

LYKOS

THE NIGHT SHIFTING

Written by Leo_Todrius and Trickster_D

Supported by the Patrons

Even for those who are not attuned to the supernatural side of the world, there is something, in a museum, that has an innate mystique, fitting for a place that is a receptacle of human knowledge, history and arts. Although only small fragments of the rich tapestry that is the existence of the human species on this planet can be preserved, museums served the invaluable purpose of helping people remember their past and their origins, and - hopefully - of providing some well-needed inspiration to build a more prosperous future, making that tapestry even richer, brighter and more complex.

But there is also a side of museums people don't realize or think much about. Each artifact, painstakingly cataloged and accompanied by a nice blurb printed on a square of pristine paper, black on white, may hide something more. Maybe their purpose has been misinterpreted by historians, perhaps what we see as a piece of jewelry was actually more akin to coin, or what we think is the tip of an ancient spear was actually a rudimentary scalpel used by the very first medical practitioners in our history. What is a museum, after all, if not a collection of mysteries?

The horizon shimmered like the last dying embers of a neglected fire, but the city was far from being plunged into darkness. Skyscrapers shimmered with a patchwork of different colored window panels, cool hued colors were projected onto the bridges that spanned the city's rivers and canals, and hundreds of art installations around the city were illuminated at all times. The clitter-clack of the subways echoed through the night, especially as some of the cars ascended from the underworld to move around on elevated tracks. It was yet another city that never slept, and Chicago's grungy little brother; Yali, Illinois.

Despite the city's rich nightlife, there were several businesses that remained on relatively conventional schedules. The Griffin Historical Museum had closed at sunset and the parking lot had emptied. Long shadows were cast from the spotlights as a figure moved up the wide red stone paved walkway before slipping to the side, heading toward a seldom used side entrance. Few walls were bare in Yali, though the swirling melange of colors and patterns that spanned the door were not graffiti but rather another piece of art by one of the city's hundreds of artists.

The side door clicked open as a badge was pressed to a reader and the shadow stepped inside with some urgency, quickly entering the copper colored elevator doors at the end of the short hallway. There was a lurch of inertia as the elevator rapidly ascended to the second floor. A slight chime echoed into the cavernous space as the elevator doors rumbled open and a

man in his late thirties or early forties emerged. He stepped out of the lift and proceeded at a brisk pace down the hall, reluctantly passing the displays. While his black security uniform was pristine and immaculate, his shaggy chestnut brown hair looked as if he'd just gotten up. Thankfully the security cap he wore hid most of the messiness. His round face was framed by a short beard that had been well groomed three days prior but was starting to look a bit unkempt.

There was an almost indefinable scent in the air; wood, paper, plaster, fur, dust... It was the smell of history. During the day it took on other accents from the patrons that filtered through the museum, but at night it returned to baseline. The main lights had been dropped slightly, though display lights still cast up across artifacts and displays. With a slight huff to his breath, the man reached a rather unremarkable bronze colored door just past the caveman exhibit. He pulled his ID badge down from the retractable lanyard that clipped it to his shirt and pressed it to the reader. The blue digital display flashed green, displaying the name Oliver Foster before the door unlocked. The large guard eased the door open, a tsunami of azure light spilling across his face, pouring from a wall of dozens of security feeds.

On the opposite wall a map of the museum was broken into color coded sections depicting movement and other indicators. In the center of it all was an island unto itself, a security ring equipped with three desk chairs.

"Heya, boss! What's up?" a gravelly voice came from the occupant of one of the chairs, who didn't turn around to greet Oliver but raised a beefy arm in the air, waving his hand. Rocky was sitting with his thick legs splayed open, his black security uniform almost looking like it had been directly painted on his muscular body. When he lowered his arm, his fingers scratched the permanent five o' clock stubble that adorned his chin and cheeks, his Mediterranean skin almost having an otherworldly glow under the azure light of the feeds. "Same shit, different day, am I right?" he added, brushing his naturally wavy mane of short jet black hair with his other hand.

"I might be able to bring a little variety when it comes to dinner time. You're still on that health kick, right?" Oliver asked as he rounded the island and moved in through the gap, settling down into his chair to clock into the system for the night, "I was thinking of having some Tom Kha Kai delivered for lunch from that restaurant that specializes in werewolf herbs, elder root and whatever. I figured it might be interesting to see if I can taste the difference as a mere mortal." Oli grinned. Rocky scoffed at that, pretending to be offended.

"You know my body's a temple. A Greek temple, to be exact. Just wait and see, Zeus will come down from Mount Olympus any day to make this nice booty his own," he said with a huge grin, giving one of his butt cheeks a perfunctory slap through the black trousers he was wearing. "And speaking of which, dude: why don't you just... ask a werewolf out? I know you'd like to be a shapeshifter. You should just find a nice canine guy to settle down with. I'm sure you can easily find one, there's no werewolf man out there who doesn't like the D after all."

"Well, uh, my body's a temple too?" Oliver haphazardly tried back. The truth of the story was that he didn't know where to begin. Werewolves had gone from being a myth to being on every bus and subway running through the city. There were dozens of factions and groups and they all had different cultures and Oliver felt like he had missed the boat, born too soon to relish the cultural awakening. "So, my marble carved friend, who takes the first patrol tonight?" Oli asked, his customary smile returning. Rocky stood up, almost six feet and a half of pure

Greek-American beef; of course, being a couple years older than his colleague, age had started to catch up with him a bit, but he quite relished in his ever increasing DILF-ness.

“Leave it to me, my adorable pipsqueak,” he replied with a smile that was a perfect showcase of his dimples, before pointing a finger towards his friend. “And just to be clear, I’m not looking forward to getting bitten for one simple reason: werewolves have a fuckton of body fur, and it would take me ages to wax. Although, can you imagine how huge I would be? I’d destroy all the other bodybuilders in my circuit for sure, with that werewolf boost...” He said dreamily, before popping an impromptu muscular pose.

“Sure, sure. Remind me how amazing you are when you have that two a.m. slump and I’m drinking my black citrus energy drink.” Oliver smirked. He had to admire Rocky’s cocky attitude. He wondered if it had come as a result of his physical prowess or if it had driven him into pursuing physical perfection. It was hard not to feel inferior around him. In comparison, he was a pipsqueak at only five foot eleven but he was clearly not a small man. He had a heft around his waist, thick arms and legs, a general barrel of a man... but the more Oli thought about it, the more he couldn’t help but imagine what Rocky would have looked like with the ‘full moon bump’ as the kids called it. The amateur bodybuilder’s brow furrowed, crow’s feet appearing near the corner of his eyes.

“Although, you know what? Screw it, pal. We should do it at some point: let’s find some nice werewolves and get ourselves turned. Call it midlife crisis or whatever, but I am in the mood for some change,” he declared, sounding quite serious. “Maybe not right now, but soon? And if I’m gonna transform into an even more hulking beast, I want my best pal to be there with me,” he added in a much sweeter, much gentler tone, as his fingers tenderly caressed Oliver’s chin. Oliver’s brown eyes darted away with embarrassment.

“Every once in a while you go and surprise me, Rocky. You deserve someone a lot nicer than Zeus. I’ve heard he’s a bit of a jerk.” Oli said sweetly, looking back up at the Greek god before him. Rocky’s grin didn’t falter.

“Yeah, but he created those fuzzy sexy beasts, didn’t he? He can’t be that bad!” without warning, he pulled the smaller guy into a bear hug, trying not to hurt him by squeezing him too much. “And, yanno... I do have a pretty nice guy in my life already, if you ask me!” he murmured in his best friend’s ear. Even though they looked so different, the two had clicked together from their very first night on the job in a way that felt almost uncanny. Oliver grinned sheepishly.

“I’ll try not to get too distracted watching you strut around with that fine body of yours on the security cams.” Oliver said, deflecting the compliment as his cheeks grew rosy beneath his beard. He always felt a bit electric when Rocky touched him, although there was a slight shifting in his pants as he grew an erection that he tried desperately to mask.

“Oh, please do get distracted. You know I like when people look at my body!” Rocky replied, letting his friend go and walking towards the door, his prominent butt shaking. Before he left, though, he turned his head around, a small smile still on his lips. “So, what do you think? Should we add ‘howl at the moon one day a month for the rest of our lives’ to our bucket list or nah?”

“One way or another, I kind of like the idea of getting bigger and hairier... Maybe I should follow you to the gym one of these days. I’m sure I’d howl as I caught a glimpse of you in the bathroom.” Oli grinned. Rocky clicked his tongue and winked.

“How about you survive one of my routines one day and I let you plow my ass like you were Zeus? They say you just need the right motivation after all!” And with one last chuckle, the Greek muscle daddy left the security room, ready to perform his duties. The door had barely shut before Oliver had reached down, his fingers curling around the bulge in his pants, giving himself a tight squeeze. The idea of fucking Rocky was incredibly alluring and it was far from the first time he’d imagined it. After a few more gropes, though, Oliver forced himself to focus on the screens, reviewing each display zone by zone.

As Rocky made his rounds in the Natural History section, Rocky’s mind was still a jumbled mess of thoughts. He had never seriously considered the idea of becoming a werewolf, but after that brief discussion with Oli, that possibility was burrowing through his mind. Maybe it would be cool, he thought. He’d get bigger, for sure, but most importantly... Oli would. Rocky usually only bedded other gym rats or bunnies like himself, but if his best bud was going to have a massive growth spurt thanks to the werewolf curse, well... he would have been more than happy to settle for him. “Maybe I should just tell him that,” he said in a barely audible whisper, that still seemed to echo a bit in the empty halls of the museum. “I mean, I felt his boner loud and clear earlier...”

“Did you say something?” Oliver’s voice crackled through the radio mounted to Rocky’s shoulder. He hadn’t heard anything directly but the museum had eyes and ears everywhere. The bodybuilder just shrugged.

“Me? Nah. Just talking to myself I guess,” he said curtly. His eyes wandered on the display showing the evolution of the human race, starting from the Australopithecus to the Homo Sapiens, and couldn’t help but thinking at the evolution both his body and Oli’s would go through after a werewolf bite, as his dick twitched pleurably in his designer underwear.

While the light pollution of Yali kept the city from ever being truly dark, the heavens were swirling with new shades of green and gold, heralding the coming dawn. Each of Oliver’s footsteps rang into the night as he ascended the steel steps towards the elevated rail station. His calves and ankles ached but thankfully his uniform was enough to keep the cold at bay. In many ways he felt lucky; his job was that perfect mix between walking too much and sitting too much and, best of all, he didn’t have to deal with the public. Still, any job took a toll at his age.

A vibration began to build in the metal steps and, as Oliver raised his gaze, he saw the milky white headlights of the subway rumbling around the curve on the elevated tracks. Grimacing slightly, Oli sped up his climb, reaching the platform with just enough time to hit the signal. The subway began to hiss and shudder as it slowed down, though several cars passed Oliver by before the conveyance came to a complete stop. The train car before him looked as if it had been dipped in tie dye. Every inch had been coated in several layers of graffiti, boasting every hue under the sun or the moon. The doors had barely started to open before Oli stepped in.

Even at the early hour, there were several other passengers. Some were curled up against their seats, others hunched forward, braced with their elbows on their knees. Oli trudged along enough to take the center seat in an empty bank of three, exhaling a bit as he took the

weight off his feet. He wiggled his toes in his work shoes, trying to look a bit casual as he lifted his gaze and looked around. Four other passengers aside from himself. One was a young latino man looking like he was barely old enough to graduate high school, let alone be awake at five in the morning.

His brownish-black hair was buzzed short but a majestic beard unfurled from his cheeks and chin, bushy to the point that it doubled the width of his head. It was the sort of beard that any Amish man would have been proud of and looked totally unearned on someone so young. His white, mildly stained tank top showed off long bare arms covered from collar bone to wrist in sleeves of inky black tattoos that also seemed surprising for someone so young.

Similarly, one of the other passengers was also sporting a magnificent beard. His, however, was incredibly long and straight, a teardrop shape descending from his chin while the hair along his jawline was only an inch or so long. Shrewd almond colored eyes watched Oliver in turn, but the guard couldn't help but gaze at the man. He had to be in his twenties, his hair in a relaxed, swept back faux hawk. The beard would have been impressive for anyone, though all color had drained from the center of his long goatee and the center crest of hair. It was not dye nor bleach, merely a natural lack of pigment that came from one of Yali's most famous werewolf groups, the Ice Pack. The sharp contrast of the hair complimented the man's Asian heritage, but his fierce look forced Oli to divert his gaze elsewhere.

The third passenger wore multiple layers of jackets and coats, each a maelstrom of color, his khaki green pants speckled and a brimmed beanie pulled down over his face so he could sleep, leaving the last passenger, a woman in her early thirties. Unlike the men, she stood, a hand gripping one of the yellow triangular handholds dangling from the ceiling. A cascade of rich red hair fell to the edge of her shoulders and her blue eyes were as rich as a sun kissed bay. Oliver didn't have to guess at her occupation as she wore burgundy medical scrubs and comfortable shoes, a smart watch wrapped around her wrist. He even was able to determine her name from the black tag affixed to her scrubs; Marina. It was a fitting name for someone with eyes like hers.

Oliver gave her a mild smile, more in sympathy that they both had the late shift and wrapped up their work as everyone else started theirs. She returned the smile, showing no fear or hesitation. Yali wasn't a city for the faint of heart, though Oli noticed the golden wedding ring on the woman's finger. Perhaps it was good he was gay. If not, he might have been heartbroken that such a beautiful woman was completely out of reach to someone like him. Satisfied with his people watching, Oliver closed his eyes to rest them, thinking back to his day at the museum.

Rocky had been such a flirt, and Oli had to admit, that felt good. He often felt as if he'd lost the race with time, that he'd lost his opportunity to have a life, to have love, to do anything with himself other than get ground down by the daily grind... but Rocky gave him hope. The idea that he wanted them both to get bit by werewolves? For them to take that plunge together? As friends, maybe even more? It was exhilarating... exhilarating enough that another blush started to spread across Oliver's cheeks beneath his beard as he debated doing something daring.

For most of his life, Oliver had been considered a geek or a nerd. He ran tabletop games, painted miniatures, and had a library of videogames so extensive that he'd likely never be able to play them all... but he also had another side. He'd spent a month's worth of

paychecks having an exact replica of his security uniform made, but instead of the cotton-polyester blend, he'd had it made in the finest leather he could afford. It took him from looking like someone that had been assigned authority to someone that commanded it. While he'd never dream of showing up to work in his leather uniform, a guilty smile crossed his lips as he imagined wearing his leather jock strap and harness to work. Would Rocky be able to tell? Would he see the slight contours of the uniform and imagine what was beneath? There was only one way to tell...

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Oliver wondered what it was about his nature that perpetually kept him on the brink of being late. He tried to walk briskly, though his long strides made the concealed leather jockstrap hug his package just a bit tighter. Vapor spilled from his lips as his breath turned to frost and his hidden leather harness hugged at his chest in all the right ways - something that had the side effect of only making him more aroused in the confines of his jockstrap. He was pretty sure that one of the werewolves on the train had smelled the leather too, given the way his eyes had briefly turned golden...

The routine was all too familiar; security access door, elevator ride to the second floor and an all but sprint to the security office annex. Despite his procrastination, Oliver paused outside of the office door, catching his breath while he looked at the intricate stone relief carving of the city's namesake, a Yali. He'd studied the mythological beast when he'd been in middle school; it was a hindu guardian spirit, one with the head and body of a lion but the tusks and trunk of an elephant. It seemed only fitting that the carving guarded the security office. Oliver put on a smile, swiped his badge against the reader and stepped into the office just like he did every night.

"Look who's here, the man of the year!" Rocky was standing in a corner of the room, his arms crossed over the shelf of muscles that was his chest, a shit-eating grin plastered on his macho face. He had probably seen his colleague coming thanks to the feed of the security cameras. The amateur bodybuilder stared at Oliver with a pensive gaze, his head slightly cocked towards his large shoulder. "You look pretty happy, dude. Something nice happened to you?"

"Just... happy to be here working with my best friend." Oliver grinned, reaching up to rub the back of his head, an act that caused the leather harness beneath his uniform to constrict ever so slightly. Rocky's smirk was almost cat-like in his appearance, looking quite incongruous on his manly face.

"Mmh-mmh, I see... Well, if you are so happy, why don't you come and give ol' Rocky here a big hug, huh?" he exclaimed, opening his thick arms. Oliver looked a little surprised at that. He had no doubt they regularly broke half a dozen human resource policies, but at the same time, how could he resist? Oliver moved over, his expression a bit sheepish as he came into Rocky's personal space, stretching his own large arms around the other guard's most impressive torso. Rocky's body shook a bit, as if he was rubbing his pecs against the other guy's chest, and his grin widened. His face leaned forward, towards his friend's ear.

"You can't fool me, man. I know the feel of a high quality harness against my muscle tits," he murmured. He seemed very happy and proud that his normally shy and reserved friend had done a gesture so unlike himself. "You wanna know a little secret, though?" he added in an even smaller voice. Oliver's eyes were as wide as dinner plates at having been so transparently discovered so all he managed was a meek nod.

"Mhm-hmm?" he muttered, not trusting himself with full words. Rocky's mouth was so close to Oli's ears, he could have probably felt the Greek man's stubble prickling the skin of his auricle.

"I'm wearing a pink thong and a butt plug under my uniform pants..." he whispered in a sultry tone, before he undid the hug and stared at his best buddy's face, looking forward to his reaction. Oliver considered for a moment, his eyes suddenly curious.

"What shade of pink? Carnation or rose?" Oliver asked. It was an inescapable question in a city so fixated on art, though surely it would help Oli picture the muscular hunk more clearly in his mind's eye. Rocky sighed and rolled his eyes, clearly disappointed by the underwhelming response.

"Dude, am I gay or am I gay? It's shocking pink, of course. So bright it would hurt your eyes!" he replied. "I can send you some pics of me flexing with only that skimpy triangle of fabric on, if you are a good enough boy, though..." Oliver gave a small, impish smile.

"What must I do to be good?" he asked, running a hand down the leg of Rocky's uniform pants.

"You can send me a pic of whatever leather goodies you have, for example. I'm glad you're finally opening yourself to new stuff instead of being terminally vanilla like I was afraid you would be," Rocky replied, looking down at the hand touching his legs and smiling: he was clearly welcoming the attention. Oliver swallowed a little before he fished his phone out of his pocket, navigating to a folder that was off the beaten path. After a few more swipes he brought up a picture of himself in his modest apartment wearing his guard uniform... except that it was glistening in the early morning light leaking through the blinds, shining in a way his uniform never would... and the security badge was not the one afforded to the Griffin Museum Guards, depicting a stylized devil instead. Oliver showed it to Rocky as if proffering his report card. The meathead let out an impressed wolf whistle, his dark eyes darting from the photo to his friend as the smile on his face grew wider and wider.

"Dude, that's sick. How much did you pay for that thing? Looks like something out of a leather daddy's wet dream... have you had sex in it already? Please tell me you have. Must be fucking great to plow some guy pussy dressed like that." He seemed to have completely forgotten the two were supposed to be at work, his pent up horniness making him throw any caution and professionalism out of the window with surprising ease. Oli took a bit of a sighing breath, his eyes finding safety in the corner of the room.

"I haven't, uh, gotten around to... having sex yet, I mean, not really. I fooled around a bit after college but we really weren't a match." Oliver said as if he'd just admitted to being a eunuch, "I do jerk off in it almost every night though?" he added as an afterthought like some sort of recompense. Rocky grabbed his friend's shoulders and looked at him deep in the eyes.

"Listen, dude... we have to find you a nice man. Preferably a werewolf, so he can turn us both," he stated, dead serious, before the unexpected beep of the card reader outside of the

office made the two turn at once towards the door of the security room. Oliver blanched, paling noticeably as he instinctively stepped back from Rocky just as the door to the room opened up and light spilled in from outside, silhouetting the newest arrival - an arrival that neither guard had noticed entering the building or approaching the security annex.

The first thing Rocky and Oli noticed was the scent: it was intense, peculiar and a bit overpowering, as if its owner had applied too much cologne... and yet it also felt, in a strange way, completely natural, an ineffable combination of zesty and metallic that made the nostrils of the two security guards tingle in pleasure, and cause their muscles to tense: there was something adventurous in that smell, but also a pinch of danger, as if it was the scent of a lion, or some other apex predator waiting to pounce.

The smell wasn't the only thing the man who stepped inside the room had in common with a lion, though: his head was framed by a veritable mane of honey blonde locks, cascading all over his shoulders in swirls and curls, like the hair of a cherub in a medieval fresco. His face, however, with its sharp, angular features, striking blue eyes and a short, dense, perfectly groomed beard, displayed the kind of quiet handsomeness that came with maturity and self-assurance.

Rocky couldn't help but to salivate internally as he stared at the man in front of him: he was wearing a black uniform, just like their own, but the first three buttons of his regulation shirt were undone, showing a veritable shelf of plump pecs covered in a thick bush of dark blond hair. The man looked at the two and flashed a smile worth a million bucks. Oliver blinked, dumbfounded for a few moments. They had been trained to have snap reactions to the unexpected as guards, but after months of nothing happening he was a bit rusty. It also didn't help that the man had simply shown up inside the security nerve center. The uniform was convincing, but Oliver knew from personal experience that they could be replicated.

"Uh, good evening?" Oliver half asked as he pulled a tablet up from the desk, keeping his eyes half on the rather gorgeous newcomer and half on notifications and emails. He grimaced internally that there were at least a dozen new messages about onboarding a new employee, ensuring credentials were entered correctly and modifications to break schedules.

"Good evening." The newcomer's voice was deep, smooth, with the right amount of vocal fry. It seemed to have an accent, but it was so vague to be extremely difficult to pinpoint. "My name is Harlan. You should have been notified of my arrival," he declared, before combing back his hair with his fingers. Oliver nodded a bit dumbly.

"Yes, we just got the notices." Oliver said. It felt as if he'd been caught with his pants down but he struggled to recover, glancing through the notices and trying to skim as fast as humanly possible, "My name is Oliver and this is Rocky. It's a pleasure to meet you Harlan." Oliver said with a small smile, trying to mask his surprise as he got himself back under control... at least until a strong hand wrapped around his wrist.

"Oli? Come with me for a moment, okay?" Rocky was saying with a huge smile on his face, as he started pulling his colleague towards the door. "We'll be right back, sorry. Just need to have a moment with my buddy here..." he added as he walked next to Harlan, who seemed a bit surprised but nonetheless politely nodded. Oliver sucked in his gut as he squeezed past Harlan's rather impressive body, getting a stronger whiff of his cologne until they were in the hallway and the door was eased shut. Oliver took a few steps to the right to a spot he knew was

just between camera views before he let out a sigh and his shoulders sagged a little. With that out of his system, he looked back up at Rocky.

“Sorry,” he admitted a bit bashfully. Rocky just shrugged.

“Nothing to be sorry about. But that guy...” the bodybuilder pointed at the closed door, his voice an excited whisper all of a sudden. “He’s definitely a werewolf. Like, have you seen it? That freaking swagger. There’s definitely something going on with him,” he said, nodding. Oliver’s brow furrowed a little.

“I mean, there are a lot of werewolves in Yali, but what are the odds one just got randomly assigned? Wouldn’t they avoid jobs they had to work on full moon nights or something?” Oli asked, though a small grin did cross his lips, “He does have swagger though...” Rocky tapped his index finger against his mouth, his forehead scrunched in deep thought.

“Mmh, that’s true... we should check if he has work scheduled for full moon nights. But wouldn’t it be cool if he was a werewolf? I’m sure we could ask him to turn us, you know... as a way to bond between colleagues. Although I guess we might have to find another job in that case, ‘cause we’d all miss full moon nights... and I’ve also heard that some people are like, allergic to werewolf bites and you basically go into anaphylactic shock and die or something like that?”

“Wait, what?!” Oliver asked, his jaw dropping, “You can just keel over if they bite you? Rocky, we’re going to have to have a conversation about priorities... But first, we should probably keep our actual jobs before we have to hypothetically give it up for a werewolf bite that may or may not come. We just left the newbie alone in the nerve center of the building. Besides, I can’t place his cologne yet and it’s going to bug me if I don’t figure it out. My first job was at Macy’s after all.” Oli grinned. Rocky chuckled in response.

“Better than my first job. I worked at fucking Blockbuster. Remember when those were a thing? By Zeus, I feel ancient now... come on, let’s go back inside before the new dreamboat manages to do something dumb.” When the two security guards walked back into the room, Harlan was basically where they had left him. His head turned around very slowly, to glance at them from over his shoulders.

“You’re back,” he murmured in a flat tone, before giving them a tiny grin.

“Yeah, sorry for that, bud,” Rocky said, taking a step closer, his right arm outstretched, presenting his arm to their new colleague. “Name’s Patroclus, but you can call me Rocky, as Oli here said. My parents were fans of the Iliad, you see... but hey, joke’s on them ‘cause I really did grow up liking boys like ol’ Patroclus did with Achilles.” One of Harlan’s elegant eyebrows arched, but he nonetheless accepted the handshake offer.

“You seem to be... quite the colorful individual,” he said, but his tone didn’t seem to betray any cynicism or mockery. He did seem quite impressed. His blue eyes then shifted towards Oli. “Oliver... I’ve heard about you, of course,” he added, quite cryptically. Oliver’s eyes got large once again, his mouth hanging slightly agape as he tried to run through where he could have possibly become known for anything. It was ironic how moments ago he’d been feeling like a man on the verge of greatness and now he was running around like a nervous freshman.

“Hopefully good things? I’ve tried to do a good job here...” Oliver said hesitantly. This Harlan did not seem like the sort of person that played tabletop games with painted miniatures and even if he was, Oli felt like he would have remembered him.

“Well, I am... acquainted with some of the people you purchase your coloring supplies from, so to speak,” Harlan explained. “You struck them as a remarkably kind individual.” Rocky nodded vigorously at that.

“Oh, yeah, Oli here is basically a human teddy bear. Never met anyone sweeter than him, right buddy?” Oliver’s smile seemed to be genuine, deep, and a bit tender before he shrugged.

“Well, I do have an extremely huggable body.” Oli said, thinking back to when Rocky had convinced him that he was a very different kind of bear. The thought made Oliver’s hidden jockstrap strain a bit more, forcing him to take a breath, “Well Harlan, do you feel like doing paperwork first or the grand tour? I’m sure there’s a lot to do.” he admitted. The blond hunk cocked his head slightly towards his left shoulder, his arms crossing over his supple chest.

“I feel like I should learn as much as possible about the job as soon as possible, shouldn’t I? So I think we should start with whatever task you think might be the most useful for me to learn first,” he replied. “My last job, well... it required a different set of skills, but in the end it was still about protection. It shouldn’t take me that long to get the jist of it, I think.” Oliver’s face barely masked the slight quirk as he realized this man very well could have put any bouncer or bodyguard to shame. What was it about the museum that drew in men that looked like living statues? Oliver glanced back over to Rocky.

“I know I said I’d take the first patrol tonight but I don’t want to deprive you of the chance to give Harlan here a tour.” Oliver offered. It was a kindness, deference due to the respect he had for his co-worker. If he were to answer honestly, he preferred giving tours to mind numbing paperwork. Oliver also had a feeling that he might be more tactful in learning if this blond bombshell really walked on the wildside. The man, however, felt a strong hand gripping his shoulder.

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous! You know the ins and outs of this place, you big nerd! I’m sure you can give our newcomer the best tour he could hope for. Plus, you seem to have friends in common, I’m sure you have, well... plenty of topics to discuss!” He sat down at the desk, in front of the open laptop. “In the meantime I’ll be here, doing some tedious paperwork!” Oli grinned at that, feeling like telling Rocky he’d owe him some nice wine or something but he didn’t want to weird out their new recruit too much. Oli gestured to the door with his hand.

“Shall we? There’s a lot to see and you don’t even have to pay admission.” Oli smiled. Harlan bowed his head and walked outside the room.

“A private tour, I feel honored,” he said, smiling at the other security guard, his blue irises gazing a bit too deep into Oli’s eyes, even though only for a split second. The bubbling knot of anxious energy that Oliver had been feeling since Harlan’s unexpected arrival loosened in his gut from that slight glance, a feeling that the heftier man would not normally expect from direct eye contact with a stranger. Maybe it was a coincidence and just the idea of showing someone around his home turf. Oli gave Harlan an appreciative head nod as he opened the door out of the security annex, ready to start the night anew.

“So...” Harlan’s stroll was fluid and elegant, and his black, well-polished shoes rhythmically tapped against the marble floors of the museum. “How did you end up here, Oliver?” he asked, sounding genuinely curious.

“I came a lot as a kid. I loved seeing all these examples of the past. It really fueled my imagination. As I got older, I realized there were a lot of exhibits that would help with the authenticity of my-” Oli hesitated, used to hiding his hobbies until he remembered that his reputation had preceded him specifically because of them. “Of the miniatures that I paint. Eventually I saw they were hiring and the idea of getting out of a customer service field was very appealing.” Oli explained as they walked, passing through an exhibit showing a variety of replicated animal species that had gone extinct. Harlan nodded at those words.

“Well, finding a way to fuel your personal passions thanks to your job is indeed enviable,” he said. “Our common acquaintances did describe you as someone who is very passionate and driven in the pursuit of art, after all.” Oliver blushed slightly beneath his short but messy beard.

“They might be overselling it. I just paint little pieces of plastic and 3D printed landscapes. I mean, I’m good at it, but in a town so full of art it feels a bit silly.” Oli shrugged, “What about you? You said you worked in protection before?” Oli asked as casually as he could, casting the line. Harlan looked at his tour guide pensively for a moment before nodding.

“Indeed. I was a bodyguard for many years, actually. Many, here in Yali, need protection... and there are some people who are better than others at providing it, so to speak.” A smirk appeared on his lips. “Plus, I do look pretty dashing while I’m wearing a suit.”

“I think you’re going to fit right in. Rocky has a very healthy appreciation for his skill set, and you seem quite aware of your strengths and attributes.” Oli smirked, taking a right past a Dodo bird. The hallway up ahead was filled with warmer light, the illumination spilling over ceramic and stone artifacts.

“What is your opinion about Patroclus?” Harlan asked in a casual tone. “You two seem to be good friends, but he doesn’t seem like the kind of person who would be interested in pursuing art.” Oliver actually laughed at that.

“Rocky’s version of art is his own body. He sculpts it, he refines it, he brings out the subtle nuances. I think the hours agree with him, but you’re right, I think we were drawn in by different things.” Oli smirked. Harlan’s eyes lingered over a display cabinet filled with ancient stoneware, before his tongue clicked against his palate.

“Well, both me and my patron can appreciate that kind of dedication, that’s for sure,” he murmured. “This place seems to be in pretty capable hands.” Harlan turned around, his blue eyes gazing at Oliver. “Do you feel threatened by my presence? Do you think Rocky does?”

“N-no!” Oli said in surprise, “I think it’s an adjustment to add someone new to a workplace dynamic, but I didn’t feel threatened. We’re not being replaced, are we?” Oli asked.

“Not that I’m aware. But, well, I did show up here uninvited...” Harlan chuckled at that. “And you were only notified today about my arrival, weren’t you? It wouldn’t be weird to find it odd or suspicious. But believe me, Oliver...” The man’s eyes felt so magnetic and deep, as if they were lakes someone could actually drown into if they weren’t careful enough. “I don’t mean any harm. Do you understand?” he said, his voice a pleasant, warm monotone.

"I understand..." Oliver repeated, "I hope we didn't make you feel uncomfortable either. Rocky and I have a close working relationship and I think we were just surprised." Harlan grinned at those words. Once again, his shoes clicked against the marble as he took a step closer to Oli.

"I see. And what would one have to do to have a... close relationship with the two of you?" he asked, his voice sultry and dense like wine mixed with honey. "You see, I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable. I have a feeling we are going to be colleagues for a long, long time, after all..." Oliver suddenly felt like melted butter, but it wasn't a terrible feeling.

"How professional were you at your last job?" Oliver asked by way of fishing how candid to be.

"Well, I feel like my patron would tell you that she was extremely satisfied with my dedication to the cause and with my integrity," Harlan replied, his answers ever so elusive. Oliver's lips pursed a little at that answer as he considered.

"I'm sure we'll fall into place with one another. It's just going to take some time." he replied diplomatically, looking at Harlan from the corner of his eyes, trying to bleed a stone when it came to information.

The night was still young, but it was hard for Oliver not to feel very old. It wasn't as much how his body felt, though it was hard to remember the last time he'd woken up without a back ache, but more the sharp contrast from the crown jewel of the Griffin Museum's traveling collection, 'Symbolism and Mythology in Ancient Egypt'. The exhibit took up the entirety of the museum's top floor and held almost two thousand artifacts, reproductions and educational entries. There were countless sculptures, reliefs, paintings, pottery, and papyri.

One of the most prized objects was an intricately carved chlorite head of the god Osiris. The statue was in marvelous condition, depicting the god's overwhelmingly perfect features from supple cheek bones to his perfectly groomed eyebrows. The head sported a precisely groomed chinstrap beard that tapered into a braided pharaoh beard that seemed almost modern in its sophistication. The chlorite stone was also an appropriate choice given that legends told that Osiris had green skin.

While the carved head was an impressive entry, one that Oliver had found himself staring at many nights before, his gaze had shifted to the stone relief carvings mounted on the wall. They were reproductions created from 3D scans of the real thing, but the benefit of being reproductions was that one could get up close and personal with them. Osiris gazed at Oliver as Oliver gazed into the past... It had been two millennia since Rome incorporated Egypt into itself. That was what made Oliver feel old. That was what made him reflect that he was an insignificant speck floating down the river of fate... and yet there was still promise, wasn't there? He wasn't sure if the protein drinks Rocky had suggested were working or not, but after Harlan started working there Oli felt like he was outnumbered and it might do to take steps to get a bit healthier.

"Anything caught your interest, Oliver?" Harlan said, right next to him. The new guard had appeared next to him without making any sound, seemingly out of thin air, his blond mane

of hair as impeccably coiffed as ever, his enticing smell surrounding him like a misty cloud. The newcomer had proved to be a good addition to the team, in the sense that he had not made any of the stupid mistakes that had cost Oli and Rocky's two previous colleagues their jobs. Then again, accidentally flooding one of the bathrooms while trying to smoke a joint during a shift was probably something that could not be topped that easily.

"It's easy to lose perspective, I think. Everything is so... liminal. Even Yali's best art installations are measured in decades, not centuries. I really like this exhibit, even if I have a hard time interpreting some of it." Oliver smiled. Harlan gently caressed his bearded chin with two fingers, staring at what his colleague was pointing at.

"I guess so. Well, sometimes it does help sharing perspectives, don't you think? Maybe I can be of some help, despite my current job I do have a background in arts as many do in our city," he said in a friendly, almost solicitous tone.

"Well..." Oli began to ask, pausing with a mildly embarrassed smile on his face. It was something he'd spoken to Rocky about hundreds of times, but so far they had been on their best behavior with Harlan. "This exhibit, at least half of the artifacts, are painting a picture of daily life more than art but we view them as art in their own way. Werewolves have become a part of Yali's daily life. Do you think there is a beauty to that?" Harlan chuckled softly at those words.

"I feel like there's beauty in pretty much everything, if you ask me," he said in his suave voice. "But I also feel like not every beautiful thing qualifies as art, and on the other hand, art doesn't necessarily have to be beautiful, nor appealing to everyone's eyes. Art needs..." Harlan paused for a second, as his blue eyes grew slightly unfocused. "A story. A meaning. And, usually, an intent. And that doesn't mean the creators themselves have to establish those things in the first place."

"Wow..." Oliver exhaled slowly, "You're really deep, man." He smiled, eyes downcast for a moment before they lit up with an idea. He looked back at Harlan shrewdly, "What is your intent?" Harlan's eyes grew a bit wider, as if the question had somehow surprised him.

"Well, I am what you may call... an impartial examiner. Super partes, so to speak. Although, these past few weeks I've grown quite fond of both your endearing naivete and Patroclus' crass sincerity, which might color my judgment, but still..." Harlan turned to face Oliver, his blue eyes as sharp as steel. "My intent is to serve my patron, of course. That's my purpose, my reason for being. If I'm here, it's because she asked me to. You see, she might have... an intent in mind for you, so to speak. She's always on the hunt for interesting and valuable people." Despite his words sounding more than vaguely ominous, Harlan's tone was disarmingly sincere and even genial, in a way.

"Y-your patron, you don't mean the museum director, do you? You work for someone else?" Oliver asked, running back the last several days of conversations in his mind to confirm what he was only now starting to realize. Endearing naivete indeed... Harlan nodded.

"Indeed. She is, quite literally, a patron. The biggest financial backer of this institution," he succinctly explained. "She's always been the kind of person with a keen interest in art and history, and therefore she holds this place in very high regard. Recent developments in the political geography of our town made her increasingly worried, unfortunately."

“Worried? The museum isn’t in trouble, is it? This place is too important to Yali, to everyone in it!” Oliver said, sounding keenly concerned. Once again, Harlan expressed his assent.

“I’m glad you agree, Oliver. Unfortunately, well... the recent actions of the werewolf population is affecting the delicate balance of our beloved city, I’m afraid. Measures will have to be taken by those of us who are concerned about stability. My patron, luckily, also has a very discerning eye when it comes to politics,” he said, casually brushing his pristine black shirt. Despite his age, there was still an inherent goodness inside Oliver, one that looked for the good in others. He and Rocky had been talking about joining the werewolves for months. They had fantasized, they had joked, they had even taken steps to consider their many options. The look of sheer disappointment was quite apparent on Oli’s face.

“What recent actions did they do? What... could a werewolf do to threaten the museum?” Oliver asked, turning fully away from the stone relief carving. Harlan tapped his index finger against his lips.

“Well, as you might have noticed, their numbers are expanding at a pretty rapid pace. The other shapeshifter species tend to be a bit more reserved and cautious when it comes to adding humans to their ranks by turning them. And, I’m afraid, my patron caught wind of the... interest you and Patroclus started to manifest towards joining a pack.” His tone was still jovial, but something glinted in the back of his eyes, like a lingering threat. “This is something that cannot be allowed, you see. I’m sure you agree, this place is way too important to fall into werewolf hands. Of course, we could fire the two of you and put someone else here, but you and Patroclus are good people. You definitely do not deserve to be caught in the crossfire.”

Oliver’s mouth opened and then closed, as if realizing that no sound had come out. His brow furrowed in further confusion until he managed to concentrate the maelstrom of questions into a single focal point; “Other shapeshifter species?”

“Well, of course,” Harlan shrugged. “I mean, if werewolves exist, it only makes sense they aren’t the only supernatural creature in existence, don’t you think? Of course, my patron is a member of one of said species... and so am I, for what matters.” This time Oliver made a soft squeak as he exhaled through a constricted throat.

“I mean, I guess that makes sense... If there were stories about werewolves and they turned out to be real, something had to inspire the other stories.” Oliver said, reaching up to rub at his beard in thought. His eyes turned towards Harlan, looking him up and down in curiosity before his eyes widened, unable to parse everything he had said. “Oh no... Your patron figured out we wanted to join a pack and she... We are going to get fired, aren’t we?” Oli said before his lip twitched, “Or... or worse?” Harlan chuckled.

“Again with your adorable naivete, my dear friend. No, neither you or Patroclus are going to get fired, I told you. We consider you valuable elements. And, actually...” The blond security guard’s body seemed to flicker, and he disappeared in front of Oli’s eyes... until he felt fingertips caressing his neck and throat. Harlan was right next to him, and his smile showed canine teeth that looked just an inch too long to be considered proper canines. “There’s no risk of rejection with my species. No risk of dying if I bite you... and Osiris knows how much I’d love to sink my teeth in your flesh and taste you, but... you see, Oliver, I’m a gentleman.” Harlan’s eyes shifted,

as if they were glasses being filled with rich, dense red wine. "I wouldn't try anything unless I have your consent."

"Vampire..." Oliver whispered, finally putting it together, though his brows furrowed once more. He turned his head slightly, looking at the green chlorite carving of Osiris, then followed the stone stare to the replica stone relief carving - one that depicted punishments the god had dolled out, including a story that Oliver had found quite interesting as a child. He looked back, a strange smile blossoming across his lips, "Here Rocky won't shut up about Zeus and it turns out he's not the only god in town, huh?" Harlan smiled back, his fingers still tracing tiny circles against Oli's skin, savoring the veins just underneath.

"Well, 'vampires' is a crude approximation. We are neither undead nor immortal, but we certainly are long-lived... more than humans and werewolves. And yes, we do enjoy the blessing of the Lord of Silence." Harlan's ears started developing into points, their auricles growing into wide triangles. "A blessing that I am willing to share with you and with Patroclus, should you decide to accept it." His bloodshot eyes were filled with a weird, somewhat twisted sweetness, as his nose started reshaping into something more akin to that of a bat. "But if you do, there is no going back. You will be a creature of the night until the day you die, just like me, my patron, and many others here in Yali."

There were many responses that the revelation of the vampires could inspire in humans; fear or anger were usually the most common, but Harlan knew instantly Oliver would not fall into either of those categories. His eyes were wide and full of wonder. He smelled... curious, excited, only very faintly anxious. His pupils had dilated as he took Harlan in, looking at the way his rich blond hair tapered into a fine, almost ashen colored fuzz where his cheeks met his ears. Oliver looked at him for several long moments until a sobering embarrassment made him look away, shaking his head.

"You're just doing this so we don't become werewolves. I can respect that, but I don't want to... mess anything up for you all. I know I haven't known you for very long, Harlan, but you're classy - damn classy. Your benefactor takes care of the museum I care about and keeps tabs on the city? I'm just a geek, a nerd, one that's a bit past my prime. I don't want to let you down, to diminish you. I promise, I can keep the secret." Oliver said softly. Deft fingers, however - ones that were now tipped with sharp claws - played with his beard, as Harlan's lips curled into a soft smile.

"That's true. But that's not the whole thing." A small sigh passed through his lips as he leaned over, placing a gentle kiss on Oli's lips. "Remember what I told you earlier, Oliver? Art needs a story, it needs meaning, and it needs intent. And that's exactly what I want to give you and your best friend: a way to contribute to the story of our beloved town. New meaning to your lives. A higher intent." His smile reached his eyes, as his expression mellowed out considerably. "I want to turn you into art. Allow you to shine as I feel like you should, Oliver. No more self-doubt, no more thinking you aren't good enough."

"Mmmm." Oliver all but purred, "You want to turn me into art?" he repeated, his smile growing quite bright.

"I can reshape you. If you let me," Harlan murmured back. "And then I'll let you do the same to your dear Patroclus. You've been thinking about making him yours since forever, right?"

“In a way, though I’m not sure how the puzzle pieces will fit, but...” Oliver smirked softly, heaving a breath, “Does it hurt?” he asked.

“Not unless I want it to, and I’m not a sadist,” Harlan replied. “I want you to enjoy this, Oliver.” His tongue, a bit longer and meatier than before, licked the security guard’s neck, tasting his aftershave. “You just need to say yes...” Oliver moaned as the tongue slicked his neck, his head tilting, presenting it to the larger guard. Oliver’s eyes were closed, his breathing deeper. Would Rocky forgive him? Would Rocky root him on? What Harlan had said made sense, and the idea of losing his job was not appealing.

“Yes.” The word was finite, certain, gentle and yet clear. Harlan didn’t reply, not with words: Oli felt twin stings in his neck, and then a series of gentle slurps, as the werewolf’s fingers started caressing his beard and the side of his face, playing with his ear, toying with his beard. Oli murmured softly, eyes still shut. There was something luxurious and indulgent about someone else playing with his beard, something that made him hard instantly... but the pressure on his neck was equally impressive, his flesh tensing up and a warm flush around the sting... Oli all but melted into Harlan’s arms, obviously enjoying himself.

As the warm, thick fluid that tasted like copper and iron and life itself poured down Harlan’s throat in dense rivulets, his body seemed to go through a change of his own that started causing his uniform to strain in places. His right arm wrapped around Oli’s back, supporting him, and it definitely felt and looked more muscular than it had been before; in the meantime, his hair started getting wilder and longer, turning into a proper mane, but that wasn’t the only way his body hair was going into overdrive.

Oli felt smaller and smaller in Harlan’s grip, almost as if he was shrinking, but it was far from that. Harlan’s perfect uniform shirt was untucking itself as the blond guard’s spine lengthened. His nice leather shoes were stretching and his dress socks had expanded to the point that they were looking lighter and lighter as the material became translucent. Oli was starting to tingle in his extremities, his toes and his fingers, a dopey smile on his face as he imagined that it was his blood that was giving Harlan this power, letting him grow simply by feeding him. Oli wondered if his blood was sweet or rich or savory. He murmured dreamily, reaching a hand up to caress one of Harlan’s pointed ears, finding it delightfully fuzzy on the backside. Feeling that touch, Harlan immediately stopped sucking, lapping the small cuts until they stopped bleeding a couple seconds later, and looked at Oli with concerned red eyes.

“Everything okay, Oliver?” he asked, his voice slightly slurred due to the ongoing mutations his facial structure was going through. His human features were still recognizable, but they were starting to twist into something beautifully, sensually bestial. And yet, the worry in his eyes was still genuine. “Am I hurting you?”

“N-no, not at all, feels great... I was just hoping I tasted good.” Oliver said, smiling as he gazed up at Harlan.

“I’ll let you taste my own blood soon, my dear Oliver. And then, you will be reborn,” Harlan replied before licking his scarlet-stained lips and once again leaning over to suck his colleague’s essence of life directly from his veins. Little by little, drop by drop, Oliver started to feel sleepy. Such was to be expected as he was exsanguinated. His body was running on less oxygen, less fuel, a drowsiness sweeping across him. Harlan’s benefactor had shared with him once that she considered the middle of the process to be the most enjoyable, when the

pressure was still high and the flow was rich, but it was important to bring Oliver as close to the brink of death as possible without actually killing him. There were often hidden bounties to bringing one as far as possible.

As Harlan kept sucking more and more blood, Harlan's footwear finally gave out - much to his chagrin, he liked those shoes a lot - revealing a fuzzy, misshapen, throbbing and slowly evolving mass where his human feet had been just a few minutes earlier. His body was mutating in ways that didn't match the kind of clothes a human being would normally wear, and - considering the sounds of ripping coming from his pants and shirt - those were going to be next. There was something intoxicating about changing while feeding. Perhaps it was that, unlike werewolves, the Varos rarely gave into instinct. Perhaps it was being surrounded by the rich history that Harlan understood on a much deeper level.

A stitch popped, followed by several more. The sleeve of Harlan's uniform shirt split out, revealing an undershirt equally strained. When the fabric underneath tore, bare skin was revealed. Oliver's eyes had grown still, a smile plastered on his face, his skin growing paler. He seemed so easy to hold, Harlan's clawed hands stretching into paws as his fingers elongated. A pressure was building beneath Harlan's armpits, the clothing growing far more cumbersome and suffocating by the second.

Harlan wasn't exactly a fan of ruining perfectly serviceable clothes like that. Usually, whenever he needed to go full primal, he made sure to get naked first; clothes created with the human form in mind, after all, didn't mesh well with giant, muscular anthropomorphic bats. That night however, was special: he was welcoming two new brothers under his wings - both metaphorically and literally - and that required something unique and outside the box. *Semel in anno licet insanire*, as the ancient Romans used to say.

The uniform seemed to pull apart, splitting out along the seams. Every inch of Harlan's body was elegant in its inhumanity. His ribs were meaty, covered in fine ashen colored fur. His pants sagged down over one of the most muscular asses that Rocky or Oliver could have ever laid eyes on. As Harlan's undershirt fell away, new flesh crept out from under his arms, spreading in rippling waves of webbed leather. The museum lights brought out the warmer chicory coloring of the skin, contrasting with the lighter tones on the fur sprouting across the guard's immense chest.

It would have been beautiful to Oliver had he been more conscious, but he floated in a limbo between the waking and the dead, eyes glazed, heart slowing, temperature dropping. It should have been painful but it was bliss, heaven, pleasure incarnate. Right above Harlan's exceptional butt, a small, triangular tail popped out from the end of his spine, looking almost incongruous before the leathery wings met just there, creating two powerful sails that would allow him to soar through the night sky. His hands, still mostly human but with much longer fingers and deadly claws, caressed Oliver's neck with sensuous, tender gestures as he once again stopped sucking his colleague's blood, looking at the half-dead human with an almost fatherly gaze.

"I still remember my siring so vividly..." he whispered, still mostly intelligible. His right index finger sliced the palm of his left hand open, as if he was using a scalpel; dense blood, of a red so deep it was almost black, started pouring out of the wound, staining his palm. "And now,

it's your turn, my brother. Drink, and be remade," he added, tilting his hand so that the first few drops of his tainted blood could fall right into Oli's agape mouth.

Three drops fell across his tongue, parched and motionless, rolling down the contour to dribble down the back of his throat. Oliver's muscles seemed to move in response, a little more vitality returning to him. His lips brushed Harlan's palm, collecting residue, staining his lips and the bottom most edge of his mustache a dark red. His tongue cleared the blood from his lips but they were stained a moment later again as he closed his lips over the wound. Harlan watched as Oliver seemed to regain his strength in the matter of a few heartbeats, suckling from the wound, drinking down the crimson flow. His fingers tightened against Harlan's skin, taking a firmer grip as he fed. The giant bat man nodded, his right hand caressing Oli's head affectionately.

"You're feeling it, aren't you, my dear Oliver?" he asked in a delicate murmur. "The hunger inside of you. Drink to your heart's content, my brother. As your blood is mine, so my blood is yours. From now on, only the nectar of life will truly satiate you... such is the blessing of the Lord of Silence." He sighed, his red eyes half-closed, as he enjoyed the throbbing and the stinging of his wound. "Soon, you will truly start feeling his effects... and I can't wait to see how splendid you're going to be."

"You're so fuzzy... and so big..." Oliver murmured, looking up at him as he suckled from his hand, his eyes slowly staining with the carnelian mark of his true fate, "And so handsome." Harlan's rubbery lips unfolded into a smile that showed a set of long, thin fangs.

"Trust my blood, and my gift," he whispered back, as his right wing wrapped around Oli's body in an intimate embrace for one long moment. "Before you know it, you will be my equal. A strong, proud, sexy Varos. And then..." his eyes glinted in anticipation. "You'll be able to turn Patroclus into your dark lover."

Steadily, Oliver began to grow strong again. His grip tightened, his sucking increased and then, at last, Harlan felt the tips of two new fangs grazing his palm. Oliver looked up with a different kind of hunger in his eyes, a hunger that came crashing over his gentle attitude. Oliver pushed up, grabbing onto Harlan's muzzled face, planting a beard rimmed kiss on him, his tongue probing the bat's lips. Oliver pressed his body against Harlan's with a waxing strength, the edges of his beard creaming outward as soft fuzz swept down his throat and up his cheeks. Even the fingers gripping Harlan's face grew more dangerous as Oliver's thick fingers developed claws, the keratin curving down into points.

"Mmh, careful there, my dear," Harlan said after breaking the kiss. He rubbed the front of the black jockstrap he was still wearing, the only garment left on his body, as his trapped erection throbbed and twitched inside of it. "Don't let the change control you. You should wait until you have fed at least once to go full primal. But for now..." His other hand started massaging Oli's prominent belly through the thin layer of cloth of his shirt. "Focus on yourself. On how you'd like to be. Humans tend to be... exceptionally pliable, as they are going to a dramatic shift like this one. Envision your ideal form, my sweet brother. Let this night truly be the moment you are reborn."

"It's up to me?" Oliver asked in surprise, his lips grazing along Harlan's muzzle, drifting down his neck before he started to kiss and suck the fur covered flesh, one clawed hand drifting to squeeze and grope Harlan's jockstrap, a deep growl of pleasure coming from the former

human. Harlan nodded. Under his fuzzy palm, he could already feel Oli's belly shifting under his clothes, as if his flesh had suddenly achieved the consistency of putty.

"You can't become a completely different person, but since you were so close to death, what is happening to you is akin to a rebirth..." the werebat murmured. "Focus on your best self, on the man you have always hoped you could become. Your body is a plaything of your mind, at least until your change is over. The words seemed to drift along Oliver's mind like a leaf landing on the surface of a river; drifting along eddies and currents, guided by unseen forces. It was only fitting that the guard began to change in subtle, fluid ways. Oliver's crimson eyes closed as he murmured softly, feeling the change as his heart circulated the tainted blood through his veins.

Oliver had become aware of how many years of his life had ticked by as he became more conscious of his body. A sore tailbone, a stiff lower back, a shoulder ache without cause... but all of it sank into oblivion, leaving him neutral in his body. He could feel his muscles, he could feel his flesh, he could feel the air current against his hair and beard, but that was it. He simply was - and it felt fantastic. Oliver pulled his head back from Harlan, his ears stretching into points as his lips tightened and pursed. His uniform was still tight, but it seemed to be rippling in different ways. The belly that Harlan had so fondly touched remained, but it reshaped. The perfectly round semi-sphere became boxier, the stockier angles indicating a lattice of muscles forming beneath the fat. Likewise, the chest of his uniform bulked out as his pectorals didn't sag as much.

While Harlan was far from Varos royalty, he had seen enough changes to know that most preferred to be lithe and supple, to regain their youth or the appearance of innocence. A smaller minority, like Harlan, leaned into the true strength of what they could be. Oliver was already standing taller, his shoulders broader, his arms thicker. A slight flex of his upper body caused his uniform shirt to pop free of the waistband, revealing the upper shelf of a hairy, meaty ass. Oliver had always been a bear, but now he seemed to be what the young called a muscle bear. Harlan caressed his changing colleague, his dexterous fingers playing with Oli's ears as they were reshaped and extended, becoming wide, sensitive triangles of flesh and cartilage.

"You're doing great, my beautiful Oliver..." he murmured enticingly, before once again sinking his teeth into his neck, sucking some of the thick, freshly-made Varos blood now coursing through his vein. It was as if that bite broke a barrier Oliver had not realized was there, his mind opening in a gasp. Oliver's moan revealed that his sharp canine teeth started to slowly extend into fangs. The world around him rushed and swirled as he sensed so much more, realizing that Harlan was cooler to the touch than he might have expected, but so was he now... But there was so much more to smell, to hear, to touch, to think.

"You are good at this..." Oli murmured, bearing his neck to his sire. Oliver closed his eyes again, picturing how surprised Rocky would be and how beautiful he would become under his influence. Harlan licked his lips, as the punctured skin on the side of the newly turned Varos' neck was already knitting shut.

"I'll teach you everything I know. Imagine the dozens, even hundreds of years of fun awaiting us." Harlan's clawed hand gently but wantonly squeezed Oliver's plump ass. "But now let us go, my fledgling. You need to show Patroclus your new and improved self. I'm sure he's going to be..." A moment of pause, as Harlan's red eyes shone. "Ecstatic."

Despite the fact that one of the security cameras was pointing right at the installation in front of which Harlan had just sired Oli, Rocky was sitting in the security annex none the wiser. It wasn't, however, because he was distracted or because he hadn't been doing his job properly. Despite his idiosyncrasies, the amateur bodybuilder was at least proud of the fact that he was pretty good at being a security guard. And yet, despite having stared at that very screen multiple times in the past twenty minutes or so, he hadn't noticed anything wrong with the feed. It was as if there was a barrier between his eyes and his brain that prevented him from realizing that Harlan had transformed into a giant bat man and had bitten and converted his best buddy.

You won't notice anything wrong with the security cameras for the next hour, someone had told him (but who? It must not have been important...), and Rocky had felt really good in obeying those words spoken in such a kind tone, sinking into their comforting, calming, maroon depths. The seed had taken root and so Rocky had not registered that Harlan had become a giant bat creature right before him, or that he had shared that gift with Oliver. Rocky hadn't even registered Oliver's approach to the annex, making the fact that the door clicked and opened a startling one.

"Oh, shit, Oli, do you want me to get a heart attack or—" the man said as he spun in his chair. Once his eyes landed on his friend, however, the sentence literally died in his throat as he almost choked on his own saliva. "Dude, what the?!" Oli was big. Not as big as Rocky was, of course, but he looked like a proper muscle-bear now, filling his uniform in ways that made Rocky's dick twitch inside the stretchy thong he was wearing under his pants. "Wait, did you... did you get yourself bitten by a werewolf yesterday and didn't tell me anything, or...?!" Rocky knew the effects of a werewolf bite weren't immediate, and that it usually took an entire day - and more often than not a pretty intense bout of fever - before the changes could manifest. Oliver looked perfectly normal when he had arrived at work earlier that night.

"Rocky..." Oliver said, moving in, reaching up to rest his hand on his coworker's cheek, smiling with warmth and... sharper teeth? "Oh Rocky, you were so right about our need to become something more but we had no idea what sort of choices were out there. This world is so much wider, so much more wondrous." Rocky's fingers trembled slightly as they touched the back of Oli's hand.

"You're... colder than usual..." he murmured. "D-did you change? What did you become, if not a werewolf?" His dark eyes looked confused, slightly alarmed, but most of all vulnerable. "You could have waited for me..." he murmured, sounding a bit hurt. Oliver's eyes looked tender at that as he leaned in and pressed a kiss to Rocky's lips. Despite his change in body temperature, his lips and his kiss were equally warm. When he broke the kiss, he caressed Rocky's cheek before letting his hand drift down to his chest, his stomach, and then his groin.

"I changed, just now. The opportunity came up and I couldn't turn it down. Besides, I think I can make it enjoyable even if I'm the one that corrupts you." Oliver grinned as he groped Rocky's package, a rich burgundy red leaking into his eyes as he looked at his partner. Rocky was panting, his mind fuzzy, pleasant shivers traveling up and down his spine.

“...Harlan?” he murmured, even though he already knew the answer. “Did he...?” But that wasn’t really important, not at that moment. Oli, his best friend, was now bigger, sexier and more confident than ever before. Whatever had happened to him, he had been transfigured by the process, and Rocky wanted nothing more than to lose himself in his splendid rust colored eyes. “W-what do I need to do?” he asked, his voice nothing more than a breath.

“Have you ever fantasized about me, Rocky? Like you did those big, strong men at the gym?” Oliver asked as his fingers started to unfasten Rocky’s uniform, taking the zipper from its already low position and drawing it down further. As Oli’s hand dropped, Rocky could see his nails darken from the color of quartz to a deep granite tone, stretching out and curving slightly into claws. Rocky gulped, trying to get rid of the knot stuck in his throat.

“I... y-yes... I did... jerk off thinking of you turning into a werewolf and becoming a sexy daddy...” he admitted, his olive skin getting flushed. “But damn, I... this is even better...” One of his hands scratched the side of his face, before he added, a bit bashful. “Like, I... I don’t know if you need to fuck me for this, but... can you do it anyway? Feels like the right thing, to be honest...” A gentle, warm, masculine laugh filled the air.

“If you had asked me a few hours ago, I think I would have been shocked and nervous, but now? I know you’re right, Rocky... I’m going to fuck you into a new existence.” Oliver purred, his hands moving faster than Rocky expected, his shoulders suddenly bared as his uniform jacket was pulled from his body. Rocky’s belt made a whizzing noise as it was unfastened and tugged out, snapping like a whip as Oliver tossed it away. He took more time and care to draw down Rocky’s pants, taking time to savor the luscious curves of his hips and the rather nice looking jockstrap he wore, leaving little to the imagination when it came to his partner’s ass. The baby blue pouch of the skimpy underwear started to darken, as a wet, damp spot appeared right where an erection was trying to fight its way out.

“Are you... gonna tell me what you are, now? Or is it gonna be a surprise?” Rocky asked. He couldn’t deny he was a bit scared by the suddenness of it all, by not knowing what was going to happen to him... but Oliver was still himself, he was still friendly and caring and attentive. And yet, he was clearly a better version of himself at the same time, free from the shackles that had been inhibiting him for all those years. “Just... be gentle, okay? I know you are, but... I have to admit, I feel so overwhelmed right now. Make me feel like I’m making the right choice, okay?”

The words sat with Oliver for a long moment as he reprocessed what had just happened to him. There was such a power and a vigor to his form, but Rocky was right. It had been sudden, it had been a surprise. It was all new and he hadn’t even told Rocky the truth of what he had become. He nodded slowly, taking one of Rocky’s hands, kissing the back of it slowly and with tender care. When he looked back up at Rocky, not only were Oliver’s eyes a richer red, but his lips parted to reveal fangs. His ears shifted to pointier tips, tapering back with a slight curve that was uncommon to werewolves.

“Harlan introduced me to the fact that there were night dwellers, other creatures, therianthropes of all sorts... But he is a Varos, what you and I would have known as a vampire. I am like him now, but it’s so much more than I expected. We aren’t just blood suckers.” Oliver grinned, “In fact, I could become the best daddy for you I can, even if I stop aging so fast.” Rocky let out a small gasp.

“Vampires?” he repeated, like he was savoring that word. “Oh, lord, what would my yaya think? God bless her soul. She was always talking about the lamias...” The big man shook his head. “But to hell with that. Do it, Oli. I want to be like you...” A small smile appeared on his lips, his eyes a bit watery. “And I want to be with you, if you’d like that. I mean, least we can do is to try and make it work, right? We’ve been best buddies for so long we’re basically married already!” Oliver purred again at that, grinning a bit more.

“Married, huh? More than just work husbands?” Oliver grinned, sliding a claw under the waistband of Rocky’s jockstrap before he pulled his finger outward. The waistband snapped, the blue pouch flinging free of Rocky’s package. “There’s no going back if I do this... We’ll be together for a very, very long time.” Oliver said, using his other clawed hand to pet the hair on Rocky’s most ample, muscled chest. Rocky’s fingers guided Oli’s fingers until they were playing with the golden ring hanging from one of his puffy, light brown nipples.

“I mean, Oli, I was perfectly willing to become a werewolf with you, do you really think I’d say no to this? And besides, if we don’t become werewolves we won’t even have to find another job. Who’s more qualified for working night shifts than two vampires, after all? Well, three, if we count Harlan... I really have to thank that cheeky bastard afterwards, by the way.”

“Me too, but right now I want to thank you for being so kind to me all these years, for seeing the potential I had, and I want to give you a gift to thank you for that.” Oliver said, leaning in to kiss Rocky again. The size disparity between them had diminished, but to Rocky’s surprise he felt one of his dress shoes suddenly grow loose and slip off his foot. A sideways glance revealed that Oliver’s foot had stretched out, gaining claws and becoming more dexterous. Oliver grinned, taking off Rocky’s other shoe, allowing him to use his flexible foot to tug off the pants that had pooled around his ankles.

“C-can I... ask you something? About this?” Rocky’s voice had a shy undertone that felt almost out of place, considering how big and imposing he was. “If you have to suck my blood for the magic to work, c-could you... could you suck one of my daddy tits instead of my neck? I kinda have a, um... fetish for guys playing with ‘em, heh.” Oliver’s response to Rocky’s statement was an almost greedy grin.

“One thing Harlan didn’t tell me until the very end is that when you awaken as a Varos, your mind will shape your form. If you got a thing about your big pecs, they’re probably going to get really big...” Oliver grinned, his clawed fingers latching onto one of Rocky’s nipple rings to tug and then twist the metal. Rocky whined, so overcome with lust it was starting to get difficult to talk. With clumsy movements he climbed on the table next to him, spreading his legs, showing his shaved ass and the loose dark pink hole nestled between his muscular butt cheeks, droplets of sweat running down his forehead.

“Please, Oli... fuck me. Suck my blood. Turn me into a sexy monster like you.” His dick - average in length, but absolutely massive in girth - twitched in response. “I’m so horny I might bust a nut any minute now, otherwise...”

“Rocky...” Oliver’s words were more felt than heard, his eyes such an intense red that they seemed to be pulsating, making Rocky’s brain throb and his vision strobe, “You’re hornier than you have ever been, your entire body aroused, but you’ll only cum when I tell you to...” Oliver said as he moved over to his partner, never breaking eye contact even as he started to move his hands across Rocky’s most perfect body.

“Y-yes...” the bodybuilder murmured without even realizing it. It was like those words were wrapped around his cock and balls like invisible chains now. No matter how or why, he now knew he couldn't cum unless Oliver told him he could, and the very thought made him, if possible, even more lustful. “Can't cum... won't cum...” he murmured, like he was repeating a mantra.

Oliver grinned at that, moving to nuzzle and kiss Rocky's neck, but that wasn't his goal. He traced his kisses down across Rocky's shoulder, then his chest, moving ever closer to his nipple. As he did, his ears seemed to be creeping up through his dark brown hair, the point of his nose becoming more defined. The fuzz at the edge of his beard crept higher on his cheeks and his brows got thicker. He seemed almost like a mirage as his own uniform, at least what was left of it after Harlan, was discarded to reveal an incredibly hairy body. The curls were thick, extending well beyond his chests and pits, crossing his back and shoulders as well. It was far from what most would have considered to be a vampire's body, but Rocky could already see something else, something animal straining to break free from Oliver.

“You look so sexy...” the bodybuilder murmured dreamily. From his vantage point, he could see Oli's feature start to distort and develop as his new true form was starting to emerge from under his skin: his the tip of his nose now pointed upwards, his nostrils elongating and thinning at the same time, as his lips darkened and started to become rubbery in texture. Even the hands roaming up and down his body felt bigger, Oli's fingers now stronger, more disproportionate, but still extremely tender.

“I want to feel sexy for you too...” Oliver said, rubbing the blunt, broad head of a very hard, very aroused cock along Rocky's shaved butt cheeks. As he did, he leaned in, running an almost oddly long tongue across his chest, teasing his nipple ring before those rubbery lips began to close on the sensitive flesh. Oliver's arms continued to move, massaging Rocky's sides. Unencumbered by the uniform, a membrane of thin but strong, leathery flesh began to work its way down from under Oliver's arms, webbing and folding as the flesh extended. The thick curls of hair across his body began to straighten and flatten, becoming a softer, slicker coating of fine fur. White stars danced in front of Rocky's eyes, his brain enveloped in a red mist.

“Please, Oli, stop... stop teasing me like that...” Small tears streamed down the sides of his face. “I'm so horny and I can't cum, this is torture...” And yet, of course, he was enjoying it immensely; but the best thing about waiting to be fucked and sucked by the gorgeous beast Oli was transforming into, was knowing that he would soon join him as a fellow creature of the night. That feel alone caused his thick cock to start dribbling a veritable torrent of precum.

Oliver resisted the urge to lick up the precum, an inhuman tongue licking at his lips. His face popped and snapped slightly as his mouth pushed forward into a muzzle, the fur creeping around his eyes. His already broad and thick shoulders only widened and sharp, faintly curved fangs escaped from his lips, glinting in the glow of the security monitors. As Oliver's nose shifted, he could smell so much more about Rocky; he could smell his sweat, his fear, his anticipation, and his lust. He murmured in delight, letting it all ensnare his senses. He let the aroma breathe like a fine wine before he swooped in.

In a single moment, Rocky felt his well stretched hole filled with a meaty member and felt the sudden spike of sharp fangs pierce the skin and muscle of his breast. Hungry lips closed around his fat, erect nipple. The fangs withdrew, the perforations allowing iron rich blood to bead

and leak out. Oliver shivered at that, lapping at the wound before he began to suck and slurp, tugging and drawing on it. The sudden change in pressure combined with unique enzymes in his saliva only encouraged the blood to flow, a silky wetness enveloping Rocky's chest.

Rocky was in heaven. He was a bottom by nature, and also because his dick was usually deemed too thick for penetration by his potential partners. But being fucked bareback while having his fat tit sucked was basically his favorite thing ever to do during sex, and the fact that he was doing it with Oli, that Oli was now a sexy vampire daddy and that he too was going to become like him soon... his balls twitched and throbbed violently, but there was no release, not until Oli said so. In that moment, Rocky realized who he belonged to now: Oliver was his sire and his master, his fangs sublime, his dick pure perfection.

Gulp by gulp, Oliver was feeling stronger and stronger. His wings grew to his elbows and then his wrists, his broad back gaining a taper point as they took deeper anchor. His ass cheeks pulled apart as fur swept across them, but his fur coat was coming in thicker and fuzzier than Harlan's had. Even his bat shaped muzzle was wooly and wild, pointed ears popping up from the top of his head. He continued to suck and drink, ramming eight inches of cock into Rocky, then ten, then more. He gaped his partner wide, red eyes half lidded, gazing up. Oliver felt powerful, yes, but he felt an enthusiasm deep inside for what Rocky would become... He was popping Rocky's proverbial cherry as a Varos and unleashing him to the night.

The stronger Oliver felt, the weaker and woozier Rocky was becoming. His eyes were already cloudy, he was hearing a low hum in his ears, and he could feel his heartbeat getting slower and lazier. *Even if Oliver has been turned into a monster and he's just feeding on me, that would still be a great way to go*, he thought with a brain that felt too heavy to formulate anything more complex than that. A vague, crooked smile appeared on his lips, as he managed to lift a hand with a supreme effort and caressed the mutating face of his friend. "This is... so good..." he murmured, panting between words. His ass and tits had never felt a higher pleasure than the one he was experiencing in that very moment. Oliver tenderly lifted his head from Rocky's chest for only a moment, meeting eyes with him.

"Cum for me, my love, give me everything..." He whispered, grinding deep in Rocky's ass before his bat head went back to sucking and drinking blood from the wound on the human's chest. Suddenly, Rocky felt as if his body had remembered how to orgasm. Feeling the rush of cum flowing through his impossibly hard cock was so intense it caused him to wince in pain.

"Uh... uuh... aaangh!" he moaned and groaned as spurt after spurt of dense semen hit Oliver's furred chest, staining his pelt. "F-fuck, Oli, I'm so... sorry..." Rocky managed to murmur, before even the mere idea of talking made him too dizzy to go on. The afterglow and the lack of blood were an almost lethal combination; he felt like his mind was starting to drift towards a cold, endless, comfortable darkness. Oliver indulged himself by massaging Rocky's thick semen into the unusually thick fur on his chest, ensuring that he was stained by the smell of his lover before he reached up and used a claw to slash a cut laterally across his chest.

As Rocky's strength ebbed, he felt his upper torso lifted, shortening the distance between Oliver's cock which remained firmly impaled in his ass and the thick, fur lined nipple that was pushing between his lips. A rich, metallic tang blossomed in his mouth with such intensity that it shook Rocky from his near death experience.

Rocky's tongue tasted red. Strong, sanguine, wild. The color of passion and life itself. He had felt too weak to even move or speak less than then seconds earlier, but now his lips greedily suckled on the wound, gulping down Oli's life essence as if it was the ambrosia of the gods itself. He even attempted to massage Oli's massive dick with his anus, gently flexing his muscular butt cheeks to provide some stimulation.

"That's it, drink from daddy and grow strong..." Oliver purred, a huge clawed hand holding Rocky's head to his chest. Oliver closed his eyes, his face in a rapturous bliss that came with reforging his lover into something new, something better. He knew their attraction would remain, their bond, their friendship, but something new would sprout too. Already he could feel Rocky's body accepting his gift, his scent shifting beneath the haze of cologne he wore.

"This is..." Rocky mumbled between one slurp and the other, his mouth stained with deep, dark red. "I can feel it... fuck, I'm... your blood is changing me..." The bodybuilder doubled his effort to make Oliver cum as he felt his insides tingling, his brain on fire, his eyes pulsating.

For several minutes, Oliver had been the one in charge. As he felt an unnatural grip around his cock, however, he let out a surprised gasp and then a moan that was right back to his classic self. He felt new muscle groups forming around his cock that clearly had not been there before. Rocky's will was guiding his corruption and its first target seemed to be milking him. Oliver's wings went wide, a snap of air gusting around them as his wings were revealed. Oliver gasped more and more, starting to fuck frantically, barely able to pull his cock out of Rocky's ass long enough to thrust in again.

The stronger he felt - and it was a different kind of strength than the one he had always felt when pushing his body and muscles to the limit. This one was more primal, as if it was pure energy coursing through his veins - the more Rocky was gaining his confidence and bravado back. His hands grabbed his bara tits, and with a cocky grin, he could feel them fill up and grow - not too much, but just enough to be notable and be slightly disproportionate compared to the rest of his body - under his touch. "Fuck yeah..." he murmured, licking his lips, slurping down more blood. His eyes were slowly filling with red and maroon, his humanity being eroded second after second.

"You're so big, Rocky. You were the best example of manliness I ever knew before, but now you're bigger and better still..." Oliver praised him, petting his hair, moaning as he fed and grew. Oliver moaned unexpectedly, gasping, "And you chose... you chose me!" Oliver declared before he suddenly came, thick webs of semen suddenly erupting deep inside of Rocky's ass, flooding deeply into him. As if the cum of the Varos was another nectar of life and change, Rocky could feel his butt cheeks growing, becoming more cushiony as a generous amount of fat turned his ass into a giant bubble butt, a veritable shelf of supple flesh. His arms grew larger, veins enticingly popping out, and his fingers twitched as they sprouted sharp dark red talons for the first time.

"Yes. I'm yours, Oli... tonight and all the nights we'll spend together from now on..." Rocky murmured, panting, red eyes staring into red eyes. Oliver gazed at Rocky with such pride, his lover managing to pull off his chest long enough for them to share that knowing, wordless bond. As Oliver connected with Rocky, he saw his partner's canine teeth sharpen and stretch, unsheathing them fully into the fangs that he would wield in his new life.

The urge to build something bigger and taller than anything else was nothing new, but steel and glass had become the hallmarks of modern architectural achievement. Skyscrapers were synonymous with big cities and Yali was no exception. The skyline had been constantly evolving since the seventies, but until recently the Tuffin Spire had been the crown jewel. While not the tallest, it retained an unparalleled view. Most of Yali was shrouded in a glowing fog that radiated the oranges, blues and greens that made up the city lights, but twelve other towers rose up from the fog like sentinels in the night.

The penthouse office of the Tuffin had a panoramic view - not only was every wall made of glass, but at the very center of the room was an iridian wall of colored glass bottles arranged into a prismatic rainbow of hues. Some of the bottles were recent, custom pieces. Others were centuries old, meticulously cleaned and restored before being placed into the display. It was beautiful, timeless, and for a vampire it was the ultimate boast. The sheer abundance of glass told everyone that the vampire did not fear the sun, that something so fragile could be kept perfectly safe. It was a symbol that extended out to the rest of the office with glass tables, crackle glazed glass pieces and even bowls of polished jewel toned glass teardrops.

With the faintest of rumbles, the artistically engraved steel doors to the elevator slipped open, revealing Harlan and unveiling the view of the stunning office and the night sky to him. The man walked out of the elevator, his polished shoes clicking against the floor. He was wearing a black suit that looked perfectly tailored for his body, with an equally black shirt and a silk tie of the very same shade of scarlet as blood. His blond, wavy hair had been tied into a ponytail, and his hands were wrapped into a pair of thin leather gloves that seemed almost painted on them. Harlan closed his right hand into a fist and placed it on his chest, right over his heart, before bowing his head.

"My queen," he murmured, in a tone dripping reverence. His words hung in empty air for a moment before a faint shadow moved behind the iridian wall of glass bottles. A woman stepped out, her arms and legs long and elegant, her body shapely. Her hair was a rich sienna, done up with a hairstyle that was intricate and felt from another era, though specifically which one was beyond Harlan. Her fingernails were just a bit too long and a bit too sharp to be human, each one painted a steely gray. Her eyes were a dark merlot color as they looked Harlan over and a small smile came to her painted lips.

"Harlan, you smell of success." The woman commented, her smile growing slightly. Harlan still didn't raise his head, stuck in his slight bow, but he did allow himself the luxury of a tiny grin.

"You know I'm extremely thorough, my queen," he replied as he allowed his irises to be filled with rich burgundy red. "Your grip on the city museum has been secured, as per your wishes. The two new fledglings are extremely promising, if I may say so myself."

"I expected nothing less. You are a fine sire, Harlan, capable of awakening some of the most unique Varos to our cause." the woman said, gesturing with one elegant hand to a pair of chairs set on opposite sides of a glass table with a centerpiece of colored glass beads in the center, "And we were fortunate to have the time to act before they allied themselves with the

wolves. Your efficiency is as appreciated as ever.” Harlan silently pulled a chair towards him, inviting his patron to take seat.

“I would have never allowed the lycan plague to fester in a place that is so dear to you, my queen,” Harlan replied, the nostrils of his sharp nose exhaling. “They have already claimed so much of Yali for themselves, no need for their dirty paws to get too greedy.”

“I must admit, part of me is almost envious...” She said languidly as she lowered into a seat across from Harlan, “Every other day there is some story about them in the press, like that puppy mill they have in Colorado, that university... But we are patient. Let them test the waters to see if the world is ready for us.”

“I guess shunning the spotlights is more our style, isn’t it?” Harlan murmured with a good-natured smile that showed the tips of his sharp canines. “I’ll gladly let those uncultured mutts take the brunt of the public opinion, for what it’s worth. At least they’ll be useful at something,” he added with a slight scoff.

“Do you think anyone will know my name one day, my darling Harlan? Do you think they will utter the name Lillian with as much reverence as you do?” she asked curiously, a bit of a sparkle in her eyes. Harlan stared at the woman with his eyelids slightly lowered, as his smile widened.

“Only a fool wouldn’t pay you the respect you deserve, my queen. Yali literally owes its fortune to you, after all. I can assure you, all those werewolves down there will learn to fear you as they should, in due time.” His eyes stared at his gloved hands for a second. “As for the fledglings, I will make sure to whip them into shape until they are... presentable enough to be introduced to you. At the moment, they are more like diamonds in the rough than anything else, as you might imagine.” Lillian looked at Harlan carefully, one eyebrow arching.

“What aren’t you saying? I sense more investment than I would have expected.” Lillian considered. For a split second, Harlan’s carefully built facade of polite perfection almost cracked. Almost.

“I imagine working alongside them in the past few weeks caused me to develop a fondness of sorts for some of their... proclivities,” he cautiously admitted. “They are both currently living in my penthouse, so that I can keep a closer eye on them and... smooth the rough edges off, so to speak.” Lillian’s smile returned.

“My dear Harlan, have you gone soft?” She asked, the remark allowed to cut for only a moment before her eyes returned to a more natural shade, “I am pleased. Do not get me wrong, your work ethic is something I wish more of my men would demonstrate, but you deserve to have a little pliability when it comes to your home life.” Harlan sighed, his eyes closing for a second or two.

“Maybe I have gone soft, my queen. It’s just that... after all these years alone, solitude started to take its toll. Having someone like those two in my life is...” Another smile, a smaller, more vulnerable one, appeared on his lips. “It’s nice. But I promise you that this will not impede my work in any way, of course.”

“You are most correct as always, my dear Harlan.” Lillian said, nodding more to herself than him, “For the next two weeks, you do not have any work. I want you to rest up, perhaps polish those rough edges of theirs?” she said before smiling faintly again. Harlan nodded.

“Not being able to see you for two entire weeks feels like a dagger being plunged into my heart, my queen,” he said, sounding quite sincere. “But I will endure that pain and make sure the fledglings are trained properly.”

“Oh, I said no work for two weeks. I fully expect a progress report on your fledgelings during that time. We can share a bottle of Dudognon Heritage Cognac that was gifted to me recently while you give me the juicy details.” Lillian smiled before she rose to her feet, “For now, return to your penthouse. The sun waits for no one.” Harlan, likewise, stood up, before he gently grabbed one of Lillian’s perfectly manicured hands and placed a gentle kiss on its back.

“I’ll eagerly wait for our next meeting, then. May the nights be gentle, my queen,” he said, before walking in silence towards the steel doors of the elevator. Her eyes remained on him until the engraved double doors rumbled quietly shut and he descended through the tower. Lillian turned slowly, walking with an almost languid pace to the wall of glass bottles. Her hand slipped up over the colorful contours before resting on one of the plum purple colored bottles. It lacked some of the molding of intricate extrusions the newer bottles boasted, but to her it was a touchstone. That particular bottle had been from the prohibition, from her human life, from the night she had become something other than human.

Her fingers grazed the glass as she kept walking until she couldn’t reach back far enough and they slipped free. It was only a few more steps before she stood in front of the floor to ceiling wall of glass looking over across the city. The skyscrapers were built in the same rainbow hues of glass as her bottles were. Fog swirled and drifted through the streets, obscuring most of the buildings below. The elevated rail subway cars snaked through the fog like fireflies, their headlights persistent. It was a beautiful city, one Lillian had helped to shape over the decades. It was a city of art and culture, of creation and expression. Harlan had been sired by her, and in turn he had sired two new vampires. It would be fascinating to see what they developed into as they matured.

The moment of tranquility was pierced by a small but sharp point of pain at the edge of her vision. The earliest morning sunlight was starting to paint the horizon. Lillian inhaled slowly, held the breath, then exhaled. She knew Harlan would have no difficulty getting home before it was too late. She only had to make the descent down to the more enclosed floor she called her home. Lillian turned sharply on her heel, moving over to the elevator before summoning it back up. As she waited, her fingers moved to brush a touch panel just above the elevator keypad.

The windows flickered, the perfectly clear glass suddenly turning to a dark milky brownish red like dried blood. The polarizing wouldn’t be enough to completely protect a Varos from the sunlight, but if anything were to summon her back up, it bought her time. Precautions had to be taken. The elevator doors rumbled open again and Lillian stepped in, turning around to face her office. She admired the view, her collection, the aesthetic as a whole before the doors closed on another night in Yali, Illinois.