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The Feast of Succession


Nyxara, The Huntress
2
6
Melee Catgirl Shadowmancer
Signature Monster
An ancient predator of the Moonless Court. Nyxara pursues marked prey without rest and may shelter her Bearer within herself when threatened. Those she accepts are guarded with frightening possessiveness. Those she rejects rarely survive the introduction.
2
6
The Gentle Cullet
5
arshfolk Culper
ectangle: Bresca is a defensive
whose extraordinary internal
llows her to shelter allies and
enemies alike. She responds
hysical affection, and prom-
es of food. the introduction.
2
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Mantis Courte
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The Feast of Succession

A Vore Novella

by
Brazzel

art by
SeekGr

edited by
LunarVulp

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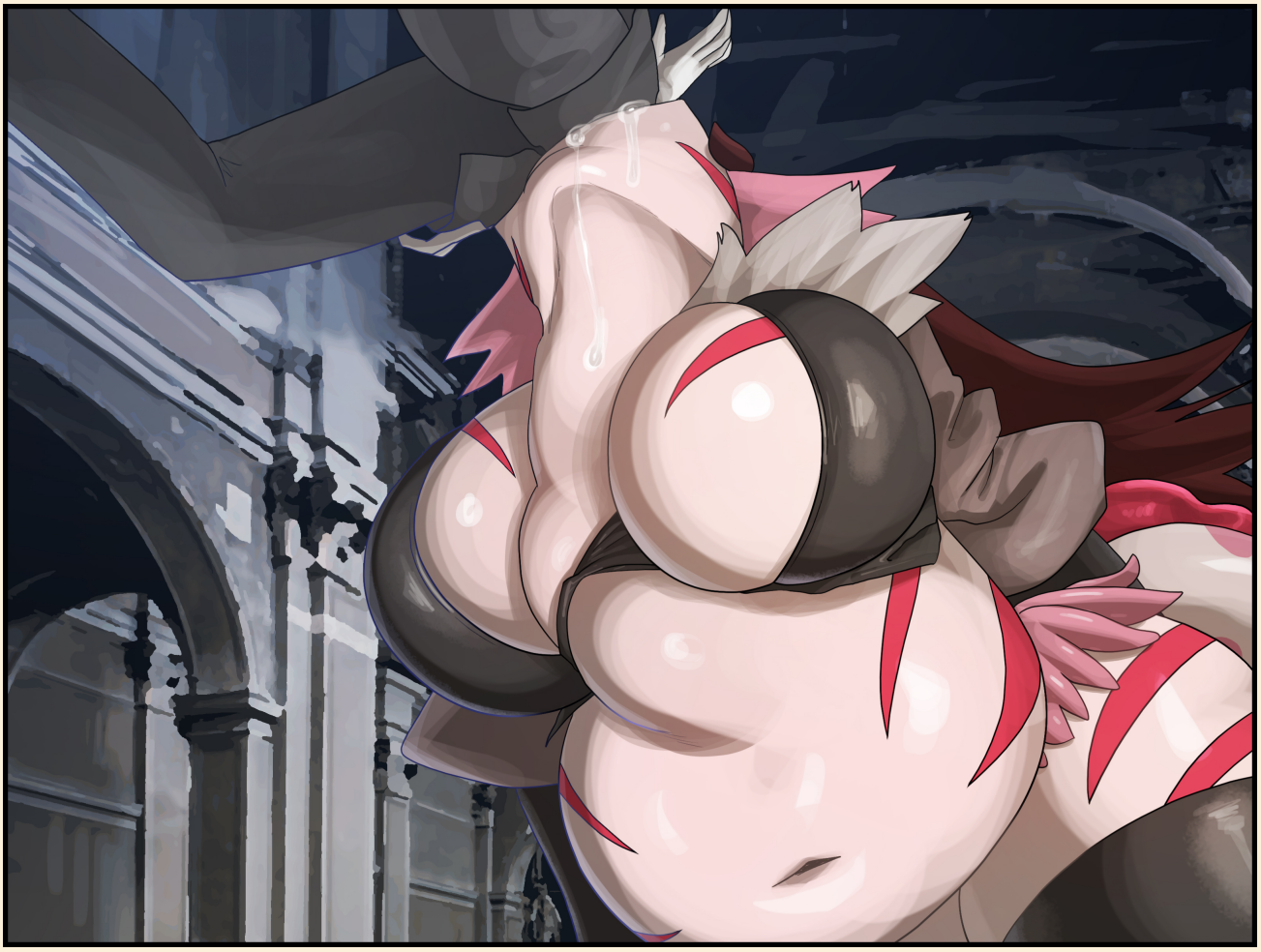
Book 1

Johnny cringed as Nyxara bent down, putting a clawed hand on his head. Her eyes bore into his, unblinking.

"You are our Bearer," she said in the tone one usually reserves for children. "The Feast of Succession is a game that is played every thousand years to determine who will rule over the Monster Realm. Each Monster has a Bearer—again, that's you—who directs them in battle against other Bearers, collecting the cards of the vanquished until none remain."

Okay, so he was definitely on drugs.

The First Feast



“Don’t celebrate yet,” Nyxara snapped. “He’s still playing cards inside her.”

Johnny’s hand froze halfway to the deck at his belt.

Across the ruined chapel, Bresca crouched among the splintered pews with one hand braced against the floor and the other spread possessively across her swollen stomach. Thirty seconds earlier, Cassian Vale had been standing beneath the broken rose window, laughing at Johnny’s inexperience. Now the opposing Bearer was a restless shape beneath the pale membrane of Bresca’s big belly, folded tightly enough that Johnny could distinguish the blunt press of a shoulder, the jut of a knee, and one desperate hand sliding over the stomach’s inner wall.

It had *seemed* conclusive.

Bresca had caught him. Bresca had swallowed him. Johnny had watched the last polished boot disappear between her jaws before she tipped back her head and forced the struggling mouthful down with three deep gulps.

“He’s inside her,” Johnny said.

“Yes.” Nyxara’s upper lip curled, exposing one long ivory fang. “That is what I just said.”

She stood between Johnny and the remains of the altar, one clawed hand extended. Calling her a ‘catgirl’ would have been like calling a tiger ‘an unusually large house pet’, but that was the description on her card.

Nyxara was nearly seven feet tall, with long digitigrade legs wrapped in sleek midnight fur from her toes to the middle of her calves. The rest of her body was mostly bare bronze skin, though the same fur climbed her forearms like opera gloves and swept in a dark ridge along her spine. A ceremonial harness of lacquered leather crossed her breasts and ribs, joined by rings of tarnished gold that chimed softly whenever she moved. Her nipples were pierced, framed by the leather rig rather than obscured by it.

Two tall ears rose through her mane of black hair. Behind her, two heavy tails lashed in contrary rhythms. One ended in a plume of soft black fur. The other tapered into a crescent of exposed bone.

Nyxara was beautiful, but cold. Johnny had been terrified of her since the moment she’d jumped out of a card and told him he had to fight in an ancient death battle.

“Once a Bearer has been taken past the throat, the claiming monster begins the Final Course,” she said. “Until it ends, they retain their hand.”

“You could’ve mentioned that before.”

“I did.”

“No you did not. You said, ‘Make the fat one eat him.’”

“I was simplifying. You asked me to simplify, Bearer.”

Bresca gave a jittering moan.

Her fingers dug into the generous softness of her abdomen. Unlike Nyxara's cutting feline elegance, Bresca had broad, indulgent curves. She was a Marshfolk: some impossible union of woman, salamander and deep-sea flower with enormous hips, thick thighs and glossy coral skin fading to creamy white across her front. Translucent fins framed her round face and fluttered along her forearms, each threaded with veins of warm pink light.

Most striking was her underside. From the hollow of her throat to the lower swell of her belly, her skin was milk-pale and faintly translucent. Johnny had watched Cassian descend through her in smeared silhouette—head, shoulders, kicking legs—until Bresca's body accepted him into the hanging weight of her stomach.



She looked slow and soft until she opened her mouth. Then her cheeks unfolded wider than any human face should permit, revealing a deep violet maw lined not with teeth but with overlapping muscular

ridges built to grip and pull. Her tongue was broad and adhesive. Cassian's final attempt to escape had ended when it wrapped around his waist.

Now those wide lips parted in a troubled gasp.

Something flashed inside her. Blue-white light shone through the curve of her stomach, illuminating Cassian's cramped silhouette. His hand had stopped searching blindly. It was holding something rectangular.

A card.

"There," Nyxara hissed.

The card burned like a lantern beneath Bresca's skin. Symbols appeared around the trapped Bearer, too sharp and geometric to belong inside living flesh.

Johnny tore his deck from its case. The cards had been blank when he found them three nights ago, stuffed into a cedar box beneath the loose floorboards of his uncle's house. They had since acquired names, illustrations and paragraphs of cramped silver lettering that seemed determined to rearrange themselves whenever he tried to read them.

"What's he playin'?"

"Assume it will be unpleasant."

"That's not helpful."

"It was not meant to be."

Across the chapel, Cassian's signature monster began to laugh.

She had been standing motionless beneath the shattered rose window since her Bearer was swallowed, her four hands folded demurely at her waist. Johnny had mistaken her stillness for surrender.

Now the creature unfurled.

Her name was Veyrel of the Ivory Scythes, and she had the lush, decadent shape of a court dancer sculpted from pearl and insect shells. Pale human skin covered her face, throat and the opulent curves of her torso, but iridescent plates overlapped her shoulders, hips and long abdomen. Two elegant human arms emerged beneath her collarbones.

Below them rested a second pair, longer and jointed, each ending in a serrated mantis blade she had kept folded against herself like the sleeves of a gown.

Petal-shaped wings opened behind her with a flutter of silk. They were too small to carry her but large enough to frame her body in layers of violet, rose, and poisonous green. Her narrow waist flared into armored hips, and from beneath them extended six slender legs tipped with needle points. Each touched the floor delicately, granting her the posture of a woman in heels.

Her face was beautiful. Heart-shaped. Symmetrical.

Then she smiled, and her lower jaw separated down the middle. Fine black mandibles unfolded from behind her painted lips, wet with strands of silver saliva.

“There you are,” Veyrel crooned toward Bresca’s belly. Her voice had the soft, musical cadence of someone coaxing a frightened lover from beneath a bed. “I was wondering when you would remember your lessons, Cassian.”

The card inside Bresca flared.

A word struck Johnny’s mind without passing through his ears.

PURGATION.

Bresca lurched.

Her stomach pulled inward around Cassian with a deep, visible clench. His silhouette compressed until his arms were pinned against his chest. For a heartbeat, Johnny thought the card had failed.

Then the contraction reversed.

A violent ripple climbed from Bresca’s belly to her chest. Her throat bulged. She swallowed convulsively, trying to force the struggling weight back down, but another spasm drove Cassian upward by inches.

“No,” Bresca whimpered.

She pressed both hands beneath the bulge as though she could hold him in place. Her gills flared crimson. The chapel filled with vivid internal sounds as her body fought the magic burning inside it.

Veyrel took one delicate step forward.

Nyxara's bone-bladed tail struck the stone in warning.

"Johnny. Find '**Seal the Lower Gate'**."

He fanned his hand open. Painted eyes, fangs, claws and fragments of impossible anatomy stared back at him.

"Which one is that?"

"The one titled 'Seal the Lower Gate'."

"They're written in a dead fuckin' language!"

"You understood Purgation!"

"It shouted itself into my skull!"

Bresca gagged. Cassian's head-shaped bulge reached the base of her throat.

Veyrel skittered toward them.

One instant she stood beneath the rose window. The next she crossed half the chapel, six pointed legs clicking over stone. Her wings streamed behind her like a torn bridal veil, and her scythed arms opened wide.

Nyxara intercepted her.

The collision cracked the floor.

Nyxara caught one ivory blade between both clawed hands while the second swept toward her ribs. Her crescent tail snapped around, striking Veyrel's forearm hard enough to scatter chips of pearlescent shell. Veyrel spun with the impact, six legs carrying her through the turn, and drove a human fist into Nyxara's stomach.

Nyxara folded slightly. Veyrel's mandibles spread beside her face.

"You smell newly woken," the mantis woman whispered. "How embarrassing. Did the boy pull you from a dusty attic?"

Nyxara headbutted her.

Veyrel reeled, laughing as black blood ran from one nostril.

Behind them, Bresca vomited Cassian's arm. It emerged slick and trembling from between her violet lips, fist still clenched around the blazing card. Bresca caught his wrist with both hands and tried to

shove him back, but the magic had turned every convulsion against her. His head followed, hair plastered across his face. Then his shoulders.



He drew breath with a ragged scream.

“Do something!” Johnny shouted.

“I am doing something!” Nyxara raked her claws across Veyrel’s breastplate. “You are the Bearer. Bear!”

Johnny looked down at his cards.

One illustration shifted beneath his thumb. A hand grasped around a snake..

The words beneath it became briefly legible.

MAKE THEM GASP.

Close enough.

He ripped it free.

“How do I play this?” he yelled

“Pay the cost!”

“Cost?”

Veyrel ducked beneath Nyxara’s claws and drove the blunt edge of one scythe into her side. Nyxara struck the floor on one knee. Veyrel vaulted over her, wings flashing open, her body angled toward Johnny.

He lifted the card and thought about playing it.

Silver lettering ignited along the card’s edges. For a moment, his body flooded with energy like he had just slammed twelve Red Bulls all at once. The energy was cold, then hot, spreading through his limbs before concentrating…

…on his crotch.

Johnny’s knees buckled as he bent double. His cock twitched against the front of his ripped jeans, painfully rubbing against the denim until he reached in and brought it to his waistband. His eyes watered as an overwhelming pressure enveloped his shaft. It was like he was being squeezed in the palm of a giantess.

“What the fuck?” he yelled, rolling away from Veyrel.

Nyxara intercepted, clawing at the mantis’s chest. Veyrel’s skin itself must have been armored because all she succeeded in doing was slapping the mantis’s tit.

But she wasn’t getting the worst of it.

Halfway out of Bresca’s mouth, Cassian Vale was braying like a donkey. Bresca had one hand over his face, covering his eyes as her other hand worked itself against the outline of his cock in her throat. Every few seconds, she would gulp, and Cassian’s whole body would shake as he tried to free himself from her torment. One gloved hand, still holding a card, spasmed as Bresca laughed.

“I like this one,” she said, each word vibrating her throat enough to make Cassian yelp. “He’s so squirmy.”

She flicked the head of his cock through her throat and Cassian’s eyes crossed. He pursed his lips, earning a sympathetic whinge from Johnny as he came, pumping his seed into the gullet of the monster, which she happily swallowed.

He let the ‘Purgation’ card fall from his fingers.



Johnny was about to pump his fist when he saw that there was a second card already waiting in his other hand.

"Oh," Nyxara said.

Johnny did not like the sound of that.

Cassian pressed the new card flat against Bresca's tongue.

EXCHANGE OF COURSES.

The world lurched.

Bresca vanished.

One moment she knelt among the broken pews with half a man protruding from her mouth. The next, her immense body collapsed inward, dragged through the card as though sucked down a drain.

Cassian struck the floor coughing, coated from head to foot in glistening strands. Bresca's card landed beside him. Nyxara went flying across the room as Veyreln threw her hard enough to break through the rotting confessionals.

And Johnny was suddenly alone in Veyrel's path.

Her lower arms opened.

Her human hands reached for him almost tenderly.

"Your first Feast," she purred. "How precious."

Johnny stumbled backward and drew another card without looking. Veyrel knocked it from his hand. One blade hooked around his waist, turning him until his back met the warm armor of her abdomen. Her human fingers slid into his pants and removed his cock.

Up close, her perfume was thick and floral, cloying enough to taste. Her split jaw opened beside his ear. The mandibles within made tiny, eager motions as Johnny gasped in her grip. He was still reeling from the 'cost' of the spell. His shaft throbbed in Veyrel's hand as she kneaded it between her fingers.

Cassian pushed himself upright across the chapel. His posh English accent had gone squeaky with rage.

"Make him suffer," he rasped. "He just made me cream myself in his fat companion. I'm going to be showering stomach goo off of me for a millenia."

Veyrel's wings trembled with pleasure.



“Hey, uh, Nyx,” Johnny said as Veyrel pushed him into a pew. “Is this stuff part of the battle?”

“Relax,” Veyrel hissed. She cupped him in her palm, her smooth fingers dragging over his length as she crawled forward on her many legs. Naked from the waist down, he could see the tight slit between her segmented hips. It was dripping. “Your salamander tormented my Bearer. Now it’s your turn.”

Johnny didn’t know if ‘torment’ was the right word for what happened next.

Veyrel mounted him. Each of her smooth, porcelain breasts were as large as his head, jiggling as she brought her hips down on his and shuddered, sheathing him in warmth. She was tight—tighter than Johnny had ever experienced—squeezing him down to the balls. Johnny took a deep gulp of air. When he exhaled, Veyrel stuffed his face between her breasts, moving her hips in gentle circles, working him into her cunt.

“There you go,” she whispered as his cards slipped from his fingers. “Forget about this nonsense. Whatever the cat promised you is nothing compared to the pleasures I can bring. Are you getting close, human? I can feel you twitching.”

Johnny was under the effect of some kind of spell. Or, well, maybe he wasn’t, but the mantis felt so good that he might as well have been. He wrapped his arms around her thin waist, groaning into her chest as she milked him in a throbbing mess. His eyes crossed. His hips bucked. He was about to cum, never noticing Veyrel’s mandibles sliding over his head when a darkness struck her from the side.

Nyxara hit with enough force to tear Johnny from Veyrel’s grasp. They rolled together across the chapel floor. He caught one glimpse of Veyrel’s scythes closing behind them before Nyxara twisted, placed herself above him and seized his face between her clawed hands.

Her golden eyes fixed upon his.

“Do not struggle,” she said, shoving his deck into his belt.

His stomach dropped. He was still twitching, disoriented, unable to grasp why Nyxara was licking her lips and pressing her flat belly into his knee.

“What?”

Her jaw unhinged.

Nyxara’s mouth did not split like Veyrel’s or unfold like Bresca’s. It simply opened wider and wider, feline lips drawing back over long white fangs as darkness deepened behind her tongue. Her breath rolled over his face, furnace-warm and scented faintly of cinnamon and musk.

“She cannot Claim what is already Claimed.”



Nyxara descended.

Heat, darkness and pressure swallowed the world. Her tongue flattened over his face, dragging him toward the tight convulsion waiting at the back of her maw. Johnny shoved instinctively at her

jaws, but her hands had already closed around his shoulders. She pulled him in with terrifying efficiency, gulping garishly, a wild animal intent on devouring him.

His face passed her throat.

Muscle closed around his skull, kneading once before drawing him deeper. Nyxara's chest pressed against his as she swallowed, her body arching over him. Each contraction took more of him: neck, shoulders, arms pinned tightly to his sides. The sounds of the chapel became muffled beneath the wet thunder of her body.

Veyrel shrieked outside, but Nyxara answered with a growl that vibrated through Johnny's bones, jerking him sideways to avoid an unseen attack.

Her jaws reached his waist. Her tongue curled beneath him, lifting his hips while gravity drew his upper body down the constricting passage of her throat. He felt each gulp as a total pressure, a firm traveling embrace that forced him inch by inch into her body. Her tongue folded around his cock and finished what Veyrel had started.

"*Nyyyyx*," Johnny gasped.

Her fangs scraped harmlessly over his thighs as she gulped. He could swear she smiled. One last swallow took his knees. Then his combat boots slipped between her lips, and Nyxara sealed him inside.

Johnny descended curled and breathless through her chest. The passage squeezed from every direction, carrying him downward until he spilled into a chamber that expanded reluctantly around his body.

Nyxara's stomach was hotter than Bresca's had looked. The walls held him in damp, muscular folds, compressing him against the cards still clenched in his hand. Every breath brought the rich animal scent of her. Every movement outside rolled through him as a powerful sway.

He heard Veyrel's blades strike.

He heard Nyxara snarl.

Then her voice came from everywhere at once, carried through the pact between Bearer and Monster.

Stop gawking.

Johnny looked down.

His cards were glowing in the darkness.

Beyond the wall pressed against his cheek, Nyxara laughed—a low, breathless, predatory sound.

You are inside a Monster, Johnny. You are not out of the Feast.

A card slid upward from his hand as though drawn by invisible fingers.

Its painted mouth opened.

Now play.

The card hovering above Johnny's palm turned slowly in the dark. Its painted surface showed four golden eyes arranged around a black pupil, each staring in a different direction. The silver letters beneath them swam until he stopped trying to read them and simply understood.

BORROWED SIGHT.

Outside, something struck Nyxara hard enough to fold the chamber around him. Her stomach clenched, forcing the breath from Johnny's lungs while the cards scattered across his chest. He heard Veyrel's hands slap against Nyxara's belly, gripping him from both sides as she attempted to stimulate her into digestion.

"Would you mind holdin' still?" he shouted.

Nyxara's answering growl shook the wet walls around him.

"Whatever! Tell me what this does!"

It allows you to see through my eyes. The title is exceptionally clear.

Another impact rolled him onto his side. Johnny slapped one hand against the yielding floor of her stomach and caught the floating card with the other. Veyrel had mounted Nyxara like she had mounted Johnny and was fondling her breasts. Nyxara's stomach started to rumble as the walls clenched, leaking foul smelling liquid.

“How do I pay for it?” he asked cautiously, covering his crotch. It was still uncomfortably tight; moreso given the warm ooze he was now floating in and the constant clenching of the walls.

Sight.

He stared at the card.

“Meaning?”

You lose yours while using mine.

Veyrel’s voice drifted through Nyxara’s body, muffled but unmistakably delighted. “I can hear him in there. Your little Bearer sounds frightened. How long can you feel him squirm inside of you before you give in to temptation? I bet he was… delicious.”

Nyxara’s abdomen tensed around Johnny.

Play the card.

He pressed his thumb to its painted eye and the world vanished. Not the darkness inside Nyxara. Everything.

For one sickening instant Johnny had no eyes, no direction and no certainty that he still possessed a face. Then vision returned from four places at once.

The chapel opened around him in a fractured golden panorama. Through Nyxara’s larger eyes, he saw Veyrel stalking forward between the ruined pews, her pearlescent armor streaked with black blood. Through a smaller, magical pair set high on Nyxara’s cheeks, he saw Cassian crawling toward Bresca’s fallen card and the pale blur of his own legs distending Nyxara’s abdomen.

He saw himself inside her.

Nyxara’s stomach hung heavily beneath the leather straps crossing her waist, its dark fur parted by a broad patch of bronze skin stretched smooth over Johnny’s curled form. Every breath he took shifted the taut curve. When he moved one hand, the motion appeared beneath her flesh as the faintest sliding pressure. He saw Nyxara bite her lip, the shudder around him redefined by the blush of her cheeks.

Heat rushed into his face despite the total darkness surrounding his actual body.



Focus, Nyxara commanded. ***I can only endure so much before I digest you.***

Veyrel squeezed Nyxara's stomach between her thighs. She had pinned Nyxara's hands with her own and was humping her, drawing loud gasps from the cat girl as she kissed her throat.

Four perspectives made the scene all the more erotic. Johnny was transfixed by the arch of Nyxara's spine; the way her voluptuous body curved beneath Veyrel's, their breasts pressed against each other's like something out of a porno.

"Holy shit," he muttered.

Veyrel reached between Nyxara's legs. Johnny felt the jolt through her entire body. His own cock hardened as a sudden, phantom pressure built inside of him, mirroring Nyxara's pleasure as she wriggled in Veyrel's grasp.

The card had plugged him into her. He was feeling what she felt.

What are you doing, you moron! Fight!

"Uh," he said.

It was hard to think with so much stimulation. Nyxara kept twisting and turning, her stomach squeezing around Johnny in an erratic rhythm. More chemical soup bubbled between his legs, but the warmth only served to make it hotter when she pushed his erect cock into the walls and into Veyrel's own, empty stomach.

Johnny focused on what he wanted Nyxara to do.

Nyxara leaned forward and bit Veyrel's nipple.

"Eek!"

What the fuck was that?

"It got her off of you, didn't it?" Johnny said as the pressure on her stomach lessened. He managed to secure enough room to remove the cards from his belt. "Now what?"

Play anything!

Veyrel's human hand caught Nyxara by the throat. Her second caressed the heavy curve of Nyxara's stomach, fingers spreading over the place where Johnny's shoulder pressed against the wall.

"Clever," she whispered.

She began to push.

Nyxara's bone-tipped tail whipped toward her, but Veyrel caught it between her scythes. The serrated edges closed around the exposed crescent with a shriek.

The pressure inside of Nyxara doubled, then tripled. He was being forcibly bent toward the bubbling acids, his face an inch away from the churning mass.

Meanwhile, Cassian reached Bresca's card.

Through Nyxara's upper right eye, Johnny watched him snatch it from the floor. His shirt and vest clung wetly to him, and his face had gone pale beneath the sheen of saliva covering it, but he still managed a smug smile.

"That was entertaining," he called. "But I think it's time to finish this. I'm going to win the Feast for Veyrel and then I'll have my wish."

Nyxara's claws flexed. She grabbed Veyrel's wrists and wrenched them back, allowing Johnny to expand back into a sitting position. Instead of reasserting her grip on Nyxara's stomach, Veyrel instead pressed the flat edge of a scythe into Nyxara's neck.

Johnny.

"I see him."

Then stop watching Veyrel.

Johnny turned his attention toward Cassian, though he had no idea how to turn eyes that were not physically his. The sensation was less like moving his gaze and more like tugging on four threads tied behind his skull.

Cassian held Bresca's card against his chest. The illustration had changed. The plush amphibian woman now appeared curled in a cramped circle, eyes shut, her round belly empty once more.

He reached into his coat with his free hand.

"He's drawing another card."

Obviously.

"I'm getting tired of the attitude."

Oh, oh, my bad. Does my Bearer wish me to be polite while I'm being fucked?

Veyrel increased her pressure on Nyxara's throat. One mantis blade kept the bony tail pinned aside while the other squeezed the breath out of her.

"I wonder whether he'll scream when I open you," she murmured. "I can't wait to find out."



Nyxara's smaller eyes rolled toward Johnny's cards, visible only as dim angular lights beneath the skin of her abdomen.

***Find* Feral Inheritance.**

Johnny released Borrowed Sight.

The chapel blinked out, leaving him blind in a more ordinary way. His own vision returned gradually, filled with gold sparks and the soft glow of cards tangled around him. He snatched at them while Nyxara strained outside.

“How am I supposed to find anything in here?”

Feel for me.

“I’ve already felt far too much of you.”

For half a second, Nyxara went completely still.

Then the stomach wall tightened around him in a slow, deliberate squeeze that pulled his back into the folds and pressed his knees closer to his chest. The bubbling acids were starting to hurt.

You would tease me? At a time like this?

Johnny swallowed.

“No.”

The chamber gave another gentle pulse.

Pity.

Veyrel’s blade touched the outside of her abdomen.

The teasing pressure vanished. Nyxara’s stomach hardened protectively around him, and Johnny’s humor went with it. He shoved both hands through the scattered cards, searching by touch.

Feel for me.

He stopped looking for a title.

Nyxara was heat and dark fur, knife-bright eyes and restrained fury. She was the weight of two tails lashing behind her. She was also a purr, a quiet gasp. She could be gentle. She was elegance balanced over violence, something royal forced into the role of an animal.

One card bit him.

Johnny hissed and jerked his hand back. Four pinpricks of blood welled from his fingertips. The card rose from the pile on its edge, bearing an image of a feline shadow crouched behind a human silhouette. Their bodies overlapped until it was impossible to tell where one ended and the other began.

FERAL INHERITANCE.

“I found it.”

Blood has already been accepted as the payment. Speak my full name.

“You never told me your full name.”

The blade outside pressed deeper. Johnny felt its tip dimple the muscular wall near his hip.

Nyxara snarled, and the card's letters rearranged themselves.

A name unfolded across Johnny's mind. Not a string of sounds but a procession of images: moonlight on black water, a pride of golden-eyed shapes watching from ruined towers, a queen wearing a crown made from the jawbones of saints. The meaning was too large to hold. His tongue seized around the first syllable.

"I can't say that."

Then approximate. Quickly.

Johnny gripped the card in his bleeding hand.

"Nyxara," he began, feeling the name resist him, "four-eyed daughter of the moonless court, last huntress of—"

The card burned.

More titles crowded behind his teeth. Breaker of White Antlers. Eater Beneath the Seventh Gate. The Silent Claw.

He chose the one that felt most dangerous.

"—the Queen Who Returned Hungry."

Outside, Nyxara laughed. The card dissolved in his hand. Black light poured through Nyxara's stomach.

Veyrel recoiled. Her blade had pierced no farther than the outermost layer of skin, but shadow erupted from the shallow wound and wrapped around her scythe. The darkness climbed the ivory limb in branching veins.

"What did you do?" Veyrel demanded.

Nyxara's human shape came apart.

She remained upright, her silhouette lengthening, widening as black fur raced over her bronze skin. Her shoulders rolled forward. Her hands struck the chapel floor as enormous paws, each tipped with hooked claws the length of Johnny's forearm.

Her mane spread around her head in a storm of living darkness. The two smaller eyes on her cheeks opened wide, joined by four more

along the sweeping bridge of her muzzle. Six golden pupils fixed upon Veyrel.

Nyxara's leather harness snapped. Tarnished rings scattered across the floor.

Her stomach expanded with the rest of her, carrying Johnny downward as her torso grew into the long, powerful body of a great hunting cat. The chamber around him stretched, giving him room to unfurl, though the walls remained snug against his back and legs. From outside, he imagined the enormous feline belly sagging low beneath her ribs with his body nestled visibly inside.

Nyxara rose until her mane brushed the chapel rafters.

Her first tail retained its black plume, now vast enough to sweep a man from his feet. The second had become a segmented length of bare white bone ending in a crescent blade wider than a shield.

Veyrel released her.

She moved backward on all six legs, wings spread, her lovely face briefly emptied of confidence.

Nyxara's voice entered Johnny through the walls.

This is why I told you to pay attention.

She pounced.

Veyrel crossed her scythes in front of herself. Nyxara batted them away.

The impact hurled the mantis creature through the altar. Stone exploded around her. Before she could rise, Nyxara's bone tail punched through the rubble and hooked beneath Veyrel's armored waist.

Veyrel slashed at it, but the blade whipped upward and tossed her across the chapel.

She opened her wings in midair. Colored membranes caught the moonlight, slowing her descent just enough for her pointed legs to strike the wall. She clung there sideways, black mandibles working furiously.

"Cassian!"

“I know!”

Cassian had drawn three cards. He flung one onto the chapel floor, where it expanded into a glowing circle beneath him.

Nyxara’s upper eyes tracked the spell. Johnny could not see through her anymore, but the bond carried impressions to him: Cassian’s heartbeat, the magic gathering around his feet, Veyrel poised against the wall.

He is attempting to flee.

“I thought the Feast didn’t let you flee.”

It does not. He intends to relocate the battlefield.

“To where?”

Somewhere advantageous to him. Somewhere filled with civilians, perhaps, where I can’t make use of this form.

The dark chamber rolled as Nyxara turned toward Cassian. Veyrel launched herself from the wall and landed on Nyxara’s back, scythes stabbing into the mane in search of flesh.

Nyxara bucked. The movement threw Johnny against her stomach wall and sent his remaining cards spinning.

One struck him across the mouth.

He caught it before it could fall.

The painted image showed a pair of jaws closing around a shining circle.

CONSUME THE WORKING.

“Nyxara, I think I have something.”

Play it.

“I don’t know the cost.”

Then discover it.

The card’s illustration opened its jaws.

A pulling sensation seized Johnny’s chest. The same invisible warmth that had filled him when he first touched the deck beneath his uncle’s floorboards began to drain into the card.

His arms weakened. The chamber tilted around him.

“Is this supposed to feel like dying?”

Most magic does, the first time.

“That isn’t reassuring.”

You remain very talkative for a dying man.

Johnny clenched the card.

CONSUME THE WORKING.

The painted jaws snapped shut.

So did Nyxara’s.

A mouth opened in the shadows beneath Cassian—vast, feline and almost perfectly flat against the floor. Cassian looked down just as the darkness yawned around his boots.

The glowing circle bent inward.

Its blue flames streamed into the shadow-mouth as though caught in a whirlpool. Symbols, light, and magic vanished between black teeth. The spell collapsed with a thunderclap.

Cassian dropped to his knees as Nyxara’s shadow swallowed the final spark and licked its lips.

Johnny felt the stolen magic arrive inside her. It poured through the stomach walls in a hot wave, sinking into his skin and refilling whatever the card had taken from him. The folds surrounding his body shuddered with satisfaction.

Nyxara purred.

The sound was deafening from within.

Again.

“What?”

Give me another.

“There isn’t another spell.”

Then give me him.

Nyxara surged forward.

Veyrel abandoned her back and dropped between them, all four arms spread. Her wings flared into a dazzling fan, every colored marking widening into an eye.

“Look at me!” she cried.

Nyxara did.

So did Johnny.

Though he had no view of the chapel, the pattern appeared in his mind through their bond: violet spirals, green rings, a thousand false pupils opening inside one another. His thoughts softened. His body relaxed against the warm, kneading walls.

Veyrel's voice became sweet.

"Release him."

Nyxara slowed.

"Your Bearer is a burden," Veyrel whispered. "A helpless little weight in your belly. Spit him out, and you can fight as you were meant to."

The chamber contracted beneath Johnny. He began to rise.

"Whoa, Nyxara? What are you doing?

It was subtle at first, a lift beneath his shoulders followed by a firm ripple that pushed him toward Nyxara's throat. Her body was obeying before her mind understood the command. The passage above opened, drawing his head into its tight entrance.

"Nyxara, snap out of it. She's got you in some kind of trance."

No answer.

Another contraction shoved him upward. His shoulders entered her throat, and the passage closed around his chest. He could feel Nyxara lowering her enormous head outside, jaws parting to surrender him at Veyrel's feet.

His cards slid away below.

All except one.

It had become trapped between his palm and the throat's muscular wall. Johnny could not see its face. He could barely move his fingers enough to feel the raised illustration: two figures joined by a line running from heart to heart.

He pressed it into Nyxara's flesh.

"I may not know your true name," he said, his voice crushed thin by the pressure around him. "I definitely don't know the rules. I'm a fuckin' bum and I don't even know why you chose me."

Nyxara's throat flexed.

Moonlight appeared above him as a faint silver slit.

"But I ain't anyone's burden!"

The card grew warm.

Outside, Veyrel continued in that syrupy voice. "That's right. Let him go."

Johnny felt the connection between himself and Nyxara: Hunger passing one way. Trust struggling to pass the other.

He pushed against the throat.

"If winning this 'Feast' thing is important to you," he said. "Then I'll guess we'll fuckin' win it!"

The card activated.

BEARER'S TRUST.

Nyxara stopped.

The slit of moonlight disappeared as her jaws closed.

For one terrible second Johnny remained wedged in her throat, held between expulsion and another swallow. Then Nyxara's muscles gathered around him with renewed purpose.

She gulped.

The powerful contraction dragged his shoulders downward. Another took his chest, then his waist, pulling him back through the long, heated passage. He dropped into her stomach and landed among his cards in a tangle of limbs.

Nyxara's purr rolled over him.

Light weight, she murmured.

Johnny lay breathless against the living floor.

"Don't start."

Helpless burden.

"Bitch, I just saved our bacon."

Her stomach squeezed him once, almost affectionately.

Then Veyrel screamed.

Through the bond, Johnny felt Nyxara close all four forepaws around the mantis woman. Two pinned her scythes. Two more

crushed her wings against her back. Veyrel's six legs stabbed uselessly at the stone as Nyxara lifted her from the floor.

Cassian scrambled away.

"No," he said. "Veyrel, use 'Molting Escape'. Veyrel!"

Nyxara opened her mouth.

Johnny sensed the shape of it through her: fangs framing darkness, tongue broad and rough, jaws large enough now to take Veyrel's upper body in a single bite.

The mantis woman twisted in her grasp. "Cassian, you fool! Save me! Do something!"

"He can't**,"** Nyxara replied, licking her lips. "He's scared."

Her gaze shifted toward Cassian. He was standing at the entrance of the church, eyes flicking between Veyrel and the door. Even as she screamed for him to help, he remained paralyzed, his cards clutched in his left hand. One of them was blinking silver. An effect about to expire.

The shadow beneath him opened again and this time it was not empty.

Bresca's hands emerged from the darkness and seized his ankles.

Cassian fell with a shout. The plush amphibian dragged herself out of Nyxara's shadow behind him, her gills blazing pink and her wide violet mouth already unfolding.

She looked furious.

"You made me spit you out," Bresca said.

Cassian clawed at the floor.

"Wait. Wait!"

Her adhesive tongue slapped across his back and cinched around his waist.

"After I swallowed you so nicely."

She reeled him in.

Cassian managed one last glance toward Veyrel as Bresca lifted him from the floor. His signature monster had stopped struggling in

Nyxara's paws. All the elegance had drained from her face, leaving behind naked fear.

"You said I was special!" he shouted. "Veyrel! Veyrel!"

Bresca's mouth closed over his head.

His scream became a wet, muffled cry.

Nyxara settled onto her haunches to watch. Johnny shifted inside her, following the motion through the sway of her stomach.

The cards floating around Cassian's abandoned deck began to flicker. Nyxara lowered her muzzle until her breath stirred the mantis woman's jeweled wings.

The Feast is not over when the Bearer is swallowed, she said. ***It ends when they have no card left to play. Or when they're digested.***

Bresca gulped.

Cassian's boots vanished.

His shape descended through her pale throat and settled heavily into her belly. The soft curve swelled around him, luminous skin showing his silhouette as she placed both hands over her newly restored prize.

But there is one other win condition, isn't there, Veyrel? It will end your claim to the throne, but allow you to continue in the Feast of Succession. What do you say? Will you surrender? Will you allow yourself to be claimed?

Inside Nyxara, Johnny's cards rose into the air.

One had appeared that he had never seen before.

Its illustration showed Veyrel kneeling beneath Nyxara's paws while Cassian struggled inside Bresca in the background. Beneath the image, silver letters wrote themselves stroke by stroke.

CLAIM THE SIGNATURE.

Johnny picked it from the air.

"What happens if I play this?"

Nyxara's tails swept across the chapel floor.

Her pleasure entered him through the bond, dark and warm.

Then, my Bearer, we take our first card and win our first Feast.



Johnny, The Bum

Johnny wasn't supposed to be there. His uncle's house was technically his brother's now and if he was caught breaking in… well, he wouldn't get much love from the family.

"Little shitbag," he growled under his breath. His key jammed in the shiny new lock, useless. "I live here for two fuckin' years and the second the old man kicks it, I'm out on the streets. Well fuck you, Michael."

His aggravated snort came out as a white mist. Winter was approaching and the weeds in the yard were already glistening with frost. Johnny looked over at the boarded up windows of the neighbor's houses and frowned, shoving his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket. He fingered the pack of playing cards there, getting angry all over again.

Nobody would question his presence here. He looked like part of the scenery. At 22, he carried the haggard look of someone much older. It was the weight of his many mistakes, he was sure. If a cop rolled past and saw him in his spiked jacket and ripped up jeans, they wouldn't spare him a second glance, but if he took a walk in Michael's neighborhood, he'd be brought in for questioning before he passed the first stop sign.

Pricks.

Johnny moved to the back of the house. The yard there was even more overgrown than the front, weeds claiming abandoned tools where they lay scattered near the rotting fence. Johnny kicked the fire pit as he passed. Cigarette butts littered the bottom of the bowl, floating in a soggy puddle of last week's rain.

The back door also had a shiny new lock. That didn't matter. Johnny looked left, then right, then bashed his elbow through the window, picking the glass from his jacket before turning the lock with a click.

The familiar smell of his uncle's home filled him with an even greater sense of injustice.

But he had to move fast.

He started in his old room, collecting his magazines and a half-full pack of cigarettes from the dresser. It had been cleaned in his absence, his possessions swept aside or tossed in the garbage, with only a few things left for him to scavenge. Johnny shoved the cigarettes in his pocket and shoved the magazines in his waistband.

He moved to his uncle's room.

All of the medications had been cleared off the nightstand. The room had a faint, antiseptic smell, but it couldn't quite mask the years of illness. The medical bed had been made up with fresh linens. Johnny touched them as he passed and frowned.

He checked the drawers, the cabinets, and the bathroom. There were a few bottles here and there, but nothing that he could sell. Heart medications, arthritis medications, prostate medications. What hadn't his uncle been suffering from? He moved on from the bathroom and went into the hall.

His eyes wandered up to the string hanging from the ceiling.

There shouldn't have been anything in the attic. Johnny had passed through it a number of times looking for things to sell, but it was all old junk; Christmas decorations, broken furniture, boxes for items no longer in the house. But for some reason, looking at the string, he felt the urge to check again.

He yanked the string and a plume of dust rained down along with the stairs.

"This is stupid," he said to nobody.

He climbed up anyway.

The attic was exactly as he remembered it: dim and dusty and filled with junk. The naked lightbulb above the stairs didn't work, but there was another bulb further back that did. Johnny had to climb over a series of plastic boxes to get to it, scraping his knees and cursing as he reached for the string.

When he pulled it, nothing happened.

"Shit!"

He stumbled over a box and fell onto his back, nearly missing a nail sticking out from the beams. His hand broke through a cobweb, trailing it as he furiously scrubbed his palm on his shirt. It was while he was scrambling in the dark that he heard the buzzing.

"Oh *shit*."

Had he stumbled into a wasp's nest? He flung himself forward toward the square of light pouring in from the attic entrance, but his jeans got caught on a floorboard and wrenched him backwards. The buzzing grew louder as he yanked to pull his leg free. Only once he yanked hard enough to pull the floorboard up did he realize where the buzzing was coming from.

"Shiiiiiit!"

He hit the deck, expecting at any second to be attacked by a swarm of wasps. When he didn't hear the telltale hum of angry wings, he opened his eyes and looked behind him.

Light. There was light coming from beneath the floorboard.

"What the fuck?"

He crawled toward it, pushing aside a mouldering box of old newspapers to look into the hole that he had created.

There was a box inside of the hole. An unassuming cedar box that might have once held cigars. Something inside of the box was shaking and glowing, buzzing ever louder the closer that he got.

"What is this?" Johnny asked.

But as he reached for it, he heard something downstairs. Voices. The telltale crackle of a radio.

Police.

"Shiiiiit!"

The door to the attic was wide open. Johnny looked around for someplace to hide, but there was nothing.

"Johnny?"

Johnny's hand clenched into a fist.

“Johnny, I know it’s you in here. Come out now and we can talk. I only called the police just in case. Johnny?”

Michael’s voice wandered into the kitchen. He’d be able to see the hallway in a second and then everything was fucked.

“I know you’re mad about the inheritance.”

Johnny’s hand went to the pocket where the worn box of playing cards pressed against the leather.

“I don’t know why he left me the house, but it was probably because you do stuff like this, Johnny. I’m going to have to replace that window, you know. God knows you won’t pay for it.”

A low voice overtook Michael’s.

“There.”

They were pointing at the stairs to the attic. The voices were getting closer.

“I know you took care of him,” Michael said. “We can work something out, Johnny, but not if you keep breaking in here. Come on out. Don’t make us come up after you.”

Through gritted teeth, Johnny almost responded. Took care of him? *Took care of him?!* He’d watched the old man fucking *die* and it was reduced to taking care of him?

None of their other family members would touch his uncle. He was a former addict, a loner, a man who had spent more time in prison than out of it. Johnny had been the one to volunteer. Johnny had bathed the old coot. Johnny had listened to his paranoid ramblings about ‘what was coming’ when ‘the Feast started’.

And what had his uncle left him?

His cards. A pack of fucking *playing cards* while his brother got *another* house that he didn’t give a shit about.

“Johnny, please.”

Tears of frustration stung Johnny’s eyes. Michael would probably forgive him for this. He’d probably drop the charges. He’d probably take Johnny home so that his pretty wife could lock up her good jewelry and treat him like a thief.

And he was.

“Why?” Johnny whispered. “Why me?”

The cedar box began to rattle.

“He’s up there,” came a deep voice.

“Come down, Johnny,” Michael called. “You have until the count of three.”

Johnny put his hands in the hole and drew out the box. It was shaking violently, spilling light into the attic.

“One.”

Johnny ripped open the lid to find a leather case. It buttoned over the top, but the button had come undone. The case itself was shaking, the glow coming from the cards within.

“Two.”

One card was pulled out further than the others. Golden text in a language that Johnny did not speak swirled against the black background. A voice that was not his whispered a name in his mind.

NYXARA

“Three.”

There were footsteps on the stairs. A flashlight beam appeared against the ceiling. A man grunted as he pulled himself up the rungs.

Johnny slid the card out from the others and held it in front of his face. There was an image on it—a catlike creature standing upright, her arms folded regally over her heavy chest.

Good choice, Bearer.

Then the world shifted.

He was still in the attic. If he squinted, he could see the boxes and the officer poking his head over the lip of the opening, but it was all bathed in a thin, blue glow. Suddenly the roof was gone and a full moon hung overhead. The world beyond was obscured by the mist.

And he wasn’t alone.

The woman that stood over him had hair as black as obsidian, studded with silver beads that swirled like constellations. She wore a harness; some kind of dominatrix getup made out of leather that

bound her enormous breasts, but did not hide them. She was naked from the waist down except for a pair of boots that came up to her thighs.

That's where the normal shit ended and the weird shit began.

She had four ears, two on top, two bent backwards diagonally across her head; all pierced with silver and covered in fine, black fur. In fact, what Johnny had assumed were boots was also black fur, covering her calves and thighs and ending in a pair of digitigrade feet capped in claws, as were her hands. Two tails hung behind her, one silky, one lethally decked out in some kind of bones, and four, orange eyes regarded Johnny with thinly-veiled disgust.

"Bearer," she said. "So we meet at last."

Johnny looked down at the bag of cards. Had the box been laced with some kind of drugs? Was he having a bad trip right now? He could still see the police officer searching the attic, but even though he stood only five feet from Johnny, his flashlight passed right over him.

"What is this?" Johnny asked. "What the fuck is this?"

The woman's lip curled. She had wicked looking fangs.

"The Feast of Succession," she said. "I am Nyxara, your new Signature, and you are Johnny… my Bearer."

Johnny got to his feet. If he hoped it would make him feel empowered, he was sorely mistaken. The woman—was she even a woman?—was a full head taller than him. Her claws looked even more deadly up close, flexed though they were against her hips, biting into the bronze skin there.

"That tells me nothin'," Johnny said, puffing out his chest. "Where are we? Where's the roof gone? What are you?"

Nyxara sighed, ignoring his questions.

"We need to Bond now," she said. "You'll have to Bond with every monster in your Menagerie—your Feast deck, as some Bearers call it—and it will be quicker if you do it all at once. There's only one other monster in the deck anyway. Bresca."

She spat the word.

Johnny was about to sling more questions at her when another card in the deck pulled itself from the pile. This one had silver text, gleaming against his palm as he yanked it free.

BRESCA

A bubble rose in the air in front of him, first one, then dozens. There was a sound, too, like ocean waves pounding against the shore, and the smell of salt and seaweed and sunburns. Johnny flinched back as a puddle formed on the floor. Bubbles continued to rise from the puddle, expanding outward as a head emerged.

"OMG, he's gorgeous!"

Johnny yelped. He couldn't help it. The woman crawling up from the floorboards had *fins* on her face, her plump cheeks jiggling as she hefted herself into the air. Her breasts came down with a thump on the floor, larger and softer than even Nyxara's, with pale white skin that shimmered in the moonlight. Her ample stomach shook free from the foam, then her legs which were covered in some kind of skirt of anemones. When she rose, she rose to the same height as Johnny.

Without any further introductions, she kissed him.

"Hey!" Johnny said, pushing her away. His lips tasted like salt and fish and came away slightly damp. "What the fuck is this?"

Bresca looked at Nyxara who sighed even more heavily.

"Didn't you tell him?" she asked.

"I was getting to it," Nyxara said, striding forward.

Johnny cringed as she bent down, putting a clawed hand on his head. Her eyes bore into his, unblinking.

"You are our Bearer," she said in the tone one usually reserves for children. "The Feast of Succession is a game that is played every thousand years to determine who will rule over the Monster Realm. Each Monster has a Bearer—again, that's you—who directs them in battle against other Bearers, collecting the cards of the vanquished until none remain."

Okay, so he was definitely on drugs.

“Alright,” Johnny said slowly. “Fine. Whatever. I have to fight people for their cards. What’s with the…?”

He gestured vaguely at the **Eclipsed Attic**.

Eclipsed Attic?

“That’s the name of the Hollow,” Nyxara said as if she could read his mind. “It’s a space set between our realm and yours. We use them for battles. And Bonding.”

Bresca let out an excited giggle.

“You mentioned that before,” Johnny said. “Bonding. What’s Bonding?”

Nyxara rolled her eyes and pushed him. Johnny stumbled backward over a box, landing on his butt as both Nyxara and Bresca came to stand over him. With her footpaw, Nyxara pulled down his jeans. His cock flopped out, half erect.

“Well, will you look at that,” Nyxara said as Johnny sputtered and tried to pull his pants up. “Our Bearer finds us attractive after all.”

“I… you… ya’ll ain’t wearin’ fuckin’ clothes! I’m a man, ain’t I?”

Nyxara snorted at that, but Bresca bent, curious, and put a finger on Johnny’s cock. It twitched in her hand, which made her giggle.

“It likes me!” she said.

Johnny blushed. Whatever this fever dream was, he was smack in the middle of it, and it wasn’t like he wasn’t down to have sex with the hot catgirl and salamander… thing. The problem was that he was in deep shit. His brother was in the house looking for him. He didn’t have time to be high and jack off to hallucinations or whatever this was.

But then Bresca put her mouth around his cock and it didn’t feel like a hallucination.

“Mmm, mmmm, mmmmm,” Bresca said, sucking away. She throated him, letting him linger against her slightly sticky tongue, then released him with a moan. She grabbed her breast, fondling herself as she slurped him again. “He tastes good, Nyx!”



“Don’t call me Nyx,” Nyxara snarled, crouching next to him. “Let’s get this over with.”

She kicked Bresca aside and straddled his hips. Johnny looked up at her in wonder as she glared down at him.

“What?” she asked.

“I dunno,” Johnny said. “You’re pretty. I ain’t used to pretty.”

Bresca laughed as Nyxara’s cheeks warmed. She looked like she was about to throttle Johnny, but instead brought her hips down. His cock slid inside of her with no resistance.

She was already wet.

At that point, Johnny stopped caring what was real or not. It had been a long time since he had been touched. The weight of a body; the warmth and the sighs; the gentle shudders that ran through Nyxara as she settled on his hips—it filled him, somehow. He found himself reaching for her thighs, running his hands through the silky black fur

all the way to the skin. When his fingers brushed Nyxara, she shivered, and in her four eyes he saw something that he recognized.

"You ain't been touched in a while, neither," he deduced.

Nyxara was larger than Johnny by a wide margin. She had to lean over him, working her hips around his shaft. When he spoke, she squeezed, and Johnny went silent, allowing her to take his hands and pin them to the attic floor.

"Bonding is establishing a trust between the Bearer and their Menagerie," Nyxara said. Her breath came out in a fast whisper. Johnny could feel the change in rhythm as she adjusted to drive him deeper. "Our future is in your hands and your life is in ours."

"My life?" Johnny gasped.

His back arched a little as he pushed further into Nyxara. The two eyes on her forehead went wide, then narrowed in bliss. Her main eyes remained focused.

"Your life," Nyxara repeated.

Bresca came to sit behind Johnny. She put his head in her lap, her voluminous belly blotting out the sky. It rumbled gently as she stroked his shoulders, kneading away years of tension in just a few expert strokes.

"What do I get… in return?"

Nyxara clenched. Johnny's knuckles turned white as he grasped her hands, bucking against her until she released, continuing the slow rhythm.

"A wish," Nyxara said.

A wish? Like in the movies?

Johnny knew that he should be excited about the prospect. A wish was… it was huge, wasn't it? But he didn't know off the top of his head what he would wish for and that perplexed him. Money, obviously, but that seemed too small. Revenge on Michael? That too, in this dreamlike space, seemed small.

World peace, superpowers, immortality—every boon ever asked for in myth or legend ran through his imagination, but a wish was too

huge, too big to get perspective on from the tiny speck that was his life.

"Why me?" Johnny asked.

Nyxara snorted. She stopped bouncing for a second and let her weight settle on top of him. Johnny's eyes rolled back in ecstasy.

"Why you?" she repeated. "I've been asking myself the same question and I've only come to one answer. You were the one holding the deck when the game began. That is all."

Johnny almost laughed.

"As if I would be so lucky," he said. "I ain't never had an ounce of luck in my entire fuckin' life. My uncle… left me his cards in his will. I thought he was fuckin' with me, that he resented me somehow, but apparently he knew about all this. How?"

"He dreamed it," Bresca said.

She put her fingers lightly on his forehead.

"I'll show you."

The world faded again, but this time it was like the setting was painted, falling away in pieces until he was left in a void. Then the void opened and gave him a glimpse of another world.

Johnny saw waterfalls and rainbows; brilliant birds flying against a violet sky. He saw frogs with wings and golden stags; harpies and hares and satyrs with fiery manes. He heard music rising from oceans and watched shooting stars die in the waves. On the shore, a creature like Nyxara ran on all fours, hunting a woman with antlers across the shadowed horizon.

Then he was back in the attic again and the pain of leaving left tears in his eyes. Bresca wiped them away, sympathetic, and even Nyxara's expression softened as he let out a rasping breath.

"I want to go there," he said. "Wherever that is."

For the first time, Nyxara smiled.

"That is our home," she said. "And it is beautiful. If we succeed here, then return we shall, and if it is your wish to join us, so be it. But first we must win the Feast of Succession. Will you help us?"



Johnny nodded. His vision was still swimming with stars.
“I will,” he said.

At that, Nyxara put all of her weight on him, and Johnny, who had been close without realizing, released inside of her, throbbing until she drained him of every last drop.

With that, she stood, and Bresca stood too, coming over to replace Nyxara near Johnny's feet as he panted, clawing the attic floor. Constellations sped across the sky. A golden flash blinked from the deck of cards strewn beside them.

We are Bonded.

The voice was Nyxara's, but the words were spoken in Johnny's head. She smirked as he looked over at her, placing a claw to her lips.

Bresca will Bond with you now.

The fat salamander girl picked up Johnny's legs and placed his feet against her breasts. She gulped several times, clearing her throat.

She Bonds quite differently.

"Alright!" Bresca said. "I'm ready!"

Johnny had accepted a lot of things since entering the ***Eclipsed Attic***. He'd accepted that magic existed and that his uncle was privy to it. He'd accepted that he was destined to win a card game against some other losers to determine the Monarch of Monsters or whatever. He'd accepted that the cat girl could now talk in his head.

He was still fucking baffled when Bresca swallowed his ankles.

"Uh, is this a fetish thing?" he asked.

The salamander girl's tongue was as wet as a normal tongue, but instead of lessening the friction, it added to it. Her tongue stuck to the back of Johnny's calves as she swallowed his feet and jeans, humming as they reappeared; a damp shadow in her gluttonous gullet.

"She's suckin' my feet," Johnny complained, looking at Nyxara. "Is this how she gets off?"

"One of many ways," Nyxara said, using her normal voice. Bresca swallowed Johnny up to his knees, her adhesive tongue pulling him past her breasts. He was sliding along the attic floor, fascinated by the fluidity of each swallow. "Just consider yourself lucky that she chose to use her mouth this time. She doesn't always."



Bresca giggled and gulped. Now Johnny was starting to get concerned.

“I’m starting to think this isn’t just a foot fetish,” he said as his thighs entered Bresca’s mouth. She had no teeth, so there was nothing to scrape against, but that made it all the more eerie to see his legs floating in her gooey torso. “Hey wait! This bitch is eating me!”

“You are ever-astute, Bearer.”

Johnny tried to flip over, wrenching himself sideways to catch hold of a box. Nyxara put a foot on his head, kicking him free as Bresca straightened her spine, lifting Johnny along with her. An enormous, violet throat opened beneath him. Muscular clenches pulled him down into the sticky mass, his feet swimming in her gut which he could see through her tits.

“Ey yo, what the fuck!” Johnny yelled. “Stop! Hey, as your master or whatever, I order you to stop!”

To his surprise, Bresca did.

She paused with her hands in her lap, whimpering around his torso.

“Why’s she makin’ that noise?” Johnny asked, trying to pry her lips loose. Apparently the order to stop did not entitle him to his freedom. That would have to be another command.

“I would continue with the Bond,” Nyxara warned.

Her tail brushed against his chin as she stalked past.

“Unbonded monsters won’t listen to you in battle. There’s a chance that they may even turn on you if the opposing Bearer lays Claim to them. Trust me when I say that Bresca has a vested interest in keeping you alive. She merely wishes to hold you for a moment while she gratifies herself.”

Johnny looked down at Bresca. She nodded vigorously, shaking him.

“She wants to hold me,” he said. “In her stomach?”

Nyxara crouched beside him and kissed his neck. Johnny immediately grew hard in Bresca’s throat, biting his lip as her throat clenched around his cock.

“We’re monsters. We eat people. Keep up.”

With that, she put her hand on Johnny's head and pushed him deep into Bresca's sopping gullet, backing up as Bresca's lips snapped shut. A gulp sent him sputtering between her breasts, then another pressed his face against the fat folds of her upper stomach. Through her transparent skin, Johnny watched Bresca bring her hands to her breasts, fondling herself as he sank through the last of her saliva to be deposited, with a jiggle, into her gut.

This feels so goooooood!

Bresca's voice echoed in Johnny's head just as Nyxara's had, high-pitched and breathless despite not needing breath. She dug her hands into her soft sides and hugged Johnny through her skin.

Are you okay in there?

"I'm, uh, fine," Johnny said, surprised to find that it was the truth.

Bresca's stomach was spacious. The air smelled faintly of seaweed, which was odd, but there seemed to be no risk of suffocation. Free from the stickiness of her throat, he was instead coated in some kind of thin, greenish slime which washed away the frictive saliva, allowing him to spin freely. He wobbled from side to side, then winced as his cock brushed against the wall.

It felt both cold and hot, like the kind of lubricant his buddy swore would make him last longer in bed.

"What is this?" he asked.

It's a special property of Bresca's body, Nyxara said. She was wandering through the attic, not looking at him, but their Bond allowed him to hear her loud and clear. ***It will be useful in a Feast. It enhances the sensitivity of her prey, making it harder to think, thus harder to play their cards.***

"Er."

It was hard to think, alright. It was *hard*, period. His cock slipped over the smooth walls, pushed in circles by Bresca's questing fists. She giggled as she gripped him, pulling his cock to the forefront of her huge, squishy belly.

The Bond is nearly complete! All you have to do is finish!

“You can’t be serious,” Johnny said.

Bresca held him in one hand and let the other fall beneath the anemone-like skirt that she wore. She let out a full-bodied shudder as her fingers drove home.

We both have to finish.

She likes it when they wriggle,” Nyxara interjected. Johnny sensed a hint of a laugh in her ‘voice.’ ***Make sure to really please her or the bond will be half-cocked.***

Johnny was about to make a comment when Bresca began to knead. He hissed between his teeth, clutching the walls while she pumped him against her stomach.

Wriggle? She wanted him to wriggle?

He shook his arms and Bresca let out an encouraging whimper. Her wrist moved slightly faster between her legs; her breaths came quicker. At the same time, her hand clenched, causing him to twist in her grasp.

Which caused her to whimper.

Which caused her to clench.

Which caused him to wriggle.

He didn’t think about how weird it was to be in her stomach while he thrust into her hand. Johnny wasn’t much for thinking anyway and whatever this was felt good. Her ample stomach jiggled as he moved around, jiggling him in turn, and her whimpers became gasps which became a quiet stream of:

Oh goodness, oh goodness, oh goodness…

It wasn’t until her stomach started to rumble that Johnny gained enough clarity to realize the danger that he was in, but at that moment, Bresca cried out, pushing her stomach forward into her fist as she came. Johnny blew his load against the transparent walls which hungrily went to work absorbing his seed.

B-bonding complete.

Her stomach clenched. Johnny, sweating, lay his head against it, wincing as the muscles around him tightened.

“Let him out, Bresca.”

Nyxara spoke normally, her voice muffled by the skin and the persistent growling. Bresca, bending over her knees, wrapped her arms around her stomach protectively.

“Just a few more minutes?” she asked.

“You know how fast you digest once you really get started.”

“Whoa, digest?” Johnny called. “Who’s digestin—”

There was a loud sizzle as a drop of liquid fell on his jacket. It burned a hole right through the leather, stinging when it hit Johnny’s skin.

“Holy fuck!”

There was an inversion; a series of muscles clenching and releasing in reverse, pulling him up instead of down as Bresca bent over and hacked him onto the attic floor. The ethereal light that surrounded them was fading. Slowly, the roof materialized again, signalling their return from the Hollow.

Johnny lay flat on his face with his bare ass in the air, covered in goo. Nyxara nudged him with her toes.

“Bearer?”

“Not sure how much I like this ‘bonding’ business,” Johnny muttered. “But it’s over now, yeah?”

Nyxara lifted his chin with her foot and smiled.

“We have to Bond after every Feast,” she said. “And the bigger the Menagerie, the longer it will take.”

Menagerie

“I am not fuckin’ the mantis lady again. She’s going to bite my cock off.”

“Don’t be a baby. A proper Bearer would gladly be gelded for the cause.”

Johnny sat with Cassian’s deck in his lap. Only one of the cards showed any text no matter how hard Johnny stared at them in the dim light pouring in through the chapel’s stained glass windows.

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VEYREL OF THE IVORY SCYTHES, FORMER SIGNATURE

***

“Former,” Johnny said. “So she ain’t like you, Nyx? Always out?”

Bresca was back in her card after Bonding with Johnny. The session had gone… okay all things considered. At least she had let him out before burning any holes in his clothing this time. Nyxara was laying in one of the pews with her hands behind her head. Her four ears twitched as cars passed outside.

“That is correct,” Nyxara yawned. “Only claimants to the throne can be Signatures and she chose to defect rather than go down with her Bearer. That makes her just another Monster in the Menagerie.”

“So I don’t have to use her,” Johnny said.

“No. But former Signature’s are usually more powerful than other monsters. They’re also more willful.”

Johnny snorted and set the card aside. His back hurt from days sleeping in the pews. Now that his uncle’s house was unavailable to him, he’d been moving from haunt to haunt, sleeping wherever there was a roof. Luckily, this wasn’t his first stint at homelessness.

“I don’t like her. She seemed evil.”

“She seemed alright to me.”

“She tried to cut your head off, Nyx.”

“We all do that.”

With a grunt of frustration, Johnny put the cards down. None of the fancy ones had revealed themselves to him, nor had Cassian pulled any monsters other than Veyrel. There was a good chance he didn’t even *have* another monster in his deck, choosing instead to fill it with defensive spells and buff cards for his Signature.

“Why does everyone else seem to be able to read their cards?” Johnny complained. “Cassian went on and on about the ‘superiority of his deck’ and the ‘strategies therein’ or whatever, but I just seem to pull random cards until shit happens.”

He squinted at the back of one of Cassian’s cards. The pattern was slightly different than his own, but when he put the two together, they melded, making them indistinguishable from each other. When he pulled them apart, the patterns separated.

It was while testing this phenomenon that one of the cards started to glow.

“Nyx, Nyx, I think I found one!”

Nyxara was at his side in a heartbeat, leaning over his shoulder to look at the card. A faint, silver pulse seemed to be coming off of it, thrumming in Cassian’s fingers as he held it up to the light.

***

GLOOM THE PSYCHOMORPH, FORMER SIGNATURE

***

Nyxara’s lip curled in distaste.

“Hmm,” she said.

“What?” Johnny asked, holding up the card. It showed a broken deer skull with shadows pouring from the cracks. Just looking at it

made him feel like he was being watched. He glanced over his shoulder nervously. “Is it bad?”

“She’s powerful,” Nyxara said, flicking her tails. She huddled closer to him instinctively, causing Johnny to blush. “Or maybe I should say that she’s powerful in the right circumstances. I didn’t know she was a claimant. It could spell trouble.”

“So what should I do?”

Nyxara shrugged.

“Release her,” she said. “She’s harmless in her current form. It’s probably how Cassian managed to snatch her from her previous owner.”

Johnny was about to voice his trepidation when a loud crunch came from the other end of the room. He jumped and so did Nyxara, whirling around to see a beam of light sweeping over the rafters. Someone had entered the chapel through the broken window.

“Police,” Johnny said automatically.

He slid down in the pew, hiding himself as the beam of the flashlight slid toward the altar. Nyxara remained upright.

“Get down,” Johnny hissed.

“Non-Bearers cannot see me,” Nyxara explained. “There’s no way their—”

The flashlight flicked left to pin Nyxara directly in its beam. A shadow appeared at the other end of the chapel.

“Come out,” came an authoritative voice. “I know you’re in here. These demons never stray far from their masters.”

This was followed by the telltale sound of a gun being drawn from its holster.

“I’m going to drag them into our Hollow,” Nyxara said, stepping in front of where Johnny was hidden behind the pew. “Hold on.”

The world shuddered. Johnny watched the walls expand, pushing backwards into the distance. A bell tolled. The altar grew. But then, just as suddenly as the world had expanded, it began to shrink. A telltale silver glow emanated from the opposite side of the room.

“What’s happenin’?” Johnny asked.

“She played a field card,” Nyxara said, fanning her tails out behind her. “Prepare yourself.”

Suddenly the pews were gone and the chapel was gone and the tolling of the bell was replaced by the clank of iron and the smell of sour sweat. Concrete bloomed like vines beneath Johnny’s feet, replacing the rotted wooden boards of the chapel. Bars grew up from the ground, clicking into place in a ceiling that was much lower. The world shook and the battlefield came into view.

A name appeared in Johnny’s head, causing his throat to tighten.

The Lockup.

“What is this?” he said, coming to stand beside Nyxara.

They were in a long hallway flanked by cells. Each cell was occupied by a group of shadows staring mournfully through the bars. At the other end of the hallway was a police officer.

And a woman in a gimp suit.

“Dude, what the fuck,” Johnny said.

Ivelle, Mistress of the Closed Harness

No part of the woman was visible through the black leather bondage gear. She knelt in front of the woman, drool forming where a pair of fangs bit into the hard plastic of a ball gag; hands behind her back. She wriggled with pleasure as the officer dug her polished boot into her shoulder.

“Well, well, well,” the officer scoffed. She glanced over Johnny and the corners of her lips twitched. “What kind of vagrant do we have here?”

Johnny had no love for the cops in general, but he had a special eye for the assholes; the cops that would be extra rough; the ones that liked to inflict pain. Even without the obvious symbolism of the gimp suit, he’d put a dime to a dollar that this girl was a grade A cunt.

For one, she carried a truncheon. The shiny black club hung from a cord around her thin wrist. For another, she had the tight bun/perfect

posture combo that screamed military brat with a chip on her shoulder. Middle-class upbringing, black and white sense of justice.

Really, the thing that pissed Johnny off was that she reminded him of his brother.

"How the fuck did a gal like you end up participating in a pervert game like this?" Johnny called.

The officer raised an eyebrow. Her Signature moaned as she kicked her forward.

Her tits hit the ground before the rest of her.

"My name is Officer Clarabelle," the woman called. She puffed out her chest and drew her cards from her belt. "And it's my job to make sure that trash like you stays in the gutter."

"What the fuck?"

Johnny looked at Nyxara who motioned for him to pull out his cards, but he was flabbergasted.

"Why the fuck do they all talk like supervillains?" he asked as he yanked his deck out of their case. One of the cards warmed in his hand. He pulled it and threw it on the field.

BRESCA

"Yippee!" the salamander squealed as she popped into existence. Her heavy tail hit the floor with a slap. "This is gonna be—"

A gag appeared in her mouth. Bresca pawed at it, confused, then her hands were suddenly yanked behind her back. Thick rope appeared out of nowhere, binding her chubby wrists to her ankles. She was yanked to her knees as the ropes knotted around her stomach and torso, circling her breasts. A flashing word blinked over her head.

DETAINED!

The woman in the gimp suit moaned. Officer Clarabelle clicked her tongue.

"Tough," she said.

"It's the field spell," Nyxara said. She sawed at Bresca's bindings, but her claws bounced off of them like they were made of

steel. Bresca fell sideways and wriggled on the ground. “They come with rules. My guess is that you have to take turns playing cards.”

“How’s that fair?” Johnny yelled as the officer gave a smirk of confirmation. “You ain’t even told us the rules!”

“I don’t have to read you your rights here,” Officer Clarabelle said, pulling a card from her deck. “In here; I’m judge, jury, and executioner!”

BINDING.

Johnny’s skin grew hot. He scratched himself, checking his body for physical wounds, but there was nothing. He just felt… odd. Kind of horny. There was a plastic taste in his mouth that he couldn't quite shake.

“What did she do?” he asked.

Nyxara snarled and dove toward Officer Clarabelle. She stood with her hands behind her back, not even flinching as her Signature pushed off of the ground and intercepted the blow.

Suddenly, Johnny was flying sideways.

CLANG!

He hit the bars of a cell and bounced off, rolling to the floor right next to Bresca. She wriggled at him, concerned, as he gasped for breath.

Ivelle moaned through the ball gag. Johnny could feel her (feel her?) excitement through the hot leather suit.

“Awww shit,” Johnny said. “Nyx, I think I know what **BINDING** does.”

He fumbled through his cards. By some freak luck, he hadn’t dropped them when he was flung. Only one card manifested a name when he reached for it and it made his nose wrinkle. He didn’t want to use her yet, but:

VEYREL OF THE IVORY SCYTHES

“Johnny, wait!”

“Huh?”



He looked up to see Nyx sprinting toward him as the mantis sprang from the card. She entered the hallway with a shriek of

triumph.

"Veyrel, attack the opposing Bearer," Johnny yelled. "Avoid his Signature!"

The mantis turned to look at him with glassy eyes. Instead of obeying, she reached down and picked up Bresca, dangling her by her rope harness. She placed the salamander's ass in her mouth. Then she spread her mandibles and swallowed.

ULP!

The lump of Bresca traveled swiftly down her throat, bouncing as it got to her stomach. Nyxara reached Johnny just as Veyrel turned toward him. Her gut hung over her twig-like legs, sloshing between her thighs. Veyrel smiled.

"Hello, Bearer," she said. "How good it is to see you again."

"You haven't Bonded yet," Nyxara said. "Damn it, Johnny, now we've wasted our turn!"

Johnny's face grew cold. Right, they'd talked about this when he'd Bonded with Nyxara and Bresca. He'd have to fuck or get swallowed by Veyrel before she'd obey him in battle and the prospect of either made him break out in goosebumps.

It was a stupid mistake.

It would cost him.

KESS, PATROL HOUND

A second Monster appeared on Officer Clarabelle's side of the field. This one was a woman with fluffy brown ears like a German Shepherd. She was also wearing a police uniform, but it looked like a costume—like something you'd see at Spirit Halloween.

"Officer Kess, reporting for duty!"

She stomped her heels together; the effect somewhat ruined by the huge, fluffy tail wagging behind her. Officer Clarabelle chuckled and pointed at Ivelle. The Signature was still rolling around in the corner, moaning.

"Binding," she said like she was calling out a play.

"Yes, ma'am!"

Kess knelt beside Ivelle and pulled her upright. Between the woman in the gimp suit's legs, there was a zipper. Kess pulled it down and a comically large cock popped out.

"Whoa," Johnny said. "Whoa!"

Nyxara was wrestling with Veyrel who was skittering from side to side, avoiding the cat's hands while Bresca jiggled around in her stomach, yelling. Only Johnny watched Kess lovingly stroke Ivelle's cock before bending over and putting it in her mouth.

The erection that Johnny got was instantaneous and painful. He stumbled against the wall as a pair of phantom lips closed around his penis, warming him slightly before enthusiastically going to town.

SLURP! SLURP! SLURP!

"He's going to Bond with you after this battle!" Nyxara was yelling. "Veyrel, gods damn it, why are you sabotaging us?!"

"Do you think he has any chance of winning?" Veyrel snapped back. "Look at him, Nyxara! We'll have better luck with a new Bearer and a claimant we can influence!"

Johnny resented that, or he would have if he wasn't getting his knob psychically slobbed by a dog girl in a police uniform. She deep-throated Ivelle and both she and Johnny groaned as her throat gripped their shaft, tongue-top working the base. Officer Clarabelle watched with obvious derision as Johnny propped himself up against the cell door.

He dropped a dozen cards just trying to read them.

"Fuck," he muttered. "Fuck."

The officer was playing with him. Her team had tactics and coordination and a deck filled with cards that fit their strategy. Johnny's team had monsters that wouldn't even listen to him and a deck that refused to reveal itself.

"Shit," he whispered as he dropped another handful of cards. Only three remained clutched between his fingers. He bent double, gasping as Kess sheathed Ivelle in her throat and kneaded her balls, drawing the orgasm out of them both.



“You bitch!”

Veyrel had pinned Nyxara to the floor and was pressing her stomach into her face. Nyxara hissed and thrashed, completely distracted.

Johnny! Johnny, she's digesting me! It… kind of tickles!

"Looks like it might be time to put you out of your misery," Officer Clarabelle said. Kess got up and wiped her mouth. Her excited eyes locked on Johnny as her stomach began to growl. "If you surrender quietly, this shouldn't hurt too bad, but if you choose to make a scene…?"

She raised her truncheon and brought it down on Ivelle's shoulders.

Ivelle screamed with pleasure.

Johnny just screamed.

Having made her point, Officer Clarabelle sat back as Kess stalked forward. Her tail was wagging a mile a minute. There was a goofy grin on her face.

"I promise I'll be so so good," Kess said. "I digest super fast, so it won't hurt at all! Then you'll be a part of my tummy and Master will rub it and tell me I'm a good girl!"

"What the fuck is this game?" Johnny asked as he stared at the three cards in his hand.

For once, all of them flashed.

>MAKE THEM GASP

>SKIN THE CAT

>GLOOM THE PSYCHOMORPH, FORMER SIGNATURE

None of the cards in his hand were good options. **MAKE THEM GASP** only worked if there was a monster available to do so. **SKIN THE CAT** sounded fucked up and bad. **GLOOM** seemed to be the best option, but Nyxara had warned him that she was dangerous and besides, like Veyrel, she was another Unbonded monster.

Kess slipped past Nyxara and Veyrel on the floor. Her neckline was wet with slobber.

"Come to Puppy," she said.

“Absolutely fuckin’ not,” Johnny said, flipping the broken skull card in his hand.

The world froze.

Nyxara and Veyrel; Kess with her hands outstretched and her mouth open; Officer Clarabelle with her foot on Ivelle’s shoulder, beady eyes squinting in satisfaction. Nyxara and Veyrel flashed a dull orange, as did the shape of Bresca in Veyrel’s stomach. Johnny, too, flashed orange, his skin pulsing to some unheard beat.

Pay the cost, Bearer.

The words felt like shards of ice in his brain. He got the same, creeping sensation that he was being watched, but this time, when he turned, there was something there.

She floated in the middle of the hallway, an ethereal, cracked skull sitting atop a fluttering white veil. Through the eye holes, Johnny could sense her malevolence. It crackled off of her like radiation, giving him goosebumps.

“The cost?” Johnny asked through frigid lips. He could see his breath in the air. “What cost?”

The skull bobbed, unanswering. Johnny looked back at his three monsters and their flashing, orange skin, then at his own skin, pulsing like…

Like an indicator.

“You want me to choose someone,” Johnny said. “To… what? Possess?”

Choose.

Johnny didn’t want to choose. If the ghost needed to possess someone, then he didn’t want to give her Veyrel who already had Bresca in her stomach. In that case, the best choice was Nyxara, who at least theoretically stood a chance in a fight. Bresca was a no go and he definitely wasn’t about to allow the ghost inside of him.

But what if it wasn’t possession?

What had Nyxara said about her? That she was powerless in her current form?

The cold was seeping through Johnny's skin, growing more painful by the second. He looked at all of his flashing monsters and closed his eyes, not wanting to make another mistake.

"Take Veyrel," he said.

Gloom cackled.

The world unfroze.

"Do hold still!" Kess said as she grabbed Johnny's shoulders. "You're being detain—

GULP!

A familiar, porcelain hand traveled over Kess's chest, unbuttoning her shirt button by button as the dog girl hung meekly from a pair of lips. When the hand reached the bottom of the shirt, it caressed Kess's abdomen, sliding back up to circle her breasts before gliding back down to cup her ass and lift her. This was followed by the slick sound of a throat opening, then a persistent ***gulp, gulp, gulp.***

A stomach appeared beneath Kess's dangling legs. Johnny could see the bulge beneath the faint, white lace, squirming and barking, growing larger with every gulp.

Then the **Creature That Was Not Veyrel** swallowed and Johnny could see her fully.

The resemblance was uncanny. She had Veyrel's delicate features; her straight, black hair and bleached skin. She had her skin and her eyes and her bottom-heavy figure, but even though she read as Veyrel, there were irreconcilable differences.

For one, she was bipedal now, standing on two, upright legs. For another, she had hooves, and her fine, black hair was half covered by a shattered deer skull, its horns hanging like a coat rack.

She carried a wicked looking scythe in her left hand. It was made of the same chitinous material that Veyrel had been made of.

"This is nice," Gloom said, patting her distended belly. "You chose well, Bearer."

"Kess!"



Across the hall, Officer Clarabelle was rifling through her cards, her face red with fury. Right in front of Johnny, Nyxara was standing

up. Bresca was beside her, finally unbound.

"That was weird!" the salamander complained. "I was in my card and then I was out here and then I was tied up and then Veyrel ate me and I was like, super digesting, and then she just disappeared!"

Nyxara hissed at Gloom. The psychomorph ignored her as she stalked toward Officer Clarabelle. Her feet made no sound as she moved.

"That was a bad idea," Nyxara whispered to Johnny. "You haven't Bonded yet. She could have killed you."

"I took a gamble," Johnny said.

"On?"

"That she'd like me more than the other gal."

Gloom swung her scythe as she walked. It whispered through the air, leaving behind strands of shadow. Wherever she passed, lights dimmed, and even the phantom prisoners in the cells shied away from her. As she walked, she whistled, and once more that cold voice sounded in Johnny's brain.

This form works nicely, Bearer. A Former Signature is a hearty meal indeed. She's still within me, you know. I can feel her hatred.

And her lust.

Ivelle rose on shaking knees to confront the ghost. Gloom regarded her, then raised her scythe.

"Wait," Johnny yelled. "We're bound—"

The scythe whistled downward and through the woman in the gimp suit. Johnny squeezed his eyes shut as she fell to her knees, but after a second, he opened them again and patted his chest. He was unharmed. Ivelle was unharmed. Gloom walked past her as if she didn't exist.

"Delicious," she said, patting her stomach.

Officer Clarabelle turned and ran. Her cards fluttered like feathers to the ground as she sprinted down the endless hallway.

Behind her, Ivelle groaned and fell onto her side, paralyzed.

“She’s scary,” Bresca noted. She shivered, then looked at Ivelle. “Wanna flip a coin to see who gets her, Nyx?”

Nyx shook her head, still staring after Gloom.

No matter how fast Officer Clarabelle seemed to run, Gloom maintained the same distance, whistling as she swung her scythe. The song echoed eerily off of the concrete walls. Its haunting melody sounded familiar to Johnny.

One of the cards on the floor—one of Officer Clarabelle’s—floated upright and sped into his hand.

APPREHEND THE SUSPECT.

“Uh, Nyx?” Johnny asked, showing her the card. “Am I allowed to use an opponent’s cards in a Feast?”

“Yes,” Nyx said, blinking and shaking her head. She inspected the card and smiled. “I suspect that one will do quite nicely.”

Johnny worried that he’d be **detained** the moment he played the card, but when it warmed in his hand, nothing happened. The price was that he couldn’t move for ten seconds. He waited, frozen, as the distant figure of Gloom turned and walked toward them.

She had a bundle under her arm.

Officer Clarabelle was hog-tied the same way that Bresca had been when she was **detained**. Her eyes darted angrily toward each of them, then widened as she looked up at Gloom. The ghost’s stomach was rumbling loudly; a wet churning sound replacing the whimpering of Kess.

“Yes,” Gloom said, smiling at Officer Clarabelle. “That’s going to happen to you, as well.”

She dumped the opposing Bearer at Johnny’s feet, then stretched. Her stomach gurgled as it collapsed in on itself, a damp glug signalling the dog girl’s descent into her intestines.

A bristly tail erupted from her rear end.

“Oh, what the fuck,” Johnny said.

Gloom hummed as her breasts doubled in size, her figure lengthening, then growing wider. Her stomach shrank, but maintained



the same puffiness that Kess's had, and her eyes, which had been pale like Veyrel's, darkened slightly. The more mature Gloom inspected

her figure, then nodded.

Officer Clarabelle began to hyperventilate into her gag.

“That’s better,” Gloom said. “Now, Bearer… I think it is time for us to Bond.”

Johnny put his hands on his belt.

“Er, now?” he asked.

Gloom chuckled.

“All you have to do is feed me.”

She nudged Officer Clarabelle with her foot.

“Then fuck me.”

“As easy as that,” Johnny said, curling his lip at the officer looking up at him from the floor. He crouched beside her with his elbows on his knees. “What was all that you were spoutin’ earlier? Called me trash? Said you were judge, jury, and executioner?”

Officer Clarabelle shook her head vigorously. Johnny clicked his tongue and stood, taking hold of the ropes that bound her hands to her feet.

“I guess the shoe’s on the other foot now. Open wide, Gloom.”

Gloom stuck out her tongue in a ghoulish parody of the dog girl and got on her knees with her hands in the air, adopting a begging posture. It weirded Johnny the fuck out, but it also slightly turned him on as he heaved on Officer Clarablle, lifting her. She struggled against her bindings to no avail. Johnny placed her ankles on Gloom’s tongue.

The woman’s muffled scream echoed from behind her gag. Gloom leaned her head back, exposing the long white column of her neck. Clarabelle’s silhouette traveled through it in stages, each gulp reshaping the ghost around her before passing her downward.

Her hips vanished.

Then her shoulders.

Then her gagged face.

Then there was nothing left but a bulge moving beneath Gloom’s skin.

Gloom sighed.



“Oooooohhh.”

Her hands traveled down her body, following Officer Clarabelle's descent. She caressed her own throat as the bulge passed beneath her fingers, then traced it over her collarbones and between her breasts. Johnny could see Clarabelle's outline clearly through the thin white material covering Gloom's chest, compressed into a narrowing passage before reaching the soft swell of her upper belly.

The ghost shuddered.

Her stomach opened and Clarabelle dropped into it all at once.

GLORP.

Gloom doubled forward with a delighted gasp as her abdomen surged outward. For half a second, Officer Clarabelle's entire body was visible beneath her skin, curled sideways in a pocket that had not been there a moment earlier. Then the walls tightened around her, smoothing away the individual details until she became one broad, struggling shape.

Gloom hugged herself.

"Mmm."

The officer kicked. Gloom's belly jumped. She kicked again, but Gloom tightened her abdomen, bringing her back into a nice, placid ball.

Gloom moaned appreciatively and looked at Johnny.

"I can't wait to see how she changes me," she said. "Now get over here and pound my pussy."

The vulgarity startled Johnny.

"Sorry," Gloom said, rolling onto her back and spreading her legs. "I think that was the mantis. Fuck me, please."

She put up her hands like paws again.

Johnny's boner had never been more confused.

"Oookay," he said, sneaking at glance at Nyxara who spun a finger beside her head.

She's crazy, Johnny. Be careful.

Gloom's belly gurgled lightly as Johnny brushed it with his fingers. Clarabelle wriggled, shaking the walls, but Gloom let out a

slow belch and she calmed down. Her ass was pressed against Gloom's navel. Gloom cupped it in her hand as Johnny pulled his pants down.

"Good," Gloom said when she saw his cock. "That will do nicely."

"You don't have to comment on my wang," Johnny said.

Gloom folded her legs around his back and pulled him forward. The heat of her cunt made his head spin as his cock half-buried itself among the folds.

"Are you shy, Bearer?" she asked, grinding her hips. Johnny had to hold onto her thighs to keep himself from shaking. His hands sank into the supple flesh there. He'd expected her to be cold, but she was very, very warm. "You don't have to be shy. In our world, sex is about as intimate as a handshake and we're very, *very* good at it."

She clenched and Johnny bucked. He fell forward onto her stomach; onto Officer Clarabelle and the pudge left behind by Kess. It was so soft and smooth that he almost plunged his face into it, but then it vibrated beneath him, sucking greedily at the trapped cop as liquid poured loudly into the chamber. Officer Clarabelle thrashed from side to side and Gloom laughed. She stroked the bindings around Clarabelle's body.

"Don't worry," she said. "She likes the pain."

That seemed to be true, actually. Johnny could hear her moaning; see her grinding against the walls for one last little bit of pleasure. Gloom fondled her breasts as she stared at him, waiting. He drew back his hips and thrust into her.

"*Guh!*"

Johnny almost came on the first pump. Maybe it was all of the pent-up adrenaline from the Feast or maybe the weird puppy shit had worked, but he was *rock hard* and ready to burst. He took a steadying breath before pushing into her a second time. Gloom, who seemed to know the effect she had on him, merely smirked with satisfaction.

"Really?" Nyxara asked.

“Shut up,” Johnny said. “Somethin’ about the big stomach and the beggin’ is driving me crazy.”



The cat girl huffed and marched over to where Bresca was playing with Ivelle. She had stripped the monster from her gimp suit, revealing Ivelle to be, well, almost completely human except for a pair of rabbit ears. She was blonde and busty. Bresca was sucking on her breasts, running her sticky tongue all over the enemy Signature's body.

"Hey!" she said as Nyxara snatched her by the armpits. Ivelle gave a lustful moan as Nyxara raised her to her lips. "You said I could have that!"

"Plans change," Nyxara said, swallowing Ivelle stubbornly.



Gloom turned Johnny's chin, directing her gaze back to her as Nyxara's gulps echoed through the lockup. He had achieved a rhythm that he could keep without cumming, but Gloom was making it difficult for him. She kept clenching her stomach, causing Clarabelle to moan.

“What’s wrong, Bearer?” Gloom asked. “Why are you holding back?”

“I’m not,” Johnny gasped.

“Want me to do the thing again?”

She widened her eyes and stuck her tongue out. Johnny throbbed inside of her, nearly losing control.

Nyxara plopped herself beside them. Her stomach had tripled in size, but as a result of eating so fast, she had developed the hiccups. Her chest jumped as she angrily tried to suppress them.

“What?” Johnny asked as she glared at him.

“Nothing.”

Now there were two thrashing stomachs in front of Johnny, both filled with moaning women, both jiggling seductively as he bit his lip.

“Why did everyone else get to eat someone?” Bresca asked.

She had wandered over and plunked herself down behind Johnny, pressing her breasts into his back as she whined for attention.

“Johnny?”

Nyxara pulled on his sleeve. When he turned to look at her, she put her hands up like paws. Her stomach lurched against her elbows, shuddering violently.

“Bearer.”

Now it was Gloom who tugged at him, tightening her grip with her legs. Johnny bucked as three women pressed against him, sending him over the edge.

“Guh!”

He pulled out at the last second, a geyser of cum splattering over Gloom and Nyxara’s stomachs as he fell backward into Bresca’s arms. The three of them stared at him on his back, blinking up at the ceiling of ***The Lockup***.

“Does that count as Bonding with all of you?” Johnny asked as the walls around him expanded. “Like a three-for-one kind of deal?”

Gloom had finished digesting Clarabelle. ***The Lockup*** was fading, returning them to the chapel.

“No,” Gloom said.

“Not even close,” Nyxara said.

“I still have to eat you,” Bresca reminded him.

Johnny stretched. His cards were scattered on the floor around him, dormant now that the Feast was over. The sounds of the city continued outside and he felt like he could feel the world spinning, turning slowly on its axis.

Nothing about his situation had changed. He was homeless. He was sleeping in abandoned buildings. Random people kept trying to kill him.

But he no longer felt lost.

“Okay,” Johnny said. “I guess we’ll take it one at a time.”

FIN





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Love,
the Snakethroat Crew

(also, if you'd like to chat with us, we have a Discord server!)