death for the pair, especially for Thirteen and through him, possibly the island or worse.

The pair approached the front of the building and Nirah turned and followed a cobbled path to the right, Thirteen followed behind her. The large building had to be at least two stories, Thirteen paid careful attention to the magical wards and boundaries that glowed with powerful magic around the structure. The smooth stone walls were polished and castle-like but plain with no decoration. If not for the large quantity of magic and smoke pouring out of the chimneys of the building, it would look almost like a garrison or fort. The path curved around and the roof broke away from the walls separating Nirah and Thirteen from what must be a cloister or courtyard. Nirah approached the large wagon sized metal gate and touched it.

"Nirah Nightenblade returning plus three" she said plainly from the side of her horse. A moment after she spoke the rasp of metal sliding on metal could be heard from inside the door followed by them silently swinging open. Nirah trotted through and gestured Thirteen through as well. She trotted over to a stone structure just through the gate doors with a large wooden door with Thirteen behind her. As soon as both Nirah and Thirteen as well as their two mounts

were clear of the door, it slid shut with a boom and more mechanical grinding. Nirah dismounted and unlatched the door, grabbing the reins of her horse, leading it into the stable. As soon as she entered, a large clay humanoid figure jerked into motion, taking the reins from Nirah and preparing to settle the horse. Thirteen rode the mount in and waited for the servitor to approach him. As soon as Nirah's mare was secure the golem approached Thirteen and waited for him to hand over the reins to his feresian. Thirteen did and followed Nirah out of the barn, the golem shut the door behind them.

The courtyard was empty aside from a fountain that trickled in the quiet afternoon air. Thirteen gazed up at the many windows lining the walls of the large structure and caught more than a few interested eyes following Nirah and his progress toward the primary entrance. Nirah opened the large iron-bound wooden door for Thirteen who noted the lack of many of the protective spells on this door particularly. Through the door Thirteen saw a plain wooden desk with a fat little kobold occupying a chair behind it, nose buried in a book. It looked up as Nirah opened the door and gazed at Thirteen with bespectacled beady little eyes as he stepped through the threshold.

"Ohho!" it chirped in a high pitched voice, "This is an interesting specimen!" it said adjusting its glasses and jumping off the chair obviously too tall for the small round lizard. Thirteen walked through the threshold as the little kobold waddled its way toward him to get a closer look. He wore a white labcoat with nothing but his scales beneath. The bottom of his labcoat hung low with several tears and tatters where the hem had likely gotten caught on the little lizard's toe-claws. Nirah followed Thirteen through, the kobold looked at her and greeted her appropriately.

"Miss Nirah, another successful mission I assume?" he asked with toothy grin.

"Indeed. This is Thirteen, he's a hopeful replacement for Korun'e, I seek to sponsor him as a potentiate under me." Nirah said.

"Thirteen?" the kobold asked, "That's his name?"

"The cell number he was locked in before he escaped" Nirah explained.

"Ah, simple. I like it!" the kobold exclaimed. "So, Thirteen, what do you hope to gain here?" the kobold asked.

"Knowledge and a chance to practice what I know with..." Thirteen paused and considered for a moment, "specific freedoms".

"Indeed" the kobold acknowledged, continuing to take stock of Thirteen. "You fit the bill, lithe and springy, I assume the lack of equipment is directly correlated to the cell number scenario" The kobold asked looking up at Thirteen.

"You could say that" Thirteen answered.

"And you seek to sponsor him" the kobold asked Nirah.

"I do, with the understanding and acceptance of all responsibilities and requirements associated with sponsoring him." Nirah said with conviction looking down at the kobold. She rummaged in her bag for a moment before offering several papers, one with a wax seal to the small lizard. He took them and broke the wax seal, looking over them for a moment before rolling them back up.

"Well then, I never thought I would see the day that you would sponsor someone into the doctor's service. Finally coming around I see. If you're going to take responsibility for him then

I'll debrief him and get him settled. He will be ready for your orientation tomorrow morning." the kobold said. Nirah nodded and left the small room through the door on the left, leaving Thirteen with the little lizardfolk. The kobold turned back to his desk and climbed up his chair with difficulty, standing over the edge and grabbing a thin tome. He scribbled some notes on a pair of lines recording Nirah and Thirteen's arrival, the time and some extraneous information. Thirteen waited patiently in front of the desk. With a snap, the kobold closed the book and set his quill back in the ink fountain in the corner. He looked back up to Thirteen and grabbed another thin tome and a small charcoal pencil. With a plop the kobold jumped back down and waddled to the door to the right with a quiet pitter patter of his footfalls on the stone floor.

"Follow me" he ordered. Thirteen complied following the recordkeeper through the plain, non-magical door frame and into a small barracks. The room was furnished with several cots, some trunks, racks, and shelves all set near each cot. The kobold walked to the nearest one and gestured him to take a seat.

"Sit" he ordered. Thirteen sat. "Since Nirah failed to introduce us, I'm Rhakzohrek, just call me Rak. Nirah mentioned you were a suitable candidate to replace Korun'e which would indicate you are skilled at stealth and subterfuge?" Rak asked.

"I am" Thirteen answered.

"Any other skills?" Rak asked scribbling some notes.

"An affinity for fire and the ability to utilize some fire magics" Thirteen elaborated, "I'm also a linguist, I can speak and comprehend nine languages. I am martially skilled with my fists as well as light weapons."

"Do you channel your spirit energy while striking with your fists like a monk or do you fight more like a brawler?" Rak asked, continuing to jot all this down.

"Brawler" Thirteen answered.

"Any other skills or abilities?" Rak asked.

"None that I would consider worth mentioning to you" Thirteen said skirting around the truth.

"And your history?"

"I was to be executed. I managed to escape, survive and found my way to Novaro. There I found Nirah and helped her with her mission. We got along well and I had nowhere else to go, she brought me here." Thirteen explained.

"Simple, what of your captors?" Rak asked.

"Oblivious of my existence, they likely think I'm dead" Thirteen said with complete confidence aware of how close to the truth he was speaking.

"Nirah provided evidence that supports everything you say. The local constable couldn't find anything on you and you seem to have a transparent existence, exactly what we look for; no family, no ties, no prying eyes" the kobold rhymed with a grin. Thirteen stared at him flatly, unamused. "You will be working under Nirah for a few days until the doctor returns to this facility to formally induct you. Until then you will need a pass, you are not authorized to leave this or the next room without an escort. Defiance is not recommended, for your own safety." Rak explained closing his notebook and walking to the door. "Make yourself comfortable, the evening servitors will be around shortly with a meal. I'll see you in the morning." Rak said before leaving Thirteen in the room alone. <That went well enough> Thirteen thought to himself

as Rak walked out and he rolled onto his cot fully, resting his head on the folded blanket. He stared up at the ceiling reviewing Nirah's instructions from the past two days, mentally constructing the building from her descriptions and from what he saw of the exterior from the courtyard.

Two hours later, the door opened and a clay humanoid golem similar to the one from the stable shuffled into the barracks. It carried a wooden plate with several helpings of hot food, a goblet and a flask. It rigidly walked over to Thirteen and offered him the plate. He took it and watched the golem turn and leave. There was a sizable hunk of poultry of some kind, either turkey, chicken or some other bird as well as half a loaf of bread and several steaming brussel sprouts. The flask was full of water. Thirteen cleaned the plate in a few fingerfuls and set his plate on the nightstand next to his cot. He poured a glass of water and drank before laying back down and continuing to pass the time.

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"Rak reporting in sir" the small kobold announced to a glowing crystal that hovered above a dias in his office-like room. When there wasn't a reply he continued. "Only two arrivals today, Nirah returned from her mission announcing success along with a potential recruit. First impression is underwhelming but I sense great potential for him. Nirah seeks him to be her potentiate. I will be providing him with a keyring tomorrow. I have placed the notes in the linklist for your review doctor. End of Report" Rak finished. The glow of the crystal visibly diminished and Rak turned to run his evening errands before nightfall. As he was about to leave the crystal lit up again.

"Nirah has sponsored a potentiate?" a voice from the other side asked. Rak jumped at the unexpected promptness of the response and pitter-pattered back over to the dias.

"Yes doctor" he answered.

"Interesting, and you say he has potential?" the doctor asked with a raspy snake like tone.

"That is my impression sir" Rak answered.

"I am intrigued. Plan for my arrival tomorrow, I wish to see Nirah's first 'recruit'" the doctor said cordially.

"As you say my lord" Rak answered. He waited by the crystal for a long minute incase there was any other messages from the doctor. Once he was sure that there wasn't any further communication, he sighed, turned and ran out of the room. <There was so much to do! The doctor wasn't supposed to be arriving for another three days!> he thought with panic.

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Morning came early with another servitor waking Thirteen before dawn. It came in with another plate of food and water, this time with a bowl filled with a simple thick soupy stew and spoon. This servitor didn't wait for Thirteen to take it from him, instead it simply replaced the empty plate with the full bowl. It quietly shuffled out of the room leaving Thirteen awake. He eyed the stew with disappointment. <I should have taken an opportunity to hunt before committing to this. These tiny snacks are hardly a meal. Why is hindsight always clearer than foresight...> he thought to himself with disappointment.

Thirteen lifted the bowl to his lips and sipped on it, testing the edibility. It was plain but effective and better than nothing. As he was halfway through his bowl the door opened again

this time with Rak and Nirah. They approached him as he returned the bowl to the table next to his cot, watching them approach.

“Your keyring” Rak said, offering a golden bracelet to Thirteen. “This will give you escorted access to the rest of the facility. I emphasize ‘Escorted Access’. Nirah will start your orientation. Once complete she is to take you to the armory and get you outfitted.” Rak finished. Thirteen took the bracelet and watched the magics of the enchantments dance around it. Transmutation and conjuration auras were particularly prevalent on the gold adornment, most likely keyed to the doorways around the facility. Thirteen slipped it on his wrist and stood. Nirah escorted him out of the barracks and through the lobby. She placed a hand on his shoulder as he passed through the doorway to the left side of the lobby, a tingling of magic passed over him and with the briefest interaction with the bracelet on his wrist along with Nirah behind him the tingling ceased uneventfully. Nirah toured him about the facility for several minutes out of posterity, she had already explained the facility but it was good for him to see it and she had to keep up appearances.

Morning came and went and by around ten the pair stopped at the small kitchen and broke for lunch. There was a covered bar that separated the dining area from the kitchen which was occupied entirely by constructs. The metal humanoids buzzed about busily preparing for the midday meal. Nirah walked up to the bar and a golem diverted to the counter to meet her. It stood, waiting patiently for a command from her.

“Two meals and a pitcher of water” she requested. The golem nodded robotically before turning and rejoining it’s comrades. Nirah walked over to the table Thirteen had occupied, joining him quietly.

“After this we’re heading to the armory” Nirah said.

“Are you nervous?” Thirteen asked.

“Moderately, yes” Nirah admitted, “If it doesn’t work, then we’ll need to try another method. I think the best alternative would be finding the specific formulae utilized for your creation.” Nirah whispered. “That way we can look at all the variables and go from there”.

“Hopefully that won’t be necessary. I just hope everything goes smoothly. The doctor isn’t supposed to be around for a few days right?” Thirteen asked.

“As far as I’ve heard.” Nirah confirmed. As Nirah finished her statement, one of the golems walked through the entryway from the kitchen with two plates, a pitcher and a pair of goblets on a tray. The construct set the tray on the table between Nirah and Thirteen and moved back to the kitchen wordlessly. Nirah and Thirteen ate quickly, excited to find out if their primary objective was going to be successful or not. While they ate, two other individuals entered the cantina and were served. One was a red skinned tiefling in a labcoat, the other was a robed human. Both of the two looked at Thirteen’s wrist and sneered as if his presence were an insult to their intelligence. Dismissing the pair, Thirteen finished his plate and waited for Nirah. Once she saw Thirteen done, she stood and took the tray back to the kitchen, sliding it across for a construct to take care of it. Thirteen walked to the door and waited for her. Together they proceeded to the first level basement and then to the armory.

A large reinforced steel door like many of the others in the complex opened with a metallic grinding. The inside of the room was lit with several of the same glowing orbs that illuminated the hallways of the lower levels they had just transversed. The light was barely

sufficient, hardly keeping the shadows at bay, which created an eerie twilight-like effect. Inside the armory was a small checkpoint with a large orc seated behind the barred cage. He had his feet up and was balancing a dagger on his finger. When the door opened he looked up and saw Thirteen escorted by Nirah. He grunted and stood, sheathing his dagger.

“Welcome, Thirteen I assume?” he boomed in an eloquent tone. “I’m Grammosh, quartermaster of lab number three”. Nirah and Thirteen closed the door behind them. Once it was shut Grammosh pulled out a large bronze key and unlocked the cage door, allowing them into the armory. “You’re here to be gettin outfitted huh?” he asked, gesturing to the walls of the armory adorned with racks of weapons of all kinds, stands of armor, shelves of accessories, and glass cases with various unique items.

“I am” Thirteen admitted browsing the inventory, taking notice of which items glowed in the magical spectrum.

“Shall I give you a once over and provide a recommendation?” Grammosh asked with a grin.

“I have an idea of what my preferences are. Do you have any longer blades that are light to wield but don’t sacrifice power?” Thirteen asked.

“Like a rapier?” Grammosh asked.

“Maybe more like a scimitar?” Thirteen asked rubbing his chin, “but one that can be wielded in one or both hands interchangeably” he added.

“Hmmm...” Grammosh hummed. “That’s quite specific, I have only one weapon that fits that description.”

“I would like to try it” Thirteen chimed with a smile.

“Let me get the one then” Grammosh smiled back as he walked across the armory and up to a large shelf with many drawers. Thirteen followed and watched as the orc opened a thin lower drawer revealing a soft bed filled with alternating blades. He picked up a faintly glowing hand and a half sword and handed it to Thirteen. Thirteen waved it about in a few test strokes, careful not to handle the heavy blade too easily with his true strength, but with enough proficiency to not look untrained.

“It’s a bit heavier than I would like. Is there nothing else?” Thirteen asked as he sheathed the sword and handed it back to Grammosh. Grammosh scowled and replaced the weapon.

“You’re free to look about, large weapons are on the racks, bows in this cabinet, swords and blades in here...” Grammosh said pointing out the different categories of weapons and where they were stored. Thirteen took the moment to look over the two cabinets full of blades. Feigning interest in a few specific choices, before pointing out a locked drawer at the bottom.

“What is in this one?” Thirteen asked innocently. Grammosh looked to him and to where Thirteen was gesturing and shook his head. Thirteen felt fear and a sense of evasiveness about the orc at the mention of the locked drawer.

“Nothing of use” Grammosh answered. Thirteen narrowed his eyes at the orc and sighed.

“Koruken is in there isn’t it?” Thirteen challenged, “a black katana, as eerie as it is sharp.” Grammosh’s eyebrows went up at the remark. He looked to Nirah who shook her head in innocence.

“Aye” Grammosh answered. “A blade who only answered to one, thus making it nothing of use”

“I don’t understand” Thirteen replied.

“Aye, it’s a bit of a conundrum. The previous owner was able to draw incredible power from the blade but since it’s been in my possession it’s been nothing but a plain piece of steel. It gives me the creeps handling it as well, almost like the damn thing’s alive.” Grammosh explained dropping his voice to a mutter near the end of his explanation.

“But even a plain piece of steel can be a powerful tool in the right hands” Thirteen argued.

“Don’t have to tell me that” boomed Grammosh in retort, “I’m the damn weapons master! Whatever, don’t say I didn’t warn you!” the orc growled as he stomped to the locked drawer and unlocked it with another key from the ring at his belt. It opened with a click and from it he produced a sheathed black katana. The grip was polished smooth leather with red trim, the guard was black mithril and the lacquered ebony sheathe was in pristine condition. Thirteen could see incredibly powerful magic radiating from the blade in his magically sensitive vision, nothing like the first sword or any of the other weapons in this armory. The orc visibly shivered as he handed the blade over to Thirteen. Out of the corner of his eye Thirteen could see Nirah over by the door eyes glued to him like a hawk, it was the moment of truth. Thirteen took the blade and as soon as he bore the weight of the blade a tendril of thought brushed against his consciousness.

<You’re no piece of steel>. Thirteen thought. <I seek to learn from you, blade of my forebearer.> Thirteen thought directing his mental words to the weapon in his hands.

In response to his words, as if he had awoken a slumbering beast, the faint tendril of thought from a moment ago reared up like a wave and sharpened into a point, piercing his consciousness.

<What are you?> the weapon asked in a echoing voice emanating a sensation of puzzled curiosity having sensed Thirteen’s true nature.

<A monstrosity created by the murderer of your previous wielder. I seek your power to help me learn. Korun’e was killed in the process of my creation and made a part of me. Awaken him within me so that we can once again be blade and body.> Thirteen mentally responded. At his words the dark shadowy presence of the blade further enveloped him, nearly suffocating Thirteen within his own mindspace. The magic and presence of the blade coalesced within his consciousness in an alien way pushing against the very boundaries of his mind.

<There> the blade boomed within his mind exposing a point of reminiscence Thirteen had experienced earlier. Like a fluid that sought to breach a crack it filled the momentary exposure and expanded causing a tumultuous experience for Thirteen. Stars danced in front of his eyes as pain like no other exploded in his head. Focusing his attention to staying conscious and present Thirteen tried to retreat into his quickly shattering mindspace.

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Grammosh watched as the feral looking human took the blade and considered it for a long moment then suddenly fell limp with the exception of the hand holding the weapon. He was grasping it so tight his hand shook.



“Thirteen?” Grammosh asked, concerned. “Are you okay mate?” he continued after a moment. “Thirteen?!” he continued, grabbing the human on the shoulder and giving him a little nudge. Nirah walked up and put her hand on Grammosh.

“Give him a moment. He’s made a connection” Nirah explained, “that sword isn’t ordinary”

“I knew that” Grammosh said, letting Thirteen go and looking at Nirah, “but I’ve never seen anything like this before. Is he going to be okay?”

“I don’t know, but he made his choice, we must stand by it” Nirah answered chin held high.

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A young kitsune stumbled into a dusty old temple, the dark red wood flaking with age. He coughed in the dust and peered into the darkness, green eyes glimmering in the low light. He stepped under a low hanging board that had collapsed and several dried leaves crunched under his paws as he pressed into the darkness. As he approached the rear of the temple he spotted an altar with the same black length that Thirteen recognized was now in his hand. The kitsune’s tails twitched in excitement as he slowly stepped up to the blade, dipping his head under the hanging talismans and up to the edge of the altar. With a cautious paw he reached up and touched the dusty sheath. The sensation of the cool flawlessly worked lacquered wood under his touch provoked him to pick up the blade. It was heavy for the small fox but he handled it, bringing his other paw to the grip and with a firm pull, drew the blade. The black metal of the blade seemed to absorb the very light around it and was only accentuated by the dark red blood-like edge and temper line.

<Who draws my power?> A voice echoed in the kitsune’s mind. The fox jumped in surprise and looked around for the source of the voice. Seeing no-one put him on edge and he turned and looked toward the entrance of the abandoned temple. The voice again echoed in his head, this time with a clearer tone, <Who Draws My Power?>

Unsure of what to do or say the fox simply said his name, “Korun’e”.

<What do you seek Korun’e?>

The kitsune hesitated for a moment and thought considerably before proudly speaking, “The strength to prove that I am not to be forsaken by my clan”.

<A worthy goal, speak mine name and wield me as thine own.> The blade responded telepathically. A name jumped into the Kitsune’s mind which he knew to be the blade’s name.

“Kuroken” both the memory of the kitsune and Thirteen in reality spoke. Like a shattering blow that knocked the wind from him, Thirteen’s mental space crumbled. The boundaries he thought were his limits fell away as a stream of Korune’s past experiences, emotions, lessons, and feelings flooded his consciousness. The flow thickened and engulfed him entirely, threatening to drown Thirteen. Panicking Thirteen tried to retreat further into himself away from the floodwaters of memories choking him. A steady draw of magic pulled his attention back to Kuroken as the consciousness of the sword lifted him above the slipway of thought like a hand scooping up a drowning kitten.

<Be Still. Breathe and Absorb>. Kuroken whispered. At the swords’ comforting words Thirteen did, taking a deep breath and processing the onslaught of memories with Kuroken’s assistance. As the flood started to abate Thirteen could sense an emotion emanating from

Kuroken, <sorrow or maybe nostalgia?> Thirteen wondered. As the fragmented pieces fell into place and the overflow of mental energy slowly coalesced into cohesive mesh, the last memories of Korune's existence fell into place. As Korun'e's encounter with the phoenix came into focus, Kuroken's presence faltered and Thirteen lost his focus as the Phoenix's lifetime of experience began to intermix with Korun'e's flow doubling the quantity of memories. Kuroken drew on more of Thirteen's magic to help him parse the increasing flow. What neither the sword nor the chimera expected however, was the reversed order that the phoenix's memories started flowing. Seconds after the phoenix's memories had been triggered, both the displacer's and courel's memories surfaced with a thunderous and painful mental explosion. Simultaneous to this complication was the raw instinct and primal energy of the most recent memories which resonated with the raw primal energy of Thirteen's subconscious. Thirteen fought to remain in control of his conscious self but in doing so was pulled, torn, and dragged along the four lifetimes of memories he was experiencing simultaneously.

The mental presence of the sword had initially recoiled at the most recent development within Thirteen, but it was determined, it shifted stances from a parallel flow to simple containment. This was not something any living creature could escape from with their sanity intact.

<Prepare yourself. Pain. Exhaustion. Incoming!> Koruken shouted within Thirteen's mindscape penetrating even the most clamorous depths of memories. Unsure if it had been heard, Koruken wasted no time. With an unfathomable hunger it consumed Thirteen's magical stamina extracting from everything including his fiery aura before drawing it into an immensely powerful mental container. With a crack of thunderous dissonance the chaos in the mental space stopped entirely before being drawn into four sphere like shapes of light that flickered with shapes, colors, and silhouettes. As the shape of the final four spheres formed, Thirteen started losing consciousness. Blood trickled from his nose and ears as he focused his attention back on reality. His vision dimmed but he looked over at Nirah and weakly pulled up his arm and offered her a thumb showing his partial success before everything faded to black.

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Nirah watched in mental horror as Thirteen's limbs shook, his eyes darting beneath his eyelids in a fierce struggle. Moments felt like hours to her as she watched with anticipation, praying for Thirteen's success. Those prayers turned into dread as blood dripped from Thirteens ears and nose. Within a matter of moments the trickle of blood went from a slow drip to a steady pat-pat-pat on the stone floor. Grammosh turned at looked at Nirah with serious concern.

"Shouldn't we do something?!" the orc pleaded with panic.

"It's must be nearly over" Nirah said with a significant change in demeanor, lacking her previous surety.

"No Shit! He's about to die!" Grammosh declared. Nirah remained silent and kept watching, pleading behind her attempted stoicism. The orc turned back just as Thirteen opened his eyes, the white of them red with blood, turned and offered a weak thumbs up before losing consciousness, falling flat on his back with sword still in hand. Nirah kneeled next to him and surveyed the damage but couldn't see any exterior damage, it was all literally in his head. She pulled a potion from her bag and dumped it down Thirteens open mouth, hoping it would help.

“Let’s take him to a medicus” Grammosh recommended.

“Can you carry him?” Nirah asked.

“Easily” Grammosh said proudly, stepping over Thirteen and struggling to lift him up into his arms. What Grammosh didn’t expect was the density of Thirteen’s body as he struggled to get him over his shoulder. Nirah grabbed Koruken and noted the strange mental probe the weapon gave her. This must be what must gives Grammosh the creeps, she thought to herself. The grip of the weapon was hot in her hand and a tenebrous voice whispered to her mentally, <Hide me. The doctor approaches...> If Nirah was terrified before, it paled before the horror she was now experiencing. Blood drained from her face and her hands shook in panic at the development of those last three words. <With haste!> Koruken nearly shouted into her mind. She jumped into action and stuffed Koruken into her pack, its length disappearing into the expansive dimensional space of the container. Just as she had finished folding the lid over her bag and looked up to Grammosh the door to the armory opened. Doctor Geroe in his five foot nothing glory stood there garbed in fine robes while wearing a stern demeanor on his expressive face. He saw Nirah and smiled immediately.

“Nirah, welcome back. Thank you for taking care of those errands for me. I heard the rats put up quite a fight, enough of one for you to turn to help!” Geroe exclaimed patting his hands together excitedly. He looked over to Grammosh and the figure in the orc’s arms. He narrowed his eyes at the blood dripping from the individuals face and looked at the weaponmaster. “What happened?” the doctor asked concerned.

“Can you look at him doctor, I think he may have some internal bleeding. He was trying out various magical weapons when this happened. Could it have been a curse or rebound?” Nirah asked. Grammosh eyed her curiously but didn’t correct her story. The doctor walked through the cage door and placed a thin hand on Thirteen’s brow. Geroe felt a unique magic at work and looked deeper at it and saw the mental trauma that the magic had caused. There was other spells at work surrounding the victim of the magic but they were minor and simple effects that didn’t warrant much attention.

“He’ll survive, he just needs rest. Quite resilient I must say, I detect a significant amount of mental trauma, however it’s not fatal and he’s recovering quite quickly even as you hold him” the doctor explained.

“Doctor meet Thirteen. He’s the candidate I would like to sponsor and take as a potentiate” Nirah offered. The doctor nodded giving the unconscious form another once over, noting the lack of any significant aetheric presence, which was unusual for even a skilled martial fighter. <Must be weakened from the rebound> he thought to himself. Geroe glanced again at the weak transmutative magic and sighed.

“I hope he’s stronger than he appears” the doctor noted, “though, this feral appearance interests me, part of some unique ancestry I assume. If your sponsoring him, I will accept him. I cannot perform the rite until he is conscious however. Shall I arrange for his own quarters?” the doctor asked Nirah after his narrative.

“That won’t be necessary” Nirah answered.

“Of course not” the doctor replied with a smile as he licked his lips. “Grammosh can you carry Nirah’s cohort to her quarters?” the doctor asked turning to the orc.

“Right away master” the orc responded with a bow of his head. The doctor walked out first, followed by Grammosh, then Nirah who locked the cage behind them.

“Nirah, let Rak know when Thirteen awakens” the doctor commanded.

“Of course Doctor” Nirah agreed. “This way Grammosh” Nirah gestured with a tone. Nirah led the orc up three flights of stairs to the second story quarters of the facility and opened the door to her room. Grammosh walked through the door frame and set Thirteen on the bed. He turned to consider Nirah who had closed the door behind them and she looked straight back at the orc.

“Thank you” Nirah exhaled with a sigh.

“Why didn’t you tell ‘em?” Grammosh asked.

“Why didn’t you correct me?” Nirah countered.

“You must have your reasons” Grammosh answered diplomatically.

“I do, just out of curiosity, are you happy working for him?” Nirah asked. Grammosh looked around nervously.

“I won’t answer that question” he said out of fear for his own safety.

“Ah but that itself is an answer” Nirah pointed out, “I’ll say this, Thirteen here, he’s special, and with his help depending on how events unfold, there might be a way ‘out’ in the future.”

“That’s treason!” Grammosh whispered loudly

“Then you better go tell the doctor” Nirah said. Grammosh held his ground.

“I’m not a stupid orc, I can hear opportunity when it knocks” he countered.

“Good” Nirah sighed, stepping away from the door and over to Thirteen, “keep your head low in case things go awry. I don’t know how things are going to unfold until Thirteen regains consciousness. Remember, say enough to be truthful but little enough to not be lying. The doctor can tell.” Nirah sighed. Grammosh patted her on the shoulder and left, closing the door behind him in a quiet thud. Nirah went to the washroom and got a cloth and bowl of water and set to cleaning Thirteen’s face, neck, and ears.

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Nirah awoke to a rap on the door. She had fallen asleep at the foot of her own bed, head on her arms next to Thirteen. She stood and smoothed her cloak and went to open the door as it opened on it’s own. Frozen in front of the door frame, the door swung open to reveal the doctor.

“Just wanted to check in on our newcomer” the doctor smiled. Nirah’s heart thundered in her chest. “How is he?”

“Still unconscious” Nirah answered tensely.

“I’m going to take another look at him. Just in case” the doctor said feigning concern. Nirah panicked but she couldn’t stop him without appearing suspicious. She gestured him in. The doctor walked over to Thirteen and narrowed his eyes again still seeing the transmutative arua. With a bit of focus he looked into the natural bindings of the spell and its effects. With a wave of his hand he fixed his sight on the true form of Thirteen in the Astral plane and then with a shocked expression, what little color there was in his face drained.

“What is it?!” Nirah asked, seeing the visible reaction the doctor expressed.

“Amalgamation subject one hundred and forty six...” the doctor whispered. He looked over to Nirah and back to Thirteen.

“You brought him back. You Brought Him Back!” the doctor exclaimed nearly shaking in excitement. Nirah’s stomach hit the floor, the ruse was up.

“What do you mean doctor?” Nirah asked.

“I don’t have time for you now, he’s alive!” the doctor said putting his hand up. “You did well Nirah. I’ll be taking this ‘Thirteen’ with me. Wait for further instructions” the doctor ordered while he placed his hand on Thirteen’s midsection and with a blink both of them disappeared.

“FUCK!” Nirah cursed <Deimos! Son of Pharama’s Worst!> She mentally raged, shaking in anxiety and apprehension at what had just transpired. She collapsed against the wall and looked up at the ceiling pitifully.

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The doctor winked into his primary laboratory slightly elevated with Thirteen still under his palm. Thirteen’s unconscious form fell onto the table with a heavy thud as the doctor’s feet hit the ground. With little problem, the doctor took a blood sample from Thirteen and ran it through some alchemical instruments. He studied the processes for several minutes, jotting notes hurriedly between measurements and tests. This went on for several minutes before Thirteen finally stirred. The doctor turned around as Thirteen cracked his eyes.

“Welcome home one-four-six” the doctor smiled warmly. The voice brought a terrible sense of foreboding for Thirteen as he turned to consider the source. He saw a thin, short human with beady eyes, a firm visage, and a tumultuous radiance of magical auras.

“One four six?” Thirteen asked confused, as he struggled to remember how he got here amongst the still many drifting after-images of his recent cascade of memories.

“Your designation, I thought you were a failure!” the doctor said excitedly bouncing on his feet. “What happened?” he asked hoping for a recount of the scenario.

“Where’s Nirah?” Thirteen asked deflecting the doctor’s question.

“She’s in her quarters, why do you ask?” the doctor probed perturbed at being deflected.

“I was just with her” Thirteen answered, “I don’t know how I got here”.

“I took you here, you were seriously wounded after suffering backlash from a magical weapon” the doctor soothed, “She’s just fine, but you must tell me, what happened?”

“What happened?” Thirteen reiterated feigning ignorance.

“When you woke up?” the doctor asked.

“I saw you here and we started having this conversation.” Thirteen answered in a confused tone.

“No no no! What happened before, when you first woke up?!” The doctor raised his voice in frustration.

“I don’t remember very clearly, I was in swamp I think? I wandered into town and they gave me clothes and food” Thirteen said, not lying, but not speaking entire truths either. The doctor narrowed his eyes at Thirteen. Thirteen took the opportunity to innocently look around the room looking at all the magical aura’s and instruments. A lead box on the doctor’s desk caught his attention almost immediately.

“Where are we?” Thirteen asked the doctor. The doctor stepped back and sighed.

“I’m growing tired of this charade one four six” the doctor warned.

“I’m having a hard time remembering, I feel as though my head has been the anvil for a blacksmith. Who are you?” Thirteen said putting his head into his hands.

“Oh, right, I’m Doctor Geroe. I get so caught up in my research and I completely lose sight of the simple things like manners.” the doctor answered.

“Can you give me a little bit to clear my mind?” Thirteen asked with a innocent tone.

“You have until the morning one-four-six” the doctor almost growled. “You can stay in here” the doctor said gesturing at a room beyond his lab.

Thirteen followed the doctor’s gesture into the side room and as soon as the doctor left him behind closed doors, Thirteen scanned the room for magical aura’s looking for listening or scrying devices. Seeing nothing particularly out of the ordinary, Thirteen sat on the small cot like bed and folded his legs. He took the time to try and make sense of what had just happened to him. He worked through the fragmented mess of memories that were retained before Kuroken had encapsulated them to protect Thirteen. Progress was slow and tedious, images, sensations and perspectives were all skewed and intermingled in a tangled mess but Thirteen worked at it tediously. Morning arrived quickly and Thirteen had made headway sorting and piecing Korun’e’s experiences together leaving the others mostly untouched. The flow had been stymied before there was enough content from the other four fragments of Thirteen’s chimeric nature to be useful.

There was a knock at the door dragging Thirteen out of his mental space and back into reality, where the doctor stepped into the room with a wooden chair. He set it across from thirteen and closed the door behind him. It locked with an audible click.

“Time’s up” the doctor said sitting in the chair.

“So it is” Thirteen responded.

“Tell me what you remember” the doctor commanded.

“I remember gaining consciousness in a swamp, I was prone and in a scorched crater. Sensations, limbs that didn’t feel right, balance, and sight all felt skewed. It took me a few moments to develop enough composure to stand. I had no recollections of what, who, or where I was which manifested into fear. I turned to my instincts and found shelter, food and water. I used a methodical approach to figuring out what exactly I was capable of.” Thirteen answered.

“Intriguing. Shed this flimsy disguise.” the doctor further commanded. Thirteen complied, pulling his chimeric form from the astral plane in an aetheric glow. He dwarfed the small single bed and dominated the small room.

“Amazing, the phoenix’s magic augmented the very fabric of the amalgamation during your reincarnation, intermingling your constituent parts tighter than the original process could. Have you experienced any negative effects?” the doctor asked getting out of his chair and poking around Thirteen’s physical form, looking at his wings, tentacles, claws, ears, whiskers, and eyes.

“I have no point of reference” Thirteen answered.

“What about special abilities” the doctor continued.

“I have no point of reference for what is ‘special’” Thirteen answered. The doctor scowled at that remark.

“I suppose we’ll have to find out then” he smiled.

“When can I return to working under Nirah” Thirteen asked. The doctor laughed.

“Nirah? Why would you work under her? You’re near the pinnacle of creation. A powerful and augmented body, enhanced senses, feral prowess, powerful magics, and you want to work alongside a lesser form?” the doctor asked incredulously.

“That was to be my role.” Thirteen answered.

“Your role will be to further my research, you are too perfect a subject. With you at my side I can finally progress beyond the physical limitations that were holding me back for so long!” the doctor exclaimed.

“I will not consent to being a tool for you to use. I may be the result of your tinkering with the laws of nature, but I still have free will.” Thirteen sternly resisted. The doctor laughed again, this time almost maniacally.

“You think you have a right to demand anything? I created you, and you will be of use to me!” the doctor almost shouted as he utilized a holding spell. It diffused around Thirteen’s natural spell resistance and Thirteen retaliated with a powerful upper-right cross, claws splayed. The attack struck true and ripped deep lines in the doctor’s face. However the wound didn’t bleed. Surprised at his failure and Thirteen’s rebuke, the doctor stepped back eyes narrowed and unleashed a more powerful spell, Thirteen reflexively struck at the doctor with one of his tentacles since he couldn’t reach with his claws. The tentacle struck true, spines slamming into the doctor’s torso followed by a deep jab of the stinger. It didn’t stop the doctor and the spell slammed into Thirteen. Invisible, weightless, coils of force wrapped around him holding the chimera in place. The doctor reached down and pulled the tentacle from his midsection, admiring the sting. He squeezed the base and more clear yellow liquid dripped from the protrusion. He touched the liquid and rolled his fingers over it, feeling its texture then smelled it.

“Beautiful, paralytic and potent. This would have incapacitated me for a week if not killed me outright.” The doctor said nodding at Thirteen. “We need to get you strapped up before you start getting rebellious again”. He touched the restrained Thirteen and teleported him to another new room. This one had a large stone table with manacles. The doctor deftly rotated Thirteen in the air telekinetically, forcing him down on the table. There were only two manacles for the arm positions so the doctor had to improvise. He grabbed two additional pairs of manacles and restrained Thirteen’s two right wrists together and then bolted the chain between the manacles to the table, repeating the process for the left side. His legs and tail followed, then finally his tentacles were staked to a wooden board behind the front of the table.

“That should do it” the doctor said, dusting his hands and releasing his holding spell on Thirteen. Thirteen roared at being released, and immediately set about testing the strength of his bonds. “I’ll be back when you’ve calmed down” the doctor laughed. The metallic ring of chains on metal echoed through the room for over an hour as Thirteen struggled against his bindings.

After thoroughly exhausting himself, Thirteen slumped against the cool stone of the table defeated. <How can I get out of this situation? What am I missing?> Thirteen thought, looking at the chains holding him, stretching and tugging on his restrained tentacles out of his sight, even trying to shuffle the bindings on his wings free. He could get enough movement from his tentacles to look at them and curl them up to his head but nothing more. <Magic maybe? But that’s too simple, the doctor would have ensured that wouldn’t be a problem.> Thirteen deduced but tried to ignite his aura anyway. As soon as he did the nails in his tentacles grounded the

magic from him as fast as he could draw it. <Cold Iron>. Thirteen realized, it would sap the magic away before he could even spin the mana into a spell or shapeshift. He closed his eyes and started strategizing.

The doctor walked in after checking on Thirteen and seeing him far more pensive.

“Ready to get to work one four six” the doctor asked rhetorically with a smile. Thirteen furiously glared at him.

“I am Thirteen and I will do everything in my power to usurp your machinations” Thirteen hissed.

“Today is all about discoveries one four six” the doctor said, completely ignoring Thirteen’s defiance. “Were going to see what new things we can discover about you”. The doctor touched the table and with a disorienting lurch, teleported himself, the table and Thirteen to his main working lab, the same place Thirteen had awoken the day prior. The doctor pulled out an implement and with an uncanny precision jabbed it into Thirteen’s arm. A fuzzy sensation overcame the chimera as the doctor injected Thirteen with a sedative and an anesthetic. Darkness surrounded him like a warm blanket as he lost consciousness.

“The elixir can’t be stabilized doctor” Thirteen heard an unfamiliar voice say as he started to regain consciousness.

“You said the same thing about the amalgamation process...” the doctor replied in a monotone voice obviously distracted.

“But that was simple and didn’t require a temporal test chamber” the unfamiliar voice said.

“Simple?!” the doctor nearly shouted, “Your appreciation for aetherochemical sciences leaves something to be desired Wilhelm. Get me the heart.” the doctor commanded. Who Thirteen assumed to be Wilhelm left the room for a few moments before returning with some crystal container and offered it to the doctor. The doctor and Wilhelm tinkered for several long minutes in silence.

“Reverse the temporal time space by four minutes, re-attempting with a 12% saturation rate per minute” the doctor stated. There was a scratch of paper and parchment and more silence.

“12% saturation rate is too aggressive, necrosis of surrounding tissue is progressing at a multiplicative rate. Test forty-eight is another failure” the doctor sighed. “Reversing temporal time space by five minutes and retrieving test material. Dispelling temporal control” the doctor said matter of factly. He turned away from his test stand with a cold iron flask that was saturated with a cloying unholy magical light as bright as Thirteen had ever seen. He placed the flask in the lead box on his desk.

“File the findings in the current projects workstation and apply the findings to the stabilization algorithm. Have four more alternatives prepared for tomorrow.” The doctor said to Wilhelm.

“Yes doctor” Wilhelm said, rolling up several pieces of parchment and leaving the lab. The doctor looked over to Thirteen and saw that he was awake.

“Ah, you’re awake. Good. I had quite the fun time taking you apart today. Did you know you have two hearts?” The doctor asked thirteen. Thirteen growled at him in reply.



"It took me a while to figure out how to nullify that regeneration of yours, hard to take someone apart that can put themselves back together faster." he smiled pointing at Thirteen's leg. A dagger was lodged in the muscle and it was numb with cold.

"You have a very high resistance to many pathogens and contagions. You're completely immune to fire, have a high tolerance to the effects of electricity, and no particular strength or weakness to acid. I can't wait to throw you against some of my other creations to see how you do in real combat" the doctor said petting Thirteen's cheek. Thirteen pulled away and growled again.

"Tut tut. So spiteful, you're mine now one four six, I've already wrapped my magic around your hearts, I'll be able to find you now, even if you escape. Best behave and maybe once I've learned what I needed you can enjoy some minute freedoms like Nirah."

"I will enjoy ripping your undead husk to shreds after I find and shatter your phylactery" Thirteen grinned. Thirteen's statement wiped the confident smile from the doctor's face.

"I was going to give you an hour or so to recover from the effects of the sedatives, but it looks as though you are well enough. Let's see how long you can last." the doctor growled. He touched Thirteen and teleported him into a large metal room. The floors, walls and ceiling were all the dull metallic grey of adamantium. The room had a small floating were-light in every corner dimly illuminating the large arena. Dried blood splatters stained the floor in various places but otherwise the room only had a single door. After a few minutes of waiting on-guard, a large magic circle glowed on the floor, from it a large iron golem appeared. Wasting no time in engaging, the golem charged Thirteen. As the large construct approached, Thirteen tripped the large construct with a pair of tentacles tying up one of it's legs long enough to throw it off balance and knock it over. Thirteen took that opportunity to pounce upon it, springing forward and slamming his claws bluntly into the chest armor of the golem. The golem attempted to stand but Thirteen stymied its attempts to escape his pummeling grasp. Thirteen continued to slam his claws into the same weld of the construct's chest. After several consecutive hits, a small crack had formed in the weld. The construct changed tactics and retaliated against Thirteen, striking him with two powerful metallic slams. One struck him powerfully against the shoulder breaking his clavicle, the other against one of his arms. Thirteen didn't relent, and with two more powerful slams, popped the weld apart and tore the metal casing from the golem's chest and slammed it down on the vulnerable gears and servos that drove the construct. A horrible grinding and squealing emanated from the golem as its internal clockwork seized against the metal obstructions. With a final stroke, Thirteen ripped the magical heart from the iron golem and crushed it like it was made of glass. He took the opportunity to rip the metal casing away from the metallic corpse and saw several metallic lengths of wire and thin plates. Thirteen poked around and found a pair of tools and with a grunt, rolled his broken clavicle, shifting it back into place so it could heal. At the same time he shoved the metal spikes under his skin hiding them from view. Another golem appeared, same as the previous one. Thirteen sighed and destroyed it like the first. This continued for hours as the doctor tested Thirteen's endurance. After six hours Thirteen was haggard and starved. He could still dispatch them but it took him much longer than the first dozen. At ten hours, Thirteen was tapped, he could barely avoid the blows, let alone retaliate. The floor had become a debris field of scrap and golem parts. Thirteen continued to stay just out of the golems reach, buying time to recover his

stamina. Halfway through a jump he was teleported back into the holding room unexpectedly. His momentum carried him into the wall roughly as the doctor stood in front of him.

"Eleven hours. Truly remarkable." the doctor said. Thirteen shook from exhaustion. He took his left arms in his right claws and roughly reset the bones with a pair sickening crunches. He collapsed to the floor, sliding down the wall panting. "Your best competition couldn't even make it two." the doctor smiled rubbing his hands. "Rest up, you need to make it to at least fourteen tomorrow." Thirteen growled as the doctor left the room.

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Nirah silently stalked to the teleporter facility and activated the circle, transporting to lab number one. As she materialized in the main lab, her bag jolted at her side and a voice echoed in her mind.

<Remove me> Kuroken asked.

Nirah did as she was asked, fishing the sword from her bag. As soon as the last cm of the sheath's length cleared the bag, it winked out of existence. Startled Nirah looked around confused before shrugging her shoulders and prowling into the lower levels toward Thirteen.

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Thirteen crawled onto the small cot like bed and folded his legs. He placed the back of his hands on his knees with his palms up and reviewed the experiences he had absorbed from Korun'e's memories. With a calm and focused intent he reached out for Koruken. It didn't appear immediately, however, after an hour of meditation and repeated attempts, it finally dropped heavily into his upturned hands. His heart fluttered anxiously in surprise at his success.

<The Situation is Dire>. Kuroken echoed, <You must complete your assimilation before morning>.

<We must escape>. Thirteen thought wasting no time. As he said it, the connection between him and Kuroken widened and the captured memories began to flow again but not like before. They were organized and linear, following a timeline.

<Did you do this?> Thirteen asked out of curiosity.

<Yes>. Kuroken answered matter of factly.

Two hours of careful assimilation later, Thirteen was processing the immense amount of knowledge he had gained. The many pieces of his physiology that didn't make sense now fit together and the numerous skills he had once had were returning to him, like riding a bike. As morning came Thirteen flickered into the invisible spectrum pulling from Korun'e's ninjutsu and further augmented with the displacer beasts' displacement field, he could hold the invisibility for far longer durations than the kitsune could. Almost on queue, the morning servitor moved into the room to serve Thirteen his breakfast. With a cleaving blow from Koruken, Thirteen skewered the core of the golem and grabbed it as it fell, preventing a large amount of noise. He laid the golem on his bed and applied a illusory glamour to the body, giving it the appearance of his human form. He took the large haunch of meat and devoured it quickly before hiding evidence of the servitor's visit under the blanket of the bed behind the disguised golem. With another magical flourish, Thirteen folded Koruken into the astral plane, tying the blade to a sigil on his wrist ensuring it was handy but not visible.

Thirteen prowled into the doctor's lab through the opened door. The doctor was sure to lock it but the servitor didn't close it behind him having been disabled promptly. His first priority was the lead box the doctor was tinkering with yesterday. He opened the clasp and lifted the heavy lid. The same cold iron flask from yesterday with the immensely powerful aura sat plainly in the velvet lined box. It had an unholy cloying scent and made Thirteen feel sick just holding the small container.

<The essence of a demon lord concentrated and distilled>, Koruken spoke to Thirteen, <an immensely powerful concoction>.

<How do I destroy it?> Thirteen asked the sword.

<Drink it. However, it will surely kill you or worse>

<Can't I just pour it out.>

<It will violently react exposing everyone in this structure to its vile power, likely killing everyone but the doctor. It has been stabilized and amplified. Hundreds will die or suffer its taint. If the doctor successfully stabilizes it, he will have access to far more than his simple magics>. Koruken explained pragmatically.

The doctor rolled into the room as Thirteen finished his conversation with Koruken. The doctor looked over to Thirteen's room without noticing the invisible chimera near his desk, he was too excited to get back on track. He saw the same transmutative aura on the form lying on the bed and knocked on the door. When the figure didn't move he unlocked the door and stepped in. Thirteen took the opportunity to rip the top of the flask off and guzzle the concoction. It was syrupy and burned his mouth and throat like acid. He dropped the flask and the doctor turned around in the room, and peered out in Thirteen's invisible direction. When the doctor saw the opened case and the empty flask on the floor he panicked. He immediately began casting a spell in a cone in front of him, magically purging Thirteen's invisibility. Thirteen coughed and grasped his throat as the furious liquid ripped through him. He groaned as immense waves of pain radiated from his core, tearing through his consciousness. The doctor ran up to Thirteen and assessed the situation alchemically.

"You will not escape my grasp with death one four six!" the doctor growled. "WILHELM!" the doctor screamed. Thirteen's chimeric form filled up the corner as he fell to his knees, losing his battle with the vile nahydrian elixir. The door burst open again as the tiefling from yesterday burst into the doctor's lab.

"I Am Thirteen!" Thirteen shouted at the doctor, weakly swiping at him with a claw.

"Get me the silver heart!" the doctor ordered sidestepping the weak blow. Wilhelm paused for a moment assessing the situation, trying to grasp the scenario. "NOW!" the doctor yelled. Geroe waved his wrist and telekinetically lifted Thirteen' onto the table, holding the large chimera down as muscular spasms start to roll across Thirteen's body causing him to shake violently. Foam started to bubble from the chimera's mouth, his breathing came in short violent bursts. Thirteen's survival instinct took control and he roared viciously, trying to free himself of Geroe's invisible tethers. Geroe cursed at the sudden surge in strength he felt from Thirteen's resistance, nearly losing control of the spell holding him. Wilhelm burst back through the door carrying a crystal decanter filled with golden fluid, inside a red-black heart which beat with a slow steady rhythm. Geroe struggled to hold Thirteen at bay as Wilhelm looked to Geroe for instructions.

“Place the heart in the chest cavity before it regenerates” the doctor said forcefully. Thirteen roared again, snapping an arm free and slashing toward Wilhelm.

“But doctor, we don’t have the right formulae to properly prevent the necrosis! What about the saturation rate?” Wilhelm asked worriedly.

“We don’t have time for that!” the doctor shouted as he redoubled the telekinetic force on Thirteen and with that brief moment of peace, pointed a finger at Thirteen’s chest and a laser of disintegration burned through one of his hearts and clear through his chest, the table and into the floor beneath. Thirteen stopped moving entirely as he lost consciousness. The singed area around the destroyed flesh immediately began bubbling and rebuilding the bones and tissues within the hole burned through his body. Taking opportunity of that moment, Wilhelm smashed the decanter on the edge of the table and caught the heart. He thrust it into Thirteen’s chest as his body healed around it. Before the hole was even halfway closed, a golden flash burst from the wound and Thirteen again resumed his powerful resistance. His eyes glowed an angry purple hue and his ignited fiery aura shifted from orange-red into a sickly purple as violent tremors wracked Thirteen’s body. The doctor couldn’t hold him down by force anymore as the chimera’s strength redoubled and with a magical flourish shunted him into the reinforced arena. The feral minded Thirteen smashed against the walls as the continued pain of the elixir tormented him. His claws made no impact on the adamantium walls and his strength began to falter. As the effects of the elixir came to an end Thirteen returned to sentience as he felt the last dregs of his constitution falter. His recent and short life flashed before his eyes as his hearts stopped.

The doctor watched from his scrying orb in the lab. As soon as Thirteen collapsed, he rushed into the room to see the results. He rolled Thirteen over and set his head against the chimera’s chest having not felt a heartbeat. It was still, no breathing or heartbeat. The doctor remembered Thirteen’s previous instance of delayed reincarnation and set him down. He watched patiently for almost two hours before losing patience. <I will not allow you to escape death one four six. Not like this, not after what you just cost me!> the doctor growled. He closed his eyes and traced a large arcane circle on the floor of the arena, large enough to place Thirteen’s body within. He added smaller adjacent circles and runes, completing the magic circle after only a few minutes. With significant effort and a huge draw of power, the doctor used his mana to activate the circle. It flashed a bright blue-white and disappeared, forcing Thirteen’s reincarnation magic to ignite. A minor aura of conjuration appeared around Thirteen that pulled in the ambient mana thirstily. The aura slowly built in power and density over the next hour. The doctor became concerned when the aura had reached a high enough concentration to destroy the facility if not for the adamantium container. The doctor rushed out of the arena and to the safety of his scrying orb. Thirteen’s body consumed the mana quickly before starting to hover as it reached critical mass. Moment’s later the concentration of magic was critical and the delayed effect was released, in a single moment, the entire concentration of magic was compressed to a singularity consuming Thirteen’s body before detonating with enough energy to shake the entire structure. A bright white flash obscured the doctor’s vision as he tried to see the outcome. When the crystal gave no insight, the doctor determined his scrying seals must have been destroyed in the blast. He released the lever to open the floor which dropped into several trapdoors that led to his anti-magic prison. With the flick of his wrist he teleported

outside the boundary of the anti-magic field that protected the prison that normally held his samples and prevented magical creatures from escaping or teleporting away.

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The reincarnation of Thirteen collapsed onto the floor of the scorched adamantium room. There was a low grinding rumble and the floor started to slide away. Thirteen's unconscious body was dragged across the room by the retreating floor, against the wall and eventually pushed off the floor and onto the angular metal funnel that was below it. He landed in a heap on the dusty stone floor of the prison before finally starting to regain consciousness. The back of his eyes hurt and his head pounded with a painfully vibrant migraine. Thirteen sat for a moment collecting himself trying to escape his stunned condition, when like an avalanche the weight of his scenario became apparent, the last few days of memories flashing before his eyes in a matter of moments. Shaking slightly in anxiety and weakness, he felt under his wrist for the metal fragments he had secreted away from his foray with the golems but they were gone and must have fallen away during his regeneration. He looked around the floor and found them, one in the corner of his cell, the other in the neighboring cell out of reach of his claws but within reach of one of his tentacles. He scooped them up and rushed to his cell door and started working at the lock, twisting the iron in his claws to form the right angles required to flip the tumblers of the lock. After a minute of trying, the lock clicked at the same time Thirteen heard the door to the prison open. He quickly tucked the picks into a claw and held the door frame with his lower claws while slamming against the outer frame with his upper claws. The doctor turned around the corner and saw Thirteen properly restrained and smiled wickedly.

"You certainly are my favorite. I appreciate your tenacity, but realize that you have cost me something nearly irreplaceable. That elixir was the focus of many ongoing studies-" the doctor said, approaching Thirteen's cell. Thirteen growled and slammed against the frame harder, feigning aggravation and trying to lure the doctor into a false sense of security. "-you have taken that from me. I'll make sure you suffer for that in time" the doctor growled.

"I'm going to enjoy tearing you limb from limb and watching you squirm as I shatter your phylactery and watch as your body turns to dust. Creating me was your worst mistake!" Thirteen promised. The doctor sneered at Thirteen's taunt.

The doctor slowly approached Thirteen's cell, "If you touch me, or fail to cooperate in any form, I will flay Nirah alive and I'll make you watch-" Geroe threatened, stopping several inches away from Thirteen's cell, attempting to prove his tenacity and force Thirteen's cooperation. As soon as the doctor had barely finished the last word in his threat, Thirteen flung the door to his cell open and launched himself at the doctor. The doctor's eyes went wide in terror and he reflexively reached out for his magic, but nothing came. The anti-magic field of the cell influenced everyone equally, here he was nothing but a weak walking corpse. Thirteen landed on him roughly, forcing Geroe to the ground. The doctor screamed in response more to surprise and to alert the guards than in response to any pain that Thirteen's claws caused as they took hold of his arms and torso, separating the two with a sickening crunch. Thirteen tossed the two useless appendages aside which shriveled and dried into a aged corpse-like pallor as soon as they were separated from the doctor's body. With a quick slash of another claw, Thirteen slit the doctor's throat putting an immediate stop to the screaming and leaving the doctor wheezing through the tattered wound. Thirteen smiled wickedly as he ripped the doctor from his cloak,

stripping him to rags and with a forceful thrust, he tossed what remained of him into the cell Thirteen had previously been occupying. The doctor landed with a quiet thud and continued to wheeze curses at him as he rolled onto his back and sat up glaring at Thirteen with fury. Thirteen found the doctor's keyring and locked the cell.

"Your own magic shall hold you prisoner here. I wonder, how many of your little minions will turn on you now that they need not fear you? More than a handful I suspect." Thirteen said as a burning lance of pain briefly reverberated through his midsection. He paused a moment to consider it before the pain echoed through him again. He focused for a moment and grabbed the doctor's effects and ran toward the door. With every other beat of his heart, the pain doubled. Thirteen's limbs began to shake and he panted with effort to keep his composure. He squeezed through the door out of the prison and there was a brief respite as access to his magics and aura was restored. He channeled his magic into healing in an attempt to stamp out the cause of the pain. After taking the moment to weave his magic and start the spell, Thirteen looked up to see the awestruck and wide-eyed orc guard staring at him. Weapon in hand and halfway to the door, the orc moved first charging at Thirteen. The chimera slammed a tentacle into his gut, burying his sting to the base of his tentacle and envenoming the orc. The orc pushed through and slashed down powerfully with a waraxe. Thirteen put up an arm to catch the blade and prevent a lethal blow, taking the axe against the bone of his arm. Having neutralized the momentum of the orc, Thirteen grappled him strongly to the ground and disarmed the prison guard, holding him until his struggles weakened into a shaking paralyzed mess. Thirteen got to his feet and relinquished the guard of his set of keys and a long tear of cloth. The deep axe wound wasn't healing and the pain in his chest wasn't getting better, the magic of his spell had simply stalled its progression. Fear began to creep into Thirteen's presence of mind and he looked to the magic barrier on the door to the guardroom. He didn't have his keyed bracelet or anyone to escort him even if he did. The dread of his scenario began to sink in as he looked around the guardroom carefully, looking for a chance of escape. He tied the strip of cloth liberated from the orc guard over his wound during his investigation.

There were manacles and weapons around the guardroom as well as several crates and a desk. Thirteen rushed over to the desk and started tearing through the drawers. He found a set of linens. He used them to further clean and bandage his wounded arm. The cloth soaked through with blood almost immediately, drawing blood from his blood-drenched fur. There were several leather backed logbooks, scraps of parchment, quills, a few bottles of some alchemical liquid, and some leather straps, but nothing to get him out of the room. He looked around again and saw the doctor's effects he had dropped when the orc attacked him. He ran over and started rummaging through the doctor's goods. He found a key bracelet, but without an escort he was still stuck. There was the robe, two rings, a spellbook, several magical implements, a pair of wands, a reagent pouch, and a string of pearls, but no obvious way out. Thirteen did however, remember the string of pearls, it was Korune's. It was a magical implement that he had used to fuel his spells beyond the normal capacity. Thirteen flipped it around his lower left wrist like Korune would wear it, appearing like a string of prayer beads. If anything it was useful in the fact that it could fuel his magic further delaying the cause of the pain. It was a beautiful implement, twenty smaller white pearls intermixed with, eight small black pearls, and four large

teal pearls. Thirteen also slipped the key-ring onto his lower right wrist and continued to mill about.

An hour of dwelling, thinking, brooding, and searching later and Thirteen was still stuck. He had carefully reviewed the magic of the portal trying to find a weakness but it was efficiently and masterfully spun. The magic of the pearls as well as Thirteen's own reserves was nearly depleted and the pain had tripled. Thirteen could barely focus and his limbs shook with weakness. He sat in the corner and panted through the pain praying for something, if he died again, this soon after a reincarnation, he wouldn't come back. He reviewed the prison, thinking of something, anything. He looked down at the guard who looked at him fearfully, still trembling on the ground, paralyzed. Then it hit him. The guard. He rolled to his feet and reeled, dizziness and lightheadedness overcoming him as his vision dimmed. He braced himself against the wall and waited for the sparks of light to dissipate and his vision to clear before stepping over the orc. With significant effort, he threw him over his shoulder before stepping out of the guardroom. Thirteen felt the magic flow over him, to his bracelet, then to the orc on his shoulder and let him pass. Breathing a sigh of relief, Thirteen limped up a circular flight of stairs and stepped onto the landing. There was another door that opened with a slight push and led to a hallway. Thirteen walked down it cautiously, aware that he was quite conspicuous and vulnerable in his current condition. He needed to find someone to help him, something was wrong with him and his regeneration wasn't able to cope. He glanced around a corner and saw a human alchemist step into a room, closing the door behind him. Thirteen walked up and knocked on the door before taking a few steps back and bracing himself against the wall.

The door opened and there was a curious "Hello?" from the human before sticking his head into the hallway to look around. Thirteen took that opportunity to put a claw over the alchemist's mouth and force himself and the alchemist into the room. He shut the door as he plowed into the human with a paw and dropped the prison guard. The panicked human looked from Thirteen to the guard and back, doubly afraid.

"If you promise not to scream and have a civil conversation with me, I promise not to cut your throat" Thirteen panted. "...do we have an accord?" he finished. The human nodded meekly behind Thirteen's massive paw. Thirteen released the human and fell to a knee, before sitting down in the small lab.

"Who or what are you?" the human asked timidly.

"Thirteen is my name. I'm an amalgamation created by Geroe who is dying of something. Help." Thirteen said between breaths. His magic reserves were just about tapped, he only had a few more minutes before whatever he was holding back would be free to kill him for good.

"Wait. What?" The alchemist asked looking at Thirteen incredulously.

"Fix me if you want a fucking life story human!" Thirteen growled. His vision started to spin again and he felt nauseated and weak. The human shook his head and started poking at Thirteen with a few instruments from his lab.

"Give me a recount of the last few hours then, or has this condition existed for longer?" the human asked as he took a small vial and captured a few drops of blood from Thirteen's wounded arm.

“Just the last few hours. I drank the elixir the doctor was studying, it killed me, I came back after the doctor did some procedure on me, everything was fine until I overpowered the doctor in the prison, it started with a dull pulsing burn that has been getting steadily worse.”

“Wait, the Nahydrian Elixir?” the alchemist asked stopping his tests.

“The demon blood one” Thirteen answered. The alchemist paled at Thirteens answer.

“And you already died once?” the alchemist asked, confirming Thirteen’s story.

“Yes” Thirteen answered without giving an explanation. The alchemist waited but didn’t push further.

“I, I can’t... That’s way beyond me. I don’t even... I’m just a third tier alchemist! I’m not even permitted in the advanced laboratories. You would need someone like Lukadrom or Parthax.” the human stammered.

“Then summon Nirah, she’ll know what to do” Thirteen wheezed.

“The half-dragon?” the human asked.

“Is there another Nirah?” Thirteen asked sarcastically, losing his patience with the human. He could tell the poor guy was afraid for his life, but still, time was not exactly an expendable resource at the moment.

“Okay...” the human agreed, turning and grabbing a stick of chalk and scribing the requisite circle on the ground. The alchemist murmured a few words and dumped a beaker of some concoction into the circle that evaporated into smoke as it touched the stone floor. The alchemist made a few hand gestures, mumbled a few more words and with a steady, clear tone, spoke.

“Nirah, Georg summons you at Thirteen’s bequest. Answer and be present!” the human said. There was a larger burst of smoke and a quiet tap of boots on stone. Nirah waved the smoke away and looked around the room. She saw the orc and Thirteen by the door and rushed over. Thirteen looked up at her and smiled.

“I drank some bad stuff. The human will fill you in. Doctor... is locked... in prison...” Thirteen said as he lost consciousness. Nirah helped ease him down and looked at the orc, who was looking at her helplessly drooling into the floor, eyes still wide in fear. She looked up to Georg and waited.

“We need a master alchemist for him, or an anointed cleric” Gerog answered preemptively.

“What the Fuck is happening to him?” Nirah asked.

“No time. He’s about ten minutes away from death. You need to find one of the two, I can buy him another ten or twenty minutes at most. He locked the doctor in the basement, I assume within the anti-magic field. If someone unlocks Geroe before then, we’re all going to end up like him.” Gerog said, turning and hastily grabbing sealed vials of various ingredients from the nearby rack. Nirah grimaced at the human but didn’t have time to argue. She paused for a moment by Thirteen’s shoulder and placed a hand on him. He was cold. Dread filled Nirah’s gut like a black hole had just burst into existence within her. She rushed out of the lab and down the hall. She turned into the advanced laboratory and found a human assistant.

“Wheres Parthax?” Nirah asked trying to appear normal. The young female pointed to the back room of the lab where the locked ingredients were kept. She smiled and thanked the girl and walked over to the door thanking her luck. She opened the door and closed it behind



her, looking down the first row of shelves. She turned and followed the library like assortment of materials until she found the Tiefling measuring out grains of a dust-like substance on a sensitive scale.

“Parthax?” Nirah whispered trying not to scare the focused tiefling.

“Moment” Parthax answered without breaking his concentration. Nirah waited what felt like an eternity before he finally looked away from his instrument. “Nirah?” Parthax asked, surprised at her presence.

“Remember that favor you owe me?” Nirah asked, hands behind her back.

“I wouldn’t forget it for the life of me, that death adder’s cap was vital for the antidote I developed to get the doctor to approve my request for masterate” Parthax answered.

“I’m calling it in. I need you to help save a friend, but with one condition. No unnecessary questions until he’s stable. Can you help me?” Nirah asked.

“Well, I mean, that depends, what’s going on?” the tiefling asked, intrigued.

“It’s life or death, he’s been poisoned or something and Georg says only a first tier alchemist or an anointed cleric could help him. Considering Lukadrom isn’t usually in this facility, you’re my only chance at saving him.” Nirah pleaded.

“If this makes us even, I will do everything in my power” Parthax agreed.

“Even avoiding unnecessary questions until after?” Nirah reiterated.

“Even avoiding unnecessary questions if that makes you happy.” Parthax sighed. Nirah walked quickly out of the storage room and back to Gerog’s lab. The human had developed a makeshift gravity drip of green liquid that followed a plastic tube to Thirteen’s vein. Thirteen’s breathing was erratic and hoarse and his claws shook slightly. Nirah opened the door for Parthax and let him in. As soon as the tiefling saw Thirteen’s prone form he stopped, paled from deep red to a pink-ish hue, turned to Nirah and opened his mouth. Nirah frowned at him and pointed at him with a reminding finger. Parthax closed his mouth in a grimace, glared daggers at Nirah and turned to Georg.

“What’s the prognosis?” Parthax asked.

“Chimeric male-” Georg started.

“-hermaphroditic-” Nirah interrupted. Georg and Parthax looked at her, then back to each other.

“Chimeric hermaphrodite with severe cytokinesis brought on by nahydrian poisoning. Patient reports singular death event in the last six hours. Administered point one five liters of resteogenotion and a two cc drip of mohogenotion.” Gerog corrected.

“You said nahydrian poisoning?!” Parthax paled further.

“I did.” Gerog said matter of factly. Parthax looked back at Nirah again with a deeper scowl.

“You and me are going to have words after this dragon!” Parthax growled. “We need to get him to the advanced lab. I can’t treat him here if I can even treat him at all.” Parthax said, getting under a pair of Thirteen’s arms. Nirah followed with the other pair, and Georg carried the glass container of green liquid that was keeping Thirteen alive. The pair hauled Thirteen through the hallway and into the advanced lab, Nirah doing more of the heavy lifting graced with magical strength from her draconic heritage. She helped position the large chimera on the

polished steel table in the center of the lab. Georg handed Parthax the sample of Thirteen's blood.

"The remainder of his blood sample" Georg said. Parthax nodded and started to poke around Thirteen's body with multiple instruments just like Georg had."

"Tell me what you know about him Nirah, considering you seem to possess an 'intimate' knowledge of his biology" Parthax asked with a sharp tone.

Nirah clicked her tongue and answered, "He's the first successful amalgamation in Geroe's line of attempts. The constituent parts were Korun'e, a phoenix, a displacer, a basilisk and one other creature that I'm not aware of."

"The kitsune?" Parthax asked, pausing. Nirah glared at him. "Sorry, anything else?"

"He mentioned imbibing the elixir and the doctor performing some procedure on him before his death event" Georg answered. Parthax turned back to Thirteen and continued various tests. He muttered a few spells and looked over Thirteen carefully. After taking a few finishing pokes around Thirteen's torso, the tiefling turned to the lab equipment and started dabbling with Thirteen's blood. After a few minutes of tests, he rushed over to the ingredient storage and after thirty seconds or so, returned with an arm full of jars and vials. He deftly unstopped them and started brewing. Nirah watched silently and Georg followed Parthax's measurements and movements

"This is bleak. The doctor's best efforts to stabilize the nahydrian elixir have failed, and I'm doing it in less than five minutes with only three variables working to my advantage. The doctor used the preserved heart of a sanctified silver dragon, the chimera's own regenerative properties, and the phoenix's reincarnative magic has somehow dampened the initial effects of the elixir and now the magics of the demon and dragon have combined into a aetherial civil war of physical carnage within the patient. So let's play attrition..." Parthax thought aloud between additions and measurements to the formula. The final product was a syrupy golden liquid and shined like a miniature sun. Parthax poured it into a small vial and screwed a metal lid onto it. He walked over to Thirteen and twisted the lid onto a receiver of the glass container that held the green fluid. As soon as the lid clicked into place, the bright liquid mixed with the green fluid slowly traveling down the plastic tube to Thirteen's vein. Within moments of it starting to disappear under his skin, his breathing calmed and the shaking of his limbs stopped.

"It's a waiting game now. He's already halfway there, if he can make it another two or three hours the foreign aetheric elements should be expelled." Parthax sighed. He looked up to Nirah with a scowl and pointed, "You have about nine-million gold worth of explaining to do".

"Ask your questions" Nirah said proudly.

"What. The. Fuck!" Parthax shouted.

"That's not a question" Nirah stated matter of factly. Parthax growled then collected himself.

"So, is this really Korun'e? Or part of him? Them? It? Err..." Parthax asked confused for a second.

"As far as I know" Nirah answered.

"How the hell did this thing get to the Nahydrian elixir?"

"I don't know"

"How did you come to know it?"

"It's Thirteen, and 'his' initial reincarnation had a delay. The doctor disposed of him before the reincarnative magic of the phoenix had triggered. I found him, or he found me on my way to Novaro. He later saved my life."

"I see. Does the doctor know about this?"

"I'm sure he knows about Thirteen. I don't think he knows about your contribution or my full experiences with him."

"What are you going to do with 'Thirteen' after he regains consciousness?"

"I'll discuss that 'when' he regains consciousness"

"Fair enough. Did Thirteen say anything else to you Georg before he lost consciousness?" Parthax asked finishing his line of questions

"I think Thirteen should explain it when he's conscious" Georg answered looking at Nirah then back to Parthax, dodging the question. Parthax narrowed his eyes and sat on a nearby stool positioned by Thirteen's table. His demonic tail twitched between the legs of the stool under his lab coat in irritation.

"Then I suppose we will wait" Parthax said.

"Georg, can you alert Grammosh to the situation, I think the quartermaster would like to know about his brother and what happened to my charge." Nirah asked. Georg nodded and started walking out leaving Nirah and Parthax alone with Thirteen. "Oh, and administer an antidote to Drakthor Thirteen likely stung him. No reason to keep the poor guy incapacitated and drooling all over himself" she added. Georg looked to the ceiling in a moment of recollection before nodding again and leaving to accomplish his errand.

"I'm not gonna lie, when I saw Thirteen on the floor of Georg's lab at your bequest I was about half a hair from telling you to fuck off." Parthax sighed.

"What stopped you?" Nirah asked.

"The way you were looking at him before I opened my mouth" Parthax answered. Nirah blushed and looked away.

"The doctor won't stand for it" Parthax advised.

"The doctor can fuck off" Nirah swore. Parthax visibly winced.

"That's dangerous Nirah. This is your life we're talking here. He won't stand for defiance" Parthax insisted. Thirteen shuffled slightly on the table. Both Parthax and Nirah looked over to him with Nirah rushing over to his side. Parthax put a set of fingers on his neck and counted for a few seconds before his brow furrowed. "Two hearts..." sighed the alchemist in frustration, "seriously...?" he added as he gave up trying to count. Thirteen's eyes fluttered open and he coughed roughly into his paw, gritty dark blood came up in globules. After almost a full minute of clearing his lungs, Thirteen wheezed and tried to sit up. Parthax held him down.

"Stay down, you're still being treated. You're regeneration is starting to assert itself, I've neutralized a large quantity of the elixir's remaining potency, drawing out the negative effects on your body. You'll be weak for a few hours, maybe days, there's no precedent for this type of treatment, but you shouldn't push yourself." Parthax advised. Thirteen paid him no mind and sat up anyway, slowly. He looked around the room, blinking in the bright light of the lab. He saw the green-yellow fluid flowing into his lower arm and left it be. After a few breaths he turned and saw Nirah. She smiled at him through tears.

"You going to be okay?" Nirah asked worriedly. Thirteen swallowed and slowly blinked.

"Is he a good guy?" Thirteen asked Nirah pointing at Parthax with a free paw.

"I'm not sure, he did help you but I coerced him into it. I suppose we're going to find out" Nirah said slowly positioning herself toward the door. Parthax caught her movement and looked at Thirteen suspiciously.

"You have my gratitude for your assistance. I'm sure you have questions" Thirteen said with a slight slur.

"Just one really." Parthax said before continuing to the question, "Why did you consume the nahydrian elixir?"

Thirteen nodded at the straightforwardness, "To take it away from the doctor. I was willing to forsake my life to prevent Geroe from unlocking the secrets of that vile power. I exploited an opportunity when I was unsupervised and restrained in the doctor's lab. As for the doctor now..." Thirteen paused, glanced at Nirah, then looked back at Parthax, "-he's enjoying the hospitality of his magically restrictive prison ward." Parthax paled.

"You overpowered the doctor?" he asked.

"Overpowered suggests I fought him on equal footing. I simply took advantage of his vanity and pride. In an anti-magic field, even a powerful and ancient lich is no more than a barely animate sack of bones to any martial contender." Thirteen answered.

"Lich...?" Parthax asked confused. Thirteen looked to Nirah and back.

"You didn't know? Geroe's a lich. Undead, soul in a jar, unkillable..." Thirteen answered and looked at Nirah, "did you know?"

"I suspected as much" Nirah answered. Parthax looked at the ground.

"He treated me well, but I suppose that I never gave him reason not too. I was tedious and helpful, and trusted him. To think he's been toying around with life so negligently, it makes a lot more sense now." Parthax said solemnly.

"So, what are you going to do. I mean the prison can literally hold him indefinitely but there are fanatical followers that will come to his aid. You have already helped me considerably and I'm sure that will not go over well if the doctor is ever set free." Nirah asked from behind him.

"I 'was' coerced" Parthax admitted, "but when the doctor's upset which I know he will be, semantics are entirely irrelevant. I blame you for this Nirah, but I can't hate you for it. This puts us past even, you both owe me for this." Parthax sighed.

"We must find a way to neutralize the doctor's magic that holds you prisoner. I can see it clearly wrapped around your hearts like black and red threads of light. He used his magic on me before I reincarnated, but it seems death breaks the spell." Thirteen said.

"There must be something in the doctor's library, notes on the spells he uses or the like." Nirah suggested. Parthax hummed in thought.

"If there is, he will have encoded it. It might be easier to just detain him until his phylactery can be located and destroyed" Parthax said.

"In which case we might find clues about where and what it could be in the doctor's personal lab, making the lab the destination in both cases." Thirteen sighed laying back down. "I think we should look at taking control of the facility first though. That would give us the advantage of being able to keep the doctor under control while we search for the phylactery.

The alternative is...dreadful” Thirteen said with a sharp tone as he ripped the cotton bandage from his now healed arm. The blackened-red cloth tore away easily at Thirteen’s strength and he held it in his claw dutifully as he ignited his fiery aura in that claw specifically. With a fiery repose the blood soaked cloth resisted the effects of the fire for as long as materially possible before eventually being consumed by Thirteen’s flames. Parthax watched with interest and Nirah watched with fear.

“Grammash should have been back by now with Georg” Nirah observed.

“He may have taken him to his quarters to check on his brother” Parthax suggested.

“Are you ever going to try striking up a conversation before jabbing those pointy bits into new acquaintances Thirteen?” Nirah teased.

“Only if they don’t try to stick me with pointy bits first. You were just an exception.” Thirteen countered.

“Glad to know I’m special” Nirah laughed. Thirteen continued to rest, his wings and tentacles sloughed awkwardly under his shoulders.

“I assume this is some inside joke?” Parthax asked, eyebrow raised. Nirah giggled.

“He assaulted me and envenomed me with the sting hidden in the tips of his tentacles, just below the pads. He uses them fairly effectively as a martial non-lethal option. It’s how we first met and it’s how he introduced himself to Grammash’s brother. I couldn’t turn down the opportunity to give him a hard time about it” Nirah answered. Parthax nodded in understanding.

“Why did you assault her to begin with?” Parthax probed.

Nirah answered first, giving Thirteen a chance to continue resting. She told him the story of Thirteen’s first encounter with her and the events that led up to this point. The whole recount took almost an hour. By the time she was finished Thirteen was sleeping again. She stroked his whiskers and ears and he opened his eyes and furrowed his brow.

“Something’s wrong, I feel tingly...” Thirteen said sitting up quickly, which was a bad idea as his vision spun. He grabbed the table to steady himself through the lightheadedness.

“What do you mean tingly” Parthax asked, jumping off his stool.

“I’m light headed and my chest, it’s the weirdest sensation, like a swarm of ants crawling about inside of me. My left heart feels like it’s beating way faster than normal...” Thirteen answered.

“Any pain, nausea or paralysis?” Parthax asked concerned. He went over to the station he was working at earlier and grabbed a stethoscope and aethroscope. “Lay back down” Parthax ordered as he started listening and observing Thirteen again.

“No, but the tips of my fingers, claws, tentacles all feel like I’m touching something very cold even though I’m very evidently not.” Thirteen answered watching the alchemist listen to his chest and set the aethroscope to his eye. Thirteen’s breathing became shallow and rapid, and he felt an odd sensation rising within him. The animalistic instincts started to rise up in a burning tide, igniting his fiery aura involuntarily. Parthax lept back at the sudden burst of flames, Thirteen growled in conflict with his animalistic self, fighting to keep control of his mental state. Nirah threw her arm up to shield her from the intense heat as she lacked the natural resistance to fire unlike Parthax.

“Thirteen, talk to me! What’s going on, what is this?” Parthax stammered, wading through the heat.

"It feels like I'm being consumed from the inside by my animalistic instincts, the feeling in my chest, it's like I'm on fire and freezing at the same time." Thirteen gasped. As he said this, his fiery aura doubled in intensity and the orange and yellow flames turned a bright green, then blue, then purple.

"Your body is adapting to the effects of the intruding demonic and draconic elements. It should be over soon, just focus on the sound of my voice. Stay with me, I don't need you blowing up the lab" Parthax said, having to eventually retreat from the fiery purple aura. Thirteen's shallow breathing got deeper and deeper, he continued to growl in defiance at his continued mental battle. He rolled off the table with a loud thud, the wooden supports for the steel table already halfway burned through. The aura's strength doubled again in a powerful burst, shifting between red, purple and white.

"Run." Thirteen said. "Run..." he roared, slamming a pair of claws into the stone floor drawing several deep cracks in the rock. Parthax stood frozen across from Nirah who was already halfway out the door watching. There was a sickly crunching, popping and snapping of muscles, bone and tendons from Thirteen's body.

<His body isn't purging the elements... it's incorporating them?! No, they've already been incorporated, the physical stimulus is now just asserting itself. Then, what have I done...? The serum I gave him should have dampened the effects of the elixir to give his body time to regenerate and expel it, but if there won't be expulsion...> Parthax thought to himself and then looked to Nirah as he extrapolated the direction of his process of thought. He rushed by the door with her and watched intently.

"We need to run!" Nirah said.

"You run. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. I would die to witness this" Parthax said watching from the cracked door, still ready to run but willing to push the envelope as close as possible in the name of science.

"You're mad!"

"Of course, I'm a scientist" Parthax laughed, never taking his eyes off Thirteen. There was another surge of fire and Parthax watched as Thirteen's limbs and legs cracked and popped, muscles bulged oddly for a moment before being snapped or pulled back into place by his regeneration. Thirteen was incessantly loud during this entire ordeal and Nirah saw more than a few curious faces sticking their heads into the hallway. It was when Thirteen got his feet under him and stood almost a whole 30cm(~1') taller that Parthax started to worry. With a turn of his head, Thirteen's fiery purple eyes met Parthax and the tiefling's blood went cold with dread. There was no rational thought behind those eyes, simply a predator who had found its prey.

"Time to run" he said slamming the door behind him and dashing down the hall. He had gotten six paces down the hall as the iron reinforced wooden door exploded into metal and splinters behind him. Nirah turned the other corner and Thirteen turned to follow the tiefling, thundering down the hall behind him. Wasting no time, Parthax pulled a clear vial from the belt at his waist and downed a potion. The effects were instantaneous, he felt like he lost all sense of weight and his stride lengthened, giving him a fleetness not even Thirteen could match. Still the chimera thundered after him heavily, growling deeply, chasing his prey. Parthax turned the corner quickly, running down a long hall that turned the corner and went back toward the lab.

He could try to lure him into the prison and into the safety of the anti-magic field. Just as he got to the end of the hall he felt two things that made his hair stand on end as he turned the corner, the fiery aura tickling the tip of his tail and the whoosh of three tentacles in the space he had been not half a second prior. <You have got to be kidding me!> Parthax thought as he poured everything he had into sprinting to the prison, he turned the corner again, hoping Nirah had gotten herself somewhere safe. As if the very thought of her summoned her from the Aether, she crashed into him as he was rounding the third corner. They both fell into a heap as Thirteen pounded to a slower pace prowling up to his imminent victory.

“Thirteen...” Nirah said “It’s me. Nirah. You know me. Come back to me.” she pleaded. Thirteen looked from her, to the tiefling and back, still slowly padding forward, angry purple flames licking from his eyes, claws, tentacles, and feathers. There was another quieter popping of joints and ligaments as Thirteen brandished a claw. He was almost 50cm(20”) taller and significantly more intimidating. Horns swept back from his scaled temples above his ears, his tail was thicker, and there were more scales and spikes on his body than before. “Thirteen...” she continued to plead. Thirteen made no hesitation, and continued to approach, two paces away, then a single pace away. With a fluid motion, Thirteen’s long claws dug through cloth cloak, leather armor, and into flesh as he lashed at Nirah. She screamed at the attack, and with a quick motion, Thirteen lifted her to his maw and suddenly stopped for a moment, then sniffed. She struggled under his grip, his paw almost the size of her torso. He considered her for a moment then put her next to his nose and drew several sampling breaths through his nostrils and mouth. He released her gently, and she curled into a ball at his feet. The chimera looked down at her and blinked several times, then looked at the tiefling. After a brief pause, Thirteen made Parthax jump as he roared in pain, throwing his head into his top pair of claws in distress. He dropped to a knee, collapsing to the side of the hallway against the wall. Nirah scampered away leaving a smear of her blood behind her, the edges of her cloak singed through where Thirteen’s claws had pierced it. Thirteen slammed his head against the stone wall repeatedly, the purple fire of his aura shifting again, getting fainter, whiter. Parthax handed Nirah another potion from his belt and watched as Thirteen writhed in turmoil. Nirah downed the potion and walked toward Thirteen, discarding the glass vial on the stone floor.

“Thirteen” She said soothingly, stepping into the hot fiery aura. Thirteen stopped his thrashing and took a defensive position, like a cornered animal, growling and staring at her as she approached. The chimera lifted his tentacles threateningly and spread his wings defensively. “It’s okay.” Nirah said, her hands out and open in a gesture of vulnerability. Thirteen winced powerfully and lashed out with a tentacle threateningly. It came millimeters from her face but she didn’t flinch. “Thirteen!” Nirah shouted. “I know you’re in there. Get the fuck back in control of yourself!” she yelled. Thirteen roared back at her in response. “You’ve gotten this far, I’m not about to lose you to... what? Yourself?!” Nirah continued her tirade.

<Call to me> An ephemeral voice whispered to Nirah. <What?> She mentally responded.

<Call to Koruken> the voice repeated. Then it dawned on Nirah, Thirteen had summoned the sword from her, and must have stored it in the aether. <You need me, to help him> the sword said enigmatically in her head.

“Koruken, I summon thee” Nirah shouted. Thirteen reflexively jumped as a flash of darkness exploded from his top left arm. The blade sprang from it freely, and into Nirah’s hand.

<You must pierce his heart> Koruken said.

<I’m not going to kill him!> Nirah answered mentally

<I will not kill him> Koruken answered, flashing images of the solution in front of her eyes. Nirah leapt forward at Koruken’s control, nearly dragged by the sword as she dodged two claws and a tentacle as she closed her eyes and winced as the second tentacle moved in to strike. There was a long second of anticipation before a warm liquid washed over her hands followed by a pat-pat-pat of blood on stone. Nirah looked up as saw the blade, hilt deep in Thirteen’s chest. She let go of the blade in fear and as she did it flashed brightly. Thirteen’s aura dissipated and he fell to his knees, trembling. He reached up and pulled the sword from his chest, as he retched and coughed while doing so.

Nirah stood watching for a moment, waiting to see the outcome.

“I told you we should have ran” Nirah said matter of factly over her shoulder. Parthax rolled his eyes and tittered his head mockingly, still breathing heavily from his sprint.

Thirteen heaved from his knees, held up by his claws, lifting his gaze from the stone to Nirah and collapsed onto the stone floor, blood still dripping from the closing wound in his chest.

Nirah sighed, “Great. Help me get him back in the lab, before we have to deal with curious onlookers.” Nirah ordered as she grabbed Kuroken before pulling a pair of his arms over her shoulder and heaved half of Thirteen’s weight onto her back. Parthax complied, but could only muster half of Nirah’s strength. It took them several minutes to drag Thirteen’s unconscious form past the shattered remains of the door and back into the lab.

“That was exhilarating” Parthax breathed while dragging Thirteen with Nirah.

“Is he going to be stable?” Nirah asked.

“I would need to A-scope him again” Parthax answered.

“What happened?”

“It’s conjecture at this point but I believe that his body integrated the foreign elements instead of expelling them, leading to bioaetheric dissonance and instability. What we saw was likely the physical manifestation of the bioaetheric effects of the integration” Parthax answered.

Nirah looked at him flatly from under Thirteen’s arms and asked again, “So, what happened?”

“Uh, his body absorbed the demonic and draconic aspects and that created a conflicting state of charged energies which led to an overflow of mana which eventually overpowered his mental state.” Parthax said.

Nirah and Parthax finally made it to the lab again and heaved Thirteen through the shattered door frame before depositing him onto the floor. Nirah rolled him over while Parthax grabbed the aetheroscope.

“Will he survive?” Nirah asked

Parthax looked through the implement and paused before answering, “Most likely, the worst part is over, from what I’m looking at now, there’s a strong magical suppression effect originating from that sword, Kuroken I believe you called it. His body will take time to adjust to the changes and may revert to its natural form under the suppression effect, the flow of mana is



turbulent but not critical. I can't discern the specific details of the magical influence until he's more stable."

Nirah sighed in response, and whispered to Thirteen, "Why are you always such a handful".

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Segmented and disjointed images flashed around a tunneled mind-space, drawing into a white endless expanse. Passing through the tunnel was disorienting, inducing vertigo and confusion as it finally relented. Thirteen neither stood nor flew, simply existed in the space. Movement was an expression of will, speaking was nothing but thought.

Thirteen hovered about uncoordinatedly trying to get his bearings. He tried beating his wings, flailing his arms, nothing seemed to work as he drifted and flipped in the white expanse.

After what felt like an eternity of attempts, Thirteen grew frustrated and angry, shouting with a roar, "Let me free of this prison! Let me out!". His shouts echoed against the endless void, mocking him. Further shouting, roaring and general aggravation led him to the same result.

Finally succumbing to helplessness, Thirteen relented exhausted and exasperated, finally relaxing as he drifted aimlessly, his rapid ragged breathing settled into a smooth rhythm as he closed his eyes. It finally gave him a chance to reminisce and that brought him as much solace as the fleeting moments prior; pain, fury, anger, dissonance. Further before that, the altercation with the doctor became clear to him, and beyond that his previous lives' memories. The images and sensations were alien and unordered, chaotic.

What felt like days crawled by as Thirteen had no choice but to dredge through his separate pasts. Each one as alien to him as the next, he owned none, they were not his. The displacer, the serpent, the courel, the phoenix, the kitsune, all separate and disconnected. After an indeterminate amount of time, Thirteen finally wondered, <What is mine?>. He remembered his time with Nirah, his battle with Geroe. Each memory sparked a surge of emotion in the chimera; these were his. One memory rekindled the real question...

<Who am I?> Thirteen asked himself, reminiscing of his time at the lofty lamb.

"We are You." Five discordant voices spoke in unison. Thirteen opened his eyes to see the speakers: the phoenix, the displacer, the serpent, the courel, the kitsune; all in front of him.

"We are You" they echoed again.

The displacer beast moved forward, "I am you" it echoed with a thought and not words.

"I was a predator and provider. I had strength and compassion, I loved and empowered. I was fierce and caring." As the beast spoke it became almost innately inherent she was a female. As she finished her short statement; images, feelings, and experiences aligned within Thirteen. He saw her hunt, bear cubs, raise them, teach them; experienced her feelings, her pride, her love. Her presence was so real and tangible that to him, he was left with nothing but inadequacy, emptiness, longing.

Without warning she started to fade as her existence was ordered within Thirteen's persona. Her memories and experience, her personality all dispersing into the chimera's mindspace. With her final moments she spoke, "Remember me, for I am you, as you are now me..." and only the four others were left. Before another stepped forward, Thirteen couldn't contain the emotional bond through the memories and experiences he had experienced in such

a short time. He broke down into tears for several long moments feeling the displacer's feelings as his own. The feelings of the joy of the hunt, of finding a mate, of bearing cubs, and the pain of failing to protect a child all coalesced within the same moment.

With a final statement after considering his new profound experiences Thirteen prayed, "You are Me" to the disappearing displacer beast. As he did so, as if on queue the serpent moved forward.

"I am You" it stated wordlessly, with only the flicker of its always curious tongue.

Thirteen saw its life flash before his eyes as he reveled in its prowess. It mentally spoke to him.

"I was the apex predator, King of my domain. I could crush rock and turn even the most determined foe away. My poison could stop armies, my tail cleave trees. I could taste fear itself. Remember me."

The serpent faded leaving Thirteen with his relative experiences. Bright and vibrant jungles, the taste and smells of its prey, the safety of his size and power flickered through Thirteen's mind. The chimera stood tall and proud in the serpent's memories, full of patience and strength; in honor of his learned experiences Thirteen finished the prayer: "You are me..."

As he finished his prayers to the serpent, the courel prowled forward, its tentacle like whiskers undulating gently and with an uncanny familiarity.

"I am you" it stated mentally. Thirteen was immediately immersed in a vast cave network of books, trinkets, and baubles.

"I was a scholar, a collector, I surrounded myself in knowledge. Hunting was a means to an end, withholden to the pursuit of desire. Act according to context, calculate, acknowledge, accomplish; Remember Me!" The courel demanded as it started to impart its ideas, thoughts, memories and knowledge to Thirteen. The smell of parchment, the frustration with humans and their arrogance, the thirst for knowledge and an absolute sense of curiosity brightened within Thirteen's mindspace.

"You are Me." Thirteen reiterated at the retreating courel. <I always thought my intellectuality was owed to the kitsune's experiences, however, this challenges that line of thinking...>

As Thirteen mentally dredged his arcane knowledge; the Phoenix had stepped forward.

"I am You, though I wish it not", the phoenix stated first to deviate from the procedure. Thirteen felt its resistance and the memories of its short life.

"I was a believer, a devotee, I offered my life to something greater than myself. I saw potential everywhere and acted upon my instincts. I was morality incarnate and a conscious to many others. Remember Me!" the phoenix said with a reserved tone bordering resentment. Thirteen could feel its animosity and disgust and through the firebird's eyes saw its last moments filled with the doctor's face, its battle with Korun'e, and its life experiences with paladins and clerics, healing the wounded, and feeding the less fortunate. Thirteen felt its morality and warmth, its love and spirituality, its beauty all come to life within him.

"We are alike; We did not choose this yet we are the same: You are Me" Thirteen states to the Phoenix.

The final aspect was the black furred kitsune. He did not step forward like the others, Thirteen found this odd but also understandable.

“Korun’e you have sought your goal and achieved it” Thirteen spoke to the kitsune.

“You know nothing of my goals monster!” Korune retaliated.

Thirteen could only chuckle at that statement. “Oh? I know nothing?” He challenged the kitsune.

“You are nothing but a monster created by Geroe, a flimsy persona built out of the wreckage of others.” the kitsune snapped gesturing to where the other shadows had stood.

“Then what of Koruken’s choice to reconnect, surely the magic of the blade would know. You have a choice Korun’e, I know of your past, your thoughts and your wishes, I know your afraid.” Thirteen said with compassion.

“I will not allow your honeyed words to take root in my mind! You’re a machination of Geroe and I will not have it!” Korun’e’s shadow retaliated.

“I offer you a choice, you can choose to resist within our mindscape, a prisoner of your own choice, or join with us like the others, as part of something greater than yourself” Thirteen finished.

“Words of the enemy” the shadow replied.

“Then, I challenge you. I give you myself, look into my short past, not the others, but mine; you will find some specifically revealing information. Before I give my thoughts to you, did you know Nirah loved you?” Thirteen finished opening his arms to the nothingness but still giving the generally helpless gesture to comfort the defensive memory.

“Nirah?! Me? Hah! Whatever, I wouldn’t care either way. I was about to die, why would some relationship have any value to me. All I wanted to do was survive” the kitsune laughed as it dove into the breast of Thirteen. Once there Korun’e’s immediate goal was to assume control of Thirteen’s mind but it hit a brick wall. The four other shadows of the chimera’s persona had already merged into Thirteen, making him infinitely more powerful than Korun’e. The chimera corralled the mental energy of Korun’e around gently and with ease. Korun’e felt a twinge of fear at the weight of power that the chimera had over him, it could force him to submit if he wanted. <So why doesn’t he just force me to submit? Why go through this charade? What does he want me to see?> Korun’e asked himself disdainfully. Frustrated he followed through with a linear timeline of Thirteen’s experiences since he reincarnated the first time. The memories of Nirah was the first blow, the second was Thirteens ‘actions’ prior to their return to the lab, and the final blow was Thirteen’s direct defiance of the doctor, choosing to imbibe the nyhadrian elixir at the risk of his own life to thwart the doctors advances. Seeing these events in Thirteens memories left no chance for the memory of Korun’e to question his successor. With that realization, Korun’e relented and accepted the chimera of thirteen with a solemn bow.

“You are Me” Korun’e stated, looking into the chimera’s green eyes, the same color as his eyes.

“I am you” Thirteen returned as Korune placed a small paw on the larger chimera’s lower, more accessible arm before disappearing like the others. Thirteen felt the resiliency and defiance of the kitsune, the pain and hurt of betrayal, the sorrow of loneliness, and the value of living.

“I am Me” Thirteen spoke to the white expanse, only after owning each and all of his aspects. His pillars, his emotions, his powers, his wisdoms, his beliefs.

<IT WILL TAKE TIME TO MASTER OWNERSHIP OVER THAT WHICH WAS NOT PREVIOUSLY YOURS>, a voice boomed through the expanse seemingly behind Thirteen. Thirteen tried to orient himself toward to voice and struggled, vainly. After several awkward moments, the being behind Thirteen with a hand held out rotated it such that Thirteen saw the source of the voice. A being of draconic and demonic parallels met his sight with nearly equal stature.

“Who are You?” Thirteen asked.

<BALANCE, POWER, CHOICE, FATE, FUTURE>, it replied.

“The result of me imbibing the elixir and the doctor’s incorporation of the dragon's heart?”

<IT GAVE US FORM. ‘WE’ ARE MORE.> it finished considering Thirteen’s question. As the figure finished it’s sentence, the white started to close in, claustrophobically and without warning. As Thirteen returned to consciousness; the figure made a final statement, <Beware: The Three Eyed Jackal, Her Claws Grow Ever Closer!..>.

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Thirteen’s eyes fluttered open as he lay on the floor of the lab. His entire body was rebellious and wracked with pain, moving anything hurt. He knew Nirah was nearby before even opening his eyes. He could smell her nearby and it gave him a sense of immediate comfort at least to some degree.

“He’s awake”, Nirah nearly shouted as she noticed Thirteen stirring. Parthax grabbed the aetherscope and stethoscope then rushed over. Grammosh followed. Parthax immediately set the aetherscope to his eyes and glowered over Thirteen’s prone form, following the flow of mana around and through the chimera’s body. After a long moment of inspection, he popped the stethoscope into his ears and listened to Thirteen’s hearts, and lungs. Thirteen purposely relaxed himself during the tiefling’s inspection. Finally, the alchemist proceeded to poke around Thirteen’s chest, neck, arms and face.

“Done yet?” Thirteen asked as he was probed.

“Not yet” Parthax answered, forcefully opening one of Thirteen’s eyelids and flashing a bright light with a snap of magic. Thirteen flinched and blinked roughly at the painfully bright light. “You look better, there’s some internal inflammation but I can’t detect any long lasting damage. A few days of rest should be all you need.” Parthax finished.

Thirteen slowly sat up, his muscles protesting his movement. “What a trip!” he sighed, through barely cracked eyes. He rubbed his temples with his upper right paw before wiping his face.

“Easy now Thirteen” Nirah cooed. Thirteen looked over at her, pretty worse for wear. She noted his haggard look and pouted, “You look like shit.”

“I feel that can be acknowledged with all recent events considered. I did just die after consuming a lethal substance, had a hole burned into my chest, a heart replaced, almost died again, blacked out, and am now sitting here, looking like ‘shit’” Thirteen retorted, sticking his tongue out at Nirah.

“Speaking of that, where are your spikey bits? When you freaked out earlier you got a whole lot bigger and meaner looking while chasing us around the lab.” Nirah observed.

“Bigger and meaner?” Thirteen asked confused.

“Yea, like you had horns and spikes and were at least like 60cm(~2’) taller” she answered. Thirteen looked to Parthax hoping for some explanation.

Parthax shrugged, “She’s not lying and I can’t provide a definitive explanation other than the magics of the nyhadrian elixir and the dragon’s heart has awoken some primal elements within your biology. Though it seems the transformation was only temporary, I would need to perform more tests to find any meaningful answers.”

“I have no recollection of this” Thirteen replied rubbing his face again. “How long have I been unconscious?”

“Only about an hour, no longer than two...” Nirah answered. Thirteen slowly got to his feet using the wall for balance. Nirah helped steady him. Thirteen saw the splintered door and made the connection prior to when he blacked out. He also saw Koruken on the lab table across the room, along with Grammosh strategically standing idly by the doorway, looking Thirteen over.

“You’re quite da creature seeing you like this” Grammosh said as he saw Thirteen look his way. “Wouldn’t have assumed you so in dat other form” He said with his hand on his axe handle strapped to his belt.

Thirteen eyed the axe and bowed, “I apologize for the deception. It was needed to try and evade the doctor.”

Grammosh grunted in response. “Until you could get at dat?” He asked gesturing his head toward Koruken. Thirteen nodded and padded over to the sword. Nirah and Parthax watched. The chimera gently placed his paw on the grip of the undersized katana and reached out with his mind. As he did the connection between the Chimera and Katana resonated almost visibly across the room.

<It is time...> Koruken stated to Thirteen. Thirteen knew the implications from his memories of Korun’e and lifted the sword fully. As he did the sword doubled in size adjusting to fit it’s owner’s stature. A white glow emanated from the katana as Thirteen held it respectfully. The weapon almost seemed to hum with magic in Thirteen’s claw.

Grammosh stared at the katana enviously. “That weapon is terrifyingly remarkable when it’s wielded properly”.

“When it wishes to be wielded” Thirteen corrected, “This weapon will choose it’s owner. Technically, since it’s previous owner is a part of me the connection still exists, otherwise Koruken’s would never grant me it’s strength.” With a flourish Thirteen flipped the katana around his wrist a few times as Korun’e would and with a minor twist of magic, folded the weapon into the astral plane binding it to his wrist like before. As he did he noticed a feeling of animosity from Grammosh, it felt retaliatory and aggravated. <This is the courel’s telepathic empathy> Thirteen realized, having felt feelings like this in the past but never considering them meaningful until now.

“I sense hostility Grammosh. What is aggravating you so?” Thirteen asked the orc confronting him. The orc narrowed his eyes at the chimera and stopped leaning against the wall.

“I’m not aggravated” Grammosh lied. He was truly upset at what Thirteen had done to his brother but couldn’t blame Thirteen for his actions, in fact he was happy Thirteen had not killed him and only incapacitated him with his venom. Thirteen felt Grammosh’s emotions shift

from aggravation to suspicion and fear. He chose not to press the issue by backing the orc into a corner.

"I see, I apologize." Thirteen relented. "What is our next move?" Thirteen asked the room.

"Someone must supervise the doctor's confinement" Grammosh answered.

"We also need to rally more hands to our cause" Nirah answered.

"And start removing any hostile forces" Parthax agreed.

"While looking through the doctor's laboratory to find clues about the bindings on your hearts and his phylactery" Thirteen finished. "Sounds like we know our roles then. Meet back here in a few hours then to re-group?" The others all nodded at Thirteen's remark, and left the room.

"Parthax, do you have a set of robes I may use? I can't walk through the halls looking like this. I need to at least fit in and I don't think a naked human is going to work" Thirteen asked before Parthax departed.

"I do" Parthax said, handing Thirteen his robe before leaving. Thirteen waited for only a couple of minutes. Parthax returned with another fine robe, some simple linens and a pair of soft boots, handing the garments to Thirteen. Thirteen thanked him and shifted into his human form before dressing. Parthax left before Thirteen had finished. Thirteen noticed faint magics woven into the fabric but didn't investigate too closely and simply donned the robe.

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Nirah waited until Parthax had finished fetching Thirteen a disguise and once he exited the scorched lab started following him down the hall.

"Where should we start?" Nirah asked. "I think it prudent to remove the doctor's most loyal followers first"

"Indeed. I think I have some implements that would be helpful for this endeavour." Parthax answered.

"Oh?" Nirah asked, looking over her shoulder. She noticed Thirteen prowling out of the lab toward the center of the facility.

"Lie detection, truth serums, maybe some other fun tools." Parthax responded with a wicked smile.

"Do you think Thirteen will be okay?" Nirah asked still looking over her shoulder.

"He's got the safest job of us all, though I hope he knows more about arcane arts than he lets on. He seems bright but... naive I guess?" Parthax answered.

"Yea, though he's a fast learner and he seems different from before. More tempered, as if his time with Koruken has triggered something" Nirah answered looking back to Parthax.

"Korun'e was an accomplished magus, tho his specialities were more evocative and abjurative, maybe some illusion and necromancy if i remember correctly. I never saw him studying in the other schools. Assuming Thirteen has access to some of that talent, he should be okay for the most part, though I think divination would be the most helpful." Parthax sighed.

"So who's our first mark?" Nirah asked.

"Obviously the curator, Theesil. One, I hate that guy, and two, he also manages the majority of the magical implements here. Removing him and taking control of the library will be important. If I were to seal his magic, could you handle him?"

“Of course! He’s only ever had his nose in books. I doubt he could even swing a club properly”

“Then let’s start there” Parthax said with conviction. He opened the door to his personal lab while Nirah waited outside.

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Thirteen prowls down the halls, the quiet footfalls of the leather boots that Parthax lent him was the only sound breaking the silence. Thirteen retraced the way to Geroe’s quarters through Korun’e’s memories, making it to the closed iron doors in only a few minutes. They were of course locked and several powerful dweomers of magic protected the entryway. <Will you assist me Koruken?> Thirteen mentally asked reaching for the touch of the stowed sword.

<What is it you seek?> Koruken asked feeling Thirteen’s mental touch and reading his thoughts. Thirteen wanted the sword’s help to weave one of Korun’e’s spells to bypass the door with a dimensional shift. <You shall have it> Koruken answered after discovering Korun’e’s intentions. Thirteen started weaving arcane magic at the guide of the sword and with a quiet pop, he flickered ten feet forward on the other side of the doors. Inside the laboratory was mostly unchanged; large shelves covered the walls full of books, scrolls, and other magical implements. A dull light hovered overhead and provided pale light to the room. A silver magic circle was inlaid in the floor in the corner, next to a desk with various open books atop it.

Unlike the previous trip here in his past life, now Thirteen had the advantage of seeing the web of spells and magics floating around the entire room. The most important of those was a triggered alarm spell that was reverberating in a bright red lines in the magical spectrum. Thirteen mentally noted that it would likely fizzle as Geroe was held in the anti-magic field out of reach of the spell’s effects. Thirteen called Koruken from the aether anyway and slashed through the simple spell, cutting the few strands of magic that connected it to the web of other magic around the room. What Thirteen didn’t expect was as soon as he did so, a chain reaction of triggered spell effects cascaded. The web of magic lit up like a wave of light as powerful abjuration and evocation magics sprang to life. Within a second, several large explosions detonated around the center of the room. Large balls of fire consumed Thirteen and the rest of the room, incinerating everything.

Thirteen coughed roughly and rubbed his ringing ears. The cloak Parthax had lent him was scorched at the hems but was otherwise undamaged, along with the boots. Koruken vibrated irritatingly in Thirteen’s hand.

<That wasn’t very bright> It mentally chided with a snide tone.

<I agree> Thirteen sighed mentally in reply.

<That would have vaporized you> the sword sighed.

Thirteen laughed a bit, <Indeed, I suppose the formula to my creation has figuratively blown up in Geroe’s face>

<Don’t make bad puns in light of the scenario. Thankfully he warded his effects against the explosions. Someone will have heard it, you are pressed for time.> Koruken stated with frustration. Thirteen sighed and stepped across the room toward the large desk with several stacked tome’s, several of them open with notes, along with quills, inkpots, and other various arcana. The flowing script on the open tome’s described the current challenges and formulas that were being utilized to stabilize the nyhadrian elixir Thirteen had consumed. He picked up

the tome and flipped through it scanning pages for important information. After a minute or two he saw enough to know that the books would be valuable for Parthax to help identify the changes that the elixir may have wrought within him. Thirteen continued looking through the room and noted some other important books and scrolls, including the details about his amalgamation and the previous attempts at the process that had created him. Knowing he was short on time, Thirteen grew impatient and started scanning for magical auras that could be important or that could hide secrets or Geroe's phylactery. He found a bag of holding that contained a spell book and several magical foci, as well as some wands and scrolls. He took it and loaded it with the books regarding the elixir and the amalgamation process. There was also a spellbound tome locked in a glass windowed cabinet. The cabinet had a lock and several spells warding it. As he noticed it, a knock came at the door. It was a light ginger rapping. Thirteen ignored it and poured magic into Koruken, preparing to slash through the cabinet and enchantments protecting it. Thirteen could feel Koruken bolster his magic with it's own and prepare for the strike. With a heavy diagonal slash and a boom, he rendered the door and half of the cabinet into splinters. He huffed a deep breath after the attack, it having expended a fair amount of his mana. With a quick hand he lifted the book and slid it into the bag and tied it to the cloth belt under his robe. Another rap rang out on the door this time much more impatient.

A feminine voice echoed from behind the iron, "Doctor? May I have a moment" the voice said melodically.

Thirteen proceeded to the small runic symbol wrought into the floor with silver and channeled some magic to activate the circle, teleporting him to the center of the facility. With a flash of light and a pop Thirteen was in the large communal hall of the facility, near where the cantina was, on the first floor. He steeled his jaw and casually walked out of the much larger golden circle and through the groups of individuals moving about. He had gotten five steps and the magic circle behind him activated, two other individuals appearing behind him. They stepped off and proceeded down the hall to the right without pause. Thirteen continued walking down the north hall hyper-vigilant of his surroundings while maintaining the guise of busied distraction. A pair of humans passed him in the hall without paying him any attention. The teleportation circle behind him activated twice more before he had turned the corner.

Thirteen finally dared to breathe and slow his stride. The echoes of the busy causeway started to fade behind him. As the hooded, disguised chimera turned the corner, a hand fell on his left shoulder, claws sinking into the cloth of the robe holding him back.

"Hold stranger" said a flowing yet stern, melodic and effeminate voice thick with accent. Thirteen turned to face his challenger. A pair of silver eyes met his, framed in a black furred feline face, her ears were drawn back in suspicion. "Who are you and why are you garbed in a master's robe?" she asked draped in the same red-gold robes Thirteen wore. Thirteen's mind whirred looking for a good answer. Before his hesitation dragged on long enough to alert suspicion he blurted his answer.

"It is Parthax's. He loaned to to me for the hour" he answered. She cocked her head and drew her claws from his shoulder and dropped her paw to her hip. A pressure behind her eyes drew in Thirteen's thoughts. His empathic sense warned him of her hostile intentions yet he started to loose focus and the tension and stress melted out of him as he lost himself in her unnatural eyes.



After a solid moment she felt her control over the human take hold and she made a mental order, <Follow me> she ordered. Thirteen could think of nothing but following her, even to the ends of the plane if that were what she wanted. As she started walking, Thirteen followed willingly. After a few dreamy moments an annoying buzzing started to draw Thirteen's attention away from his mistress. He pushed it away and out of his mind. She turned down another hall and walked up a set of stairs, the dominated Thirteen close behind. Again the buzzing came back, louder this time. Thirteen shook his head and cleared his mind again, refocusing on the catfolk in front of him, looking at her bare paws on the stone floor and her tail swishing back and forth with each of her strides.

With a sickening lurch, Thirteen's perspective shifted away from his body followed by a massive feeling of vertigo. Again the buzzing returned in deafening volume, incomprehensible words behind the sound. With the faintest focus, he listened to the sound, trying to understand what the words could be. As soon as he gave the sound even a brief moment of his attention, it clarified into the booming voice of Koruken.

<FINALLY HE LISTENS! She has you under her spell. Don't hesitate or act out, I've taken the liberty of displacing your consciousness and taken over your motor functions. Play by her commands, she's a vampire. I will hide our bond from her, she will make a move soon.> Koruken mentally communicated with a harried tone. The vampiress opened a sturdy wooden door and Thirteen was shoved back into his head with an awkward lurch as he stood passively behind her awaiting orders.

<Enter> said a voice that was not Koruken's in Thirteen's mind, a mental command from the catfolk. He feigned mindlessness and entered, once again in control of his own actions. The room was barren, with smooth stone walls and no visible source of light aside from the flickering torch on the wall behind them. He stood relaxedly in the middle of the room. She followed him in and latched the door closed. Thirteen's mouth twitched in amusement.

<Again, a foolish predator entraps herself with prey she knows nothing of. What action do you recommend Koruken?> Thirteen thought.

<Do as you like, though I feel a lesson should be imparted on this prideful creature. Though that may just be your demeanor influencing me> Koruken sighed. She approached behind him quiet as a whisper and with a sanguine grace, she sensuously drew Thirteen's hood back as she stepped in front of him. Thirteen saw the reflective membranes of her eyes tracing the features of his face in his peripheral vision. He was careful not to let his eyes betray him and kept a distant disinterested look focused into the darkness.

"Tell me, who are you and what are you doing with Parthax's robe?" she asked again.

"I am Thirteen. He is letting me borrow it" Thirteen answered flatly.

"Why?"

"My other robe was damaged in an alchemy fire" He answered. She looked at the singed edges of the robe and believed him. She sighed and clicked her tongue.

"How long have you been working for that red skinned bastard?" she asked, continuing her interrogation.

"Three days"

"On what?"

“Stabilizers for some potent negative energy contagion or poison under Geroes’ supervision” Thirteen lied. She hummed at his answer.

“Return to Parthax and listen, read his notes, memorize them and return to me here in this room tomorrow at this time” she commanded. Thirteen turned to her and looked her in the eyes.

“No” he responded matter of factly. She furrowed her brow and widened her eyes in surprise.

“Why the Fuck not?” she asked emphasizing her curse.

“Because Parthax warned me about a sultry catfolk who might try to squeeze his secrets from me and that I under no circumstance was to follow any orders from her against him. I will not violate my superior’s order” Thirteen answered mechanically as if he were quoting Parthax.

“Oho!” she said with a evil smile, revealing her wickedly long teeth. “Did Parthax tell you what I do to smartass little apprentices?”

“He did not” Thirteen said again with the mechanical tone.

“I rip them to bits, slowly, painfully... all before I drain what blood is left” she said threatening him sensually.

Thirteen leaned forward and licked the side of her muzzle, starting at her cheek and ending next to her eye. She was frozen in disbelief at the audacity of this mortal, then she recoiled at his look, knowing then that he was never under her command. He had been playing her from the start. A red hot fury flared to life in her at this realization. Then Thirteen taunted her.

“I dare you to try” he said with a smile. A Smile! Her ears flipped back and her lip curled into a snarl.

“You! You... Insolent Mortal!” She roared with her hackles raised. She reached her claw around Thirteen’s neck and tried to lift him with a momentary effort. Thirteen stood smugly as her anger bled into confusion as she tried to heft his weight twice more. Her claws dug into the skin of his neck with her effort, drawing drops of blood. Finally relenting on her plan to try and lift him, instead she lashed her free claws across his face, ripping four deep lacerations across Thirteen’s face. Blood trickled down his face and neck at her assault. She smirked at the damage she had wrought. Thirteen took the opportunity to turn and look at her still smiling face as the wounds visibly knitted back together. Her smirk faded in fear.

“What are you?” she asked with quiet surprise.

“Your lesson in pride” Thirteen answered. For a brief moment uncertainty and terror flickered over her eyes. She steeled herself quickly and lunged at him, claws and teeth bared. Thirteen raised an arm to keep her teeth away from his neck and torso and catch her mid pounce. Her claws found his shoulders as she barreled into him, teeth sinking into his forearm, smashing his bones. Her strength and momentum nearly knocked him prone, <She’s nearly as strong as Nirah> Thirteen thought. With painful effort, Thirteen lifted his fractured arm and the biting creature attached to it and smashed a fist into the feline’s throat with as much leverage as he could muster. Blood sprayed from the cat’s mouth, Thirteen hoped it was hers, but knew it was likely his and maybe a bit of hers. She retched and coughed immediately losing her grip on his shoulders. Thirteen then planted a boot solidly into her abdomen and shoved, ripping her off of him. She stumbled back still coughing as she fell to the stone floor. Thirteen set the bones of

his arm back in place with a grotesque crunch and looked to his opponent. Thirteen took the opportunity to remove the robe, boots and linens. She watched him while coughing hoarsely. She got to her feet, licking her chops of his blood greedily.

“Oh how I’m going to enjoy this...” she growled hoarsely excited at seeing the naked human standing off defiantly against her. Thirteen laughed heartily. She glowered at his mirth.

“You still think you have a chance” Thirteen said between his chuckles empathically feeling her confidence. “I wonder what will break first, your pride or your body?” he asked rhetorically. She growled.

“You mouthy curr! I’ll see your blood-” she started as Thirteen channeled into his chimeric form, filling her path to the locked doorway with a black wall of fur, feathers, scales, and tentacles. “-i-it can’t be...you’re a chimera, Geroe succeeded?!” she gasped, this time terror evident all over her face. Her eyes darted to the door then back to Thirteen. As if predicting her line of thought, Thirteen ignited his fiery aura filling the room with a warm orange glow.

“When Geroe finds out about you-” she stammered before Thirteen cut her off.

“-Geroe and I have already come to an understanding. He’s understanding how useless a dried lich of a necromancer is in his own anti-magic prison.” He interrupted her. Her fear quickly transformed into dread, then despair. She sighed and with resignation lifted her head in defeat.

“Then slay me. You have bested me, I know of your formula one four six, I know I cannot win. The magic of the phoenix is absolute in this competition.”

“I said I was your lesson in pride, not mortality. Tell me kitten, when was the last time you surrendered? When Geroe forced you into his service?”

“Kill me and be done with it” she growled. Thirteen whipped into her with a open tentacle, hooking her with the spines and dragging her toward him quickly. As she tripped forward toward him, he caught her with a claw around her neck. He lifted her effortlessly up to his eye level. She hung limply in his grip eyes filled with defiance.

**// WARNING: MORE PRON READ AT OWN RISK (NON-CONSENT CONTENT)**

“And let you escape your lesson? No, I think not. Here’s a rhetorical question, when was the last time you were... not in control?” Thirteen asked undoing her robe with his lower set of arms. It fell to the ground with a whisper revealing her loose fitting silk clothing beneath. Thirteen smiled emphasizing his own long canines and licked her face again. At this she squirmed uncomfortably in his claw. The stoic acceptance started to falter as he unlaced her tunic and breeches.

“Please, don’t” she whispered, pleadingly. Thirteen could feel her despair double at the realization of what his intentions might be.

“How many asked the same of you when they were but dough in your hands?” Thirteen asked, unlacing another eyelet on her shirt, revealing her bosom. He was enjoying the feeling of power, control over another, but at the same time had doubt. A flicker of morality passed and he dwelled on it while he gently traced her features with an extended claw. <Is this really a lesson that will teach? I’m lowering myself to her level if I do this... is there another way without slaying her outright? No, this is her mercy.>

Clenching his jaw in resentment of her past actions, Thirteen twisted two of his tentacles around her wrists and supported her weight, lifting her throat out of his claws. His second pair

of tentacles twined around her neck and tightened, compressing her trachea until she couldn't even gasp, if she had a heartbeat she would likely pass out from the lack of blood circulation. He looked into her steely, unnaturally silver eyes and felt a burning anger and despair behind them. He let her hang there for a long minute, drawing out the feeling of domination and control. He didn't sneer, smile, or blink. Just stared into her eyes. She broke under his oppressive glare and closed her eyes. Thirteen ripped her breeches slowly with his lower claws, eventually dropping the tattered silken pants to the floor. She continued to hang, listlessly, eyes forced shut, tail curled between her legs. Thirteen pulled her closer to him, close enough he could smell the mustiness of her undeath along with the floral scent of her perfume and fur. She was perfectly toned, her fur silky smooth and shiney. He rubbed all four paws down her body and thighs, feeling her fur and tense corded muscles beneath.

"You really are quite beautiful on the outside, I wonder how strong is your loyalty to that crusty necromancer?" Thirteen asked rhetorically as he brought his upper paws behind her legs and up to her ass, cradling her weight and bringing his other pair of paws under her knees. With a small amount of force he pried her legs open and down until she was seated in his four paws. He drew her close to his mouth until his whiskers tickled her thighs and she was barley inches from his nose. He blew gently between her legs and her whole body flinched. He looked up to her face and saw her eyes still forced shut and jaw clenched tight.

<What the fuck is he doing? Why doesn't he just rape me and be done with it?> Kyra thought to herself, <I swear i'm going to destroy this hellspawn son of a bitch the first opportunity I get! Eat up you monstrous piece of shit, it's the last meal you'll ever have!>

Thirteen could sense her confusion and resentment and went purposely slow, opening his mouth and licking her clit with the roughest part of his tongue on purpose. She shuddered at his violations, her hips rolled back away from him. He held her rump firmly with his paws and teased her again and again. Finally he pushed his tongue past her clit and into her, surprised at how cold she was. He rolled his tongue around testily, tasting her. After determining it not-unbearable, he committed the majority of his tongues length to her folds, finding that rough spot as if he were licking his nose. As soon as his tongue hit that spot she almost convulsed. He grinned behind his tongue and doubled his efforts, his two cocks erecting with anticipation. Her anger quickly melted into resistance, then desperation as he worked her into enjoying his work, willingly or not. Within minutes, tears streamed down her face and her chest heaved vainly to take a breath. Her mouth was lolling open and teeth revealed in a drooling grimace of forced pleasure. Seconds later, she convulsed again, her vaginal walls contracted on Thirteen's tongue and moisture cascaded along its length before it dripped to the stone floor. Thirteen pulled his tongue free and let her spasm in her undesired pleasure for several long seconds. As she came down off her orgasm, Thirteen let her again hang from his tentacles, lowering her feet back to the stone floor. She shuddered for several moments, strung up by the chimera's tentacles, tips of her foot-paws barely touching the ground. Thirteen leaned in and licked the tears from her face. He felt her rage fly back like an electric current, replacing her desperation and weakness. Thirteen grinned at his provocation and spun her in the air forcing her back to him. He caressed her hips and brought his large paws up and under her silken tunic, cupping her bosom, tracing over her nips with the pads of his first digits. He closed the gap between them with a small step, her head coming up to just above his abdomen as he pushed her down

onto her knees, atop her discarded robe and tattered pants. He dropped to his own knees and sat on his feet behind her as he grabbed her hips strongly with his lower paws. With his upper paws he grasped her shoulders and pulled her back into his scaled chest. He released her arms and leaned against her heavily, forcing her forward and onto her hands, with him on top of her, upper paws next to hers. He growled deeply into her ear and stabilized her hips with his lower paws as he lined his upper cock into her cool, wet snatch. It parted willingly for his tapered tool and he slid in steadily, being careful not to force himself to deeply too quickly.

<Fuck him for being gentle like this! Just let it be over already you monstrous fuck!> Kyrah thought looking down and away from his face, toward her knees, finally opening her eyes. As soon as she did, she wished she hadn't. She locked onto the second long spined, 36cm(14") monstrosity bobbing between her legs in time with Thirteen's gentle thrusting. <Fuck he's huge> she thought anxiously as she saw he was only halfway buried into her with his upper cock. Thirteen felt her anxiety and pushed deeper, gaining another few centimeters of penetration. He nuzzled her shoulder, brushing the tentacles around her neck with his whiskers, taking deep growling breaths.

<When he lets his guard down, when he fucking cums, I'm out of this stupid shit and I'm going to torture this fucking monster> Kyrah mentally promised as he pushed against her cervix painfully.

"I hope your ready" Thirteen growled as he withdrew his cock fully from her cunt and leaned back onto his haunches. With a paw, he carefully lined up his slick upper member with her ass and his dry lower member with her snatch. With both cocks positioned, he fell back on top of her and held her hips strongly with his lower paws. With a forceful, slow thrust, he pushed into both orifices. She tensed under him again with discomfort at his violation of her. With both cocks partially penetrated, he forced her head down, buckling her elbows and dropping her onto her breasts. He clenched her wrists with his upper claws and bit down firmly onto the nape of her neck, not hard enough to draw blood but enough to remind her of her race and position. Her hips rocked back involuntarily at his bite, giving him free access to further his violations. The next thrust came faster and harder than the one before it, creating a building momentum until Thirteen was pistoning her as deeply as she could physically take. She squirmed under him as he pushed her further and deeper than ever before, she hated him for it and herself more for starting to enjoy it through the pain. He growled through his teeth with each breath approaching his apex. He felt her tense up under him, feeling her anxiety and apprehension build, knowing she had something planned for his orgasm led him to it, excited to see her trick. He came hard as she tensed up again, ready to spring. Less than a second later, the first stream of cum splattering inside of her hit her like a brick. It burned gloriously inside of her, filling her like molten gold. In that second, all of her resistance disappeared as the bliss of vitality flowed into her like the first time she had ever fed, but hundreds of times more potent. By his second thrust she wanted more, had to have more, forcing herself deeper on his cocks. The third filled her to vaginal capacity and beyond, white gobs gushing onto the robe beneath her. Her stomach started to distend as he continued to ride his peak filling her ass with as much as she could handle. She was so lost in her need she barely registered the room, the situation, only her desire of more of that pure vitality, the life-force welling up within her as she orgasmed in response to it's potency. Thirteen came down first and sensed her euphoria and need. At first

it confused him, then he dismissed it and pulled himself free of her. She immediately felt remorseful at the sudden emptiness within her as she shuttered on the floor dripping onto the stone, her eyes wide with euphoria and thighs sticky-slick with mess. Thirteen looked down at her with concern and he was surprised when she looked up at him with something Thirteen couldn't quite place.

<Hate? No. ...Desire? No. ...Desperation? ...Why? ...Feeding off me?> Thirteen guessed feeling her powerful desire, her need of him. <Like a drug... Thats unexpected and manipulative...> he grimaced at the thought of what had come of his actions.

"It's your choice now kitten, fall back in line under what's left of Geroe's forces and meet us in battle or join us against him. When we find the key to set his slaves free, set you free, freedom could be yours. Choose your side carefully" Thirteen whispered to her. She slowly and weakly reached for him pleadingly, eyes glazed and unfocused. He retracted the tentacles from around her neck and looked at her guiltily for a moment. She didn't dare to breathe in fear of losing her euphoria, afraid to lose any of the essence feeding her. He cleaned himself on her robe. With a moment of magical glow, he shifted back into his disguised human form, dressed quickly and left quietly, unlatching the door and closing it behind him with a quiet thud. He retraced his steps to the hall and rushed back up to the alchemy labs.

**//END PRON**

Two dwarves worked quietly on the damaged door frame of Parthax's lab. They saw Thirteen approach, more specifically, they saw a master's robe approaching and quickly made way, allowing Thirteen into the room with eyes locked intently on the stone floor. Thirteen noticed the dangerous looking collars bolted around the worker's necks as he stepped by them casually and through the threshold. He stepped past the damaged and scorched table and into what he assumed was Parthax's back office.

The office was decorated sparsely and was almost entirely functional in appearance. A sturdy desk was positioned in the center of the room, with a lightly trimmed and cushioned chair behind it. Thirteen looked around the room momentarily, getting his bearings before latching the door behind him. The desk was clean and only held a inkpot, quill, and roll of clean parchment. To Thirteen's right was a shelf littered with rolled scrolls and leather bound tomes remarkably dust free.

<Clean, functional, I like it.> Thirteen thought, as he stepped up behind the desk and dropped a strap of the magical bag over the top of the chair. He rubbed his eyes with a pair of fingers with a sigh before reaching into the bag and retracting the first of several books to sift through. As soon as he opened the first page of the book, a sinking feeling dropped like a lead ball in his gut. The pages were written in code just like Parthax guessed. <This is going to take a while...> Thirteen thought despairingly.

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Grammash opened the door to Gerog's lab after a quiet knock. The alchemist was working at his lab tinkering with his glassware filled with colored concoctions of various hues. The orc looked over to his brother, who waved to him with an unsteady hand as Grammash entered the room.

"How yah holding up?" Grammash asked his brother as he stepped up next to his bed.

“Better than I thought, all things considered” Karath answered slowly and carefully, trying not to slur his words, “still a bit weak but breathing”.

“Aye, about that. What was it like?”

“What? Getting poisoned?”

“No, fighting him...”

Karath chuckled weakly, “Fight? I barely scratched it with my axe and those tentacles come out of nowhere. I was so caught up in the situation that I charged in anyway, I wouldn’t do it again. Not now, not ever. That thing is a monster...” he finished with a distant look in his eyes.

“So here’s dah thing, that thing is kinda starting a rebellion against da doctor with Nirah and Parthax. So, we need to choose a side bruh. Thirteen, tha’ monster, got da doctor already all locked up in the jail so...” Grammosh said, updating his brother on the situation.

“Then just kill da fucker” Karath said punching his palm animatedly.

“Can’t, the tiefling says da doctors a lich or somethin. So if you break his body, he’ll just come back to life somewhere out of the jail and start the revenging”

“I hate death magics, dead things should stay dead” Karath sighed.

“So we gunna fight with dah monster or da doctor? I like dah monster, he’s trying to free us from the doctor’s magics and he’s like Korun’e. I liked him.”

“But if da doctor gets out it’s going to be a world of hurt for us...”

“Yah... we just need to make sure he doesn’t den huh?” Grammosh said with confidence.

Karath hums at Grammosh’s comment, “I think dats going to be easier said dan done. I wanna meet dah monster, maybe punch it’s face one good time for doin dis to me. After dat I’d feel better.”

<You say dat now when he’s not standing in front of you, I bet you change your tone when he is> Grammosh thought to himself at his brothers remark before commenting; “I can let him know when I see him again, I’m going to get down to the prison and keep an eye on dah doctor though. Don’t need any wandering eyes to find him right now, not that it’s likely but bettah safe dan sorry”.

----- Parthax bit?

----- Kyras Bit?

Kyras lay on the cool stone floor, eyes vacant as she slowly breathed in, then out. Simply for the sake of existence and what it meant to her, she took breaths, they didn’t sustain her, were unnecessary but still she did, the very life force inside her drove her to desire it. Her whole body tingled with feeling, her nose sparkled with the sweet and fresh scent of the musty air of the corridors. Inside, her organs burned with vitality, horribly, wonderfully, after 1-4-6’s violation of her. Time dragged on for minutes, hours, days, months, it mattered not for Kyras, as long as this feeling lingered. This euphoria, the vitality and pure essence of life, she couldn’t have enough of it, not now, not ever. During her lucid moments she could still feel 1-4-6’s touch, his tongue, his power, his control, she hated it, she needed it. She remembered his words, so inviting, welcoming, supporting his manipulation of her. She felt herself being torn in half by her pride and need of him. The absolute desire to feel that vitality again, her need of his essence, to feed off him shifted into the forefront of her mind.

<I need him. I need him now. Whatever it takes...> she thought to herself. Her pride had an answer.

<He raped you, and you beg for more? Seriously?> she answered herself.

<He was gentle and caressed us, it's more than I've had in lifetimes> she replied.

<I'm going crazy I'm here on the floor arguing with myself about the moralities of being raped versus not> she finalized before internalizing her actual fear of being morally split over this dilemma. She acknowledged she would need his physical body again, normal mortal blood was water to his essence which shone like the fluorescent silver. Even as she came to that thought, she felt immense shame in herself as she lied in her dirtied robes on the cold stone floor of the room she had used, time and again to dominate her foes. As she felt her remorse and pity, the voice in her memory rang out...

..."Join me and be free"... she remembered, visualizing his naked and ominous form as it glowered over her powerfully and ominously after her recent experience. This vision played over and over again in her head like a broken record.

<I have no love for Geroe, what has he done to me in comparison to Geroe?> she asked herself. Hours passed and she only saw her tally further increase on one side and not the other.

Thirteen prowled around the small bedroom in agitation desperate for a release from his biology. His kilt tented by his rut driven erections and more annoying was the incessant burning itch buried in his abdomen. He had to mentally quell his instinct to roar his desire to the castle and beckon any partner to help satiate either of his needs. It had only been a day and a half since the biological switch was flipped and he was already a dripping mess, his mind flooded with thoughts of nothing but filling or being filled, with a specific interest in Nirah. He hoped she would smell the musk of his 'situation' before she came to his door, and more importantly, knocked first. Both her and Parthax had been away nearly three days now, having traveled to the other facility and he need the latter of the two to hopefully come up with some kind of alchemical solution to this problem, the last thing he wanted to deal with in the short future would be offspring, and that thought extended to all the potential sources. He knew he couldn't risk leaving his bedroom and had even locked the door and slid the brass key out into the hall just to ensure the safety of others incase things took on a more animalistic direction.

Kyrah prowled through the hallways of the western corridor toward Parthax's lab. The soft silk of her gown and the silver of her jewelry hidden under her robe, her hood was pulled low over her brow and she kept her eyes angled to the ground, not that she really needed them to navigate. She didn't look forward to having to interact with the snide tiefling in order to see



Thirteen again, but she didn't have much other choice other than poking in and out of the many rooms, chambers and offices hoping to find him by chance. Her ears flipped back in annoyance but she pressed on with a steady breath. Her mind drifted to her experience with Thirteen and the feeling of life he had forced within her, she was still furious at his manipulation of her but her desire and curiosity, and most specifically the idea of freedom, was much more valuable. Her thoughts bore her through her reminiscence until she found herself already outside Parthax's lab. The smell of the freshly replaced wood and the polish of new steel reinforcement was a testament to the gouges still apparent in the wood floor. Nirah reached down and ran her claws over them, they were wider than three of her fingers apart and nearly an inch deep. She had a moment of concern as she visualized Thirteen's paws making these, <Too wide, too deep, he's big but not that big> she thought, <what else could have done it?> she wondered. She turned to open the door to Parthax's lab and then froze. A deep throaty growl broke the silence, once, twice, then a third time. Nirah's fur nearly prickled through her heavy robe and her tail was easily twice its normal size. She stalked to the corner and turned, stealthily trying to find the origin of the sound. She saw nothing down the hall and prowled to the next intersection and looked, left then right. A glimpse of metal on the floor caught her attention, she glared at it, confused, <a key?> she asked herself rhetorically. She paused for a moment before stalking after it, and with confidence picked it up. <A regular room key?> she remarked mentally, <who would need a... > she started before she finally dared to breathe and when she did it suddenly became clear. She remembered Thirteen's scent well from their time together, just experiencing it on torn clothing from the event jolted her like electricity, this was nothing compared to that time. She was paralyzed in a full on lightning storm of olfactory-erotica. She knew what was making that noise, and she knew she wouldn't even have to ask for what she wanted. With a moment of concentration and a sheepish grin, her form grew faint, then insubstantial as she dissolved into a misty vapor. With a brief thought she floated slowly under the crack of the door and into the room. Once completely through the doorway, she blindly dispersed around the room until she found a suitable corner and with another moment of concentration, was reforming into her original shape in a matter of moments.

Utilizing the ability usually left her disoriented for a few moments but that was quickly whisked away as she gaped in surprise and horror. The creature crouching a pair of meters in front of her, unintelligent eyes level with her own, couldn't even fit in the bedroom if it had stood. She knew it was Thirteen but he was much larger, had horns, spikes, more scales, and a silvery aura shimmering between white and black flickered over his body. She could feel the raw primal power this creature had become a manifestation of and she craved it, she was terrified of it, but wanted it, desperately.

"Thirteen?" she asked meekly. A long deep throated growl was her only response. She looked him over, his top pair of clawed hands held open, claws flayed defensively. His second pair of arms supporting his weight in a quadrupedal crouch. Between his legs both of his cocks stood erect and ready, she noticed they easily matched Thirteen's increase in stature. She steadied herself again and locked her eyes onto Thirteen's and with a tendril of thought and all of her mental power she grasped for him. The lack of intelligible thought was her first observation, the second was how tentative and flimsy her manipulation was. She knew immediately that all she could do was at best present an emotional suggestion and hope to steer

his primal focus in that direction. She pressed firmly and clearly into his mind the image of her need of him and her naked form prostrated under him. Thirteen didn't move, there was no acknowledgement or sensation from him that she could see or feel. She carefully rolled off her robe and started undressing, taking slow non-threatening movements. As her slip fell away and she was nothing but fur and the few bits of jewelry she determined were not worth risking to remove she slowly stepped toward him. He straightened slightly and towered over her, the tops of his folded wings touching the stone ceiling. She continued to push her mental insinuations toward him, never taking her dominating eyes off of him. He reached out, not quickly, but not slowly either and batted her to the floor. She had seen it coming and chose not to dodge, yet was still surprised at the amount of power it had behind it. If he had intended to hurt her, she would likely have broken more than a few bones. She lay on the floor for a moment stunned but his prowling shadow kept her still once she had recovered. She looked toward him to see his head looming toward her, followed by a heavy paw landing next to her torso. She quivered at the size of it even with the claws hidden, she knew at that moment this was going to be exactly like last time, but with a bigger, potentially meaner animal, one without a sense of morality to keep it's actions in check. One paw could easily wrap around most of her waist, two would flow over her like a gown, and this monster had four of those paws. Her imagination ran with that for a moment and constructed the image of a black furred cat-like ragdoll being bent and twisted by those claws. Her instincts at that point finally started to assert themselves and she tried to make herself very much smaller than she was. It made no impact on her predator, from it's perspective the difference between a gnat and an ant is irrelevant, but he was still curious. He sniffed at her thigh and up to the base of her curled tail. His hot breath boring into her groin like a bellows. He opened his mouth and rolled his tongue, before deciding. He snorted and retreated returning to the corner in his crouch to watch the undead thing. She looked back and watched his retreat and sighed both with relief and disappointment.

"Not good enough for you huh" she whispered as she slowly got to her feet. He only chuffed a rough reply. She didn't know if that was him agree or disagreeing but she had come this far and she wasn't going to give up because he was being timid or choosy. She slowly turned and step at a time approached him. He growled a low deep warning but let her approach, unafraid of the tiny creature. She touched him softly, brushing her paws over his scaled chest, slowly moving them down toward his abdomen, then to the tip of his upper erect member. The pads of her hand clung to its wetness and slipped over the spines and down its girth, feeling the heat, heft and girth of the organ. He seemed unimpressed or at most, passive about the experience, choosing to neither move toward or away from her caress. She took the opportunity then to include her other paw in the ministrations, wrapping both around his upper cock and with slow gentle motions pushed and pulled her pads along his length. He finally relented to her attention after a few moments, sinking from his crouch and letting his legs relax in front of him, his tail curled around to the side, the tip flicking lightly back and forth. She backed away at his descent into a sitting position, before slowly re-engaging.

"Going to step it up, hope you like it tight" she said with a wry smile as she straddled his lower cock while using his upper erection for balance. The tapered tip of his length penetrated easy enough, their combined wetness providing copious lubricant, her anticipation and his natural pre. However after the first few centimeters she knew the inevitable would happen, his

girth would be a problem long before his length was. She continued to slowly press her body weight down and jerk his upper cock with long reaching strokes, sinking a millimeter or two for each three or four pistons of his upper cock. Without warning he reached up and put both his lower claws on her, grasping around her abdomen, hips and upper legs. She knew she didn't even have a second to prepare herself as stars danced in her vision. It took everything she had not to scream in agony as he forced her down onto his lower cock. It felt like meters of hot raging cock were being buried into her cunt, she was nothing but a furry black sock being stuffed to capacity and stretched beyond. Burning fire raged through her abdomen as it strained to accommodate him before she was wrenched up, his thickness dragging against her, the soft spines of his length resisting her ascent before she was slammed back down again, again fiery pain, again colorful lights across her vision. Time became imaginary to Kyrah, there was not moments or minutes or years, there was only the eternity between being lifted up, and wrenched back down. She didn't realize, couldn't realize that mechanically she still rocked her paws up and down his upper cock, though no longer in smooth motions, she jerked and spasmed her once fluid ministrations. She knew her cervix had already crumpled under his power and could only imagine that her womb had been penetrated too, that his cock was filling her past her diaphragm, past her lungs, even through her throat, it was all the way up to her skull, jackhammering away with the timelessly slow dreadful tempo, lifted up, wrenched back down. In reality she had only taken about two thirds of his length and the eternity she was experiencing was nothing but two, almost three minutes when with a growling groan the chimera pulled her down again and tensed up, seating her atop a knot almost as wide as her hips. Dazed, she leaned into his upper cock and buried as much of the tip of it into her mouth as she dared swallowing nearly a quarter of his length before the limits of her jaw forced the tips of her teeth against his girth tightly. He held her tightly and she felt it roll up through both her cunt and claws, the first blast of his burning hot seed. The bursts came simultaneously gushing down her throat and forcing its way into her womb. She didn't comprehend the next moments, her eyes rolled into the back of her head and every single neuron in her vampiric body lit up with fiery pleasure of life energy. She drank of him beyond the measure of what a mortal body could contain, her body bulging to capacity as he emptied himself into her, and she was too intoxicated to know when she had reached capacity and just sat incapacitated. Jets of pure white lassoed from her nose, maw and cunt as the chimera finally finished his climax. She slumped as he pulled his cock away from her mouth, allowing several mouthfuls of his seed to drool from it onto her bulged naked form. She remained partially seated, held up only by the still erect cock buried in her cunt. She saw a hazy paw reach up toward her and felt pressure then blacked out.

The first sensation was a dull thudding and a sparkle of pain. Kyrah tried to push it out of her mind but it persisted so she just ignored it. The electric tingle of life poured through her every pore and everything felt inconsequential. It may have been mere seconds or ten years to Kyrah but she cared little before a sense of vertigo wrenched her from the bliss. She felt herself being lifted up. She opened her eyes and saw nothing but colored flashes and bright lights for a few moments before she realized her face was against the ground, she felt the sheer virility of the chimera in her stomach and what was left of it in her cunt which sparkled with a dull ache, then grimaced as she came to the realization that she was being supported by his lower cock,

no long impaling her cunt, instead it fell between her thighs and up to her breasts, while his upper member had penetrated her ass and had already worked her to capacity, sparkling with the same dull ache as her cunt, protesting at being ravaged up to his knot. She drooled his cum in a daze as he rocked his hips against her, holding her hips with his lower paws and her shoulders with his upper paws, pinning her between his cock and the ground like a toy. She was hardly conscious and let him ravage her, she was beyond pain and pride. There was only life. His energy, her need of him, was her only desire and she had met that objective. After another indeterminate amount of time she faintly felt his forcefulness increase and she knew that it should be important to her but like the buzzing ache in her abused body, she ignored it. The vertigo shifted again and she felt a smothering weight fall on her, she fought to focus on it, to bring herself back to consciousness enough to figure out what had happened. She looked glassy eyed over her shoulder as a pair of fangs, each nearly as wide as her wrist hooked under her clavicles and a firm bite grasped the fur of her neck firmly, she tried to struggle but couldn't move as the weight of the chimera pressed down on her and with a few thunderous heartbeats and the bulging of his cock in her ass she felt him climax. She tensed up again, immediately succumbing to more of the essence that poured into her, filling her with rope after rope of his virility. He filled her to capacity and then some, bloating her out further until it drooled in a breathless river from her mouth. She was paralyzed in pleasure, filled beyond capacity and conscious. He forced himself out of her and she felt her lower half fall to the floor, the weight of her body forcing globs of his cum from all of her orifices. She couldn't breathe, think or even process the surroundings, her vision flickered with colored lights and she felt herself start falling, even though she never left that cool stone floor.

She blinked dimly, her eyes still glazed. She tried to move but found her limbs heavy and stuck to the floor. She heaved her arm up with all of her might and felt her elbow lift away from the stone barely an inch, a thickened sticky mess resisting her escape. She rolled her tongue through her dry caked mouth and felt it filled with the same salty substance. The realization of what had happened brought her back and she started before forcing herself out of the drying puddle, globs of semi-dry semen sticking to her fur. She gasped a single cough and decided that breathing was not important before the urge to actually draw breath asserted itself and she coughed again, wheezing a breath. She tried again, and after a few moments she again felt the need to breathe. She panicked for a moment and felt to her chest, feeling for a heartbeat. A long moment of anticipation passed as she felt nothing under her bosom. She swallowed thickly, running her tongue along the inside of her mouth to remove whatever remnants she could. She cleared her throat coarsely and swallowed again. She glanced over and saw the flickering silver aura and the chimera's shining eyes on her. He was stretched on his side across the long part of the room, she noticed that both his members were still erect. She glanced down at her body, still distended from his deposits. She struggled to keep her balance as vertigo assaulted her again, threatening to force her to the floor. She slowly crawled toward the small washroom next to the broken bed. She hadn't noticed that before she realized, focused as she was on the danger when she had first saw the chimera. She padded past it on her hands and knees and into the small closet. She struggled to reach up and turn a knob, when she did water started to pour into a wide wooden tub, large enough for Kyrah but hardly sufficient for even the normal sized chimera unless he was in his human form. After a long

minute the water temperature rose until layers of steam started to rise from the fountain, the vampire fumbled with the bung for the drain before fastening it then stared into the stream of water as it slowly filled the tub. The white vapor of the steam flowing through her dazed vision like ribbons of the chimera's cum. Another sense of vertigo assaulted her followed by another sensation, one vaguely familiar but that she couldn't remember. A thick pressure in her abdomen and chest slowly rolled over her. A knot formed at the back of her throat and with a lurching punch, her stomach cramped and a gagging breath escaped from her mouth.

<Nausea?!> she mentally exclaimed as another spasm wracked her body. She gagged again before the third spasm forced salty globs of the chimera's cum into the water of the bath. She blindly fumbled for the bung again, lifting it off the drain as she gagged and vomited again into the water. She hurled mouthful after mouthful into the water as her drugged body started shaking in convulsions. After nearly an hour of Kyrah emptying her stomach she finally re-bunged the tub and crawled into the steaming water. She coughed and breathed heavily, sometimes gasping when she again started suppressing the autonomous need to breathe.

<What has he done to me?> Kyrah panicked through her drug addled high, trying to formulate thoughts. She drifted in and out of sleep a few times, refilling the tub with hot water when it had cooled to uncomfortable levels or if she had slipped below the water and started to choke on the water.

When she saw the beginning of daylight through the shaded window she moved to get out of the tub, she saw the chimera's head poke into the washroom and looked at it curiously. She stood and he pushed as much as his upper body as the small doorway would accommodate. He pushed his snout up to her bosom and sniffed those bellow like breaths again, moving down to between her thighs and with an opened mouth flehmen response breathed deeply again. He considered for a moment and licked at her fur nearly lifting her from the bath. His broad tongue stripping the water from her fur easily.

"Thirsty?" she asked, "I wouldn't doubt it, here..." she finished unbunging the bath and turning on the cold water tap. The chimera lapped at the draining water greedily as she stepped out, waiting patiently for him to finish so she could get past the filled doorway. He drank for several long minutes to the point where Kyrah's brows went up in surprise. Finally, he relented, drops of water dripping from his chin and long canines. He chuffed at her and sniffed at her again before continuing his grooming of her. She pushed away at his attention but he didn't relent, grabbing her with a paw and dragging her out of the washroom and with her firmly held in his massive paws, forcefully licked at her. She relented and again let him contort her, manipulating her like a cub until she was sure he had covered every inch, twice, before struggling against him again. She pushed away at his snout and he recoiled, nipping at her arms gently. She continued to struggle and he relented, releasing her to the floor. She rolled her eyes at him as he sat back down on the floor, both his members still engorged and hanging between his thighs. She padded over to the corner and dressed, she noticed her garments disheveled but all intact. She slipped on her dress and robe and moved to the door.

"It's been fun, when I see Parthax, I'll let him know what's going on" she spoke to the chimera. He stared at her unblinking, giving no sign of acknowledgement or understanding. She focused for a moment to gather her concentration which seemed difficult, still addled as she was on her high. Once she had gathered it, she felt for the magic to diffuse herself into vapor as

she had come, but couldn't feel it. She focused harder, knowing it to be more difficult in her mentally distanced state. Nothing came. She felt a pit of dread form in her gut, and reached again to where her heart was. Nothing, no heartbeat. Reassured, she took another breath and tried again for the ability to vaporize. Nothing came. She dragged her paw-pads over her eyes and looked to the chimera in exasperation. She bit her paw-pad, hard enough to draw blood, if she could bleed, and watched. The skin glistened for a moment and then slowly stitched back together. She still had fast healing, but not vapor form, she looked to the window. That pit of dread came back but this time with a sense of exhilaration. She pulled a corner of the heavy curtain back, letting in a ray of the rising sun. Tiny motes of dust danced in the ray of sunlight, a premonition she knew of blinding pain if it touched her skin. Thankfully her fur was thick enough in most places to occlude most of that issue, however her nose, ears and eyes were usually a problem. She slowly lowered an open paw into the open light, letting the rays fall onto her black paw-pads. Nothing happened. She hiccuped in excitement. No pain, no burning, a slight tingle, and then warmth. It dragged her back a century, to her childhood, to memories she had long forgotten. Tears welled up in her eyes as she grew bolder and bolder, moving more and more of the curtain out of the way, certain that the moment might end and she would start to burn in agony. She stood fully immersed in the sunlight, her robe thrown back, her dark fur drawing in the light like a silky shadow, she closed her tear filled eyes and felt the warmth of the sun permeate her and drank of it, like she had of the chimera. She stood like that for nearly an hour, until the sun threatened to move past the lip of the window and disappear above the ceiling of the roof of the structure.

A click at the door surprised her, and before she could turn and shout a warning...

"Thirteen why is the door..." Nirah asked while opening the door. She stopped halfway as she saw him in the corner, his eyes locking on to her and his pupils dilating widely. Time froze for Nirah as three things immediately became apparent, one, Thirteen was in heat, two, she was too, and three, Kyras was in the room, in the light, not dead.

"Nirah, don't move!" She whispered forcefully, expressing her dominating presence over her. Nirah froze, not by choice, she struggled vainly as the massive chimera slowly moved his feet under him, his eyes never leaving Nirah, his nostrils flaring wildly breathing in Nirah's presence, his tentacles slowly moving out from under his wings. "You will have one chance to get as far away as you can, the door will only hold him for a few moments" Kyras said, slowly moving between her and the chimera. Once she was sure she could get him to make eye contact she said, "You know when to run". And with a jerk she grabbed one of the chimera's teeth forcing his eyes into hers. "STARE" She nearly shouted, forcing all of her mental willpower into the command. His large emerald eyes bore into hers for a long moment, flickers of silvery aura dancing through them. There was a click of the door and with that miniscule distraction his wave of resistance broke her grasp like a cobweb. As he turned and glanced back to the door she grasped onto his head firmly, reaching for another handhold and grabbing the sensitive whisker on his right cheek. There was a click from the door as the key turned. With a flick of his head, he threw Kyras from his face and with deep gouges rending the stone under his heavy claws, he lunged at the door, where his prey had been seconds before. It held against the first tackle but the second, with the force of paired arm swings behind it, splintered it to shambles as

the hinges flew into the courtyard. The chimera looked left, then right, and then sniffed deeply as he squeezed through the door. The hunt was on, it was time to breed.

Kyrah rolled up off the floor just as the tips of a feathered tail disappeared past the ruined door frame, the soft thuds of his paw-pads and clicking of his nails on the stone disappearing quickly. She leapt to the doorframe and looked in the direction she saw his tail disappear and saw nothing, she sighed in frustration.

<Dumb enough to lose himself, smart enough to know how to manipulate displacement fields and silence auras...> Kyrah cursed mentally. From around the corner to the right, a pair of aides turned and saw Kyrah standing in front of the ruined doorway. Knowing of her temper and ability, they just turned and quickly shuffled away, avoiding eye contact. The vampire shook her head and prowled after the direction the chimera went.

Nirah gasped as she turned the corner and fumbled with her key to open the armory door, a solid slab of steel, hopefully capable of keeping something safe between her and the predatory Thirteen, at least until he calms down. As she fumbled with the keys shakily, she realized something dangerous, which led to another dangerous predicament, and then another.

<I usually stay fertile for a whole month! We can't fight geroe like that, not if Thirteen turns into a monstrous animal anytime either of us are fertile. This is his first... we don't even know how long he will be... or how often... > She realized. She turned and raced down another hallway, circling back toward Parthax's lab. A sense of enigmatic dread at the alternative, she remembered seeing Thirteen's monstrous cocks as he started prowling after her. She couldn't even fully manage them in his normal form and in this heat driven animalistic lust, she feared for herself.

Parthax set his bag down on his desk and surveyed Thirteen's progress. It was promising work but, there was a lot missing, he had expected more to have been done during the three days Nirah and he were dealing with the southern facility. He retrieved his formula book and two other tomes he had brought specifically from the southern facility and started flipping through the thicker one looking for a specific page he saw with several of the symbols Geroe had used in this codified document. The door to his lab was nearly torn from its hinges again as Nirah burst through it with enough force to send it slamming against the adjacent wall. Parthax jumped at the intrusion and glanced to her sweat beaded brow and looked to her with dreadful concern.

"He's coming, not much time, You need to somehow deal with him." Nirah gasped between labored breathes.

"Who, what and why?" Parthax spoke quickly prepping his ingredient satchel and standing in front of his alchemy station. Nirah quickly moved to a corner of the lab and ducked down, her tail wrapped between her legs between her cloak.

"Thirteen, he's transformed again, and he's in heat. You can smell it from a mile away, I didn't realize until too late. He's coming for me, his mate. You might not be safe either." Nirah steadied her breath until she could speak in a whisper.

Parthax paled from his normal maroon, to a red hue at the mention of his cohort's monstrous transformation, it provoking memories of the last time the chimera had transformed and taken him apart with his tentacles and claws. Then from that red to a pink at the realization

that he had completely forgot that Thirteen was non-binary, and featured anatomy from both genders. A pelvis crushing visualization sent his hands into a frenzy.

“I can’t make anything to counteract it until I have some samples Nirah” he breathed with guilt and concern.

“Then what am I supposed to do?!” she whispered in panic. “I’d rather not having my ovaries smashed by a pair of ogre’s clubs thanks very much! Can’t you just...”

“Drink this, it will last several hours, not forever, it’s all I can...” Parthax stopped mid sentence as he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Nirah likewise froze. Their eyes darted wildly in their sockets looking for something, anything. Their ears strained for any sign of the chimera’s presence. Nirah knew she couldn’t hide, not from his sense of smell, or his thermovisual receptors, she could only run. Parthax gasped and quickly slipped a leaf into his mouth and tossed Nirah the vial. She caught it as Parthax was lifted from the floor for a moment, arching his back, blood running down the stab wound where Thirteen’s thick tentacle pad had latched onto and stung into the tiefling’s back.

“Thirteen, In the back?! T-that’s f-fukin rood mate!” Parthax gasped as his limbs already started trembling. With a gentle flick, the chimera must have tossed the tiefling aside, as the blood that dripped from the tentacle disappeared from view. There were a few plips of liquid onto the floor as blood appeared where it had fallen from the invisible chimera stalking in for it’s prey. Nirah saw Parthax, gritting his teeth roughly several times, as his limp form shook helplessly against the wall near the door. Nirah couldn’t sense anything about Thirteen anywhere around. She knew he had to be here and thought she should be able to smell him, hear him, anything, a faint outline of his field of invisibility but all of them were gone. She truly panicked as she felt his bifurcated tongue rasp against her cheek but when she went to reach for him, there was nothing. She was paralyzed with fear and confusion as she was lifted from the ground gently but she couldn’t feel his claws around her. It was as if some force was invisibly manipulating her. She could tell that her wait was being supported by her butt and lower back, but when she grasped for him, her hands slipped through thin air. Nirah realized she was white-knuckling the vial Parthax had tossed her and looked to it carefully, a viscous crystalline blue liquid filled the crystal vial. Nirah took the moment to consider the situation and placed the uncorked vial in her mouth ready to swallow it even if her arms get restrained, holding it carefully against her cheek. She soon saw she was being carried back to Thirteen’s room. Once inside the black fur and scales of his arms became visible as he lowered Nirah to the floor. She looked to the door then back to him, wondering if she could escape. She immediately dismissed the thought, there was nowhere she could run that he couldn’t find her. She glanced down at the pair of weapons between his legs and winced in anticipated agony. The chimera prowled over to the bed, the frame of which had been broken but the rest of the bedding was intact. Thirteen lifted the bedframe aside and into the doorway, lifting a straw mattress from the floor and sliding over toward Nirah. She looked down at it then at him. He prowled after her and she knew it was now or never. She tipped the glass vial in her mouth and felt the electric blue liquid roll down her throat. She wasn’t sure how long it would take or what even Parthax had prepared in so short a time.

“Wait” Nirah said forcefully putting a hand up. The chimera did not. It slowed and sniffed deeply at her. Nirah was sure she could see his cocks further hardening in anticipation when



two things hit her simultaneously. First his musk again permeated her sense of smell like the first time it had when she had stormed in and it tickled at her for a moment before a switch flipped in her head. Second the effects of the potion threatened their effects, tightening the clothes around her. She was confused for a moment before she understood, <Parthax you sick fuck, it is better than nothing, I only hope it lasts as long as he does> Nirah thought as she started ripping at her buttons and belts as the clothing she wore continued to shrink around her. She had to nearly rip her breeches off they were so tight around her legs and she knew that her linen undergarments were going to have to be sacrificed as her stature and strength had nearly doubled under the effects of the potion. She was still dwarfed by the chimera, but instead of being torn in half she would simply have to deal with the another good stretching. Nirah couldn't get over how different it was going to be this time. She had only been in the room for a minute and already she could think of nothing but finding her way onto the chimera's cocks and her readiness was not only noticed by her. Thirteen prowled over her as she continued to increase in size, as soon as she had ripped her breeches off. With a effortless caress he clawed the tightening linen from her loins and dived in nose first wanting to bathe in her scent. She grasped at his massive head with her claws as his tongue pushed past her swollen, needy scales and into her. His tongue pushed deeper and deeper into it filled her with its length. His hot breath and drool rolled down her thighs and cunt, down her ass and to the sides of her tail. She gasped in needy anticipation, the hot desire in her legs driving her into a wild frenzy. The restless thought that she would be full of eggs was all that mattered, Geroe be damned, mortality be damned. She needed to be absolutely full with Thirteen's virility, to bear his offspring, to mother his whelps. She couldn't take it anymore, she wrenched his head from her cunt, his tongue lolling out of his mouth as she rolled onto her hands and knees, flicking her upraised tail around the chimera's neck tauntingly.

"You just going to have a taste? Give in to what the animal in you really wants to do!" Nirah commanded. Thirteen already didn't need any encouragement and if her words had any effect on him, she couldn't tell. He prowled over to her and with practiced motions slid both cocks home, his upper cock pressing into her tailhole and his lower member parting the scaly folds of her cunt. With animalistic conviction Thirteen hilted himself in only one steady thrust. Nirah grunted in discomfort but knew what was coming and mentally prepared herself. He leaned into her heavily as he rutted her into small mattress under them. His twin cocks pistoning in and out of her cunt, dragging against her differently that she was used too. She focused on the ridges along the length that weren't normally there. She gasped as he thrust into her with building momentum pressing against her cervix but it was dilated and ready to receive the ridged head of a dragon cock to lock them together and flood her womb. She knew Thirteen's member was similar in shape but lacked that sharp ridged head, and the barbs scratched against her in a completely different stimulating sensation. He was still virile enough to know that she wouldn't have to worry about draconic anatomy to conceive. He pushed into her again and again, with growing animalistic ferocity. She trembled under him, grunting with his thrusts, fighting against his strength, wrapping her tail around his. A pair of teeth came down around her neck and gently grasped at her skin, grasping firmly but not lethally as he rocked forward suddenly and Nirah knew what was coming next. Except the first the that happened wasn't what she expected, what felt like the sharp ridged head of a dragon

penetrated her cervix fully but it was barbed and tapered and then followed was the expect bulbous knots at the base of his cocks. He pressed them steadily into her holes and she groaned as he forced them in. The first popped into her ass then her cunt swallowed its partner and the engorging of those bitch breakers forced her legs together as she was tied, he rocked into her a few more times as the first ropes of cum painted into her guts like a cooling wave, washing through her desires so deeply her eyes crossed. The next moments dragged on as he continued to pump her full of his virile seed ensuring a true breeding.

<That's right Thirteen, breed me like the bitch I am, fill me with your whelps, I want it all> she mentally cooed as she milked him for his seed, the moments dragged on until finally the chimera lurched heavily atop her and his cocks stopped twitching their seed into her swollen belly. She placed her hand atop her swollen abdomen like every other time but felt protective of it for a change, wanting to hold it and keep it. The chimera atop of her seemed to follow that belief as he rolled onto his back, gently dragging her onto his scaled chest. Both his cocks still thundered to the beat of his hearts within her, occasionally twitching another few drops of his cum into her. She reclined into his warm chest for a moment before sitting up, laying her tail across his abdomen. She reached down between his thighs and without even having to get close was nearly scorched by the temperature radiating from between his thighs. She sympathized and imagined being driven by only her most basic instincts and seeking out a partner like he would.

"Who will you choose to be the father?" she asked him rhetorically, knowing that he wouldn't answer. She felt him lurch under her and realized that the cocks inside her had not even started to loosen their grip. With a minor hip gyration he teeter tottered her between his cocks, his knots holding her well seated but pushing and pulling with alternating motions. She gasped at the stimulation it provided, pressing and pulling against her all at the same time with so much sandwiched between the two rods. It wasn't even a minute and she groaned out in ecstasy and she felt an odd pinching sensation within her abdomen followed by a blinding wave of pleasure as she felt her womb still powerfully penetrated and seeded. The chimera ignored her cacophony of pleasure and continued to gyrate under her, building his own momentum, pulling and pushing in greater force each cycle of his hips. His heartbeats thundered heavily again and his breathing became labored as he grasped at her hips pulling her down as he thrust heavily upward simultaneously forcing himself deeper into her than ever before. She screamed at his climax as more of his virile seed pumped into her forcing her to climax again, another pinching sensation from her abdomen that she completely ignored. This continued for hours, until she was completely filled and beyond with his seed and she was a disheveled sticky mess, mewling on the floor with her chimera lover wrapped up protectively around her.

When Nirah woke up she had returned to her original size and felt to her belly protectively, caressing it hopefully. The needy heat in her abdomen was abating, it still burned but instead of a raging inferno, it was the hot embers of a fire finally in the process of burning itself out. Nirah heard a click clack of metal sliding on stone near her and saw Parthax through the door. The chimera stirred instantly and glared to the door but Parthax had already stepped around the doorframe. The monster pulled Nirah in close again and wrapped her in his arms closer. Parthax poked his head back around the corner, and made a series of hand gestures, pointing at what looked like a metal syringe, pointed at the chimera, and then pointed at the

jugular vein in his neck. Nirah reached out and grasped the syringe and slowly rolled around to face the chimera within his claws. She reached up around his neck to hug him waited, holding him close. He relaxed under her embrace and she bumped his head as she inserted the syringe, quickly depressing the plunger. He stirred for a moment at the minor sting but seeing nothing out of the ordinary nuzzled heavily into Nirah. Within moments he breathing slowed and his paws relaxed around her.

“He’s out” Nirah said calmly throwing on her frayed breeches quickly as Parthax wiggled through the bedframe barring the door.

“We don’t have long, that’s the strongest anesthetic I can make and I doubt it will keep him down for more than ten minutes”

“What do u need me to do, take your pants off” Parthax said matter of factly. Nirah glared at him. “I need a sample and I doubt you could coax one out of him now” Parthax said pointing between the chimera’s thighs.

Nirah lowered her pants and looked away as Parthax prodded her with an implement and placed it into a glass vial. She blushed and slipped her pants back on quickly.

“You need to be here when he wakes up, I’ll see what I can do about this.” He said as he took a few drops of blood from Thirteen’s paw-pad. Before a third drop could even fall from his large pad, Parthax scowled. He wiped away the blood and scoffed, “His regeneration ability has increased, I’m concerned what else he’s capable of, bloody backstabbing monster”. Parthax went to leave.

“He’s capable of some form of undetectability, he carried me here, invisible and I couldn’t see, hear, feel, touch, even smell him, it was VERY unnerving” Nirah said with emphasis.

“Oh thats bloody ‘terrifying’” Parthax said with conviction. “Stay safe and hope he’s not horny when he wakes up, I made another one if he is, just in case...” he finished as he handed her another crystal vial filled with the same electric blue liquid.

“Oh, he will be...” Nirah promised, “He’s never one to disappoint in that fashion.” Parthax simply shook his head in reply and stalked out of the room. Nirah caressed her monstrous mate’s head while he slept, heaving it onto her thighs. He twitched meekly a few minutes later. Nirah breathed sharply in surprise, he had only been out for about ten minutes. If that was Parthax’s strongest non-lethal anesthetic, maybe they would need a more lethal option to keep the monstrous chimera unconscious for longer.

Parthax scowled as he looked under his microscope at the sample he had taken from Nirah. The chimera’s unique biology apparently extended beyond his own physiology, the sperm in the sample were nearly four times time size of a standard human’s and featured a pair of tails that worked in concentric propeller like motions instead of a single tail and it’s simple back and forth pattern. Parthax increased the magnification effect and clicked a few magical switches on his microscope, examining one of the sperm that had fallen still, looking at the chromosomal information stored within. As soon as he found focus a rainbow of colors assaulted him.

<No wonder they are so big, his genome is eight times that of a humans. There’s no way we have time to decode this, not without a thousand thousand samples!> Parthax pulled away from the microscope, touching a lever and extinguishing the magical lighting element. He

took the small blood sample and diluted it into several vials. He applied several fluids with hormonal dyes to identify concentration of various hormones like testosterone, estrogen, progesterone and several other known proteins. All of them were colored deep hues of the various dyes. Parthax stared at the last test disbelievingly, either there was a false positive, or his chimera friend was already pregnant. <I doubt your biology works that fast friend, I doubt half of these proteins even work on you with how the results are showing, but I have to say based on these hormone levels, your not going to enjoy much time between your fertility cycles and with how complex your genome is... you won't find any partners that will... Oh, he won't like that, Hah! It's what he gets for stabbing me in the back.> Parthax thought to himself smiling wolfishly. He poked around his lab for a few moments found the materials he needed and set to work.

Parthax came around the corner to hear the slapping of scales on skin and rolled his eyes. He glanced around the corner of the bedframe door again and saw Nirah on top of the monstrous chimera being thrust into. She leaned into him letting him pleasure her and fill her further. He tossed another syringe into the room it sliding right into Nirah's braced knee. She glanced down at it then to Parthax, snatched it up, rode him until he groaned with climax, and lifted off an inch, spotted a thick pressurized vein, stabbed the small needle in and injected the anesthetic. Thirteen continued his gyrations as he lolled into a trance, continuing to thrust every few moments or so. Parthax could only stare awestruck that he was still even remotely conscious.

"Don't have long Parthax..." she gasped still impaled by his two cocks.

"How, fuck, ugh, so quick story short, he's basically going to be in heat until he finds a mate and if that mate isn't compatible, he may have a week, maybe a month, before he will be fertile again. Could be less."

"Well that's not ideal, any way to neutralize it, not without a complete workup of his protein structure which... isn't going to be a possibility"

"Then, Uh~" Nirah gasped as the chimera thrust deep, "What can we do?"

"We'll we need someone who is compatible with his genome to breed him..." Parthax answered.

"Where are we gonna find that?" Nirah gasped, "and wouldn't that get him pregnant?"

"You're sitting on someone compatible. Yes, yes it would" Parthax laughed.

"You.. you want to use his own... you want him to breed himself?!" Nirah gawked.

"It's a bit more round about than that...but yes effectively"

"He isn't going to like that..." Nirah trailed off.

"Better than captured by Geroe because he couldn't get enough fuck on..." Parthax said.

"What about me, am I not compatible" Nirah asked.

"Your missing some necessary biology Nirah" Parthax said lamely.

"No I mean, can he not, is he not compatible with me?" she clarified.

"I don't know for certain but I assume with a healthy level of surety that no, you are not compatible with him." Parthax answered, but regretted it almost immediately. The way Nirah's hand went to her abdomen pitifully and the look of loss on her face was clear as day. "Look, I could be wrong..." Parthax tried to reassure her meekly.

“We both know that happens about as often as Geroe succeeds at experiments” Nirah sighed. “Well, am I just going to stick my arm up there or what?” Nirah asked.

“Use this” Parthax said, tossing her a tubular contraption. It featured a silicone shaft vaguely resembling the chimera’s large cock, a silicone cylinder with a bunch of soft rubber rings inside and connecting the two ends was a plastic hose with a small flexible bulb fixed near the cylinder. “Slide the...”

“I figure how it works.” Nirah said, looking over the design of the machine. “You made it this fast?”

“Yea, be sure to use the little bulb to pump as much of it as you can, two loads if possible”

“Got it” Nirah said as she lifted herself from him and started draining what she could from herself into the cylinder. Parthax watched for a moment as she slipped the silicon shaft into her own cunt first to lubricate the soft rubber thing. She glanced over at Parthax and clicked her tongue at him.

“Sorry~ It’s for science~” He cooed and slipped away.

With a gentle shove Nirah slipped the large silicone cock into the chimera’s own internally hooded cunt until she found an odd resistance, she pushed and it eventually gave way until the bulbous base and tapered end were all that was left, she shrugged and forced it the rest of the way in with no remorse, <Revenge is mine, how do you like my knot baby~!> she laughed to herself. <I’m going to have your babies one way or another! I just wish that we could have done it together, traitor!> She mused at seeing Thirteen’s scowling face when he learns he’s the one carrying the eggs. <Another animal thing I guess, trying to be like seahorses now I suppose, if you will even lay eggs...>

She straddled him and lowered the silicone cylinder over his lower cock, the massive thing didn’t even fully fit into the cylinder lengthwise, the tapered tip of his cock pressing up into the rounded tip of the container. The soft rubber concentric rings hugged the length tightly creating a sufficient vacuum seal ever few millimeters. The base of the cylinder couldn’t accommodate his knot but had a rubber ring with a small noose to fasten it around the bottom of it anyway. She tightened it gently around him knowing that unless he ripped it off himself, it likely wouldn’t be going anywhere. She lowered her cunt onto his top cock before he fully came to consciousness and started pleasuring herself on it while she waited for him to resume his instinctual breeding of her. Around fifteen minutes later he was fucking her gently again, as if nothing happened, but his motions were delayed, he was still groggy from the effects of the medication and Nirah doubled down on getting him to ejaculate while fully rigged before he became aware enough that he was being penetrated himself. Those few moments turned out to be crucial, Nirah slammed away on him with as much power and lust as she could muster and he groaned again and she knotted herself on him. She groaned with him feeling more hot ropes of his seed fill her, she held the contraption close to her chest as she did, voraciously squeezing the little bulb, and less than three seconds later, the chimera shifted under her, finally noticing after hot jets of seed pouring into his own womb that it was penetrated and being bred. Nirah wasn’t prepared for the lust it drove the chimera into, his cock twitching a few times before the aura around her lover doubled in intensity followed by the rippling pop behind her. The thundering of his heartbeat doubled within her followed by something she didn’t expect, she felt

his hips widen under her, his claws grew larger around her hips holding her against him as his cock insidely pushed deeper, straining against her already stretched limits. He was growing even larger at his own impregnation, followed by larger and more powerful bursts of semen. She could feel his own womb filling beneath her as bursts of his seed leaked in jets from their connection. She tried to fight him and lift away from his engorging body and cock but he held her fast. She panicked as he stopped thrusting and leaned forward and hugged her with all four of his now massive arms as his climax started to end.

<Fuck me Thirteen, what the fuck was that?! Why don't I get to have orgasms like that?> Nirah breathed in fading panic. She put her hand to her abdomen again, distended and hard to the touch, absolutely full. He panted behind her before and after a long moment he felt his embrace loosen and a gentleness to his touch.

"What the fuck happened?" a deeper yet familiar voice rumbled behind Nirah, "What is going on, Don't tell me I, You..." Thirteen started and saw the contraption still being grasped by Nirah nearly bursting with his further enlarged cock. "Does that..." Thirteen started to ask as he reached between his legs and found the tapered edges of the silicone dildo with the tube protruding from it.

"Yea, you lost yourself, hard. This was the only way..." Nirah answered trailing off.

Thirteen collapsed onto his wings defeated... his lower right paw already finding itself over his abdomen. He rolled his eyes and banished his wings with a thought. He reached up to his face and rubbed his eyes and felt the bony protrusions on his brow. He blinked for a moment confused and finally took stock of his setting. He was either in a human room, or his room had gotten twice as small... "Where..." he started to ask and then saw the shelf with his personal effects and the quilts he had used under him. "...Is there a short version?" Thirteen asked Nirah confused but not looking to hear a long story.

"Uhhh, when you went into heat, you turned into the bigger spiker version I told you about before, and when you experienced being bred, you got larger" Nirah surmised after a pause.

"Like bigger than the big version?"

"Yea"

"And that's this here?" He asked gesturing to himself.

"Yea"

"Let me change to human form, that thing cannot be comfortable in you" Thirteen remarked. He focused for a moment, and reached for the ability it reacted to his will like always and he felt the cool sensation wash over him and then nothing happened. Nirah waited for a moment but after a moment turned into a minute she got concerned.

Thirteen scowled, "I can feel the magic, however it does not respond like before, something is different..." Nirah just gestured at him with a spin of her finger. Thirteen sighed and just focused on breathing, trying to overcome the scents of their combined lovemaking and heat that permeated the room. He continued to try and channel into a smaller shape while Nirah loosened the sleeve from his cock and gently coaxed it from his length. A deluge of cum rolled down the length of both.

"Look just lay on your side and we can nap together okay?" Nirah suggested.

“Sleep is not something I... look, one of my greatest anxieties has just been made reality. My greatest fear is the vulnerability of my children in the situation we are currently entrenched in.”

“Our children.” Nirah corrected. Thirteen conceded the point considering she was still wholly impaled womb deep on his cock and in the throes of her own heat. He felt a sharp pang of negative emotion from Nirah that felt out of place for the scenario, but didn’t press the issue.

“Why are you bigger?” Thirteen asked after a moment of silence.

“Parthax’s stopgap measure to ensure you didn’t break me when you snatched me”

“You let me snatch you?” Thirteen asked incredulously

“I’m going to be very straightforward here...” Nirah started, “Nothing can hide from you... you’re a purpose built creature. There’s only two options, relent or run.” Thirteen scowled thinking up a hundred different situations where he couldn’t find something or someone, but quickly found that his biology allowed for a almost flawless form of track and pursue. Knowing a targets scent made it easier and knowing that Nirah was in heat and about a thousand times more detectable for him quelled his arguments.

“Can you use your invisibility?” Nirah asked. Thirteen was going to ask why but acquiesced without question. He wove the light around him like always, and with so little concentration now it almost surprised him how easy it came. Nirah jerked at his knotted cock a few times trying to lift herself free.

“That is terrifying, are you doing anything different?” She asked.

“No?” Thirteen admitted quizzically.

“Thirteen?” She asked.

“No, nothing different” he repeated himself.

“Thirteeen?!” she repeated more worried, reaching around for him and rubbing her hands over his form. Thirteen watched her absolutely dumbstruck.

“Still right here...” he said as he continued flailing about like she had never touched him. He poked her twice on the cheek. She flinched at his touch.

“Stop, seriously! Answer me!” She said with panic.

“I am!” He raised his own voice at this point.

“PLEASE THIRTEEN!” she begged on the verge of tears. At a loss for what to do Thirteen started to panic too, had he cursed himself somehow? He dismissed his invisibility.

“BAHAMUT’S CHOSEN! DON’T EVER DO THAT AGAIN!” Nirah cried nearly shouting at him.

“Why couldn’t you hear me?” Thirteen asked utterly confused.

“Because you weren’t saying anything?” Nirah scowled in obvious sarcasm.

“I shouted back at you” Thirteen responded flatly. He could sense her fear and confusion. “You even touched me while you were floundering about, multiple times, even”.

“No.” she retorted even more confused, “my hands went thru everything, I couldn’t move, I was stuck on you still but I couldn’t feel any part of you, including this monster inside me?” she asked incredulously.

“I didn’t move, I poked you on the cheek twice after I tried answering you the third time and you didn’t acknowledge it” Thirteen said flatly.

“That’s not possible...” Nirah squirmed.

"I am inclined to agree... let me try something." Thirteen prompted, "...just, act normal". He activated his field of invisibility again and leaned over and snatched up a plank of the broken bedframe and broke it into several pieces. He tossed one casually across the room. Nirah didn't move or respond in any way. The second piece he placed on her lap gently. The third and final had a semi-sharp point and he poked her with it. She jumped at the poke and when she noticed the piece having magically appeared on her lap without any indication on how it got there she flinched hard enough to pop herself loose of Thirteen's member. She flailed again and Thirteen caught a swift fist to an eye and his whisker roughly yanked on as she continued to flounder for a handhold and eventually fell from his lap onto the stone floor, his creamy seed drooling from between her legs. He blinked the pain away and dismissed his invisibility again.

"Ow" he said.

"What do you mean ow? I'm going to be feeling that one for a few days" she growled pointing at his top cock.

"You punched me straight in the eye and got snagged up on my whisker, you know how sensitive those are..." Thirteen replied.

"I what? No, I fell off you when you startled me with that wood trick" Nirah answered. Thirteen pointed across the bedroom to the large piece of board sitting on the mattress that was very much not there during their intercourse earlier. Nirah glared at it.

"I tossed a piece across the room. I set one in your lap. I poked u with the last one" Thirteen answered as he started to inspect the other half of the contraption still inserted into his vaginal cavity. He tugged at it and it didn't budge. "When you noticed the piece in your lap you flinched and floundered about, and punched me"

"That is absolutely terrifying, I didn't notice that the board was even moved until you mentioned it. Same with the piece of wood on my lap. I did feel the poke though" Nirah responded.

"How hard did you jam this thing in me?" Thirteen asked still trying to tug on the silicone penetrator.

"Not hard, it did pop in snugly though..." she answered moving in to help him. His lower cock bobbed distractingly in her face, semi-erect and with the knot still engorged.

"Use the loop from the other half to yank it out, it makes me feel uncomfortable..." Nirah caught the use of words, <Oh, it doesn't feel uncomfortable, you feel uncomfortable> she mentally remarked.

"On your knees, tail up." She commanded. He did as she asked. "So willing." She commented as she looped the rubber slipknot around the tapered end of the penetrator. Thirteen rolled his eyes at the response.

"Don't get too used to being back there like that... this was a one time deal" Thirteen remarked.

"Hah!" Nirah laughed, "If I had a cock you would have let me fuck you into the floor that's of course after you had already found your fill with your other two tools" she rebutted. Thirteen squirmed under the weight of those words. He already felt vulnerable and knowing that he had lost himself so completely to the need to breed invoked a newfound fear in the chimera. If let loose, how many females would he ravage before finding a suitable male to present himself too? Nirah finally had gotten a tight enough loop around the tapered end and heaved. Thirteen



wincing at the resistance his body was giving to releasing the soft rubber tool. She pulled again, and again Thirteen felt his body contract around the penetrator. He took a deep breath and relaxed himself. <Let go of it you crazy monster cunt> he thought to himself... She adjusted her grip put her elbow on his rump for leverage and with a downward lurch of her body weight heaved. Thirteen felt his cunt clamp even harder in resistance, defying Nirah and him with its desire to remain filled.

Thirteen shook his head. "Leave it, just help me find my clothes so we can go wash up, we both reek of copulation". Nirah nodded letting the contraption hang loosely between his legs as he got to his feet. He rolled his eyes again and with minor effort pulled the tube connecting the penetrator to the sleeve free of his groin. He tossed the contraption to the floor in frustration and prowled about looking for and then finding what was left of his kilt and jacket. A massive sigh of frustration permeated the room as he lifted the torn articles from the floor. "You have got to be kidding me..." he wheezed.

"I think you mean, 'kitten'you" Nirah giggled, clearly more jovial about his circumstances than he was. Thirteen shot Nirah a dangerous glare and his aura flickered into life around him, still silver. Nirah and Thirteen both noticed that oddity at once. They both stopped to investigate. Thirteen immediately increased the intensity of his aura to see further. Nirah immediately yelped in surprise.

"Hot hot!" She said immediately backing away from him. Thirteen quieted his aura enough so that Nirah could approach again. He focused the power into single paw-pad and it ignited in brilliant white-black fire, bright enough that Thirteen had to squint to avoid hurting his eyes and the four thermoreceptive organs on his snout. "You're full of new tricks today" Nirah commented entranced by the small yet powerful flame.

"I don't like this one, it's so much more powerful that it's difficult to scale and adjust for" he said with concern. "If I'm not careful fully exerting my aura could burn a building to the ground in seconds, or melt rock and metal in what I would expect to be around a minute".

"It sure is pretty tho, I liked the orange, but this one has such a deeper more intense beauty" Nirah commented, before realizing, "Oh, can I see it on your wings?"

"Not in here, maybe near the water of the bath where I won't set the building ablaze on accident"

//confrontation with an ideal or goal that is not comitable ... (StarWars Ep7 1:04:00)

////reinforced or foreshadowed interactions and/or complications...

//Geroe's phylactery is in the center of a series of traps in the center of the main facilities power generation laboratory. The only way to destroy his phylactery is to destroy the power system which will cause a cascading failure that will destroy the primary facility along with the

secondary and tertiary facilities making the phylactery vulnerable. None of the MC's now this at this time and will discover it with plot developments.

//The aftermath will follow with one of Geroe's subordinates stepping forward and congratulating the PC's on escaping the hands of the doctor but simultaneously handing the years of the doctor's research to the demon of greed.

//Desna butterfly dream scene?

//Conflict with internal instincts versus mental commands \*too many pilots for one brain\* creating delay/conflict... thirteen bails creating instinctual dependency.