

"...This kinda feels weird. Being here."

"Hm? How come?"

Jade walked slowly through silent white halls, Navi flying by his side. The boys were in a place that would come to be known as Unilab, its Lapistoria branch having been built over the ruins of an abandoned lapis research facility.

"I dunno how to put it. We both know what this used to be..." That facility was the very place Jade had been born. "I guess my muscle memory's all messed up now?"

"Ohh. Right... yeah, I see what you mean. Weird not to know where you're going anymore." With Navi's connection to Mimi and Nyami, who spearheaded the idea of Unilab, they had been permitted to tour this branch of the lab before it became open to the public. "But... it's good to let the past be the past, right?"

The chairman thought for a moment. Unilab was quite splendid, even without people filling its rooms as they performed experiments- surely it would be even more so when it was open. Even then, his feelings were complicated. It felt strange to lose where his past had been, even if it was a bad past. But he was sure of one thing. "...I'm sure Black would agree with you. The old lab was horrible, especially with them... perhaps being here can help them do away with all those horrible memories. If they ever choose to come here, anyways."

"What about Cherumin?"

"Cherry... she might be happy to know that her temple's been restored. I can see her spending a lot of time here."

Navi smiled- though he lacked a mouth in this tiny form of his, it was easy to tell when he did.

"That'll be good! Mimi and Nyami did say they'd need all the help they could get here. And when it comes to making music, anyone can help! It's just like energy, y'know?"

"Hehe... I guess it is."

And they continued through the lab in comforting silence after that, until they stopped in an open area. Jade stared at a door to their right, a door marked "BASEMENT - RESTRICTED", the crystalline frills on the sides of his head falling slightly at the sight. The little robot noticed, naturally, and his concern grew without words. "...Just remembering something about the old lab, that's all."

"...is it bad?"

"Yeah. But it won't hurt me if I talk about it." He took Navi into his arms. "See... There was a monster in the basement back then. Another one of us that they could never get to behave, because it was nothing like a human at all. Every time it was woken up, it'd hurt the researchers until it was put back to sleep in the basement..."

"That's horrible..."

"Mm. Thing is, I don't know if Weiss and Elenoa saved it with the others. It could still be in there..."

The little robot looked up at his friend. "Then we should tell Mimi and Nyami, right? Just so they can be careful?"

"And when word of this monster gets out so close to when the lab opens to the public?"

*Everyone's gonna be scared. They won't get the help they need then." A short silence. "...We **should** tell them someday, but... I think it's too early. Let the lab grow first, and eventually..."*

"...they'll be ready to do something about it."

They agreed to keep this between them for just a while longer.

Navi waited a little over a year before telling his mother figures about the monster in the basement. Truthfully, he wasn't certain if it really was there. He wanted to believe that Dr. Weiss and Elenoa had saved it with the other children and that Jade was simply unable to remember this (traumatic memories are often suppressed, after all, and that entire era of his life can only be described as that). But sure enough, they found it, and it rampaged when awoken from its deep, deep stasis. And Mimi and Nyami managed to do something that it seems the researchers in the lapis facility could never do; they calmed the beast and allowed her to stay as she was.

Elem, the chimera of the old lab, now rested in a research room after her rampage, and Navi was there with her.

Mimi and Nyami had left the room to ask those who knew of the chimera before what, exactly, they knew. Out of their depth and not knowing how to care for her. They entrusted the robot to watch over her, then- Mimi even suggested that they could get to know each other whenever she woke up. Navi wasn't opposed to the idea, but he didn't want to prematurely wake her up from this nap. So he sat in a chair along the wall, taking on his bigger form and idly kicking his legs as he tried to commit her appearance to memory. Pink and cyan hair that curled at the ends. Bicolor horns and a line on her forehead, likely denoting a third eye. A purple and blue dress, massive claws, cyan hooves, black tail ending in a large tuft. She was curled up floating in a large flask in the middle of the room, a flask that was there for an unclear purpose. But she seemed to have no trouble being in there, as her eyes were peacefully shut. He found it hard to believe she was called a monster once upon a time, she looked cute here. ...Looks were always deceiving, though, so could he say that for sure? Time would tell...

And time marched too slowly for his liking. Soon enough, he began to pace around the room, glancing at anything scattered across as he went. Eventually, he ran out of things to see, turning his attention back to the giant flask housing Elem. *What could this thing possibly be for*, he wondered, *aside from a napping spot for chimeras?* The apparatuses attached to it didn't have any further installations. It was... simply an oversized flask. And even though he was in his humanoid form, he was still less than half the thing's height. Reaching up above him and putting a paw on the glass, he figured that was still only half. Really, what was the point-

Clink.

Ah. Navi realized he had woken Elem up by touching the glass. She stared at him with a curious expression, all eyes open, tail waving as she matched where his paw was with her own. Holding hands through the glass. All he could do was stare back. After what felt like an eternity, she left the flask (it lacked a stopper, so her escape was easy), leaping onto the floor with little effort. ...She was shorter than she seemed in the flask.

"...Who are you?" A tinge of curiosity in her quiet voice. "Where are Mimi and Nyami?"

"Oh, um... My name's Navi! And Mimi and Nyami are asking questions around the lab, so they asked me to look after you." The robot smiled just a bit. "I'm sorry for waking you up, especially when you looked so calm. I didn't realize I would."

"It's okay..." She let out a big yawn. "Did they tell you who I am?"

He nodded, holding out a paw. "Elem, right? It's nice to meet you."

Elem took the paw into both of her claws, staring at it intently before looking up. "...You're cold. Why are you cold? Do you need to warm up?"

"No, I'm alright. I'm a robot, so feeling cold is just the way it is for me. Y'know?"

"...a robot?"

Oh, right... I can't be sure of how much she knows, can I? He pulled his paw away. "...That just means I'm made of metal. And that's something cold. Don't worry too much about it."

"Ohh. I see now." She took a look around with some careful steps, surprised at first by the sound her hooves made on the floor. "I didn't realize it before, but... it's whiter in here. Whiter than I remember. And it feels bigger. Everything is... different."

Grabbing paper and pens from one of the room's drawers, Navi sat on the floor with the chimera soon joining him. He wasn't entirely certain how to start explaining to her what happened while she was asleep, and he didn't know what to draw, so he simply... stared at the paper. Paper as white as the floor they sat on.

"You seem like you know something," Elem muttered after a moment, startling him. "Did something happen to make this place different?"

"...I don't know too much. I know there was a lab here before that researched lapises. I know they created children and did horrible experiments with them. That the lab was eventually destroyed and they were set free. And that this lab, Unilab, was built over its ruins." He looked down, realizing he had begun to sketch out Jade on the paper. ...Perhaps talking about the labs just did that to his mind. "...I don't know the details, and I don't know what they did to you... but it's different here now. This lab won't be like that lab."

"How can you be sure?"

"Because Mimi and Nyami would never allow things like that to happen. I *know* they won't. They always treat everyone like family. Family doesn't hurt family."

Elem was silent, processing this with a blank expression. It seemed like she understood, but also... didn't? It was hard to be certain what was going on in her head. She looked to Navi's paper, though, tapping a claw to it. "...I wanna do what you're doing."

"Oh, you wanna draw?" He slid a paper and a pen to her, clicking the latter so its tip stuck out.

"Do you know how to hold the pen? I can show you if you want!"

"Um... yes, please show me."

After a while of Navi gently guiding Elem on how to hold the pen and how to draw, the two now laid quietly on the floor, left to their own devices. The robot had drawn much of his typical material at this point- his best friend, animals he saw on their adventures, starflowers, the works. The chimera, on the other hand, took to drawing herself and Navi. She somehow mastered holding the pen with those massive claws, and even if her drawing of the two was crude, her tail still wagged when admiring her work.

She eventually broke the silence. "...Navi? You mentioned something earlier that I wanted to ask about."

"Yeah?" Part of him dreaded a question about the old lab, but...

"It's about this... 'family' thing you mentioned. The thing Mimi and Nyami treat everyone as. What is that?"

He took a breath. Although a better question to get than one about the labs, it was a deceptively tough one. "Ah... shoot, how do I explain it..." A brief silence followed as the robot gathered his

thoughts. "Family can mean different things to different people. For me... it's a small group of special people who love me a lot, and I love them back. They protect me from bad things, and I try to protect them. What they do for me, I try to do for them, because I love them. Does that make sense?"

"Almost. Love is...?"

"...A very, very strong happiness. The kind you can get from your family, without needing to do anything to earn it, is the strongest there is."

Elem's tail tapped against the floor as she processed this information. Both she and Navi had sat up at this point. "I... think I get it. Then, Mimi and Nyami... do they treat everyone like family because everyone makes them happy?"

"Mhm! But it's important to remember that being treated *like* family isn't the same as *being* family. They show care to me that I don't think they show to anyone else because I'm a part of their family..."

"...so you're special to them."

"Pretty much."

The chimera thought some more, staring down at her drawing. Then to her claws, and then to Navi. And she envisioned Mimi and Nyami as they appeared trying to quell her rampage once she had woken up. All of them are different. Navi is way more different than Mimi and Nyami, she figured. He's cold, and they were warm. Yet he's special to them all the same... "Could... I have something like that, too?"

"Hm?"

"A family. People who care for me in a special way, and people I can care for back. It sounds... nice. I want to have that. ...Do you think I can?"

...He giggled. "I think you're closer to having that than you think, El."

El. He shortened her name. Without realizing it, her tail began to wave. "I am?"

"I told you Mimi and Nyami went to ask questions around the lab, right? Well... they actually told me they're asking questions about you! 'Cause they want to know how to take care of you in the same way they do for me."

"But... they only just met me. *You* only just met me, too. Are you sure-?"

"I'm sure. Once they get back, if you'd like, then..." He looked back to his drawing paper to grab it and draw something, only to realize he filled up both sides already. "...oh. Can I borrow your paper real quick? I won't do anything bad with it."

Elem complied, passing her paper over to him and moving to peer over his shoulder as he drew. Next to her drawing of the two of them, he added Mimi and Nyami, smiling brightly. Something was above all 4 of them, and her claw tapped next to it. "What's this?"

"That's the word 'family'," Navi responded with a smile. "This could be us, if you'd like it to be. A big, happy family."

...She recalled how the girls had calmed her when the scientists in the past would have put her back to sleep. One of them had carried her to this room to get some rest after that. And she considered the patience, the care, that Navi had shown her thus far.

...She realized that all of them cared. As family does. Leaning in closer to Navi, her head rested on his shoulder, looking at the drawing they had made with a smile.

"...I'd like that a lot."