

The Khaki Project: Made Whole

Three days of dealing with his alien infection. That's the best Isaac could describe it. Each workday has been walking a razor's edge. Walking on eggshells would be an understatement. The small saving grace is the creature held within him understood when to go into hiding. Though was it a good thing though? It would mean if he wanted to tell someone and *show* them, he's shit out of luck. Was that the creature's plan? To keep him isolated? Such thoughts swirl in his mind, worry, fear, yet all his emotions have felt muted, relaxed, a clear-headed stoned state. It's rather maddening. To know he's being used, pulled to a location by this creature, but the conversations related to it have been... confusing.

"What is it that we are *really* looking for?" he asks in his car, driving to the location set on his phone's GPS.

Softly spoken into his ear canal, with that gravely growing voice "Bring together. Make one. Torn."

A cold shiver runs down his spine but is stopped halfway down in an abrupt fashion, "Yes, you've said that," he says, thinking, "*It's scary it can make a small mouth in my ear to whisper, and yet I can barely feel it.*" His fingers gently drum along the steering wheel, "How do you know it's here? This is where you landed or something? Have your kind body snatched up everyone here and now I'm going to join them?"

"Make one... join."

He tenses a little, "I think this is a terrible idea, and you know that... but I can't turn this down. As a freelance journalist, I can't just not go into the jaws of danger to uncover a possible world takeover of an alien species? Who wouldn't? Though I could just be taken and join without a chance to report it... but it's a chance I have to take," he says with a nervous chuckle, feeling himself quickly relax.

"Join. Be one. Whole. Know more."

He sighs, "That is what I am afraid of," he says, pulling into a local park's parking lot. He looks over at the young children playing in the park, his body tensing, "Please tell me it's not in that direction."

"No, not here."

"That's a relief. I hope I brought enough Nascar fuel for this race," he remarks, getting out of the car, slipping on his backpack with a giant two liter thermos filled with the most powerful essence of the devil that he could find, "Then where?"

"There," it whispers, his body feels a pressure along his skin, his shirt moves, knowing the creature underneath is doing its *thing*, but letting him feel the pull and tug of the direction.

He turns to the middle-class suburban mass produced construction homes, "I thought I felt that direction... at least now I know," he says, taking his first steps toward there.

"Yes, that way... close, near. Soon."

He rubs the back of his head, popping the sipper from his thermos, taking a big gulp of the hot devil's broth, the coffee flowing into him, excitement building up, the surge of false

energy coursing through his veins before its tempered by the creature within him, “Could you at least give me this much?” he asks with a huff, stepping into the neighborhood the surge of being awake through the witch’s brew returning, “Rewarding me with it as I go along? Now I feel like a pet,” he says with a sigh.

He walks down the sidewalk, admiring the homes for just a moment, but also taking in his surroundings. The well cut lawns, the small alleyways between every other home that has big green and blue garbage and recycling containers, “*If only they knew that if its a real recycling program they’d have the plastics, papers and glasses separated,*” he thinks, taking a big chug of his dark brew, “It’s just a ploy for some tech companies to gather plastic cheaply to be used in their bio experiments if anything.”

A shiver runs through him, like he’s being watched by *something*. He looks around, the neighborhood appears to be relatively quiet. The wind blowing through here has a scent in the air that makes his hair stand on end.

“Close, feel. Close. Bring Whole,” it whispers into his ear.

He keeps a lookout, eyes shifting from one place to the next, expecting people from the windows to spot him and look away just as their eyes meet, yet there is nothing. The sensation keeps nagging at him as he walks down one of the alley ways, “A small quiet neighborhood, probably taken over by aliens. Controlling and puppeting these poor people. Why am I walking down here? Just to get jumped... I’m sure it is to get jumped,” he says with a soft sigh, the tense mood and sensation melting away to keep calm and collected.

Slowly he walks into the alleyway, “*It’s really strange to walk into a space where I should be concerned, nervous yet I’m as calm as taking a hot shower,*” he thinks, noticing that garbage is strewn about the ground, the plastic white fresh scented bags are torn asunder and the half-eaten meals have been fully consumed, “I guess even alien infested towns have to deal with racoons.”

“Close, find. Search. Now.” There’s a rush of excitement through him, a sensation that is tugging him forward. Urging him to go further into the alleyway, a curiosity to find more? Or something more? It’s hard to tell, but the tone in the creature’s voice, speaking in his ear, makes it clear that he’s close to its goal.

He stiffens, “I hope it’s not in the garbage. I had enough crap with the sewer,” he remarks, stepping over it, noticing the tipped over container showing unusual damage. He gets closer, feeling an excitement course through him that’s not his own, “What did this?” he remarks, noticing piercing gash marks in the plastic container, “What caused this?” he mutters, moving closer, running his hand across the marks, one of the hinges broken and torn asunder for the cover.

“Do they have alien guard animals?” he mutters, looking down at his hand, seeing the sleek black fingers with blue claws attached, the skin has a strange shine to it. His clawed hand follows some of the claw marks but notices that his hand is clearly *bigger* than whatever made them, “*I should be freaking out right now, but the fact I am not is worrying.*”

“No, you will not turn me into a monster,” he says, clenching his clawed hand, pulling it away from the trash can, standing up, “This is my body, and if you want to find what you are looking for you will let me remain in control.”

“Close, Find. Soon.”

“Soon, soon, yes, close. Work *with* me,” he mutters, watching the sleek hand soften, becoming liquid, drawing back into his body, looking like it's simply evaporating away, but knows deep down that is not the case. He takes a deep breath and sighs, “Good, thank you.”

“Welcome.”

“Learning manners. That’s good. Thank you for doing that.”

“Welcome.”

“That or you learned to say that when I say thank you.”

“Welcome.”

He sighs, “I can’t tell if that was a joke or serious... that is a problem,” he mutters, pulling away from it, taking a moment to look over the destruction had here, “This just is all the more perplexing. Unless this is meant to lure me into a false sense of security!” he exclaims jumping around expecting to perhaps see something, his thermos rattles against his backpack, but all he’s greeted with is the grey siding of the other home.

He straightens himself, “Right I knew that. I’m just being paranoid... or it is making me more paranoid... could I tell if it is it or is it just me? Oh man... I wasn’t expecting a crisis of what makes me, me all of a sudden,” he says, anxiety starting to bubble up within him. Heart starting to race, a tingle running down his spine and then it just as quickly it disappears, leaving him with a faint want, like the end of a long time of hiccups and expecting the next one to hit, but that too fades away by the time he gets out of the alley way, “*Nothing there. This is the most peculiar alien invasion I have ever seen.*”

He stops and lets out a heart chuckle, till the creature says to him, “Move. Close. Find. One. Whole.”

He groans, “Come on. I’m working on this; do you have some magic to tell me exactly where?”

“No. Feel. Close. Ahead.”

“Relax, I... we got this,” he responds, shaking his head, “*Was it trying to distract me from my thoughts, or is this the paranoid loop going in my mind? But honestly just how many alien invasions have I seen that were real except this one? None. I’m way over my head but...what choice do I have? Nothing,*” he thinks, wondering about this whole surreal situation, checking the next alley, which is in a better state of affairs than the last.

“*What in the world could it be planning? Wanting? I can’t just ignore it. But at the same time, my curiosity to know more about this alien parasite is too much for me not to explore. I just...*” he thinks, leaning against a gate, leaning over, looking out to the simple yard, “Big home, small yard.”

“Find, close. Search.”

He sighs, "I am searching. I'd be better if you let me enjoy my one terrible addiction, the life blood of the universe," he mutters, pushing himself from the gate, opening his thermos, taking another big swig of the coffee he desired, feeling that pain of disappointment of the lacking rush that followed, even if he didn't feel tired at all, "If you were a bit more clear on what I am trying to find I bet this will go easier."

"Close. Hard to tell. Moving quick. Scared. Hungry."

"So it's moving, that's new information. Good to know," he says, thinking, *"Does this mean their headquarters are moving? Or is it underground? Or is it infecting one neighborhood and moving onto the next? Snatching and infecting people to the creature's will and I am resistant? If that's the case then I would need to find legit evidence for..."*

A siren bloop draws his attention to the road where a police car pulls up right beside him, stepping out of the car is a anthropomorphic golden haired lion dressed in a blue policeman's uniform with bright neon yellow stripes, "Hello there, how are you doing today?"

"Please don't come out... please, please," he thinks, about to feel the adrenaline rush that is quashed within an instant, *"At least I'm going to be calm. Lions have good noses and could smell if someone is being fearful... could he smell the creature? Or is he one of them and smells me as one of them? Do they have a code? Shit, shit, shit."*

"Everything alright? Are you lost? I know this neighborhood well and you don't look like someone around here."

"Ahh, yeah, I'm not."

The lion approaches, "What brings you here? Jogging through?"

"You see, I'm looking for someone, very close to me."

"Someone close? A missing person?" he asks, his ears flattening, whiskers twitching.

"My cat. House cat. His name is Axel. He's an indoor cat but he got outside and normally he comes back within a day but he didn't."

His ears perk but flatten again as he listens to the story, "Ah, I see. And what makes you think he's here?"

"GPS. I had a tracker on his collar so if something like this were to happen, I could find it. But the thing they don't tell you about those trackers as they last only a few days, and wouldn't you know it? The battery died like an hour before I got here. So, I'm just looking to see if I can find him."

"What does he look like?"

"I have pictures of him on my phone if you want me to show you."

He smiles, showing his sharp teeth, "Please."

"Do you mind if I dig into my pocket?"

"Go right ahead," he says, waving him along.

"He's a cute bundle of torment," he says, showing him dozens of images of him, "See? I'm surprised he's made it this far, but pets can surprise you."

"Well isn't he cute. You know you can learn a lot about someone with how they treat their pets. What's your number? In case I happen to see him I can let you know."

“That is very kind of you it’s...” he says.

The police officer notes it down on a notepad, “Thanks.”

“I hope there wasn’t any problem with me looking for him?”

“No, no. Just some concerned neighbors. There’s been a lot of noises late at night and ruined garbage cans. A wild animal of some kind.”

“I should hurry and find him before something happens.”

“I wish you luck. Just stay out of the neighbor’s property without their permission.”

“I intend to. I wish I brought a bag of cat treats or a can of tuna, that would have really made this easier, but I wasn’t thinking that. And after what you said, I don’t want to go get some and lose track of him.”

“Good, good. I’m glad. Just be careful and check if someone’s home. Let people know what’s going on. It’ll really cut down on suspicion.”

“Thanks, good to know. I just didn’t want to disturb anyone unless I knew Axel was in a person’s yard and he’s being a bit of an idiot. You know cats, they want to do what they want.”

“Oh? Why do you think I’d know what my cat would want?”

“Ah uhh, um, well you see, I really didn’t mea...”

His words are cut off by a heart growling laugh, “Relax, relax. I’m a pet owner myself. Two dogs, and you would not believe the looks I get when I tell people that... yeah that look,” he chuckles.

“Sorry, didn’t mean anything by it.”

He waves him off, “It’s fine, just take it easy okay?”

“I will officer.”

“Good,” he says, getting back into his police car, driving off.

There’s a soft sigh of relief, “I have never been so relaxed before a police officer... thanks.”

“Welcome.”

He shudders, “I need another swig of the bean juice,” he remarks, taking another huge chug, the bitter taste reminding him that he is still alive and himself, “*Either he couldn’t tell and not infected, or is and could... I hope the former. Former would be nice,*” he thinks, closing the cap, “Come you creature from the great expanse, let’s find what will make you whole.”

“Yes, keep going... please.”

He chuckles, “At least you are becoming more polite... I hope,” he says, checking down a few more alleyways, catching two more that have been torn apart by the same creature, with garbage strewn about. A gentle pull is felt in the back of his mind, moving through his body, drawing him toward a section of the neighborhood that has a larger alleyway where a big metal dumpster sits in the back.

“I’m getting a bad feeling about this,” he says, his hand gently drumming against his pants pocket, feeling the outline of his phone.

“Close, close, Go, go!”

He tenses, "I'm going, relax. Ever heard of being cautious? If we're caught by those that don't want us, it'll be very bad not just for you, but for *me too*. Unless you're leaving, We need to work together," he remarks, moving in deeper, out of the view of the rest of the neighborhood, steadily approaching the dumpster, noticing claw scratches along the sides, the heavy rubber top has a hole torn clear through it.

"I'm starting to think that perhaps this town may not be under alien influence," he thinks as a low growl hiss echoes out from within the container.

"Angry, afraid. Hungry. Must unite. Must be one."

Isaac looks in the direction of the whispers even though he knows it's in his ear canal, "What? With what that? What the heck is that?"

"Yes. Together, one, made whole again."

"Relax," he says, feeling the creature shift and move through him, the sleek black and blue liquid growing around his hand, "Hey, hey!" he exclaims, hearing the rumble and growl from the dumpster as whatever is inside leaps from the hole with such force that it causes the whole container to rattle. It lands a short distance away, a wolf sized creature, sleek, shiny, streamlined claws and teeth. A hybrid between a racoon and a feline with a bushy tail, with exaggerated deadly claws. It looks at him with glowing blue gaze that sends a shiver down his spine, "Never mind," he remarks, quickly whipping his backpack off to the side, the bag sliding across the ground as the alien creature turns its attention to it then back to them.

"Is this it?" he asks, knowing the answer, but it's quickly confirmed.

"Yes! Yes! Make whole!" it hisses growls, the creature rolling over his hand, forming deadly set of claws on one hand and then the other, the creature's head no longer whispering into his ear but speaking along his head, sliding across his face, shifting his vision making it shaper, nostrils flaring, heightening his senses and just how terrible that garbage smells making him gag.

"Fuck that is rancid milk," he states, coughing what feels like a lung.

The racoon cat chitters, letting out a long growl before rushing out at him, claws extended slashing at him.

"Can we talk about this!" he exclaims holding up his arm which has grown to nearly double its original size, claws extended outward, the claws digging into the strange sleek skin, absorbing most of the damage. He jumps back, looking at his alien arm, seeing the gash marks which stop just shy of his body. The blue goo blood latches onto the opening pulling itself together to seal the wound. "Hey, I'm with your friend. Let's not fight," he yells out to it as it paces around him, back hunched, tail raised and fluffed out.

"Scared. Not thinking. Instinct," his creature responds, expanding over more of his body, giving a glimpse of the monstrous creature he could become. An alien hybrid between a human, a feline and something else. It covers only sixty percent of his body, mainly his legs, arms and part of his head. Creating a digitigrade stance that causes him to fall over.

"Shit," he states, the animal pounces, claws extending outward, lashing at him. He rolls out of the way just in time to see notable claw marks left in the concrete ground, making his human eye widen, "Can you tell it we come in peace?!"

“No, fear. Not think. Not know,” it responds with a long hissing growl, which somewhat matches the other.

“Great, an alien that is freaking out,” he sighs, the extended and extorted body forces him into a semi primal stance, leaning forward, on all fours, the extended body becoming clearer to him with each passing moment, the feel of the rough ground on his feet, the wind across his smooth tough skin, the flick of his... tail? He looks back in surprise at the sensation, the thin spindly black tail with blue tiger markings coming down to a sharp scorpion like stinger.

“Watch my other half!” growls, a tug against him doesn’t so much force his head to look back at his assailant but to make him feel he should turn his head.

He leaps out of the way, up several feet in the air, the strength and power at his fingertips... claw tips. Like a roller coaster ride his stomach is pulled down, the ground leaving him, limbs flaying about in the air, “Ahhh!” he lands with a thud on top of the dumpster, claws digging into the hard rubber with ease, feeling the container shake under his claws. “I chickened out on bungee jumping and now I am a giant springboard,” he says with a growled sigh.

The creature’s tail flicks, growling, claws digging into the concrete, muscles tensing as it looks up at him from his perched position, sharp blue teeth revealed as the black lips curl. It strikes back at him.

He jumps back the dumpster shifting and grinding an inch under the force of his jump, but not before he strikes out at his wild attacker, leaving deep gash marks in the creature’s face. The blue gooey ‘blood’ strings together sealing up the wound within just a few seconds.

“Creepy but cool. Now tell me... what do we do?” he asks, panting heavily, shifting to keep his new center of gravity, feeling like a shark out of water in his posture that also feels oddly *natural* for him.

“Merge. Make whole with us.”

“Yeah, but how. It doesn’t look like it wants to,” he says, dodging a series of attacks. Each move he makes feels a bit more natural, blocking a few strikes with his arm. The gashes ache and burn but then a soothing cool takes over as the wound heals.

Sweat rolls down his human brow, deep heavy breaths, heart racing as he strains under the exertion, “I’m a little out of shape,” he says with a heavy huff.

“Pull tear, take from other.”

“Other?” he asks, tilting his head, leaping out of the way of another strike, countering with another deep gash across the creature’s body, but the wounds quickly heal, “There’s nothing there but more of whatever you are.”

“Deeper. Grab, bite, pin, fight.”

“I am *not* going to bite, that is... what kind of alien are you that bites?!” he exclaims, having a quick thought, “*Unless this is like the alien’s attack dogs?*” but he has little time to think it further as they go back and forth with their attacks, one such runs across his chest, tearing through the upper layers of clothes drawing blood. The heat of the wounds run through his body. Some of the creature around him liquifies, sliding across his body, covering the relatively light wounds sealing them up.

“Hurry. Or be caught. Make a lot of noise.”

“Damn, you’re right, I have to just do this, or we’re both sunk,” he states, moving back toward the wall, the creature getting into its pouncing position growling and snarling, which he somewhat does in kind with the help of the bound creature within him, “Come on... pounce,” he remarks checking the wall behind him.

With a hiss it leaps at him. They leap up, dodging the attack their attacker hitting the wall with a heavy thud, claws running across the bricked surface, while he flies up in the air coming down on the creature’s head with all his might, pinning the creature to the ground as it hisses and snarls at him.

“Tear, merge, make whole!” his creature growls at him.

“I am... I hope,” he says, claws digging into the creature’s side, ripping chunks out of the creature. The liquid tendrils try to draw and repair the damage, while the piece in his hand is wrapped and pulled into his body under dozens of blue and black liquid tendrils, consuming the flesh and merging it into his own. The new piece sends shivers through Isaac’s body, but there is no time to dwell and think on it.

The animal below him growls and snaps at him crawling and biting at his limbs, trying to tear pieces back. The creature within him urges him to continue the devastation, tearing the other one bit by bit. Absorbing and tearing through it, beginning to reveal what was hidden underneath. Grey, brown and black mottled fur hidden deep within the hardened black and blue liquid creature.

“*What is this?*” he wonders, pulling more pieces out, leaving less and less to repair itself. The animal underneath growls and chitters, crying out in pain as he pulls the creature from its host toward him. Strength, power, surge of conflict swells within Isaac’s mind. Animal sensations, feelings, instincts flowing through him as he removes every last bit of the liquid creature.

Within minutes nothing is left of the other creature, except it's now lifeless host. Isaac pants and wheezes, letting out a deep animalistic growl. He blinks, catching himself, shuddering as the creature shifts and moves around him, “A racoon? It was a racoon?” he mutters.

“Scared, fighting, alone, making whole,” the creature states, while hisses, chattering, and other raccoon and cat-like noises fill his ears. The body around him shifts and changes around him. The raccoon-cat’s head flows out of his body, trying to bite down while a larger duplicate of his barely humanoid shaped monster pulls out biting back and forth like two vicious predatory animals fighting over claimed territory.

The pull and tug of the creatures within him, free his head and parts of his body from their coveting control but it sways and flows across his form like being pulled under water, “Hey, hey, hey! I made you whole, now give me my body back!” he yells, moving behind the dumpster, trying to stay out of any possible sight of anyone as the back-and-forth cat fight over him rages on, the rise and fall of the form around him, shifting from something even more feral than was before, to something vaguely human-ish.

There is no response from his host as its focus is for vying for control, leaving devastation in its wake. Isaac's shoes are forced from his feet, clothes stretch and torn, a realization of just how much care his guest has given to him up till this point. Crawling, growling, like two liquid creatures battling with one another flowing in and out of the other. Each fighting just as fiercely, aggressively, acting as if their life depended on this fight, but one is clearly larger, stronger, with stronger *intent* to win.

Excitement, fear, anger, anguish, delight. Adrenaline rushing through his body, as the surge of emotions and instincts brought on by the two competing sides crash through his mind like a terrible storm and he's the small boat stuck between the crashing forces.

Shifting, moving, changing, the creature around his body moves about. Claws becoming more feral with only minimal dexterity in the claws, to something more human and everything in between. The sleek black skin with blue stripes, sharp claws, vision becoming sharper than anything he's seen, a fuller spectrum than he's thought possible, the stench of the dumpster making his stomach wrench, noises from all around crashing into his head, thundering into his mind.

"Calm down... calm down. You need to stay in control. You are not to let it control you... but what if this was its plan all along? And now I am going to become some kind of bestial pawn?" he thinks, mind racing through the possibility, feeling his shifting claws squeeze and hold onto his contorted face, while the fight rages all around him.

Slowly, steadily the body became calm, the tattered bits of clothing lay at his clawed feet and hands. The full bestial creature around him with deep heavy breathing. His human body is trapped within this creature. He twitches, the excitement coming down, calm washing over him slowly.

His new monstrous alien form solidifies. His human body is trapped underneath the strong powerful creature that surrounds him like an egg and he's the yolk. He moves his hand, tensing it, feeling the claws extend outward, the elongated muzzle, pointed triangular ears, mouth full of sharp teeth, rough tongue running across the roof of his mouth. "What is this," he says with a long growl, his words distorted, gravelly.

"I should be freaking out... but I'm not. How much control is it exerting over me now? Am I stuck like this? Is it going to take me to some facility to get my mind wiped or am I going to slowly lose myself? I don't want some cliche where Bailey has to call out for my humanity in some kind of twisted beauty and the beast?"

He shakes his head, holding it with his claws, "No, no, no. I will not be a puppet," he states, looking over to the raccoon, "Yet..." he states feeling a shiver run down his spine, *"If it was me or him... It's stuck with me?"* He takes a slow deep breath, letting the cool air flood his lungs, "You can do this... Look whatever you are. This is still my body. And you will return me to my form. Got it?" he states, drawing up the courage from deep within himself. There's a moment of silence, which is laden with his deep feral breaths.

"Hey, respond. I helped you, now help me."

The creature breaks the silence, his words returning to a level of fierceness not seen since it first spoke to him, "Whole, difficult, control, help."

"Wait, are you still asking for my help? I just helped you!" he exclaims, the creature's form withdrawing back into his boy revealing his naked human form, "No, help you."

He takes a moment to pat himself down, feeling his soft tender skin, the cool air blowing into the alleyway kicking up a random grocery bag, as he looks down at himself in embarrassment, "Good, good. Try not to destroy my clothes again, please?"

"Sorry."

He sighs, rushing over to grab his backpack, then scampering back behind the dumpster, "I brought a second pair of clothes in case we had to go into the sewers again. I wasn't expecting to have my clothes torn to shreds," he says with a sigh, going commando when he puts on his new set of threads. He chugs down the last of his tantalizing mental juice, needing the power to steam his way through the events that transpired, the last of it rolling down his tongue, contract expired, in need of desperate renewal.

"You are going to tell me more about how you got here, got it?"

"Yes, show, go now, will show. Help and help."

"Ahh... well that is easy, but I need a cold coffee to cool my head from what haaaaa!" he says, stepping out of the alley way just to barely dodge out of the way of a broom swing toward his head. He catches out of the corner of his eye, his hand shifting into that clawed monster, but he quickly pulls it behind his back, his assailant an elderly anthropomorphic tortoise with notable thick glasses with a golden chain attached.

"Hey! What are you doing back there? Drugs? It's drugs, isn't it?!" she exclaims, shaking the broom at him.

"Hey, hey, hey, put that down before you put someone's eye out. Let's all remain calm here," he says, using only his normal hand to interact with her.

"You aren't from around here," she says, giving him a real stink eye.

"I'm not, I'm looking for my cat and I thought he was back there."

"You can't fool me! I have a famous detective grandson, and he knows about you hoodlums and your drug deals in the dumpster alley ways. To think it has come to my neighborhood now. Times are changing for the worst. I remember when things used to be perfect like when momma baked her apple pies, letting it cool on the windowsill."

"No, really, I was just looking for my pet cat Axel. I have a picture of him on my phone."

"There's no way to know if it is your real cat or images you get from the interwebs."

"Look ma'am. I don't mean to have any trouble."

"If you didn't want any trouble, why did you make so much noise back there? Drug deal gone bad?" she says shaking the broom in front of him.

"I thought my cat was back there, and it turned out to be a raccoon. It attacked me and well it was a harrowing experience."

"A raccoon? Is that all? You all afraid of a little trash panda?"

“I think it’s not correct to call racoons that. It’s insulting to raccoon and panda folk.”

“Hush you druggie. Just wait here till the police arrive.”

“The police?”

“Yes, I called them. After that racket? My grandson will see through your lies and lock you up. He’s such a great detective.”

“I’m sure he is ma’am. I’m a bit of a detective myself.”

“You? Pah, how could you be a detective. You’re so young. Do you know my grandson?”

“I don’t know your grandson. I am more of a hobbyist detective. Sleuthing for the truth behind conspiracy theories.”

“Oh, you are one of those flat turtles are you?”

“No, I am more of one who points fault at their logic, bringing evidence and thought against them.”

“And drugs?!”

“No, no drugs.”

She eyes him, slowly lowering her broom, “Well... you don’t respond like you are on drugs.”

“If you don’t count caffeine then I’m not.”

“My grandson lives on the stuff... so no. If he says it’s fine then I suppose it is.”

“Glad we can agree on something. Do you mind if I go? I’d like to find my cat and he’s clearly not here.”

She gives him a long hard stare, “What’s behind your back? You’ve kept your hand back there this whole time.”

“Behind my back? Oh, nothing of course,” he says, slowly pulling his hand out in front, revealing his normal human hand, “See?”

“Turn around.”

“Sure,” he says, doing so.

“Now lift your leg and hop on one foot.”

He quirks an eyebrow, “Huh? Ma’am what are you smo...”

“Do it. It’s a cop trick I learned, to see if you are doing the drugs.”

“Alright, alright,” he says, doing as she’s asked, “Happy?”

“Now pat your head and rub your belly while doing it.”

“Ahh... I don’t think I could do that while sober.”

“Do it,” she says, shaking the broom at him, almost bopping him in the face.

“I’m doing it, sheesh,” he says with a sigh, just barely managing to pull it off, with a moment of switching to which is being petted and what is being rubbed, “There happy?”

She chuckles “Yes, yes.”

“You did that last one for fun didn’t you?” he says, regaining his composure.

“It’s what you get for making such a ruckus that an old lady like me has to come all the way out here to see what kind of shenanigans is happening.”

He rubs the back of his head, “Sorry about that Miss, I was not expecting what happened to happen. Now if you don’t mind I gotta get going.”

“Go, go, all youngsters are always off rushing to the next place.”

“I just have a lot to do and not a lot of time to do it,” he says, heading off, and once he’s fair away he’ll mutter, “You can’t just come out like that. We talked about this.”

“Fear, instinct. Sorry. New feeling, hole once again.”

“So, you were split between me and that racoon?”

“Yes.”

“That was not what I was expecting, but now you’ll help me learn more about you?”

“Yes.”

“Will you answer my question about more of you now?”

“Yes.”

“Are there?”

“Yes.”

“Can you say something besides yes?”

“Yes.”

He sighs, “Is there a place we can go that I can learn more then?”

“Yes, we lead, together, show you.”

“We as you and me or we as you your two halves and I?”

“Yes.”

He takes a slow deep breath, slowly releasing it in a sigh that seems to last a lifetime, “I’m going to get some coffee and you aren’t going to stop me.”

“Yes.”

“That better not be a yes that you will stop me,” he huffs, waiting for the response only to be left in silence, “Good... good, yeah that’s good,” he says, looking over himself, pressing his thumbs to his fingers, feeling the soft tender pink skin, “*They’re still my hands... my hands... thank God I have my hands,*” he thinks, the next thing he knows he’s standing in in front of a coffee shop.

“Ah, my least favorite brand Sun Dollar Coffee. Well, it’s better than drinking water,” he says, stepping into the moderately busy shop. The sweet aroma of the I.T. coal has flooded the building several times over. He approaches the counter where a young male deer working the counter, his ears twitch, antlers already grown to an impressive size.

He looks at him with a thousand-mile stare and a forced smile, “Hello welcome to Sun Dollar, what can I get you.”

“Ahh... what to get... how about an iced triple espresso shot cinnamon vanilla bean coffee latte, large please.”

“That it?” he asks.

“Yeah, it’s all soulless crap here anyway,” he remarks with a sigh, looking over at his empty thermos with a long stare.

“Coming right up...” he says, passing on the order to his caribou coworker, “You know, if you like coffee of actual quality, I plan to open up a shop one day.”

“Oh really? I do enjoy local places, so that would be nice.”

The caribou chuckles, “Ha, that place will be nothing compared to *my* coffee place. Going to name it after my kind, and it is going to be glorious.”

“You only got that naming idea from me and my store name.”

“Nu uh, you came up with your coffee shop name when I just so happened to say mine,” the caribou exclaims, humming his way through creating Isaac’s devil’s brew.

“Jealous as always,” he says, waving his friend off.

“I’m not jealous, you are.”

Isaac clears his throat, “Ladies please. I only came to get my coffee and go. I’m sure both of your coffee brands can be a great success and exist side by side. But I’ve had a long and unusual day and it’s not over. I have a nice tip for the two of you if you can get this done, please?”

Both of them stare at him as if he was a car, but then the sign of a tip, the bill dancing in Isaac’s hand makes quick work of mortal enemies now turned lifelong friends for just a few brief moments, and before he knows it, the coffee is in hand, and he’s out the door.

Isaac takes a moment to let the cool refreshment slide across his tongue, flowing down his throat, parching his dry throat, “I should have gotten a snack but the prices in there are a killer.”

“Kill? Death? Fight?” the creature whispers into his ear, feeling a shift just under his clothes.

Isaac’s eyes widen, shaking his head whispering, “No, no, just a saying, relax,” he says the sensation dissipating, “Now, where are we,” he mutters, pulling out of his phone and within a few swipes he’s taken back by his GPS location, “What in the blazing? How did I get that far away from my car?” he grumps, sliding his thumb across the screen, “It looks like we are heading toward the area I was when I... hmm. Shit, I need to walk all the way back to my car. I am not going to walk wherever this is, understand?”

“Yes.”

Isaac rubs his temples, “Why am I not surprised by that answer?” he remarks, making his way back to the car, feeling a sense of relief when he gets back there, his civilization fuel long sense empty and tossed in the first trash can he could find.

“Now... I don’t know how you got me to go so far astray from my car on foot, but do you think it is possible you could guide me the way you want me to go from here? I prefer not to walk if I don’t have to.”

“Yes.”

“For the love that is all whole bean delight, I think I enjoyed you more when you were only half as much begging me to find your other half.”

“Hole, again. Help. Good, yes.”

“For a moment I had hope... and then... it was gone,” he says, driving off in the direction of the creature’s ‘will’ as it were. More of a feeling, a strange sense of having been in the area before even though he knows for certain he hasn’t.

As he drives down the street in a more industrial part of the town the creature stiffens within him, “Here, here, here! It happened here!”

Isaac slams on the brakes, the car behind him honks his horn as the quick adrenaline rush fades, “Where?” he asks, his knuckles go white as he grips the steering wheel.

The creature forms a clawed hand and points in the direction of the alleyway, “There?”
“Yes.”

He rolls his eyes, pulling off the side, just as the angry driver drives past him, yelling out a series of obscenities. He ignores the driver, heading down an alleyway. His shoes crunch the random bits of debris on the cracked black pavement, “Is this the place?”

“Yes... it’s...” the creature responds, with a strange vibrating growl in its voice.

Isaac raises his eye ridge, “Uh... are you okay?” he asks, his heart starts to pound with each step, hairs standing up on the back of his neck. His eyes dart from one side to the other, hands starting to shake, “W-what the heck?” he mutters, holding his hands still, a tingle rushing down his spine, breathing growing heavy.

“Calm down... calm down,” he huffs, feeling as if his heart is about to burst out of his chest. He pushes forward, finding a bent and cracked chrome metal container on the ground with a sewer drain only a few feet away. He focuses on it, feeling a draw to it like a moth to the flame and with it the weight and tension grew, the world narrowing down to this one container, only breaking away toward the drain. A surge a sensation like a tragedy took place, a murder of a loved one.

“Water. Fear. Here. Torn, broken. Lost,” the creature whispers into his ear, shifting under his body but thankfully his clothes are hiding it well.

“Relax, relax, nothing will happen to you. You’re with me... just relax or you are going to freak me out,” he says with deep heavy breaths, “*Remember what your instructor taught you. Slow deep breaths, keep focus,*” he thinks, feeling the flow in and out of his lungs, slowing his breathing to a nice steady pace.

“Now, what do we have here?” he mutters looking over the container, seeing the biohazard symbols on it, checking the unique interwoven lettered logo of the company, “Dynamic Defense Company? They are the ones with the government contracts and...” he mutters to himself, pulling out his phone, taking a video of the container as he captures all of it, “This doesn’t make any sense... are you saying you came from this container?”

“Yes.”

“For once I don’t mind that answer...” he remarks, looking around, then over at the drain, “It was raining hard the day we met... if you can call it that. You were in this and then... washed into the sewer, where I was,” he says, eyes widening, “Simplest explanation is normally the best. You aren’t an alien, but some kind of secret government funded project. Honestly, I am not sure which I would prefer,” he says, putting his phone away, “This changes everything.

We need to go. They are going to be looking for this and I doubt they wouldn't have put a tracking device on it. Last thing I need is to have them ask me questions," he says, rushing out of the alleyway.

All the while overhead a small copter drone hovers overhead, watching the container, it's camera capturing everything on film. The data is transmitted back over to the DDC, where only thirty or so minutes from the time they leave a crew from the company will retrieve the broken and most importantly *empty* container.

Miss Shirly Tempole looks over the container, running her fingers across the cracked open, "My poor baby. Lost in the world, perhaps drowned in the water. To have her life snuffed out like that," she says, with some tears swelling up in her eyes. The facility in the process of being stripped down and gutted of everything of value.

Mr. Kaffee Ploro lets out a deep sigh, "I told you; you shouldn't personify them. They are military grade bio combat armor. Nothing more."

"But they are alive."

"Created to do what we tell them to do. But now we have another one that's missing."

"Do you think the guy spotted by the container has anything to do with it?"

"I doubt it. The container has water in it, must of happened during the storm. It leaked out way before he arrived. But regardless," he says, pulling out a PDF, scrolling through the video feed, which shows one angle that gives a clear view of Isaac's face, "We'll have to give this Miller a visit. He took pictures of the container. We can't let this fiasco leak back to us."