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Jakob stood outside of the inn preparing the cart that would take them to Helmsgarten, when Iskandarr returned, carrying Ciana's catatonic body in his arms. With one look, Jakob knew that she was unscathed physiologically, but it was clear that something had damaged her soul, as he felt with his obsidian hand how it struggled to stay within her body, as though attempting to break out of its mortal shell in some attempt to self-destruct.

"What happened?" Jakob asked, but before Iskandarr could muster up a proper response, he had put his right hand on her brow and realised the truth of what had reduced her to *this*.

After Wothram had lain Ciana to rest in one of the unoccupied rooms of the tavern, Jakob found the boy outside by a coppice of slender trees. Part of him, the part that wanted to learn all there was to know of the world and the Beyond, was about to ask how Iskandarr had discovered the ability to wield his name and make demands of the Great Ones. But another part of him took over first. It was a part that rarely came out.

With Jakob's left hand, the one that had become obsidian and could transcend the physical world to manipulate the metaphysical veil, he grabbed hold of Iskandarr's right forearm and squeezed.

The boy, though he was perhaps too grown up to deserve such a name now, fell to his knees with an angry yelp of pain, but Jakob did not relent in his grip.

"You may possess powers beyond imagining," Jakob told him. "But you lack the prudence to comprehend the consequences of your own actions!"

He squeezed even harder and Iskandarr's body nearly went limp from the excruciating agony Jakob was inflicting with his obsidian claw.

The condemnation of the youthful Sovereign was as much for his sake as it was for Jakob's own, after all, he bore the responsibility for his failings as a teacher to the boy. Instead of teaching him to consider the ramifications of his actions, Jakob had been too preoccupied with teachings Iskandarr about his Fleshcraft and the many things he believed he would need to know to be like him.

"Father...! Please...! I did not know...!"

"You should have known!" Jakob yelled, the frustrated anger flushing his face red. "You should have known what your actions would lead to!"

He knew that if Hessel had been here, the Wight would have judged Jakob for the hypocrisy of his words, as he himself had more than once become the victim of the consequences from his own actions. The loss of Hessel was but one of the many failures Jakob carried with him like scars on his soul. He had hoped it would be the last failure, but it seemed that the Watcher had other plans.

"You knew... what she had lost!" Iskandarr argued between pained breaths.

Jakob released his grip and the Sovereign quickly retracted his wounded arm. The skin on his forearm and wrist had turned black from the damage to his soul, but he would recover in less than a week, such was the resilience of his body.

"Of course I knew!" Jakob yelled back. "But I also understood the danger of Ciana realising what she had lost! What she had given up unwittingly! I made a promise to her that she would see her dearest wish fulfilled, but *I failed her!* Now *you* have failed her too by giving back to her *that* wish and the knowledge that she will *never* see it realised!"

“You can grant her the wish! You have that power! Or are you just a crafter of flesh in name alone!?”

Jakob released a steady breath of vapour from his masked face. “I have taught you what I know, Iskandarr. With this knowledge, do you see a way to give to her the gift of childbirth?”

The Sovereign was silent; a sign that he knew the truth Jakob spoke.

“There is no way to realise her desire,” he said coldly. “Even possessed of boundless knowledge as I am, I see no way. A mortal cannot realise her dream.”

He turned his back on the child who had become a man in the span of two months.

There were no patrons of the tavern left. Iskandarr had killed a few in his sudden bursts of violent rage and Jakob had taken the rest for his purposes. The proprietor had broken from the spellbound allure of Iskandarr’s natural aura and fled while he was gone, so only the three of them and Jakob’s many constructs remained.

Mayhew stood by the foot of the staircase that led to the second floor. For some reason, the sight of him standing in a place where he had not been ordered to guard raised the hairs on the back of Jakob’s neck. Perhaps in fear of the servant having gained a malign sentience or due to some repressed anger, he reached out with his obsidian hand and squished the soul fragment in Mayhew’s chest, smothering its Birthed Sentience in an instant.

As the tall construct collapsed to the floor as an empty vessel, Jakob ascended to the third floor, where he found Wothram waiting outside the room they had left Ciana in.

“Wothram. Take the body of Mayhew to the laboratorium and prepare for a Rite of Birthed Sentience.”

There was a moment of hesitation, no more than a quarter of a second, before the Golem got to work. That quarter-second of hesitation spoke volumes though, and, for a moment, Jakob almost contemplated reaching out and smothering his long-serving Golem’s life as well. But then the moment passed and he just watched as it lumbered down the steps, before he heard the sounds of clattering bones as the Golem carried the empty vessel away.

Jakob let the tension fade from his body before he pushed aside the door. He distantly wondered why Iskandarr had even decided to try and help Ciana, as it seemed uncharacteristic for him, though, in truth, the Sovereign had never shown any disdain for her, but perhaps it was the rivalry that had made Jakob believe that he despised her. He still had much to learn about the boy it seemed.

As the door slid open and Jakob’s eyes settled on Ciana’s figure, he felt as though a cold spread from his heart and out along his veins.

Jakob’s footfalls seemed very quiet as he crossed from the door to the bed she was leant against.

He knelt down in front of her carefully, brushing aside her hair which fell in front her face, before he took the wing that lay in her lap and hugged it tightly.

“What have you done, Ciana?” he whispered to the severed fragment of her soul.

The way a simple smile adorned her lifeless face made his chest clench and a star-crushing void form in the root of his belly.

Ciana was undefeatable, so it had been ordained by a Great One with the power to reduce worlds to chaos and apocalyptic damnation, but her body was truly lifeless.

Jakob stood back up, holding the severed wing in his arms. It was as resplendent as ever, the fragment of Ciana’s soul clearly still alive within it, though what sort of life was left was impossible to say. Through the severing of her own ethereal wing, it had gained a physical form and now draped

across Jakob's arms like a gossamer banner of impossibly-thin silk. He coiled it around his left arm, before stooping low to pick up her lifeless body.

Ciana felt so much lighter than he remembered.