

## Interim

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**Warning:** This story contains elements of open and/or alternative sexuality such as growth, expansion and inflation as well as sensually arousing or erotic circumstances. Reader discretion is advised.

**Rated:** R for Restricted

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### Chapter 3: Boxes

Smelling salts woke me a short while later, and I rose with a jiggling of unbound and milk-engorged breasts, coming up immediately for air with my mind subtly numb.

"Careful... you don't want to faint from blood rush." Pendragon was saying as I rose and coughed, my head swimming as the room spun and had contrails like I'd just dropped a pint of acid right on my spinal cord.

"D-damn you and your friggin' breath." I moaned and palmed my head, sitting up with more wobbling of breasts.

What I hated most about Pen's dragon breath – wait... when the hell did he use it on me before? My mother? Was this a memory? – but regardless, what I hated most about it was that it made me feel slightly... aroused. I was blushing... a deep blush that suffused cheeks and breasts, deep enough to show through my fur. I pinched my legs to hide the fact that my loins were so pert and erect at the moment. It did not help, one iota, that I was also in heat right now.

"Never failed me yet." Pen said and I heard him padding about before he came back and taking my hand, placed a bowl of tea in it. "Drink. This will clear your head."

I drank, and the resulting sensation was like having my head immediately dunked in a pail of ice water. "Whoa. What is this?"

"An elixir. Usually used to wake drunks up... but it works well enough on the effects of my breath weapon."

"What happened?" I asked, and accepted a pack of ice to place against my forehead as my vision cleared.

Pen looked over his shoulder. "It appears as if your Anhogamon has been up to some mischief since his separation from your first mother." Pen replied quietly. "I don't remember him so... stalwart."

I turned my head and looked, seeing a nearly naked Anho laying against a bed atop a raised platform in traditional Japanese style. A steaming washcloth was on his forehead and several heavy blankets were strewn across him to cover him from feet to chin. Now that he wasn't obscured by the ice, I felt my lips between my legs purse tightly, clenching, knotting as I was presented with memories of a very virile and well-built cat-man placating my sexuality with his manhood... back and forth, up and down, round and round... I pressed my thighs more tightly about those

loins to quiet them, and then pursed the supple lips on my face as I felt myself... drawn. I never wanted anything more in my life at that moment, my heart pattering and pounding, beating passionately as I stood, still with thighs pressed together and I fidgeted as I got a good look upon his face.

He looked older than my mother remembered... sort of. His mane and his beard obscured the hard, wild masculine features of someone who lived by the sword and was ready to die by the sword, someone who lived in a time of utter chaos where peace was rare and precious. I started breathing deeper and harder, my teats erecting hard as they swelled till they ached, and I exhaled an imperceptible sigh through my nose, feeling my woman's heart quicken, thudding harder and harder, the pulses exploding through me and pounding into my loins until...

"Careful Fellania... any more arousal from you might wake him up." Pen smirked and blushing deeper, I shot a glowering glare at him before folding my arms and cupping my hands to cover the ends of my teats... right as light jets of milk slipped into either hand. I was getting moist with sweat and vaginal juices, and the panties that had managed to stay on me during the fight ground as my muscles expanded as they clenched.

"Keep your nose to yourself..." I growled as I approached.

"Antennae actually." Pen sniffed and the pair rose and arched forward for me to see as he tugged on the end of one of them. "They're far more sensitive than my nose is."

I rolled my eyes as he grinned at me. It was his way to make light of serious situations... This shrine was based on practices of the Smiling Happy Buddha... Religion through laughter, and it fit him in all honesty. "Why do you mean more stalwart... how did he escape anyways? I thought you saw everything before it happened."

Pen's demeanor became grave suddenly and he frowned. A frown on him was as out of place as a male badger wearing a wedding dress getting married to a female squid in a tux in the middle of a snow storm in Antarctica. It worried me immediately.

"I'll admit that I don't see anything... but my margin of error has never been this bad. A few hours, maybe... not by whole days. I didn't expect him to leave his prison for days yet, Fellania. By all accounts he should still be within an ice block six inches thick. Believe me when I say that I'm... very concerned about this turn of events. I have some hunches but... no... she couldn't have. This room was shielded from everyone including her."

"Her... who?" I asked.

"Lilly." Pen answered and I blinked, remembering that simple cat-woman that strangely was as muscle-bound as Sue was... but there was something incredible about her. But until Pen continued, I didn't know exactly how incredible she really was. "I can't see her at all." Pen admitted. "The future is always askew whenever she is involved. She's what's known as a 'Wild Card,' to seers and scryers like me. Nothing that she does shows up on any E.S.P. in creation... not even mine.

"I doubt that the Fates themselves could see the actions of a Wild Card.

"I'd have to run a few tests and scenarios, but... no she couldn't have. Something else is interfering here." He folded two arms into a thinker pose, the other two coming to rest on his narrow little hips as his tail slapped the ground and his ears and antennae twitched in irritation. "Something else... something else..." he started tapping a foot irritably.

I stared at it. He really was thrown for a loop here.

“But what do we do about him now?” I paused and thought. “And what do you mean that he’s been up to *‘mischief?’*” I asked and waited as Pen kept tapping a foot. “Pen.” Still thinking. “PEN!”

“Hm? What? Sorry? Oh yes... Anho. His recovery has accelerated. Putting a hot washcloth on the forehead of a recently frozen warrior? Not a chance... he should be going into shock and *dying* as we speak. But now... his body is already compensating for the radical change in atmospheres. Either he has developed some tricks that I cannot see or someone else is interfering on his benefit somehow. Someone greater than me even, and by my count, there’s only one or two individuals that could do that beyond my capabilities.

“I know not what memories you may have of him, Fellania, but he’s... changed, from what I remember of him.”

“A journey of many decades that gets you wound up frozen in the ice in Antarctica will do that.” I mentioned, still fidgeting, twisting my fingers and biting my lower lip as I looked down at him.

He was so handsome, so alluring. I’d never looked upon a man and considered him beautiful before. He was small, but for his size he was strong, tough... like a solid lump of chiseled iron wrapped in a taut leather covering lined with fur and set to a feline appearance. He was as sharp and as hard as the sword that rested on the floor beside him, and about as weathered as the scabbard that sheathed it. A man’s man...

I was feeling wanting, possessive, selfish... I wanted him all to myself, I wanted Pen to leave so that I could be alone with him, even in his sleep. I had dreams and fantasies that the moment he woke up he’d ravish me, and those thoughts made my loins and teats come more and more alive, and the panties I was wearing were soon getting soggy.

“Shattering of Pangea and tectonic drift will also do that.” Pen mentioned with a glance and a raised eyebrow in my direction. My returning glare told him to mind his own business. “Chances are he was frozen in the mountains during a snow storm and never thawed. The great mystery as to why he never returned to your first mother has apparently been answered. It wasn’t that he abandoned her... it was that he was unable to return to her.”

His words made my heart soften, and that part of me that was my first mother relaxed... and the relaxing of stress of three hundred thousand years made me feel like a sudden irrevocably massive weight had suddenly been lifted off my shoulders. In its wake I felt myself swooning as I lowered to his bedside, lowering my arms from my breasts, letting them wobble and dangle – moist with milk as they were – and despite Pen was here I lowered myself and laid against him. My breasts cleaved to conform to his body, one pressing against his firm bicep, the other flattening between me and his chest, and though they were still contained within the radical cut robes I wore – well, sort of contained – my breasts spilled onto his chest.

He was cold... he was cold but I remembered this touch, this sensation... but he was harder, ropier... stronger... tougher. The years of separation from when he left me... I mean left my first mother had made him even greater. I wanted him badly, and try as I might I couldn’t stop the subtle trickle of arousing juices as I smelt the beginnings of his pheromones as he continued to warm after thawing, and I pressed my nose and fingers into his thick chest fur and smelled deeply.

“I forgive you for not coming back.” I said in a whisper and rising, took the washcloth off his head and turned it over, but before I replaced the cloth I bent and kissed him over the brow, and after I replaced it I tussled his hair with one hand. “He needs a haircut.” I said quietly.

“He’ll need food soon enough. Baser requirements first, Fellania. His muscles should be atrophied from disuse... but strangely they remain quite potent and strong. Perhaps I’ve underestimated the preservation of extreme cold on a person. I can imagine it was still nonetheless very painful to move a short while ago. It would’ve made him instinctively berserk like he did.”

I tucked Anho in, folding the blanket about him and used my own body to warm him as Pen approached and placed his little hand on my massive and ropy shoulder.

“As for the Mischief...” Pen mentioned. “I couldn’t get a good feel for it when he was in the ice, Fellania... But for safety’s sake I’ve stowed his box away.”

“Why?” I blinked, looking at him, remembering the box that Anho had carried with him, protected with his life and risked his death to retrieve. It was never out of his sight. “What’s in the box?”

“That is a question a woman a hundred thousand years ago asked... and her curiosity doomed the human race to sickness and hardship. It’s the curious eye I protect it against. He will ask for it, undoubtedly. Tell him I have it and I’ll give it back should he awaken before I return.”

And he turned to leave.

“But... where are you going?” I asked.

“Food and water. I have a cornucopia stowed away somewhere... but be mindful that he needs to be kept warm, Fellania,” and he turned to me with a smirk and gestured at us with a hand and a wiggling index finger. “Just like that actually...”

“I’ll leave you two alone then.” And he passed through the doors and they slid quietly shut behind him.

*Warm... gotta keep him warm, I thought to myself. Well, what warms better than a nice fur pelt?*

Rising up onto my knees, I removed the ruined robes and the halter top I was wearing, spilling the great mammary orbs decorating my chest, the spongy innards expanding the pair as they were freed being that they were no longer compressed before I shifted forms into the great brown bear shape I possessed. Then peeling the blankets back, just the top layer, I laid against him and covered myself – well, my bottom self – with the blanket and laid against him. Breasts cleaved to the sides of his chest, groin against my hyper-muscled belly, with my thick, hard muscles framing the ropy knot that he was.

Settling against him, I dared to lay my head against his chest, pressing a large rounded ear of mine there, and I listened to the slow, steady yet powerful la-lump, la-lump of his heart, listening to it getting more energetic and stronger with nearly every beat. Triggered memories stirred with that rhythmic sound and I had a waking dream.

I was naked, laying against him as he was naked, his hardened erection fit within the bowl of my pelvis and thighs. We were in a cave large enough for me to stand, heated by a hot spring and the fires of lamps and a fire pit. It was very, very warm here, comfortable in the winter months. He’d been injured and I was nursing him back to health, sometimes figuratively, sometimes literally. In his unconsciousness he nursed from my breast for nourishment.

The image vanished with one sudden and very poignant sensation, one that got my eyes to bug out and my lips to purse and broaden against my face as I found myself laying against a short yet powerful man... who was getting a

rather poignant erection. It fit itself as it lengthened from my upper belly to press between both breasts as it thickened beneath the blanket, and with eyes still wide I felt it thicken and swell and...

I closed my eyes... and perhaps it was the lingering effects of Pen's breath weapon on me, perhaps it was another waking dream or memory, but I had several dirty thoughts that very quickly made me very, very wet, sensations that made me moan... but in my next mental images I was on my back, legs spread wide as he rolled himself over me, kissing me at the very moment he penetrated me with an impressively large enough maleness to please this much, much larger feminine form...

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*I am Sue.*

*Madoushi and I were getting ready for a night on the town... well getting ready amidst groping and kissing, fondling and groping, and somewhere in there we shifted from helping each other to dress to helping each other to undress.*

*Ah me... to be in love... and more explicitly away from some possible distractions like Lee. Honestly... he was like a lost puppy...*

*Mady and I might just get a hotel room or something, and exiting our room and falling against a wall, one of my legs lifted as Mad fingered the fabric of my panties aside for penetration, I was feeling so enticed that I was about to hike up those skirts of mine and let him in! Ooo... that big-dicked, relationship repressed man... I've never been so aroused or incensed for so long since I came to know him... that as he came to me and we kissed, making love with our faces, I for one was oblivious to who else may've been in the hall, and quite possibly so too was Mad for that matter, for suddenly...*

*"Eee! Are you two making another baby?" Mad and I separated instantly to see that towering Persian Lycan, the fem known simply as 'Lilly Jade' standing before us, back arched and hands folded before her, her eyes bright and her face beaming with child-like awe. "If you are can I watch? I've been so fascinated with it I want to see it happen! Nya!" she said with much glee.*

*"Ah... no..." I managed with a wry smirk. "We already made the baby. It'll be more than nine months yet before we can make another." I poked my belly. "Room filled... no vacancy."*

*"So then why are you kissing again?" she blinked.*

*"Well because we love each other." Mad prompted.*

*"But... I don't understand. I... I thought that every time a man and a woman kiss, they have a baby."*

*Mad and I stared at her. Truly she wasn't that simple!*

*"That... might... be a bit of an over simplification of the process, Miss Jade." Madoushi blinked.*

*"You mean... every time a girl kisses a boy – mew – she doesn't have a baby?" I whimpered. "Oh..." she thought. "Sometimes has a baby? Oh I know! It's because you haven't had yours yet!"*

*"Yes and no. Lilly, I'd be glad to explain it... but... Madoushi and I are going out for a bit."*

“Ooo! Can I come! I’ve wanted to leave the shrine for awhile now! Ooo... are you going to go to the city?! Mew!” *she mewled happily, her whiskers twitching.*

“Um... You’re not really...” *Mad Gesticulated briefly and I turned to him to zip up his pants noticing his barn door was open since we were this close to having a romp right there in the hall.* “Thank you... You’re not really in the right shape to go amongst humans.” *Mad mentioned, trying to belay her coming with.*

“Oh... right... well I can fix that! Nya!”

*And right before our very eyes, this titaness began to diminish and shrink, her muscles deflating as quickly as balloons being popped, each popping coming with a dull explosion beneath her flesh as she churned and twisted, shrinking and flattened, her clothes stirring and weaving and waving about her as they realigned and folded magically about her. It was like a reverse Sailor Moon Flash. This continued in rapid succession till a human woman with short hair and a loose fitting bell collar about her neck stood before us. With a mist of sparkling dust, a pair of glasses formed before her eyes and her now short hair was pulled back by a pair of barrettes.*

“I’m ready.” *She said smoothly, and we both blinked.*

*Her personality even with those two words seemed so different. Like... she was devoid of that phenomenal positive emotion and bounciness that she’d displayed so recently and the only thing left was something sterile... like a laboratory. The glasses she wore only finalized that effect.*

*But with a personality that was still as direct as ever, what could we do but say yes?*

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I was being woken up abruptly, shoved off and thrown aside to land upon my bottom with a bouncing of tits and body as I bounced a few times on my rump. Instincts made me instantly awake as I rolled to my feet with a further jostling of tits and a stirring of blankets, only to find Anhogamon on his feet looking panicky, sword in hand but still sheathed, but his other hand was fiercely gripping the pommel of the blade. He was speaking some strange language, one that I didn’t recognize, and then he saw me and... *recognition* actually floated across his eyes and he took two halting steps forward and repeated the strange words he said before.

I shook my head and splayed my hands, and he started to look panicky looking around and gripping the long mane of hair he had before shouting the same question to me.

“I’m sorry... I don’t...” his eyes widened as I spoke and he stared at me questioningly and in wonder till a soft voice spoke more words I didn’t recognize, and turning we both saw Pen entering with a Cornucopia in two hands and a pitcher in another.

Regardless, Anho calmed somewhat, but still looked anxious.

“You won’t recognize the language, Fellania. It’s been a dead tongue longer than currently recorded human history can recall. Even the ruins that would point at that language have long since been destroyed. As a matter of course, you, Sue and Madoushi destroyed the last vestiges of that civilization when Lea Monde collapsed.

“Since the time Anhogamon left us, two new proto languages have arisen in the human tongue and the Tower of Babel also happened to detract from the original purity of what humans spoke when they were new to this world. I’d assume that the crass and harsh usage of English might even sound abrasive to his ears.” Anho said something

else and Pen nodded at him and replied with something else. “He’s wondering about his box. I told him I have it, it’s safe and unopened.”

I blinked, and had a memory of sitting before that box, cross legged and naked again – my first mother was apparently unabashed about her own nudity – as I looked at what was inside, using it’s writing implements and such.

“Why is it so important to be unopened?” I asked. “I... remember it being opened before.”

“Yes but its contents have changed.” Pen said and said no more about the subject as he came to me and lifting up the Pitcher and the Cornucopia to me, I accepted them before from within his robes, he pulled out objects, the first being a robe for me that he handed to me and I quickly donned with a blush... the other was a robe for Anho, a warm one lined with fur, neither of which had no possible way of fitting inside the robes of such a little guy as Pen. Taking the second robe he strode to Anho and offered it to him with a quick bow of the head and a clicking of the heels.

Anho accepted the robe and quickly swirled it around his shoulders – ooo... he looked like Auron from FF-X like that – before he nodded a quick curt nod in thanks for the warmth. Pen then gestured and rugs fluttered to the ground and with another hand Pen gestured for him to sit, and he promptly lowered into a cross-legged position with his swords over his lap before Pen gestured to me to do likewise.

Anho looked expectantly at me and I got the impression that for me not to sit would be considered phenomenally rude... and despite being topless still since I hadn’t donned the robe more than hold it to my chest, I didn’t even bother covering up as I sat before him and Pen took the Cornucopia and the pitcher and conjured up some plates and goblets with its magic.

“Now then... Fellania... we begin the arduous act of programming English into Anhogamon’s mind.”

“Programming?”

“I assume you both would like me to cheat. Months if not years to teach English the old fashioned way can be a bother, don’t you think... especially when you want to... *express* yourself to Anho as quickly as possible. I can tell you that he wants to express also, and though he’s not saying anything about it... he is certainly thinking it rather loudly.”

“What... what is he thinking about me?”

“Shame on you, Fell.” Pen smirked. “You should know that hearing thoughts are one thing, but relaying thoughts of another is rather rude. You’ll just have to ask him yourself.”

“How long will this take?” I blinked at him, naked breasts pressing together as I leaned forward.

“Don’t know... it’s a mystery.” He smirked, stating his favorite line. “But all in all, Fellania... it depends upon how receptive he is to my instruction... and really how hard he wants to speak with you.”

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*I am Sue.*

*I had to admit, Lilly was a dear to have around. Her personality shifted so drastically though when she shifted forms, and as a human she put off so little energy she actually appeared mundane to all my senses. Even Mady*

*mentioned that she seemed remarkably unspectacular in her form. Perhaps that was a benefit; it was a wonderful guise hiding something so powerful as she was inside a container that was so mundane.*

*In her altered form, though, all big and fluffy as she was, she just sucked the dismay out of the room, filled it with joy and loving intent like you were in a great big padded room filled with fuzzy fluffy love. Now her personality was calm and precise, but uniquely innocent. Really innocent. I had no idea how old she was but she looked younger than me... but despite that she had the innocence of maybe a young girl that was a fraction of that age.*

*Suddenly... Mad and I knew what it was like to be parents. Sure this isn't what we wanted for a date night, but it was a needed experience to know what an inquisitive young woman was like. Case in point... she thought that kissing was all you needed to do to create a baby. She thought that that was sex! Great Maker... I hoped I wasn't the one that'd have to explain the penis in vagina trick.*

*“So what is sex then?” she asked inquisitively suddenly, right out of the blue while we were on a street corner at a street-side noodle vendor, she asking the question like a scientist might when asking questions about some experiment.*

*Now this was Japan... people spoke English here just as they spoke Japanese... it was a major place of business, and even a street vendor like this guy gave us an odd look.*

*Mad and I floundered for a bit till I took a deep breath and explained it.*

*“Well... when a man and a woman really love each other...”*

*I've never been stared at by one person for so long or so intently. But nonetheless, Madoushi also had to be taught about a few things, and since this was our first excursion into the world of man since our return from Lea Monde, there was so much to show. Strangely... Lilly had such an intense knowledge of these things. She used words and acronyms that I had no idea existed.*

*As I was explaining cars, she in turn explained something called a Wankel Engine used in certain Mazda cars, she also explained what a Catalytic Converter was and what it did and more specifically the chemical transformations that occurred therein and the exact chemical compositions of their byproducts. With a sip of a slushie she blinked and then went into a slew of its chemical compositions from just a taste... like a computer spitting out a read out of an analyzed substance.*

*What was more was that in the course of us walking through Tokyo, she showed off a knowledge of three different languages – German, Chinese and Japanese – switching perfectly into their accents to actually be a guide for us.*

*But how did a woman like this... not know anything about sex?!*

*“Can I watch you both have sex?” she asked as we were returning to the Shrine. We'd hit a carnival... Madoushi showed an expert's appeal at the carnival games, and Lilly and I had a clutch of balloons and several stuffed animals apiece. When she said that though...*

*Madoushi choked immediately on his soda, going into a coughing fit while I blushed a very, very deep red that spread right into my breasts.*

*“Ah n-no. No.” I burned even brighter and she looked disappointed. “Lilly... that sort of thing is a very private act of love. Sure, some people let people watch them, but I'm not one of them, and I'm sure when he can catch his*



breath Madoushi would tell you the same thing.” *Mad nodded vigorously while still coughing and catching his breath.* “I’m sorry, we’re flattered but no.”

“But... how am I going to learn?” *she pouted.*

*Being desperate, I tried passing the buck to the only person left in my head who I was certain would know about such things.*

“Pen?” *I ventured hopefully.*

*She blinked.* “Yes... that should work.” *She smiled, and then transformed in a swirling of fabric that stretched and re-knit itself into her robes instead of the slacks and shirt they’d been this whole night, and suddenly she was a very big kitty.* “Mew...” *and she strode off with a metronome-like swaying of the hips and tail with a rather graceful, dancer’s walk, one arm and hand holding all her prizes.*

“That was horrifying...” *Mad breathed.*

“Yes... but you’ll have to do it all over again when our daughter asks where babies come from.” *I mused and palmed my belly.* *A moment later Mad palmed my hand palming my tummy before he bent to kiss my forehead.*

“You should get some rest. An expecting mother shouldn’t be on her feet all day.”

“How refreshing. Judging upon the time period you came from, I half-expect you to expect me to remain barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen.”

*Mad smirked.* “You forget. I’m a tribal man. There were women from my own tribe who were physically my superior when I was... taken... from the world and sucked into Lea Monde.”

“And now you can protect me from Lee’s advances. I used to think no one was stronger than he is.”

“Till you managed to look inside yourself and found a being stronger than him?” *he asked and I chuckled.*

“Possibly...” *and then I pushed all his winnings for me into his arms.* “I’ll be right up... I crave fish.”

“Another craving?” *he blinked with a smirk.*

“Afraid I’ll get fat?” *I smirked back.*

“No... it’s just that...” *he paused and looked down.*

“Hey... I’m a cat, and you’re partially a cat. It doesn’t mean anything. I’m just... suddenly really hungry for fish.”

“Yeah...”

*It was a fear. We both had it, we both shared it... it was the fear that the child growing in me was Lee’s, not Mad’s, and a desire for fish might mean that the baby in me was a tiger breed like Lee and not a Thylacine like Mad. If Lee was the father then he’d claim it. I... didn’t know what I’d do if he tried to take my baby from me. I worried of some ultimate confrontation between Lee and Madoushi... or Lee and ME!*

*If he tried to take my baby then there'd be no other course of action but to kick his ass and shove his tail up it.*

*"I'll be right up." I kissed him on the cheek and we parted.*

*Smoothing my tummy in which my daughter grew, I strode into the kitchen where several very tuckered out Fairy dragons were laying on the counter panting and one or two of them were smoking cigarettes.*

*"Oh hell no! You are not dirtying another dish!" One lithe little female shouted at me accusingly.*

*"Don't worry... I won't." I smirked and opened the pantry and removed a can of tuna, and using the long nail of one thumb, cut the top of the can off like the P-tool on a Swiss Army knife.*

*As a human, I would've never drank the juices from a can of tuna... but I found that one of the more delectable parts of such a meal. And then fingering several mouthfuls of the fish into my mouth and sucking the juices from it, I turned and stopped dead at the broad chest that was before me, and looking up I swallowed sharply at the appearance of Lee standing before me.*

*"Lee..." I swallowed and then straightened my back. "Excuse me please..." and I tried to move around him but he moved to block me. "Lee... I've about had enough of you..." I said testily.*

*"I want to talk." He told me.*

*"You've had plenty of chances before now Lee." I voiced in annoyance. "I gave you more than one chance, many chances even, and with Madoushi on my arm I gave you a chance and still you can't do it. I don't even want to talk or see you any more till you can say it. Say the words, and if you can't even say that, then be silent, be invisible, and stay the hell out of my way, or so help me I'll kick your ass! And not just a light ass kicking, I'm talking about Bang! Zoom! Right to the moon Alice!"*

*I was getting emotional suddenly, and angry, very angry. The hackles on the back of my neck were rising and I shifted forms partially, gaining elongated elf-like ears that furred slightly with the rest of me, and I gained about twenty-five pounds and six inches as I stared up at him, my eyes were tearing up. Suddenly, one of the fairy dragons leapt up and flew away while the others hid behind, under or in pots and pans.*

*Myself, standing on tip toes and holding the can in one hand, I dared him to man-up to what we had together. I was shorter than he was when we were both in our human forms, and still he couldn't look me in the eye by looking down.*

*"I didn't think so." I said and slid around him, shoving him aside and slipping my finger and wiping up more of the tuna before sucking it off my thumb.*

*I'd made it several paces before I heard something that stopped me cold.*

*"I loved you."*

*The words halted me and I stopped dead, my breath catching in my throat and the tuna mid-swallow. "I found myself loving you, wanting a family, wanting children. It's not too late... we can..."*

*"It is too late, Lee." I interrupted. "Madoushi and I are getting married soon. This child is mine and she will go where I go."*

*The air seemed to crystallize with tension all of a sudden.*

“And what about me? What if I’m the father? What if that child is mine? Just because you decide so you’ll push me out of its life? Just like that? Just because you’re the woman? I have rights as the father as well! What about my wishes?”

“If you’re the father.” *I said and turned round to face him so fiercely that my milk-engorged breasts wobbled repeatedly back and forth before settling.* “But do you think I want my daughter living in a tent without any formal education? Do you think I want to live in a tent? You speak of things like duty, well I have duties too, and a daughter’s place is with her mother!”

“And what if it’s a son?”

“It’s not.” *I said simply.*

“Why?! Because that pipsqueak you call master said so?!” *Voices were rising, and Lee was baring in on me, standing over me, but I stood my ground. I wasn’t the timid little woman he’d first met. I defeated Chernavog, a greatest corrupted earth elemental. I battled against Lilith, the Queen of the Damned. I wasn’t at all timid anymore...*

“Don’t you bring him into this! This isn’t about him! This is about you and me and my daughter! I say ‘my’ because she’s mine not yours, and Madoushi is the father! At best you’re a sire, but that isn’t even clear yet! I believe in Pen’s vision of things because he hasn’t been wrong yet! He says it’s a girl then I believe it’s a girl! And you have no idea what I went through to verify that it’s a girl!”

“That said you testosterone ridden freak... what if this is a girl?!” *and I folded one hand over my belly.* “Would you even care for it?! Or do you only care if it’s a son?! All that I went through sure as hell guarantees that you won’t take her from me! I won’t let you!”

“You won’t let me?! I’m the man... you’re the woman... I dictate what’s best for the family! If I need remind you of that lesson I...”

*There was a click. It was a forceful, subtle click of the butt of a staff striking the tiled floor of the kitchen. The sound attacked our minds on a subconscious level and demanded we pay attention to it. Turning we both stood and beheld Pendragon himself standing in the entryway of the kitchen, a youthful fairy dragon hiding behind his shoulder.*

“Forgive me, but am I interrupting?” *he asked quietly with a raised eyebrow.*

“Stay out of this, rodent.” *Lee said sharply.* “This is a conversation that is between me and her.”

“You mean ‘her and me’” *Pen corrected Lee’s grammar.* “You always list yourself as last in a conversation, Lee. It’s polite to give honor to the other people you’re talking about first. And I agree... truly... this is a conversation the two of you should have... but not using screaming tones in the middle of the night in a Shrine of Peace. Susan... you should know better than that.”

“S-sorry Pen.” *I nodded and folded a hand over my belly as I felt my stomach squirm suddenly from the tension.*

“And Lee... you are a guest in my home. You are welcome to stay so long as you don't continue in causing contention.” *Lee was tight-lipped.* “I'm sorry? You were about to apologize for waking my students and guests... weren't you?”

*Lee trembled and gripped his hands.* “I... apologize.”

*Pen nodded and approached, his gaze focusing on Lee.* “Oh... and one more thing Lee... Your surface thoughts were quite open a moment ago. I was able to hear your intentions a moment ago. Were you about to strike a woman, a pregnant woman might I add, in my shrine?” *I shot a look at Lee as he stiffened.* “I see... then allow me a warning for you then Lee... there is an age-old adage: ‘Try not the patience of Dragons... for you are crunchy and taste good with catsup.’ But that's for regular dragons... I'm a fairy dragon... the ultimate of tricksters. With us, an even older adage goes: ‘Try not the patience of Fairy Dragons, for your mind is weak and is easily broken.’”

“Yeah! And we pwn you too noob!” *the little fairy dragon on his shoulder cried out.*

“Silence you annoying little cur!” *Lee snarled and the fairy dragon cowered but Pen reached up and took the dragon off his shoulder and held him while sighing.*

“My patience has been wearing thin as of late, Lee... I have not lost my temper in the past fifty millennium and I promise you... you will not like it if I lose it.” *Pen's knuckles were clenching around the staff, and though his head was mostly scaled and armored, there were still nonetheless patches at his temples, and I could see them throbbing. I was mad, but I dared not think of what would happen should he really loose his temper. Thoughts of Mount Fuji erupting came to mind.* “Now... since you're acting like a child, I'll treat you like a child. Go to your room, Lee.” *And he pointed sharply.*

*Lee seemed to realize the situation he was in and seemed to stiffen even more. Pen raised an eyebrow, his eyes narrowing beneath those brows, and even Lee's truncated bravery based on his stupid honor gave way before he slid into motion, striding passed us, but when he got to the door...*

“And one more thing, Lee,” *Pen said while stroking the Fairy Dragon's back.* “Should you ever cast the first blow in my shrine outside of a Ring of Honor, I will break whatever of you is left over after the sound thrashing you receive. Should you strike Susan, especially with her with child, most especially with her with the child she carries... the hell I will send you through will leave you an emaciated gibbering idiot by the time I finally release you from my ire, and when I return you as a wadded up ball of flesh and bone to your tribe and clan, we shall see how the honor-bound Windigo feels about his warder after I tell him the childish acts you've engrossed yourself within inside my home.” *And Pen stamped his staff against the floor tiles and broke one, but the tile slowly repaired itself before Pen lifted the fingers of his free hand and rubbed the cleft of the short muzzle of his nose while exhaling and Lee disappeared from the room.*

“Thank you.” *I mentioned.*

“You're welcome.” *Came his immediate reply as he regained his composure immediately.* “Are you ok?”

“I hear that question a lot lately.” *I mentioned and began scooping tuna from the can ferociously now, but before I knew it, tears started seeping from my eyes and with a sob I slammed the can down and braced myself against the counter while the fairy dragons went and hid again.*

*It was only a matter of moments before the diminutive four foot tall drake was palming the small of my back after having leapt onto the top of his staff.*

“Susan...”

“I’m all right.” *I said hurriedly and tried to wipe my eyes, my mascara running.* “Damn these hormones...”

“Yes... hormones...” *Pen nodded sagely, almost sarcastically actually.*

*He knew I wasn’t having a hormonal problem. I shot a look at him, seeing him smiling up at me and I couldn’t help but chuckle at him while I wiped away my tears.*

“No getting past you is there?” *I sighed.*

“Nope. Let me escort you to your room.” *I merely nodded and let him guide me out of the kitchen, me snatching the can of tuna up again and devouring the rest of the tuna as he led me through the halls of his shrine.*

“How was your date night?” *he asked me suddenly.* “Was Madoushi impressed with the modern world.?”

*My earlier argument with Lee forgotten in the face of tuna... I nodded and smacked my lips.* “Sure. Horseless carriages, cell phones, computers, flashing lights... the whole bit. Thankfully Lilly was there to translate for us. She is just a darling...”

“Lilly went outside?!” *Pen gasped and turned me to face him.* “You took her outside?”

“Yes... is that bad?” *I blinked seeing the concern in Pen’s glowing blue eyes.*

“I... I don’t know.” *He said and looked away, cupping his chin and rubbing it with one hand.* “I... didn’t see her leave... or return.”

*I looked down at him. He seemed to be mildly distraught.*

“Pen... what’s the matter? What’s so special about Lilly?”

*He turned to focus on me.* “Sit down,” *and he gestured to a bench nearby that I sat on and he hopped up onto.* “Lilly is a very special woman.”

“Special special?” *I smirked.*

“No... I think. But... Lilly is a very, very rare sort of person. About one in a billion individuals are born like her.”

“One in a billion?” *I blinked. I thought I was unique.*

“You are unique.” *Pen said, obviously working off my surface thoughts.* “If you think about it Susan, you are the byproduct of nearly three hundred thousand years special breeding. I can assure you that that number is in the trillions. But Lilly is what some refer to as a ‘Wild Card.’”

“What? Like in Poker?”

“Similarly. It’s a reference to the entity referred to as Fate. Fate plays cards with the universe... rolls dice, that sort of thing. A Wild Card is in reference to that game of chance with Fate in which cards are involved. A tarot deck, poker cards... that sort of thing.”

“But what does a Wild Card do?”

“They... are completely invisible to any form of clairvoyance.” *Pen said, and such a thing struck me as so surprising that I actually did a double take.*

“You mean... you can’t see...” *I began and Pen shook his head.*

“A Wild Card’s actions aren’t determined in any sort of scrying. Whether that is seeing current events or seeing future events or recalling past events. Whatever mystic blessing or aberration that exists in them, whatever mutation of the flow of ether in their creation and birth, they are nevertheless completely invisible to the third eye.

“The term ‘*Third Eye Blind*’ is in reference to them.

“It’s people like her why I cannot guarantee the results of scrying. No one can, regardless as to how powerful they are. The more directly such a person is involved in present events, the more they throw off the viewable future. I must take everything that I see in the future with a grain of salt. I have to think of how Lilly would act if she were involved in those events. Her presence throws off certain foreseeable events.

“But her being a Wild Card doesn’t end there in dictating how special she is.”

“That part about counterbalancing the world’s assholes?” *I asked and he nodded.*

“The stronger she gets the more docile she gets. You have to know that there are certain organizations that are still looking for her, Susan, the United States Government being one of them.”

“And the United States and Japan have close ties economically and militarily.” *I mentioned and Pen nodded.*

“And Big Brother, though people believe it to be a Myth, has been active since the nineteen fifties. Every camera in every major city in the world is a potential eye that can recognize Lilly, and anyone they see her with will immediately become suspect and matters of interest. The added problem is that I don’t know if they saw her. I can’t tell because of what she is. So I have to assume that we have visitors coming.”

“Visitors?” *I blinked and suddenly several of the young fairy dragons snapped into place before us dressed in black suits with black ties and white shirts wearing black sunglasses and wearing those curlicue ear buds, right before they all did some weird team pose.*

“In a word... G-Men.” *Pen said, eyeing the bunch, even as another fairy dragon dressed as Neo rushed in and started kicking the butts of the others.* “The United States Government still has very, very close ties with the Japanese Government. Enough where their government agents can practically go wherever they want to, whether or not the Japanese people understand they can or can’t.”

*More and more fairy dragons were rushing into the unfolding scene of Neo versus Agent Smith from the third movie... you know... the utterly ridiculous part that they should’ve cut five minutes earlier than they did?*

*Pen and I watched the reenactment, Pen eyeing them for a moment or two before he spoke up.*

“Alright enough. Off to bed, all of you.” *Pen said at last, which was met with a collective Aww...* “Fairy dragons like to play.” *He told me simply and got struck in the hair with a paper airplane.*

“Uh huh. So be careful when I take Lilly out. I’m sorry Pen... I must be such a burden.”

“No... don’t think that. But... if you could... I’d like to ask you a favor for tomorrow.”

“Certainly.” *I beamed.*

“Could you perhaps stand in at the gift shop? Help serve our English-speaking visitors?”

“You have a gift shop?” *I blinked, shopping instincts waking up in me and he smirked at my expression.*

“Just charms and little drums and clothes... things my students make. Plus... if any visitors from an organization come looking for you, they’ll find just a woman minding a store in a shrine. The best way to hide a thing is in plain view.”

“I can handle that.” *I smirked at last and Pen smiled at me.*

*He had the cutest beaming little smile, especially when it got his antennae up.*

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*Sue was seen safely to her room, Ba’ab’s brood was safely in bed – I hoped – and now to one final measure.*

*A gesture made the wall disappear and the two doors to slide open, only to reveal the interior of the broad room beneath the shrine. A storage space used to hide secret things... like what I would call a toy. But I cleared all that away to make way for a current interest... namely the ice man Anhogamon and the venerable Fellania Bloodclaw. Fellania was laying face down on the raised bed plank, sleeping, while Anhogamon...*

*One had to respect this Ronin... a masterless samurai before the samurai were called samurai, who sat with ankles on knees and swords across lap, with a particular book in his hand. The book was titled: ‘The Book of the Five Rings’ Written by none other than Miyamoto Musashi, the man considered to be the world’s greatest swordsman... ever.*

*Having only rarely seen Anhogamon use his skills more than three hundred thousand years ago, I’d nonetheless placed him within the ranks of the world’s greatest swordsmen and women of all time, right along with Miyamoto Musashi, Yagyu Jubei and Baron de Jarnac of France.*

“I’d like to have met this Musashi.” *Anho mentioned in the common tongue of his time.*

“Met... or fought.” *I replied and entered further, the doors closing silently behind me.*

“Both. Our battle would’ve been legendary.” *He said and closed the book.* “My box... Master Pendragon. Do not make me force you.”

“Of course... I will go fetch it presently, Master Anhogamon... but...” *and I sat before him, balancing my staff against my lap.* “What are you going to do with it if you have it? For whom are you doing your quest now that everyone in whom you ever knew and loved is now dead?”

*My words were harsh... but they needed to be. This was a tempered warrior who squelched all emotion inside himself. Oh there was passion in there all right, and if Fellania could draw it out again, she was in for a ride. But I needed his reaction... needed to see why he was still doing this.*

“I was tasked with a quest, Master Pendragon... I will see it to the end.”

“Why not entrust it to someone else?”

“It was entrusted to me by the Empress herself. I will not shirk my duty.”

“*‘A man without duty is not a man,’* Anhogamon?”

*He looked directly at me, his stone gaze being met by my steely one.* “How do you know those words, Pendragon? They were meant... for another.”

“Because Fellania... your Fellania, told them to me. She both cursed and blessed your existence right up to her dying breath. Personally, Anhogamon... I consider you to be a damned fool to place honor above family.”

“Ronin don’t have family, Pendragon.”

*I rocked forward and rose in an impossible way, standing on tip toe at an angle of less than forty five degrees with the floor in order to stick my face in his.*

“Yes... But you did.” *I told him.* “But... now that we’re talking about honor, Anhogamon... your late mate directed me to fulfill a quest too.”

“She did?”

“Yup. And I apologize in advance for this.” *And I snapped from one position to the next.*

*Oh he tried to block all right, but Fairy Dragons were nothing but creatures that defied reality in every shape and form, and my blow knocked him sprawling to his side.*

*In the next instant there was the sound of a sword leaving its scabbard, and the long blade that Anhogamon was known to wield was brought to bare on me as I lifted my fist and kissed its knuckles before looking to him.*

“Like I said... she both blessed, and cursed your name to her dying breath, Anhogamon... I’d hope for all the respect that I had for you that you wouldn’t be so stubborn or so thick-headed to consider her beneath a concept as fouled as personal honor. My first lesson to you is that above all else: *‘Family... always... comes first.’*

“Now... prove to me you’re not a total ass and sheathe that sword... or if your honor is so important to you, I’ll put you in your place. But... after all this time, I’m certain that Fellania would hate me if I was forced to thrash you like a farmer beats the dust out of their wheat. And I’ll do that to... beat the dust out of you. It starts like this,” *and I made a holding motion with all four arms.* “And you beat and you beat,” *I raised my arms and brought them down*



*repeatedly.* “And beat... well you get the idea. Unless of course you believe in your weakened condition you can handle a great wyrm fairy dragon.”

*Anhogamon grit his teeth and then with a flourish sheathed his sword. The blade was absolutely fine, folded and mystically etched steel alloy, and for him to possess such a blade was – to quote another movie – ‘was like finding Moses’s DVD collection.’ The wood, however, was made out of perfectly symmetric White Oak that was taken from the very core of the wood where it was at its hardest and laced with fine silk.*

“Good man.” *I said and settled to a squat before him again, and clapping two hands together, bowed over them with those hands pressed over my nose, my other two hands resting on my knees.* “And now your personal healing may begin with three words that you will have to acknowledge.” *Anho lifted an eyebrow at me and settled before me with the robe I’d given him settling around them.*

“What words of wisdom do you give me, Dragon?” Anho asked.

“Simply this: ‘*You...were...wrong.*’”

“Enlighten me, guru... how was I wrong? Do you have any idea what my quest was about... how important it was for me?”

“You could’ve brought her with you.”

“I didn’t intend to fail... and for that matter, I didn’t intend to get trapped in a block of ice either.” *He rose abruptly and turned away from me. Normally that would be insulting in certain circles, but instead he turned to the sleeping Fellania while he gripped his sword in one hand as he folded both arms before himself.* “A wife and a child... the world was no place for either of them. I couldn’t take them with me... not where I was going.”

“And where were you going... exactly... where they couldn’t come with?” *Anho was silent and I raised an eyebrow at him.* “Sworn to secrecy were you?” *Still he didn’t answer and so I made a mockery of rubbing my chin in thought.* “Let’s see here... would it have anything to do with... a second box?” *Anho turned immediately and his eyes shifted to me with a glint of panic in them.* “And let’s see what else, what else. Would it have to do with the world tree?”

“How do you know such things?” *He said low and calm... and dangerously.*

“Because I know what’s in your box.” *And now his panic was apparent, so much so that in his panic his thumb pressed forward on the pommel of his sword, clearing the tension of the blade’s hilt from the scabbard.*

“You looked in it?!” *his voice was agonized.* “Master Pendragon... how could...”

“I did no such thing.” I replied tersely. “I can do no such thing. If you truly knew what you carried then you’d know that for me to look into the box that is in your box is impossible. Only a woman may open the vessel you carry... which is why it is sealed by the Empress’s own seal. Any warlord would have no hope of using it if they did get their hands on it and the mindset of men of the time belittled women and thought they had no purpose greater than breeding. But... some information you might not know:

“Three hundred thousand years is a long... long... time, Anho... even for me. I’d consider it the better part of my entire life. The current Bahumat is barely that old even. If you’re going to be so damned stubborn in completing your quest, then you should know what’s changed other than the myriad of languages there are out there. The

English that we meticulously instilled inside your mind, though the most commonly known language in the world, is still only one of hundreds that remain in the world.”

Anho’s surprise was apparent. To one such as he, so many languages was ludicrous to think of.

“Additionally... is that the location that you are searching for... no longer exists.” *I finished.*

“What...” *he breathed, staring at me incredulously, and for good reason too... a third of a million years ago if someone were to tell me the same I would’ve disbelieved it too.*

“You search for the World Tree,” *he nodded blankly.* “She’s dead. The Dragon Midgar, per her request, devoured her, and he was murdered by the Fae Thor for the crime.”

“But how can that be? How can that possibly be if this world still lives?”

“Because she managed to have offspring. His name is Tre’Ent, and she secreted him away to a place far, far away from the reach of man, Fae or Dragon. We had to be told about him to know that he was there.”

“A *male* tree? How can a male be the absolute representation of life?”

“I don’t know... how did you manage it with your Fellania?” *I smirked sarcastically.*

“Well I stuck my... I see...” *he said and eyed me and I just smiled up at him for a moment.*

“It takes both a male and a female to procreate, Anhogamon, but a tree possesses both sexes just like any other plant. The World Tree Gaia merely chose a feminine mentality... a provider, the original Giving Tree. Tre’Ent is male... the definitive protector tree. But he was alive long, long... *long* before even I was ever hatched. Gaia produced him long before Dragon even came to the Earth. Tre’Ent likewise has had twelve other offspring... the Earth is in good hands.

“But the Loss of Gaia means that the chamber of the box has moved what it does mean is that the chamber has gone to the only place it could go... down.” And I pointed downward. “As the remains of her great trunk decayed, the chamber merely slid into the Earth into a place that is now called... Gaia’s Cradle. As Gaia’s final resting place, it still remains the source of all life on Earth, but the chamber you seek and the box that lies within now lies more than a league beneath the Earth’s surface.

“And what’s more... I know it’s *exact* location. I can even take you there.”

*Anhogamon stared at me, his eyes discerning... probing. He’d spent a lifetime searching for subtle hints in an opponent’s body, and I wasn’t hiding a thing. I wanted him to ask.*

“In exchange... for what?” *he asked at last.* “What do I have that I can actually give you that you can either use or even want for such information?”

“Oh... you don’t have it... or should I say *her* yet.” *I replied and made a direct display of inspecting my claws. Nonetheless, Anho turned and looked toward where Fellania still slept.*

“If I don’t have her, she’s not mine to give you, so your bargain falls apart before it even begins.” *He replied stoically.*

“Not exactly. You are under the false mindset that you are greater than a woman regardless as to her own prowess because you are a man. Time for you to wake up and be aware that in this day and age, humans practice equality between the sexes. Women can fight, and men can cook.”

“When men can bare children... then you can tell me about equality.” *I stared at him, smiling subtly and simply slowly and repeatedly blinked at him.* “What?”

“Oh nothing. Human science has just found a way for a male to gestate and birth a baby, is all.” *I shrugged. The look on Anho’s face was hilarious... eyes as wide as platters, lips pursed nice and tight, body frozen with muscle lock from sheer surprise.* “And I should perhaps also tell you that there are specific males in species that have existed since the very beginning that bore the young, not the female... the seahorse being the most famously known of them. Even the Creator Himself has deemed there be a certain degree of equality between male and female... who are you to argue with the Creator’s design?”

*Anho deflated and lifted a hand hurriedly and felt his face and beard before coming back and pulling on a few strands. He scoffed then and let his hands drop.*

“So you want me to bring a woman with me. You want me to stop being a gentleman and allow a woman to fight and journey with me.”

“Yes... only for you to see with your own eyes what she’s capable of, Anhogamon. Promise me that and I will return you your box in the morning... or store it if you wish... it is quite safe where it is now. And when you have your strength, I will portal you near to Gaia’s Cradle.”

“Near to. Why is it only ever near to?”

“Because the Ether of Gaia’s Cradle is the most spiritually potent place on Earth, Anhogamon. Chaos isn’t a strong enough of a term to describe what the ether is doing there. I can attempt to portal you there... but then you might wind up dropping from leagues up in the air or materialize inside solid bedrock. I can take the chance if you’re willing to...”

“Close will be fine.” *He said and raised a hand at me, and then lowered his sword and held it like a cane.* “I’m getting too old for this shit.”

“Well... for three hundred thousand years of age you look pretty good, Anhogamon. But before we end our conversation, perhaps I should take a moment to tell you of one more thing that’s changed.”

“What would that be?”

“You.”

*He turned to face me, looking upon me as if I were crazy again, but then his features slowly changed. This time, I didn’t face him with humor, but rather utmost seriousness.*

“Explain.”

“Again... three hundred thousand years is a long time, Anhogamon. Spirit Folk have evolved, and in order to revive you, you had to evolve as well.”

“What do you mean?”

“In your day, Spirit Folk could change between human and beast forms... a throwback from your demonic heritage, but the changes were long and arduous, often exceptionally painful, taking days or even weeks to accomplish.”

“And?”

“Spirit Folk are now called Lycanthropes... named after the wolves, or Lycan for short. Eons of evolution have allowed the transformation to be quicker... almost instantaneous and likewise more often... pleasureable.” *I gave a flourish of one hand and he raised an eyebrow at me.*

“Transformation... Into a human?” *Anho asked.* “No more... being looked down as a vagrant and a vagabond, no more denied food because I’m a monster or a mongrel, no more being denied aide...”

“Lycan hide among humans, Anhogamon.” *I finished for him.*

“Cowards...”

“Maybe... but what would you do for a better life, Anhogamon. You may be the wrong person to answer that but...”

“What do you mean ‘but’? I’ve made a very good life for myself.”

“But it could’ve been better. Why didn’t you take her with you? She would’ve broken ties with the mountain... she would’ve followed you carrying your daughter on her back the whole way. Why didn’t you see that?”

“Because!” *He shouted and Fellania stirred briefly but did not wake. Anho nonetheless quieted.* “I... would not see my mate and child walk the same path as me.

“Well there’s the result, Anhogamon.” *I said and directed a hand toward Fell.* “More than a million generations separate you from her... though she is of your progeny, there’s barely anything of you left in her.”

“But... she looks so much like Fellania... I... I thought it was really her for a moment.”

“She is... but then again she isn’t. It’s complicated.” *I waved my hands dismissively.*

“Complicated for a dragon?” *Anho asked with a raised eyebrow.*

“Regardless, we need to train you further. The English words I’ve implanted in your mind will take some doing to make your mind continue remembering them. I’ll have to use my lores repeatedly to make them stick till your mind can remember them on its own. But there is much you should be aware of. Technology is the new magic... it is a power greater than any force you’ve ever heard of. Control so fine that they can see and understand worlds within worlds, Anhogamon... and what’s more is their sciences have created weapons that you must be introduced to if you wish to be prepared for them.” *He nodded.* “And then likewise how to transform. Best we handle that first.”

“Why that first?”

“Well... so you can show your face above ground and outdoors beside the woman that you wish to call mate and wife again, really.”

“Why... I fear no human being.” *I smirked at him.* “What now you old wurm?”

“Lord Oberon... High King of the Fae... said those very words about two hundred thousand years ago. I saw him eat those words the day that a nation called America destroyed an entire city twelve leagues wide with a single weapon called a nuclear bomb. Fae can do many things, but one thing which has been and may yet always be outside of a magician’s control, even one as potent as a Fae, is control of a thing on its most base alchemical level.

“Humans not only managed that four hundred years ago through the inventions of a man named Leonardo Da Vinci, but they one-uped it too and went so far as to break those base alchemical properties that they call molecules into even baser properties called electrons, protons and neutrons. Also, recently, I’ve heard news that they’re doing it again... separating even those elements into even baser elements called matter and anti-matter. They’ve discovered a way to manipulate energy on a physical plane, Anhogamon...”

*That, at least, wasn’t lost on him. It was one of the wide spread rules of magic in his time. Magic had limits... my words were telling him that science did not.*

“I fear humans,” *I told him.* “I am older than their entire race, Anhogamon. I fear them, the King of the Dragons, The Bahumat, fears humans, and you can either learn to respect them like we did and hope to earn their respect... or you can fall at their hands like the Elves did, like the Fae did... like we did.” *I looked at him poignantly to drive that last statement home. We dragons were considered the ultimate of species on earth in his time. If humans could manage to split the atom and overcome a species like us... there was no limit to them.* “Unlike me... you are actually considered one of them. So you can either try to blend in, or you can go out looking like what they’d call a monster and a freak, be hunted, imprisoned and then dissected to satisfy their curiosity.”