

Sizable Reservations: Real and Imagined

By: RaddaRaem

“Sooooooooooooo,” Tyridia trailed on. Faint green stains accumulated upon his sandals as his feet scuffed against the blades of grass lining the sides of the trail.

Morgan’s subdued footfalls, thunderous and earth-shaking, spanned the entirety of the pebble lined path leading to Yash. “So?” she replied. The sheer volume of air displaced by her broad padded soles sent clouds of dirt swirling around the giantess’ ankles following her every seismic step.

Tyr clenched his eyes shut when he walked into yet another lingering puff of dust; his muzzle scrunched in irritation as the particulate matter mottled his bright orange fur. “So, umm... what exactly are we going to do? When we get back to Yash, I mean?” The foxy summoner dared to inquire.

Black lips pulled flat, the white mage offered up a subdued shrug. “Head back to the guild and touch base with Master? Like we always do?” Both her tone and expression were incredulous.

“No! No, I-I mean. Well.” Whining, his eyes swiveled side to side along the bottoms of their sockets. “Yes, I get that, but just the whole... you. You know.” He awkwardly gestured at her enormous everything.

“Tyr, be honest.” Arms at her sides, Morgan swished her open palms through the air and splayed her fingers apart with a forced flourish. “What else are we supposed to do? We can’t very well just wait this out. Okay so technically, yes, we could. But for how long?”

Clawed fingertips scratched at the back of the fox’s flattened ears. “I would think, I-I mean, I would hope a spell this potent would burn itself off over the day. Maybe Xissss-” At the mere mention of the kitsune’s name Tyridia felt himself wilting under the gravity of Morgan’s glower. Tongue pressed against the roof his mouth, a whistle wafted out between his lips as he struggled to salvage his train of thought. “-sssssss is better left to Master.”

Eyes half-lidded, the muscles in Morgan’s cheeks strained as her lips tugged to the side in a display of equal parts dismissiveness and disgust. “Like I said... what else are we supposed to do?”

The fox’s white tipped tail shyly flit side to side before tucking itself between his legs. “Yeah. Yeahhhhhhhh. That and Master would justifiably wonder where and why we wandered off for the day.” His shoulders slouched at the thought of being chewed out by the greying panther.

“You know she’d be hard pressed to believe we were waiting out an illusion made real short of showing her,” Morgan mumbled. The raccoon distracted herself from her sizeable predicament, for at least the moment, by puffing up at a long lock of hair dangling before her face. Wrinkles formed in the black mask of fur that wrapped around her amber eyes as she alternated between huffs and puffs.

“To be fair...” Tyridia tapered off. His thoughts struggled to form themselves into coherent sentences as his legs burned from treading into and out of paw-shaped depressions in the earth left in Morgan’s wake. The thick raccoon feet responsible for them, all but obscuring his vision with their padded heels and soles, weren’t helping. “This... uh... t-this is downright tame compared to what we’ve been wrangling with lately thanks in no small part to Russo! There’s been what... demons and deities and who knows what else!”

Morgan brushed back the uncooperative strand of hair and took to rolling her all but exposed shoulders. Tattered tufts of white cotton sailed away on the breeze as every swing of the raccoon's arms ripped her robe's sleeves well beyond recognition. "I really could see her giving us a pass on this, not that we need it. And besides, you did offer to cover for me today. Not tomorrow or the day after. Today."

"It's not like I was trying to back out of it or anything..." Tyr smarted. The stinging barbs, and rumbling octaves, of her spoken words hung heavily on his shoulders. As did the guilt and shame of flubbing up a spell so spectacularly that he temporarily rendered his best friend a behemoth.

Tyridia forced the welling lump in his throat down with a hard swallow. A-a beautiful behemoth, at that. Try as he might to force his gaze downward at his feet, and the sun bleached straps of leather wrapped around them, his grassy green eyes always managed to drift onwards and upwards towards Morgan. "Noooooo," he uselessly chastised himself as he looked upon those toned and shapely legs that dwarfed him in thickness. "No no no no no," Tyr ashamedly sussed at himself as he continued to ogle those lumbering grey furred limbs that subtly tensed with every step.

T-this was his best friend he was leering at for goodness sakes! His bignormous best friend whose soft and rounded ankles came up to his chin. Said ankles connecting to broad black soled paws that revealed themselves every time she stepped forward. "Stoppit, stoppit, stoppit," Tyridia helplessly repeated as did anything but that and dutifully took note of the faint layer of dirt caking her soles. That and the overwhelming warmth radiating off of their fox smothering surfaces. T-then of course how could he neglect the steady hiss of pebbles, sputtering free from the wrinkled folds of flesh lining the bottom of her paws?

Tyridia sighed bitterly and ran his hands up along his fuzzy cream cheeks before cupping his palms against his eyes. His fingers clamped together as he steadfastly denied himself yet another sneak peek. This was going to be a long day. "Where should we start?" he mumbled into his palms.

"If we're lucky, maybe Master will be able to fix this? Magical suppression is her bread and butter after all. I would think... I would hope, cancelling out an illusion is something she's more than capable of," Morgan mulled aloud while her ringed tail wrapped itself around her waist. She abruptly eeped when a balmy gust of wind all but goosed her, prompting the wumbo white mage's teeth to clack together at an uncomfortable realization; her ill-fitting robe didn't cover her behind so much as it rested atop it. Gods above, no wonder Tyridia could hardly bring himself to look at her.

An uneasy groan exposed the first cracks in Morgan's otherwise composed veneer as her padded fingers clutched comfortingly at her puffy appendage. "And if she can't... we can always count on her to keep our noses to the grindstone. Errr. Your nose to the grindstone, anyway. It'll be something familiar at least."

"Hope for the best and assume the worst?" the fox wryly smirked even as he continued to stare into the padded palms pressed against his face.

Morgan allowed a shy smile to crease her lips. Her embarrassment slowly gave way to affection. "Don't be getting all defeatist on me! Yet, anyway. Save that for *if* Master – and hopefully hopefully hopefully not when -- dashes those hopes faster than we can raise them. Deal?"

"Deal," Tyridia timidly acquiesced as his white tipped tail took to swishing to and fro behind him.

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“Hey there!” Hand held up in a placating manner, Morgan waved at the dumbfounded merchant stationed along Yash’s outskirts. Wide-eyed, the wolf stared back up at her. His jaw parted as a drawn out vowel proceeded to rumble forth from his maw.

“Please don’t scream! Please. Please,” she implored. The colossal raccoon pedaled backwards as daintily as she could manage. The tiny shack violently rattled in place all the same.

The screaming continued unabated.

Morgan continued to distance herself. “No harm no foul, see? It’s uhh... well actually it’s a pretty short story but trust me when I say I’m not a giant! Not usually, anyway. Heck, I’m a returning customer even!”

In response, the screaming grew even louder.

Tyridia forced a nervous smile. “At least he hasn’t run off? Better he does this than start a panic.” Arms crossed about his chest, Tyridia rubbed his hands along the sleeves of his kimono.

“Tyr, I know you’re trying to be supportive,” Morgan sighed as she slouched forward. “But this isn’t exactly something I want to be congratulated about. Literally paralyzing someone with fear.” Her lips pulled down into a frown at the stubbornly persistent wails. “You’re going to have to breathe sometime. You do know that, right?”

Strained coughs sounded out when the cowardly wolf finally emptied his lungs. A welcome silence filled the air as he flopped forward onto his selection of mana crystals and panted.

“Want me to go grab Master before he gets started again?” Tyridia inquired. The fox grimaced when the merchant feebly patted at his chest.

“Please do,” Morgan replied. Nostrils flared, she drew deeply from the air around her in an attempt to soothe her sagging spirits. Or tried to, at least. A pronounced rrrrrrip emanated out from her chest as her lungs inflated.

“Ummm...” Tyridia swallowed hard.

The white mage’s eyes cratered to the bottom of their sockets and warily regarded her now exposed cleavage. Dread clutched at both her chest, and throat, as her panicked heart pounded against the back of her ribcage, her bosom bouncing with every beat. Continued rrrrrrips and tiny tears spread throughout what remained of her robe every time they did so.

Arms draped uselessly at his sides Tyr ogled those grey furred hills threatening to flood forth. The fine fabric levees barely holding back his best friend’s petite bosom showed signs of strain as the white walls of cloth spread themselves dangerously thin.

Morgan exhaled slowly and with restraint. “Please hurry,” she groaned out in between her noticeably shallower breaths.

Head nodding furiously, Tyridia turned tail and hauled ass.

The colossal raccoon’s pointed ears twitched when the clapping of the fox’s sandals against his soles soon was joined by the soft tunk of leather on cobblestone. At least he was making good progress.

Limbs trembling, the cowed wolf could barely muster the energy to whine much less scream.

The white mage bit down into her lower lip. When faced with curses most foul and diabolical demons she never once wavered. Yet here she was choking up at the possibility of a freaking wardrobe malfunction? “Shameful,” Morgan chided herself under her breath. “Absolutely shameful.” Like hell she was going to let her revealing attire, or her imposing and unwieldy stature, stop her from doing what needed to be done.

Clearing her throat, the raccoon turned her attention towards the solemn duties required of her as a proper white mage. “Hey uhh... you. It might not look it but I’m a white mage by trade! See?” Dropping to a crouch, her eyebrows flattened when, unsurprisingly, her clothing kept on covering less and less of her. Morgan inhaled through her teeth when she felt her tattered robe pull up along her back. While the breeze was nice, she didn’t terribly enjoy feeling it brush against her exposed butt cheeks.

A faint groan escaped from the canine’s throat.

With a roll of her eyes, Morgan extended an open palm out to the wolf. Soothing wisps of energy trailed off her padded digits as she channeled a simple Cure spell. The faint and smoky ether twirled along errant puffs of wind and ultimately dissipated within the moisture laden air as a pale white aura came to engulf her hand upon completion of the casting. “Please, let me help! I can put your wearied soul to rest and-” Oh gods. Cheeks puffed out, she watched the wolf shiver as her shadow swallowed up him and his ho-hum shop. Phrasing, Morgan, phrasing.

“No no no no I didn’t mean like...” The raccoon sighed bitterly. “Alright look, I’ll make this quick. Wait. Oh, dammit. You know what I’ll just stop talking.” Reaching forward, she achingly maneuvered an outstretched finger towards him. Translucent beads of ether congealed upon her padded fingertip as the white mage guided it into the open-air stall. A faint pressure pressed against her warm leathery flesh when she made contact. “There!”

Her wrist gone stiff, Morgan cautiously retracted her hand while an inviting glow filled the structure as plumes of purple trailed off his shoulders. Blinking repeatedly, the canine pulled himself off his wares and regarded his continued existence with disbelief.

Morgan couldn’t help but smile when the merchant’s stress figuratively and literally melted away. “Better?” she asked.

The wolf replied with subdued nods while he shakily dusted himself off and rearranged his scattered wares.

“Good.” Her lips curled into a smile as her ringtail wrapped itself around her ankles.

Before the otherwise one-sided exchange could drag itself on into an awkward silence a mismatched pair of footfalls registered in the raccoon’s ears. “Please be them please be them please be them,” Morgan pleaded under her breath.

“I’m not saying I don’t believe you, Tyridia. You have the benefit of my doubt after all! Why else would I have accompanied you out here?” The panther gently elbowed the flustered fox at her side.

“That’ll leave a bruise...” Tyr mumbled under his breath as he nursed his sore shoulder. “Thanks, Master. It’s just... a lot to take in is all!”

Nadie’s long legs stomped to a halt when she breached Yash’s informal boundaries. The panther took to stroking the salty white patches of fuzz that lined her otherwise black furred chin and hrmmed. “So she is.”

Even when crouching Morgan still managed to shame every structure in the immediate vicinity in terms of sheer size.

The Yash guild master's steely grey eyes slowly swung back and forth between her sizeable subordinate and the forgotten outposts that lined Yash's outskirts. Were the panther to climb atop their ramshackle roofs she still wouldn't be eye level with the poor girl...

"Oh thank goodness," Morgan heaved in relief. Arm crossed about her chest, forearm covering her cleavage, she shyly took to waving at her guild mate and guild master with her free hand. The simple motion of swinging her limb side to side sent gusts, along with pebbles and stray splinters peeled from the merchant's stall, tumbling towards them.

Brows arched, a nonplussed expression creased Nadie's features as the cape of her cloak fluttered behind her. "If this is but a remarkably convincing illusion I would peg it well beyond your current capabilities. No offense, Tyridia."

"None taken, Master."

Nadie smirked and took to waving back at Morgan as she sauntered towards her. "I will admit. I'm conflicted as to whether to cheer or chide the both of you. Blurring the lines between what's real and imagined is a fantastic feat! Now how you chose to do so, granted, is... questionable."

"I knowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww," the fox groaned. "I know, I know, I know." Head hanging low, Tyridia's gaze settled on his clawed toes twiddling against the dark divots in his sandal's soles. His ears burned hot at the mere thought of Morgan and her amplified... everything. Tyr winced when the low and pitiful whine rumbling out from his throat was interrupted by Nadie's thick palm slapping against his back.

"You feel guilty. You feel ashamed. You feel responsible for what has transpired. Tyridia, do not be mistaken. I am proud to know you feel as such. To know that you've cultivated such a fine tuned moral compass. But now is not the time to wallow. Reflect later. Act now." Squeezing firmly at the scruff of his neck, Nadie forced the foxy summoner to match her pace, all the while her thick black kitty tail undulated behind her in betrayal of her inquisitive intentions. "Come, child. Let's do what we can for her."

"Do you really think this will work, Master?" Morgan asked. Her eyes rolled about their sockets at every ahhhhh, eeeeeek, and ooooooh directed her way.

Leading the raccoon, Nadie doled out half-hearted waves and knowing nods to every anxious passerby. "At ease. She's with me," she purred out ad nauseam. The panther's commanding presence and confident composure snuffed out any semblance of an outright panic from settling upon the streets. Even so, a palpable unease lingered in the humid air.

"To answer your question, no," Nadie tersely stated in between reassurances. "However, it's worth a shot all the same. Suppressing spells is a straightforward affair. Smothering finely crafted ether, regardless of what form it takes, is a trivial matter thanks to the swarms of shadow that blanket the land. Problem is... the thunder of your footfalls and the breeze upon your breath are no spells. That is the swing of your step; the unthinking act of inhaling and exhaling. Now I won't deny that their scale and scope derive *from* a spell, yes, but to put it plainly... that's all you. I'm not sure what there is of *you* that can be suppressed."

Folds of the raccoon's black furred mask pressed against the underside of her eyes. "...The honesty is appreciated," she sighed. The fresh trail of paw-shaped craters left in her wake did little to lift her mood.

"Maybe if I squint hard enough, I'll see where I trampled over whatever hopes I had for this working itself out," Morgan ruefully thought. Her shoulders bunched together at the sound of shingles rattling free from the roofs of the homes that they passed. They continued to do so at the sound of said shingles shattering against the crater pocked cobblestone below.

"This is going to get worse before it gets better, isn't it?" she commented aloud. Cheeks flushed, the raccoon shyly wriggled and flexed her toes to knock free the mix of stone and mortar caught between them.

The panther's rounded ears fwipped at Morgan's palpable disappointment. "As I said, it's still worth making an attempt. Lesser illusions can be broken by suffocating the magic that fuels them. It's not unreasonable to think the same would apply to greater ones; no matter how convincing they may be. Uncertainty remains, and I intend to extinguish it."

Tyridia's legs trembled at the unseen shockwaves accompanying Morgan's meteoric footfalls. Pointed teeth poking against his lips, he quietly forced out one sigh after another. No matter how hard he heaved or huffed the knotted weight in his chest refused to loosen.

"Soooo that's why we're making this detour?" Tyr feebly asked. His gaze drifted towards a lonely workshop, situated some blocks away from them, atop an otherwise barren lot of land. "Master?" he called out once more.

Arcs of magic roiled out from the plumes of smoke chugging from the soot stained chimney. Arrhythmic snaps sounded out repeatedly in a telltale sign of ether contracting and expanding violently.

Both the fox and raccoon audibly expressed their concern through clenched teeth upon approach. "Ahhh!" they both shrieked in unison at the explosive pop that radiated out from the heavy smoke lingering in the air. A faint whistling accompanied the mixture of hail and embers that promptly rained down upon them. Unsurprisingly, given the intensely localized inclement weather, only the hardiest of weeds and mosses dotted the equal parts damp and scorched earth around the shop.

Nadie's continued lack of a reply left Tyridia understandably uneasy; he wasted no time pressing on with his inquiries. "So the more powerful the spell the more magic -- d-dark magic specifically -- needed to break it? That... that's what you're getting at, right?"

The panther flashed the fox a toothy smile. "Precisely. Darkness tainted mana crystals, dusk shards, lucid gems... I could go on and on. Do take note though, Tyridia. I'll require your assistance keeping stock of what we will and won't require. And carrying them to the counter."

"Yes, Master," Tyr dutifully answered. Lips pulled flat, the vulpine could already imagine his arms trying to tug themselves out of their sockets. Gods, he'd be lucky to survive the physical and emotional toll this day would surely wring from him. Yet... his brows furrowed angrily at the thought. I-it was for a good cause though. The best cause! Chin tucked against his neck, he peered back at his best friend and forced a smile for her. The lead tendrils, or at least what felt like such, coiling their way through his ribcage relaxed their grip when she returned the gesture.

Morgan's smile didn't last. Not when she couldn't help but recoil at the damage she wrought by the simply walking.

“Sorry!” she apologized. Wincing, her lips pulled back at the sight of people stumbling into the craterous divots left by her tremendous toes. That or knocking their shins against the slabs of stone crumbling down from the wrinkles in her soles.

“Hmmpf. I can do more than moan and groan at the very least...” Morgan reminded herself. Nostrils flared, she clenched her toes. The streams of rock came to a halt. Uncomfortable as it was, with jagged masses of mortar caught between the pinched tight folds of leathery flesh that lined the bottoms of her feet, she endured. Scrapes and sore pads were laughable inconveniences compared to the broken feet and twisted ankles everyone treading in her wake had to potentially contend with.

Toes curled, Morgan awkwardly lumbered forward. “Should we really be out and about on the town like this? Or...” the raccoon puffed up at strands of hair brushing against her forehead before correcting herself. “Better yet, should ‘I’? All I’m doing is making a mess.”

To her much needed relief, bumpy and uneven cobblestones finally gave way to flattened dirt. They had reached their destination. Sighing, Morgan splayed apart her toes. It was easy enough to ruin a road. Not so much a plot of dirt.

Nadie purred as she pondered. “That remains to be seen. Morgan, there’s no point in answering that until after an attempt is made at breaking the illusion. Know that regardless of the outcome I will not abandon you. And do recall... this town has recovered from worse,” the feline answered with a smirk.

Morgan advanced. With one footfall, fissures spread out beneath her feet. The parched earth, layered with ashen embers, coughed up clouds of dust and shriveled up grass roots. Another step forward yielded cool and pliant mud that molded around her sole. Damp clumps of moss tickled against her toes and tugged free the chunks of street caught between them.

“Knowing that I’m not *the* worst thing to ever wind my way through Yash isn’t exactly encouraging,” Morgan rumbled as she approached the workshop with whatever grace she could manage.

A series of loud knocks sounded out as the panther’s knuckles rapped against the entrance.

Shifting in place, Morgan idly crossed her arms and twiddled her fingers against her elbows, mindful not to scrape her shins against the shop’s slanted roof. “The help we’re looking for is here, right? I don’t know what will be left, if anything, of the streets if I have to make a return trip.” A sense of unease settled on her shoulders at the sight of her shadow swallowing up her friends.

Nadie’s answer was to ante up her rapping to forceful plank splitting pounding.

“Enough!” A cracking voice called out through the poorly fitting windows. Much to Morgan’s relief, the crackling plumes of smoke pouring from the chimney, shooting off spells roughly at her eye level, tapered off to smoky wisps. The battered, and now concave, door swung inward to reveal a shrew. She wrinkled her long whiskered nose in disgust at the hulking feline before her. “Ech. You. What do you want?”

“Your audience,” Nadie curtly replied. “And your wares, while we’re at it.” Tyridia peeked out from behind the panther’s broad form to timidly wave at their uncooperative acquaintance. “Your questionable curios and activities are allowed within Yash’s limits by yours truly, need I remind. Do not mistake my pragmatism for generosity, Blanca.”

The diminutive shopkeep dragged her bony fingers back and forth along her gnarled knuckles and grunted. Blanca's long nails scratched at the various stains and burns that coated their fur-less surface. "Elaborate."

Brows arched, the Yash guild master stepped to the side. Clawed toes, curled shyly and more than capable of smothering the most imposing of warriors beneath their padded undersides, loomed large behind her. "Umm. Hello," the owner of said digits meekly answered.

Blanca's beady little eyes narrowed at Nadie's smirk. "Hmmp. Get in and get out." Back turned to the panther, she slunk through the clutter that consumed her keep. A veritable labyrinth of wooden cabinets caked with a mixture of dust and ash stretched on up from the scratched floor to the bowed ceiling. A mixture of runes and chicken scratch carved into the individual drawers, one stacked atop the other, were the only hints offered as to the contents nestled within them.

"You heard her," Nadie rumbled. Once inside, both the feline and fox batted aside the motes of dust that hovered within the rare rays of sunshine that managed to infiltrate the interior.

"I'll uhh..." Morgan idly mused. "I'll. Just. Stay here, I guess."

"Make yourself as comfortable as you are able, Morgan. This will take a while." Nadie's rumbling purrs wafted up from the gaps in the shingled roof.

Bony elbows upon her countertop, Blanca flashed her tiny pointed teeth as she cupped a sunken cheek against her palm. Lingering puffs of smoke trailed up into the cracked open chimney turned ramshackle fume hood.

"Good to know," the white mage glumly replied with eyes half lidded. Her spirit lifted, however briefly, with her curiosity. The massive raccoon couldn't help but peer out at the expanse of rooftops that stretched out in every direction. It was... strange. Like looking out over a stone ocean. Chimneys piercing the slanted and static waves as if they were stoic and weathered lighthouses. Unsettling but... not altogether unpleasant seeing her home from such a vantage point.

"Ahhhh! A giant!"

Morgan reflexively rolled her eyes. Well, the lull in shrieks and screaming was nice while it lasted. "I can at least make it a little harder to stand out," she mumbled as she slowly slumped down to a sitting position.

"Eep!" Mortified, the raccoon felt her clothing struggling to cover less and less of her. "Why do I keep crouching?" she chided herself under her breath. Lips pulled flat, Morgan swung her puffy tail up between her legs the instant those shredded cotton weaves came up above her waistline. Cheeks ablaze with embarrassment, she nervously circled around the shop and mouthed a profane prayer at the realization that not a single window graced the building's backside. With a thoom, Morgan settled her exposed rump onto the mossy ground.

"You... you alright out there, Morgan?" Tyridia worriedly wondered as the shop shook.

Morgan cautiously considered her options as she weighed the balance between comfort and basic decency. "I will be when we fix this. If we fix this."

Pensive growls emanated from within the shop. "Blanca, you know very well my sojourns here would be all the shorter if you would put any effort into organizing the place," Nadie observed.

“And all the more frequent,” the shrew bitterly answered. “Why... it’s almost as if I’m trying to discourage you from doing so in the first place. If not outright stop you.”

Nadie’s thick black tail flit behind her contentedly. “You would not survive the attempt,” she casually commented.

The white mage slouched forward, the structure groaning when her thighs and bountiful behind pressed against it. Cheeks puffed out, Morgan dug her heels into the ground and pivoted her legs back and forth upon them. “Sometime today, please,” she mumbled under her breath.

“...That’s it?” Morgan asked dumbfounded.

“That’s it!” Nadie replied as she brushed her palms together. Black and purple wisps of ether trailed off her fingers whenever they clapped together.

The raccoon cocooned herself with the stretched out remnants of her robe while she curiously eyed the spell circle she stood within. “Huh. I... I’ll be honest, I had long since relegated myself to this *not* being the end result.” Her clawed toes, with some effort, ploughed through the damp earth when she curled them.

“No need to thank me,” the panther teased with eyes half-lidded.

Nostrils flared, the white mage clenched her eyelids shut to dam the waterworks threatening to well up from within her. She tried, and failed, to muster up a comeback.

“As I said,” Nadie spoke, “I will not abandon you. Now I’m not going to pretend that your ‘condition’ didn’t interest me but... you will always take priority over my research.” She laid a soft and heavy hand upon the raccoon’s shoulders and gently squeezed.

Morgan leaned into her guild master and nodded. “Mmhmmm,” she sniffled out as her head sank into and came to rest against a heavy padding of cloth.

The feline’s expression softened as purrs rumbled out from her throat. With some hesitation, she gingerly embraced her subordinate. “We’ll discuss this matter, and the costs associated with it, later. For now, head on inside and clean yourself up.”

“Yes, Master. I’ll uhh... Yeah,” Morgan replied as she hurriedly blinked away her tears. Huffing, she embarrassedly disengaged from her hug.

With a swish of her wrist Nadie motioned for the white mage to get gone. Her pale grey eyes followed along the curved and crisscrossing lines of chalk that spanned the length of the lot situated behind the Yash guild. Spent and faded magical crystals, plopped amongst tufts of grass and clods of dirt, lined the concentric chalk circles.

“Facsimile or no, interacting with a giant was an enlightening experience all the same! Especially a cooperative one,” the panther quietly ruminated. She turned her attention towards the raccoon. Nadie couldn’t help but wonder what similarities, if any, existed between the imagined giant and a bonafide one.

Robe, or what was left of it anyway, wrapped tightly around her chest, Morgan relished the sensation of clothing brushing against her fur once more. That her feet no longer thumped. Hell, no matter

how hard she stamped her soles against the earth there were no paw prints, no craters, no nothing left in her wake! Although...

Morgan tapered to a halt. The white mage's amber eyes couldn't help but stare at the reminder, the depression in the ground, she had left on the trip here. Her own foot print, which was more than capable of swallowing the raccoon up to her knees, dwarfed her in both size and width. She shuddered at the sight. A thought, a frightening and ruinous what-if, what if she were careless or inattentive for but a moment, refused to leave her. Master and Tyridia both could have simply... disappeared, beneath her soles.

Teeth clenched, Morgan shook her head side to side to physically derail that line of thought. Aaaaaaanyway. "See you inside?" she inquired of the fox.

"When Master is done with me, sure," Tyr tiredly sighed. "I'll... umm. M-make it up to you then?" His eyes locked with hers, the duo shared an awkward, yet not altogether unpleasant, moment.

The rumbling bass of Nadie's thoughtful purrs brought them back to attention. "Tyridia, if you'd be so kind as to collect the crystals anchoring the circle," she all but voluntold him.

"Yes, Master!" Tyr practically barked. He bid a shy wave to the raccoon before jogging to the panther's side.

"See you then," Morgan softly replied once the fox had wandered out of earshot. Shifting her weight from one paw to the other, she continued to linger outside among the shade. The air, heavy and stale, draped over Yash as it baked beneath the glower of the late afternoon sun. Breathing in deeply, dry air scratching at her throat and lungs, Morgan relished her return to normalcy. Just... just godsssss above it was wonderful to be swallowed up by, as opposed to swallowing up, the shadows for a change.

"This is nice," the white mage reassured herself as she hummed and closed her eyes. "...But a fresh change of clothes would feel even better," Morgan thought aloud. Ringed tail flitting behind her, she meandered into the guild hall to indulge in just that.

Dropping to his knees, Tyridia plucked up one colorless crystal after the next. Their translucent forms glittered in his palm as he panted in the heat. "Master, not that I doubted you or anything, but was there any sort of backup plan in place in case this didn't work?"

"Sure wasn't!" Nadie cheerily answered. "The amount of magic you managed to layer upon Morgan was well beyond even my most generous overestimations. Ideally, the ether we offered up would have been equal to the amount that had accumulated within Morgan. An effective one to one ratio where the amount of magic offered is equal to the amount of magic unwoven from her."

Lips pursed, Tyr continued to hobble along the circumference of the spell circle, pinching crystals between his clawed fingers as he went. "Ideally?"

"That spell should not have succeeded. It did, much to my pleasant surprise, but it shouldn't have. Then again, illusions, by their very nature, are typically quite frail and struggle to reconstitute themselves..."

That it worked at all was what mattered to Tyridia. A heaving sigh sputtered out from between his lips as he left Nadie to her own thoughts while he stewed amongst his own. After some time, he spoke. "Master? I... thank you."

“HmMMM?” Nadie grunted as she scuffed the soles of her boots against the dirt. Puffs of chalk and dust lingered around the panther’s ankles as she crudely cleared away the spell circle.

“For, you know, fixing my fuckup.” Wrinkles formed in the fur lining Tyr’s forehead as his expression soured. The fox turned his frustrations, at the problems that he caused and then proved incapable of fixing, inward at himself.

Nadie continued to drag her feet. “Tyridia,” the panther rumbled. “I want you to learn from your mistakes. Not dwell on them.”

Even with his eyes to the ground, Tyr could feel her steely gaze upon him. Her patience for the sad sack routine had worn thin. That, and, come to think of it, his had too. “Y-yes, Master,” he fumbled out in reply.

“Clean clothes, clean clothes!” Morgan happily recited to herself as she slid her arms into the rumpled and snugly fitting sleeves of her robe. She brushed a hand across them to smooth out the wrinkles. The notion, dreadful as it was, that she had retained a couple of extra inches was one she refused to entertain. Her change of clothes were just a little on the small side was all! “A tight fit, sure, but it’s better than none at all,” the raccoon mumbled under her breath.

The raccoon’s relief, now that she’d had an afternoon to reflect on it, had since given way to a pensive dread. She sighed as she ran a hand through her hair. “So much could’ve gone wrong that didn’t...” Morgan thought. An emptied canteen and a crumb lined plate, her late lunch, sat on her desk. What would she have done for food at that size? What would she have done for water? A canteen, assuming it didn’t explode into a mist of droplets and leather when pinched between her fingers, would barely be felt upon her tongue. Regarding food... what she normally would’ve considered a full and filling meal would barely pass as a mouthful. Hands papped against her cheeks, Morgan savored the fact she was living a near-disaster as opposed to a full-blown one.

A series of raps, gentle and uncertain, knocked against her door.

“Oh! Come on in, Tyr!” the raccoon answered.

With a creeaaaaak, the door swung open. Tyridia stood there, awkwardly, as he fretted over what to do with his dirt-stained self. “Hey Morgan,” he sheepishly greeted her with a wave.

Smirking, Morgan motioned for him to venture inside.

“I-I don’t wanna dirty up the place!” he protested. “Just... swinging by to see what all I’m covering for you. I mean, I’m sweaty and yucky enough as it is. Might as well knock all of that out since I’m only gonna get more so.”

She continued to coax him past the doorframe. “Tyr, helping me clean up my room was going to fall on your list of to-dos anyway. Now you’ll have all the more reason to do so!”

Teeth clacked together, the fox whined as he reluctantly ventured into... into... a girl’s room.

“Master wasn’t too tough on you was she?” Morgan asked. Ringed tail swishing behind her, she cleared a path for her guest by nudging aside a pair of boots that had been left sprawled out on the middle of the floor.

A disheveled and messy girl's room, at that, Tyr noted. The fox's gaze shifted pitifully between the noodly arms hanging at his sides. "Take a wild guess," he groaned with a forced smile.

"I'm going to guess..." the raccoon trailed off as she approached him. Hands held up before her, she twiddled her clawed fingers and gently set them upon Tyridia's shoulders. A soft glow spilled out from beneath her palms as she kneaded and massaged the fox's weary flesh. "...That you could use this."

"Y-you're a good guesser," Tyridia stuttered. The fox tucked his chin against his chest, reluctant to meet her gaze, and exhaled as his thoughts bubbled up. He closed his eyes and hummed. "How... how should I go about this? I've already been apologizing up and down all day," he pondered.

Morgan grunted as the openings of her sleeves constricted around her wrists.

Tyr, with his eyes clenched shut, shook his head side to side. He mmffed when he felt the raccoon's fingers brush against his neck. "N-no! No more moping. Don't be sorry for the umpteenth time. Be bigger than that!" Resolute in his thoughts, the fox opened his eyes. "Be – ohhhhhh gods no be not that. Be not big."

Jaw gone slack, Tyr fumbled for his words.

"I promise not to jinx this if you don't," Morgan stated. Her hands, inching up and out, swallowed up the fox's shoulders.

Too late for that. Air whistling as he inhaled through his teeth, Tyridia nodded nervously. Both the fox and the raccoon silently regarded one another, wary and reluctant to acknowledge that there was a pronounced, and growing, disparity in size between them. He slouched beneath the ever increasing weight of her broad palms. "...Be supportive," he mumbled under his breath.

"Let's... augh. Fine. This is a thing that's happening," Morgan sighed. Faint and smoky puffs of dark magic trailed off of her as Nadie's spell faltered. Gingerly, the raccoon lifted her hands off of Tyr's shoulders. She breathed easier, and shallower, when his posture straightened in response.

"Y-yeah. So it's looking like the illusion wasn't broken after all," Tyridia opined in a subdued manner as he found himself eye level with his best friend's navel. "Just. Weakened."

Morgan could feel her sleeves ride up along her limbs, pinching at her forearms, as they made the transition from uncomfortably form-fitting to skin tight. Her pants fared little better as the seams running down her legs tugged apart, revealing the grey tufts of fur that lined her shapely legs. She couldn't help but purse her lips and huff. "I could've done without the whole 'back to normal' tease, but, this is *technically* an improvement. Even if it is just less bad."

"Want me to fetch Master again?" Tyr asked. Supportive. He'd be supportive! He'd be useful! He'd be-

"Eep!"

Both the fox and raccoon and yelped when her swelling paws spilled atop his own. Blushes creasing both their cheeks, the duo bumbled away from each other following their unexpected footsies.

Tyr laughed nervously as he shuffled to Morgan's side. He'd be... flustered. A-and maybe a little disappointed that didn't last longer and no no no no no stoppit.

Ears brushing against the wooden rafters, Morgan mmffed as she felt increasingly claustrophobic. She dropped to her knees, clenching her teeth and simply accepting that additional rips and tears were a given at this rate. Her sleeves tugged up to her elbows as her pants legs receded towards her shins.

“Maybe we should focus on me first,” she stated, urgency in her voice. Alternating pops and snaps could be heard as the seams running along her legs and shoulders pulled apart.

“L-let’s,” Tyr nodded in affirmation. “Do you mind if I umm... move?” he worriedly inquired as his friend’s limbs advanced towards him, threatening to pin him between herself and the bookshelves lining the walls of her room.

Even when kneeling, Morgan’s head bumped against the rafters once more. The white mage leaned forward and came to rest upon her forearms as she crawled towards her narrowing exit. “From where to where?”

“Umm. From here to...” Tyridia clambered over her bed and hugged against the walls as he skittered towards the back of her room. He whined as her thickening feet, rivaling him in size and exuding warmth, slid back towards him. The fox trailed off as he found himself flanked between her legs and confronted with a shapely raccoon rump. “Uhh. Here. ...I probably should have just ran when I had the chance, shouldn’t I?”

Morgan grit her teeth. The thought that she might end up crushing her best friend between her thighs, or beneath her behind, was mortifying to say the least. “This is just as much my fault for dragging you in here in the first place,” she woefully acknowledged.

“N-not to rush you or anything...” Tyridia chimed in as he found himself swept back by her ringed tail.

Folds of her black furred mask pressed against the underside of the raccoon’s eyes. She reached forward, as her plump toes came to press against the back wall, and shoved her arm through the doorframe; even that was becoming a tight fit. The white mage’s heart thumped furiously in her chest. “Panicking isn’t going to help,” Morgan reminded herself even as she struggled to soothe the flurry of thoughts swarming in her head.

“I’m not fitting through there,” Morgan bluntly acknowledged. “I could maybe, hopefully, force my way out. I’d rather not but...” her eyes swiveled to the periphery of her vision. Behind her, pressed between her tail and padded soles, she could feel and hear Tyr panicking. Reserved and politely sure, but he was flailing all the same. The raccoon’s breathing grew strained as the opportunity for action, one that didn’t involve obliterating her room or flattening a fox, narrowed considerably.

“Magic?” she frantically thought. “It got me into this after all. Why couldn’t it get me out? Tyr’s... yeah, no. Mine...” Morgan hurriedly cycled through the spells at her disposal. “Cure, Dispel, Reverse, Vox-”

Without hesitation, she slapped a hand against her chest. Ether, congealed and thick, squeezed out from beneath her palm like jelly. “Reverse!” she shouted out as she cast the spell. It spread out across her torso, clinging heavily to her form, and darkened and warped in response to the fading sunlight poking through the windows.

Morgan grunted as the slick film of ether lurched up along her neck in slow rolling waves. Fingers curled, the raccoon panted while the spell worked its magic and a suffocating pressure forced her

in on herself. Ether ensnared her limb as the illusion temporarily reversed itself and shrank rather than enlarged her. The dwindling white mage, and her wardrobe, became a shimmering chromatic inversion of themselves.

“I can do this...” the raccoon assured herself as she forced herself forward. Her now snowy white hair bobbed when her shoulders, confined beneath a straining pitch black robe, bumped against the doorframe. “Okay maybe not yet, but soon!” Morgan impatiently observed as she brushed some hanging locks of hair aside from the porcelain mask of fur that wrapped around her eyes.

Tyridia, clinging to her tail, watched on wide eyed as the advancing magic, cool to the touch, slid beneath his grip. It paid the fox no heed and simply continued to swallow up the raccoon’s marginally darker grey and ivory ringed appendage.

Morgan continued to shove herself through, scrabbling her waxen white padded soles against the floor for some semblance of leverage. “Come on come on c’mon c’mon c’mon!” she wailed as she finally succeeded in wedging both of her arms out. Her clawed fingers dug into the gaps between the planks of wood that comprised the floor while she proceeded to drag herself forward. Morgan hadn’t the faintest idea how long her Reverse spell, given the unpredictability of the illusion, much less her tolerance of it, were going to last. Hopefully, she wouldn’t find out until she was free from the cramped confines of her room. “Almost thereeeeeee...”

“Be supportive, be supportive, be supportive” Tyr relentlessly repeated to himself as he felt himself tugged forward with Morgan. He could help push, maybe? Sink his hands into her rear and know what maybe not. “...D-don’t distract her, at the very least,” he chided himself.

Dragging herself forward, knees knocking against the floor, Morgan unceremoniously pulled herself out into the hallway. Exhausted, she repositioned herself until she was parallel with the lantern lined walls.

Tyridia released his grip on her tail and landed with a painful flop. Rising to his feet with a groan, he dusted himself off. “Morgan? Are you-” He caught himself when he realized maybe it was a bit much to assume she was perfectly okay given, well, everything. “Umm. I-is there anything I can do to help?”

The raccoon achingly reached up and patted herself on the shoulder for a job well done. “No. No, I’m... I’ll manage. Thank you though, Tyr,” she mumbled between breaths. “I know you’re just trying to do what you can.”

She continued to pat at herself as imperfections and bubbles appeared in the film of ether spread out across her entire body. A pronounced pop, and a spray of magic that evaporated into smoky wisps as it pelted against the walls and wooden flooring, accompanied a successful Dispel. Morgan’s coloration returned to normal, as did that of her baggy and stretched out clothes. For the hell of it, the white mage cast another Dispel. If she were able to reverse the illusion why wouldn’t she be able to-

Creaks and wooden groans echoed out from around the raccoon as she took to swelling once more. ...It was worth a shot, anyway. The floor, the supports, the rafters; all of them were beset upon and bowed out by a growing raccoon. Morgan sighed when her clothing retreated up along her limbs once more and immediately transitioned from baggy, to form-fitting, to skin-tight.

Tyr swallowed hard. “Don’t ogle, dammit,” he implored with himself. Don’t ogle at those hallway filling hips, with those pants of hers tugged so tightly that they left next to nothing to the imagination and were actively threatening to split apart. O-or those soft and swollen feet that shamed him

in size and whose soles rippled with warm soft wrinkles every time she curled her toes. “Oh, heck,” he sighed as he relegated himself to his failure.

Biting into her lower lip, Morgan couldn't help but blush at the unintended eyeful she was giving him. “Actually, Tyr, there is something you can do. Could youuuuuu, not that I'm accusing you or anything, but could you maaaaaybe try to get out in front of me?” She grunted as her petering growth left her wedged firmly in place between the guild's decorated hallways.

“Never mind,” she followed up with her lips pulled flat.

“Ahhhh! A... oh. You're the same giant from earlier aren't you? Wait. Did you get... umm... less giant?” Scratching at her chin, the inquisitive feline onlooker found herself staring into a fuzzy pair of shins.

Eyes half-lidded, Morgan heaved out a frustrated sigh. The raccoon's robe, if it could even be called that anymore, left little to the imagination. “Do I really have to answer this? I mean you don't see me casually commenting on how... how... how staturally challenged you are.”

The curious cat tugged uneasily at the shoulder of her tunic. “I... guess not? *Sorry* for asking,” she mrowled before discretely making her exit.

“It's been a long day and I'm not in the mood to explain myself for the somethingth time,” Morgan thought aloud as the cobblestones lining the street cracked and reshaped themselves beneath the contours of her feet. She squinted at the passersby awkwardly meandering after their call to panic had been grumpily slapped down. Wilting under the glare of both Morgan and the setting sun, they made themselves scarce.

Tyridia wobbled up alongside the white mage. Lumpy knapsack pressing against his back, its leather straps grinding his shoulders raw, the fox struggled to keep himself vertical. “All packed – And – Ready to go!” he declared in between breaths.

“You sure?” Morgan's asked with eyebrows cocked.

“Not really,” Tyr answered as he let himself stumble forward. “But... I-I promised to cover for you. The least I can do is pack for and set up a campsite for us. Given our uhh...”

“Given our current circumstances, right,” she finished for him. “At least the guild's still intact, save the front doors. ...And the stairs leading up to them.” The raccoon ran a hand along her elbow and plucked out splintered planks of wood from her fur; irritating reminders from when she crawled her way to freedom. Shame that her spells healed boo boos and broken bones, but not property damage.

Tyridia's legs couldn't, wouldn't, let him stop as he struggled to straighten his posture. “It's... okay so maybe it's not okay, but I'll take care of it! You've got enough to deal with as it is.”

Morgan alternated between curling her fingers into clenched fists and splaying them apart. The false hopes and false starts scattered throughout the day had left her exhausted. “I know. I know... I'm just, it's really hard to not care. Even if,” she gestured at herself, “all of this isn't my fault, everything that comes about because of it is.”

The foxy illusionist fell forward onto the simmering street with a fwump. “Ungh,” Tyr groaned as he felt himself flatten out beneath his overstuffed knapsack. “Even if that’s true, that’s on me to sort out, not you. I-I’m the one who got you into this mess, after all.”

“Well. I mean. You’re not wrong,” the raccoon trailed off. Her generous stride allowed her to catch up to Tyridia’s sprawled out form with just a couple of footfalls. Morgan pondered, and immediately recoiled from, the thought of pinching the fox between her fingers and setting him back on his feet. Gut churning worst-case scenarios overwhelmed her; she quietly reconsidered. Dipping down to her knees, the raccoon instead opted to let the back of her hand come to rest on the ground before him. “Here,” she offered.

Tyr sank his fingers into the wrinkles of her padded digits and pulled himself back up to a standing position. “Heh, thanks.”

Gingerly, Morgan retracted her hand after her foxy friend regained his balance. She then proceeded to fumble with it as she instinctively tried to shove it into her nonexistent pockets, which under normal-sized circumstances, would have been found along her waist. Instead, the raccoon’s hand brushed along her exposed midriff. “So,” Morgan bluntly changed the topic as she took to crossing her arms about her chest, “Where to?”

“I was kind of banking on the woods just north of here? That way, we won’t be wanting for kindling for a campfire! That and maybe kinda sorta because Master told me to patrol the path leading there when I had the chance.”

The raccoon blew a brief raspberry while she rolled her eyes. “At least you’re honest,” she snarked. Brows arched, the scantily clad white mage found that she honestly didn’t care enough to muster an argument otherwise. “Might as well,” Morgan acquiesced with a shrug.

“Thanks,” Tyr pitifully replied as he passed in and out of the shadows stretched out across the cobblestone.

Morgan waited for Tyridia to get a healthy head start, a couple paces bare minimum, before setting off at a snail’s pace. Shuffling forward, she was mindful to watch her gait. Her footsteps were slow and measured so as not to send the fox stumbling.

In silence, the duo made their departure. Their thoughts idled and wandered as the shop lined streets gave way to well-trod paths flanked by yellowing stalks of grass.

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“Now how should I make my entrance?” the hooded highwayman pondered to himself. “Beware, for Vexus the... uh... vexing? Vivicaious? Virile? Ehh, uhhh, no. Just, no. The alliterative route ain’t gonna cut it.” Lying in wait, hidden amongst the wildflowers that threatened to overtake the plains, he patiently staked out the path before him. Those goody-goody guildies were sure to send someone out to investigate and dammit to hell why was alliteration so easy for everyone but him?! “I know a name change is the easy way out but I shouldn’t have to, DAMMIT.” He tossed up his gloved hands in frustration. “Forget it, I’m overthinking this. A robbery is a robbery is robbery. All that matters is that my gain is their loss.”

Vexus narrowed his unseen eyes. Ohhhh they’d come. “Today, preferably,” he griped aloud. After all, he had explicitly been making a nuisance out of himself for the sole purpose of luring out the

Yash Guild. Their members were well equipped and well compensated for their efforts which made them ideal high-value targets. Very capable high-value targets that kicked his ass more often than not, sure. But all he had to do was get lucky once, just once, and he'd easily break the bank.

The pensive thief came to rest his chin on his hands while he waited. Sighing impatiently, a faint breeze sent whorls of dust and shriveled leaves bopping against him. "Come the hell on! I've been at this for days now. I thought those jackasses were supposed to care about keeping the peace." Velexus' hood deflated as he let his forehead come to rest against his knuckles. "I'd like to think they'd take this seriously. That they'd take me seriously."

A faint and rhythmic thump, that Velexus could both hear and feel, carried along the path.

"Ah! Finally!" He wriggled excitedly amongst the thorny undergrowth. "Okay. Okay okay okay. Stay calm, stay cool, stay composed. You've got a script, doesn't matter who you deliver it to, guildie or no, that you need to stick to." As Velexus tampered down his excitement and expectations, he ran a hand down his thigh and thrummed his fingers against the earthen disc nestled within his pocket. Everything was going according to plan. In a matter of moments his unknowing targets would wander by and he'd-

"What do you think you're doing down there?"

Velexus' limbs went stiff.

"Yes, you. Down there splayed out in the grass," his feminine accuser called out.

That voice... he recognized that voice! Oh the indignities he'd been made to suffer under that dreadful white mage. Damn. Damn damn damn! "Knew I should have expected as much," the highwayman cursed under his breath. "Of course they'd know to look for... wait. Wait. That means they DID send someone after me! They DO take me seriously!" Velexus thought as his hood perked back up. Brimming with confidence, he slowly rose to his feet as he plotted his next move.

"Sometime today, please," his soon-to-be foe flatly remarked.

"Heh. No use playing dumb," Velexus casually replied. With one outstretched arm he brushed aside the thorny green stalks he had, apparently, not so covertly concealed himself among, while his other draped along his side. Reaching into his pocket, fingers curled around the enchanted stone disc, Velexus lobbed it forward with a flourish. "You know what they say! Fortune favors the bollllllllhhhhhhhh my goodness. What happened to you?!"

Head tilted back, Velexus gawked at the looming raccoon. Before him, the lumpy discus wobbled violently in the air as mounds of earth, dust trailing off their misshapen chunks, were drawn into it. A primitive golem took shape as Velexus awkwardly waited for his answer.

"Illusion spell gone awry. Not in the mood to elaborate." Holding up an index finger, Morgan furrowed her brows as ether collected upon its clawed tip. Bearing the consistency and color of tar, the gathered magic soaked up what little sunlight still managed to peek out over the horizon.

Panting, Tyridia slowly advanced out of Morgan's long shadow. Hunched over, the fox struggled to keep his spine from becoming perpendicular to his waist as his knapsack bore down heavily upon him. "H-heh. You mind if I just keep going? If I stop... I don't think I'm getting back up."

“Go for it, Tyr,” the wumbo white mage replied. Turning her attention elsewhere, the raccoon curled her finger against her thumb as she readied her Reverse spell. With a flick, she sent the glob of magic sailing towards Velexus’ ready-made golem. Her spell collided against it with a noisy slap.

Velexus warily regarded his golem as it underwent a chromal inversion. A purple pallor overtook the magical automaton as rocks and stones of varying sizes were violently expelled from its rapidly dwindling form. “I’m not stupid enough to try and stop you,” he hurriedly clarified.

Nodding, Tyridia swallowed hard in between breaths. “Thanks,” he mumbled out. Placing one wobbling foot before the other, the fox continued to trudge ever onward.

Velexus sighed as his golem simply ceased to be. Nothing remained, save the enchanted disc flailing about in the air. It sent waves of dust lapping at the failed thief’s boots while the forcibly reversed enchantment continued to repel earth instead of draw it in. He winced when a brilliant orb of light, a Cure spell, sailed into it and, when combined with the already active Reverse spell, rendered the disc to dust. “Ummm. S-so what am I looking at here? An untimely end? A super-sized ass kicking?”

“Neither,” Morgan bluntly answered. “If I wanted to just...” She curled her toes and scowled at the thought. “If I wanted to ‘big’ at you I would have done so. As you can plainly see, I did not.” The raccoon tiredly gestured at herself. “This isn’t something I plan to familiarize myself with, much less rely upon.”

Both of Velexus’ limbs hung limply at his sides. “Huh. Okay. So... you’re not going to kick my ass?”

“I can if you really want me to,” Morgan answered as she readied another Reverse spell.

“No no! No. No. I’ll uhh...”

“Turn yourself in,” she finished for him.

“Yes. That,” Velexus acquiesced as his hood bobbed up and down.

An awkward silence, which mostly consisted of Morgan staring down at him, followed.

“R-right. I’ll get on that.” With that, his legs chafed against one another as he abruptly burst into a sprint. He knew better than to wait for the raccoon to ‘encourage’ him to cooperate. “Ah well...” Velexus mehhd as he advanced towards the faint flicker of torches on the horizon. There was always next time. That and, with how much time he spent in them, the Yash dungeon cells were downright homely! He could think of worse places to bed down for the night. Silver linings, Velexus, silver linings.

Rubbing her hands up and down along her exposed arms, fingers brushing against the tattered sleeves that barely covered her shoulders, Morgan sighed in relief. “At least something finally-” Actually, no. No snark. No wry comments. No nothing. Just get the day done and over with. Lips scrunched, the raccoon plodded after Tyr. ... Which took all of a couple steps.

“T-tyr. Tyr, lemme help. Come on, we’ll be lucky to make it there by sundown at this rate,” she tiredly implored him as she readied another Cure spell.

“You’re sure about this, Tyr?” Knapsack pinched between her fingers, Morgan released her grip and allowed it to flop onto her waiting palm.

Tyridia’s limbs trembled as he carried the last handful of kindling over to their eventual campfire. With every uneasy step, the pinecones, the rotted branches, and the fallen leaves, all piled high, threatened to spill free from the fox’s clutches. “It’s no big deal! I-I can just go to bed... for dinner.”

“Tyr.”

“It’s not going to kill me to go hungry for the night,” he replied. Chest deflating as he exhaled, Tyridia tossed his arms out to his sides. The collected debris tumbled into the fire pit at his feet.

Eyes half-lidded, Morgan rolled the bundled cloth around her palm. Its contents, equal parts bread, barley, and jerky, spilled out and collected within the wrinkles of her padded flesh. “Not even a little bit? Tyr, this is barely a mouthful to me as it is. Come on.”

“Do I have to?” the fox complained.

“Tyr, I appreciate the effort but what you’re trying to pull isn’t selfless so much as it is... stupid. Now come on.” Leaning forward, she shoved her food-filled palm out towards the fox.

“Okay, okay, okay! I give. Let me set up our campfire first.” Hand held up before him, a faint weight settled upon his fingers as he coated them with conjured ether. “Just add heat and...” Snapping his fluffy thumb and middle finger together, a purple wisp of fox fire burst to life within Tyridia’s grasp. Twisting his hand about his wrist, he splayed out his fingers and released his hold on the conjured flame. It fell into the firepit with a fwip.

Morgan mmped when she felt the foodstuffs crumble apart in the wrinkles of her padded palm. “Grab what you can, I guess.”

Embers crackling to life behind him, Tyr approached the outstretched hand. He sank his digits deep into the pinched folds of flesh and blushed furiously when the raccoon giggled at the ticklish sensations. Tyridia hurriedly retracted them and tucked his arms against his sides.

“Y-you good?” Morgan bashfully inquired. Toes curled tightly against her soles, she couldn’t help but huff.

“I-I. Ummm.” Finely ground powder, interlaced with crumbling chunks of jerky, sifted between the fox’s clenched fingers. Tyridia sheepishly brought a hand up to his mouth and forced himself to choke down the mixture. He coughed as the powdered bread and barley caked his tongue. “I’m good.”

The raccoon nodded before mimicking the fox’s actions for herself. To her pleasant surprise, she was actually able to manage a couple of chews before swallowing.

An awkward silence fell over the forest as the duo turned their attention towards anything but each other. Tyridia absently tended to the fire, logs snapping and popping noisily. Morgan peered up through the gaps in the leafy canopy and traced out the constellations that poked the purpling sky.

“Sooooo...” the white mage interrupted as she thrummed her fingers against her thighs.

“Sooooo?” Tyr replied with some hesitation. His gaze reluctantly settled upon her as she slid back against a tree. One that, thankfully, didn’t groan in protest and threaten to uproot itself when she did so.

Morgan crossed her arms about her chest, forearms purposefully obscuring her bosom, as her ringed tail swished behind her shyly. “Sooooo about today. With... what all you saw.”

Tyridia tried, and failed, to look away when her heels dragged against the forest floor as she stretched her legs. Those long shapely limbs, clad with ripped and torn form-fitting pants that accentuated every curve they could cover, sent his frail heart thumping. “I-I’ll forget everything!” he stammered out.

Chin tucked against her chest, Morgan’s amber eyes swiveled towards the sides of their sockets. “That’s not what I’m asking. A-actually, maybe this isn’t the best time for this,” she trailed off before planting her arms at her sides.

Staring down at his sandals, Tyr grappled briefly with his curiosity before giving in. “...When would be a good time?” he asked.

A nervous and pronounced raspberry was the only reply Morgan could muster up in response.

“I-it can be never!” the fox frantically replied.

Cheeks puffed out, the white mage idly pondered whether or not it was worth it to cast Dispel. Maybe see if it could banish the awkward airs draped about them. “No. Nooooo. This is... I’m...” Why did she even broach the topic? She was gigantic and flustered and this conversation was difficult enough to have even under the best of circumstances and aughhhhhh. “You... you know what I’m trying to get at with this, right?”

Tyridia forced himself to meet her gaze. Steeling his nerves, he inhaled deeply. “Y-yeah.”

...Okay, he could do better than that. Clawed fingers curled against his palms, the fox relented and embraced the awkwardness. “We... we kinda suck at this whole flirting thing, don’t we?” O-oh geeze was that too forward? No no nooooo he just out and out went and admitted that-

“Oh gods, we do. We really really do,” Morgan heaved out in relief. She relaxed her scrunched up shoulders and breathed easy at the admission.

Well then. “S-so this isn’t just a one-sided me thing?” Tyr sheepishly asked.

Morgan snorted and cracked a toothy grin. “No,” she quietly and confidently answered.

“I. Umm.” The fox’s cheeks strained from smiling so much. “You’re not still mad about today, are you? I mean, y-you’re allowed to be, of course!”

“Hmmm? Yeah, no, today sucked,” Morgan bluntly answered.

“Oh.”

“But... I appreciate you doing everything you could to try and make it less so. Even if it was technically your fault to begin with,” she smirked. The raccoon turned her attention towards the fire crackling by her hips and, in turn, the shadow she cast in its presence. She hummed at the light-warping trails of ether that radiated off of her silhouette. Subtle as it was, it was reassuring to see that the illusion was slowly but surely unraveling itself.

Tyridia laughed nervously as he rubbed a hand up and down along one of his loose fitting sleeves. “R-right. Speaking of... is there anything else I can do for you?”

Morgan hummed. Biting into her bottom lip, she gently bumped against the foxy summoner with a grey furred thigh. "I... I..." The raccoon papped a hand against one of her cheeks and tried to hide the bright crimson blush that had spread across it. "Wow I suck at this," she wryly giggled.

Tail puffed out behind him, Tyr leaned into her leg. "Don't screw this up, don't screw this up, DON'T SCREW THIS UP," he relentlessly repeated to himself as he all but spontaneously combusted at her very touch. "Not like I'm any better," he mumbled in reply.

"Here's to mutual suckage?" Morgan smirked as she gingerly cupped a palm against his back.

"Here's to mutual suckage," he shyly cheered back before squeezing at one of her fingers.

"Where do I even start?" Morgan thought aloud. Flat on her stomach, legs kicked up behind her, the raccoon's forearms sank into her mattress as she rested her weight upon them.

"Is that a rhetorical question? Or... or just the regular kind?" Tyr sulked.

The raccoon playfully shrugged. "Ehhhhhh I'm still thinking about it. I mean, hey, at least you're learning."

"Learning how? By process of elimination?"

Morgan's lips pulled flat. "Well, it's not like Xis is the kind to out and out teach you the right way to go about it. Tyr, I know it's not what you want to hear right now but learning what *not* to do is just as important as learning what *to* do." She paused. "...What did Xis have to say about all this, anyway?"

"Do we really have to talk about this?" the fox snipped back. Reciting the kitsune's... critiques of his performance was the furthest thing from Tyridia's mind. He shifted uneasily on his feet as the cushioned ground bowed beneath him.

Nostrils flared, the pajama clad white mage exhaled with a huff. Fun as it was, she really should have known better than to prod. "Tyr, I'm sorry. We... we can talk about this when you want, if you want, at your own pace. That sound okay?"

Tyr lazily kicked at the wrinkled hills of cloth before him. "It's just... frustrating."

"I know, I know," Morgan reassured him. Her arm gliding forward along her bedsheets, the raccoon offered Tyr her hand. A tiny Tyridia hesitatingly stumbled towards it.

The summoner groaned as his clawed fingers pinched at Morgan's broad palm. At least the exaggerated disparity in size was something he was already familiar with, laughable as it was. "I went the bird route again..." Tyr sighed.

"Bird route? Oh! Oh. Why didn't you tell me?" Morgan's expression softened at the realization. She gently pressed her thumb against his back and stroked him gently.

With a blush, Tyridia leaned into her digit. "I was scared I'd screw it up again. Not like I need to remind you what happened last time I tried to make an illusion real."

"Sure don't," Morgan replied with brows arched. She breathed out through pursed lips before continuing. "So you went and tried it on your own with Xis?" Said kitsune, she silently acknowledged,

was gracious enough to let her know something was amiss after the fact. Even if it was in his typically biting and sardonic manner.

“Yeahhhhhhhh,” he answered. Shame and resentment hung heavily on his every word. “This time around I focused on what a bird would see, not from the air, but from on the ground. Imagined myself eye-level with the floor trimming and... and I choked.”

The raccoon crossed her legs at the ankles and tapped the sides of her padded soles together. “At least your clothes shrank with you,” Morgan quietly offered.

“That’s kind of what brought this all crashing down,” Tyr mumbled with puffed out cheeks. “I wondered what I would do for clothes, or, well, if I would even have clothes when the illusion wore off. So then I tried to figure out what a kimono would look like on a bird and I couldn’t so... so this!” he replied as he gesticulated wildly.

Morgan guided the flustered fox into her palm with a tap of her thumb. “We’ll wait this out, don’t worry.”

“Hey, hey, hey!” Tyridia whined and fidgeted when he found himself cradled against her warm, him-sized, fingers. “I-I thought you said you didn’t want to get used to being big!”

“I’m not,” the white mage cooed as she made no attempt to hide the grin spreading across her reddening cheeks. “This isn’t me getting used to being big. This is me getting used to you being little.”

A stream of half-formed words and syllables stammered forth from Tyridia’s maw.

“What? I thought you’d enjoy this! You could hardly stop blushing and guffawing when we walked home hand-in-hand after *my* illusion finally wore off.”

“That’s because I was holding your hand, not sitting in it!”

Wrinkles formed in the black mask of fur wrapped around Morgan’s eyes as she narrowed her gaze. “So you don’t like this?” she teased.

His eyes darted up to meet her own... along with those tremendous feet, padded toes alternating between curling inwards or splaying apart, kicking back and forth behind her. “...I never said that,” Tyr mumbled out in reply.