

Ghostpaw fingered the plain, cardboard box as he picked it up off of the stoop and carried it inside. He touched the thin red ribbon and the tiny, folded card in momentary reverie, stepping into the smaller of the two doors carved out of the warehouse, the girth of his thick snow leopard tail flowing behind him. It wasn't quite claustrophobic in the concrete valley between the tilt-ups, although anything larger than his own sportsbike couldn't easily turn itself between the buildings. Instead, the white motorcycle looked small in the open bay of a tall single wide garage door, a glaring gap in the side of the grey urban canyon that revealed a narrow mechanics workshop - like concrete ribs and steel hex-wrench viscera under the smooth skin.

From outside, he'd look like he was wearing proper riding gear as he stepped into the shadows of the interior. Sheathed neck down in black and holding a white leopard-spotted helmet under one arm, a casual glance wouldn't discern the thin, tight material that hugged him tightly from street armor to prevent road rash, but the skintight garb would likely shred. Padding to take a spill would perhaps obscure the thin, almost effeminate lines of his body, and almost certainly bulk out shoulders that otherwise curl down into his lithe, lean frame with the roundest of edges.

Helmet set down by the door, a practiced paw motion up behind his head, and the tightly wrapped cascade of white headfur rolled down over those shoulders with a matching smoothness. The tips trailed lightly over the top of his exposed tail and the rubberized ring that allowed his luxurious tail to fly free.

With a sigh, he dropped the package lightly onto his table - An old tool chest, that along with a battered, duct-taped couch made up the only furniture in the small living space, wedged in on raised concrete beside the workshop. It held his eyes, even if paws were needed elsewhere - Even with well hidden mesh vents on the catsuits under arms and thighs, it conspired with his fur to become brutally hot. Holding the high collar and yanking a shining silver zipper down his chest, peeling shoulders from the heated embrace of the suit... It was all the most important step of his evening ritual, right before he brought the bike in.

This time, that task slipped further down priorities, as he slipped heavily onto the couch, air whooshing from the suits vents. Fingers held open the letter's flap, violet eyes narrowed at the message, then claws snipped at the ribbon. Top off... and inside, an article of deep, dried blood red clothing to give the Leopard pause.

Solid, hand-sewn stitches marked vertical panels of red brocade, stiff with boning. Fine embroidery curled across the seams like flowers overgrowing their pots - almost literally, with ornate roses of every color but red curling around the garment's hourglass shape. Glistening black chord, shining in black metal eyelets. He tugged his paws off and picked the piece out, holding it up. "A corset." he purred to himself with a smile.

"A Corset?" he had laughed, at first. But now, with the low, gleaming green wrapped around his torso, the lithe feline chided his own inhibition. "Nothing ventured..."

".. Nothing gained ." she finished. She'd been one of the good ones, Ghost recalled. On her, against the unblemished, almost eerie white of her thick white husky fur, the emerald silks would glisten like dragonscales, making the kelly green of her eyes vibrant in the low lights. Now, claws dipped in matching emerald paint ran and danced through rosettes along his spine, at least, where the

tight corset didn't hide them. Four eyelets at the top stood empty, the cord usually threaded through them needed to cinch her clothing around his bigger frame. Her chest had not been ample - And the underbust style meant for just the barest inflection of cups, perhaps saving Ghostpaw from absurdity as she had cinched him into the girdle. He had never really reflected on her flat-chested nature.

At the time, he came to her for what filled their time between the sheets, not what filled her tops... That, and then after, laying out and watching by candlelight as their spontaneous lovemaking filtered through her deft mind and poured onto paper in free verse that somehow always did their passion justice.

*That was very long ago.* He pushed the bike into the shop, nudging the big green button on the wall to bring the big roll-up door rolling back down and locking. He hardly noticed the extra sweat under his matted fur, but pushed the suit down to his waist nonetheless. Turned inside-out as he extracted himself, it followed him like a too thick, too shiny shadow, blotting out his tail. He pushed the kickstand down and then glanced back over to the tiny table, to the red. Was this fleeting memory the last time he'd worn a corset, despite his eagerness of late to endure the chafing, fur-matting embrace of much more restricting rubber second skins? He thought it had. Then, he thought about her.

Within the apartment the duo existed in another world. He'd arch into her playful claws, sometimes before, and sometimes after they lay beside one another, panting, usually with his middle cinched, his already lean body accentuated by the night's choice of corsetry, usually the emerald underbust. The way her fingers slipped under it, the way she laced it up and down with hypnotic precision. Laying in the curling smoke of candles while a fountain pen squirreled across homemade parchment, recording stanzas about his violet eyes, her rounded hips, or her long tongue, his calloused, rough fingers...It could have gone on forever.

It, however, did not. Like many reveries it ended when the outside world came knocking, this housecall the booted hindpaw of a stout, pierced doberman winning out over the inexpensive doorframe of a near-penniless poet's apartment. His latest escape, his latest little world, came crashing down with the sound of that door, incense and innocence blown away by the door's last gust of motion.

"D'you think Zeb couldn't see you, Slut? Down the street with his binoculars, think you hid your damn toy bike? You waste the Boss' time, the boss won't let you keep nice things." he straightened up, pierced, clipped ears brushing the doorframe of the front room as he strode right for the lounging duo, too-small white tank straining as he reached out.

Neither one paid much mind to the lanky hyena woman entering after, long coat draped from her shoulders, twirling a cell phone around by the tchotchke-capped strap in the doorway and grinning in that too-many-teeth way her sort always seem to.

"We knew you was skipping out on us again, Snowy-Romeo. This titless waif gonna pay up for you, or get more titless?"

Ghost lay tense, frozen, survival instinct waiting for the other shoe to drop. Best not to be hasty, when people kick in the door. Especially these people. Hope strained against his inner, foiled sense of cynicism, waiting, hoping-

"Well, watcha gotta say, ya little boy?" The doberman grabbed the husky by the shoulder alongside his crude insult, and of course, there was the knife. It was, he winced, kind of Rod's thing. Comically small in his hands, it never made it less sharp.

The Husky was stunned, eyes wide. Looking to him.

Ghost sighed, and folded his ears back, slowly shifting, sitting up, and sighing as, luck would have it, the dog took the knife off of his love's shoulder when he laughed at the clothing. "Not bad enough you're slumming down here, Wastin' precious screwing clock time - Stealin' clothes too?"

The leopard winced and wilted, seeing comprehension in the husky's eyes.

The 'Yena bitch stepping into the room, kicking idly at stacks of journals and putting out a cigarette in an open inkwell, must have seen it to. "So, I take it then," she mused matter-of-factly, "You didn't know that lover-boy here.." she reached out, grabbed his scruff and yanked him off the bed, "...is a whore? Funny. He seems to keep forgetting to charge pretty, broke things like you."

Swallowing, steeling himself, Ghost yanked against Zeb's grip. "Rod- She hasn't done anything, you jackasses. " he purred, forcing down fear and irritation in equal parts. "Just take me back. Take my bike. Put me back in-" Zeb smacked him under the jaw, fangs clipping his tongue with a sharp whimper of pain.

Behind the now-shaking husky, the thug spoke up, making her turn her head just slightly, ears high and trembling. "Aw, hell no." Rod chuckled. "You know the rules, slut. You gotta be all pretty and show-ready." that horrible little knife clicked again, churning Ghost's insides as his lover wailed under a tiny cut to her upper arm. "No use for damaged goods, as you well know. So, this is the..."

"Last time we have this talk.. Ever." Ghost sighed, deflating, sagging into Zeb's hold on his neck. "Just stop. Don't..."

Zeb yanked him back, and tore the cord of the corset with her teeth for want of an empty hand.

Rod closed the knife, via a little twist and tug that bit into the poet's shoulder, husky and leopard wincing in pain or empathy respectively. "Was that so damn hard, loverboy?"

Tugging the emerald corset away and throwing it in the Husky's lap, where it clashed with the ribbon of red on her shoulder, Zeb whistled and turned to haul Ghost to the door.

"Yeah." he sighed, holding the red corset in his hands. "It was pretty damn hard." But that was a long time ago.

Ghostpaw swayed his tail and leaned his catsuit-clad ass back against his bike, remembering the name, the message in the little fold of paper:

"Made me think of you, loverboy." it said.

How words change. The world changes. Remembering now and then was good, but as he looked down, ran his buttery soft fingertips over the corset, he exhaled, he smiled. Maybe there wouldn't be poetry this time. He wouldn't have to worry about the door falling in, either.

Sometimes, when he was lucky, things didn't change - Tugging the red, rosy garment

tight to his bared, lithe torso, Ghostpaw admired himself in the long, broken shard of mirror bolted to his workbench.

He still looked amazing in a corset.