

## “Regina”

Tomara stumbled a bit as Ben led her forward. She was blindfolded and had no idea where they were. Today was Tomara’s 1000<sup>th</sup> birthday—one-third of a normal succubus’ lifespan. Of course, she was an effectively immortal android now, but she appreciated the sentiment. Ben had promised her the biggest present of her life, while complaining that he “would never be able to top it.”

As she moved forward, Tomara could hear noises that sounded like computers humming, and something else, something odd... Bubbles? “Ben,” Tomara said, giggling a bit, “could you at least tell me where we are?”

“Jayhawk Arctic Base, my dear!” Ben replied, a note of triumph in his voice. “And as a matter of fact, we have arrived. Tomy, I give you...” he continued with a dramatic intonation as he slipped her blindfold off, “the Uterus Chamber!”

Tomara nearly rolled her eyes at the flash of lightning and small peal of thunder that followed, but she was quickly transfixed by what she saw in the dimly-lit room. There were computers and monitors all around. She recognized what she saw on some of the monitors: one of them showed a heart monitor’s pulsing line, another showed slightly fluctuating bars indicating concentrations of certain chemicals. But all that was not nearly as interesting as what they were all hooked up to.

In the center of the room was a huge glass tube capped at the top and bottom with machines. Inside the chamber was some kind of fluid; she could tell by all the bubbles running up from the bottom of the chamber. Inside the chamber were some wires and tubes... All running to a strange creature suspended in the middle of the chamber. The glass was somewhat tinted, so she got in close for a better look.

Tomara’s eyes widened as she realized what the “creature” was. It was a fetus... A feline fetus. She adjusted her robotic eyes to get a clearer view. It was... a cheetah? No, that wasn’t right, she could see tiny, underdeveloped tendrils forming at the back of the jaw; it was a coeurl, just like her. But her sensors indicated that much of the skin was blue—the same color as Ben’s fur. There were also tiny, underdeveloped wings forming on its back.

Tomara touched the glass, completely in awe. “Ben,” she said, not turning her gaze away from the baby, “what is this?”

“*That*, my dear, is our new daughter.”

Tomara whipped her head back toward Ben. “Our... *daughter!*? But how can that be?”

“You ever heard of in-vitro fertilization?”

Tomara said nothing, her jaw hanging slightly loose.

Ben chuckled a bit as he walked up to her. “Yeah, it’s kinda like that, only the baby grows inside this chamber instead of an actual womb. Y’see, Tomy, it’s like this: on the night you were killed, Daryil was able to save as many of your eggs as he could. Then of course, you add my sperm and... Well, there you go.” Ben turned his gaze to the baby and his wife did likewise. “Of course, it’s a delicate procedure, and not cheap. That’s why I’ve been kind of stingy for the last century or so; I was saving up for this.”

Ben put an arm around his wife. “I know you... we both have kind of regretted that we didn’t have more children before your original body was killed. I considered doing this centuries ago, but I wanted to wait until I was sure you were ready. I know it’s not the same, but... I knew you’d be happy regardless.”

Ben looked back at Tomara. Jayhawk had done a good job designing their android replica bodies; the tears streaming down his wife’s face were certainly artificial, but no one would know the difference. “I’ve timed this perfectly,” he began again, “It’s been four months since conception; by now the baby would be able to hear noises coming from outside the womb, if this were a normal pregnancy. Of course, that chamber doesn’t exactly conduct sound waves so well, but fortunately, we have the ability to communicate telepathically, don’t we?” Ben winked at her and put his other hand on her other shoulder. “And I brought you here today specifically so your voice can be the first she ever hears. Go on,” he said, gesturing toward the baby, “say ‘hi’ to your daughter.”

Tomara stood there staring, mouth agape, for another moment until Ben heard her voice in his mind. "...Baby? Hi, darling," she said. She stifled a squeal as the baby kicked in surprise. "I... I can hear her voice!" she said out loud, beginning to sob. "It's just senseless babbling, but I can hear it! Can you hear it, Ben?" She began to weep.

Ben hugged her tight, wrapping his wings around her as she cried. "Happy birthday, Tomy," he whispered softly.

They didn't even notice as Jakob walked past the doorway, quietly shooing Daryil and Ashley away.

END