

Outside the sun warms sandstone. Ul'dah is as hot as ever and Zhyk tells himself again that he's only inside the Ossuary to escape the heat. It has nothing to do with the books lining the walls nor the building's connection to the thaumaturges' guild.

He'd slipped in half a bell ago, tailing a small group likely on their way to discuss funerary rites, and parted ways as nonchalantly as possible when no one was paying attention. Just some scrap of a miqo'te loitering behind one of the wide pillars, book in hand, appearing for all the world as if he was supposed to be there.

Pages turn beneath his fingers, script he's browsed before. Treading the same ground, researching the same topic, but not willing to speak of it with others. What knowledge he gains can only come from discreet sources and tongues will wag if he starts to inquire.

Further within the tome are the same words he's read before: *As possession of this nature is irreversible, the only mercy afforded such a host should be a swift and decisive demise.*

The cover shuts. What did he expect? That the writing would change after several moons away?

He shelves the tome and pries another from its spot, flipping through in a less precise manner, the pages fluttering beneath his touch. Again, similar phrasing. *An irrevocable fate... offer a last shred of compassion... put to the sword.*

Is it penance that he comes by every few moons and rifles through the same set of tomes, staring at the shelves as if there would be something new slotted between the books he nearly knows by heart? Is it some vestige of foolish hope, praying to a deity who he didn't believe in that somehow the ink on the pages would be different? Or is it simply confirmation, to reassert the truth of his being and what would happen if any were to learn of it?

He returns the tome to the shelf. His touch lingers. He could simply... turn himself over. Let the blade find his throat as it should have so long ago.

But he doesn't. He steps into the mid-afternoon heat, the sun baking Ul'dah as it always does.

Yet there's a chill settled in his bones, one he carries constantly. A dread carved so deeply it might as well be etched on his soul.

This is how it will be until his pact ends.

*If it ends.*