

Mori leans forward, hair black as raven's wings spilling over her shoulders. It falls in her eyes, but she doesn't notice.

Her father had brushed her hair. She remembers it vividly, over a decade past. Her own strokes are insufficient and only mimic the feeling.

The monitor chimes, and her reverie shatters. The device tolls only when a response far enough into the desired spectrum occurs. The next step is the injection. Her fingers tremble and the needle nearly falls from her grip, the flesh vice it nestles in failing for a moment. When was the last time she slept? Control eludes her; she bruises the muscle with such a poorly placed injection. In a way it's a good thing; one more trial for her machine.

Demetri jerks to life on the table. Leather restraints, an inch-and-a-half across and a half-inch thick, tear like brittle newspaper clippings and dangle from his wrists and ankles. Mori falls back, both pleased and a tiny bit horrified. He lunges at her throat, crooked fingers begging, "please, mummy, please, make the pain go away."

But Demetri is not her only experiment; at the threat to their mistress, Alpha and Beta spring, flying through mid-air. The twins have never failed her. Alpha wraps around the boy's torso and knocks him to the dirty tile; the head of her target careens off a drain grate. Beta snakes around Demetri's legs and sinks unnaturally jointed fingers into vulnerable seams of muscle and tendon. Demetri-that-is screams in a way that Demetri-that-was never could.

Already an improvement on previous sessions.

Alpha lays Demetri at Mori's feet. The injection takes effect, slowing his systems to the point that life in the body is nearly imperceptible to the untrained observer. She lifts her logbook in one hand as the other fumbles across the print-out tearaway that rolls out of the monitor. Dots, bars, and perforations along the edge of the torn paper confirm what her basic shapes can already tell her from the transparent overlay she uses to cover the paper.

The results are identical. Biorhythms, from pulse to brain waves, exactly matching the proposed results of fifteen years past. It has been so long since the tendrils of hope climbed in her heart, but more must be done before she can truly rejoice.

She sweeps away, the twins crawling with the adroitness of spiders in the web of her steps, before remembering. "Melissa," she conjures, "secure Demetri to his place."

The brown haired girl is crying in the corner again, her head alight with pulses of green. If only she could em-

brace the bigger picture, then Mori wouldn't need the diodes to control her.

"Ms. Mori - "

"Ms. va Umbral, dear. I've told you time and time again. Does Beta need to remind you?"

The wreckage of a man at her feet crawls around her, canine and feline at the same time, over-juiced muscles twitching in pleasure at his name called. The lass shivers. "No ma'am."

"Hop to it then. Just one more test." One more test, and her father can rest easy. Her family can come out of their social exile. She can lay claim to a lost fortune, to lands and estates that were her joy as a girl. And, most importantly, her father's remains can be pulled from the gibbet's yards and laid with her mother's.

She reaches her office in the hall beyond the operating theater. It had been her grandfather's once, a bastion from where he had shaped Evangless' social structures with a rash of asylums and other government- and privately-maintained homes for broken minds and bodies. Her father had viewed the institutions with distaste. "Gutters for the trash," as he had put it, "and no true places of healing at all."

A picture of him graces the wall, taken on the day he graduated from medical school. His smile is confident, a man accustomed to success. She has another picture of him, taken on the last day of his trial. She does not look at that one very often.

Her inherited journal lays in its customary place of honor on her desk. Alpha and Beta retreat to the corner as she sits with purpose at the desk and dips her father's quill into the antique well. No pen or typewriter here. Just the traditions of the past and a legacy to be fulfilled.

She skims past her previous summaries.

*Dec. 14, male, eyes. Failure.*

*Jan. 06, female, hands. Failure.*

*Feb. 14, male and female, tongue and ears. Failure.*

*Feb. 20, male, feet. Failure.*

*April 1, female, all sensory organs. Failure.*

A new page for a fresh start.

*May 19. The results match. Just one more test to prove that father was right, and his work will be vindicated. This will expunge our family's undeserved stain.*

*His records indicate that the machine, this technology he came into possession of known as 'bio-flux' by his contact, is perfectly capable of healing trauma on a massive scale. Organs regrown, limbs reattached, lives -*

*Her quill scratches dry. She dips, fills, and rushes*

back to the paper. Ink cannot dry before her findings are recorded. Too much time has been spent to waste a moment now.

*- saved? There are no limits. None for those with the wit to see it.*

I know the device inside and out. When Demetri awakens, I will save him. I am well aware of the hubris implied, that his assailant might also be his savior. I cannot present my findings without a firm foundation. His pain is vital.

She runs dry and fills again.

*All we require is the most extreme test. Through my experiments I have discovered a way to shape the flesh into something new. Alpha and Beta both bear witness to this, through their enhanced muscles, stronger bones, even the ability to light their flesh aflame. I can hurt them.*

*I can heal them.*

*Now Demetri will be my final test. His sister serves me through the device I have laid across her skull.*

*Father will be exonerated.*

Her concentration is broken again, but not by the machine monitoring Demetri. It is the ring of the bell pull by the reception desk. They've found her.

No. She was supposed to have more time. Her one escapee was too severely damaged to have gotten far, and unlikely to say much. Just a few more hours are needed.

She looks at her bio-zapper hanging in its holster across the back of her chair, and the decision is made. It slides next to the .45 at her hip. She's too close to give up.

Melissa will slow them down, and Alpha and Beta will die before they let any harm come to her.

She draws the second picture of her father out from the desk drawer, laying her hand across it.

*Papa, I won't let you down.*