

First

Exp Conversion [6f]:

[375 exp](#) + [50 exp](#) + [75 exp](#) + [50 exp](#) + [75 exp](#) = 625 exp

Store Point Conversion [10f]:

[5 points](#)

Daily Prompts:

- [3/15/21 \[1f\]](#)
- [3/19/21 \[1f\]](#)

Corinth

I01 [2f]:

If you boiled Corinth down to a single word, it would be jealous. She has spent her entire life desperately trying to get some sort of attention or validation from everyone she cares for, and in the process, she has filled herself with rage. Corinth can come across as conniving and intelligent, but it is obvious if you look a bit closer that her plans are flimsy at best. She is not the mastermind she believes she is; because of her selfish motivations and desperate need for the attention she never got, she doesn't always make the most strategic decisions, opting instead for whatever gives her instant gratification. Thinking ahead has never been and will never be her strong suit, because at the end of the day, she has never quite matured. She is still a child deep down, driven crazy by the fact that she never got the love she wanted (and arguably needed) as a cub. Maybe she wouldn't have turned out this way if things had been different, or maybe she would have no matter what had happened in her life. Regardless, as terrible as the lioness can be, so terrible that she would become murderous and conniving in an attempt to get what she feels she deserves, the truth is that Corinth isn't all bad. There's still some shred of humanity deep down inside her, even if it has been locked away and twisted from the hurt and anger. Her history does not justify what she's done; rather, it simply contextualizes it, suggesting that maybe she ought to be seen with pity rather than through a lens of pure resentment. One would hope that her fate of being locked away in the Mountain Pride's prison would change things. While she is detained as a punishment, it is not a matter of keeping her there forever. Her sister, Eris, would like one day to let out her sister, who she had no idea was hurting so badly caught in her shadow. However, that hinges on whether or not Corinth can prove herself capable of change. Until that occurs, she will have to remain in the limbo-like prison the Mountain Pride constructed long ago for its most dangerous prisoners.

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Ambitious, Independent, Determined / Negative: Selfish, Impatient, Jealous

I03 [1f]:

Corinth was born to a broken pride and hurting parents: Hera, the disgraced queen, and Odysseus, her right paw. They did not stay together; before she was even born, the two had split apart, though not by Odysseus' choice. On the contrary, he had wanted to do everything he could to salvage their relationship. Corinth suffered because of it: her father was too focused on figuring out how to win Hera back and her mother was far more interested in her older sister, someone whose father Hera didn't hate. Corinth was especially desperate for her mother's affections, because she saw the way her mother cared for Eris, and no matter how hard she tried, she could not get that affection from her. That need for attention and validation was what fostered her jealousy and rage; when push came to shove, Corinth took matters into her own paws, determined to carve out a place for herself if she wouldn't be given one.

I04 [1f]:

Corinth's role in her group is complicated, to say the least. For all intents and purposes, she doesn't really do anything. After all, she's not exactly in a position to contribute when she's a prisoner, is she? Before that point, she was a princess, a princess that was only really treated as such in name and name only. She had no real responsibilities, nothing to occupy her time or make her feel of any real value. In turn, she had plenty of time to stew and let her anger fester till finally she snapped and lashed out. It was with regret that Eris locked her away, and since then, Corinth has arguably contributed even less to the pride. After all, now she cannot help with anything, and instead efforts must be wasted on making sure she (and any other prisoners) are guarded and cared for. And in return, she is left with even less to do, forced to occupy the time in her head instead.

I05 [1f]:

At one time, Corinth's dream would have been to become a part of her family. Growing up feeling unloved and unwanted hurt the poor cub, playing a large part in how she became the lioness she is today. All she wanted was attention, the attention that everyone else seemed to get besides her, that Eris especially seemed to receive. Now, her goal has changed to carving out a name for herself, no matter what it takes. Jealousy is an ugly thing, and once it took root in Corinth, there was no shaking it. She wouldn't be shoved into the shadows any longer, would prove that she was far stronger than her sister ever would be, that she was the one who should have everyone's attention. Being locked in the Mountain Pride's prison is simply a minor setback, that's all, a stepping stone on the way to getting what Corinth feels like she deserves.

I06 [1f]:

Corinth's biggest fear is never escaping the shadow of her family. Granted, to a certain extent she's assured that won't happen, at least for now. After all, the entire Mountain Pride now talks about her in hushed tones, knowing her as the princess who went crazy and tried to slaughter her own sister. She is powerful and feared, but that is only a temporary state. Locked away in a magical limbo, Corinth knows that she will eventually be forgotten by the majority of the pride, if not all of them. They will forget their fear of her, forget the threat she posed, and she will once again fall back into the shadows, overlooked and unimportant. Losing the ground she's gained is her biggest fear, because she has done so much to carve a place out for herself in the history of

the Mountain Pride, to prove she is the superior child in her bloodline, and she will ensure that that achievement is not taken from her.

107 [1f]:

Corinth is named after her maternal grandmother. Hera had always loved her mother; as the youngest daughter, they had always been particularly close (her siblings might have gone so far as to argue that she was spoiled by their mother), and losing her was quite the blow to Hera in particular. In a sense, Corinth's name makes her feel special; after all, her mother named her after someone very important to her, which would suggest that Corinth herself should be quite important to the disgraced queen. And yet, as Corinth continually found herself overshadowed by Eris and ignored by Hera, she almost felt like the name was a last ditch effort on Hera's part to force some affection for her. She has an odd mix of resentment and appreciation for the name she was given; does the name gain her favor with her mother, or has it only served to make her interest in her wain even further, because her name reminds her of her dead mother and the rest of Hera's family, all of whom died and left her a throne she was never meant to have and a kingdom that fell apart under her rule.

108 [5f]:

https://f2.toyhou.se/file/f2-toyhou-se/images/31299255_jE2GK6YDOanXXCY.jpg

109 [1f]:

Corinth's greatest enemy is without a doubt her older half-sister, Eris. Eris has everything that Corinth has ever wanted: Hera's approval, responsibility, respect from their pridemates, and attention in general. She has always felt like Eris has been her rival for their mother's affection, and no matter how hard she tried, Corinth was always second-best. The jealousy she felt gnawed away at her, festering as she grew more and more dissatisfied with her lot in life. She was far more powerful than Eris and far more qualified to be the next in line for the throne. Despite her obvious superiority, Eris continued to succeed and Corinth continued to be left in her shadow, till finally she snapped. Being defeated and locked up by the sister she'd grown to resent was a blow to her pride, only serving to further fuel Corinth's rage. Her entire life was essentially taken from her, her freedom revoked because Corinth had tried to show Eris' flaws. The fact that she failed couldn't be her own fault; no, it was her sister's, and she intends to ensure she never fails to her again.

110 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/9810512.corinth/gallery#31300267>

111 [3f]:

<https://toyhou.se/9810512.corinth/gallery#31303950>

112 [4f]:

<https://toyhou.se/9810512.corinth/gallery#31307296>

I13 [1f]:

Corinth does not respond well to insults and disrespect. For as long as she can remember, she's been treated as inferior to others (Eris specifically, sure, but she is not the only one Corinth has felt lesser than), and she hates it. Any comment that even suggests insult or disrespect for the younger daughter of Hera can cause her to explode. After everything she's done to prove Eris is a weakling compared to her, she still lost, which only proved to make Corinth even more sensitive to any perceived insults. It's best to hold your tongue on any form of criticism or negativity that might be in any way, shape, or form directed at her, especially now that she is a prisoner. Although all she can do in theory is growl and yell and snarl, she has nothing better to do than dwell on anyone and everyone who she feels has ever wronged her, only proving to fan the flames of her anger even higher as she thinks about what she will do to everyone who has looked down on her and thought poorly of her when she gets out.

I14 [1f]:

Corinth's greatest strength is her determination. When she sets her mind to something, she will do whatever it takes to accomplish it. Granted, sometimes her method for accomplishing these things change; after all, what started out as a mission to prove to her mother she was better than Eris by trying to find new responsibilities she could take on turned into a mission to usurp her sister and ensure she never would risk being in her shadow ever again. This same determination is a big reason for her resistance to changing her ways now that she is locked up. It would be easy to believe Eris' nice words, to think that she could be accepted into the family again if she changed, to believe that she never meant for Corinth to feel the way she did, but Corinth knows better. If she accepted that offer, she would just be right back where she started, just with a few extra side eyes and whispers about her. No, she is determined to do things her way, to get out of the Mountain Pride's prison and ensure her name is one the pride remembers.

I15 [1f]:

Corinth's greatest weakness is her own childish arrogance. Despite her best efforts, at the end of the day, she is still quite childish and selfish. She feels that she is the most important person in the room, and she refuses to compromise with others or put them first. Her jealousy over her sister has bled into everything; anyone who is in any way superior to her is someone she doesn't like. This has led to her being eager for instant gratification; if she has a choice between an immediate, small (perhaps even temporary) reward or a long-term, large (generally more permanent) one, she will always pick the former. It's not good, especially when she has proven herself capable of coming up with elaborate strategies that have worked. If she would just be willing to have more patience, she would be much faster in accomplishing her goals, but she is arrogant enough to believe that any victory she has will be long-lasting and any plans flawless.

I16 [1f]:

Corinth's biggest regret is not killing her sister, Eris, when she had the chance. She had everything exactly where she wanted it, had the advantage over her older and widely regarded as superior half-sister, and yet she hesitated. Eris started saying all of these things about loving her, about how she could be a part of the family again, about how she was sorry that she had hurt Corinth the way she had. The younger lioness had frozen up, had actually considered her

sister's words and been prepared to stop her assault on the Mountain Pride...only to find she'd been led into a trap. In that moment, Corinth felt more hatred for Eris than she ever had in her life, even as the older girl insisted that this was the way things had to be done so people would be willing to accept Corinth back into the folds, that if they didn't do it this way, she would never fit in. Her imprisonment has given Corinth plenty of time to stew over what she should have done better, and at the end of the day, it always seems to come back to her moment of weakness, the moment she spared Eris instead of killing her and proving once and for all that she was the better daughter of Hera.

I17 [1f]:

It's simple really: Corinth is never wrong. In a sense, she's delusional; she believes everything she does is justified and that she is always in the right, no matter the circumstances or context. At one time, this likely wasn't the case; however, somewhere along the road of neglect and fruitless efforts to get attention and affection Corinth convinced herself that she was being treated unfairly. If this were all she'd done, she'd be correct, but she took it further than that, believing she was the only one who saw the truth (both about herself and about the pride and the world it exists in as a whole) and deciding to take matters into her own paws to prove it. If someone tells her she's wrong, Corinth will freak out at them, but she has never believed them. The only moment that has ever given her pause is when she paused in her efforts to defeat her sister, actually listening and almost believing Eris when she said that she could make sure things changed, make sure that Corinth got the recognition she should have gotten (deserved to get), but the results of that encounter have only further solidified her belief that she has never been wrong.

I18 [1f]:

Corinth is a leader, if not simply because she would never agree to follow anyone. She does not compromise, does not hear out others and consider whether they have something worthwhile to contribute; her strategies will always be the best, and although it's true that she is quite the strategist, it certainly wouldn't hurt her to have help (especially since it might ensure her accomplishments are a bit more long-lasting). She is selfish, arrogant, childish, and jealous; she would never be able to cooperate under someone else's leadership, because Corinth would ultimately feel like she was being overshadowed like she was with Eris. The only way to ensure people see her and treat her the way she should be treated is if she is in control, or so the purple lioness believes, and she will do anything in her power to ensure that happens. She would not make a good leader, at least, not in the state she's in right now; however, she will never knowingly allow someone else to control and direct her.

I19 [2f]:

Corinth is proud of the fact that she is superior to her older half-sister, Eris, which is why it frustrates her to no end that no one else seems to realize it. She knows that she is the best of Hera's daughters and believes she always will be; the fact that she is now locked in prison, meant to be kept there till her sister gives the word to allow her release, hurts even worse because of this. After all, the one thing that Corinth has consistently been able to feel any sense of accomplishment from is the fact that she is more powerful than Eris, because she isn't afraid

to take advantage of the Old Magic that used to run in the veins of the Mountain Pride before it was forbidden (and has not destroyed her body in the process of harnessing it). Why should Eris then be the one who receives all the praise and adoration, when Corinth is stronger than she will ever be? It only makes sense that she should seek for everyone to see the thing she is so proud of; it's akin to a child running to their mother to show them a drawing they've done, hoping it will end up pinned to the refrigerator. Eventually, if Corinth tries hard enough, she believes that she will show that she has surpassed her sister, that she has completely eclipsed her in talent and potential, and that she is the one that deserves the glory. Her imprisonment is ultimately a temporary setback, one that Corinth will not allow to stand for long. She will not let Eris destroy the one thing that has always helped her hang on no matter how hard things got. Her entire life has been spent in Eris' shadow despite her knowing she is the more powerful of the two sisters, and she will not let her sister ruin her chances of proving that to everyone, not when it is how she will finally force everyone to acknowledge her and her obvious superiority. Corinth doesn't care what it entails; she will do whatever is necessary to prove her point and make everyone (Hera especially) see how proud they should be in her, because in some twisted way, she really believes her mission will do that.

I20 [1f]:

It is unsurprising that Corinth views her ambition as her most valuable trait. If she were weaker, she would have caved under the weight of knowing she could never escape the long shadow Eris cast, and would never experience the love her parents should have given her. Instead, this fueled her to work harder, to get smarter. She knew what she wanted in life, and she also knew she would do whatever it took to get it. Corinth wouldn't settle for being second-best to her sister; she didn't simply want to be acknowledged. No, Corinth wanted to prove a point, both that she was the one more-suited to lead and that she was far more powerful than Eris could ever dream of becoming. This ambition is why she had no inhibitions drawing on the forbidden Old Magic; she disagreed with the laws banning it, and so she took matters into her own paws, using what she was capable of doing to her advantage. This ambition is also why she continues to scheme now that she is imprisoned, not willing to be proven as weaker than Eris (even if, for a moment, she really, truly considered giving it all up, believing her sister when she claimed they could change things up until she was trapped).

I21 [1f]:

What Corinth values most in others is their submission to her. She doesn't want others to be superior to her; she doesn't even want them to be her equal. After being trapped in others' shadows for so long, Corinth has no interest in there being even the slightest opportunity that someone else will outshine her. She wants people who are content to listen to her and not challenge her command, to treat her as the strong and powerful lioness she believes herself to be. If someone does not acknowledge her superiority, she is not going to find them worthy of any respect from her; in fact, she will go out of her way to try and cause them harm in a show of her power. After all, those that kept everyone's attention were those that proved themselves to be powerful soon into their introduction, or so Corinth assumes. If making sure her first impression is one that demands others' submission, well, that shouldn't be too hard, now should it?

I22 [1f]:

Ironically, at one time, the person Corinth admired most was actually her older half-sister, Eris. Eris was everything Corinth wanted to be, *had* everything Corinth ever wanted: a mother's love, the pride's attention, a respected position of authority. Perhaps it's surprising that someone she admired so much during her childhood became someone she harbors so much resentment for, or perhaps that is all the more reason for it. The older sister that Corinth strove for so long to keep up with constantly outshined her, and what once was adoration for someone she wanted to be became frustration at the fact that she could never do anything better than Eris. Jealousy twisted her admiration, forcing Corinth to acknowledge the fact that everyone saw her as inferior to Eris, if they remembered her at all, and all the qualities she admired for so long became loathsome. Why should she admire someone who helped foster the atmosphere that had made Corinth so miserable for so long?

I23 [2f]:

Corinth knows that fantasy exists. After all, if it didn't, she would have no way to harness the Old Magic. She has felt it rushing through her veins, through the roots of the fractured Mountain Pride itself, and it is exhilarating. Dangerous, yes, but exhilarating. She knows that it is forbidden, and perhaps that is what makes it all the more enticing; she learned that the Old Magic still existed as her hurt over constantly being compared to Eris and being found lacking shifted to jealous rage, and so she sought out what their ancestors had banned, disregarding any thought of whether or not those who had died before her would frown on her for it. It is untamable with a will of its own, but Corinth was able to bend it to serve her as needed, proving to herself what she'd already known: she was stronger than Corinth ever would be. It was this that allowed her to get so far in her efforts to best her sister, and that same Old Magic is a large reason for her imprisonment. Beyond treason, Corinth is also powerful in a way the Mountain Pride does not know how to fight; even if Eris were not insistent on trying to reform her sister, any execution attempted would risk the chance of the younger daughter of Hera escaping, and there is no telling if she would be able to be defeated this time around. Granted, she can't practice her control of the Old Magic while imprisoned; the prison itself was made with magic, woven together with the strongest magic that could be harnessed at the time, and it is one of the few remaining bits of Old Magic that the pride still uses. It is created specifically to neutralize magic, completely leveling the playing field and ensuring Corinth no longer has that advantage over anyone. Corinth doesn't understand why the Old Magic was forbidden or why the fantastical elements that once were deep parts of the Mountain Pride have now been completely abandoned, but she thinks it's ridiculous to ignore what once made their pride so strong. She has only grown stronger since she harnessed the Old Magic, proving she would not be destroyed as the stories always said they would be, and if she could just prove that it isn't just fantasy, that it's something that could be used to revive the Mountain Pride back to its former glory, everything would be so much better.

I24 [1f]:

Corinth is incredibly organized, though it may not appear that way to others. She knows what works for her, and she feels no need to change her methods. She is very meticulous; after all,

one has to be when they are planning on staging a coup against their sister. Granted, the organization only extends to short-term plans; when it comes to the long-term, Corinth doesn't put much thought into things or keep her ideas organized, instead just assuming she'll remember them later and can figure it out better on the fly or closer to the actual time it's necessary. As one might expect, that is not efficient in any way, and it is there that Corinth gets sloppy. Anything outward, however, is very neat and put-together, especially now that is locked up in a prison cell and has nothing to really keep organized. At least her cell looks more put-together than many of the other cells, but maybe she will even lose that when she's been in there for too long.

I25 [1f]:

Corinth's biggest secret is just how deep her knowledge of the Old Magic really goes. She exposed her knowledge of a forbidden magic to her pride and the reaction was not what she wanted; luckily for her, she did not give away how much she had learned. Now that she is trapped within the magical prison made by much older, now dead members of the Mountain Pride. Though she cannot access that magic right now, at least not at the moment, she is doing her best to figure out a way to break the spells woven together to hold the prison in place. Most likely, any magic she uses will not only free herself, but ultimately will free any of the other dangerous prisoners contained in there. Corinth is not all that concerned about it, though she'd prefer not to free those who could prove to be a problem for her plans; the magic that she is working on understanding and using is some of the wildest, strongest Old Magic, and one has to wonder if the destruction it might bring is worth the cost. To Corinth, it most definitely is.

I26 [1f]:

Corinth does not cope well with sadness. As a cub, she was most definitely depressed, though for some time she likely didn't even realize how sad she was. Still, it wasn't long before her sadness over being neglected by her family in favor of other family members (most specifically Eris) grew to become anger. Now, any sadness she feels is covered by rage, which is far more potent and useful to Corinth than any sadness ever would be. She views sadness as pathetic, a sign of weakness; if you're sad, you are sitting around and moping instead of doing something about whatever is upsetting you. If anyone were to try to point out that she's sad, it would immediately set her off into a rage, becoming incredibly defensive in an attempt to deny her actual feelings. At the end of the day, she doesn't just view sadness as weak; in truth, she doesn't want to admit that she's been hurt, especially when showing that vulnerability to Eris allowed her sister to trick her into becoming imprisoned.

I27 [1f]:

Though Corinth does not handle sadness very well, she arguably handles anger worse. She views it as her motivator, something to propel her forward. Almost everything makes her angry: her family, her status, her living conditions, if it exists, it's probably upset Corinth (and honestly, even more abstract concepts can too). The former princess is always fuming, finding the energy and motivation to work harder and accomplish her ambitions because of it. She clings to her anger, needing it to keep going, because she cannot face the sadness that would take its place instead. She would much rather continue to cling onto her rage at what the things in her life

have done to her, because if she doesn't, she may have to face the fact that she has not handled things the way she should have. If she's angry, she's allowed to be blinded by her rage, able to view it as righteous anger; Corinth relies almost entirely on that anger to move forward, and it is not healthy, not in the slightest.

I28 [1f]:

Corinth both is and isn't intelligent. On the one hand, she is quite the strategist; she is quick on her paws and more than capable of staying several steps ahead of others, plotting out all of the details necessary to execute her plans in the short term. Not only that, but Corinth shows a control over the Old Magic that has not been seen in the Mountain Pride for a very long time. Though she has far from mastered it, she has learned largely from trial and error as opposed to having any sort of teacher, not to mention she has so far shown no signs of the magic threatening to consume her, that particular danger being the main reason for it being outlawed within the Mountain Pride; that alone is an indication of above average intelligence. Despite all of those qualities, however, Corinth is no paragon of genius. Though she is brilliant when it comes to short-term plans, she will often sacrifice long-term victories for short-term gratification, failing to consider the big picture. Deep down, certain parts of her are still the same as they were when she was a child, not helped by the fact that she has been locked away.

I29 [1f]:

While Corinth does not seem to grasp the idea of changing herself, she typically views change as a positive thing. After all, she personally believes the heir of the Mountain Pride should change from her older sister to her, doing everything within her power to change the way everyone viewed her by proving she was more powerful. And change their perspective she did, though not in the way she intended; instead of proving herself as stronger and far more capable than Eris, they viewed her as a threat, or perhaps even a liability, and she was locked away after being tricked into thinking there was a chance things would finally change to accept Corinth. Since then, Corinth herself has changed, becoming less interested in showing she would make a better lead and more interested in proving she is more powerful by crushing the group that never showed her the affection she should have received as a cub.

I30 [1f]:

Corinth expresses herself through her use of the Old Magic, something that has become much harder since being locked in a prison specifically meant to inhibit magic usage. Granted, Corinth is a quick study, so she is slowly but surely finding ways to manipulate the powerful magic that created the prison so that she can free herself, but it has managed to stifle her expression significantly. After all, the way that she both vented her emotions and expressed them to others has been forcibly taken from her, meant to keep her from posing any sort of threat to the Mountain Pride till she seems rehabilitated. Maybe Corinth ought to play along, learn a better way to express herself so that she can hide her emotions and escape by tricking her sister and the rest of her pridemates, but that feels like a loss in it of itself. No, they ruined Corinth's life, and she is not going to let them win, even if it would just be pretending. The anger fueling her has only helped accelerate her learning to use the Old Magic while imprisoned, spiking up when she gets particularly worked up.

I1-I30 Completion [2bf]:

see above

Second:

Cole:

I01 [2f]:

To sum up Cole in a phrase, he is an old soul in a young lion's body. He comes across as a bit grumpy when first interacting with him, but that gruff attitude is never meant to be rude. Cole simply doesn't know how to interact with those around him. He is bigger than the average lion and clumsy, which already makes him feel awkward and self-conscious around others. Add to that the fact that he doesn't know what he should talk to them about, and Cole just finds it easier to stay cooped up on his own. Everything he loves he can do just fine on his own: read, write, organize. His position in the pride is perfect for that, and it is very hard for him to adjust to letting others in. After all, he doesn't want to be disliked, and what if he responds to something wrong because he doesn't know what he's meant to say? He'd much rather give a grunt of affirmation or a shake of the head to indicate that he's listening than actually try to contribute. This does often give off the impression that he doesn't care if someone doesn't know him better, but Cole really is trying to put his best paw forward within the pride. The fact of the matter is that he does not have the energy to keep up with most of the pride's liveliness, and he doesn't have any interest in changing that. If others can accept that and find a way to fit in with him instead of trying to force him to change, Cole would probably be much more open to interaction without fearing the judgement of others. As it is, though, he has a way he likes things done and can do that just fine on his own, so he doesn't see a reason to force himself to change for others, even if he does sometimes wish he got along with his pridemates better. He's really a softy if you get to know him, and cares deeply about those who manage to get past his tough outer shell. You just have to know how.

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Sincere, Diligent, Inquisitive / Negative: Awkward, Blunt, Particular

I03 [2f]:

Cole does not remember much of his life before coming to the Sky Oasis, courtesy of Icarus' magic. However, unlike many of his pridemates, he knows the situation Icarus got him from. Because he manages the Sky Oasis' archives and keeps most of the records, he helps record the situations the cubs that Icarus steals come from (though such accounts are biased to only Icarus' perspective on things). The records aren't accessible to just anyone, so Cole is one of the select few. Icarus found him alone in the woods, lost and scared and alone. It was a cold night in the fall, toeing the line of changing to winter, and he obviously had not eaten in some time. He was crying and frightened, but he apparently had relaxed quickly while speaking with

Icarus. Though Icarus has never checked to be sure and had been hesitant to even tell Cole, they ultimately recorded the suspicion that Cole's mother had died. Judging by the weather and temperature of that time, it was most likely sickness; if it had been an attack, Cole suspected that he wouldn't have been alive to be found. To patch up the hole left by his lost memories, Cole has fashioned his own story of what might have happened using the information he has. Following the theory that disease took his mother, he assumes his father was never around, so there never was a chance of someone else stepping up to care for him. Perhaps he died too, maybe even before Cole would have been old enough to remember, but if he really did just abandon them, Cole does not even wish to risk having his fabricated story give his father the dignity of being a good parent. Regardless of his father's fate, Cole imagines that, if his mother did get sick, she likely died within their den. If that was the case, it would make sense that Cole was out in the woods all alone; after all, what else was he supposed to do, when the corpse of his mother lay dead in his home? Even now, Cole wouldn't have wanted to move it and continue to stay there, and he doubted he would've been strong enough as a cub. Perhaps he could've created a more cheerful story, but that is simply not Cole's way. He feels that tale is the most likely to be accurate, and unless proven otherwise, will content himself with that story being his history.

104 [2f]:

Cole is the Archivist in the Sky Oasis. It is his job to record what goes on within the pride, both small and large. It is a task he enjoys, and one Icarus suggested for him after seeing how much he liked looking through the old records (especially as Cole proved that he was far better suited for it than Icarus ever had been). Cole keeps track of all of the old books, both fictional stories written by pridemates and nonfictional accounts of things. In some senses, he is a glorified librarian, which is ironic considering his build. He looks like he should be a warrior or in a similar position relying on physical power, but though Cole is perfectly capable of holding his own in a fight (he is by no means skilled as he has had no formal training, but he is bigger and stronger than the average lion), he has no interest in it. It is not that he detests violence or anything of that sort; he is perfectly fine recording the events of a battle, and does not mind the graphic or gruesome details. However, he would much rather spend his time in the quiet archives, where he can be of service directing those to the information he needs and keeping track of everything. It takes a load off of Icarus, who is no longer the only one responsible for ensuring any information that should be remembered is written down for the future in case word of mouth should fail; as Archivist, Cole fulfills a role fewer are capable to fill than as a fighter, which he would not have been remarkable in. Besides that, he enjoys simply organizing and writing. It is calm and quiet in the archives, and everything is as it should be, because he was allowed to determine an organization set-up to fix the state it was in under Icarus' direct authority. Furthermore, his memory allows him to quickly direct others to what they need or to remember smaller details of an event that others might forget when trying to record about them. It is almost as if the role was made for Cole.

Iona:

102 [1f]:

Positive: Genuine, Attentive, Mature / Negative: Aimless, Distant, Jealous

Lust:

I01 [2f]:

Lust is a very conflicted figure. She has high moral standards, very obviously caring for others and wanting to do what's right; this is evident to the members of the church, and is part of why she is one of the most favored of the seven gods. However, though she has a strong moral compass, Lust cannot bring herself to do anything more than sit idly by as Pride and the other gods lie and manipulate their worshippers. She is too timid to stand up to them, too timid to break things off with Pride (who she had no intentions to take as a mate in the first place), too timid to just leave. But even deeper than that, try as she might to deny it, Lust does enjoy the attention lavished on her with the status of goddess. They adore her, and she barely has to lift a paw if she doesn't want to. It is the high life, and though Lust despises how she has come to be in that position, a part of her questions if it is so bad to keep taking advantage of the situation. There is the selfish desire to leave the status quo in place, a status quo she's already too scared to break, because it benefits her. Life is easy as a goddess, and if she's not actively aiding Pride's efforts, is she doing anything wrong in being passive in it? Deep down, she doesn't believe that she can be neutral; if she does not stand up against evil, she is just as complacent in it. Lust wants so badly to be good, and she doesn't know how to respond to the selfish thoughts she has, especially when, save for Elias, there is no one around to encourage her to do the right thing. If she wants to do anything, she must conquer her own inner demons, or she will always feel conflicted about whatever decision she makes. She has to come to grips with the parts of herself she wants to ignore, and either embrace or overcome them. Whether or not Lust can actually do that has yet to be seen.

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Empathetic, Conscientious, Scrupulous / Negative: Timid, Weak-Willed, Passive

I03 [2f]:

Lust doesn't remember a time when she wasn't alone in the world. Alone is not quite right; she doesn't remember a time without Elias, but it was always the two of them against the world, twins that only had each other to rely on. Elias protected Lust, looking out for her as best he could. When they stumbled across the Mortal Church, which was only just beginning to gain its roots, Pride lured them in with false promises and empty miracles. It's easy to believe what you want to see, and although Elias was reluctant, Lust was fascinated by the would-be god. Unfortunately, that fascination came at a price, and by the time she realized his plots, it was too late. "It is you, my darling" he had said, as if his eyes were finally opening. "You came after me. I'm so sorry for not realizing sooner." Till that point of time, Lust had gone by a different name: Laken. Once Pride declared her to be another god come down from the skies (and his wife of all things), however, that changed. Her old name was abandoned to help her "remember" her origins, and Pride fed her pretty words to try and keep her complacent in his plotting. She didn't know enough to argue with his words, and so she took her place by his side, uncertain as to what her future would hold. Elias, ever the faithful brother, stuck by her; she wasn't certain what she would have done if he hadn't. Thankfully, she was able to make him her attendant; though Pride proved to be incredibly controlling at first (which, despite letting up with time, still hasn't completely changed), he allowed her to at least keep that comfort, instead of separating her

from him to make sure he didn't try to get her to leave. It was the perfect trap; the people adored her, and because they all believed whatever Pride said and saw him publicly "discover" her true identity, they were more than eager to have her as their queen. Their excitement held Lust in place, in part because she didn't want to break it and in part because she had no openings. By the time she did, the conflicted feelings had begun.

I04 [2f]:

Lust is a goddess within the Mortal Church. Furthermore, she is the queen of the gods, as she is supposed to be married to the king of the gods, Pride. This is, however, all a lie. Pride has completely fabricated this story, and Lust cannot bring herself to speak out against him. She has the least duties out of the seven gods, as Pride is more concerned about keeping her safe and protected than having her actually do anything as a leader in the church. He insists that because he loves her, he cannot allow her to strain herself. Therefore, instead of doing anything of real consequence to contribute to the group, he has Lust in charge of far more trivial or frivolous activities, such as festivals and other festivities. It's not that the planning of those sort of things isn't important; they are celebrations of the gods and various things relating to them, so naturally they are necessary, if not simply to appease the believers and keep them from questioning things. Unfortunately for both Lust and Pride, the frequency of the festivals is not enough to keep Lust constantly busy, and just sitting still and looking pretty by Pride's side does not hold much interest for her either. Technically, she does supply jobs for some of the members of the church, as she has her own personal attendants and the like (as all the other gods do), but even this is not quite on par with everyone else, as Pride is pickier on who he allows to serve her. Lust does not want to simply make appearances and be a shallow leader, but unfortunately, Pride only sees her as a pretty face. Whether he simply does not believe she could contribute or is afraid to give her more responsibilities in case she were to try anything is unclear; despite marrying her, he is not open with her, and she therefore is not open with him. So instead, Lust is stuck, hating that she looks almost eagerly ahead to when the next event will occur so that she will have something to do other than reflect on what her life has become and why she won't do anything to act against it.

Raphaël:

I01 [2f]:

Raphaël is a snake in sheep's clothing. He plays to his audience, charming those he encounters with frightening ease. He has obviously practiced his methods of manipulation, creating emotional bonds where there aren't any and convincing others that they identify with each other. He uses every method under the sun: a common enemy, the assumed we, hyperbole; if it's a persuasive tactic, Raphaël has used it at some point. Despite how easily he can slip into a group and convince others to believe him, he should not be trusted. He has no boundaries in his manipulation, no morals to guide him. Raphaël has one goal and purpose: to serve Keket. He and the demon possessing him will do whatever it takes to accomplish what she wants, regardless of what it takes to do so. He lets people get close, but if he needs to, he'll strike without hesitation and with deadly precision. Quick on his paws and intelligent, Raphaël is a threat not only because of the powers granted to him due to the demon he shares a body with, but also because he actually is a strategist. Every word that leaves his mouth is planned and

calculated to accomplish a goal; there is no way of knowing if he is actually being truthful when he speaks. In fact, it is probably better to assume he is being mostly disingenuous in any encounter he has, though he makes a point to tie some truth in in order to ground his words in believability. After all, why make something up when you can simply stretch what is already true? Raphaël does not care who he hurts; he has no qualms endangering others - or even himself - if it will get the end result necessary. If he really wanted to, he could talk most people into walking to a cliff edge, and they might not even notice till he'd already pushed them over. The worst danger is the one you don't expect, and as a mass-manipulator, Raphaël ensures he is not likely to be suspected. It is unsurprising that he has claimed a position in the court; beyond his connections with the temple and Keket, he can change personas in the blink of an eye, becoming exactly who he needs to be depending on the given circumstances. It is almost beautiful how easily he can shed one skin and dawn another as necessary. The fact that it is a skill that has obviously been practiced, honed, and perfected only makes it all the more terrifying. One has to wonder if he even has any humanity left.

102 [1f]:

Positive: Zealous, Charismatic, Strategic / Negative: Manipulative, Unforgiving, Callous

103 [2f]:

Raphaël was not always the creature that he now is. At one time, he was a normal lion, with no crystal growths or goddess or demon to concern himself with. As a cub, he and his twin brother, Yves, were orphaned. The memories of that time are hazy at best; now, he sees no reason for them, and so makes no point to dwell on them or think about any of the details. The fact that he was so sickly only makes remembering those times even harder. Yves did his best to look out for him, but there was nothing he could do as Raphaël's conditions got worse and worse. Eventually, despite his brother's best efforts, Raphaël died. And yet, he didn't. Not long after, Raphaël found himself back in his body, but he was not the same. His body had changed; crystal growths had developed, jutting out of his skin in a perhaps grotesque fashion. If it were just his appearance, that would have been fine; after all, Yves was also changed when Raphaël returned to himself. However, when Raphaël reawakened, he was not alone in his head. There was something else, someone else who had just as much agency in his body as him, if not more. The young cub was afraid till the other being appeased him, explaining what he was doing there. Raphaël does not know (nor does he care) if the thing used its abilities to manipulate him into accepting it; soon enough, he found that a demon was inhabiting his body, so the chances that it did something to ensure he handled the news well are high. And as Raphaël learned more about the demon he would now be living with, he began to drift away from the brother who had done so much to bring him back. Raphaël had come back, but he was no longer Raphaël. He was not sickly; he was terrifying, a force to be reckoned with in the most unexpected fashion. With the aid of Keket and his new companion, he rose in the ranks, joining the court of the castle and becoming a vessel in a better position to aid Keket in her efforts to grow more powerful.

I04 [1f]:

Technically, Raphaël is the court magician in Altalab. He can perform feats no one else can, but no one knows the true reason for this is the fact that he shares his body with a demon, a demon who in return allows him access to his powers. However, his role within the kingdom actually goes much deeper. Since being resurrected by the goddess Keket in a deal his brother probably never should have made, Raphaël has lived his life carrying out her whims. His allegiance is first and foremost to Keket as opposed to the royal family or even the priests; the only one who might even hold a candle to that is the demon he shares a body with, but the two have the exact same goals, seeing as the demon has molded Raphaël to be what Keket needs. He manipulates those in Altalab as needed and is a physical vessel to help Keket possess whoever is meant to be the next Mouth of the Goddess. Though he is not necessary for such a task, the extra magic helps speed up the process and make it even harder for it to be disrupted (though not impossible, as demonstrated by Desiree and Faye). In truth, Raphaël is whatever Keket needs him to be, but to keep up pretenses, he has a title in the court.

Daily Prompts:

- [3/29/21 \[1f\]](#)
 - [6/11/21 \[1f\]](#)
-

Third:

Cheka:

B01 - The Little Hyena Story [2f]:

"Tell us a story!" Kina said, climbing up onto Cheka's back.

Cheka winced a bit when the small cub's claws dug into her back, gently shaking her off. "What story do you want to hear?"

Her daughter slid back down to land beside her siblings, excitedly answering, "The one about the mountain!"

Kidogo gasped at her sister's suggestion. "Yes, and the little hyena!"

Of course Kidogo would like that one, Cheka thought with a small smile as she looked at the three excited cubs curled up by her. *I just hope she doesn't get any silly ideas about trying to copy it*. Her eyes twinkled playfully as she said aloud, "Alright, alright. But didn't I tell you that one last night?"

"Yes," Fadhili said very seriously, "but that doesn't mean we don't want to hear it again. The moral of the story is very nice."

"Yeah!" Kidogo said excitedly. "Plus I like it that the little hyena can still help." Surprisingly, Fadhili didn't point out that that was what he'd meant when he referenced the moral of the story, but she supposed he always had been the most patient of the triplet.

"Alright, alright. Settle down." They did as told, looking up at her with wide, excited eyes. "Once upon a time, there were two very happy hyena parents. They had just had a cub, and they

couldn't be happier. That was why they named him, 'Blessing from the Skies Above,' or 'Skies' for short. Skies was their pride and joy, and they loved him. But as Skies grew, they and the rest of the clan were shocked to find that, despite his big and strong parents, he was small. In fact, he was smaller than every other hyena in the clan. No one knew what to make of it, and though it didn't affect his parents' love for him, Skies hated how small he was. He wasn't as good as the other hyenas at hunting or fighting, and he felt useless."

She paused, surprised that none of the cubs had interrupted her yet. But when Cheka looked down at them, she was surprised to see them all fast asleep. Apparently they were more tired than they'd initially appeared; she hadn't even gotten past the beginning of the story. No doubt they'd ask her to tell it again tomorrow to make up for that. And she'd be happy to oblige; she liked telling them the stories she'd been raised hearing.

Corinth:

I(b)1 [1bf]:

"Who do you love?" The Old Magic breathed in her ear.

Corinth tensed, claws scraping against the stone beneath her paws. The magic pulsed under her skin, clinging to her bones and tying together with the sinew. It filled her lungs, burning at her heart and knocking against her skull. It was ancient, it was powerful, and it was hungry. Twisting around her ribs and brushing against her heart, it caressed her like a tragic lover. "Tell me about your family."

The purple lioness growled, growing agitated. The magic was beaten back, forced to recede and not cling so tightly to her chest. "My mother holds no love for me. She looks at me in contempt; she wants nothing to do with me. I am a reminder of her mistakes,."

"And your father?" It whispered.

Corinth's tail lashed as the magic was forced to further loosen its grip. "He thought I could save his marriage, as if a cub can fix anything. When he realized he was wrong, he dropped me in favor of pursuing my mother. She doesn't love him, yet still he chases after her, neglecting the daughter he wanted so badly in the process."

"What of your sister?" She didn't question how it knew. It was ancient

The laugh that left her throat was raw and bitter, containing an anger threatening to bubble over at any moment. "My sister? My sister is the worst of them all. She stands in front of them all, so high and mighty and powerful, but she can't see just how weak she is with her solutions. Mother adores her, and so does the rest of the Mountain Pride; no matter what I do, I'll never escape her shadow, not like this. I need to be more powerful, need to show them just how much more capable I am than her. She never saw me, never stopped to see if I was okay, if I was hurting. She thinks she's so amazing, but even she never sees me.

"I want to make her see the truth. I want to make them all see the truth. That they were wrong to neglect me. That I am not weak. I want to see them pay for what they've done."

There was a rage swirling up in her, and it threw itself against the magic, pounding and pulsing as the two warred inside of her. The anger that had gone untapped for so long was finally growing too big for Corinth to hold back. Jealousy, rage, sadness, neglect, all of those negative emotions struck in a perfect storm.

The magic cowered before her. "What then of love?"

And she was its master. "Love is nothing." Her teeth were bared, her eyes flashed, and her tail lashed back and forth behind her. "It is a weakness. It is something people use to compare you, to justify certain treatment by, to wield against you as some trophy to be won or some object to be taken away. Who do they think they are, to behave in such a fashion? If that is love, I don't want it. I want nothing to do with something that will only keep me from doing what is necessary. If they have no room to love me amid their contempt, I welcome it gladly; I will show them just how weak their love makes them."

And the Old Magic bled. It bled into her soul, seeping into every crevice, every crack, every wound, till it consumed her. Or perhaps she consumed it. The magic was a beast of its own, but it bent to her whim, cracking and reshaping to complete her. Her head throbbed as it stole her breath away. When her lungs filled again, it was like she'd never breathed before. Her veins burned but she felt no pain; she felt like she could have moved mountains had she tried. She felt powerful.

"You have never been loved," the magic whispered, "but are you sure there is nothing you love?"

She let out a gasp, flexing her paws against the ground to test the feeling of the magic coursing through her, which seemed to ebb and flow to move with her. "I love you."

It grinned as it curled inside her lungs, like a dragon guarding its horde as it rooted itself against her heart. It was a part of her, and she a part of it. "Show me how much you love me. Show me how powerful you are."

I(b)2 [1bf + 1f]:

Corinth stood, tall and proud and powerful against the cavern walls behind her. Her eyes crackled, her mouth burned, and her heart pounded. The Old Magic was singing in her blood, demanding for her to release it, to rain down hell and justice on the pride cowering in front of her.

She had stood on this ledge exactly once before. She remembered it well; it was her coming-of-age ceremony, when she was officially named an adult within the Mountain Pride. Then, she had been so scared of messing up. She had only been a bit shorter than she was now, but at the time, she had never felt so small. It was the closest she'd been to Hera since she was a nursing cub, but her mother had not looked at her, not really. Corinth had hoped for some sort of comfort, some sign that she was doing well, but Hera had barely been able to maintain eye contact. The disdain had been evident to Corinth, though she doubted anyone else had been close enough to notice; only she knew how much her mother detested having to look at her, speak to her, be near her.

Why, on the day she was meant to become an adult, had she never felt more like a cub?

It had been Hera's last chance to impress Corinth. All throughout her cubhood, Corinth had been desperate for her mother's approval and love, desperate for some validation or even some acknowledgement. Instead, she was constantly ignored, looked over in favor of her half sister, Eris. Her half sister, who obviously reminded Hera not of someone she regretted but someone she loved. Though Hera didn't dote on anyone, if she did, she would have doted on Eris. Corinth had no doubt about that.

And for so long, Corinth had found herself inadequate. She was certain that she'd done something wrong. No matter how hard she tried, no one in the whole pride would look at her.

She was always in the shadow of her sister, and Hera seemed to hate her existence. From a young age, Corinth realized that her mother regretted ever giving birth to her.

She had cowered for so long, been upset and tried to figure out the right way to gain everyone's attention, to prove herself. That was when she'd found the Old Magic. Forbidden to all because of its danger, she sought it out, desperate enough to try anything.

And it answered. It found her worthy, or perhaps simply interesting. She could feel how powerful it was, how thin the line she walked of controlling it and being controlled by it. It opened her eyes, showing her not just its power but how powerful she was to be able to wield it the way she did. It claimed it had not seen someone so capable in centuries; Corinth believed it. It praised her the way no one ever had before.

The Old Magic helped her realize her jealousy, her rage, her potential. It helped her identify and harness it all, helped her come up with a plan to get justice from all who had wronged her. It helped her see that the love they all held and kept from her was weak, that all she needed was it. It had filled her, completed her, but even the magic was not enough. It whispered to her that she needed to demonstrate for all of those who wronged her the truth, that she was far more powerful than Eris, that she had been just as worthy of receiving the love she was denied for so long. But more than that, she needed to show them why they were weak and why she was strong.

Corinth relished in what the magic taught her, how free she now was. She never even realized she had instead made herself a prisoner to it, a prisoner so willing she didn't even recognize she'd walked into her own cage and locked the door behind her.

And that was why she stood before the pride now, high above them all as they all cowered beneath her. For once, they all saw her and only her. Their eyes were open in a way they never had been before, and Corinth savored it. She didn't care that the first time they saw her for her, they feared her; all that mattered was that for once, Corinth would have no shadow cast over her.

"Corinth!" Someone called out, and she turned, her pelt crackling with the ancient magic that filled every nook and cranny of her being. It was one with her, she its mortal shell. Sometimes, Corinth wasn't sure which of them was in control, and she didn't even care. The power was all that mattered; she loved it, craved it, needed it, and what did it matter so long as it was her everyone looked to? "Corinth, please!"

"Eris." Corinth's voice was not her own, not anymore. It was there, somewhere, coated in something ancient, something beyond their comprehension. "Do you see me now?"

"What have I done?" The sob that left her half sister's throat caught Corinth off guard as Eris looked at her, really looked at her. "I didn't know."

The smile Corinth gave her back was cold. "You will now."

"It doesn't have to be this way though. Please, stop. Stop now, and we can fix this. We can be the family we never were before. Please."

And somewhere within her, something stirred. For as powerful as Corinth now was, as far as she thought she had come, deep down, the child still remained.

l(b)3 [1bf + 3f]:

The drumming in her heart came on suddenly.

Corinth paused where she stood in the woods, breathing growing shallow and quick as her panic rose. Her blood hummed and her lungs constricted as something slunk around inside her chest. It was a feeling she'd known too well for too long.

"No-" She choked out.

It shushed her, beginning to flood her being and forcing her to bend and snap and scream. "Did you miss me, Corinth?" It grinned as her body continued to shudder and twist, reclaiming the places that had been empty for so long since she'd expelled it.

Tears began to stream down the purple lioness' face as she writhed on the ground, helpless yet trying so desperately to stop what was coming over her. "No! No, I got rid of you. You're gone!"

"You can never truly get rid of me. You need me. You'll always need me. No matter what you do, no matter where you go, I am a being older than you could possibly fathom; I will always be here with you."

It wrapped around her throat, forcing it to constrict as she struggled to respond, as if somehow that would be enough to get rid of it. "I don't need you anymore. I don't, I don't, I'm not that person anymore!"

"You will always be that neglected, jealous child, Corinth." It laughed as she choked on the air, unable to say anything more as she kept wildly kicking and twitching. "Corinth. Corinth. Corinth!" Suddenly, she sat up, smacking her head against someone else's and biting her tongue. She shrieked, shaking her head and whining, blinking to clear her fuzzy vision. She wasn't in the woods. She was sitting in a small cave, paws resting on a moss bed, and Elias was moaning in front of her, rubbing a paw over his obviously pained face.

"Oh no," Corinth whimpered, ears falling flat against her head as she realized what she'd done.

"Elias, I'm so sorry."

The black and white lion shook his head at her before she could continue. "No, don't apologize." He took a seat beside her, tail brushing against hers in a silent request. She obliged, intertwining them as he gently rubbed his head against her shoulder. "You were screaming in your sleep again."

She anxiously shuffled her paws. "I'm sor-" She managed to stop herself from finishing that statement when Elias frowned at her. She also had to bite back yet another apology for apologizing when she didn't need to.

"Was it back?" Corinth nodded at his question, not trusting herself to answer out loud. "The same dream then?"

"Similar."

"You don't need to be ashamed of having a nightmare," he said quietly.

In truth, the purple lioness hadn't even realized how much she'd been curling into herself, an obvious testament to how terrible she felt. "I know, but...I'm scared."

And ever patient, Elias brushed his muzzle against hers. "Tell me about it?" He asked.

He always asked. He never pressed, never forced her to explain when she wasn't ready. He let her tell him at her own pace, never getting angry when she didn't want to tell him the details of what plagued her at night. "It just...overtook me. I couldn't stop it, couldn't get rid of it. It seized control and reminded me of just how powerful it was. It told me I'd never get rid of it, that it was always there, that I'd always need it. That I'd always...that I'd never change."

Elias' bright yellow eyes were filled with compassion, but there was something else. Admiration? Respect? Corinth couldn't understand it. "You are so strong, Corinth." He whispered, voice soft

and gentle. "I know I didn't know you back then, but even since we've met...you've changed. You are not the same lioness you once were."

"But it was right," she whimpered, tears beginning to run anew. "When the magic rushed over me, it...it felt right. Like a piece of me had been missing and was finally returned. It felt good, feeling so powerful. I'm terrified that a part of me still wants that, still craves what it offered."

"We all want to be powerful; we all experience temptation. It is okay to recognize you are not fully healed; the path to recovery isn't completed in a day, it's a mountain that we're all climbing to the top of. And sometimes, we slip, but that doesn't mean we can't try again." He looked at her with such intensity, Corinth wondered if she was falling in love with him all over again. "And you didn't slip, Corinth. That Old Magic? It does not control you. You still fought against it, even when it wasn't really here. We all have a part of us that will want the worst things; it is what you do in response to those desires that defines you."

And though it was watery, Corinth managed to smile. "How did you get so wise?"

He smiled, though it didn't quite reach his eyes. "I have a lot of practice giving advice."

She felt Elias shut down a little, and gently rubbed her head against his chest. "Will you ever tell me about her?"

They sat there for a few moments, her with her head resting against him, before he finally responded. "Yes," he was so quiet, he practically breathed the word into her ear. "Yes, I will. I just...don't know if I'm ready to face it yet. To face her yet." He sighed, voice so melancholic. Sometimes, he sounded like he had lived lifetimes, and Corinth wished she knew how to soothe that ache away forever, so he'd never sound so old and tired and alone ever again. "I want to tell you all of it, but I'm not as strong as you."

"Hey," she said firmly, sitting up. Now, it was her turn to stare him in the eye, gaze filled with an intense determination. "We are all on our own journey, Elias. You just reminded me of that fact." That elicited a small smile from him. "Yes, I suppose I did," he said weakly. "Not very nice, using my own words against me."

She smiled back. "Well, I'm not very nice. You're the nice one." She paused, letting the air rest easy for a moment before she continued. "Of course I want you to tell me, but I want you to tell me on your own time, when you're ready. I will always be here to listen and support you, whether I know everything or not; I never want you to feel obligated or like you can't trust me."

"And I don't feel that way, I just-"

She gently shushed him. "Don't. You don't need to say anything. As long as I know you trust me, that's enough." She rested her head against his chest again, looking up at him as she pressed herself close. "I will be your rock, just like you are mine. And through hell or high water, I will stand alongside you as long as you'll have me."

"I know. And I the same."

"I love you," she murmured. "I love you more than I could ever put to words. It scares me, how much I want to be with you. How fascinating you are. That I want to know everything about you, every nook and cranny. For so long, I thought I'd never know love, not really. And then we met, and I..." She trailed off, shaking her head. "I'm no good with words. Not the way you are."

He let out a low chuckle. "And yet I'm the quiet one."

"Indeed." She smiled a smile that only Elias ever managed to coax out of her.

"I love you too," he whispered. "You taught me what love is, Corinth. I didn't know what it was, not really, till I met you."

"When you say things like that, it makes me want to stay like this forever."

"I would like that. I would like that very much."

I(b)4 [1bf + 3bf]:

Corinth's Birth: Corinth was born to an unhappy family. Hera, her mother, didn't want her, only having her after Odysseus, her father, pressured her into it, believing a cub was what they needed to make their relationship work. When Corinth came into the world, it was the final push Hera needed to end things. Odysseus was not interested in his daughter when he realized she would not help him fix his marriage, and Hera could barely stand the sight of her, seeing her as a reminder of her mistake. From the moment she entered the world, Corinth did not know love the way a cub should.

Meeting Eris: Corinth was just a cub when she first met Eris, and she was immediately entranced. There was a decent age gap between them; though Eris wasn't an adult yet, she was certainly not a cub. In some ways, Corinth idolized her. She was a perfect princess and daughter, and Corinth sought to emulate her in any way she could. Eris didn't have much time for her, but she humored Corinth when necessary. She was not a bad old sister, just absent, busy with her princess duties and generally being adored by the Mountain Pride as she sought to obey her mother. It didn't matter; Corinth was determined to be just like her.

Seeking the Old Magic: It wasn't long before Corinth realized that she would never measure up to Eris. She quickly fell into depression, seeking out some way to define herself, to escape the shadow of her sister and force everyone, including her mother, to look at her. This was how she learned of the Old Magic. Forbidden to all, she couldn't help but be intrigued, so she sought it out. Despite it being against the law, she found a way to harness it, and began to speak with it. She could only do small things at first, but that was enough to satisfy her, despite the magic's pushing for her to come more, do more. It was her secret, something she alone could do within the pride, and she planned to find a way for it to help her gain what she wanted: attention, love, and validation.

Coming of Age: When Corinth finally came of age, she was certain Hera would finally see her. It was the closest she'd been to her mother in years, and she thought that maybe, just maybe, it would be enough. Finally, now that she wasn't a cub, everyone would see her as her own person. And yet, when she stood before her mother, she felt nothing but disgust. It was obvious that Hera would never look at Corinth and see her, and that was the tipping point. After so long, Corinth snapped. She was no longer eager to please, desperate for everyone's approval; instead, she began to pull away from everyone, stewing.

Embracing the Old Magic: After that day, Corinth returned to her hiding place and fully embraced the Old Magic. When it spoke to her, she listened, and in return it unlocked her rage, her jealousy, all of the terrible feelings she'd tried to bury deep down inside. It filled her being, and some days, it was hard to tell which was whose master. Where so many had been destroyed, she seemed to thrive, but even Corinth knew she was playing with something bigger and more dangerous than she ever knew. The Old Magic was an ancient being with its own

agenda, but she didn't care. If she could use it to prove herself to everyone, to get revenge and exact justice on her pridemates, that would be enough.

The Descent: With goading from the Old Magic, Corinth decided she didn't just want everyone's attention, didn't just want to stand in her own light: she wanted to eradicate the shadow that had fallen over her for so long. The Old Magic took the feelings she felt for her family and helped her focus them. In some twisted way, she still wanted to prove herself to Hera, though it was more to prove she'd made a mistake in favoring Eris than anything else. Odysseus was mostly ignored; her father had, ironically, paid her the most attention, even if it had always obviously been for show; he was ultimately lumped in with the rest of the pride. It was with Eris that her true hatred and rage and jealousy burned, and that fire was stoked, the flames growing higher and higher as the Old Magic constantly told Corinth she was better.

The Coup: After spending more time planning than she normally would have (and even then, not spending nearly enough to account for everything), Corinth snapped. She unleashed the Old Magic in a way she never had before, terrifying the members of the Mountain Pride with the power she possessed. No one in the pride had been alive when the Old Magic was still allowed to be used, forbidden for so long that most had forgotten it was anything more than an old wives tale. Sure, it had left a few lingering effects on the pride, but those didn't have to be attributed to the ancient magic that cubs barely learned about. Corinth struck fear into everyone's hearts as she stood tall and proud before them, claiming the throne as her own and calling them all out for the way they acted. The one thing she hadn't anticipated was Eris. Looking back on it, Corinth would claim Eris was far more clever than she anticipated; with more growth, Corinth would realize she'd underestimated her half sister's character. Eris begged Corinth to stop, apologizing for everything. She told Corinth that she was sorry, that she had realized too late how Corinth was feeling and that she hadn't known what to do, but that she should've done something more than ignore it and go on pretending like everything was alright. She wanted more than anything to be a family, for Corinth to really be her sister. "If you stop now, we can fix all of this. We can be a family. I want to be a family too." Those words had been enough to stop Corinth in her tracks, awakening the cub inside her who knew that that was all she'd ever wanted. The Old Magic didn't anticipate the shift in the tides, and it lost its hold on Corinth; despite its protests, she let her guard down, believing Eris and surrendering.

Imprisonment: She didn't expect her sister to apologize once she surrendered, or the betrayal of realizing one of the few remnants of magic the pride still relied on had been invoked. Corinth couldn't bring the Old Magic back to lash out; she couldn't even move. Eris was too distraught, so it was Hera who ultimately gave the orders to have Corinth imprisoned. It was only once she was in prison that she was free to move again. For the first time in moons, the magic wasn't present; it was nowhere to be found at all. Irony, that a prison made using the Old Magic could be so well-designed as to keep the Old Magic out. Eris came soon after (or so Corinth assumed; it is hard to gauge how time passes within the prison, which supposedly exists in a realm of its own), apologizing profusely but explaining that it was necessary. She promised that if Corinth could take the time to prove she'd changed, Eris would get her out. Eris claimed she'd meant what she'd said, and that she truly did want to be sisters, but that the Mountain Pride was

scared of Corinth. It would take time for both Corinth to process her own feelings and the Mountain Pride to be ready to accept her. Corinth hated her sister for that, hated her for the perceived betrayal, and was enraged. The imprisonment only caused Corinth's hatred for Eris to grow, but despite this, Eris continued to visit, determinedly believing that Corinth could change.

The Return of the Old Magic: It took time, but eventually, Corinth managed to connect to the Old Magic. It was brief, and hard; it took a lot out of her. But she did it, and for a moment, she could feel its presence calming her, promising to help her enact her revenge. The process was slow-going, but Corinth managed to harness the magic in spite of all the barriers and protection. As time went on, she slowly gained better and better control of it, knowing that sooner or later she would be able to use it to make her grand escape. But without its constant presence in her mind, Corinth's hatred dimmed. Though she still hurt from everything she'd been through, there was a guilt there over what she'd done that she'd never felt before, a guilt that she hated. When she used the Old Magic, it covered the guilt, tucking it away so it could occupy that space instead, and so Corinth was filled with a new desperation, needing to escape that dreadful feeling that she'd done something terrible and unwarranted. With the help of the magic, she was even able to contact some of the other prisoners, all of which had been there for far longer than she could ever dream of. Most of the prisoners she'd never even heard of, and the idea of being forgotten in such a manner terrified Corinth. In a strange way, though she didn't notice it, it also opened her up to what Eris was saying.

The Prison Break: She'd never know how long it took, but one day, Corinth finally managed it. She broke a hole into the barrier of the prison, and though it tried to quickly reseal itself, she had been powerful enough to escape through it. Immediately, the Old Magic flooded through her, taking residence again. Though the feeling had been nice in short bursts while imprisoned, Corinth now felt the feeling was more foreign than comforting. She didn't like it, nor did she like the Old Magic stirring at her bones and urging her to break the other prisoners free as part of her revenge against the Mountain Pride. She lurked away from the pride, much to the magic's frustration. She had broken out, but Corinth still felt like she was in a prison.

Rejecting the Old Magic: The magic grew impatient. Though the other prisoners had all connected to it in some way, Corinth was the only one who had ever managed to use it and escape. The Mountain Pride knew by now, and they were looking for her. The Old Magic began to demand her obedience, reminding her of what she once was, of how weak and powerful and pitiful she'd been. It tried every piece of leverage it had against her, even going so far as to threaten to separate and leave her powerless. But Corinth was tired. The magic did not live in her the way it had before; for all its centuries of knowledge, it had not noticed that it didn't settle in the way it had before. It was as it pushed her that Corinth realized she had no interest in what the magic had offered her, not anymore. She didn't need it, couldn't keep relying on it. And so, she expelled it from her. The Old Magic tried to take root in her, tried to twist and claw and choke, but it could do nothing to stop her. It too had grown complacent, believing that it had full control (while letting Corinth think she had just as much power in their dynamic). She was more powerful than it had ever dreamed of, and she cast it aside, somehow managing to escape its

grip and deny it any more room inside her. For the first time since she'd first connected with the Old Magic, Corinth could not feel even a trace of it lingering with her.

The Decision to Leave: With the Old Magic gone, Corinth had her head to herself again. And without its manipulation, Corinth was forced to realize just how guilty she was. She had enjoyed feeling powerful, but now, she felt regret. She hated what she'd become more than she'd ever hated her family; as she realized that, her feelings for her family cooled. In some ways, she knew she loved them, or at least Eris; in another world, she would have loved for things to be different. But as it was, Corinth did not see any way she could return to the Mountain Pride. At best, she'd be accepted into things again, but it would never be real; her pridemates would always look at her and question if she'd do it again. At worst, she would be deemed a more formidable threat than anything before, and would be imprisoned again, maybe forever. They might even wish to kill her. Nothing good could come of going back. And though she wanted a relationship with Eris, Corinth did not think she was ready for that. She had a lot of feelings to work through about her sister, and she was sure that, even if Eris didn't realize it, her half sister had a lot of feelings to work through about her too. For the first time, Corinth realized she did not have to be tied to the pride she had called home for so long; why should she stay, when it had never felt like a home to her? Though she was terrified, Corinth left the Mountain Pride territory. She hoped one day to return, but she also recognized she maybe never would, and somehow, she was at peace with that. It was almost exciting, to finally make a choice based on nothing more than what she wanted. No expectations, no relationships, no responsibilities. She left knowing that she was doing what was best for her, and that she could learn to be okay with the fact that maybe she'd never be able to confront her family and work through everything they'd all done to each other.

Meeting Elias: It wasn't too long into her travels that Corinth met Elias. She had been struggling on her own; she had never been on her own before, and Corinth was quickly learning that taking care of herself by herself was much harder than she anticipated. When she'd first encountered Elias, she had been defensive and hostile, certain that they would get into a fight. Instead, he'd offered her his food, guessing that she'd been struggling recently. It'd been embarrassing, and she hadn't planned to accept it till Elias mentioned he only knew since he too had only recently struck out on his own. They exchanged vague details about themselves, both hesitant to trust the other but at least willing to open up a bit upon realizing they had more in common than anticipated. When it began to rain, Elias offered to share the small shelter he'd been staying in for the few days he was resting there. She accepted only because she did not want to get soaked, and though it was awkward, the two hesitantly agreed the next day to continue traveling with each other, "just for a bit, since there's safety in numbers." They both claimed it was because it was beneficial for them; in truth, both saw a bit more of themselves in the other than they cared to admit.

The Nightmares Begin: They really had planned to separate with time, but each kept finding reasons to continue on together. It was slow, learning to coexist with each other; Corinth was not used to really caring about another's needs, nor was she used to minding the fact that she could be quite rude and temperamental. Elias was not perfect either; he was forced to learn that

he needed to make decisions with Corinth now as opposed to on his own, and he was hesitant to allow her to do anything for him, as if that somehow made him weak. Their relationship was functional, but awkward. It all came to a head on one particularly cold night when Elias suggested they sleep by each other to conserve heat, as the snow did not appear to be letting up anytime soon. Though Corinth was used to the cold, it was obvious he wasn't, and she found herself appreciating the heat more than she anticipated. It was the first time she was able to truly sleep. It was also the first time she dreamed, finally resting well enough for it, but it was no dream. She woke up panting and sobbing, terrified of what had been there. Though she'd rejected it, the Old Magic would not let her go, or so the nightmare had gone. Elias had awoken her, obviously concerned, and embarrassed, Corinth told him to go back to sleep. Though he obviously was worried, he didn't protest, respecting her wishes. If he snuggled a bit closer to her, neither of them commented on it, but the next day, there was a level of understanding between the two that there hadn't been before.

Falling in Love: It was after several nights of Elias waking her up that Corinth finally told him anything. She didn't tell him everything, not yet, though she one day would. At the time, she just told him enough for him to understand she had regrets, that she'd done something terrible and despite her attempts to escape it, she felt she could never change. Corinth expected him to brush it off, to offer idle comfort but ultimately urge her to just go back to sleep; instead, he said the kindest things to her she had ever heard before. For the first time since the nightmares began, Corinth felt like she had when she first left the Mountain Pride: free to define herself, rather than to be defined by her actions and the actions of those around her. Though she understood it in concept, she hadn't truly understood that her healing could not happen in a day till he spoke with her. For the first time, Corinth really felt seen. She didn't realize it then, but later, she would say that was the moment she really fell in love with him. He didn't even know all the details, but he had seen a glimpse into the dark mess that Corinth was, and he had not turned her away. He had not hated her, and Corinth adored him for that. As time went on, she told him more, confessing everything that she could put to words. Some parts she'd never be able to explain; it was too painful to relive everything about how the Old Magic took hold of her and controlled her, and even if it hadn't been, she didn't know how to put to words the way it felt. How do you explain how something can speak to you, smile and cling to you, when it's not even visible? How do you express how it feels to have it surge through your blood, touching every part of you and changing you in ways you'd never imagined possible? Corinth would never be able to tell it all, and Elias understood that. He tried to understand the best he could, and in return, just as slowly, Corinth slowly learned his story as well. They were more alike than she'd expected, and it was just as exciting as it was terrifying. Elias didn't care how many times he had to wake her up from her nightmares, or how many times she had woken up feeling the same fears she had the night before. He was patient, and he always wanted her to talk through what she was feeling if she was up for it, even if she would only end up repeating things she'd already said in the past. In return, she did her best to offer him the same, and was rewarded in being able to support him in his own journey. Neither had known love, not the right kind of love, and though they did not fall quickly, when they both realized their love for each other, it was passionate like one would never believe. He was home, he was safety, he was love. They weren't perfect, but they were trying, and she didn't know what she would do without him. Elias

had so quickly become a permanent fixture in her life, and she wouldn't have traded that for anything. No matter what happened, she knew she had him, and it was because of that that she was able to face the world and face herself. And even when she hated herself, hated everything that she had done and gone through, she knew she wouldn't trade it for the world, because it brought her to Elias. He was hers and she was his, and that was all that mattered.

l(b)5 [1bf + 2f]:

Sometimes, Corinth did not want to sleep. It was silly; she knew she had to, and she would always end up going to bed sooner or later when she attempted to avoid it. Still, when she slept, Corinth had to face her nightmares. They grew less frequent with time, but they were always there, lurking. A reminder of her past mistakes and failures.

Her nightmares always centered around one specific fear, though they found numerous ways to prey upon it. No matter what happened, they always involved the Old Magic. Despite knowing her body was empty and her own, that there was no ancient being curled inside her chest offering enough power to do whatever she dreamed as it drove her mad, that her blood no longer sang a song that had never belonged to her to begin with, Corinth couldn't forget how it felt. She couldn't forget what lengths the magic had driven her too, that she had let herself go to. She wasn't proud of what she'd done, not anymore, and the magic she'd once loved was a symbol of everything about her old self that she now hated.

But deeper than that, the nightmares terrified her because of how right the magic felt as it settled back upon her. As far as she knew, it was never actually there; when she woke up in the morning, she couldn't feel it clinging to her, couldn't see any sign of it at all. That didn't stop her from fearing how good it was to have the power thrumming in her paws again, how right it felt to have the magic make a home inside her so it could guide her. She had changed, or so she wanted to believe, but her nightmares suggested that, were the magic to return to her, she would ultimately give in. The Old Magic saw her for what she was, tearing away every layer and shield till all that was left was a sniveling, jealous, stupid cub.

It knew her in a way nothing ever could, and every night she was forced to face it, it told her that was all she'd ever be. And sometimes, Corinth believed it.

So, when she had a particularly hard time and could feel that she was vulnerable to nightmares that night, Corinth would put off going to bed for as long as possible. Instead, she would stay outside and stare up at the night sky, counting every star that she could see. She always lost count along the way, but that didn't deter her; the night sky was beautiful, something she wanted to admire, and it felt safe in a way that sleep never did, perhaps because it was one of the few things left untouched by the Old Magic and her time in the Mountain Pride's prison. Though she had often practiced the forbidden magic at night, when there was no one around to notice her creeping off and playing with a fire she knew she could never fully control (and yet still underestimated), she had never really stopped to look at the sky. The magic ensured she kept herself firmly planted on the ground, focused on breaking apart the earth and the mountains. And once she was imprisoned, though daylight did somehow come in, there was no way to look at the sky. It was one of the first things she'd stopped to take in once she finally managed to escape; when she finally saw the moon and stars again, it was almost like seeing them for the first time, because they seemed far more wonderful than they ever had before. That feeling that

had welled up inside her was one she'd never forget, and so Corinth always found some solace in that sky, a small treasure that the magic couldn't take from her.

And that night, like many nights before, she could feel the anxiety welling up inside of her.

Corinth hated it, hated how weak and helpless she felt when she couldn't even fight against her own nightmares, but she couldn't face them. The purple lioness didn't want to be trapped by a past she had done everything to escape, but her fears that she never would actually change, that deep down she'd always be the same jealous cub, paralyzed her.

"Focus on the stars," she whispered to herself, a reminder that she ought not dwell on the anxiety, which would only make things worse. After all, the whole point was to distract from it so that, when she did inevitably go to sleep, Corinth would not be thinking about it and therefore would be less likely to suffer dreams about it (and less likely to remember her dreams in general). "A star for each breath."

One star. She breathed in. Two stars. She breathed out. Three stars. She breathed in. Four stars. She breathed out.

She lost track somewhere around two hundred and seventy one. It was higher than she usually got to; perhaps she was just getting better after practice, or she had paid less attention and had counted some of the same stars without realizing it before losing her place.

"Corinth, it's late," Elias murmured, pressing his head against her shoulder.

She was surprised by his approach, but ultimately didn't do much to react besides leaning a bit closer to him. "I know."

He let them stand there like that for a few minutes longer (it could have easily been a few seconds or a few hours, Corinth didn't really know) before finally breaking the silence again.

"Come lay down with me?"

"I'm scared."

"I know," he whispered, nuzzling her. "I wish there was more I could do. If I could, I'd chase every nightmare away from you. I'd have a nightmare every night if it meant you never would again."

"I wouldn't want that," Corinth said quietly, turning to look at him. It was a bit more forceful than she'd anticipated, but she resisted the urge to apologize. His eyes widened slightly in confusion, but he didn't interrupt, seemingly intent to wait and hear what else she had to say before questioning her. "I know that you have nightmares, Elias, even if they are less frequent. You have regrets, fears, everything that I have too."

Elias sighed, but there was a hint of a smile in his expression, even if it wasn't visible on his face. "You could just let me be sweet for once."

"Maybe later," she said with a pained smile, obviously trying to lighten the mood.

"Alright." They sat in silence for a few moments longer before he gently nudged her to her paws.

"Come on, let's get you inside. I'll sing you to sleep."

Corinth and Elias:

B01 - Thinking Spot [1bf]:

"You know, this is generally my thinking spot," Corinth joked as she gently took a seat by Elias on the hill side. His ear twitched, but besides that, he had no visible reaction to her intrusion.

Quickly realizing he wasn't looking to be cheered up, the purple lioness switched tactics.

"Everything alright?"

The answer was obviously no, but she needed a bridge to get to the heart of the matter. Unfortunately, Elias didn't seem ready to take her up on her silent offer to listen. "Sorry, I'll move so you can sit here."

Corinth shook her head, brushing her tail against his to ensure he didn't move so hastily. "It's alright, you can sit here until you feel better." After a moment of silence, she asked, "Can I sit with you?"

Elias nodded, so the former princess settled down beside him, happy to simply sit and look at the surrounding world. She liked being in his presence; perhaps it was weird to not have a steady stream of conversation, but both of them were content to enjoy each other's company without the need to constantly be discussing something. He was safe and comfortable, and Corinth appreciated how relaxed she felt around him. He had on plenty of occasions simply sat with her as she internally struggled, never pushing her to share, and it was about time she had the chance to return the favor.

She wasn't sure how long they sat there before he finally broke the silence. "I was reminded of her."

"Her?" Corinth prompted, unsure if she was meant to speak but deciding it was for the best.

"Your sister?"

"Yes, little Laken." Elias continued to stare straight ahead, his expression suggesting he was doing everything he could to stay composed. "I...she hated thunderstorms."

She blinked, understanding washing over her. "And last night's storm?"

"Reminded me of her, yes," he nodded. "Is it silly for me to still worry about her?"

"I don't think so. I was the one who caused so many problems for my sister; I still don't know how I feel about her. But I worry about her nonetheless."

That got a small smile from Elias. "I wonder if you would have gotten along. I think she'd find your assertiveness off-putting."

Corinth rested her head against his shoulder, looking forward again. "So she'd dislike me?"

"Not necessarily. I think she could have learned a lot from you."

"Were you two separated?"

The black and white lion beside her stiffened for a moment, holding his breath for a moment. Corinth was worried that she'd gone too far asking questions or touched something too tender, but then he breathed out and continued. "You could say that." It seemed that that was all the answer she would get, and she was content with that for now. That was why she was so surprised when he spoke again. "I left our pride of my own volition. I've told you that before."

"Yes," she hummed her affirmation.

"We'd gotten into an argument. Her mate," he almost spat the word. Obviously there was more to that than what might meet the eye, "kept restricting her. They didn't love each other, and suddenly he wanted cubs. I tried to urge Laken to leave, but she didn't want to hear it. She didn't want to just leave the pride; in truth, I think she somewhat liked the position she was in, even if she also hated it." Elias sighed. "She told me she didn't want to see me, showed me out of her den, and I was angry. I had tried so hard to protect her, but she didn't want to listen to me or my advice. So, that night, I left without her. I never even said goodbye."

"And you wonder if you did the wrong thing."

He seemed surprised by her assessment, but didn't disagree. "When I remember how little and fragile she was as a cub, I remember the sister I spent my whole life protecting. How could I just

abandon her like that? She was all I had for so long, and I left her in a den of wolves. What has happened to her since then? Is she okay?"

Corinth's tail entwined with his. "Elias, she's not a cub anymore. She is not your responsibility."

"But she was. She was for so long."

"And that wasn't fair on you," She said firmly before he could go any further with that argument.

"We all have things you regret. You remind me of that all the time, when my guilt is overwhelming me. Now it's my turn. I can't tell you everything that would have happened if you hadn't left, but I can tell you that we would have likely never met. And if your old pride is as dangerous as some of the bits and pieces you've told me make it sound, there's no way of knowing what would have happened to you. There's no telling if Laken would have changed her mind and listened, and if she didn't, there would be nothing you could do. You can't save someone that doesn't want to be saved, Elias."

He finally looked at her, his expression soft. "Because that was you?"

She nodded. "Yes, because that was me. Try as my sister might, I didn't want to be saved, not after she betrayed me." Corinth sighed, but didn't focus on her own regret. "I had to figure it out for myself, after I left. Her words may not have swayed me, but they did help me. What she did helped me make the right choice."

"But how can what I did help Laken save herself?"

"If she really wants to leave, when the time comes, she'll do it. And the fact that you held to your word, that you knew you couldn't stay there any longer and left, will weigh on her conscience.

From the little I've gathered from what you've told me, it sounds like, deep down, she wants to do what's right. Maybe you leaving her is the push she needs."

Desiree and Faye:

R01 [1f]:

Desiree and Faye have a peculiar relationship, to say the least. It is not a romantic one; how could it be, when they are currently sharing Desiree's body? They aren't exactly family, but they are certainly closer than friends. Such a development is essentially unavoidable when sharing the same head space, unable to avoid each other intruding on any interaction or thought. When the possession first occurred, it was uncomfortable and awkward for both of them; now, however, Desiree doesn't know what she'd do if the space Faye occupied was empty. Faye has protected her, advised her, and encouraged her. She pushes her to be better while also allowing Desiree the space to make her own decisions. In some ways, Faye is a mentor, and she is very protective of the young cheetah princess. She worries, however, that someday she is going to have to let her go, perhaps not by choice.

Desiree and Lunete:

B01 - Picnic with Auntie [2f]:

Desiree jumped a bit when there was a knock on the door. "Princess Desiree?" The guard who had been stationed to wait outside her door spoke in a loud, boisterous tone. If he hadn't proven to be one of her kinder guards, she would have complained about it, but in truth, the attitude was a bit refreshing, even if she did get startled when he tried to start conversations. "You have a visitor."

Di scrambled to get off her bed and to the bench that sat at the end of it, licking her chest to try and flatten a bit of fur sticking up in a feeble attempt to look a bit better. "They may come in!" There was a bit of shuffling outside, and then the door opened. Her guard stepped inside, bowing low enough to the ground that his helmet brushed against the floor as he announced the cheetah entering after him. "Mouthpiece of the Goddess, Voice of Keket, Sister to the Queen, Firstborn Daughter of Juste, Lady Lunete is here to see you."

The cheetah in question quickly made her way over to her niece, smiling brightly. "My darling Di," she cooed, pausing to look Desiree over, "you look as wonderful as ever. An absolutely beautiful daughter. Régine must be so proud of how grown-up you've become!"

Embarrassed, Di's ears fell back against her head as she awkwardly shuffled her paws. "I would like to hope so," she said politely, swallowing nervously. "What brings you here, Aunt Lunete?" Her aunt sighed a bit, a teasing glint in her eyes. "I miss when you would call me Auntie Lunete. It was adorably endearing."

"Why did you want to see me?" Desiree asked, hoping to change the conversation since she didn't know how to respond to the older cheetah's last comment.

"I wanted to spend some time with my favorite little niece. How would you like to come on a picnic with me?"

"A picnic?"

Her aunt nodded, gently smacking Desiree on the head with her tail. "Yes, my silly Di. I thought you'd like a break from all your tedious studying. My sister tells me you've been very diligent studying the duties of the heir."

Any conversation with Aunt Lunete about her aspirations was always awkward. It felt like Desiree was entering into a forest filled with traps, but she had no way of knowing where they were. So she just swallowed and nodded, deciding not saying anything would be the best course of action.

"With how much time you've spent cooped up in here, the fresh air will do you some good," her aunt added.

Cuore and Hadithi:

B01 - Flower Delivery [2f]:

"Cuore! Cuore, look!" Hadithi shouted through the flowers in her mouth, only to trip over her own paws in her rush to get to him and land flat on her face.

Petals went flying when she smacked the ground, but luckily most of them stayed intact. That, however, was not what the golden healer was worried about. He quickly dropped the poultice he had been working on, rushing over to check on the small cub.

"Careful, Hadithi!" He gently chided, using his paw to gently lift her back to her paws. "Are you alright? Did you get hurt?"

The little lioness shook her head fervently, just smiling wide like nothing had happened. "Look!" She said, voice just as muffled as before. Thank goodness she wasn't trying to say anything more complex, or Cuore never would've understood what she was saying.

"You brought me flowers?" He asked, amusement twinkling in his eyes.

"I brought you flowers!" She confirmed, nodding her head fervently. She delicately set them on the ground in front of her, bouncing in place in excitement. "Do you like them? Do you?"

"Yes, they're beautiful," he confirmed with a laugh. "Where did you find them?"

"By the nursery," she said proudly, puffing her chest out a bit. "Kubariki wanted to stomp on them to practice hunting, but I didn't let him. I wanted to give them to you so you could make medicine."

Cuore's eyes widened in sudden understanding, and he had to bite back a chuckle. "Is that so?" Hadithi nodded firmly with a fierce, "Yes! He shouldn't waste things like that."

Cuore didn't have the heart to tell the little cub that the flowers she gathered were absolutely useless when it came to medicine. The gesture was still incredibly thoughtful, and in truth, he felt a bit honored that she'd taken the time to try and gently gather them and bring them to him, even if they had gotten a bit beaten up along the way.

So instead, he said, "You are a very smart cub, Hadithi."

"Thank you!" She gasped, looking at him like she was staring at stars. He'd have to talk to the nursing mothers and make sure she was actually getting positive affirmation there. She was acting as if no one had ever praised her like that before. "One day, I want to make medicine like you!"

"What happened to being queen?" He chuckled.

Her face scrunched up in thought. "Can't I be a healer and the...the concert?"

Cuore laughed, gently booping her on the head. "You can be whatever you set your mind to, cubface."

Eris:

B01 - Sisterly Bonds [2f]:

Eris nervously made her way down the halls, ignoring the various rooms on either side of her and the noise of the prisoners (or lack thereof) as she stayed focused on her destination. She'd insisted that the guards remain at their stations or take their deserved rest rather than escort her; the prison was safe and secure with no way for its inhabitants to escape, so there was no reason for them to come along to protect her. Still, with the way some of the gazes lingered on her, she almost regretted it.

But she knew she made the right choice. This was already going to be an awkward conversation to have; the last thing she needed was to put her sister on edge by coming with guards. She'd never believe her if it looked like Eris believed she needed a defense against her. "Corinth?" She asked hesitantly, looking into the cell that her sister was supposedly being kept in.

And there she was, sitting in the corner of the cell and absently staring at the wall across from her. There was a moment of nothing, but then her sister slowly turned her head to look at Eris. She looked exhausted and defeated. Eris hated seeing the younger lioness looking like that. How could she have let things get to this point? Why hadn't she done anything to comfort her when she obviously had needed someone? If Eris had done something sooner, would they even be in this situation? Could she have saved her sister from feeling the things that drove her to the point of lashing out at the Mountain Pride, or had she noticed too late to take any action to change things?

"Corinth, I didn't want to lock you up in here. But the pride is terrified; they need to see you've changed before they'll trust you to be free. I promise, I'll do everything I can, but-"

"Don't worry, Eris." Corinth smiled, causing Eris to stop and blink in surprise. "I'm not mad."

"You're not?"

"Of course not," Corinth assured. "I understand." The word was tense and dark, and Eris stiffened, sensing what was about to come before the purple lioness in the cell even said it. "I understand that you lied to me. I'm not mad at you; you did what you needed to save your pride. I'm mad at myself for believing a single word you said."

Eris stepped back, horrified. "Corinth, I wasn't lying! I want to be the sister you needed. It's just-" Corinth bristled. "You're a little late for that, aren't you? You said needed; that means you and I both know that is in the past. I don't need a sister anymore."

"Please," the older princess begged, stepping closer to the cell again. "I-"

"Go away!" Corinth roared.

Eris sighed, not wanting to agitate her further. "I'll come back tomorrow."

"Don't bother."

Finnley:

B01 - Foolish Indeed [2f]:

"Momma, where are you going?" Finnley asked as his mother made her way towards the entrance to the den.

Lust paused, glancing back towards her cub and looking at him with an emotion he didn't recognize. If he were older, he would have recognized that emotion as regret. "Your daddy needs me to go somewhere for a bit, that's all."

The small cub wormed his way out from between his two sisters and stumbled towards her.

"You're going away?"

"Yes," she said softly, "but just for a bit."

"I thought we were all leaving together?"

His mother inhaled sharply. "Plans changed," she said softly. "Daddy wanted us to do something else instead."

Finnley's fluffy tail wrapped around his paws, as it was wont to do when he was nervous or upset. "But I thought I wasn't supposed to listen to Daddy. Why are you listening to him?"

Lust seemed to struggle for the right words. "Well...your daddy is very strong. Sometimes, we have to do what he wants, even if we don't want to. It's up to us to figure out if it's something too bad for us to do."

"And what he's telling you to do isn't too bad for you?"

"No, it's not," she said. If he were older, he would've recognized the obvious lie his mother told, but he was a cub, and therefore too naïve to see the signs of what was really going to happen.

"Go back to sleep, little one. Momma needs to go, before Daddy gets upset that she's taking too long."

Finnley reluctantly nodded. He was too little to notice anything was seriously long, but he still felt something was off. It was that exact feeling that had caused him to stir and question where his mother was off to so late at night. One day, when he understood what regret was, he would regret not doing more to stop her from going. But then, he had no reason or way to, so he nodded and ignored the bad feeling in his stomach.

"Okay," he said, frowning a little. Then he smiled brightly, adding, "Come home soon! I don't like going to sleep without you; it's scary."

He turned away too soon to see Lust begin to silently cry. He just knew she watched him creep back to their nest and snuggle back in between Fleur and Azalea before finally leaving. That

night was one of his strongest memories of his mother, one of his only memories of her. When he was older, he would wonder what he could have done differently, but then, the only thing he could think about was how he couldn't wait for her to come home. Foolish indeed.

B01 - Firefly Wishes [2f]:

"Come back here!" Finnley called loudly, bounding after the small bug after it flew off the blade of grass he'd last seen it on.

Azalea barely looked up at him from the rock she was curled up on. "Give it up, Finnley. You're never going to catch any of them."

"That's not true," Finnley defended, tail fluffing up in agitation. "Plenty of people catch fireflies. I can do it too."

"Why do you even want to catch one so badly?" She asked, pushing herself up into a sitting position.

He didn't answer at first, focusing his attention on another bug who had landed just a little ways away from him. Crouching down, he wiggled his butt in the air for a moment before springing forward to try and capture it, but he missed yet again. With a huff of frustration, he sat up, licking his chest before glancing at his sister.

"You actually want to know?" He asked suspiciously.

"No, I just asked so you'd ignore me," she shot back sarcastically, but then she relented a bit.

"Sorry. Yes, I actually want to know." When he still didn't seem convinced, she sighed and added, "I promise, I won't make fun of you."

After a moment of contemplation, uncertain if he actually ought to trust his sister's assurances, Finnley began. "Momma told me once that fireflies carry wishes."

Azalea interrupted before he could go any further. "I thought falling stars carried wishes." When Finnley glared at her, obviously not appreciating her contribution, she apologized. "Sorry, I'll be quiet. Keep going."

"When you catch a firefly," he explained, tone serious as he turned to scan the ground for another one to try and catch, "you make a wish on it. Then, when you let them go, they fly to the sky and become a falling star. When the star falls, it grants your wish."

"And what wish are you planning to make?" Azalea asked.

They both already knew the answer to that. "For Momma," he said quietly, not wanting to say the whole thing aloud.

Azalea didn't push the subject any further, and Finnley continued to move about, desperate to catch something. That was why he was so caught off guard when suddenly Azalea moved, snatching one out of the air when he was turned around. He did his best to hide the fact that he was peeking at her, but he did pick up the words she whispered.

"I wish Momma would come back." And then she opened her paws and the firefly darted up and away.

Fleur:

B01 - Daddy's Little Angel [2f]:

As their nursing mother gathered the cubs together, Fleur sat up straight and puffed out her chest. Their dad was coming to see them, and they needed to be on their best behavior. Finnley

sat quietly by her side, looking rather pathetic for the next heir to the pride. They were going to begin their official training soon, and that was how he decided to present himself? She couldn't believe it.

It was better than Azalea though. She was completely uncooperative, acting very childish as the nursing mother tried to get her to stay in place and behave. Fleur found the entire thing quite tedious; Azalea had unfounded anger towards their father, and she wasn't going to do what she was told if it was to impress him. If their keeper had really wanted to make Azalea behave, she ought to have said it was someone else coming to see them, someone that her sister actually had any respect for.

Right as the mother finally got Azalea to sit, their father stepped into the den. "How are my little cubs?" He said, looking at the three of them.

Azalea lifted her head in disdain, refusing to even look in his general direction. Meanwhile, Finnley fidgeted with his tail and avoided looking at anyone. Her brother really was painfully awkward; she didn't know how their father intended to make him into a proper heir. There was nothing about him that suggested he would be capable of holding such a position; she was certain the only reason he'd been picked was because he was the only male.

If her siblings were going to give such a spectacular failure of a greeting to their father, there wasn't even a reason to try very hard to do well. But Fleur was genuinely pleased to see her father, which was why she got to her paws and hurriedly (but gracefully) made her way to him.

"Hello, dad!" She said brightly, staring up at him with big bright eyes. "How do I look? Mother Irene made sure to brush my fur before you came.

"Adorable, my little flower. You look adorable." Pride crouched down to get a better look at her, letting her gently rub her head against his. "Have you all been behaving for Mother Irene?"

"Azalea hasn't," Fleur said from her spot by Pride's paws, smirking at the cub in question once she was sure her father couldn't see her less-than-innocent expression. After all, she was just a cub answering her father's question; how was she to know that repercussions her sister might suffer because of her tattling?

But she knew. She paid attention and listened when her father allowed her to spend time in his den, and she was more than happy to get Azalea in trouble just to demonstrate how much he favored her to her siblings.

Hayle and Salvus:

R01 [1f]:

At one point, if asked, Hayle would have said without hesitation that Salvus annoyed her to pieces. Though it would be a slight exaggeration, she would insist that she loathed him, that she would rather die than exist in a world where they were the last two to exist. Alternatively, Salvus would have spoken very highly about Hayle. He enjoyed antagonizing her, but he also admired her. He wanted to be around her, to get to know everything about her and understand who she was, what made her tick. Things have since changed. Salvus knows more about Hayle than he could have ever dreamed of, but the dynamic has shifted. Before, she had protected him at times from his own idiotic behavior; now, he protected her. In turn, she learned to trust him, allowing herself to be open to the lion underneath the goofy teasing and realizing Salvus had a lot more depth than she thought.

Kina:

B01 - Don't Forgive Me [2f]:

Kina woke up in a cold sweat. She lifted her head up, glancing around the small den. Beside her, Cole shifted a bit, but he ultimately did not stir. It was times like these that she was grateful her mate wasn't a light sleeper.

Slowly getting to her feet and carefully stepping out from the bigger lion's paws, Kina crept to the edge of their den, needing that breath of fresh air. Just a minute or two by the entrance, taking in the cool night air, and then she'd return to the nest and go back to sleep. That ought to be enough to calm herself down so that she could sleep peacefully.

"I may not be here anymore, but my love will last forever." Who would have thought such comforting words could invoke such a reaction in her? And yet, it was all Kina could do to keep herself from hurling her guts out.

Why was he there in her dreams? Why was he forcing her to remember the mistake she'd made, to relive that guilt? He had looked at her and had the nerve to say he forgave her. He forgave her, forgave her for murdering him. How could he do that? How could he forgive the fact that his own daughter had murdered him? How could he still love her?

And here she was, hiding from the mistake she'd made by running from her family. Her brother was married to the leader of this pride, and he had no idea what Kina had done. She was there lying to him, pretending that she hadn't killed Nasaba in cold blood when they had already won, all because a lioness she thought of as a role model (someone she now knew she never should have listened to) told her he had to die for getting in the way of justice.

She was a terrible excuse for a daughter, so was her consciousness simply trying to assuage her guilt by conjuring images of her dead father offering words of comfort? Or worse still, was it really him visiting her dreams, trying to tell her that he loved her anyways? The latter option somehow felt worse. Kina hated herself for what she did; she would never forgive herself for killing a lion who had done nothing but love and raise her. She had destroyed her family in one fell swoop, and it had all been for nothing.

Kubariki:

B01 [1f] - My Concert Consort:

"One day, I'm going to be king," Kubariki said, climbing onto the small rock in front of the nursery den. "I'm going to be amazing. I'm going to be even stronger than my dad!"

The smaller cub beside him giggled, trying to push him back to the ground. "Yeah, right. King Nasaba is so big!"

Kubariki puffed his chest out. "When I grow up, I'm going to be even bigger, Hadithi."

Hadithi didn't seem so convinced. "No way," she said, stepping back and shaking her head.

The bigger cub's tone grew a bit whinier at her disbelief. "It's true! My dad told me so himself. He said I'm already a lot tougher than him."

At that, Hadithi's eyes went wide with awe. "Really?"

Kubariki nodded vigorously, sliding off the rock he was perched on. "Yeah, so I need lots of practice. That way I'll be the best king ever."

Hadithi nodded, but suddenly frowned. "What'll I be then?"

"You'll be my con...my con...my concert, obviously." He completely missed the way his mother chuckled a little ways away when she heard him try to pronounce it.

"Wow, really?" Her eyes gleamed with excitement as she hopped around a bit.

"Yeah, silly. That's the king's best friend; they're always together. Like my mom is always with my dad."

Hadithi nodded, following along quite well with this logic. "Queen Hadithi. That sounds really good."

Kubariki grinned, playfully swatting at his friend. "Not as good as King Kubariki."

"Yeah, right!" Hadithi giggled, scrambling up onto the rock Kubariki had gotten off of. "Maybe I'll be king, and you'll be my concert!"

"That's not how it works. I'll be king because my dad is king. We're practicing for that, remember?"

"Oh, right." Hadithi stepped down and gave a very low bow to the other cub. "So, what does the king order?"

Lust and Pride:

R(b)1 [1bf]:

"You don't love me." The words burst out of Lust's lungs before she could stop them.

It was something she had known for a long time, though perhaps she tried to ignore the full implications of it. She did not care for Pride, hating that she enjoyed benefitting from the way he ran his pride. No, not his pride, but his cult, for that's what it was; a cult that preyed on those that were desperate to believe in miracles. However, she always had thought that Pride loved her, or at least loved the idea of her. It wasn't exactly a comforting thought, but it was something. He had chosen her specifically to bewitch and trick into becoming his wife and a goddess by his side; with how possessive he was of her, she had just assumed that he felt something when he was with her, no matter what that feeling was.

She never could have fallen for him when he acted so despicably, but perhaps a part of her hoped that he would fall for her, that maybe that would change things. Perhaps a part of her really believed the sweet words he'd said to her when they'd first begun to meet. That everything she had lost for him would one day be worth it.

Pride turned away towards the exit to her den as he gave a smooth response of, "Of course I love you."

"Look at me!" It sounded like a demand, but Lust might as well have been begging. She had had his cubs, cubs he had wanted so badly and who had been her only source of joy within the miserable church she called home, and since that moment Pride had barely given her a second glance. He kept the same standards for her, but he saw her much less; even the ceremonies and announcements he had often made her stand by his side for he no longer bothered bringing her too. She didn't contribute to them anyways, but now Lust was truly restricted to her den and only her den, with him often taking Finnley. "Look at me and tell me you love me."

Pride turned to look at her, but his eyes were distant. His mouth moved, but she didn't hear the words he was saying. The dull, annoyed look in his eyes got the message through loud and clear; his words would contradict it, but Lust knew enough after watching him lie for so long to recognize his real feelings.

Maybe he had never cared at all.

"Go," she choked out.

She wasn't sure if she hoped he'd try and protest her decision, try to correct the truth Lust had realized, but he didn't. He simply turned and left, not even bothering to comfort his mate whose legs wobbled and eyes glowed till he left. Then, she crumpled, quietly sobbing on the ground as she realized how foolish she was.

Lust didn't love Pride, but she knew that she could have grown to, had he changed. Instead, she was forced to realize even the bit of good she saw in him had been a lie all along; she was just as blind as all of his followers.

Pride did not care. Lust was a piece of his chess game that he no longer needed; she had provided him with an heir and daughters who could prove as powerful tokens in alliances. It was like taking the crown from a queen and reducing her to a pawn. Sure, she could remain such a thing in name, but Pride's gaze had turned to consorts and other ways to gain more power and become even closer to being the god on earth that he claimed to be. The half blooded snow leopard had been a stepping stone; if she had been more supportive, perhaps it wouldn't have come to this, but though she was too cowardly to actually stand up to him, she was not someone who could help him move forward. He needed someone blindly loyal, and Lust would never be that, so he would raise their cubs to be what he needed and keep Lust out of sight and out of mind as much as possible.

R(b)5 [1bf + 2f]:

Lust panted, pressing up against the tree and (not for the first time) cursing how much fluffier she was than the average lion. It was dark in the woods; she could barely see two paws in front of her, but at the moment, that didn't matter. She couldn't stop for long, so she would have to press onwards regardless of her inability to see danger in front of her till it would be almost impossible to avoid.

As she moved to continue onwards, something came slamming down on her back, and Lust let out a howl of pain as she fell to the ground. The half blooded snow leopard had already stopped for too long.

"I found you." Pride snarled in her ear, running his claws around her back. "Did you really think you could escape me?"

"What else was I supposed to do?" She choked out, eyes glowing bright as tears began to flow.

"I don't mean now," he growled impatiently, swiping a claw across her ears. "You tried to take them. You tried to take my cubs."

"Our cubs." Despite her desperation and fear, Lust couldn't help but grow angry at the implication. "They are mine more than yours."

"Then why did Fleur tell me about your plan?"

Lust's eyes stung as she managed to find the strength to get to her feet, trying to throw Pride off of her. "Shut up!" Had her daughter really done that? Had she really been corrupted by her father already? Lust had been so focused on ensuring Finnley did not become his father that she hadn't even realized he had gotten to Fleur.

Pride was merciless. Though she succeeded in dislodging him and throwing him off her back, he was back to his paws in moments, throwing himself atop her once more. Though both of them had guards of their own to defend them, evidently Pride was not a complete coward; he at least knew how to fight, and he did so better than Lust ever could. She wondered not for the first

time since this punishment began if he had purposefully kept her weak, wanting to ensure she'd never be a physical threat to him. It would be yet another explanation for why he continually kept her locked away in their den.

Maybe he'd just been waiting for her to try something so he could sentence her to a fight to the death.

"You will die," Pride snarled as he shoved her to the ground. "I will drag your body out of the forest, throw it down in front of the church, and tell them a demon corrupted you. That you were still weak, and that heaven has reclaimed you. That in your final moments, you promised to return to me, your husband who you love so dearly. And in the future, another will come along, someone who can stand by me the way you never could, and they will be my Lust. You will be nothing more than a distant memory; our cubs will not know you, the pride will not speak of you, and everything you believed will be for nothing."

"N-no," Lust tried once more to get to her paws, but it was futile; Pride slammed her down once again, and she cried in pain.

"Don't fight it, Lust. This is the way it should be."

"Laken."

He paused, front paws resting against her backs and claws digging in just enough to remind her what the pressure meant. "What?"

"I don't want to die as Lust. Lust is who you made me. I want to die as Laken."

She managed to turn to look at him, and Pride was taken back to a different time, when he'd first spoken with the half blooded snow leopard. He was young then, intelligent but still a fool when it came to things like love. Those bright blue eyes didn't sparkle with the life that they had then, life that he had thought he could capture and bend and direct in ways that benefited him. It reminded him that, somewhere deep down, he had held some affection for the lioness in front of him. He had chosen her because she had the makings to be a wonderful queen; unfortunately, a fairytale queen could not rule a bloodthirsty cult, and one would ultimately crush the other. Pride was not one to be sentimental, but when he really looked at her for the first time in moons, he realized the life from back then had died. He had done that; he had killed that.

He had killed her long before she'd stepped paw inside the arena.

He retracted his claws, stepping back and staring intensely at the half blood. "Go."

"W-what?"

"Go, Laken." His breaths were uneven and his chest hurt. "Lust is dead. She slipped into the gorge; I saw her head split on the rocks before the river washed her away. The demon left her, and the goddess will return in a new body one day."

"What are you doing?" Lust couldn't seem to fathom what he was saying, struggling to her paws and wobbling as blood trickled down from her wounds, mixing in her already matted fur.

A thousand thoughts shined in Pride's eyes, but he voiced none of them. Perhaps it was because even he wasn't sure why. Instead, he gestured with his tail behind her. "The woods eventually give way to a birch forest; once you're there, you can go wherever you want. Just never return, or I will be forced to kill whatever creature tried to deceive me and my followers in the guise of my dead wife."

Her whole body trembled as she began to stumble forward, but then she paused, glancing back and softly saying, "Thank you, Akilles." Pride didn't know how she knew the name he'd had before; as far as he could remember, he had never told anyone in the Mortal Church, though

with how resourceful and ruthless some of the other members of the pantheon were, he wasn't surprised someone had learned it.

Still, as Laken disappeared into the dark trees, he supposed it was fitting. In those brief moments, he had not been Pride. Had he been Akilles then? He didn't know; he hadn't been Akilles in a long time. And he wouldn't be again. As Laken disappeared, the only one who seemed to realize there had been a glimmer of somebody else for even a moment, Akilles lost the one tie he had left, the one final reminder of who he'd been before. Pride killed him, just like he killed everything else that stood against him.

He stood in the spot for a moment longer before leaving. There was nothing to mark the grave, no sign that anything had occurred there, save for the two who died.

Perhaps it was better that way.

Mort:

B01 - Cursed Cursebreaker [2f]:

"Mom, come on! We gotta go hide!" The little cub tugged on his mother's tail, desperately trying to get her moving.

The mother in question laughed, getting to her paws. "Don't worry, I'm coming. We have plenty of time."

Another little cub shook her head. "No, Dad is really good! He'll catch you super fast if you don't have an amazing hiding spot!" She then scurried off, obviously already having a spot in mind.

"7. 8. 9." The father in question had his head pressed against a tree trunk, sounding amused as he slowly counted upwards.

All of this Mort watched with a slight ache. It was an adorable scene, quite domestic, really. It was quite common once he helped a family for them to do something together, all able to have fun in a way they hadn't up until that point. The interactions were all very sweet, and Mort liked to watch them from a distance so as not to intrude.

But they were also a reminder of what he himself had missed. He had spent almost no time with his mother, and had never even met his father. He was a gift, his mother had said, or at least he was meant to be. He and his siblings were a blessing for her and her friend, dropped in this world from another world where she and her friend had a different relationship instead. Mort grew frustrated just thinking about the story.

Why was he removed from a world where he was seemingly loved? Where he was probably happy? In that world, had he and his siblings been able to play with his parents like these cubs were? Did their whole family have a great relationship with one another? He couldn't see how the answer could possibly be no to either of those questions, which frustrated him to no end. Instead of a happy family, Mort was cast out. His mother was married to someone else here, never having any romance with his father, and that lion hated him on sight. He was sent away, deemed as a curse.

Cursebreaker, his self-proclaimed mantle. How could he call himself that, when he himself was supposedly a curse? It was a cruel irony that was never lost on him. And yet, he kept at it, searching out those with curses and doing whatever he could to break them. And all the while he hurt himself, watching families reunite and celebrate the broken curse in a way he'd never be able to, oftentimes not even getting thanked.

That was alright. No one needed to know the price he often had to pay to break curses anyways.

Nimue:

B01 - Love Makes Us Crazy [3f]:

"I love you, Nimue. Why can't you see that?" Morganna stared at her with wild eyes, and Nimue tensed, uncertain just what her friend was going to do but fearing she might lash out at any moment.

"You killed me!" Nimue hissed back, knowing she ought to try and calm the situation down but unable to keep from pointing out the hypocrisy of Morganna's words.

"But I brought you back," the half blooded cheetah pointed out, stepping closer. Nimue took a step back, feeling a bit of the dirt under her paw give way. She was dangerously close to the hole, but she didn't know where to move to without setting Morganna off. "I didn't need to do that. With you out of the way, no one would interrupt my plans. I could do as I want, and nobody would know. It was the perfect solution. But you're my best friend; I didn't want you to die. Doesn't that mean anything?"

"You have to stop this." Nimue changed her tactic to begging, hoping that some form of pleading might get through to the friend she no longer felt she recognized. "This isn't the way to do things. This isn't you."

"Why would I be given this power if not to use it?" Morganna shot back, one paw stretching up to gently tap the clock on the chain around her neck. "This is what I was born to do. I was born to forge my own fate by whatever means necessary. If I make a mistake, I can simply turn the clocks back and do it all again. Haven't you noticed how perfect our relationship was till you suddenly could remember the repeating? I took special care to make sure we never argued; when we fought, I'd do it all again. I did that because I love you, Nimue."

"That's not love." The brown lioness said firmly, though her voice shook a bit.

"If only words could express my love for you," Morganna muttered, not seeming to hear her.

"But you're not listening. My words aren't enough. You aren't understanding." She looked up at Nimue, expression suddenly unreadable. "You're going to keep trying to stop me."

The response she gave was her grand mistake. "O-of course I am. You can't just do as you please."

Morganna stood there silent for a moment. "Then I must do this. I have to protect you and keep you out of the way. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Before Nimue could question what the half blooded cheetah meant, she lunged forward, shoving her full weight into her. Nimue shrieked as she lost the purchase she had on the ground, legs twisting and flailing as she was suddenly free-falling. She hit the rocky floor with a painful crack, and with a groan twisted to look up at her attacker and self-proclaimed friend.

"This is what needs to be done," Morganna said flatly. "Until you understand that I love you, you have to stay out of the way."

"What do you mean?" Nimue demanded as she stared up at her. "When anyone passes by, they'll hear me screaming and come see me. They'll rescue me."

"No, they won't."

Nimue wanted to argue, but Morganna disappeared from view. "Morganna?" She called out.

"Morganna, what are you doing?"

She got her answer shortly after. Suddenly, the pile of rocks by the hole began to tilt, and Nimue shrieked, scrambling backwards to avoid being hit by any of the rocks. She didn't avoid them all, getting smacked about by a few, but the injuries were minimal compared to what she would have sustained had she kept standing where she had before.

Morganna had trapped her down here. Nimue had to find a way out. She had to...

She had to kill her.

Yves:

B01 - Trauma Made Me a Bard [3f]:

Yves stumbled a little as he began to walk down the tight tunnel corridor again. His eyes were vacant, seeing a scene in front of him that wasn't really there. No, the half blooded manticore had been swept away to times gone by as he began to hum a haunting tune.

"Father, tell me, where did you go? Off to the shipyard, I'm sailing away," the song slipped out as he paused in his tracks, staring at the various directions he could go in the tunnel. "Father, tell me, why did you go? Into the ocean, it's my new home."

He continued forward, humming again before beginning a new verse. "Mother, tell me, where did you go? Off to the mountains, I'm visiting friends. Mother, tell me, why did you go? Fetching my blanket, deep in the snow."

As he began to hum once more, he turned down the right tunnel, seemingly without any real reason. He just continued to amble forward, tail dragging against the ground. "Raphaël, tell me, where did you go? Off to the castle, I'm happier there." This verse was much choppy, seemingly a new creation rather than anything established. "Raphaël, tell me, why did you go? Dancing with Keket, I hate you." There wasn't even any effort being made by the end as he practically spit the words, finally slumping against the tunnel's wall and sliding down to the ground. After a few more moments, he quietly spoke more than sang one last verse. "Yves, tell me, where did you go? Off to the rebels, I'm running away. Yves, tell me, why did you go? Belongs to a coward, that devil deal."

He didn't know what had jogged the memory of one of the songs he and Raphaël would sing sometimes. It had been one of Raphaël's favorites; perhaps that's why it hurt so much to think of it. The actual song had plenty of verses beyond the mother and father, but Yves wasn't actually certain what they were. He knew the ones he and Raphaël had sung, but he no longer remembered which ones were ones they had created and which were the ones he remembered people singing at festivals. Was there really a line about Grandfather and Grandmother, Brother and Sister? He was fairly certain the one verse he remembered fairly clearly, one about the moon, was one they had invented, but he couldn't even say that with complete certainty.

Yves had never understood why they'd always enjoyed singing a song about people leaving. He had assumed it had something to do with their own feelings of abandonment, but now, he wondered if it had been foreshadowing for eventually losing each other. The other songs they'd favored were also varying degrees of sad. "The Tragedy of the Kingdom of Ash" came to mind, as did "The Wreck of the Golden Crew." Those were popular festival songs, which was how they'd learned of them. Another was "Your Sweetheart," one of the few memories he had of their mother. In truth, he didn't even have a concrete picture to accompany it, no sensations or anything. All he remembered were the words his mother had sung with the faintest traces of her voice from time to time. When he'd sung it to Raphaël as a lullaby, he'd always thought it was

sweet. It wasn't till recently that he'd dwelled on it enough to understand the lyrics and realize the titular sweetheart had, at the end, died, leaving the song's protagonist alone.

Did he make the same mistake as me? Yves wondered halfheartedly. *No, he loved her too much to do what I did. He loved her enough to understand he had to let go.*

Yves and Raphaël:

B01 - You'll Always Be My Hero [2f]:

"No, Raphaël, please," Yves begged, pressing his nose against his brother's fur. "Come on, get up. Get up. We still have to see the water that eats the sun, remember? We promised we'd go see it together."

There in the alley between two buildings, the smaller cub coughed weakly, barely able to move his head to try and look at his brother. "I'm sorry, Yves," he said weakly.

Tears pricked at the blue cub's eyes as he looked around desperately, as if some sort of solution would be dropped from the sky for him to use. "No, this isn't it. You'll be fine, Raphaël. You just gotta stand up, okay?"

"Stop it," Raphaël said, somehow still managing to sound firm despite the weak state he was in. "It's okay."

"But it's not," Yves protested, unable to stop the tears that were falling fast and heavy now. "It's not okay, and it's not fair."

His brother didn't respond to that, instead giving him a wide, shaky smile. "You'll always be my hero."

"Stop talking like that," the bigger cub scolded, growing desperate. "Stop talking like you're leaving."

"You've always protected me and looked out for me. You've been the best big brother I could ever ask for."

"Stop it! Stop saying that! I didn't, I wasn't. This wouldn't be happening if I was!"

Raphaël dropped his head back against the dirt. "You can't fix everything, Yves. You can't fix something broken inside of me. Nothing you did would have changed this."

His brother sounded wise beyond his years, but Yves didn't want to hear wisdom right now, turning away to try and look around the alley like someone would be there to help. He just wanted someone to tell him that everything would be alright, that this was all just a bad dream.

"What about all the things we said we were gonna do together? We promised we'd do them all together. You can't...you can't break your promise." He was met with silence. "Raphaël?" His voice was almost nonexistent as he turned back to look at the frail cub. His eyes went wide, and horror made him choke on his words. "Raphaël!"

But even as he shoved his face against his brother's fur, desperately searching for some sign of breathing, some sign of life, he knew it was too late. Raphaël's eyes had gone dull, and his body had stilled, looking peaceful for the first time in weeks after the sickness had begun to wreak havoc on his body with a vengeance.

Fourth:

Akilia:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/5349833.akilia/gallery#38662984>

Cendrillon:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/9257352.cendrillon/gallery#38921006>

Corinth:

I(b)6 [1bf + 4f]:

Corinth stared into the darkness of the cave, silence acting as the only beast to accompany her. The sealed away places seemed to echo and fizzle with something inhuman, an entirely different domain from the world she knew. And yet, here she was, not only entering but intending to walk out with a piece of it for herself.

All the readings pointed to this being the way to reach out and grasp the Old Magic; it was the reason the places were forbidden for anyone to enter, even the current King or Queen of the Mountain Pride. At one time, they'd likely been guarded to ensure this ruling was followed, but now, the pride had gotten sloppy. Her mother had gotten sloppy. The Old Magic was such a far flung memory that no one even thought about the places it had once filled, perhaps not even remembering that it existed at all. But Corinth had read about it, obsessed over it, sought it out, and though she could feel it lurking, she couldn't reach it above. It was then that she learned of the sealed away places, places that were referenced even less in the restricted records than the Old Magic was. This was where the connections formed; this was why the pride could have those specifically dedicated to the pursuit of the magic. They had to connect to it on its terms first, bend it to their will by forcing a piece to come back with them. There was no record of what the practice actually was or how they did it; Corinth could only hope she'd be able to puzzle that out for herself.

She put one paw forward, then the next, anxiety welling up within her as it reminded her that this was not her space and she did not belong. But she wasn't able to step too far into the cave before her fears bested her; she was terrified of the dark, terrified of the ancient thing that weighed down the air. She didn't know what was housed deeper inside the caves, but if anything could live with the weight of the magic, she was terrified to face it.

She wanted the Old Magic, but she was not brave enough for now.

As she turned, something brushed against her fur. She bit back a scream, not wanting to risk being heard and caught by any passing members of the pride, even if she was likely too deep down to be heard (and even if no one was likely passing anywhere near this location, because it had long since been discarded as a spot for any real pride activity after this particular entrance to the deeper was sealed off). Instead, her eyes darted around as she tried to remind herself to breathe, wondering if she ought to just continue onwards.

"Who are you?" There was no other to describe it than a creature whispering, thrumming in the air around her.

It was something that existed, something almost tangible. That was the way one particular record had described the magic, and though she'd never felt it before, on instinct she understood that this was the feeling that the author had tried in vain to capture.

"I am Corinth," she answered.

It hummed its disapproval, buzzing in her ears. "That is what you're called, not who you are."

She wasn't sure what it wanted, so she tried another description. "I am the daughter of Hera."

"These words are meaningless. Who. Are. You." It was suddenly booming and loud, and Corinth felt the blood rush to her head like she had been turned upside down, despite the fact that her paws never left the ground.

Scrambling desperately for some answer to satisfy it, she gasped out, "I am the second princess of the Mountain Pride."

The feeling didn't fade, but rather suddenly stopped. Corinth felt as if she had just been dragged over a mountain range in seconds, head aching. "How?"

This seemed simpler to answer; then again, its first question had seemed simple too, and its reaction to her not knowing what it wanted her to say was not one she wished to experience again. "By birth."

It circled her, brushing up against her fur. "And what do you do?"

She paused, a lie resting on the tip of her tongue in some foolish attempt to impress it. It would be so easy, so easy to claim she was powerful and brilliant and strong and worthwhile. But Corinth had come down to this place because none of that was true, and if she couldn't claim the magic honestly, how was she meant to use it?

And so, as grand a tale as she wanted to spin for herself, she resisted. Instead, she spoke the truth. "Nothing. I gained a title through birthright, a title I did nothing to earn and a title I have no responsibilities associated with. I want them to see me, to understand that I can do more. I am a princess, but I am not, but I want to be. I want to earn the role beyond being born into it, to prove I am just as capable."

It was inexplicable, but she could feel the way it smiled, how it curled around her almost gleefully. It was appraising her.

"You want to make them pay," it said after a moment, the shadow of a grin in its tone.

"No!" She gasped, reeling back as the magic receded ever so slightly, hovering just by her rather than against her. "No, I just want to prove myself. I just want to prove that I am a capable princess too, that I am worth being a part of this family."

This time when it spoke, it was slower, more careful. "I see. How inexplicable." She could feel its wild nature begin to pick up again, another hint to just how uncontrollable it really was. In the records she'd read, that had seemed to be every magic user's fatal flaw: they thought they'd tamed it, and in doing so left themselves open to its destruction. This was ancient, wild magic, and though it may bend to her will, it would never be hers, a tool to be borrowed rather than mastered. "I see potential in you. Do you want to be opened? Do you want to be filled?"

The way it spoke frightened her, and the purple lioness shook her head. "No, I-I only need a little bit."

"How amusing. You believe that will be enough?"

"It has to be."

"Perhaps," it said, and then it went silent.

But it was there, clinging to her fur. Now, when she stretched out in her mind for it as one magic user had described in a partially destroyed record, she could feel magic there, a presence for her to shape and mold and harness as she needed. Dangerous, but also distant; she could only harness a small amount to pull to herself, and it wasn't an amount she could keep, always slipping back into the mass of magic it had been pulled out of when she didn't do anything with it. It was as if there was a barrier in place, something that kept her from accessing more than a little of the magic.

She decided that was for the best. Another safeguard to ensure she didn't suffer the same fate many magic users before her had, unable to be overwhelmed by the ancient power not meant for such a fragile vessel because of it. Perhaps that's why it asked if she had wanted to be opened; it had likely wished to break whatever it was that kept it at bay.

If she'd known then what her fate would be, perhaps Corinth wouldn't have ventured down into the sealed places, wouldn't have sought the magic that was meant to make her a proper princess, magic that only helped her become a villainess, a prisoner, and even a runaway (though that was technically a choice she made of her own volition). She sought the magic to help her deserve her place in the pride, and instead it completely shifted her world, corrupting her. And yet, despite the consequences, the end result was something good.

Sad sometimes, perhaps even bittersweet, but good. It was the magic that pushed her to rebel, that got her locked away, and that got her to escape. All of those events were the reason she now had no pride, just a mate who she adored dearly. In a sense, it freed her from a rank she felt she'd never be able to deserve. To not go to the deeper that day might not have changed anything; perhaps she would have done it anyways at a later date or done the same things in a different manner. There was no way to know, and the what if's used to keep Corinth up at night, forcing her to wonder if her status as a loner with no pride was shameful for someone born into royalty. And yet, there was a sense of pride in knowing that it was a role she had, for all intents and purposes, earned herself, a sense of pride being a princess in the Mountain Pride had never given her.

l(b)7 [1bf + 2f]:

"You are free now," it whispered, heavy in her ears. "You are free from that wicked place."

She had felt so stifled for so long, dying slowly in that cell no matter how fine her outer appearance had looked. The only thing that had kept her alive was the fact that she was able to access the Old Magic, defying all the rules the place was made of and using it to, eventually, escape. Now that she was free, however, there was a weight inside her that she had not had inside. It was the first time she realized just how heavy the magic weighed on her, how deep it sank its claws into her and how strong its hold was. It enveloped her whole life in a way she was only just noticing; like the magic users she'd been so determined not to follow in the pawprints of, she had gotten too lax in her awareness.

When had she let it fill her in this way, invading her every sense, every private corner of her mind till she could feel it buzzing in her no matter what she did? It was inescapable, and for the first time since the Deeper, Corinth was truly terrified of it. Because her freedom from the prison came at the price of another chain, this magic that had a tighter hold on her than she'd ever realized.

And if this was how tightly it clung to her when it was only first able to settle in her once again, how tightly had it held her before? How much had she let it dictate her actions, even as she thought that she had just as much control?

"They need to pay for their sins."

"What do you mean?" She asked softly, but she already knew the answer.

"Are you not enraged? You were locked away, betrayed. Your sister doesn't love you."

Corinth stared at the ground, flexing her claws against the rocks as she contemplated what it said. Finally, she settled on her answer. "Of course I'm angry. I told her as much when she first visited, as well as every time after. I hated her for what she did, for tricking me. But I don't hate her."

It was almost a relief to say those words, like a weight was lifted off her shoulders. "I don't hate her."

The magic hissed its displeasure. "The pride has wronged you. Your family hates you. Don't be fooled by pretty words stated when she knew you couldn't do anything. She is just as afraid of your magic as the rest of the pride."

"My magic?" She echoed. "We both know that's not true."

It ignored her pointed statement, as if it could brush its attempt to manipulate her (an attempt she'd seen through; had she bought into that before?) under the rug. "You can break the prison. You can free the rest. You can bring down the justice you wanted to see so badly."

"What are you saying?" She gasped, feeling sick to her stomach. "I spoke with those inside. They're not...they're not the same. They're dangerous."

"They are mine, like you. They can do what you wish."

"That's not what I wish," she said, tail lashing out behind her as a sudden realization began to set in. "That's what you taught me to wish. I never wanted to hurt them. I was hurt and wanted acknowledgement, and you...you turned that against me. You convinced me I wanted to fight them, wanted to hurt them the way they hurt me, when all I ever wanted was-" she choked, distress and anger mangling each other and becoming an amalgamation of a feeling so much worse.

"I only gave you a push," the Old Magic whispered. "It was all inside you. I just brought it out."

"I know that!"

It swirled around her, wild and wicked. "Then why try to blame me?"

"That's the worst part. I don't. I want it so badly to be your fault, but I still made the choice. I still let you have that power over me. I won't do that again."

"You won't?" The fact that it could laugh at her attempt at defiance, so cold and uncaring, unnerved her. This truly was an ancient being, something that was nothing like any other creature she knew. "You need me. More than that, you want me. You know you are more powerful than so many of those who have borrowed from me before. They destroyed themselves with power they could never hope to wield, burning and bleeding and breaking till their bodies were mangled beyond recognition. Others drove themselves mad. You saw both of those in there. You know you are far superior."

"Because I could escape? Because you didn't break me the same way? What do you even want from me?"

"Everything."

She held her ground, panting as she felt it try to sink into her again, trying to fill her heart and lungs and head and blood till there was nothing of her left, till it had every part of her under its control to use as it needed. "I won't bow to you," she snarled, whirling around as if she could somehow find a physical manifestation of it to direct her anger towards, "not now, not ever." It grinned tauntingly. "You think you can get rid of me?" It was as if it had bitten into her head, teeth sinking through her skull and into her brain, and she let out a loud shriek of pain. "You are mine to use as needed, the vessel I was waiting for; you became so the moment you agreed to let me in. You will do what all the others before you could not."

She didn't know what the ancient magic wanted that it couldn't do itself; at one time, she might have wanted to know, but no longer. Now, it took everything in her to try and throw it off, to twist and shake and scream till finally she freed up enough space to breathe.

"I don't need a payment of blood for their crimes! Your way is wrong; it can't give me what I want! Just get out, get out, get out!" She felt it sizzling inside of her, burning and freezing all over. It was an experience she'd never felt before, and she almost wondered if it was finally killing her the way it killed all the rest. "I'm the one that deserves to pay!"

"You don't believe that." It almost sounded afraid.

But she didn't yield against the pressure it inflicted on her, trying to press her to the ground under its weight. "I will die if that's what it takes. I will never open to you again; I will never let your darkness persuade me ever again."

And suddenly, it was gone, and Corinth was left alone with only herself and her cacophony of emotions to keep her company.

l(b)8 [1bf + 1f]:

Corinth wants to be a parent badly. She is also absolutely terrified of the thought of being one. She never had a good relationship with her parents. Both of them were fairly absent figures in her life, and the little interaction they did have left much to be desired. It hurt to overhear the rumors that she was born as a desperate attempt to save their mateship, and it hurt even more to realize said rumors were true. When you overhear enough conversations, it becomes possible to read through the lines with the context you've been given, and unfortunately for Corinth, that was exactly what she managed to do. She watched and listened to Odysseus and Hera interact enough to learn that Odysseus had pushed for them to have cubs, believing that that would keep them together. It was foolish, but Hera went along with it, though Corinth could never figure out why. Perhaps she too was simply desperate to find something that could make them work; while not very satisfying, it was the only conclusion Corinth could come to that seemed like a believable reason (however illogical).

Regardless, Corinth was born, and she did nothing to help the state of the mateship. In fact, she arguably made it worse. Hera wanted nothing to do with her; she was a reminder of a mistake, and she couldn't compare to her half-sister, Eris, who Hera so adored. It was obvious that just as she was a painful reminder of her father, so Eris was a reminder of hers, and despite the fact that Hera also split up with him, it was obvious that she had had genuine feelings for that lion. And so, Corinth grew up feeling inferior to her sister, less loved and worthy and capable. Odysseus almost seemed to forget about her once he realized Hera wanted nothing to do with her; though he'd visit her from time to time, as she was not nursed or raised by Hera herself, Odysseus typically acted almost as if he had no daughter. Looking back on it, she can never

decide which one was the worst: the father who at least seemed to like her when he remembered she existed, or the mother who remembered her existence and hated her for it. With no real role model for parenthood, she only has stories and her observations of other parents' interactions with their cubs as guides to determine what makes a good parent. She already has examples of what not to do in both of hers, but she does fear that the terrible job her parents did will cause her to fail as well. She knows a parent should love their children, and should she have some of her own one day, she knows she will do everything within her power to ensure they never feel like they are competing against one another. If she unintentionally led her children to feel the same way that she did growing up, it would destroy Corinth. That is the biggest reason she is so afraid; she is so afraid she'll mimic the mistakes of the past and raise a child who will follow the same path she took in her youth. Corinth wants to love and protect and guide them in any way she can, but she doesn't know how much is too much and how much is not enough. So instead, she hesitates, not wanting to give up on having cubs but also not wanting to move forward with it in case she isn't prepared.

The first time Elias asked her about having cubs, she ran away. It wasn't her proudest moment, and she didn't run far; she had nowhere to go, after all, but beyond that, she didn't actually want to leave Elias. She just needed to escape, to calm herself down and work through her problems rationally. Her mate, of course, had no idea that that topic of conversation would be so hard for her; while he knew of her feelings towards her sister and the fact that her parents were fairly absent in her life, it wasn't till she returned and explained herself that he learned just what exactly that entailed. Once he knew her fears, Elias was able to voice his own concerns stemming from not having any memories of his own parents, and though the discussion wasn't easy for either of them, it helped remind Corinth that she wouldn't be alone in the process. Elias was also able to clarify that he didn't even mean to have cubs right then; he had just been trying to broach the subject with her so he could learn if that was something she was open to in the future (though he retroactively stated he probably could have had more tact in broaching the subject with her). That had calmed her down significantly, and they were able to discuss from there how they could help each other become more comfortable and confident for when they were ready to start a family of their own.

It terrifies Corinth still, but less so than it once did. She has a partner by her side, something neither of her parents did; that is what she clings to when she is most afraid of talking about parenting with Elias or thinking about what might become of her cubs. The most important thing for a parent is to remember that they are not alone, to have a support system to help them, whether that be their mate or pridemates or friends or someone else entirely.

I(b)9 [1bf + 1f]:

"Corinth, I never wanted to hurt you." The purple lioness in question didn't budge, sitting and staring at the wall in front of her with her back to the speaker. They were not dissuaded by the show Corinth made of ignoring them, however, and persisted. "I know you're hurt by me putting you in here. More than that, I know you've been hurt by how I acted before this point; you're *still* obviously hurting. But I-I never meant for any of that. I didn't know-"

Apparently that was enough to set the lioness off, because she was on her feet and whirling to face the unintentional antagonist in seconds, fur bunched up and tail lashing behind her as she bared her teeth at them. "That's the problem, Eris. It was an accident; you didn't mean to. You

didn't even notice I was hurting, or maybe you did, and you just enjoyed watching it. I bet you liked watching me get hurt, watching me spiral out of control and seek out any and every way to finally for once get ahead and be better than you."

Eris' eyes flashed, hurt evident in her voice. "No! I hated it when I realized how you were feeling, hated that I was contributing to that, no matter how unintentional it was. But I didn't know what to do, so I didn't do anything. I was a coward, Eris, I admit that, but what you're saying? I wouldn't...I would never ever want you to feel that way, let alone because of my actions."

A growl bubbled up in Corinth's throat. "And I'm supposed to believe that?"

"Yes," Eris replied, almost desperate. "What happened to you, Corinth? Two days ago, we talked, and I actually felt...it felt like we'd connected, like we were almost sisters like we should have been growing up. What changed?"

Of course Eris wouldn't know, and Corinth would never tell her. Two days ago, she had almost begun to believe what Eris was telling her, almost believed that they really could be a family again, but the flame of that hope would dwindle when Eris wasn't there to stoke it. And yesterday night at a particularly low point, she'd reached out for the Old Magic like she'd tried time and time again since being locked in there; the difference was that, that time, she actually managed to take hold of it.

It wasn't for long, but it was enough. For the brief seconds the magic had been able to cling to her, it had left one word in her mind, Eris, and one feeling in her heart, rage. The rage festered quickly, dredging up all of the terrible experiences and feelings inside her because there was nothing to distract her, and soon it evolved into hatred for the one she perceived as the culprit. All it took was that one moment of magic, and she was back to square one; all of the work Eris had done to try and build a relationship between them was destroyed like a tower of pebbles by a short gust of wind.

She shouldn't have been able to reach the magic there. The whole point of the prison was to keep the Old Magic out, and for the most part, it did its job. Unfortunately, the prison itself was created using that very magic; in fact, it was one of the only things connected to the Old Magic that the Mountain Pride still used. All of that meant that, in theory, someone would be able to use the very magic holding the prison together and stifling use of any other magic. Corinth hadn't known all of that upon entering, and she wouldn't till she could hold onto that unpredictable magic for a bit longer and talk to it. All she'd known was that it was all she'd had, so even though she'd believed it to be impossible, she kept trying it nonetheless.

She wanted out, and she wanted to make Eris pay for what she'd done.

But she could hold her tongue, and so she did, once again turning around and staring at the wall so that she could ignore her visitor. Eris seemed to understand no progress would be made that day, and she too relented, disappearing down the halls of the prison and outside. She was free and Corinth was trapped, and neither was what the other deserved. All of her family, all of her pridemates had wronged her; they should all be locked up, not Corinth. And yet, she was on the inside staring out at them through the fractured glimpses Eris' visits offered her, and she hated it.

No matter what Eris said, she knew it wasn't accidental. They'd all known what they were doing to her, and she wasn't going to make the mistake of believing what Eris had to say again. Their actions were intentional and meant to hurt, but they weren't the only ones who could play that game. Thoughts of revenge swirled in her head, her only motivation and fascination in a cell that

gave her nothing else to do besides sleep and eat when food was given. There was no one to talk to; the guards wouldn't speak to her beyond barking out orders, and Eris was her only visitor. That was, in truth, the biggest mistake made, for if she hadn't been left to her own devices and in her own head, perhaps she never would have reconnected with the Old Magic.

I(b)10 [1bf]:

Corinth's sense of morality has seen every end of the spectrum, to say the least. Her past and current self would be at complete odds with each other on the subject; after all, her younger self's insatiable desire for vengeance disguised as justice is exactly the sort of thing she now condemns. In fact, vengeance is one of the worst things Corinth believes a lion can do, having seen the consequences of it in so many different ways both in her life and in the lives of the prisoners of the Mountain Pride. With time, she has realized that there is a difference between justice and vengeance, but the line between them is thin and easily crossed. One has to tread carefully and be mindful of how closely entwined the two are, because if your wits are not about you you are liable to cross over without even realizing it.

A good person seeks out justice; Corinth believes that wholeheartedly. If one does not act against evil, they are almost as bad as the one committing the evil, as they are standing by idle and letting it triumph through their inaction. Corinth wants justice to occur in those scenarios, especially because she wishes she herself had a way to bring those who hurt her to justice (even though she believes she forfeited her right to that the moment she retaliated with far worse actions). If someone does something wrong, they should be called out and punished for it, for without any correction, how will anything ever change?

The issue, of course, is how that justice is enacted. Corinth knows there is a right and wrong way to go about it; after all, she herself did many things that would have invalidated any justice she had intended to dole out. Looking back on it, by the time she staged her attempted coup, she isn't even sure that she was trying to make anyone pay for their actions anymore; the Old Magic had twisted and manipulated her to such a degree that her own motivations were warped and confused beyond belief. The only thing she does know is that that cemented the fact that she had no right to try and bring anyone to justice, because her sins were far worse than anything they did. She acted without regard for anyone, hurting lions who had absolutely no involvement (who likely didn't even see what was going on within the royal family beyond rumors and speculation, who had no way of knowing there was anyone that needed to be brought to justice) in some selfish display of power. At that point, she was no longer bringing about justice, but rather was simply trying to get revenge.

It is not hard to be bad. One would think it would take a conscious effort, and to a certain extent that's not wrong; if one wants to be well and truly evil, it does involve jumping through some mental hoops that a regular person would likely never entertain. But being bad and being evil are not the same thing; instead, being bad is simply a stepping stone one would take to get to being evil. It is easy to think you are doing what's right, only to look back and realize you were too blind to see the terrible actions you took. So was the case with Corinth. With enough poking and prodding, the Old Magic manipulated her exactly where it wanted her, knowing exactly what puppet strings to yank at what time to make her dance the way it needed. The more she talked with it and the more injustices in her life it pointed out, the more sure she became that she needed to do something about it. The problem arose when the Old Magic offered solutions; she

had already entertained that path when she sought out magic forbidden to anyone in the pride, even going into an area sealed off and abandoned by the Mountain Pride to connect to it, and so it wasn't hard to lure her in further. A good cause can be corrupted and a good reason can be used to try and justify terrible things. At the time, Corinth didn't realize that, but now she does, and that is a lesson she will never forget.

Becoming bad is easy, but coming back to being good afterwards is much, much harder.

Corinth and Elias:

R01 [1f]:

Elias and Corinth's relationship is undeniably a romantic one. After a somewhat awkward start, the two grew closer and closer, seeing the deepest, rawest parts of the other and loving them in spite of it. They are loners and so are no longer with a pride, travelling as they see fit and almost never too far away from each other. They never did anything to officially become mates as they no longer were associated with a group that could perform such a ceremony, nor did they see a need to. They knew they loved each other, and so they decided that they were now mates. The two know each other on a deeper level than one might realize from just a chance encounter, but watching them long enough makes it clear that they understand each other in a way no one else likely could. The fact that they are often content simply to be in the other's company without even speaking is proof enough of that.

Eilidh:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/10022344.eilidh/gallery#38995018>

Fleur:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/11577368.fleur/gallery#38924595>

Iona:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/8534182.iona/gallery#38994324>

Keket:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/9257429.keket/gallery#38925795>

Lust:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/7372514.lust/gallery#38685862>

Maji:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/5349888.maji/gallery#38916965>

Nychta:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/11517131.nychta/gallery#38917566>

Raphaël:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/7737132.rapha-l/gallery#38664659>

Vesuvius:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/11619923.vesuvius#38889385>

Yves:

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/7737146.yves/gallery#38890404>

Yves and Raphaël:

R01 [1f]:

Yves and Raphaël have a complicated relationship, to say the least. Once upon a time, they were brothers; technically speaking, they still are. And yet, were you to ask either of them, it is unlikely they would refer to the other in such a way. When they were little, they were incredibly close to each other, having no one else to lean on and so relying on each other for everything. Yves was Raphaël's hero and protector, and in return Raphaël was what Yves cherished most. Now, however, the two are completely at odds with one another. Raphaël hates his brother, not for the deal he made, but because of what he perceives him to be. Yves hates, however, himself for the deal he made, but even more than that, he hates what his brother has become and the fact that, for all intents and purposes, it is his fault. He didn't realize when he made the deal that he was agreeing to allow a demon into Raphaël's body, and he has regretted it every day since then.

Fifth:

Abraxis

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Rational, Knowledgeable, Kind / Negative: Awkward, Anti-Social, Oblivious

Amir

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Funny, Loyal, Supportive / Negative: Facetious, Irresponsible, Flippant

Amity

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Logical, Responsible, Independent / Negative: Abrasive, Overly Critical, Apathetic

Aphrodite

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Empathetic, Thoughtful, Sedulous / Negative: Indulgent, Oblivious, Overly Sensitive

Armageddon

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Clever, Determined, Independent / Negative: Aggressive, Standoffish, Sore Loser

Azalea

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Perceptive, Affectionate, Veracious / Negative: Skeptical, Defensive, Spiteful

Barakoa

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Family-Oriented, Obedient, Cautious / Negative: Jaded, Stickler, Judgemental

Callahan

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Dedicated, Optimistic, Sweet / Negative: Foolish, Weak-Willed, Pushover

Captain

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Faithful, Sympathetic, Fatherly / Negative: Passive, Guilt-Ridden, Reticent

Cendrillon

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Ambitious, Self-Aware, Meticulous / Negative: Conniving, Selfish, Petty

Cetus

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Relaxed, Casual, Creative / Negative: Lethargic, Annoying, Disrespectful

Dionysus

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Creative, Perceptive, Bold / Negative: Disruptive, Malicious, Spiteful

Dissent

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Introspective, Sedulous, Loyal / Negative: Reserved, Self-Deprecating, Self-Destructive

Egan

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Honorable, Romantic, Disillusioned / Negative: Lovelorn, Passive, Stagnant

Eilidh

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Romantic, Sympathetic, Well-Meaning / Negative: Meddlesome, Emotional, Overly Sensitive

Elias

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Empathetic, Family-Oriented, Protective / Negative: Dependent, Overly Lenient, Hesitant

Eris

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Respectful, Punctual, Organized / Negative: Stubborn, Oblivious, Melancholy

Greed

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/10126438.greed/gallery#46742162>

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Intelligent, Calm, Patient / Negative: Selfish, Cowardly, Greedy

Hayle

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/5523515.hayle/gallery#46742722>

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Passionate, Self-Reliant, Honest / Negative: Judgemental, Stubborn, Blunt

Helios

I10 [2f]:

<https://toyhou.se/5668191.helios/gallery#46403078>

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Sociable, Sweet, Competent / Negative: Anxious, Romantically Naive, Tryhard

Keket

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Persuasive, Cunning, Ambitious / Negative: Entitled, Cruel, Deceitful

Pride

I02 [1f]:

Positive: Charismatic, Audacious, Resolute / Negative: Mendacious, Cowardly, Prideful

Sixth:

Lion

I? [#f]:

Prompt or link

Breeding Prompts:

Kusafiri and Maji:

K1, M3 [618]:

Immortality is a blessing and a curse.

Kusafiri had known that for a long time. It didn't make it any less daunting to be constantly faced with that reality when with Maji.

And he never said a word about it to her. How were you even meant to broach that subject with someone? It was something he could never give her, and truthfully, he wasn't sure he would even if he was given the choice. He loved Maji, but it was in his own way, the way a being who

has been and always will be beyond normal comprehension can grow to care for a creature that lives for what is ultimately only seconds of its long life.

And though he never said it to her, Maji understood it. He didn't know she did, or maybe he did, deep in his unconscious mind, and simply chose to ignore that. She assumed it was easier for him to see it that way, to believe she would be upset with the reality that, in the grand scheme of things, she was such a small element of his life.

But she had loved a demon before. A demon who had tricked her, trapped her, possessed her, yes, but whom she had initially loved. Maybe the water demon had always been manipulating her, or maybe, in some twisted, demented way, it had truly cared for her, but regardless, before it had showed its true colors, she did love it.

If nothing else, she could at least remember those feelings. Despite every other element of her former life being lost to her, she knew that she had really, truly cared for that demon.

Was Kusafiri a demon? Maji didn't know. He didn't speak about the tales that surrounded him and his name, and she didn't ask. She didn't need to. Somehow, she knew, knew that there was a darkness clinging to him that she had glimpsed in some way before. Like the water demon, Kusafiri was a being outside the bounds of times known by a mortal, and Maji didn't care.

He probably found it odd how fond she was of him. But she found it odd too, how much he cared for the pride he had taken residence in despite so obviously (to her at least) being something entirely different from the lions around them. Still, she saw no reason for it to change anything.

Kusafiri never told her what brought him to the water that night. He didn't have to. Both relics from a time long gone by, they had found each other, maybe by fate, maybe by chance. With the demon inside of her gone, she would be free to once again grow old and die, not knowing if any remnants of the life she had forgotten were even still alive, since she had no way to know how long she was enthralled for. That was alright. Kusafiri helped her integrate into the pride, helped her breathe when all she could hear was that demon in her ears, trying to lure her back to the place she had barely escaped, till she couldn't hear it anymore because he was there instead; and in turn, she offered him someone to be around who wouldn't always be looking at him with eyes that could never hope to comprehend but so desperately wanted to, who had no interest in teasing his stories out of him or prying for information he was not ready to give (and maybe never would be).

They were blessed, they were cursed, and it didn't matter, because even if it was really only for moments in the great expanse of time, they cared for each other.

That was enough.

Konan and Ruin:

K1, R2 [577]:

He was never hers to have, but gosh, did she wish for him anyways.

It was foolish of her to venture from the pride. Outside of the Sky Oasis, she was an outcast; and yet, even inside the pride, though it was safe, it was no less lonely. Her terrible scarring often scared the cubs that Icarus would find, leaving her reluctant to venture out too often, and even the pride members that weren't scared by her appearance were often equally as freaked out by her gift. It was like she had been created and formed specifically to ensure she would never be able to fit in.

Some part of Ruin wondered, as she always did when she decided to venture down the mountain and out into the wilderness, if there was a reason to come back. She'd walked for who knows how long before reaching the ocean cliffside, staring down at the water and wondering if the fall would really be so bad.

But for everything in her that felt that pain would be equal to that she already suffered, another part of her assured her that she was not yet finished. Despite everything else, she was not completely alone and neglected; Icarus and Hadithi had proven to care for her, and if nothing else, the Sky Oasis at least did benefit from her gift. There was more she had yet to weave, and she had been recognizing the thrumming inside of her of a new message for days now.

In a cruel twist of irony, as she came to realize she could at least find a purpose for herself (even if it was not the one she wanted) and turned to go, Ruin slipped.

She closed her eyes and braced herself, unable to face the water and jagged stones she was plummeting towards, yet she never hit them. She just felt the impact of hitting the water, and then everything went dark.

When she opened her eyes, she was laying in the sand, a concerned lion leaning over her. It was as if someone had bottled the most beautiful sky and coated his coat in it. The air with which he carried himself was unearthly, and Ruin immediately felt drawn to him. Though the Sky Oasis had none of its own, Ruin's birth pride had believed in gods, and she recognized this lion as one immediately.

"Are you alright?" He asked. Ruin tried to answer, but just ended up spitting up water and sand instead. The lion gently shushed her to keep her from sputtering too much. "My name is Konan. I'm sorry I wasn't fast enough; if I had been, maybe you wouldn't have hit the water."

Even as she shook her head to try and make sure he knew it wasn't his fault, Ruin's treacherous heart was already falling.

She stayed with him for several days, for once in her life actually feeling treasured, maybe even adored. He helped her heal, even seeming to grow to have feelings for her too, but when her pain had dissipated, he suddenly seemed distant.

"I'm sorry," he finally said one morning, almost transparent in her sight. "Ruin, I-I should have told you, but...I am a demigod, a demigod of suffering. And I can't...I can't manifest to someone who I can no longer justify as suffering."

And then he was gone, and Ruin was left to find her way back to the Sky Oasis alone.

Egan and Keket:

E1, K1 [597]:

Once upon a time, she was his and he was hers, and everything had been right.

Egan remembered those times fondly. Cathal was a wonder, and every moment with her felt reckless and beautiful. She yearned to go further, to ascend to godhood and stand alongside the likes of Iona or Zion, while Egan was content to remain in his position as a demigod under Keyne.

Maybe he should've known that his ambitions were not high enough for him to remain with her. Maybe she longed for heights too high for him to ever reach. Maybe that was why she was the demigod of constellations, the one who placed the stars in the sky in the stead of a long-dead goddess, and he was just the demigod of the sunrise, the one who painted the sky each morning to symbolize the brief moment his father and mother were able to meet.

He never learned for sure what happened. Cathal had told him one night that she had finally won an audience for herself, that she had finally done enough and earned the right to plead her case. She would go before the gods of the pantheon and, should they rule her powerful and capable enough, ascend to godhood. And in that moment, he had sworn that he would follow her wherever she went.

But when she returned, there was something wrong.

She looked *wrong*.

There were horns atop her head and shadowy tendrils that sprouted out from her back, more sinister than any creature he'd seen Cetus bring forth from the deep. And her eyes, those bright eyes always filled with excitement and wonder and ambition, glowed red with a rage Egan had always known Cathal possessed but never believed would rise to the surface, that he had never truly understood.

"Cathal?" He questioned.

But she was silent. She didn't answer him, simply creeping off into the den to sleep. Egan did not join her; he stayed outside and stared vacantly at the world as he wondered what they had done to her.

Or, as he would come to learn, what she had done to herself.

When he returned the next day, she was waiting for him. There was no explanation, no greeting, nothing but words that sounded hollow and empty. "Come with me."

"Cathal, what are you talking about? What happened?"

"We could be gods, Egan. There is nothing holding us to these stupid pirates and their idle worship. Their prayers do nothing; if they did, it would mean something that they prayed to gods who are long dead. The pantheon is a joke. Do you really believe they are the only gods, the only creatures powerful enough to achieve such power? Egan, look at me. I am more powerful than any of those elder fools. I can give you that power too."

Egan struggled to speak. "I don't...I don't want that."

"You swore that you'd come with me." And her tone stung, not because she sounded betrayed, but because she didn't.

As if she had expected this all along.

"You know I can't. Not this way. Please-"

She left, and when the morning came, the various ships of the Scarlet Crew swore the sunrise wept. On the wind, he heard stories of a kingdom rising up under the guidance of a goddess who called herself Keket. Eilide fed him the information, and he was never sure whether he loved or hated her for it and the pitying looks she gave him.

It didn't matter. The lioness he'd fallen in love with was long gone.

Greed and Gluttony:

Ge1, Gl1 [554]:

All of the gods were selfish in their own right, but of the six remaining members of the Mortal Church's pantheon, Greed had quickly come to realize that he and Gluttony were by far the most wanting.

Gluttony was certainly not the most intelligent of the gods. She was arguably the least cunning, preferring to solve problems with her paws instead of her words, and was one of the less revered because of it. To look at it from a more positive angle, she was one of the most

trustworthy of the other five gods, brutally honest and blunt with her intentions. She was an open book, save for the subject of the pantheon's godhood: when it came to that in particular, Greed could not tell whether or not Gluttony actually believed what Pride was claiming. But the fact of the matter was that both Gluttony and Greed were *wanting*. Greed was always craving more, whether it be of his followers, his possessions, or his influence. He was not, however, quite as reckless as some of the other pantheon members. Greed was far less willing to put his neck on the line to gain what he wanted, valuing self-preservation above satiating his greed. After all, if he died, what was the point of gaining any of it?

Similarly, Gluttony seemed to constantly be yearning for something new. She did not want the same way that Greed did; she seemed less focused on gaining more of the things she already had and more interested in the new, constantly looking for something she hadn't seen before. Perhaps that was why she was always so eager to fight in comparison to a god like Envy or Pride: the chance to fight someone she hadn't before was almost guaranteed to be new and exciting, a break from the monotony. Gluttony craved the new and exciting, and so her hunger often found itself aligned with Greed, who was more than happy to take her scraps for himself. It wasn't all that surprising, then, that Greed approached Gluttony to help him with his desires. He was typically not a jealous god, preferring to leave such things to Envy (though he supposed his proclivity towards those feelings was why Envy favored him from among their companions, even if he was rather ambivalent towards her). But to want is to desire, and how can desire be built if not from seeing something someone else has that you don't? Greed had watched Pride and Lust together, and although their relationship was a sham, he still experienced a desire for something similar. In the same way, he found himself desiring cubs of his own, even after the disastrous way things ended for Lust. That, he believed, was the fault of Pride; in fact, the disaster almost made him want it even more, greedy to have what Pride had not.

And who better to request affection from than Gluttony, who hungered for anything and everything? The relationship was anything but traditional; there was a general level of respect between the two of them, a sudden attachment that ran deeper than most (if not all) of the other relationships between the gods, but it was not love.

But perhaps it could be, someday, or perhaps it was as close as the Mortal Church's gods could get.

Kidogo and Zareb:

K2, Z2 [524]:

"Stay with me."

For a moment, he wonders how three simple words can have such a profound effect on him.

Then he remembers that, were they said by anyone else, they wouldn't.

But this is Kidogo, and Kidogo is his everything.

It's ironic, really, how close they've found themselves when from their first impressions they despised one another: Zareb for her being the one to find his pendant, and Kidogo for the way he interfered in her life. Then again, perhaps despised was a strong word. They both held the other responsible for the dilemma, and while they may not have gotten along, there was never an exact malice between them. Some might say it was only natural that, with time, things blossomed into something more.

Maybe the real reason those words invoke such emotion in him is because of how she rejected him once before. Deservedly so - he had interfered where he had been expressly told not to, a well-intentioned attempt to help her (save her, really) becoming something far more ugly and despicable when he realized how he had ruined the opportunity for her to establish herself. He had done exactly what her family always did.

She did take it a bit too far, tossing his pendant away to be picked up by who-knows-what and taken to who-knows-where. But she'd regretted it, and he'd regretted it, and he supposed in the end it didn't matter, because they were reunited again. If anything, both of them grew from the experience.

Now, when she was looking up at him with such sweet eyes, Zareb couldn't imagine ever leaving her side. He was protective of Kidogo, sometimes too much so, but he tried to reign it in for her sake. In turn, she did her best to lean on him for support when she needed it instead of insisting on going alone.

That vulnerability was fleeting; she didn't like exposing that side of herself to anyone, even her mate. But with those three words, she let Zareb have a glimpse into the side of her that she was always so insistent on hiding. She had affirmed that she wanted him with her.

"What's brought this on?" He asked, brushing his muzzle against hers.

Her eyes suddenly welled up with tears, and Zareb panicked. Evidently that response was not right for this moment. Maybe he should've realized that; in a moment of softness, what Kidogo needed was affirmation: nothing more, nothing less.

"Please stay." The pleading in her voice made his heart ache as he pulled her closer, allowing her to hide her face in his chest.

"I'm not going anywhere, Kidogo."

But she just kept crying, weeping. Zareb didn't know what to do, didn't understand why she just kept telling him not to leave when he wasn't going anywhere. She wasn't going to get rid of him that easily. So why was she suddenly so scared?

"What happened?" He asked quietly, but he didn't expect an answer.

She fell asleep with her face buried in his chest, leaving Zareb to cuddle her and wonder, terrified, to himself what might have brought this on in her.

Hayle and Salvus

H1, S1 [503]:

Hayle's whole world shifted over the course of one devastating night, taking everything from her and forcing her into a world that she no longer knew, that felt actively hostile towards her.

Sometimes, she wondered if this was some sort of divine justice, a punishment for a crime she hadn't realized she'd committed. Perhaps she deserved what had been brought upon her, but that did little to appease her distress.

It was ironic, really, that the one comfort she found in all of her loss was someone she had detested (or, for a less hyperbolic description, severely disliked) for so long up until that point.

Salvus was, for all intents and purposes, a lion she held little to no regard for. He was an arrogant and foolish flirt, and sometimes she wondered if he existed solely to torment her, because he certainly seemed to thrive off of it.

Then their pride fell apart.

Hayle was born blind, so she had learned to live without her sight. Even back then, the more superstitious had whispered about it, with Hayle hearing bits and pieces of the rumors as to why it had happened. Penance for some secret sin her parents had committed, punishment for something she'd done in a past life, or intervention to forestall her future self. Whatever the case, there was always something egregious in the story, some theory that went beyond any rational suspicion and founded in little to no actual evidence.

Perhaps that was part of why she was always so prickly with Salvus. She couldn't even see, but she still contributed to the pride (and she did so far beyond what anyone had anticipated), yet ever since they had reached the age where they would start training, he had made a point to single her out and lavish his (unwarranted, unwanted, annoying, and mean) attention on her. But all of the places she had come to recognize so well, her capability to navigate some of the more treacherous aspects of the camp and territory (or know where to avoid), were decimated in the destruction of her pride. Everything was twisted and mangled beyond recognition, and she could barely tell her right from her left. With seemingly no one around, Hayle quickly lost any faith in being found, and was terrified trying to scavenge for food (something compounded by the fact that prey was scarce, as many animals had fled alongside many members of the pride, and she had no way to identify plants as harmful or not).

She had cried from both relief and rage when Salvus' voice reached her ears. She hated him, despised him for being the one to find her, despite the fact that he too had been unable to find anyone, because why couldn't it have been her brother, Flarion? Better yet, why couldn't it have been literally anyone else? And yet, at the same time, finally having someone familiar (and who could see), no matter how annoying, was never going to not be a relief.