

Ascension

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(Note: This story follows immediately after DocWolph's story titled: "Two Fighters Storm")

Day 1: The Bargain

Mayia walked through the corridors of the Shadow League's Home, a quiet and peaceful place that was a mixture of incredibly high bio-technology, and impeccable levels of natural magics coming from the Millennial Tree in which this home and school was built within.

An island of Earth, surrounded by a sea of Water, a blister cap of Fire under the open Air, with this worlds greatest symbol of Nature and life in the form of the tree.

She'd just returned from her mission with Siklohn. She'd saved his life sometime during it, in which her comparatively tiny body with all its sealed powers had been incredibly unable to move the heavy wolf. By sheer will alone she had broken Sage's seal, or rather, met Sage's requirement for the seal to unlock. The need to be strong enough to save, serve and protect broke it, the sheer determination in order to carry him to safety and protect the others in her care – women and children mostly – instantly transformed her into her unlocked state, and then some.

She tore through much of her clothing and protected all those people with her Ribbon Weapon expertly until Siklohn could awake.

Even now, she can feel her third Chakra, one of her seven 'power plants' burning at a point behind her solar plexus. She'd never felt so warm than with this power burning in her chest. But despite all her accomplishments as of late – with Kaya, the wonderment of at least advancing in Geevo's attention to the level of a friend, and then returning unlocked – she still had yet to outlive the stigma of fear she'd already induced in her fellow students.

And seeing her unlocked again so soon was a very painful thing for them to see. It meant to them that their bully was back.

She was aware of her fellow students moving out of her way as she walked with her Apprentice Master's robes held open about her to reveal her sexy body. That, strangely, and above all others, had been developing more than her powers had been.

That was because of her fourth Chakra burning sweetly inside her. Perhaps something Kaya had done... when she'd shown her such erotic elation. She wondered oddly why this point of her powers was developing so quickly, especially unaided and untrained.

Full rounded breasts, broad hips, well rounded and strong shoulders, and a sinuous body hiding hidden strengths due to Sage's Inner Strength techniques. Her body's developments were so unlike the largest portion of her race. Too large of a portion. She'd grown up in a universe filled with Aphkians and Casid, with their powerful bodies, and in the case of the females, an intense virility in which her race never had.

And now, here she was, with those traits that the Aphkians and the Casid both possessed. She was larger than any known member of her race, and was developing at a startling rate due to her first Chakra point having been opened.

Then why won't the other six open?

She stepped agilely, possessing a grace no other student in the Shadow League's chapter of the Mystic League possessed. It was a feminine grace, beautiful and alluring that flexed her buttocks one cheek after the other.

Then why doesn't Geevo want me?

She was easily the most skilled, if not the strongest, member of the Shadow League.

Then why can't I meet Teema's Challenge?

She bit her lower lip with her oversized bicuspid as she tread into a section of the tree that the lower students were not allowed to go to unless summoned. It is the singular corridor leading to Sage's home. But as Fate would have it, this time she was summoned.

It was no secret that her position of Apprentice Master was in danger, and her lofty title was in danger of being stripped from her. She was afraid that all her hard work was about to be made all for naught.

She arrived at the top of the Stair and stepped onto the antechamber before Sage's door, and was surprised to see Siklohn there as well.

"Siklohn." She blinked. "Why..."

"He refuses to see me first." He said, head bowed and his arms folded across his chest as he leaned against the wall. "He wants to speak with you first."

Again she blinked, and bit her lower lip again, this time to keep it from trembling. There was a feeling in the pit of her stomach as she strode forward, walking on her toes and lifted a hand to rap on Sage's door. But even as she was about to knock, the door slid open, and Daedalus's principal drone – not a holographic avatar this time – bowed to her.

"He is waiting for you..."

I stood with my back to my student as she entered and promptly bowed.

“I am disappointed with you, Mayia.” I said immediately, and I heard her gasp. I’d never said such things to a student thus far, and Mayia knew of that fact. That made this statement all the more profound in her ears.

“Master I...”

“Do not speak, Mayia.” I said and turned to her, compressing my face into a stern look, seeing the anguish in her own eyes. It pained me to do this. I hated causing harm. “I have been watching your actions as of late.”

On cue dozens upon dozens of images rose about me from Daedalus’s holographic projectors. Each one showed Mayia picking on her fellow students. Verbal and physical confrontations with them, including the one she had most recently with Caliban, the volume on this one raised well over all the others so that Caliban’s anguished and angry screams echoed in her large ears more painfully than anything else.

When one finished, another began, but now the volume was turned off.

“I am disappointed with you, Mayia. I expect more from my apprentice. You’ve failed repeatedly in your tasks.”

Mayia then threw herself to the floor, huddles up in a ball, head bowed and body trembling.

“I’m sorry master, I...”

“I said do not speak!” I demanded. “Do not make me repeat myself again, Mayia. And stop your groveling!”

I turned my back waving a hand through all the images around me and steeled myself, shutting off my emotions now. I could not let her see me cry.

Behind me, Mayia rose to her feet, but my ears swiveled to hear her body trembling, and I could feel the air vibrate with the action. My growing mental powers caught on her emotions and her fears, and despite my emotionless state, it nearly broke me.

“Your mouth and your pride in yourself have gotten you into far more trouble than even a delinquent could have gotten into Mayia.” I rounded on her as I spoke her name, and she jumped. Her lips were pressed firmly together, and I could smell her perspiration.

I walked up to her, allowing her a very rare view of my cat eyes behind their emerald green glow as I drew close to her, towering over her in my Hybrid form. I then reached down and forcibly untied the sash keeping her robe shut about her middle from how she’d been wearing it as a robe, jerked it open and then off her. I promptly turned it inside out, revealing the white and red trimmed insides, the sleeves remaining folded inside before I flung it over her again. The hood I drew down to hide her features, the robe’s hangings falling over her shoulders to hide her body.

Now her robe hung as a cloak, hiding her beneath its folds.

“When you walk among the students, you are to wear your uniform as thus. Additionally, Mayia, you are not permitted to speak for thirty days.”

She opened her mouth as she began to cry, but promptly closed it again before bowing and then bringing herself back up straighter than she was before.

There you go girl, I thought, determination instead of pride.

“Now go.” I finished and pointed a clawed finger sharply at the door, still staring at her.

Again she bowed and promptly left without a single word.

Siklohn remained outside, still brooding, not even thinking at the moment because of it. Then suddenly the door to Sage’s chamber opened, and he himself was surprised at what exited. Mayia came out, her uniform... altered... in such a way that the only piece of her that he could see at the moment was her mouth and nose.

“Mayia?” he urged and when she looked up at him, the shadows and light playing on her face shifted to show her eyes brighter than they ever had been before, but they shone with tears. “What happened?”

But she promptly looked away, lowering her face again and walked out of the anteroom and down the stairs. Some deep and latent desire in Siklohn demanded that he follow her and ask what was wrong, but then he caught sight of Dallas standing in the door way.

“Lord Sage will see you now.”

I held my back to the boy as he entered, my hand rising to my face as I rubbed the corners of my eyes closest to my nose, and when I drew my hand back, there was far more moisture there than there should have been.

“Sir!”

I heard him snap to, back straight, hands to the seams in his trousers, head held up high, looking straight.

“Siklohn, you are exactly what I expect from years of military training.” I said immediately, still keeping my back to him.

“Thank you sir.”

“It wasn’t a compliment.” I chided. “Sit down, Siklohn.”

“I’d rather stand, Sir!”

“*Sit down...*” The voice modulation in my voice triggered responses in his mind, his body reacted to the actions, and I heard him promptly sit down behind me.

It was the Siren’s Voice, an art my Order has rediscovered, and its utterance worked on the mind as easily as the Dhim Mach worked on the body in the hands of a master. I turned at last to Siklohn, seeing the look in his face that he was confused at what had just happened. I remained emotionless, for I hoped not to take pleasure in seeing that.

The boy, after all, was far too disobedient for me.

“You continually shrug off my teachings despite your father’s wishes, Siklohn. You are continually thinking of the future, living in the past, and not at all in the present. All of this makes you self destructive, manipulative and arrogant, and I will no longer have it.”

“But Sage....” Siklohn began.

“Do you suppose yourself a master in high enough standing to attempt to be able to speak to me in the familiar sense?” I demanded, taking a step forward.

“No sir.”

“You could’ve surprised me.” I returned immediately, and all around me appeared a horde of images just like they had with Mayia, but this time they were both holographic and illusionary through magical means. They included images from his Retreat Forge, in which Siklohn was watching with a blank face at the moment. But then, his face was always blank.

“You have challenged my authority, Siklohn, especially in creating your second forge outside the Lair after I forbid it. So I accept your challenge to my authority. I am giving you precisely thirty days in which to assemble your best armors and weapons and meet me in battle before the school.

“And to liven the wager, I will willingly restrict myself to my human form, and be artificially handicapped to the level of a Journeyman Mage. I will meet you with no armor, and no weapon.

“Should I loose, I shall make you an Apprentice Master, and allow you to teach your art openly and freely to all those who desire to learn. Should you loose, I will require your absolute obedience...”

My voice changed, deepened even, and my eye-coloring was changing toward red, which meant that my control was slipping. I mentally punched it back down.

“Do you understand my conditions of your challenge?”

Siklohn stared at me, emotionless for a time, his eyes calculating. But I saw him swallow nervously, and again, I forced down the pleasure of seeing that boy sweat out of me. Such emotions under such conditions were wrong, no matter how deserving they were.

“Yes, Master Sage.” Siklohn voiced as if his answer were rehearsed.

“Good. You are hereby excused from all classes in order to prepare yourself for your challenge. You are dismissed.” And I promptly turned my back on him.

Day 5: Purity and Perseverance

The rumor of what had happened to Mayia and Siklohn soon made its way throughout the whole of the school – both the Shadow League, and the Mystic League, and some rumors making its way to the Demon League off-world – as to what *might* have happened. It took only Siklohn to explain to his team of friends as to exactly what *had* happened, for the rumors to spread all the faster.

They nigh exploded after that point.

Mayia, in her silenced state, drifted through the school as a ghost, speaking to no one as per her commandment, her head drooping dejectedly. Siklohn, though he was excused from his classes, still attended them, but amidst taking notes and listening to the lectures by Sage and the few Masters he'd hired or brought from his homeworld, he was etching design specifications for a sword and armor.

“...It's the first time I've ever seen Siklohn sweat...”

“...’Bout time someone shut that bitch up. And it looks like it took Sage himself to do it.”

Though these comments weren't really the truth.

Siklohn was working in such an incredible fervor, that between classes and smithing his armor, he was forgoing sleep, and his sweat was due to his unbelievable determination. Also, Mayia was silent, not shut up, but with her large ears and sensitive hearing, she heard her students chivying remarks in perfect clarity as if they were spoken right at her shoulder.

Caliban had followed her new lovmate into his second forge, where he hammered relentlessly on a set of armor. He was layering it... with already a bodysuit hanging beside a suit of imbued chain mail made of a metal similar to the element Mithril from Sage's homeworld.

The light plate would be covered in places by heavier plate, and all of it etched with as many of his arcane smithing abilities as he could muster.

Caliban sat quietly, trying not to distract him, watching as he worked fervently, tirelessly. By this time, he has not slept in over twenty four hours. His eyes were wide, and he hardly ever blinked. She'd never seem him so focused on such a target. Ever.

As she watched him work, she began to learn the pattern of working, and despite that she could do none of the smithing process herself, she nonetheless uncoiled from her position and reached up to take the handle of his bellows, even as he reached up to take firm hold of it. Instead his hand fell about hers and he snapped his head to look at her in surprise.

He hadn't even known she was there, or at least, didn't realize she'd moved.

Her eyes shone as the corners of his lips turned upward ever so slightly. She then began to pump the bellows for him, which was throwing the hot air flowing over the volcanic vein beneath their feet so that he could heat his metal.

Mayia, however, was not with as much comfort as Siklohn.

She was in pain at all times. She felt the feeling of being alone more than ever.

This time, it was she who avoided contact with all others, and this time, it was her fellow students who'd be following her, wondering the why of her not speaking, or the why of her hiding as she did.

At classes, she purposefully sat alone, and due to her requirement not speak she did not raise her hand at lecture to comment or ask questions. She simply did, and did so expertly.

She had only one joy left. Late in the evening, after all chores and classes were completed, she went alone into a place of privacy in the thick groves of trees behind The Lair. Her excitement rose inside her as she quickly began to untie her robe-made-cloak, opening it up from around her as she entered into the grove where she'd gone unerringly for the past week.

There, she found a surprise. The recently bare ground had been replaced with large marble slabs. Fresh grouting laid between each slab, and each slab was polished to a beautiful sheen. She could still smell the smell of lacquer in the air. It was dried, so apparently someone had recently prepared this place.

She paused, looking around, but not wanting to be denied her only remaining pleasure, she disrobed, removing her uniform of loose pants and double-breasted sleeveless jacket, and stood with her primary weapon arrayed about her like a one-piece bodysuit.

To call a bolt of cloth a weapon was ludicrous in many people's minds. Even Sage himself, she knew, when he was a young student, had scoffed at the idea that a bolt of silk could ever pose a threat to anyone. That is until he received several broken ribs numerous cuts and a concussion from one of the apprentice masters of his own order at the time. She herself had chosen it because it looked like the most non-threatening thing in Sage's Arsenal. That, of course, was its purpose.

It was *meant* to look non-threatening.

It was folded around her, meaning to look sensual as it revealed her long legs, and pulled her breasts up high and apart from one another. The soft blue silk hugged her bodice lovingly, creating a more sensual appearance than she might've possessed even if nude. Half way down its length it was pulled tightly into the back of her neck. There, it crossed over her chest over either bosom and slid over her sides. It crossed again over the middle of her back and slid over either of her hips. From there the two sides of the cloth folded over her sex before being drawn upward between her butt cheeks, where a subtle bend was formed at the peak of her cheeks but

beneath her tail, and the cloth folded around her middle several times and ended at the small of her back in a bow.

Geevo wore this cloth as well, though his was tied a little differently to show off his chest, and accentuate his... package. *The little oddball*, Mayia thought with a blush and a bit of longing, managing her first true smile in days, *why did he have to go with pink?*

But then she abandoned her clothes, kicked off her slippers at the edge of the “stage” and stepped lithely onto it. With a simple click in her mind, Mayia’s body changed its stance, gait, and every way of movement. “Sensual” was far too subtle a word to be able to describe the way she moved.

Her foot steps, which were normally side by side, now switched to one foot in front of the other. Slow, deliberate steps. One... right after the other. She closed her eyes, as she came to the center of the stage, her hands rising to the back of her head to undo the wrappings binding her ears together and the twists of her braid to allow her long red mane to flow free. She listened, heard the sighing of the breezes, the beating of her heart, the rhythmic sound of Siklohn working in his second forge.

And then she stepped, sliding her foot before her in a line along a painted circle on the marble plates beneath her feet, and she began to dance. Her every movement was specifically in tune to the sounds around her, specifically poised to be as sensual as possible.

The art she was learning was the art of assassins after all. To distract you from what was truly about to happen to you. But in its basic form, it was beautiful to look at.

She balanced on the fronts of her toes, stepping and prancing, pirouetting gracefully before landing in a form, balancing again on the tips of her toes, one finger innocently to her chin, the other splayed elegantly off to one side, while her trailing leg coiled upward impossibly as her back arched.

It was remarkable that she was able to touch the back of her head with the sole of her foot.

Such a beautiful, striking and remarkable pose. Such a deadly pose. If done correctly, and rightly, she could’ve just shoved her toes straight beneath the solar plexus of an enemy and shoved her foot straight into that person’s heart.

The why of this action was completely gone from her mind right now, she only wanted the how of the action.

And so she danced like an expert ballerina who’d been doing such an act all her life. With Mayia, however, that was so near to the truth. She’d always loved dancing.

And Lord Sage had given her more. She loved him so much for that. Like a doting daughter actually, but to see him doing these same moves, as they were intended to, especially in his

human form, she, and all the other young girls watching such an act, they couldn't help but be aroused by it.

And with that thought, she came to the part she loved as she pranced back to the center of the stage and pirouetted a dozen times and slowed to a stop. Her hands lifted then and began to caress herself, sliding over her breasts, erecting her teats, before lowering and cupping her sex, her thumbs sliding into the waist-wrap portion of her silk weapon. Thumbs still hooked, she moaned at the pleasure she felt as her labia clenched about her erecting clit and brought her hands around to her waist and then to her backside to untie the simple knot of her weapon.

The wrappings about her middle uncoiled like twin snakes, whipping about her thighs as she lifted a leg straight outward in front of her while she balancing on the tips of her toes of her other foot, so as to release the bunched up silk between her buttocks.

Her hands wrapped into the trailings and she began to dance again, the trailing edges of the silk falling over her forearms and hands like a shawl as she pranced and leapt impossible heights, twittering her toes rapidly beneath her as if they were allowing her to jump so high, and all the while she gracefully moved her arms, which brought the trailings of the silk cloth along with them.

She looked like an angel in flight.

She began to make love to herself without ever inserting her hands into anything, running her fingers through her hair, cupping her breasts, soothing her sides, her belly and her hips. Oh, what a sight to behold. Such an arousing thing to see.

And finally, she unfolded the rest of her silken wrap like a peep show, and her sensual dance became more rhythmic as Siklohn's hammer fell harder just then, and her heart began to beat heavier. The tempo of the wind, however, remained the same.

"Hnnn..." she sighed through her nose and continued to dance, finally removing her wrap from off her, revealing her full and rounded breasts, which bounced and jiggled from her chest while the simple patch of her G-string – the triangular fold over her sex that hid her femininity was *just* large enough to hide it, for her unabashed dancing did have its limits – straining over the folds of her swelling crotch to reveal every last bump and curve of her labia and clit.

The silk cloth now whipped about her like a shield.

The next step in her training with this weapon was to make it her own, etch its entire length with mystical spells to make it unbreakable and sharp along its edges. She couldn't wait to train with a real weapon like that at long last.

The true form of this weapon was revealed in the snapping sounds it made as if it were tethered to a pole in a full hurricane. It moved blindingly about her, and when holes opened up in it, allowing one to see into its core, she was in a different place, a different location and stance.

Likewise, when a hole did open, her arms and legs flowed gracefully through it, as if to punch or rip at something.

It was good that she did this in private. It would be best if her fellow students did not watch exactly how far she'd progressed with this weapon. She did not want to give them any more reason to fear her.

That and other than her miniscule panty, she was completely nude.

At last, as night was falling, there was one final clang from Siklohn's forge, and Mayia stopped dancing, her silk cloth still flowing around her as she twisted and turned, inside it. A perfect ring fell about her from her cloth as she slowly stopped pirouetting at the center of it all.

She was panting, perspiring, and felt elated as her chest heaved, her firm breasts swelling minutely with each breath, and only then did she open her eyes.

And suddenly her whole body stopped at what greeted her. She stopped breathing, felt her heart skip several beats, felt her body tense up as she saw that situated atop one of the many wooden posts around the stage was Geevo.

She stared at him, and bit her lower lip as her body reawakened almost painfully from its pause. He must've been the one who'd constructed this place, and so quickly too. He must've had help though, that was obvious but... *has he been there the whole time?*

She both hoped and dreaded that the answer to that question would be 'yes.'

"I've heard what Sage has placed on you." he said simply as he hopped down from his perch, wearing the uniform of the Shadow League with certain... modifications. The sides had been slit open, and his jacket was too small so as to better reveal his pack of tight abs.

He's so beautiful, she thought, blushing, unabashed that her naked bosom was now tweaking up harder in the nipple area.

"Is it true?"

She nodded, and bit her lower lip.

"Regardless of his reasons, Mayia, it is not right for you to be alone in this." He paused, looking at her, at her face, and not the things that made her a woman. And then he spoke again. "I will not let you be alone, so from this point forward, Mayia, if you are silent, then so shall I."

And with that, he unbuttoned his jacket and removed it, just before sliding out of his trousers and undoing his lace high-heels. Mayia's eyes went wide as she saw him standing there, dressed in his pink sash as he focused on her, stepping forward beautifully, coaxingly, keeping his side to her and stepping sideways toward her while she stood there watching, he being perfectly silent.

She licked her lips, and Geevo smiled.

His pink sash was pulled tight against the back of his neck, but instead of crossing over his chest, it went straight away under his arms. It crossed at his back and made straight away to slide between his buttocks, rising upward between his legs to fold over his groin and then wrap about his waist like hers had been.

When he stood before her, still fixating her with his eyes, he smiled, showing off those buck teeth before he reached behind him and untied the sash. It unwrapped about his legs like hers had done as he grabbed both ends and spun, pirouetting several times as he almost magically unwrapped the thing the rest of the way from off his body, spun with it over his head and let go. It formed another ring around him that overlapped her own.

She half-expected him to be nude, but instead he wore a “banana hammock” with just enough cloth to cover his groin; his G-string white in color just as hers was. Even Geevo had to admit that Sage, when demonstrating the motions similarly dressed as he is now, was quite scintillating enough.

‘Scantily clad is often times more sexy than being nude.’ Sage had said, and then proved it.

He strode sideways to the edge of his circle where it overlapped hers, still staring at her intently, struck a pose that jutted his hip and buttocks toward her, his tail wiggling, and lifted one hooking arm that invaded her ring by the breadth of a hand.

She smiled back at him, and twisted forward, elegantly, sexily as she gave him the same view of herself, and placed her wrist and hooking hand beneath his, staring into his eyes as fixedly as he did hers.

Then as one, they began to dance.

They closed in toward one another till her breasts pressed against his chest, she felt her nipples harden till they ached before they both withdrew from one another, and following each other step for step, completely mirroring one another, they danced. It was silent, unspoken.

Mayia’s happiness at that moment, has never, ever, been greater her whole life.

In another area of the school...

I paused in my steps and smiled, feeling a good feeling inside my heart that literally brought tears to my eyes. The overpowering feeling of joy erupted in my heart as I turned to look toward a remote corner of the school grounds, at the far end of the caldera of the volcano came this incredible feeling, and I felt giddy from the feel of it.

Mayia was happy...

“He cries.” Came a soft voice, altogether calming, and I turned toward it to see Sanari – sitting on a small marble bench – raise a hand to wipe tears away from her own eyes with one long sinuous finger.

“It does my heart so much good.” I said, seeing this vision of loveliness sitting before me all of a sudden. I’d been so taken by the emotions this night that I hadn’t felt her approach. She did that so well, far better than most others I’d known.

Perhaps it was the cat in me, but I wanted to know the moment anyone ever stepped into my territory. But she, I wished to know the moment that she stepped onto the sands of this volcanic island’s beach for other reasons; mainly because I’d steadily grown quite fond of this gentle creature, and felt it was wrong to let her arrive without a proper greeting. Even it was only to say hello.

I’d have to... “Mark my territory” as it were, and enact the Ritual of Claim sometime. Only then would my link to this land be complete, and this gentle goddess would never have to walk alone within my school again if I could help it.

Nonetheless, I walked along the cobble stones toward her and sat beside her.

“As it does mine.” She smiled warmly, and I felt a chill run along my spine at the sight of such a smile being directed toward me. “It fills me with gladness Sage, and for many reasons. I had thought that I could never feel such passion again. It is a good sign.” And she folded a hand over her heart while I heard a nigh inaudible purr come from within her bosom.

“It is.” I smiled at her, looking at her profile, and enjoying the beauty of it, a face locked this way in her own immortality.

“What do you call this?” she asked suddenly, and I turned to look at what she was viewing, and the two of us gazed upon the simple Zen Garden I’d formed about many of the fallen volcanic rocks within the Caldera.

Several massive boulders of obsidian glass, surrounded by the black sands this volcano had produced, thusly surrounded by white tile. The sands were groomed into ripples about each rock, like the ripples of water around an island, and surrounded by a curving flow of water from the tide.

“A Zen Garden. It is a meditative place and an old practice from Earth that I wished to create here. It’s design comes from the Japanese of my homeworld. To me, these gardens create a solid natural peace that puts me at ease and aide in meditation. A connection with the Earth.”

Sanari looked out at it, and at the Firebugs – this world’s version of Fireflies – dancing over it; their light reflecting off the obsidian.

“It *is* peaceful here,” she acknowledged, and then looked toward me. “The natural magic in the air in your school is incredibly intense, Sage. Powerful natural spirits rest within the peace here.”

I smiled at her, watching as her hair bunched up over one of her shoulders while she turned and smiled at me, and I look back at her, both of us feeling the joy and rapture permeating through the air, she an astute Ecomancer and the Creator knew what else, me a dabbling Ecomancer and a powerful Shaman and Priest, both of us reveling in the peace here punctuated with the joy in the air.

She moved slightly, a little more toward me, planting her hand beside her on the bench between us as she hunched her shoulders like a girl.

“I should ask you what brings you to my home,” I asked, leaning a little closer to her.

“I... was hoping that you would show me your shrine. I was on my way to see you when... well...” she finished this shyly with the corners of her lips turning upward, and the burn of a blush echoing through her cheeks..

Till that feeling struck, I finished for her mentally.

“Well... I would love...” I began, but stopped abruptly.

The feelings both of us were receiving had been drawing us closer and closer together, and just then, I'd leaned over toward her to where I had to readjust my seating, and when I did, I lowered my hand to balance myself...

And my fingers fell over hers.

Such a thing as this was happening with remarkable regularity whenever we were alone together, and at that moment, I dared only to stroke her hand with my thumb briefly before I rose to my feet and took a step away from her to look over the garden.

“I'm sorry.” I managed at last.

“For what? You only touched my hand.” She mused, rising to her feet. I listened longingly to the sound of her robes rustling about her sensual body and forcibly forced any unclean thoughts about her out of my mind. “You are not so dangerous that I might wither and die should you touch me Sage.”

But her words struck a nerve inside me, and my eyes closed suddenly as I bowed my head, smiling a sad smile, and the face of another female in my life suddenly flashed into my mind's eye before I could drive it out.

“No. That would be silly.” And I managed a short laugh.

But when I opened my eyes and they sparkled with tears, remembering that the first woman I'd ever loved, died because I had resolved to remain a pacifist. I blocked out the rest of that thought and all the evils that I did that came along with that memory. As well as the heart ache.

Then I felt Sanari's soothing touch against the back of my bare arm from where it poked out of my jerkin, her fingers tracing the contours of my tricep.

"You will of course still show me your shrine, Lord Sage?" she asked, and I turned to her, and was greeted with a smile with the brilliance of the sun.

"Yes of course." I managed to smile for her. "Please, this way..."

Siklohn pounded against a punching bag in the shape of a humanoid. Purposely not utilizing Sage's markings on the thing, with all the circles of major pressure points on it as he threw his punches, and then his kicks against it.

He was exhausted, but he still trained, throwing his arms, legs and even his head and body into it, remembering his training from before he came to this school. This was a chance to prove himself, prove his traditional fighting arts against Sage's own, which was a ruthless fighting art from another universe.

And instead of pressure points, he was going for vitals. A hand jabbed forward with a knife hand, and it punched straight into the practice dummy before he made a fist and wrenched out a large chunk of the bag like tearing its heart out. A ridge hand, and his trailing claws after striking the neck area of the dummy, slid across it and tore a gash open across the arteries that would feed the brain of an opponent. And then he punched, and the bag was lanced straight into the ground, torn from its moorings.

He stared down at the thing, breathing slow and steady, controlled, with his body much larger and stronger than it had been before since coming to the Shadow League. He looked down at his hand, and wondered why he'd just done that. He compared it to his other hand.

They look like good strong hands, he thought, the ebon claws shining brilliantly in the bright lights of the workout gym on the third sub level. *Good and strong. Then why is it that I find it difficult to hold onto things that I care about?*

He stared and stared at them for a good long time, until a droplet of something wet and warm fell onto them, and he blinked for a moment, wondering what it was, and reaching up to his cheek, pulled away more moisture and lowered his hand again to look at it again.

Tears?

Sanari followed Sage to one edge of the caldera, her eyes looking over his exotic garden of plants, trees and bushes from his homeworld. She learned words like Bonsai, and Taoism, admiring the beauty of the cherry tree blossoms and the curvature of lotus petals in his own garden, and she reveled in the beauty of a plant that still sat in a pot, waiting to be planted.

The name of this flower, so beautiful in every way, was called a rose.

She began to see the landscape change as she neared the edge of the caldera, walking as close beside Sage as she dared without touching him, despite how much she wanted to. She shot him several glances, watching his features in their somber, handsome and exotic chiseled way, with those wide, sloping eyes and firm features. She'd turn her attention back to walking, and caught a glimpse of him looking at her in the same way she'd done to him out of the corner of her eye.

That made her smile.

At last, they came to a double set of great wooden doorways, with architecture that was simple and firm, built to be able to withstand the ages, even with the periodic earthquake this volcanic island produced. White tapestries hung to either side of the door, which showed twin dragons – one on either door – etched carefully within its white painted wood. Only the gold details of these dragons – like eyes and scale edges – were in any other color other than white. She paused here as Sage moved forward to swing the doors open, and she paused on one of the steps of the sculpted hill that the shrine rested on, looking to all the painstakingly detailed designs and the placements of the plant life; their weaknesses pruned out and their strengths enhanced.

All this was built within a corner of the grounds supporting a school that taught the arts of combat and battle, but this place, this shrine was such a place of beauty and peace. It told much of what he was *really* like.

There were several more examples of flora here that not even she recognized. *Perhaps they are more plants from his homeworld like all the others?*

Looking behind her, she saw an artificial stream, in which swam beautiful fish of gold and red, each with long whiskers, that came to the surface to breathe the air or eat one of the Firebugs that came too low.

She turned back to Sage at last to see him smiling warmly at her. Dotingly perhaps. He was watching her take in this shrine, hoping that she'd find interest in it. She didn't need to be psychic like he was to know what he was thinking.

Her blackened lips smiled up at him as she stepped forward and took his arm, the great thick thing which was broad enough to be larger than the whole of her thigh. She'd been so tired of having to be strong all the time, and whenever she was with Sage... well... he made her feel safe. And for once, that feeling wasn't an illusion. She didn't *have* to be strong when she was with him.

Still holding onto his arm, she followed him into a courtyard made of simple clay slabs. Everything was simple, and sturdy, made of basic materials. Every ten feet or so hung a different white tapestry with the same red etchings on it, the etchings a strange calligraphic style of arching criss-crossing lines and dots.

“Does Daedalus maintain this place?” she commented, admiring the immaculate cleanliness of the shrine. “I don’t see any of his drones.”

“No.” he responded simply, and without any pride in his voice. “I maintain these grounds myself. Every morning before the sun comes up.”

She slid a hand over the stone railing as Sage led her up a short flight of stairs from the courtyard to the porch leading inside the shrine itself, which rose above them with a sloping roof of overlapping curved stone tiles. When she moved her hand away from the railing, she found that it was remarkably clean of dust, and the stone felt nigh glass-smooth. She was pleased that she found no dust here.

A dirty shrine states a dirty master. She was pleased at how clean this shrine was.

At the top of the stair, Sage removed his swords from his back and placed them within a metal tray covered with a simple white cloth.

She watched as he pressed his hands together and then pressed his hands to his face and bowed over the weapons. He was silent for a moment in prayer, and then rose again, and lightly taking her hand, led her inside.

“You remove your weapons?” she asked, looking at him.

“It is sacrilege for a member of my order to bring a weapon of war inside a shrine of peace.” He said simply.

“But what of your bio-blade?” she asked, remembering on how he submits himself to having that power locked, freely of his own will, whenever he entered into her own shrine. But at first, he was quite displeased that her guardian spirit of her shrine wouldn’t allow him to enter into her shrine and home without first having even that weapon locked.

Sage smiled at her. “It is true that that is a weapon, Sanari, but it’s also an extension of myself; a physical representation of my powers, and the principal focus of my powers. Once the power is learned, it cannot be unlearned. It does, however, require a certain degree of... intention, in order to draw it, and as you will soon see, gaining the intention to do harm while inside these walls is a very difficult thing to do.”

For a moment, he paused at the beginning of a corridor leading into the shrine, and pausing; he turned, smiled at her again and extended his five-fingered hand to her. She looked down at that hand, and lifting her own four-fingered hand, she slid it into his grasp. Sage then led her by the hand into a corridor that glowed with runes and glyphs, with circle magic every ten feet to ward

away evil spirits and other types of magical know how she didn't recognize. The only purposeful light sources were small spheres of soft blue light imbedded in the walls every twenty feet. Most of the light in here was ambient from the glowing lines and glyphs.

They passed numerous side corridors but did not turn to the left or the right till Sage led her inside a darkened room.

It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the darkness, and for a short while she saw many black slabs set in tiers about this chamber, and from out of the corners of her eyes, she saw Sage working in the darkness before there was suddenly a mote of light from a lit piece of wood, and then the unmistakable smell of incense coming from a pan above their head that smelled of scented oils. Sage then moved to light several tall candles, and within moments she saw tall slabs of black marble polished like glass all around her, including the way back!

H-how did he do that? She wondered, looking back at the black slab behind her. There was no movement, no magical trigger, it simply was...

There was more of that same script that were on the white flags outside on each slab, and again, she saw Sage move into that Prayer Stance amidst the glowing lights; thighs pressed close together, hands together pressed against the ridge of his nose, waist bowed and head down-turned.

It was comforting to see a warrior like Sage pray, to see that someone so powerful as he still believed in a divine being greater than himself that guided his footsteps.

But as he prayed, those slabs began to shine, the etchings glowing a burning red and shimmering like embers, while the marble themselves began to shine brighter and brighter till they glowed, and burned a pure white, lighting the room fully in celestial brightness.

More etchings in the floor lit, showing a concentric circle plan on the floor, and each ring of the circles shone just as pure, and just as white as the once black slabs.

She opened her mouth to comment once Sage had uncoiled from his prayer stance, but he smiled and covered his lips with one silencing finger. She looked up into his face and almost began to cry at the brilliant look he shone with, with his green eyes seeming to be happy, and when he took both of her hands briefly, he lifted them and kissed her fingers, holding them, looking into her eyes before he turned, releasing his grasp on her fingers and tapped the center of a large gong that, a moment ago, was not there.

Sanari gasped as the chamber rang with that single note, the resonance echoing over and over again, and as it faded away, she began to hear other things, a low note sung as if by a thousand voices on that same note. Feminine, masculine, adult and children, it all rose in one brilliant choir, and Sage had to actually catch her from collapsing to her knees as the spiritual power of that room, the utter happiness and bliss and above all *love* swelled her heart to where it almost ached.

The note formed by all those voices began to shift and modulate; a remarkable song that stirred from all those hidden throats in a language she never knew the like of, and as she listened, tears did indeed flow from the corners of her eyes, and as she turned to look at Sage it was with the utmost look of wonder.

He was smiling at her, and for the barest of moments, he tipped his head forward, his lips pursing minutely. For a moment she thought that at last she'd taste those lips, but he stopped for some reason, and then helped her to her feet. The happiness in his face faded some, but then he turned and tapped the gong again, and its single note rung once more as the metal barrier that was the gong and the wall behind it faded away, revealing a stone wrought archway leading into an inner sanctum. She followed him in, again taking his arm, holding onto it with both hands lest she be lost.

The inner sanctum was wrought full of spirits that slid in and out of existence about them both, so strong was the spiritual forces here that these lesser spirits took shape and helped in maintaining this place. Some were serpentine, others were shapes of males and females who looked up and smiled happily at them as they passed.

They walked along a path bordered on either side by water, and all along the walls were a complex scrawl work that glowed a fiery red, glittering red and orange as if holding the life essence of the Earth through its walls in the form of blazing hot magma. The ceiling was high and vaulted, with light streaming down from it as if from direct sunlight, shining straight down on them both. The song continued, and it may have been a trick of the light, but it appeared as if the walls were expanding outward, this pocket world unfolding for them both. She could hear the sounds of dripping water about her, and looking at the twin streams to her right and left. She saw the occasional droplet of water fall to the pools, creating ripples that added to the sounds here.

Voices of the Wind, Rhythm of the Water, the Echo of the Earth, the Resonance of Fire, and the Spirit of Life.

She looked at him, still in wonder.

He's a shaman: a natural wizard, she thought. Just like me...

She felt lazy, and in spite of her refinement, slid sideways and hugged his arm; nuzzling his shoulder with her cheek. He stopped them both, and she felt his knuckles against her thigh through her robes. She watched him as he lit a brazier without use of his magic or powers, using a stick that glowed on its end with an ember.

Any use of his powers upset the balance in here.

He bid her to kneel then and she did so, watching him as he also knelt right beside her and then bowed his head, settled on his heels and pressed the palms of his hands on his lap after straightening the layered cloths of his priesthoods on his lap.

He bowed his head and closed his eyes, and she watched him enter into a meditative state.

He looks so at peace, she thought, feeling her heart flutter. She lifted a hand but resisted the desire to touch his face. *It would be a sin to disturb such a state*. She thought, her lips puckering into a small smile, before she turned and set herself immediately into a meditative state similar to his.

Almost immediately she was pulled from her body by the hands of the spirits, lifted up from her mortal shell, and looking down, she saw it drop rapidly beneath her as she was brought up into a world of spirits as one of them, her naked bodice shining with her power, her body instead showing her spiritual strength and not her physical strength, showing her off much the way she used to look centuries ago when she still carried a sword. Strong, with a firm bodice and endowed in her womanly form, and even muscular...

For a brief moment she looked about her at all the spirits, and then found one looking fondly at her, and she blinked realizing that this was Sage! He was perhaps even stronger than before, taller too, but then looking about herself, she saw that she and he were of like height!

The spirits clothed them in simple robes, and again offering her his hand Sage showed her this spirit world, and for a time as a being of light, beside Sage, she enjoyed life in the bosom of this world, Sanari enjoyed herself being wrapped in pure joy.

Siklohn now hammered at his steel well into the night. He needed a distraction, and sleep wasn't enough of one. Caliban had followed him here, but had passed off into sleep in one corner of his forge while he sweated over the forge's heat. He did not blame her for wanting rest, but something inside him was driving him. The closest word that he could place upon it was... passion.

He was focused in the here and now, he forgot about classes, friends and what few loved ones he had were barely in his mind, but were there enough to support him. As the hours passed, this most recent piece, the most important, the helmet, was forged and focused to match his head. It was as if some otherworldly force were guiding his actions, for the style was detracting completely from what he'd always done.

It was his own style, not the style of the one who'd taught him.

He held up the face shield in his tongs, which were likewise held by his hand encased by leather gloves, looking at his reflection in the steel. His brows were compressed, his eyes intense as they rarely were and his jaw was set.

His other hand which held a heavy mallet tensed about the leather-gilded handle, his muscles tense and bulging from working so hard in such a short amount of time. The ability as to not feel pain allowed him to ignore all the lactic acid in his muscles, but not the fatigue. He was losing his focus, and that was not good.

Compressing his lips, he set the mask to the water barrel and then shifted the piece onto the metal work table before going over to the wall where the completed pieces hung. His weapons – a sword, a riding spear, and a massive hammer hung from the wall beside the suit of chain, the black body suit that was so similar to Sage’s Mage-Suit, and finally the beginning pieces of his armor.

He looked at it all, still feeling his set jaw and determination pounding inside him, thundering inside his rib cage as he fingered the pieces, feeling that the power set in them has been just right.

This was one of his dreams: a fight with a master. A victory against Lord Sage would mean much for his clan. And Sage has proven himself, even without his powers, to truly be one of the best warriors in the universe, and if what he says is true, he is among the best in *six* universes.

He held so few dreams. Ghosts weren’t allowed to dream. *And yet... why did this one remain?* He asked himself. He had it since he was a boy with nothing but a wooden sword in his hand.

Just then he heard a low sigh, and turned to see Caliban as she squirmed a little on her precarious place of rest atop one of his waiting benches.

And why has a ghost earned the faithfulness of someone like her?

He was confused.

His eyes felt heavy then, but he shrugged off the fatigue a little longer before walking over to her, and kneeling, picked her up in his arms.

It was very late, and so there was no one to see him as he carried her back to her quarters. Her roommate was no where to be seen as he entered their quarters, and laying her down, began to remove her clothing for rest, leaving her only in her panties and undershirt before pulling her fresh bed covers up over her and tucking her in.

He was surprised that he caressed her cheek before leaving, and he looked at his hand before clenching it. He knew that he should have felt more than just the texture of her cheek, and for the first time hated not being able to feel it.

He knew that his species had an lack of touch in comparison to some species, but surely it wasn’t this poor...

He left her room immediately, allowing the door to close swiftly behind him without looking back.

Sanari gasped as she came out of her trance, feeling purified, feeling like a little child, and she hugged herself and rubbed her shoulder, kissing her own hand while her lips spread into a brilliant smile. She felt as if she were glowing with the life forces of that world flowing through her, still touching at her heart, and comforting her.

It's as if centuries of evil never happened.

She felt a hand on her shoulder and looking quickly over, she found Sage still kneeling there beside her, his face still beaming with exactly what she felt.

She gasped with the spiritual power of this room, the chime and chant still resounding in this chamber of perfect acoustics, *or perhaps enhanced acoustics*, she thought, and waited as Sage gave one brief prayer, his hands to the ridge of his nose again, before he tipped forward and rose, and then helped her to her feet.

She felt weak at the knees, and still unable to speak as Sage then brought her to an alter and a basin of water, where he dipped his hands in the water, which shone with a magical blue light as he swirled his hands within the pure water, and then removed them again, letting the waters swirl through his fingers and fur. He bid her do the same with a nod of his head and she dipped her hands within the waters.

The waters were warm, a perfect level of warm.

They wiped their hands free over the waters, straining the waters out of their fur and shaking off the last of it back into the basin.

Sanari looked to her hands, oddly silent as she looked at her claws.

Moments ago, she'd walked among fields of people, Aphkians, Casid, Humans, Elves, and walking beside Sage, she was met by some of them, and she remembered gasping at the sight of their faces; many of which she remembered just before ending their lives.

"I forgive you." They had each said, moving up to her, touching her, and each time speaking the words: "I forgive you." What felt like hours and hours passed as she walked through those fields, hearing over and over. "I forgive you."

Afterwards, for what felt like an eternity, she wept in Sage's arms while he stroked her hair. And now, as she washed her hands, she felt many of those sins she'd felt so guilty of simply wash away.

How is this possible? And she turned to Sage, asking that same exact question with the look in her eyes.

But he bid her to the very last point in this shrine, *or temple is more like it*, she considered as they made their way to the very end of the corridor, there she was introduced to a very holy looking book. All in white, with scroll work on its cover. When she opened it, the etchings and

scrawls realigned on its metal pages into her own language. She shot a glance to Sage who urged her to go on with a nod of his head, and she read.

'In the beginning, there was darkness... there was The Void. The element of The Great Destroyer. And then the Creator struck a light within The Void, and it cowered as it was pushed back from the radiance.'

'And the radiance blossomed.'

'From the darkness, He separated the dark from the light, and gave strength to the light to push back the dark.'

'The Creator looked upon this and called it good.'

Sanari's features drew blank as she continued to read, passage by passage from this holy book, turning the metal page even to be sure.

'And He gathered the elements together and formed worlds...'

'And He called the darkness night, and the light day...'

She looked up at Sage, and saw that he was indeed watching her intently. She looked back down at the book, and then closed it, staring at its cover.

Suddenly, Sage's shrine did not feel so peaceful any longer, and she turned and began to leave in a rush, her mind awchirl with many thoughts about what had happened here. Sage hurried up to her, pausing on the stair leading on the way out to turn and bow in a quick prayer before he followed her out. She entered into the anteroom where Sage had enacted all of this and quickly moved into the corridor leading out, and not able to move any further, she stopped and raised her own hands in prayer. Fist in cupped hand, she brought them to her lips, and with eyes open, began to pray.

Why... why are they the same? Great maker, bless your servant with insight.

She then she felt Sage's hands on her shoulders, and she spasomed in surprise at his touch and turned suddenly to him, her eyes wide as she stared at them. His touch landed on her shoulders again, and surprisingly she was comforted... a little.

"Why are they the same? Word for word, verbatim, your holy book is identical to our own! There's no way you could have gotten a copy. Each copy is a guarded relic. Why are they the same? How could they be the same?"

Sage moved his hands to her face this time, holding it so that she stared at his glowing eyes. This close, she can actually see the minute difference between his pupils and the outside color of his green eyes.

“Does it bother you, knowing that we aren’t as different as you thought? Doesn’t it comfort you that you and I are more the same now than we were moments ago? That our peoples do have something in common?” she continued to stare at him. “I... do not know ‘Why,’ but I’ve encountered the same thing with a dozen other races anthropomorphic races. The answer to your question is quite simple, Sanari. And I am sure you know it...”

She stepped forward and pressed against his chest for warmth. “There is only one God.”

His lips spread open a little. “It makes the multiverse seem a bit smaller now, doesn’t it?”

She nodded, and then looked up at him, looked up at his features anew, and did draw comfort from the fact that this strange being from another universe did indeed share *something* with her other than the fact both were feline.

Sage had known this all along. She was glad that he’d shown her this.

“There are certain races that are different, Sanari. I am sure that your holy book links the spiritual castes of all races in this universe. Likewise, they link the spiritual castes of all other anthromorphs in all other universes I’ve visited. Humans, Fae, Dragons... they all have a holy book written differently, but are similar.”

She nodded, lowering her head briefly while still clasping her hands together before she lifted her gaze back to Sage.

But as they both looked at one another, Sage’s face drew somber as he looked into her eyes, a soft light behind them akin to the blazing green glow that surrounded his own eyes, a light of power. She felt her heart do a double tap inside her chest, found herself rising up on her tip toes, her lips pursing as he leaned his head toward hers. And then...

“I’m sorry,” He said suddenly forcing a smile, his attempt at a happy face being pained with an agonized look that sent a pang through her heart. “It must be getting late. Here, I’ll show you out...”

To say that Sanari felt disappointed didn’t quite touch the sudden fall of her heart into the pit of her stomach. *Why does he back away?* She wondered, and she herself barely contained a pained look that spread over her own face as Sage took her small hand and held it with his own on his arm closest to her. She nibbled on her lower lip as she walked beside him, the wonderful experience inside his shrine nearly gone now. Her hand clasped beneath his about his strong arm comfortingly.

Why is it that every time I try to get close to him that he tries to step back? She wondered again, but remained content – for now – to remain close to him.

They arrived into the full light of Wave World’s moons shining brightly above them, the moons spreading a rainbow of light from their many colors so that it was as bright out on this night of full moons, as if it were late evening. Their forms even cast shadows. It was a night in which

Sage was at his utmost power and unable to change back to his human form. She wondered exactly how powerful he got on a night of full moons.

In spite of herself, she looked up at him dotingly.

But then something else drew her attention, and looking down, she blinked seeing a pair of figures, one female, the other male, both were of a species unlike anything she'd ever seen before, both working in the courtyard of the shrine and wearing scant white robes across their bodies that did little more than to hide their sexes in chest wrappings and loincloths. Their hair was white, their eyes were blue, and the female was rather heavy with child.

Other than that, Sanari truly had no word for them.

Their bodies were scale, chitinous body armor, feathers fur and tough hide, and other than the hide, all was white. Their heads were crowned in great obsidian colored horns, and spikes of ebon projected out of their backs, shoulders, arms and knees, with immensely powerful muscle underneath all that. Either was equal in size to even Sage's battle form and the only physical difference between male and female was the specifics between sexes. She had broad hips, large breasts, and softer curves, and he had a rather pronounced satchel between his legs. Even their maturity and their sexes showed well their endowments, to the point where the female's chest wrappings did very little to hide her swollen mammaries – Sanari counted six of them – that was perhaps because of the milk developing behind them from being so heavy with child.

As a final feature, Great wings folded against their bodies and around their shoulders like cloaks, and to Sanari, she saw creatures that seemed built for the most viscous of battles, gently tending a place of utmost peace.

Much like her own life was now.

“Mélange! Matee!” Sage greeted in excitement and excused himself from Sanari's side quickly and stepped over to the pair of creatures and embraced them about the middles while Sanari looked on happily, and wondering who these people were.

“Good evening Master Sage.” The female called Matee greeted, holding onto her swollen belly with two extra hands and spindly arms which until now, had been hidden from Sanari's sight, and held her broom with one of her larger primary arms. The other primary arm hung lightly at her side.

“I trust your trip was relaxing?” Sage said, throwing an arm around either of the great things who, in Sage's current form, were head and shoulders taller than he was.

“Oh yes!” the one known as Mélange laughed, and he grinned a mouth full of serrated teeth that made Sanari blanche at the sight of; all of them pearly white, with the canines overlapping the row of teeth opposite them. She even saw a pair of mandibles attached to the lower jaw realign. The thick cheeks meant an incredibly viscous bite.

“Ah! Please forgive me, Mélange, Matee, this is Mother Sanari.” He introduced, coming quickly, almost bashfully to Sanari’s side again, and taking her hand brought her down the short flight of steps to the courtyard to meet the newcomers, and like Sage was in his battle form, these two towered over her, either well twice her size. Literally. “Sanari, this is Mélange, and his lifemate Matee.”

“Pleased to meet you.” the pair bowed and spoke as one, and Sanari shook their hands one after the other with both of hers, her small hands unable to hold onto more than a finger or two of theirs. She noted that they looked her up and down from head to foot, and then to Sage before looking back at her with a hint at a wry smile.

“I am honored. And where did you two come from?”

“Through Sage’s Lair.” Matee answered. “We... well, we just came from our honeymoon.” She slid sideways and grasped her mate’s hand tightly.

“Father saw to it that we were...” Mélange began, lowering his head to indicate Sage, and Sanari jerked awake suddenly at his words.

“Father?” Sanari blinked, looking to Sage, and he turned to her with yet another very somber look in his eyes, with the hit of a prideful smile barely edging at the corners of his mouth. But other than that, any other emotion there was unreadable on that face. “B-but, I thought you never married.”

“I never did.” Sage admitted, and placed a hand somewhere on Mélange’s massive back. “I am their father, like I’m Daedalus’s father.”

“You... *made* them?!” Sanari’s voice cracked incredulously, her eyes wide with surprise. She’d heard rumors of his mastery of biological science, seen him work in Namah’s hospital, even Namah sometimes stepped out of the way to let him work. *‘It’s like he’s a specialist in everything.’* She had confided in Sanari once.

“In a manner of speaking. I created their bodies; the Creator gave them their souls.”

“Matee and I, and sometimes Wildcat, still call Sage ‘Father’ now and again. It’s an old habit. Daedalus is an exception to calling Sage our Father. He considers Sage more of a friend and master than a creator.”

“He always did, even before he could call himself a he, and it’s mutual, and I wished the rest of you would follow his example.” But when Sage clasped his hand on Mélange’s arm, it was more like a father doting on his son.

Do you desire a family so much, my beautiful Lord? Sanari thought, looking at him with her features softening with her heart. She wondered what it would be like to have his child...

“I’d built them up from base amino acids,” Sage continued. “Putting together the traits of every were-creature that existed, taking samples from many different worlds and dimensions, and even throwing in a few new traits here and there.

“I’d truly never expected him to awaken.”

“And I did. Like a newborn baby until Sage could program me.” Mélange added. Matee was suddenly beside him, hugging his side as she gave Sage’s swords to him from where they’d rested on the platter outside the shrine’s entrance.

“Programmed?” Sanari blinked again.

“The brain can be infused with basic knowledge by extremely tight electro-magnetic control. Base thought patterns, basic mathematics, basic principals of science, and an understanding of the world and so on can be ‘gifted’ to someone by helping the brain to develop in certain ways.”

“But it takes a God-awful long time,” Matee supplied.

“Matee was created because of Mélange’s desire for a mate.” Sage continued. “I took a sample of his DNA, altered the four sexual genes they possess to produce a female, and programmed her with the mind of a young adult female.”

“*Four* sexual genes?” Sanari’s eyes were beginning to hurt from opening wide in surprise.

Matee and Mélange chuckled before Sage continued. “My world calls a four sexual gene holder a Chimera. Those, and their multitude of traits, lead me to call their were-race the Chimera. They were only recently recognized as a new clan, and allowed to marry.”

“And how happy we are too.” Matee grinned, sliding in close to her mate and sliding one large hand down his thick abs toward his groin. She didn’t actually cup him for decency, but Sanari could see that on her mind.

“But she was never programmed to simply love me right off.” Mélange commented, looking at her fondly with what Sanari could now see as eight eyes, like a spider, though their other six eyes were located on a thick armor plate on their foreheads. “Sage designed her so that I had to earn her affections.”

Sanari looked at the couple, seeing how they were very much in love with one another. She folded her hands inside her robes and clasped her hands tightly inside them feeling a pang of desire to share that same expression with Sage. Now it was she who wanted to leave.

“It was a pleasure to meet you both.” She smiled before turning to Sage and daring to lay a hand on his bare arm. Her fingers squeezed it, trying to will him to know her feelings for him. “Thank you for showing me your shrine, Sage. It was a remembered experience, but I must return to my own shrine before my students begin to miss me.”

She managed a small chuckle and a larger smile before she began to withdraw. But then she experienced then what she had thought was impossible between them at the moment. Just as her hand was slipping off his arm Sage lifted his hand and caught her fingers.

“You know you are always welcome here whenever you wish, Sanari.” He said, managing a pleasing smile to her, folding her hand in both of his, and raising it to his lips, kissed the back of her slender fingers. “I’d like to make you dinner some time.”

Her heart gave a low thump inside her chest, and she smiled genuinely up at him, her eyes glittering slightly.

“I would love to.”

Sanari walked quietly away from the shrine, her hands folded inside the sleeves of her robe. She tried to tell herself that she wasn’t running away now instead of Sage, but there was something about that thought that didn’t quite freeze itself inside her mind.

Her eyes shimmered, and when she closed them to blink it away, a little too much moisture squeezed from underneath her eyelids. She tried not to think she was crying, but nevertheless her foot steps slowed as she climbed all the stairs and platforms out of the caldera. Even as she was rising to the peak of the caldera, something that could’ve taken a minute or two to fly up, took her the better part of half an hour, she truly was not prepared for what greeted her there.

“Good evening, Mother Sanari.” She looked up in surprise even as Daedalus bowed to her.

Daedalus was Sage’s House computer, or rather a massive biological entity hidden away that acted as his house computer. Very little happened on this island that he was not aware of.

It was strange on how she felt a soul whenever she was near his principal drone, a “Bioroid” as Sage called it. Daedalus treated the word as if it was the defining word of his species. Like Aphkei, Casid, Dragaseir or Human. A biological creature that, along with Daedalus’s other drones functioned like a hive mind that spanned six universes and spaces in between them.

“Good evening Daedalus.” She greeted, managing a smile.

“I wanted to catch you before you left, my lady. I feel it necessary that I return these to you.” and he nigh magically pulled a cage with squirming, gibbering winged creatures from behind his back.

In spite of herself, Sanari’s body trembled with a chuckle as she recognized the gremlins she’d set loose on him as she accepted the cage.

“Thank you, Dallas,” she said, and held the thing up to look inside. “But weren’t there thirteen?”

To which Dallas then removed one final Gremlin who he'd been holding behind his back by the wings and inserted it into the cage.

"I am truly sorry for the misunderstanding, my lady. It appears as if my master isn't the only one who is guilty of it from time to time, and this is one that I must apologize for."

"Misunderstanding?" Sanari gaped, slightly affronted. "Dallas, I found one of your drones inside my shrine."

"An honest mistake." He said, and began walking down the outer slope of the caldera of the volcano with her, following the cobble-stoned paths. "It was a scout drone. A new design and I was testing it by having it map the school. It... took a wrong turn in its attempt to return to me."

"Luckily I was able to retrieve its program before whatever that was crushed the drone."

"I know how you do not allow the 'taint' of technology inside your shrine. The high technology would offset the natural magic there. Much is the same with Lord Sage's shrine. It is the only place on the island safe from my eyes."

"I hope that they didn't do to much harm." Sanari said, a little more sorry now for obeying the will of her temper and setting those things on him. "Sage was so very concerned that they might damage you."

Daedalus smirked as he planted his hands behind his back. "They uh... they never penetrated my outermost defenses." Sanari shot him a brief withering glare that melted into one of humor at the grin on his face. "Gremlins are annoying, but easy to handle when you know how, and confining them with security screens with bio-technology is a bit difficult for them to circumvent. They just don't understand it as well as they do hard-core technology."

"Though I will admit they were more of an annoyance than the usual gremlins I'm used to dealing with. At least they didn't get wet and multiply."

"But enough of that. Did you enjoy your stay here?"

Sanari was suddenly thrown into thinking about her recent experience within the shrine, about Sage, and her heart gave a flutter. She paused in her step, and then sat down on one of the tiers leading down from the volcano. Dallas, ever the gracious host, sat down with her.

She was quiet for a time, organizing her thoughts amidst the gibbering of the Gremlins, before a heavy tap of a finger of her hand resting idly on their cage silenced them all.

"Daedalus, I... I would like to ask you a favor." Her fingers clenched into the lap of her robes. "Sage... I... Whenever I try to get close to Sage, he tries to back away. You've known him longer than anyone, do you know why?"

Dallas looked at Mother Sanari, with his features settling on her while his eyes – loaded with every type of scanner imaginable – focused on her.

“I will give you that information on two conditions.” He said, and waited for her to look at him and nod. “Firstly, that you understand that you may not repeat what I am about to tell you. It is to remain inside your head for your own personal knowledge... under oath.”

“I promise.” She said earnestly, and Dallas nodded.

“Secondly, I ask that you allow yourself the understanding of the truth that I am a living thing and not some mindless automaton. A truth I know that you are aware of, but are not letting yourself believe.”

She thought of the two new creatures she met below, of Mélange and his mate Matee, that they were truly living, breathing creatures created by Sage. *Then why not Daedalus?*

She continued to look at him, and then slowly nodded.

“Lord Sage has only dared to love, four times.” Dallas said with no preamble, which spoke of his understanding of the situation. “He will not give himself half-heartedly to any female. They must either take the whole of him, or none at all.”

“But I...” Sanari began, but Dallas raised a finger and shot her a warning glance, and she was amazed that she fell quiet.

“The fault does not lie with you, Sanari, it lies with Sage.

“All four times in which he’d dared to love a female, fate or some other force has deemed that she been taken away from him. The most recent was Rae Iksaki. She was an immortal, someone who could literally live her life out with Sage, but she chose instead Makahn when he’d challenged Sage for her. Sage recognized that he did not love Rae as much as Makahn did, so he quietly, honorably, stepped away.

“Before Rae was a quiet, humble student of his named Ki when he was still on our homeworld of Earth. But like Rae, she’d chosen another.

“Before her, was a young human scientist named Gina. Few beings have been able to match Sage in wisdom, and in many ways she was actually smarter and wiser than he. She left him with a broken heart and an apology that she couldn’t go on living with him because she loved her science more than she did him. That alone was an incredible blow, because Sage had at last, after two decades allowed himself to again open his heart to a woman as deeply as he loved her.

“Again? Two decades? What had happened before that?”

“Ariel.” Dallas answered, and Sanari gasped as she watched a tear actually fall from first one of the Bioroid’s eyes, and then from the other before he looked to her again. She sensed the intense

emotion from him, and that, above all else, proved to her that he was alive. “When Sage was still young, and a scholar, very much like you are now, a beloved teacher of his clan, he had sworn a life of pacifism. He was truly happy then... unlike he’d ever been before or since then. Ariel was a were-tiger, just like he was, with frost white fur and blue, within blue eyes and a beauty that was unheard of even with the elder races of Earth.

“He’d loved her so much.

“Ariel was the closest Sage has ever gotten to being married and sealed – bonded – to a female. There was talk that she was also bearing his cub, being that she’d first come to him when she was in the throes of a heat.

“But, there was also a species of Lycan on Earth, a recent evolution from Sage’s parent race of Shapeshifters, wolf-like creatures with four arms called the Kell. They thought themselves superior, being that they were better fighters, stronger, more developed and smarter than nearly all of the other races. They became smug, then bullies, and finally terrorists.

“Their leader, Kor, had cornered Sage and a group of the Holy Order that Sage was trying to help to safety, with thirty of his warriors. They pitted Sage in a battle, to which Sage did not fight back, *refused* to fight back. I was damaged and thrown away while I was still little more than a pocket computer. To force him to fight, they made him watch as they tortured members of the party.

“Still he would not fight.

“Then they began to slaughter, and still he would not fight, for to deny one’s oaths was to deny oneself. Sage had spoken of this with me much later. He said that it was one of the few times in his life that he was truly afraid.

“One after the other his wards fell, till at last, they came to Ariel.”

Sanari gasped as she listened, her hand rising over her mouth. She’d somehow forgotten how to breathe.

“They saw how Sage began to struggle, crying out her name, and while his cronies restrained him, the Kor violated her, while slowly crushing Ariel’s throat with his bare hand.”

Dallas fell silent, his face blank now, and he remained silent for a very long time. Then his eyes closed, as if to recall those memories before he continued.

“No one in this universe has ever seen Sage – truly – angry.” Dallas said, fixing Sanari with his gaze. “You cannot comprehend it. Even you Sanari, even as old as you are, cannot comprehend what he is capable when truly enraged.”

“He watched her fall to the ground, and as the life force bled from her, and because they were so closely intertwined, a piece of him died with her. That night was a night of the blood moons,

when our usually yellow-white mother moon and yellow orange child moon turn red. A long time ago, when Earth only had one moon, this was called the feral eye. Now with two, it was called a Demon Sky, and their powers over the Lycan was incredibly much more well pronounced.

“The twin moons were just beginning to rise over the cold mountains to view this scene, and they looked upon Sage with that red eyed stare, and for a creature like him, who’s might is held sway by the moons, was granted their power, and accepted it.

“A god of War and Chaos was born that day, a creature who the angrier he gets, the stronger he gets. Sage sucked in all his hate, all his anger, all of his loss and his shadow fed off it. It grew inside him, like a fiery black inferno and transformed him.

“The Battle Form in which you’ve seen him use against Illia was unlocked, a massive creature of unbelievable strength, nigh invulnerability, and a hyper healing factor which is as of yet unmatched in all the multiverse, became an unstoppable killing machine.

“The ground burned with fire beneath his feet, etching his footstep into solid stone, while his teeth were like sabers, and his claws like knives. The darkness swelled inside him, his body being wrapped in shadows, his eyes turning into a burning red, and when he opened his mouth, more fire, like from a blast furnace, erupted from him.

“Thirty Kell were hunted one by one, skinned alive, disemboweled, their arms and legs ripped from them. Only then did Sage kill them by twisting their heads off. But their leader, Kor, Sage left alone.

“He tracked him, over and over again, to their lairs, to their strongholds. And he killed, and he killed and he killed. Males and females alike... their children, their pets, everything they owned, butchered and slaughtered like cattle. Their belongings he incinerated with a terrible fire, his baleful scream heard for miles around like a banshee’s wail, told of his ache.

“That cry still invokes terror and madness in all who hear it, even from a distance.

“With that war party’s act, Sage’s clan declared war on the Kell, but each time one of their war parties marched on a stronghold, they found it shattered and in flames, and the bodies of the Kell all arrayed outside it skewered on pig-poles.

“And Sage continued to hunt their leader. Each time he found one of his family members he flayed them alive, hung them upside down, and then tore their head off so that their blood spilled out their bodies. And he’d leave the leader be.

“Again, he’d hunt him, kill all those around them, leave him with the baleful cry of terror screaming straight in his face, and then leave. Till at last Sage found them at their last bastion. He killed mercilessly over three thousand Kell, and now that their entire sub-species lay dead around him, Sage finally fought their leader.

“The term of an “ignominies death” comes absolutely no where near how the last Kell died. Sage was found at long last amidst flames and wreckage, still punching at bits of him.

“His white fur had been stained blood-red; his green eyes burned a like color.

“And all of this, because of his love of a woman.”

Sanari’s heart had forgotten how to beat just then as Dallas continued to watch her, and she forgot all her womanly graces as she covered her mouth with two cupping hands, her eyes shed tears, and her body shook.

“When Sage returned home to the valley of his home in the mountains, he wept, and the force of the emotion was so powerful that the whole of the valley mourned with him. It was so powerful that it awakened even me to it. I remembered cursing myself with the inability to weep.

“It took three whole years for his eyes to loose their red shine and go back to green. It took an additional two to cleanse him enough of all the blood where his pelt turned white again, and the other priests of the Order allowed him to enter the Shrine of the Earth again. It took nearly an decade to allow him to love again as he once did.

“He leads a very cursed life, Sanari. Every female he’s ever loved has been taken from him. I can see the fear in his eyes at the thought of loving again, and yet he tries, he truly tries.” Dallas breathed, and rising up off his seat he knelt before Sanari and took both her hands in his. “I truly don’t want to see his hope dashed again Sanari. You are among one of the few beings since Ariel that did not fear him at first, and I know you love him.

“So please, in Sage’s name, please... do not give up on him.”

Again, Dallas was crying, and Sanari’s heart wrenched alive inside her at the ache she felt from his story, and removing a hand from his grasp, she smoothed his bald head and kissed the top of it.

“Never.” She said, and swallowed hard. “I will never give up on him...”

Day 10: Focus

Several days later saw Mayia walking through the corridors, quietly and almost silently, her apprentice master's robe skirting about her ankles as she strode forward.

She was avoiding other people's gazes now, those who still talked about her behind her back, which she could still hear with her sensitive ears. Geevo, the Creator bless him, was also bearing the whispers being that he had stopped speaking, and word was spreading through the school that Sage had also punished him as well. But when he was confronted with someone who asked him if he was being punished, he just smiled brightly and shook his head.

But the fact that he didn't speak didn't stop him from courting as many young ladies as he possibly could. The fact that he'd stopped using his voice, just like Mayia, meant that instead he began his 'conversations' with other young girls with a caress, or a touch.

It made her nipples so incredibly hard as she wondered what it would be like for him to touch her like that. She so wanted him to.

Her partner, Siklohn was, by Sage's leave, allowed to act without her now, so busy was he preparing and training, that he was rarely in their room anymore. He barely slept.

But now she walked down the halls feeling a shiver down her spine. She'd been 'summoned' again. But there was good news... it wasn't to Sage's office, but rather to the well used meditation chambers built for the students.

She looked along the room numbers for the one she was required to enter, the light revealing her face underneath her hood for the barest of moments as she lifted it, which brought about a gasp from someone passing by as they saw her face. She ignored it and stepped forward, the doors sliding silently open and then closed again as she entered into an antechamber designed to cut off sound from beyond without disturbing the person meditating inside. She waited for the second set of doors to open for her, revealing a small chamber with dimmed light, in which Sage's form stood in his familiar prayer stance.

He uncoiled from it as she entered and turned toward her. Mayia promptly snapped to, and bent her body deeply at the waist in a bow before righting herself to her master. With her not able to speak, it was the only way for her to communicate was with body language, and to bow to one's master was all the respect Sage desired.

"Sit." Sage said, and gestured to a mat.

Mayia turned and stood on the mat, turned gracefully and descended. The motion was rather fluid, like Sage had trained all his students, but Mayia with all her training in dancing and grace accomplished it better than anyone by not having to readjust her balance so much. She was even better than Sage himself, he admitted once, but then also admitted females had a greater ability at balance and grace than males did; all because of their lower center of balance.

And so she lowered herself.

Feet together, hands on lap, she squatted. *First position, The Squat*, in which Sage's students would remain for as long as they were able, or till he told them to end. Calves, thighs, buttocks and balance were all trained simultaneously.

Mayia then settled forward onto her knees and sat up as straight as she could, hands on thighs, feet crossed beneath her rump. *Second position, The Kneel*. With the body upright, the whole of the back and the abdominals were stretched and firmed. One got tired real fast at first in this position, but it strengthened one's rear quarters, back muscles and enforced correct posture.

She then settled backward over her crossed feet onto her rump, her thighs spreading open and her hands following them to rest on her knees now, with her feet crossed directly between her thighs. *Third position, The Sit*. So far, this was as relaxed as Sage would allow his students to be, but it nonetheless stressed the inner thighs to stretch and become more flexible. The back remained straight, but the shoulders were no longer square.

Sage descended across from her in the same way.

"Fourth position." He said simply. "Meditation stance." And his hands moved from his knees to cup one another in the bowl formed by his legs just above his groin and directly in front of his navel before his thumbs pressed against one another and his head bowed slightly.

"Do not tense your muscles and relax." He said.

Blinking, Mayia followed his motion, and clasped her hands in her lap like he did.

"I've been studying your species for some time now, Mayia, and through successive bio-scans of each student I've received; your species presently has the highest inherent, un-awakened capacity for psychic ability.

"This is good, and will make your advancement all the easier. We seek balance here in all degrees. Light versus Dark. Body level with Spirit and Mind. And finally, we must awaken you to all your elemental sources or charkas, and their aspects.

"As such, on your road to balance, we will now begin to develop your seventh Chakra."

Mayia's mouth went dry, sapping away all her ability to speak beyond her will. *B-but the seventh Chakra is thought! The Chakra of the Psychic! Surely I don't possess...*

'Truly you do possess the ability, Mayia.' came Sage's voice in her head, and for the first time in weeks she made a sound through her mouth, in the form of a gasp. Sage smiled. *'The Seventh Chakra governs the Mind and thought. With this next stage of your training, you will now be awakened like your former mentor Noxi was awakened.'*

'Psionics is a circle of magic, just like any other magical art. It has specified formulae in the form of Wave Form Emanations that you can learn and 'cast' just like you would cast your Sorcerous spells or your Chi Spells.

He paused and then continued using his mind to communicate with her. *'But now comes the application and culmination of all your skills, Mayia. The spirit flows through the body, is enhanced by the mind, and produces effects of such magnitude that in the next few weeks that I am sure that there will be few upper classmen in the Core Mystic League that will be able to stand against you. You are at the point in advancement where your potential will explode. Just like mine did, just like every last member in our order who has reached this point.*

'The mixing of powers, combining them together, produces effects that with one skill alone, would require a much more refined master to produce. To summon a fireball using the limitless energy of the spirit, channel it and refine it with your body as a conduit, and then enhance it through Pyrokinesis. With very little energy, you create a remarkable effect.'

Mayia was staring at Sage, understanding the simple prospect at what he was trying to teach her. All the others Chapters of the Mystic League focused on only one aspect of magic per student. Sage's school had seemed to be inefficient only because he was preparing all his students, advancing them to their limits, and then when they were at the breach, breaking those limits.

High level magics became so much easier to do! She understood it! She wanted it... but then Sage was continuing.

'Be aware, however, that there will be periods of... transformation.' He focused her with that steely gaze of his, his glowing green eyes capturing her. *'You must not be afraid of these changes; you must let them happen without fear in you. They are natural advancements.*

'Do you understand?'

Mayia nodded.

'We shall now begin with the basics. First, we shall begin with telepathy and then move into the kinetics...'

Siklohn's eyes looked mad. Those deep black within black eyes within his hard features no longer looked noble, but rather normal now. Just like anyone else. He felt excitement as he hammered away at his craft, piece after piece.

CLANG! T-tang... CLANG! T-tang...

He was counting out the rhythm, one beat on the metal, two on the anvil, a steady rhythm that was ceaseless. Other students came to watch him for hours on end between classes, just to watch him work. He was pulling out all the stops, etching his armor with precision, a master's work!

Theories in his art suddenly made sense as he implored them, his mind ravenous. There was little more than a week left, and he'd yet to begin on the heavier armor casts that would lay over the rest of his body... let alone his shield.

Each finished piece was a work of art. Beautiful, polished silver inlaid with gold. The magical level of each was so great that each piece hummed with the power of the Artificer who'd created them.

The final piece of the greaves he was constructing was at last finished, its hammered steel forged using the Rhythm of the Forge; the way a Smith made Magic. Iron made steel, and then imbued with the movements of the Smith who forged the steel, the time of his mallet striking the steel in a specific manner, thousands of time over, wrought a sort of spell unlike any other kind in the multiverse.

Siklohn set the greave to water, and it hissed menacingly, glowing red inside the waters to signify that it had been made correctly as it sucked background magical power into it, the force of the imbue spell sealed inside its steel.

It was now unbreakable.

It was the first time he'd gone so long without making a single mistake like botching the imbue or miss etching the scrollwork.

He went to his scrap bin for another piece of metal, but stopped as he saw Caliban standing in front of him, the vixen's sexual form hidden inside her baggy clothes that are meant for a male in form and in size. He could've worn her clothing and not looked out of place and been quite comfortable in them. This sweet, demure fem, a short while ago, was a woman-hating, woman-bashing male Aphkian wolf, a fiend who'd earned him the ire of every last female in the mystic league.

All four chapters.

As punishment, she was transformed by Chief Headmistress Meniko into a female, with her sizeable endowment as a male, transforming into incredible endowments as a female. She'd spent over two years as a female, and now whatever she *had* been was now fading away from her mind.

It was because her newly acquired feminine heart was stricken by this handsome white-furred vulpine of the Dousaka Clan: Prince Siklohn. That heart wanted her to forget.

"Please eat Siklohn. You haven't eaten for days." She said, holding up a tray loaded with all of Siklohn's favorite foods. He walked up to her, looked down at the tray and lifted a hand as if to push her out of the way, but when he looked at her, he couldn't do it.

With a sigh, his hand instead moved to some sweet bread before he sat down on one of his work stools with it and proceeded to devour it. Cali, as she was beginning to call herself now, watched happily as he devoured every last crumb. She herself didn't touch any of it, preferring to make sure that he got his fill first. The young Lord used his bread to sponge up his soup after he'd drained it by simply bypassing the spoon and upending the bowl into his mouth, slurping loudly.

He was always so proper, she thought, this was so unlike him to bypass all his upbringing.

"Thank you." he managed and then moved swiftly back to the metal bin and removed several large pieces before dropping them into his melting pot and sliding it over the thermal vent. But when he turned, he was again met by Cali as she stood in his way.

His mouth opened to protest, but then he felt his gloves being removed, and looking down, saw Cali removing his gloves from off his fingers.

"Oh..." she winced as she saw the heat and sweat blisters on his hands. "Siklohn come here." She said fiercely, grabbing him by the wrists and pulling him back over to the work stools. "You are working yourself raw, Siklohn. You'll be hammering on your hands and not know it soon."

She removed a hair pin from her done up and stylized hair and began to pop his blisters and push the puss out, letting his own healing factor repair the wound she caused.

"I don't understand. Why are you letting Sage bully you into this fight?"

"He's not bullying me." Siklohn said simply, not even wincing as she squeezed every last drop of the sweat and puss from his hands. Siklohn didn't feel pain. This, as he was beginning to feel, had both its ups and downs. Though it saved him from the pain of all those blisters, to the point where he didn't even know it till Cali was popping them like bubble wrap, but it also didn't allow him to truly feel the sensation of her delicate fingers handling his strong hands. "I challenged him, and he accepted."

Cali looked at him incredulously; the corners of her eyes pinching and her jaw slacked.

"I challenged his authority since day one. I am surprised he took this long to recognize it. He is either not as wise as his name professes, or he has far more patience than anyone I've ever met."

Cali's mouth pressed shut. She had an opinion about all this, but the moment she settled on one opinion, a thought entered into her mind and that changed her opinion into another. But the deep down truth was that she did not approve of this whole thing.

The pair of them fell into relative silence, and Siklohn found himself watching Caliban's nimble fingers as she continued to work on his hands, even using what little healing magics she knew unnecessarily on his hands to help them heal. Then at long last she was done, and she fingered one of his hands as his free hand gripped his gloves.

Then to his surprise, she pulled his hand to her face with both of her hands, and turned her chin to kiss his palm.

“Your hand is so soft.” She said quietly, which for the moment was true after they’d so recently healed themselves; and she held his hand there, nuzzling it briefly before opening her eyes and looking at him. Her body thrummed with its desire to at long last be laid down by him, and to feel these hands spreading her thighs as he takes her.

Her body tensed from her sex and nipples to her toes as she thought this with a smile. But nonetheless, Siklohn was given the feel of her tears against his fingertips. Seeing her like this, he felt a pang of something deep inside his heart. It was kept mainly away from his mind from experiencing fully, and he gritted his teeth wanting to feel it, even if it was bad.

For the first time he cursed the way of his birth. He truly cursed it.

He rose to his feet and stepped forward, cupping her soft, lovely features with both hands now before he lowered his head to kiss her on the forehead.

“I must continue.” He said simply, and more of her tears slid from her eyes onto his hands.

“I... I must get back to s-school,” she managed and stood before him, and leaning forward hugged him closely.

She wished that for once he’d embrace her back instead of just hold onto her hips, and for once, he did. For a moment, it was like that even, till, ever so slowly, she felt his hands slide up her back, just before his strong hands closed about her shoulders. Her breasts pressed against his chest, and the two held each other for the longest time. Then Cali retreated, averting her eyes as she retreated.

Siklohn watched after her, waiting for her to leave. He then strode to his armor and looked down to his hands, seeing the moisture that was still there from her eyes, and reaching up with his left hand, he smeared her tears over the heart of the breastplate armor, and then moving sideways, he rubbed her tears over the closed faceplate of his helmet.

When he withdrew his hand and looked at the helmet, he suddenly reached up and wrenched his helmet right off the wall and proceeded with it over to his workbench. Carefully prying the face guard from its housing and mechanism, he then proceeded to paint it, and then re-gloss its once silvery surface. He spent an immensely long time carefully resetting the face plate into his helm so as to not scratch the new paint before walking back to his armor wall and replacing the helm and closing the face plate again.

He looked up at the face plate, now painted a pearly white, and from under the crystalline eyes, painted in blue with the effect of a harlequin’s mask, were six tears. Three for each eye.

Sanari sat in her garden quietly, her reclaimed staff lodged against her breast, one shoulder and the ground while she stared at the old weathered tree. The ancient protector had been uprooted during the last hurricane, and was now being covered in moss and lichen, with its many sons and daughters growing from its decaying form now.

Small creatures made it their home, and the feel of the garden around this spot had turned to peace once again. The tree's children were thankful for its sacrifice.

She had not slept at all last night, so deep was she in thought that she didn't even bother undressing from her visit to Sage's island the night before. She was thinking of her experiences there, but most of all, she regaled Daedalus's story of his master, Sage.

"No one here has ever seen Sage – truly – angry." She remembered his words, and thought of what he had done.

There was a stirring and a rustling nearby as Eakjo un-hid himself drawing her attention and a weary smile from her face as he climbed up onto the stone bench she sat upon and holding her side, nuzzled her breast with his cheek and mouth.

She stroked his back, a sad look pinching the corners of her eyes as she looked down at the little orphan as he tried to comfort his 'mother.'

She, like Sage had done, thought of him as their shared son.

Many would condemn Sage for such an unspeakable act like that, she thought. The systematic and brutal erasure of an entire sub-species, but she herself had witnessed more bloodshed, and caused much of it herself then she cared to remember. She had killed for the sheer purpose of anger at a person. Though thinking of all the chaos and death that Sage had caused, all for the love of a single woman, she hoped that she could someday fill the void in his heart caused by his loss of her. But unlike that one female, Sanari's hands were stained with blood as well as Sage's.

Though you could not see the stain, it was nonetheless there. There was a very large span of her life she wished that she could just forget about.

She looked at her hands, and thought that the crimson that she always thought was there had dissipated some. *Washed away by those holy waters in Sage's own shrine?* She considered. And in that Other Realm he'd brought her too, where the faces of the dead, those who'd died by her own hands, had forgiven her... it was as if a rather heavy weight in her life had been lifted some, the invisible yoke and the chains it held bound to her lessened some.

He was a monster that professed peace, forgiveness and wisdom, she thought, her hand sliding along Eakjo's back comfortingly, a small smile crossing her face as he hugged her, gripping onto her robes and laying his head on her bosom. A subtle, high-pitched purr from him calmed her a little.

So sorrowful was she of her past life that she had put up her swords and never taken them down again. And now Sage was all that much more of a perfect match for her. They *both* had pasts they were trying to forget.

And so much violence, for one so young, she thought with a sad look at Eakjo and all his scars, and of Sage.

She thought that she might be damned for those crimes; it was that thought which had led her into the role she lives now in hopes of somehow righting all those wrongs.

He'd spoken of wars that he had fought; the second Dragon War, the third World War, the Mage War, and constant conflict with Earth's invaders. There were tears in her eyes just then, and she lifted a hand to wipe them away, wondering when exactly she began to weep.

Eakjo reached up and helped to wipe away those tears, and she smiled happily down at the cub as he tried, crawling onto her narrow shoulders in an attempt to do so, finally hugging her around the neck. Her own hand lifted to hold onto his own tiny, yet strong hand.

Count yourself lucky, my sweet Lord, she thought, *that you have not seen so much as I.* She rose at last from the place she'd been for, for so many hours, passing her hand before her eyes to clear them of her tears.

"Sleep well, my old friend." She said to the fallen tree, and turned with Eakjo still on her shoulders then to return back to her shrine, only to see Yusuma approaching her. Yus was Sanari's chief student, just as Mayia was Sage's. But Yus was far more gentle in appearance and social grace than Mayia was, this red-furred and rather impressively endowed D'nyrrii beauty bowed to her headmistress, leaning on her own staff.

"Good morning, mother." She greeted, and then straightened before tilting her head to one side slightly with a wry, mischievous smile crossing her beautiful face.

"What?" Sanari mused.

"Lord Sage... has sent you a 'gift.'" She said at last, and the mischievous look in her eye told of whole stories of mischief that were running through her mind.

"Well lead on," Sanari urged, and the two of them walked together back to the shrine, but as they drew near to one of the archways leading into the center courtyard, Yusuma held off and stepped to the side of the archway, allowing her Headmistress to go first.

Many of her students were talking about what was arrayed in the direct sunlight of the courtyard, set in clay pots atop benches and stone decorations were small bushes. But the flower was the like she'd never seen before till last night, and she slowed as she neared, Eakjo coiling rapidly down and around her bodice onto the ground as he pranced up to the flowers to sniff at the beautiful, luscious flowers of crimson red, finch yellow, and snow white.

As she neared to some of the red ones, she bent forward and held one of the complex, tight blossoms with her long fingers and smelled the petals, the aroma filling her senses.

“Watch out, Mother, the flower stems have...” Tla, who’d been waiting nearby began, and then Eakjo gave out a short whelp and showed off a hand that began to bleed. “...Thorns.” She finished with a giggle.

Eakjo held up his bleeding hand, his face a whimper, but he made no other sound. Sanari knelt, and bracing her staff against her shoulder again, took the cub’s hand in hers and with but a touch healed the needle prick. He pranced away, showing off his hand to the other Grace Leaguers, laughing, and she watched him happily. He was definitely far less shy, but outsiders who regularly didn’t come to her shrine still brought out that shy streak.

So far, only Sage himself had been able to coax him out and gain his trust. *You are far too gentle of a spirit to be a warrior, my lord*, Sanari thought, a small smile on her face as she thought of how gentle Sage was despite his massive size and incredible strength.

Some said that he was even physically stronger than Rae, but that was only speculation. The two of them knew which was stronger, and they didn’t tell others the truth.

Rising to her feet, she at last saw a note that was held by a special clasp jutting out of the nearest plant. Flipping it open, she read:

I’d seen you admiring these flowers the other night, and thought that you may desire some for your own shrine.

They are called roses, and are fabled to be my world’s most beautiful and delicate flower, with an intoxicating aroma that I’ve included as a perfume of scented oils that I’ve concocted.

Sanari paused and found a small crystal bottle, and opening it, smelt the supple aroma of these flowers contained within. Looking left and right to make sure not to many were watching her, she slid the stopper’s crystal pestle across her neck and breathed deeply of the smell before continuing.

I thought of you when I collected these bushes, and thought that only a being with such beauty and delicate grace to match their petals should care for them.

A flower such as you.

Do be mindful of these flowers though, their thorns are sharp, and always remember the most beautiful of flowers always have thorns of some kind.

White for Life.

Yellow for Friendship

Red for Love and Passion.

*With love and honor,
Sage Preypacer*

Sanari's eyes watered as she looked at her prize, more glad of Sage's words about her than his gift.

"Tla! Yusuma! Hurry, fetch work aprons and the gardening tools. We must get these planted immediately!"

I couldn't remember the last time I felt this happy... I truly couldn't, and I wondered if I'd ever felt as good as this, or if it'd been so long that I'd forgotten. It was then that I settled into my observatory that overlooked the caldera, set in a place where the openings in the meter long leaves of the Millennium Tree allowed me to see down over the whole school through a crystal bubble, and likewise see out over the ocean.

It was here that I set my art scaffold and stool, arraying my case of pastels, pencils and paints off to my side and began to art.

I was actually humming as I began the first sinuous line with a pencil on the canvas.

Sanari had enjoyed my gift. I'd watched her from secrecy as she accepted it and enjoyed immensely the sight of seeing her smile. I enjoyed making her smile.

My hand continued to etch out lines and details, sliding this way and that rapidly, faster than I've ever been able to accomplish this act before. It happened speedily; it formed perfect lines this way and that, all the while the light from Wave World's sun filtered in through the crystal dome of my quarter's observation deck.

I was truly inspired by a muse; something I hadn't thought to have for myself in what felt like an age. Cheek bones, eye ridges, almond-shaped pupils... high, tapering, hooded ears, and a shapely full and rounded bosom.

Satisfied with the shapes, I began to detail.

Jewelry, hand placement, facets in the eyes, lines in the lips, and so on, till at last I lifted my pallet, set my colors to them, and began to paint with oil based colors.

I had traveled a total of six universes, searching for ways to help me fulfill the task that my own master had set upon me: to eventually replace him as grandmaster. I'd become the strongest warrior of my universe, bested the champions of five others, and now, though I was fulfilling the fine points of my bargain with Rae, it was the first time that I'd paused, and actually enjoyed the people of a universe.

And this school had so much to offer, more than the others ever had.

The Great Wide Universe, or universe Omega, was the closest sister universe to my home realm of the Prime Universe. It was nearly as old, but instead of primates being the principal life form in my universe, anthromorphs were the principal life form in this one.

Though their magical science of Sorcery is potentially not as strong or powerful as Magery, what they did have was far more refined. There were certain schools, however, that they did not have, and others we did not have.

I hoped to learn those here.

My library of magical knowledge had increased several fold since coming here, even though Meniko only allows me to see what she wants me to see, the Public Databases of some of the other more prominent schools fill in the gaps Meniko leaves for me. Daedalus had been profoundly helpful on that accord.

By now he's probably downloaded the totality of the public domain knowledge of this universe from their archives and sorted it.

Though he's does that in each universe we've established a base in, this universe has an unbelievable level of knowledge and powerful beings. And here, engrossed in the principal school for such arts, I was learning much.

And some of it was more than just mere magical know-how, more than mere knowledge in warfare.

I... I think... I think I am learning to love again...

The light of the sun continued to wane as I worked, the total and utter beauty of my subject finally being given the breath of life as I worked, putting some of my soul into this artwork. In the late evening I put on the final touches, and pulling out one final brush, I marked my name in kanji script at the bottom of the page and stepped back to look at it.

Sanari's lovely face looked back at me, her eyes open, looking at the viewer, her hands folded genially to cover her naked breasts, with a rose flower in her hair, and beautiful jewelry adorning her neck, ears and head.

My hand lifted toward the painting, not touching it so as not to smudge the paint, but my fingers slid over it a finger's breadth from the surface.

The image I had created was innocent and radiant, with eyes that shone with the wisdom of the ages, showing her to be a goddess in her own right. Full bosom hidden by her hands, and her hair done up beautifully with ribbons, hair-stays and jewelry. Beauty beyond measure, and each time I saw her, she seemed all the more beautiful...

This was as I saw her...



My hand gestured, and a pyramid of light surrounded the painting, and the painting itself, becoming the focus of this temporal skill, suddenly aged five years. The reason I did this was so that the oils dried fully in an instant, being that it took years for such paints to dry fully. I didn't want them to smudge.

"Are you complete with Sanari's birthday present, Lord Sage?" came a familiar voice, and I turned to see Daedalus, or at least his principal drone, standing before me with a covered china platter in which several aromas permeated from it.

I smiled. *Steak – very well done – steamed and peppered vegetables, sweetened green tea, and sweet bread,* I thought, smelling all the aromas. Being a Tiger has its

benefits. One such benefit is having a sense of smell similar to a blood hound, which was better than most wolves ever hoped to achieve.

"Yes, Dallas, and thank you for finding her birth certificate."

"It was my pleasure, sir." He set the platter down on the lowered dining table nearby and removed the top. "It took some doing – her planet was nigh totally razed when it was assaulted by the Aphkei Dousaka Clan. Luckily, her homeworld did produce a records storage facility like all other well developed worlds in this universe. The centralized store house there had kept much of that world's records safe and unharmed. Including the record of her birth.

"I've also accumulated a thirty generation Gemology for her as well. It is being scribed as we speak."

I thought a moment about Sanari's homeworld and how it was razed, and how one of my students – Siklohn – was a member of the former warlords that had caused the razing.

“She still harbors some hatred for that boy.” I said sadly and moved to where Dallas was taking the plates off his china platter and setting them in specific placements at the head of the table.

“Indeed sir. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why she hasn't come to your school until recently?”

I came to Dallas's side and clasped my large hand over his shoulder. The technology to create his principal drones was difficult to establish. Dallas himself has ironed out some of the traits to show the world a face he prefers to give them. A young, bald, blue eyed man in his thirties perhaps, with the only pieces of his *vast* cybernetic network inside a biological body being the metal cowl wrapped around the back and sides of his head.

Though he had the ability to create hair, I was surprised he'd chosen not to.

“Thank you Dallas, for all of your help.”

“My pleasure, Master. Now please, eat, before your dinner gets cold.”

Day 11: Dream Time

Sanari entered into her quarters late in the evening, well after midnight, after making sure that her shrine's grounds were locked, and everyone was in their dorms. She routinely did this every night, walking the grounds of her shrine with nary a person to interfere with her thoughts. It allowed her to think.

Rarely, if ever do her students violate their curfew, and usually it is simply because time got away from them while they were outside the walls of the shrine. They are all at the least respectful scholars, and the only one who really has permission to stay up past curfew, simply because when he starts working he cannot stop till its done, is the artificer Aphkian Mountain Wolf named Helseg.

Even now she can hear the steady rhythm of his hammer falling on the steel.

She turned and slid the door to her rooms shut. The simple rice paper with the makings of wood and mortar formed her splinter school here, stationed close to the main school of the Mystic League. There was not a shred of technology here other than simple mechanisms like door locks. Helseg's shop was the most that she would tolerate. Though it was a mistake, Dallas had caused some damage to the natural magic here, which though easy to patch up, was nonetheless aggravating.

She was sorry she'd let her temper get loose.

She lifted her dainty hands and set them to their bindings about her robes, immediately undoing them one layer at a time as she walked to her wardrobe. Little by little, this priestess removed her many layers of robes, hanging each piece on its own hanger, till at last she was removing the scintillating effects of her undergarments, made of body shaping white silk.

She wore very little jewelry, and these she removed and placed in a platter inside the wardrobe – bracelets signifying her station in her school's order, a couple of rings, and a gilded and bejeweled headdress from within her hair.

She then stepped quietly, nigh on silently across the wooden floor laden with ornate carpets from her homeworld. These cost a small fortune for her from museums – *museums*, she thought – but she wished to have some semblance of her old home about her, her sinuous and firm form stepping with the grace of an immortal. Against her back, however, visible in glances from within the covering fur over it and now visible outside her robes, were three long scars that etched themselves horizontally across her well shaped form.

And then she found herself before her mirror, a floor to ceiling thing surrounded in silver.

One of her earlier students had crafted it for her by making everything from scratch... including the mirror pane itself.

She looked at her nude body, one hand lifting to push between her breasts to finger a simple silver locket that hung around her neck there, a keepsake that she never took off, and viewed her body objectively.

Am I desirable? She wondered, folding both her hands over her rounded belly now, compressed pleasingly inside its hour-glass shaped form. *Is this the form Sage desires?* She turned again and slid her hands over her apple-shaped bottom, her long tail sliding back and forth across her calves as she looked at herself from behind. She supposed that this was a desirable form, with a well-rounded bottom, and a good strong back and shoulders, but then she noticed the three horizontal slashes across her back and she hugged herself, turning away from the mirror.

The Dousaka had done that to her.

She remembered a time then, very long ago, where she'd been stripped nude, humiliated and bound tightly by the wrists face-first to a cross bar while she was whipped. The marks all over her back had mostly healed, but these three marks remained. Even after magically healing they had remained.

Strange that shortly after this experience she grew powerful enough to awaken as an immortal.

The Dousaka lord that had captured her wanted her broken and turned into a pleasure slave, as a woman should be, according to his judgment. And once she was broken, she'd be paraded before her people to break their hope.

For them, she never let herself be broken.

It was good that she'd never been violated, for the Lord would not do so unless she was thoroughly broken.

She sighed and turned back to the mirror again looking at herself, trying to think as Sage might upon looking at this for the first time, as if she expected that tomorrow they were to wed, and he'd take her to his bed that evening. She cupped a breast and heaved it, lifted her arms up behind her head to see them heft as her chest lifted with her arms, and then looked at her image again.

Then she summoned her spirit power and in an instant, streamers of holy power were surging toward her, flowing into her navel, and she began to grow taller, stronger, and more physically massive. Her breasts filled and distended, her muscles clenched and bulged, her mane growing longer and fuller and her tail wider as every muscle in her body swelled.

Soon she was as large and as imposing as Equis, and in spite of herself she struck a pose, testing her new muscle.

Transforming spirit energy into physical form was a simple matter, but it required concentration to maintain it, simply because you had to keep sucking power into you. Sage's mass was based on this, but somehow he bypassed the need for concentration. She could sense him using the

same power on top of his natural strength, which was already immense, like Rae Iksaki's strength was immense. The power source in his navel was remarkable, and his spiritual prowess was what drew her to him in the first place. She was now simply growing more enraptured about all his other qualities.

His gentleness, his nobility, his kindness...

She looked at her bodice, her thick muscles, which bulged impossibly many times their original size as she struck another pose, her biceps pushing her breasts together while she looked at either of her forearms in turn, and then sighing, she released the power and immediately shrank back down to what she was before and hugged herself around the middle again.

Best not to make myself something else, she thought. Best to make myself what I am, not what he may want me to be. Besides, maintaining that form took too much effort.

That was one of the teachings of her school after all. 'Why bash something to pieces with might and power when simple kindness, logic and reason worked better?'

She hugged herself closer now, her hands folding beneath her chin as her breasts compressed together beneath her arms while her thighs pressed together and her tail wrapped about them.

She remained as such, not looking at her image before she stepped back to her wardrobe and removed her sleeping robe, a sheer white cloth that fell to the floor both to the front and the back of her, with cinching straps just over the hips to hold it shut about the sides.

She walked lithely to her bed that was set into the floor, her hand rising so that she might gesture with her finger, and all the candle lights and lamps shut off around the room. Crawling into bed, she pulled the sheets over her and laid her head against her pillow, and closing her eyes, she began to dream.

Sanari truly did not know where she was at the moment.

Everything around her was luminescent, glowing subtly with a yellow light. This was a sight she'd only caught glimpses of at times past whenever she was in meditation, her eyes closed and she communicated with the plants around her. The trees, the flowers and grasses, all had a shimmering yellow-orange light to them at those times.

Now, wherever she was, everything had that soft yellow glow. Including herself, and as she looked down at herself to see this glow, she looked down upon her naked bosom and body, and realized at once that she was naked.

And she didn't quite feel right.

The darker emanations that usually assailed her were gone, as if she were in a place that was only good intentions. She'd been in places like this, most recently that elevated reality Sage had taken her to in his shrine/temple.

Wondering where she was, she nonetheless stepped forward, being that to stay in one place in a world of the unknown meant never to gain enlightenment.

Her footsteps carried her through a field of tall grasses, yellow stems with their seeds dangling at their tops. The dry grasses slid against her thighs and between her legs, caressing the length of her sex and tail and tapping her rounded bottom with the feel of the winds as she slid her hands over the tops of the grasses. A long unfelt feeling of being free with ones nakedness assailed her, and she reveled in the feeling of the wind caressing her bodice, and the freedom of her bosom unbound against her chest in the warm, perhaps autumn air.

It was like walking naked and barefoot through the plains and fields of her homeworld when she was a child. Before the Dousaka menace. She hugged herself, closed her eyes, and standing in one place with her thighs together, breathed in deeply while her body was warmed by the golden sun above.

Even if this world is fake, she thought, then it is nonetheless a good place to visit, every once and awhile. If this is a dream... then it is a good dream.

But then her ear twitched as she caught a sound that was separate from the natural sounds of the wind and the insects chirping, and opening her eyes, she started and looked around, and then slid sideways as she turned on her hip toward the sound, stepping quickly forward to see if there was some other being here on this strange wonderful world other than her.

A shimmering lake greeted her as she topped a hill, surrounded by tall evergreen trees.

The sound was definitely a flute now, sounding as if two were playing at once. She stepped forward, half jogging, with her bosom bouncing with each step, she slowed and pressed against a tree as she saw a massive creature of white fur, feline features and black stripes. In his large hands was a long flute, which he deftly manipulated with those clawed fingers of his.

She pressed closer to the tree, one breast flattening against the bark of it as, like a wood nymph; she looked out on this male with his handsome features. She slid around to the other side of the tree and pressed against it again, her other breasts compressing while her curious feline nature took her as she wished to divine the nature of this creature, noting that his massive form was without apparel, just like she was.

His head and body moved minutely then, and suddenly, she saw that it was Sage!

She gasped and flattened her back against the tree, her chest heaving as she ran a hand through her hair, and looking down, she actually watched her nipples clench and stick out of her fur. When she looked up, she saw another figure there, a slender but buxom female of white fur and black stripes.

Sanari blinked at her as she smiled back almost lovingly at her. This feline was taller, stronger, with broader shoulders and wider hips. Her chest was more mature. The species was unmistakable. She was also a Weretiger, and turning her head back to Lord Sage, seeing him only out of the corner of her eye she looked back at this female.

'Ariel!' she wanted to say the word, her eyes growing wide, and though her lips did not move, this other female nonetheless heard it.

'Yes.' Sanari heard in her mind. *'I am she. I was watching when Sage's servant had told you about me.'*

Sanari swallowed and the creature known as Ariel stepped forward, embracing Sanari, their chests pressing against one another.

'I know you seek him as a lovmate,' Ariel replied as she withdrew, her shining blue eyes looking at Sanari. *'My dearest heart deserves someone like you, Sanari. Perhaps you were the one meant for him instead of I, so I brought you both here.'*

'W-why?' Sanari asked, her mouth still not moving.

'Because I love him, and I want him to be happy. He's long been very, very sad, and when you come to him, he forgets me. It's as it should. The living should not dwell on the no longer living or,' she reached down to her belly. *'The not yet alive.'*

'I also wish to give you something Sanari.'

Sanari's eyes were wide, her chest heaving as her heart beat rapidly inside her chest.

'Yes?' she prompted, but to answer her, Ariel reached forward and caressed one of Sanari's breasts, slid her other hand down her navel, and then held onto her hips before leaning forward again and kissed her, her lips against Sanari's.

Sanari's eyes widened greatly as she felt something flood inside her through her mouth from Ariel's, a soul's power. In all her life as an Ecomancer and a priestess, she'd never dared to take a soul into her. They helped her, they lent her their power, but she'd never taken one inside her. Even when times were most dire in her life, she'd never thought to violate a soul by taking their soul and empowering her own.

It was a secret that she'd never taught to any of her students, and never shall. But this creature Ariel was *giving* it to her. And with it, came something else...

Ariel withdrew finally, her form a little less solid, and she smiled happily, caressing Sanari's cheek.

'You now have me with you, Sanari.' She said. *'All of my knowledge as a druidess, all my graces, and all my knowledge of our beloved. Your body will change, a little, to reflect this.'*

'B-but why? Why give me this?'

'So that we may both love him, and...' she lowered her hand and felt Sanari's belly, which was already tightening with Ariel's muscle. *'Because of this.'*

Sanari gasped as something bright and wonderful shone from within her navel, and she grasped her belly with one hand, and Ariel's hand with her other.

'This is the spark of Sage's child that I carried in me at the time of my death. I give it to you to bare now.' She smiled at the look in Sanari's eyes. *'You and he will have to create a new vessel for it to reside in, until then, it will comfort you.'*

Ariel was ever steadily fading away as she lifted her chin and kissed Sanari's head before stepping backward and folding her hands before her.

'Now go to him. Comfort him as I have... and love him... as I have.'

And right before Sanari's eyes, the were-tigress known as Ariel faded completely away.

Sanari lifted a hand to her chest, her fingernails a bit longer as she slid her hand through a patch of fur at the peak of her chest between her breasts before she turned and peaked from behind the tree. The new soul inside her urged her on, her form changing minutely into a slightly taller, slightly stronger Sanari, with fuller, firmer yet still rounded breasts and broadening hips ready for the blessings of motherhood. Her mind was filling with desires and knowledge of places on Sage's body to touch, of things to say...

She stepped forward, folding her hands before her as she stepped lithely forward, walking on her toes as she approached the mountain of tiger perched on a rock before the lake, his fur shining the purest white as hers shone golden.

She was incensed, she could feel a burning in her navel and in her chest as she stepped one foot after the next toward him, a deep blush rising up in her cheeks while she listened to the hauntingly beautiful sounds he drew from that flute.

He will not be aware that this is anything other than a dream... a thought occurred to her, and at the moment she was not aware if it was her own or Ariel's.

She held her breath, standing quietly beside him, and then lifting a hand to touch him, she withdrew it in hesitation, and then felt her resolve steadied by Ariel's soul, and she reached out and cupped the back of Sage's neck, sliding her hand teasingly up along his neck into that long mane of his.

Sage's playing stopped with her touch, and he turned immediately to see her, withdrawing the flute from out of his mouth and holding it with one hand. He was surprised to see her this way, but he smiled happily at her, his wide, angling eyes pinching at their corners as she walked about his side to face him, her fingers caressing his cheek as they slid across his face as they followed with her.

She felt calmer than she'd ever been in her life, and happy, especially when Sage rose to his feet to stand before her. She felt her eyes go wide with his size, and when her eyes lowered to his groin, her eyes widened also at the sight of his... size! Sage continued to smile at her, his flute now resting on the rock once he'd risen, and now she felt both his hands cupping her face, his thumbs caressing her cheeks, his eyes looking lovingly into hers.

There it is, she breathed. That's the look I wanted to see in your eyes when you look at me Sage.

He stood head, chest and shoulders above her, it was a view that even Ariel was familiar with, and looking lovingly back up at him, she began to purr, and slid her face into one of his cupping hands, both of her much smaller hands holding onto his wrist and fingers as she kissed his palm.

She stepped forward as his arms fell about her, her breasts cleaving to his middle, as she heard him purr as well, a deep rumbling beneath her cheek and ear like a diesel engine idling. She embraced him, smiling and closing her eyes, feeling safe as her arms conformed to his strong back and waist. She wiped her cheek against his belly, marking him as hers with her scent.

He moved backward and sat on his rock again, settling her on his lap, placing her in just the right position so that they could see eye to eye. A dotting smile changed his face then as she leaned forward, and was met halfway by her with his kiss.

A tear escaped out of the corner of her eye, and then from the other eye as she felt her chest swell with a sharp intake of breath through her nostrils. His grasp slid up her navel, over the subtle creases of her belly to slide in between her breasts to cover her heart, his middle finger tapping her chest in tune with her heart beat as he withdrew and kissed her again, withdrew, and then dipped his head to kiss her neck. More tears escaped her eyes in happiness as she bowed her head and kissed the top of his head, her long fingers lacing through his mane, cupping his ears that had flattened against his head, her back arching to press her breasts into his throat and the base of his chin.

His other hand lifted and joined the first in holding her about the ribs, his fingers sliding over the hidden lumps of her secondary set of nipples hidden beneath her breasts, teats that did not develop until the gift of motherhood among cats, and then promptly disappeared once nursing was done. They were nonetheless, just as sensitive as her primary set. She hugged his head, pulling her kisses down onto her chest as she rubbed her other cheek against his mane, planting her kisses where she could find purchase while she tried to purr harder for him.

She licked his brow, and found him lifting his head to kiss her again, a longer, more passionate one than the first, and before she knew it, her body was moving on its own. She rose; her tail lifting high at her backside as she stepped backward one, drawing him with her, and then

flattening her back onto the grasses about the rock, settling Sage above her. One of her legs lifted to slide against his hip and thick thigh, her arms rising behind her head as her back arched.

Sage wiped the tears away from her eyes with one hand, planting his other hand to her side, being careful not to crush her with his weight as he fingered her lips, nose and chin after wiping away the tears before descending to kiss her again.

Her nipples hardened till they ached, and her thighs rubbed together as Sage lowered himself to kiss her again, withdrawing only long enough to moisten her black lips with his tongue before kissing her again.

Sage's teasing hand then lifted from her face as he withdrew again, and both of them watched as he lowered it again to cup her breast. She'd made love to many a male, who immediately began to twist her hard nipples between their fingers, or knead her tit like they were making bread, but Sage's touch merely alighted upon her fur-laden tit, his hand drawing back to their fingertips as he slid his index finger about the circumference of her areola and then slid the side of that finger back and forth along that hard nipple.

She sighed through her nose, closing her eyes as he merely shifted the breast, now sliding two fingers across her nipple, tweaking it as first one finger slid over the tower and it snapped back erect, and then the second finger repeating it before both slid back in the same way.

She sighed again, her hips arching now while her thighs compressed about her sex, which was even now growing moist and firm. His lips descended to her tit, his thumb caressing the mound of woman flesh again before his kissed her teat, moistened it with his tongue and then blew on it with his breath. She groaned now as a realm of goose bumps slid over her chest, spine and arms; her body aching and her chest perspiring, sweat sliding in between the deep fur, as her already aching nipples quivered harder.

Sage rose further above her, still steadying himself with one hand close to her side as the touch of his caressing hand now slid over her ribs and onto her navel. Her tight abs clenched as his fingers slid from her sternum, down the length of her belly to the recess of her belly button.

She looked back up at him as his hand turned and brushed his knuckles against the base of her abdomen, and as he sat backward, his fingers caressed her thighs, coaxing them to part. Her jaw set as she watched him kneel between her thighs, the touch of one of his large hands smoothing her belly, the other teasing her other breast now as she herself moved a hand to hold onto the one of his caressing her tit, while her other snapped to her side and clenched into the ground to brace herself.

She bit her lower lip, chewed on one cheek before he moved, opening his own thighs to show her briefly his unsheathed and erect phallus, and she remarked briefly that even his race practiced circumcision just before that broad head pierced her loins, and he slid into her slowly, carefully.

Her hips arched as her mouth opened to gasp, her back arching even further as he pushed centimeter by centimeter into her, one of her legs lifting to wrap about his back while her other hand slapped to her side and she held onto the earth with both hands.

He filled her... filled her perfectly, as if he was built specifically to sate her, and in her desire to embrace him, she rose to settle onto his lap, letting go of the earth only so long as it took for her to clutch onto him.

Her breasts settled high atop his chest, flattening against his chest and trembling as she shivered and he continued to purr, and she hung on him, her head resting on his shoulder as he slid the great pack of his cheek against hers, marking her as his.

His hands found purchase on her rump as he helped spread the two cheeks apart, and to her surprise, she slid deeper onto him, before his arms rose then to hold her to him; his form moving enough for her to feel that gyration stir her from inside her loins, sliding up and downward and around with her sex spread open wide to accept him.

It was difficult for her to think, her body moving of its own accord apart from her will. She knew that this wasn't Ariel helping her, but rather her body working off of the most basic of instincts engraved inside her head.

It took a great deal of her to try to control herself enough where she could move her body herself instead of itself controlling her. She'd made love many times before, then why, oh why was this affecting her so? She'd always been in control, but this great were-tiger, the beloved of her heart, pleased her in ways only those other males dreamed of.

His art of combat mixed with his knowledge of healing, to perfectly draw out mind-altering levels of sensual emotion. He knew where to touch, how to touch, to liven her sex, to heat her body, to drive all thought from her mind in favor of feeling her pleasure.

And she wanted to return the favor.

With immense concentration amidst her pleasure she coaxed him onto his back, but then once she got him to lie down she felt weak with the effort and she braced herself against his chest and shoulders, especially when he suddenly clenched inside her and the swelling of his erection filled her loins with a thudding lurch that numbed her brain thoroughly. The lips of her sex spread open, dragging out her clit as it hardened even further, and she gasped as she felt that great throbbing mass inside her massaging her from the inside.

She gasped, her breasts hanging heavily from her chest, her mane sliding about her face and eyes as her eyes opened halfway to look down at him. She was breathing through her mouth, sighing with every exhale, gasping with every inhale, and then while she watched him, his hands took hold of her hips and he stirred her yet again. Her eyes tightened as one of her hands slid down her belly to hold their conjoined sexes, her hand pressing her erect clit against his shaft as he stroked into her, and she groaned as his other hand took hold of one of the hanging fruits from off her chest and caressed it like he'd done before.

She gasped, her eyes squeezing shut – tightly – and her body took over again as it forced her down on him to his hilt before an orgasm forced all the muscles of her sex to clench, even tighter than her eyes had just done, about him; holding his extension firmly, trapping him inside her before her back arched deeply.

Her fingers slid up to her navel and clenched into her belly as her stomach constricted. She could feel him deep inside her, feel her navel pushing outward a little as he clenched again inside her, and she gasped again, a trickle of her love juices sliding from inside her to coat his erection. Then she felt one of his hands leave her hip as he braced himself, and then she felt her breasts settle onto his chest as he rose, and opening her eyes, she looked straight into his glowing, emerald green eyes, closer than she'd ever had before.

Breathing shallowly, she tipped her chin forward and caught his mouth, both her hands lifting to lazily hold onto his face as she kissed him as another wave of tears escaped her eyes. She leaned her forehead against his as she braced herself onto his chest again, beginning to churn her hips now, her fingers sliding against his chest and ribs, finding each of his six nipples in turn before she began to clench her inner muscles to draw him deeper inside her.

This time it was his turn to grow numb in the mind as she teased him, her body rising onto his lap, her feet lifting to arch over his thighs, hooking over the thick muscular things just behind her rump as she rose above him, and she saw him look upon her naked bodice lovingly, admiringly, and she was filled with joy at the sight of that look on his face for her. Her hands slid over her belly, her stomach muscles again clenching to please him as she kneaded her abs with her hands, and was surprised to find those strong fingers of his lacing with her own. She gave his hands a squeeze before he withdrew them, and to her surprise he then cupped them around their coupled sexes. Thumb and forefingers slid about the O-shaped opening of her womanhood, teasing her firm labia and holding her clit onto his erection as they both gyrated for each other's pleasure.

She closed her eyes, now taking to riding him, her arms lifting to fold behind her head, hefting her bosom higher, giving them the impression of suddenly growing larger, revealing the hardened nipples of her secondaries beneath them before she opened her eyes and felt her whole body stop in amazement at what she saw.

He was crying.

Her heart gave a lurch as she descended quickly to him, sliding her arms beneath her shoulders as she wiped his tears away with her cheeks, and he embraced her gently.

He held onto her possessively and she took to nuzzling his mouth and face with her nose and lips.

'Love you...' she tried to whisper and rose above him, her face growing somber as she touched his mouth with one hand, and pulled all her hair over one shoulder to dangle onto his chest with the other hand before bracing herself against him.

And they continued to love...

Mayia walked quietly across the open grounds of the Shadow League, wrapped in her apprentice robes against the night chill, while the mountainous walls of the volcano's caldera rose up all about her.

A brief vibration trembled beneath her feet, and she stopped, feeling the rumbling as the tree's power quelled it as soon as it began. Those who slept more than likely didn't even feel the rumble. As time progressed, the fury of this volcanic island grew more and more suppressed.

She knew that Daedalus's eyes were upon her, but at the moment, she didn't care if she was busted for violating curfew. She had a lot on her mind at the moment, and wanted to walk it off a little.

And so it came to pass that she found herself in the center piece of Sage's outdoor garden, the great Zen Garden of massive boulders of volcanic glass and black sands. To simply look upon the stones and the waves etched in the sands demanded contemplation, contemplation led to meditation, and in spite of herself she sat down on one of the many marble benches and contemplated them.

She didn't really know how much time passed as she looked at them, finding her mind positively blank, unable to think. If left to herself, she would've sat there till dawn. But then a visitor approached, and it took him to reach down to touch her shoulder before she was aware of him.

She looked up at Geevo, standing there in thigh socks that left his toes open, and a body suit that covered his muscular arms and sexual body and was completely open below the waist save for a loin cloth that fell down only on the front down past his knees. This loincloth bore the markings of a beginning priest in the order Sage, and now all his students, belonged in. She wanted to ask him dearly why he was studying such refined ways as those, but he was changing into a far more caring person than he was before coming to this school. He cared more for others, especially young females like herself.

She smiled at that thought.

She was almost sorry that Sage had required that he wear some sort of support for his endowment, to which he only acquiesced after one too many knee strikes to his groin by the master himself. Geevo – as well as all the other male students – now began to wear some sort of armored cup for their fronts in case Sage suddenly desired to test the sensitivity of their groins with his knee again.

The type that Geevo wore, however, left his bottom and his tail well open for all to admire when he wasn't in uniform.

She lifted her head, much of her face hidden beneath the shadows of her hood, but Geevo nonetheless saw her lips spread into a smile, and he sat down beside her, taking both her hands in his.

Before, when she'd first met him, and even up until recently, she wanted nothing more than to feel this beautiful bunny pierce her loins and take her virginity away. She'd mistaken sex for love. But now that he'd at least tried to become her friend, she was quickly understanding the difference between the two, and vastly preferred love.

Especially when he took both of her hands and held them between them both, trying to look into her hood as his ears folded against the back of his head.

Since he'd also vowed silence, they had very little left to themselves to express their affections for one another aside from gestures, and her developing psyche was not strong enough yet for telepathic communications. So as he took her hands and held them, she squeezed them in turn, and leaned herself against him.

Every night they danced with one another, except tonight. With Siklohn absorbed with preparing for his challenge, and Cali absorbed with him, Geevo and herself were both out of practice partners. So they exercised with one another, they danced, they touched hands. Expressions became their language, as if the ancient art of communicating with body language was being rediscovered between the two of them.

Mayia, looking to the rocks now, suddenly felt his hands tighten about her fingers in a brief squeeze, and looking up to him, she saw him watching her instead of the stones. He smiled, and then removed the fingers of one of his hands from hers and instead lifted them to her hood and pushed it up over her head.

She looked at his expression as he opened his eyes wider, his mouth opening briefly in wonder before he smiled at her as if to say: *you look beautiful*.

She bit her lower lip with her oversized incisors, as she caressed the large plait of muscle of her cheek, fingering her lips with his thumb. The two of them, continued to watch one another, more crossing between them than words would be able to manage, Geevo lowering his hand to hold hers again. But as she looked at him, she swallowed, her eyes half closing as she lifted her chin. Geevo in turn tilted his head to one side, and the two of them closing their eyes as one, kissed.

They withdrew and kissed again.

And still again, and nuzzled one another.

Mayia then laid her head against Geevo's shoulder, lacing her four fingers with those of one of his hands, and the two of them covered the conjoined and clasping hands with each of their free hands.

Yes, she thought, I certainly much prefer love...

Sanari awoke in her room with a lurch, her eyes squeezing tightly together as her body gave off a subtle spasm. Her sheets, which were all gathered about her waist, clung to her middle as she awoke with an orgasm; her fingers clenching around the posts of the head board of her bedding. Her eyes opened lazily as she stared at her ceiling, her mouth opening to taste the mixed scents of the cloud of her pheromones mixing with the fresh sea air and the scents of the flowers in her shrine's garden with her tongue as she smelt them with her nostrils.

Her fur was matted and sticky with sweat, her body still incensed to the point as she laid there, her thighs pressed together and her stomach muscles clenched in a wave from sternum to her loins in one final orgasmic release that spilled the last of her love juices into her bedding.

She closed her eyes and relaxed her body, sighing through her nose before rising in her bedding to a sitting position, smiling happily as her hands felt her belly, and at the new definition in her abs there. She hadn't had a natural six pack for the longest time, and she'd definitely grown a little in both height and endowment over the night.

Her smile broadened as she could feel Ariel mixing with her own soul's energies, and at the life spark held comfortably in her navel, filling her with solid warmth. Already she held Sage's first child in her. All she needed to do now is to ascend in her relationship with him her in the real world.

But tonight was a wonderful boost, she thought, remembering the multiple times they'd made love in that dream state; different methods, different positions... she was surprised that a male who'd only made love five times in his life of eighty or so years knew how to pleasure a woman so well.

And yet he did again... and again... she sighed and her labia squeezed tightly between her thighs as her thighs compressed, her clit notching tightly into the peak of her sex. Her bedding and her sleeping gown were in a terrible state, and her mane was in remarkable disarray.

I need to see him again, she thought and looking up, sat up and then quickly rose to her feet. *But not like this*, she laughed, looking at all her matted fur and disheveled mane drooping about her ears and features. *Need a shower first!* She spied her gift of the scented rose oils Sage had recently given her on her way to her bathing chamber, and with a broad grin she snatched it up and proceeded into the next chamber to bathe.

I leaned against one wall of my shower as I was pelted by the remarkably hot water, the sort of heat that would get my dick to shrink up. Since I woke this morning, just after blowing a batch into my bedding, the damned thing wouldn't sheathe. Even now I held it compressed inside my hand in some hopes that it would slide back inside its pouch.

Damn, I haven't had this much problem with this thing since puberty!

My eyes opened as the waters continued to rain down on me from four different directions above my head, sliding through my mane, and streaming before my eyes as I looked at nothing in particular.

It was so real... I thought, my fingers finding the edges of a piece of tile as I breathed heavily through the hot, moist hair. It felt real. The pleasure, the emotions, her soft pleasing body, and those warm breasts about my shaft later on as she sucked...

I gritted my teeth and snarled as my erection began to return and I tried to drive those thoughts from my head. I would not dishonor that sweet creature like this.

And why not? A voice inside my head told me. I rarely heard from it, for often times my shadow did not give me advise. It held sway over my ID, my darker and baser desires. *She is a woman that should be honored with your feelings Sage, and sated by your physical form. Not dishonored by them...*

Damn your eyes Sage... another voice supplied, which was even stranger, being that this was my lighter side speaking, my Aura, and it was rare – if ever – a possibility of the two agreeing, ever. It held my rational mind and logic. *Don't you even see the way she looks at you? Don't you even acknowledge how you feel around her?*

Yes, I answered simply, my eyes closing a little more, and momentarily abandoning my attempt to sheathe my sword, I lifted my other hand to the wall and simply allowed myself to remember.

Remember the feel of her breasts, the firmness of her bottom beneath your hands.

Remember the feel of her womanhood clenching around you, her lips kissing you, her fingers caressing you.

Remember her loving heart tapping against you as she presses against you, the rumble of her body as she purrs her contentment for you, as she professed her love for you.

My eyes opened, not realizing that I had closed them as I listened to the thoughts in my head. They were all my own, but they were triggered by different points in my head.

She said she loved me... I thought, and sat down in the shower with all my fur being matted down about me. The other two consciousnesses were silent at that. They wanted me to consider that simple fact. *But it was just a dream!*

Stop trying to rationalize it. You love HER!

Let yourself go.

Go to her...

I blinked my eyes open, feeling a compression in my chest at that last thought. There was one final consciousness that affected me, something that all cultures, in every universe everywhere called 'the holy spirit.'

It's voice could not be heard, and it was difficult to understand what it wanted. But now, it was like it had found my heart strings and was tugging them in the direction of the Mystic League's main island where Sanari and her shrine resided, with her splinter school of holy students.

That presence inside you, which warmed you from within, was a presence that once you learned how to recognize it, was very difficult to ignore. Everyone had one unless you drove it away, but even if you did, it would always come back. Breathing outward sharply as I watched the water seep through the floor drain, I rose to my feet and promptly shut the hot water off, and the water raining down on me immediately became artesian. Very, very cold!

For a snow cat like myself, it required things that were really, *really* cold in order for me to feel them.

"If I am going, then you, my little friend," and pointed at the cluster between my legs. "Are going to retract."

Damn, talking to voices in my head, and now to my dick. I must be going mad...

But before I go... there are some quick errands that will need to be run first.

Day 12: Masters

Mayia and Geevo walked down the corridors. They had expected this, Sage had summoned them. It was a definite that Sage had been notified by Dallas as to their escapades last night. Out *well* after curfew. Practically till dawn as it were.

Mayia, with her hood drawn again, looked sidelong to Geevo, now in his own uniform of loose pants that were slit down the sides to show off his legs at least, and a sleeveless black jerkin held shut with toggles, he looked positively chivalrous in her eyes now. Sliding a hand out of her robe, she reached sidelong and grasped his, and was greeted by a smile from him as their fingers laced.

The two of them finally turned one final time, and stepped into one of the as of yet unused rooms of The Lair. Sage was there, but so was someone unfamiliar. She and Geevo looked at this stranger from head to toe in surprise.

She was a she, white fur from head to toe, and as they entered, she positively beamed at them, a smile so grand and happy to see them that it relieved much of their original confusion. But they also looked to other things. She was dressed in a body cloth and a tube top of the same soft blue color, the two of which formed a cross on her body of sheer blue cloth. Her simple G-string of white silk covered her sex perfectly.

She was tall, and built with most of her muscle concentration in her legs, with beautiful definition in her arms, chest, and ribs. She was well stacked too, which led Mayia to elbowing Geevo in the ribs to keep him from staring at her chest.

She giggled, and lifted a hand with black fingers, three of which – thumb, index and middle fingers – were encased in some sort of flexible metal casing covered with beautiful purple-red ceramics beset in some arcane method.

She was taller than the two of them, definitely much more well defined muscle-wise but without the girth Mayia was showing now, but what surprised the two of them the most was that this newcomer was a hare. Complete with the large ears that rose above her head in a perky way, either of which holding a large golden ear stud. She also had five fingers on each hand... just like Lord Sage.

Which meant that she was from his universe, Mayia considered

“Geevo, Mayia, this is Master Tia.” Sage introduced, with a bit of a smile on his face.

The two turned to look at him, their faces showing their confusion, and Tia giggled happily.

“She is from my homeworld, a Lycan, just as I am, but from the Hare Tribe of my Clan. Now that my students are beginning to rise up in their chosen paths, I’ve decided to call in specialized

instructors from the Order so as to help you along in your higher level training while I continue with the new students in the basic to mid levels.

“As you can see, she shares your path.”

Again they blinked, and now looking to her, saw that she wore the same bolt of silk cloth weapon that the two of them held beneath their uniforms, though hers was white, and at first was unnoticeable in the way she wore it, hers being worn like a jacket with two great loops against her back like hollow wings. Now that Mayia looked at her, she began to spy all the concealed weaponry in the form of hair stays and jewelry. She now looked to the strange purple finger sheathes she wore on either hand, and immediately wanted to ask the question as to what they were, and where she could get them or how she could earn them.

They were pretty. Geevo was even eying them.

Nestled at her back were a pair of closed metal fans and a collection of small sheathed knives, all of which were set in an ornamental sort of way. Against her back and atop her chest were plates of pearly white layered armor made of pieces of overlapping, painted metal plates held onto her bodice by pieces of more white silk.

She was positively beautiful!

“There is an obstacle that the three of you must master, however.” Sage continued, and she and Geevo looked expectantly at him again. “Tia is a mute.”

The two of them immediately looked back at the newcomer who smiled happily and waved at them again with her fingers, and they both felt their hearts drop again in disappointment.

“But, that is another reason why I selected her, for she will be teaching you the Silent Tongue. A way of communication within our order without using speech, and instead uses sign language and body language to communicate, and there is no other in the order better than she at it.”

This time, the pair of rabbits looked at one another with excitement, and Mayia surged forward to hug Sage, and then her new teacher. Geevo went straight to Tia and giving a bow, kissed the back of her hand like a regular romancer. He then moved to Sage and clasped his forearm and shook it enthusiastically.

“I knew you’d both enjoy her company.” Sage smiled. “The Silent Tongue will be a required course before graduation, and the two of you will be taking her first course here so that she can iron out the details of her instruction. On top of that she’ll also further your training in the use of the Ribbon, as well as any other associated weaponry you may both choose. As a final point, she’ll also further your understanding of dance. You shall report to her every morning after your chores, and every evening after classes and dinner for her instruction. As such, this will allow you a later curfew of midnight, so lets not have a repeat of last night. I’ll let you both off with a warning.

“Mayia, Geevo... good training.”

All three of them bowed and Sage bowed in return and then left, and before they knew it, Tia was taking both Mayia and Geevo by the hands and leading them down to the base of an auditorium and bade them to sit before her so that they were all in a circle. She handed them new data cards and provided them with temporary data pads for working with, and when they loaded them, they immediately found all of her lessons for them to read. Tia placed her finger sheathes into a waist pouch and taking her datapad, began typing characters into it with a blinding speed and precision with one hand. When she held up her data pad, in big, bold letters were written the words in perfect grammar and punctuation:

My name is Tia. What are yours?

Siklohn had paused from his work only so that he could care for his mount. This was one of his daily tasks that he actually took time in, and much of his usual personality returned as he made sure to shoe him and brush him down, and make sure that he was properly fed.

He stood within the stables amongst many of the other steeds Sage had brought from a dozen different worlds. There were other students here, but Siklohn was the only one who could care for this mount. Around them were large horses of stunning form and poise, a Kirin, which was a great maned and horned creature that was the only one that could hold a candle to Siklohn's mount.

Sage had attempted to interest Siklohn in a new mount when he first arrived, but Siklohn adamantly refused. He had a bond with this animal that was beyond friendship. As young as Siklohn was, he and this beast had been in many battles – or should they be called engagements – with each other. He'd curled up with this animal on cold nights in the field and had been taught that often times that one's mount was a better companion than anything a soldier might ever know.

Recently, he was beginning to doubt the teachings of his clan. Or at least that there were exceptions to this rule. Like Cali...

As if the thought of her new name was a summoning spell, Siklohn suddenly felt her body slide up against his, while her hands slid around his sides to grasp at his chest. He felt her breasts pressing against his shoulder blades, felt her body conforming against his, and despite how much he wished it, he couldn't derive as much pleasure from this experience as he wanted.

It was, nonetheless, enough to force his hand to pause in its brushing.

“Why do you relent in showing affection for this ghost, Cali?” he asked quietly.

“Because I so wish it,” She answered simply, and held tighter onto him. “Even if my lord is as a ghost, I will thank my guardian and my savior with ever ounce of my being if need be.”

He couldn't find any words to dispute her this time, and he was continually finding himself at a greater and greater loss of words when it regarded her. Deep down inside, he knew that he could never love her the way she wanted him to... as much as *he* wanted to, so he unconsciously tried to drive her away.

Unsuccessfully. He was losing this battle to a much more powerful force.

Cali had all but forgotten her given name and the situation of her birth, and despite those situations, she was trying to help him live the same way. *Forget the situation of your birth and love me*, her body was saying right now. Her every poise and posture, her every gesture, her very presence all hinted at that fact whenever she was with him.

With her, he knew hope.

Great maker I cannot hurt her...

"Enough." he said, and peeled her hands away from his chest, and stepping away from her, dropped his brush on a nearby table and sat down on a stool. "Please go away, Caliban. You don't interest me any longer."

She continued to stand there.

"Well? Go then!" he only just raised his voice in command but couldn't bare to look at her for more than an instant.

She stepped forward so that she was right before him.

"Go!" He repeated

"Only if you look me in the eye and command me to do so." She said in return, calmly and with profound confidence in her words.

Siklohn rose to his feet, fists clenching as he looked into her face, and opened his mouth to speak, but the look within her eyes paralyzed his jaw from mouthing the words to command her to leave him.

Defeated again, he promptly sat down and turned away from her, leaning against the work bench with all the grooming tools and brushes. But then his ears twitched as he heard Mayia moving just outside the field of his vision, and turning to look at her, he felt his jaw fall as she undid the front of her sleeved uniform jacket and pulled it and the straps of her undershirt from off her shoulders, her undershirt falling down till just her nipples were covered, the pair hardening, and she sat on his lap.

"I didn't think you could do it." She whispered into his ear and hugged his head, resting it upon her ample bosom so that he could hear her heart beating. Her hands brushed his mane with her

fingers, and she hummed a song under her breath. Siklohn could've sworn it was a lullaby. It took over an hour of him stubbornly resisting her, but minute after minute, he relaxed further into her warm embrace, and minute by minute, his hands moved to encompass her shapely waist.

I arrived back at my quarters after seeing that all the morning chores and classes were completed. I wanted to look my best for Sanari when I presented her my birthday gifts, but as I climbed the stair to my rooms, I was greeted by Dallas standing by the front door.

“You have a guest, Lord Sage.” He said without preamble.

My brows beetled. “Who?”

“Mother Sanari. Breath mint?” and he held out a tray with three mints. Swallowing I took them all and chewed them up rapidly before moving to the door. Dallas wiped off my shoulders and picked a piece of lint off my back, and remained behind as I entered.

My nostrils flared as I searched for her, and gritting my teeth, followed her scent to my observatory deck up the stairs. As soon as I rose up onto the upper floor, I saw her figure, poised quietly before the art piece that I'd left out for her to eventually see, her head bowed and staring at it with her arms folded quietly before her inside her usual robes, which looked remarkably like a kimono.

I came to stand behind her as she continued to look at the painting, just before her ears twitched, and swiveled against her head to point at me. Then she turned elegantly, and I took a slow intake of breath as the setting sun caught her in that instant, wreathing her in a golden light just like I'd seen her in that dream last night.

“Is this me?” she asked, and turned again back to the painting, laying a hand on the edge of the canvas.

“Yes.”

“I... don't think anyone's ever looked at me like this before. I like it. Truly I do.”

“I was inspired.” I said, feeling the corners of my mouth rise in a smile. “I'd meant it for you, but wanted it framed before you saw it.”

“You are a very talented man, Sage.” And slid her fingers down the length of the painting's edge, and rubbed her fingertips together, and looking at me smiled warmly. I puffed up in pride, breathing in deeply her scent.

Apparently she too knew that oils took a very long time to dry.

“I will cherish it, though I *am* confused. I’m not one to be considered to be given gifts, usually. And now you’ve been giving me many. Why all the interest?”

“I had mentioned to Daedalus that I wished I knew what day your birthday was. I wanted it to be a surprise and so asked around the school to see if anyone knew. Not even Meniko or Rae Iksaki knew.”

She looked at me expectantly. “Not surprising. Though I may not look it, I am very old, and my homeworld is still in ruins. There are very little records left.” She turned and looked to the painting again, hiding her face from me, but not before I saw her features fade a little.

“So Dallas told me. But that still didn’t stop him from scouring every database he could find, searching for it. He is tireless when he sets a task for himself. Finally, he found records from an archeology dig that had uncovered your world’s great library, and found this.” I lifted my hand and flicked my index and middle fingers at her from off my thumb, and suddenly a piece of parchment, folded into thirds and bound with a blue ribbon appeared between my fingers.

Sanari turned back to me, her own brows beetling now as she looked at the parchment, and then to me, and accepting it, she unfolded it and no sooner did she begin to read than she covered her mouth with one hand and tears began to escape from her eyes.

“This was his gift to you. I am having trouble finding something suitable enough to compare to it.” I smiled at her as she looked up at me, and surging forward she embraced me tightly.

She wiped her tears on my tunic and looked up at me with shining eyes.

“I’d forgotten. I’d forgotten how old I was, even what date and where.” She looked at the parchment, on which was a copy of her birth certificate.

“Happy two thousand, five hundred, twenty third, Sanari.”

She held onto Sage tighter. “Thank you! And where is that Bioroid?!”

“You called madam?”

We both turned to see Dallas standing there, with a subtle grin on his face, and before he knew it Sanari had hurried over to him and squeezed him tight.

“You’re welcome.” He said. “But this was all truly Lord Sage’s idea. You should thank him properly by accepting his dinner proposal. I’d suggest three days from now... on the official date of your birth.”

“You *are* alive.” I heard her whisper to him, and then turned still clutching the proof of her existence. “I accept your proposal Lord Sage. Shall we make it at nine? After all the students are under curfew?”

Mayia strode through the halls of the Shadow League between classes, her robes rustling about her, hiding her body and much of her face. She was surprised at how many of the young males now looked at her from afar, being that her robes only suggested her body form, and her reddened lips, from her make up, amidst her angled face, suggested a hidden beauty.

Since Sage's punishment, which she truly wasn't seeing as a punishment anymore now that she's caught onto his plan, her reputation as a developing bully was rapidly being forgotten, and she had learned how to listen a lot more. Few have truly seen her face since then. Not even she herself. She refused to look into a mirror until this was over.

If this whole affair was to gain her the affections of Geevo, then she truly would've taken far worse than this.

But as she walked through the halls, just before everyone else's curfew to go meet Tia with Geevo, she paused, hearing some voices. She approached quietly, listening with her sensitive hearing, and heard Cali speaking.

"Sage is hurting him!" she complained to one of her girlfriends, one of the few who actually forgave her for her actions. Now what was her name? Kirn! Clio's bond mate with Karn. "He's breaking himself to meet this challenge. I hate Sage for doing this to him. Siklohn's withdrawn even further than ever."

"You shouldn't be so harsh. I've never known Sage to do something that wasn't good. He has something planned for your cute lover, whatever it is. And I'm sure you'll even thank him."

"Never. I'll never forgive Sage for this. He'll be the death of us all if we simply let him to... hey!"

Cali didn't get a chance to finish her sentiment as Mayia shouldered her way between the two smaller fems, who, despite that she was a rabbit and a weak prey species, was head, neck and shoulders taller than either of them. She patted Kirn on the shoulder to say she was sorry, but then turned sharply on Cali, her jaw set, and lifted her head so that the shadows of her hood faded away to show Cali her face.

She saw the vixen gasp at seeing her visage, locked in its stern look of warning, but she was sure that that gasp wasn't just because of her look. Whenever someone saw her face as of late, they gasped at whatever they saw.

Mayia then lowered her head and lifted a warning finger before she continued on to her meeting, but soon had Cali storming after her.

"Now just wait a damn minute, little miss high and mighty." And rounded around Mayia's side and stood in front of her to block her way before poking her firmly in the chest only to bruise her

finger on Mayia's Constant Iron Shirt Technique. Sage's Psi training had increased all his earlier Chi magics a hundred fold almost over night, and now her body deflected low grade firearms.

Cali sucked on her finger briefly. "Ow!" but then remembered why she was there and then rose up on her toes to face the apprentice master. "I can't believe you support that bloated windbag." She continued while Kirn waited quietly behind them.

Mayia lifted her hands inside her robes, getting them ready to deflect any further strikes.

"And you sit in the same room with Siklohn, seeing him slowly waste away, and you do nothing. Your so into Sage, you should just go and screw him like the little bitch you are. He's slowly killing Siklohn!

"I cannot believe you'd condone that! I cannot believe that you support him so blindly that you'd allow him to break such a beautiful thing as him... and I just want to know why! Why do you so blindly follow something so callous, so pompous, so arrogant... so... GUH?!"

Cali's words got caught in her throat as Mayia lifted her hand from her robes. She didn't act in anger or hatred... annoyance maybe, but not those, and pressed her thumb, index and forefinger against Cali's head and concentrated.

Against an untrained mind, this act was unblockable. It was the nature of the Holy Order in which Sage taught to rise up all the different traits of a being – mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional – and Sage was true to his word in stating that she and all Oliverians truly do have a talent for the psychic.

Mayia slipped into Cali's mind and began to play one of the memories that she, Mayia, had experienced, and Cali awakened herself to being Mayia during that memory.

She was running, she was afraid, very afraid, so much so that she was blinded by tears.

It was on the main island of the Mystic League, and all was dark out. She turned, saw the shadows following her, jeering at her, and with a soft wail she ran as fast as she could. But then she ran into a hard body that was as solid as a brick wall and rebounded backward dizzy, and looking up, she saw the face of Rudfuul.

He was naked, nearly twice her size, and even as horror tore its way through her features as she looked up at this creature, a massive hand was clamped down over her mouth and she was spun, pulled into the gardens of the Mystic League, where three other shadows joined them.

"Here! I snatched one for you Caliban. You can have this one..." and she felt Rudfuul's groin stiffening into her rear, and she arched forward as his shaft pushed hard into the base of her tail as if to pierce her anus.

She cried and tried to bite, but even her tough incisors couldn't pierce his thick skin. She was then turned roughly to face the male form of Caliban, a large, calloused Aphkei male wolf, who

licked his teeth as if looking at a free meal. Before she knew it, he had clenched his fists into her bodysuit and tore it open, with one deft pull of either hand and immediately revealed her naked bodice to him. Again he licked his teeth and fondled her breasts, and she tried to scream, tried to scream and scream as loud as she could tried, to kick with her strong legs but a single punch to her knee from him numbed the whole of her leg.

She still felt that attempted penetration on her rear, and a muffled wailing came from her as she felt her entire soul dying from this violation.

“Ohh! She’s a lively one, Caliban.” Rudfuul sneered, licking her cheek roughly with his tongue. “She’ll wriggle and squirm nicely for you. Quick, before a security detail comes by.”

And she was hauled over to one of the stone benches and roughly laid on top of it. She tried to bite harder, but only heard. “Hey! That tickles, cut it out.” And was bapped in the head by Rudfuul massive erection.

She looked wildly around for help, and then saw Caliban as he sat on the end of the bench she was on, naked and already sporting a hard erection. The next thing she knew, her knees were being spread painfully wide, so much that the insides of her thighs ached, and she screamed harder than ever as she felt his hard prick press against her womanhood.

“Damn it! She’s too small.” Caliban said.

“So force it.” One of Rudfuul’s cronies said.

“Yeah! Tear her open and split her hips.” Another said. “This is for your pleasure, not hers.” And she heard their laughter, mostly from Caliban as he began to force himself, and she wailed in pain.

She felt her hips groaning, and then her leg popped out of joint due to his strength as he spooed a jet of hot milky liquid all over her thighs and sex.

”Yeah! Go Lubrication!” one of the cronies cried out as the tip of Caliban’s prick pushed its way into the crack between her labia, and she heard his viscous laughter.

But then there was the sound of thunder, and a flash of blazing light slapped against Caliban’s head and knocked him immediately off of her, and she coiled her one good leg up over to protect her sex now that it was let go. She ached everywhere.

“Go away, you, this doesn’t concern you.” Rudfuul growled, but she could see that Caliban and the two cronies were frightened for their lives. There, standing in the opening to the gardens, his body sparking with electricity was the alien from another dimension, Lord Sage.

She looked at him, her eyes begging him to save her, and he looked at her with those kind green eyes, and then to Rudfuul with a pair of eyes that blazed as dark a red as a red giant super star. His fist that was before him clenched, and she saw trailing of some strange tentacles breaking out

from the inside of his hand, wrapping themselves into a hilt and pommel before a long double edged and narrow blade ejected outward into a two-meter length from that hilt.

“You boys are in violation of curfew. I suggest you return to your dorms immediately before I report you for greater crimes.” Sage said quietly.

Rudfuul, his prick spouting a brief gout of spooage all over her breasts snarled at him instead. “Get him...” he grinned insanely, and rather face the unknown Sage instead of the vicious Rudfuul, his cronies, including Caliban, rushed Sage, only to feel the pain of having critical wounds slice their way through hamstrings, nerve bundles and muscle packs which felled the three once they’d come within striking distance.

“Idiots.” Rudfuul said, rising to his feet, completely forgetting Mayia now rose to challenge Sage, and roaring at him leapt at him, but only got a foot in the face which turned him and slammed him into the floor till Sage’s sword tip slid him from the abdomen to the tip all along the length of his shaft.

“Security.” He called into a wrist communicator. “I have four juvenile Aphkei students who’ve been brawling after curfew. Require medical assistance. Please alert Namah, I will be arriving shortly with a special case.”

And then the green eyed creature returned, and was before her. His clawed hand lifted to her thigh, a blue glow suffusing his hand as he touched her there, and though she heard the lurching sound of her hip popping back into joint, she did not feel it reset. Taking off his jacket, he wrapped her up in it and carried her personally to Namah, leaving the four boys rolling in pain.

A flurry of memories assailed Cali then, of she watched herself being cared for through Mayia’s eyes by Sage, protected and watched over, conversations with Noxi, her mentor, and with Rae and Meniko about her. More memories of her confidence being shattered, about her grades failing. Then another memory.

Cali as Mayia stood with many others, teetering with her mind numb from heat exhaustion and the weight and pull of the gravity about her. Her shoulders sagged, but her knees locked. She would not be defeated, not now.

Sage’s requirement was that he would except anyone who stood their ground here from dawn till dusk.

It was nearly dusk.

Just a little bit more! She thought, she thought hard, tried to summon the power to remain standing, tried to force her knees to remain locked. Time went by, and her knees unlocked, they began to sag, and as she collapsed, she blacked out.

A good time later she awoke with a splitting headache and a cold damp cloth over her brow.

“How could you do this to these students, Sage?” Namah, the Mystic League’s Chief Medical Officer was saying.

“Some things are necessary, Namah.” He said, looking down at her with those kind, green eyes while she heard grumblings from Namah.

“No!” she groaned, and began to cry, pushing her hands to her face. “I failed. I failed.”

But then she felt a sharp prick in her brow, and then someone removing her hands from her face, and, curiously, saw a pin sticking out of her brow, and likewise, she felt her headache abating rapidly.

“Failed? No, I don’t think so, young Mayia. You passed my test. You stood your ground for as long as you could, though your body failed. I do not discriminate between the weak and the strong. All can benefit from my teachings.

“Now sleep.” And he flicked the needle’s end in her head, and her eyes immediately closed of their own accord.

More memories, of her gaining her first uniform, of her excelling at these teachings, at her *improving!* Then of her getting her Apprentice Robe. And finally of Sage’s smiling face.

All the images faded as Mayia removed her hand from Cali’s forehead, only to see tears already pouring from her eyes. She could see Cali working all this information out, but most of all, she saw her quiver at the memories of her old self. A girl hating, trash talking raping male, that likewise got her reprieve from Meniko and Sage.

This, above all, turned out for the best in the case of her and Siklohn.

And here was Mayia, who had knowledge of her as a he attempting to rape her. She had all the reason in the world to hate Cali, and yet she had remained silent. She even tried to forgive Cali for all the harm that had been done. A single word from Mayia would have landed her, Caliban, the same fate that had befallen Rudfuul’s cronies, and the same sentence that Rudfuul would someday feel.

Executed for acts of rape.

But Cali knew what it meant to be raped, and that, with her having been transformed into a female, for all the greater good, now, it seemed, Mayia had kept herself silent concerning Cali’s old life.

But for doubting Master Sage, Mayia moved her hand out to their sides and held it there till Caliban turned to look at it, and Mayia immediately changed it into an open palm, and then brought it sharply across Cali’s face, slapping her so that it stung.

Cali collapsed to her knees, folding her face into her hands and cried, but then Mayia's features softened, and she knelt before the vixen and folded her into a comforting embrace, to which Cali leapt forward and embraced her back.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry... I'm sorry... I'm so sorry. Forgive me." Cali cried, and Mayia brought her back to arms-length, smiled at her as she wiped her tears, and then bent forward and kissed her on the forehead before helping her to stand, telling her that she was forgiven.

Mayia turned to Kirn, and lifting a hand, gestured for her to approach, and when she drew near, pushed Cali into Kirn's care, and lifting a hand, she touched Kirn's shoulder and squeezed it, looking at the Casid and asking her with her eyes to care for Cali.

Kirn, in her sexy two-piece, gave Mayia a thumb's up and hugged Cali as she cried her eyes out.

Mayia then continued on to her classes with Tia and Geevo, only wiping her eyes once she'd turned a bend in the hall away from them.

Day 15: Mistress and Master

Sanari arrived at Sage's Lair late in the evening on the twenty eighth of the month, quietly and silently, appearing in his courtyard amidst a flickering of light that radiated outward like a water droplet on a still pool of water. Her form shimmered into existence even as her teleport completed itself, and she walked forward to be greeted by the Bioroid Daedalus.

He bowed to her in greeting and led her into the lair, dressed superbly like a gentleman's manservant, holding himself with all the poise of an English butler. Through quiet corridors that were punctuated only by the occasional student, they wound their way to the sealed door leading to the upper levels of The Lair, and Sage's personal quarters. The wall melted away into the sides of the corridor as they approached, revealing a staircase leading upward and spiraling around a corner.

The pair rose steadily, Sanari picking up the front of her robes so as not to trip on them going up the stairs.

They passed another, more traditional Zen Garden, and finally up into the massive pods nestled within the crotch of the great Millennium Tree that the Headmaster's Quarters, and the Top Students quarters were contained. They climbed into the base of the largest of the pod clusters, and into Sage's anteroom, and stopped.

"May I take your cloak, Mother Sanari?" Daedalus asked before allowing entrance, and Mother Sanari smiled and lifted her hands to peel away the two long, trench coat-like flaps that enclosed her form, allowing Dallas to help her out of the hooded thing, to reveal her in all her feminine glory.

Other than times of bathing or sleeping, this was the least she'd worn in a long time. White thigh socks, long white gloves that rose to the crooks of her shoulders, a simple white silk patch of deep white silk held on by bead covered wire to cover her sex. A black coat that revealed the whole of her hourglass-shaped navel, with billowing sleeves that fell about her arms enclosed the whole of her chest and clasped tightly about the throat of her narrow neck with a silver clasp. Off of that clasp hung a little silver bell. The sweeping folds of this final garment fell downward over her behind, cleaving at the small of her back like the tails of a tuxedo to make way for her long sinuous tail, these tails becoming parts of her sleeves. At the front, the cleaving appeared at a point directly beneath her recently enlarged breasts, which filled the front of the coat to their fullest.

The sheer cloth was then done in elegant silver stitches, all done to accent her bust as the twin mammaries pushed against one another and upward atop her chest all for Sage's view.

A silver necklace below the neck clasp of her coat, as well as silver bracelets, anklets and hair stays further accented this being of light and darkness, with gems of green to compliment her eyes, and her hair done up elaborately in overlapping waves and braids.

About her middle, a silvery chain with a silver finger ring hanging off it dangled into the sunken recess of her navel.

As a final bout, she now wore a delicate application of make up. Reddened lipstick to cover her black lips, mascara to lengthen her eyelashes and vague eye shadow upon her eyelids that sparkled with glitter on silver grey. And to show her appreciation of her gifts from sage, her hair bore one of the white roses, open to full bloom, and the fragrance of his scented oils permeated her neck, wrists, behind her ears and bosom.

She looked like a lady, and even Daedalus, a creature she'd thought was just a mere machine at times, puffed up in the typical male reaction of looking upon a beautiful woman.

“You look very beautiful, Mother Sanari.”

“Thank you Dallas.” She smiled at him, folding her hands into the deep, flowing sleeves of her coat. She did this to keep him from fully seeing her wringing her hands in nervousness.

But nonetheless, Dallas lifted his five-fingered hand and covered the pair of hers. “He will not be disappointed.” He said simply, and the door to Sage’s quarters slid quietly open. “I will be returning later. Master Sage has insisted on serving you himself, and so has given me the night to myself.”

“You’re not coming?” she asked, blinking at the Bioroid.

“No. But you will be fine,” and he gave her hands one last squeeze.

He then turned and disappeared with her robe down the stairway, leaving her alone to step into the personal abode of Lord Sage’s home here in this universe.

She walked on her toes, her thigh socks open at the toes and heels, and at once her nostrils were filled with the scents of incense used in an attempt to cover a manly musk. She smiled at this, and then followed her nose to a dining area where a myriad of exotic smells greeted her. Music was being piped in through the rooms, a soft, spiritual chant sung in a language she didn’t recognize. Very quieting.

Entering into the archway leading to a dining area, she paused, and smiled as Lord Sage suddenly entered, carrying a covered tray of silver in which was one of their entrées, from which something delicious exuded to make her mouth water.

The long table was set at one side, at its head, with the place settings facing one another, instead of one setting at the head, and another at its right hand. It made her feel important that in his house, he treated her as an equal. The place settings were even expertly set, with white silk napkins, tea bowls, a salad plate on top of a dinner plate and a soup bowl on top of both of those. To either side of the plates were the knives, two spoons, three forks... he was apparently not without his own social graces.

He himself was dressed in a lord's garb; white silk shirt with a loose fitting black jacket and pants that clasped about his feet and ankles, looping beneath them like her thigh socks did. The jacket was the first thing she'd ever seen him wear that had sleeves, and it had great cuffs about the wrists that were done up in silver thread, as was his collar. The double-breasted jacket was undone at the first two buttons on either side, the halves folded downward to reveal the collar of his shirt.

It was also the first time she'd ever seen him without his priestly apparel and loincloths.

She lowered her hands and arched her back a little, waiting for him to notice her, which he did as he rose after planting the tray between the place settings along with the other food. She saw him stop, saw him stop breathing, and watched his eyes shine as they widened a little.

"Great Maker..." he whispered and stepped up to her, his head bobbing once to take the whole of her in.

One of her ears flicked, and a silver ear clasp shimmered briefly in the candle light, and she lifted a hand to him which he took and bowed over it before kissing the crook between her index and fore finger.

"You must tell me how I have earned the presence of such a flawless beauty, mother Sanari." He said, fixing her with his gaze, still bowed over her hand like a gentleman.

"You flatter me, Lord Sage." She said quietly, and gave his hand a squeeze, and let him seat her at the low table.

He lifted his chin and breathed in deeply. "I'm glad you enjoyed the scented oils I made you. They compliment you very well."

"Thank you." She blushed again.

She knelt there, resettling the trailings of her coat about her, and waited patiently as Sage dished a simple broth and then sat across her, and the two of them offered a prayer of thanks over the food before eating.

Soup, then salad, then something to clear the pallet in the form of a chocolate covered strawberry. Finally Sage uncovered the main dish, and her nostrils flared with the smell of it.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Salmon. It's a fish from my homeworld, and in my opinion the best tasting kind of fish. Especially once grilled and served with a basting of lemon pepper. My brother Patch was able to secure me a filet."

But once he'd dished her out an ample helping, he sat back and watched her. He'd hardly touched most of his food. She knew that he was looking upon her admiringly and now expectantly as she sampled some of his cuisine.

"Oh, that's very good!" she said in surprise. "Did Daedalus prepare all of this?"

Sage smiled. "No. I wanted everything to be special."

Only with her approval did he begin to eat, savoring the taste of the fish with her. Through half closed eyes as she cut her meat and ate, she could see him watching her. His gaze settled upon her chest as it swelled and contracted with each breath, and upon the deep arches of where her pelvis met with her thighs. With the low arching patch of white silk over her sex, held on by beaded wire that was all but hidden by her fur about her hips, gave off the impression that while she knelt like that, that she was naked below the waist.

"That is a beautiful gown you are wearing." He commented, and Sanari blushed even as her teeth closed around the morsel on her fork. "The females of my world tend to have gowns that hide their bodies and reveal as much of their bosom as possible. Yours hides your bosom and shows off your body."

"You look like you enjoy the effect." She said, favoring him with a small grin.

"I do."

"We are taught to be proud of our bodies, but not to display our sexuality. It shows off one's beauty and attracts the sorts who are interested in one's beauty, and not one's sexuality."

"The effect is very refined. I favor this way of thought than the other. I could even say that I'm enraptured with it. You are very beautiful."

Sanari's blush deepened so that it actually showed through her fur. She was beginning to think that if she continued to be commented this way that the blush would burn its way into her cheeks.

They continued to eat, moving onto a desert of sweet bread – doughy bread filled with a sweet sugary concoction – and Sanari rose once the meal had completed and looked about Sage's home while he quickly did the dishes.

Mayia was now walking silently about the grounds of the Shadow League, feeling positively alive after yet another of her special training sessions with Geevo and Tia. Mayia had become quite immaculate in all her beauty and graces due to all of Sage's teachings, but that creature Tia, that Lycan, held an unusually supernatural grace and visage she herself wished to possess someday.

She also wanted to be as happy as her some day.

Mayia was smiling softly in the rising moonlight, her footsteps having changed in the past few days, now led her to walk on her toes instead of her heels, and her stride placed each of her footsteps one in front of the other, one step after the next in a graceful stance.

She *had* been changing. Just like Sage had said. Her way of thinking primarily was altering. It affected everything she did now. How she held myself, how she walked, how she acted... it was amazing. And she enjoyed it.

And even more so, she was getting steadily stronger, and stronger.

Every muscle was growing, her bones were hardening, and yesterday during her daily gravity chamber training she'd actually achieved one hundred G's! So far the only person in the League who could survive one hundred G's other than Lord Sage himself, was Fatima. This of course was nothing in comparison to most of the more accomplished Power Leaguers, like Rae Iksaki's husband Makahn, whose strength was totally natural, but all grades of herself were all contributing to her strength now, and she could feel it enhancing her.

Blending, mixing, merging... changing her.

Is this what Fatima or Rae feels like? She asked herself.

But certainly she wasn't advancing anywhere near as quickly as they did. No one, not even Lord Sage himself advanced as quickly as they did. It took him over eighty years to get to that point. It was as if the two Iksaki sisters were blessed to advance like that. But whatever it was, Mayia was beginning to feel as if she were advancing far too quickly that she should be, as if she too had been selected for something like they had. That or Sage's training was so expertly compatible with her that she was meant to absorb the totality of its teachings.

It frightened and excited her all at the same time.

She smiled and hugged herself, feeling her four energies – raw Ethereal Energy from her sorceress and mage teachings, Spirit Energy from her Chi powers, Psychic Energy from her growing mental powers, and her own raw physical might – all co-mingling inside her navel and throbbing like a second heartbeat.

As she felt it, pausing as she focused on it, tried to help it along, the quagmire of energy stores suddenly coalesced somewhere in her navel where they all met, and her brows beetled as she felt the collision of all that energy inside her.

Then before she knew it, a shuddering lurch erupted inside her and with a gasp she dropped to her knees, feeling her body spasm as a burning sensation began to ride along every last millimeter of her veins and arteries, and every last breadth of her nervous system.

She felt as if she were burning up, and her fingers lifted to her collar in an attempt to free her cloak from off her.

She closed her eyes tightly as something that was part pain and part rectifying pleasure slid into her, and she rose up onto her knees, sliding her hands down her tight eight pack of abs, feeling them all tightening beneath her fingers before her hands found her crotch, rubbing her sex as she felt her nipples firm, her clit erect, and her labia and buttocks clench tightly.

Should Geevo have walked by at that moment...

She groaned and began to breathe heavily just then, her chest heaving with each breath, and the first thing that ever happened was her breasts began to swell. She groaned as the toggles on her chest stretched and then slid off their points, and her chest unfolded from within her uniform front, swelling outward larger and larger. Her undershirt immediately began to tear and shred, erupting open to dis-engage the fat and engorged masses attached to her chest.

Her hands lifted to fondle them, not believing what she saw as her tits began to swell right before her eyes, her nipples pressing outward, rising atop her areola boobs as her ribs suddenly cracked into motion and hefted her chest high atop her chest. Her breasts bounced with the sudden motion, and she groaned heavily at the feel of her sexuality heightening. Soon the pleasure almost completely covered the pain she was experiencing.

With a gasp she saw her pecks bulge outward, and then crease with her breasts attached to their lower edges, watched them crease and re-crease as her pecks bulged over her collar bone and thickened outward. Her breasts tightened, firming upward as they literally rolled atop her chest, the glands swelling and thickening with each passing moment. Her shoulders broadened as her back swelled outward then, and she struggled to pull her jacket off, holding onto its arm loops as her upper body swelled, her belly lengthening and sinking beneath her ribcage as it erected forward.

She groaned and wet the front of her panties with a sudden jet of spoooge, groaned again as her spine turned outward and her neck lengthened, all her muscles in her neck thickening to attach her head directly to her shoulders.

Her arms flexed of their own accord, and the two massive bulges of her biceps swelled upward, cleaving midway into their flex, spreading open and creasing with secondary muscles as she wet her panties again, the patch of white sticking to her crotch as her arms swelled out to her triceps, forward into her biceps, and flared her forearms as those riddled up and down with long overlapping muscle packs.

Her rear squeezed tightly, her hips broadening as she flexed her arms again, and her back erupted outward even further, popping with heavier and heavier muscles that spread her back apart, her arm muscles redoubling in thickness as she punched the ground with one hand, feeling a tremor in the earth as the power in her body seared its way straight from her abdomen, up her bodice through her heart, into the joint of her shoulder, and then surging downward into her fist. The

strike point shattered a stray cobblestone that were placed here and there, unfinished work to surround the great Millennium tree with a full courtyard.

Her thighs swelled as her body engorged, coiling over herself as she slid both of her hands over her crotch, her breasts steadily pushing into her thighs while she felt her labia swell and spread open; her broadening waist and hips snapping the chords of her panties. The soft white patch literally peeled off her with urgings of her fingers. Immediately after that she began to rub herself, feeling her sexuality come alive the more this transformation proceeded.

Her thighs thickened, her calves flared as her feet lengthened, her fur thinning in some areas as she slid her fingers along her clit, keeping her voice silent as she felt all this.

Veins and arteries slid along her arms, bulged thickly, engorging her pink parts all the harder as she creamed again, and now orgasmed... hard.

The wind kicked up around her, erupting in bursts of shock waves that emanated from her body as she slid forward, scrapping her massive breasts along the ground and raising her bottom up into the air, so horny now for a male that she wouldn't have cared who'd just taken her at that moment, as long as they did.

She even considered hunting for a male, thought of Geevo at that moment, and then realizing this, and slapped both her palms to her head to drive that thought out of her head before collapsing onto the ground, trying to drive this new sexual drive out.

No! Never! She thought. I will not debase him like that.

But she had to do something. Squeezing her eyes shut, she settled on her heels again even as her sex clenched, and cupping it gently with both hands, folding her hands between her thighs, she began to stroke herself for release.

And she continued to transform... growing ever larger by the minute.

I'd hurried with the dishes and hurried outward to my guest, unrolling my sleeves only to find her leaning against the railing on the open air deck overlooking the grounds listening to one of the Moon Singers serenade her with its haunting music.

The view I was offered, however, with the back of her gown splitting open midway down her back, revealed her apple-shaped bare bottom, with nothing more than a simple white patch of silk covering her sex. It was view offered by a perfectly formed female. And to top it all off, her tail had lifted and was wagging happily while she listened to the bird's song; her chest falling heavily into the front of her jacket to bulge outward against her sides.

I suddenly felt very warm.

In spite of myself as I refastened my jacket, I reached up and refastened my collar. I felt very alive with the sight of this sensual creature, and quietly re-buttoned the two sides of my jacket to themselves; showing off the jacket's red in-wash and the rest of my shirt.

I stepped quietly up to her, and laid a hand on the small of her back above her tail, and she rose suddenly in surprise, straightening and turning to see me. Then she turned and hugged my arm, and I had the wonderful feeling of her breasts cleaving about it.

"I am so surprised that you've gained the attention of so many Moon Singers." She said, listening to their beautiful song.

"That's not all I did." I smiled down at her, and she looked at me in confusion. "A moment. The chorus is about to start."

And then a new voice began, low at first, but slowly rose in pitch and was joined by several other voices. It was a piercing cry, and was in perfect harmony with the voices of the Moon Singers, and I was sure that she wondered what could possibly be voicing that music. And then she saw the fiery light punctuated in the trees amidst the silvery blue of the Moon Singers. I pointed at it as one of the balls of red light rose up from within the tree, soaring between branches as it sung, and she gasped as a bird that was nigh identical in shape and form to the Moon Singers passed before her eyes, radiating an aura of burning red and orange as its feminine voice mixed with the masculine of the Moon Singers.

"The Phoenix Chorus. It is a song of healing and rebirth." I explained but then there was another sound, and blossoms of blue-green erupted within the tree branches in a deep chanting resonance, and yet another bird soared through the air before us.

"And the Ghost Dancers Dirge." I supplied, and felt Sanari's arms close more firmly about my arm.

"I brought a few Phoenixes and Ghost Dancers from my homeworld here. They came under the understanding that they must remain within the safety of this island. All three of them are remarkably identical in shape in form. Only their coloring, song and innate powers differ."

"And they act so beautifully together." She mentioned.

"Yes." I commented and looked at her. "Remarkably well in fact."

"How is that?" she asked and turned to me.

"Phoenixes are female. Each and every last one of them. They live till old age, and when they die, they erupt into a ball of fire and their chicks are reborn from the ashes left over from the flames.

“Ghost Dancers and Moon Singers are all males. Though I haven’t witnessed a Moon Singer’s entire life cycle, a Ghost Dancer erupts into green flames punctuated with lightning. Their death always summons great storms. Their chicks are reborn likewise reborn from the ashes.

“But bring a Phoenix among the Ghost Dancers, or in this case, with the Moon Singers, and they do the only logical thing.”

“They’re nesting?”

I pointed again, to where a large nest was formed within the crux of several thick branches. The female Phoenix and the male Moon Singer were being cared for and serenaded by all the others, and watched over by a particularly large Ghost Dancer that had silver in his plumage.

“It gives proof to a few things. Firstly, that all things are created in like images by the Creator, and that beings from opposing universes, if of the same auspice – birds, canines... felines,” Sanari turned sharply to look at him. “– can have a perfectly fruitful life with one another.”

Sanari’s face was come over with relief as she moved into me, her hands lifting to rest against my shoulders, her chest flattening against mine as her sleeves fell down to the crook of her arms opposite her elbows.

Together, we watched the Serenade, not really wanting to speak any more. It’d been a long time since I’d simply enjoyed a female’s company like this. It truly was... romantic.

Day 16: Advancement

Morning came quickly.

Sanari had returned to her shrine some time ago, and I had retired shortly thereafter. But when I awoke, it was with a start, and I sat up straight, feeling something that I had thought wouldn't happen for some time.

And so I crawled out of bed, my black bodysuit of bio-genetic science slid up my body to form my mage suit, shortly before a second layer of clothing formed from that; a sleeveless jerkin and loose fitting pants.

With a brief moment of thought I appeared elsewhere on the grounds of the Shadow League, surprising a few of my students before I looked around me, opened myself to my magic senses again, and teleported.

This time I appeared at the sight of intense magical output, and scattered about the area were shredded clothing, and one apprentice master's uniform.

"How long has she been transforming?" I said quietly out into the open air.

"...Since late last night, Master Sage." Dallas's voice rung out from no where, "I've been monitoring her, and she seems to be doing quite well at the moment, though her brain waves are beginning to dictate that she is growing sorely afraid. I was going to inform you the moment you awoke.

"I have had certain difficulties as of late. When the other students began to appear, she took off. Quite spectacular of a disappearance as well." And Dallas's hologram appeared beside me. "She leapt the entire height of the caldera unaided by her powers, and disappeared into the trees surrounding the island.

"I've been keeping an eye on her via my satellite array, but my sensors there are having trouble keeping track of her through the wood."

"I understand, thank you Dallas," I said, bending down to pick up Mayia's discarded, but wholly intact robe, my nostrils flaring. Dallas saw this and commented.

"And her sexual activity is approaching the level of a heat, Lord Sage. Her body seems to be energizing on the Chakra. She will need guidance I am sure. Worry not, I will clean up here."

"Thank you. Where is she?"

"Quadrant two, sector C-twelve."

I nodded and teleported.

Mayia shuddered as another orgasmic lurch erupted from between her loins, splattering her inner thighs as she grew even larger across the shoulders, her back swelling outward to create a razor back of sorts.

She was positively monstrous in size, with much of her fur having been retracted, leaving only boots on her arms and lower legs, back in the form of a billowing mane and shoulders. Veins and arteries puffed outward, but that was nothing in comparison to her sex, which had pushed outward and had swollen to massive sizes, her clitoris a thick nib the size of her finger.

It's not stopping! She cried, as she hugged a tree, rubbing up against it with her crotch while her massive breasts cleaved about its edges.

She was about to let herself cry out in fear when she heard a calming voice nearby.

“Do not be afraid of it, Mayia.” It said, and she relinquished her embrace of the tree to look down upon, actually *down* upon, the eight foot tall Sage as he hung something on a tree branch as he approached.

She collapsed to her knees, clutching at his jacket front as she gritted her teeth, still not issuing a single word, and she felt his comforting hands around her as he embraced her head.

“Relax, don't struggle.” Sage's voice came to her ears as he stroked her mane, which had grown voluminous.

Mayia tried not to flex even a single muscle, instead feeling her heart patter rapidly inside her chest.

“Now gently,” He said then, and began moving her backward, her massive form sitting down. “Lay down.”

She reclined slowly, her head swimming with so many erotic desires that the tuft of fur on her pelvis was quite moist and sticky. She could see her huge mountainous breasts, framed by equally sized biceps as she reclined, and only those muscles she had no control of tensed and relaxed rhythmically, and she felt sage's touch alight between her breasts and rub the soft tuft of fur over her hear as he opened one of her eyes wide to look into it.

“Now give your strength a place to go.” He was saying into one of her large ears. “Don't expel it, or the power you are gaining will be lost forever, but it will need to be stored properly, or it'll continue to fill in your muscle. Enact the Iron Shirt, technique, but instead of your body, you must learn how to transform this onto the rest of your body.”

Mayia laid back, closing her eyes, trying to concentrate. Her body gave a shuddering spasm of growth, and her hands went to her crotch as she came into her awaiting hands. Sage pushed her back down, waiting for her to end it.

“It’s ok,” he said, hearing her whimper in fear. “Try again, relax. Channel it into the pockets of your being. Use your compression techniques, create new spirit batteries.”

She nodded and once again tried to do as Sage directed; forcing herself to relax.

Compress, redirect, and create, she thought, feeling some of the power sliding out of her muscles as she redirected it. It was like making a ditch to redirect the flow of a raging river, and at first she didn’t think it would work.

But she could feel her body tightening; she could feel her form shrinking. Sage directed her in what she needed to do moment by moment, teaching her techniques she had no way of knowing how to do yet, but his voice on the edge of her consciousness as she battled with her growing sexuality and her growing body was most comforting to hear, if difficult to discern.

The day wore on as she struggled with this, and as she compressed, she made more spirit batteries for her new purified powers – a place inside her body that held a level of her power in storage. All creatures had at least one, located in their navel. As the hours drug on, she produced two more in her chest, while a third one just developed of its own accord in her loins. As she followed his directions to create these, her body suddenly shrank a great deal, and some of the incoming flow of arcane might she was absorbing was redirected to feed it. The rest of the flow was being laced mentally to her power sources, each of the seven Chakra located down the center of her body, and the remainder of that was improving her physical being.

The total density of the massive creature she’d been at dawn was being compressed into a body that was perhaps a tenth the size. The last hour was the hardest, and the most painful, and her naked form clamped hard onto Sage as he held her and comforted her, offering her words of encouragement.

Mid day came around when she collapsed in exhaustion, her body nearly similar to what it had been when she’d originally joined the league. There were differences however.

Sage gave her some water that he produced from nowhere, leaving her with the bottle as he helped her to rise and balance herself. Retrieving her robe, she was wrapped within the thing before she got a chance to look at her new body, but the way she felt, she knew that she had changed. Taller, definitely fuller of bosom, and as her hands slid into the wedge between her legs to tease the last of the sexual desires in her, she felt the full, pouting lips of her sex, surrounded by soft downy fur, and a hard and erected clit.

And then there was the feeling of a seething power inside her bodice, weakened, nonetheless, but it burned inside her. All those wonderful feats she’d done last night, the remarkable leaps, the powerful blows of her arms was still there, ready to be released in a moment’s notice of her will.

She felt weak with the knowledge of that power in her.

She noticed that the hem of her robes didn't meet the ground anymore, and was dangling about her calves at the moment before Sage picked her up in his arms. Just then they teleported. After the transport, she blinked her eyes and suddenly they were at the hot spring located near the towering waterfall.

The pools were a prominent place for bathing and recreation. Sage's bathhouse was built over them. There were other young females here who gasped in surprise at the snapping sound of Sage arriving with Mayia in his arms, and several of them rose in shock as Sage then placed her on her feet.

"You've been through a lot of work, Mayia. I want you to wash it off and then rest for today." He said and opened her robe to reveal her naked body and weary visage to those in the bathhouse.

Mayia wearily lifted her face as she heard several gasps as the other young girls looked at her. Looking down at her body, she noted visibly that her breasts were definitely larger than before, and her body seemed far more slender than it was last night. Lot less visible muscle, but that was because all that muscle had been compressed so well.

As she stepped forward, she moved slowly, grabbing hold of the stainless steel poles leading into the hot water.

"I will be sending master Tia to watch over you for the time being, Mayia, in the mean time," he nodded to two of the other female students. "Mina, Kirn, could you please watch over her till Tia arrives?"

"Yes master Sage." Kirn acknowledged with a small bow, and then Sage was gone, having disappeared silently.

Mayia was wading forward, trying to make it to a bench, but before she made it there, she slowly, weakly sank to her knees, falling limp as her head bowed.

So difficult to stay... awake, she thought. But then the other two girls were there, and absently, Mayia heard their words of comfort as they each took an arm of hers. She smiled to each of them in thanks as they brought her to a bench, and then bathed her.

Mayia had regained her strength in whole, and then some, in only four hours of good sleep. Tia was then able to escort her to the space station in orbit above Wave World to do some shopping in the space colony up there; the place that was the former school grounds for the Mystic League before some... extenuating circumstances happened.

Sage had given her some new clothing credits to have her clothes retailored and new ones added in. Tia smiled and gave her encouragement the whole time. It was like she was a big sister.

Later that evening, Mayia was even up to rejoining Tia and Geevo in their nightly lessons, after being ragged on by Geevo for missing the first session that morning. But strangely, he felt silent when he viewed her once she'd removed her apprentice robe in order to dance.

He was staring at her. Mayia blushed.

Right now, she and Geevo sat next to one another on the ground of the main courtyard as they watched Tia as she came to the center of the training ring. Tia, and both Geevo and Mayia for that matter, was nearly naked at the moment, having stripped out of every piece of clothing save for a G-string.

This, and their ribbons, was the extent of their dancing uniforms at the moment, which left the two females topless for the moment aside for simple pasties over their teats.

The floodlights had been turned on, revealing all the interlocking circles patterned in the ground. Mayia and Geevo both were excited to see what this master of their art was about to do as she took up a graceful stance. Above them, the chorus of the various Spirit Birds sung a song that Tia set herself to dance to.

She stepped, a long step forward with one foot like testing the waters, and then skipped forward, leapt and pranced, her toes remaining on those interlocking and concentric training circles, and they watched someone dancing with true passion for the art.

For someone who was mute, Tia's only form of expression was in body language, and the truest expression of that language was in dance. Her way of communication left others silent in awe of her seamless grace and dance.

Time passed, and her feet, arms and body kept true to the time of the song, and as she danced, it seemed to Mayia at least, that the world moved around her instead, making love to her in her simple graces as she flew, pranced and pirouetted across the training grounds in a truly unnatural grace.

And she danced with so much energy, to the point where her white fur was blessed by the light of the moons, and she literally glowed with a silver light with it.

Then her hands came together and slowly drew apart, first the palms, then most of her fingers, leaving only the index and fore fingers together. And when she brought these apart, a streamer of light erupted from that point, trailing outward with her fingers as she moved them about her.

This was the art of the Spell Weaver. They'd seen Sage use this art, creating spells on the fly, truly powerful spells made to tailor to the situation, but she was using them like her ribbon weapon, but with one in each hand. Where her hands moved, that streamer followed, cutting the air about her and whipping about her in long lashes of brilliant red fire. A simple mistake

would've severed a limb, but she danced about the deathly dangerous ribbons in a way that even Mayia found arousing.

Wherever the ribbons lashed against stone they created sparks of static and lightning and fire, which burst about her in brilliant displays of light like fireworks. But watching her, with their knowledge of what she was doing, Mayia and Geevo fully understood what these spectacular moves and elegant graces would eventually lead to.

Ribbons that were like monofilament wire, blasts of sparklers that were used to burn and blind, and truly flexible moves which improved speed and precision, making it utterly difficult for someone to strike you, and easy for you to strike them instead with utter precision.

That is what those reddish-purple finger sheathes she wore were for.

On their second day with her, she demonstrated their usage by finger striking a boulder of solid stone, and the pair of them actually jumped in amazement when her fingers dug deeply into the stone itself. This was to be used against those beings that were able to recede their weak points beneath the surface of their flesh. All that meant was that in order to touch off those pressure points, one had to pierce the skin, which caused grades more pain once they were touched. Also when she struck her fingers, flicking them against each other, she created a spark sufficient enough in brilliance and heat to create fires... or light fuses on bombs that she had concealed about her body

They were both given a more detailed chart of Chakra power points, muscle and nerve manipulators, pressure points and acupuncture points by Sage on the third day and encouraged to learn it by heart.

Mayia, at least, was now becoming afraid of what knowledge she was becoming.

There are five hundred and sixty seven methods in which to kill another being. Of those methods – the art of killing with one's bare hands – most governments categorize over fifty-six hundred individual ways of killing another human being. Here, you are able to learn over one hundred thousand ways of killing another being before getting into magical structure. You will learn that there are ways to heal and ways to kill with a mere touch.

Likewise, you will learn that there are fates you can cause that are far worse than death.

Mayia was recalling these very words from Lord Sage himself. This was what she remembered from his opening speech on her first day of school here at the Shadow League. Lately, as she was breaching the advanced points of his instruction, she was beginning to learn just how potent of a fighter she was being made into...

But then their new master slowed and finished with a flourish, in a dancer's poise that ended with her perfectly balancing herself on a single toe, her body perched like a swan.

Not even out of breath with her exertion, she bowed as Geevo and Mayia both applauded, and Tia bowed and stood up again; her elaborately done up mane at the back of her flowing about her face only in the form of thin streamers of her fur-like hair.

Then Tia's hands lifted and she signed in the Silent Tongue: "*Now... let me see what the two of you can do.*" And she gestured for the two Oliverians to join her in the rings.

With eagerness she and Geevo undressed to their dance uniforms; only the barest essentials.

In only three days, the two of them had grown to such grace and beauty from Tia's teachings, that they were rapidly becoming the envy of all the other students in the Shadow League. Mayia's change yesterday, whatever in creation had happened, brought shocks to all who saw her face and body. Now instead of insults and curses sent in her direction, she heard envious gasps.

The two of them ravenously poured over the lessons of the Silent Tongue in their desire of finding *some* way to communicate with one another, and soon were having whole conversations in sign and body language, drawing looks of confusion from the other students as they did it in the hallways.

Now Geevo was the only one she could communicate with other than Tia and Sage. It helped a great deal that he had the same problem with her, that she was the only young female that, because of his vow to her, that he could actually hold a conversation with.

She felt as if she were falling in love...

They arrived in the center ring, and striking the same alternating pose with one another, his wrist arched over hers, they stepped around one another in what could only be termed a lover's dance.

Tia sat back and watched happily, enjoying their own show, complete with our ribbons of pink and blue.

Day 30: Challenge

The entire school was released from their classes today.

Sage had *strictly* forbid gambling in his school and every time gambling went on he found out about it and took all their gambled credits away. So the students began “trading” things as rewards instead. Like special attentions and favors. The only favors that he interfered with were those of a sexual nature.

Dates, however, were still fair play.

The courtyard was surrounded on all sides by over a hundred students and masters, and all of them here to see one thing.

A fight between Lord Sage Preypacer and Prince Siklohn Dousaka.

Sage had agreed to take handicaps in order to make the fight fair, but now that they heard more about it, they wondered if Sage was in his right mind...

“Sage gets no armor, no weapons, *and* a reduction in power, and Siklohn gets to use all that new armor and gear he’s made. What’s Sage getting at? Without all his power, Siklohn’s gonna mop the floor with him.” One student said

“Ha! Doubtful. Though he’s reduced in power, Sage is still a master. It’s guaranteed that this is the day that we finally get to see Siklohn broken!” another retorted.

“Oh yeah? Well I’m *still* gonna say Siklohn wins.”

“Bull, Sage will win!”

The two students, one male and one female, shook hands sharply on their hidden bargain and promptly turned away from one another, snubbing the other as they folded their arms in defiance.

Dallas watched all this through all his sensors and his principal drone shook his head.

“Master Sage, the students have gathered.” He said, and finished fastening a collar about Sage’s neck.

“Tell me when Siklohn arrives first. I want all the students to see him in all his glory.”

“Yes master. But is this wise, what you are planning? The Dousaka are known to be this universe’s most potent warriors.”

“No I am not sure, and if they were the most potent, then they wouldn’t have been defeated. But it is a calculated risk that I’ll need to take. The boy isn’t growing at all.”

Sage finished applying some blue paint to his body from a jar marked: Spell Paint.

Dallas shifted his head slightly and now watched some guests arrive. Namely representatives from the main island who'd heard of this fight. Meniko in her tall bird maiden form among them. Other notables were Rae Iksaki, who stood next to her sister, and several of the students from the Main island of both the Mystic and...

"Mother Sanari is in the crowds, Master Sage." Dallas said at last, and Sage paused amidst raising his hand to apply the last of the spell paint. "She seems to be accompanied by several of her students."

"Standing room only, Dallas. That will include the dignitaries. This is a brawl not a prize fight." Sage said simply, and then blew onto the markings on his still notably broad forearm, and the darkened room was momentarily illuminated as all the blue lines on his body lit up and faded again in a radial blur from the point he'd blown on.

Dallas mentally controlled his master's collar, which was to act as one of his many handicaps, and stopped his power output to only one hundred thousand Personal Power Points, or Three-P energy level.

Once done, Dallas's sensors gave him a view that Sage was waiting for, and Dallas's head tweaked again to one side.

"He is entering the ring now sir."

Siklohn Dousaka emerged from his forge, his visor down after receiving a kiss of good luck from Cali. Attached to his back was the great sword and massive hammer, and in his hand was the riding lance. He was encased in black and silver, all the edges bordered in red etched lines that glowed with their own light as if the wearer of the armor burned inside it. Large patches on his shoulders, forearms, forelegs, thighs and back were glowing patches of red-orange that shone as if they were shells of crystal holding back the very forge fire that made them.

There was not a chink open in his armor, and as he moved from his forge to the ring, the crowd parted widely for him. With the campaign cloak and a great sun disk at his back, and the horns on his helm, he looked like death itself walking amongst them. A frightening similarity of his father reminded Sanari of centuries of conflict with these foul creatures, and in spite of herself and her gentle ways, she wished inwardly that Sage would crush this insolent pup who'd dare call himself Death itself.

I've seen death, pup, and you do not hold a candle to him, she thought, her fingers tightening on her staff. Yusuma, standing next to her, reminded of when this cub had arrived on Wave World to attend Sage's school, remembered the hurt and angry the mother had revealed at the memories inside her head caused by the Dousaka.

Sanari lifted a hand to cover Yusuma's, and then found another hand grasping her shoulder and turned sharply to see Daedalus standing there beside her. He nodded to the entrance of The Lair, just as a shadow began walking down the length of the entrance corridor.

It paused briefly in the shadows of the entrance corridor, and for a brief moment there was a flash of blue etchings against its body before Lord Sage Preypacer stepped out into the main courtyard.

He was dressed in only a pair of loose-fitting breeches. His entire body was naked and bare otherwise, the collar around his neck locking him in human form. Boxy ears, no tail, no fur, not even body hair it seemed, but still those eyes blazed an emerald green. The only remaining soul gem was the one that was imbedded in his chest. But covering his body, everywhere, were perfectly etched lines done in blue paint.

Noxi, who'd come with the opportunity to see her old student, Mayia, stood beside Meniko and thought for a moment that Sage looked like a living circuit board. Rae and her sister Fatima stood close together here as well, wondering what in heaven could possibly be going through Sage's head at the moment.

The two fighters squared off with one another, and the crowd grew quiet.

"I am here, on the proposed date, Sage." Siklohn's voice was rendered metallic inside the stylized white facemask and the tears under the eyes.

Sage did not answer, he simply turned his body, showing Siklohn his left shoulder, his wrists turning his hands to crack the joints, before his fingers clenched and cracked his knuckles. Sanari blinked, swearing that she just saw all those lines on his body glow a bit brighter at that moment.

Surely that's not just war paint... she thought.

But then Siklohn dashed at him, his lance held expertly at his side like a soldier is trained to hold it while on foot, and he focused on Sage with those crystal eyes in his effort to skewer him with it. But Sage simply acted when the blow was near. His left hand lifted, clasping the edge of the blade and turning it expertly before pushing it away, before Sage turned grabbed hold of the weapon's haft and twisted the haft while turning the whole thing in a wide circle, forcing its end up over Siklohn's head before Sage kicked Siklohn full in the chest.

The kick was little more than a blur, Sage's kick chambering, striking, retracting and setting back onto the ground before kinetic energy had fully transferred into Siklohn's armor and knocked him backward with the sound of a thunder blow.

The armor protected him, but the sheer loosening of his grip and the sudden movement backward forced him to fully let go of the spear haft.

Sage simply balanced the new weapon across his shoulders, the weapon torn as if from the hands of a child by a reproofing adult. He still did not say anything as he waited for Siklohn to get to his feet. The fingers of his balancing hand tapped the haft of the weapon, which was expertly pieced together by dozens of interlocking plates to form a semi-solid rod so as to hold their imbued might.

This sort of a lance could've pierced the armor of a lesser dragon, Sage thought with a grimace, but you have a long way to come before making a Dragon Lance, boy.

Siklohn rose and faced Sage in all his armor, and lifting a gauntleted hand as if he were pulling something to him, the lance rattled in Sage's hands, but Sage merely turned and pivoted, taking both hands to the haft of the lance and turning its pull downward into a plunge, burying its blade deep into the ground. Still holding onto the quivering haft, Sage watched Siklohn as he pulled harder, with both hands to wrench his weapon free.

Now you learn boy... Sage thought, and slid into motion. All gathered saw his hand rise, naked fingers drawing backward to tighten his palm, and for an instant Sage channeled his mage power, or what little of it he was allowed to use as he struck the blade's haft. Arcane might slid through his body, and along the blue lines like circuitry, glowing brightly for a moment and then flashed into motion as Sage struck, and the haft of the pole snapped at the hilt, and the glowing red lines in the weapon fizzled and faded away.

A collective gasp entered through the crowd as they witnessed what they had thought was impossible. *A forge-built weapon, Destroyed? Impossible!* And yet, here was Sage tossing away the haft to send it clattering against the ground away from him.

Siklohn's eyes widened behind his visor as he looked at the fallen haft, at the blade edged in the ground and then at Sage.

He was fully aware that Sage had been bested by his father in an act of one-on-one combat. The particulars of that battle were not made known to him, but Sage nonetheless admitted defeat. Setting his jaw, Siklohn lifted his hand to his back, and pulled out the massive sledge hammer set there.

Sage turned his right side to him now, slapping his hand downward and patting his thigh with it before gesturing for him to come. It was an insult, like patting a dog to you, but his face completely blank and emotionless.

Siklohn balanced the weapon in both hands, wrapping his hand in the leather thong at its base so as to not lose the weapon as easily as his favored weapon had just been removed from him. He cautiously edged toward Sage, his back hand holding tightly onto the hammer, while his fore hand slid along its shaft in order to have it in the right position when Sage attacked.

Before ever arriving, Siklohn was an accomplished knight and soldier. He already knew how to ride, how to fight, how to manipulate his weapons. He to this day did not understand why his father had sent him here, but he nonetheless came.

He did what he was told; he even came with an open mind and attempted to learn Sage's ridiculous techniques. *But my ways are greater.* He believed in them.

He shoved his hammer forward, but Sage side-stepped. Siklohn turned and twisted, swinging the hammer toward Sage, but Sage bent backward and fell beneath the blow. He brought the hammer up and back down more swiftly than anyone thought he could do, but Sage's body flipped upward, and a blow that would have hammered the Master's body into the ground fell just before his head. Siklohn immediately tried to slide the hammer forward, but Sage hopped atop it, adding his whole weight – which was remarkably heavier than it seemed – and smiled at the young Aphkian.

He's only human, Siklohn thought. Humans are weak!

He twisted the hammer to get Sage off it, pulled it back and surged it up and forward like a battering ram, but Sage tipped its head out of the way with a simple tap of his hand, side-stepped into Siklohn and pushing on his chest and pulling forward on his legs with a leg hooking about them, shoved him roughly to the ground. The hammer came flailing downward to create a small impact crater in the ground, and when Siklohn shook his head to clear it, he found Sage standing on his chest.

“You have excellent form, boy. Much like your father's. A pity that he doesn't live up to you...”

Siklohn shoved his body upward, and with a complex maneuver, using the heavy weight of his hammer to add in his momentum to rise, he was on his feet and spun around to face Sage with the hammer still in his hands.

“What do you mean?” he said through the metal visor as Sage turned his right side to him again.

“You have honor.”

“Are you stating that my father has no honor?!”

“Most cheaters don't.”

“What?!” and Siklohn reacted, his hammer falling to the ground and igniting with thunder, and many of the students ‘ooed’ at the sight of such an advanced forge craft. “How dare you call my father that?!”

“And he's a coward too.” Sage grinned, baring his teeth, and patted his leg and gestured for Siklohn to come to him.

He's making me loose my temper. How is he doing that? Siklohn calmed down, and tightened his grip on his hammer.

“Your pitiful tricks and tactics are not worth my time, Lord Sage.” Siklohn said, reverting to his old self, but there was nonetheless a nagging sensation in the back of his head. It felt like... anger.

Swinging the hammer over either shoulder twice, the hammer was brought down with the might of Thor himself, and the resultant blow collapsed a portion of the courtyard, transforming it into a bowled shape just before Siklohn, but Sage was not there. Siklohn looked around him, and hefting the hammer, turned first one way, and then the next, and saw people pointing. He swiveled completely around, but still no Sage. He was completely unaware that Sage was staying completely at his back, watching his movements and sliding about him, tapping him on one shoulder to get him to look one way or the other till Siklohn let out a growling battle cry and swung his hammer in a full circle.

Sage leapt up and landed on the head of his hammer again, balancing gracefully on one foot at the end of Siklohn's strike. Siklohn got a brief glance of the painted master staring down at him reprovingly before he hopped upward, and with his weight coming down, slammed Siklohn's hammer to the ground.

“I've read your clan handbook. Nothing but the teachings of bloodthirsty, unfeeling, fatalistic monsters who need to be rooted out of the cosmos before their lineage grows and festers. Your clan before they were banished was a group of Machiavellian tricksters who failed to take over and empire. In banishment, they set whole worlds aflame. Too many members of the cosmos want to see your whole clan wiped out, and that handbook only confirms their fears. I can't believe you live that load of tripe, Siklohn. You strike me as being above all that. You only consider yourself a ghost.”

Siklohn slept with a copy of that handbook on his bedside table. He held it in as much reverence as a priest would his holy book and symbol.

“Blasphemy!” and rising his hammer in a rising arch, flipping Sage off of it, he brought his second weapon downward, screaming with the blood curdling rage that his people were capable of. Only a state of logic kept that beast at bay, and inadvertently – or on purpose? – Sage just released it.

But as he landed on his feet, Sage's body moved again, and he rose with his fist toward the hammer, his fist passing through a summoned magic ring as all the lines on his body shone so vibrantly that they nearly turned white, and with a sheering, screeching sound of metal, the head of the hammer erupted in a shower of metal shards, fragments and metal filings as it broke itself on Sage's fist; its magic exploding and knocking Siklohn off his feet but somehow passed around Sage as if he weren't there.

“You have only one flaw, Siklohn,” Sage said aloud, now loud enough for the crowd to hear after their gasp of another of his weapons shattering. “You think as your father does.”

Siklohn's hand came down from off his chest, the claws of his gauntlet grabbing deeply into the stone and etched deep scores into the cobbles. "And that's wrong?" he said, slowly rising up. The blows he was suffering were not felt due to his protective armor.

"Yes. You see... not only is he a cheater... he is also a coward."

"WHAT?!" Siklohn's lips were peeling away from his teeth underneath his mask, and the crowd, including Sanari, Rae and Meniko, actually backed away from the young lord as in one move, he raised his hands above him, snapped the remnants of the hammer from off his wrist, snapping the leather thong, cast away the shaft and ripped the great sword from his back. The thick metal blade snapped open and an even longer blade slid outward as the hand guard folded open. A blazing long sword of white fire roared to life as he held it out with one hand.

It was a weapon to rival the one that Nyl Dousaka himself wielded. This one was simpler, but there was almost as much power in it, Sage saw.

But already in the crowd, students and teachers were speaking and gasping in a twitter at Sage's words as he stood calmly, now facing Siklohn with the front of his body facing him. Sage was actually calling Nyl *and* Siklohn cheaters and cowards. How could he be that blazon?

"How DARE you insult my family!!" Siklohn raged, lifting the sword and taking a wholly different stance.

"How dare I not?" Sage shot back. "I can only speak the truth, Siklohn. I have never spoken falsely in over seventy years. So tell me boy, did you ever learn how your father beat me?" There was a great pause, especially from Siklohn as he grew quiet, and this time it was Sage who stepped into action, side stepping really, crossing his legs one beside the other as his hands rose. "He challenged me to a duel, and arrived in his full armor, with his massive sword at the ready. He also brought two orbital snipers trained in on me."

There was a gasp from the whole of the crowd. Especially from those who considered themselves warrior.

"I was wholly unarmored, and under the presence of mind that it was a one on one battle. That is until a ceramic ballistic shell broke my favorite pan hat."

Siklohn was looking around him now, at all the faces that had looked up to him, seeing all their mixed emotions.

"You lie." Siklohn said, taking his sword with both hands and brandishing the blazing thing at Sage. "My father would never do such a thing."

"Who is wrong in this situation boy? Your father who has done anything to win a fight, or your teacher; someone who is unable to lie? If I am unable to lie, Siklohn, then that means that what I saw is true."

Silence permeated everything. Never before in this universe had anything been so quiet. It was as if sound itself ceased to be. The wind did not blow, all hearts stopped, no one breathed, and not a creature stirred.

All knew that despite some of his shortcomings, Sage was good to his word. His honor was infallible when it came to his reputation. He never spoke an untruth. Siklohn felt all eyes on him as he slowly lifted his sword, his mind not thinking properly anymore, his training obliterating against the truth, and then sound came, starting first as a deep growl in his throat, and slowly rising in pitch into a deafening scream, a battle cry, as Siklohn surged toward Sage. It was a battle rage, and a master Sword Technique was moving into action, and the speed of what happened next was far too fast for even the immortals in the crowd to stop.

Siklohn was swinging with the intent of cutting Sage in half, the sword moving in his hands as if it were weightless.

Sage's feet planted, and he smirked as his fingers drew back to tighten the palms, and his arms swung upward, the lines in his body surging with so much power that it made those that were attuned to it gasp as it surged through them. Sage's hands crashed against the sides of the weapon, and he cried out his own battle cry.

“Sword BREAKER!”

Time slowed as twin disks of spell energy focused off of Sage's palms smashed against the weapon, holding it there for but a moment just as red cracks appeared all along its length. Sage's counter was intensified through the use of language, the spell given a name and given power because of it. The cracks lengthened and joined, the sword literally screaming as its energy was overwhelmed.

And then the entire length of the blade shattered. A wave of force that blew across the whole of the gathered crowd erupted from the ruined sword, knocking some down, others being caught by those around them.

As if he expected this, Siklohn threw the remnants of his sword away, loosing himself to the battle rage of berserker warriors in which the Viking Warriors of Sage's homeworld held no candle to, and Sage's first wounds appeared as Siklohn attacked him with the claws of his gauntlets.

Sage shifted his battle mode and began blocking, getting quite bloody real fast from Siklohn's cutting slashes and his sheer Battle Drive. Sage fought as he always did, learned the way of his opponent's way of battle, and adapted to counter it. But being Siklohn's master, Sage knew full well what the boy was capable of, he was just waiting for any new tricks. And received some nasty ones.

Sage's body was raked open several times by those claws, his own blows striking effortlessly against the metal armor Siklohn wore, but even those sounded like the heavy handed blows of an anvil against steel.

Siklohn punched and raked, his blows growing increasingly less regular, and he acted tirelessly against Sage, who was merely blocking him while his wounds healed with unbelievable rapidness and efficiency; going so far as sucking blood back into him.

Finally, Sage simply raised both hands and one foot upward and struck all at once, and with Siklohn's metal shod feet, he slid backward across the courtyard, the far end of the crowd there backing speedily away so as not to get in the way of the enraged Dousaka.

They didn't care that he was Siklohn anymore. He was a Dousaka. And in his current state, he was a murderous monster.

"Cowards and cheaters," Sage shot.

"Liar!"

"Dishonorable, weak..."

"Shut up!!"

"Monsters... your mother is the only one in your whole clan that I've met that I have reason to respect." Sage grinned from ear to ear, like a Cheshire cat, and his glowing green eyes turned red.

All whoever watched this happen to his eyes, knew that they were about to be defeated. Siklohn didn't care. He simply charged.

"Shut up! SHUT UP!!" Siklohn cried and surged forward, practically teleporting across the courtyard to Sage, who waited patiently for him.

And then yet another impossibility as Sage's fingers curled backward away from the palm, and he skipped forward and slapped Siklohn full in the chest.

"Armor BREAKER!" Sage casted, and before everyone's eyes, another forge made item, the stronger form, the armor form, shattered beneath Sage's blow.

At the pinpoint of the strike, three large disks of spell energy cascaded down Sage's arms, lancing into the chest armor one after the other, the first denting it, the second cracking it, and the third and largest ring shattering it. In his stunned silence as he fingered the spot of his busted heavy armor plate, Siklohn looked upward just as Sage lifted up Siklohn's visor and flicked his eye in an eye thump, closed the visor again, and kicked the Aphkei away from him.

“Cowards, all of you, especially your father. In times past you picked on women and children and nigh defenseless militia. Oh yeah... a fully armed and armored soldier is definitely a match for a farmer with a wooden rake. Oh he is pretty brave inside armor the likes of a siege tank boy, with a legions of soldiers before him to protect him. But strip him of his armor and his weapon and he is a weak, pathetic fool. Strip me of my armor and my weapon, and I am still very, very deadly.

“Quarter my powers even, throw me down to a level of strength that is less than you, and I can still defeat you. Because your tradition and your holier-than-thou genetics program is a joke. To remove the ability to feel pain breeds in weakness. Without pain you do not know fear, without fear you know no caution, without caution you fling yourselves into the fray with little thought. Such actions are the actions of fools.”

“Shut up!” Siklohn raged, and Cali surged forward to the front of the crowd in hopes to be closer to him. *He was sobbing?!*

“Your father challenged me Siklohn, in a one on one duel, and used actions that would be condoned only at time of war, for in war there are no rules. But this was a time of peace, as I am constantly reminded. He cheated in a duel only to send his only son away to learn the ways of some *‘out world warrior from a backwater planet.’*

“He cheated. All he needed to do was ask me, and I would have accepted you, but he had to cheat in a battle of honor.”

“Shut... **UP!**” Siklohn cried out, his fists clenching as he surged forward, but Sage’s Intercepting Hand kept him from even touching him now, Sage’s counter blows simply redirecting the young Dousaka, setting him off balance, and several more times that imperious Armor Breaker technique shattered more and more of Siklohn’s armor before a rising side kick snapped upward into Siklohn’s jaw and lunged Siklohn upward and backward to land on his back dozens of yards away.

Bare white fur was being born through breaks and chinks in his armor in which until recently there had been none.

“There are two myths that you all still believe in, a conclusion that I’ve reached from my observations of your magical science, and it seems to be the limitation of Sorcery. Firstly, your ‘Artificing’ skills,” Sage rose his middle and index fingers up on either hand and clenched them twice like quotation marks. “Is thought to be impervious and unbreakable.

“It is not. Anything can be overcome if done properly.

“If you need further proving of this matter, Siklohn I will prove it against your father himself, but I warn you, he will be publicly humiliated if I do. True Artifacts require ritual magic to destroy them. Your little toys are little more than advanced magical items on my homeworld.

“Secondly, you believe that magic cannot go beyond the sphere of a planet. Yes indeed, I could have crushed those orbital snipers from long distance before they knew what had happened, but that would’ve killed two innocent pilots.

“I do not kill unless I have a reason to, and only as a last resort. I had neither then.”

Sanari blinked, remembering Dallas’s story of how Sage had mercilessly slaughtered hundreds of Kell Lycans regardless of their age or gender, and wiped their history from off the Earth. *That is why he says that*, she thought with a gasp, looking at the were-tiger in his exotic looking human form and all its Asian details. *He will never kill mercilessly again.*

Siklohn was trembling as he rose to his feet, staring at Sage and his red eyes.

“You talk to me about cowardice, and yet even you come into this battle ring with power enhancers and armor.” Siklohn points at the lines etched on Sage’s body, and all eyes in turn turned to Sage.

“Weak coward, pontificating bastard, hypocrite.

“You talk of fairness and coming into a battle meeting an enemy on their own ground. You come with your powers limited and unarmored, and yet you set yourself with, with *things* that protect you.”

“Dishonorable liar, mon... ster... **QUIT LAUGHING!**”

For Sage was indeed laughing, quite loudly.

“Is that what you think these are for? You think I get power from these? Do you think that these are armor? They have only one purpose, Siklohn. A magical item sometimes explodes when you ruin it. I simply did not feel like being blasted on my ass each time one of them blew up.”

“They are simply a defense, and one that can be over come by breaking the lines. Which you did pretty well, might I add.” And he held up his arm where he’d been scratched. Some of the lines were now just paint, where the wounds had healed.

“I can’t properly disrupt a blast without some larger magics at hand.”

“I have been true to my word, Siklohn. No armor other than the ‘soft flesh’ of my human form, no weapons other than my ‘inferior skills,’ no magic ability greater than a journeyman, as this collar insures.” He adjusted the collar about his throat. “I said nothing about not decorating my body with imbued war paint, which technically, and officially, does not typify as armor, because I felt every blow you dealt.

“And what about you, hypocrite.” Sage’s red eyes narrowed. “You state you do as you are told. Everything your father commands you are to do. His exact words to you when he introduced

you to me were: ‘Follow this man’s commands as if he were your superior officer. Do as you are told.’

“It is treason to disobey a superior officer, and yet you disobey me or challenge my authority at every turn. I forbeyed you to construct your second forge, and yet you did so anyways. I commanded you to continue your work in Artificing under supervision inside the Lair, and yet you disobeyed. Your father commanded you to do as I said, and you disobeyed.

“Insolent whelp.

“You’ve been defeated. Now realize that you have been defeated Siklohn. You were defeated before you ever stepped onto my island. Since your father’s challenge, I’ve been playing, you and your whole family, like a devil plays a harp.”

Siklohn started; a spasm that shook his body as he brought his arms up in a combat stance. A truly pained cry escaped his throat as he surged forward to strike Sage. Sage in turn merely turned his left side to the rampaging youth and lifted his left hand, the fingers splaying open as an aura coiled about his hand. Thick claws and scales formed about his fingers and hand, and a blazing green jewel formed there; opening like an eye.

Sage opened his mouth and spoke the name of a spell as his fingers gestured. In his full power, this act would be little more than a flick of a finger.

“**Shatter Storm.**” He softly spoke it, but the words left his mouth in an echoing resonance, the essence of a Mage’s Tongue, which erupted in the rapidly weaving spell energies from his aura enclosing his hand and forearm, and a blossoming bubble of energy erupted from the tip of his index finger.

A dome of rippling light, like ripples of water on a pool, spread outward to encompass the whole courtyard. Siklohn felt it happen as he charged forward, felt all the energies of his armor immediately fade about him, and then gasped in surprise as it collapsed and fell about his body, leaving him in only a pair of short pants as he tripped from his feet leaving his shattering greaves.

Sage caught him, his aura encompassed hand flicking the light of the aura away before his hand lifted and caught Siklohn’s throat and squeezed, cutting off nerve impulses, blood and oxygen all, forcing his body to fall limp before the simple human.

“Your father charged me to make you what he is not, Siklohn, and so I shall teach you three lessons this day in which he has never learned.”

“Firstly, you must know pain.” Sage’s free hand lifted, and the crowd gasped, even Namah flinched as she saw Sage’s hand slide effortlessly into Siklohn’s skull. He cried out as his brain was invaded. Despite what it looked like, on second glance, all were allowed to see that Sage’s hand was not piercing the boy’s skull. And to demonstrate this again, he released Siklohn’s throat only to pierce his skull with the other hand, his finger magically phasing inside.

“Geneticists have removed your ability to feel pain. They’ve shut off or deadened the receptors inside your head in order to keep you from experiencing it; like shutting off a switch or turning down a dial. What they don’t realize is how easy this switch is to turn back on by Psychics, Ecomancers, Bio Mages and Temporal Mages. I’m sure many of your clan mates fell this way. So let’s just turn those switches back on and see what happens to your resolve.”

And Sage’s hands twisted. There was a loud crack that everyone could hear, and Siklohn immediately cried out in pain as all the wounds he’d sustained during this battle, even some bruises that hadn’t quite healed from previous bouts, as well as all the stresses he’d put himself over the last thirty days, crashed in on him.

“Secondly... you must know defeat. Even when you’ve been beaten before, you have yet to think yourself defeated. Very noble and optimistic of you. But I assure you boy, I will show you how defeated you are.”

And grasping Siklohn’s chin firmly in his human hand, he turned to the crowd and gestured for them to move out of the way. They tripped over themselves to move out of his way as his raised hand gestured, and grades of magical power surged down his arm, growing in focus before his hand while Sage held Siklohn’s head firmly in place to see what his target was.

Siklohn stared at his only remaining place of solitude: his forge, just before a blazing eruption of light lanced outward and leveled it. A bubble of lava rising upward to engulf the ruins and quickly freezing over as rock ended its existence.

He cried out as he saw it disappear right before his eyes, just before he was turned around to face Sage, Sage’s one hand lifting him up so that he saw the Master, even as his eyes narrowed and blazed with a dark and bloody red, ethereal vapor burning off his eyes to waft in the wind.

“And lastly, you will know fear. And to do that... I will *break you*...”

Siklohn’s mind numbed as Sage’s hand lifted about his throat and squeezed, again rendering him weak to the Master’s will.

“You call yourself death. I’ve met death and spat in his face, and you, my boy, are a weak manifestation of him. If he were here he’d smite you for such blasphemy as shaming his name. Furthermore, I’ve been death, so how can you be?”

Sage then head butted him, using the top of his head, the hardest point of his body. Siklohn became fodder for Sage’s blows and kicks. His bones were broken, only for him to feel his cursed regeneration heal them, so only to have Sage break them again. He knew the fear of having the wind knocked out of him, of having his blood choked out, of his face being bashed in repeatedly.

Damn it boy... give in! Sage feared as he beat him repeatedly.

He felt his face being smashed into the earth, felt skull fractures and concussions, felt the raw relentless fury of a Weretiger.

“Stop it!” came a feminine voice in the crowd, and Sage knew it to be Caliban.

Then at last all saw Sage raise the boy mercilessly above his head and then hammer him back down over his knee, shattering his back, crushing his spine before tossing him away. His lower body temporarily useless as his body tried to repair itself, with remarkable difficulty due to the damage to his central nervous system, Siklohn tried to crawl away from Sage as he slowly followed him.

Sage then reached down, flipped the boy over, and Siklohn raised his hands and turned his head away from the raised and bloodied fist that Sage held over him.

“No... Please!” he sobbed.

Sage looked down at him, feeling with his growing telepathy the true fear in this boy’s heart. This time he wasn’t faking it. Satisfied, Sage jerked his hand downward driving his second knuckle forward and rapped Siklohn in one of the temples at the center of his head.

Siklohn’s eyes snapped wide for a moment, and then slowly closed as his mind numbed and he fell unconscious.

I bent down over Siklohn, feeling his pulse, feeling his breath, and prying his eye open to check his pupil. Righting his waist so that his spine could finish healing properly, I genially crouched down and gently picked him up.

“Namah. I will need your help.” I said, cradling Siklohn in my arms.

I could see her struggling with her desire to tell me to go to hell, and with her need to help those who were hurt, and in time her more basic need to help overcame her want and she followed me, grumbling about unnecessary injuries. To deny this later feeling would mean to deny herself.

“Everyone, you are dismissed.” I said as I entered The Lair. “The medical wing is hereby closed to visitors until further notice, and will be open only for emergencies.” And then I hurried inside with Namah, praying that I hadn’t done too much damage to the boy.”

Day 30: Aftermath

Caliban stormed through the halls to the Headmaster's quarters 'as summoned.'

Fury unlike she'd ever felt as a male surged through her as she marched up the stairs, fists tightening. So much fury flowed through her that it drove her to tears. Arriving at Sage's door, it opened for her, and immediately upon entering his chambers, she seized the nearest thing she could find, a vase filled with water and flowers, and hurled it at him.

"How could you!" she screamed at the top of her lungs.

But her revenge was rendered useless as Sage turned, deftly caught the vase, turned it to catch all the water and gently set it on a table near him, rearranging the flowers with one hand before he continued to wipe the blue lines from off his body.

"I have a task for you, Caliban." He said quietly.

"Go to hell!" Cali bit off, and folded her arms first over her chest, forgetting about its size briefly, and then resettled them beneath them as she turned her back on Sage.

"Cali... this involves Siklohn." She heard behind her, and she turned immediately to face him, her anger forgotten, she immediately transformed into someone who would do anything to see him at the moment.

"I am giving you a unique opportunity, Caliban," he said, and out of the corners of her eyes, she spied Meniko herself, with CMO Namah and Mother Sanari standing in an adjoining room. They were surprisingly quiet. "I have just opened Siklohn up to a whole world that his clan has cruelly shut him off to. And you are going to teach him about it."

"Anything." She said, and surged forward, grasping onto Sage's hands as she collapsed to one knee.

"You are to teach him the pain of pleasure." He said simply, caressing her cheek with the backs of two furless fingers.

"But... I don't understand." She said.

"Pain and pleasure are received in the same place inside the mind." came another voice, this time from headmistress Meniko as she and Namah entered the room; Sanari remained behind. "Psychically and physically, they induce many of the same expressions from our faces in reaction, are stimulated from the same places, and are received in the same way as sensations."

"Siklohn's artificial defenses against pain, which have stopped his ability to also feel pleasure, have been broken." Sanari supplied. "My world held off his clan's invasion long enough for the

Aphkei to arrive because we were able to shut down those defenses Like Sage has just done. If it had happened to him in a battle, he would now be dead.”

“And you, Cali, are to show him pleasure.” Sage continued. “You are not being sent to him as a whore, or a prostitute... as a matter of fact, you are forbidden to sex him.”

“B-but why?” she asked, feeling a bit overwhelmed at the moment.

“Because of his vows.” Sanari spoke again. “He has vowed only to give himself to his maiden wife, and only after they have both reached adulthood.”

“For you to sex him now, in light of that,” Meniko now spoke. “Would mean to break his vow, lesson his honor, deplete him, and ruin his respect for you.”

“B-but... but what should I do?”

“Start with a massage.” Sage smiled. “Remember what you desired from a female as a male, and give that to him.

“Dallas has been instructed to let only you passed the security screens into the chamber we’ve placed him in. He is fully healed now... surprisingly there was little that Namah and I needed to do.” And Namah nodded her acknowledgement of that.

“Go to him.” Meniko added, and then Sanari: “Make haste.”

“Make him yours.” Sage added.

Without another word, Caliban rose to her feet and hurried out the door.

Cali walked toward the medical wing, and approached a dull humming sound, and was soon faced with a silvery white shimmering field of bio-electric energy – like shimmering water – over the medical wing’s entrance. Strong enough to keep even bio-hazards at bay; Cali approached it, feeling so nervous that she clenched her hands into her belly fur to still the butterflies.

As she approached the screen, the hum lessened, and the waving light dissipated, allowing her to enter, but no sooner than was she walked through than the field reenergized itself.

She walked down the curving length of the corridor and the white walls of the hall, the lights dimmed here as she followed the corridor, seeing energized security screens over every medical bay she passed.

Then she rounded a bend, and saw one field that wasn't energized, inviting her inside. She hurried forward and stopped just short of the door, and taking a deep breath, stepped quietly inside the room.

Soft blue lighting lit the room, showing Siklohn's body on one of the medical beds, which was horizontal now. She noted that it was also one of the wider medical beds reserved for larger specimens. Master Sage must've prepared long for this day.

She stepped lithely to Siklohn's side.

"Go away." He said with a shuddering gasp.

He was crying, she thought and then spoke: "No."

"Please go away." He said then.

"My answer's still no." she spoke, and stopped at the side of his bed, and reaching outward, covered his hand with one of her own.

She rubbed his hand comfortingly, thinking for a moment, and then ran the tips of her fingers up the length of his arm, squeezing his hand with her other that still cradled it, and then moved her caressing fingers to his cheek.

He turned to her finally, staring at her as she raised his hand, holding it, smiling at him; her fingers massaging his.

"I will never leave, for so long as my protector is in pain, so must I comfort him," and her hand caressing his cheek wiped away the tears. "My beloved protector." She whispered, and kissed his hand, holding it to her face as she cried. "I must soothe his aches, and I must stay with him even when he sends me away. I must help bare his burdens, for I shall never leave him."

She placed his hand on his chest as he shivered, and she felt his brow. *He's cold, and he's feeling it. Then let's see if he can feel warmth.*

A broad smile crossed her face as she lowered her hands to her waist and unbuttoned the front of her trousers, letting the loose fitting silk fall off her long, muscled legs before she undid the toggles of her jacket binding her chest. She removed that, and then lifted her shirt up over her head, and first one tit and then the other bouncing into view, and she smiled warmly as his lips pursed as he looked upon her.

He was apparently discovering the joys of an erection. A quick look to his waist definitely showed that he was pinching a tent.

She still wore her panties, and she left that on to guard her against temptation as she hopped up on his bed, and lifting the blanket he had wrapped about himself at the waist, she slid into his

side, resting her head atop his chest, she pressed against his side, her leg curling upward to roll over his thigh, and most of all his penis.

Her sinuous thigh moved over it, and she felt him tense as it hardened suddenly, but remembering Sage's words, she did not go any further than that. *He did not say, however, that he could not sex me*, she thought, and helped him maneuver his hands onto her bare rear to feel her fur-laden and firm behind. She then rose up on one arm, and taking his other hand, she slid it onto her breast for him to feel.

She watched his face as he felt it, and she bit her lower lip as she saw him beginning to cry. These are yours to touch, beloved heart," She whispered. "Whenever you so desire it. And when you make me your wife, as you'd promised, then I'll gladly let you have the rest of me. All of me."

And she bent downward to kiss him, grinding his hip with her sex, and moistening a bit as at long last, he returned her affection. He embraced her suddenly drawing her to him, and suddenly there was no greater amount of fabric between she and him other than the barest wedge of her panties covering her womanhood.

But he simply held her, feeling at long last those things he so greatly desired to feel from her. He began to cry in earnest as she clutched onto him, her breasts flattening against his chest as he then began to sob. He shook with it, and she did her best to soothe him from it, and the more she soothed, the more firmly he held her, and the deeper he sobbed, till she simply lay there, letting him embrace her.

"I'm here, beloved. I'm here.... And I will *never* abandon you..."

I continued trying to wipe off all that paint, and cursed.

"Damn, I forgot how hard this stuff was to rub off." I groaned, still in my human form and wiping off the slick paint.

Sanari giggled as I rubbed at it, hiding her laugh behind her hand. Meniko and Namah had already left. "Would you like some help?" she smiled, watching me with a peculiar look on her face while she held her tea bowl.

I scrubbed harder at a spot and finally gave up and waved my hands with the rag.

"Gladly." I managed to say, and saw for a moment Sanari's expression change. It was the sort of impish look I'd seen many a woman do before they enacted some sort of mischief; a broad toothy grin, narrowed eyes drawn tight by her rising cheekbones.

She shrugged her shoulders, a rather provocative movement as she rose to her feet, but by the time she'd risen to her feet, her robes settling about her, she calmly drank the rest of her tea, set

it down on a coaster, and seemed to float toward me. She took the rag and turned it over in her hands.

“This truly will not do.” She said and tossed the rag over her head and then pointed at my nose with her index finger forming a square with her thumb, and her other two fingers curled against her palm. “And judging by those lines on your feet,” her hand began to descend down my center, over the eight individual abdominals, and actually pressed against my navel before hooking into my trousers. “These things go all the way down”

She smirked, leaving the tip of her finger hooked in the front of my trousers, and I looked down at her hand, and then lifted my head to look her in the face.

“And you stink too, Lord Sage,” and she pinched her nose with her free hand, making a mock face of disgust. “Too much spit and grime and musk about you. You’ll need a lot of soap and water to wash this off, and best that we hurry, lest it stains this furless flesh of yours!”

“What do you suggest?” I asked, raising an eyebrow and focusing my gaze on her.

“A good, hearty bath.” She smiled slyly.

And before I knew it, we were teleporting.

The surroundings of my lair faded rapidly away, melting downward as I felt like I was being carried by the hands of an angel, and then lightly placed down on solid ground. New details melted inward, everything still flowing downward like water, and before I knew it there was a radial burst of light rippling around us like the waves from a water drop on a still pond. The room suddenly solidified, and I looked around myself, finding myself firmly planted on the brown tiles of Sanari’s bath house.

“You must be joking.” I mused, but then Sanari’s hand drew backward, and the draw-strings of my trousers were undone, the waistband loosening suddenly and I had to catch it lest it reveal too much.

True to my word to Siklohn, I didn’t wear a bit of armor; which included my codpiece.

Sanari began stepping away, already undoing the bindings of her robes. “Don’t be so embarrassed with your body, Sage.” She mused, wrinkling her nose as she opened her robe, pushed one side about her back and gathered all of its folds over one hand. My lips pressed together as I saw the form of her bottom and the swell of a breast under her arm as she raised a hand to dismiss my shyness away with the wave of a hand. “I want those pants off by the time I come back.”

I smirked, watching as she lifted her tail more and wagged it, showing me again the same view she had inadvertently given me on her birthday, of a white patch between her legs from her panties, and the well rounded bottom... and the firm...

I looked down sharply, my eyes widening as I tightened my jaw, trying to force my libido down, with difficulty. I then looked back up at her as she placed her slippers by a changing screen, and stepped behind it.

“Who’s being shy, Sanari? I don’t even have a screen to hide behind.” I practically bit out, and bending over, pushed my trousers off, stepped out of the legs, and rose again.

There I froze as she stepped nude from behind her screen. “So who’s hiding?” She winked teasingly, and then turned her back toward me before pulling on the bathing robe of a lowly servitor. Made of white silk, it slid over her body, a little tighter than I remembered it being the last time I saw her wear it while bathing Eakjo. My lips pursed as I found myself admiring that perfectly developed form.

But before that gown slid down over her, I chanced to see something I did not see before, in the form of three narrow, long scars against her back. My brows beetled in thought for a moment as she pulled her hair out of the neck of the gown, and then turned toward me, her long muscled legs, not as bulging as most of the females around me now, but rather firm and sinuous – the legs of a dancer – showing lovely out of the recesses of that gown.

“Please sit, Lord Sage.” She bowed, and indicated the edge of the pool with one hand.

I sat obediently, and shortly thereafter got a jug full of steaming hot water that had been warming on some coals in the corner of the bath house. Shaking my fur-like hair to clear out some of the water, I then got another jug full after that, and opening my eyes again, I sputtered out some water that was falling before my lips.

“Admittedly, I have never bathed a being with so little fur as your human form shows.” Sanari said, and I felt her pour some soaps mixed with lotions over my head and begin washing my hair, generating a healthy lather. “I always admired humans though. No fur, no teeth or claws, and yet they excel faster than any other known species. Even the Aphkei will have to beware of them in a short while.”

“Do you truly think so?” I voiced, turning to look at her, and found myself looking at her naked bosom through the drooping neck of her gown. I looked down not wishing to dishonor her so.

“I do. I’d visited Earth long ago. About a thousand years ago... or was it two thousand? I truly forget the passage of time sometimes.

I stared ahead, watching the rippling of the waters. For a moment I watched adult male warriors of the Kell, as well as their women and children, being slaughtered by my own hands within the waters, and I closed my eyes tightly, pressing my lips together and shaking my head slightly.

“I wish it were easy to forget sometimes.” And when I opened my eyes, a single stream of tears slid down my cheeks to fall off my jaw.

Sanari paused in her washing, out of the corner of my eye I watched her reach toward my face and then withdraw quickly before continuing her washings

“I watched the people of your world do remarkable things, Sage. They are a people to be proud of. When I visited, it was because my own Order had been petitioned for aide. They sent me. When I arrived, it was amidst a great battle, and the fortress that I arrived in was under siege.”

I listened to her, my eyes opening again as I sat there, Sanari’s scrubbing lightly ridding my body of all the blue paint.

“I watched the warriors of a hundred different cultures stand against a massive horde of demons.”

“Russia.” I breathed. “Nineteen seventeen.” And I turned to look at her disbelieving. “A lone sorceress, believed to be a Lycan because of her fur laden body, nigh single-handedly held off an invasion from the Hades Realm. Our whole world was in a state of war then. The empires of the time were fighting with one another, while the holy orders had conglomerated to stem off hell itself from invading during the confusion.”

Sanari’s scrubbing slowed as her mind remembered something, and then continued in their rhythmic movements.

“Nigh single-handedly.” She repeated, and then shook her head. “Those people deserve that credit, Lord Sage. Not I. All around me they hurled stones and burning fire from catapults at the invaders. Their lords and kings with their swords and armor fought side by side amongst commoners and farmers with little more than pitchforks and rudimentary firearms.

“When their swords and armor gave way, they fought with sticks and stones. When those ran out they fought with their bare fists. I watched some of them fling themselves in sacrifice to save others.”

She turned her head away from me, and focused on a spot on my muscled shoulder as she knelt beside me.

“I remember feeling myself inadequate with so much bravery.”

“The fortress was held, at the very gates of Hell, before the Forces of Light could arrive and drive them back. Ninety days and a night.” I was quoting from first hand accounts, diaries of survivors... and the honored dead. My eyes watched her as her motions slowed and nearly stopped, but then I lifted a hand and squeezed hers.

“Thank you.” I said then.

She smiled, and then moved forward and continued washing me.

“I respect humans because of that.” She mused, her lips pursing softly. “In all their shapes and forms.” She looked into my eyes briefly before looking back down to mind her work.

“I respect you.” she said quietly, and smiled at me again.

“I appreciate it.” I was smiling at her, aware that I was smiling at her, and for a time I did not mind that I was.

She was many times older than me, and yet she had a body that was locked in immortality. A well-rounded bosom, a long graceful body with wide hips that were perfect for holding onto, and...

I looked away as I noticed her gown slowly turning transparent instead of just sheer from the water, the way she was kneeling had offered me a view of her sex through the cloth. Inside me awakened many... desires... reminiscent of those I had experienced in the dream I had of her recently. The desire triggered more inside me, and my own sex began to swell in preparation of piercing hers, but I willed my body not to do that.

“You are constantly averting your eyes from me, Lord Sage.” She sad, washing my chest now as she leaned on into my side, and even from the corner of my eye I saw her breasts straining in her wet garment, and her long leg extending into my view for balance. “Are you ashamed to look at me?”

“I do not wish to dishonor you.” I blushed, and she giggled as she moved again to focus on my abs, one sinuous leg sliding into the waters now. But then she placed a hand on my thigh and I looked at her long, slender fingers as they held her balance against me.

“Finally, and honorable man. And a gentleman.” She mused and moved again, and now I couldn’t help but look at her body.

Her tail had lifted so that she could hold it above the water as she leaned toward me, back arching, and those breasts – so familiar from what I remembered from my dream – fell into the front of her gown, the lumps of her nipples shining fleshy red underneath her gown. My fingers clenched at my sides in their desire to reach up and caress them, and I was realizing that I was steadily loosing my battle with my libido and closed my legs to trap my groin beneath my thighs.

“I am so very pleased that you would honor me with so much respect, Lord Sage. By now, I would’ve been fondled by my lord, or at least pinched.” I thought at that moment that her hand caressed my thigh, and I looked down even as her hand lifted off me and she slid before me into the water to start work on the other side of me.

“I haven’t been pampered so much since...” and I stopped, my eyes growing wide and my face drawing slack.

“Since...?” Sanari had stopped her motions and stood before me, looking at me in earnest.

...*Since Ariel*. “Nothing, it’s not important.” But I fell silent for awhile, not really looking at anything as she continued to wash me, working all the way around me from front to back, and then returned to climb into the waters again.

“Please, my lord is to now stand in the waters and allow me to bathe him.” She said, lending a hand to help me to rise, gesturing out into the middle of the great bath.

I moved forward, for once not minding my nakedness, and caught Sanari sneaking peaks at me as I slid into the waters.

A haze of steam rose above the waters, and I stood as Sanari finished on the backs of my legs and lower back, having to dip into the water before rising. When she did rise, I felt my lips purse and my eyes dilate as the water streamed through her now completely transparent garb, and I reveled in the sight of her bodice as the garment conformed and stuck to her every curve, bump and crease.

Her nipples began tightening right before my eyes, drawing a tight fold between them in her gown while the rest of the garment stuck everywhere else against her. In one quick glance, my eyes moved of their own accord from her chest to her thighs and back up again. I then realized what I was doing and forcibly looked away, but not before my groin swelled enough where it began to float in the water. But averting my eyes did nothing as she moved to stand before me, and before I knew it she was moving in close, and with a smile, she shifted her hips, lifting one side higher than the other briefly as she moved in flush with my body.

I felt the press of her breasts, felt the firmness of her belly, marveling in the perfection her body conformed to mine as she then rose upward, rubbing against me briefly so that she could wipe my face off of the last of the blue smudges.

I braced our weight behind me on the edge of the pool with both hands, letting her do her work and finding myself looking into her eyes then – those alluringly beautiful eyes – and realized one more thing:

with the two of us standing like this, all I had to do was gain a proper... *stiffness*... and it would slide right in between her thighs.

And as Fate would have it, all the blood in my body suddenly surged to my navel.

“There!” she finished, and as she fell to her heels in the pool again, her breasts bounced hypnotically, and then she moved away just before my manhood rose above the water.

I gritted my teeth and tried to force it down with will alone.

“Now if my lord would seat himself,” she said as she moved around my side, caressing my bicep it felt as she did, stepping toward a tray of grooming tools, “We can continue. And if you could, Lord Sage, this next part will require that you shift your forms to the one you usually walk in.”

I turned to watch her move as she bent over to reach out for her tray, and again felt my lips purse as I saw her supple form bend over, chest flattening against the tile beneath her gown, and her rounded bottom curving from her lower back straight into her rear and right into the water to follow her thigh.

I continued to watch, my gaze lingering now, and I forgot to restrain my libido now as she moved over to me.

“Lord Sage... your hybrid form, please.” She reminded, smiling at me and gently placing a hand on the nape of my neck – which sent tingles all up and down my spine – she helped me to dip myself face first. Under the water I shifted, and when I rose again, I rose in my Hybrid Form.

Even sitting, half my body was out of the water now, and just by leaning backward, I could rest my elbows on the edge of the pool as she continued.

“I need to repay you for your kindness, Mother Sanari.” I whispered as she knelt behind me, and began brushing my mane backward into her waiting hands.

“And what does a warrior priest have to offer me, my Lord?” she said, a soothing sound in her voice, and I began to smell scented oils just before she anointed me with them and then bound my mane at the base of the long trestle with a leather thong.

I turned to her as she put her things away, and lifting my arm closest to her, I placed it on her knee.

“I am also a healer, sweet mother. The hands of a healer are gentle and know what to touch in order to soothe. If you’d allow me, I want to repay you for your service, with service in kind.” My hand squeezed her knee, and I watched as her lips pursed this time as she looked at me.

“My Lord is too kind. I will gladly accept his offer.”

I smiled at her, just before she turned and dipped her fingers in one last vial, and climbing into the water with me again, she slid before me, and leaning forward, her chest pressing against mine again, she slid her fingers across my brow, her thumb down the length of my nose, before she wiped the rest of it on my chest just over my heart.

She did not comment about this, but I knew I was just anointed, the greatest honor a servant could give her master.

Why for me? I asked myself, and as she moved away, she suddenly looked down to see my fingers, which had pressed against the peak of her abdomen, had followed her as she moved back.

We both looked at the touch before I looked up at her, my ears flattening against my head as my face drew somber. My hand flattened against her much smaller body, my hand nearly holding

the front of her bodice from side to side, with the tips of my fingers sliding to press against the spot just above her heart.

Her heart beats just as it did in the dream. An omen? Something else? Great Maker, let this be what I think it is, I prayed, and uncoiled from my roosting spot. I was gaining an erection, I knew, the tips of two of my fingers pressing against the bases of her breasts. Her hands came to lie upon my chest as her eyes half closed. *Please, please let this be fate,* I thought as she descended a little, the fingers of one of her hands suddenly finding the few strands of my mane that fell before my eyes so that she could brush them away.

Her breasts, full and firm, distended with their weight as they were, found purchase just above my collar bone as she laid against me like that, legs braced widely as she descended a little.

A flash of fate was granted to me, the temporal magics in me offering me such bouts of seer-like inspiration, and I saw flashes and snippets of images slide before my consciousness as I looked into her eyes.

I saw myself becoming hers as she slid down onto me.

I saw her naked body as I caressed her womanhood, brought it alive as we made love.

I saw her as we knelt at an altar; fingers intertwined.

I saw her after having just given birth to our child, she suckling it from her breast as she lay in a maternity bed.

And all of those images and more flashed through my head in a flurry, all of them moving simultaneously to end in a solitary kiss. And then they all vanished, leaving me with the feeling of her bodice against me, leaving me with the wonderful visage of this immortal goddess before me. I exhaled sharply in disbelief and unfathomable hope that they were to be true, and I knew to seal all those images, all we had to do....

Was kiss.

My hand lifted to her thigh, my thumb caressing its inside curve close to her sex. I knew that I was poised already to enter her, to pleasure her here and now, or perhaps the other way around, for her to make me her Lord try and true. Her tail had lifted, her back had arched as she laid against me, her legs opened for us to couple, and all that needed to happen to ensure this, was for us to kiss.

I leaned forward, feeling her heart thud faster beneath my fingertips, feeling my manhood grow firmer than it'd ever been, poised to pierce her loins. Her eyes closed, her lips began to compress, and I tilted my head to catch those lips, those blackened lips. Her fingers clenched, I could feel her breath as we shared it, and I felt the moisture of her breath even as her body began to descend to sit on my lap, a pressure even between our sexes as our lips brushed each other, until...

“KAWAII!” a loud voice yelled, and we were both shocked away from one another as a fur laden body vaulted off the edge of the bath and landed in a great splash beside us.

We were both showered with water, and as one we both lifted an arm to ward off the wave of water, and when it cleared, Eakjo popped his head out of the water, his tassel covered ears heavy with moisture, hanging against the sides of his head while his favorite toy – a squeaky toy shaped like a fish one of the adepts gave him – was gripped in his mouth.

He bit on it and the toy gave a mild squeak, and suddenly I found myself with Sanari still against me, my arm about her waist, and the two of us looked at one another. Despite the interruption, *when we were so close*, we both couldn't help but laugh.

The cub leapt on me, crawling up onto my massive arm and then onto my shoulders as he sat on my head, laughing like a child should laugh; his toes and fingers gripping into my mane while he sat on my head naked.

But then, something else that was almost as wonderful as what nearly had just happened between Sanari and me, repaid us both in penance to the loss we just had.

“Poppa!” Eakjo said, and fell down around my shoulders, hugging my head briefly

I shared a look of shock with Sanari as he crawled around my shoulder, his great squirrel-like tail still stringing rivulets of water. He then held out one hand as he hung off me, one strong hand gripping the side of my head as he reached out for Sanari.

“Momma!” he pronounced as if it were now law, pointing at her as he hopped off onto her and nuzzled her ample chest, purring as loudly as a kitten with a ball of string would.

Sanari and I could not truly say anything. Our shock was quite pronounced. But then I smiled, my smile turning into a chuckle, and my chuckle into a laugh, Sanari joining me.

For awhile, we all played in the waters. For awhile, I knew what it was like to have a family...

For the first time in a very, very long time, I was sure now that I knew what it was like to be was happy...

Day 31: Renewal

Dawn found the Shadow League on the aftermath of the battle between its top student and headmaster. Losers of bets were now up early doing extra chores. Headmistress Meniko, soaring through the air looked down on the volcanic island, and from her lofty height she spied a great white thing amidst all the greenery; the once desolate isle now an emerald isle of green plants. It was viewable only because it was walking amongst the shoreline, well outside the protected caldera of the island and the massive millennial tree whose branches formed a protective canopy like a cap to the volcano. She shifted her weight slightly and slowly arched her body through the air, coiling about the edge of the island, tracing the shoreline around till she shifted her weight, and transformed in mid flight to land gracefully upon the black sands of the shore.

Her form transformed, being a naked angel of red feathers and draconic features before her robes appeared first as clouds and then in wisps of wind before folding about her as she landed; her wings folding about her shoulders like a cloak of feathers.

There she found Lord Sage himself, the massive Weretiger standing on the shoreline in only a pair of black trousers. But strangely he was standing with his back to her, a large jug hanging off his shoulder by one hand, while he urinated on the sands.

“Good morning, headmistress Meniko.” He said, and she raised an eyebrow, amazed at the fact that he was still leaking. “You will excuse me if I don’t turn to greet you properly. You caught me in the middle of Caren building.”

“A *what* building?” she asked, approaching him, but still keeping her distance.

“A Shamanic fortress.” Sage answered simply, and took a swig out of whatever he was drinking from. “How may I be of use to you headmistress?”

Meniko knew that he did not drink alcohol, so she assumed that that was more of his honey-laced green tea.

“I have come to see Caliban.” She said quietly.

Sage’s head lowered some, and then he nodded. “I understand.” The long stream slowed and he shook himself off, and then kicked some sand over the place he’d just ‘marked.’ “Enjoy your stay, headmistress.

“We shall see, Lord Sage. This trip is not for pleasure.” Again he nodded, but did not comment further on it.

“Then I shall leave you to your business. Good day Headmistress.” And he stepped forward, walking along the beach, right over the spot he’d just marked.

Meniko's features compressed in wonder as Lord Sage turned to a tree, clawed several shavings off, being very precise about the way he did it and then continued down the shore line. He marked three more trees over the course of a mile, and then stopped right exactly a mile away, took a swig from his jug, and then whipped it out and began to urinating on the sand again.

Strangest damn ritual magic I ever did see, she thought, and then jumped up into the air in a small hop, teleported, and when she descended again, it was to descend in the center of Sage's courtyard. But whatever it is, it'll encompass the whole island. I'll have to somehow learn what exactly he is doing.

Sage's students – or those who were working this morning – bowed to her as she approached the main entrance to The Lair, the towering millennial tree built in the very center of the caldera... right over the former cinder cone.

In her own home, she felt tense and aggravated. She even hated Sage. But when on his own island, she felt safe, protected, and he was more or less a friend... a *distant* friend. It was as if the wards Sage placed here, spells upon spells, coupled with ultra high technology all built with this great tree as its center piece, created an unfelt barrier against the darkness.

She felt soothed, and more alive. *Perhaps his warnings of a dark presence were true...* she considered, folding her arms into her robes. Perhaps it would be best to start building her own kind of 'fortress.'

She made her way through The Lair's corridors, walking gracefully, beautifully... holding the power of the Dragaseir in her supple frame which was that of a full bodied female, with ample breasts and strong body. She was the headmistress of her school, and beings like Rae Iksaki, Illia Romov and Equis had all learned their skills from someone, and to look on Meniko meant to understand who that someone was. She was muscular, powerfully muscular, but all that was trapped within a beautiful, tall, feminine frame whose head nearly brushed against a fifteen foot ceiling.

Students saw her approaching, and she was surprised to see the respect they offered her as they moved promptly out of her way into side corridors and doorways, promptly bowing deeply to her as she passed.

Apparently Sage teaches some sort of respect amidst his teachings. And they recognized me, even though many of these students I'd never met, which means he is showing his respect to me.

That brought a smile to her features as she looked at the posted signs written in several different languages, a couple even she didn't recognize, before she turned toward the medical wing following the signs. A security screen greeted her at the end of one wall, and she felt for a moment of being watched intently before the screen fell, allowing her entrance.

As soon as she stepped through, however, the screen reactivated.

Daedalus, Sage's house computer, was a ponderous thing. A creature that maintained that it was a he, and acted like a hive mind with literally billions of Bioroids – as Sage called them – bio-genetic drones that followed the central computer's will, with a rising complexity of entities beginning with simple nanites, and moving right up to Daedalus's face, or the principal drone that acted as Sage's servant.

Meniko, not really understanding computers as well as she understood sorcery, could only imagine what this computer looked *really* looked like.

But whoever, or whatever he was, he was showing her the way quite easily. She simply had to walk in the direction of whatever security screen fell before her. At last she turned one final corner, and found her inside the lab room environment that was one of Sage's many sickbays.

There, the young lord Siklohn slept.

No broken bones, no bruises, no scars... his healing factor is almost as impressive as even Sage's was.

She lifted a clawed hand over his body, passing it over him as she ascertained his powers.

And you haven't grown much in power, young Siklohn. Is that your fault, or the fault of the teacher?

The act that played out between this cub and Sage she had originally thought was Sage loosing his patience. Surely Siklohn's father would hear of this. She truly feared what the Dousaka would do being that his only son has just been broken so thoroughly. Again. The first time had been by his student Mayia. Surely Nyl already knew what had happened by now. It was all over her school this morning, and many of her students had parents who were high up in imperial society.

Nyl must surely know about this by now... she reasoned.

She lowered her hand onto the boy's forehead as he slept soundlessly, and remained as such when a voice suddenly entered her high tapering ears.

“Beloved, I thought you were hungry so I... **Gasp!**”

Meniko turned just as Caliban entered into the sickbay, her body poised and frightened at seeing the headmistress here. Caliban's form was scrunched up, and her eyes were wide and her body poised as if she were about to run. At present she wore only a simple G-string to cover her sex, her well-swollen mammaries hanging loose and open, either full and pressing against her biceps, and each with an ample teat on their ends.

Good breasts for suckling. Good hips for child birthing. Now... for her final exam.

“Hello Caliban.” She greeted, trying to sound kind and motherly, removing her hand from Siklohn’s forehead.

Caliban gave a little squeak but nonetheless brought herself up to a full stand and then bowed promptly, her loose mane falling about her head and face, her ears flattening against her head, and her breasts spilling into the tray of covered food she carried so as to hide her nakedness.

“I would like a word with you, Caliban.” She said, and stepped past her out the door and into the hallway.

Caliban promptly deposited all the trays onto a surgical trolley, and using the tray as a guard, held it up to her bodice with both hands.

“I-I’m so sorry for disobeying the dress code, headmistress, b-but I... I...” she began as she entered the hallway.

“That is unimportant at the moment Caliban,” Meniko stated immediately. “What *is* important is that you have completed your punishment. I was very satisfied last night about your compassion and understanding as a female, as well as an understanding what a young female must live through all her life. As such, I am here to congratulate you, and transform you back.”

Meniko lifted a hand, her fingers already curling into a mock sign before she felt her fingers screw up from Caliban grabbing onto her hand with both hands, the tray she was using as a chest guard clattering onto the ground.

“No! I-I mean...” she let go of Meniko’s hand and promptly stood back, hands folding before her thighs with her head bowed deeply. “Mother Meniko, I am truly sorry for my actions as a male. My experiences have shown me my errors, and the penalties, of those ways, and every young female here and in your school that I have bullied or mocked has let me know that I’ve hurt them.

“Some a little later than others... and some simply bullied me back. Others... showed me compassion.” Tears were crawling out her eyes as she looked up at Meniko again sharply, some of her tears leaping off her face from her head coming up so quickly, but other than that, she did not lose her composure. “I have grown used to this body, even desirous of it. For the longest time I,” she paused and then laughed a little. “For the longest time I wanted to be inside a female, to feel her body, to feel her supple curves and graces as I pleased her, and now... now my curse has become a blessing, and now I am that female. I want to keep this body. I want to know what it’s like to have a baby.” She fondled her navel. “I want to know what it’s like to have it suckle from my breast; I want to grow stronger in this body, just as strong as any male... stronger! If Rae...” she smiled. “If even Mayia is any good example.

“I enjoy the compassion this body provides. I enjoy the capacity for love, and loving it has. And in spite of myself... I want to feel my virginity taken as a female... not a male.

“Besides... the wolf Caliban is a heartless monster. I don't want to go back to being that thing again.”

She hugged herself, her sizeable breasts flowing over her muscular arms. She had the body of an Olympian, but Sage's students seemed to have a much higher muscle output per pound of muscle than her students did. They were smaller; leaner... but the ratios of strength output per pound of muscle was much greater for Sage's students.

Remarkable, she commented, sensing the girl's strength.

“Are you sure this is what you want? I am a busy being, Caliban. If I walk away today, then you may never get your body switched. I had to take a lot out of my day to come here and switch you, and now you want to stay the way you are?”

“Yes.” She said simply.

Meniko's features grew more kind as she knelt before Caliban, her large clawed hands taking her arms in hers.

“Do your parents even know of your punishment, Caliban?”

“I did not tell them. I couldn't bare to face them yet. I wasn't sure what I wanted until yesternight.” She looked back toward Siklohn's room. “For the first time in a very, very long time, I am sure of myself. I know what I want. Perhaps more sure than I've ever been. But please, leave me as I am, Headmistress, and leave this place, and I shall tell them straight away. As soon as I am able.”

She looked away again, and began rubbing her arms. *She truly is a beautiful creature*, Meniko thought with half a smile showing on her face.

“They have been sending me so many letters, I was... ashamed at first to answer them.” Cali continued. “Then afraid to. Now I want to. Their baby boy is now a little girl.” She chuckled a little bit, crying with a happy face on. “Mama finally gets what she always wanted...”

But then Caliban's face changed into one of surprise as she was pulled into Meniko's arms and embraced. Meniko's breasts were firm, very firm, her body taut with her strength, and warm from her power. Caliban laid her head on her bosom and let herself be hugged.

“If that is your choice, then it shall be done, Cali.” Meniko whispered into her folded ears, which slowly lifted as Cali heard her name spoken by the Headmistress in the feminine. “Now go to him, but do not show him any tears,” Meniko said as she sat back and wiped Cali's eyes away with the back of a finger. “A female must be strong for her lovmate, to show that she is capable of bearing him sons and daughters, as well as capable of being by his side at all times. And for a Dousaka, like his mother, that involves being by his side even in battle.”

Cali embraced the noble Dragaseir about her long, thick neck, and then promptly retreated back into the room in whence she came from. Meniko, rising, and wiping a tear away herself, walked agilely back out of Sage's domain.

Cali walked back into Siklohn's room, only to see him sitting up and watching her as she entered, his ears standing on end and attentive.

"You were listening." She said as a matter-of-fact, and Siklohn nodded.

"Since the pan dropped." He admitted, and turned on his bed to let his legs hang off the edge of the medical bed, his blanket gathered about his waist, she was phenomenally relieved when he smiled at her. "Why did you do it? Why did you not want to go back? When I first met you, you wanted nothing more than to go back to being a male again."

"I-I fell in love." She said, and took a step forward, setting herself into a stance with her hands clasped behind her, with legs pressed together to show off the folds of her labia underneath the soft white cotton panty, and her back arched to fully display her enlarged assets to him.

She giggled when he suddenly looked down, revealing that he was pitching a tent again, and he promptly covered it with both hands.

"Damn Sage, he's taken away much of my body control." He said, and then still covering himself with one hand, he turned his other and rubbed his fingers together, actually looking at them move in wonder. "And bless him, for giving me the ability to feel what I've never been able to feel."

Cali stepped up to Siklohn, and taking up his hand, she folded it over one of her breasts, holding it there as she moved forward to kiss him. Yet another surprise... he accepted it, and returned it. And even more remarkable, there was passion in his kiss.

When she withdrew to look into his face, it was to see that he looked far less like a ghost. There was more color in his pelt than just grey. There was a brilliant assortment of blues as well, and he looked even more beautiful than the being that had called himself 'Death' upon first arriving on this world.

And he looked like death itself... till this morning. He was so beautiful now, that she was creaming into the front of her panties with desire, and her nipples were hardening into his palm.

Siklohn's gaze fell to her tit as he caressed it, drawing his fingers back and then looking at his hand. Cali then took it and pressed it to her face, not giving him time enough to think about anything... just feel, and for good measure, she reached between his legs and caressed his groin, and she giggled as he straightened more, took a sharp intake of breath, and released it in two short gasps before she retracted his hand.

It took him a long time to recover from this simple touch, and when he looked at her, it was with a pained and confused look.

'The pain of pleasure,' she recalled Lord Sage's words. That's what he was feeling. She never realized that the two sensations were so closely linked. With Siklohn's genetic engineering shutting off the switch to feel pain, it also shut off the switch for him to experience pleasure. Now he was knowing the pleasures of a feminine body, he was caressing her fur, taking pleasure in looking at her, feeling the wonders of a hand job, which she knew the benefits to all too well.

'...you are forbidden to sex him.' They had said, and she refrained from touching his groin again.

And then they both heard a growl, and looking down at Siklohn's belly, they both laughed, and Cali retrieved the platter of food she had retrieved from the commissary for him: all sorts of foods; delicious ones and sweets. Hopping up beside him, she fed him savory meats, tactile vegetables and sweet fruits galore. Sweet pies and cakes, cheeses and fruit juices.

Siklohn ate as if he'd never done so before. And she was pleased. And in between every few bites, they kissed, they caressed, and she grew more and more in danger of losing her last shred of clothing, either to her hands, or his, as he also patted her bottom, or when she was atop him later, the two of them kissing one another, his groin pushing against her crotch, and more than once her hand moved to pull on the draw strings keeping the triangular patch over her sex before she remembered her warning.

But then, one final time, as Siklohn grinded her, his hands on her behind, with the chords slowly loosening from one of her hands, she was about to become truly naked and crawl in underneath the blanket when.

"OUCH!" Siklohn cried and spasmed and she was knocked off the medical bed onto the floor.

Confused, Cali leapt up onto her feet and was beside him as he held his wrist, showing off the back of his hand where a small bloody scrape he must've gotten off of the sharp edge of one of the tools hanging over the side of the bed.

"Oh... that's nothing, love, it's just a scrape." She said, hoping in earnest to continue their caressing, "It's truly nothing to... worry... about." Her voice trailed off as she looked up into his face.

There were heavy tears in his eyes, and he was biting on his lower lip, his hand trembling as he felt the searing negative side of pain. Cali looked around and found a medical wipe and wiped the blood away from his hand, even though the wound had already healed over.

"It hurts... it hurts... it hurts..." he whimpered, tightening his hand into a fist and closing his eyes.

Cali licked the place where the wound had been, tasting his blood, feeling it engraving his genetic code inside her as if she'd just given him a love bite in mating. She then kissed it and

blew on the wound, sending her cool breath onto his hand, and climbing up onto his lap again, she embraced him, pulling his head to her bosom.

“It hurts... it hurts... it hurts.” He kept repeating, crying into her shoulder.

She rocked him. “Yes, I know, it’s all right. Shhh.”

She quieted him with difficulty. He clutched onto her with his one good hand, but the other ‘wounded’ one, he did not use. That lay forgotten at his side.

For someone who’s never felt pain other than a simple ‘sensation,’ such an experience as actual pain has triggered an emotional response. But for Siklohn, that said emotional response is one that is far too underdeveloped. The response of a child.

This will take time, my love, she thought. But we will do it together.

I completed the last ‘mark’ and kicked sand over it, and immediately my Caren came alive. Hundreds of ‘marks’ in the sand and on the trees all glowed red for a brief instant before going dormant again.

Damn, I might never have to pee again after this, I thought as I drained the last of my tea, and at once the marks I had made completely faded from sight, and as they did, I felt the presence and location of where every last one of my students was. I looked after a few of them, saw Siklohn and Cali, saw Mayia and Geevo, saw Headmistress Meniko as she left my island before I returned to my own senses.

I then teleported, using the power of the Caren, appearing in impossible places, atop poles and towering rocks, within the towering edifice of my tree among one of the branches, and deep underground by the furnaces. Then I appeared outside again on the shore.

My hand lifted toward a stone, and without using any of my own powers, I commanded it to rise, and it did so, floating in the air, spinning briefly, before more and more rocks flooded to it, also by my command, as well as trees and vines, mosses and even the sand itself. I summoned one of the powerful spirits on the island to imbue this form, and immediately I had a guardian for my shores.

“Your name shall be Moss.” I commanded, and moving to the rock, etched with my claws in the stone a new glyph stating its name, the creature one part golem, one part earth elemental, and one part nature spirit.

The glyph that I’d made was of the ancient alphabet of the Lycan, which was made with our claws and set into symbols and given names to imbue them with power.

I made dozens more of these creatures over the next hour, and commanded them to watch and be wary, and attack only those that threatened the peace of the island.

The most powerful of adversaries were those that could command the very battle ground to their needs. This was the creed of Ecomancers, Bio-mages and Shamans. It was a simple matter also to link them to the tree so as to protect it, and I being the master of the Caren, all of its many powers became mine, but above all, I was now aware of every last being that set foot or even flew over the boundaries of this island.

Shouldering my jug, I now walked back to my school before classes began.

Sanari stepped onto Sage's island, stepping off the boat transport between the Mystic League and the Shadow League. She could've teleported here in an instant, but she was sure that Sage would've known of her arrival through magic, and she wanted her arrival to be a surprise. That and she loved the sea. And she loved to ride boats.

"Watch your step miss," The boat dock attendant greeted, helping her off the gangplank.

She smiled at him. Despite that she was over twenty five hundred years old; she still liked the fact that people called her miss.

Taking up her robes, she walked across the dock planks, and stepped off the dock onto the sands that were cooled by the night air. She wiggled her bare toes in the sands, and was about to set on her way up the caldera when she felt a hand on her shoulder, which promptly squeezed it.

She turned around and actually jumped back in surprise at the sight of Lord Sage.

"Good evening Mother Sanari." He said; folding his arms into the long sleeves of a white jacket he was wearing. "Welcome to my island."

Sanari chuckled. "Have you been waiting for me Lord Sage." She said, stepping closer to him to recover from her first moment of shock.

"Not exactly. You are early, Mother Sanari; I wasn't quite expecting you for another hour or so."

Sanari looked at him. *Then how did he know that I was here?*

"Shall we then?" he said, gesturing up the path leading up the caldera. Sanari smiled and lifted a hand onto his thick arm, and together they shared a quiet walk up the caldera, and down inside it.

She was so amazed that an active volcano was rendered nearly inactive. There was still the occasional rumbling, and sometimes the sea boiled from the volcanic vents increasing the size of

the island from under the water but other than that, this island was quite peaceful... and built soundly.

She looked at Sage, the two of them conversing about things, random things, Like Eakjo, and their students, and she felt her heart flutter listening to him laugh. He was such a loving being, affectionate... it was such a pity that few saw him like this, and still others refused to see it when he presented this face to them.

But then an eight foot tall power house, who has the reputation of being at least Rae Iksaki's equal does inspire a level of awe, and unlike her, Sage taught with firmness along with his generosity, and Rae taught only with love.

She sighed, and from the peak of the caldera, she looked about her. Several years ago, this island was too new to support life, and literally overnight it became a island teeming with life. Especially the beautiful yet reclusive Moon Singers this world had to offer. On the night of their date was the night she'd actually seen one instead of just hearing them sing during the night.

Towering trees, grasses, mosses and the like, trees native to this world, and others in which she'd never seen before grow here, the natural order of things perfectly dwarfs any other place in the multiverse she'd ever been. But then no other place in the multiverse holds Sage's presence.

The life spark inside her yearned for life so much that she was tempted, mildly, to give herself to him at that moment, but she quelled the desire by holding the spark with both hands over her belly.

Patience, my little love, she thought inwardly to it. These things must be done properly.

Since Ariel, Sage's old lovmate, had given her, Sanari, her life force, Sanari had changed into a creature of such unnatural beauty and grace that her students were beginning to question her how it was done. She'd answered them that continued training, even among masters, improves oneself beyond their boundaries.

And it wasn't as if she were not enjoying the attention. Young males who knew who she was, and also how old she was, hid behind structures as she passed. And even Lord Sage had a certain twinkle in his eye whenever she was near, a smile on his face, and she loved the way he puffed up a little when he took in the air about her presence.

The scent of rose oils on her fur were apparently his favorite thing to smell on a female, and she'd taken to adding her own pheromones to the mix to heighten his desire of her.

The quarter moons shone down on them when they entered Sage's lair, and instead of taking her up into the tree, he instead led her downward into the ground.

She could feel the increased gravity inside his lair, *somewhere at just above two G's*, she thought, but remarkably, it didn't affect her as much as she thought it would. Even when the

gravity increased the deeper into the earth they went, she didn't really feel all that much of an increase.

More of Ariel's influence?

Sanari and Sage at last arrived into a chamber set deep inside his lair. It was so warm here Sanari actually undid her neck clasp to let her clothes circulate better. This trait was helped along by the steam in the air, making it quite humid. In the center of the chamber were multiple large stone rocks with large white blankets on them. There were a few changing screens here as well.

"What are we doing here?" she asked.

"This is where I repay your bath yesterday." He said, turning to her with a simple smile on his face. She saw his hand lift, move as if to caress her face, but then he changed its motion and gestured toward the rocks. "This is a creation designed by another healer on my homeworld. He is also a Lycan like me, but of the Gold Clan feline breeds; a noble king-cheetah from Africa, and a fellow healer.

"He is very old, even by our standards, and his joints don't work as well as they used to, so he designed a room very similar to this one, and a process in order to relax his body and relieve the pain he feels.

"He taught me the architecture when I healed his tendonitis."

"Graciously, I would bet, for healing such a painful ailment, but what do we do?"

"Well, you will lay, belly first on the towels upon these heated rocks. For cats, this is a particularly pleasurable experience; like lying in the sun. You may use the screens over there to change out of your robes if you'd like and into a dressing robe I have there till you can lay down on one of these stones. I will then show you what the hands of a healer can do."

He gave her a toothy grin. She knew that the baring of one's fangs for his world meant great humor, and so smiled back at him.

"All right. Let's see what you can do."

He nodded once, and leaving her there, he pulled off his jacket, leaving it tucked into his waist band, and just pushed the waist band into his belt. She felt her lips purse at the sight of his muscular back, and then she smiled mischievously at him as he began washing his hands in a mineral water sink. She backed up, already undoing the draw strings, the toggles and wrappings of her gown, unfolding the layered clothing a piece at a time, and then she paused, lowering her head a little, and she waited for him to turn to her. At that moment she opened her robes, and from underneath her eyelids, she saw him pause as he looked upon her naked bosom, before she dropped her arms, and let the folds of her robes simply fall off them. She smoothed her stomach, showing him the firmness and the subtle folds of her tight abs now, hidden lightly with her belly

fur. Then her hands pulled on a pair of ties lacing through grommets in her miniscule panty that covered her crotch, the straps unfolding from off her hips before the body forming garment fell from off her sex.

Sage stared at her, actually stared at her, longer than he had dared do so before, but he still averted his eyes at last and walked over to one of the stones, but there was still a smile on his face, nonetheless.

Her life had begun as a servant in her holy order. She soothed, she pleased – though not sexually, though she was taught how to – and she was taught how to give her master’s pleasure by looking upon her body alone.

“What next?” she asked and stepped gracefully over to him, her body setting itself into a poise that would draw his attention, which it did, and he took a second look – briefly – at her bodice before looking up at her face.

Sage patted the stone.

“Lay down on your belly here.” He directed, and she hopped up, and gave off an ‘oh’ of pleasure as her bottom was immediately warmed by an almost hot warmth.

She enjoyed her position for a moment, and then made a show of laying on her side, her breasts shifting to rest first, and then her side before she turned onto her belly, laying her head on a soft pillow while her breasts flattened underneath her bodice into the crooks of her arms. Sage covered her with a soft, white silk blanket, and then folded it in half back over her legs while she enjoyed the warmth, and working of its own accord, she began to purr in contentment.

Sage wheeled a tray into view, filled with many different bottles and such, but before going to them, he immediately began to massage her back while she lay there, and almost immediately her purring grew louder, rising into her throat as its sound escaped through her nostrils and clenched teeth.

The sensation was wonderful.

It felt as if he was feeling her instead of massaging, tracing contours of her back from her neck to the small of her back where her tail emerged.

“Hm... what *are* you doing? Ng.” she sighed as two of his fingers slid up her spine.

“Learning the contours of your body. Memorizing them.”

“Memorizing them? You intend to do this again, Lord Sage?”

“If my lady commands it.” He said, and his hands shifted now to their finger tips, and he began touching off chi centers and pressure points. Her eyes grew lazy as she laid there, a low rumbling coming from within her chest.

He's worthwhile just for this alone, she thought with a stupid smile on her face as he forced her to relax with his touch. But then she blinked as his fingers slid across the scars on her back, and her eyes opened as he traced them back again.

“Suddenly, I understand why you put up your sword, Sanari.” He said, and then continued his massage. “Or at least a little of it. Do you want these removed?”

Her eyes opened a little wider, and she rose from off her chest to face him, her breasts hanging heavily from her chest as she looked at him incredulously. “You can do that?”

“Yes. Right now if you wish it.”

She laid down again, hands hanging off the other end of her rock. She lay there, thinking for a moment about it. *What are you thinking about it for, you fool*, she thought. *YES!*

“Give me some time to think about it.” She said at last, and settled into the bedding there. *What are you doing?*

But Sage continued, focusing on those scars, he seemed to push them in a little, but she could still feel them on her back. He'd simply made them less noticeable. He went to his tray then, and removed a bottle, wetting his hands down with a solution, he then set them to her back muscles.

“Oh! What is that! It burns!”

“Several concoctions together, and then diluted. The burning relaxes your muscles better. He continued to work, kneading out all the strain, helping her body to relax better.

Then he used another solution, which cooled now, and soothed. Amidst all this, she laid there with a dumb look on her face, her mind relaxed and focused on feeling the sheer pleasure of her muscles being massaged so that all the tenseness was removed from them. Occasionally she felt his hands slide along her sides, brushing against her breasts, and her thighs compressed while her smile broadened.

Solution after solution, with the final one simply being worked into her fur before Sage brushed it down. She even felt him place some of those pins in her back, relieving her stresses and strains quite easily while his fingers kneaded and pinched.

And then she smelled scented rose oils, and opened her eyes as Sage anointed her. Apparently he did know of the significance of her gesture yesterday.

But while she lay there, Sage then folded the white silk blanket up over her back, and then folded the bottom half over her back with it, revealing her bottom half. And she was surprised as he started the whole process over, starting from ‘memorizing’ her muscle tone and form. But this is where it became more sensual, as he touched her bottom, his hands coming close to the delicate

folds of her womanhood as he worked on her inner thighs. From buttocks to her toes, all through the whole process from start till finish, till at last he anointed her again at the base of her spine this time. He then unfolded the top half of her blanket, and then taking hold of each corner, lifted it up off her body.

“Now... if you please, turn over.”

Her eyes opened and she blushed, but without hesitation, she turned, showing him all of her feminine glory, and lying on her back now, she turned and smiled at him, and he smiled back before laying the blanket over her, and again folding the top down over her loins, revealing her sultry bosom.

She couldn't help but feel her nipples harden as he began to sooth her face, her neck and chest, his hands actually touching her breasts to move them out of the way, pinching and massaging the fur-laden flesh of her breasts where they met her chest. And the process started over yet again, and she purred harder for him, though she was a little disappointed that he didn't touch her breasts directly.

Like how he caressed me in that dream, sucked from my nipples as he... Sanari closed her eyes and sighed, remembering the long session of love making they'd both had in that dream.

Like she had done with him, he was acting the part of the servant, and to touch the sexuality of one's master – or lady – was an affront, no matter how much she wished it at the moment. And again she was anointed, on the forehead, the bridge of her nose, each side of her neck, and finally, and she shivered as he did it, over the top edge of her breasts where her flesh met her chest.

And then one final time did he shift her cloth, and this time her lower bodice, from the front, was revealed, and she closed her eyes as he worked. His fingers came ever so close to her sex, but he did not touch. That, it felt, was far more stimulating at the moment. The closest he ever got was to massage the inside of her thigh, but in spite of that she did clench her femininity, she allowed herself to be aroused, and when Lord Sage noticed, she laid there, placatingly, one leg lifted and spread open inside his hands.

Her eyes were even inviting.

But Sage did not attempt to take her, but focused on his work before he folded the cloth back down and sat down beside her while she looked up at him. When he anointed her, his fingers again brushed close to her sex, along her inner thighs and her navel this time. Her lips parted as she looked into those glowing eyes, she wanted to tell him so much how much she loved him. She'd already done so, but that was just a dream-like state for him.

“Very well done.” She said instead, her smile fading a little in disappointment in herself. “I enjoyed that immensely.”

“It is my pleasure to serve.” He said, and he looked upon her, his hand lifting, and for a moment it looked as if he were about to cup her breast, she could see him thinking about it, but instead he pulled her silk blanket higher up on her chest and braced himself with one long arm beside her head.

She fingered his abs, the remarkable overlapping abdominals that were an impossible twelve pack. She loved being in his presence, she loved those kind eyes, and lifting her gaze from his stomach – and his groin – she looked up into his eyes, and she watched his head drop toward her briefly.

A little closer, she thought, attracting him to her. Closer... CLOSER!

Her eyes half closed, her lips puckered as he neared. She was close now, almost as close as last night! But then Sage suddenly stopped, withdrew, his face changing into one of concentration, his eyes going out of focus as his attention focused on something other than her, his head turning to look beyond the walls and levels of the Lair at something beyond her notice.

And then he retracted.

“I have one final item for your enjoyment, Mother Sanari.” He said, and opened a steamer and reached in with his bare hands to remove a heavy wet towel. When he returned, he picked at the silk cloth, his finger finding purchase between her breasts briefly before he slid the white cloth off her, deposited it behind him. “Please lay on your belly again.” He smiled at her, and a bit confused she turned and lay down again.

It was then that he laid a steaming wet towel over her body, right up to her shoulders while she hugged the pillow and tucked its edges in about her to crate a seal.

“I am sorry to leave you, Sanari, but a guest that I have been waiting for has just arrived. I shall not be long, and its best to feel the warmth for at least half an hour to feel totally relaxed.”

“Where are you going?” she asked, lifting up, her chest hanging freely as she turned a little toward him.

“To administer a job interview to a prospective new professor.” He smiled. “I’ve been waiting for her to arrive for sometime, and we seem to keep missing our appointments. But no worries. I shall return.”

He urged her to lie down again, and replaced the wet towel, before putting a steaming wet washcloth atop her head. There was a scent in it, and the moisture was soothing her body as it steamed away.

“Just relax and enjoy yourself.” And he placed three pins in one of her shoulders, and she relaxed so well that she literally sank into her bedding, enjoying the sensation.

A dark figure skirted across the quiet grounds of the Shadow League, with a smaller shadow accompanying it, or much rather in tow. As figments and pinpoints of light played across their bodies, one could see by the snippets that they got was that both of these entities were female, one adult, one young.

The flash of a sword could also be seen in the sparse moonlight. There was only a quarter moon, and many clouds, but even that would betray them. They were in the lair of a most competent of hunters, and the larger female as she ran silently across the courtyard to avoid detection, with the smaller hurriedly running right after her, though a little more noisily, did so only after a signal from the first.

The first figure stopped in the middle of the courtyard, watching the shadows on the ground of the courtyard as the moonlight spread across the ground. Though there were two quarter moons, they still shed enough light to equal a half moon on most other worlds with a single satellite moon.

Damn, I should've tried this some other night, the leader thought, and holding the smaller shadow closely as she slid into her arms. The older more mature of the two took a moment to readjust the smaller one's hair with a motherly smile on her face while a long curving sword bared before them just in case.

She embraced the smaller one briefly, and began edging her way toward the entrance to the Lair, waving the smaller one back, still watching the light and shadows play on the ground. She paused then as one massive shadow moved across the ground, helped by the tree cover, but as rays of the moonlight slid before the entrance, she stopped cold as she saw the flash of metal, and gritting her teeth, she watched as the light slid up the fine edge of a blade, just before the shadows began coughing up a most brilliant frost white; a white so pure that it did not reflect any other colors. That white was thusly etched by black stripes, stripes so black that the light fell right into them and didn't even get a chance to scream.

A male's form unfolded from the light, and she watched a monster of a cat's head lift to look at her, and as it opened its eyes, a flash of green pierced the darkness, just as more pinpoints on its body lit to reveal themselves in the same glowing green manner.

"Lord Sage." She gasped. *He was expecting me?!*

The shadow of white and black opened his mouth and spoke in soft tones.

"Welcome, Lady Luna."

Luna straightened, lifting her chin while Sage remained motionlessly before her; his hands folded one over the other on the end of his blade as it rested point down, but with the edge outward. She lifted her sword with a whipping sound through the air.

"So you finally caught me." She said, her mind becoming emotionless.

“That all depends. I wish to strike a bargain with you, Luna.”

Luna’s brows beetled and her jaw set. “No bargains, Lord Sage.” She said sternly. “You will not keep me from training her. I *will* train her, I *will* pass my arts to another generation, and there is nothing you can do that will stop me. Come Lovely. We’re leaving.”

Sage did not move as she moved backward, holding out her hand for her daughter Lovely to take it. When she did not take it, Luna shook her hand, her eyes pinching as her eyes remained on Lord Sage.

“Come Lovely, I said we are leaving!”

She stepped backward, waving back and forth with her hand to try to find her daughter, and then chanced a look for her daughter, removing her eyes from Sage for but a moment, and then seeing that her daughter wasn’t there, she turned fully around, and around again when she didn’t find her.

“You son of a bitch, what did you do with my daughter!” Luna growled, her eyes darkening as she took a definite battle stance, not caring if the Rage Drive broke from her as she gripped her sword with both hands and angled it toward Sage.

“She is quite safe.” Sage said, and indicated with one hand off to his right, and she turned her head to look out the corner of her eye where flood lamps suddenly activated to show her being cared for a rather lovely young human woman with a *very* full belly from pregnancy. “And she will always be near and within sight till our business is concluded.

“Matee is a very gentle creature, and she’ll watch over your daughter Lovely quite well.”

Luna stood there, watching as her daughter accepted a pretty dolly, which she took and hugged deeply as she and this stranger Matee sat on the ground. Lovely was getting sodas and sandwiches too. They were feeding her daughter...

She’s been so hungry lately.

She looked back to Sage even as another person, a large strapping human male, also in white robes like the female, placed a small table on the ground between she and Sage, and then two chairs for them to sit upon. Sage’s servant, Daedalus arrived, and setting a table cloth expertly with one hand, he then lowered a large platter that had been balanced in his other hand and removed a jug of something sweet smelling, a couple of hand bowls and little platters for them, and a plate full of little sandwiches. Once he was done, he bowed and took a step back.

Luna lowered her sword as Sage handed his to the large male human standing nearby, and gesturing, the chair meant for him moved out from under the table to allow him to sit, which he did; being careful of his tail. He then gestured for her to sit.

She paused and thought, and thought longer, and looking to her daughter as she was laughing with this mysterious human named Matee, Luna finally stepped forward into a graceful glide, and planted her sword into one of the stone cobbles even as some flood lights shone on them to offer some lightning.

Sage gestured again, and her chair moved out for her, and sitting, it moved forward again to help her sit pleasantly at the table.

“What of this bargain?” she said without preamble as Dallas stepped forward again and poured them both some tea. She did not drink, and neither did Sage, though he did reach out to hold his hand bowl with three fingers.

“You want to teach Fatima Iksaki?” he asked in return, and she nodded.

“I do.”

“What else do you want?” he asked, and Luna blinked at him, becoming very suspicious.

“Nothing of consequence.”

“But what of your daughter, then? What do you want for her?”

Luna turned, seeing her pressing her ear against Matee’s swollen belly and listening to the baby kick.

“Everything.” She answered before she knew what she was saying; her features softening as the emotions of a mother spread into her.

“As does every parent. But not much of a life so far for her. No real home, no promise as to when she’ll eat next, if at all; and the question in her mind as to where will she sleep next? In a bed, or under a bush?”

“She is a remarkable child, nonetheless, for being raised by an alleged murderess and a former member of the Sword League. There is a phenomenal price on your head which makes you an infamous female, and the target of professional hit men and bounty hunters.

“Not quite a proper life for a child, always on the run, always moving and never setting in roots, never having any friends.”

Luna slowly turned her head toward Sage as he spoke these things, her eyes darkening with her temper, and her hand on the table was clawing deep grooves into it, tearing the table cloth while curls of wood scraped from beneath her claws.

“If you have an offer to make, Lord Sage, I suggest you make it.” She said firmly.

“In this moment of your life, I offer you several options:

“The first is simple. You can reject all that I say and attack me. You are a phenomenal sword mistress, but even despite your Rage Drive, it is nothing in comparison to what happens when I get pissed off, and as it is, I am many times your better at the sword. Despite the fact that my sword is ten meters away, I will nonetheless cut you down before you even have yours in your hand.”

He’s serious! She thought; her mouth opening in stunned shock.

“There is more to that option. Your daughter will see you broken, right before her very eyes, and while you are turned over to the Imperium for execution for your crimes, she is sent to an orphanage to live out the rest of her life. She will seek revenge against me, will follow your life to a T until that day, and when she arrives, I will cut her down just as easily as I will do to you.

“The Second option is that you leave this place with your daughter. You are free to go under the understanding that you shall never step upon my island again. I have taken additional precautions against individuals such as yourself, and allow me to state that I was aware of you the moment that you stepped onto my island. Should you leave and then return a second time, then the first option will enact itself. You will be broken and then executed, and your daughter will follow you some forty seven years later.”

He speaks as if he’s seen this. Is he a seer as well?

Luna rose to her feet, paused and then turned to retrieve her daughter. She didn’t get more than three steps before she heard Sage speak again.

“There is a third option...” Sage spoke, and turning, she glared at him.

“And what is that?” she demanded, fists clenching. “More bad news, doomsayer?”

Again, Sage indicated the chair opposite him, and with much deliberation, Luna strode back to her seat and sat down, the chair again pushing forward to make her comfortable there.

“The price on your head is quite formidable, Luna. But there is a line item in the laws of the Empire which allows someone like me to purchase the price on your head, in essence buying your servitude.”

“Slavery.” She bit out.

“Indentured Servitude.” Sage corrected. “It’s how some people treat this servitude is where the question of slavery comes in or not. But I will buy the price on your head, at the usual ten times penalty, in which case you become my servant for a period of five years – the standard contract – in which you will be paying for your crimes in service. You will be receiving free room and board for both you and your daughter, spacious private quarters, and credits to buy food, clothing and possessions for the two of you.

“After five years, I will free you and give you *and* your daughter your severance pay, which should allow the two of you to live comfortably till Lovely is old and grey.

“Lovely will be given schooling other than the almighty school of the street, and allowed to enter into the Shadow League when she is old enough if she so chooses. She’ll have a roof over her head, playmates, food, clothing, and a luxury quality bed for her to sleep in.”

“And what will I be doing?” Luna growled. “Walking around in a skimpy outfit cleaning for you? Serving you tea with a thong up my butt?!”

“I would not consider degrading a warrior such as yourself like that. Such a thing would be like shattering a thousand year old, fine stained glass window. Such a thing is unthinkable. Dallas cares for the whole of the Shadow League, and does not require help. No... your servitude will be as a professor and instructor of the fighting arts in my school. You will have more than adequate facilities to utilize.”

Luna eyed him carefully. *This is too good to be true. Far to good to be true.*

“And the catch?”

Sage leaned forward and folded both his hands about his hand bowl.

“There is one addendum that I am required to add to the standard contract, as well as certain legal requirements that you must undergo and enter into under full understanding before the imperial government will allow us to enact this agreement.

“My addendum is simple. You can teach whoever you want to here, Luna, but only under one condition: They must come to you to learn, not you to them. So unless Fatima Iksaki seeks you out, you are not to assail her with constant requests to enter your classes. Additionally, you shall teach me your ways. In my dealings with you, I have learned that there are certain skills that you possess that I have need of.

“As for the legal constraints, the first is that you are now confined into this little corner of space. You are not allowed to leave this solar system unless emergency dictates otherwise, which shall be left up to my discretion. Likewise, even in such an emergency, you must go with a chaperone, which will be either myself or one of my dully appointed representatives. As such, with everything considered, the size of your ‘prison’ is the Mystic League, the Shadow League, and the orbital space station above.”

“And the second?” she asked warily.

Sage lifted one hand and gestured, and Luna saw a black thing with a red jewel appear at the center of the table, and she immediately slid away from it on her chair when she saw it.

“By Imperial Law, this becomes the symbol of your servitude.” Sage finished.

It was a Collar. A restraining Collar, complete with the metal brace and attached toggle just beneath the jewel for a leash to reside on.

“But this is not an Imperial Collar, Luna. Thankfully Dallas had found a loophole that you only need wear a restraining collar. It did not state who made it or who it was sanctioned by. This is one of my own designs. It does, however, have all the same qualities as their standard collars.”

Neural inhibitors, tracking device, pain inducers, and an explosive device, she thought in remembrance. It insured her obedience. Neural inhibitors could render her whole body inert like a limp noodle. The tracking device would tell her master where she was at all times, the pain inducers were for whenever she ‘misbehaved’ and needed a spanking, and the explosive device was for her tracheal arteries should she need to be dispatched.

“Unlike a standard model, the Imperium cannot remote detonate this device. There are only two people who have that ability, and that is myself, and Dallas.”

Luna slowly sat down, looking at a different kind of imprisonment than what she’d feared for all these years. Ever since she’d killed Lovely’s father for his betrayal and suddenly became a wanted woman. She stared at the collar, and then looked down at a datapad that Dallas had placed on the table for her. It’s only feature on the pad was a place for her to digitally sign her name and place her thumbprint in, signifying her acceptance of the contract.

She weighed all her options, she stared at the collar, stared at the datapad, and then turned to her daughter as she was resting against the woman Matee’s breast and passing off into sleep.

Then she looked at the datapad, and picking up the stylus, she signed her name, pressed her thumb to the screen, and with a shaking hand, she reached out and took the collar, and with one last inhale and exhale of freedom, she close the clasp around her neck.

There was a hum from the device just before it segmented and spread open about her neck, and looking about her, she saw a field of green light forming between all the segments, just before they spread open into a wide disk made of all the interconnecting pieces. A field of green suddenly lit, working straight through her neck, and it made her dizzy briefly before the pieces snapped away from the disk about her neck, attaching to her flesh and sinking inside it.

The metal toggle for the leash rattled as it’s piece sunk into her throat, the bright red gem sinking in, while four metal studs remained outside her body with it. There was the brief snap and crackle as she knew that these studs were her pain amplifiers before they went quiet and inert.

Sage then took the datapad and held it up for her to see, and she watched her life changing as data was moved around. Money was deposited, hundreds of millions of credits for her head, and the paperwork was submitted, and after a brief pause, her file was automatically downloaded along with her indentured servitude papers with her thumbprint and signature already macroing themselves into the right places.

And then she saw the bright words of “Transference complete.”

She exhaled sharply, and then turned to look at her daughter, only to find her lying in the arms of the female Matee nearby.

“Poor little thing. She was all tuckered out.” Matee was saying as she laid Lovely into Luna’s arms, just before she felt her sword being pushed into its scabbard at her side.

She turned to look expectantly at Sage.

“Daedalus shall see you to your new home, Luna, where you’ll find that new linens have been provided, your beds have been made and a bath has been drawn. Beginning of next term shall be in two months, after the end of current term and the thirty day rest period. I would show you to your rooms, my lady, but I have another guest that I must see to the comfort of.

“Good evening.” He said, and bowed before turning to leave.

“This way Mistress Luna.” Dallas spoke, and Luna watched as Sage retrieved his sword, and she watched as the thing retracted itself inside his own hand. The legendary bio-blade, the weapon of Lord Sage that was rapidly spanning the underworld, in which swordsmen and women were coveting the knowledge of.

Words failed her as she watched him enter The Lair, before she followed after the Bioroid Daedalus.

Sanari turned her head when she felt the pins leave her back, and smiled as she saw Sage, naked as he was the other night in the bath, hop up, giving her a wonderful view of his package before he laid down belly first on one of the rocks near her.

“Welcome back.” She said with a smile. “Did your meeting go well?”

“I think so.” He answered, hugging his pillow like she was as he watched her. “I feel good about it. I’ll tell you about the whole thing tomorrow, but right now, I simply wish to enjoy the company of a beautiful lady, and rest for the night. My meeting was rather stressful.

Sanari chuckled and she laid deeper into her bedding, watching Sage watch her, and the two of them carried on their small talk well into the night, and later they dried themselves in a sauna, she laying down on her side on the wooden planks as her fur dried in the stifling hot heat; Sage sitting across from her with his towel about his shoulders.

She liked how they no longer minded each other’s nudity, though Sage still tried averting his eyes now and again. And they conversed more.

When it came time for her to leave, they both dressed each other, and Sage continued with her, up the caldera and down its outside again, remaining until she was stepping up onto the dock

leading to the boats. The boatman geared up his vessel while Sage stood on the dock, seeing her off.

Sanari stood there perfectly still despite the rocking boat, watching Sage as he stood on the dock. They watched the spot where each other was until long after the other disappeared from sight.

Luna bathed with her child, for the first time in a very long time, she didn't worry about clean clothes for her, she didn't worry about good food for her, or a bed. She really didn't know what to think right now.

But then Lovely fingered the toggle attached to the peak of her chest, fused magically to her collar bones, and her smile lost a bit of its luster.

"This is really pretty, Mommy." Lovely giggled, her post adolescent body just beginning to transform into an adult. "Can I have one?"

"No, I'm sorry you can't, Lovely." She said. "It's a one of a kind gift your mommy just got from Lord Sage. He's going to help us for awhile, so we get to stay here!"

"I'm glad," she said, her whole face smiling as she sat down in the bath, and Luna was glad that she could get off the subject of her servitude. "Matee is nice, mommy, and guess what! She doesn't have any fur! I've never seen an alien like that..." she splashed and laughed, and Luna smiled happily at her daughter, almost on the verge of tears.

She couldn't tell her the what, why and how they'd just come to being here. Lovely just wouldn't understand about her whole life yet. As it was, Luna wasn't too sure she could ever bring herself to telling lovely about her life.

After a time in the bath, Luna rose, helping her daughter up, and turning, she was surprised to see two genderless Bioroids standing there; the pair made up of living metal instead of flesh like their more advanced counterpart Daedalus was.

They opened separate robes for them, smiling and nodding to her as she allowed them to dress her.

"And who are you two?" she asked, pulling her hair from within her collar.

"I am J-Alpha-Ten, or Jax, ma'am." the one who'd dressed her said in a perfectly normal sounding voice.

"And I am Delta-Alpha-Zero, or Dao." The second intoned as it knelt beside Lovely and rubbed her body with her robe. Lovely giggled.

“Lord Sage has had us assigned to you,” both intoned in the exact same moment, their voices mingling. “We are to be your personal servants in your home.”

And they both bowed.

Luna crossed her arms underneath her breasts, looking sternly at the pair. “Or my watchers, perchance?” she asked, and she was aware that Lovely was watching her.

“Not at all mistress.” Jax said, bowing again. “There is no need for that, as I am told.”

Luna sighed, brushing a hand through her mane. “Whatever, I am turning in. Where are our beds?”

“If ma’am and little miss were to follow me,” Dao said, bowing promptly again. “We have had your rooms made up. Will there be any luggage we should be expecting?”

“No.” Luna said, and followed these bio-mechanical beings through her new spacious home. It was, admittedly, the most comfortable prison she’d ever seen.

“We have taken your clothing to be cleaned, hemmed and repaired.” Jax stated, opening a pair of sliding doors to a rather large chamber, complete with rugs, and a vanity. “Lord Sage has stated that you will need to remain on the island for at least thirty days, mistress, to ensure that all filings and holdings have been completed. Afterwards, Wildcat has stated he will accompany you to the space station to shop for a more suitable wardrobe. We will accompany you too as well, if you so desire ma’am.”

Luna sat down on the large bed that was built a mere six inches off the floor. There was another bed nearby for Lovely.

“We shall see,” she said. “Now please, leave us. I desire to turn in.”

“At once ma’am,” the two bioroids said and bowed as one, but before leaving, Dao opened a vanity to show them their new clothing provided for them.

“These shall be for you both when you awake.” It said, and it closed the doors to the vanity, and as the pair left, the sliding doors shut automatically behind them, and the light beyond shut off.

It was a well made bed. Sturdy with a good mattress, and Luna, not even bothering with her robe, fell right back into it. *Finally, a decent bed.* She thought with a half smile.

Lovely, who had sat on her own bed, instead rose, and stepping quietly over to her mother, crawled into bed with her, and like they had for so many a night since Lovely was born, Lovely used her mother’s ample breasts as a pillow, curling in close to her for warmth.

Luna pulled the blankets up over them both, and soon, before she knew it, she’d fallen asleep.

Day 32: Ascension

Mayia walked silently, still dressed with her apprentice robe wrapped about her shoulders. It was between classes at noon rest, and she was walking across the courtyard toward her target. Her target was with her friends, a very popular girl at the school, with her friends equally held in high esteem. On most worlds, Mayia's movements would be like an unpopular kid going to try to break into the popular clique.

Mayia stopped up before them, and waited patiently to be noticed, watching her prospective target intently.

Fatima Iksaki, noticing that some of her friends were now watching something over her shoulder, and feeling the intent gaze on her back, winced and gritted her teeth like she was about to deal with something unpleasant. She turned, seeing the robed bunny standing before her, seeing only her reddened lips, neck and chin from underneath the shadows.

"Yes, Apprentice Mayia." Fatima greeted, wincing again as she rose to stand well above the bunny, and Fatima stood flat on her feet, Mayia stood on her toes.

Mayia made no noise, spoke no words, but simply lifted her hand. Her robes covered her hands, but a white card was extended from the shadows of the robe to the 'unofficial head student.' Everyone knew that Fatima was the top student. Stronger than Siklohn and Mayia combined, they said, but Sage leveled his students' authority in his school dependant on how far in his own arts they have advanced.

Fatima accepted the card, and turned it to see the simple lettering in red ink on one of its faces.

'Challenge.'

"Mayia, are you sure you want to do this? Especially now? You haven't even trained one iota since our last fight."

Mayia nodded simply, making no other move.

"This is your last chance to ever join my team." Fatima urged, hoping that she wouldn't have to seriously hurt Mayia.

Mayia merely nodded.

Fatima exhaled, "Ok." And she and Mayia walked side by side to the center of the courtyard.

The courtyard cleared for a massive battle as if it were a magical thing, all the other students coiling this way and that as the two of them then parted to their own starting points.

Lord Sage appeared as if out of nowhere, causing a few of the students to jump as he crossed his arms before his chest as the two young women faced off with one another. The two looked to

him, and he nodded simply, and taking up her fighting stance, Fatima immediately teleported to the center of the major ring. Mayia, however, calmly walked to the center, showing the utmost confidence in her stride, which looked as if she were simply floating across the floor.

“Let’s do this.” Fatima said once the Apprentice had reached the center with her, getting on her game face. A viscous thing, her face contorting in an unnatural manner as she faced down Mayia. “Just back down, Mayia. You don’t want to really fight me. You don’t really want to...”

“Ready?! FIGHT!” Sage called, and before Fatima knew it, she had just been slapped across the face, the force and speed of which actually *turned her!*

She looked back to Mayia as her robes resettled about her and her head lifted a little to show Fatima a smile.

She slapped me? Fatima thought incredulously. But her game face was gone, and Fatima laughed, actually tasting blood on her face as she recovered.

“Well good. You *have* learned something new. But lets see if it sticks.” And Fatima lunged forward.

Her punch lanced outward but Mayia bent backward at ninety degrees so quickly that she seemed to teleport into that position, and when she slowly, and even ponderously righted herself, she struck, and Fatima felt her punch land right below her breasts.

“T-K-KRACK!” it snapped into her, and Fatima actually staggered backward holding her chest against the stinging pain there.

She rubbed it only briefly, seeing Mayia turn her back to her. The crowd was gasping at this already. Smiling in a slightly raised respect for the head student, Fatima decided to step herself up, and chuckling lightly as she reclaimed her game face, Fatima stepped forward – snapped forward was perhaps a better description – and grabbed Mayia by her robes and hauled upward.

Fatima felt her carrying Mayia upward, even felt her weight at half way up, but in between that and throwing the robes downward, something happened. When Fatima threw the bundle downward toward the ground with a force push, she blinked in surprise as only a bundle of clothing hit against the ground with the force wave, creating a small creator. But Mayia was not in them.

“T-K-KRACK! T-K-KRACK!”

Two more blows landed on Fatima’s back right over her kidneys, and the whole of her back exploded with pain. In spite of all her power, Fatima stumbled forward with a titanic gasp from the crowds, holding her back as all her muscles back there spasomed suddenly, compressing on her spine.

“Ow... that hurt.” She said, and whipped around to face Mayia.

Mayia stood there in her Apprentice uniform. White baggy pants collected about her ankles to show off her bare feet, with some sort of leathery spat covering their tops and threading between her big and second toes. Her black, sleeveless uniform top was opened to show off her chest, which had grown since Fatima had last seen her. The opened jacket also displayed Mayia's weapon of choice – blue silk ribbon – wrapping over her bosom and upper body like a one-piece bathing suit. Her ears were folded back, her hair in a long red braid beneath them.

She held herself in an ultimately graceful position of femininity; legs crossed slightly, head bowed, back arched, and hands held at her sides, with a long red finger sheath on three of her fingers of either hand.

Fatima turned sharply to face her, even as Mayia's head lifted and her eyes opened.

This time the crowd *and* Fatima backed away at the sight of her face, which held an unnatural siren's beauty. But most of that came from her eyes, eyes that glowed with a soft amber haze. Her sheathed fingers clicked as she drew herself up straighter, her piercing eyes penetrating Fatima to the very core.

And Fatima heard a voice, Mayia's voice, inside her head.

'You do not realize it yet, but you have already been defeated.' The voice said, and Fatima, for the first time in a rather long time, was surprised by an opponent.

But then her features softened and she snapped forward again, going into a true martial arts fest. The two of them were moving so fast that time seemed to slow down outside their tiny circle, and with hundreds of strikes being blocked between the two of them. But Fatima's blows were landing far more regularly. She was just that much faster than the bunny, but despite that Mayia was dodging in what even she thought of as impossible, her body contorting into unique directions and actually dodging some of Fatima's faster strikes. Also, when Fatima struck Mayia, it was like striking a lump of iron. Her body was so hard! Somehow, Mayia's fighting level had skyrocketed over the past month.

And already she had stuck four times... "T-K-KRACK!" Make that five times.

And whenever Mayia did land a strike, it hurt.

But Mayia was getting slapped around pretty hard, and every time her face was knocked away from a blow, it snapped right back again with that same fierce gaze.

"THUMP-T-K-KRACK!"

This last was from a kicking strike to Fatima's abdominals. It came so fast and so fierce, right through an ever so brief opening in Fatima's defenses that it knocked her back, and she had to slide along the ground on her bare feet to slow herself; her hands folding over her abs.

Don't loose your temper Fatty, Fatima thought to herself. It's only six blows, and you should be happy that she's gotten this far!

Fatima snapped forward, moving so fast that it looked like she was teleporting, and this time her fist – the thing the size of Mayia's whole face – hammered forward with the full motion of her body. Mayia gasped and lifted both hands, catching her fist as she hopped up, still holding onto Fatima's fist, and when she retracted her fist and lunged again, Mayia was still falling.

But still! She escaped harm! Fatima smiled just as her other fist lanced forward, and Mayia pushed it out of the way with both hands as she landed. Fatima used the added momentum to turn, her elbow swinging around with her body motion toward Mayia's face, and just a few mere nanoseconds before her elbow struck...

“T-K-KRACK!” The blow landed right beneath Fatima's arm pit, right where her whole arm's nerve cluster was, and she felt that arm go numb. But despite that her falling elbow smacked Mayia right in the face, and she was slammed so hard into the ground that she crumbled and tumbled away.

Fatima held her armpit as her arm continued to numb, her fingers actually falling open from their clenched fist as all her muscles from her shoulder downward relaxed.

Impossible! Fatima thought, Looking at her arm, and following what Lord Sage taught her, she pinched and poked a few nerve bundles about her chest and shoulder and the numbness began to subside, like waking up after sleeping on your arm, feeling it loose all feeling, and then rubbing it in an effort to get feeling back to it. *Only Sage has ever been able to trigger those pressure points before.*

But even so, Mayia wobbled, and then twisted, planting a hand on the ground as she balanced on it and righted herself through sheer upper body strength. Her legs split wide open before she planted her toes on the ground, giving all the boys behind her a fine view of her shapely behind before she uncoiled and straightened; rising to her full height and arching her back again to expose her chest.

Fatima watched as Mayia lifted a hand to wipe her pert, petite little triangular nose, wiping off the blood before she spit more out from underneath her buckteeth.

Again that piercing gaze. It demanded respect, but Fatima refused to give it just yet.

Seven, Fatima counted and lifted her good arm, trying to shake off the numbness, but as soon as her arm rose, Mayia stepped forward, and vanished.

S-she teleported?

Fatima turned this way and that, being used to teleporting fighters already. But then Mayia appeared suddenly, snapping into place with a loud crack, right before Fatima's face. The whole of her view was taken up by those piercing eyes, and then...

“T-K-KRACK!”

The blow was right into Fatima’s ear, and the swinging blow from Mayia sent Fatima straight to the ground. She only just caught her fall with her one good hand, even as her other hand came alive again, and rising up as swift as the wind with her fist guiding her, Fatima caught Mayia even as she was falling, but Mayia teleported again, ceasing to be where she was even as Fatima’s blow caught her. Though it was direct, and would’ve knocked her out, it was really little more than a glancing blow.

Eight. Fatima counted, and then teleported herself, reappearing just as Mayia did on the opposite side of the courtyard, descending slowly back onto her toes and setting herself up again in that graceful stance.

There’s a pause in her teleport. It’s not instantaneous. But why did this one take longer than last time? Can she set delays?!

Fatima set herself in her own battle stance, and the two faced off with one another, Mayia remaining motionless as she focused those eyes on Fatima. Fatima decided to drag the clock out a few more seconds, before she screamed, and she and Mayia ran at one another.

Over the ground, the bunny was far swifter of foot, and was on Fatima before she’d even reached the half way mark of the courtyard, and teleported instantly after the last few feet and landed a final punch right into Fatima’s solar plexus.

“T-K-KRACK!” *Nine!* Fatima cried inside her head, and then spun as pain shot through her chest, stinging her nipples even before a crushing blow from her crumpled Mayia straight into the ground.

“Time!” Lord Sage called, and the gathered students actually gave a collective “Awww...” that Mayia hadn’t made it, for they too counted only nine blows.

Fatima felt sorry for her, but perhaps it was best. If Mayia couldn’t hold up in a fight such as this, then how in the heavens could she last in a combat situation where other fighters would be attempting to break her?

“I’m sorry, Mayia.” Fatima said to her as she rolled onto her back. “But you only struck nine blows on me.” Fatima opened a hand, which Mayia took, and Fatima helped her to her feet.

Mayia felt her jaw and a gentle amber glow suffused her body and Fatima saw blood withdraw back into her nose, and a tooth grow back inside her jaw as Mayia worked her mouth against some of the punches. But in spite of that, when she looked at Fatima again, it was with a much kinder, far more exotic look than the intense glare, and Mayia smiled before shaking her head. She simply continued to look at Fatima, her eyes sparkling before they both heard a pair of hands clapping.

“Wonderful display, both of you.” and they turned to see Lord Sage approaching. “Mayia that was spectacular! You’ve superceded even my expectations, and yours I see. You finally did it!”

Mayia turned to look at Fatima with that wonderful crimson-lipped smile, her eyes shining with knowledge as Lord Sage planted both of his large hands on her shoulders. The students who had been leaving after the fight all paused and turned quickly around, rushing back to the courtyard at Sage’s words, all of them attentive now.

“Pardon me; Lord Sage... but what exactly did the Apprentice do?” Fatima said carefully.

Sage’s eyes opened wider in mock surprise.

“Why, she just completed your Challenge, Fatima.” Sage smiled. The twinkle in his eye let Fatima know that there was some private joke going on right now, and his small smile was mischievous.

Surely he wasn’t going to force me to take her anyways! Fatima thought with the corners of her eyes pinching in confusion. *Lord Sage has always been just and fair and Mayia simply did not fulfill the challenge!*

“Forgive me, Master Sage.” Fatima said. “But Mayia only struck nine blows. She had to strike ten blows within sixty seconds.”

There were nods from Fatima’s Challenge Team and also from several of the other students as well as calls of acquiescence, and a throng began pushing in closer to them.

“Funny... I counted twenty eight.” Sage said simply, fixing his glowing-eyed gaze on Fatima.

There was murmuring now from the other students, and the larger giants among the students held up some of the smaller students caught in the back so that they could see what was going on.

“Master Sage...” Fatima prompted again carefully, her confusion mounting. “There were only nine.”

“I beg to differ, Miss Iksaki,” came a new voice, and all turned to see Daedalus approaching. “I too distinctly saw twenty eight blows within the allotted time span of sixty seconds.”

Fatima looked to Mayia, who was still watching her with that knowing gaze and that soft smile, and she reached out and took both of Fatima’s hands with both of hers. Still she did not speak. Sage, however, went into action.

“Then a demonstration then. Students! FORMATIONS!” Sage Bellowed, and snapping to, all the students moved into morning formation, or at least all those who were present. There were those who were sick, and those who were inside preparing for more classes, and so there were holes in the formation. Fatima was in the front row, where she’d been since the school’s formation. Mayia, as one of the dozen or so top students, were in the leading row in front of her.

“Dallas, a soft target, if you please.” Sage voiced, as he stood in front of them all, with the assorted masters and instructors who were present behind him. Fatima saw some new faces back there, including a rabbit breed that had five fingers. She was beginning to understand what had happened during the last thirty days.

“Yes sir.” Dallas voiced, and one of the many smaller training circles in the ground lowered and slid away, and a large obelisk of solid clay rose into view.

“Apprentice Mayia. Please demonstrate to the school the Rabbit Strike.” Sage called out, and Mayia bowed deeply at the waist, again giving all behind her a good view of her well rounded behind before she rose and detached herself from the throng, hurrying over to the obelisk.

Setting herself, with everyone paying rapt attention, Mayia rose up on her toes, her hands in a classic punching chambering position, and focusing on the obelisk, she struck. Her hand lanced outward once and struck the obelisk, and Fatima blinked in surprise as, with the one punch, three fist impressions landed within the clay.

“T-T-THUMP.”

Fatima wished she had her sister’s Combat Sense at that moment, to be able to slow down one’s perception, but sure enough, with one strike, three blows landed.

Fatima gasped in disbelief.

“Mater Tia. Please display to the school the Jack Rabbit Strike.”

The new master, wearing very light armor and soft Master’s robes similar to those of Mayia’s apprentice robe, only more decorative, bowed sharply at the waist and moved before the school, even as the obelisk rotated to give her a blank side.

Master Tia, the new master Fatima had seen, did little more than a quick jab, and five impressions made their way onto the clay.

“F-T-T-T-THUMP.

Fatima’s lips pursed as she saw punches, hand rakes, and two finger-jab impressions in the clay, and then looked at Mayia who was standing at attention beside the obelisk.

“And now, I shall display the ultimate of this technique:” Sage stated. “The Hundred Hand.”

Again, the obelisk rotated for Master Sage. He set himself, and then set himself forward into a punch. The whole school gasped as in the time it took one to count “one-one-thousand,” Sage hand had punched outward and became a blur. The strikes, blows, claw marks, finger strikes, ox-bow strikes and so on, erupted all over the front of the obelisk, and the whole strike sounded in a dull “WHUMP!”

The whole front of the Obelisk was just one beaten crater.

Sage turned and bowed to his school and righted himself only after the school bowed in return. “Assembly! Assume Third Position.” And the whole of the school descended to a squat, then to their knees, and then fell backward onto their rumps, some of the larger students causing impact tremors that forced a few of the other students to bounce with it.

“Daedalus. Could we please have footage of the first ten strikes struck by Apprentice Mayia?”

“Yes, Master Sage.” Dallas said, and immediately a massive holo screen appeared before them, the same screen Dallas formed during movie night on their weekends where they viewed the cinema of this universe. The holo-movie was usually a voted upon thing.

This time, however, the screen displayed the action of Fatima and Mayia’s fight in slow motion, the movement slowing dramatically during each blow.

“First strike, Mayia.” Daedalus stated. “Open palm strike to the face, one-hundred-ninety-two kilometers-per-hour. New school record for fastest hand technique.”

The motion returned to normal, and the next three strikes were shown, and Fatima watched in amazement as Mayia’s hand extended quickly and retracted fully in rapid speed, despite that the images were slowed down to about one : one-hundredth of a second.

“You will all note,” Sage stated. “That according to standard rules of combat located throughout the multiverse, for a strike to be counted a strike, it must chamber, strike and re-chamber. As these images display, each of the apprentice’s strikes follow this motion, even during the Rabbit Strike. As such, though many of you only saw her extend her arm only once, in truth, she did so three times in rapid succession, one right after the other.”

“Ten strikes, completed in nine-point-two seconds.” Dallas supplied. “New school record for Fatima Iksaki’s challenge.”

The silence was phenomenal. It was the silence of disbelief, even though they were watching it happen right before their eyes, recorded imagery. They even saw Master Sage, the new Master Tia, and even Mayia herself accomplish the same task.

They continued to watch the entire fight, blow by blow, with time moving in the images to bring them to the highlights of the strikes.

“Twenty-eight strikes in sixty seconds while accomplishing Fatima Iksaki’s Challenge. New School record.” Dallas intoned as the image ended, and the screen collapsed, and the gathered students were looking and muttering to one another. Fatima was staring at Mayia with a chuckle, as she looked right back at her with that same knowing smile.

“That will be all for today,” Sage called out once the image had disappeared. “You are dismissed until next bell.”

The school grounds became an instant chatterbox as everyone dispersed, and Fatima, still not believing this, nonetheless rose to her feet as Mayia did, and the two met with one another in the center.

“I stand corrected.” She smiled, rubbing the back of her neck with one hand, and the next thing she knew, Mayia had hugged her tightly around the middle. The bunny girl had been growing, and she was quite tall now for her species, but Fatima was still a bit taller.

Fatima laughed softly and hugged her back.

“We train every morning, Mayia – I mean apprentice – don’t be late.”

Mayia grinned and nodded her head vigorously, grinning harder as she hugged herself now, jumping on both feet before punching a hand up toward the sky and then hugged Fatima again. She ran, gathering her robe again, putting it back on like it had been before, and hurried inside.

Way to go... Fatima, smiled, and then went to rejoin her friends, who greeted her with an alarming band of questions.

“She actually *made* it?!”

“Holy smokes! How did it feel being out there?”

Fatima spent the rest of the next hour retelling her fight.

Mayia walked through the halls of The Lair, waving “hi” to passer bys who wanted to congratulate her. Still she did not speak. She found her way into the deserted library and sat down at one of the great fabricated tables surrounded by books, and pulling on a pair of glasses from her belt pouch, she pulled out her favorite book, and was about to return to her seat when she stopped up short.

Geevo stood with his back to one of the book cases, leaning against it with his arms crossed. *He is so beautiful*, she thought, looking on him.

He watched her quietly, and just as quietly, unfolded his hands, and signed. “*You know you don’t have to remain silent any longer.*” His hands said.

She smiled and nodded, being very happy to see him standing there. His form had been changing to be as built and as strong as a male ballet dancer, his body transforming as of late from the post adolescent she’d met him as, to a strapping adult male of their species. Broad shoulders and a toned chest, which was open and bare for all to see. His legs had grown taut

with his growing strength and grace, and he balanced on the toes of a pair of big feet. He'd also taken to walking on his toes, which was nonetheless a good thing. It had the same shaping effect to his calves as high heels as he was want to wear, but didn't make that loud click-click sound as he walked, nor did the heels get stuck in the wet earth after a rain. On top of it all, constantly walking on one's toes built up the calves and thighs something fierce better than having some sort of support under the heels.

Her gaze looked over his legs, both wrapped up in chaps that had been made out of his old uniform trousers, with his groin snuggled inside a banana hammock underneath the conforming silk wrappings of his own pink ribbon weapon. Sage himself had not said anything about this new way of wearing his uniform, and if Geevo wasn't careful, he might start a new trend with it. Her gaze hung on his third leg for a moment or two, and she blushed and smiled deeper before she looked up at his face, but nonetheless, her sexuality changed to show her elation; clit and nipples erecting while she moistened a little with the thought of him sliding into her.

"Why..." he paused, gathering his thoughts before continuing signing. *"Why don't you speak? Have you forgotten how?"*

She smiled and shook her head, and placing her book beside her on the table, she lifted her hands from out of her robes, and signed in return.

"I haven't forgotten, but this 'punishment,'" complete with quotation signs with her fingers. *"Has taught me the value of silence, and the value of the spoken word. I only wish to speak something if I truly, truly mean it. That and I wanted you to be the first to hear me speak after my punishment was done."*

And then she lowered her hands, approaching Geevo one step at a time, and opening her lips, she spoke for the first time in thirty days.

"I love you." she said, and Geevo blinked in surprise, his body jerking with his shock as she came to stand before him, bowing her head. "I am yours, tried and true. I've wanted to be yours for a very long time. Ever since I'd ever seen you." she closed her eyes as they began to shimmer in the light, and tears escaped from them to wet the fur over her cheeks.

Geevo swallowed while looking at her. Somehow, he'd forgotten how to breathe. Because of her, he'd advanced so far in such a short period of time. Bottomless faithfulness, unstoppable loyalty, beauty that was truly supernatural somehow, and eyes that drew one to her. And that voice! After having not heard it for a month, hearing it now had a sort of siren's spell on him. She'd changed... so much.

"I wanted you to love me so badly," she continued, and her hands lifted to touch him, clenched, and then fell again. "I wanted to force you to do so, but that would've ruined whatever could have been."

She was perfect, he thought. Perfect beauty, perfect mind, perfect body and with a great rack! And hips one could hang on to! And she was strong. Strong of heart, strong of body, strong of mind. Perfect...

“I wanted you to hear this with my first breath with words.” She continued, opening her eyes, but then closed them again, squeezing out more tears. “And I want you to know that I will wait... until you want me. You enjoy the touch of women, and I know you like chasing them, so I will not interfere until you choose to come for me. But when you do want me, know that I am already yours.”

She finished and fell silent, turning her head away from him as she hugged herself, her arms crossing about her chest as her shoulders hunched.

She is the one, he thought, his mind being decided, and just like that, a switch inside him transformed him into something more of a mentally mature adult than he was just a second ago. With one long step he had closed the distance between she and him, and with his first breath in weeks with words...

“I do want you, Mayia.” He said, and her ears lifted with a snap so that she could hear it, and she was folded into his arms as he lifted his chin and kissed her. Not that full mouthed kiss with a tongue he’d used on others, this was a passionate kiss, one designed to steal her heart... if it wasn’t already stolen by him.

When he held her, it was to rest his hands on her hips, not invade her uniform to fondle her butt or her breasts, and as she felt his heart in it, she cried more.

When he finally released her, his touch alighting on her face now, he smiled warmly at her, *lovingly even*, she thought, and as she moved closer, her breasts swelling with breath and compressing against his chest, she moved in close to him, hands and head on his chest as he moved to hold her.

‘He will come to you when you are already his,’ she thought in remembrance to a near prophecy Aauie had told her. Thank you for being right you sweet psychic, she smiled softly, and nuzzled closer to Geevo so as to feel his warmth.

Thank the Maker... you were right...

Caliban followed closely behind Siklohn as he walked regally at his full height. Other students gasped as he walked through the halls, getting well out of their way as he led the way, exiting The Lair finally and pausing only briefly to find his target, he strode up a hill where Sage sat smoking his pipe, watching his students at practice.

But the practices slowed and eventually stopped as people spied him.

Instead of his imperial uniform, he was instead wearing his Shadow League uniform. He was aware that all eyes were turning toward him as he walked, he was used to that sort of attention, but this time he felt something he did not like at the back of his head.

“Back to practice,” Sage called out, and they all immediately went back to what they were doing, but it was half-hearted as they wanted to watch this confrontation.

Sage did not rise for the young lord, only sat there smoking his pipe of sweet herbs.

Siklohn brought himself up to the headmaster, and Sage continued watching him for a time, and then ever so slowly, ponderously even, Siklohn lowered himself to his knees, and then lowered his hands to rest before his knees, and bent over in as deep and as placating a bow as he could muster.

“You have won, Master Sage.”

“I didn’t win anything, now get up boy and stop embarrassing yourself. I do not require others to grovel before me, no matter their station, and I will not have you demean yourself in such a way.”

Siklohn slowly got to his feet, waving off Cali as she moved to try and help him up, and when he rose, he kept his head bowed.

“Chin up. If you always kept your eyes lowered, then you will forever be running into things.” Siklohn did as he was told, and brought himself to what could only be called a parade rest.”

But even so, he looks dejected, Sage thought, and tapped out his pipe on his thigh, and with a magician’s gesture the pipe vanished before he rose to his feet to tower over Siklohn.

“What is it, head student? Do you have a concern you wish to bring to my attention.”

“A plea, sir.” Siklohn said. “I’ve come prepared to beg if necessary. I want you to reactivate my pain block.”

“No.” Sage said simply, his voice stating an end to the conversation.

“B-but sir...” Siklohn began in earnest, unfolding from his perfect rest stance.

“When I was much younger than you, Siklohn, I took something called the Hippocratic Oath. It is an oath among the healers of my world, not to cause any undue harm while healing another. I have just removed an error in your physical structure, and I cannot go against my Oath and simply put it back.

“You being a Dousaka are obviously well aware of the importance of oaths.”

It was a shot, Sage was aware, and at his clan's allegiance to the Empire, which was an oath of fealty.

"Sir, I must protest! I..."

"Enough Siklohn." Sage said, ending the matter.

Siklohn, no longer in control of his emotions as well as he was before, began to growl, first low in his throat, and then in a raising clamor before he jerked into motion to strike his Headmaster. But before he could move more than a foot, he felt a raking slash across his face, slicing one whole half of his face to ribbons, and he cried out with a spray of blood before collapsing to the ground.

There was a cry from Caliban as Siklohn went to the ground, clutching at his face with both hands, and while he was down there sliding his head against the grass in an effort to deaden the pain, Sage stood there, planting his hands behind his back while his tail flicked in agitation. Caliban helped Siklohn remove his hands from his face, even as the slashes from Sage's wickedly hooked claws healed, but it was done slower than it should have, and he gasped and gritted his teeth as every centimeter sealed themselves.

Sage's claw attack caused aggravated wounds, which were harder to attack due to some magical enchantment on his species.

Sage then stepped over to him, and squatted down, and lifting one hand, wiped a tear away from his cheek.

"Every action has a reaction, every movement has a counter-movement." He began, and turning to Caliban. "Cali, could you please go get us a bowl with cold water and a washcloth please." He said, and she looked to both of them in turn, and then hopping up ran as quickly as she could to go fetch what Sage had asked her.

Sage then sat cross-legged before Siklohn. "Third position, please." He prompted, and Siklohn slowly shifted into the third resting position. "It has taken me a long time to engineer a situation that would cause you to react, instead of act, Siklohn, and now you find yourself following my actions, instead of the other way around. Mental manipulation and re-manipulation is definitely a game I need not teach you. You enact it with Machiavellian precision."

"Sir... who is..." Siklohn began, but Sage immediately broke in.

"Don't interrupt. There will be time for questions.

"Siklohn, you have been broken, and are presently far more receptive than you've ever been in your entire life. As a reward for your trial, I will give you certain secrets that only I possess, if you are willing to learn them."

Siklohn nodded.

“Firstly, I shall teach you the advanced levels of Artificing, secrets that your people do not even know of yet. I will then gift you with my science, and the ability of bio-manipulation and Bio-magic. In time, I will even help you develop the art of the bio-blade. Only my most precious of students ever are allowed to learn its art, as such, you will have few matches in the arts of the smith.

“Secondly, I shall harden you. You will be taught on how to take pain, and understand, that now that you are unlocked to your pain, Siklohn, the deeper pain that you know of, the greater the pleasure you will be able to experience because of it.”

The slightly darkened disks of his eyes that served as his pupils compressed into almond shapes and then shifted as Caliban ran back with the bowl, sloshing some of it all over her front, before she arrived. And kneeling swiftly beside Siklohn, she wet down the washcloth and held it to his face.

It coated, and soothed...

“The second starts tonight after nightfall, Siklohn, and the first starts an hour before daybreak tomorrow.” Sage then rose swiftly to his feet. “Don’t be late.”

He then turned to his students who’d stopped training again.

“Back... to practice!” he roared, and they all stepped back into practice in earnest.

Siklohn’s life changed steadily on a day by day basis. Every morning Sage presented him with a new gift to advance him, every night, he was given new wisdom to grow on.

His first morning, he received a book, translated into Aphkei, written by a master strategist from Sage’s homeworld, a book entitled “The Art of War,” by SunTsu. The second night brought another translated book... “The Book of Five Rings” by a warrior named Musashi.

Remarkable that this human swordsman used only a wooden sword. Such a thing was remarkable with how devastating he was with it.

These books were remarkable. They became Siklohn’s new holy books. They spoke of honor, and the codes of the warriors, and the art of battle. They gave him passion, and new ways of thinking.

At night, each night, Siklohn was granted a new skill as he studied with Sage in the Forge at the very center of The Lair. Including a spell to create a fire that was the heat of a star, as well as metal combinations that could withstand the heat of a sun.

Arcane languages that actually held the power of magic inside them, and still greater methods.

Later Siklohn found himself gripping a hammer again in Sage's forge, banging away in the sound-proofed walls as Sage set him tasks to test his existing knowledge. He so enjoyed creating things with his hands, it was such an uncharacteristic trait of the future lord of the Dousaka.

Every morning, Sage also taught him to take pain, showing him impossible traits like lying on a bed of nails with a block of ice on his chest, in his human form, while Siklohn broke the block with a hammer. Or breaking a spear by sheer use of pressure with the spear point in the hollow of his throat, walking on coals, and so on.

Also, he was taught how to meditate, and calm his mind.

Through all these events, Cali was always present with him, watching and smiling dotingly, watching her love grow. With Sage having him work in increased gravity, Siklohn's lean body was rapidly growing larger and stronger. She sat atop a post now in the early morning, on the day of Term's end, wearing Siklohn's new Apprentice Master's robe over her shoulders to keep herself warm in the morning mists. She watched Siklohn and Master Sage standing in positions of meditation underneath the heavy fall of the waterfall that poured almost from the peak of the caldera.

As she had promised Meniko, her parents learned of everything that had befallen her over the past two years. About how she had acted at school before being transformed, at the months following and then the years as she got used to being a female, and actually liking it. She also told them that she'd fallen in love with a well-to-do young male, and even told them who it was.

She and Siklohn would be going to her homeworld to visit her parents at the end of term.

She felt unbelievably nervous.

But now that she had Siklohn, she knew that she could brave anything. She had her new lord and master to take care of. And her beloved protector took good care of her also. Remarkably, she felt...

Happy.

Fin...