

The sound of gunshots. Free's pained whines. The scent of blood infesting the air. Burning, agonizing pain; those were the last memories Agata had before waking up. He was expecting to be inside that same accursed tunnel if not outright *dead*. Instead, what graced him was an old, wooden ceiling with the air around the room stinking of decay and mold. Even while still half asleep, eyes only barely half open, he could tell that the wood was rotting and that there were gaps in the ceiling—moonlight peeking through them.

"Shit..." He slowly sat up, a dilapidated room meeting his gaze. He certainly wasn't inside the mansion anymore—not even the maids or any lower-ranked staff would be afforded a room of such poor quality. The wooden floor was smeared with dried-up stains of unknown origin. The bed he was resting on had no covers, only a dirty yellow mattress that he *hoped to god* was that color naturally and not the result of grime and body sweat seeping into it. The only other thing in the room besides said bed was a wooden shelf filled to the brim with contrastingly *expensive-looking* golden knick-knacks.

"What the hell...?" Rising up from the bed, Agata walked over to the accessories to take a closer look at them.

They all seemed to be made in the image of an overweight nine-tailed fox. Each statue posed him in an unorthodox position that always seemed to show off his overly bloated midsection—uncomfortably similar to the Buddha statues inside of Ibuki's room back in the manor when they still lived together. Besides the detail of the canine on the statue posing to show off his stomach in a proud manner, Agata noticed that he was wearing a large robe draped over his shoulders and sides while leaving his middle exposed. Around his neck was a collar made out of seven large beads the size of its hands, some of the statues depicting him holding up the large beads with a mischievous smile. "Where... did they take me?"

Looking out the window, the Kibishi mansion was nowhere to be seen. Instead, an entire town cast under moonlight lay outside the house he found himself in. It looked like the one he grew up in; small in land size but packed with a large number of houses and stores, barely any space left between the buildings except for a plaza in the very center of the town. "Woah..." The sheer contrast of scenery was enough to quell his panic for a second, looking out at the vast expanse of old traditional Japanese architecture and paper lanterns hanging between them. "Why would they take me here instead of killing me? They would've tied me up if they wanted to torture me, so that can't be it either..." He ruminated to himself.

Looking down, he blinked and shook his head, realizing that he wasn't wearing his usual suit—what he wore when he was shot by that backstabbing detective—but instead was sporting a yukata, a silky waistcoat tailored to fit his body perfectly.

He recognized it as the same kind of garment Louis had worn for a certain special occasion some years ago with a tiger named William, though the buck was adamant about denying the date-like nature of the event.

Without any other options, Agata ran down the first floor. Like the room he woke up in, nothing was around except nine-tailed fox iconography. “Whoever took me here, they have some weird ass obsession with that myth...” He found out about the legend as a teen just like how most people at that age did; watching copious amounts of anime that referenced it. The amount of devotion to the mythical being combined with the total lack of any kind of expressiveness inside the house left Agata with an uneasy feeling. He couldn’t explain it, but there was something... *off* about it. It just didn’t feel like an actual home, but a house transformed into a shrine in honor of the nine-tailed fox.

He turned his head to what he thought to be the living room; a table hosting a basket of fake fruits covered in golden paint was surrounded by two couches. However, that paled in comparison to the... *things* seated there. Two mannequin-esque fox dolls were sprawled out on the chairs. Their expression sported a cartoonish grin that stretched around their faces, yet their bodily proportions were an exact match to a real body. Their heads were locked towards the fruit bowl, completely unmoving.

“God, I feel like I stumbled into a serial killer’s home...” Behind the table and chairs was a fireplace that seemed recently extinguished from the smell of burnt wood. Above it was a painting depicting the very same fox sculpted in the statues on the second floor. Displayed in a large, expansive canvas, the details on the nine-tailed fox’s body were striking. The painting depicted him lying in a provocative pose on what appeared to be a luxurious four-poster bed. His thin robe barely concealed his large frame, with bulging arms and thick, toned legs. Despite the large gut that fell out of the sash, Agata found himself appreciating the mythical being’s physique. “This is... I don’t know.” He continued talking to himself, placing his paw over his mouth as he uttered the words.

Moving over to the kitchen, the cupboards and cabinets were all empty. The sink overflowed with a glossy, almost metallic-looking, yellow semi-solid substance, while an overwhelmingly sweet odor filled the air. It was like a dessert made with a cheap cake mix and twice as much sugar as the recipe stated. “Better not touch that.” He said to himself while looking at the yellow goop.

Opening the fridge, he was shocked to see that it was fully stocked. A strange mix of carnival junk food and old medicinal herbs was arranged through the fridge shelves. Fried cookies and donuts were placed next to glass jars filled with all sorts of liquids and roots, causing a strange aroma that while similar, seemed independent of the other scent across the kitchen.

Despite the light inside not functioning, Agata was still met with a fresh wave of cold air—signaling that at least electricity was running through the village. That just made the lack of any apparent people all the weirder. Was he perhaps saved by... eccentric but harmless folks?

Unsure of how long he’d be wandering through the town, Agata reached for the first thing that caught his eye; a large Taiyaki stored inside a rubber plastic bag. It wasn’t often that he got to relish in childish snacks like these—he had a masculine image to keep with the rest

of the Shishigumi, after all—but alone, even when kidnapped, he'd be a fool to not take the chance to indulge in some forbidden fruit.

Pulling it out of the fridge and closing it behind him, Agata noticed that the fried dessert was far bigger than the ones sold at his hometown's festival. While the old ones would fit cleanly in his palm. On the other hand, the one in the plastic bag was chunky and large, almost the size of his head. Agata had never seen one *that* big in his entire life, giddy at the thought of how much chocolate would be inside. "Woah... Cool!" With pure childlike glee, Agata ripped the bag open with his fangs, throwing the scraps down to the floor before digging in. He bit down on the dough, a surge of chocolate flowing out as he decapitated the candied fish. The flavor was overwhelming, so fierce that it was as if he discovered what sugar was for the first time all over again. While moaning in gusto at the sweet, he accidentally got some on his clothes, the sugary sludge inside a smidge too hot despite being on the fridge. Maybe the actual device was busted, mediocre cooling as a result. "Mmph, fhuck..."

He looked down at the expertly crafted yukata, gazing upon the smeared chocolate stains that ruined the pristine fabric. He let out an exasperated groan. Was this some sort of ploy from his captors, to make him feel welcome and lower guard? He didn't want to jump to conclusions, but they did leave him with food.

Suddenly as he was midway through the taiyaki, the sound of a bell ringing outside the house made Agata cock his head. He instinctively reached to his waist, trying to brandish a gun that he no longer had on him. "Shit..."

He still maintained the position in case he was being observed through a window or any other vantage point, at least wanting to *look* like he was armed. He slowly approached the door, his steps as quiet as the night itself.

Whoever was behind the door was whispering something, but it was too quiet to make out what exactly he was saying. Agata could only play defense—lacking both information and firepower. *I just have to wait... if it's a bell, it's probably strung by a cord. That means he has to pull it...* He lay in wait for the ringing, counting every second in his head, clawed hands tapping the sides of the chocolate-stained yukata. *Come on, come on...*

RING. RING. RING.

Agata threw his feet at the door, wood crunching under the impact. He hit the man behind the door, sending him crashing to the floor with a startled scream. The bell continued ringing on its own as the man—a grey elephant—screamed out in agony, curled up on the floor and wailing while clutching his stomach as if he had been stabbed. Agata stood still, looking at the herbivore in a cocktail of adrenaline, confusion, and pride for at least being the one out of the two still standing.

"FUCK!" The elephant screamed, wincing while sucking air through his clenched molars. "You motherfucking asshole, why'd you do that?! Agh, mgh..." He whined, struggling to insult Agata. Inhaling drily, he tried to recover the breath that was fiercely kicked out of

him, smidges of tears beginning to form around his eyes. “D-don’t fucking stand there, help me up!”

“Oh, right...” Agata reached out his hand to the elephant, arm tensing up once the elephant grabbed it back, the lion realizes that the herbivore’s at least twice as heavy as him. He was so used to his boss’ petite, almost weightless body that he often forgot that there was a fair amount of herbivore species that were as bulky if not more than carnivores.

Now on his feet, the elephant wiped down his yukata—the same design as Agata’s with the exception that it was a deep maroon instead of purple—as he huffed angrily. “Christ almighty, is this how the locals meet people in this shithole? You should be grateful that whoever took me here snatched my gun. You’d be filled with lead otherwise.” He said while glaring at Agata, creases forming across the rough, gray skin of his face.

Yeah, he’s a Kibishi alright. Should’ve guessed. “So you were taken too?” *But if he’s with the family, shouldn’t he be aware? Maybe he’s a distant relative? Or kicked out...* “Where did they take you from?”

“My bachelor’s party. Was going to be married off to some dumb *broad* whose dad is running the silver vine ring.” The elephant explained, his face contorting with uncontested chagrin the second he brought up his fiancé. “I was partying and then I think just passed out. I don’t remember getting hit. Don’t have any wounds or bruises either.”

That’s one of us. Agata thought, the ghastly visage of Free’s bleeding chest permanently ingrained in his mind. The edge and readiness for death had faded once they abandoned the yakuza lifestyle to be Louis’ private guard, and *god* was he feeling that agony in his chest. He couldn’t dwell on it—not in front of a stranger cut from that dangerous cloth—but the ache was still there despite how hard Agata wanted to ignore it. “So, what’s your name?”

“Renoir Kibishi.” He stated, hands on his hips. The trunk made it hard to see, but the displeased expression on him persisted. His ears were folded back, making him look a smidge taller. The left ear was clipped with a large array of golden piercings and earrings that glimmered against the intense moonlight. Underneath his yukata was a heavy golden chain that bulged through the cloth. “A pleasure meeting you in the middle of nowhere, strange brown lion man.” He hummed sarcastically.

“Really? The name sounds—“

“Foreign? I get that all the time, buddy. My mom’s side of the family’s from a bumfuck country on the other side of the planet.” He explained bitterly. “And what ‘bout you, huh? From the expression on your mug, you’re not from this shithole either.”

“Agata Koreto.” He made sure to give him the new last name that Louis had given him as part of his new identity. “I work security in Horns Conglomerate.”

Renoir raised his brows. “Funny, I swore that your boss was on the guest list for my party. Was he there with you?”

Boss is way too much of an influential figure to kill. At least I know that he'll be fine... hopefully. “No. I woke up alone..”

“Figures,” Renoir grumbled, the side of his trunk moving to wipe some sweat from his forehead. “Did you already pick up your bead at least?”

“My... what?”

From a small pouch attached to his waist, Renoir took out a golden sphere that fit on his palm. “Your bead. I found mine right in front of the house I woke up in, held by a statue.” His gaze then shifted behind Agata. “See? There’s the one.” He said while pointing past the lion’s shoulder.

"Hm?" Agata turned around, finally noticing the golden statue to the door's right. The six-foot statue depicted a naked, muscular male fox with a stiff erection holding a ceramic bowl with a similar sphere inside. Its face was obscured by a golden kitsune mask that was clearly not part of the base statue. The statues' rough features appeared polished under the shifting moonlight as if they had been finished and refined mere hours ago. Looking closer, Agata couldn't help but feel uncomfortable. He was no stranger to art featuring nudity, but the pose the vulpine assumed was rigid—almost robotic. The stiff golden shaft and the way its arms were positioned just left a strange impression and a bad taste in his mouth.

“It’s like an offering or something from whoever built this place, I guess,” Renoir said from behind him. “There’s a written note underneath the sphere. Check it out.”

Agata reached out and plucked it from the ceramic bowl, feeling its smooth texture against his fingertips. Just as Renoir explained, a note written with ink on top of old, weathered paper was underneath the sphere.

Collect the seven beads, complete my accessory, and I'll allow you to leave this town.

“What does it mean...?”

“We have to do what it says,” Renoir said bluntly, his jaw set and eyes locked onto the small sphere in his hands. “I tried booking it out of the entrance, but I just passed out as soon as I tried to leave through the gate. Then I woke up in the same stupid house again.”

Agata let out a quiet gasp, a chill running down his spine. Could someone—even with seemingly infinite economic resources—do something like that? It sounded like something taken out of a video game. “Are you serious?” he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Do you want to try it by yourself? Because believe me, it leaves you feeling like shit. Maybe they drugged us or put microchips inside of our bodies. Something like that.”

“...But you were okay, right?”

“Yeah, but-“

Renoir's words hung heavy between them, and Agata knew he had to act on impulse. His heart raced as he shoved his sphere into Renoir's chest before he grabbed the elephant's arm and pulled him swiftly towards the entrance.

"W-what the?! Stop!" Renoir screamed, still holding onto his sphere and Agata's hand out of sheer panic.

"Doesn't hurt to try! Maybe if two people are escaping at the same time, something will happen!" He yelled.

Agata felt the electrifying energy of the night air against his skin, completely uncertain of what was about to happen. With raging determination, He kept randomly going through cramped streets and turning left and right without rhyme or reason until he found himself near the gate. Agata paused, his heart pounding as he glanced back at Renoir for a brief moment. "See? Let's go."

"You're going to regret this." Renoir flatly said. "I'd stop you, but maybe you need to see how it works."

"I don't know you, so I can't trust that it's happening to you."

"The same to you, lion man."

"Then maybe we should cross together..."

"...Fine." The elephant said while rolling his eyes.

The two of them rushed forward, passing underneath it in an instant. One second, he was met with an expansive forest that seemed to stretch on forever, the city nowhere in sight. The only thing that could be seen behind the endless sea of trees was the vague outline of mountains obscured by fog.

The next second, he suddenly felt an immense pressure around him, almost like being submerged underwater. Agata wanted to scream, but before he could take it all in, darkness completely overtook him. A sharp pain ripped across his forehead, the urge to scream befalling him but finding himself incapable of uttering even the faintest of whispers. Agata clutched his head through the dark, and then just as suddenly as it came, the large shadow that overtook his vision dissipated. Instead, what met him was... a familiar-looking wooden ceiling.

He was back at the house once again, left with only a sore head and an echoing sense of regret. "God *damm*it," he hissed under his breath.

Rushing outside, Agata saw Renoir exiting another house with their two spheres in hand. The lingering, dream-like buzz across his head still persisted, like a jackhammer pounding down against his cranium. His thoughts seemed to be delayed when reaching his legs—every step wobbly, legs shaking after each step was taken. He looked like a drunkard stumbling out of a bar, body tilting side to side. Renoir was similarly dizzy, his large gray

head wobbling back and forth. The elephant had chosen to simply sit down to wait for the haze to fade away, clutching the two spheres with half-lidded eyes.

“S-shit...” Agata placed his hand against one of the houses, hand clutching his mane as he felt the brown locks tainted by the downpour of sweat. “HEY!” He screamed, Renoir’s head snapping upwards to look back at him. “ARE YOU OKAY?!”

“What do you think, dumbass?” The elephant asked cockily. “I told you that we’d get knocked out.”

“I didn’t know that it could HAPPEN! I had to check!”

The elephant groaned loudly, rolling his eyes. “Sure you did.”

Agata continued shimmying towards Renoir, stopping every few seconds to catch his breath. He could feel the yukata sticking to his body, cringing at the feeling. “Sorry, sorry.” He apologized loudly. “Just... give me a second...”

“Jesus Christ...”

Agata bent down, hands on his knees as he took a deep breath before shaking his head and setting himself straight. “Alright, alright. I’m... okay now. I’m sorry, I just didn’t expect that—“

"Yeah, yeah. I know." Renoir waved his hand around dismissively. "We can split up to search for the other five. I'll check the buildings in the south of the town and you take the ones in the north."

I don't want to be alone, but at the same time... There wasn't much he could do. Renoir wasn't the most pleasant person to be around, but it was clear that they were running on limited time. Their kidnappers could arrive at any time, so whatever risk with working with Renoir was worth it in comparison to simply waiting. Splitting up did give him some thoughts, but the reasoning was decent enough for Agata to chalk up his suspicion to paranoia brought by the situation.

“Sounds perfect. Should we meet back in an hour? Since we don’t have any phones to communicate.”

“Sounds like a plan. I looked at the clock in the house I woke up in earlier. Currently, it's 12:00 a.m. So we should be meeting around 1:00 a.m.” Renoir hummed. “I’ll hold onto the two spheres we have. You can have one of the bags. There was a giant storage crate full of them.” He chucked the brown bag at Agata, the lion catching it in the air. “I’ll rest here for a few more minutes. I don’t want to end up conking my skull against the ground.”

“What happens if the other doesn’t come back?” Agata asked.

“We wait for the other to come. Even if the other doesn’t come back, it’d be dangerous to go wandering along in the dark in the case that we aren’t the only ones here.”

“Alright... then I’ll see you in an hour!” Agata said with determination.

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A towering, expansive shrine stood in the middle of what Agata assumed to be a park. Booths filled with fresh carnival food were lined up in such a way that it almost formed a direct path to the shrine—a metaphorical red carpet guiding him forward. Despite the array of fried goods arranged beside him, their scent was completely overtaken by the intense odor of incense coming from within the shrine.

While the houses being stocked with food was questionable, the large preparations for what seemed to be a festivity were downright perplexing. The six booths around him alone would be enough to feed at least twenty people, not to mention that he could spot more even deeper into the park. “Maybe they’re preparing for a festival?” He thought about waiting that some people would come once the sun rose, but the thought of the attendees being in cahoots with the kidnappers made him give up on that train of thought as fast as he came up with it.

Grabbing a candied apple and biting down on it, Agata wandered deep into the shrine. Lit candles illuminated the inside. The only thing besides the sources of light was another statue—a cartoonish smile painted across the kitsune mask instead of the sly smile of the first statue.

Agata's eyes widened as he stepped closer. While the statue on the outside of the house he woke up in displayed a fox with a muscular, lean build, the one in front of him was clearly more akin to the fox displayed across the other statues and paintings. He was striking a pose that showed off its girthy, muscular arm; one hand clenched into a fist while the other held the bowl.

The musculature of this one was far more detailed than the first. Every line of definition and bulge of muscle ran along his body like a carefully crafted work of art, emphasizing his strength. His biceps were so well-defined that Agata almost felt as if they could crush metal between them. And, while Dolph had somewhat of a gut, the fox in front of Agata had an orb fixed atop his torso—a perfectly round sphere of a gut that captivated his gaze. The other thing that he noticed about it was an extra detail that wasn’t present on the first one; it had been carefully inscribed with extra gold coming out of its erect shaft in the shape of liquid, shimmering around its stiff member.

“Woah...” With the combination of the potent incense and the scene in front of him, Agata was helpless as he felt his face heat up. While the first statue gave him a chill with its completely lifeless pose, this one made him feel a strange, juvenile sense of warmth. It was the same kind of feeling when Dolph took his virginity mere months after he joined the Shishigumi. Unable to avert his gaze away from the golden cock, he reached for the sphere and put it inside of the bag. “I wonder why the statues are different... Isn't it supposed to be made in the image of the same fox?”

Before he could ponder about the differences further, his belly grumbled loudly. He placed his paw against his midsection, immediately feeling an intense craving. “What the hell? But

I just ate..." He thought that it could've maybe been a stomachache from eating the strange taiyaki, but yet another growl made it clear that he was *starving*. "Maybe I spent a long time unconscious and I didn't realize?"

Without thinking too much about it, Agata bit down on the apple. As soon as he swallowed down on the sticky, candied fruit, it was as if his entire world was turned alight. It was as if a surge of adrenaline coursed through him, leaving him paralyzed for a second as his muscles struggled to move from the intense rush. Almost robotically, Agata turned back—his body feeling not his own. He moved as if he were a puppet guided along by strings, every step making him feel like a passenger in his own body.

Instead of an empty park engulfed by the night, he was walking out to a bustling park filled with men drinking and partying together. The scent of sake lingered in the air, ever-extending lines in front of the booths. Everyone was carrying a fried good in each hand, the sound of slurping joining the incessant chatter of the intoxicated populace.

What the hell?

Agata looked down at himself. He was still wearing the same purple yukata, yet his body was completely different. His brown spotted fur pattern remained, but instead of his toned frame, his pillowy stomach *surged* out of the yukata, almost his entire furry torso exposed to the public. His feet were obscured by his large midsection, his bulbous stomach gurgling as it demanded even more food. Agata instinctively tried to cover himself, but his body wouldn't obey his commands. He mindlessly walked forward, people all glancing and then waving at him—their greetings familiar, like they had known each other for a long time.

God... I feel so fucking heavy... Mghfuuck...

Agata's hand moved on its own, rubbing circles across his distended gut. A strange feeling of pride and glee wormed its way through his brain as he tenderly ran his hands down his stomach. Such feelings were not his own, and yet he couldn't do anything but embrace them with open arms. He felt his facial muscles contort into a smile, tongue hanging out of his mouth.

Every step made the earth beneath him shake. The imprint of his lumbering stomps was left onto the grass, grass crunching underneath his titanic mass. He felt like a giant wandering through a town too small for him, yet the almost non-existent reaction from the strangers around him made him feel as if it was normal, which it was definitely *not*. That normality only bolstered the growing pride in his size that came with the strange mirage he was stuck in. What was it that he was seeing? None of it made sense. He was like a movie watcher glued to their chair, forced to watch a predetermined outcome.

A distant, groggy voice reverberated through his ears. It was like a whisper spoken through a megaphone. The words were warbled and hard to parse, Agata squinting as he tried to understand what was being spoken through the noise of his enlarged stomach gurgling.

Suddenly, a pair of hands came from behind him around his mouth. His body locked up as a pair of brown, furry digits forced his muzzle open, a candied apple shoved inside.

“T-thhaa?!” Drool built up on the back of his mouth as soon as the sugary bit of fruit made contact with his taste buds. His entire body loosened as the sweet, punchy taste sent adrenaline through his body. “Mmmh... Thaeess...” He whined, the words spoken completely unknown to him.

“A bit of a glutton, aren’t you?”

The voice was completely foreign to him. Agata knew for a *fact* that he hadn’t heard the man before; deep and rumbling, like someone at least twice his age and with lungs weathered by nicotine. Yet even with that unfamiliarity clear to him, he couldn’t help but feel comforted by the teasing from the strange man.

“Cat got your tongue, A—”

Agata gasped drily, feeling like he finally breathed after spending minutes underwater. He clutched his chest, coughing loudly as spit flew out of his mouth. His throat felt as dry and coarse as sandpaper, his lungs aching as he struggled to regain air. “M-mgah, ah... What... What happened?” Looking down at himself, the apple was thoroughly consumed and the plastic stick that it had been skewered with was covered in bite marks all over. “When did I eat that? I don’t... I don’t remember...” Looking up, he was no longer in the park anymore. He was on a random street, sandwiched between a convenience store with the lights on and a two-story house. “Did I black out again? But I didn’t even leave the stupid town!” He cursed, gritting his fangs. “What the *fuck* is going on?!”

Looking around, he quickly realized that he was a few minutes away from the meeting place he and Renoir agreed on. *I passed out... I don’t know how long I’ve been gone.* He was really feeling the lack of a phone. Even something as the time was inaccessible to him. He wandered aimlessly through the town, hoping to find some kind of place with a clock. *I need to know how long I was gone out for. Maybe that candied apple was the thing that knocked me out? If it was the shrine, I would’ve passed out immediately.*

Finally, he turned to see a convenience store, fluorescent neon flying from the sign. Immediately, he rushed to the display glass, pressing his face against it to see if he could check the time. Just as he hoped, there was a clock hanging on the wall—ticking away, displaying that it was still functional. To his shock, the hands marked 1:40 a.m. “Oh, *shit!* Renoir must be waiting for me...”

Agata broke into a sprint, using visual clues from his run to the shrine to guide himself back to the house.

“Renoir, I...” To his shock, the elephant was nowhere to be found. “DAMMIT!” He stomped his feet, cleftching his mane as he paced around the front of the house.

Pacing around, he wasn’t the only thing missing from the meeting spot, however. The statue that greeted him when he first ran out of the house was completely gone. The spot where it was first seen even carried its imprint—a perfectly spotless circumference surrounded by layers of grime and dust. *Could the statue have... No. That’s ridiculous.*

Renoir was probably right in his assumption that their sudden lapses in consciousness were the result of either a drug or some kind of microscopic apparatus put inside of them by their captors. Jumping to conclusions about ghosts would probably just get his already paranoid mind racing with even more catastrophic thoughts. *Still. I'm not even sure if we should wait. What if the kidnapers get back and I'm all alone? Oh, god... he has the spheres too.*

Even if he didn't find the spheres, he should look for a weapon. Considering the large array of buildings, he was *bound* to find something that he could defend himself with.

Looking around, he noticed something that could help him; footprints. Renoir's stomping feet had left a trail for him to follow. "Shit, did he not notice?" While lucky for him, Agata couldn't help but think that maybe their kidnapers *were* in the town with them and followed the trail. Despite what the elephant had sternly told him, he couldn't stand by while the poor bastard was possibly being brutalized.

"Alright... Let's go." He told himself, shaking his head and psyching himself up.

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"The Nine-Tailed Fox Memorial Museum..." Agata read out loud, looking at the sign. The building stuck out like a sore thumb among the traditional, old Japanese architecture with its modern flourishes. "Is this where Renoir was taken to?" He tried looking around the outside to see if another trail of steps was there, but no luck. He didn't want to go inside a building where he could be ambushed, but at this point, it was either that or waiting for the morning to be ambushed either way. He should act while he still had a chance to escape.

Heading towards the entrance, he saw another statue right next to the doorway. This one pictured two men interlocked with each other; an elephant and a fox. By now, the sight of a stiff cock on the statues only made the sudden rush of arousal was starting to hit him harder each time. He could feel himself tenting at the sight, a pink warmth spreading across his spotted cheeks. It was like trying to not be aroused while in the middle of a kink store. *The constant barrage of naked men would probably drive anyone a little bit horny...* at least that was what he wanted to believe. The best thing he could do was to ignore his erection and keep on moving. Still... the design was so captivating. Despite walking forward, his gaze was *glued* to the pair of golden animals.

The elephant—a hulking pile of musculature and dominance if the pose was anything to go by—had his hands firmly on the Fox's rotund behind. One hand squeezed against one of his respective ass cheeks, the vulpine's ass so large that even the elephant's large, mannish hands could only take one at a time. For some reason, while not wearing a mask, there was still a strange separation between the base of his head and his face. It was as if an elephant mask had been wielded on top of the head of an already-built statue.

Inching closer to the statue while still moving closer to the doorway so that he could pretend that he was simply checking it out without distracting himself, Agata gazed further. The fox himself was as equally large as the second fox statue he found in the shrine. His gut was rubbing against the elephant's toned, muscled torso. The kistune mask retained the

impish smile from the second mask, yet now a pair of frowning brows were added to the marking.

...Wait, where's the sphere? Anxiety rose in his chest as he frantically scanned the perimeter, his eyes darting from one statue to the other. His eyes soon found what he was looking for—suspended between two statues was a bowl with two spheres. It was held up by four solid metal chains that were tightly secured to the statues' nipples. Agata shuddered, mouth slightly open before he pressed his lips together and shoved the spheres down onto the bag around his waist. *Don't think about it too hard. This is just to mess with your mind...*

Shaking his head, Agata jerked his sight away from the statues. “Just keep moving...” He told himself, chest tightening.

Running inside, Agata quickly looked for a light switch. The bulbs stored inside the lanterns lit up, revealing that the entrance led to a gift shop for the museum with two doors—one on each side. There was an entire wall's worth of nine-tailed fox merchandise stored on shelves and booths, ranging from figurines to keychains of various sizes. Some shelves even had books and posters of the creature, years of history all condensed into color-coded encyclopedias. Agata felt like his heart had stopped as he gazed around in wonder at all the items on display.

He couldn't explain it, but it was like the merchandise was drawing his attention forcefully. His eyes darted across the array of merchandise against his will, suddenly stopping dead in their tracks when he saw a line of nine-tailed fox plushies—their tails and fur-trimmed to match the look from the framed picture Agata saw back in the first house—stood along the back of the gift shop. Each one was more than two feet tall and wide with big purple coats wrapped around their bodies—pudgy stumps for limbs that ended in flat, soft edges with the image of a paw pad imprinted on the bottom. Their smile was as large as the kitsune mask from the second and third statues.

“Woah... So... Soft...” Stroking the plushie, he noticed something. Between the legs of the largest one was a bowl with yet another sphere. “Oh, great! Just one more and—“

My image is fit for both sensuality and adorableness, is it not?

Agata shuddered as he heard a voice in his head. He tried to speak, but his mouth did not obey him. Before he could even try and question the presence of another entity inside his body, the plushies began to convulse, the little mouths sewn on their round heads squealing with each jerk. Agata's breath quickened as the lights slowly dimmed, shrouding him in darkness. Suddenly, a light flared and burned brightly, extinguishing all the others. He flinched... only for the exit to *slam* shut behind him.

The room was coruscated by the walking merchandise coming to life, the fabric glowing and showing that... *there was a person* inside one of the plushies—the largest one out of the bunch and the one that seemed to be leading them.

The person inside was in a fetal position, seemingly unconscious. A horrible chill went down the lion's spine as he slowly tried and walk away from the horde, his breath dry and jagged.

Are you afraid of joining them? Do not worry. I have bigger plans for you.

Agata sprinted to the right, panting as he rushed to what looked to be an antique section with glass display cases hosting a variety of artifacts. He desperately searched for something that could help him as the plushies slowly advanced on him. His eyes eventually landed on a large sword held in one of the cases.

He rushed towards the display and he elbowed it with all his might, shattering the glass and grabbing the sword.

Glass fell to the floor alongside the sword, Agata leaning down and quickly heaving it up to shoulder height. He ran back to the entrance as the ominous glow from the horde turned brighter and brighter.

The plushies kept their distance and stared at Agata warily, their large plastic eyes flickering. Agata's stomach churned as he realized that they were most likely trying to assess whether or not he was a threat or if he was easy prey, their silence almost suffocating compared to before when they were jostling around like little children. Taking advantage of their hesitation, Agata clumsily wedged the sword into both door handles tightly before slamming the door behind him.

He ran off down a long hallway filled with doors leading who knows where, mindlessly running away like a prey animal in pursuit. Going down twisting and turning hallways that seemed endless, it wasn't until he arrived at an area that looked plucked out of a mansion that he stopped. Not because of the opulent furniture and decorations, but because of what he thought to be a statue in the center of the room. It wasn't until the 'statue' moved and gasped that Agata realized that he wasn't staring at a statue, but a person with a large block of gold encasing their feet. His vision was so blurry and hazy from the adrenaline that he had to step closer, heart beating intensely that the beat reached his ears. *it's so odd... This looks like a statue, but for some reason—*

His eyes widened as he focused his vision. It wasn't a statue.

It was a person stuck inside the golden block.

His arms were held stiffly at his sides as if they had been glued to his body. His usually styled pompadour was now slick with sweat and had been carelessly pulled downwards at the nape of his neck. Beads of perspiration ran freely down the ridges of his ripped abdomen and trickled along his thighs, sliding down to the solid block of gold to form small puddles. His thick shaft throbbed with arousal, pre leaking out of his tip and splattering alongside the puddles of sweat

"...Free?" Agata gasped, horror spreading to his face.

“A-Agha...tah...” He spoke in low, measured tones, his gaze focused to the ground.
“Agghuh...”

Agata paused, out of breath and panting heavily. Shouting "Free, FREE!" he ran up to his fellow lion, trying desperately to free him. No matter how hard he tried, the stone did not budge.

Suddenly, a croaky, dry wail came from behind. Agata recognized the tone immediately, feeling his chest tighten. “Renoir?” The lion asked, turning around.

“A...Agata...” The elephant slowly limped into the room, gripping his sides. Illness and exhaustion had taken over his body. His skin was pale, nausea written all across his face. He looked like he would kneel over and puke. “Help me... I think I'm...” He stumbled into the room, the two balls rolling down across the floor and at Agata’s feet.

Ah. He’s finally here. I missed him...

Agata’s head swung back and forth as he didn’t know who to help. The voice’s lingering echoes were carnal, almost ravenous. He could feel the entity *gawking* at Renoir as if he were a piece of juicy meat. Drool built up in the back of his mouth, forcing Agata to cover his mouth in disgust. "I-I don't know how to get him out!" He yelped, voice quivering.

“H-help me... I-I-I’ll free him. I swear, just help me first...” Renoir said, trying to placate him. “I’ll make sure that he doesn’t end up like the others...”

Agata’s heart skipped a beat as he looked at Renoir. “T-The others?”

“L-Look...” He shakily pointed behind Agata.

Free suddenly began to thrash wildly—thrashing as much as he could within his encasing. The lion’s body tightened as he hung his head down, his gaze falling on the puddle of pre leaking from his cock as weak, pathetic attempts to roar against his captors parted his fanged maw. “A-Aghaha! Help, *Heeeeelp!*” He wailed, squirming against the coldness of the metal encasing his feet. It felt like every drop of pre was being absorbed into the gold. Free’s shaft began to twitch and harden, drop after drop pouring from his cock. “Gheeeh mee out of hehere! HEY! *Geeh me out of heere NOW!*” Free’s voice rose into a higher pitch, panic beginning to set, speech growing even more unclear the longer he screamed.

“A-Agata... I-I’m going to...” Renoir said weakly, staggering towards Agata until his feet gave out. He crashed onto the ground with a meaty thud, sending a chair careening to the floor with his body.

Agata couldn't even process what had happened to Renoir as he heard Free scream again. From within the gold block, liquid, metallic coating had begun to crawl up from Free's ankles to up his leg like a living, slithering creature. It constricted around his immobile calf and gently pulled him closer, giving him no choice but to follow its insistent pull. The bound lion couldn't do anything but yell as the semi-solid metal covered his skin, cold at first but quickly turning hot and soaking into his fur until it was almost a part of him. He whined and moaned "Agahaa!" over and over again like a mantra, desperately looking for escape. As the gold reached his upper thighs, Free gasped as he felt it slowly slither up his rectum, the gooey nature of the liquid making it self-lubricating. It sloshed around inside of

him, pleasuring him as it smashed against his wall, that specific part of the coating gaining a solid form to pleasure him even further. His cock throbbed as the barrage of pleasure rained down on him, tearing his mind asunder with impossible to comprehend arousal.

Free could feel his glistening cock throb as precum continued to spill from his tip like a leaky faucet, splattering onto the floor. "Haaagh!" He screamed, arousal rending his voice into a violent shrill as he arched his back and threw his head back, the gold now fully covering his crotch. "Agahhhhh!" The mass of metal was almost hot to the touch, its form now solid and curved to fit Free's frame perfectly. The golden coating had frozen his bottom half, keeping the lion's cock in the middle of an interrupted orgasm. Cries and assorted moans of pleasure continued to escape Free's lips as the gold molded itself to his body, his waist grinding against the metal encasing him. "Ah-Guhuu..."

He is being molded in our image. Isn't he beautiful?

Agata was struck by simultaneous waves of arousal and nausea. The gagging, slushy sounds that his friend was making as the gold engulfed him was something that he had never, ever heard before. He could feel his own shaft leaking at the sight, each pulsating wave of arousal making him feel violated yet longing for more.

Free's pupils widened as the gold spread across his frame, and he bit down on his lip to keep from crying out. The tendril inside of him relentlessly pounded against his prostate as he writhed in agony, desperately trying to escape but met with failure.

He winced and closed his eyes, desperately attempting to avoid the gold that threatened to cover him entirely. But suddenly, Renoir was there beside him, moving with ease that he couldn't move with mere moments before. In one hand he held a kitsune mask with a phallic-shaped golden protrusion that glimmered menacingly stuck to the inside.

Agata stood in mute horror as Renoir grasped Free's head firmly, the latter choking on air as he watched the golden phallus slide into his mouth, pushing deep into his throat as his panicked moans were muffled by the glistening shaft that bulged through his neck—wet, garbled begs coming through the mask. More gold suddenly burst from within the mask, an explosion of more liquid metal covering the rest of his face in an instant. Like a cherry being placed atop a sundae after completion, a thick fox tail suddenly surged from the same tendril that had penetrated Free, a feline now transformed into a golden vulpine.

The congo lion could do nothing by the time that he snapped back into lucidity. Everything transpired so fast that it felt like a blur. Free was immobile, completely covered in gold like molten lava covering a statue. He was unmoving—No different than the other statues spread around the town.

Oh. Oh my god.

He stumbled as a wave of vertigo struck him so violently that he gripped his head, trying to hold himself together. He reached out an arm toward Renoir to try and comfort himself. All the statues in the town.

Every. Single. One of them was a person, every last one of them completely consumed by the gold and stuck in a limbo between pleasure and release.

Renoir suddenly spoke up, hands behind his back as he waltzed around Agata with pure gusto and joy. "You discovered him before I could set up the final clue to our little scavenger hunt. I'm surprised that you moved so fast, Aoi."

"Aoi...?" Agata couldn't bring himself to move, and collapsed onto his knees. "That's... not my name..."

"Ah, of course. I forgot that we still needed to finish the ritual for you to come back." Renoir ruminated. His voice had gone from a rough, almost juvenile pitch to something more refined. "Pity. I wanted for both of us to come back at the same time, but I suppose that I was always a little bit ahead of you."

Don't compliment yourself.

"I didn't say that." Agata shuddered.

"I know you didn't, lion cub," Renoir reassured him. "Just let me look for something... aha! There it is." From a shelf hosting a tea set, the elephant took out a bowl and a sphere. Like a director setting a stage, he placed the bowl on the base of the golden block with the sphere inside. "The surprise is a little ruined, but it's okay. Our little game is still preserved through spirit."

Agata looked at him in utter disbelief, his face scrunched up in pure agony.

"Oh, I'm sure that you must be *terribly* confused." Renoir cooed. "Let me do something, okay? Things will be clear posthaste."

Renoir's muscles suddenly began to swell against his yukata. In a matter of seconds, his musculature began to balloon to the point that his once baggy clothing began to fit him evenly, then tightly. His skin changed in texture, from rough hide to something more soft and fleshy, and as he pulled back the sleeves of his garment, Agata could see that chocolate brown fur had begun to grow across his body.

The man he met a few hours ago was now a completely different being that had no traces of the original in him.

"Apologies for my great grandson's behavior." The ex-elephant now woolly mammoth said as he adjusted his yukata to be looser. "He's a brat, but he's lucky to have me guiding him."

"Who... who are you?" Agata asked, posing the question less as if he was inquiring about the identity of a person and instead, chatting with something far beyond a mere mortal.

"Thales Shibiki." He said coldly. "And you are going to help my friend Aoi come back."

"Aoi...?"

Thales gestured at a painting; a portrait made in the image of the very room they were standing in with two particular animals seated across each other—a woolly mammoth... and a large, bulky fox.

"My friend was a *very* important man. Most people thought he was crazy for his obsession with the myth of the nine-tailed fox, but none dared to voice their scorn with how much

wealth he commanded.” Thales nostalgically explained, sighing wistfully. “And of course, just as I was brought back, I considered it fair to bring my dear friend back.”

Agata—against his better judgment—looked back at Free. “Is that why you—“

“Turned your brethren into effigies of Aoi? Yes. They represent him through the stages of his life. I wanted to leave the most important stage for last; *the beginning of our bond.*”

“My...” Agata already had a feeling. As soon as he thought about the number of beads and the fact that Aoi’s voice said that he had different plans for him—leaving seven lions in total with him excluded—he couldn’t stop himself from thinking about the morbid possibility. He just didn’t expect it to have it confirmed so carelessly and without fanfare by the puppeteer.

“The first one was that old fool with the scarred mouth tissue for Aoi’s last days on earth. I didn’t want an outsider seeing my beloved in such a state, so I took care of that one myself to get it out of the way as soon as possible.”

Sabu.

“Next was that pompous, odious metrosexual boy. He struggled fiercely, probably because he wanted that white fur pristine.” Thales explained with chagrin. “He was for Aoi’s early adulthood, but I do admit I had some fun with him before I turned him into an effigy. Draining the rebelliousness out of him was quite fun.”

Hino.

“Next, you went to the shrine. Aoi told me about it. That’s where the effigies of his prime were being made. That brute of a lion tried to fight back. I admit, hypnotizing him wasn’t as fun, but it had to be done. He made for a great model as I poured all that gold over him. Shame about that scar on him, ruined such a pretty face.”

Dolph.

"Same for those two long-maned boys. I needed to make our bond into a physical object. The nipple clamps were a goodbye gift from me to them, though. I thought they could use some extra pleasure on their way to being statues."

Jinma and Dope.

“Aoi was always very whimsical. Since I had the muscle of your group to deal with, I thought that it’d be fitting to imprison him in something... *softer* to placate whatever innate aggression his spirit could have. Cradled by the softest stuffing money can buy, I’m sure he’s enjoying his eternal sleep.”

Miguel.

"And of course... the night that I converted my dear Aoi. Bound in golden rubber, he took in all my teachings. Even now, no one has matched his receptiveness. A truly brilliant mind."

Free.

“And now, you must be wondering about your role in all of this...” Thales raised his arms, all seven beads floating above him. A tendril of light went through each one, slowly forming a large, heavy collar that hovered above the mammoth. “You will be the host to my dear Aoi. You are the one he requested, after all.”

The word ‘host’ instantly snapped Agata out of his horror-fueled trance. “Wait, what?!”

“Fitting, isn’t it? For all the trouble I went to, it was obvious that the last piece of the puzzle would be you.” Thales said as the collar slowly hovered towards Agata.

“No, sto—“

Do not fight, child.

Agata’s entire body froze up. He was a statue—a metaphorical one, unlike his brethren—all in thanks to the whims of Aoi’s presence inside his mind. The thick beads were placed around the lion’s neck, and instantly, he felt his entire body begin to vibrate as if it were a bomb about to explode.

His slender frame started to balloon, his arms and legs thickening as a layer of fat seemed to blanket his body. His clothes became tighter as he grew, and he felt a dull throbbing in his gut that reminded him of the mysterious vision at Dolph’s shrine.

He could feel the pounds piling on while his face reddened from the immense pressure in his abdomen. The widening, distended stomach churned with every instance of bloat, Agata’s stomach slowly approaching the large, round dome of the stomach he saw in his vision. An overwhelming sense of heaviness enveloped his engorged limbs, panting as everything around him got softer—fat beginning to envelop his arms and legs, his thighs even brushing against each other, and his chest pillowing forward as it turned from a pair of hard abs to two plushy man breasts. His hands stretched to be pillows of fat with fingers as thick as sausages.

Granted momentary freedom to gawk at the poundages added to his body, Agata reached out to touch his stomach. His fingers sunk into the adipose tissue, his skin becoming loose and hanging as he did so.

Ah, a more fitting base. Let’s add more changes on top of that, shall we?

The texture of his fur grew softer and softer, turning smooth and silky—perfectly brushed and as if it was maintained by the best fur products in the world. As he continued rubbing circles on his stomach, Agata couldn’t help but fall in awe at how soft his pelt had become. Touching the golden sheen adorning his frame was like gliding one’s hand across a pillow—the sensation so dream-like that it quelled Agata’s anxiety. Like a lullaby sung to an unruly child, the soft, comfortable touch sent waves of peace across his body, waves crashing down against building stress.

A strange, creeping fur hue began to spread from his feet up to his ankles. A golden coating began to consume his pelt, transforming his chocolate brown fur into a pristine, yellow coat. The feeling was like being entangled by tentacles. The wave of change left an intense, buzzing afterglow that made Agata shiver in a strange mix of pleasure and confusion. It was like having his body massaged, pressure points being prodded the more the changing

tide traveled up him. His muscles loosened, an involuntary sigh of relief parting his lips. His fingers twitched as his palms turned a bright white, with the back of his hand was coated in yellow.

"W-what's happening? Why does it feel... so... good?"

Your body's changing to fit me. A man who loves his body is a man who is happy, cub.

"L-Love? Love your... my... body?" He asked confusedly, his brain being violently tugged from every possible direction.

Every last lock of hair on his mane shifted from a dark brown to yellow fur with the tips turning silvery white. His tail grew in length as it curled and swayed to his every whim, a massive clump of fur suddenly forming around the appendage to give it a poofy, almost plush-like quality with its sudden size increase.

Ah, how beautiful! I missed my precious, soft tail!

"W-why did my tail *chaahaan*—" The features on his face started to smoothen and round out, his muzzle extending outwards while his cheekbones and jawline changed to accommodate for the longer, pointier face. Agata's face began to shift from a mostly feline visage to a heavily animalistic one, much akin to what the effigies held. His pupils went from slit and dilated to a smaller pair with a purple ring around the iris on both eyes. "M-my face!" He whined, patting his head in pure desperation breaking through the momentary mental peace.

Nono, cub. My face. Aoi cooed, his pitch mocking and condescending as if he was talking down to a mere child.

His nose—large, pink, and damp—shrank to become a small button of flesh at the end of his elongated muzzle. Immediately, all the scents of his room went up his nostrils ten times as powerful as before. Agata stumbled backward, holding onto the chair that Aoi was sitting on in the picture for support, a blast of stimuli passing through his head like a truck trying to jam through a small garage door.. His whiskers retracted into his cheeks, his entire body convulsing as thousands of volts passed through it and almost making him fall, clutching the chair like a lifeboat.

"M-mgh, so... good..." Agata moaned, the words leaving his mouth starting to feel like they weren't his own. "So... good... beautiful... body..." He vigorously hugged himself, warm huffs coming from his mouth as his tongue drooped in a show of pure ecstasy.

"Very good, lion cub. You're perfect for my dear Aoi."

Agata panted, the wonderful warmth spreading across his body, rushing in his veins like wildfire through a forest. The sheer euphoria brought by his fox-ening body left him quaking—thick, chunky legs struggling to maintain upright. "Mgh, thank you..." He moaned, drool cascading from his mouth.

The pleasure pushed forward through his shaft, staining the yukata. His enlarged physique caused the bottom of the garment to ride up around his waist, his cock and loins *barely* concealed. As his heart beat fiercely, a burning tingle enveloped his cock, blood rushing

down—his dick pulsating with arousal so intense that each time that it throbbed, a splurge of pre would leak downwards. “Mgh, mghah...”

Already at your limit? But we're not even done. Let me show you how the cock of a real man feels, lion cub...

His dick surged with arousal, now growing with each burst of pre. His cock went from long and slender to corpulent, ballooning inch by inch. The tent in the yukata pushed further, nothing left to the imagination. “Mgh, I love... me...” The world turned blurry, pleasure tainting every one of his senses. “I...want...” He tried focusing, just barely able to fight off Aoi's voice as his hand brushed against his needy shaft.

So cute! Stay still, I must make sure that my body's properly balanced.

His testicles pulled downwards, a deep churning coming from them as they hung low between his legs, seed rapidly building inside to be shot out in bursts of slimy, semitransparent semen.

With his vision blurring dark and breathing turning rapid, he slid his hand down over his stomach until it covered the base of his cock. His strokes were slow at first, hesitant but growing longer and more confident with each spark of pleasure running through his veins. His shaft throbbed and responded to his touch, engorging itself with anticipation. He increased the intensity, pushing deeper into his flesh, coaxing out a thick stream of pre-cum that ran from its tip "...Ghet out of my... heaaaah..." He panted, his breathing heavy as his fingers goaded his cock further to overflow. He fell onto his knees, the ground covered by a slick sheen of pre. "Mmmgh... who am I..."

How adorable... I'll give you a goodbye gift before you surrender your brain to me.

Aoi's voice echoed through his head, drowning out everything else. Agata closed his eyes, pushing himself even harder, the fox's soothing words commanding him to pleasure himself even more. Arching his vulpine head back, he let out a euphoria-riddled wail, fingers gripping tightly around his shaft as he relished in the bliss that coursed through him. His legs trembled and shook with every thrust and spasm that rippled throughout his body, his entire being consumed in pleasure.

Agata's body trembled as the last wave of pleasure surged through him. His teeth chattered and his eyes rolled back into his head, the bliss threatening to consume him completely. He felt himself nearing his climax; a euphoric sensation that flooded every inch of his body. With one final push, he thrust himself over the edge and into ecstasy. Aoi's voice whispered in his ear, words overlaid on top of each other—all of them massaging his brain into submission. Agata let out a guttural moan that echoed off of the walls. His cum shot out in a torrent that sprayed across the room like a fountain, before slowly fading back into stillness. His breathing became labored and heavy, sweat dripping from every inch of skin as he slumped forward, completely still like a machine dying down.

Agata lay there on the floor, his back against the hard stone ground. He was panting heavily, shaking in aftershocks of pleasure. His mind was still swirling with pleasure. It was only when he tried to thank Aoi—the pleasure so wonderful that he didn't even think twice about trying to express gratitude—when he realized something had changed.

Hah... Hah... Wait... why can't I... speak? Agata's thoughts sounded muffled inside his head. His head dangled downwards, mouth open as saliva slowly dripped from it. *There's something... wrong...* A chill ran down his spine as he felt something inside his head bulging. It was as if Aoi's very presence was physically worming itself deeper inside his brain, pushing against the walls of his mind.

His identity and sense of self—personal guard to the heir of Horns Conglomerate, in his 30s, son to Anzu and Jigoku Javor—dissolved as Aoi's persona began to crawl through his brain. Despite the titillating danger, the feeling was euphoric, his body quivering with pleasure as he experienced the sensation of the two consciousnesses merging into one. His lips formed a satisfied smirk, and he melted into a puddle of blissful release. The boundaries between Agata and Aoi drifted away.

Aoi's own memories began to swirl with his own; his days and the Shishigumi and the fox's deals with the mafia and business titans merging into unrecognizable, chopped-up fragments of time. He didn't know where he ended and where Aoi began. The fox was infecting everything that he knew and loved, the corrosive mental pollution leaving him intoxicated with uncontrollable glee and mania. His soul tossed and turned until it felt like they were completely intertwined. He could feel himself growing in strength and confidence with each passing second as he tried to connect what his 'true self' was.

Three hundred li farther east is Qing Qiu Mountain, where much jade can be found on its south slope and green cinnabar on its north. There is a beast here whose form resembles a fox with nine tails.

Agata's eyes flickered. *Loui... Loou... Thales...*

He finally collapsed with a massive thud, the ground shaking underneath.

///

Mmgh... This is the best sleep I've had in a long time. Aoi slowly opened his eyes, savoring the sensation of being in control of Agata's body. He ran his hands over his toned physique, admiring the strength that had been gifted to him by their union. His tongue swept across his lips, tasting the sweet remnants of the candied apple from earlier. He had never felt this powerful before—it was intoxicating. *The little cub feels so wonderful! So glad that I chose him. A bit of a shame that I had to take out the cutest, but oh well...*

Standing up slowly, he took further care in caressing each inch of his new form, awe filling him as his newfound power pulsed through his veins. His breathing was still labored, savoring the traces of pleasure from the leftover sensations from Agata that still lingered there.

Suddenly, he felt a gentle tug on his shoulder. He turned to see Thales standing behind him, a slice of the candied apple in hand.

“Good morning.” The mammoth whispered. “You look as beautiful as the day that we departed as old men.” He cooed, the only telltale of any kind of vulnerability being the warmth spreading across his furry face.

Aoi smiled wide, chuckling as he took the slice from Thales' hand. "You know how to treat a glutton like me, Thales." He popped the piece into his mouth as he savored the sweet flavors that melted on his tongue. The newfound energy that coursed through him was invigorating

"This should help you maintain your new form." Thales explained. "How are you feeling?"

"How about I show you?" Aoi leaned in for a kiss, practically shoving his tongue inside Thales' mouth.

The mammoth let out a soft moan as their lips locked, his arms finding their way around Aoi's neck. He could feel the energy and intensity of the fox's new form radiating off of him. Finally reunited with his beloved after so long apart, he could barely hold himself back—their mouths tangling together in an intimate embrace that burned with passion.

Aoi's hands roamed Thales' body freely, exploring each curve and muscle as he savored the sweet taste of his lips. His fingertips traced over Thales' broad shoulders then traveled down to the small of his back before finally resting on his hips.

The two lovers basked in each other's presence—no worries or hardships threatening to take away their blissful future together.

They had won.