I woke up with a start. And I did that… emerging from a pool of water? What?

I looked down and saw that I was not just under water. I was in a tub, almost twice my size, carved out in the rock outside my mansion. I gathered that by the ice covering the border and the snow right outside it. Thank God I was immune to cold temperatures.

And the tub was not full of water either. It was blood.

Or, if the tingle I felt over my skin was any indication, Dragonblood.

I raised my head to look around. As imagined, I was right outside the mansion, in what I suspect was a tub carved out in a hurry by the priests. It was day, more near dawn than noon, and that meant that whatever they had done to keep me alive had taken *hours*, and probably Blood Magic. Stupid aggravated damage.

My priests were not there. I expected them to be, but maybe I just remained unconscious for a long time and when they determined I was going to make it, returned to their cities. I would commend them for that.

But there was someone that I was sure was there.

“Valohk!” I called, and the shadow priest immediately materialized at my side.

“*Master, you have awakened.*”

“Yes, thanks to you and the others.” I replied, standing. I quickly removed the excessive blood from my skin and then materialized my clothes as I got out from the tub. “You’ll have to explain to me how you did that. I thought that kind of wound couldn’t be healed.”

“*It didn’t.*” Confirmed Valohk. He sounded… wary?

I turned to look at him. “Is everything alright?”

The priest paused. A lot. I was starting to get anxious. “*It’s better if we discuss this inside, Master.*”

Ok, now I *was* worried. “Something went wrong?”

“*No, the operation went perfectly.*” Replied the shadow, floating inside the mansion. “*You’re as healthy as you can be, Master. Even better.*”

“Then what’s the problem?” I asked, following him inside the mansion. He didn’t answer until I was in my bedroom, and gestured me to sat down. I obliged him, but all of this was not helping my nerves.

“*Do you feel… different, Master?*”

I frowned, confused. Different? No, not really. I…

Wait a second. Now that he mentioned it… my body felt slightly off. Not in bad way. On the contrary, I was… *more* conscious of my body then before. I had the *feel* that I had more control over it that I ever did. Almost like…

My mind froze in horror. “Valohk… *what did you do?*”

Valohk didn’t say anything for a while. Then, finally…

“*You were dying.*” He explained. “*We couldn’t stop the hemorrhage. Magic didn’t work… even Blood Magic couldn’t close the wounds. We could replace* some *of your blood, but not enough. In the end, we decided to do something…* drastic.”

“*What*?” I croaked, my voice coming out with effort from my serrated throat.

Valohk looked at me straight in the eye. “*We couldn’t heal your body. So… we tried to replace the wounded part using Blood Magic and Dragonblood.*”

My mind made a jump. “You tried to give me new lungs… lungs that were not wounded.” I checked my body, even removing my clothes to see better. My skin was unmarred. Even the scars I had before the fight with the Sidereal were not there anymore. “It didn’t work.”

“*No.*” Admitted the shadow. “*Your body rejected the new organs. We are not sure why, but we suspect that we couldn’t make them as close as the originals as we needed.*”

Of course. Biology was not a simple matter. *I* could probably create a completely new organ that was 100% compatible with the receiver, but that required knowledge of biology that they didn’t possess. They tried to make a pair of lungs and they didn’t match.

“So… what did you try next?” I feared I already knew the answer to that.

Valohk didn’t shuffle from uneasiness, but I got the very stark impression that his mind was. “*Everything we could think of. Grow new tissue using Dragonblood, merge the two… in the end, we were left with only an option. If your body couldn’t accept the new organs… then we needed to change the body.*”

Right. Like… like I suspected.

They replaced my body with one made of Dragonblood.

“How?” I asked.

“*We had to sublimate your old body into Dragonblood as we formed the new one.*” Replied Valohk. “*We proceeded as cautiously as possible. We didn’t want to accidentally kill you by replacing your brain and heart wrong. We… may have to use Soul Magic to assure that you remained… yourself. I’m very sorry to use such a dangerous magic on you, Master, but it was the only way.*”

So they melted my body into his basic components and rebuilt it, using my soul as mold. Ingenious, even brilliant…

But I was not in the mood to admire the cleverness of my servant.

I was not… *me* anymore. Well, my soul was, but not my body. It was just a… puppet, a *thing* made by simil-flesh but that actually was just pure magic energy. That was why I was so conscious of my body. I was not *human* anymore.

“I… I need some time alone.” I said. “Please leave.”

“*My Lord…*” Started Valohk, floating near me.

“I said leave!”

That was I meant to say. It got out like a roar that made the entire mountain tremble. The shadow stopped.

“*As my Lord command.*” He said. I could feel his sadness, mixed with acceptance. It made me feel terrible, but… I needed some time to think.

-X-

All around the Refuge, the Akyn felt the rage of their Creator and trembled. Then, as the tremor caused by His Voice subsided, they went to the Shadow Lords.

“Why is the Creator angry?” They asked.

“*To save his life, we were forced to alter his body in an irreversible way.*” They answered.

“Will He return to His normal self? He will not abandon us in His rage, right?” Was the question they asked after the first.

“*The Creator is compassionate and understanding. He loves his children. He will not abandon you. You just need have faith.*”

Fearful, but accepting the word of the Lords, the Akyn returned to their jobs. But every now and then, they will look up, to the peak of the mountain, and murmur a brief prayer. The Lords told them that He couldn’t hear them, for He was no God… but they did it regardless.

-X-

It took me a lot of time –more than I’m willing to admit- to get my shit together. It took a lot of thinking –or rationalization/lying to myself- but in the end I did manage to calm down.

In retrospect, my initial reaction sounded… exaggerated.

My body was not mine anymore? Well, yeah, but I was no sure the body I had when I woke up in *Skyrim* was my own. Changing a fake body –or the body of a poor SoB that I unwillingly possessed- to another was not that big of a change.

I was not human anymore? Yes. But, from the perspective of the people at home, my superhuman power and magic already made me pretty inhuman. And, technically, I was not

a *human* since I ate the soul of a dragon, at the very least. Since that moment, I have been a Dragonborn.

I was not me anymore? That was not true. My very *soul* had been used to rebuild my body. And if there was a part of me that was 1000% *me*, that was my freaking soul. In fact, you could argue that I was more me than when I woke up on Skyrim.

Yeah, having your body restructured and being a mass of magical energy that had assumed physical form, like some kind of incarnate spirit, was not *ideal* to my sense of self, but it was also not that big of a change as I thought. It would take time to get used to this new body, but I managed to adapt to being a magical human able to eat dragon souls, I could adapt to *that*.

The fact that it was *shockingly* similar to my old body helped. By a brief test I made, I realized that, if left go, it acted exactly like my old body. In fact, if Valohk hadn't pointed out, I would have never realized there was something wrong.

The difference between the old and new body were reflected in the fact that my new body was more *malleable* then the old one. I could will it to do things I could normally never do. Like stopping it from needing things like… breathing. Or food. Or pain. I suspected that I could also change some anatomical details if I wanted, but I left that out for the moment, because I still needed time to adjust to *that* idea.

Now, before everything else. "Valohk."

The shadow immediately materialized at my side. "*You called, Master.*"

I nodded. "Someone recovered the pieces of my sword?"

The shadow nodded. "*Yes, they're wrapped in a cloth on the other side of your bed. We thought you would want to repair it.*"

I turned around to see a piece of cloth laying a couple of steps from me. Right… I completely missed it before.

I made the cloth jump in my head with telekinesis and then unwrapped it. Inside, there was Dupahtuz, still shattered in two pieces and various fragments. The blade was unsalvageable. But… I could still feel pain radiating from it.

"Why are you alive?" I whispered to the blade. And why I didn't realize sooner?

"*I have a theory on that regard.*"

I blinked and looked at the undead. "Really? What theory?"

"*The Dovah are not like most living things.*" Said Valohk. "*They cannot be killed, and when their mortal body is strike down, their soul doesn't leave to an afterlife. Instead, it remains inside their corpses, waiting. It is my theory, and the theory of most of the others, that when you infused dragon bones with Thu'um… you somehow infused some semblance of life inside them.*"

I… Uh. That was not as impossible as it sounded. A Shout was powered by the will and life force of a creature. By infusing a bone of a dragon with life force, it *could* have granted it some part of that lifeforce. After all, while you couldn't manipulate a dragon souls using necromancy, you could animate their body.

"But that will not explain why Dupahtuz is alive and the other weapons are not." I noted… and immediately stopped considering. Were they not? I didn't use them as much as the sword. I would need to check.

"*Maybe the nature of the enchantment you put on the sword has to do with that.*" Replied Valohk. "*It is a life stealing enchanting, isn't it?*"

A good point. It could also explain why none of the other weapons was alive –if they weren't. Aside from my dagger, none had something similar to a life-stealing enchantment, and I didn't use my dagger so much because soul-stealing was a little icky and I didn't like to use it on human targets. Besides, I didn't need filled soul gems recently. No real reason to use it.

"I'll verify myself." I nodded. "The connection with Creation?"

"*Sealed. We didn't want the killer to come and finish the work.*"

I sighed. "Alright. Good. I… I'm sorry if I snapped before. I had a lot to unpack."

"*I understand, Master. It's not a change that can be brushed off.*"

"Yeah. But I need to return there. I… I need materials and other things from that universe, if I want to complete the project."

To tell the truth, I *did not* want to return there. I was almost killed by a random ass Exalted, who could apparently find my anywhere and had a specific reason to kill me. Next time I could not be so lucky to have my priests save my skin.

But I needed to do it. I couldn't just hole up in my mansion. If I let *one* near-death experience stop me, I would never return home.

But I needed a little time to psyche myself up.

I and Valohk discusses for a while about the possible necessity of an escort, but I shot down the entire thing. The Akyn were not going to save my ass if that guy returned. If he had managed to get me, he could deal with an army of them. Besides, the Akyn were not the most subtle escort. They were tall, heavy built humanoid reptiles. They would stand out a lot anywhere I went.

So, in the end, I took the courage to return to Creation. Not before casting all type of disguise magic I could think of. Unfortunately, the Sidereals seemed to track me down using the… influence I had on the Loom of Fate, probably a destructive influence considering how they worded the thing. Maybe it was related to being a Prisoner? I was free from any Fate that was not the one the Prophecy listed. That could have bad repercussion on something like the Loom. And I had no method to mask that, because Fate hax was not one of my powers.

I also discovered that my Falna was gone. Well, not gone-gone, it was still there, but the destruction and rebuilding of my body had… disconnected it, so to say? The power was still there, but I couldn't access it like before. It was probably something I could fix. After all, with the body I had now, I was more attuned with my soul then before. Maybe I *could* place a Falna on someone now. But that was something to study later.

So, I took a deep breath, divined the clearing I created last night to confirm there was not another Wild Hunt patrol waiting for me, and I opened the portal.

I didn't walk outside immediately. My heart was beating fast and I felt an anxiety I didn't feel in a long while. I… never had to fight against something that managed to *almost* kill me two times. Usually, the thing in question managed to almost kill me but I killed it in the end, or it was killed by someone else while I was out of commission. Knowing that the Sidereals were still *there*, waiting for me to return and finish the work…

I shook my head, closed my eyes, and took another deep breath. I underestimated the dangers of Creation… or at least, I didn't expect one of the strongest factions of the entire setting to want me dead from the start. I was not ready. Now I had a better idea of what I was facing. I could prepare. I could be more cautious. I could exploit my strong points to avoid them. Even if the only real way I could think of was to stay away from as much people as possible, to avoid interfering with their Fate. Still, it was something.

I opened my eyes and stepped on Creation again.

And as I did that, the world around me froze.

What in the actual fuck?

-X-

Waiting so much outside the clearing had been worthy.

"He's here." Announced a voice. The tall man that had assisted at the utter madness that had been the last night was looking at the portal opening with focused eyes.

"Uh? I didn't expect him to be here." Replied the boarman. "He should have gone out away from here."

"That's *if* he can." Replied the masked companion. "The spell he's using could not make it possible."

"We can ask him." Replied the monk. "Let's approach him. Slowly. I can only imagine how the experience of last night could have done to his nerves."

The rest of the group nodded and slowly, very slowly, they emerged from the shadows of the forest and toward the man. They froze when he raised his hand up.

-X-

I looked around, trying to understand what was happening. It was not some kind of time stop, because I would *feel* it. Time was my domain… sort of. More like I was linked to the passage of time by my dragon soul, so if time fuckery happened, I *recognized it*. So this couldn't be time fuckery. But then what?

"Don't be scared." Said a feminine voice. "This is merely a vision. Time is not flowing here to give us time to talk."

I turned and locked my eyes on the person who had spoken. And the only way I could describe her was… silver. Lots, lots of silver. The woman had a silver and white dress, silver hair on a pale skin, and she seemed to *radiate* silver light.

I may not be much into Exalted lore to know every single detail, but even I could recognize her with a glance.

"Luna, Goddess of the Moon." I said, stunned.

She smiled. Her smiled was… a little too large for her mouth. "You're well informed, for someone that hails from beyond Creation."

I blinked and filed away the fact that she knew *that* for later. "That's my thing. What are you doing here, Luna? I thought the gods didn't talk to mortals aside from…" I paused as a memory surfaced. "…Wait, I am to become one of your Chosen?"

Luna didn't react as I supposed she would. Well, actually, I didn't *know* how she was supposed to react, but sighing sadly was not what I expected anyway. "Ah, I wish you could join my children, traveler. And I'm not the only one, old Sol would like to give you his blessing too… but your soul is already claimed."

Claimed? "You mean my dragon soul is stopping you from giving me literal divine powers?"

"Dragon soul? That's what it is?" Asked Luna, looking behind me with curiosity. "Quite marvelous, if I can say it. It reminds me of the blessing of Sol, but… different."

Well, Akatosh *was* the patron of the Empire and the leader of the Nine Divine, so I could get the resemblance. But he was also time itself, so he should look different, more… Primordial. Or maybe not? I was not exactly sure how much the Primordial were *incarnations* of their concept, or just… obsessed with it. Depending on that, Akatosh could be either a Primordial or an Incarnae, in Exalted terms.

But he was probably some weird mix of the two. A Primordial Incarnae?

Anyway…

"I would love to talk with you about our respective cosmologies, but, if I'm not too rude… why are you here again?"

Luna looked at me in the eyes and smiled again. "Because while I cannot give you *my* blessing, it would be a shame if I didn't gave you *something.* And, considering the Maiden's children are hunting you…" She paused, and hold out her closed hand. When her arm was

completely outstretched, she opened her fingers, revealing… a bright, golden flame, dancing on the palm of her hand with what seemed like maniac energy.

“Uh… what that’s supposed to be?” I asked, confused. Golden flame was not exactly Luna’s deal.

“Ah, maybe you’re not as knowledgeable as I suspected.” She grinned. “This is the Flame of Exigence.”

I looked at the flame. What the hell was that supposed to mea-

My eyes widened in shock when my brain connected the dots. “You mean this is the thing you use to… Exalt humans?”

Luna laughed. “My, you really are a knowledgeable one. Not many mortals know as much. Yes, this is the vessel we use to give our blessing to the mortals. Or, to be more precise, how Sol grant lesser gods the ability to create an Exalted champion, since we don’t need it. Normally, you’ll see a flame colored by the divine power of the god that asked Sol Invictus the privilege of using one… but this one is empty.”

Ok… “Uh… how’s that supposed to help? If my dragon soul stops you from give me your blessing, why should this do anything? And, since we’re talking about this, how you managed to get one? I thought you already had your Chosen and you couldn’t get more.”

The grin on Luna’s face was positively cat-like. “Well, the rules are that you need Sol permission to get an Exigence… but I was never one for rules.” She suddenly started to float an inch or two from the ground, and then slowly glided near me. “As for your first question… I’m not sure if it can help. But, the soul inside your body is not *that* different from the fragments of power we use to grant our blessings. So, I thought that giving you an Exigence’s Flame, it could… renew the bond with it.”

I eyed the Exigence, thinking. Was it really possible? Could I upgrade my Dragonborn powers by using an Exigence?

“And if it doesn’t work?”

“Then nothing happens.” She shrugged. “But I would worry about what will happen if it *works*. I can assure you, if the Chosen of the Maidens are hunting you now, this will not dissuade them. In fact, it could make things *worse*.”

Yeah, I could see that. But, on the other hand, they were already hunting me. And while I could still not have Fate bullshit with it… I would have *my* kind of bullshit.

So, I raised my hand, and Luna let the golden flame slid on it. It was… well, I could say it was warm, but it was not. It was like an explosion constantly going off. It didn’t burn me, per se, but it’s raw power painfully stabbed my palm.

“Thank you, Luna. I greatly appreciate your gift.” I said, bowing my head. Being polite didn’t hurt.

“Oh, the pleasure is *mine*, traveler. I’m sure you’ll be very entertaining.” She smiled back.

I looked at the Exigence in my hand. Uhm… “How do I use it?”

“Oh, you *cannot*. It’s meant for gods, and while impressive, you’re still fundamentally mortal. But, your friend behind you will probably find a way.”

My friend behind? I started to turn to see what the hell she was talking about, when she grabbed my face with her hands. “Ha-ha-ha. Not now, my dear. You wouldn’t want to wake him up while I’m still here, right? He could get… territorial.”

I nodded, but I still managed to get a look with the corner of my eye. And… there was *something* behind me, something I never really saw until now, but maybe because of the Exigence in my hand, or because of the presence of Luna, or something else. Something big, flaming, and *alive*.

“Well, I will not stop you much longer. Just… try to treat my children well when you meet them, alright?”

“As long as they don’t attack me first, I will not lay an hand on your Chosen.” I promised.

“Thank you. Now go, traveler. You have much do to.” She smiled, before disappearing from my sight. I looked at the Exigence again, still a little unsure. Was this really a good idea?

Well, if it helped me fight the Sidereal…

I closed my fist around the Exigence and absorbed it, making it flow inside my body and where now I knew was my dragon soul. It burned like I was trying to substitute my blood with magma, but it lasted only until it reached my heart.

The second later, orange and blue fire erupted from me.