

In Vivo Studies

By C. Jade Wyton

Cirrus comes to Dr Mori, furious after finding out about the man's mistreatment of the young girl Gix, and Dr Mori takes the opportunity to show Cirrus just how far his malpractice can go.

A collaboration with my friend, Vanessa.

Contains depictions of violence, gore, medical malpractice, torture, surgery while conscious, forced-feeding, tendon ripping, organ fondling, and obsessive behaviours. Also contains mentions of child abuse, and overall horror themes.

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Mori was adjusting the composition of the mixture of liquid in his embryonic vats, but he could barely enjoy it. He was too furious about his predicament, and it was sitting at the front of his mind as he worked; his actions so practised they were mechanical and correct, even without true focus.

It was only recently that Zaltec had gotten enough information to tell him what was *truly* going on.

That Wonda's death had been faked.... That the *real* Wonda was out there.... That the real Wonda was with *Plume of fucking Feathers*, of all people—! It made him furious!

*Both* his favourite studies —his two sources of immortality— were hiding away *together*, and he couldn't access *either* of them!

Even worse was Cirrus.

Cirrus, the *spy*, who had filled Mori's brain with smoke to confuse him and convince him of a friendship that never was. That had been travelling back and forth, between the lab and the escaped experiments, manipulating the outcome of Mori's work so he would be none the wiser— *Cursing* him and his usually-wonderful brain, so he couldn't focus or succeed!

*That he had been quietly befriending Ashdown. Seducing the man who was supposed to be at Mori's every beck and call....*

Oh, his blood *boiled* at the knowledge of Cirrus's meddling... but, still. He kept calm.

The protective spell from Zaltec would keep Cirrus from altering his mind again, after all. Protect him from that horrid smoke.... The first blessing had been too weak, they had found that out quickly. But, as Mori had kept his promise to Zaltec, he had now received his promised reward... and with that reward, extra layers of protection against Cirrus's powers. Because no matter how powerful Cirrus was, he was simply a mystic... and Mori was in the final stages of becoming a *god*.

He had no reason to fear mortals. Not any more; not now that he had shed his mortality. And as long as Plume remained on course, and set foot on ground

within Weltaron's walls... the bargain would complete, and the rest of Mori's promised powers would become his.

Then, he could truly do as he pleased, with nobody to stop him.

Not Plume. Not Wonda. Not Fourteen.

And not Cirrus.

Mori noted down the last of the updates on his clones, and returned his notebook to its place.

For now, he would stay here in Weltaron; using himself as bait for Plume. She would come to seek him in an attempt to claim her powers back, and then he could take her, and punish her for running away.... Until then, though, he would pretend to be none-the-wiser, the next time Cirrus visited him.

Not that he would have to wait long.

Already on his way to confront the "doctor," Cirrus strode through the castle with an uncharacteristic anger and stiffness to his gait. He clenched and unclenched his hands as he walked, ignoring the few glances he got from sleepy night-workers as he made a beeline for Mori's lab.

He didn't knock or otherwise announce his arrival: he just used his powers to throw open the door with a slam.

Though, Mori didn't even flinch at the dramatic entrance. For one, it was in the main entrance of the lab, not his more private backroom. And for two, he was used to this sort of anger already, from many others who lived in Weltaron. So when the door to his private room flung open, he was calm, and simply turned to Cirrus with a false cool look as he allowed Zalte's blessing to mask his annoyance from the mind-reader.

"Cirrus." He greeted, his voice flat and sarcastic. "It's been a while since you've... *graced* me with your presence, hasn't it? To what do I owe the disturbance— And— What in the *world* are you wearing?! You look like you've been running around in one of Wonda's storybooks!"

Cirrus *scowled*, pinning his ears back as his face turned in disgust. There was a moment that he looked at the man, all but growling, before he finally responded. "Cut the shit, Mori! Ideally, I'd like to know what the fuck is *wrong* with you, but I know I'm not gonna get an answer for *that* anytime soon. So I'll ask this, instead: what the *fuck* did you do to Gix?"

Surprisingly, Mori actually took pause at that. At Cirrus's tone. At the animalistic snort that escaped the satyr when he finished talking. And at the strange and sudden topic of conversation.

"Gix?" He echoed, slowly moving from the shelf where he stored his notes, to his desk. He was quiet for a moment, seemingly in thought that Cirrus couldn't read through the shield on his mind, as he retrieved a pair of blue-tinted goggles. He looked them over, and it was clear Cirrus's comments had made him think on something.... Though, his brain was impenetrable. "What makes you think I have *anything* to do with that child?"

"A child turns up in the middle of the night, clearly *injured* and *starving*—" Items on the shelves and bench-tops nearest to Cirrus began to tremble and shake violently, as though a tremor was running through the building... though the ground was still. "—In the middle of a *blizzard*, no less! Though there are no signs of frost-bite. Only abuse and neglect.... What *else* fits the bill, Mori?"

“Well, Willard liked his girls young!” Mori gave a dismissive, almost *playful* and *humoured* shrug before he turned away. Though, he quickly turned back as a glass beaker flew off the shelf and cut off his path to shatter against the wall beside him.

“Is this *funny* to you?!” Cirrus hissed.

Biting back the urge to respond with sarcastic confirmation, Mori chewed his lip. And instead of saying his ever-so-tempting ‘yes,’ he instead began to clean his goggles, wiping the muck and dust off the odd-coloured lenses with his sleeve.

“Of course not,” he lied. “What kind of person would that make me, to make jokes about what happened to poor, sweet, *naïve* Pauline? I could *never* think it funny, how she ignored *every* warning from *every* older woman about Willard’s behaviour, and gaslit herself into thinking he was a half-decent man.... There’s simply no humour in it.”

Cirrus’s ears flicked down in annoyance. “I did not come here to talk about what *Willard* did to *Pauline*.” He responded firmly. “I came here to talk about what *you* did to *Gix*.”

“What *I* did to *Gix*....” Mori echoed, slowly, before he chuckled and leant on his desk. “Oh, Cirrus, my friend! Just ask anyone: I’m not allowed near the children, and nobody’s ever seen me lay a hand on her— Why don’t you go ask *Fungus* where he found her, hm? *He’s* the one who brought her into the family, after all!”

“Not being *allowed* near the children hasn’t stopped you from taking them before.” Cirrus growled, softly, as he recalled Franch’s worried mumblings about his childhood friend and how Mori had gotten his hands on her. “And as far as I’m aware, *you’re* the only man not allowed near the children at *all*.” He paused to let out another angry snort. “All the others who put them at risk are now *dead*.”

“So who says it wasn’t one of *them* who brought her in?” Mori gave Cirrus a shit-eating look, clearly aware he couldn’t be proven wrong, as what he was saying was all... technically the truth. “I haven’t left the castle in years. Where would *I* find a mystery child?”

“You never seem to have trouble finding test subjects.” Cirrus replied. “And that’s exactly the thing: no one *left* the castle at the time Gix was found. Which means she had been here a while before being found.... And your laboratory is the only place private enough to hide things in. So I ask you again: What. Did. You. *Do?*!”

An impatient stomp *thumped* on the floor of Mori’s lab as Cirrus asked his question, and the scientist gave a scoff as he finished removing the last of the grime from his strange eye-wear.

Satisfied with his work, Mori pulled the goggles over his eyes, obscuring his vision with the tinted blue and opening his world to a new plane. It was one usually invisible to the naked eye but, much like glasses enchanted with spells to translate languages, Mori had figured out how to enchant his goggles with a spell that let him view the non-material planes.... Essences, auras, and even spirits— Though, he made a point to ignore all the haunting little faces that skittered into the shadows to hide from him as his gaze shifted around the laboratory and came to rest on Cirrus.

He eyed the string-like cord that trailed out of the man, presumably reaching out to connect him to his true body, and smirked. Then he turned on his heels, and began to walk the length of his shelved walls, running a hand over the various tools that sat upon them as he did.

“You’re a lot smarter than you seem, Cirrus. It’s rather annoying, actually....” He came to a stop at a large pair of strange tongs, which he picked up and bounced briefly in his hand, as if checking their weight. “I know you’ve been travelling back and forth, between here and there. And I know that this body of yours is just an astral projection. A fascinating one, though! I must say, I’m intrigued. To create a complete, *physical* form to surround a soul that’s stepped out of its body? I didn’t know that was possible.”

A low, quiet clicking echoed the quiet lab as Cirrus shifted from one hoof to the other, and his ears flicked in the direction of Mori’s voice. The satyr was tense. His jaw was set, teeth grinding in anger as he *desperately* tried to remain calm.

The clicking was echoed by the tongs as Mori adjusted them, closing them against the air and causing a small, circular blade much like an apple corer, to appear from their centre and shoot forward. It was clear as the blade twisted, its serrated edges spinning in their eagerness to slice and tear, that it was designed to puncture and remove pieces from whatever the tongs gripped.

“You want to know what I did to Gix?” Mori sounded rather distracted as he examined the tongs.... Though it was short-lived, as his gaze then turned to Cirrus and a sickening grin appeared on his lips. “Alright. I’ll show you.”

Not giving pause for a response, Mori lunged forward and used the tongs to grip the invisible cord attached to Cirrus. And the blade did its job; shooting forward to rip viciously through the spiritual cable with a red-hot enchantment that sent a blindingly sharp pain through the satyr. It only took a second, and the severance of his soul—this solid astral projection— and his body far away in Traxwood, was completed.

He let out a strangled, bleat-like cry before immediately crumpling to the floor, his mouth hanging agape in both shock and agony as his body—this new, detached instance of himself— spasmed and writhed on the filthy lab floor. Desperate but unable to control his body through the pain, Cirrus let out shuddering gasps and whimpers as he struggled to right himself and look up at Mori with horror.

“What— *Hhkk*—“ He cut off as pain squeezed him, and was left panting like a dog, his chest rising and falling heavily as his body tried to regain function of its instincts.

A metallic *clang* echoed through the lab as Mori discarded his tongs to the side and grinned wickedly down at the man. He approached, and Cirrus let out another bleat-like whimper and shook his head... though it was short-lived, as Cirrus was still addled enough that tossing his head around quickly made him dizzy.

“It’s really fascinating, you know.” Speaking softly, Mori crouched down to address Cirrus on the floor. “The soul is connected to the body like any other organ.... It’s a very delicate thing, that reaches through the body like our nervous system does.... Though, unlike our better-studied nervous systems, this part of

our bodies is special. Non-corporeal and undetectable without magic.... And *I* discovered it...!”

He pet Cirrus on the head, mocking the man’s pain as he groaned and twitched and panted.

“When I first discovered this system, I developed a theory.... Though I was unable to prove it correct, until just now. Ah, shouldn’t you be so happy! You’ve just helped me confirm my hypothesis: Astral projection and creating phylacteries are similar practices that manipulate the same parts of the bodies, simply in different ways. In both instances, you take a small piece of the soul out of the body, without severing the connection to the rest of the system running through the flesh.... With the main difference between the two being if the soul is then allowed to walk freely to project itself elsewhere, or if it is then trapped within an object to prevent the complete destruction of the soul within the original body.... And I know, already, from Gix, that souls can grow back if removed. So, it stands to reason that a piece of soul trapped in a phylactery will regenerate, and then use the connection it has to the body to bring itself back to life. Think of a liver!”

The only response from the satyr was a low, guttural groan of pain, which Mori chuckled at before he rose to his feet again and made for his desk. He looked through his things to find a belt-like strap and a strange clamp that was almost helmet-shaped.

“It’s interesting, though. Somehow, you’ve managed to turn your non-corporeal system into a physical object. I didn’t think that was possible! But here we are!” He returned to Cirrus’s side quickly, and affixed the trap around the man’s hands to restrain him. “It’s got my mind *racing* with theories! And now that I’ve severed your connection, and your soul can’t return to its body —can’t dissipate to its natural spiritual state— I can *examine* it!”

The clamp was painfully fitted over Cirrus’s head, forcing his horn to bend, slightly, to accommodate it. And Cirrus immediately realised he’d made a mistake, by being still long enough for Mori to bind him. As soon as he realised what was happening he began to kick and thrash about wildly. His hooves clicked on the tiled floor, unable to gain purchase to help him escape away from the man who now sat on him to restrain him. Desperate to shake Mori off, Cirrus rolled, slamming desperately into a nearby cupboard and knocking things down around them.... But Mori was surprisingly skilled at straddling him, and managed to pin him back down. It was all too clear that he had held others down in this way, as he effortlessly moved with Cirrus, riding him like a mechanical bull, and continued his work unbothered by the struggling body beneath him.

“Don’t worry, though!” Mori continued, gripping the clamp tight and continuing to force it onto Cirrus. “Your body should be fine! Gix’s was, after all. Perhaps it will even grow a new soul, like hers did! I’d love to see that— Do you think it will have the same powers as you? Or do you think your powers will remain in this new body you’ve made? It’s an interesting question, if your powers are a part of your body or your soul.”

A shriek escaped Cirrus as the clamp jolted down the final inch and Mori pulled back with a too-proud chuckle, rising to his feet and stepping back to give Cirrus room to flail.... For as soon as the clamp was in place, the noosphere went

silent and Cirrus's powers were trapped in his mind; as if restrained in a tight cage that gave them no room to activate.

*It was so quiet.*

The noosphere —both his home and his burden— suddenly, was *gone*.

"No! No, no, no, no, no, no—" He mumbled miserably, not noticing a tear rolling down his cheek already as he slammed his head into the cupboard again.

And again.

And *again*.

His horn scraped against the wood, gouging a deep splinter in the panel during his frantic attempts to catch the clamp on the handle to pull it off; his desperate endeavour to smash that cruel device trapping him here.

He, unfortunately, ended up catching something else instead: his own horn. With a sickening snap like the bending of splintered wood, and another animalistic scream, Cirrus's remaining horn *snapped* and clattered to the floor, allowing the clamp to slide into place *perfectly*.

Snorting loudly in humour, Mori simply watched Cirrus struggle a moment before retrieving another strap from his desk and giving it a hard flick to crack it loud like a whip.

Another frightened bleat filled the lab as Cirrus *flinched* away from the sound. He scrabbled about on the floor, managing to push himself backwards as his thick hair and fur slid on the polished floor.

"I can't *wait* to cut you open!" Mori chirped, approaching Cirrus with obvious intent to restrain him further. "See just what, exactly, your soul is made of to be so powerful!"

"NO! No! No —wait— *please!*" The begging came out in frightened gasps. Cirrus tried to get to his feet, but with his hands tied and the physical shock he was still recovering from, he found he could do little else besides tremble, flop around and kick out at Mori with his hooves as the man approached.

It was pointless, though, as Mori swiped Cirrus's legs to the side easily and raised the strap above him.

"Fill my brain with smoke, huh?!" Snapped Mori as he brought the strap harshly down onto Cirrus's face. "Disrupt my research?!"

Another shriek as the strap cut into the soft skin of Cirrus's cheek, and the man was momentarily stunned by the violence. Automatically, as it always did, he could feel his powers swell up inside him... then it felt like his head was going to *explode*, with nowhere for them to go. The pressure built and built, and all the while Cirrus's eyes rolled back into his head, and he let out a guttural groan as the scientist grabbed him by a wrist and hefted him up with surprising strength.

"Well!" Mori gave an indignant *huff* as Cirrus nearly flopped over on top of him. "Now you're going to be a *part* of my research! And you'll *not* make a fool of me, again!"

Legs staggering under his weight like a newborn fawn's, Cirrus couldn't fight back as Mori examined the clamp over his head and grinned. He tapped some sort of pressure gauge on it's side, and then yanked Cirrus sideways to yet another door; leading him *deeper* into the dungeon-converted-to-laboratory.

"Don't you worry, Cirrus, I'll drain that pressure right out, for you!" He commented, pulling Cirrus through the horrid hallway to a

cell-turned-to-surgical-suite. “As soon as I have you secure, that is....”

Mori made for a filthy table covered in rotten sludge, and Cirrus stumbled along after him helplessly, mumbling incoherently under his breath a few times. It wasn't until he was slammed onto the table that he seemed to jolt back to reality; struggling with renewed desperation as he was strapped down. His hooves clanged loudly against the metal as he once again began kicking and shrieking.

“Stop! Stop, stop! STOP! STOP!” His voice rose to a shrieking wail as the pressure in his skull built up even more. A thin line of blood oozed from his nose, momentarily silencing him as he choked on a few drops that fell into his open mouth.

“Oh, now *that's* interesting!” Mori commented, examining the trickle a moment before he grabbed a vial to collect it. “So you have *blood* in this body, too!”

He set the vial aside before grabbing another series of tools; a large needle connected to a cannula.

“Wh— Of *course* I—” Cirrus began to reply, until he caught sight of the needle. He choked on his words as his face paled and he began to tremble all over, desperately shaking his head. “No— Please—”

“Hold still; this is the part you're going to actually *enjoy!*” Mori chuckled. “The part that will actually feel *good!*”

An instinct that he had long grown out of suddenly returned to Cirrus, as Mori aimed the needle at Cirrus's head, and he froze. Like all satyr fawns instinctively knew to do when faced with danger. He felt so small and hopeless and helpless in that moment, that his body couldn't do anything else, but return to its oldest known methods to seek safety.

“*Good man...*” Mori mumbled, carefully inserting the needle into Cirrus's head. “*You really don't want me poking this in the wrong lobe....*”

The oppressive pressure was immediately relieved as Cirrus's trapped excess magic began to drain through the cannula into a large IV bag, and Cirrus's eyes cut to the side to catch a glimpse of the essence as it was drained from him. Thick white-grey liquid, swirling in patterns that resembled smoke from his hookah, oozed into the bag, and a new wave of terror washed over Cirrus so strong he gagged.

*He felt like he was going to be sick!*

“Look at how *fast* that's filling up!” Mori chuckled, fondling the bag in excitement as he squished it between his fingers like some sort of entertaining toy. “You're a powerful spell-caster, indeed.... I have the feeling I'm going to need another bag. Maybe even *two!*”

Disappearing from Cirrus's view, Mori quickly stepped away to retrieve the things he needed to complete the procedure, and then returned to Cirrus's side to loom over him like a predator about to pounce its prey.... He ran a finger up Cirrus's body, from his naval to his collarbone, and Cirrus squirmed and trembled even more than before.

“While we wait for those to fill, why don't I prep you for the next part?” Mori commented as he reached for his tools. He held up a large razor for Cirrus to see. “Can't cut you open when you're covered in *this* much hair!”

“Wh-Why—” Cirrus stuttered, barely able to speak as he shook in fear. “Sh-Should— I-I-I shouldn’t be awake—” He finally managed to get the words out. He then flailed his head rapidly and strained against the restraints.

Once again, he repeatedly struck his head against the table, his horn stumps making a rather loud *THWACK* as they clacked against metal with each blow.

“The anticipation’s almost as thrilling as the procedure itself, isn’t it?” Mori mocked, running the razor softly up Cirrus’s body. It sliced through his hair effortlessly, not breaking skin despite the movement of the body it ran across; another sickeningly well-practised skill from the doctor. “Don’t worry. It won’t be long now before I get to cut into you.”

It made Cirrus sick, how skilled Mori was at this. Just *how many* souls had suffered under his hand?!

Back arching and straining against the straps that held him down with all he had, Cirrus gave an almost angry-sounding snort. He could feel that *slight* pressure buildup in his head again, and caught a glimpse of the IV bag filling up a little quicker.

“The— *FFFUCK* are you even gonna—” He wheezed, his body trembling with effort. “Y-You’re just getting distracted again!”

He hoped, if nothing else, the accusation might stop Mori in his tracks even a *little*.

“No, thanks to Zaltec, I’m thinking as clearly as I *ever* have!” Mori retorted, putting that little bit more pressure down; so that the razor cut closer to the skin. He brushed the shaven hair aside, before continuing to clean up Cirrus’s chest, finding the spots he’d missed. “It’s interesting that your magic flows faster when you’re in distress. Wonda’s is much the same. Though Astrid was the opposite; I tried to test her magical flow under distress, and it immediately dried up on me! Fascinating, isn’t it, how our bodies can have such different responses to the same stressors? I don’t think that girl’s been able to cast a single spell since my tests. I’d really love to get my hands on her again and see if it can be reversed. I have so many questions about her reaction to my tests! Is it a blockage? And if so, do you think it’s mental, physical, or spiritual? Is it a rare occurrence? Is she an *outlier*? Or is it common, and has my pool of test subjects simply been too small to see it twice? Or was it perhaps to do with her race? Goblins have never been the most blessed spell-casters. Especially compared to gods, unicorns, and mystics.... Could it have been her race? Or maybe it was because she was still so young, and her glands weren’t fully developed, and I damaged them when I—”

“*STOP!*” Cirrus hissed, suddenly jerking forward as though he was trying to lunge at Mori. “You’re *sick!* You’re a sick *fuck* who preys on little girls!”

Hands clenching into fists, Cirrus let out a snarl. His body contorted into an almost unnatural position, muscles flexed to their utter limits. For a few seconds it almost seemed like he could break free... until the two were interrupted by the sound of the pressure gauge clicking rapidly— It was building up *much* more vigorously now. And somehow, in the few minutes since it had been checked on last, the IV bag was so impossibly swollen it looked about ready to burst.

Mori hurried to switch the bags over, a wicked grin on his lips as he did. He examined the full bag carefully, before cutting his eyes to Cirrus. “I think there’ll be more than three bags. Don’t you?” He giggled, before vanishing from Cirrus’s



view again. "I wonder how long it will take before I've exhausted you!"

It was only a few moments, but by the time Mori had returned, Cirrus was sweating and panting heavily. One leg was raised aloft slightly— Somehow he'd managed to free it, but not without skinning it along his lower calf upon pulling it free.

Everywhere else where the restraints had managed to last now left bleeding wounds across his skin, rubbed completely *raw* from his struggles, the thick, hard leather cutting in at its edges.... But these were not the only parts left bloody. His nosebleed had intensified, and a thin trail of blood leaked from the corner of his mouth.

When Mori got closer, Cirrus once again tried to kick him with his free hoof, aiming directly for the man's head; though Mori seemed more entertained by Cirrus's pain, than distressed by the attempts to kick him, and he simply flicked down his goggles again and then grabbed Cirrus's free leg, poking at where the skin had been pulled away with his freshly-gloved fingers.

"Give me a moment, Cirrus! There are only *so many* things I can examine at once!" He was clearly thrilled about Cirrus's injuries and the chance to see their makeup. "Fascinating! It really is a true body, not just a projection! This is actually *real* tissue, not magic *pretending* to be organic matter! *Real!*"

He took a pinch of loose skin between his fingers as he examined it, peeling it back a little further just to see how it tore from the flesh, and Cirrus bleated in distress once more and tried to tug his leg free from Mori's hands. He didn't notice until it was too late, however, that Mori had a firm grip on the loose skin, and with one desperate tug a thin strip of it came away from the flesh.

Mori had let go at the last second, and allowed the satyr to do the work for him.

"Yes! Real skin, too!"

With his strength waning, Cirrus began to sob again, tears trailing down his cheeks. "*Don't touch me!*" He begged. "*Don't....*"

Mori ignored Cirrus's begging; it was all words he'd heard before. So many times. And rather than making him feel merciful, it only sought to make him feel all the more powerful, almost god-like; he savoured the memory of every little voice that begged for their life. And so he grabbed Cirrus's leg again, just to make him squirm.

A yelp echoed off the walls as freshly-gloved hands dug back into flesh.

The sensation of a finger forcing its way along the tissue, yanking on tendons and watching his hoof twitch and writhe like he was simply a toy, was unbearable to poor Cirrus. But there was nothing he could do to stop Mori as he had his fun.

All he could do was cry and wheeze until Mori grew bored of fondling his leg, and moved back up towards Cirrus's face again.

The pressure in the IV connected to his head had dropped considerably as Cirrus weakened, making the flow slow down to a trickle.

"Let's just tighten this up a bit, see if we can squeeze out any more." Mori mumbled under his breath, using the razor to shear off any hair that got caught or otherwise in his way as he worked.

Cirrus continued to beg and plead as the clamp around his head grew ever tighter, but Mori ignored it. And then, once he was satisfied with the state of the

clamp around Cirrus's head, he grabbed Cirrus by the jaw, smearing a line of blood across his cheeks as he examined the satyr.

Teeth. Eyes. Ears. All seemed relatively... *now hold on!*

"You're *undead*?" Mori asked, a new hint of excitement in his voice.

All Cirrus could do was whimper as he was held roughly by the jaw. "Y...Yes." He replied meekly, choking back another sob as he tried, weakly, to struggle free from his bindings. "B-B-But I don't know h-how or... why...."

Though he knew it wasn't likely, he hoped his attempts to explain would somehow lead Mori to conclude he was an invalid test subject—not worth the effort and energy—and thus not worth holding prisoner. He silently prayed the man would give up and toss him out; let him go free.... Though it was clear Mori was far too excited to show him any mercy.

"And yet, this body can *bleed*!" The scientist chirped. "I wonder if it's just this body, or if you other body bleeds, too! Is this body, designed by your perception of yourself, rather than your actual reality, more alive than your *real* body? Hm...."

Jaw suddenly released, Cirrus tossed his head sideways as Mori's hand moved down. Fingers trailed over skin, brushing gently over Cirrus's neck and pausing a moment to play with the thyroid cartilage bounce as the satyr swallowed and panted. The rubber of the gloves moved easily across Cirrus's exposed throat, lubricated by the man's blood as Mori fondled him curiously. And then the feeling shifted down, and Mori's hand caressed Cirrus's chest, measuring his heart as it pumped in his chest.

The scientist could *feel* Cirrus's desperation through his skin, and it *thrilled* him.

"I wonder what your *real* body is like." He commented, continuing to run his hand over Cirrus's chest. He moved his hand up to his collarbone, pressing his fingers along the bone to gauge their shape and sending a tingle along the sensitive muscle.

Leaning forward, Mori all but pressed himself against Cirrus as he moved in close to examine his terrified expression. His breath was hot on the satyr's cheek, as he shifted his other hand to just below Cirrus's ribs and pushed down and felt the rise and fall of the man's ragged breathing as he whimpered his quiet plea for the doctor to stop.

"*There's something wrong with your lungs, smoke monster.*" It was a mocking tone, whispered softly into Cirrus's ear as a hiss. "*Any idea what it may be?*"

More pressure was applied to Cirrus's chest, just enough that he couldn't pull a breath back in after exhaling, and Mori watched on curiously as Cirrus wheezed and flopped his head limply to the side, gasping helplessly. Despite the fact he technically had no need to breathe, his body still tried to function; it was instinct left over from life. His body's natural state. So, even without the need, it still tried, and Cirrus struggled under Mori's hand.

"*You remind me of her.*" Mori whispered. "*You're so much the same. I still remember the way she gasped under my hands, unable to die. Does she still talk about me? Does she still beg for mercy in her sleep? Do those beautiful golden eyes still glaze over at the sound of footsteps on stairs?*"

The reply was a wheezing gasp and a tear rolling down Cirrus's cheek.

"*I hope I live in her forever....*" The wicked hiss was followed by more pressure, and Mori forced out the very last of the air from Cirrus's lungs. A chuckle followed as poisonous green residue was choked up, spraying up and dribbling down Cirrus's chin with his blood and spit. "There we are!" Mori chirped. "I think *this* may be the cause of death!"

"*Dragon!*" Cirrus rasped as he was released, hoping it would get the man to stop. He choked, head spinning from the sudden rush of air as Mori ran the edge of a vial along his skin to scoop up the sample. "It was— Dragon. *Green*—" He continued to cough, gagging and retching as more residue came up. "Stop, please.... I'll tell you...." He continued to beg.

Mori's wicked grin only grew at Cirrus's exclamation. "Ah, so you were *lying* to me? Or did the pain jog your memory? I do recall Maggie talking about how you're rather forgetful...."

The small mercy of his hands being completely removed from Cirrus's body was given, and he labelled the sample he'd taken and began to reorganise his tools.

"Speaking of Maggie, I'd love to see how Ashdown made *her*! I'm curious about her wings. How he managed to attach them to a tabaxi body.... Did he graft parts of the aarakocra spine into it, do you think?" He leant in close, again, and pet Cirrus's cheek. "I don't see why you like that man so much, Cirrus. You hate me because *I* 'prey on little girls?' But then you fall in love with Ashdown? That's so hypocritical of you.... You know he killed Maggie and Fourteen's parts himself, right? Shot one in the leg, and the other in the stomach, and let them bleed out.... How do you justify that, to yourself, while still condemning me?"

Cirrus *glared* at Mori, feeling the knot of fear in his belly grow larger and intertwined with anger when he began to talk about his friends. There was so much he wanted to say. So much he wanted to *scream* at this psychopath!

Instead, as Mori's breath touched his ear again, Cirrus settled on action instead, and he spat directly in the man's face: a rotting mix of blood, spit and poisonous residue that had built up within his lungs. He knew that Mori was lucky to still be wearing his goggles, as the toxic mixture could have been potentially blinding. But in the position he was, the doctor clearly felt cocky, and simply snorted a laugh through his nose.

"If... you...." Cirrus paused between each word to gasp. "Touch... *either*... of those... girls... I will... do... much worse... than just smoke...."

"I don't think you're in any position to be making *threats*, Cirrus." Mori retorted. "Besides, it's not *either of those girls* you should be worried about. It's the *other* two —You know the ones I mean— that I *really* want the chance to pick apart again."

"*I've seen your death a hundred times over, Richard Pagsamahin Mori.*" Cirrus hissed, his bloody teeth bared at the man. His body gleamed under a thin sheen of sweat, and his breath had a whistling rattle sound to it as he all but snarled: "*Those girls want to rip you to shreds. Them and many others.*"

Finally, something gave Mori pause.

His name.

His *full* name.

Nobody had known his full name for... almost a century, now.... *How did Cirrus...?*

A quick glance-over of the satyr calmed Mori's nerves; he was panting and shaking from the effort now, clearly growing exhausted. There was *no* way he'd read Mori's mind, today. It must have been from a previous session of snooping about in his brain.

"When did you pull *that* out of my mind?" He asked, swallowing down the tickle of anxiety as he tried to stay calm. If he didn't let Cirrus know it bothered him, he couldn't know to use it against him. So instead of letting his surprise betray him, he moved to check that the suppressive clamp was still properly in place. When he found that it was, he felt his confidence come back. "Very soon, those girls won't be able to touch me.... I'm already immortal, Cirrus. And soon, when I complete the last part of my contract, Zaltec will give me what I've sought after *most*...." He leant in close again. "Can you guess what that is? Or do you want a hint?"

"You won't succeed." Cirrus replied, oddly calm and still now. "The universe has spoken. Your fate is sealed no matter what path you take now, Richard."

Frustrated by Cirrus's lack of reaction, Mori's lip upturned in a scowl.

"You already jump at shadows and watch your back as much as you do your front." Cirrus's voice was eerily monotone, and his breathing slowed to the point of almost being non-existent, only taking a breath when he needed to speak. "You isolate yourself from others for the worry that they may catch you in the act. Foil you. You speak far too confidently for a man with as many fears and doubts as yourself."

"If I'm fated to lose this game, I'll abandon it and start another." His annoyance couldn't hide the prickle of anxiety in his tone as he licked his teeth and scoffed. "One where the rules are my own. If the lich can do it, so can I."

A hard breath, much like a snort, escaped Cirrus as his face split into a crooked, shit-eating grin. Blood and poison mucus dribbled down his cracked lips and between his crooked teeth. "You *fool*. The Wheel of Fate is not commanded by any one person. If you think the lich is capable of that, then you have *severely* misread the situation."

"I think *you* might be mistaken, with who I mean when I talk about *the* lich." Returning Cirrus's scoff and ignoring his smile, Mori rose back up to his full height and stared down his nose at the man. "Genevieve, as she used to be called, is *no* lich. Even if she *has* had her soul ripped in two, her phylactery is too separated from herself to be the source of her life after death...." A chuckle escaped Mori, then, and he picked up a knife and examined the blade in the light of his lamp before moving over to his sharpener to swipe it a few times. "Besides, even if she *was* a lich, she's not special enough to earn a title like '*the*' from me.... She's simply a revenant, brought back to serve her more powerful master.... Gullible. Stupid. Easily manipulated. And most of all, *miserable*! No, she's no lich.... Now, *Ashdown*! Ashdown is a lich. But, still. He's not important enough to be *the* lich.... No. When I say *the* lich, I mean *the* lich. The god-killer."

Satisfied with his knife, Mori moved back to Cirrus's side. Cirrus grew silent now, his eyes glistening with fear as he stared at the knife. He dared not speak, as Mori rambled on. All he could do was stare at the knife as Mori motioned with it

casually.

“Those who spin and stop the wheel are being picked off one-by-one, and their powers weigh heavily in their new host.” He said, softly tracing a finger in a Y shape over Cirrus as he mentally prepared for the cut. “Our universe is losing control of itself. Those who inhabit this world have been growing stronger than it was built to contain.... The Wheel of Fate is collapsing in under itself, and Zaltec told me *your* ancestors are to blame.... So don’t mind me, if I leave you behind, when I follow the gods to a safer plane of existence.”

It was like fear brought Cirrus back to life, as he felt that Y shape being traced into his chest. Suddenly he began thrashing and flailing in his bindings, begging and *screaming* for Mori to stop; his voice echoing far down the hall but not reaching the ears of any who could have possibly saved him.

The only ears that it met paid his cries for mercy no heed. Mori had never shown care to his test subjects, before. Even souls much more innocent than Cirrus. So he wasn’t about to show it now.... Not when the man had humiliated him, and stolen the attention of his assistant.

No, as far as Mori was concerned, Cirrus *deserved* this.

So, ignoring the cries of the man below him, Mori tightened the bindings around Cirrus to force him even stiller. And then he lined up his knife, hovering for a moment to feel the thrill of Cirrus’s horrified anticipation... before he sliced through skin with ease and truly began his work.

He began at the clavicles; a rush of sick, hedonistic pleasure coursing through him as he drew his blade down once from either side to meet in the middle at the sternum. A moment was taken to savour Cirrus’s shriek before he drew the knife down again to complete the Y, and he licked his lips as he slipped his fingers into the incisions.

“Let’s see how those ribs look.”

Peeling the skin back with well-practised motions, Mori coerced another wonderful bleat-like shriek of agony from Cirrus and watched as he threw his head back against the table with a loud and metallic *bang!*

The satyr’s chest rose and fell deeply, his now-visible ribs wet with dark-coloured gore that rose up to meet Mori’s hands with each agonal breath he took. Skin, fat and fascia fell away from bone with a sickeningly wet tearing sound, barely audible as it intermingled with Cirrus’s screams.

Only once everything was in place did Mori step back and shake his hands free, spattering the floor with droplets of gore before wiping the last of the gunk off on his lab coat.

“For you, I’m thinking... we go the costal route, instead of via the sternum.” Mori grinned, picking up a large pair of shears and leaning over Cirrus with malicious intent. He positioned the head of the shears around one of Cirrus’s ribs, on its outer side. He took a moment to chuckle at Cirrus’s whimpers and pleas, before squeezing the shears closed.

The sound of the shears piercing through the bone was a horrific *CRACK* that echoed off the walls, as Cirrus’s scream suddenly cut short and went limp.

“Hm.” Mori poked at Cirrus, not surprised that the mad had reached his limit and lost consciousness, before he shrugged and continued his work. “Boring, but certainly easier to work with.”

Nineteen nauseating bone cracks later, and Mori was able to remove the front of Cirrus's rib-cage with his sternum intact. He held it in his hands for a moment, admiring the fact that he was able to get it off in one, clean piece. Then he promptly dumped it on the nearby bench with little care, and returned to Cirrus's body.

Hands rubbing together in excitement, he peered into Cirrus, trying to decide what he wanted to play with first.... He settled on the lungs, and reached in to gently cradle one.

"Hrm. Rather stiff... most likely emphysema due to smoking.... *Though*, it could also be fibrosis due to the cause of death...." Mori mumbled under his breath as he gave it an experimental squeeze.

Without the ribs and anterior wall of tissue keeping the pressure stable, Cirrus's lungs began to inflate and deflate unevenly, sometimes even ballooning outwards. And Mori simply watched on, enamoured by Cirrus's undead insides.

It wasn't until Cirrus began to choke that he was seemingly snapped out of his trance.

"Oh for— They *always* aspirate!"

Quickening his working pace, Mori retrieved an endotracheal tube and jammed it forcefully down Cirrus's throat to get him breathing again. He switched on the little machine it was attached to—a rare and expensive prize he had stolen from a colleague decades ago—and adjusted it until Cirrus was stable.

"There. Much better." He mumbled, cradling the lung in his hand again so he could feel how it inflated and deflated with the aid of the machine. After a moment of letting it function, he pulled a seat close, and snapped off his gloves so he could write down a series of complicated notes. "*Mmhm....*"

A muffled moan broke the quiet, as Cirrus's eyes began to slowly flutter open. Realising something more was wrong, the man shook his head, trying to dislodge the tube down his throat.

His fingers clawed uselessly against the tabletop as he struggled; not realising that the tube keeping his head in his place was a mercy that prevented him from being able to peer into his own open chest cavity.

As he regained his senses, he let out some more distressed grunts, before he settled on biting down on the tube in his mouth in an attempt to break it with his teeth.

At the sound of Cirrus's furious grumble, Mori paused writing his notes and turned to give the man a firm smack on the face. "Hey! That's expensive! And unless you want to drown in your own blood, I suggest you *leave it alone*."

The response was a muffle whimper and a shake of Cirrus's head.

He loosened the grip of his teeth on the tube and instead focused his efforts on moving the other parts of his body. Seeing as his bloodied leg was still free, he slowly raised it into the air again, only to wince as his recently sliced open abdomen *screamed* in agony.

Another groan, and he tried to speak again, managing to get out a muffled series of sounds that was almost coherent. Something close to: '*I can breathe. I don't need it.*'

"Tube stays in." Mori said, simply, before picking up his gloves and tugging them back on. "Now. Seeing as you're *awake*, how does this feel? Try and

describe it as best you can for me.”

Lung in hand again, Mori gave it a soft squeeze so that it couldn't inflate properly. And Cirrus let out a whine that was barely audible over the gentle hiss of the machine.

As Mori squeezed, Cirrus's heart began to beat harder and faster, desperately trying to balance out the lack of air by circulating his blood *faster*.

*It was a beautiful sight*, Mori thought as he peered into Cirrus's chest. Pleased by the result of his torment, he released Cirrus's lung and took off one of his gloves to write more notes.

“What kind of pain would you call that? Searing? Stabbing? Aching?”

Cirrus simply let out an agonised wail and began to sob. Then, due to the spasms from his crying, he began to choke on the tube in his throat.

By now he was truly a *pathetic* sight.

Setting down his pen, Mori frowned. “You know, this would go a lot quicker if you just cooperated.... *Oh well*.”

Notes now down, and gloves back on with a vicious *snap* of rubber, Mori leant over Cirrus to coax another sob out of him. “Do you know what a biopsy is, Cirrus?”

Anxious eyes darted between Mori and his tools, and Cirrus began to tremble again. A soft, pleading whine came from the man. And once again, thanks to his chest his terror was incredibly *visceral*. His heart beat faster and faster, lungs heaving in and out in panicked breaths, shaking as much as he was as they fought against the tube controlling his breathing.

Cirrus watched as Mori retrieved his tools, and flinched away from the wicked grin that was cast his way.

“Hold still.”

A strangled scream filled the room as the agony was inflicted, and Cirrus's lungs began to flail and flutter once the samples were collected.

The scream was followed by a snicker as Mori placed his samples in jars for later.

He then plunged his hands into Cirrus's chest once more, this time tracing the various veins and arteries branching from his heart outwards. He paused once he reached the subclavian on the side where Cirrus had previously received his shoulder wound.

“Hmm.” Mori dug around a little deeper, coaxing more screaming and struggling from Cirrus. “I don't suppose you remember how Ashdown fixed this spot up, do you? I'd *really* like to know if it healed like this because of your biology or his intervention.” He then paused, grinning wickedly. “It's a shame we can't just *ask* him about it.”

Cirrus let out an indignant huff. Still though, despite his determination, he couldn't help but shudder a little at how close he'd come to... well... *this* when Ashdown had fixed him up. Mori was hanging around then, too. Wanting to be a part of it, of course. But with Ashdown's help they'd been able to shoo him away.

*But he didn't have Ashdown's help now. Nor did he have his own powers.*

“I suppose, though, we can always run our *own* experiment.” Mori continued, withdrawing his hands. “If that's how your shoulder healed *with* intervention, why don't we see how the other heals *without*?”

In moments, he had retrieved a long, metal, spear-like object, and —after finding the exact spot that mirrored Cirrus’s scar— pressed the point against his skin.

“*Should I?*” Cooed in a mocking tone, Mori pursed his lips into a pout.

Cirrus shook his head hurriedly. By now, he’d scratched his fingertips bloody clawing at the table beneath as he’d writhed in agony. His eyes were fixated on the metal spear-point, tears welling up in them.

“Well. You *say* that, but we *both* know you’ve lied to me before!” Voice taking on a dark note, Mori’s face turned to a grin before he drove the spear through Cirrus’s flesh.

Yet another scream filled the room— Albeit this one was softer, more *wheezy* than the others had been.... Cirrus’s strength was clearly waning.

Fresh blood oozed from the wound, immediately welling up around the spear in a dark pool. Mori yanked it free, sending up a spray of fresh blood as he did so and leaving Cirrus’s arm trembling and spasming. And Mori watched on with glee.

Then, much like he had done to the other shoulder, Mori pushed his hand into Cirrus’s open chest cavity and up to the wound. Though this time, his fingers poked through the injury and back to the air.

“That should be good enough!” He decided aloud. “Now! What next? Hm.... I’ve heard from the gossip of the cooks that you can’t eat animal products. Is that right? Why’s *that*, Cirrus? Is it because you’re a satyr, or because of another condition? I’m curious.”

One eyebrow raised weakly in scepticism, Cirrus simply stared at Mori. Despite his inability to speak with the tube still down his throat, his expression clearly asked: ‘*Since when do you ever gossip with the cooks?*’

“What’s with *that* look? What? I can’t eavesdrop when my food is delivered?” Mori scoffed, before walking across the room and retrieving a plate of half-eaten food, which he showed off to Cirrus. It was clearly some sort of venison; the worst of the cuts. Barely edible. “My appetite hasn’t been the same since that little *trick* of yours. I wasn’t able to finish my dinner.... Now, as you smoke a lot of cannabis, I’m confident that *your* appetite is *just fine*.”

Face wrinkling in disgust, Cirrus gave Mori another look. *Are you fucking serious?!*

He then shook his head again indignantly and bit down on the tube again.

“I’m serious.” Mori answered, his voice flat and annoyed. “Now. There are two ways we can do this, and I’ll even let you *choose*.... Down the throat, or through an incision directly into your stomach. *Pick*.”

Cirrus shrunk back a little, as much as he could while being strapped down. He stared up at Mori for a few moments, unsure of whether the man truly *was* being serious or not. Then, after a long hesitation, he awkwardly tried to gesture towards his face.

“Natural intake, hm?” Mori chirped, placing down the plate of food so he could pull the tube from Cirrus’s throat. “Just make sure you chew it, well. Don’t want you choking!”

The tube pulled from Cirrus throat with a wet *slorping* sound, and the satyr gagged and choked up more toxic residue and blood. It stuck to the tube,



following it out of Cirrus's mouth as a long, sticky trail that stretched, broke, and dripped to the floor.... The dangling trail was then replaced by dangling meat, as Mori mockingly held up a piece of the venison over Cirrus's glare.

Surprisingly, the satyr opened his mouth to take it with no struggle. His eyes watered as he chewed a few times, trying his best not to gag.

But when Mori leaned down to sneer at him, he spat the half-chewed piece of meat back in the man's face.

A moment of pause, with a tense look on Mori's face, before the scientist pulled the chunk off his cheek

"You chose the way it goes in.... And it's *going* in." Mori commented, retrieving a large syringe without needle, and another, unused tube. "Now, I'm not stupid enough to put my fingers in your mouth... but this little trick always worked on Plume, when she refused to eat.... Wonda was a little easier to feed. And Gix? Well. A soulless body doesn't have the mind to disobey when something is placed in its mouth. The hard part was making sure she didn't breathe while I triggered the swallow reflex." He attached the tube to the syringe and filled the syringe with air, before stuffing food tightly into the tube's end. "You might burp a bit after. That's normal; sometimes air gets in the stomach when I use this method."

Pursing his lips tightly together, Cirrus stubbornly turned his face away to refuse the tube. Though, he kept an eye on Mori, hoping that the man would shift in the wrong direction, closer to where Cirrus's free leg would be able to reach him. Perhaps *he* could lay a blow. Just *one*.

It was futile, but the thought kept him from *completely* panicking, at least.

Unluckily for Cirrus, Mori came from above with a modified cast spreader in one hand, and the tube in the other. "Open your mouth, before I open it for you."

Cirrus's glare intensified as he locked eyes with the man, refusing to open his mouth. Then he suddenly spat in his face a third time, though this time it was only blood and saliva; traces of the poison finally having faded away.

"Well, I'm glad I'm still wearing my goggles." Mori commented, this time not even pausing to wipe the spit off as he jammed the cast spreader into Cirrus's mouth and forced it open. "I recommend you swallow as I put this in. It's going down either way, but being cooperative will make it hurt a lot less!"

He then jammed the feeding tube into Cirrus's throat.

Of course Cirrus gagged as it went down. His body allowed nothing else as it instinctively began to writhe and squirm in its attempts to get away from its captor.

A gurgle bubbled out of Cirrus's stomach as the food was forced into him, and his free hoof scrabbled against the table frantically

"*This is for all the meals I missed.*" Mori mumbled under his breath, before removing the tube and refilling it. "Really, Cirrus. You should have asked Wonda how safe it was to cross me. I'm sure she would have warned you away from it.... She knows that I don't let even the *smallest* of transgressions slide without punishment!"

He jammed the tube in again, and Cirrus gagged just as before, dry-heaving around the tube in his throat. His lungs swelled uncomfortably out of his chest as his heart sped up again, and Mori smirked as he watched on. He left the tube in

longer than before, so he could take a moment to pet Cirrus on the cheek.

"I'd say it's a lesson for next time, but we both know there won't *be* a next time." Mori mocked, before emptying the syringe.

The doctor continued in this manner, slowly and methodically; whispering every slight Cirrus had ever committed against him as he did so. It was only once he was finished feeding Cirrus that he straightened up, stretched, and returned the breathing tube to Cirrus's lungs.

"There we are! How's that? Now *you* get the pleasure of having eaten something you think is foul!" He gave Cirrus another pet on the cheek, before poking at his insides again; especially his now-too-full stomach. "I saw that burn mark on your chest, by the way.... Was that Fourteen's work? Strange; she seems rather fond of you. I can't imagine what you said to receive such an injury from her."

Cirrus simply huffed angrily against the breathing tube, finding himself wishing that Fourteen had actually been able to blow Mori up without repercussions before.

He didn't even feel bad about thinking such thoughts this time.

He was *exhausted*. There was not a single part of him that wasn't in agony. He was *scared* and angry somehow at the same time and most overwhelmingly of all: utterly *disgusted* by Mori.

"What's with that huff!" Mori teased. "Is the pacifist not feeling so passive, anymore? Perhaps you should have killed me, when you had the *chance*. Now, I'm afraid, you're too late. Plume's immortality is mine, and I have no intention of giving it back to her."

He moved away from Cirrus, again, and the man was unable to see what Mori was doing until he returned... a red-hot cauteriser in his hand.

"Pick a body part." He said, simply, as he held the device out for Cirrus to see. "And be serious about it, this time, or you'll get an education on heat-based contraception."

A muffled squeal escaped Cirrus and he attempted to cross his legs as Mori waved the cauteriser around his hips in a threatening motion that let Cirrus *feel* the heat radiating off it.... A confirmation that he was, in fact, serious.

Cirrus then, hesitantly, extended his free leg towards Mori. And as Mori took his leg he screwed his eyes shut tightly, trembling all over again.

"There's a good man." Chirped Mori, examining the wound on Cirrus's leg once again. "Good opportunity for me to stop this bleeding properly, too...."

The pain was instant and searing, as Mori didn't hesitate to press the device into Cirrus's leg. Cirrus let out that agonising bleat-scream once more, even with the tube shoved down his throat, and Mori held the man still as the smell of cooking flesh filled the room.

"Five... four... three... two... one...."

When Mori released him, he was sobbing, panting and shaking with renewed vigour. He seemed almost as terrified as he had when Mori had first restrained him to the table.

Anticipating the potential for another surge of defiance, Mori stepped back so he could avoid being kicked and gave a haughty sniff. He ignored Cirrus's distress as he checked on the bag of magic draining from his head.

“I might change this one now.” He commented, doing just as he said, and then writing notes on each harvested bag of magic. “Fresh bag, for fresh distress; Wonda’s magic always seemed to change depending on what I did to her before a cutting.... I wonder how your magic will be affected by your mood. Both of you have your primary magic glands in your heads, after all. Unlike Plume. Hers was closer to her heart.”

A low groan escaped Cirrus, though as Mori spoke of his friends it transitioned into a sort of guttural *growl*. Stubbornly, he screwed his eyes shut tight once more and turned his head away, refusing to even *look* at Mori.

It was then, with his eyes closed, he decided to try and calm himself down. He was a master of meditation after all. And he was getting tired of seeing Mori’s face light up with sick glee whenever he screamed or reacted in pain.

Mori watched as Cirrus began to meditate, and gave a little hum of curiosity.

“I didn’t think you’d comply so well; it’ll be nice to see how your magic works when you’re calm.” He commended. He poked at the bags of magic, again, before tapping his fingers on the table. “*Hm, I wonder.... No, no. I shouldn’t....*” He mumbled to himself. “*It may be like last time....*”

Cirrus’s face twitched, one ear flicking in annoyance at Mori’s comment. But he reminded himself not to react.

*Do not give him what he wants!*

“Hmm... the texture of this magic is so different, though.” Mori said to himself. “Wonda’s was like glass.... This is more the texture of...” he poked the bag, ‘dare I say gelatine? Ah, well. I can’t die anymore, so.... What’s the *worst* that can happen to me if I do?”

With that, he picked up the half-full bag of magic and drank directly from it; downing the entire thing in several large gulps....

And then he hit the floor with a heavy thump and clattering of tools; crumpled in an unconscious heap.

—END—

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