

## Interlude – Naha Changes

Naha looked at the vial in her hands, terrified that she would drop it. It was worth more than she could imagine, and Zach had gotten it for her. She didn't know how to feel about that. He had used a favor of a High Ranker to get this for her. Something that everyone in the world would probably be willing to risk their lives for. She knew that the elixir could be useful for him too, that he could get stronger, and yet he hadn't asked for it with himself in mind. It made Naha feel... she didn't know how to feel really.

*“This will help you greatly,”* Illuiy spoke inside her head.

*“It can help him too, he could grow much stronger if he removed his Cultivation,”* Naha added.

*“Your love has decided that you are worth more than his own power. Respect that,”* Illuiy said.

Naha sighed, she knew just how much this could mean for her. And yet, just like Zach wanted to help her, she wanted to help him.

“You don't need to do it right now, we can wait a bit,” Zach said, she raised her head and met his eyes, then shook her head. She made her decision, not because Illuiy convinced her, but because she knew that Zach needed her sane.

He had done so much for her, he had come into her life and made her fall in love with the way that he viewed the world. And he fell in love with her because he had been alone for so long, consumed with anger and desire for vengeance.

He learned of who she was, of how broken and damaged she was, and he still loved her. It had taken Naha a while to accept it, but the truth was that she too had craved to have someone know the real her, know all parts of her. Her imbalance manifested in a particular type of madness. Urges that came out of nowhere and warping of the way she saw the world. She had been aware of the madness, but even so, actually trying to fix it was not something that could be done easily. It had been Zach that had made her truly try, because for the first time in a long while, she had something—someone—to

care about. She had tried very hard not to show him the worst of it, and she was very good at pretending.

But often, even in their intimate moments, her thoughts would turn to dark places. She would lie next to him, her head on his chest, her legs twined around his, and her madness would come. She would start to think about what it would feel like to have him fear her, to show him how terrifying she could be. She wondered what it would feel like to take him while he was tied up, at her mercy, while she cut lines in his chest and then licked the blood off. It excited her in more ways than one, but she resisted.

Generally, she was more stable in the bodies that she wore most often. Quell was the one that she was the most sane in, simply because she spent long periods of time in that skin. Because Zach preferred her. Each body had its own identity, its own quirks, but the newer it was the less developed. And therefore more prone to being twisted by her madness.

Her new skills helped more than she had thought that they would, and over the last few months, she had gotten better at pushing the thoughts away. But she knew that she wasn't fixed, that she was nowhere near fixed. She still wanted him to fear her, she still wondered what it would feel like to wear his skin. But she loved him, and he loved her, so she tried her best. Without **Illuiy** whispering in her head, she would've slipped up months ago. Even with him, sometimes she had to slip away, to lock herself in a room and cut her flesh just to force the thoughts to go away.

She was broken, but the year they had spent together had shown her that he was too. It made her sad, it made her want to help him, the same way that he was helping her. But she knew that she was in no place to do so. He tried to hide it, and he did well enough, she supposed, but it was hard to hide such things from someone who had spent centuries hiding who they truly were.

Zach loved her, but Naha was aware that he needed her. That she was his purpose, that without her he would succumb to his fears and his pain. She knew that she was the cause of a great amount of his pain—finding out what she was hurt him more than she imagined. It broke him in a way, and made him question everything about himself.

He had been so full of anger and despair, the life that he had on the old world had not been an easy one. And he felt responsible both for what happened there and for fulfilling the oaths given to those that had given their lives for him. Meeting Quell had been the first piece of happiness that he had touched in a long time. He hadn't even realized how much he had been alone, how much he was hurting. Quell had helped him feel joy again, and then she turned out to be a lie.

Not a complete one, Naha told herself, pieces of Quell were her after all. She did not lie about everything, but it had still been too much for him. She had seen it in his eyes, the moment when his mind broke. When he tried to correlate the image of himself with reality. He didn't need to put it into words for her to understand, she knew how to read people. Zach had always considered himself as a good person, but someone who was willing to make the hard choices for what was ultimately in service of others. And then he found out that he had fallen in love with her, a killer, a monster—much like the one that he had been hunting and hating for years before.

Naha knew that he questioned himself, how a good person could fall in love with a monster. The reason why he accepted her, why he wanted to help her, was because he needed her to get better. He needed her to become a good person, because that would prove to him that he was a good person too. That she wasn't a monster, but someone that was sick and that could be helped.

She understood Zach more than perhaps he understood himself. She knew that the truth would only hurt him if he knew. The madness that the Framework inflicted enhanced the things that were already there. One did not reach high in any focus without being able to understand it. A Cultivator in a high Realm knew their path intimately, they understood what it meant and they agreed with its purpose. A high leveled Classer already had the tendencies that the Class brought out, perhaps buried deep inside, but still there. You could not get a Class devised for something that you did not have the potential to become. A warrior would never get a Class evolution that couldn't be used to fight. A true crafter would never get anything that didn't have an application to his work.

The parts that Naha had put into her skills hadn't been twisted, her understanding of them had. The desire to punish the unworthy depended on what she considered to be unworthy, something that had changed over time. Her desire to grow stronger, had never really changed, she had just stopped caring about any moral codes that she had once held.

Then there was her love for Zach. It was the one thing that gave her the strength to push through with trying to get better. It was a vow that she had given to him, like the vows any two of her people could make long ago, before the Framework, when they decided to join their lives. A promise to always love another, the only difference was that she had made that promise something that she couldn't ever change. She did not regret the choice, skills were the most powerful things in the Infinite Realm, and few realized it. They were the tools that allowed one to build themselves up. To create the person that they wanted to be and never need to worry about something outside of themselves being able to change them.

Zach's idea to help her was a great one, as she had come to realize. She had sealed two more parts of herself inside her skills, two parts that were perhaps lesser than the more complicated parts that she had sealed before, but she did not want to put another such part into a skill. The more complicated concepts were broader, they encapsulated more things about her than something simple would. So, she put in her determination and her open-mindedness. They were simpler things, smaller in scope, but important nonetheless. Determination would serve her well in the future, and one couldn't be a good shapeshifter without being open-minded.

The vial in her hands felt heavy. She could erase her cultivation, and she wondered if she could just get the worst of her impulses out of her. The desire to instill fear in others, of being horrifying. She knew that it wouldn't fix her immediately. Her and Zach's research had led them to believe that someone who was imbalanced wouldn't be fixed immediately once they managed to get balanced again. Their mind would recover slowly, over time, just as the insanity had gotten worse over time. But she didn't know what exactly would happen if one of those influences was just gone.

She slowly uncorked the vial, and brought it slowly to her lips. She couldn't help but wonder what was going to happen to her. Losing her perks

was going to be hard, but she wondered about the impact of losing her True Body. It helped increase the speed of her shapeshifting greatly, and allowed her to shift her body on a whim with her will alone. Without that, she was going to have to rely on her class perk.

*“It is necessary, and a great gift,” Illuiy’s* voice spoke in her head.

Naha steeled herself and then drank.

The liquid burned down her throat, the sensation enough to make her grimace. And then it settled in her stomach. The interface appeared in front of her eyes, asking her which focus she wanted to remove. She picked her Cultivation without hesitating, almost afraid to wait.

As soon as she picked the option, the pain hit her in the gut, doubling her over. She grunted as it started to radiate, a searing heat that made her feel like her insides were on fire. She tried to fight through it, but it quickly built and then the pain overwhelmed her. She opened her mouth and screamed.

A moment later she felt Zach come near her, put his hand on her back, but the contact just made the pain worse. As soon as he touched her, he moved his hand away, somehow realizing that it hurt. Perhaps she screamed harder, she didn’t know. The pain made everything go white, her ears were ringing, and she couldn’t think.

She squirmed and twisted, feeling her bones, her skin, her flesh tighten, it was a sensation that she had never felt before, and couldn’t quite describe. She only knew that it hurt like nothing she had ever felt before. She didn’t know for how long she remained that way, but eventually the pain started to go away.

As reality came back to her, she realized that she was on the floor, panting, lying in her own vomit. Her eyes were blurry from tears, and as she moved she saw red on the hardwood floor, blood mixing with spit, bile, and vomit. She saw more of it a bit away, and dragging markings. Zach had to have dragged her out of the worst of it.

He was kneeling nearby, looking at her.

“How are you feeling?” He asked, he had a healing potion in his hand, but she didn’t know if that would help. She felt... drained.

“I’m fine,” she tried to say, but it came more like a garbled mess. Zach moved and reached for her, his touch didn’t send agony through her, but it did feel like her skin was sore all over.

She tried to move, but found that she didn’t have any strength. Slowly, Zach gathered her up and stood. She shivered at his touch, but it was getting better. She was soaking his shirt with blood and the stuff that she had been lying in, but he didn’t seem to care.

She did also notice that he had changed. He carried her to the bathroom, where a large tub had already been filled with water and heated. Slowly, Zach lowered her on a bench that sat in the corner and took her clothes off. She tried to help, but she realized that she was being more of a nuisance than a help, so she relaxed and let him take care of her. Once she was out of her ruined clothes, he took up a soaked towel. She realized that she had bled from all over. Streaks of blood were marking her entire body. He cleaned the worst of it from her.

Then, slowly, he gathered her up and put her in the tub. The sensation of the water hitting her skin was somewhat pleasant. It helped with the tingling on her skin. Once she was submerged down to her chest, he took a jug and washed her hair. She was glad that she hadn’t tried this in a razvor body, she couldn’t imagine how hard it would be to get all the stuff from fur.

She relaxed under his touch, as he grabbed a sponge and some cleaning scented cleaning solution. A part of her was embarrassed, she could barely move and was as weak as a babe, and she was old. She had grown used to doing things by herself. She and Zach had grown close over the last year, very close. They had done things that she knew he was uncomfortable with, but he had done them for her. They had spent all that time barely ever separated by more than a few feet. They spoke of many things, shared stories, and intimate moments. But this... it seemed more intimate than anything else they had done.

She had never had someone care for her like this, not in all of her years. She didn’t quite know what to do. She had been in love before, but none of her previous relationships had ended well. Some died, from monsters, from old age, from accidents. Everyone around her seemed to leave her behind, it made her want to never love anyone again.

And then she met Zach, and she saw a Ranker. A man who was going to get stronger, who needed to get stronger to prove to himself that he hadn't been wrong. And she fell in love with that part of him. She put that love in her skill because she didn't want to fall out of love again, because she was tired of being alone.

Now, as he was taking care of her, she couldn't help it—tears started flowing down her face.

“What's wrong? Am I hurting you?” Zach asked, concerned. He moved his hand off her body, but she quickly shook her head.

She opened her mouth and spoke slowly, making an effort to form the right sounds. “No, I'm...” she couldn't say anything else, her throat closed up.

Zach seemed to understand, which only made things worse for her. He continued washing her, and she cried.

She wondered if perhaps this had something to do with the loss of her Cultivation. If perhaps the removal of it, the return to balance, had somehow broken something loose inside of her. She couldn't remember the last time she cried, and now she started bawling her eyes out.

*“Everything will be alright, Nahamassa,”* Illuivy told her.

She didn't have the strength to answer.

Naha woke up slowly, feeling rested and at least partly back to herself. And yet, somehow she knew that something was... different. She wasn't the same as she had been before. She was in her bed, wearing her nightshirt. The room was shrouded in darkness, and through the window, she could see that it was night. She remembered Zach washing her, and then bundling her up and taking her to the bed, where she fell asleep immediately. The entire ordeal had drained her, both physically and mentally.

She looked around and found Zach sleeping next to her in a chair. Just looking at him made her feel warm and content. Something was definitely wrong, she realized. She loved him, but she hadn't felt this way before. She knew that the reason had to be the removal of one of her focus, there was more to it than just madness it seemed. She felt... lighter, but... she could tell

that she wasn't fixed. She didn't feel the need to make him fear her, but the look of his skin, was still appealing to her. She turned her mind from that thought, pushing it violently back. She didn't want to tarnish this moment.

So, she pulled her screens and looked at him to distract herself.

Name	Nahamassa Planerunner
Race	Ravzor (Great Plane — Iteration

<b>Titles</b>		
<b>Adventurer</b>	Hunted more than 100 monsters	+5 to all stats, 5 000 Essence
<b>Hero of Promise</b>	Save more than 10 people with a single action	+5 to all stats, 5 000 Essence
<b>First to Ten</b>	First person in the world to reach level Ten	+10% to all stats, 10 000 Essence
<b>One Against Many</b>	Fight against more than 10 opponents and win	+5 to all stats, 5 000 Essence
<b>Beloved</b>	Loved by more than half of a world's population	+50 to all stats, 100 000 Essence
<b>True Understanding V</b>	Evolve a skill to tier 6	+20 to all stats, 20 000 Greater Essence (per tier 6 skill)
<b>Lord</b>	Reach Lord Realm	+5 to all stats, 500 Greater Essence
<b>Murderer</b>	Murder more than 10 people that you had no connection and	+2 to all stats, 10 Greater Essence



	that wished you no harm outside of war or feud setting	
<b>Cannibal</b>	Kill more than 5000 people of your own race for their Essence	+10 to all stats, 50 Greater Essence
<b>Torturer</b>	Torture a person for more than three months	+2 to all stats, 500 Essence
<b>Class Evolution II</b>	Evolved your class for the second time.	+10 to all stats, 50 Greater Essence
<b>Bloody Hands</b>	Murder more than 100 people that you had no connection and that wished you no harm outside of war or feud setting	+10 to all stats, 10 000 Greater Essence
<b>Burglar</b>	Steal more than 10 items that you have no right to	+2 to all stats, 10 Greater Essence
<b>Cruel Mind</b>	Torment more than 100 people that you had no connection and that wished you no harm outside of war or feud setting	+10 to all stats, 5000 Greater Essence
<b>Thief</b>	Steal more than 100 items that you have no right to	+15 to all stats, 1000 Greater Essence

<b>Beyond Understanding II</b>	Focus and specialize your understanding of a tier 6 skill.	<b>+250 to all stats, 100 000 Greater Essence (per focused skill)</b>
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<b>Perks</b>	
Hunter's Nose (Class Perk)	Five times per day magnify your sense of smell by a factor of ten.
Partial Shift(Class Perk)	Change a body part into a different shape. Can only shift into shapes of animals that you have personally killed. Shape change lasts for ten minutes.
Silent Hunter (Class Perk)	Your movements don't disrupt the air around you, making you nearly silent. Strength of effect depends on dexterity stat.
Shifting and Malleable (Bond Perk)	As long as you are bonded with Greed and Change, you are no longer affected by stat imbalance or sickness.
Hunter's Stamina (Class Perk)	+40% to stamina pool.
Devour Life (Class Perk)	Executing attack. Once per year kill a person to steal one fifth of their remaining life, and add it to your own. Only works on people on the same tier of power as you.
Form Shift (Class Perk)	Devour a piece of a corpse and gain its form. You can completely shift into that form and stay in it indefinitely. You retain all

	your stats and power. Your status screen will change to reflect the identity of your new form. You may have <b>5</b> forms saved at a time. Adding a new form beyond the last slot will destroy the oldest form.
Greater Reflex (Class Perk)	Your reflexes are enhanced by 100%, speed of response equal to twice your dexterity.
Greater Strike (Class Perk)	Once per combat your next attack deals 3x damage.
Rapid Regeneration (Class Perk)	Once per combat, increase your body's regeneration by a factor of ten.
Shadow Step (Skill Perk)	Your <b>My Shadow, As Night Itself</b> allows for blending in shadows. Five times per battle, and unlimited outside of it, you may step through one shadow and come out through another as long as the distance is no longer than ten meters. +10% to dexterity.
Shadow Stab (Skill Perk)	Your <b>My Way, In the Shadows</b> allows from attacking from shadows. All attacks made from the shadows while undetected deal 200% damage. +10% to strength.

<b>Class</b>	<a href="#">Devourer (E)</a>
<b>Level</b>	148
<b>Combat Ability</b>	Devour Flesh

<b>Movement Ability</b>	Devourer's Step
<b>Support Ability</b>	Greater Shapeshift

<b>EVOLUTION ATTUNEMENT BONUS:</b>	
<b>Fleshcraft</b>	All regenerative powers have their effectiveness increased by 20%. Gain +10% to wisdom and +10% to vitality.

<b>Passive Skills</b>	<b>Active Skills</b>
Perfect Danger Sense	Perfect Lacerate
Perfect Shadow Strike Style: My Way, In the Shadows	Perfect Shadow Stealth: My Shadow, As Night Itself
Mind Resistance >> Greater Mind Resistance >> Clear Mind	Perfect Imitation
Night Eyes >> Greater Night Eyes >> Night Vision	Evade >> Enhanced Evade >> Evasive Step >> Greater Evasive Step >> Spatial Step
	Meditation >> Enhanced Meditation >> Focused Meditation >> Greater Focused Meditation >> Singular Mantra

Strength	1335
Dexterity	1368
Vitality	1088
Endurance	860

Intelligence	1043
Wisdom	1525

Her Path was truly gone. She didn't know what to feel about that. She had had it for so long, had learned to rely on things that it provided, and now she no longer had them. She was going to need to spend a long time figuring out how this changed her, how the loss of her True Body would impact her shapeshifting. But, she couldn't help but smile. She was no longer imbalanced, and now getting better wasn't just a dream. Still tired, she closed her eyes, and drifted off to sleep.