

Imreign did not invite many over to the manor he shared with Alloy. He could only think of two outside of his little family who were even allowed to set foot on the estate. One, Round-Eyes, had not asked yet, and the other, a human named Cecil, only ever showed up in an emergency; that hadn't happened yet, thankfully.

When Cecil arrived, Imreign was already dressed, favoring something casual enough to be comfortable around his freshly shined shell.

"Good evening, Imreign," Cecil said with a bowed head. "Is something the matter?"

Imreign allowed Cecil entry and guided him to a common sitting area. A den with comfortable couches and a charcuterie board at the ready. While Imreign liked to eat food, he was aware that Cecil *loved* food. And a friendly conversation always felt better over food.

"You know I took the day off," Imreign started, matter-of-fact. "I've come to the conclusion that I am a level of stressed that cannot be willed away within a business day."

Cecil's neutral line of a mouth curved gently up. "I see."

"And I thought having pleasant company would help," Imreign continued. "It usually does, though I admit our 1st few meetings have been very..."

"Corporate?"

"In a sense." Imreign sat down and crossed one leg over the other. "I've experienced hardship before, but this is different in many ways I was unprepared for."

Cecil shrugged and sat across from Imreign, surprisingly relaxed for someone who'd never seen the inside of the estate like this before. "I don't think anybody expects perfection at a time like this."

"I suppose not," Imreign mused. "But I cannot deny that I strive for it regardless and am bumping up against obstacles."

"Like what?"

Imreign's golden lips parted, but words failed him. "Like a pervasive tension that will not end for another five years if projections turn out to be accurate. At least."