

Xavier gave a short sigh as he walked through the bustling city streets of New York, leather jacket squeaking gently as he reached into his jacket pocket for the box of cigarettes he kept on his person. Flipping open the paper box, the dark haired cccat in disguise brought one of the nicotine paper sticks up to his mouth. The small red lighter in his pack pocket would supply the flame needed to ignite the cherry on the end of the cigarette, Xavier inhaling the smoke deep into his lungs.

Large electronic billboards of various shapes and sizes shone overhead, silently displaying colorful ads of upcoming shows, political commercials and other various items flickering across the massive LED screens.

The city was just too loud for Xavier, between the people, the vehicles and the smog, he left work everyday with a stomach ache where his wormling sat. The human in disguise was actually a crowned clown cat from several planets away, a planet by the name of Skire to its locals. The humans amongst earth had not discovered it yet, which Xavier took for a good thing considering all they had done to the planet they currently lived on.

The planet of Skire was vastly different from earth, filled to the brim with wildlife of all shapes and sizes, creatures here were hunted to extinction. The smog and the muck choked out the life of several hundred organisms amongst earth, polluting both the sky and the waters below. He had heard that this wretched planet didn't use to be this way— that several dozens of years before his arrival things used to be greener, more animals existed and the people didn't hate each other; He almost wished he could have seen the planet for what it was before all of this.

The further he walked the less chaotic the streets around him became as he left the inner circle of the city, tall skyscrapers turning into short buildings filled with individual families living their own individual lives. The thought of his own home caused an ache to form inside his chest, thinking back to that fateful day his portal malfunctioned, causing him to become stranded on this awful planet.

He had been working late in hopes of creating a portal to one of the nearby moons of earth's particular solar system, having heard a rumor that one in particular was made up entirely of white crystal. The planet of skire had nearly exhausted its own resources of white crystal, having used a large portion of it to build the planet's defense system. While mining up their own resources did not negatively impact the planet of skire, it did prevent them from making any further technological advances without obtaining more of the crystals.

If Xavier could locate an *entire planet* made of white crystal his life would be set for the remainder of his days. Thinking of the technological advances the planet of skire could make with that level of resources is what drove the black and red cccat to push his limits when working on his portal, working well into the evenings for several days straight in hopes of achieving his goal quicker.

Before Xavier could continue on with recollecting just how he got into this predicament to begin with, the cccat's crowns perked up at an angelic sound drifting through the air. His crowns remained tucked safely up beneath a large beanie that kept both his head and ears warm from the frigid November air. Xavier had zoned out in the time from walking away from the bustling inner city, having found himself outside a large building. The surface of the building seemed to

be made of concrete weathered throughout the years, dark green algae had grown across the surface giving it a rather gloomy appearance. A set of large double doors beneath an archway stood at the top of a series of brick steps, portions of the clay worn away from use over the years as thousands of feet climbed and descended the steps into the church. The windows seemed to be made of stained glass, the sun shining through likely caused rays of multicolored light to dance across the building's interior during mass.

As Xavier stopped to admire the building's architecture he once again heard that angelic singing voice, his crowns reacting for a second time as the voice danced between his ears. The only thing that would cause Xavier's crowns to vibrate in such a way would be communicating with another crowned clown cat, something he hadn't done since he had been back on his home planet. *That angelic voice is coming from inside the church?* Xavier wondered, his feet quickly taking him up the worn steps, his boots slapping against the cold ground; The large doors opened inward as the cccat pushed against them, their hinges groaning with use. Dust particles flitted through the air as the air from the outside rushed forward to meet the inside of the building, lit candles lining the edges of the room flickering rapidly at the sudden burst of oxygen.

Rows of dusty wooden pews lined each side of the room, subtly turning inward the closer they got to the front of the chapel. A hooded figure knelt towards the ground slowly stood with Xavier's arrival, a series of dark robes billowed around the being as the air rushed inward then out at the wooden doors shut with an audible bang as wood met wood. The sound caused Xavier to jump, the dark hair on his neck standing in attention as he took in his current surroundings. When his eye turned to the being now standing at the end of the room his mouth went dry with anxiety, attempting to swallow the sudden lump in his throat. Neither one of them spoke, two beings watching each other from several yards away waiting for the other to make a move.

Xavier was the first to break, raising a finger to his shirt collar to pull on the fabric.

"Ah.. h-hello.. I apologize for the intrusion, I just.. I heard someone singing and I.. felt the need to figure out who it was. I'm sorry. Saying it out loud now has me realizing how foolish it was of me to just barge on in here. I'll just be on my way.." The now embarrassed cccat turned to leave the way he came, only for the hooded figure to finally speak and stop him in his tracks.

"You are like me.. yes?" The hooded figure asked, their voice soft yet somehow audible enough to be heard clear across the room.

Xavier's hand paused on the wooden door, ready to push the wooden slab open to swiftly exit the room.

"Like.. you?" He asked, head turning back towards the hooded figure.

"From another planet, far far away from here. Stranded, with no way to return to our home world." The figure replied, taking a step towards Xavier, movements silent and calculated.

"I.. how do you know that?" Xavier pressed, hand falling away from the door as he turned back towards the only other person in the room. "We are one in the same." The person continued, a

sudden buzzing inside Xavier's brain accompanied with the subtle vibration of his crows telling him everything he needed to know.

Raising their hands, the figure grasped at the dark cloak surrounding their face, the hood dipping well into their line of sight. They slowly pulled the Cotton fabric away from their face, revealing soft feminine features, long brown hair and a singular working eye. Their eye caused Xavier to internally gasp, an array of colors seemingly made of stained glass stared back at his own red one, a silent emotion shared between the two cccats both in a human disguise. This was the first crowned clown cat Xavier had encountered since he became stranded all those years ago, the wormling inside his chest squiming wildly simulating a fast beating heart. She was beautiful in every way, white glass crowns dangling behind her ears, soft petite face surrounded by brown hair that perfectly framed her face. Xavier once again forced himself to swallow, taking several steps closer to this stranger.

"How did you come to arrive here?" She asked, causing Xavier to stop in his tracks. To her, he likely seemed to be a stranger intruding on her place of work, judging by the black and white robes she currently wore. He had seen other people dressed in similar fashion walking through the streets of New York at a time, often hearing others murmur around him the words "holy" and "nun", these phrases seeming to be of great importance to those who worshiped the self proclaimed lord of the earth. They served their "lord" through prayer and devotion, the nuns closer to him than any regular human.

"My.. my portal malfunctioned, it auto-locked once I was through and shut me out on the other side. On this planet, I mean." Xavier continued, sweat breaking out across the palms of his hands. It had been so long since he had encountered another of his own kind let alone being several feet away from one as beautiful as this one. "What about you?" He pressed, wanting the spotlight off of him for a moment. "What is your name? I'm Xavier." He hoped willingly sharing this information would make her feel more comfortable in sharing her story with him.

"... my name is Chapel." She replied, taking the initiative Xavier had set out. "I was brought here in hopes of gathering resources from the planet to assist in developing our own back home. It is said that this planet and its neighboring moons are made up of high levels of—" "white crystal." Xavier finished for her, dread bubbling up inside his stomach like bile. Chapel seemed almost surprised at Xavier's reply, her own face mirroring her emotions.

"Is.. is that the reason you were.." she couldn't finish, fingers wringing parts of her robe taught between her slender fingers.

"Yeah.. yeah it was." He replied with a heavy sigh, feeling comfortable enough now to sit against one of the dusty pews, his head falling into his hands in defeat. "Research supported the evidence that their moon in particular held the highest level of white crystal needed to further our home's infrastructure amongst all the neighboring planets. By the time I realized what was happening it was too late, I had already stepped through the portal. And this infested planet is light years away from having the technology capable of getting us home."

“.. I am sorry.” Chapel eventually spoke, her gaze pointed towards the floor. “My story is of similar nature, a group of scientists constructing a *functioning* portal which would allow us to safely obtain resources lightyears away. Foolishly, I chose to go first. I was able to mimic the DNA of the primary organism on this planet to remain hidden. Judging by your appearance you were able to do the same unless you are hiding something beneath your.. interesting clothing choice.”

“My choice of clothing is interesting to you?” Xavier laughed softly, choosing to see the humor in the current situation rather than wallow in self pity. “You’re a nun, right? Whatever that is. I’ve heard humans talk about their holy deities in passing. Was it a purposeful choice?”

Chapel shook her head, a small laugh escaping her lips. “The humans who once occupied this building gave them to me as I appeared without clothing which was not appropriate. They took me in and fed me as if I was one of their own, teaching me the ways of their god while sheltering me from the elements. I never exposed my true self to them and yet they still treated me with such kindness that I found myself continuing on with their daily rituals despite the rest of them passing on to the other side. It has kept me from feeling so alone.”