



Hikaru, the Enhanced Cyborg

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A gift for Shad-Wolf



Hikaru's ears perked with interest as shi thumbed through the small packet of hir mail. Amidst the bills and sales papers sat a gilded envelope, addressed from the government. Shi wondered what could possibly warrant such an ornate delivery, though waited until shi returned to hir abode to sate hir curiosity. The crisp sound of shearing paper filled the hir small nook as hir knife bit into the thin package, freeing its contents across hir table. Excitement replaced apprehension as shi skimmed the official letter, finally culminating in a small shout of glee as shi reached its end. The lesser mail fluttered to the ground as shi gathered hir belongings, then piled herself into hir car and sped off to the edge of the city. While shi sat in traffic, the contents of the summons drifted through hir mind.

Valued soldier, you have been selected as a pioneer for our cybernetics program for your years of dedicated service and genetic compatibility. Please review the information included within and report to headquarters ASAP.

After an eternity of stagnant gridlock, shi drove through the main gate of the sprawling military base. The complex was a city in itself, from towering reactors to indoor fields, and from its center rose the fortified obelisk of headquarters. Shi was greeted by one of the building's receptionists as shi stepped into the cooled space, almost too taken aback by the grandiose décor to return her courtesy. The roofox presented hir papers once hir sense returned, prompting the wolfess to scrutinize every detail. The canine nodded in approval after a surprisingly tense moment and directed the roofox to an armored tram. She punched in a code and scanned her key card as Hikaru watched, and in a matter of seconds the automated cart was on its way into the depths of the facility.

The roofox marveled as shi was guided through the labyrinth of wide corridors, enjoying the heavily monitored tour of the base's inner workings. Some of the more bashful windows frosted over as shi passed, evidently conscious of hir lack of clearance. Strange considering shi was about to become the subject of one of their most ambitious experiments. The hall became significantly less interesting as it was reduced to featureless concrete, bringing hir to the conclusion that shi was either moving between buildings or underground. It was remarkably difficult to tell how long shi spent watching blank slate wall go by, but based on the speed of the tram, shi had covered no small amount of distance.

Just before boredom could tarnish hir excitement, the passage opened into a voluminous cavern. The ceiling must have been twenty meters high, and floor was packed to the brim with heavy scientific equipment and dedicated operators. The entire place buzzed with frantic purpose, and the excitement charging the air was contagious. A thrill ran through Hikaru's heart as shi recognized some of the machinery flying by, including a few life-support tanks and nanite colonies. Shi was finally able to acknowledge the reality of the situation, and it lifted hir spirits

like nothing else. This chamber would be the site of hir metamorphosis and hir home for the coming months.

The tram came to a lurching stop in one of the more populated stations, a grin spreading across hir muzzle as a welcoming party greeted their fabled pioneer. Most of the group offered murmured greetings and low introductions, but one of them, presumably the lead of the project, stepped forward to properly acclimate the roofox. A warm smile spread across the silver fox's muzzle as he examined Hikaru, a gesture shi didn't quite expect from a scientist. Thankfully before the situation became awkward, the slender vulpine spoke up.

"Good afternoon," he grinned. "You must be Hikaru, yes?"

The roofox gave a distracted nod as shi drank in the sights, still processing the significance of where shi was.

"Excellent! Do you know why you're here today?"

"Yeah...? I'm participating in the cybernetics experiment, right?"

"Indeed you are," he remarked. "I'm glad the Brass didn't leave you in the dark. You'd be surprised how often that happens."

The pair shared a small chuckle over that, but quickly got down to business. The place was a military instillation after all, and that meant they were on a tight schedule. The fox led hir through his domain at a brisk pace, idly offering sweeping overviews of what they hoped to accomplish with this project and its history. It was nothing Hikaru hadn't heard before, but shi appreciated the scientist's attempt at transparency regardless. A grin spread across hir muzzle as shi watched his tail accelerate with building anticipation, evidently taking a great deal of pride in his work. As their impromptu tour continued, shi got a sense of just how much he had to be proud of!

Finally the silver fox came to a stop before the heart and soul of the lab. Hikaru joined him in admiring the glass and steel monument as shi caught up, a similar sense of wonder overtaking hir. The object of their mutual fascination, the fox explained, was a machine dubbed the union vat. To the untrained eye it appeared to be little more than a clear tube with some machinery attached to it, but everyone who had sacrificed their time and effort at its altar knew it was so much more. Above all else it was the lynch pin of the entire cybernetics program, and today would be its first true test.

"This is your last chance to change your mind, Hikaru," he warned. "Once you take the plunge, there is no turning back."

Hikaru paused for a moment to reflect on hir decision. Shi had spent a great deal of time considering the consequences before signing up, but actually being selected was little more than

a dream then. What was once a hopeful vision was tangible now that shi stood within arm's reach of the device that would make it all happen. It stirred up a bevy of conflicting emotions, fear of what shi would lose, anticipation of what shi would gain, but what cut through the mire was optimism. Shi would be transfigured in the name of hir military, but it would give hir the power to truly make a difference in the world. A grin spread across hir muzzle as shi dwelled on this, and in a few short seconds became convinced shi could no longer walk away.

"I'm ready," shi nodded.

"Fantastic," the scientist grinned. "I'm glad all this prep work wasn't for nothing. I don't think the techs could have handled another false start."

The thought of former attempts didn't exactly inspire confidence, but the silver fox was waving over a harness before she could dwell on it. "Alright Hikaru, just strip down, slip into the supports, and relax. We'll take care of everything from there."

The roofox blushed as shi shed hir clothing, but fortunately the display didn't seem to attract much attention. The entire lab was far too enamored with the vat's initiation to pay hir any mind anyway. Shi dimly felt a set of straps wrap around hir limbs as shi watched the machine hum to life, the fluid within changing from pale green to vivid purple. Hir focus returned to hir as ropes pulled taught around hir, unburdening hir legs of hir weight. A small crane hoisted hir to the top of the tank, and a twinge of panic shot through hir as hir toes broke through the surface of the lukewarm goo.

"Relax Hikaru," the silver fox called out. "You're in good hands."

Numbness swept up hir legs as shi was dipped further into the viscous liquid, robbing hir of the luxury of movement. It was no doubt one of the many effects of the tank, but it was unsettling until shi got used to the paralysis. Hikaru's mind fogged over as hir bare torso fell below the surface of the slime, hir body succumbing to the full force of the medicated ooze. With one last sigh in the body of hir birth, shi allowed darkness to overtake hir. Hir job was done, and the rest was up to the cybernetics team.

Consciousness slowly returned to the reborn roofox as anesthetics wore off, dragging hir into the waking world. Confusion set in as hir vision slowly focused, but something was off about the color of everything. The lab appeared as if passed through a filter, but shi couldn't place the exact color of the apparent screen. Surfacing memory told hir it should have been purple, but what shi actually saw didn't match. Shi dully tried to ask one of the techs monitoring the tank about the discrepancy, but hir attempts were thwarted by a tube lodged in her mouth. Instinctively shi moved to remove the obstruction, but found hir arms were sluggish and uncooperative. Hir groggy fidgeting was enough to capture the attention of the silver fox

however, who met hir through the glass with a triumphant smile. The vulpine scientist gestured they were about to extract hir from the soup, but the meaning of his waving about was lost on hir.

Hikaru's thoughts became more coherent as hir head breached the surface of the thick fluid, granting hir the knowledge of hir location. Hir ears rang with the glee of the small crowd gathered around the vat, but shi was unable to connect meaning to their words for the time being. The cool air of the cavernous lab came as a shock to hir, but it was a sting not felt evenly across hir form. The roofox sagged in hir harness as the sensation of weightlessness was stripped from hir, and its impact seemed greater than shi remembered. Only then was shi compelled to turn hir attention onto hirself.

Roughly half of the roofox's body had been replaced, but shi would come to realize that the changes ran much deeper than hir pelt. It finally dawned on hir that a visor had been placed over the majority of hir face, and with this realization it retracted into hidden slots. Hikaru was immediately taken aback by the sharpness of hir vision. Hir eyes weren't bad before the procedure, but now shi could count the threads in the fox's coat from twenty feet if shi put hir mind to it. A glint of metal caught hir eye before shi could lose hirself in the minutia of the fabric, bringing hir gaze down to hir new body.

Most of hir upper body had been completely replaced, and shi saw did not displease hir. Dark plates encased hir vitals in rigid metal, but golden webbing between them allowed hir to retain a full range of movement. Pinpoints of neon blue light marked the joints between panels, easing the task of maintenance and matching the gear to hir natural markings. The reborn roofox got a better chance to look hirself over as the winch gently lowered hir to the floor, allowing hir full weight to settle onto hir legs. Despite Hikaru's concerns about increased mass, shi hardly felt any of it. In fact, shi felt lighter than ever before! Hir stance wavered as shi adjusted to a new center of balance, but she adjusted quickly and rose to hir full height. The harness pulled away shortly after, and the grinning scientist approached.

"Good news Hikaru," he beamed. "The procedure was a complete success, and your diagnostics are looking great."

The fox's enthusiasm began to rub off on the mechanized hybrid, and the more shi familiarized hirself with hir new body, the more shi joined him in the joys of success. Hikaru marveled as shi watched hir arms, now fully robotic, move at hir mental command without delay with utmost precision. Shi nearly jumped with delight as shi accidentally conjured a spark of electricity in hir metal palm, bringing a light chuckle from the scientist. As shi grew more accustomed to the novelty of it all however, a burning question took root in hir mind.

"This is great and all, but how long was I in there?"

The fox was caught off guard, but he responded before shi could press it further. “You’ll be filled on all the details during your debriefing tomorrow,” he offered. “Until then, why don’t I take you to your quarters so you can get more familiar with yourself.”