

The pair made their way back through the tall halls of the draconic lair, the smaller of the two hunched over and rubbing his arms, the strange new feeling of smooth, clean scales under his digits causing him to slow now and then while he checked himself over, marveling at the brightened hue of his scales, only to yip and hurriedly catch up with the dragoness when she glanced back to him, an amused, fond smile on her face. Shuffling sheepishly under that gaze, Ovu stepped hurriedly to keep pace with the dragoness, following her back into the bedchamber and coming to a stop at her side once she settled on her haunches near the mattress.

Looking down to the kobold, Mortivir held her paw palm-up to the little humanoid again, smiling when he obediently stepped up onto the limb without prompt this time. Lifting him to the head of the bed, the wyrm settled Ovu down by the headboard once more, following him up onto the mattress and hearing him give a little squeak as her weight shifted the massive bed under him. Mortivir couldn't help a soft chuckle when the kobold fell onto his rump, looking up to her with those awe-struck eyes while she settled herself down upon the mattress, her long tail pulling the satchel she'd brought in previously toward herself. The dragon retrieved more of the silk she'd pilfered from the tapestries along the walls, a brief frown forming on her face at the demonic entity portrayed in the textile's patterning, though that image was easily undone as her claws started to glide through the smooth fabric, cutting bolts and reams from the silk as Ovu watched curiously.

The reptilian humanoid fidgeted with his digits in the absence of his familiar, ragged vest, watching while Mortivir's sharp claws easily parted the silken fibers and trying not to imagine how much effort it might take for those powerful limbs to do the same to a kobold's hide. Ovu gave a startled gasp when the dragon suddenly brought one of those reams of silk up to his bare chest, going still while she tilted her head side to side with a thoughtful hum. The kobold's eyes widened at taking in the sight of the huge claws that held the silk against him, gulping anxiously as he felt his tail tucking tight against his thigh.

Mortivir paused in her work when she felt a soft shudder through the silk she held, her gaze focusing on Ovu's face and finding him staring timidly at her paw. Recognition dawning on the dragon's face, the wyrm was quick to pull the limb back and set the silk aside for a moment, the kobold looking up toward the dragoness quizzically, only to blink in surprise when he found her suddenly gone again. Before he could call out with worry at suddenly being alone, Ovu sucked in a sharp breath when he felt a slender hand on his shoulder, eyes snapping down to see the silver scales of the dragon's smaller form, offering him a comforting smile and giving his shoulder a gentle squeeze.

"Is this better?" Mortivir asked, holding herself in a relaxed posture that she hoped to be non-threatening to the timid kobold.

Ovu's brow knitted while his head cocked, eyes widening when he realized why the wyrm had changed her form again, shame crossing his features as he averted his gaze. "V-Vir doesn't have to," he started, worried that he'd somehow offended the dragon with his own cowardice, "Ovu d-didn't mean to "

The kobold found himself quieted again by a gentle brush on the head, lifting his gaze from the bed to regard Mortivir with an uncertain expression. The silver-scaled reptilian regarded him with kind, gentle eyes, stroking his shoulder tenderly while she sat down beside him. "You're less scared when I'm your size, right?" the shapeshifted wyrm observed, watching the red kobold's expression shift between guilt and uncertainty, yet still he eventually gave a short, affirmative nod.

Before his gaze could fall again, Mortivir caught Ovu's chin in her palm, lifting his muzzle so he looked in her eyes once more. "It's okay," the dragoness crooned, hand sliding up the kobold's jaw and caressing his cheek reassuringly, "You don't have to be scared anymore. I'll keep you safe."

Ovu stared into the silver eyes that held his gaze in such a dominant, yet gentle manner, authority and care near-tangibly radiating from the shrunken dragoness. It was such an unfamiliar experience, the kobold could only sit and stare in wonder, his vision blurring when his eyes started to sting with the alien emotions overwhelming him in that moment of tender contact. "B-but, Ovu is supposed to " the little humanoid tried to object in a cracking voice, only to find himself quieted by a gentle finger on his muzzle yet again.

"You don't *need* to do anything," Mortivir said, patting the side of the kobold's muzzle gently and offering a kind smile, "If you want to help me out and offer your services, that's your choice. But nobody is ordering you to; you're your own master now, Ovu."

The reptile opened his mouth to reply, only to close it again, repeating the process several times, before finally managing to muster a reply. "But Ovu... he always hears that dragons is masters. Ovu... wants to be a good kobold and have a dragon master to make proud," the kobold tried to explain, his slender hands wringing together anxiously as he spoke his mind, the tension in his shoulders revealing the lingering trepidation in expressing himself so openly to a dragon, even a transfigured one, "Vir is... not wanting Ovu? Is... not good enough for Vir to be Ovu's master?"

It was Mortivir's turn to lose her words, for once, taken aback by the kobold's reasoning and question. "That's not... Ovu, you shouldn't," the dragoness attempted to reply, finding herself looking into the pleading, submissive eyes of the humanoid for several moments, before her head tilted as she asked in a tone of genuine curiosity, "Is that what you really want? To have a dragon be your master?"

The response came faster than the dragoness expected, Ovu's head bobbing up and down as he gave a subtle, hopeful smile. "Kobolds is supposed to make dragons proud and be useful to masters, Ovu is wanting to make a dragon proud," he insisted with a sincerity that brought a soft chuckle from the dragon that sat beside him, her head cocking the other way while she regarded the little humanoid.

"You're going to be insistent on this, aren't you?" Mortivir asked in a slightly exasperated, yet endeared tone, the kobold rubbing his arm abashedly from the dragon's question. Sighing softly, the silver kobold shook her head briefly, before patting the reptile's shoulder. "Look, I'm not going to call myself your mistress," she prefaced, chuckling slightly when the kobold's face dropped, reaching up and lightly brushing Ovu's head, "But, if that's what you'd like to call me, I'm not going to stop you."

Ovu perked up slightly, though the nuance of the dragoness' statement seemed to evade him as he cocked his head this way and that. "Ovu... can call Vir his mistress?" the kobold clarified, leaning forward while his tail wagged behind him subtly, "Ovu has a dragon master to make happy?"

Another few seconds of regarding the kobold's expression, and the dragoness eventually gave a permissive nod. "It seems very important to you," she observed, giving the kobold's head an affectionate pet, "So, if that's what you really want, then yes."

Once again perking up, Ovu opened his mouth to reply, only to hesitate when Mortivir lifted a hand. "But, I want you to tell me if I ever ask you to do something you're not comfortable with, or if you feel like I'm taking advantage of you," the dragoness insisted, looking into her

companion's eyes with clear concern, "I know you believe that dragons are meant to be masters, but... Ovu, just promise me you'll be honest with me, no matter what."

The reptile's head cocked this way and that at the request, yet still he gave another of those half smiles as he nodded obediently. "Yes, Master! Ovu will be honest, is promise!"

Mortivir cocked her brow while a small smile came over her own features. "Even if I ask you to do something you don't want to do?" she checked, and she watched as the kobold's features fell, his muzzle opening and closing repeatedly while his head ducked down, gaze falling and fiddling with his digits.

"Vir wants Ovu to... say when Vir asks for something Ovu doesn't like?" the red reptilian asked, not lifting his gaze from the bedsheets, "That... won't make Ovu a bad kobold?"

"No, it won't," the dragoness assured the kobold, "Consider this your top-priority order; you will tell me if I ask, order, request, command, or demand anything that you don't like. You will tell me promptly and clearly, and you do not, absolutely *do not*, have to obey such an order. Are we clear?"

Ovu's head lifted when he was addressed in a more formal tone, listening attentively while he hugged around himself. He considered the dragoness' words for another moment, before finally nodding as he replied, "Y-yes... Ovu will tell." There was a pause, the kobold regarding the transfigured dragon for another few seconds of quiet, before adding in a low, soft tone, "Vir... isn't going to yell or hurt Ovu if Ovu doesn't want to do something Vir asks him to do?"

"Absolutely not," the wyrm reaffirmed, smiling as she reached out to touch the kobold's cheek, surprised when he didn't pull away this time, simply looking to his newly-dubbed mistress with that attentive, eager expression, "I'll never hurt or yell at you, Ovu. That's a dragon's promise, swear on my heart."

The kobold visibly relaxed from that single promise, his muzzle curling into a more sincere smile. "Dragon... promise," he repeated, reaching up and rubbing his neck as he considered the words, eventually giving a shallow nod as he leaned forward, eyes holding his companion's gaze with lingering wariness, "Vir... makes nice promises."

Smiling to the kobold, Mortivir gave the cheek her palm rested against an approving pat. "And I'll hold you to your own promise, too," the dragon in kobold form insisted, before returning her focus to her task.

As the shapeshifted wyrm worked on the silk, Ovu considered the strange request that the dragon had made of him. What sort of mistress would ask her servant to disobey her? It was such a paradoxical concept. Then, would he be disobedient by doing as he was asked? What if it was just something unpleasant like washing out the latrine? Was he supposed to obey then, or not? So many questions ran through the kobold's head, yet he couldn't find the courage to seek clarification. Especially not when the dragon was so busy with... well, whatever she was doing.

Looking to the silver kobold, Ovu fidgeted with his claws another moment, before tentatively speaking up. "Does... M-mistress want help?" he asked, a scaley digit pointing at the ream of silk the dragoness had made from one of the destroyed tapestries, the kobold eager to find something less confusing to focus his attention on.

Lifting her head, Mortivir hummed as she regarded the little humanoid. "Well, how much experience do you have in outfit coordination?" she asked, a nagging feeling of doubt playing at her mind even as she asked the question. That intuition seemed to prove correct when the kobold's face fell slightly, before lifting up and looking to her with determination.

"O-Ovu can learn," he insisted, though his gaze shifted sideways as he fiddled with his fingers, "Ovu sees old nana doing the sewing with rat hides and such when was little. Is mostly remembering how she did this."

The dragoness couldn't help a scowl; not just at the choice of material for the kobold's previous clothing, though. "Ovu, we really have to work on your Common," the wyrm remarked, looking to the kobold and changing dialects to Draconic, *"No reason to keep yourself limited to a second language, though. It isn't as though there are others present who need us to be understandable."*

Smiling to the kobold encouragingly, that expression fell when the humanoid simply regarded her with a blank expression, his head cocking with uncertainty. "You... don't speak Draconic?" Mortivir asked incredulously, her own eyes wide with disbelief.

Ovu once more fidgeted, wringing his thin hands. "Elder kobolds did speak dragonspeak, but old master forbid teaching this to younger kobbies," the reptilian replied, rubbing his neck, "Said dragonspeak was for dragons, kobolds shouldn't speak it."

Once again glad that the red dragon had met as gruesome a fate as he had, Mortivir took a moment to breathe in, before exhaling and looking toward the kobold again. "I take it proper Common wasn't exactly an encouraged field of study either, was it?" she asked, the abashed kobold eventually giving a subtle shake of his head in the negative.

"Gods bless this poor soul," Mortivir groaned under her breath, drawing a palm down her long face, before straightening herself and shifting around to face the kobold properly, "Right, since you've at least the basics of Common, let's start there. Give me a sentence."

Ovu regarded the dragoness with uncertainty again. "Sentence is... punishment?" the kobold asked with confusion, "Ovu isn't supposed to "

"No, a sentence is..." the dragoness corrected, before trailing off as she once more centered herself to keep from showing her frustration at the kobold's forced lack of education. "Right, a sentence can be a punishment, yes," the wyrm affirmed, before clarifying, "But it can also be a connected sequence of words forming a thought. We speak in sentences. Understand?"

That blank stare told the dragoness all she needed to know, taking in a sharp breath as she tried again. "'The kobold had a steak,' this is a sentence," she gave as an example, "I want you to just... give me a thought. Anything that comes to mind."

Brow furrowing another moment, Ovu's expression suddenly lit up once he put the pieces together. "Oh, Ovu understands!" he declared, starting to think of what he could say, only to have his thought process interrupted.

"Okay, let's start there," Mortivir quickly jumped in, latching onto the kobold's comprehension while it was still hot, "When you're speaking of yourself, you should be using 'I', not your name. Just as I do, speaking in first person."

Ovu seemed confused again, though not for lack of understanding. "Is... not rude?" he asked, rubbing his neck again, "Old master didn't want kobolds speaking this way... said it was above kobolds to say as if was... um, word was 'individuals'?"

"I hope Asmodeus himself is chewing on your soul right now," Mortivir growled subtly, though she was quick to subdue the sound when Ovu yipped and shuffled back fearfully. "Not directed at you, dear," the dragoness hastily reassured the kobold, before clearing her throat and continuing, "No, it's not rude. Go ahead, give it a try."

Though hesitant, especially after seemingly making the dragoness angry, Ovu still gave another obedient nod. "Um... I... understands?" he remarked anxiously.

"I understand'," Mortivir corrected, scooting closer to brush the kobold's shoulder, "Try again."

"Oh. I, um, understand?"

"That's it! There you go," the dragoness was quick to praise the kobold, offering an encouraging smile as she stroked his arm, "We'll have you speaking properly in no time. And looking proper as well, once we have some new clothes for you."

The kobold nodded, smiling slightly from the praise. Even if it was strange to receive so much positive reinforcement, Ovu couldn't deny the pleasant feeling of it all. Under Mortivir's guidance, the red reptile helped to convert former fiendish banners into lengths of silky fabric in blues and whites. Once that was done, Mortivir gave an arcane gesture and word over the silks, along with a few silver coins from the hoard, and Ovu's eyes widened when he was treated to the sight of a fabrication spell.

The resultant set of clothing was simple, yet undoubtedly the highest-quality garments the kobold had ever been presented with. He nearly objected that he wasn't worthy of such a gift, yet even before he'd managed to get the first syllable out, his companion gently cut him off. "Come now, Ovu, you don't need to be so self-deprecating," she insisted, quickly amending when the kobold looked at her quizzically, "You put yourself down too much. No more 'I'm not worthy' or 'I don't deserve nice things', okay? You're as worthy as anyone else, dear; you deserve nice things. Say it with me, now."

Ovu fidgeted in uncertainty yet again, averting his gaze. "O-Ovu... deserves..." he tried, only to wince and rub his neck when he hesitated, "This thing to say is... O-Ovu isn't sure is okay."

"I, dear," Mortivir corrected gently, brushing the kobold's arm again reassuringly, "And it's okay, really. Say it with me, now. 'I deserve nice things'."

The kobold gulped, rubbing his neck and trying to swallow the anxious lump in his throat. "I-I... des-serve... nice things," Ovu mumbled quietly, rewarded with another gentle stroke and encouraging smile, before Mortivir offered the clothing to him again.

Gingerly accepting the gift, Ovu awkwardly slipped the blue silken tunic over his head, unused to clothing that wasn't merely stitched together scraps. The v-neck design allowed him to slide his horned head through with relative ease, though the arm-holes had him fumbling for a moment, blushing when Mortivir tittered and reached over to help pull his slender arms through the proper openings. Gentle as she was, Ovu felt his anxiety rising again at how tangibly powerful the dragon was even in her transfigured state, withdrawing unconsciously the moment her grasp was released and rubbing his arms gingerly.

With Mortivir's assistance, the kobold donned the new trousers as well, fidgeting self-consciously while the white article was fastened over his tail with a silver button. "There! Look at this handsome lad!" the dragon in kobold guise praised once she'd stepped back to take in how Ovu looked in his new outfit, "I daresay I've outdone myself! Oh, but you need a mirror, don't you?"

The kobold was still processing the fact that he'd just been called handsome when Mortivir jumped down from the bed, scurrying off from the bedchamber. Those pittering steps turned to deep thumps a moment after the dragon disappeared from sight, leaving Ovu to stare out the stone archway leading out of the room. "H... handsome?" the kobold breathed, looking down at himself. What dragon in their right mind would call him that?

Sliding down the headboard, Ovu pulled his knees up to his chest once more, trying to make sense of it all. The compliments, the praise, the gifts; none of it made any sense. Least of all from a dragon. What was she doing? What was she going to do? How long would she have her fun with this game? What happens when it's over?

The kobold pulled into himself, shuddering with the overwhelming uncertainty pressing in around him. No sense, no sense, none of it made sense. What should he do? What could he do? Breaths came faster and faster, heart beating in his ears, hands to his head. "No... no, no, no, n " "Ovu?"

The kobold jerked with a gasp at the touch to his shoulder, looking up at Mortivir while the silver kobold looked down to him with concern. "Ovu, what's wr "

"JUST DO IT!" Ovu cried out, unable to stop the words from rushing out, even with his whole body trembling fearfully, "Ovu i-isnt for playing with! Crush, chomp, bite, claw, Ovu can't t-take the waiting! Do it! N-no games, just... do it..."

Burying his face in his knees, Ovu shook as his eyes stung. "Please... m-mercy... Ovu can't take the games anymore," the kobold whimpered, his claws digging at his legs through the silk of his trousers while he waited for the brief moment of pain that would put him out of his misery.

Instead, the kobold felt arms gently wrapping around his shoulders, pulling him into a close embrace. Ovu only curled tighter into himself, sniffing and trying to stifle the sobs that began to rise in his chest. Wordlessly, Mortivir brushed her slender digits over the kobold's brow, her heart aching at the poor humanoid's outburst. Hopeful as she'd been, she knew she couldn't expect the kobold to trust her so soon. That didn't make it any less painful to see her companion so distressed.

Still holding the balled-up kobold, Mortivir gently rested her chin atop his horned head, humming soothingly while she rocked them both. "Shh, it's going to be okay," she crooned softly, stroking Ovu's cheek in a gesture she hoped would comfort him, brushing hot tears from his scales, "Nobody is going to hurt you. You're safe, I've got you."

Steadily, the red kobold's breath slowed, coughing through stifled sobs. A low whine escaped Ovu's muzzle once fear transitioned into guilt, unable to bring himself to look up at the one doing her best to comfort him. Sensing the gradual shift, Mortivir slowly slid her hands down the kobold's arms, curling her digits around his own. He didn't resist, yet his face remained buried against his legs, still trembling under the weight of uncertainty.

"Ovu... didn't mean it," a hoarse whisper came eventually, his shaky voice full of contrition and regret.

"I know," Mortivir assured, hesitating for a moment, before releasing one of Ovu's hands to reach in and gently cup the kobold's chin, coaxing him to lift his gaze, tears still rolling down his scales. "It's alright, I'm not mad," she insisted, forcing a smile to her features in spite of her lingering heartache, "You've been through a lot, I can't blame you for lashing out. Deep breaths, okay?"

Gulping, Ovu nodded shallowly, trying to take longer breaths as he was told. "There, that's good," Mortivir cooed, shifting position to sit beside the kobold, still holding his hand in her own. He didn't react, save for curling into himself slightly once more, his eyes turning away from her in shame.

Another pang of sympathy crossed Mortivir's heart, her gaze wandering for a moment, before looking back to the kobold and gently squeezing his hand. "Did something happen, Ovu?" she asked, rubbing the scaly digits in her grasp, "Was it something I said?"

The kobold didn't reply immediately, picking at the seam of his trousers for several moments. "H... handsome," came a subtle whisper, the transfigured dragon beside him tilting her head.

"Handsome?" Mortivir repeated in confusion.

Ovu winced, averting his gaze. "Mortivir... said Ovu is handsome," he clarified, hesitating another few seconds before he continued, "Mortivir... says so many nice things. Does so many

nice things... Ovu doesn't understand. What... what does Mortivir want? Ovu doesn't... understand."

"Oh, sweet thing," Mortivir breathed, tentatively reaching up to brush Ovu's head, though she could feel him flinch at the contact. "I want to help you," she said plainly, her words finally getting the kobold to turn and meet her gaze once more, disbelief clear in his expression.

"Why?"

The question caught Mortivir off-guard, the dragon regarding Ovu's searching eyes briefly. Letting out a sigh, Mortivir released the kobold's hand to run her digits over her horned head, trying to find the right words. "Because helping people is what brings me joy," the dragoness said slowly, "Seeing someone smile after rescuing their loved ones, or returning a stolen treasure, or just helping someone out with common chores; that's what makes me happy."

Meeting Ovu's gaze again, Mortivir gave a little smile. "If you wonder what I get out of it, that's just it; I don't need gold and silver, though I won't deny part of me definitely wants treasure. I am a dragon after all!" Chuckling, the wyrm shook her head, drawing her knees up and resting her arms across the limbs. "No, I get something better when I help someone," she stated, nodding toward Ovu, "I get to know I'm leaving the world a better place after I'm gone. Which might not be for another several centuries, admittedly, or possibly millenia if I'm lucky, but that just means I have plenty more time to do as much good as I can. Maybe that makes me an idealist, but I don't care. It's what I want, that's all that matters."

Mortivir paused, looking over to Ovu to make sure she hadn't lost him, only to find the kobold regarding her with a mix of wonder and a look that made it seem like she'd just turned green before his eyes. The expression was so unexpected that she couldn't help a light snort and chuckle, her head tilting bemusedly and giving a little smirk as she asked, "What?"

Catching himself, Ovu ducked his head, averting his gaze again and rubbing the dried tears from his face. "That's... what Vir wants?" he asked, fidgeting his claws habitually, "Mortivir is dragon... dragons want gold, kingdoms, magic... but, Vir just wants... to help." There was a pause, the kobold slowly turning to face Mortivir again and rubbing his head with evident confusion, "Mortivir is... sure is a dragon?"

"H-hey!" the wyrm laughed, nudging Ovu's side and getting a soft yelp from the reptilian. "I'm every bit a dragon!" Mortivir assured, the kobold withdrawing contritely from her, though she gave a reassuring smile while patting his shoulder, "Like I said, I definitely do want treasure and such, I can't help that. But doing good and easing hurts, that's what I truly want, above everything else. It's my calling, what I knew I wanted from the day I was born. Everything else is just a bonus compared to that."

Again, Ovu searched the dragon's expression, as though looking for any sign of deception or trickery. "Vir... really means that," he said out loud, his voice full of wonder. That awed expression darkened into uncertainty again, however, the kobold's gaze falling as he asked, "But... Ovu is healed, yes? If Vir is happy from helping... what will Vir do if Ovu doesn't need help? Is... stealing if Ovu wants to be the one helping?"

The wyrm laughed, shaking her head while she looked toward her companion. "No, Ovu, I don't mind you wanting to be my helper," she replied, giving another warm smile, "And I'm not going to abandon you just because you're doing better." If anything, there was still a lot more progress to be made, though the dragon kept that to herself, resting a hand on Ovu's own once more, "You're welcome to stay with me, Ovu, if that's what you want. I want you to be happy."

Slowly, the hint of a smile came to Ovu's face, his head nodding shallowly. "Ovu... um, I-I want to stay with M... with you," he affirmed.

Smiling in return, Mortivir gently curled her arm across Ovu's shoulders. And though she could feel him tense, the kobold didn't pull away, looking to her with a glimmer of hope in his eyes. "Just promise me you won't tell me to hurt you again, okay? You really scared me," she insisted, the kobold's face falling as he lowered his gaze, rubbing his arm.

"Ovu... I promise," the kobold replied, eyes lifting when he felt a gentle pat on his shoulder, greeted by a warm smile.

"Now, did you want to get a look at your new outfit?" the dragon asked, her voice full of gentle reassurance as she indicated the mirror she'd left at the foot of the bed.

The kobold seemed hesitant, looking down at himself and what to him seemed to be clothes that were far too valuable for him to even be wearing. Still, turning away a gift from his mistress might be offensive, he worried, and so he gave a tentative little nod while slowly letting his curled up posture relax. Feeling one more gentle stroke over his head, Ovu looked up while Mortivir stepped over to the edge of the bed, hopping down and landing in her true form, before taking up the oversized hand-mirror in her paw and presenting it to her companion.

Ovu blinked, his head tilting this way and that. He couldn't remember the last time he'd seen his own reflection that wasn't in a pool of dirty water or the treasures he would be made to polish. He looked so different now. Not just because of the clothing, either; he was so used to the dull and grimy look to his scales that seeing himself with his hide cleaned and polished to reveal his true, ruby-red coloration caused a brief moment of cognitive dissonance. Add on top of that the silken tunic and trousers, their seams hidden by beautiful, ivy-like embroidery and graced with silver buttons, and Ovu was looking better than he had for years.

Turning this way and that, the wide-eyed reptile took himself in, not quite realizing the little smile that was starting to form over his muzzle, much to Mortivir's endearment. "We just need some leather for a belt, vest, and boots, and you'll look positively dashing," the dragoness commented, pulling Ovu's attention from himself as he gave a shy smile.

"Mort... er, y-you doesn't have to," the kobold mumbled, rolling the fabric of his shirt between his digits.

"No, but I'd like to," Mortivir replied, holding a paw up to the bed, "Say, why don't you help me find some leather from red's treasures? I could use the help getting through all of that."

Perking up at the mention of being able to help, Ovu's brightened features did all the answering for him.