

||Chapter eight - awakening | _

The fox woke up, gasping for air. He bewilderedly looked around, and noticed he was in his own bed in room 263. Immediately after that, he looked at the chameleon, who was soundly asleep in his own bed. Confused about how he got back, the fox sat up straight in his bed, when he noticed that he was still wearing his pajamas, only with a slight stain around his groin. Roya's cheeks turned red in slight embarrassment, after which he noticed that the metronome on his nightstand was still steadily ticking. The fox looked at it, turned it off and looked back at the chameleon.

"Roc" the fox whispered. "Are you awake?"

The chameleon groaned and slowly sat straight up. "Now I am." He replied.

Roya struggled to find words, awkwardly looking around the room.

"Do you remember anything about last night?" the fox asked.

The chameleon squinted his eyes in confusion. "Well, yeah. I remember dreaming about driving my dad's car. Also I went to the toilet at one point, while you and Oliver were sound asleep. Why?"

".. no reason." The fox replied, starting to doubt himself. "Guess I just had a weird nightmare." Roya followed up.

Oliver stretched and rubbed through his eyes. "That's normal. Your brain isn't used to hypnosis, so it's been hyperactive at night. I know what you're going through." The goat told Roya.

"That has to be it, I guess." The fox replied. Roc yawned, got up, and walked towards Roya. "Get dressed and then we're gonna get breakfast"

The two walked through the hallways of the sleeping quarters, who were buzzing with students who'd just woken up. Some of them were slightly more active than the others.

"I'm really curious about this hypnosis thing now. I've got unlocking next week, but I wanna see if it's something for me first. Think you can 'tize me before they get to fuck with my head?" the chameleon asked. Roya looked at his roommate, considering the offer he'd just gotten. "I can try," the fox replied, "but I can't promise anything. I've only been hypnotized twice." He continued.

The chameleon frowned. "Twice?" he asked.

"Nevermind that. I meant once" the fox replied.

|Chapter nine - first attempt|

The day passed pretty fast for the two roommates. They both shared the same roster for the entirety of the day. After two hours of reading and researching classical theater plays, the students all got lunch break, and the two quickly lunched and then retreated back into their room.

"You sure you wanna do this?" Roya asked his roommate, who was already excitedly laying on his bed with his eyes closed.

"yeah, yeah! Let's begin. I *need* to know now." The chameleon replied.

The fox nodded, grabbed his metronome and turned it on.

"Alright. I want you to try to focus on the ticking on the metronome. Focus on the slow ticks, synchronizing your breaths with the tick. In, out. In, out. You think you can do that?" the fox began. The chameleon replied with a short "yup."

"What I want you to do is just relax your entire body, and listen to my voice. Just follow my voice and you'll be fine. Try to imagine being in a place you feel safe. Like a forest, or a local park, or whatever." The fox said, paying attention to his roommate. The chameleon had a relaxed expression, very attentive to the fox. "Can you describe the place to me?" Roya asked.

"It's a beach.." the chameleon began. "I've been here before. It's a beach in Spain where I spent most of my summer last year. It's completely empty except for me." The chameleon replied.

"Good. I want you to imagine laying in a hammock on that beach. The sun is shining on you, relaxing your entire body as the warmth spreads through your head. It's not uncomfortably warm though, because there's a slight breeze keeping you at perfect temperature. Listen to the ticking of the metronome, as the tides roll in and out with your breathing."

"Yes.." the chameleon murmured, softly floating to the words of the fox.

"You're doing very good now, just drifting to my words as you sink deeper into relaxat-"

Suddenly, the fox got rudely interrupted by the intercom in their room. "Attention to all students. The principal would like to make an announcement in the dinner hall. All students please gather at the dinner hall. Thank you."

The fox sighed and turned off the metronome. "Sorry, we can try again at a later point."

"It's fine! I already love it!" the chameleon replied.

|Chapter ten - Announcement|

One by one, the students gathered at the dining hall where the rector, along with a couple of teachers, were patiently waiting for the students to arrive. Roc and Roya were ones of the last to arrive in the hall, as most hadn't left during lunch. The fox and chameleon sat down at an empty table and waited for the wolf to start talking.

"Hello Students! I'm happy to announce the first visitors! Next Monday, a couple of scouts will come and see you play. You will all individually have 5 minutes to show your talent. You'll all have plenty of time to practice in the upcoming week! Also we've made sure everybody gets at least one Unlocking class scheduled in. Be sure check your rosters as they have been updated to fit the visitors in. Have fun and good luck practicing for next week!"

Roc looked at Roya. "Exciting stuff!" the chameleon said. "Guess this is gonna be a usual thing, seeing as we're only one week into the year" he continued.

The fox nodded. He was already thinking about what he'd perform.

"I think I'll do slam poetry. I've always liked writing and improvising" Roc said to Roya. The fox smirked. "I was thinking the same thing." He replied, scratching behind his ear.

The fox wrote a lot of poetry back when he was still in middle school, and he was usually the one to write poems or stories for in the school newspapers. Now that scouts would come by to check for talent, he'd have a bit more pressure behind it though. Thinking about the scouts made him excited. The fox loved flexing his literature-muscles.

Roc grabbed his phone and checked his new roster. "Oh wow, looks like my unlocking got placed forward. I've got a session in 10 minutes. Guess I'll make my way there!" the chameleon said, before scurrying off into the hallways. Roya watched his roommate walk away and grabbed his own phone, looking at his own schedule. The fox didn't have any lessons left for the rest of the day, so he decided to go to his own room and try the hypnosis thing again.

Roya unlocked his door, hopped onto his bed, and turned on the metronome. As he lay down on his bed, the fox closed his eyes. However, the second he closed his eyes, the fox could see himself walking through the fourth building. Memories of the vague nightmare haunted his thoughts, and the fox couldn't really concentrate on relaxing. After about

15 minutes of trying to relax, the fox gave up and turned off his metronome. He'd have to wait for his next unlocking session to try and get under.

|Chapter eleven - Scout|

The rest of the week went by pretty fast. The chameleon had returned incredibly excited from his first unlocking session, telling the fox about how he'd loved the lesson. The fox had attempted a few more times to go under hypnosis but to no avail – the thought of the fourth house lingered whenever he concentrated on the metronome.

In the weekend, the two practiced their own individual play in front of each other, attempting to give each other critique to improve on their performance – despite the fact that they both new performing in front of actual professional scouts added a whole new dimension. Roya had written a rap-like song text in poetry version about a forbidden relationship, whereas Roc decided to write an improv play centered around a kid discovering the world. Eventually they managed to convince Oliver to give feedback, as he'd already had a year on the academy. The goat didn't really offer much in the end.

Eventually, it turned Monday and the fox and chameleon gathered at the theater, where their class would perform one by one. After waiting for their classmates to finish – since they were chosen in alphabetical order, Roc was told to enter the theater hall. The chameleon looked over his shoulder and whispered a “wish me luck” to the fox. “Break a leg!” the fox shouted, before watching his roommate disappear into the theater.

The theater was an eerily empty building. Even though it had been renovated, most of the walls were still covered by scaffolding and blue cloth. The chameleon looked around and followed his teacher, who opened a door leading to a dimly lit room. “toi toi toi” the teacher whispered, before gesturing the Chameleon to enter the room. Roc walked in, and heard the door close behind him. There were three scouts sitting on black folding chairs – one caracal; one young wolf; and a horse. In front of them was a small stage, lit up by one single spotlight. The chameleon scraped his throat, got up on the stage, nodded to the scouts, and began his play.

The scouts payed close attention to the chameleon, took notes, and once Roc finished they applauded. The chameleon bowed for them and waited for them to speak.

“Thank you, you can go now. Just follow the same way you came in.” The wolf said. He sounded just as old as their roommate Oliver. The response slightly shook the Chameleon, who'd expected a more positive feedback. But he didn't get stopped midway either so he couldn't really

judge. The chameleon got off stage, walked through the door, and went outside again.

"How'd it go?" Roya asked immediately. The chameleon shrugged. "fine, I guess." He genuinely didn't know.

Roc sat back down on the plastic bench placed in front of the theater building, and watched his fox roommate enter the building.

The fox had a similar experience. He entered the room, noticed the scouts sitting on their chairs, and got on stage. He began his play, slowly building up in his pace. As the fox ended, the wolf nodded. The scout scribbled something on his notepad, applauded, and repeated the exact same line.

"Thank you, you can go now. Just follow the same way you came in." The wolf said.

Roya smirked. He now got why Roc didn't know how he did. The scouts remained as emotionless as they were at the beginning of his play. Roya bowed, got off the stage, and walked back out.

He was immediately greeted by Roc who asked the same question.

"I guess it went fine! I couldn't really tell, they weren't really expressive about it." The fox replied, suppressing a smirk. The fox sat down next to the chameleon and they waited for the final two students to finish up.

After about half an hour, the scouts appeared from inside the building and stepped onto the grass. They were carrying an envelope, with a few notes scribbled on it. The wolf stepped forward, snatching the envelope out of the paws of the caracal, who got caught off guard by it.

"We're all quite impressed by your talent. You're a good bunch – especially for students in their first year – nay – month. We've selected a list of two students who we want to speak to again." The wolf began. Roc and Roya glanced at each other.

The wolf continued. "We'd like to speak.." the wolf opened the envelope and squinted his eyes – reading the name on the paper. "Roc, the chameleon again." Roc smiled, poking his roommate. "Nice!" the fox replied, giving the chameleon a fist bump.

Roc stepped forward.

"We'd also like to speak with Roya, the fox." The wolf continued "Ayy!" exclaimed, turning back around to hug his roommate. The two got selected out of their entire class. Excitedly the fox got up, stepped forward, and together they followed the scouts back into the theater.

The scouts sat back down in their chair, except for the wolf, who gestured the two roommates to get back on the podium. Roc and Roya both listened, climbing back up on the podium. The wolf clapped in his paws and sat down in his chair.

“Good. And now, stage 3”

Snap