

Marcie pried his eyes open to take in the soft morning light that streamed through his bedroom window. Someone frantically knocked outside his door. With a groan, he turned over and wrapped a pillow over his head.

*"Marcie, I swear to—Are you even awake?"* A muffled voice sounded, *"Christ, you have a... guest!"*

He groaned again, louder this time, before tossing the covers to the side and slipping himself off the mattress. He yawned, stretched his eternally-aching back, and plucked the small prescription bottle from the nightstand. The pills inside glimmered with the iridescent sheen of purified magic. They were a supplement of sorts given to him by Frieren, supposedly to flush out the effects of magic mixing that wracked his body.

*"Marcie!"*

Marcie popped open the cap and tossed two of the capsules into his mouth before shoving the bottle back on the nightstand. He crossed the room and cracked the door open, peering through only to be met by a wall of grey fur. He trailed his eyes upward until he met Frieren's irritated gaze. *Ah. Right.* He was in human form. A smaller shape helped him conserve energy on days when the mixed magic seemed to seep the life directly from his bones. Normally, he'd have about a head's worth of height over the other.

Marcie leaned his foggy head on the doorframe, keeping the door barely ajar, "Can you give me five minutes?" It came out as more of an irritated mumble than he intended, but there wasn't much he could do about that once it left his lips.

Frieren's nose wrinkled, "No, I cannot give you five minutes, I can't even give you one! I've had to deal with him for an *hour*. It's *your* turn to make sure he keeps his jaw shut."

Marcie frowned and furrowed his brow. It was then that he became strikingly aware of a second presence outside his door before he saw him—in the form of the suffocating cannibal scent that wafted toward him. A toothy grin came into view behind Frieren's shoulder.

*"...Yes, yeah, okay,"* Marcie sighed and shook his head, *"Just leave him in my office."*

Marcie closed the door again and turned around, yelling internally in his head. God, that magic better kick in soon.

When he emerged from his room again, he was, at the very least, presentable. He sported a cream button up underneath a brown wool sweater vest, tan dress pants, and a modest pair of square-rimmed glasses that sat comfortably on the bridge of his nose. His hair still stuck up in odd ways that caused his eye to twitch with irritation, but he didn't really have time to fix it with the active nuclear bomb waiting beyond the door.

He squinted, scanning the room but seemingly finding no signs of life. Surely he hadn't taken so long that Novocaine simply took his leave? Marcie shut the door behind him gently and a chill shot up his spine as soon as it clicked shut. Clawed fingers curled their way around his shoulder from behind.

*"What's up with this?"* An irritating voice purred from behind him.

Marcie slapped the hand off his shoulder before turning around. Once again, he was met with the startling realization of their height differences as he stared at a wall of white chest fur. He darted his eyes upward and scoffed.

*"I'm not sure what you mean."*

Novocaine gestured with a tendril toward him, “Y’know... *this*. Why do you look like that?”

Marcie raised a brow and turned to walk toward his desk on the other side of the room, “Wow, what a great conversationalist you are.” He mumbled, voice thick with sarcasm. Novocaine huffed out a light laugh.

Marcie sunk down into the cushion of his desk chair and swiveled himself around to face his guest.

“I presume you were only here for a check-up?”

Novocaine nodded and opened his jaw to speak, only to be immediately cut off by Marcie raising a clawed palm up in the air.

“So why are you *here*? Frieren should have taken care of everything and I’m not supposed to have any appointments today.” Marcie growled.

“Am I not allowed to visit a colleague for a midday chat?”

“You are not a doctor.”

Novocaine frowned, “The hundreds of surgeries I’ve performed would say otherwise,”

“I think your lack of a license and many, *many* counts of medical malpractice would agree with me.” He hissed.

Novocaine raised an eyebrow, “Do *you* have a license?”

Marcie waved off the question with his hand and repeated, with ample frustration, “Why are you here?”

“Why do you look like that?”

Marcie felt his blood beginning to boil. He pressed a hand to his forehead, shaking his head in frustration. He wasn’t supposed to work today. The rest of the week had been non-stop appointments and paperwork that piled on top of his already drained energy reserves and completely wiped him out. Of course, he could never admit that here. Novocaine having that kind of ammo on him would only give him all the more reason to show up and irritate him each week.

Marcie snapped out of his thoughts and realized that Novocaine had gotten quite close and was crouching in front of him, squinting and looking him up and down with curious eyes. Grimacing, he shoved the crook’s snout back with his hand.

“Staring is rude.”

Novocaine sniffled, rubbing the bridge of his nose with a clawed hand, “Are you stuck like this or something?”

“No, obviously. You have a human form too—I don’t get why this is so interesting to you.” Marcie hissed.

“I’ve never seen yours... it’s pretty.”

Marcie furrowed his brow. Something squeezed in his chest similar to disgust, but settled warmly in his stomach once his brain processed the words. He soured his expression even further in hopes it would counteract the feeling.

“Wow, I’m charmed. Does this normally work for you?” He retorted with a lick of sarcasm.

“Why are you so much smaller though?” Novocaine scratched the stubble on his face patch.

Marcie snorted, “Humans don’t grow to be eight feet tall.”

"Are you eight feet normally? Hm, I could've sworn you were shorter..." A wry smile worked itself onto his face.

Marcie responded only with a flick of his ear, which unfortunately only seemed to pique the other's curiosity about him more.

"So you retain your ears and your tail... anything else?" He cooed, as though asking a patient about their symptoms.

"Whuh," Marcie stuttered, "This is *normal*, it's *normal* for me to look like this." He could feel his tone growing more exasperated with each sentence. Normally he could keep his head level through much more arduous conversation than this, but a combination of exhaustion and, well, Novocaine, seemed to make his skull pound.

"I never said it was abnormal, I'm simply making an observation." Novocaine mused.

"Well I'd prefer if you didn't observe at all."

"Is that not in our nature as beings of science? Besides, is it such a crime to want to know you better?"

"You're impossible," Marcie sighed and shook his head again, "If you really only came here to bother me, congratulations, you've achieved your goal."

Novocaine huffed out a laugh, "Maybe you wouldn't be so tired if you learned how to relax. I could help with that, you know."

Marcie's eyes were drawn to Novocaine's neck, where he thumbed at the small vial hanging off the zipper of his work shirt. The blue liquid inside bubbled as it slunk around from the movement. Though he'd never seen it in action, he knew it was a strong anesthetic by scent alone. He wrinkled his nose.

"If I didn't know you better, I may have taken that to be a threat."

"Oh, not at all Doctor!" Novocaine released the vial from his hand, holding up his palm as if to feign innocence, "I merely meant to suggest taking a night off of work to yourself... and maybe going out to dinner with a colleague?"

Marcie raised his brow. As forward as the suggestion was, it certainly wasn't the first time they'd gone out to eat together as "colleagues". It was a risk he had taken for reasons he wasn't quite sure of himself. He knew Novocaine's charm was nothing but a facade; It was there to break down his walls and nothing more than that. Still, the conversation and warmth was alluring on its own. He simply couldn't help but say yes.

"Oh," Marcie groaned, "Get out of my office."

Novocaine blinked.

Marcie rocked himself off the desk chair and back onto his feet. Novocaine stepped back and stood up fully in response, towering over him once more. With a grunt, he shoved the crook's chest in an attempt to move him back toward the door.

"Get out."

"Tonight?" Novocaine walked backward slowly, less-so being pushed and more simply letting Marcie lead him in that direction.

Marcie let out a grunt.

"Eight? At that lovely little pasta place down the road?"

Novocaine stumbled over the threshold of the office. He gripped onto the door frame with a large hand to avoid spilling less-than-gracefully into the white hallway.

"I'll pay?" He wrenched his eyebrows upward into a pleading look.

Marcie stared back with a furrowed expression. He removed his glasses and massaged the bridge of his nose in frustrated thought, as though if he thought hard enough, the other crook may just disappear.

“...Fine”

“Fine?”

“Yes, I’ll go.”

Novocaine grinned in a way that may have looked more like a snarl if Marcie didn’t know better, “*Fantastic!* I’ll even walk you over.”

Marcie huffed, something more akin to a laugh this time, “Such a gentleman. If I had no senses on me, I might just fall head-over-heels right now.”

“Hah, maybe...” Novocaine trailed off, once again looking him up and down.

Marcie’s momentarily light-hearted expression dulled.

“What?” Said more like a statement than a question.

“Just wondering if you’d like me to match you tonight..”

Marcie softened slightly as the question loaded slowly in his exhausted brain, “Oh, well... sure.”

He’d seen the other’s human form before, though it wasn’t a common occurrence. If he was going to be like this regardless, they both might as well shed their claws and teeth and crawl out of their skins for the evening.

Novocaine waved his goodbyes, leaving Marcie hanging out the doorway and staring down the hallway after him for a full five minutes after he had gone. The world seemed slow and quiet, if only for a moment before obligation hit him once more like a bus. He gazed down at the watch on his wrist: 12:47.

With a sigh, he closed his office door and made a bee-line back toward the bedroom, flopping back onto the mattress and shutting his eyes. A small rest wouldn’t hurt... he would need the energy later anyways.