Summary

The King’s reign has ended. And with that, comes a new chapter in the lives of The Survivors. Learning to live without fear although not all is completely well... Not off the bat at least. It takes time to adjust… To allow the light in from the shadows.
All seemed to be quiet as it were in the Shadow World. Hounds playing with each other under the moonlight that was breaking through the clouds, the pigmen at rest, just a normal night by their standards.

Wickerbottom was silent in thought as she walked about the land, taking everything in. While she was more than ready to be a leader, it was still an adjustment she was getting used to. She had a lot on her shoulders now and she had many ideas in mind in how to improve the place.

*I want my home to be how it used to be if not better.*

She sighed, rubbing her temples a little.

*Just hate the headaches that come with this. Even us shadow beings are still susceptible to insanity.*

"Got a lot on your mind, Your Highness?"

Wickerbottom glanced to the side, seeing Jack floating not too far from her.

"Just tending to the land and trying to keep my head clear. Being ruler is no easy task. All the more reason I'm glad I didn't let Wilson subject himself to this. While he is strong in mind these headaches are not exactly fun to deal with."

Jack shook his head.
"Oi… You would think the shadows would have more respect for their ruler."

"They just have needs, hence the headaches. It's their way of saying something is wrong and they want it fixed now. Maxwell spoiled them so it was never really an issue for him for the most part." Wickerbottom scowled a little. "Of course, he just made it that way."

"I admit, while I have been part of this world for two years I still feel I don't know much about the shadows even from the stuff you have told me… They're… like you aren't they? Just… I dunno… sick?"

"Something like that but what caused this to happen is in the past. I have full intentions of helping my people get back to their former selves. They don't have to live in hiding anymore or as they are. Maxwell is no longer holding on to us with his iron fist. It's time for us to flourish once more."

"And I'll do what I can to help. You sure you don't mind me being the Reaper still? I know it's kind of law that when a new reign begins a new Reaper is chosen."

Wickerbottom gave a gentle look.

"I know you still have business here to settle Jack and you've been one of the best the Shadow World has had in awhile so I'm honored to still have you as part of my court."

Jack smiled back, giving a bit of sneaky look in his eyes.

"Good. Because I admit, I'd love to get my hands on Maxwell and give him a good slice with my wings."

Wickerbottom chortled a little.

"Now, now, Jack, while he may deserve it, it's best to leave him alone unless he causes a problem. If he bothers someone, all bets are off and he's all yours."

"Perfect." Jack rubbed his hands together. "So, where do we begin?"

"Well, I need to help The Survivors in regards to having access to all the islands in the area so first things first, we create more portals. After that, we'll see."

"We sure got a tall order of things to complete."

"Yes, but thankfully we have plenty of time to do it."

Jack nodded, looking up at the sky. "This place is different with actual moonlight. Not pitch blackness. Charlie no longer having to prowl in the dark." I hope she's adjusting alright. Two years of being a beast.

"I'm thankful she is no longer is binded to The Grue. But that doesn't mean there isn't one prowling around, it's just not Charlie herself." Wickerbottom pinched the bridge of her nose. "You know very well why Maxwell got the idea to fuse her to it."

He narrowed his eyes, growling under his breath. "Oh yes. Wanted to make use of her and to break William even more. Punishing me and her were his best ways to break him for as long as he had and if I ever get my hands on him I will cause a problem for him if he ever tries anything."

"And knowing him, he will try something, he's just biding his time since well, we're on full alert. He's not an idiot but he is not one to give in easily either. But when he comes, we'll be waiting for
him."

Jack gave a nod, sighing a bit.

"It never ends."

"Just how it is." Wickerbottom snapped her fingers. "Sebastian."

A shadow creature materialized near them.

"Yessss Missstress?" It hissed.

"Always one for the dramatics." Jack remarked.

Wickerbottom rolled her eyes, smiling a little.

"Could you please gather some others and help bring materials in constructing portals like the one in the throne room? I need to create access points for Wilson and his team to rescue other survivors. Also, see if you can arrange scout teams to look for said survivors and make sure they do NOT get the urge to eat anyone. Understood?"

The creature nodded quickly.

"Yesss my mistress. I will be quick!" Sebastian disappeared as he hurried off to complete his task.

"I bet he'll be happy to take human form again."

"All in due time, just need to work on finding something in the Codex that can reverse whatever Maxwell did. For now, he's just stuck like that."

Jack sighed a bit. "The blasted curse."

"It was awful, yet my people brought it on themselves so many years ago, long before my time."

"Indeed. Because some got it in their heads..."

"It was just a bad idea to try and overthrow someone who was already slipping into his own brand of insanity... I need to remember to tell you about that whole debacle later."

Jack crossed his arms.

"Indeed you do. To imagine Maxwell was ever slightly san."

"Everyone has a point in their life when they were different. We just change with time."

"That is so true, Your Highness. Well..." He looked to her. "We also can make changes and I'll help however I can."

"And I know you will do your best." Wickerbottom looked behind her, seeing Sebastian approaching with other shadow creatures behind him. "We all will."

From those here in our world, to those in the Light Dimension.

This is a new beginning for all of us.
Conversation

Chapter by AileenRoseven
What's the matter? Wererit you expecting me?

You knew this was inevitable.

Or were you just trying so hard to deny it?
Though, I understand where you're coming from, trust me. I mean, I'm you after all. I understand your fear of being lost to the shadows... to be shit out.

Thief just asSaaren as Maxwell.

Well... Guess what?

I don't want to be like him either. I don't want to be anything like that bloody fool. So, again, I understand how you're feeling.

However... If we are going to avoid that there can't exactly be two of us.

So let's just do us a favor and get this over with. Fal.
W-Wait. We don't have to do this.

I WANT to do this.

Now just shut up...

Auuuuuugh!!

And fight me!!

Ngh...

... "sigh" Alright.
You want a quick fight?

Then here you go. Take the shot and finish it.

Fine.
I think that's enough fighting from both of us.

You... You're not going to kill me?

What would be the point?

It wouldn't matter who goes down, we would just find a way to come back and it would just be a never ending cycle.
And we would be no better than Maxwell... And yet, we already are better than him.

You could have killed me instantly. I KNOW you could have killed me instantly. Yet you didn’t. That says something about us.

We were both scared... But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Light and Shadow need each other in order to exist. So... I think we can be the same.

After all... You’re me, just like you said.
So, how about we
Want to give it a try

...Yeah... I'd like that.

Then come on.
We got work to do.

END
"Pulse… stable. Breathing…shallow." Wilson sighed as he took off his stethoscope, slinging it around his neck. "Nothing different from the days before."

It had been about a week since The Survivors had settled into their new home. Work was being done to make it more hospitable and so far, progress was being made at a good pace.

*Wish I could say the same for William.*

"How is he?"

Wilson looked over to the entrance of the medical tent, seeing Charlie poking her head in.

Wilson frowned.

"Same as always."

Charlie frowned as well.

"Oh." She made her way over, kneeling next to Wilson, looking at William. "It's been over a week… I'm starting to worry. What if he never wakes up?"

"Hey." Wilson placed a hand on her shoulder. "We need to remember something. He was fused to someone for nearly two years. Two years of having to bend to their will. Two years of suffering whatever kind of torture they put him through. Two years of basically insanity nonstop. Whatever
Maxwell did before I separated them, combined with that, took its toll. What I'm trying to say is, it makes sense why he's still resting but I wouldn't give up hope just yet."

Charlie nodded.

"I understand. Just... I want to hear his voice again. I want to hear him as William. I want to see him smile again. But most of all, I just want to be with him."

Wilson gave her a gentle look, squeezing her shoulder a little.

"I know, Charlie and I'm sure once he wakes up you're all he'll be able to think about. He just needs time to heal. Both physically and mentally."

"Right. I know the others are waiting as best as they can too. Wigfrid has plans to make him meat and carrot stew when he's up, Wolfgang wants to see if he's still good at the French he taught him and Wes... I dunno. He's always full of surprises. Then of course, the twins just want to give him the biggest hug ever."

"Well, I know one thing he won't be lacking in when he's ready." Wilson smiled a bit. "He'll have plenty of love of all kinds from all corners. Which he'll need, given all. He's quite lucky in that regard."

"Jack would be happy to know he's being taken care of and still loved. It's what he would've wanted for him." Charlie sighed a little. "Since he can't do it himself."

Wilson sighed. "Though, I admit, I'm questioning my own methods a little. It's hard to treat a person when you don't know what medications they can tolerate. On top of that..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm still getting the hang of this whole medical aspect."

"Your dark knowledge let's you know everything, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. But it doesn't allow me the luxury of knowing all of a person's past and I have to hear something about it or see something before the rest pieces it together."

"I see. Well..." Charlie hummed in thought. "I can't bring you a file but Jack was William's main doctor for the longest time and knew all of his health problems even back when they were lads. If there's anyone who would know his history from start to finish it's him."

Wilson nodded to himself. "Then I'll just have to see if he's willing to make an appearance for me. At least for the sake of William. I just... don't want to make his situation worse for him."

"I'm sure he wouldn't mind." Charlie smiled a little. "He would do anything for William. After all, the two years of being Reaper, he kept hoping somehow or someway William could come back. Then you came."

Wilson chuckled a bit, giving a small shrug. "And I was just glad to be able to do something. It's been one heck of a ride that's for sure and Jack was such a huge help when we were taking down Maxwell. It helped to have a guide... and he kept my soul from being devoured. He had a hand in saving my life. I want a hand in helping his brother's."

"And knowing him, he'll take that as payment for saving your life. All you need to do is ask him. Though um... don't expect me to accompany you to the Shadow World." Charlie shuddered a little. "I just... don't think I can ever go back there like you guys are. Something just feels off even when standing near the portal."
"You spent so long stuck there. I would never ask you to return there." Wilson brought an arm around her. "All I will ask is that you make sure this one." He nodded to William. "Doesn't suddenly start sleepwalking."

Charlie giggled.

"It's a deal."

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After packing a bag for the night and letting the others know where he was going, Wilson headed off through the portal.

*Alright, best place to go is just straight back to my old camp. Might not be the best place but it's a good chance I could run into him to there. At least it's autumn and not summer or winter.*

Wilson could see the base in view. It was surprising to see it was still standing even after being away for so long. There were some areas of it that were roughed up but it was still holding strong.

*Repair work should fix that no problem-*

"RARF! RARF! RARF!"

A familiar figure came running up to Wilson, knocking him over as it tackled him to the ground, licking him all over his face.

"RARF!"

Wilson burst out laughing as he petted the creature on the head, trying to get away from the barrage of licking.

"Chester! Silly ol'boy!"

"Bark!"

Chester stopped, letting Wilson sit up, cuddling up to the man, whimpering a little. The message was clear.

"I missed you."

Wilson brought his arms around Chester, resting his head atop his for a few moments. "I missed you too my dear friend. I'm sorry I haven't brought you through the portal yet. Just have to make sure it's safe for you to go through."

"Rawr."

"I think he was just getting worried you weren't coming back for him."

Wilson looked up, seeing Jack perched on top of the fort structure, a small smile on his face.

"He's been waiting here the whole time since you went to see Her Highness."

Wilson smiled a little, giving a slight wave. "Just glad he hasn't decided picking a fight with the killer bees is a good idea… again."

Chester whimpered, nuzzling up to him.
"Still, he was willing to wait as long as he needed." Jack came down, removing his hood. "How has the Light Dimension been treating you? I know it's not exactly Earth but from what Her Highness has told me it's a nice little home away from home."

"Oh, it's turning out just fine. Getting the structures built and all. Not perfect yet but it's a good place to be. The girls love it there. I haven't seen them this happy in a long time. Though… there is one problem."

"What's that? Are there monsters there too? Some kind of other problems when it gets dark? I sure hope not. I thought Grue problems were a Shadow World exclusive."

Wilson shook his head. "No, no, nothing like that. It actually concerns William. He's stable, mind you but… Ugh, I can't seem to get him to wake up and on top of that, I've noted his breathing is shallow all the time. Sometimes he goes into coughing fits."

Jack groaned, running a hand through his hair.

"Maxwell... Maxwell... Maxwell. I wanted to kill him multiple times when he started smoking." Jack growled, his eyes seeming to light up a little brighter. "William didn't have good lungs to begin with and he up and did that as an insult to my face."

"... Oh you have to be kidding me. Maxwell possessed him and never even thought "gee these lungs sure are terrible"!?!"

"Well, they weren't awful, awful like they were when he was a lad. Actually, by the time he was in his twenties he was pretty close to that of a normal person thanks to my work. When I had finished medical school I devoted time to figuring out treatments for him. His main issue was not being able to get enough oxygen, so anything like long distance travel or extensive activities would leave him exhausted. So, I was able to find ways to get his lungs to function better to the point he was able to finally handle things like traveling overseas so he could come to America."

Wilson frowned.

"And Maxwell ruined all that work to punish you both but that's why I'm here, Jack. I want to undo what was done. I want to give him a fighting chance so when he wakes up he has the best chance for a normal life - As much as normal can get where we're at currently." He sighed. "Unfortunately, this dark knowledge isn't perfect. I need help."

Jack rubbed the back of his neck.

"Well… I can teach you what I know I just… don't think I can do anything physically and on top of that, I need to see William myself but… I don't know if I could go into the Light Dimension. I'm kind of bound to here as it were with my duties and... I don't know what would happen if I did enter it."

"If I found out if it was safe would you come? … Or if I had to, I could have him brought here instead."

Jack shook his head.

"Absolutely not. You're not bringing William back here in the state he's in. I'll take the risk of just going there."

"Well, all discoveries were made with risks in mind weren't they?"
"Yep. Even in medicine. Well, if Her Highness needs another Reaper I'm sure she can find the next eligible ghost."

"... Dark."

"When you've lived in this world for two years, you start to grow a very jaded sense of humor."

Wilson shrugged, petting the top of Chester's head.

"If it makes you feel better, I've often entertained thoughts of ripping out Maxwell's lungs, if he even possesses them, to stick them into William."

"Oh you wouldn't want those lungs to begin with." Jack smirked. "They'd have his nastiness all over them."

"Oh so true, so true." Wilson snickered a little. "And besides, they're full of hot air. Like he was!"

"Ha!" Jack threw his head back laughing. "True. Alright, let's go have a chat with Her Highness about me taking leave for an hour or two... and bringing this little fluff ball back to camp."

"Sir yes sir!"

"Rarf!"

oooooo

"Hm..." Wickerbottom circled around Jack, taking in all Wilson had told her and what they were both asking of her. "Well... It should be possible. But there might be side effects even I don't know about. After all, Jack serves as the light in the Shadow World. I'm not entirely sure what will happen if he steps into the Light Dimension. Could either be good or bad but as for being gone for a few hours, I can just handle his burden for the time he is gone."

"Which is all we need. I just need time to soak in the information and do what I need to." Wilson replied. "And it would only be for a few hours at most."

"And as for those unexpected side effects, I'll take the risk." Jack gave a determined look. "I don't want to stand by again and do nothing while William is struggling. I've had enough of that."

Wickerbottom sighed.

"Alright. Just be mindful. I'll be standing by if something goes wrong. Oh, and Wilson, it's completely safe to take Chester too."

"YES!" Wilson cheered a bit before he cleared his throat. "I-I mean, how wonderful. Thank you kindly."

"RARF!" Chester nuzzled up against his leg.

Wickerbottom chortled a little.

"I believe you two have work to do. Now, go on."

Both nodded, making their way for the portal.

Jack took a deep breath, removing his cloak entirely.
"I'm coming, William."

Wilson looked to him. "Let's go."

Without another word, they stepped into the light.

Jack cringed a little, feeling something pierce through him but it soon faded as they stepped into the dimension. Sights of open fields and mountains meeting his eyes… and it felt warm.

**Warmth…? When was the last time I felt that…?**

Jack looked around, taking everything in… then looked to Wilson, who was staring at him wide eyed.

"What?" Jack asked.

"Uh… wardrobe change much?"

Jack looked at himself, seeing he was no longer in his Reaper attire. Instead, he was in his old slacks and button shirt along with a red bow tie.

"Huh…? H-How…?" Jack looked back to Wilson confused. "I haven't worn these clothes since I died."

"She did say there could be side effects." Wilson replied, just as confused… and curious. "... And yet I wonder." He reached out to touch Jack's shoulder.

Much to both their surprise, Wilson was able to place his hand firmly on it.

"... Wilson… What about my eyes? Are they… normal?"

Wilson nodded slowly.

"Completely normal. I can see the color clearly and they're not glowing."

"... I represent the light in the Shadow World. This is the Light Dimension."

"... You get to have a temporary body." Wilson said with genuine surprise.

"I guess it kind of makes sense. This place is linked to the Shadow World so I guess when something of light comes in it just… becomes normal."

"It makes sense. There's no need for a Reaper or a Grue in this world. It's a haven."

"... Well… I'm not questioning it. Though I don't want anyone seeing me. Just… Reasons. I'm not a permanent resident and I'd rather not draw attention to myself."

Wilson nodded, giving an understanding look.

"I know exactly what you mean…. Let's head straight to the medical tent then. The girls won't come within ten feet of it if that's what you're worried about and we have a distraction." Wilson looked to Chester. "Go find the girls, Chester."

Chester nodded before running off.

Jack got a sad look in his eyes.
"It's exactly what I'm worried about."

Wilson frowned. "They love you very much. They still think of you as their hero."

"And I'm happy to hear that. I just… don't want to break their hearts knowing I can't be here all the time."

"I understand." Wilson lead the way, keeping Jack out of view, taking a different path than he normally would. "You're a good father, Jack."

"I did what I could." Jack kept his focus on the tent, heading straight inside. "And I'm trusting you to pick up what I left behind."

"And I do as best as I can." Wilson set down his bag, doing a quick vital check on William. "They're loved." And William you're not helping my case. Still the same as usual.

Jack swiped his stethoscope, doing the exact same thing. He closed his eyes, focusing on everything he was hearing.

This brings back memories.

"Will, you trust me, right?"

"Y-Yeah."

"Then I need you to trust me that I know what I'm doing. It's going to be hard. It's probably going to hurt too. But I promise in the end you'll be healthy."

Jack sighed, looping the stethoscope around his neck.

"Just as I thought. His breathing patterns match the ones I remember him having before I treated him. Save they're a little worse. He's congested because of the smoke damage."

"I was worried about that. His heart rate stays steady but his breathing just seems to take a dive." Wilson crossed his arms. "It'll be a challenge but one I'm willing to take on."

"I guess we could try the treatments I did previously but I don't know if it'll be as effective with the inclusion of smoke damage."

"We have to try. So if it's not as effective, we'll just double the doses or try new medications in addition."

"Main thing is to just clear the airways. I used a combination of both medicine and… as silly as it sounds, nature. Part of training William's lungs to take in more air, I'd have him take walks with me but that part will have to come later when he's awake. For now, we'll just start with simple medicine and who knows, since your powers allow you learn anything science, you might be able to develop something even I don't know."

Wilson smirked, giving a nod, a determined look coming to his eyes. "I'm willing to give it a try." He offered Jack a handshake. "Shall we, Doctor?"

Jack smiled, shaking his hand.

"We shall, Doctor."

They got straight to work, going late into the night with their treatments. Keeping track of things,
Wilson taking in everything Jack was doing and saying to him. The powers filling in what he wasn't sure on.

_I just hope this works._

"Okay… I think this is as far as we go." Jack hummed in thought, putting finishing touches on a medical report, clipping all the pages together. "This has everything on William's medical history so hopefully it might be helpful in figuring out further treatments without me here."

Wilson nodded, leaning back a little. "I'm sure it will. Thank you for this. It was extremely helpful and informative. I'm confident I can handle it now that I have the knowledge of what to do for his health's sake."

"You're faster than any intern I saw in the hospitals I worked at, that's for sure." Jack looked to William, smiling as he took note of his breaths being much more evenly paced. "Brother."

Wilson smiled softly. "He's going to be just fine now."

"I have you to thank for that." Jack moved over to William, holding one of his hands. He closed his eyes, taking in the little warmth they had, feeling the pulse from William's wrist. "... It's weird, It's been the longest time since I've been able to do something as simple as hold someone's hand and I just… can't help but take in all the details."

"Things can make you look at everything in perspective."

William squeezed his hand faintly, taking Jack by surprise.

"Brother…?" Jack asked softly, bringing his other hand over William's. He squeezed his hand again, stirring just a little.

"He's in there."

Jack nodded, brushing part of William's hair out of his face.

"Hang in there." Jack cringed a little, pulling his hand back. "Agh…"

Wilson frowned, laying a hand on his shoulder. "You need to get back to the Shadow World. It's been more than just a few hours. I'll let you know how he's doing and adjusting."

"Thank you. Ngh…" Jack held out his hand, seeing the faint glow of a life line sitting in his palm. "Oh please don't be someone dead." He pulled away from Wilson, making his way for the tent exit. He looked back one last time, showing his eyes were starting to revert back. "Take care of them."

He hurried out, booking it straight to the portal, disappearing within seconds.

Wilson sighed heavily.

"I promise." He murmured more so to himself now than anything else. "I will protect them with all I have."
Comfort in the Dark

Wendy couldn't sleep. Even though there was virtually no danger outside and she had her sister alive and well on the bed roll across from her, she still couldn't relax. She could swear it seemed like the roof of the tent was moving in closer towards her in the dark… and she hated it.

"Why do we gotta have our own tent? It's not fair."

"Abi…?" She whispered. "Abi, you up?"

"Mm…?" Abigail yawned a bit. "Yeah, Sis…?"

Wendy frowned, feeling a small pang of guilt, wondering if she had woken her twin up. "I didn't wake you, did I?"

"Nope, I've still been awake. I can't sleep."

"Me either."

Abigail sighed.

"The dark may be safe now yet… it doesn't feel safe. I still feel like something is waiting to get us."

Wendy nodded. "Me too." She sat up, feeling around for the lantern Wilson had given them. She soon found it and turned it on, illuminating the tent. "I don't like sleeping in here all alone either.
Papa was always with us before."

"Yeah, Willow too. We knew if something came they'd both be up and take care of whatever it was but now it's just you and me. It... feels lonely."

Wendy got up, bringing her blanket around her like a cloak. "Then let's find Papa. He wouldn't be mad, right?"

"I don't think so." Abigail got her blanket as well, taking her sister's hand. "Come on."

They headed out of their tent, making their way around quietly in the camp. Some survivors were still up, sitting around the campfire, talking the night away but none of them were Wilson so the girls paid no mind to them. They soon came upon Wilson's tent, peering inside, surprised to see Wilson himself was still up. He was reading a book and taking notes by lantern light.

"Papa?" Wendy spoke up. "You're still awake?"

"I thought you said it was bedtime." Abigail blinked.

Wilson looked to the girls in surprise, giving a sheepish look.

"I couldn't sleep. Insomnia." He gave a concerned look. "Though you two should be in bed. Is something wrong?"

"We hate our tent!" Both twins exclaimed. "It's dark and it's scary and it's too far away from you!"

Wilson was taken aback, nearly falling over in surprise.

"G-Girls..." Wilson wasn't sure what to say in response.

"I thought they were excited at the idea of having their own "room" as it were. I didn't expect this.

"W-We thought it'd be fun." Abigail looked down. "But it doesn't feel safe. Once the light was off we couldn't relax and it still feels like something's watching us. Waiting to get us cause you're not there."

"C-Can we please stay?" Wendy pleaded. Both twins looked exhausted and there was some lingering fear in their eyes.

Wilson's gaze soften a bit, a small smile crossing his face. He set down his book and journal, patting the areas beside him on his straw roll.

"Come here."

They hurried over, lying beside him, Wendy on his right Abigail on his left.

"Thanks Papa." Abigail hugged his side. "Sorry. It's just... hard."

"It's okay." Wilson stroked her hair. "I completely understand."

She relaxed, nuzzling his hand a little. "We love you."

"A lot." Wendy added, huddling close, a yawn escaping her. "Just... don't wanna be too far."

Wilson made himself comfortable, dimming the light of the lantern, bringing them closer to him.
"And I love you both so much." He brought his blanket over all three of them. "And I want you to feel safe so, you're welcome to my tent. Besides, you're my girls, I wouldn't have it any other way."

The twins smiled, laying their heads on his shoulder. "Thanks, Papa." Wendy whispered.

"We won't kick or nothin'." Abigail yawned, closing her eyes, curling up. "And we'll help in the mornin'."

"I know you will." Wilson gave them both a kiss on the head. "But right now you just need to sleep and if any monster wants to get you, they're going through me first."

"And you'll kick their butts?"

"And make 'em run away?"

"You know it." Wilson smiled.

The twins smiled, relaxing against him. It wasn't long before they were both fast asleep, keeping close to their father. Safe and sound.

Wilson gave a gentle look, shifting a bit so the girls were comfortable before closing his eyes, drifting off himself.

_Sweet dreams._
"Alright, first mission ever. This is going to be interesting." Wilson said, looking at the portal before him, Woodie standing next to him. "Ready?"

"Sure am." Woodie lifted his axe over his shoulder. "Lucy?"

"You know it, Love."

"Good." Wilson took a deep breath. "We're not going to be looking for much since Grandmother hasn't been able to localize other survivors yet but we're going to see if we can find anything she can't."

"And we're also checking to be sure Maxwell isn't trying anything, right?"

Wilson grinned. "But of course and if he is, take him down or at least scare him off." He cleared his throat, giving a determined look. "Now, CHARGE!"

Woodie grinned, running in with him. Soon, they found themselves back in the Shadow World, though in territory they didn't recognize.

"This… isn't the throne room." Woodie said, looking around. "I thought there was only one portal."

"Was." Wilson quipped, looking around. "Grandmother has been trying to connect the islands by building more of these Florid Posterns as she calls them."
"I see… and how exactly does the system work? Do they just randomize where you go or do they take to the Light Dimension if you enter them from this side?"

"I believe the destination to the Light Dimension is the same regardless." Wilson explained. "Though it would make sense to not have us start off in the throne room."

"Right." Woodie held Lucy in a ready position. "I just don't recognize any of this terrain."

Wilson pulled out his map, looking at it.

"Hrm… I… don't recognize it either. Well, we'll just have to figure it out."

"Right." Woodie started looking around with Wilson, keeping to his side. "It just never crossed my mind there would be other terrains besides the one we were all surviving in. Makes you feel rather small realizing how big this world actually is."

"It's a strange feeling, that is for sure." Wilson looked around, noticing some of the things he was seeing.

"... Is that… a living tree?" Wilson asked as he walked up to an odd looking tree. "... It has a face."

Woodie looked at it as well, tilting his head.

"... I ain't cutting that." Lucy dead panned. "It has a face. That would just be mean."

"Agreed. I'm calling it Frank."

"Very well." Wilson jotted it down on the map. "Frank the Living Tree." He looked around. walking further… not realizing something was lurking under his feet. "Ah and here's a swamp-"

A large tentacle shot up, wrapping itself around his leg. "WAH!"

Wilson flailed, dropping his map as the tentacle thrashed him about. "OOOOF! NONONO!!"

"Hang on Wilson!" Woodie gave the tentacle a hard swing with Lucy, causing it to drop him, Woodie acting quickly to catch him. "Got ya!"

The tentacle came in from a second attack, Woodie jumping out of the way, giving it another hit with Lucy.

"BACK OFF!"

It slithered back into the ground. Wilson gave Woodie a grateful look mixed with a sheepish one.

"I apologize."

"Hey, don't worry about it." Woodie set him down. "We've never been in a swamp before so it kind of spooked me too."

Wilson nodded, dusting himself off. "Just so much curious territory. I just wanted to see more of it."

"And I do too. Let's just try not to get ourselves killed."

"We'll be safe."
They decided to continue onward, minding the swamp area in case more tentacles decided to catch them off guard. Thankfully, bubbles in the ground were enough to be warning signs. Though Wilson couldn't help but notice something else. Woodie was generally rather relaxed for the most part in the times Wilson had spent with him. But as it were right now, he wore a more serious and alert look and had Lucy ready to swing too. It… was kind of odd. Plus, at the slightest sign that something was going to attack, Woodie got in front of him.

After another unfortunate encounter with a tentacle, resulting in said tentacle's demise at Woodie's hands, Wilson had to speak up.

"Woodie, what's going on with you?"

"Eh?" Woodie looked to him confused. "What do you mean?"

Wilson raised an eyebrow. "I haven't seen you ever get this… protective. At the slightest sign of danger you do all the fighting." He lifted up the prize from the latest tentacle kill. A spiked weapon. "I think I can handle myself-"

"I just don't want you dying, okay?" Woodie replied quickly, turning away from Wilson. "Isn't that what friends do? Make sure the other doesn't get himself killed?"

"Yes, so let me do my fair share-!"

"No!"

Another tentacle came up out of the swamp, wrapping itself around Woodie, bringing him into the air, thrashing him around.

"WAH!"

"Woodie!" Wilson cried before growling, lunging at the tentacle, attacking it with his newfound weapon. "LET GO YOU SLIMEY MONSTER!"

There was a shriek but it held its grasp on Woodie, tightening its grip. Woodie cringed, finding himself gasping for air.

Wilson's eyes widened in horror before he snarled.

"I SAID…." He summoned a large shadow flame in his hand before slamming it against the tentacle. "LEGGO!"

There was a loud shriek at the tentacle died, turning into shadows, leaving behind remains, dropping Woodie to the ground. He coughed as he was finally able to breathe again.

"Augh that smarts."

Wilson knelt by his side, patting his back, looking him over for injuries. "Are you okay? Where's it hurt?"

Woodie lifted up his arm, pointing to his right side.

"Really sore around here."

"Oh, Love." Lucy said, almost whispered, worry in her voice.
Wilson frowned, gently feeling the spot. "Oh no."

"What…?" Woodie asked, wincing a little.

"Woodie, I think you broke a couple of your ribs."

"Oh… that's just dandy." He groaned, lying his head on the ground. "First mission and I blow it."

"Oh yes, because EVERY mission requires everyone coming back not at all injured. Yes you certainly did - Woodie how could you have expected a TENTACLE to start thrashing you about like a rag doll?" Wilson told him, going through his supplies, starting to patch him up. "It is in no way your fault and you didn't blow anything."

"Sure." Woodie didn't meet his gaze, keeping his eyes on the ground.

"Woodie."

Woodie seemed to relax, someone stroking his hair that Wilson couldn't see.

"Lucy."

"Relax… and Woodie, don't be so hard on yourself. You've gotten hurt before and… just be honest with Wilson."

Woodie sighed.

"I can't help it."

"Come now, you can trust him. Like you trust me."

"Something you need to tell me?" Wilson asked, raising an eyebrow.

Woodie was silent, before looking up, giving a small nod.

"I haven't been honest with you on… why I'm acting like this. Why I've… been rather protective."

Wilson frowned. "I won't judge. You can tell me."

Woodie sighed, closing his eyes.

"Remember when we met, I told you I had been stuck here for nearly a year and a half?"

"You mentioned." Wilson finished treating Woodie before starting to work on getting a campfire starter. "What about it?"

"I saw a lot during that time. Lot of terrain, beasts… but the one thing that sticks to me is all the death I saw." Woodie opened his eyes, a bit of a mortified look in them. "I met people, even tried making friends then… but before I knew it, they would be gone. Some I didn't see how they died. Others…" He shuddered. "It hurt watching them slip away and me being unable to do anything."

Wilson gave him a sympathetic look, taking one of his hands and squeezing it gently.

"You're worried if I slip away again there'd be no way to return me to this life. You don't want to lose anyone else. I can respect that."

"You're the only one who came back." Woodie squeezed his hand. "I saw you die but then I also
saw you come back. I… I just don't want to see it again." Woodie rubbed his eyes with his free hand. "I just don't want to lose friends. I have Lucy but… we don't like seeing people go. Not like this."

Wilson nodded. "I promise you I'm not leaving anytime soon and I'm not letting anything happen to anyone if I can help it. I've lost people too. The pain never really goes away, you know?"

"Yeah." Woodie sat up, sighing a bit. "Lucy was my first real loss." He picked up the axe, hugging her close to him. "Sort of."

Wilson's gaze softened.

"May I ask what happened to her?"

"Lucy?"

"I don't mind."

Woodie nodded, stroking the base of the axe.

"Lucy… she and I were on the same farm land. I was a lumberjack just going about my work days and she was one of the girls who helped cooked meals for us to eat and even helped with the animals. She got very sick one day and… well… slipped into a coma. The doctors said she might never wake up. I was heartbroken that day. I kept praying day and night for some miracle to wake her up and bring her back to me. I was getting desperate. Then one fateful night, I heard a voice call to me through the radio, saying I could have Lucy with me again. By my side for the rest of my life and make me the best lumberjack as a bonus."

Wilson frowned. He had a bad feeling he knew where this was going.

"It was Maxwell, wasn't it?" He asked, feeling dread.

"Yes." Woodie lowered his head. "I made a pact with him. He brought Lucy back… but… Oh what he did." Woodie looked to Lucy. "Sealed her into an axe that never breaks and me, cursed. Much like your dark knowledge, I was given my own brand which is the werebeaver curse. It related to my wish, so, Lucy got to be by my side and me, the supposed best lumberjack because I'm part beaver."

He squeezed his shoulder. "What he did to you both is despicable and I swear… I swear to you both when I find a way to bring Lucy back to her real self. I'll even treat her illness. You two WILL have a life together."

Woodie smiled a bit.

"We'd like that very much, Wilson. Thank you."


"Heh…"

"See?" Lucy giggled. "Much better."

"I can agree."

"Now, how about I cook us up some dinner?"
"That, sounds wonderful."

Wilson nodded before getting straight to work, humming a little.

Woodie kept by the fire, chuckling to himself as he watched Wilson work.

"Guess he really is my friend Lucy." He whispered. "I haven't made any in so long."

"And I'm so happy for you." She giggled, Woodie grinning as he felt a kiss on his head. "I know you've been wanting it for a long time now and so have I. I love your company but nothing makes things better than having friends around to share things with."

"It really does make a difference and he sure is one heck of a friend." He sighed in content. "I'm just glad everything's turning around now."

"Just keep your head up and remember, you're never alone."

"I won't forget that one. That's for sure."
"Sur la grand' côte elle est monté."

"Sur la grand' côte elle est monté."

"Elle a perdu son tablier. Ti ta ti dla dla dla lam!"

"Ti ta ti dla dla dla lam!"

Woodie sighed happily at the sound of Lucy's singing voice.

"Oh how I've missed singing with you Lucy. You have such a pretty voice."

"Oh, Woodie." The axe giggled. "I've missed it too. Now if only we could dance again too."

"I'm sure Wilson will find a way for that to come true soon. We just gotta be patient."

"Right. For now, shall we bring our load back to camp?"

"But of course! We made a bounty today!"

Woodie looked behind him, grinning at the nicely sized pile of logs he had on his cart.

"Then let's show 'em!"
"Aye!"

Woodie gave a holler, swinging Lucy over his shoulder before hurrying back to the camp. He gave a big grin, greeting anyone he saw as he made his way for the log pile. The place was starting to look more like a village with crops being properly organized and structures of houses finally taking form. It was becoming home and Woodie couldn't be happier about it.

He hummed a tune as he started to unload his logs onto the pile. Wasn't long before the cart was empty.

"There."

"Ow…"

"Hm?"

Woodie looked behind him, seeing Charlie by the fire pit. She was sitting down on one of the hay bales, rubbing her feet. He frowned, noticing there were some blisters on them.

Goodness. What she do to herself?

Woodie made his way over to her, sitting next to her.

"You alright, Ms. Charlie?"

"Huh?" Charlie looked up, surprise in her eyes. "Oh, just you Woodie. I'm alright. Just a little sore."

"I think those blisters say otherwise." Woodie pointed to her feet. "What you do?"

Charlie looked back at her feet before sighing a bit.

"I was trying to help with some work around the camp today and… well… my shoes are not exactly suited for heavy work. Nor are my clothes suited for anything for that matter." She lowered her head a bit. "I want to help, I just sadly don't have suitable attire. I try to work with what I have but I either can't do much because my dress gets caught on something or is restrictive or my shoes turn on me because they're not meant for heavy lifting chores or long distance walking." She sighed again. "I just don't want to sit by and do nothing. I want to help… and it takes my mind off things."

Woodie frowned.

"I understand, Ms. Charlie but you should be more careful. You don't want to ruin those feet of yours now."

"I know. I'm just not sure how I can fix it. I know nothing about making new clothes and I really don't want to bother anyone about it."

"Hey, we're all here for each other." Woodie gave a gentle smile. "And I might be able to help you with your clothes problem."

"Oh, might?" Lucy giggled. "Woodie, more like you KNOW you can."

Charlie tilted her head.

"How?"
"Well." Woodie rubbed the back of his neck. "I do happen to be pretty good at sewing. So, if you let me, I could make you some new clothes."

Charlie's eyes got wide.

"You… You would do that for me?"

"Of course!" Woodie chuckled. "We're all friends here and I always do all I can to help my friends."

Charlie squealed a little before hugging Woodie.

"Oh thank you thank you thank you, Woodie!"

Woodie smiled, giving her a quick hug.

"You're welcome, Ms. Charlie." He pulled back, looking at her carefully. "Hm… Yes, I think I know something that'll suit ya. I'll just need measurements."

"Easily done." Charlie smiled. "And I'll get you materials too-"

"Nope. I'll handle that too, Ms. Charlie. You rest your feet. Leave the hard work to me."

"Are you sure?"

"I am." Woodie got up, rubbing his hands together. "Don't you worry about a thing. I'll handle this."

"Alright then. Thank you again, Woodie."

"Anytime."

oooooo

Woodie waited patiently outside a tent, whittling away at a twig with a knife.

"Everything okay in there, Ms. Charlie?" he asked. "Hope I didn't make them too big."

"No, they're perfect."

Woodie looked up as Charlie came out. He grinned at the look on her face. She was smiling happily as she twirled a bit in the new outfit she had on. It was a loose light purple blouse with a long dark purple skirt. The final touch, work boots made with a soft material so they weren't hard on her feet.

Woodie whistled, giving a thumbs up.

"You look beautiful, Ms. Charlie."

Charlie giggled, giving a bit of a curtsey. "Why thank you, Woodie. These are perfect. I just love them. The fabric breathes and everything feels so much more comfortable." She smiled. "I appreciate it."

"You're very welcome. Doing chores should be much easier now for ya. That skirt is made of a strong material so even it gets caught on something it won't tear easily. You'll be just fine now and you shouldn't get blisters in those boots."
She hugged him quickly.

"You really know your stuff about these kinds of things."

Lucy giggled.

"He should. He helped plenty with some of my dresses."

Woodie grinned, stroking the base of the axe.

"Yep, every last dress she wore I helped do repair work for or made it for her."

Charlie's gaze softened. "Woodie, that's so kind. You're just a big sweetheart."

"He is. That's why I married him." Lucy agreed. "Would never find a kinder man in all of Canada."

Charlie blinked back confusion.

"Wait a minute, you two are married?"

Woodie grinned, taking off his glove to reveal a ring made of wood on his left hand.

"Eh, not traditionally but we are. Let's just say I didn't get the father's approval entirely because he wasn't fond of his daughter running off with some "hick" as he put it."

"So, we found a priest and tied the knot. Small wedding but it's just what we wanted." Lucy sighed happily. "Happiest day of my life."

"You eloped." Charlie giggled a little. "I never would've guessed. I mean I knew you two were close but... I just never thought..."

"Well, we don't really bring it up." Woodie shrugged. "Plus, I always have my gloves on so no one can see the ring. I was so grateful my curse didn't destroy the thing. It took forever to make it smooth to the point of no splinters." Woodie grinned. "Regardless, being married doesn't mean flaunting the fact it happened. Being married means living for one another and sticking it through to the end no matter what comes your way."

"That's so true, Woodie. Being with the one you love. Caring for each other." Charlie smiled. "Anything anyone can hope for, right?"

"I like to think so." Woodie eyed the ring on Charlie's finger. "I imagine that's something you'll be experiencing yourself once William wakes up."

She nodded, a nostalgic look coming to her eyes as she adjusted her ring. "And he's all I want. I don't need a second ring or a fancy dress. I just want my William. See him smile, hear his laugh."

"He's a lucky man to have you waiting on him." Woodie smiled gently. "If you ever need help with anything else clothing related, let me know. Okay?"

Charlie smiled back.

"Of course. Goodness, my sister used to say that all the time. She was a tailor. That dress I was wearing, she made that herself."

"Quite the designer then." Woodie chuckled. "Those materials must've been hard to come by."
"She had her ways." Charlie giggled a bit. "Hope she's doing alright. I haven't seen her in so long."

"Well, who knows." Woodie got up, touching her shoulder. "You might see her again at some point."

"Right. Thanks again Woodie. You're a real friend."

"I do my best." Woodie smiled. "William's jaw is going to drop when he sees you in those duds."

She giggled blushing a little.

"Here's hoping. I just want him awake but no one said I couldn't doll myself up a little for him."

"Exactly."

Charlie nodded, waving before running off.

"I better go help with chores now, see you!"

Woodie waved goodbye before looking to Lucy.

"Well my dear, shall we go out for a walk in the woods?"

"I'd like nothing more!"

"Then let's get to it, my love."
Wilson sighed as he finished up his work for the day. Things were coming together nicely. Though he still saw many possibilities for improvements, there was little he could do when his legs felt like they might buckle under him.

Despite that, he still found it in him to head towards the lake, something kept close to him. He had been surprised when Wickerbottom had presented it to him.

"Where did you even get this?"

"Wilson, I know about the shack."

"My house is not a shack! ... But thank you."

Looking around to be sure no one could see, he took the item - a violin, out of its case as he got into position. He hummed a familiar tune before starting to play in accordance, feeling as if the night around him faded away.

There was nothing but him and the music.

*I don't even know the name of this song yet I've been able to play it ever since I was young.*

He played on, not noting someone behind a tree was watching him. They kept quiet, eyes wide in wonder as Wilson moved the bow with grace, swaying a didn't want to interrupt him but as fate would have it, a fallen twig gave away their position the minute they stepped on it.
"Shoot!" They cursed under their breath.

Wilson froze in place, his eyes narrowing. Swiftly, he kicked a small rock right against the tree.

"I know you're there!"

The person behind the tree flinched at the rock, sighing as they made themselves visible, revealing it was Willow.

"Yeesh, don't need to be so violent, Wildork."

Wilson's eyes widened, feeling heat come to his face. Now he felt rather silly for overreacting like that.

"I-I am so SO sorry. It-It wasn't intentional it was-I just-"

Willow shook her head before going over to him, touching his shoulder.

"I know, I know, instinct. We're used to monsters popping out of bushes or trees and let's face it, we're still not over it even when we're here."

He frowned, giving a nod. "That's exactly it. I still can't get the girls to even sleep in their own tent since the night still scares them."

"Yeah and I never go anywhere without a torch. I mean, I love fire but… I can never feel comfortable enough to sleep without it."

"I understand, Willow." Wilson's gaze softened. "It helps comfort you and helps you feel safe. I understand completely."

Willow nodded, before shaking her head.

"Enough about me though." She eyed the violin. "Since when do you play music? I thought you were all about science."

"There is science in music!" He insisted. "The study of sound, the vibrations caused by even our own vocal chords. All of it relates to it." He looked at the violin with fondness. "And I've loved it ever since I was young."

Willow smiled.

"Guess you have some good memories attached to that thing, don't you?"

"I do." Wilson sighed happily. "Playing with my mother, learning how to play it properly for the first time, memorizing a song I wanted to play for her, some others that are unclear. I may be fascinated with science but music was part of my up bringing."

"That sounds amazing. That song you were playing, what was it? I don't think I've heard it before… Em kind of. I've heard you hum it to the girls and even me but I've never heard anyone else but you hum the tune."

"Well… the song in question, while I know it in regards in how to play it, I don't remember the title. I just… I'm not sure why but anytime I play it or hum it I just feel calm."

"Maybe someone played it for you whenever you were tired or stressed to help you calm down?"
"Perhaps. It might've been my mother. She was always taking care of me. Never wanted me hurt or ill. Never liked seeing me sad." He frowned. "... Goodness, I haven't seen her in so long."

"Is she still around?"

"Last time I wrote a letter to her she was. I imagine she still is. Goodness, she might be worried about me since the last time I wrote her a letter it was quite a few months ago and that was before I crossed paths with Maxwell."

"Well, if we ever find a way to go to Earth maybe you could find her and then bring her here or something."

"Maybe... I'd... really rather not bother her."

"Why not? You said she might be worried. Why wouldn't you visit her?"

"Willow... I..." Wilson looked away. There was pain in his eyes. "I'm nothing but a disgrace. She should be ashamed of me. I'm considered the runt of my family. The screw up. That's all I ever did. Why would she want to see a failure-"

"Now just a minute!" Willow snapped, turning his face so he was looking her in the eyes. "You, Wilson Percival Higgsbury are NOT a screw up! You hear me!? Does a screw up build a fort like the one you did? Does a screw up build all the tools you did? Does a screw up go out of his way to help complete strangers and then take them in and help them successfully? Does a screw up trick a SHADOW KING? I don't know what kind of mother you have but if she always viewed you as a runt then screw her! You're much more than that!"

"N-No! It wasn't Mum!"

"Then who DID say that!?"

Wilson bit his lip.

"Our extended family. People I'd rather not ever see again for as long as I live. Mother always defended me against them but... Willow... There's a lot of places my mind went when I moved out of my mother's home. Not all of them good."

Willow frowned.

"Wilson."

"I just... I just wanted to prove them wrong. So badly... Yet in the end I failed."

Willow shook her head.

"Wilson. You've fought monsters of every kind, you've built countless things, you took two little girls under your wing and have been doing your best to raise them, you dethroned a king, you're a prince and a leader. I don't think that's failure in any form. Sure, you might've fallen down in the past but Wilson that's the past. I know it's hard to let go but what matters is where you are now. And for your mother, since she was defending you and I'm assuming loved you with all her heart, I think she would be proud of you."

Wilson was quiet before a smile came to his face, a touched look in his eyes. "Willow... Thank you. That means a lot." He ran a hand through his hair. "Goodness, listen to me. Why do I still even worry about that? ... Sometimes my mind just goes places I suppose... and my mother was a
strong person, She raised me basically by herself with help from my grandfather and grandmother."

"Sounds strong for that alone." Willow cupped a cheek in her hand. "Also, one more thing I'm adding to the list of accomplishments. You took a pyro in who was probably the most unstable person you would ever meet despite her threatening you at first."

Wilson chuckled, leaning into her hand.

"You know it was only the one time you threatened to burn my hair off, right?" He brought his hand over hers. "And Willow, to give my own compliment, you are far more than just a "pyro"."

"I suppose." She smiled.

"No suppose. You're the light to my darkness… Em sorry…” He blushed. "I mean, You've had my back this entire time."

Willow shook her head, nuzzling him gently, blushing a bit herself.

"Dork."

"Heh."

"Wilson, if you get the chance, see your mother. I don't know what it's like to have parents but I know if I did, I would want to treasure every moment I had with them."

"I promise I will and I'll bring her to meet you too."

"That would be fun." Willow smiled. "But for now…” She eyed his violin. "Would you care to treat me with some music?"

Wilson grinned, giving a bow before getting into position.

"I would be honored, M'lady. Any requests?"

"Hm… I want to hear that song you were playing earlier. The nameless one."

"Very well." He closed his eyes, humming a bit as he started to play.

Wilson and Willow swayed to the music, the world around them fading away. Wilson opened his eyes, gazing at Willow, smiling gently. Willow smiled back, sighing happily.

It was just the two of them and the music.

And I'm lucky to have her.
WX-78 never liked humans. Even if he was friends with everyone in the group, he didn't really see any worth in the relationships. They were all still fleshies and he was superior… Well, to a point in regards to Wickerbottom. He didn't dare say he was more powerful than her. That was a death wish.

Though there was only one among the fleshies he did like spending some time with. It confused him though and he was trying all he could to understand it. The fleshie in question…

"WX! WX!"

WX-78 looked to the source of the voice, seeing Webber running up to him, hiding something behind his back.

WX-78 was resting under a tree and had been cloud watching. He had been doing chores but he wanted to take a break.

"YES?" He asked, tilting his head. "WHAT IS IT WEBBER?"

Webber giggled, bouncing in place a little.

"You have to close your eyes first."

"I DO NOT HAVE EYES. I HAVE OPTICS."
"Can you see with optics?"

"YES?"

"Then they're eyes!" Webber gave a smile. "Now, close them!"

WX shook his head before doing as told.

"THEY ARE OFFLINE."

"Perfect!" Webber checked to be sure before putting something around WX-78's neck. "Okay, open them!"

WX-78 opened his optics, looking down at his neck, seeing he now had a necklace made of flowers around his neck.

"WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS ADORNMENT MADE OF ORGANIC MATTER?"

Webber giggled again.

"You always call things the funniest names. It's a flower necklace! Wendy and Abi showed me how to make one so I wanted to make one for you. They told me if you make one you should give it to someone as a way of showing you care for them and well, you've been really nice to me lately and well, I thought you could use some love since you don't really talk to anyone else in the camp."

WX was surprised to say the least. He didn't think what he had been doing was all that special. He blinked twice before touching the necklace.

"... THANK YOU, WEBBER."

"Hehee, you're welcome! Everyone deserves a present!"

"I SUPPOSE."

"I think so!" Webber grinned. "You can be really nice once you're done being grumpy. You should be happier more. You're more fun when you are. I mean, I understand you're so different from everyone because you're metal but look at me, I'm a monster and I can still be around others like I was one of them. I mean, I view us as the same despite being different. I guess that might be because we have that in common. We're not exactly human."

"YOU ARE HUMAN THOUGH." WX-78 hesitated a bit before placing his hand on Webber's head, smoothing the fur on his head down. "YOU ARE MERELY STUCK TO THE ARACHNID."

Webber nuzzled his hand.

"Yeah… I can't wait to be myself again. For now, just the monster kid."

"INCORRECT. YOU ARE WEBBER. DO NOT LABEL YOURSELF AS MONSTER KID. YOU ARE MORE THAN THAT."

Webber smiled, a touched look coming to his eyes.

"Thank you, WX!"

WX-78 didn't know why he felt… relieved seeing the look in Webber's eyes. It was true he was
fond of the boy more so than the other fleshies. But this… he mused if this was similar to how the other fleshlings viewed the children in the group.

"YOU ARE WELCOME. DO NOT ALLOW ANYONE INFERIOR REFER TO YOU AS A MONSTER CHILD. ESPECIALLY HIGGSBURY."

"Oh, he would never!" Webber giggled. "We're practically family him and me since Ms. Wickerbottom took me in. Just yesterday, I asked him what would that make us since I was adopted into the family. He said either brothers or cousins but he said I could pick which one felt best and well, I decided Cousin Wilson sounded cooler than brother. I mean, having an older brother would be awesome but I see Wilson more like a cousin than anything else."

"NOT EVEN AS THE TWO FLESHLING GIRLS REFER TO HIM AS FATHER?"

"Wendy and Abi? They always refer to him as Papa since he took them in. They do have their real father but Wilson's basically filling in for him since he isn't around anymore. I don't view them as family as much though." Webber rubbed the back of his neck. "They're more like close friends. Especially Wendy."

"NO. I MEAN YOU DO NOT VIEW HIGGSBURY AS A PARENTAL UNIT?"

"Oh, I misunderstood ya. No. I mean, he's way older than me and could be my dad but honestly, I'm waiting till I can find my father. He's gotta be out there somewhere. The only real person I refer to as some kind of parent is but even that's grandparent."

"GOOD. DO NOT FORGET THAT."

Webber tilted his head.

"I won't… but… why would that concern you?"

WX-78 paused for a moment to think on this.

THE UNUSUALLY INTELLIGENT FLESHBAG ACTS PROTECTIVE OF THE YOUNGER ONES. HOWEVER, WHY DO I CARE IF HE VIEWS HIM AS A PARENTAL UNIT OR NOT?

... THIS COULD NOT BE... ENVY COULD IT?

"WX?"

"I JUST THINK YOUR FATHER WOULD NOT WANT TO FEEL HE HAS BEEN REPLACED." WX-78 said, practically blurted.

Webber chuckled.

"I think my dad would understand if someone else took me in if he couldn't take care of me anymore. Wendy and Abi may view Wilson as their dad now but the thing is he doesn't replace their real dad. They just made room for Wilson in their hearts next to the love for their father. Least, that's how Wendy told me."

"I SEE." He nodded. "THAT MAKES… SOME SENSE OF YOU FLESHIES AND YOUR CULTURE."

"You're silly." Webber poked WX-78 on the face plate where his nose would be if he had one. "My dad was the same way too."
WX-78 ruffled the fur on his head in return. "I AM NOT AS YOU WOULD REFER TO "SILLY" I AM A HIGHLY INTELLIGENT-"

"Automaton who is merely tolerating our existence with the exception of the queen. Yeah, heard it all before." Webber giggled. "Silly. Like I said."

WX-78 swore some of his circuits might have fried for a moment at Webber's response.

... WHY DO I FEEL THIS SENSE OF... PRIDE FOR HIM REPEATING THAT SO PERFECTLY?

"Well, I'll let you get back to cloud watching, I know you enjoy it. I'm gonna see if I can make something for Wendy." He ran off, waving to him. "Bye, WX-78!"

The robot waved back.

"... Goodbye, Webber."
It was humilitating what had happened. All in a matter of minutes his king hood was robbed of him and from a simple human no less.

Maxwell was in a remote area of the Shadow World, holding the wound in his side tightly, trying to stop the bleeding.

It was rare he felt the way he did. Tired, in pain, helpless, especially that last one. He could always help himself or fall back on something to solve whatever problem was facing him but not this time.

He groaned, falling over onto his side under a tree. The pain from his injury had finally sapped, him of the last of his energy. He could barely move at all.

"That stupid scientist… I'll get him… I'll get him and his grandmother." He said, more so whispered. "Then I'll get the rest of them too. I'll kill them all and make them pay for what they did. Just… Just need to recover… my strength." His eyes started to close. "I'll just… rest my eyes for… for a minute."

His eyes soon shut entirely, the man quickly drifting off to sleep.

*I'll get them… I'll get them all.*

oooooo

"RUN!"
Maxwell's heart was pounding as he watched the madness before him unfold. This wasn't how it was supposed to be.

Negotiation and peace throughout the worlds not what was happening before him.

War. Full out war.

"We need to close the gateway before more of Pugna's troops come in!" Someone shouted, heading for an ancient looking structure. "I knew we couldn't trust that man beast! Or any of those other outsiders for that matter!"

"Magnus Umbra! Magnus Lux! Protect us, please!"

The scene changed, Maxwell finding himself battling off monsters and creatures of all kinds, clad in armor. He fought them with ease, using spells and his trusty sword… and his claws. He wasn't human at the moment. He, was back in his true shadow form and beside him, was a being made of pure light who was doing what they could to fend off the attacks as well, using the wings coming out of their back.

"Looks like they're retreating, Brother." The creature grinned. "It'll be over soon."

"That would great." Maxwell grunted as he took out another monster. "This is getting really old." Maxwell growled. "You think people would be more civil but no, Pugna just couldn't help himself nor could the others. Then again I don't think I can blame the other worlds for being angry with us."

"Not like what happened we meant to happen on purpose." The light creature took out another monster. "And on top of that we had nothing to do with it was… well… HE caused it to happen."

"Blaming games won't solve anything or change the leaders' minds." Maxwell narrowed his eyes. "Once this is over we're cutting off connections. It's not worth risking the lives of our weakened subjects."

"I guess… It just seems so sad since there was once harmony between the worlds."

"Trust me, it saddens me too, Lux."

Lux…

The scene shifted again. The war was over but tragedy was still present. Lux was sprawled out on the ground, his light barely glowing at all off his body that was mangled with black scars. He looked up at Maxwell weakly, reaching a hand up to him.

"Brother… It… It hurts… It hurts!"

Maxwell took his hand.

"I know, Lux, I know and I promise I'm going to make it better. Just hang in there."

Lux nodded, sniffling.

"Why… Why were They mean to me? What did I do? Did… Did I do something bad?"

"No." Maxwell shook his head, squeezing his hand. "You did nothing wrong Lux. They… They were just being stupid. Absolutely stupid."
"I guess… I… I thought I was helping with protecting Them and our people… Why did They hurt me?"

"I wish I knew Lux. I wish I knew. They're strange… They're things we rule, yet They act impulsively like They did with this war and with you… and… I'll do everything I can to get Them back in line for what They've done today."

"Magnus…"

"Yes?"

Lux squeezed his hand.

"Do what you have to do just… please… don't lose yourself… to Them…"

Maxwell nodded, sniffling a bit.

"I promise."

Lux smiled a bit.

"I love you, Brother."

Maxwell bit his lip, tears streaming down his face.

"Lux…"

"Maxwell…"

Lux morphed into Aharon, the man cut up all over, pale from the blood loss. Maxwell's eyes went wide with shock, falling back a bit.

"Take care of them…” Aharon whispered, his eyes sliding shut.

"Aharon!"

Aharon faded into dust, Maxwell now being surrounded by total darkness. There were nightmare monsters all around, laughing at him.

"Aww… Look at the poor little shadow. Lost as can be."

"He thinks he's king? Pathetic!"

"He needs to be tougher than he is! He's too soft!"

Maxwell gripped at his head.

"Shut up…"

"So your supposed brother is dead. Your best friend is dead. So what? That doesn't matter in the long run! You were designed to keep us in line! You were just damage control because the king before you made a horrific mistake of making a deal with us!"

"You're no king!"

"You're our servant!"
"And always will be!"

"SHUT UP!"

*I'm not a servant! They're the servants, They were the ones who should have been bowing to my will!*

*They were the ones causing trouble… Causing war.*

*I'm not a slave. I'm not… I…*

Maxwell gripped his head as he started to scream, trying to block it all out.

"JUST SHUT UP FOR ONCE!"

"No and we never will."

"Accept your fate."

"Magnus Umbra."

"SHUT UP!"

oooooo

Maxwell's eyes snapped open, a gasp leaving his mouth. He was still under the tree but it was day time now in the Shadow World instead of night. He looked down at his injury, seeing the bleeding had now stopped but he was still feeling weak and unable to move.

*Great… Just great.*

He sighed, looking around him, trying to will himself to move.

*Get up. Just GET UP!*

But it seemed no matter what he tried, his body wouldn't move.

*Blast it all!*

He leaned his head back, looking up at the sky.

Why was nothing working?

He thought about all that had happened and well… He was ripped apart brutally from someone he had been in possession of against his will, he sustained an injury that had cut pretty deep into him and the adrenaline he had had to get away from the scene had worn off entirely and was taking its toll.

How long would he be here though was the part he wasn't sure of. He had been in plenty fights and walked away from them just fine but this one… he just wasn't sure.

And going back to sleep didn't sound too appealing either.

*Alone in my thoughts. Wonderful.*

He sighed, narrowing his eyes before closing them.
I won't let this beat me… I'll have my revenge.

No matter how long this takes.
She couldn't stop running. The forest was quiet behind her as she sprinted through the woods, dodging vines and roots as she went.

Her hands came up to protect her face from low hanging branches, refusing to look behind her. It was coming, it wouldn't stop until it had caught her.

*Don't stop. I'm almost safe.*

The girl burst through the clearing, panting as she skidded to a halt, looking around her. There was no one there. Whatever had been pursuing her was gone.

She grinned, feeling triumphant, throwing her hands into her air.

"YES! I AM THE VICTORIOUS!" The girl laughed, placing her foot atop a boulder. "I, Abigail Carter-Higgsbury am the uncatchable, the untamable, the-"

She felt a presence behind her as she was lifted up from behind.

"The little girl who is going to be eaten by the fierce lion!" Wilson grinned as the girl started laughing up a storm, squirming wildly.

"Noooo! Never!" She squealed as Wilson lifted her up higher.

Wilson nuzzled her. "Nom, nom, tastes like strawberries!"
"Nooo!" Abigail laughed, nuzzling him. "I'm Abi, not a berry!"

Wilson pulled her back, a bit making his eyes look wide.

"My stars!" He gasped. "Why it is Abigail!"

Abigail hugged him, giggling.

"You big goof!"

Wilson chuckled, hugging her close. Abigail sighed happily, curling up a little.

"I'm a bit goofy."

It was one of those rare moments where Wilson wasn't busy with something or someone. It had been a busy week but it was nice to finally have some time together. Wendy was still hiding in a ragtag game of "hide and seek tag" between the father and daughters. The safe spot was the clearing.

"Now, we need to find your sister."

"I'll get her! Put me down!"

That was something Wilson hadn't expected. Wendy was the more timid and gentler of the two... Abigail, was like a little fireball of energy now that she didn't have to fear anything. The girl easily squirmed out of Wilson's arms before he could respond, bolting back into the woods as he started to chase after her.

"Abigail!"

Abigail was also fast and careful about traversing the forest around the village. Easily a blur if one didn't keep their eye on her.

She skidded to a halt, looking around her before looking up.

"I see you!"

Wilson's eyes trailed up, widening as he ran to the tree Abigail was looking at. Wendy was perched on a high branch, looking down with a mischievous look.

"... WENDY! WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING UP THERE!?"

"Hiding." She grinned, sticking her tongue out. "You can't get me up here!"

Wilson gulped, holding his arms out.

"And that makes me very nervous! Please come down, you might fall!"

"But she's done it before." Abigail scoffed. "She does it with Webber all the time."

"WHAT!?"

"Ahuh." Wendy grinned. "I used to climb trees and be able to perch on branches with ease. I got my nickname Wendy Bird for a reason by Uncle Will."

Wilson ran a hand through his hair, shaking his head, giving a nervous laugh.
"Oh goodness. You two are little rascals sometimes."

"We love you!"

"And I love you both very much. Now, Wendy, can you please come down? I'm going to have a heart attack at this rate."

Wendy's eyes got wide before she jumped down, right into Wilson's arms, hugging him.

"No! Don't have a heart attack!"

Wilson stumbled back a bit, hugging her tightly.

"I won't now that I know you're safe." He kissed her head. "You had me a little scared there."

Wendy nuzzled him. "I'm sorry Papa. But it was fun!"

"I know Sweetie but just be more careful." Wilson gave a gentle look. "I really don't want to see you get hurt."

"I'll be super careful." Wendy promised. "You won't ever see me hurt!"

"I'll help too." Abigail hugged Wilson's leg.

Wilson chuckled, moving Wendy to one arm so he could pick up Abigail with his free arm.

"That's my girls." Wilson got a sneaky look. "So... since I found both of you... how does ice cream sound? Chocolate in particular?"

The girls looked to one another before looking up at Wilson, getting grins on their faces.

"Yes, please, Papa!"

"With sprinkles?"

"All the sprinkles!"

"Yay!"

Wilson laughed before running off with them.

"Come on then! The treats await!"

"YEAH!"

Abigail moved to jump out of his arms, Wilson tightening his hold on her a bit.

"Oh no ya don't!"

"No! I've been caught!"

They laughed as they continued on.

*I didn't think I'd ever be a father, much less to two wonderful little girls like these.*

*How did I get so lucky?*
"You sure you sensed magic here?"

Sebastian looked to Wickerbottom, giving his best grin.

"Mel, would I ever lie to you about sssssomething like thissss?"

Wickerbottom shook her head.

"No just… what if they got scared off if they sensed you or any of the other nightmare monsters? They might think Maxwell is looking for them."

"I promissssse they're ssssstill here. Besssssssidessss, I'm ssssssure by now they had to have noticed a change in the air ssssssince dear old Maxy isssssn't on the throne anymore."

"True."

The two came up on a cluster of thick trees, noticing a distinct path could be found between them if looked at it closely.

"Trademark sssssign of a village."

"Indeed… Well, here goes."

Wickerbottom took a deep breath before making her way through, minding her dress as she stepped
over roots and brambles. Soon, the path lead to an area full of small houses, gardens and various other things.

"Ssssssee! It'ssss real!" Sebastian exclaimed.

"I…" Wickerbottom was in shock. "I can't believe it." She moved further down the path, looking at the structures carefully. "It… It's just like our old village, Sebastian."

"Yeah! Only thing missssssssing is people. Sssssspeaking of, where issss everyone!?"

"I was about to ask the same-"

"Hault!"

Both froze in place, seeing people come out from behind the structures, weapons drawn, eyes narrowed at the two.

"Don't. Move." One of them warned, pointing a blow dart pipe at her.

Wickerbottom did as told but stood tall, looking at the villagers carefully.

All were now visible, standing in a circle around Wickerbottom, their weapons pointed at her. One stepped forward, armed with a sword.

"Usually we're not hostile towards survivors but thing is it's pretty clear you're not one since you're in association with that terrorbeak." He gestured his sword to Sebastian. "Don't think we didn't sense you, you scum."

"Hey! That'ssss Misssssstter Ssssscum to you!" Sebastian hissed. "Sssssso what'sss your deal with me?"

"Don't play dumb. The only people who associate with the nightmare monsters are Maxwell and those who serve him. So, if our guesses are correct, your friend here is here to cause us trouble on his behalf. Well, we're not going to have it. We'll make her a bloody mess and send her back to her king as a warning to him to not dare try finding us. He may have been our king once but he turned his back on us so we do the same to him and any of those that pledge loyalty to him!"

The villagers shouted in agreement, readying their weapons.

"Uh… Mel. Thissss issss'n't looking sssso good. I would hope they would ssssssense Maxwell isssn't the king."

Wickerbottom narrowed her eyes, looking to them all.

"I understand your hatred of the king but I am no servant to him and he is no longer who you answer to." She growled. "I am THE QUEEN!"

The villagers froze in place, staring at Wickerbottom.

"What?" The leader blinked. "Maxwell… isn't the king?"

"He got dethroned!" Sebastian hissed. "He'ssss been off the throne for nearly a month! Haven't any of you noticed a different feeling in the air? The fact nightmare monstersssssss haven't been as common! It's because of her! And sssssssince it'ssss clear none of you numskullssssssss recognize her, she'ssss Melinda Wickerbottom! Daughter of Julian and Veronica Wickerbottom!"
At once, the leader lowered his weapon, shock in his eyes.

"If she's Melinda… Someone fetch Jules. Now."

One of the villagers hurried off to another home, the others all lowering their weapons entirely.

"But… how?" a younger villager asked. "Maxwell always said he would never fall. Never to any shadow being. How did you do it?"

"I didn't do it alone." Wickerbottom made shadow flames in her hands, showing images of the survivors to the villagers. "These brave survivors were the ones to cause his downfall. In particular." She showed an image of Wilson. "Wilson Percival Higgsbury was the one to trick the king and dethrone him. I became queen as a means of not subjecting him to the fate that comes with being ruler."

The leader's eyes grew wide as he took this information in. "My goodness… You really are her." He lowered his head in respect. "M'lady."

The others followed suit, bowing their heads in respect.

"Your Highness." They said in unison.

"Now that'sssss more like it." Sebastian grinned.

Wickerbottom shook her head.

"Sebby…"

"Melly?"

Wickerbottom's head snapped to the side, eyes widening at the sight of her father and her mother. The villager that lead them out stepped aside as Jules made his way over to her.

"Melly… Is… Is that really you?" He asked, his eyes having tears welled up in them.

Melinda felt her eyes sting with tears. She nodded.

"Father….?" She moved closer.

Jules brought a hand to her face, cupping a cheek in it.

"... Oh Mel. It is you. Veronica, it's our girl. She's come home."

Veronica nodded, looking at Wickerbottom carefully.

"We thought we'd never see you again after you ran away to Earth. Oh look at you."

Wickerbottom smiled sheepishly.

"Older now. Much older… but I'm doing well."

"More than well! Your great grandssssson kicked Maxwell off hisss throne!" Sebastian laughed. "Our world issssss oursssss again!"

"Wilson… Edward's boy." Jules chuckled. "Who would've thought?" He shook his head. "But one thing is clear. We don't have to hide anymore."
"No. It's safe now. Our world is ours again." Wickerbottom smiled.

Jules nodded, looking to the villagers.

"Everyone, this is a time of celebration. Maxwell is no longer our king. Our world can now flourish once more like it did before. May we learn from our ancestors again and let them guide us to a brighter future!"

The villagers cheered, raising their weapons in the air.

"To a brighter future and long live Queen Melinda!"

Melinda felt her cheeks turn a bit red.

"P-Please, just Melinda. I'm still me."

"They can't help, Melly." Veronica giggled. "It's respect. Regardless though, this is the best news we've heard in a long time. It means we can pick up the pieces again and make things better than they were before."

"Yes… and I can finally introduce you to Wilson. He's never known this part of himself."

"We look forward to meeting him then but for now, please, how about some catching up? We haven't seen you in so long."

"There's a lot we have to talk about."

"We have time. The night is still young." Jules smiled. "Come everyone, let us enjoy it, for a new era has begun."

Wickerbottom smiled, following her father and everyone else to main structure.

*It's good to be home.*
"Where are we going exactly, Grandmother?"

Wilson was a bit baffled when he was greeted in the morning by Wickerbottom, requesting him to join her in the Shadow World. She said it was something important but she didn't elaborate on details and it was admittedly driving him a little mad.

"Did you find other survivors? Did Maxwell do something and we need to send him a message?"

"No, none of those." Wickerbottom shook her head, leading him on. "Like I said, it's important."

"Then would you care to give me details? Vagueness isn't going to help much."

"It's a surprise."

Wilson gave her a curious look. He hadn't seen her look this excited in a long time. He smiled, giving a nod.

*If it makes her happy, I'll deal with vagueness.*

Soon, they came upon a thick patch of trees.

Wickerbottom smiled, parting the trees to reveal a path, leading Wilson into them.

"Sebastian and I found this a week ago and I've been meaning to show you this but you had your
hands full."

"Between building and taking care of two girls, of course I had my hands full." Wilson chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck as he looked around, his curiosity growing.

The trees faded as structures came into view. Small houses and gardens built around the path they were on. But what drew Wilson's attention were the people that were going about their days among the structures. They were human looking but two things said otherwise. Their ears were long and pointed and they had black markings on their faces.

"Wilson." Wickerbottom smiled. "These people here were people from my old village. We found surviving shadow beings."

Wilson's eyes grew wide as he inhaled sharply.

"That's…" He grinned broadly. "That's incredible! These people… they're our kind!"

"That's right." Wickerbottom chuckled. "It's the other half of your heritage."

"Oi! Look!" One of the people shouted, pointing to Wickerbottom and Wilson. "The Queen is here! And she has a guest!"

Others looked up, waving to them, some walking over to them. Wilson found himself stumbling back a bit at the response as many came up to him in particular, looking at him carefully. Especially smaller shadow beings.

"His ears look funny." One of the little ones giggled, looking at Wilson, up and down. "They're all curved!"

"Yeah! They're not pointy!"

Wilson smirked. "Oh?" He knelt to their level, a gentle look in his eyes. "What should they look like then?"

"Like this!" The child smiled, pointing to their ears, twitching them. "Long and pointy!"

"It's how shadow beings look." Another giggled. "So if his ears are funny, that means he's a survivor or human as some refer to them as."

"Well, there's one thing he's not lacking in the pointy department." A child had found their way onto Wilson's back, poking at his hair, particularly at his curls. "His hair sure is pointy… and springy."

Wilson chuckled. "It's genetic."

The other children got curious as Wilson found himself with them, climbing up as well, taking turns playing with his curls.

"H-Hey!" He laughed. "That tickles!"

Wickerbottom chuckled.

"Ah, children."

Older shadow beings came over, getting the children off him.
"We apologize, Your Majesty." They bowed to Wickerbottom. "They've never seen a human before so they're bound to be curious."

"It's fine." Wickerbottom smiled as Wilson stood up fully, dusting himself off. "Wilson doesn't mind."

"Not at all." Wilson smiled, rubbing the back of his neck. "I have two girls I take care of."

"Still, we apologize."

"Wilson… Wait… He's…" Their eyes grew wide.

"The guy who defeated the king!" One of the children squealed, pointing at him. "The Prince of Shadows!"

The other children gasped as they too squealed, gathering around Wilson again.

"Do the magic, do the magic!"

"E-Easy now children."

Wilson was taken aback at this, not really sure what to do.

"U-Um…"

"Did you really trick him?" One them asked, bouncing in place. "We were always told Maxwell is too smart to be tricked. How did you do it?"

Wilson looked to each child before a mischievous grin appeared on his face.

"I made him think I was going to double cross my friends.Then, when he least expected it, I attacked!"

They all gasped, some of the adults shuddering at the thought of attacking the former king.

"Whoa! What did you use? Magic? A sword?"

"Little bit of both." Wilson chuckled. "Sword to strike him down, magic to end the fight."

"Is he dead?" One of them asked, tilting their head. "We heard he might still be around."

"He is but he's not as dangerous as he used to be. Let's just say he was limping on the way out from the battle."

One of the children, a little boy, climbed up onto Wilson's back again. "You're like a hero!"

"Maybe a little."

"I think you are!" A girl squealed, bouncing a bit. "No one has ever gotten into a fight with Maxwell and left without being turned into some monster! You pulled a miracle!"

The adults around him bowed their heads in respect.

"She is right." One of them said. "Maxwell has always won his battles. We never thought his downfall would be caused by a survivor of all things."

Wilson smiled.
"I just did what I had to. I had enough of being under his thumb but I can't take credit for it alone. I had Grandmother, my friends and my daughters all by my side."

Wickerbottom smiled, placing a hand on Wilson's shoulder.

"It was a group effort. That's for sure."

"So he's a hybrid?" One of the villagers asked. "Sorry for asking just since he's related to you I would think that would make him part shadow being."

"Slightly." Wickerbottom looked to them. "He's my grandson so he's only about a 4th shadow being since my son, his father, was only half."

"How interesting."

"And he still had all that power."

"Maxwell amplified it when he gave him dark knowledge and even more so when he tried to make Wilson a servant. It all came together and... well, he is what he is now."

"That's so cool!" The boy on his back squealed. "He's of both worlds!"

Wilson chuckled, reaching behind him, ruffling the boy's hair. "That's right and this is the first time I'm meeting other shadow beings besides Grandmother."

"Wow! Neat! Do you like us?"

"I do. I feel very welcomed."

"Yay!"

Wickerbottom smiled.

"I'm glad." She gently pulled the child off Wilson's back, setting him down. "Thank you for welcoming my grandson but I have some people I would like him to meet real fast but you can see him again after we're finished if you like."

"Yeah!" One of them cheered.

"We can play magic tag or something!"

Wilson got a curious look.

"You'll have to teach me. I've never played."

"We'll show you!"

"It's a deal." Wilson looked to Wickerbottom. "Shall we?"

Wickerbottom nodded, leading him away from the crowd.

"I hope that wasn't too overwhelming for you."

Wilson shook his head, looking around at the village. "No, not at all. I'm excited honestly."

"I'm glad." Wickerbottom smiled. "Heh... you have the same look Percival did when I first showed him this world."
"I do huh?" He smiled warmly, perking up at the mention of his grandfather. "How did they react to him?"

"Well, when he first came here he didn't meet children but the day he did, they couldn't stop asking questions or playing with ears and hair."

"Sounds familiar."

"Like grandfather like grandson." Wickerbottom smiled, looking ahead, heading over to a house. "One moment." She gave a knock. "Mother? Father?"

The door opened, revealing Jules on the other side.

"Ah, Melinda. Good to see you again."

Wickerbottom smiled.

"It's good to see you too, Father. I've brought someone for you to meet." She gestured to Wilson. "Father, this is Wilson."

Jules eyes were wide before a grin crossed his face, walking over to Wilson, offering a hand to him.

"It's a pleasure to meet you."

Wilson shook his hand, unable to help himself as he stared at Jules, seeing pieces of himself in the man.

"This is incredible."

"Indeed. Jules Wickerbottom, at your service." Jules looked at him carefully. "Goodness, you got the same eyes as Percival. If not for the hair you'd be a spitting image of the man."

Wilson felt some pride swell up at hearing that.

"Heh, I've been told I take after him quite a bit. Including my love for all kinds of sciences and learning in general."

"Except for geology. Percival could never keep your attention on that." Wickerbottom chuckled.

"I was always so sleepy."

Jules shook his head.

"Regardless, it's nice to meet you. Never thought I'd have the pleasure of meeting my great grandson."

"Pleasure is all mine, Sir." Wilson looked at him, a bit baffled that while definitely showing signs of age, Jules didn't look old enough to be a great grandfather."

"Heh, I know that look." Jules chuckled. "Don't know if Melly told you but we shadow beings live for a very long time. Our bodies just don't age very fast and that's partly due to the world we live in but if you're curious, by human standards I am 97 years of age."

"That is is amazing." Wilson was a bit wide eyed as he took this information in. "I wonder how this effects across generations..."
"Well you do look quite young for… 33?"

"That's right."

"Well, it's possible. Either way, it's nice to have you with us. One moment." Jules headed inside, coming back with Veronica. "Wilson, this is my wife, Veronica. She's your great grandmother."

Veronica smiled, taking Wilson's hand into hers, giving it a gentle shake.

"Such a pleasure to meet you."

Wilson smiled, returning it. "The pleasure is mine. I never thought I'd get to meet my great grandparents. I'm honored."

"Oh, Wilson, the honor is all ours."

She's kind. Just like Grandmother.

"Would you like to come in? I was just making some earl grey tea."

"I would love that. Earl grey's my favorite." Wilson smiled, following them inside, taking a look around the house, seeing some paintings on the wall and a few photographs. "I didn't know you had cameras. They're so expensive back on Earth."

"Ours were a gift from your grandfather actually. Trying to win Jules over to get permission to marry Melly."

"Ah a good man he was." Jules chuckled, remembering that. "I knew he was fine for my daughter but I was glad to see he wanted to prove himself. He pulled out all the stops and of course ol' Wagstaff did what he could to help."

Wilson stopped short.

"Wagstaff? As in…. Robert Wagstaff?"

"The very one. Inventor of Voxola PR-76 radio in your world I believe."

"He was friends with Grandfather!?" Wilson exclaimed.

"Best friends at that. Had quite the crush on Sebastian's sister too."

"How..." Wilson looked to Wickerbottom. "How come I never knew about this!?"

Wickerbottom shrugged.

"Robert got really busy with his radio work when you were born so he wasn't really around for us to bring him up. There wasn't really a chance to bring him up when we had you to worry about and help take care of… and… after Percival passed, Robert eventually joined him after the factory burned down."

He frowned, nodding. "I see… I'm sorry to hear that. I had one of his radios."

"I believe that was the one Percival himself owned before it was handed down to you."

"That's right." Wilson smiled a bit. "Mother gave it to me."
"That sounds like Cecelia." Veronica said, heading into the kitchen. "That means you had one of the first hand made models ever built then."

"I enjoyed it quite a bit. I hope to either get a chance to retrieve it or to rebuild it. Though more than likely it'll be rebuilt."

"I can just make another trip back to Earth and retrieve it like I did your violin." Wickerbottom grinned. "So long as the shack hasn't fallen over."

Wilson turned a bit red. "Oh come now! It withstood the wind just fine! It only had one hole in the roof!"

Jules covered his mouth, snorting a bit.

"Do I want to know?"

"Wilson has poor tastes when it comes to the housing market."

Wilson bristled a bit.

"It was a bargain! The sale price was so cheap!"

"Keep telling yourself that, Wilson."

Jules shook his head.

"Alright, alright, enough of that. We should be grateful that Wilson was able to find a place to call home."

Wilson grinned.

"Thank you!"

"Oh yes, humor him."

"I'd rather not have contention in my household, thank you." Jules sat down on the couch. "Please, sit."

Wickerbottom rolled her eyes, doing as told, Wilson doing the same.

"Oh, one thing I forgot to ask. Wilson, are you allergic to any animals?"

Wilson shook his head.

"Not at all. I'm quite fond of them actually. From beefalo to chesters." He chuckled. "The only ones I don't like are bats and spiders."

"Oh good because we have a pet and he loves his cuddles-"

"Mew!"

Wilson jumped a bit as a creature that looked like a cat mixed with a racoon hopped up onto his lap.

"Mew?" The creatures looked at him curiously, rubbing against him, purring.

He was curious… although Wilson would admit he felt his heart melt a little.
"A cat… A very friendly cat." He smiled, bringing his arms around the creature, scratching behind its ears.

"A catcoon to be exact." Jules grinned.

Wickerbottom smiled, chuckling a bit.

"I can't believe you kept Puck after all this time. I thought I lost him when I ran away to Earth."

"Nope, we kept a good eye on the little devil." Jules smiled. "We knew he meant a lot to you so we held on to him."

Wickerbottom reached over, rubbing under Puck's chin, eliciting a loud purr from the catcoon.

"There we are. Still know his sweet spot."

"He's very friendly." Wilson smiled. "So fascinating as well."

Jules smiled.

"Percival said the same thing. Heh… You are his grandson."

"Mew!" Puck curled up in Wilson's lap, his tail swishing gently across Wilson's chest.

Wilson smiled softly, leaning back against the couch petting Puck.

"Heh. Animals tend to like me."

_I feel so… welcomed here._

"Tea's ready." Veronica said as she came into the room with a tray that had cups and a teapot on it.

"Perfect." Jules looked to Wilson. "Wilson, I imagine you probably have a lot of questions and I want to be clear, Veronica and I would be more than happy to answer any you might have. As would the rest of our people"

"Thank you and I do have a lot but I'm just trying to take it all in. This village, how you all survived… and…" Wilson's voice cracked a little as he lowered his head. "Why you're so open to me. A total stranger."

Jules had a confused look come to his face.

"Why wouldn't we be? You're family."

Wickerbottom frowned, squeezing Wilson's shoulder.

Wilson looked up, a sad look in his eyes. "I'm… not used to extended family wanting me around. My mother's family made it clear what they thought of me."

Veronica scowled a bit.

"Those Barlows. We heard plenty about them from Melinda. Such awful people. Shame on them for treating you less than a person."

"Indeed." Jules scowled a bit himself. "That's not what family is supposed to do. Family is there for each other. We've been here for Melinda and Percival, we've been here to support them when
Edward and Cecelia came around and we most certainly will be here for our great grandson."

"That means a lot. That seriously means a lot to me. You have no idea." Wilson smiled a little, feeling himself relax.

*I'm wanted.*

"Mew." Puck nuzzled up to him, purring loudly. "Merow."

"We are strangers but we'd be more than happy to get to know you, Wilson." Jules smiled softly. "We understand everything about this is new and we want to help you understand it as best as we can."

Wilson smiled warmly, giving a nod. "I'd really like that."

"And oh, Wilson, wait til you see our library."

He perked up, sitting up straight. "Library?"

"Oh dear." Veronica chuckled. "He got Mel's love of books. Jules, would you like to show him while I get the tea served?"

"Of course." Jules got up. "Wilson?"

Wilson got up, Puck hopping down and following them as Jules lead Wilson to the back of the house. Jules grinned, opening a set of doors, revealing the shelves upon shelves of books in a room that seemed bigger than the house itself.

Wilson felt his jaw drop open a bit as he walked in, turning around, trying to look at all of the books.

"... Wow." He breathed.

"It's quite the collection." Jules smiled, following Wilson. "But all are important. Some are from Earth, some are from here and some are records I helped in creating when I was the archivist for the king."

"That's amazing. What was it like back then? Working for Maxwell, I mean."

"Well, he was a bit more calm back in those days. He still had his moments but he didn't lose his head as much as he did in recent years. I respected him and he respected me. He was very… well, much like the rest of us. He just had more magic than any of us could've imagined having." Jules shook his head. "Though no one could deny he was slowly going mad."

"From what Grandmother told me he was as insane as they could come." Wilson crossed his arms.

"And I can understand why. Maxwell… He made a lot of poor decisions and he even admitted at times in front of me."

Wilson nodded, moving a hand out in front of him, making a small shadow flame. "I just hope… I never wind up like that."

Jules gave a gentle look, going over to Wilson, putting an arm around him.

"We all make mistakes. Shadow beings and humans alike but making mistakes is what makes us,
us. We learn and grow from them." Jules squeezed his shoulder. "I can't say what the future holds but I do believe you'll be nothing like our old king. You'll be you."

Wilson smiled, nodding. "Right. I'm going to do my absolute best… and I do plan to come back here more often. How do you feel about great great granddaughters?"

"I have no objections." Jules smiled.

Wilson grinned. "I'll be sure to bring the twins then. They'd love to know more of our family."

"And I'd love to get to know all of you as well."

"It's a plan."

Jules smiled, giving him a side hug, leading him deeper into the library.

"Come. You have much to learn."
"Wilson, do be careful up there." Wickerbottom looked up at her grandson who was on a very precarious ladder.

They had been spending some time together, sharing research notes and catching up at Wickerbottom's home… and Wilson was currently raiding her library for materials.

"I need this math book. I'm not leaving without it." He called down. "What's the hurry anyways?"

"Technically, according to the children, you do not need it but I don't want you falling." She smiled. "Besides, we still have much to discuss."

He smiled, sliding down the ladder, book in hand. "You said there was something you wanted to show me when I got here earlier. I admit, I'm getting rather curious."

"Well, it's a concept that's not too foreign to Earth but takes on a whole different meaning in the Shadow World." Wickerbottom smiled. "Come, we shall discuss in my garden."

Wilson nodded, following her out.

"Wilson, I know you're not one who takes interest in spiritual matters, relatively speaking, but have you heard of the concept of the Twilight Hour?"

"I believe so. A few folk-tales Mother read to me when I was little." Wilson smiled, getting a nostalgic look in his eyes. "Something about the veil thinning between this world and the next."
"That's exactly right. However, here, that concept is reality."

Wilson's eyes widened.

"Are… Are you serious?"

Wickerbottom nodded, sitting down on a stone bench.

"In the Shadow World, a whole hour is in complete twilight. It is during this hour that spirits that have already passed on can come down and visit their loved ones. All that needs to be done is for those loved ones to call their name and they shall come down. You can see them, talk to them, interact with them and many other things as if they were still alive."

Wilson had a stunned look.

"Y-You mean that? And it would really happen?"

"I've experienced it, Wilson." She gave a gentle look. "And as long as you know their name you can call out to them."

Wilson looked up at the night sky, an unsure look in his eyes.

"... What if you're afraid they're disappointed?"

Wickerbottom frowned, a knowing look in her eyes.

"Wilson, he is FAR from disappointed."

"H-Huh?"

"He never was and he never will be." Wickerbottom looked up, seeing the sky becoming a beautiful orange and blue violet color. "Right, Percival?"

"Quite so, my love." said a voice.

Wilson froze up at hearing the voice. He turned slowly to the source, eyes widening as he saw a familiar man standing not too far from him. He was dressed in a green vest and black pants and had a white cloak around him. He had wild dark hair and deep blue eyes just like Wilson's. Wilson hadn't seen this man in years, let alone seen what he looked like when he as in his prime but… he was there. The man smiled gently at him, chuckling a bit.

"Been a while, hasn't it, Grandson?"

Wilson was quiet, staring at him, stunned. He walked up to him, looking him over.

"It… It has." He whispered, placing a hand on his shoulder to see if he was real. "Grandfather..." He laughed a little, eyes getting misty. "Oh goodness it's you. It's really you!"

"In the astral form." Percival placed his hand over his. "It's so good to see you again."

Wilson nodded, wiping a tear out of his eyes.

"It's really good to see you too. I've..." His voice cracked. "I've really missed you."

"And I've missed you too, Wilson." Percival gave him a knowing look, offering an arm to him. "C'mere."
Wilson threw his arms around him, sobbing quietly.

"Grandfather I… I…"

"Shhhh…" Percival stroked his back. "It's okay. You're okay."

Wilson sniffled a little, burying his face in his shoulder. It had been years since he had last heard his voice. Last time he had even spent time with him.

"I'm sorry… i'm sorry…"

"Oh, Wilson, you have nothing to apologize for." Percival chuckled. "It's alright."

Wilson looked up, seeing Percival had a gentle smile on his face.

"I promise." He added.

Wilson smiled a bit, relaxing.

"Thank you. It's really good to see you again."

"And it's good to see you. You've grown so much and have done so many things. I couldn't be more proud of you."

Wilson sighed happily, a touched look coming to his eyes.

"That means a lot to hear.. I… I really wanted to do right by you. I really tried."

"And you've succeeded. I feel very lucky I can call you my grandchild."

"Grandfather…"

"I mean it." Percival brought him close. "We've got a lot to talk about you and me."

"That we do." Wilson chuckled, hugging him tightly. "I don't even know where to start."

"How about the beginning, hm?"

"That sounds wonderful."
"Your Highnessssss!"

Wickerbottom looked up from the Codex, seeing Sebastian approaching the throne with Wigfrid and Wes behind him.

"Yes?" She raised an eyebrow. "What is it?"

"Theessssse two have a favor to asssssk you apparently." Sebastian pouted a little, least the best he could for being a terrorbeak. "They won't tell me what it isss though!"

"Well, we are nöt acquainted with yöu and… I'm nöt sure höw much can trust a terrörbeak. Nö öffense."

"Neh, none taken." Sebastian moved so he was now beside Wickerbottom, head held high. "Now, ssssstate your demandssss to the queen!"

Wickerbottom rolled her eyes.

"Pardon him, he's over dramatic sometimes. What can I do for you two?"

Wigfrid and Wes looked to each other before nodding, Wigfrid stepping forward, bowing her head in respect.

"We need yöur assistance in regards tö a prömise Wes and I made tö each öther when we first came
here two years ago, Your Highness."

"How may I help you then?"

Wigfrid looked up, giving a serious look.

"Your Highness, are you able to oversee certain events? More specifically, a marriage?"

Her eyes widened a bit before a gentle smile came to her face.

"I can. That is something I'm able to do as ruler of the land."

"Then Wes and I humbly ask if you can oversee ours."

Wes stepped forward, signing to Wickerbottom.

"The two of us made a promise when we reunited in this world. We nearly died at that time and weren't sure what was going to happen from then on but we promised if we were able to come out alive in the end, we would want to be together for as long as we live. Finally take the next step forward. This is all we ask of you, Your Highness."

Wickerbottom nodded, an understanding look in her eyes.

"I can most definitely do that for you. I was in love once myself. I know how much it can mean to a person. Just let me know when."

"As soon as possible, please." Wigfrid bowed her head in respect. "We know it sounds silly to ask that but we just can't wait any longer."

"I understand, trust me." She smiled. "Just say the word. I imagine you two at least want some arrangements made."

"Nothing too big. Just simple. A nice set up and well, proper clothes."

"And we should probably tell everyone." Wes signed. "Can't wait to see what their reactions are gonna be like."

Wigfrid smirked.

"I know Wolfgang won't be shocked. He knew after all."

"Everyone else, fair game for surprise."

Wickerbottom chuckled.

"I'm sure the majority will be happy for you both except maybe WX-78 since he's not really a happy one."

"Eh, WX is just WX, that's what we've come to accept after hanging around with him for so long." Wigfrid put an arm around Wes' shoulders. "Regardless, we better go tell everyone and well, pick a spot in the Light Dimension to have our little ceremony."

"Sounds like a plan."

The two gave a bow before leaving.
Sebastian swooned, looking to Wickerbottom.

"Not even two monthssss and we have a couple wanting you to help them get hitched… Did…
Maxwell ever do ssssstuff like that? I really can't sssee that guy over sssseeing weddings."

"He might've many many MANY years ago but in more recent years I believe he left it to his
archivists and other shadow beings to handle it instead. Can't really confirm if he ever did though."

"Either way, least you get to help with that now."

Wickerbottom smiled.

"Indeed."

oooooo

"Everyone!" Wigfrid stood up on a bail of hay, holding up her spear in the air. "Wes and I have an
announcemennt we'd like you all to hear, so please, may we have your undivided attention!"

Everyone took notice, curiosity coming to their eyes.

Wilson looked to Willow who gave a shrug.

This should be interesting. Wigfrid usually doesn't make statements like this.

"Wigfrid isn't like this unless it's really important." Charlie tilted her head, looking to Wolfgang.
"Any ideas?"

Wolfgang brought a hand to his chin.

"None are really coming to mind. Let us just hear what she has to say."

All moved in close to where Wigfrid was, the woman grinning brightly as she saw them approach. She brought Wes up onto the bail of hay with her, holding one of his hands, bringing it into the air.

"Wes and I are to be wedded this week!"

There were some surprised looks before Charlie let out a squeal.

"Oh you two! It's about time!"

"Indeed, never thought you'd finally get there." Wolfgang smirked. "Wessy especially."

Wes blushed, bringing his arms around Wigfrid's neck, giving her a kiss on the cheek.

"We had a promise to keep and finally we're following through." Wigfrid kissed his cheek in return.

"YOU HUMANS AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS." WX-78 scoffed a little. "THEN AGAIN, IT IS GOOD YOU TWO ARE NOW SURE ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP'S DEVELOPMENT SO I GUESS THIS IS GOOD NEWS EVEN FOR ME."

"You have the strangest ways of giving compliments, Shiny." Wigfrid rolled her eyes. "But thanks, I guess."

"I think it's great!" Webber smiled. WX-78 patted his head.
"SEE? I AGREE."

"Congrats you two." Wilson chuckled. "Though whom will be officiating the ceremony?"

Wigfrid grinned.

"Queen Wickerböttöm öf course. We asked her töday and she said yes. We just need tö pick a spöt för the ceremöny."

"Hm… We could set up an area by the lake. Beautiful view for such a ceremony." He suggested.

"Oh, oh, Wigfrid, can we help?" Wendy asked, the twins both bouncing in place from excitement.

"Öf course!" Wigfrid got down from the bail of hay, ruffling their hair. "I'm sure yöu girls could be a huge help with flöwers."

"You bet ya!" Abigail giggled. "Oh, Wendy! We could make an arrangement for a bouquet!"

"Yeah, yeah! And a flower crown worthy of a warrior! Let's go!" Wendy grabbed Webber's arm. "And you're helping.

"EEP!"

"And off they go." Wilson shook his head. "I'm sure I could put together a small altar or something in a good hour or so. Would be nice to work on something else besides houses for a change."

"Yeah, given you insist you get the last house," Willow quipped. "I'll make some big torches to light the place up for awhile."

"I'll get you for that comment later."

"I know."

"And I can help with clothes." Woodie offered. "I'll just need to know what you two would want."

"I'll help with that too," Charlie raised her hand. "I'm not my sister but I do know a thing or two about designing."

"Very gööd, very gööd." Wigfrid nodded, a grateful look coming to her face. "Thank yöu. All öf yöu."

"Is there any way I can help?" Wolfgang asked.

"Hm..." Wigfrid hummed in thought. "Öh! Well, every wedding needs a best man. Wöuld yöu like tö be that?"

"I'd be honored." He smiled, giving a brief bow. "You two have been my friends for years. I'd like nothing more."

"Great!" Wigfrid grinned.

"I WILL JUST BE A WITNESS." WX-78 said, heading off to where Wendy, Abigail and Webber had gone. "NOW I BETTER BE SURE WEBBER IS NOT DROWNING IN FLOWERS."

"I swear, he's getting weirder by the day." Wes signed.
"Yeah but better than when we first met 'em. I'd rather worrying over death by petals than angry robot smothering us." Wigfrid shrugged.

"I think that's everyone. Well... save one." Wes looked over to the medical tent. "I think William will understand but it's a shame he can't be here for this."

Wigfrid's gaze softened.

"I know, Wessy but we can visit with him and tell him about it. Who knows, it may give him a dream so it's like he was there."

"Yeah, I'd like that."

"It's a deal." She brought an arm around him. "Now, we need to plan our feast."

"Can there be cake?"

"If a cake is what my mime wants it's a cake he shall get!"

"And for my valkyrie." Wes spun her, bringing her into a dip, signing with his free hand. "The best meat stew in all the Light Dimension!"

Wigfrid grinned, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek.

"And it will be a day to remember." He brought her back up as she hugged him tightly. "Wes, I'm so happy right now. I mean that."

"As am I." Wes hugged her in return. "I thought this got stolen from us the moment Maxwell put me in that field of clockwork bishops. When we got separated on that horrible night."

She kept close to him.

"That night's long past us now and Maxwell, may there be vargs chewing on his bones."

"Now that's just rude to the vargs."

"True but regardless, we're here now. We just need to prepare."

Wes nodded.

"Then let us do just that."

oooooo

By week's end, everything was all set up. A small arch built by Wilson was standing near the lake's edge, flowers woven into it by Wendy and Abigail. There were torches around it, along with a path they made up that lead to it. It was just how Wigfrid and Wes wanted it.

The moon was high in the sky at its full cycle, giving a nice gentle light to the scene. Everyone stood on the sides of the path, all dressed in suits and dresses Woodie and Charlie had made for them. Wes stood at the arch, Wickerbottom standing with him. He smiled as he saw Wolfgang approaching the area, Wigfrid right beside him.

He sighed happily, taking in Wigfrid's appearance. She was wearing a combination of a dress and a warrior's garb. The dress was a rich brown color and had a gold chest plate being worn over it that matched the headband on her head. Her hair was tied up loosely, her red locks flowing down her
She grinned, looking to him as she and Wolfgang came up to him.

"Ready?" She whispered, Wes giving a nod.

"Always." He signed.

They took each other's hands, looking to Wickerbottom.

She smiled, looking to them and everyone present.

"Welcome everyone. Tonight, we are here for the union of this mime and this valkyrie. Your presence here is appreciated, even those who are only here in spirit." She focused her attention on the couple "They've been through many trials together and have finally reached one of their many goals because of their endurance. I hope that as they go forward together, their bond will help them reach more and overcome many other things that may come their way." Wickerbottom looked to Wes. "Do you, Wes, take Wigfrid to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

Wes nodded.

"And do you, Wigfrid, take Wes to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

"I do."

"Then by the power vested in me you may--"

Before Wickerbottom could even finish, Wigfrid pulled Wes into a kiss by his tie.

"Well, there you go."

Everyone cheered and applauded.

"Guess in this case, it's you may kiss the groom instead of the bride." Wilson chuckled.

"Wig's a forward lady. Of course she'd do that." Willow giggled.

Wendy tugged on Wilson's suit sleeve.

"Papa…?"

"Hm?"

"When are you getting married?"

Wilson turned bright red.

"Ahahaha… Em… This really isn't about me right now. This about Wigfrid and Wes. B-Besides ahaha I… Uh…" Wilson rubbed the back of his neck. "Ehehehe…"

"I was just asking… for science." She grinned.

*I REALLY regret teaching her that unintentionally.*

Wilson relaxed himself, scooping the girl up into his arms.

"Maybe one day just not now, Sweetie. For now, let's be happy for them." Wilson gestured to
Wigfrid and Wes. "They've waited two years for this. They deserve all the happiness people can give them tonight."

Wendy smiled, giving a nod before looking over to them. "They do Papa. They really do. All the happiness and the love they can get."

"That's my girl."

"Cöme everyöne! Tönight, we shall dance and feast like we were in Valhalla!" Wigfrid said as she and Wes made their way down the path back to the camp.

Everyone followed after them.

"You heard the lady!" Willow grabbed Wilson's free hand, dragging him along. "Come on!"

"Wah! W-Willow!"

Wickerbottom smiled, bringing up the rear, watching as the camp came to life with sounds of laughter and song, people dancing to their heart’s content. The main couple happy beyond belief. It was a moment of bliss, that was certain.

*Enjoy yourselves, my friends. This is your night.*

The party went on for awhile, the camp soon settling into a more quiet tone, people exhausted from the dancing and festivities.

"I'll be sure to work on finishing your house first thing, starting tomorrow." Wilson said, stretching a bit. "It's my wedding gift to you two."

"Appreciate it Wilsön. Thank yöu sö much." Wigfrid replied, yawning a little, her head on Wes's shoulder.

"Though one small request - an extra room?" Wes signed a small grin on his face. "For the future."

"Of course." Wilson smiled. "I'll work that into the structure. For now, I'm going to go get some rest and help the girls get some rest too. They're barely standing up over there with Webber."

"Get to it then."

Wilson nodded, hurrying off, taking the two girls into his arms, Webber following behind him.

"Guess that will be us one day." Wes signed. "But no rush, right?"

"Nö rush at all, Wessy." Wigfrid smiled, nuzzling him a little. "We can wait as löng as we want."

Wes nodded.

"Right… Though, there's one last thing we need to do before we rest." Wes held one her hands, heading over to the medical tent, smiling gently at its lone occupant. "We need to catch someone up."

Wigfrid smiled, nodding. The two sat on opposite ends of William, each taking one of his hands.

"Hey, Willy." Wigfrid said softly. "Tönight was probably öne öf the möst happiest nights för me and Wessy here. We finally had a wedding. Can yöu believe that? Töök us löng enough but… it happened. We really wanted yöu tö be there but we understand yöu're nöt in the best öf cönditions.
That, however, doesn't mean we can't tell you what happened. I'll do my best to explain it for as will Wessy. Overall, we just want you to know we care about you and that despite not being there physically we know you were there in spirit.

Wes squeezed William's hand, writing signs on his hand with his finger.

"We miss you our friend. Please wake up soon." Wes looked to Wigfrid. "Well, where shall we start?"

"Well..." Wigfrid smiled. "The stage was set for our wedding by a beautifully full lit möön..."
"Good afternoon, William."

Charlie smiled as she entered the medical tent, sitting beside the sleeping man.

"Just thought I'd check on you." She ran a hand through hair, smoothing it out. "Hope you've been having good dreams today."

There was no response but Charlie kept silent for a few minutes before speaking up again.

"So much got done today. Wilson finished a house. The very first one. It's for Wigfrid and Wes. It was his wedding present to them. Oh, William I wish you could've seen that. Wigfrid and Wes were so happy. Oh and I actually helped gather food without getting scratched up once. I'm getting really good at it. Not a master by any means but least I'm getting up there."

"And you'll be a master in time, Charlie."

Charlie jumped, looking behind her, seeing Wilson was now present. He grinned sheepishly, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Sorry, didn't mean to spook you. Was just here to check on William myself since I wasn't able to do it this morning."
"I-It's fine." She smiled sheepishly. "I was just seeing how he was doing. It doesn't hurt to let him know what's been going on. At least, I like to think he can hear me."

"I'm sure he can. Our ears can still pick up sounds even when we're asleep. It can be really effective with comatose patients as well since certain sounds or voices can cause activity in the brain so it's good for him if he gets to hear you."

She nodded, moving aside to give Wilson his space as he got right to work with examining William. She couldn't help but become a bit nervous. Just worried to hear: No change.

"W-Well… How is he?"

"Hm… He's doing a lot better today." Wilson made a few scribbles in his notebook. "His lungs aren't as congested." He whipped out his stethoscope, listening to William's heart. "... Increased heart rate. Not unhealthy but… unusual compared to the last week or so." He narrowed his eyes a little, listening to his lungs again. "..."

"Wilson?"

Wilson kept silent, glancing to William's face, noticing his eyes were twitching. His own eyes widened at this.

"It couldn't be." He took off his stethoscope.

"Couldn't be what?" Charlie asked, worry appearing in her eyes.

Wilson took one of William's hands in his, giving it a squeeze.

"William, if you can hear me, squeeze my hand."

No response.

"William." Wilson repeated. "If you can hear me, squeeze my hand."

Wilson stayed silent, waiting…

Till William's hand twitched, squeezing Wilson's hand lightly, a small gasp escaping Wilson's mouth.

"William." He looked to Charlie. "Charlie, I think he might be regaining consciousness."

Her eyes widened before they filled with joy.

"He hasn't responded that well before." She added, hesitating before taking his other hand. "C-Can I?"

"By all means. I think hearing your voice would be more effective than mine since I'm still a stranger to him."

She nodded before looking at William.

"William, it's Charlie. If you can hear me, please, squeeze my hand."

William's hand twitched before squeezing her hand, quite tightly at that. His eyes twitched before they slowly opened.
"Goodness…" Wilson whispered. "He's awake!"

Charlie was overjoyed as she squeezed his hand in return.

"Hi, Will." She moved into his line of sight, some tears in her eyes. "Welcome back."

William looked at her, squinting his eyes a bit.

"H-Huh…?"

"Hm?" Wilson raised an eyebrow. "Is… he having trouble seeing?"

"Oh! He's always had trouble with his eyes." She dug through her pockets. "I have something to fix that." She pulled out a pair of circular glasses. "Here we are!"

She slipped them on over his eyes, William's eyes relaxing as soon as the lenses came over them. Least they were relaxed till they widened at the sight of seeing Charlie clearly, a gasp escaping his mouth.

He quickly sat up, cringing a bit, bringing an arm around his injury.

"O-Ow…"

"Easy." Wilson cautioned him. "You're still healing. Don't try to move so fast."

"I'm right here, William. Right here." She moved closer, cupping one of his cheeks.

William placed his free hand over hers, tears brimming in his eyes.

She's okay… Oh thank heavens, she's okay!

He leaned in closer, moving his hand to her cheek, taking in all her features.

Charlie was the same as he remembered her. The same warm eyes, the same smile and the same look she always gave him when she was happy.

She leaned into his hand, nuzzling it. "Oh Will it's you. It's really you!"

William smiled a little, tears streaking his face.

"C-Charlie… Oh my dear sweet Charlie."

He brought his arms around her, hugging her as tightly as he could, Charlie returning the gesturing.

"I missed you, so much." She buried her face into his shoulder. "The real you."

William ran a hand through her hair, keeping her close.

"S-Sorry it took me so long to come back. Charlie… I… I'm so… so sorry for what I did. To you and everyone. I… I'm so sorry."

Charlie pulled back gently, cupping a cheek in her hand again.

"It's come and gone William. It was wrong and we all had our part in it but we can move past it." Charlie kissed his cheek gently. "I forgive you. Just… please don't do something like that again. Okay?"
William nodded, hesitating before kissing her cheek in return.

"Okay." He brought her close again, Charlie relaxing against him, sighing happily.

William gave a small smile before looking to Wilson, seeing the man was keeping off to the side.

He had a gentle look on his features.

"It's good to see you awake, William. You had your friends worried for quite some time. I'm sure the others are going to be ecstatic when they see you."

"I suppose." William's smile faded. "... I... I did a lot of things I'm not proud of. I'm surprised anyone would want to see me."

"You have people that care about you." Wilson nodded to Charlie. "Sure, you messed up but you want to make up for that, right?"

"Yes... In however way I can."

"Then that's all that matters." Wilson went over to them, kneeling down, placing a hand on his shoulder. "They were mad but they've moved past that, just like Charlie has. They just want to see you as yourself again. Think you can do that?"

William looked at Wilson before looking to Charlie, the woman content in his arms.

He gave a small smile.

"For hers and their sake, I certainly can."
Wilson had let William and Charlie have some alone time for a little bit before asking William if it it would be alright to alert the others of him being awake. He said yes but… William had to admit, he was nervous about seeing all of them.

His hands wouldn't stop shaking as he and Charlie sat patiently.

_I know Charlie and Wilson have been telling they all forgave me but… what if there's still some bitterness they need to get out? Or… Or the twins might not be all that happy to see the man who was responsible for their father dying? Or…_

Charlie noticed this and brought an arm around him, rubbing his shoulder comfortingly.

"It's okay. I promise."

William frowned, opening his mouth to speak his concerns but didn't get to as the tent flap was opened.

"Uncle...?" Wendy asked, peering into the medical tent, her eyes widening as Abigail let out a squeal.

"It's really Uncle!"

Wendy let out a squeal of her own before running over to William, throwing her arms around him, Abigail following suit.
"Uncle Will! Uncle Will!"

"Uwah!"

William nearly fell over, blinking in surprise at the girl's reaction before letting out a small laugh, hugging them both.

"You little rascals."

The twins nuzzled him, keeping close to their uncle. Wendy giggled up a storm, hugging him as tightly as she could while Abigail opted to bury her face in his shirt.

"We missed you lots. You're awake again!"

"You're our uncle again." Abigail mumbled, her voice shaking a bit.

William's eyes widen in alarm at Abigail's tone, concern coming to them.

"Oh oh Abi shhh..." He stroked her hair. "It... It's okay... I'm right here. Right here."

She nodded, taking a shaky breath, looking up, smiling, despite the tears in her eyes. "I know. I love you, Uncle. I love you lots and lots."

"And I love you too, Abi Girl." He brought Wendy close. "And that goes for you too, Wendy Bird."

Wendy nodded, kissing his chin. "Yeah! And you're smiling again."

"We missed your laugh too." Abigail nuzzled into his side again, sighing happily.

Charlie smiled softly at the sight. "The girls couldn't stop asking about you."

"Yeah and we wanted to show you stuff we found while out exploring but Papa said you can't go too far yet."

"Sadly not." William gave a sheepish look. "My body took quite the toll from the spell and from being asleep for so long. I can barely get my legs to move and sadly I lost a bit of weight so my body isn't in the best of states but I'll be back on my feet in time. I'll just need help getting around."

"We'll be nurses then and help!" Wendy chirped, grinning a little. "We learn a lot from watching Papa do stuff and from what Daddy did before. Right?"

"Ahuh! Lots of stuff!"

William chuckled.

"You two are pretty sharp for your age. So, I'd love that."

"Then we're on the case!" They saluted, giggling a bit.

William patted their heads.

"I know you'll do great."

"Ya bet they will, Willy Böy!"

William's head snapped towards the entrance of the tent, seeing Wigfrid, Wes and Wolfgang
present, all having grins on their faces.

"Wigfrid, Wes, Wolfgang!" William's eyes were wide. "You're... You're all here."

"Course we're here! Why wouldn't we be?" Wigfrid laughed a little. "We wouldn't dare miss seeing our friend again after all this time."

"Oui." Wolfgang grinned. "We missed Magician Man very much."

Wes nodded, slipping a few signs in that only William could understand. William kept his eyes on the three as they approached. His eyes grew misty, a trembling grin crossing his face.

"You're all okay... and... happy to see me... even after all I did to you." He looked to Wes. "Especially you Wes... I... I'm so sorry."

Wes gave a gentle look, moving close, the twins moving out of the way so the man could hug William as tightly as he could without hurting him. William returned the gesture.

"Thank you..." He whispered.

Wes pulled back, signing to him.

"You're welcome, my friend. So good to see you awake and yourself again. I'm not angry, I promise. Let's both move forward together, okay?"

William nodded.

"Okay."

"Nöw, we can properly celebrate." Wigfrid grinned. "I'll make ye a proper meal. Get yöu söme meat back ön them bônes."

"Heh, nothing too heavy please. It's been so long since I ate anything." William rubbed the back of his neck. "Though speaking of celebrating, congratulations to you and Wes. Charlie told me you two finally got hitched. I'm so happy for you both."

Wes blushed, rubbing the back of his neck, showing off his new wedding band before signing a little.

"Thank you, Will. We're quite happy about it too."

William nodded, as he got a bit of a mischievous look. "So, when am I going to be an uncle?"

Wes turned bright red, his hands going still as Wigfrid clapped him hard on the back

"Breathe, Wessy."

Wes gave a sheepish look.

"What about you though, Magician Man?" Wolfgang pointed to William.

"What about me?"

"I mean, obviously after when you and Charlie say your vows."

William turned bright red as did Charlie. "E-Eh?"
Charlie twirled a strand of her hair between her fingers.

"W-Well.. Um… Little too soon to be talking about that. He just woke up and everything and he's not even strong enough to even walk down an aisle for a wedding."

"Ah, so you two are still going to then?" Wigfrid looked to Charlie. "I mean, Charlie did keep the ring after all."

William stammered a bit giving a nod. "If-she'll have me!"

"Of course!"

William turned bright red.

"You… You would?"

Charlie turned his head to her, kissing him lightly.

"I would."

William got a silly grin on his face.

"Charlie… Oh Charlie!" He brought her into his arms, resting his forehead against hers before kissing her himself.

Charlie closed her eyes returning the kiss, bringing her arms around him tightly.

"My Will."

The twins giggled.

"Aunt Charlie and Uncle William."

"Sitting in a Birchnut Tree."

"K.I.S.S.I.N.G!"

"First comes love then comes marriage!"

"And a new little cousin in a baby carriage!"

"GIRLS!"

Wolfgang lifted the two twins on his shoulders.

"Alright, no more teasing Magician Man, Little Girls or no apple pie tonight for dessert."

They pouted, before giggling.

"Okay!"

"We'll play later!"

William sighed in relief.

"Thank you… but yes. I… I do want to have that wedding I promised Charlie so long ago. Just right now I can barely even move in this bed."
"So we'll wait and help you too." Wes signed. "We'll do whatever it takes to help. Right?"

"Right!"

William smiled.

"Thank you… All of you."

"For now, you rest up. Take it easy on your legs."

"And we'll help too, Uncle!"

William nodded.

"Will do and thank you again, Girls."

Charlie sighed happily, kissing his cheek.

"Welcome back, William."

The others gathered around, all bringing their arms around him as best as they could.

"Yeah, welcome back to the circus family, Will." Wigfrid grinned.

William smiled, closing his eyes.

"It's good to be back."
William gripped tightly to the walking cane in his hands, trying to get his legs to stop shaking. He was glad to finally be out of bed but the one thing he wasn't enjoying was having to rehabilitate himself to what would be deemed "normal activities". Such as walking properly.

He sighed, standing up as straight as he could before attempting to walk again. His legs still kept trembling as he went but he did his best to ignore it. He had his eyes trained on a tree he was trying to reach. Wilson had suggested for any walking exercises to focus on a spot he should try to reach. This tree in particular was the closest to the medical tent so it wasn't too far but not too short of a walk either.

So far he had not reached this tree once. He had always keeled over halfway or not even halfway. His legs just didn't want to work for him.

_Not this time. I'm going to do it this time._

He pushed on harder… though as if on cue, soon as he hit the halfway point, his legs decided they wanted to give out entirely, the man falling over on his side. He let out a frustrated sigh, running a hand through his hair.

_And here we are again. Perfect. Just perfect._
He sat up, setting his cane beside him, rubbing his temples.

*My legs just don't want to work for me… Guh… This is way worse than when it was just my lungs. I hate this feeling. Being helpless… makes me feel so… useless. How does everyone put up with me?*

There was the sound of footsteps nearby. William looked up, seeing it was Charlie hurrying over, a worried look on her face.

"William? Are you okay?" She asked, kneeling beside him. "I saw you fall."

William sighed, looking to her before looking at the ground.

"For the most part, I'm okay. Legs just don't want to work for me. This is try number five and I still can't reach that tree. My legs just give out as soon as I reach halfway or even before that. I'm just… weak… like I was before if not worse." He brought his face into his hands.

*It is worse. Don't deny that.*

Charlie frowned, bringing her arms around him, guiding his head to her shoulder.

"Hey, it'll be okay, Will. You're not weak. Your body's been sleeping for over a month. It's natural you wouldn't be right as rain on the first try."

He shook his head, burying his face into her shoulder. This was humiliating. He didn't want her to see him like this.

*I'm still surprised she even wants to be with me still.*

Charlie stroked his hair a bit before tipping his chin up, having his eyes meet with hers.

"Will, I know this is hard for you. I know you hate being weak because it makes you feel useless and that's always been something you've feared but you're not useless. William, this won't last forever. All sickness doesn't last forever and this is no different. You just need to be patient and less hard on yourself. I honestly believe that you can do it. You can do so much. You just need time." She stroked his cheek with her thumb. "You've gotten this far, I don't see why you can't go further."

William placed his hand over hers, a small smile on his face.

*Charlie…*

She smiled softly, touching her forehead to his.

"I promise things will get better. You just need to give yourself time and I'm right here to help if you need it. I mean that." She pulled back, kissing his forehead. "I love you."

William smiled a bit, blushing.

"I love you too."

He looked to the tree he was trying to reach, narrowing his eyes a little.

*Just once… Once I would like to reach it.*

Charlie followed his gaze before looking back to him, giving a smile.
"Come on." She put arm around him, helping him to his feet. "I know you want to reach that tree on your own at some point but no one said you couldn't reach it with some help before then."

William smiled a bit, grabbing his cane so he wasn't leaning on Charlie entirely. It was a slow pace at first but within time, they reached the tree together. Charlie smiled, taking his hand, having him place it against the tree with hers on top of it.

"Here's success number one. With a little help."

William gave her a grin, nodding quickly.

Charlie smiled, kissing his cheek.

"You'll get there, William. Just know I believe in you and so does everyone else."

William smiled and before he could help himself he threw his arms around her, spinning her for a second before he fell over due to his legs not being able to handle the action, Charlie landing right on top of him. He turned bright red.

"I-I am s-s-so SORRY!"

Charlie shook her head, giving him a grin. "It's okay, William." She rolled off of him instead, huddling against his side. "How's this instead? Besides, I think we both need a break."

"Better." He said, resting his head against hers. "And a break sounds nice."

"Then a break we shall have." She nuzzled him a little, sighing happily. "I'm so proud of you, Will."

William smiled, bringing her closer. Charlie curled up bringing her arms around him.

William gazed at her before kissing her head.

"Thank you."

"What'd I do?" She asked, tilting her head a little.

"You helped me feel a little better about myself. I admit I… I've just been hard on myself since I woke up. I want to do my part, make it up to everyone and … and I just can't. Least… not right now. I… I just want to make up for what I did."

"William, you don't have to push yourself to the limit to prove you're different than Maxwell. I know you're different. Everyone knows you are."

"Still…"

Charlie shook her head, kissing him quickly.

"William, it's okay. Everyone has forgiven you. You have nothing to prove to them. I know it's strange for you but I promise it is genuine what everyone thinks, including me. All I ask is that you be yourself again. Be that kind and gentle man I fell in love with and know that you are."

William's eyes widened a little before he nodded.

"I will. That much I can promise." He sighed. "I never want to be the way I acted before again."
"And that, I know you can do with ease." She rested her head on his chest, huddling close.

William relaxed a little, keeping her close. He laid an arm around her, stroking her hair.

*I've needed this.*

Charlie sighed happily, closing her eyes.

"This is nice."

William nodded kissing her head.

"Very nice."

He closed his eyes as well, moving a little bit so they were lying against the tree for some support.

"Is it okay we stay here for abit? I don't want to go anywhere right now." Charlie asked, yawning a bit.

"I'd like nothing better. Besides, the others can keep themselves busy annoying Wilson." William said.

Charlie giggled, nodding.

"Right." She huddled closer to his side. "Warm."

William smiled, taking off his glasses before relaxing entirely, closing his eyes, Charlie doing the same.

*It's a start but we'll get there.*
Things were going better in Wilson's eyes. Houses were now up and people starting to live in them, and well… the place was starting to look more like a village.

*Still got a few more to build and touch up but least it's all coming together. Just glad everyone can be comfortable.*

He hummed in thought, not really paying attention to his journal he was writing in. He looked around, seeing the others going about their day. He smiled gently as he saw William and Charlie pass by, both laughing over something the other said.

*So glad to see him doing better.*

He glanced around again, his eyes soon catching sight of Willow. The young woman was enjoying herself, playing with Chester who was carrying a few logs in his mouth.

"Rarmf! Rarmf!"

"Silly boy!" She laughed. "Give me those! I need them for the fire tonight!"

"Rarmf!"

*Heh... Cute.*

"Chester!" Willow managed to finally scoop him up into her arms. "Silly boy! If you're not going to
give them to me… Then I'll just have to carry you!"

"Rawr!"

Wilson didn't even realize he was staring at her… or what he was even writing down in his journal… till someone spoke up.

"Never thought I'd see you lost in thought."

Wilson straightened up a bit to see it was Woodie standing right behind him, looking over his shoulder.

"W- Woodie what do you mean? I'm not lost in thought." Wilson looked at his journal. "I-I'm not…"

"Then what's that?" Woodie asked, pointing down to what Wilson just wrote… which was Willow's name… with a heart next to it.

Wilson felt his face heat up. There was also a sketch of her playing with Chester, a heart framing her face.

*I… I couldn't help it… S-She was just so happy.*

Woodie couldn't help but smirk.

"Wilson… you're about as red as a flame. Got something to confess?"

Wilson stammered a bit.

"W-What ever do-do you mean? I-I'm fine. I-I'm fine. T-These symptoms are-are nothing to be concerned over.."

"I wouldn't say concerned more… I dunno… Okay, maybe concerned over the fact you might be denying yourself something I think you honestly deserve."

Wilson tilted his head.

"Denying myself? What do you mean by that?"

"Want me to be blunt or vague?"

"... Be honest with me."

"Alright." Woodie gestured over to Willow. "I think you and Willow deserve each other."

Wilson's eyes grew wide, dropping his journal.

"PARDON ME!?"

Woodie brought a hand over his mouth, trying not to laugh.

"Oh goodness, you really are in denial."

Wilson's face was bright red.

"Why!? I- I… Why would she even want to be with someone as crazy as I am? An-And for that matter, t-things like-like courting never ended well-"
"Wilson, be honest with me, have you even tried?"

He looked around, picking up his journal before leading Woodie to a more secluded spot.

"The most I've ever had as far as courting goes was trying to ask ladies to dance at family events and being sabotaged."

"Ah, I see." Woodie crossed his arms. "Well, good news, this is much different."

"Woodie, I'm going to be 100% honest, I can not, for the life of me... do... courting... I just... I don't know the cues... and..."

"Wilson." Woodie gave a stern look. "There is no one right way to do courting. Any courtship is tailored to each couple, depending on the circumstances and what the two are like. Lucy and I? We bonded over things like just spending time together on the farmland, talking about life, helping her cook, or, her favorite thing, folk dancing which I learned so I could spend that time with her and make her happy. I see something like that with you and Willow."

"Well... we do spend a lot of time together." Wilson looked to where Willow had headed off to. "And I do like doing anything that makes her happy. Even if it's just sitting by the fire talking the night away... and she helps me with the twins. They adore her like a mother... and... I'm hard pressed to be upset when I'm with her. Even when she's gotten on my nerves a few times."

"And on top of that I've seen you help her with her little nervous breakdowns over that lingering trauma she has from her asylum days. You stay calm and collected and just hold her. Not a lot of people can do that."

Wilson's gaze softened. "She doesn't deserve to suffer. If I can help her be calm and help her deal with her trauma in any way I can, I will. I even made her that thermal stone she carries around when she's stressed out."

"Which is a sign of how well you know her, Wilson. You know what makes her happy and you strive for that. Friends can be like that, sure... but... you've been kind of gazing at her lately like you were just now. Had that wistful look... probably admiring her beauty."

Wilson felt his face heat up again.

"S-She was being cute... and she is quite lovely."

"Agreed, I think she's rather pretty too. I'm just already committed to Lucy. But you... Wilson, I think you're starting to show genuine feelings for her, considering your little journal doodle."

Wilson looked down at the book, looking at the sketch... and knowing that it wasn't the only one.

"And it's not the only sketch."

"May I?"

Wilson nodded, handing it over.

Woodie flipped through it. He chuckled, seeing there were sketches of some of the other survivors too. The twins playing with Webber, William and Charlie chatting with each other, there was even a sketch of Woodie himself in there too just chopping down trees.

"Never pinned you for a drawer." Woodie said as he kept flipping through.
"I've always had a knack for it. Learning how to draw came in handy with things like planning out blueprints or coming up with diagrams for school assignments," Wilson rubbed the back of his neck. "I just never really let anyone look before."

"I see." Woodie chuckled, looking at some other sketches before one caught his attention. It was a picture of Willow sitting by a campfire, her long hair down for once that she was brushing, her face illuminated by the fire, a content expression present. Though no hearts were present, Woodie could tell there was a lot of feeling with just the details alone.

"Wow…" Woodie whispered. "She… really is something, ain't she?"

Wilson looked at the drawing, a warm look in his eyes. "She is… we just… click. I feel like I can talk to her about anything and everything… We work together just fine and I trust her with my life."

"I see." Woodie flipped the page, seeing a drawing of two hands intertwined with each other. One hand had a glove on it, the other didn't. Woodie didn't need to ask. He knew whose hands they were. Underneath the hands was the word "maybe". "What's this one all about?"

Wilson was quiet for a moment before he sighed.

"... Maybe I could see a life with her… If she'd have me..

"... Oh you got it bad." Woodie grinned. "You ARE in love with her."

Wilson was bright red adjusting his collar. 'I-I uh, uh… Um…"

Woodie chuckled.

"Oh and you're tongue tied. Yup, it's official. Our local scientist is in love with the pyro."

"She is so much more than just "The Pyro" she's a lovely young woman with a wonderful personality-!"

Woodie just smiled as Wilson stopped short.

"Yes. Go on." Woodie nodded.

Wilson cleared his throat nervously.

"I'm… I'm very fond of her… and…" He looked to the side. "When I was… was stuck as a spirit, nothing hurt more than seeing her suffer over my not being there. I hate seeing her hurt. I want her happy. I want to be there for her."

"You want to be by her side and if possible, you'd want to spend most of your time in this world with her."

"Yes… I want all of that and more." Wilson sighed. "I… I can't believe I'm saying it… but you're right. I am in love with her… I just… don't want to rush her. Not after all she's been through"

"And I'm not telling you to rush it, Wilson." Woodie placed a hand on his shoulder. "Go at your own pace. All I'm saying is don't deny yourself of the idea of being able to have that chance."

Wilson nodded quickly. "I-I know… I won't. I'll take it nice and easy."
"Just be you. That's what she likes about you the most because there's no one else quite like you."

Wilson smiled warmly. "You think so, huh?"

"Positive." Woodie grinned. "You'll find that courage to tell her, but for now..." He handed him back his journal. "You can keep your little fantasies to yourself."

Wilson held it close to him.

"Thank you, Woodie."

"You're welcome and I promise I won't tell anyone. This is our little secret."

"Thank you." Wilson smirked. "You're a good friend."

Woodie chuckled.

"I do my best... and oh lookie, there's Willow."

Wilson perked up, looking around.

"Where? Where?"

Woodie pointed over to the fire pit, Wilson following his finger, seeing the woman putting logs in.

_Ah... So cute._ Woodie smiled to himself. _Just mentioning her presence gets him all excited._

"I... think I'm going to go help her with those." Wilson grinned.

"Go do that." Woodie patted him on the back. "I'm sure she'd love that."

Wilson nodded, hurrying off to the fire pit, helping her immediately.

"You know, they remind me of how we were at first." Lucy spoke up, having been quiet the entire time.

"That they do. Heh... the other lumberjacks just loved giving me a hard time about getting all dreamy eyed around you."

"But you figured it out. Just like they will."

"Darn right." Woodie smiled, watching Wilson and Willow laugh over something. "Just need a little push is all."

"Indeed and they deserve each other."

"Yeah. After all they been through, I don't see why not."

_Especially Wilson._

_He deserves to be happy._
William was running down a long hallway. He wasn't sure why he was but he had an urgent feeling in his chest that he needed to be somewhere and fast. He was running all fours, his body warped into some kind of creature made of shadow. He was bothered by it but yet he continued to move.

He arrived at his destination. A throne room that was Egyptian in appearance. Bodies were strewn about the room, soaked in blood. By their attire, William could tell they were guards and maybe a few priests. Though what stole his attention entirely was what he was now holding in his arms.

It was a young man with dark skin and hair, dressed in an attire that resembled that of a king. He looked up at William weakly, his red eyes barely open. He reached a hand up, cupping one of William's cheeks, William instinctively bringing his hand over his. Tears were running down his face... and he wasn't sure why. He didn't know this man, yet he felt great sadness seeing him injured and dying in his arms.

The man wheezed before speaking.

"Max... Take... Take care of them." He said. "Take care... of my family... please..."

"Aharon..." William heard himself say. "Please... You... You can't die. Please! I'm begging you!"

*What am I even saying!?*

"Maxwell, they're coming!"
The scene changed. William was in the throne room of the Shadow World now. He was still in his monster like form and before him stood a whole group of people who had weapons pointed at him. The leader stepped forward, pointing their sword at him.

"This ends today Max!"

William heard himself laughing.

"Say what you will Cato but today shall not be forgotten and you shall deeply regret ever trying to commit treason!"

The man, Cato, charged forward, William smacking him with shadow magic as the man's form changed into that of a terrorbeak but that didn't stop him. He charged again, his maw gaping wide open.

William froze, his eyes going completely wide as darkness consumed him.

"I will be back Maxwell. THIS I SWEAR!"

William's eyes snapped open as he sat up, gasping for breath. He was in the medical tent now. Sweat was running down his face as his body trembled.

He eventually calmed his breathing, bringing hand over his chest.

"Just a dream… Just a dream…” He whispered before a doubtful look crossed his face. "... Or… maybe it wasn't."

*My own memories are still foggy but… Those weren't mine. Not that I know off.*

*Those… I was Maxwell. MAXWELL.*

He put his head in his heads, sighing.

"What on Earth is wrong with me?"

*Those dreams... Could... Could they possibly be?*

He had to write this down. He looked around his immediate area, grabbing a piece of paper from a clipboard left lying on the ground along with a pen, quickly jotting stuff down. He closed his eyes in between his swipes of the pen, doing his best to remember what he saw. After a few moments, he took pause as he noticed something about his handwriting… or rather… the dialect that was being written down.

It wasn't English.

William held up the piece of paper, his hand trembling. From what he could understand… he just wrote down half of page of hieroglyphs.. And he could read it. Perfectly.

"No… No no no… Don't tell me that I… That that dream was…” He dropped the paper, bringing his hands to his head. "That we're still connected."

There were footsteps heard outside before the flap to the tent opened. Wes was on the other side, concern in his eyes.

"William?” He signed. "Are you alright?"
William gave a nervous look.

"Nightmares again. Nothing new."

Wes gave him a suspicious look.

"I heard the pen."

William swallowed hard, his eyes wandering to the piece of paper. Wes followed his gaze, picking it up, shock coming to his face at what he saw on it. He set it down, signing to William.

"Will… Did you write all that?"

William lowered his head before nodding.

"Yes… Wes… I… I don't know what's happening. I… I've been having strange dreams lately where I'm in what looks like Egypt. This isn't the first time this has happened but is the first time I've decided to document what I saw. I… I…" William brought his hands to his head again. "In these dreams… I'm Maxwell. I don't know why but I'm him and… I don't understand why I'm him. I'm not bonded to him anymore. Least I don't think I am. Oh heavens please don't tell me I am…"

William brought his hands away from his face, looking at them, both trembling. "I… I don't want to be what he is. He… He…" William shut his eyes tightly. "I don't want to be anything like him!"

Wes stepped back as shadow magic came out from William's hands, quickly fading as it had appeared.

The mime tapped William's shoulder to get his attention.

"Will, did you feel anything odd just now?"

"N-Not particularly. Why?" William gave him a scared look.

"I saw sparks of magic… Like when you…" Wes frowned seeing the fear in his eyes. "When you first made the deal."

William looked at his hands, shaking his head.

"No, no, no."

This… this can't be real. I… I can't.

He focused for a moment and sure enough, sparks appeared. William went pale at this.

"Oh… Oh Go-" He brought his hands to his face. "No no no no no no."

Wes stroked his back, concerned for his friend. He knew how much William regretted even making his deal.

And they didn't know if Maxwell hadn't left anything behind after the separation. He supposed now they knew.

What do we do…? He's terrified.

William looked to Wes, tears brimming his eyes.

"Wes… I… I don't want to go back to how I was during that time… I… I don't."
Wes squeezed his shoulder.

"I know and you won't." Wes thought it over for a moment before continuing. "William… Just because you're seeing what we can only assume are his memories and you still have magic doesn't mean you're linked to him or you are him. If… I had to guess, it might just be a side effect. After all, you two were bonded for an extremely long time and well… everyone one of us has something we got when we were brought to the Shadow World. Like my ability to make my special balloons and the small amount of knowledge I was given. Maybe this is what your dark knowledge is William."

William looked at his hands again, forming the sparks again, this time making small flames.

"Something that caused so much harm to those I cared about?"

Wes shook his head.

"No one said you'll harm anyone again - and remember, you were being manipulated even if you were awake back then. He was still putting the strings on and tugging them as hard as he could."

"Still… I treated you and the others like garbage. This magic made me behave like that regardless of whose strings they were holding up."

"Stop picking on yourself."

"Wes-

"I mean it." Wes' look turned serious. "William, you can look at these powers like a curse or you can look at them how I'm seeing them. These are yours to use. No one is pulling your strings now. You now have the powers to choose how YOU want to use them. What YOU will do with them. If you ask me, I bet you could do amazing things, just like you used to do."

William was taken aback.

"M-Me? Amazing things?"

Wes nodded.

"We didn't call you The Amazing William Carter for nothing. William, you are capable of so much more than you think. Also, Wilson has powers just like this, maybe you and him have something in common now. You may have something you never knew you could do it and it's just waiting for you to discover it. You just need to be willing to take that first step forward to understanding and controlling it. As for the memories… Well, I'm not sure what can be done but maybe doing what you did here might help. Also… it might not be all bad. If you have his memories, that means you have his knowledge about certain things in the Shadow World, including maybe helping us find people who need our help."

William looked to the flames he currently had in his hands.

"Maybe I could surprise people with good things again then. Make up for it."

"You can be the magician you always were before all that insanity."

William smiled a little.

"Maybe."
Just maybe.
"And then, Robin Hood and Little John ran off to Sherwood Forest, having won the battle that day and swore to be back again to continue helping the poor."

Wendy and Abigail giggled, huddling closer together under the blankets of their bed as William went on. It had been awhile since they got to hear stories from their uncle. It was just like old times.

"And that will be it for now." William smiled, tucking them in. "You two need to sleep and I need to go for my nightly walk to stretch my legs."

"Aww…” Wendy pouted. "But we're not sleepy yet, Uncle Will."

William chuckled.

"I know Wendy Bird but your father said you need to be resting now. It's your bedtime."

"B-But, but.." Wendy pouted sitting up a little. "You'll be all alone."

"Yeah!" Abigail pouted as well, the two leaning their heads together, giving a kicked look.

William cringed. He loved his nieces but oh how they could pull at his heart strings with ease drove him crazy.

"Girls…"
"And we know Aunt Charlie is busy right now."

"So pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaase?"

William sighed, shaking his head.

"Alright, alright but if your father asks… it was Chester."

The girls giggled, nodding.

"Ahuh."

"We'll be good."

William got up, grabbing his lantern and cane, the twins standing on either side of him. He hoped Wilson wouldn't catch them out of bed at this hour.

*But they just want time together… and time with me, surprisingly.*

William walked down as quietly as he could down the stairs, the twins doing the same. They took note that Wilson was busy at work some project and had his back turned towards them. The three nodded to each other and swiftly made their way out the door. Soon as they were far away enough from the house they let out a sigh of relief.

"Alright, a few loops around the lake then straight to bed, deal?" William said as they walked towards the location in question.

"Deal. And we get tucked in again."

"Deal."

The twins giggled, skipping a bit.

"Just don't get dirty."

"We won't!"

William chuckled, keeping up his pace with them, mainly relying on his cane to help.

"Hey, Uncle Will?" Abigail asked.

"Hm?"

"You're gonna get married soon, right?" Abigail tilted her head. "I mean, Charlie's got her ring so it's gonna be soon right?"

William rubbed the back of his neck.

"Just depends on my health. I can barely get anywhere without this cane and I just want to give it a little time so Charlie is sure about all this since the last two years weren't exactly positive."

Wendy crossed her arms.

"So? You still love her lots. She stayed with you every day when you were sleeping."

"W-Well…" He stammered a bit.
"And she even fell asleep a few times cuddled up to you."

"Girls…"

Both huddled up close to him.

"We're sure she loves you Uncle Will. She wouldn't be keeping the ring if she didn't."

"True…"

The girls nodded, William chuckling a bit.

"You two really want to see me happy, huh?"

Wendy and Abigail smiled hugging him tightly on both sides.

"You're our uncle. Our only uncle."

"And we love you lots. Sure, there were some bad times but a lot of good ones too."

"And I want to be able to make things right however I can."

"And you're already doing that now, Uncle."

William gave a small smile.

"Thank you."

Splash!

The three jumped, looking to the source of the sound. Not too far from them down the path they could see someone sitting by the lake, skipping rocks.

The twins had confusion in their eyes as William narrowed his.

"Who is that?" Abigail whispered. Wendy hugged her twin's arm, whimpering a bit.

"No one back home is up right now."

William looked to the twins, giving a stern look.

"Stay here. Both of you. Okay?"

"O-Okay."

"Careful."

The girls stayed in the general area, finding a tree to hide behind as William headed over to the mysterious person. As he got closer he could start to make out some details. They appeared to be male from what he could tell by their stature. They had messy blond hair and were wearing a collar shirt, a red bow tie, suspenders and reddish brown slacks. He couldn't see much of their face as they were more focused on the lake in front of them, aiming the next rock they were about to throw.

As they were about skip the next rock, William cleared his throat to get their attention.

"Excuse me, sir?"
The man jumped, holding up the rock in a battle ready stance as they looked to William. They froze completely as their eyes locked with William's, surprise in the man's eyes and shock in William's as he realized who was standing before him.

They stood in silence, staring at each other before William spoke, his voice trembling.

"J… Jack?"

Jack gave a sheepish look, rubbing the back of his neck, lowering his and that held the rock.

"Yeah… Um… Hey there. Long time no see?"

William was quiet, looking him over feeling tears sting his eyes as he took in his brother's form. He looked just like how he remembered him. Minus all the injuries he remembered.

*Jack... It's really him.*

William set down his lantern and hurried up to him, stumbling a bit with his cane.

"YOU BIG IDIOT DON'T SCARE ME LIKE THAT AGAIN!"

Jack's arms went out as William hugged him tightly, surprise in his eyes.

"Will…"

"I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD YOU BLOODY IDIOT AND ALL YOU CAN SAY IS LONG TIME NO SEE!?" William sobbed a bit. "I… I…"

Jack shook his head, bringing his arms around him, stroking his back.

"Usually I'm pretty good with introductions but to be fair I wasn't thinking I'd see you again tonight during one of my visits here. This was… not exactly what I had planned."

William took a shaky breath, looking up.

"I didn't plan this either. I was just doing my therapy after tucking the girls in-Oh gosh the girls…"

William ran a hand through his hair. "They wouldn't go to sleep they wanted to walk with me."

"The girls are here too-?"

"D-Daddy?"

Jack froze, looking over William to see the girls had left their hiding spot, the two staring at him, tears brimming in their eyes.

Jack's heart broke seeing them so distraught.

"Girls…" Jack whispered.

The girls both sniffled, running right to him as William pulled out of the way so they could reach them.

"DADDY!" They both cried out as Jack fell to one knee, bringing them close.

"Oh, oh girls, shh… Shh.." His voice cracked. *This is exactly what I was afraid of… Oh, my little girls.*
The twins huddled close to him, Wendy burying her face into his shirt, while Abigail looped her arm over his shoulder, hiding her face in his neck. Both couldn't help but cry still. They really had never thought they would see their father again, let alone be able to be near him.

Jack had tears sliding down his face as held his girls closer to him.

"I… I am so sorry."

"Where've you been?" Abigail asked, looking up at him a little. "We… We thought…"

Oh girls…

Jack cringed.

He thought it would easy to at some point tell his girls and William what had become of him but… this was painful.

"Girls… Brother… I… I have no excuse for not coming to you sooner and… and telling you why I… I haven't been here with you." Jack lowered his head. "I… I am so sorry."

The girls whimpered, hiding their faces again.

"It's okay." Wendy whispered. "I-It's okay…"

William laid a hand on his brother's shoulder. "Jackie, you're here now. You're alive and well—"

Jack shook his head.

"No, I'm not alive and well. I'm well but I'm far from being alive."

The twins and William stared at him in shock.

"What!?" They exclaimed. Jack cringed, looking away from his family. Why did this hurt him so much to say it?

*I swear Maxwell I'm going to cut you into ribbons when I find you for this moment alone.*

"The only reason I look and feel alive is… is because of the energy of this place. I'm… I'm…" His voice quivered. "I'm sorry."

"But… I… I don't understand." William got a confused look. "You look alive and you're not… like you were when you… When I thought you…"

Jack sighed, pulling away from them, closing his eyes.

*Just need to focus.*

He took a deep breath as light energy gathered around him, changing his appearance for a brief moment to his reaper form, wings and all. He opened his eyes, showing his glowing pupils. He had a saddened look in his features as he saw the shock from his family. He sighed as the form faded off.

"The truth is… I'm what is known as The Reaper. I became this when I died two years ago back in the Shadow World because of Maxwell. The reason William didn't know was because Maxwell blocked that out to break him and make him think I was gone for good and… I couldn't tell Wendy or Abigail I was here because they couldn't see me… I… I'm so sorry…"
William was the first to come forward, bringing an arm around his shoulders as Jack gave him a surprised look.

"It's okay." He whispered. "It's okay, Brother."

"Will…"

William gave a sad smile.

"It was my fault you got stuck like this. I should be the one saying sorry. I'm sorry I did this to you."

Jack shook his head.

"No, Will, don't do that." Jack brought a hand to William's cheek. "It wasn't your fault I wound up like this."

William leaned into his hand.

"Yes, it was. I should never had made that deal. I… I could've stopped."

"And I could've done better to help." Jack gave a gentle look. "Will, I'm not mad at you. I forgave you for what happened. Please… forgive yourself. I can't stand seeing you like this."

William's eyes got misty as he brought his arms around his brother.

"And I hate seeing you like that too. So… So can we both forgive ourselves?"

"Of course, Will."

Jack hugged his brother tightly, his shoulders shaking a bit as a few sobs got out. William pulled back again as the twins came up, tears now fully running down their face. Jack knelt to their level, William doing the same.

"My beautiful girls." Jack gave a sad smile. "I love you both so much but I just… can't be here all the time. I have to help people in the other world. I'm sorry I can't really be a father anymore. Wilson has that covered now so… I… I just wasn't sure if you'd want me back when you've already got him."

"Don't be silly!" Wendy hugged him. "Just because Wilson became our papa doesn't mean you're not Daddy anymore!"

Jack's gaze softened. "Wendy…"

"She's right!" Abigail hugged him tightly. "You're still our daddy. Wilson's Papa. We can still have two. There's room in our hearts for both!"

Jack brought them close, kissing both of their heads.

"How in all the worlds did I get so lucky?"

"You're Daddy, that's how." Wendy kissed his cheek. "Right, Abi?"

"Ahuh."

Jack chuckled, wiping away their tears.
"My sweet little angels." He looked over to William, extending an arm to him. "Get over here."

William chuckled a bit, hugging his brother and nieces.

"Gladly. We love you Jackie. So much."

"And I love all of you." Jack smiled, keeping them close. "Wish I was a little more prepared for this but… I don't care. I can finally talk to you all again."

"Us too!" Abigail kissed his chin. "We love you Daddy!"

"A lot!"

William smiled. "I'm just glad we can talk again. So you can't be around all the time. That's okay. It's better than nothing."

Jack chuckled.

"I'm glad. I guess I'll just have to work on slowly telling everyone else… I'm going to need some help."

"We can help!" The twins grinned. "We're really good at that!"

"And I'll do what I can too." William gave a small smile.

"Thank you. For now…" Jack held his family close. "Can… it just be us? I just want to be with you three right now."

"I think that's a good idea."

The twins nodded, yawning a little as they huddled close to their father.

"Yeah. Tell us stories too..?"

"Please?"

"Alright, which ones?"

"All of them."

Jack chuckled, getting comfortable, lying on the grass with the girls between him and William.

"Very well, whatever the princesses wish, I shall obey."
William and Wes were out in the woods alone. They had decided to go for a walk, needing a break from the busyness of the village. William was getting stronger day by day. He still needed his cane for walking but he could stand on his own for a bit without it.

Though that wasn't his current focus at the moment.

Wes was looking over a journal William had started in regards to keeping track of his dreams. He marveled at the different languages present in it.

"So… Maxwell knows how many languages…?" Wes signed.

"I lost count." William said.

William was standing in the middle of a clearing of trees, Wes sitting not too far from under a tree so that William could see his hands. William was currently practicing different hand gestures. Warming up before doing what he was planning to do.

"Rough guess?"

William hummed in thought before answering.

"... About 1,000."

Wes' eyes went wide.
"And… that's all in your head?"

"Yes and let me tell you, it is strange."

"Try speaking one!"

William hummed in thought before giving a sheepish look. "Honestly, I don't know… I can understand it as if I'm the one speaking it but… I'm not sure how it would come out."

"Give it a try!"

"I-I don't know."

"Come on. I'm the only one here and I promise not to air laugh."

William smiled a bit before closing his eyes, searching his mind to see which language he should try. Something simple, that he knew for sure.

Okay… Deep breath.

"So… It's game time." William spoke in fluent Egyptian, looking at Wes with a sheepish look.

Wes blinked.

"Wow. That was good." He signed. "What did you just say?"

"It's game time."

Wes gave a silent chuckle.

"Of course."

"It was something Maxwell was fond of saying during his travels to Egypt, which that was the language by the way. Egyptian. It was his favorite to use."

"So, he spoke it a lot?"

"It's how he communicated with someone I see a lot in his memories." William went back to practicing his hand gestures. "A friend of his who was a pharaoh of Egypt. Hard to imagine Maxwell had friends but… with all I've seen…" William frowned. "… Wes, can I tell you a secret?"

"My hands are sealed."

William sighed.

"He's been around for centuries. He saw a lot and he's been through a lot. He experienced love, joy, sadness, depression, anger… loss… Is… Is it wrong, despite all he did to me that I… feel somewhat sorry for him?"

Wes put a hand to his chin, thinking it over before signing.

"I don't think it's wrong, William. You understand how he feels because you've been there… and it's human. You feel sorry for him because he's never been normal."

"And I've seen what turned him mad. What made him decide he should just be a monster. At one point he was respected. Looked up to. Genuinely hailed as a good ruler."
"What changed all that then?"

William felt cold as the memory flashed before him.

"Mutiny from one of his subjects."

"For what reason? Did he wrong them?"

"No. They just didn't think he was fit to be king. He was being sparse with how many humans he brought to the Shadow World to be punished. That he wasn't treating the method properly. That they should just go out and capture humans and treat them like livestock, waiting to be brought to the slaughter." William's eyes went dark. "The man wanted war. Something Maxwell never, ever, ever wanted. Not again."

"Again?" Wes tilted his head. "Was there a war before?"

"It was a long time ago." William closed his eyes. "Way before any us and even before he met the pharaoh. I don't have all the pieces of it but… from what I have seen it was horrible. Maxwell never wanted to go through it again so when this came up… Ho, he was seething."

"Did he kill the man?"

"No, he just enacted his usual punishment which was turning the man into a nightmare monster. A terror beak to be precise."

Wes shuddered at the thought. He had seen a few during bouts of insanity.

"Good gracious. Still brutal!"

"Horrible habit of his he developed after the fact. Reason the Queen's butler is the way he is. Though in his case, it was sort of an accident. Maxwell was defending himself and he cast the curse out of instinct. Had a bit of a breakdown afterward."

Wes gulped, imagining the possibility if Maxwell's punishment on him had gone differently.

"That is quite terrifying."

"I know." William shook his head. "Though it was only a punishment he could enact on shadow beings. Humans? Turns out we're immune to that curse in particular. Only thing he can do that is similar to it is what he did to Wilson but in that case you need Their help." William shuddered. "And that is something I'd rather not go into too much detail about but… the main thing with it is that is how new kings or queens are made. It twists your mind to be the darker version of yourself, taking desires and passions and warping them into something that fits Their needs. Fighting the voices is what can make one a great king or queen, something both Wickerbottom and Wilson have and at one point, Maxwell had too before he found the invisible chains They had on him."

Wes frowned. He still had his own grievances with Maxwell for what he had done to change their lives forever… but he couldn't help the pity that he felt for the former king.

"He… really needed help then. Didn't he?"

"He did. He just didn't want to admit it since he never wanted to show weakness. He wanted to be seen as strong, invincible, that he was in charge… but in truth, he was in chains. They lead him onto think he was in charge when in truth They just let him do what he pleased so long as it fit Their needs then… They cornered him, brought him into line but he would never tell anyone that,
not even his closest advisor. The most he would say is They were hungry but he would never tell
how They were tearing at his mind, forcing him to carry out Their needs whether he liked it or not.
His hubris was his downfall since he could never bring himself to cry out for help." William gave a
bitter chuckle. "I guess… that's something we have in common."

Wes shook his head standing up.

"I don't think so. Not exactly. Yes, you have trouble asking for help but you eventually do it. Not…
wait thousands of years!"

"Honestly, with how long it took for me to realize what was happening? It might as well have
been."

"Will…"

William lowered his head.

"S-Sorry… I just… I can't help but keep thinking about what happened. I know you've all forgiven
me but… I… I just can't help the guilt that comes over me. I put you and the others through so
much pain and…"

Wes tipped his chin up, giving a gentle smile.

"And it's not going to be easy to get over it but I promise this, with time, you will heal." Wes
signed. "You've already started with wanting to make use of the powers you have, the journal and
everything else you've been doing. You may fall but we'll be here to help you back up. I'm not
giving up on you nor is anyone else here. I will sign that as many times as I have to so you never
forget that."

William felt his eyes get misty smiling a little.

"That means a lot, Wes. That means…" His voice shook. "A lot, to know I'm not alone… That
you're here for me even after all that."

"Max may have been alone but you're not. Now, come here." Wes threw his arms around William,
surprising the man a little.

William relaxed, bringing his arms around him after a moment.

"Thank you, my friend."

Wes nodded, pulling back.

"Now, show me what you got with that magic."

William nodded, readying his hands.

"Okay… one… two… three!"

He made a gesture with his hands, conjuring shadow flames. He moved them around, the flames
flowing like water till they came together in the air, forming a flower with long flowing petals that
made it look like a sun.

Wes grinned, applauding him, an impressed look on his face.

"Well done!" He signed when William made eye contact again. "Again, again!"
"Alright. Let's try something a little different." William took a deep breath making another gesture as he moved, focus in his eyes. The flames that came forth shifted and moved into the shape of something quite familiar to both men.

It was a shadow version of Chester.

"Ta-da!"

Wes grinned, clapping.

"Just as cute as the original!"

William chuckled, making it dissipate.

"And there's a lot more but I don't want to over do it. I'm getting good at it though. Just like I was back in the circus. Now I just need to figure out how I'm going to tell the others about it. Especially Charlie. I don't want to scare them."

Wes hummed in thought before a sly look came to his face as he grinned mischievously. William gulped, knowing that look always lead to trouble back at the circus.

"... What is that face for?"

Wes just grinned wider before he signed.

"Put on a show!"

"... No!"

"Oh YES!"

"Wes, no!"

"Wes, yes!"

"Wes, please!" William started wringing his hands. "I... I don't know if I even have the confidence for that."

Wes gave a sad look, batting his eyes.

"Just one?"

William looked away… or tried to as Wes continued to give him a look that reminded him far too much of when the girls would beg him to play.

"... Only if you help set up and I'll need an assistant since I doubt Charlie would want to."

"You could ask but if she says no of course."

"I think it's best you just help me. Probably best Charlie finds out about it with me performing."

"Then it's a deal." Wes grinned. "I promise I'll do everything I can to help."

"Thank you, my friend." William smiled. "You're the best."

Wes gave a silent chuckle.
"Anything to help."
It was a restless night for William. He had tried so many times to fall back to sleep only to be greeted by his strange dreams once more.

*Or least I wish I could say they were dreams.*

He sighed, looking down at the journal he had been writing in. There wasn't a lick of English written down just like the times before. This time it was in Gaelic, telling of a story involving getting roped into something in regards to harvesting seaweed and some kind of song.

*Something tells me Maxwell didn't like talking about this one. He sure he got around though.*

He shook his head, putting his journal away and grabbing his cane, leaving the medical tent. He made his way for the fire pit, not daring to go on a walk tonight. Even if the stars provided light the moon was in its new moon phase so the light was dimmer than usual. He didn't want to risk it even if there was no danger.

*The Shadow World makes you view the dark differently after all is said and done.*

As he approached the fire pit, he took note someone else was up and tending to the fire. To his surprise, it wasn't Willow but instead, Wolfgang.

"Wolf?" He asked, getting the man's attention. "What are you doing up?"

Wolfgang shrugged.
"Couldn't sleep. Thought I tend fire for a while to see if it could help me relax."

"I understand that. May I join you?"

"Oui."

William smiled, sitting next to him.

"What keeping you up, Magician Man?" Wolfgang asked, some concern in his eyes.

William sighed.

"Dreams I keep having. They're not nightmares… for the most part but I just… no matter good or bad they just remind of what happened and who I was for a while." William brought his arms around himself. "I have nothing to fear yet… I feel scared sometimes and I don't know why."

Wolfgang gave him a sympathetic look.

"Dreams of bad times, they never look the same. It is no good for rest. I know how you feel."

William looked up, a curious look in his eyes.

"You do? I mean… I know you have your fear of the dark from what I recall but that as far as it goes, right? And you're never embarrassed to admit it."

Wolfgang frowned.

"I wish it was only just a fear of not being able to see. Did I ever tell you I was in the army?"

William's eyes widened.

"I… I actually don't recall that at all."

Wolfgang chuckled, looking to the fire.

"It is something I don't like speaking of much. I was part of many victories for France but… victory never came without loss as well. I saw many things out there, some I'd rather not disclose but the reason the dark was always frightening after all that time was that thought that something was coming for me in the night. All would be quiet in the camps with my fellow soldiers but we knew we had to be ready for anything. For ambushes were common during those times." Wolfgang lowered his head. "Many were lost to those and I got to watch and I couldn't do anything. I barely saw people as people with those we were fighting with. I did things I do not want to admit to but had to so I could live. So trust me, Magician Man, I know where you're coming from. Both in fear and in guilt."

William put a hand on the man's shoulder.

"In your case though it was self defense. I was responsible for manslaughter."

"Your mind was not in the right place Magician Man or rather, someone else was in your mind. Not your fault and none of us blame you."

"Still… A lot things were my fault. If I hadn't made that deal…"

"Magician Man, the past has already gone. Nothing will change it." Wolfgang turned to William, gently turning his face so he was looking him in the eyes. "I know these past few weeks have been
hard for you and moving on from what has happened is not easy and it will take time but know this, at some point you will find way to let go. I have learned this too. There are some things that like to come back but letting it haunt won't fix it. So please, try and move forward. You are better than you think you are. I believe in that Magician Man that I know you are."

William gave him a grateful look, relief in his eyes. He nodded shakily.

"I-I promise I'll do my best for that."

"Good." Wolfgang smiled. "I will do what I can to help you. I always did that for my fellow soldiers and still do that now with one of the greatest things I thought I would never have."

"And that's?"

"Friends that are practically family."

William smiled getting a little misty eyed. It sometimes still surprised him that he did still have friends.

"That means a lot Wolf. Thank you so much."

Wolfgang grinned, giving him a side hug.

"De rien, mon ami."

William returned the embrace.

"You're the best."

Wolfgang chuckled.

"I do what I can. Now, could I interest you in some frog leg sandwiches? I know it late but I find snack helps."

William grinned.

"I don't see why not."
Okay… Deep breath… Focus.

Wilson held his hands out in front of him, summoning shadow flames to them. He nodded, seeing it had worked before starting to manipulate them, making simple shapes at first before making more complex ones.

Okay. Got that. Let's try creating.

He made the shape of a sword, making it start to materialize into a real one but stopping as he felt a small pain in his head. The sword dissipated, Wilson bringing his hands to head.

"Dangit. I was able to do this before. Why can't I now!?" He sat down, running a hand through his hair. "Then again the times I did do it it was in the moment and I had adrenaline going through me… and I honestly don't know if I know what I am doing."

"Maybe you don't, maybe you do or maybe it's fear still holding you back."

Wilson cringed, holding his head at hearing a voice similar to his own, save this one had a more harsh and venomous tone to it.

"I'm… I'm not scared."

"Are you sure? You were pretty scared when I showed up. I know we came to an agreement to try and work together but I can't take you seriously when you're so scared to embrace your other
"Half."

"I'm. Not. SCARED!" Wilson growled. "I… I just…"

"You're what? Figure out so we can get past this. You're smart. Do it!"

Wilson sunk further into his hands.

"I don't know how!"

The voice went quiet as Wilson tried to calm himself down but it just didn't seem to be helping much.

"Wilson?"

The man jumped, looking up, seeing William was standing before him, leaning on his cane. There was a look of concern in the man's eyes at the state Wilson was in.

"M-My apologies. I heard you crying out. A-Are you okay?"

Wilson laughed bitterly, shaking his head.

"Oh, just splendid. Dandy I'd say!"

I'M JUST LOSING MY EVER LOVING MIND!

William flinched a bit, moving back some.

"E-Em… I'm sorry… I…"

Wilson sighed.

"Don't run. I didn't mean it like that. There's just… a lot on my mind. A lot going on."

"Would you care to share?" William sat down in front of him. "If you're comfortable."

Wilson nodded, leaning back a bit though he kept his gaze on the ground.

"... When we first got to this world, I had a very strange dream, where I was fighting with that form I took when I freed you from Maxwell's influence." He sighed shakily. "That form… That voice… was so angry yet so scared. I thought we could work together but… Oh good heavens, I'm terrified I'm going insane now!"

"Take a deep breath."

Wilson inhaled slowly.

"Now, out."

He let it out, running a hand through his hair.

"I hear it now whenever I try to learn to control these powers. Manipulate them like I had back then. But whenever I try I can hear them. They answer back… I… It makes me not want use them."

William frowned, putting a hand on Wilson's shoulder.

"I think I can understand what you're going through to an extent."
Wilson looked up at William, fear present in his eyes.

"I… I really hope I'm not developing some kind of split personality or… something. I don't know but… Okay, I admit it, it scares me. I don't want… I don't know…” Wilson brought his hands to his face. "It hasn't been a huge issue and I haven't really spoken to anyone about it but… I don't know. I just don't know."

William squeezed his shoulder.

"Wilson, what you're experiencing is not what you think it is. Mine was someone talking back at me that wasn't me. What's going on here is something that everyone here has dealt with in the Shadow World and in a sense, we still deal with even here because certain things from the Shadow World don't go away upon leaving. That other you you're describing is a part of you but he's not a separate entity like Maxwell was for me. He is you and you can work with him but the thing is he also carries something else with him. Your doubt and fears, the voices that could be heard in the other world that would try to talk us to go over the edge."

Wilson closed his eyes as he took in this information. He did recall moments such as those. Especially in the first few days of being in that world alone.

"How do I get past it though?" He sighed. "I don't want to be afraid. Yet here I am… and listen to me complaining when you had it far worse."

"We are not playing the "Who had it worse." game. Your feelings and fears are just as valid, Wilson."

"William I…"

William shook his head.

"Listen. This other you was something I helped create along with the things that tortured me. They really did want you to be king over Maxwell since you were more useful to Them."

"But I thought They respected him?"

"Hardly." William scoffed a bit. "They followed his orders but honestly, They were the ones in charge since Maxwell had to tend to Their needs too. In a sense, They bullied him just as much he bullied me into acting a certain way and being a certain thing and that's how it works. They take the worst in you and amplify it and take something you desire and twist into something dark that will serve Their needs. That's how new kings or queens are created. Your grandmother is quite the exception being someone who took the throne willingly but she is native to the Shadow World so that helps and she still has her battle to fight to not let Them change her and she's doing well for herself. That is what is happening to you since Maxwell did plant the seeds for you to have your personality warped. Getting past it is a matter of both working with it and finding balance. Rejecting it will just make it resent you, though I think you already knew that from your dream."

Wilson nodded.

"Yes… I never knew there was so much behind being the one of the throne or just having powers like this."

"It's complicated and sometimes I don't even understand what I know half the time. I don't think even Maxwell completely understood it either."

Wilson chuckled a little.
"Maxwell didn't even fully understand it. That's... That's honestly rather amusing given how smug he was and how knowledgeable he acted."

"Oh don't I know it. Load of hot air."

"Pfft!"

William grinned.

"I think he was just as confused as I was and he was at it for a long time. I... I have a lot of stories to tell you in regards to him but right now, let's focus on you. I might be able to help since... I have made a recent discovery about myself."

"Hm? That so?"

William nodded, before holding out his hands, summoning shadow flames to them.

"Turns out, I might still have some power left as a side effect of being fused to Maxwell for so long."

Wilson's eyes widened.

"That's amazing."

"It certainly is an experience. Perhaps we could help each other?"

"I don't see why not. You're more so a master than I am... William, do you have a shadow form like mine too then?"

"I'm not sure to be honest." William grinned sheepishly. "Maxwell was technically mine but for all I know, I might have something of my own I never knew about."

"It'd be interesting to find out."

"It would be and... might be helpful in me trying to move on." William had a serious look come to his eyes. "I'm going to be honest, Wilson, I've had my own voices talking to me. Constant reminders of what I did. I don't want to live like that anymore. I know what I did is wrong but I want to make it right and being racked with guilt and moping around isn't going to help anyone. So maybe... I can help you and you can help me get this under control."

Wilson's gaze softened as he nodded. He got a determined look, holding a hand out for William.

"It's a deal my friend."

William took it, shaking it.

"We'll figure this out. Together."

"Together."
"Just like that. Perfect, Wilson."

Wilson kept his eyes narrowed as he manipulated the shadow flames in front of them, causing them to burst out like a firework before dissipating.

William clapped.

"Nicely done. You're catching on quick."

Wilson smiled, giving a bow.

"Thank you."

"And the voices, if I might ask?"

"Not as bad. I actually rarely hear from the other me. When he does speak up though, he's just mainly telling me how to improve. It's… strange but seems we're… getting along?"

"Well, better than arguing if you ask me." William rubbed the back of his neck. "Though um… off the subject but… you sure you want to perform with me still? I know stage performance isn't really something you take interest in."

Wilson fiddled with his fingers, giving a sheepish grin.
"I think Willow would like the shadow-works as I've started calling them."

William got an understanding look as he smirked.

"Oh, I see how it is."

"W-What?"

"You want to impress her, don't you?"

Wilson blushed, turning away as he made a few sparks in his hands, a far off look coming to his eyes.

"Just… She's amazing, she's fiery, she's gentle when she wants to be, she's a fierce fighter, she listens to me and she always has had my back ever since I met her. Always. I…"

William tapped his shoulder, pointing to his hand as Wilson realized he had made a silhouette of her with his flames.

"UWAH!"

William chuckled.

"Careful, magic tends to reflect feelings too. Nothing wrong with wanting to impress someone or at the very least, entertain, something I think the village could possibly use since everyone has been working so hard."

"Definitely. And I know the kids have gotten rather bored lately. Going a bit stir crazy."

"And we can't have that."

"So…" William picked up a top hat he had lying nearby. "Let's give 'em a show."

oooooo

Wes had everyone gathered around the fire pit area where a small stage had been set up. It wasn't anything fancy, just a simple plank made platform with a wall behind it that had curtains draped over it but it was good enough.

Wes held up title cards as soon as everyone was seated.

"Ladies and gentlemen, presenting, The Amazing William Carter and The Gentleman Scientist Wilson Higgsbury as they perform illusions that your eyes have never seen with the help of me! Wes the Mime!"

Everyone chuckled at the last card before Wes set them down, hurrying on stage, cueing the two men on stage. They ran up on stage, both giving a bow as everyone clapped.

"So, what you think these two are up to?" Willow whispered to Charlie. "I would think if William was ever going to do magic shows again he would ask you to be his assistant instead of Wes."

"I'm not sure. I thought so too." Charlie giggled. "But we'll see."

William gave his best confident look to the small crowd before them.

"Thank you everyone for coming to our show. We hope you enjoy." He whistled as Wilson stepped
back, the two men giving each other smirks.

"You know I think there's not enough room on this stage for us both." Wilson remarked bringing his hands together as a small ball of shadow magic appeared in them. "CATCH!"

William reacted quickly as Wilson threw the ball, catching it in his hands.

"Oh dear, must you be so brash?" William chuckled. "There's plenty of room, right Wes?"

Wes nodded, giving a thumbs up.

"But if you want to play that game." William tossed the ball back to him, the ball shifting into a small hound that knocked Wilson over. "We'll play that game."

The survivors had stunned looks on their faces. The children cheered and Charlie… was just surprised.

"He still has it." She whispered.

Wilson got up, dusting himself off.

"How dare you!" He grinned, changing the hound into a ball again throwing it as it morphed into a phoenix made of shadow flames that flew around William's head.

Willow let out an audible squeal.

"YES!"

William ducked but couldn't avoid the phoenix pulling at his hair.

"Gah! No fair!"

"How? We have no rules!"

William laughed.

"Alright, alright, try this then." William brought the phoenix down, changing it back into a ball before throwing it as it morphed into Chester, though instead of knocking Wilson over it just bounced over to him before bouncing up high enough to lick him on the cheek. "... I did not mean for it to do that but okay then!"

Wilson laughed.

"Of course!"

Chester who was sitting with the twins gave a whine.

"No need to be jealous old friend!" Wilson assured, tapping the shadow copy before getting an idea as he grinned. He shifted the ball around before tossing it as a shark formed from it, its jaws snapping…

Albeit it was quite small and instead hung onto the rim of William's top hat, its tail squirming around.

"... I intended for that to be more dramatic."
Everyone burst out laughing at this.

William chuckled before making the shark dissipate.

"Alright, enough dueling. I believe our assistant would like to participate." He waved for Wes to step forward. "So, my dear mime, have you ever dreamt of flying?"

Wes nodded a grin coming to his face.

"Well then, let's make him fly!" Wilson smirked.

"Oh this is gonna go well." Charlie whispered to Willow. "These two are hamming it up."

Wilson and William started making the same motions with their hands, moving in perfect synchronization before summoning shadow flames that worked their way around Wes before forming a pair of wings on his back that attached to him through a shadow flame harness. Wes grinned as the wings flapped, bringing him into the air. Wes struck a pose once he was high enough, everyone cheering.

Wes flew around them a few times before coming back to the stage, taking a sweeping bow and blowing a kiss to Wigfrid.

Wigfrid chuckled, cheering.

"That's me husband!"

Wes bowed again before letting Wilson and William take center stage.

"And now, our finale." William said. "Ready, Wilson?"

"Yes." Wilson smiled.

The two moved in synchronization again, manipulating shadow flames, bringing them together. It took a moment before they formed a flower with long petals and leaves, making it look like a sun of sorts. Everyone stared at it in amazement, then took note of the two men. Their eyes widened as they saw their forms shift.

Wilson's attire changed to that of his shadow suit, his hair becoming wild like fire and his ears elongated. The same happened to William. His attire was now something more fitted for a showman. A nice fancy black coat with long coat tails with silver accents to match his silver grey vest under and the rose adorning his black and red top hat. His ears were elongated as well and his hair, while not wild like Wilson's, now had silver streaks in it.

"Behold!" They both called out as everyone started applauding.

"Wow." Willow breathed. "They really are amazing, aren't they?"

Charlie looked William over, surprised.

"They really are.."

The made the flower dissipate before taking a bow. There hearts were pounding but despite that, they felt great. They looked to each other with grins before being taken aback by the appearances they now had.

"W-When did you change?" William asked. "I-I don't remember that being part of the act."
Wilson felt his hair and looked over himself stunned.

"I don't remember doing it. I don't recall you having that form either."

William got a confused look before looking at himself, gasping a bit. This had never happened before. He touched his ears, feeling they were elongated.

"H-How...?" William wasn't sure what to make of this.

Wilson put a hand to his chin.

"... We were in perfect sync."

"And it felt well... Good."

Wilson gave a small shrug.

"I suppose it's just part of getting control of it."

"I suppose so."

So this... this is the other half of myself. Just like Wilson has. This is... Me.

The twins were the first to come running up to the stage, hugging Wilson, Willow soon joining them.

"Papa you were amazing!" Wendy squealed. "Both you and Uncle Will!"

"Yeah!" Abigail hugged him tighter. "You were just like a real performer!"

Wilson chuckled, hugging the girls close.

"Why thank you very much. I'm glad you enjoyed it."

Abigail looked to William, holding an arm out to him.

"You deserve hugs too!"

William smiled, walking over as he brought his arms around them.

"Thank you, girls."

"Anytime! You were just like you were before but better!"

"Yeah! And that new suit looks good on you!"

William blushed, glancing at himself again.

"I-If you say so."

"So modest." Willow chuckled before looking to Wilson. "Hey you."

"Yes?" Wilson grinned sheepishly.

Willow kissed his cheek.

"Amazing show. Can you do this again sometime?"
Wilson turned bright red, his ears standing up.
"Y-You would wanna see this again?"

"Oh yes! Maybe even see some solo performances too."

Wilson grinned.
"If the fair lady wishes."

"We shall make plans then." William looked over to Wes, seeing the mime was currently being smothered in kisses by his wife. "Cute."

William pulled away from the group, dusting himself off, sighing in relief.

That went better than I thought it would.

He looked to the audience, seeing Charlie approaching the stage.

"H-Hey." William smiled sheepishly.

Charlie smiled warmly, taking his hands into hers.

"Look at you. Quite the change."

His ears folded down a little.

"I-Is this okay? I.. I don't know how to change back yet but I'll figure it out-"

She silenced him with a kiss. After a moment, she pulled back, giving a grin.

"I love it."

William was bright red, his ears twitching and a silly grin on his face.

"Y-You do?"

"Yes!" She squealed throwing her arms around him. "You're so CUTE!"

William's ears twitched again, bringing his own arms around her, smiling a bit.

"Well… I'm glad you like this. I was trying to figure out how to tell you and the others about the power situation I just… didn't want to scare anyone."

Charlie nuzzled him, bringing a hand up behind his head, stroking one of his ears.

"You're not scaring anyone. I'll always love you no matter what. This is just… amazing."

William smiled, nuzzling her hand.

"Thank you, Charlie."

Charlie smiled, kissing the tip of his nose.

"You're very welcome. I'm so proud of you." She gave a puppy eyed look. "But next time, can I be your assistant again?"
William grinned, bringing her closer, kissing her head.

"I'd love nothing more."

She sighed happily, keeping close.

"Then it's a date."
"Do you think they'll mind us asking this?" William asked quietly as he and Charlie made their way through the village. Charlie had her arm around him securely, helping steady him.

"I hope not. They did it for Wigfrid and Wes." She whispered. "Everyone else has nice clothes still from that. I just need a new dress and you need a better suit."

William kept an arm around Charlie.

"I hope they don't mind."

"Well, we'll find out."

They soon came upon Wilson, who was currently working on another house, supposedly the second to last one before he got to his own.

"Wilson?" William asked as the man jumped a bit, whirling around.

"Oh! William, Charlie, greetings. How're you both? Not overdoing it?"

"Wilson, you don't need to go doctor mode every time you see us." Charlie rolled her eyes with a small smirk.

"Pardon me for being concerned." Wilson twirled the hammer in his hand. "So, what can I do for you both?"
"Well… We… We were wondering… It if it's not too much of a bother we… we would like to be able to… have our wedding ceremony some time soon."

Wilson smiled warmly.

"Just tell me when. I'm almost done with this house which would be yours. So, if you give me a few days I can have it done - and add on any extras."

Charlie's eyes lit up.

"An extra room? Or two?"

"Oh, two?"

William blushed a little.

"We… do eventually want to start a family. It was something we often talked about before things went awry."

"I can do that for you. If you could give me about a week I can get it done. Would that be doable?"

Charlie looked to William.

"Is that too much of a wait?"

"Not at all. I'd rather us have a house than me carry my bride back to the medical tent."

"Then it's perfect."

"I'll let Grandmother know then. In the meantime, we'll make preparations. I'd definitely go see Woodie for attire and such. He knows his stuff."

Charlie giggled.

"Oh yes and I can sketch up what I'd like."

William's gaze softened.

"I know what you want my dear."

"I just hope he can make it."

"I'm sure he can." Wilson smiled. "Just give him time. If you need anything else, please let me know."

"Of course! Em, do you know where Woodie is right now?"

"I think he's doing some log organizing over at his cabin. I'd check there first. If not, check the fire pit log stash."

"Will do, thank you again!"

With that, the couple hurried off, finding Woodie where Wilson said they would. William gulped a bit. At times he still was nervous around the others.

Charlie squeezed his hand, noting his nervous look.
"Hey, it's okay. It's just Woodie."

"I-I know. Still not used to being friends with everyone just yet…"

Charlie nuzzled him gently.

"It'll be okay. Now, come on."

They came upon Woodie's cabin, seeing the man organizing logs by the type of tree they were from.

"Alright so this was from the pines…"

"Um… Excuse me?" William said, almost whispered.

Woodie turned around, grinning as he saw the couple.


"Not right now." Charlie gave him a bit of a puppy eyed look. "We're actually planning our wedding ceremony and were wondering if you could help us with the wardrobe, please?"

"I could use a new suit and… Charlie has something special in mind."

"I'd be honored to help with that." Woodie chuckled. "I was hoping that was soon with all the talk me and Charlie had about you two eventually getting married and stuff before you were awake and all."

Charlie giggled a little.

"Yeah, those were fun conversations whenever I was helping you sew outfits."

"Indeed. Come, to my cabin."

The couple followed Woodie inside to a room in his cabin where he had all his material and sewing supply.

"Alright." Woodie pulled up a chair for himself and the couple, handing a piece of paper and some charcoal to Charlie. "What would you like, Ms. Charlie?"

"Let's see…” Charlie began to sketch, nostalgia coming to her eyes as line by line, stroke by stroke, the image in her mind appeared on the page. "Something like this and for the veil something like this?" She asked holding it up.

It was a long flowing dress with a shawl that had rose patterns in it and a veil that had roses adorning the band.

"Think you could make this?"

Woodie looked it over, nodding as he took in the details.

"Shouldn't be too much trouble. I like a challenge. Hm…” He hummed in thought. "Actually, this along with some attire would make a nice line up. Would you mind if I made rose themed outfits for everyone attending the wedding as a means of matching the dress and eventual suit for William?"
Charlie's eyes lit up nodding quickly.

"Oh yes yes yes! That's honestly what I had envisioned when we first started planning. I was going to even have the bridesmaids decked out in roses."

"Then leave it to me. You two deserve a wonderful wedding. Hm..." Woodie got his own piece of paper, sketching an outfit before showing it to Charlie and William. "How about this for the groom?"

It was a simple long flowing coat with a dress shirt, vest and black pants.

"Oh, that is perfect!" Charlie nodded.

William smiled, nuzzling her a little.

"I love it. Nothing too outrageous and it'll compliment my beautiful bride."

"Will." She giggled, blushing a bit.

"Heh, you two are adorable. I should have everything made in a week or so."

"That's perfect. That's when our house will be finished." William smiled.

Charlie squealed a bit.

"Oh Woodie, thank you thank you thank you!"

"Hey, anything for my friends." Woodie grinned. "We'll have a wedding for roses before you know it."

"It'll be wonderful!"

"Say Charlie, why don't you let the others know? I'll finish up any details here." William offered.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm getting better with my cane. I'll be fine."

She smiled, kissing his cheek before hurrying off. William made sure she was gone before looking to Woodie.

"May I request something myself? Just... for down the line."

oooooo

"I now pronounce you, husband and wife." Wickerbottom smiled. "You may kiss."

William pulled Charlie close, kissing her on the lips as she brought her hands to his cheeks, everyone applauding.

Wilson smiled warmly as he applauded glancing to his daughters, the two cheering loudly, jumping around a little.

"Isn't it wonderful?"

"It is!" Abigail giggled. "They finally get to be together!"
"I think this is the best wedding ever!"

They finally get their happy ending.

Jack was off to the side, discreetly wiping away a tear from his face.

"Way to go, Will."

William chuckled a little before scooping Charlie up into his arms, bridal style, eliciting a giggle from the woman.

"So, Mrs. Carter, shall we carry on with the festivities?"

Charlie grinned, kissing his cheek.

"Yes we shall Mr. Carter. Let the reception begin!"

Everyone cheered, following the bride and groom back to the village. The place once again became alit with song and dance as it had at Wes and Wigfrid's wedding. All congratulating the couple and giving them gifts.

It went on for some time till late into the night, when everyone felt tired to finally call it good. William grinned as he carried Charlie to their new home, keeping her close.

"So, was it everything you wanted?" William asked.

Charlie sighed happily, nuzzling him.

"It was wonderful. Like I was having the most amazing dream." She yawned a little, nuzzling into his coat a bit. "Everything was wonderful. The clothes, the food, the music, the company…" She frowned a bit. "I wish my sisters and father could've been here but… I'm sure they would be happy too, I would hope."

"I'm sure they would've been." William kissed her head. "Sorry that was the one thing I couldn't do for you."

"It's fine, what we were able to have was perfect and… who knows, maybe we'll see them soon."

"Only time will tell. For now, let's go home."

"Right… Our home… It's really ours."

William nodded, nuzzling her.

"I've got one more thing I want to show you before bed. I asked a favor of Woodie and Wilson because… I know there's something we both are planning for when we feel ready."

Charlie blinked a bit as William carried her in, setting her down when they reached the hallway.

"It's the second door on the right."

Charlie was curious as she opened it, her eyes widening at what she saw.

"William...?"

William smiled, coming up behind her, putting his hands on her shoulders. In the room, a crib was
set up along with a few other pieces of furniture meant for a nursery and in the crib, was a small little dress made of pink material that had rose patterns on it.

"I know we don't know if we'll be having a boy or girl in our future but… I asked Woodie if he could make that for us. Just in case." He gave a sheepish look. "I hope this isn't too much just thought it would it would be a good idea. Do you like it?"

Charlie smiled, a look of joy in her eyes, as she leaned her head back, nuzzling him.

"Oh, William this is beautiful… This is perfect." She moved his arms so he had them around her, nuzzling him again. "You are perfect."

"So are you." William kissed her head. "I'm glad you like it, Charlie."

She kissed his chin.

"I love it… This is our life now."

"And I love every second."

William smiled, keeping her close.

"I'm looking forward to the future. More than I have in quite some time."

Charlie closed her eyes keeping close.

"Tonight's the start of a new life."
"And you've been experiencing these symptoms for about a month or so?" Wilson asked as he was quickly writing things down on a piece of paper.

Charlie nodded.

"Yes… It's been rough but I've been pulling through and some days are better than others. I think I'm sick then the next day I feel fine."

"I see…" Wilson hummed in thought. "Nausea, some stomach pain and some notable bulging in the stomach?"

"It's not a lot but I noticed when I was trying on my old dress it didn't quite fit properly."

Wilson nodded, noting Charlie was looking a little different in regards to figure.

"Charlie, be honest with me, have you been having any problems in regards to that red curse as some women refer to it as?"

Charlie's eyes widened a little before giving a sheepish look, nodding.

"Y-Yes. It hasn't come at all since I started feeling like this. It's not really a complaint though, you know?"

"I'm aware. Though this starts to add up." Wilson looked amused as he jotted it down.
"What's with that look?"

Wilson chuckled before looking her right in the eyes

"Mrs. Carter, I believe you're showing the signs of being two months into what would be considered a healthy normal pregnancy."

Charlie gasped a little, before she started to laugh a bit herself.

"Oh goodness… It's really happening? You're not playing a joke?"

"I would never kid about someone's health. I promise you that. You're fine."

"Oh goodness…" She brought her hands to her stomach. "This… This explains a lot… Oh my gosh I'm… I'm going to have a baby." Her eyes got a little misty. "I… I mean. William and I were planning on it but we were worried for a bit since we weren't sure if me being the Grue would've affected me in regards to having children or what happened to him and… we just sure if it would really happen."

Wilson gave a gentle look, squeezing her shoulder.

"Then please allow me to congratulate you. Of course, I'll keep an eye on your health, but for someone who didn't know - everything looks just fine. Coming along nicely in fact."

"Thank you." She wiped her eyes quickly. "I'm going to have a baby… I'm going to be a mother!"

"And William a father. I'm sure he'll be ecstatic."

"I can't wait to tell him."

"Let me just do one more thing then I'll let you go." Wilson got his stethoscope. "Can you lift up your shirt please so I can see your stomach? I want to see how developed the baby is."

Charlie nodded, doing as told as Wilson listened in. He smiled softly as he heard the sound of a small heartbeat.

"Nice strong heartbeat. Small, but strong."

Charlie smiled, getting a bit misty eyed again.

"That's wonderful."

"Would you like to listen?"

"Can I?"

Wilson nodded, taking off the stethoscope and putting it on Charlie, letting her listen to the heartbeat.

"See?"

Charlie nodded, closing her eyes, listening for a moment.

This is my baby… They're right here, right now. Their healthy and safe… and they're ours. Mine and William.
"Perfect." She took off the stethoscope as Wilson helped her up. "Thank you so much Wilson. Oh, William is going to be so excited."

"Well, better go break the news to him. I'll have a follow up with you each month to track the baby's progress and make sure you two are fine and healthy."

Charlie smiled giving a nod.

"Right. Thank you again." She gave him a quick hug before hurrying off.

**If I recall right, he and Wes were spending time together fishing today. He should still be there by the lake.**

Sure enough, there they were by the lake. Both signing to each other, on a break from fishing, their rods set aside.

"Then, woosh! The tree guard went up in flames!" Wes signed, laughing. "That day, Wigfrid vowed to never enrage to the tree guards again by planting a pine cone every time she chopped down a tree. Even though some days we refer to them as tree gods because they basically are."

William threw his head back laughing as he pictured it. It would be just like Wigfrid to anger them.

"She's always such a spit fire! I'm not surprised at all by that." He signed chuckling.

"She learned though."

"Indeed."

Charlie smiled softly at the sight, going over to them, motioning for Wes to be quiet before she threw her arms around William.

"Hi."

William blinked a few time before chuckling, nuzzling her.

"Hey you. Everything go alright with Wilson?"

Charlie kissed his cheek.

"It went just fine. In fact, more than fine."

"Is that so? I'm so glad. You were feeling so sick. Did he give you any medicine?"

Charlie grinned.

"No… But he gave me some news."

**Hm.. What was that sign again... Ah.**

Charlie moved in front of him, making a motion as if she was rocking a baby.

It took William a moment to register what the sign was before his eyes widened.

"Charlie… are… are you...?"

Charlie nodded, a bright smile on her face.
"Yes. William we're having a baby!"

William was silent for a moment before throwing his arms around her, bringing her close.

"Oh, Charlie that's wonderful! I... I can't believe it!" He pulled back a little, looking at her. "H- How far along? I really should think before hugging too hard."

Charlie kissed his nose quickly.

"Two months and don't worry so much. The baby's nice and safe... and I got to hear the heart. They're so strong."

He gazed at her, his eyes getting glassy, before pressing his forehead to hers, laughing a bit.

"They're healthy and safe... Oh, I'm so glad. So, so, glad. Charlie. My dear Charlie."

"William..." Charlie nuzzled him, sighing happily.

Wes squished his cheeks before getting up.

"I gotta tell everyone!" He signed before running off.

They laughed keeping close to one another, William bringing his hands over her stomach.

"Is this okay?"

"More than okay. They're yours too." She laid her head over his shoulder. "I'm just so happy. We're having a baby. Our baby."

William nodded, keeping her close.

"Boy or girl, I think I'm already in love."

Charlie nuzzled him.

"I can agree. Whatever they'll be, I'll love them no matter what."

William smiled, sighing happily.

"Just have to wait."

She nodded closing her eyes.

"Worth it."
"I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Sincerely,

Wilson Percival Higgsbury

P.S. Thank for the cookies. They were quite wonderful."

Cecelia sighed as she looked at the last letter she had gotten from her son for what was probably the tenth time that day. It had been months since she had last heard from him.

I wonder if my last letter got lost on its way to him. He usually responds within a month or so.

She slumped against the table she was at, running a hand through her hair.

Maybe he’s just busy. Wilson always did have a habit of getting caught up in his work that he’d forget about things. Percival had that habit too. He’s a grown man now, he can take care of himself without me having to worry about him so much... yet I can’t help it.

"Cece?"

Cecelia looked up, seeing her brother come into the kitchen.

"Ah, Emmett. Shift over already?"
"Yeah, they let me off early since the equipment was being temperamental and they didn't want me being a liability." He gave a small smile. "How about you though? Lungs doing alright?"

"Yes, starting to feel a little better. I just hate not being able to work alongside you at the factory."

"Hey, don't worry about it." Emmett made his way over to her, stroking her back. "Your health comes first and those fumes were not doing you any favors."

"Still though…"

Emmett shook his head before looking at the letter in Cecelia's hands.

"Thinking about him again?"

"Yes." Cecelia closed her eyes. "Emmett… It's been months since we've heard from him. I know I shouldn't worry so much but… my heart tells me something might've happened to him. He's never this quiet even on his bad days or months. I know my son and this isn't like him."

"It is concerning." Emmett frowned. "Then again, Wilson hasn't really been himself since he left home. Seemed like every year he just grew more distant from us but he never went silent entirely."

"That's what worries me." Cecelia lowered her head.

Emmett stroked his sister's back, humming in thought.

"Tell you what, how about we visit him this weekend? I have that time off."

Cecelia looked up to her brother in surprise.

"You sure?"

"Positive. Besides, I want to be sure my nephew's okay."

Cecelia gave a small smile.

"Should we send a letter to let him know we're coming?"

"Nah." Emmett smirked. "Let's surprise him."

oooooo

Cecelia and Emmett stared at the building before them. Cecelia looked at the address from the last letter Wilson had sent her and back up and the house.

Or what could be loosely, LOOSELY described as a house. It was leaning ominously to the side and there was a poorly made picket fence around it. The house had several tiles missing in the roof as well.

"This… This is his house?" Emmett gasped, jaw dropping open.

Cecelia made a sound very akin to when she was in pain as she rushed to the door, knocking on it.

"No, no, I don't care if he's a grown man he is NOT staying here! NO!"

"Cece, slow down and careful!" Emmett shouted, chasing after her, making sure to watch his step as he ran up to the house, soon at Cecelia's side.
After a few minutes of no answer being heard, Cecelia opened the door, looking around.

"Wilson?" She asked, looking around. "Wilson, are you home?"

As the two walked around the house, they couldn't help but notice how… orderly the place was. Not in the good way though. It was orderly in the manner that no one had been moving around the place for quite some time.

"Wilson? Wilson boy?" Emmett asked, stopping in front of a table with papers stacked on it. He took one of them, noting it was the last letter Cecelia had sent to Wilson. "Looks like he got your letter Cece. Seems he didn't reply though."

Cecelia didn't answer as she made her way through the different levels of the house, checking every room, despair gripping at her mind tighter and tighter when she found no sign of her son anywhere. Finally, she made her way to the attic, Emmett right behind her.

There… They weren't sure what to think. The place was a mess. Papers scattered everywhere along with tools, books lying open on the floor. It was like a storm had blown through the place. The biggest thing that caught their attention was the odd contraption that was in the center of the room.

"What… is that…?" Emmett questioned, walking up to it. "It… kind of looks like a face."

"Wilson…" Cecelia whispered. "What were you doing…?"

Emmett frowned, looking to her sister before glancing around the room again, his eyes noting something on one of the tables. He made his way over, picking up what had caught his attention. It was a knife that had blood on it. Dried up blood. That had been there for who knows how long.

"Cece… I've got a bad feeling about what was going on in here."

Cecelia turned to him, her eyes going wide as she took in the knife, horror filling her.

"No." She went closer looking at it.

Emmett frowned, letting her take it into her hands carefully.

"Cece… I-"

"... He can't be." She whispered looking down at it in shock. What had he been doing?

What had he done?

Her gaze flickered to the large window, hurrying to it, looking out and down, seeing a large chasm below.

"... You don't think he...?"

"I hope to high heaven he didn't." Emmett looked at the contraption again. "Somehow… I wonder if all this mess has something to do with that thing."

Cecelia set the knife down, looking at the contraption before picking up the papers scattered around, reading through them, concern going through her.

"I fear I'll wind up forgotten. It feels like every day I get farther and farther from a break through. I'm such a failure."
"I'm going to figure it out. No matter how many years it takes. I won't wind up like others before me."

"A voice has called out to me today." She read aloud from the final note. "I've never felt such energy before. So many ideas, so much knowledge. I feel elated. Yet as if my head might explode from too much. I have to keep working. I have to finish it..

I'm worried. What if something got him like it got Ed?

Emmett kept his eyes on the contraption, examining it, trying to see exactly what Wilson was intending to accomplish with it. Though none of it really made sense. The only thing clear about how it worked was a lever attached to it

Do I even dare...?

He reached his hand out, hovering it over the knob of the lever.

"Emmett?" Cece made her way over, eyes full of concern. "What are you doing?"

"It's either find out what this did or climb down the cliff to see if we can find him." He told her before he pulled the lever.

The contraption creaked and whirred as it came to life. Both looked at the machine in horror at how much it seemed to resemble a face of sorts. A very unwelcoming one at that. They moved back, starting to head for the exit till both felt something grab at their feet. They looked down, their eyes widening at the sight of shadow hands coming out of the floor and grabbing at them.

"Cece!" Emmett reached for his sister as he was being pulled through the floor by the hands.

Cecelia reached out grasping his wrists with both of her hands as he did the same for her, trying to stay together as the shadow hands pulled harder, faster.

"EMMETT!"

The room faded to black for both of them and they were gone from sight.
It had been a long day of scouting for Wilson in the Shadow World. He decided to handle this one on his own. While he enjoyed the company of others, he needed some time on his own... well, relatively speaking.

Chester bounced alongside him, keeping close to the man. It felt like old times having it just be him and Chester traveling together.

*But unlike those times, I have a real safe home to go back to.*

He looked at the surroundings they were in. He had decided he wanted to go further into the swamp he and Woodie had found a while back. Sure, it was risky to explore alone but he made sure to mind his footing and he had Chester to help him detect any danger in the terrain.

He sat down, drawing out the area around him on his map, making careful notes.

"Alright, we should be done soon." He rubbed his head a little. "And thankfully so. I think this place is giving me a headache with the stench."

"Bark."

Wilson sighed, shaking his head, trying to clear it.

"I'll take a nap when we get to a place to settle for the night."
Chester whimpered, nuzzling him.

"I promise."

Wilson continued with his drawing. While the swamp was mostly silent there was the faint sounds of creatures moving under the surface and bugs buzzing around. It wasn't peaceful but it was nice, so to speak. Though all of that was soon interrupted by a shriek that ripped through the air.

Chester perked up, as did Wilson.

"That… didn't sound like a monster shriek." Wilson said.

*That sounded human.*

Wilson quickly packed his map away, grabbing his spear and headed towards the source of the shriek. He looked around, unsure what he was searching for exactly till something caught his attention. He saw a pack of humanoid fish like creatures piling on top of something, beating whatever it was to what he could assume was to death.

He growled, running in, swinging at one hard, striking it in the head.

"HEY YOU MONGRELS! Try something else on for size!"

The creatures snarled, two of them making their way for him. Wilson dodged a few hits, striking once again.

They shrieked at him, trying to land more punches but he was too fast for them. He struck one to the ground dead, the monster disappearing instantly, leaving behind a fish.

*This world is still so odd in how it works.*

He went to attack the other, only to find himself punched in the back by one behind him. He cried out, falling over. The two charged at him, ready to strike. He braced himself for a hit… only for it to never come. Instead, he heard a loud sound of a punch followed by a howl of agony from one of the beasts.

"Hands off you bloody mongrels!" said a voice.

Wilson opened his eyes, quickly sitting up. Before him, he saw a woman with short black hair, dressed in a button up shirt with a purple sweater vest and black skirt taking on the beasts with just her mere fists. He couldn't see her face due her back being turned to him. She took the beasts head on, punching one of them hard in the chin, causing it to fall back before turning into a fish. She turned her attention to the other one, delivering a few blows before it met the same fate as its companion.

She looked to the others that were off the side, getting into a ready stance.

"Any of you other blokes want some of this!?"

The creatures rushed off, fleeing in terror. The woman snorted, crossing her arms.

"That's right, you better run ya lowly scum!"

Wilson couldn't help but stare.

*I'm being reminded a lot of when Willow saved me… but who is this woman? Her voice… it… it*
Wilson got up, making his way towards her but stopped, not wanting to startle her. He kept a few feet away before clearing his throat.

"Um… Miss…?" He asked.

The woman turned around, facing him entirely. A gasp escaped her mouth as soon as her eyes landed on Wilson. A gasp escaped Wilson as well as he got a better look at her face. He knew that face anywhere.

They were silent as they stared at each other, not sure how to react or even what to say. Finally, the woman broke the silence.

"Wilson?" She asked, tears stinging her eyes. "Is that you…?"

Wilson nodded, his jaw dropping open a bit, hardly able to believe his eyes. He thought he'd never see her again.

That she might no longer be living.

Finally, he spoke, his voice cracking.

"Mother..?"

Cecelia approached him slowly, bringing one of her hands to his face. She looked at him carefully, her thumb brushing across his cheek. She knew those eyes anywhere. Those deep blue eyes that were just like his father's.

"Oh heavens… It's you… It's really you." She bit her lip. "Wilson… My little boy."

Wilson felt tears sting his eyes as he brought his arms around her.

"Mum… Oh Mum!" He sobbed a little. "I… I.."

Cecelia brought her arms around him tightly, running one her hands through his hair.

"You're alive. Oh thank goodness you're alive!"

Wilson nuzzled her hand, tears rolling down his face.

"I'm here… I'm here… And you…"

She pulled back a little, kissing both his cheeks before kissing his head.

"I thought I would never see you again after being brought here but… Oh Wilson, you have no idea how happy I am to see you after all this time."

Wilson smiled, relief going through him as he nuzzled her.

"I'm so glad to see you. I was wondering if you… If you were still… I didn't know how much time I..." He brought a hand to his head. "Oh Mother."

Cecelia frowned, bringing her hand over his.

"Wilson, I haven't heard from you in over eight months. I was so worried something terrible had
happened to you since I never got a reply to my last letter."

Wilson felt guilt settle into his stomach as he gazed at her.

"I..." He looked down going quiet.

Cecelia nuzzled him, bringing him closer to her again.

"But I don't care. You're here now and that's all that matters to me."

Wilson hugged her tightly, resting his head on her shoulder.

"Mother, I really have missed you a lot."

"And I have missed you." She kissed his head. "Oh my son."

Wilson smiled a bit, enjoying her embrace before pulling back a bit, getting a better look at her. She hadn't changed too much, she was still the same as he remembered her, yet the shock still held strong of actually seeing her here.

"I have so many questions." Wilson said

"And hopefully I can answer them all but how about we head to back to mine and Emmett's camp and I can answer them along the way?"

Wilson's eyes widened.

"UNCLE EMMETT'S HERE TOO!?"

"Yes it was... quite the freak accident in how we got here." Cecelia shook her head, remembering how they got here in the first place. "I'll tell you on the way."

Wilson nodded, whistling as Chester bounced up beside him.

"Bark! Bark!"

Cecelia smiled, giggling a bit.

"Awww! You made a little friend!"

Wilson chuckled. "This is Chester. He's a dog of sorts."

Chester nodded before opening his mouth producing a canteen for Wilson as he took it out.

"A useful one."

"I see." Cecelia petted Chester's head. "So cute..."

"Bark!"

Cecelia giggled.

"Alright, this way."

She lead Wilson on a path out of the swamp, telling her tale as they went along.

"And then we found this weird contraption in the attic amongst the mess up there." She looked to
Wilson. "Wilson, what was that thing?"

Wilson cringed.

"It was a portal to this world. I was tricked, you see."

"By what?"

Wilson sighed.

"Mother, I just want you to understand that what I am about to tell you is true. I was tricked by a voice I heard through a radio. I didn't know who the voice belonged to till I was brought here. It belonged to the king who once ruled the world. A shadow king to be exact and… he gave me knowledge through shadow magic. Shadow magic that I now have control of. He's no longer in power now and things turned out differently than I expected but that's what happened."

Cecelia was silent, taking all this in.

"I see… Reminds me a lot of what Melinda told me so long ago."

Wilson's head snapped to the side, looking to her in shock.

"You… Knew?"

"She told you about your father right? What actually happened to him?" She asked, picking a berry off of a bush they passed and tossing it into her mouth.

"She said he was attacked by shadow creatures and went insane. I just… I didn't think you knew about it. How long have you known?"

"Since that incident, which was when you were five so… about 28 years." Cecelia frowned. "I've been aware that this place existed but I never imagined I'd wind up in the thick of it." She sighed. "I admit, when we found the state of your home I was worried that you had suffered a similar fate like your father."

Wilson frowned, lowering his gaze.

"I… I'm so sorry I put you through that. I'm sane, I promise."

"And I believe you, Wilson." Cecelia smiled gently, brushing one of his cheeks with the back of her hand. "You seem so different now. Your eyes have life again and you look so confident too."

He smiled a little standing up straighter.

"You really think so, Mum?" He asked.

"Oh, I know so. Not just think, know. I know it's been rough for you back home."

"I won't deny that I was in a bad place but I promise it's not like that anymore. I have so much I need to tell you."

"And as do I but for now." She looked ahead. "You have an uncle to greet."

They came upon a small camp that had two small tents set up with a fire pit in the middle. There by the firepit was Emmett, cooking meat on a stick.
"Emmett! I'm back!"

"Ah Cece, find anything good-" Emmett stopped short as his eyes landed on Wilson. "Wilson!?"

Wilson smirked.

"I like to think she found something good." He retorted. "Good to see you too."

Emmett set the food aside, hurrying over to Wilson, giving him a good strong hug.

"You crazy boy! You gave me and your mother a heart attack!"

Wilson laughed, hugging him tightly.

"I'm very sorry for that. I'm so glad to see you both!"

"And I'm glad to see you." Emmett pulled back, looking him over. "You look good. Healthy and strong." Emmett gestured to the fire pit. "Come, sit. I was just making dinner. We got some catching up to do."

"That we do." Cecelia smiled, sitting down. "We've got quite a few stories to tell and so does Wilson."

"That I do." Wilson sat beside his mother. "But I mainly want to hear yours first."

"Sounds fair." Emmett grinned. "Though keep in mind Wilson Boy, it's gonna be a loooong story. You sure you're up for me rambling along with your Mum?"

Wilson looked to his mother, bringing an arm around her.

"I don't think I'm too old for stories from Mum."

Cecelia smiled warmly, bringing an arm around her son.

"It started quite a few seasons ago…"

The family was up late into the night, exchanging stories. Some good. Some bad. It was near dawn when they decided to head back out.

"You sure you're up for this Wil?" Cecelia asked him as he lead the way, following his map.

"I'm sure. We can sleep like kings once we get home."

Emmett looked over his shoulder.

"So we'll be seeing your Light Village. Hm, you sure you want to be around us, Your Highness?" He smirked.

Wilson grinned, playfully shoving him a bit.

"Surely you jest. You're still my family - I mean I wouldn't invite just ANYONE on your side."

"Neither would we."

"See my point?"
Cecelia nodded.

"It'll be wonderful to see Mother again. To think this whole time she's been alive and well."

"As well she can be. She's had her lumps too but she's doing well for herself in the position she's in."

"Sounds like she has a lot on her shoulders."

"She's does, but it's nothing she can't handle."

Wilson smiled as the arch came into view.

"There it is."

Emmett let out a whistle at the sight of the arch.

"Fancy."

Cecelia gazed up at it impressed.

"Incredible."

Wilson smiled.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

He nodded, leading the way through the portal as the Light Village came into view. Wilson sighed happily, Chester barking as he bounced off to greet everyone.

"Welcome home."

Cecelia looked around, her eyes wide in amazement at the site before her.

"Incredible…"

"It's beautiful." Emmett smiled. "And those structures. Did you make those yourself Wilson?"

"With some help."

"You've been quite the busy man."

Wilson chuckled as he lead the way, showing them around.

"It's been interesting to say the least. We work together and we do what we can. One of my friends, Woodie, makes most of our clothes. He could even make Mother something if she wishes. He made another friend's wedding gown-"

"How about you? When are you getting married?"

Wilson stuttered, going red.

"HEY!"

"Shouldn't have brought up anything related to weddings, Wilson Boy." Emmett chuckled. "You
know she just wants you to be happy right?"

Wilson rubbed the back of his neck, smiling sheepishly.

"I know but there is something related to that happiness.. Not a wedding but something." He grinned, seeing his own home - finally all finished as he mentally patted himself on the back.

"Hm? And what might that be?"

"You'll see."

Wilson opened the door, calling upstairs.

"Girls! I'm home!"

"Papa!"

The twins came running down the stairs, throwing their arms around Wilson, hugging him tightly.

"You're home!"

Wilson laughed, scooping them up, hugging them tightly.

"And I'm so glad to be home. I missed you both!"

"And we missed you!" Abigail giggled, playing with his hair a bit. "We were good though."

"Ahuh. I helped Wigfrid make dinner every night!" Wendy chirped.

"That's my girls."

Emmett grinned at the site.

"Well, would you look at that Cece- Cece?" Emmett looked to his sister, seeing she had tears in her eyes and her hands were over her mouth. "Eh… Cece?"

"I have grandchildren." She squealed, bouncing in place a bit. "I. HAVE. GRANDCHILDREN!"

"Oh boy." Emmett moved to the side as Cecelia hurried over.

Wilson chuckled, seeing the excitement in her eyes as the twins gave her a curious look.

"That reminds me. Girls, I brought some family home as well. This is your grandmother Cecelia and your great uncle Emmett."

"Ooo."

"We have a grandma!?"

"Yes. Yes you do."

Cecelia looked at them both, trying her best to contain any other squeals she had in her.

"Oh they're so cute. Oh Wilson, where did you find them?"

"Well, out wandering on their own." Wilson held them close. "And after I took them in they grew on me. The rest is history."
The twins hugged Wilson one more time before wiggling out of his arms, walking up to Cecelia, curious.

"Hello." Abigail said with a smile.

Wendy gave a shy smile waving.

"Hi."

Cecelia knelt to their level giving them a gentle look.

"It's so nice to meet you both. Oh you two are so cute!"

The twins giggled.

"Hee?"

"So, if you're our grandma… Do we get hugs and stuff too?"

"Of course!"

Cecelia brought them into her arms, hugging them close, just savoring the moment.

*I'm in utter BLISS.*

The twins giggled, cuddling up to their grandmother, all more than happy to have a new member in their family. Wilson smiled, feeling his heart warm at the sight.

Emmett smiled, patting him on the back.

"Way to really brighten up Cece's mind, Wilson. We were scared for the longest time we lost you but now not only did we find you but find out you're doing better than we ever could've thought."

Wilson chuckled.

"I'm glad I could ease your minds… And honestly? This is the happiest I've been in years." He shrugged a bit. "Who would've thought an evil shadow king would've been the key to changing my life around?"

"Life works in strange ways my dear nephew."

"That it does Uncle Emmett."

*That it does.*
"And they lived happily ever after."

Cecelia smiled as she looked up from the book she was reading, seeing Wendy and Abigail fast asleep, curled up under the blankets, Chester resting at the foot of their bed. She chuckled, kissing both their heads before tucking them in.

"Sweet dreams, little ones." she whispered.

Cecelia got up, setting the book on the nightstand before turning down the lamp. She walked out quietly, closing the door behind her gently. She sighed happily. She never imagined she would become a grandmother in just the matter of a day. It was a dream to say the least.

She made her way to the lower level of the house. She chuckled, seeing Emmett passed out on the couch, his hat over his head, snoring here and there.

*Sawing logs like usual.*

She turned her attention to Wilson's study area, finding the man busy at work at his desk. She wasn't really sure exactly what he was doing but the most she could tell he was busy with mixing chemicals of some sort, judging from the beakers.

Cecelia raised an eyebrow though as Wilson stopped his work, taking a moment to cough into his
That didn't sound good.

She walked over to the study, knocking on the doorway.

"Wilson?"

Wilson straightened up, looking to her.

"Oh, Mother. I didn't hear you. Are the twins asleep already?"

Cecelia nodded.

"Yes. I just finished reading to them." Cecelia made her way over to him, feeling his cheeks and forehead.

Wilson got a confused look.

"M-Mother, what are you doing?"

"Don't think I didn't see you coughing just now. Come to think of it your voice sounds a little raspy too."

"Mother, it's nothing." Wilson said, trying to pull away.

Cecelia narrowed her eyes.

"Wilson, don't be a naughty poofer."

Wilson groaned.

"Not that nickname, please."

Cecelia shook her head.

"Just… let me be sure my baby isn't sick, please? Just humor me here?"

Wilson sighed.

"Fine."

Cecelia brought her hand to his forehead again, frowning.

"You're rather warm, Wilson. Maybe you should rest. Whatever it is you're working on I'm sure it can wait."

"N-No, I got projects I need to do-"

"Wilson." Cecelia's foot started to tap. "Rest."

GAH! I HATE IT WHEN SHE DOES THAT!

"Okay, okay!" Wilson put away his equipment before following his mother out to the living room, sitting on the other couch with her. "See? Resting."

Cecelia nodded.
"Good." She sighed. "... Sorry, just... I know this is annoying you but you're still my baby. I can't help but worry. Especially after everything that has happened in the past year."

Wilson felt a pang of guilt, lowering his gaze a little.

"And I know I scared you..."

"Wilson, I don't know what I would do if you weren't in this world." Cecelia cupped his cheek in her hand, concern in her eyes. "You're my only child. I know I shouldn't worry because you're an adult - but you're always gonna have me worried. It's just my job."

Wilson leaned into her hand.

"I know." Wilson closed his eyes. "Mother... I... I actually wanted to talk to you about something."

"Hm?" Cecelia tilted her head. "What is it?"

Wilson sighed.

"The... last time we saw each other in person back at home I... I was so awful to you. I had no right to talk to you the way I did about all that was happening with life and... and with Father. I should never have said the things I said. I was being a horrible son and I am so... so sorry."

Cecelia frowned, bringing him closer, stroking his hair.

"Don't be sorry." She sighed. "I know you were in a bad mood. I just... I wish I could've helped more. But I didn't want you to think I was holding you back either. I know you had to find your way too. I was never mad."

"But-"

"I forgave you the instant you said it. I felt worse that you were so upset... Wilson, I felt like I failed you letting you walk out that door."

"No, Mother, please." Wilson brought a hand to her face. "If anyone was the failure it was me. I... I didn't really do well back home. I didn't... really do anything great or get anywhere with science-"

"Stop it right there."

Wilson eyes went wide.

"H-Huh?"

"Just because you didn't get far doesn't mean you're a failure. Wilson, you were distraught, angry and I know how that can affect your abilities but know this and never forget this. You don't need to be some famous scientist or inventor because no matter, what you will always be my son and I will always love you."

Wilson smiled a little relaxing as he saw the gentle look in her eyes.

"And I love you too, Mother... Y-You really aren't disappointed?"

"You're alive. That's all that matters to me. You could be king of that crazy world and I would still be going: "Yep, that's my son."
"Well, lucky for you, I'm not the king. Prince technically but still."

Cecelia nodded, keeping him close, stroking his hair.

"And right now, you just have to be yourself. Just resting."

Wilson nodded, turning away, coughing a little.

"I guess I am sick after all."

"Then rest is a requirement." Cecelia held him closer.

Wilson rested his head on her shoulder.

"Mother, about Father…"

"We can talk about that more later. I know you were angry at him and I wouldn't be surprised if you still were but…"

"You still love him, right?"

Cecelia was silent for a moment before speaking.

"He was and will be the only man I'll ever love."

Wilson closed his eyes, nodding.

"That's all I wanted to know. I'm sorry I questioned it."

Cecelia kissed his forehead.

"Stop apologizing you silly poofer."

Wilson chuckled, relaxing.

"Alright… But Mother, I will say this: I promise I'm going to find a way to help him. Grandmother told me what happened and… there has to be a way to fix it."

"That's what we've been hoping for."

"Then please. I want to help."

Cecelia nuzzled him.

"I know you can. You've always wanted to help people."

Wilson nodded, coughing a little.

"I'm just not very good at helping myself sometimes."

"Then I can fix that." Cecelia stroked his back, kissing his head. "Love you, Little Wil."

Wilson yawned a little, relaxing against her.

"Love you too."

"Just let me take care of you right now though." She hummed softly, rocking him a bit in her arms.
"You're okay."

Wilson nodded, starting to drift.

"I'll... I'll just rest my eyes for a few minutes. That's okay, right?"

"It is getting pretty late, Wil." Cecelia grabbed the blanket off the back of the couch, draping it around him. "So, rest your eyes. Dream of that next big idea. I'll be here when you wake up."

"Okay." Wilson closed his eyes, relaxing against her. "Goodnight, Mother."

Cecelia kept humming until she felt him slump against her, fast asleep. She looked up, giving a small sigh.

"I wish you could see him, Ed. He really has grown into a wonderful man. Just like you are."
It is said in asylums there isn't much sound. There would be the occasional dripping of water from leftover rain that would fall through windows or maybe the squeak of a rat scavenging for food. Another rare but common sound would be the sound of someone screaming for mercy as they were given their "treatments" for the day. Other than that, the place would mainly be eerily quiet… if not for one of the residents.

Edward Higgsbury's hands moved gracefully across what appeared to be a fake set of keys for a piano that had been scratched into the ground of his room… and yet, as he pressed the fake keys, notes poured out from them, forming a song. Something he did everyday. Something he HAD to do everyday.

It kept the demons away… It kept HIM away.

Edward sighed as he brought his song to close, finding his hands getting tired from going on for so long. He always went for as long as he could but he always had to stop. His hands could only endure so much.

It was quiet for a moment, before a familiar voice rang in his ears.

"Aww… you finally stopped playing. Did you do it for me, Edward?"

Edward scoffed.
"I would never stop for you. You know that, Cato."

"Hey, a terrorbeak can dream."

Edward rolled his eyes, focusing on the sheet music in front of him that he had scratched into the wall, trying to ignore the nightmare monster standing behind him.

"Well, keep dreaming then, because it's never going to happen."

"Sure, sure… By the way, I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Bugger off. I don't want to hear anything you have to say."

"Oh, but I insist. It involves some people that are very precious to you."

"Right. Sure."

Cato got an unamused look.

"Alright. I guess we'll just do this the hard way."

Edward cringed as he felt a pulsing pain go through his head, a black scar appearing across his left eye. He fell to the ground, holding his head as a vision flashed before his eyes.

He saw a young man with wild hair, defending himself from dog like beasts of sorts, another man next to him, doing what he could too. It was a losing battle to the say least and then… the young man was pinned to the ground as the dog like creature that was bigger than the others bit into his throat, killing him instantly.

The last thing Edward was saw was the young man lying on the ground, bleeding out, his eyes glazed with death. Edward panted as the vision ended.

"Why… Why did you show me that?"

"Just thought I should let you know your son is dead."

Edward froze up.

"... W-What…?"

"That man you saw, was your son. Wilson Percival Higgsbury. He's DEAD."

Edward eyes were trembling as he looked to the drawing on the wall he had scratched in next to his sheet music. An image he had held onto for so long as a means of not letting himself slip away. The image of his young son being held in the arms of his beloved wife.

"No… He… He can't be… No…"

"I know it's hard to believe. Especially considering the last time you saw him he was just a little boy… but that's not the case anymore. You know for fact many years have passed, Edward Higgsbury. Your little boy isn't or I should say, wasn't so little anymore. Oh and your dear wife, heh, what a sad tale for her. Her family trying to marry her off again and oh look."

Edward had another vision flash before his eyes of a newspaper, showing a column that had a title that read "REPORTED MISSING" and under it, were pictures of Cecelia and her brother, Emmett.
"Seems she's gotten into trouble herself."

Edward held his head, his fingers tangling themselves in his hair.

"No… No… They… They can't… NO!"

Cato grinned as he wrapped himself around the man.

"I'm sorry to say, Edward Higgsbury, but the only people you've ever cared about are all gone now. Your parents, both gone, as you know, your wife, missing and now your dear little Wilson is dead. You have NOTHING."

Edward sobbed, crouching over, shaking his head.

"NO! NO NO NO NO!"

"Deny all you want, but this is the truth and there's no changing it."

Tears were streaming down Edwards's face, hitting the floor.

"Cecelia… Wilson… I…"

Darkness started to shroud around Edward, the man feeling himself slip away.

"They're gone. You have nothing. You are nothing. Just let go. You'll feel better if you do. Spare yourself the pain. Just let go. Let go entirely."

"No…" Edward's eyes started to slide shut. "I… I can't…"

"There's no one waiting for you. Just sleep and forget about everything."

Edward's eyes closed as he fell to the floor, slipping completely into darkness.

His body remained still for a moment before his eyes opened. The whites of his eyes were completely black, his blue irises now an amber color and black markings were now on his face along with the scar over his left eye. His pained expression was gone, replaced with a twisted and pleased grin as he sat up.

"Finally…" He whispered, summoning shadow flames to his hands, chuckling. "After so many years, it is time."

He got up, bringing the flames around him, changing his outfit to a garb suited for someone of nobility. A deep red and black suit with a dark grey ruffled tie, a ruby brooch adorning it. His hair was groomed into a wild yet dignified style, his long beard now trimmed into a proper goatee.

He looked around him, seeing nightmare creatures looking to him eagerly, awaiting orders.

"Is it time, Lord Cato?"

"Yes." Edward… Cato, answered, chuckling, his eyes glinting with a slight glow.

"I believe it's time we paid Maxwell a long overdue visit."
It was a calmer night in the Shadow World. Well, as calm as it could get for the place but it was enough to not be weary of your surroundings.

Maxwell found himself trudging through one of the thicker forest areas, arms wrapped tightly around himself, trying to keep warm. He was thankful for his coat but the cold still managed to nip at his body.

This... is... humiliating!

He sat down by a pond, deciding to rest for a moment, his legs feeling weak from all the walking he had done that day.

To think... within in a few mere MONTHS I've been reduced to this. I was a KING! A BLOODY KING! And now... I'm nothing. Absolutely nothing.

He gripped at his arms, growling a bit, his eyes narrowing in anger.

I won't let it stay that way though. I told them I would be back and oh I will be. I'll make them ALL pay. Especially Higgsbury. He has it coming the most. Yes... That's what I'll do. I'll gather up power again. I'll kill every last one of them and take my throne back and then... then...

... I'd be back where I started...

Maxwell lowered his head.
… Is that what I really want though…? Having power was great when it actually was something I had control over but… looking at how it has been…

He looked down at his reflection in the pond. He looked nothing like he last remembered. There was no denying that he looked like a wreck. His suit was ruffled, torn in some places, stained with mud and still had the blood stain from his battle with Wilson. Most notable thing of all was his hair. He wasn't sure when it happened but instead of being the dark brown he and William shared, it was now silver in color and was wild and loose.

Maxwell's hand shook as he brought it to his hair, running it through the silver locks as he stared into the pond, eyes wide in shock as he took it all in.

"I'm aging…" He whispered, his voice cracking. "I'm actually aging…" Panic welled up in his chest.

*I'm going to die of old age. Splendid. JUST SPLENDID. Thank you SOOO much for this, Higgsbury. I jump start your weak genes and this is how you thank me!?"

He took a deep breath trying to calm himself down. No, if he was going to die by old age he would have by now, he reasoned. Surely it would've happened already, nothing but dust and bones.

Wonderful… is this how a king meets his end?

Maxwell cringed at that thought, looking at himself again in the pond, thinking back to it all.

… I was no king. I was a slave to the nightmare monsters. I always had to tend to their needs so balance could be kept. So they didn't give me a bigger headaches. So the world didn't come crumbling down because of Them… Guess that's just how it's always been. I never had control. That was my only purpose. Keep the nightmare monsters in line. Please Them. It was never me calling the shots. It was THEM.

Maxwell's shoulders shook as he gripped harder at his arms.

*Hehe… Aahahaha… It was all one big illusion on myself… I was such a bloody fool. More of a fool than William was… Ahahaha… I was never meant to be anything more than damage control. That's all I ever was since I was created! Nothing more than that! Who was I to think I could be a king let alone a GOD!?!*

Maxwell laid down flat on the ground, arms spread out, small laughs escaping his mouth.

"Why do I ever want to go back there? Being king again sounds rather awful. No, it is awful, no more lying… Heh… I guess Higgsbury did me a favor then in separating William and I. It got me off the throne and broke the cycle. To top it off he gave me this form so he really did do me a favor." Maxwell stopped short as he realized what just left his mouth. "... Wilson Percival Higgsbury did me a favor… I…" One of his eyes twitched. "... I actually OWE him!" He groaned bringing a hand to his face. "What has this world come to? I actually owe someone for once instead of the other way around! Unbelievable!"

*I owe someone a favor. Great, now I want to kill him just to eliminate that.*

But then he'd find a way to come back.

*Always.*

Ugh… What has happened to my life? What in all shadows IS my life now!?
"RAAAAAAAUGH!"

CRASH!

Maxwell's ear perked up at the sound of a screeching monster. He knew that sound all too well.

"Deerclops?" He asked, getting up, hurrying over to the source.

It was quite the distance but he soon found the place, his eyes widening in horror at what he saw. The mighty beast's corpse was lying on its side, its single eye glazed over with death. Its fur was matted and torn, blood dripping from large wounds that had been inflicted on it.

"What… in shadows?" Maxwell looked at the wounds carefully. "No survivor caused this. The wounds are larger than any weapon they can make."

"C'mere little fawn. I just want to play."

"Scree!"

Maxwell's head snapped towards the sounds, seeing a man cornering what appeared to be a much smaller and younger looking version of the deerclops.

The fawn cowered in fear, backing up against a tree as the man drew closer.

"That's right, cry out. Cry out for dear king or should I call him your father? Either way, cry for him. I want him to see you die at my hands so he can pay for everything he did."

Maxwell didn't need any further explanation. He knew exactly who the man was. While he knew many held grudges against him, there was only one who was this cruel and bitter. Who would go to such lengths just to get him angry.

And by shadows, Maxwell was SEETHING.

The fawn let out a shriek, cowering as the man drew back his hand, said hand covered in claws made of shadows.

"Now DIE!"

Maxwell rushed over, grabbing the man's arm before he could strike the fawn.

"So much as lay a finger on him and you'll lose your whole arm, Cato!" Maxwell hissed.

Cato sneered at him, a laugh escaping him.

"So, you finally show yourself eh, Your Highness?" He struggled. "Release me at once!"

"I don't take orders from scum like you. Especially scum that try to mimic me." Maxwell narrowed his eyes, taking in Cato's appearance. "So, you finally got the man?"

"I have you to thank for that." Cato broke from his grasp, facing him entirely. "It's quite a nice body, I must say. He was perfectly healthy despite being in an asylum for so long. Sure, had to do some grooming but little things."

Maxwell narrowed his eyes, seeing what he had done to the body. The man's hair was nicely smoothed back, some silver streaks being present in the dark hair. He had a small beard as well, nicely trimmed to the tip of his chin. He sneered a bit, seeing Cato was right about the condition of
the body. It was perfectly tuned and young in every way.

"You made him that way." Maxwell growled. "You kept him young so when he finally broke he would be perfect. That's just unforgivable!"

"Oh, like you're any different." Cato spat. "You're just as bad! I've seen your other hosts. You do the same thing to every single one."

"I am not!"

"Bloody hypocrite."

"I only did it once I was in control! Not when they were still alive! I had some decency to not torture them with THAT!"

"Mm-hm... Right... So, your last host..." Cato narrowed his eyes. "A perfectly healthy young man just gave up his body like that? And you had no influence on his mind? Or locking up his consciousness?"

Maxwell wanted to respond but... he couldn't deny any of that. They were all correct. All he could respond with was silence.

*I am a horrible person.*

"And now you're here, protecting your demon spawn. I'd be doing the world a favor by killing him, just like how I'd be doing it a favor for doing you in." Cato moved to slash right at Maxwell's face.

Maxwell, however, was faster, dodging, growling at him, getting in front of the fawn, taking on a defensive stance.

"I'd rather not go out by garbage."

"Hmph. I prefer monster." Cato scoffed. "Regardless, I'm the result of you not handling your powers properly. I bet Tenebrae would be so disappointed in his creation."

Maxwell's eyes narrowed.

"Yes... He would. I'm not holding back the nightmare monsters. I'm not stuck to the throne like a trained animal. I'm everything I wasn't supposed to be and I hate myself for it. Are you happy about that?"

"Not enough, if we're being honest."

"Then what will satisfy you?"

"Your death, me taking the throne once I remove that hag and her grandson and finally, enacting what I had planned long ago."

Maxwell sneered.

"Well, hate to crush your dreams but none of those are EVER happening. I took a vow long ago that you would die at my hands, Cato. That vow still holds to this day." He narrowed his eyes. "I will end you and not lay one hand on the man you're possessing."

Cato threw his head back laughing.
"This man is dead! He's useless without me! And you don't even have your original power!" He gave a crazed grin. "I'll never die. Especially when I get rid of you."

"... Even if you got rid of me. Honestly, you should fear someone else more than me. That person being Higgsbury. He was the one to dethrone me after all and not you."

"Feh. He's not even half like my host. He only has power because of YOU."

Maxwell fought down the urge to cringe.

_I may have given him some but he had something innate. Something I couldn't even bestow. That was his genetics not my work._

"Regardless, even he has his weaknesses. One of them being this man standing before you." Cato chuckled. "One look at me and he'll start to crumble. I can see it now. "Father... Father, please, stop it!" Ha! I look forward to breaking his mind. Come on Maxy, you know that's something you would want to see. See him squirm after all he did to you. Wouldn't it be great?"

Maxwell was seeing red now.

Before Cato knew it, Maxwell struck him HARD across the face, his head snapping to the side.

"Silence. You're a disgrace to terrorbeaks and to Shadow Beings when you used to be one."

Cato was silent, looking at Maxwell shocked.

"... What did those survivors do the vile King Maxwell I once knew?"

Maxwell gave him a serious look.

"They freed me. Something you clearly forgot existed."

Cato stepped back, crossing his arms.

"Heh... you've gone soft. Well, this is quite the development. That aside, I guess I'll leave you alone for now. But know this, I'm far from being done. The deerclops was only the start. Your other children will soon be crying for their dear daddy to come save them."

Maxwell glared, a growl escaping him.

"And I will be there every time. You attack my young I'll kill you. Maybe I'll even skip separating you and allow you to feel everything that man would feel."

"Tsk, tsk, Let's not be brash now."

"LEAVE!"

"I will but I have... one last thing to give you." He snapped his fingers, nightmare monster materializing behind him, carrying some kind of form on their back. "The new queen has been neglecting this poor thing. Well, I mean, she has a will of her own, but she certainly isn't strong like she used to be. She tried picking a fight with me but let's say it didn't end well for her." He took the form off the nightmare monsters, tossing it before Maxwell's feet.

Maxwell's eyes widened as he realized what it was.

It was the Grue.
"Oh, shadows…" He knelt to them, bringing the form into his arms. "My Grue… My only companion after all these years…" He looked up at Cato, hatred in his eyes. "Why…? Why!?"

"Because the look on your face is so satisfying." Cato threw his head back laughing. "Don't worry, she's still alive, if only barely, but I thought I should return the dog back to her master."

Maxwell held the Grue closer, snarling at Cato.

"Call her a dog again and I rip your throat out."

"So brash. It's beautiful to see how far you've fallen from grace, Maxy. It pleases my darkened soul." Cato stepped back, turning on his heel. "I'll leave you to tend to your shattered life now. I'm sure we'll meet again. We're far from finished."

"The next time we meet I'm going to behead you! I'm sure I can recall how it was done back in the day!"

"Mm-hm. Sure… Sure… Till then, farewell."

And like that, he was gone.

Maxwell growled a bit before relaxing, looking at the collapsed form in his arms. She shared some likeness to Charlie in her face, but he knew for fact it wasn't her.

*Just the side effect of being bonded to her.*

Her black body was cut up all over, her face bruised. Her breathing was shallow, but it was a sign of life. She shifted a bit in his arms, huddling closer to him.

"My poor Grue…" Maxwell held her closer. "Please forgive me for being so stupid."

"Squeak."

Maxwell looked down, seeing the fawn was now at this side, tugging at his coat, giving a pleading look.

"I got you." He scooped him up into his free arm, cradling him close. "I'm here, my child. I'm never going to let this happen again."

The fawn huddled closer, relaxing, churring a bit. Maxwell churred in response, nuzzling them as the fawn buried his face in his coat.

"There we go. We'll save your siblings too. Right now, I need to focus on you and the Grue."

He shifted the Grue a bit so the fawn could be put into her arms, Maxwell being able to carry them both now.

The fawn curled up against the Grue, a yawn escaping him.

"Rest now… We're safe… You're safe."

The fawn nodded, closing his eye.

Maxwell gave a gentle smile, keeping them both close to him.

*I may not be king anymore but at least I haven't lost everything.*
His look darkened as he looked out to the landscape.

And I'm most certainly not letting Cato take it all away. I don't care what it takes or that I'm helping those survivors by trying to take him down.

He's gone too far now and it's time he paid in full.
She could hear the rain. That was the first thing she registered. It was still dark all around her but she could hear the rain perfectly. It was coming down heavily, hitting branches of trees and the ground with all its might. Yet… she didn't feel it on herself. If anything, she could feel warmth. It was faint, but it was present.

She opened her eyes slowly, finding she was in a tent. It was bigger than the ones she remembered survivors used. Least, that's what it seemed like. Either way, it explained why she wasn't getting wet. As for the warmth, she noted a thermal stone had been placed near her abdomen and she had a blanket over her.

How… did I get here? Last I remember I was in a fight with…

She hissed as she remembered the battle.

Cato… That scum. He cheated. Using nightmare monsters to attack me in mass after paralyzing me with that strange power of his. If he had some dignity he would've just defeated me himself, the coward.

She lowered her head, a frown crossing her face.

But it was still a loss… I've never lost fights yet I lost this one. Maxwell would not be pleased. Thank goodness I don't have to answer to him anymore. He'd probably have my head.
She sat up, wincing a bit, feeling her injuries from the battle. Though upon examining them she noted they were bandaged and some were healed.

How…?

"Squeak!"

She jumped, looking down to the source of the sound, seeing a fawn with one eye looking up at her.

"Squeak!"

She blinked, staring at it before recognition flashed.

"... Deerclops?" she asked as the fawn nodded.

"Squeak!"

"What are you doing here? You should be terrorizing survivors."

The deerclops lowered his head, showing he had injuries on him.

"Squeak…"

She frowned at this.

"You were hurt too… And considering you're a fawn that means you were slain. You poor thing."

The deerclops sighed before going up to her, holding up his arms.

"Squeak?"

Her eyes widened a bit.

"M-Me..?"

The deerclops whimpered. She scooped him up into her arms.

"Shh… No need for tears."

"Squeak…" The deerclops huddled closer, nuzzling her.

"It's okay now. We're both safe here."

I think. I have no idea who patched us up or whom this tent belongs to. I really am not sure if I should be scared or thankful to whoever rescued us.

"Honk?"

"Rawr?"

The Grue jumped again as she noted two other creatures that made themselves present before her. She recognized them easily. It was the bearger and goose moose and just like deerclops, they were their smaller sizes.

"Good heavens what happened to you?" she asked, frowning as she noted they too had injuries. The Grue hesitated a bit before offering her free arm to them as they huddled close to her.
"Shh… Shh. It's okay."

They all kept silent, staying close to her, closing their eyes. She kept silent as well, stroking their heads gently.

"I'll keep you safe. No need to fear."

"Honk."

"Rawr."

It was silent as they kept close together, save the rain beating against the tent. Then footsteps were heard as someone entered, a cloak over them so their face couldn't be seen.

"Giants! I'm back!" They said, closing the tent flap. "And I found dragonfly-" The person stopped short as they took note the Grue was awake, their eyes wide under the hood of the cloak.

She looked at the person, her arms wrapping a bit tighter around the giants, hissing a little.

"Who are you?"

The person stood silent, frozen in place before reaching a hand up, removing their hood, revealing their face, a sad expression present on it.

"Grue, it's me."

Her hostile look faded away to one of shock. The giants in her arms squeaking happily at the sight of them.

"My King?" She asked unable to hide the shock. "I had no idea you survived."

Maxwell shrugged, making his way over to her.

"I kept as low as I could. Really didn't want attention after the whole dethroning incident. Had an injury to tend to and plans to make. Plans I gave up on because I didn't see the point in even trying. Then of course trouble decided to show his face and I had to worry about my creations going extinct. Thankfully." He showed a small dragonfly in his arm. "I was able to save all of them."

"I can only guess who was slaying all of them." Her gaze softened at the exhausted dragonfly clinging to Maxwell's arm with her claws. "Oh, the poor thing…"

"Creee…?"

Maxwell frowned, stroking dragonfly's head.

"There was blood everywhere in her nest. Lot of her eggs got left behind too. Poor thing put up her best fight but in the end…” Maxwell growled. "Cato beat her mercilessly."

The Grue growled a bit.

"He's really going all out isn't he? Slaying the giants, attacking me… He's lost whatever was left of his mind!"

"That he has." Maxwell set the dragonfly down in a small bed, tucking her in. He lowered his head, running a hand through his hair. "I should've killed him when I had the chance but I didn't and now he's doing all this… It's all my fault."
"My King, he kicked you when you were down. This is not your fault-

"If I hadn't done what I had you wouldn't be weak! The giants wouldn't have been harmed!"
Maxwell gripped at the ground a little. "I… I just don't know what I'm doing anymore…"

The Grue was shocked at this. She had seen Maxwell upset before but… this confused? Hardly ever. Regret? A rarer sight than that. She set the giants in her arms down, making her way over to him, touching his shoulder.

He froze up at the touch, looking to her with surprise in his eyes.

"My King, I've never seen you this upset… But." She squeezed his shoulder a little. "If it makes any difference to you, I gave up my anger long ago. You weren't well."

Maxwell's eyes grew wider, his hand coming over hers.

"I… I don't understand. I've mistreated you so much over the years. Especially what I subjected you to in regards to Charlie. How… How could you not be wanting to rip my throat out? I deserve every last bit of your rage."

Confusion came to her eyes, tilting her head a bit.

"Why would I want to rip your throat out? Admittedly, I did feel anger… but I remembered the time we had before that. I remember the conversations between hunts. I remember those times when everyone in the land looked up to and respected you… and I know part of you is still that."

Maxwell stared at her, disbelief crossing his face.

"Even after all I've done… how in all this world can you look past my actions?"

The Grue looked down at the ground, falling quiet for a moment.

"Because I still care for you. I'm still loyal to my king."

Maxwell was silent, looking at her carefully, before moving her hand away from his shoulder… before bringing both his arms around her, hugging her close to him, burying his face a little in shadow hair.

The Grue froze a little stunned at this before bringing her arms around him, running her hand through his hair.

"My King…"

"Grue… Why? Why?"

She was silent, trying to find an answer to Maxwell's question… yet she found herself unsure of the answer. Being loyal to Maxwell was all she ever knew. It was her purpose since her creation. Then again… maybe that was part of it.

"... You and I are the only ones of our kind." She huddled closer. "All my life, I knew my purpose was to be by your side. Protect you, tend to the land and hunt. That's all my life has ever been. But it was all worth it to serve you. Now that that's gone… I… I'm not really sure what I'm supposed to be anymore myself. So… I… I think I understand what you're going through. I lost a fight. Something that's never happened before. I really don't know where to go from here… I…" She bit her lip. "I just don't want to be left alone."
Maxwell was quiet, tightening his arms around her. He pulled back a bit gazing into her eyes.

"Then if I may have one selfish wish… Will you continue to be by my side as… as my equal?"

Her eyes widened at this.

"Maxwell…"

"I mean that with every last word, my dear." Maxwell lowered his head. "Truth is, I planned on just being alone myself. I thought if I just spent the rest of my existence alone I would be fine. I wouldn't get hurt. Yet… I just felt empty. Nothing. Then, when I saw what Cato had done to you and the giants, I felt the need to protect. To have you all with me. Because… you're all I have left of my reign and… I… I don't think I could bear losing the last of things that meant something to me. I already lost enough. So please… please accept my offer. I… I don't want to be alone… I… I don't want to be nothing."

The Grue went quiet before she nodded, a small smile coming to her face.

"I'd love that. That would mean everything to me."

Maxwell sighed in relief, bringing her close once more.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome, my king." She hugged him tightly. "Max…"

"Grue…" Maxwell stroked her hair, gazing down at her. "Hm, though I believe there are some changes to be made. You can't walk in the light like that."

"It would be the end of me."

"Then I have a solution if you will let me."

The Grue was quiet, giving a nod, gulping a bit.

"Yes." She took a deep breath. "I will."

"Very well." Maxwell moved his hands to her face, closes his eyes.

Magic surged from his hands and into her body. She let out a gasp as her form changed. Shadow becoming skin, real hair forming on her head and as a final touch, a beautiful gray and black dress with a small hat with a red feather to match appeared on her body.

"There, finished." Maxwell pulled back gently.

The Grue looked down at her new appearance, feeling energized. She smiled taking in the details on her dress and running her hand through her hair.

"Maxwell, this is incredible!"

He smiled gently.

"I wasn't sure if the spell would work but it's something I worked on a while back. It was designed to be a reverse spell for those I turned into nightmare monsters. I tweaked it a little so now I can use it on anything."
She grinned, throwing her arms around him.

"Oh darling, thank you!"

Maxwell felt his face heat up a bit.

"Y-You're welcome… and I do have an idea for a proper name if you wouldn't mind it."

"Let's hear it."

He held her close.

"Scarlet."

"Scarlet…" She smiled, resting her head on Maxwell's shoulder. "I like it."

Maxwell rested his head against hers.

"I'm so glad." He closed his eyes. "Neither of us will have to be alone anymore."

"It sounds wonderful."

"It's something… I haven't wanted in a long time. Not since Lux and Aharon died... I guess… This was something I forgot during all that time on the throne. I was so busy trying to keep the nightmare monsters in line I forgot that I had you with me. Through thick and thin you were there and I took it all for granted."

Scarlet curled up against him, sighing in content.

"I'll always be here for you, Maxwell. That's one thing that won't change. I promise."

Maxwell looked down at her. He hadn't felt this way in a long time.

To have company and enjoy it. To want others around… To feel… safe.

He held her closer, bringing his cloak around them both.

"Then I promise I'll do what I can to take care for you… and treat you better than I have in recent years. I want to make it up to you Scarlet."

Scarlet looked up at him, smiling softly.

"You already are doing that, my king. Thank you for this chance."

Maxwell smiled as well, resting his head against hers.

"Anything for you, my queen."
"Weird for me to say this but it's fun to be out scouting again." Willow said as she and Wilson made their way around a desert terrain. "Then again, least we know we have a place to go back to when we're tired."

"That does make quite the difference." Wilson noted, drawing things down on his map. "We still need to exercise caution but least we know we have a stable environment we can go back to. I'd like to say death isn't constantly hanging over our heads but I don't trust this world all that much even if Grandmother is in charge now."

Willow frowned, moving closer to him, hugging his arm a little.

"Wilson…"

Wilson stopped, frowning a bit himself.

"H-Hey… I… I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that, honest."

"I know just…"

Wilson rested his head against hers, nuzzling her gently.

"I'm not going anywhere. I never want to leave you behind like that again."

"Good or I'd have to burn all your science equipment."
Wilson chuckled, pulling back from her gently.
"Come on. Let's finish up mapping this area."

"Right."

The two carried on, making note of certain formations and plants to use as landmarks for the area. Then it started to get hot. It was already warm to begin with but now it just felt scalding hot all of sudden.

"Good grief what is with this heat?" Wilson tugged at the collar of his shirt. "It's like we stepped into a furnace."

"I'm not sure." Willow fanned herself a little with her hand. "I like warmth but even this is too much-" She stopped short as her eyes caught sight of something. "Uh… Wilson."

"Yes?"

"Look."

He looked to where Willow was looking, eyes widening at what he saw. There were four big pools of lava spread out over the terrain.

"... That would explain the heat."

"They're nicely set up though, like it was arranged this way." Willow made her way over to the pools.

"C-Careful now! Get any closer to those pools and you'll get cooked!" Wilson cautioned.

"I'll be okay." Willow looked back, giving him a reassuring look before taking a closer look. The way it was set up, there was at least a bit of space between each pool, almost in a circular pattern and Willow was right in the center.

"This… reminds me of how tallbird nests are setup." She mused out loud. "Like, whatever set these up had them set up to keep something safe and warm."

"You think it might be a nest?" Wilson asked.

"I think so. Though why open pits of lava? That one's a mystery." She leaned over one of the pools a little, looking into it. "Too bad it'd burn me alive. It looks so warm and cozy. It's liquid fire." Willow gave him a grin. "Isn't it neat?"

"It'd be neater if you'd move away from it. You're giving me anxiety."

"Okay, okay." Willow moved away from it. "Better?"

"Better. Though… isn't it bothering you?" Wilson tilted his head. "Being that close you'd be sweating up a storm yet you look only a little warm."

Willow gave him a confused look.

"It's pretty warm but I'm not that uncomfortable."

"Hm, intriguing." But I'm still making sure she keeps plenty hydrated."
The young woman shrugged before looking around again.

Wilson did what he could to observe as well, noting scorch marks in the ground that looked claw like… as well as a roasted skeleton.

"... Something was here." He said, some worry coming over him. "Something dangerous."

"Yeah and it looks like it was huge." She walked the span of the claw marks, confusion coming to her eyes when she noticed something.

There were smaller scorch marks in straighter lines moving away from a dugout part of the ground.

"Hey, Wilson. What do you make of this?"

Wilson walked over to her, noting the odd marks.

"With the way these ones are patterned… it kind of reminds me slime paths slugs or snails would make."

Willow knelt down, moving some of the dirt aside, confusion in her eyes before alarm as she moved back.

Egg shells.

"We're disturbing something we shouldn't."

"We better move then.-" Wilson stopped short as he noticed something along with the scorch marks. There was dried up blood and what appeared to be some kind of slash and skid marks made by something that was human sized. "... There was battle here."

"Someone who knew what they were doing." Willow looked around. She noticed another dug out area, making her way over. Whatever was previously there was gone now so she felt no need to hurry.

On top of that, the dirt was moving. Her hand tightened around the spear in her hands, ready for a fight… when something small and reddish poked a tiny head out.

"Creee..." The little creature squeaked, looking up at Willow with dimly lit orange eyes. "Cree..."

"Well hi there." Willow knelt down to its level. "What might you be?"

"Cree..." The creature made its way out of the ground, inching its way to her. It had little legs and it resembled a bug of sorts. It glowed a little but not very much. "Cree..." It nuzzled her leg, Willow feeling the warmth the creature gave off.

Wilson took note of the creature, eyes widening a little but relaxed, seeing it wasn't causing any harm.

*And hopefully it has no intentions of doing so.*

Wilson looked at it carefully, humming a bit in thought.

"... Weird comparison but it resembles fly larvae. Just… much bigger and less slimey."

Willow petted the creature carefully.
"It looks more like it's made out of lava though… A lavae!"

"Creee!" The creature nuzzled her hand, working its way up her leg and into her lap. "Creee!"

"Well, it seems fond of you." Wilson chuckled. "And I think that's what we'll call it. A lavae."
Willow giggled continuing to pet the lavae, the creature even rolling onto its back for her.

"And it likes belly rubs. How adorable is this?"

"Really adorable." Wilson smiled.

The lavae sighed in content as Willow pet it. Though started coughing a little, its glow fading a bit.

"Creee."
Willow frowned.

"Not feeling well, huh?"

The lavae coughed again, shivering, burrowing into her skirt a little for warmth, the glow dimming more.

"Hm…" Wilson looked at it carefully. "Well… from you said about it looking like it's made of lava, maybe it needs warmth?"

"Yeah, though I'm not dipping it in the lava pools. That would be way too hot for it." Willow cradled the lavae, wrapping it in her shirt a little. "Or least too hot for us to pull it out. Maybe we could set up a small campfire? It is gonna get dark soon."

"True. We should stop for a bit till day comes. Though I might take advantage of the lava pits for some cooking. But, none the less, let's set up a campfire."

It took a bit longer than usual due to Willow having to juggle the lighter with the lavae and trying to be sure it didn't try to get out of her arms but soon enough, a large fire was lit, the two residing beside it.

"I just wonder what this thing's gonna grow into if it even lasts that long."

"I wonder that myself." Wilson said as he stirred a pot he had hanging over one of the lava pits, minding his footing and distance. "Though the only guess I have is whatever made these claw and scorch marks. Which means it might actually become something huge."

"Yeah, though hard to imagine something this tiny getting that big." Willow was concerned still as she tried to keep the lavae warm. It's light was still dimming. "Poor baby."

"Looks like it might be sick." Wilson mused before lifting the pot away from the lava pit, setting it near the campfire to keep it warm. He got a bowl ready, scooping some of the contents of the pot out into the bowl. "We'll do what we can but for now, dinner." He offered the bowl to her. "Your favorite, spicy chili."

Willow smiled, taking the bowl.

"Thanks, Wil." She sighed happily as she took a taste of it. "I swear you must put some kind of magic in your food."
"Just a lot of practice. Cooking is a type of science after all."

"Still, it's wonderful."

Wilson smiled, getting up.

"I'm gonna cook up something else real fast then I'll join you."

Wilson hurried over to the lava pit, getting to work. Willow watched him work for a moment before focusing on her food again.

"Cree?" The lavae looked at the food in her hands. "Cree?"

"You want something to eat too?" Willow asked it. The lavae sniffed at her bowl, grabbing at it a little with its tiny legs. "Alright alright." She giggled, scooping out a bit for the lavae, offering it. "Here you go."

The lavae took the offer happily, nibbling at the chili.

"Cree!"

Willow smiled, continuing to feed the lavae, feeling it start to warm up after a few bites.

"You must've been starving, huh?"

"Cree! Cree!"

"I got ya, I got ya. Keep eating, have all you want."

The lavae squealed, falling right into the bowl, devouring the chili within seconds.

"Cree!"

Willow laughed, tipping the bowl out carefully moving to fill it again from the pot… Only for the lavae to squirm its way right into the pot.

"H-Hey!"

"CREEE!" It dove right into the chili, nibbling at it quickly, being completely buried by the rest of it.

Willow wasn't really sure what to do. She just stared blankly… though stumbled back a bit as smoke came pluming out of the pot, a small explosion being heard.

"E-Eh?"

The smoke cleared and out of the pot came a different creature. It had green and yellow scales on it and had a reptilian like body, yet it's eyes and wings looked more bug like. It climbed out of the pot with its black claws, sneezing before flying up a little with its wings, looking at Willow with its small red eyes.

"Creee." It churred, flying up to her, nuzzling. Willow giggled a bit, nuzzling it back.

"Aww… Is this what you really look like?"

The creature nodded, laying itself over her shoulder, churring louder.
"Creee…"

"I got you." Willow nuzzled it gently, stroking its back.

"Willow?"

Willow turned around, seeing Wilson rushing over.

"I heard an explosion. What-" He stopped when he saw the new creature on Willow's shoulder, stumbling back a bit. "Wah! What is that!?"

"I don't know but it used to be the lavae. Little thing was so hungry it gobbled up all the chili and then." Willow gestured to the creature as she kept stroking its back, the creature purring.

Wilson's eyes were wide as he came closer looking at it.

"A mix of dragon and fly if I had to guess… A dragonfly."

The little "dragonfly" churred, huddling close to Willow, sneezing a bit, spitting out some small embers.

"... And it breathes fire. Yep. Definitely like a dragon."

The dragonfly scrunched its nose up, snorting at Wilson.

"... I don't think they like being called an it, Wilson."

"He?"

Another snort and a growl. Wilson put his hands up.

"Alright, alright. She!"

"Cree!" The dragonfly snuggled up to Willow, churring happily.

"With the way she's acting, it's like you're her mother."

Willow smiled softly, nuzzling the dragonfly.

"I don't mind that one bit. My kind of kid in that case!"

"Creee! Creee!"

"Well… she seems safe enough. So long as she doesn't get embers on anything."

"I think she'll be just fine. Sooo… I can keep her?" Willow grinned excitedly.

"Hm… Well…"

The dragonfly flew off Willow's shoulder, nuzzling Wilson under his chin, purring.

"H-Hey!" He laughed.

The dragonfly continued purring, clinging to his vest with her small claws.

"I think she's saying "Daddy"." Willow giggled.
Wilson blushed a little at that but collected himself, bringing his arms around the dragonfly.

"I guess she's trying to wrym her way into my heart… and it's working." He petted her head.

The dragonfly looked up at him, giving her best cute look.

"... Alright. You can keep her but she'll need a name."

"A name… Hm..." Willow hummed in thought, looking at the dragonfly. After a moment, she grinned. "Delphi."

"As in the oracle from Greek Mythology?"

"Darn right." She grinned.

*And she's well read.*

"Very well. Delphi it is."

Delphi cheered, flying back over to Willow, curling up to her in her arms.

"Creee!"

"I got you." Willow held her close. "My little baby girl."

… *That is adorable.* Wilson thought as he grinned at the sight.

Delphi curled up, letting out a squeaky sounding yawn, drifting off to sleep in Willow's arms.

Willow rocked her gently, kissing her head.

"I'm here."

Delphi relaxed entirely, falling fast asleep.

"Aww…" Wilson smiled.

"Can't be helped. I have such a soft spot for babies."

"Guess that makes two of us." Wilson rubbed the back of his neck.

"Yup." Willow giggled. "Used to be allowed to help with the babies back at the orphanage when I was little. Couldn't help but love them after that."

"Really now?" Wilson took a seat by the fire.

"Yeah." Willow sat down across from him, rocking Delphi still. "Something to keep me out of mischief - even though I found it anyway."

"I see." Wilson smiled. "Well, looks like it's come in handy for you now with Delphi there."

"Yep." Willow grinned. "I'll take real good care of her too."

"I have no doubt in my mind you will."

Willow blushed a little, giving a sheepish smile.
"Ehehe…"

Wilson chuckled before getting up.

"I need to go check on the thing I was cooking. Keep an eye on Delphi now." He hurried off, leaving Willow by herself with Delphi.

Willow was content where she was. Delphi was warm and occasionally purring in her sleep. Combined with the warmth of the fire and hearing Wilson hum to himself as he cooked, Willow found herself curled up beside the fire, dozing off.

Wilson returned, smiling gently at the sight.

"All tired out." He said quietly, sitting beside her, setting his food aside, stroking Willow's back.

Willow smiled, relaxing, moving her head to rest against him.

"Warm."

Wilson blushed a little but smiled more, letting her head rest in his lap.

"I got you. Both of you."
It had been interesting the last few days. Namely when Willow and Wilson returned from their most recent excursion into the Shadow World and bringing back their newest addition.

There had been some odd looks and questions upon seeing the tiny dragonfly but once it was shown she was harmless it was fine… for the most part.

Wilson couldn't shake the feeling that there was something going on whenever he and Willow had to chase after Delphi to keep her out of trouble.

A look they kept getting.

Currently, however, he ignored any he got as he looked around the main kitchen area of the village.

"Delphi, come out, come out wherever you are."

There was the sound of a lid being lowered on a crockpot as Wilson's head lifted up, singling out one in particular that had the lid shaking even though the crockpot was off… He did know for a fact that pot was at least previously full of chili.

_Got you now._

He slowly crept up and lifted the lid off the pot.

"AHA!"
Delphi squeaked, burrowing into the food, trying to hide.

"Young lady that is not an appropriate playing area."

She squeaked, ducking in more.

Wilson shook his head, pulling her out.

"That is for everyone to eat. Don't be selfish."

"Rawr..." Delphi's wings drooped a little, giving a sad look.

"Don't be like that. You need a bath now and if you behave, I can make you your own bowl of spicy chili to eat, CLEANLY, after we're done."

At the word "bath" Delphi gave a shriek as she started squirming trying to get away. Wilson kept a firm hold on her as he started walking away from the kitchen.

"You're getting one. You're covered in sauce and you'll get all sticky if it dries. Then your scales won't feel very good I guarantee you that."

"CREEEEE!" Delphi shrieked, spitting some embers out.

"Tantrums don't work on me. If you don't behave you won't get your own bowl of chili."

Delphi went slack in his hold, giving a sad churr.

Wilson shook his head again, making his way over his little outside lab setup. He kept Delphi in one arm as he got water boiled quickly before pouring it into a basin, adding some soap he made himself in before setting Delphi in it.

"I promise the water is warm."

Delphi relaxed as she splashed a bit at the water.

"Cree!"

Wilson chuckled, taking off his gloves before going about scrubbing her scales free of the food.

"There we go. Want you nice and shiny don't we?"

"Cree! Cree!"

Wilson grinned.

"That's my girl." Wilson kept scrubbing, seeing some scales come off but it didn't worry him much.

*Most likely just shedding.*

He soon finished, drying her off.

"There we go. All clean."

Delphi chirped, nuzzling him under his chin, flapping her wings happily. Wilson nuzzled her, chuckling.
"Good girl, Delphi. You've been very good."

"Aww aren't you being a good dad?"

Wilson felt his face heat up as he looked to see Woodie leaning against one of the houses, a grin on his face.

"S-She was a mess! It wouldn't have been good to let her stay like that."

"And it's good you did clean her up just can't help but chuckle a bit. She's like a baby for you and Willow."

Wilson turned bright red.

"A-A b-baby…?"

"Especially when you got her all wrapped up like that."

Delphi cuddled up closer to Wilson, churring.

"U-Um... Well... Uh... I guess?"

Woodie grinned.

"It's adorable."

Wilson gave a sheepish look, cradling Delphi a bit in his arms.

"She is just a hatchling still. She needs all the care we can both give - even if she is a bit naughty at times..."

"Just how it is. Good practice too."

"P-Practice?"

Woodie shook his head.

"Well, technically you have been getting practice with the twins but you know, for when you settle down and have your own kids."

Wilson's jaw dropped open, his mind going blank as he stared at Woodie.

Delphi wiggled out of the towel she was wrapped in, poking his forehead with one of her claws.

He didn't even blink.

"Oh dear, I think I went too far and I broke him, Delphi." Woodie waved a hand in front of Wilson. "Uh, you still alive, Wilson?"

"O-Our own kids." He gasped. "M-Me and Willow h-having o-our own..."

"Well, 't that the next step? Love, marriage then-"

"I know how that rhyme goes!" Wilson was bright red, bringing a hand to his face. "A-And me and her aren't even engaged yet-"

"So you're planning to!"
"W-Woodie let's remember something. I haven't even gone on a proper date let alone confess my feelings!"

"Then maybe we can fix that."

"E-Eh?"

Woodie smirked.

"Don't have to confess your feelings just yet but at least I can help you get a proper outing set up. I'm quite good at it."

Wilson blushed.

"I-If you wouldn't mind."

"Just leave it to me." Woodie winked. "I'll make sure you two have a lovely night by the lake. Though to be fair, Wilson, you two have spent time together doing things that could be considered dates. Just saying."

"If you call scouting a date then sure."

"Besides just that."

"Ehehe…?"

Woodie put a hand on his shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

"Just one step at a time."

"Right."

"Wilson!"

Both looked to see Willow running up, Delphi sitting on her head.

"Yes, Willow?" Wilson turned to her fully.

*I didn't even realize Delphi had flown off. Sneaky little girl.*

"Did you wash Delphi? She's all shiny."

Wilson nodded.

"Yes. She got into one of the crockpots and needed a good scrub."

Willow grinned, before hugging him.

"Thank you! You're the best!"

Wilson's arms spread out behind him before he grinned, hugging her.

"I try. Couldn't let your… our little one stay all dirty. She'd get sick."

"Mm-hm." Willow giggled as Delphi wormed her way in between their arms, cuddling up to them.
both. "Aww… Look at our baby dragon girl."

"Creeee!"

Wilson gave a gentle look, bringing a hand up, stroking Delphi's head, earning a purr.

"She's perfect. Just like her mum."

Willow blushed.

"Ah stop it."

"I mean it."

Willow stammered a little, before hugging him, using his shoulder to try to hide the blush.

"You dork!"

Wilson chuckled, resting his head against hers.

"Delphi gets it from someone."

Willow sighed happily, nuzzling him a little.

"Well, we both know you're warm."

Delphi churred, cuddling between them.

"Heh… I suppose." Wilson blushed, nuzzling back.

Willow giggled, keeping close.

"It's true."

"Ehehe… Willow um may I trouble you with a question?"

Willow moved her head up to look at him.

"Sure! What is it?"

"Would you maybe consider… sometime this week having a… quiet outing by the lake? Dinner perhaps?"

Her eyes lit up giving a grin.

"I'd love that! Like a picnic?"

"Of sorts, yes. I'd do all the cooking and Delphi can come along too."

Willow giggled, hugging him tightly.

"It's a date!"

Wilson turned bright red.

"Y-Yes. Um… How about three days from now so I can get work done?"
She nodded.

"That's perfect. I need to get a new dress, see if Charlie will help with my hair… Oh it'll be fun!"

"Quite fun. It'll be nice and calm. Just you, me and Delphi."

_Heh… A date with Willow._

Willow nodded before pulling back.

"Well, I'll let you get stuff done then. I got some of my own things to take care of."

"Right and if you want anything else to be part of our outing please let me know."

"Of course!" Willow ran off with Delphi in her arms. "Come on baby girl! Let's go have some spicy chili together!"

"Creeee!"

Wilson chuckled as he watched her run off, Woodie chuckling as well.

"Not gonna say you have to but maybe you should consider telling her how you feel on that night just you can past this feeling awkward phase."

"Maybe… Just maybe."

"Well, think on it and if you need any help, I would be more than happy to assist."

"Thanks, Woodie."

Woodie smiled.

"What else are friends for, eh?"

Wilson grinned.

"To help each other out - even in this sense. I appreciate it."

"Anytime my friend. Anytime."
The men of the village were busy at work. They were putting finishing touches on the houses and getting the last of the furniture moved in.

For the ladies, they had taken a night to rest. Including Wigfrid, at Willow and Charlie's insistence.

"Sö, what dö we dö nöw?" Wigfrid asked as Charlie shook some type of pan over the fire they were seated at.

"We'll talk, enjoy some time… Maybe even bug the men every now and then." Willow grinned.

"It's just good fun and you needed a rest too. We know you've been working super hard but you don't wanna over do it, Wig." Charlie added, grinning as she heard popping noises from inside the pot. "Yes! Popcorn soon!"

"And it's always good to rest once and awhile." Cecelia said, leaning back a bit on her bail of hay. "And just some quality girl time to do whatever we like."

"Sö… Anything göes?" Wigfrid grinned. "Anything?"

"Anything at all." Charlie said.

Wigfrid stood up, taking her spear off her back, twirling it in her hand.
"Then allöw me tö tell yöu ladies the dark and gruesome tale öf the Draugr!"

Willow, Cecelia and Charlie exchanged a glance.

Draugr?

Wigfrid smirked.

"The Draugr, is a viking whö has risen fröm the grave, eager tö cöme back tö finish the fight he had begun in life but he isn't interested in sides anymore - nö… The Draugr wants blööd and önly that and if yöu get near..." She lowered her voice a bit. "THEN WATCH ÖUT!"

"EEP!"

"I don't know if I wanna hear this one." Charlie cringed.

"Let her. We know she's gotta get it out of her system." Willow replied. "That popcorn done yet?"

"Almost."

Wigfrid nodded her approval to Willow as she went on to tell the legend, her voice growing in volume at times, almost shouting or going to a whisper. The firelight caused her shadow to stretch across one of the houses that made it appear as if the monster of her story was coming to life.

"And sö the yöung miss was lifted high intö the air and-"

They heard two distinct sets of voices crying out as they jumped.

"Whö göes there?!"

Wigfrid felt guilt creep up as the twins walked out, looking genuinely startled.

"That was a scary story!"

"What are you girls doing over here? I thought you were gonna play." Cecelia frowned.

"We were bored!"

"Then we heard Wigfrid and thought it'd be a fun story… Not.." Abigail shuddered. "That."

"Aww lassies I'm sörry." Wigfrid lowered her weapon as the girls ran up to her, hugging her. "Höw aböut I make it up tö you with the end? I prömise it's a gööd öne."

"Mm… Okay. Only if we get popcorn too." Wendy pouted.

"Deal."

Wigfrid cleared her throat.

"The yöung maiden was lifted high into the air - as she kicked free öf the mönster, pushing him back intö his öwn grave thus sealing him away föröer!"

"Whoa! Really?" Wendy's eyes got wide. "With just a kick?"

"Draugrs aren't knöwn to be very gööd at handling squirmy targets." Wigfrid grinned. "And the lass was cunning. She knew höw tö get away."
"I wonder if we could do that to Maxwell." Abigail mused. "He's as skinny as uncle Will."

"And Papa took him down with one swing of his blade! Maybe all Maxwell needs it to be put to rest."

"Well, we can think of revenge plans another day, Lassies." Wigfrid ruffled their hair. "You're plenty tough."

"YAY!"

Charlie giggled.

"Aww!"

"That is so cute." Willow chuckled. "The little ones are all ready to take on the big bad dethroned king."

"I'm such a proud grandmother." Cecelia smiled, wiping away a non existent tear from her eye.

"We're big tough warrior girls too!" Abigail cheered.

"We helped too back then!"

"Aye ya did, Lassies and a fine job you did. But revenge slaying is not what we wish for tonight."

The twins pouted.

"Awww."

"But." Charlie grinned, showing the finished popcorn. "There's plenty of popcorn for all of us to munch on."

"Yes!" The twins darted to her side, gobbling up fistfuls of the snack.

"Oh, this is even better than the popcorn at the circus!"

"Charlie can pop some corn, that's for sure." Willow chuckled. "Alright, how about a less violent story? I don't think Wilson would be happy if we gave the kids nightmares."

"THAT is a horror story right there." Charlie smirked.

"Well, anyone have stories they would like to tell?" Wigfrid asked.

"Ooo! Ooo!" Wendy hopped onto a hay bail. "Abi! Maybe we could retell the story of Peter Pan like Daddy always did!"

"Yeah! Good idea, Wendy!" Abigail jumped up beside her sister. "Let's do it!"

The women smiled falling quiet as the girls began to tell their story. The two took turns playing roles of the characters, sometimes using the shadows from the fire to their advantage. This went on for awhile till they finally reached the end of their story.

"I remember that ship, from when I was a child long ago." The father said as the family looked up at the clouds that formed the shape of a pirate ship." Wendy and Abigail bowed. "And that's the end."
"Bravo!"

"That's my nieces!"

"Very good job, Sweeties!"

"Well done, Little Warriors!"

The girls giggled before sitting down, yawning a bit.

"Ah… That was fun. Right Abi?"

"M-hm." Abigail rubbed her eyes. "Lots of fun."

Willow smiled softly, offering her arms to the girls.

"C'mere you two. It's getting late."

"We're not tired though… and Papa's still busy." Wendy yawned though cuddled up to Willow's right side, closing her eyes. "And we're big girls."

"Big girls need sleep too."

"But Willow…"

"Rest." Willow stroked their heads. "I'm sure your papa will be done soon but for now you can stay with us big girls."

The twins yawned cuddling close.

"Okay…"

"Night."

"Good night."

Willow smiled, keeping them close.

"So cute."

"Aye, very cute." Wigfrid chuckled. "They're gőöd girls."

Charlie smiled softly.

"Very good girls."

"Sweethearts to the core." Cecelia smiled.

Willow nodded.

"Yeah."

"You know, you're very much like a mother to them Willow." Charlie got a sneaky look. "I mean, you and Wilson have been taking care of them together for awhile now."

Willow blushed.
"I… I guess so, huh?" She gazed down at the twins, her look softening. "I don't remember much about having a mom but… I wanted to help and take care of them. So they don't feel scared or alone. So I guess that's what being a mom is like."

"Oh I can vouch." Cecelia chuckled. "Although that's only part of it."

"And I think their birth mother would be glad to know that you feel that way, Willöw." Wigfrid looked to Charlie. "Remind you of anyone?"

"Yep. Diana would be very proud."

Willow smiled softly.

"Means a lot guys."

"Anytime. Speaking of raising children, where's Delphi?"

"Fast asleep in her basket." Willow chuckled. "She likes to nap a lot."

Charlie giggled.

"Babies are like that. Monster or human."

"Oh yes." Cecelia chuckled. "I remember that."

"M-hm." Willow got a sneaky look towards Charlie. "You'll be knowing that in a couple of months won't ya, Mrs. Carter?"

Charlie grinned, feeling at the small bump that was starting to form on her abdomen.

"Indeed. Just waiting on this little one."

Wigfrid elbowed her playfully.

"You still have some of your figure at least."

"For now."

"It's going to be interesting to have a baby in the camp that's human." Willow giggled. "Hard to believe you're with child."

Charlie smiled.

"It was a surprise. A good one. Wish you guys could've seen the look on William's face. He turned seven shades of pale!"

"Ah come on." Wigfrid laughed. "From what Wessie told me he was beyond joy when you told him!"

"There was that wonderful part too. But I think he was more worried about hurting me than anything else. He started worrying he hugged me too hard. It was really sweet."


"I think he's going to make a great dad." Cecelia chuckled.

"Aye, för sure." Wigfrid nodded.
Charlie smiled before looking to Willow again.

"A little off the subject but your date with Wilson is tomorrow, right?"

"Yep… Heh… Date. It's weird to call it that but… that's what it is, right?"

"Dinner by the lake? Just the two of you and your dragonfly? Most certainly." Charlie chuckled. "Though I imagine he probably hesitates to call it that. He seems to be the easily flustered type."

"Yeah, he does tend to get red in the face easily." Willow twirled a strand of hair between her fingers. "But… I admit, for me I just… I like to think it's a date but I just don't want to make it awkward. He's a gentleman and he's amazing and… I sometimes don't understand my own feelings when I'm around him." Willow sighed a bit. "I just know that… I love being with him the most out of everyone here."

Charlie reached over squeezing her shoulder.

"If you feel like that for him, maybe you should tell him?"

"W-What if it gets weird?"

"You'll find a way to make it work." Charlie smiled softly. "I remember being the same way with William. Want to know who kissed first?"

Willow raised an eyebrow.

"Who?"

"I did." Charlie winked. "It was after one our dates. He wanted to kiss me but he got a little nervous so I thought I'd help him out."

Willow bit her lip to keep from squealing and waking the girls up.

"That is so sweet!"

"M-hm. He relaxed afterwards." Charlie sighed happily. "And the rest is history."

"Maybe one day I can say that about me and Wilson." Willow giggled.

"I'm sure you will and if you can, maybe try talking to him about it. Doesn't have to be on your little outing this week but if you feel like it, give it a try."

"I will. I promise. And I'll tell you three how it goes."

"Good. I'd hate to miss out."

"Aye, me too."

"I certainly want to know. It's my son involved after all."

Willow grinned, nodding.

"Whatever happens, happens right?"

"Yep."

_Well… maybe I'll tell him. Maybe I won't. Either way…_
I still love him.
"I can't do this. I can't do this. I can't do-"

BONK!

"OW!"

Woodie sighed as he gave Wilson a gentle bump on the head with the end of Lucy's handle.

"Stop saying that. You'll make it worse on your nerves."

Wilson rubbed the top of his head, giving an irritated look.

"But Woodie this is probably one of the bigger things I've attempted to do in all my time of being with everyone! I can lead, sure. I can build things, sure. But… confessing my feelings and not worry about possibly being rejected and then have things be awkward from there on? No-"

BONK!

"Ow!"

"Not with that attitude." Woodie shook his head. "Wilson, seriously, have more faith in yourself. You care about Willow a lot and she cares about you. As I've told you before, I worry for you in this regard because you're denying yourself a chance to take things further with her. With the way you two act you might as well already be courting. You just haven't had the chance to say those
lovely magical words."

"Those lovely magical words, as you put it, are some of the most terrifying to say." Wilson shot back, running a hand through his hair, unable to help but tug on it a little.

"You say them all the time. To the queen, to your children. I've even heard you saying it to CHESTER. What's so different?"

"The implications! That's what changes them!"

"Oi, Willow really does have an affect on you. Regardless, Wilson, you need to say it before you have regrets. I mean, you already asked her to join you for a private picnic by the lake so kind of hard to turn back."

Wilson nodded.

"And she made me promise to play my violin for her."

"And asking for a romantic gesture at that!"

"... Wait. You think she already thinks we're...?"

"Wilson, my friend." Woodie brought an arm around him. "This, what you're doing tonight, is quite the romantic gesture. I think she might be harboring some feelings of her own that match yours."

Wilson nodded, thinking back to recent interactions, including the night when they had found Willow's beloved dragonfly.

"And Delphi imprinted on me too. Willow also likes to keep close when she's tired."

"She always likes being with you on expeditions more than anyone else. Whenever night draws near she's closest to you around the fire pit. She talks to you about everything. You've always been there for her during her panic attacks. Plus, you two are rather cuddly for just friends. No girl is that comfortable with just anyone. Lucy taught me that."

"It's true." Lucy said. "The way you two act, you might as well already be a couple."

"Right..." Wilson took a deep breath. "Nothing ventured nothing gained right? Well, I'm going to go out there, be perfectly honest with her - and hope to shadows I don't screw up... Too confident sounding? Oh that sounded cocky."

Woodie gave a flat look before giving him another gentle bump with Lucy.

'BONK!'

"GAH!"

"You're. Fine. Now." He got behind Wilson, shoving him towards the lake. "Get going! You shouldn't keep a lady waiting!"

"Wah!" Wilson stumbled a bit before regaining his balance, taking a deep breath.

*Thaaaanks Woodie. You're a real pal.*

He rubbed his head a bit before smoothing his hair out.
Okay... Here goes.

He headed towards the designated location. A blanket had been set up that had a basket and his violin on it along with a lantern that was brightly lit. He hurried over, taking a seat and picking up his violin, starting to play it.

Just calm your nerves with playing. Though... where is Willow? I thought she would be here before me.

It wasn't too long before Willow showed up... though Wilson felt his jaw dropping a little at the sight of her. She had traded her usual clothes for a simple red dress that made her eyes light up in the moonlight. Her hair was down and curled slightly. Delphi trailed behind her as she grinned at him, waving.

"Hey, Wilson!"

"H-Hey yourself." Wilson couldn't help but blush. "W-Wow…"

"What?" She smiled.

"You... You look beautiful."

Willow blushed a little. She gave a sheepish grin twirling a bit for him.

"Not too much?"

"No. Just right." He got up, going to her. "I only really had this fancy vest and dress pants that Woodie made for me. I hope this is not too little."

"No. It's perfect." Willow smiled, taking one of his hands into hers. "I like this. Not too over the top or not too simple. It's... Wilson."

Wilson smiled, bringing her close to him, his free arm coming around her.

"Good. Well, I have a meal of spicy chili and meatballs waiting for us along with some pie I cooked up. Sound good?"

"Oh, sounds wonderful." Willow giggled, bringing her arm around him as they went back to the picnic blanket. "You spoil me I swear."

"I can't help it. I love seeing you smile."

"Creee!" Delphi settled on the blanket as well, giving a kicked puppy look.

"I know what you want." Wilson chuckled, digging into the basket, pulling out a large bowl of spicy chili. "Just for you, Delphi."

"Creee!" Delphi clapped her claws before digging in. "Onomnomnom."

Willow giggled, grinning as Wilson handed her a bowl for herself.

"Why thank you."

"You're welcome, M'Lady." Wilson dug into his own bowl.

The two ate quietly for a few minutes before they started talking. How the day had been, how
personal projects were going. Even talking about past events too.

"It's crazy all that happened then." Wilson said as he set down his plate, having finished his slice of pie. "Both of us running for our lives, not trusting each other at first and now… here we are."

"And I can't imagine a better outcome." Willow set her plate on top of his, letting Delphi finish off the remains of her pie piece. "I never thought I'd actually find someone who likes me the way I am. Or at least another person who does.

"I feel the same way." Wilson rubbed the back of his neck. "I mean, my mother and Uncle Emmett liked me but… I never really had friends or anyone outside my family that liked me. I just came off as annoying to a lot of people because of my personality and ambitions. Least, that's what others kept telling me. Reason I was alone for so long." He lowered his head a little. "You're less likely to get hurt when you're off on your own."

Willow frowned, laying her hand over his shoulder.

"I know how that feels. You think the world can't touch you. That you're able to cut out all the world and not care. Even if it hurts. Right?"

"Yes." Wilson closed his eyes. "You only have to worry about yourself and the only thing that can hurt you is yourself… But then you start to realize that being alone isn't all it's cracked up to be."

"And in the end, it still hurts." Willow moved closer laying her head on his shoulder.

Wilson rested his head against hers, relaxing.

"It does. Coming here and meeting everyone made me realize that. Especially when I met you. I had been fine on my own with Chester but… I didn't know what it was like to live for someone else. It drove me to be better, stronger… I felt… happy, despite the circumstances because I knew that end of the day, there was someone waiting for me to come back. Who was depending on me to do my best."

Willow smiled, closing her eyes.

"I did too. I had a reason to keep fighting. To keep wanting to be better than I was. Someone to talk to, to listen to me and for me to listen to them too. To learn how to exist together. I didn't know how much I needed that or wanted it."

"And with everyone here, I've never felt so alive… but if there is one who really gets me going… it's you."

Willow blushed, nuzzling him a little.

"You think so huh?"

"I know so." Wilson nuzzled her. "Because if anything makes my day, it's when I can make you happy."

Willow smiled, opening her eyes, turning to look at him. He smiled giving, her hand a squeeze.

"That means a lot, Wilson, because anytime you do something that makes me happy, I feel like the luckiest girl alive."

"Willow…"
Willow giggled, leaning in closer, her forehead touching with his. "I feel… wanted. That I belong… and…” she blushed a little. "And…”

"And…?" Wilson gave a concerned look.

"Oh, I don't know how I want to say it without coming off stupid or cheesy."

"Trust me, I understand that." Wilson gave a sheepish look. "Because stars and atoms I want to say something too but… I…. I just don't know if I can say it."

"Well, how about we start off simple?" Willow offered. "Like…. I love your eyes. Like the night sky."

Wilson turned red in the face, taking a deep breath to calm himself.

"And… I love your laugh. It's just so cute-" He brought a hand over his mouth.

\textit{GAAH!}

Delphi snickered, covering her own mouth.

Willow reached over, giving Delphi's nose a tap with her finger.

"Don't mock him." She looked back to him, her own face was red. "Do… you really think it's cute?"

"Adorable." Wilson rubbed the back of his neck.

Willow couldn't help it as she giggled. Wilson grinned.

"There it is."

"I can't help it. That makes me so happy! And I love yours. It's charming."

"C-Charming? Me?"

"Yes."

"Heh… No woman has ever told me that in my life. I… Heh…"

Willow brought her arms around him, huddling close.

"Well, I think that about you a lot. You're also warm and kind. Gentle and funny. You can be strict but you don't like having to be."

"No. It's never fun but… I try to do it out of everyone's best interest." Wilson sighed, pulling back a little, his eyes locking with Willow's. "Willow…"

Willow tilted her head a little. "Yeah…?"

Wilson held her hands tightly.

"I… I want you to know that I care for you very deeply and it's… it's more than just… out of the fact that I care for everyone here. This is something… different." \textit{JUST SAY IT!} "Oh for the love of all that is science! I love you! There! I said it!"
Willow was stunned as she tried to process this… before she threw her arms around him tightly, almost knocking him over.

"I love you too you big dork!"

Wilson turned bright red, a huge grin crossing his face.

"Y-You do?"

Willow had a grin of her own, giving a nod.

"I do. I really do Wilson!"

Wilson was silent for a moment before he laughed, getting to his feet, lifting Willow up and spinning her around.

"Oh, Willow! Hahahaha!"

Willow squealed, laughing as she kept close to him. She ran her hand through his hair.

"Wilson… My Wilson."

"R-Really?"

"Have I ever lied about this kind of thing?"

"No. Not that I recall." He stopped spinning her, resting his forehead against hers, smiling, warmth in his eyes. "M'Lady."

Willow had joy shining in hers.

"M'Lord."

At this moment, nothing could ruin it for them. They had each other and they both knew how the other felt.

It was perfect.

Delphi looked up at them before flying up, shoving Wilson's head hard with her tail.

"Cree!"

Wilson stumbled a bit as his lips collided with Willow's, both of their eyes going wide.

Delphi landed on the ground, clapping her claws, pleased at what she had just caused.

The two stared at each other before parting.

"Um… I… Uh…"

Willow put a finger over his mouth.

"Let's try that again, hm? No dragonfly to make it happen."

Wilson nodded silently as Willow moved her hand away, their lips meeting again, gently this time. Wilson relaxed entirely, bringing his arms around her as his eyes slide shut.
Willow closed her own eyes, leaning into the kiss. They stayed like this for a few moments, savoring the warmth of it before parting gently gazing at each other.

"Much better."
It was a late night in the village. Most were content and fast asleep in bed, save for a few who were gathered around the firepit, finding themselves unable to sleep.

Wilson was writing in his journal, the twins playing with his hair as he did, William and Charlie were huddled close together, William's arms around Charlie's bulging stomach, both content to just remain silent with Wolfgang sitting next to them and Willow was stoking the flames of the fire.

"Hm… I think either tomorrow or some other time this week I'll be making a hike to the outer regions of our village." Wilson said aloud. "I mean, it wouldn't hurt to know what else is here, right?"

"Wouldn't hurt at all." Willow replied, her eyes on the flames. "Know more stuff to burn-"

"Willow."

"Kidding."

"It would be wise." William said, looking up. "For all we know there might be something else here that we haven't been aware of."


"Okay and done!" Wendy grinned as she and Abigail finished their work. "A wonderful flower crown for an amazing prince."
"M-hm!" Abigail picked up a mirror, showing Wilson what they had done. "Do you like it, Papa?"

Wilson chuckled as he looked in the mirror, seeing he now had a flower crown made of blue flowers of some sort along with sunflowers in his hair.

"It's lovely."

"Yay!"

"Cute." Charlie giggled, huddling closer to William. "I remember them doing something similar for you back in California."

William chuckled kissing her head.

"I recall. I also remember them doing it to Jack when he was tired."

"Oh but that time they braided flowers into his hair." Charlie smiled at the memory. "He took it in stride though, saying he looked fabulous before striking a pose." Charlie winced a bit, bringing a hand over her stomach at feeling a kick from her unborn child. "And they're awake again…"

William nuzzled her, humming softly.

"Easy now little one. Be easy on your mother now."

There was another small kick before a small thump was felt, Charlie sighing in relief.

"Thank you."

"Anytime, my dear."

Wilson chuckled.

Cute.

Wilson focused back on his journal, falling back into deep thought.

Hm… Either I go north or I go south…

His thoughts were soon interrupted when he heard the sound of… flapping wings? He looked around, trying to find the source but to no avail since the noise went silent before he could locate it.

"Did anyone else hear that?"

The others were looking up, confusion in their eyes.

"I did." William narrowed his eyes.

"So did I." Willow replied.

Wendy and Abigail huddled closer to Wilson, nervousness coming over them.

Wolfgang nodded.

"Oui. It was close. That didn't sound like normal bird."

Wilson got up, picking up a torch and lighting it.
"I'll go scout."

Willow got her lighter.

"I'm coming too."

"Very well. Everyone else, stay close to the fire pit."

Wilson and Willow headed off, looking around the village. Charlie kept the twins close to her as William and Wolfgang looked around the fire pit area, both ready to fight if needed.

*Please let there be no giants here. That's all I ask.* Wilson pleaded mentally. He would be willing to take some kind of animal hybrid or some kind of fae but the last thing he wanted to deal with was another giant.

"Hey, Wilson!"

Wilson looked to where Willow was, finding she was by the portal. He hurried over, seeing in her other hand was a feather that was rather large in size.

"Look at the size of this thing." Willow looked it over carefully. "Are there any kind of birds with feathers this big?"

"Not that I know of." Wilson took the feather into his hand. "I mean, I know of one from the Shadow World who has large feathers but this is much smaller than the ones Grandmother showed me."

"Then… do you think something is here that's entirely new?"

"It's quite possible."

Both hurried back to the fire pit area, seeing everyone was still there.

"Did you find anything?" William asked.

"Only this." Wilson held up the feather. "We either have a large bird flying around or some other kind of creature."

"Oh goodie." William looked around, shadow flames sparking in his hands. "Well, whatever it is, least we're aware of it."

Wilson nodded.

"Though we'll continue scouting for it. I'll head out bright and early in the morning when we're not at the mercy of the night."

"That sounds good."

Wendy and Abigail looked to Wilson, worry in their eyes.

"Papa you're not gonna get hurt are ya?"

Wilson gave a gentle look, stroking their heads.

"I'll be fine. I promise."
"You better."

Both the twins hugged him.

Wilson hugged the girls close to him.

"I promise girls. I won't let anything happen to me - and I certainly won't let anything happen to anyone here."

"Good."

Wilson looked up at the sky.

"Though for now, I think we might be best to returning to our cabins for the night. Better to not have anything sneak up on us."

"Noo!" The twins whined. "We're not tired."

"Please, Papa!"

"No ifs ands or buts young ladies."

They gave their best pout but to no avail as Wilson picked them up.

"Come on now or no bedtime stories from me or Grandma Cece."

They gasped, giving him sad looks.

"Noo! We'll be good!"

"That's what I thought. Say goodnight to everyone now."

"Night!"

Everyone waved goodbye, heading to their respective cabins.

William helped Charlie to her feet, keeping him close to her.

"William, do you have any idea what might be out there? You have Maxwell's memories after all. Did he know anything about this place?"

"He knew about it but not much. I can't recall anything in his memories that mentions bird like creatures." William's eyes narrowed a bit. "Or anything. I admit those memories haven't come clear yet for me."

Charlie gave him a concerned look, keeping an arm wrapped around him.

"Do you think something's here to hurt us?"

William gave her a gentle look.

"I won't let anything harm you Charlie. I promise."

"Okay." Charlie huddled closer to him. "Thank you."

William nodded, leading her into their home.
"Anything for you."

ooooo

The next day, Wilson got his things ready to go scouting as he had planned. He grabbed a spear and a spare log suit, starting to head out of the village.

The man heard a noise behind him and turned to see Chester was standing behind him, whimpering.

"No boy. I don't think you wanna come with me this time."

Chester whined, nuzzling his leg.

Wilson shook his head.

"I don't think so-"

"Bark!"

"Chester, no." Wilson patted his head. "Look after the girls while I'm gone."

Wilson started walking again but stopped, seeing Chester was still following him.

"Chester. Please."

"Bark! Bark! Bark!"

Wilson narrowed his eyes into a warning look that faltered, seeing Chester had lowered himself as much as he could to the ground, whimpering.

"Okay, fiiiine!" He sighed. "Come on but if you get underfoot-"

Chester bounced ahead of him.

"Bark! Bark!"

"Ah! Chester! I lead, not you!"

Wilson ran after the creature, both now making their way for the mountain area.

Chester barked happily, easily keeping ahead of Wilson until he caught up to him, giving the creature a look.

"Come on now, let's work together on this. Or no scratches."

Chester barked, falling into line behind Wilson as they made their way up the mountain. Albeit for Wilson some difficulty with the slopes in particular.

The Shadow World was generally flat. He hadn't thought about mountain areas in it before.

*Of course. Geology. My least favorite subject.*

Wilson shook his head, continuing forward, not noting someone was watching him from the trees. They narrowed their blue eyes, moving from tree to tree with ease as they followed Wilson, keeping as quiet as possible.
Wilson kept his focus on going up the slope and making sure Chester was keeping up. It was quite a few hours before Wilson was nearing the top, the man panting.

*Maybe... I should've gone south.*

He decided now would be a good time to rest. He moved to sit, only to find himself being picked up by his arms and swooped right into the air by something. Chester barked helplessly as Wilson was taken to the sky.

Wilson let out a scream, kicking his legs frantically in surprise. He craned his neck, trying to see what had grabbed him, his eyes widening as he saw it was a young man. He had dark skin and hair. His eyes were bright blue and had a furious look in them. The most shocking thing of all about this young man, were the great big wings on his back that resembled that of a falcon.

Wilson was without words as he stared at the man.

The man narrowed his eyes as he brought them even higher into the air.

"Who are you and what are you doing in our land?"
"Who are you and what are you doing in our land?"

Wilson struggled as he stared at the man holding onto him. He was terrified as they flew higher into the sky… and judging from the furious look the man had, Wilson guessed he would be capable of dropping him to his death and not feel bad about it.

The man gave Wilson a light shake when he didn't answer right away

"AH!" Wilson shook his head. "My-My name is Wilson Higgsbury, I'm I'm a settler here. Please, don't do anything to me!" He looked down, feeling his stomach drop as he calculated how high up they were.

*If he drops me I'm going to die for sure.*

"A settler?" The man asked. "From where?"

"T-The Shadow World." Wilson narrowed his eyes. "I swear I'm not out to cause harm, I was scouting. I didn't know there was other people here." Or bird… men… THINGS.

"The Constant?" the man asked. "You came from The Constant?"

"If by "The Constant' you mean Shadow World then yes! Just please don't kill me!"
The man stared at him for another moment, processing what Wilson had said before flying back down to the ground to where Chester was, setting Wilson down before landing in front of him, crossing his arms.

"I don't recall me or my team bringing you and your other people in. Were you the one who reactivated the portal?"

"I helped construct the gateway from the other side but yes." Wilson admitted, trying to catch his breath, leaning against a tree. "And what do you mean by team?"

The man looked to the mountains, his wings moving as the breeze picked up.

"I'm not the only native to The Haven."

_The Haven...?_

"Look, I was looking for something because some kind of creature invaded our village last night and startled us."

"And what would you have done if you had found it?"

Wilson sighed.

"If it was docile I would've left it be, maybe lead it away with food. If it had been hostile I would've defended myself and my comrades. That's survival."

"And understandable but you went too far in your search."

Wilson sighed.

"I apologize." He looked the man over, reaching into his backpack as he took out the feather, holding it up as he looked specifically at the man's large wings.

It was a perfect match.

The man smirked a little.

"Find what you were looking for?"

"I... You were?" Wilson growled a little. "Why!? We aren't harming the land nor doing anything to it!"

"I have my own business here as well. I wanted to be sure you weren't out to harm my people either. Just like you were scouting so was I... and I was looking for something myself."

Wilson sighed.

"Just please... I don't want any trouble honest."

"And you have no interest in the natives here?"

"I promise. I mean it."

"Very well then."

Wilson sighed in relief.
"We just… want peace and a place to call home. That's all we ask."

"I see." The man looked him over carefully. "Well… you've come to the right place. The Haven is meant for that."

"Do they both have specific names or was it something you created?"

"The Haven has had its own name for quite some time. The Constant also has had that name for a long time but it has other names as well, such as The Shadow World."

"I… I don't understand. Okay, I guess first thing is first, who are you?"

The man gave a bow, spreading his wings widely.

"King Sabra, the ruler of the land alongside Queen Chione."

Wilson's eyes widened before he bowed himself.

"A-Ah my apologies, Your Highness."

Sabra grinned.

"No need. You didn't know. I'm just amazed to see a human here whom I didn't bring in from The Constant."

Wilson chuckled.

"Well, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance sir." He replied. "I didn't know you could travel there though… What purpose is it to you?"

"To rescue." Sabra gave a gentle look. "Least, that's my own self designated duty. Many fall into despair when in The Constant and on Earth or any dimension for that matter. It my duty alongside my team to rescue those who have lost hope. To help them find peace in their troubled lives. I bring them here so they may heal and find solace."

"That's incredible… So that explains why we haven't really found many other survivors." Wilson hummed in thought. "That's incredible."

"And it ensures no one is trapped there as a spirit if I can avoid it."

"And do all who come here…" Wilson was staring at his wings and noted the man also had pointed ears.

Sabra chuckled.

"The new attributes are an option."

Wilson heaved a sigh of relief putting a hand over his heart.

"Oh, thank goodness! Em no offense, I just don't think I'd want them myself."

Sabra smirked.

"Understandable. Though, keep in mind - I've been doing this for a very long time. So, it was just natural to happen."
"I see…" Wilson ran a hand through his hair. "I have so many questions… Just… The Constant… I never even heard Grandmother mention that name. You and… your people… I… I don't even know where to start."

Sabra hummed in thought before glancing to his wings.

"Pick up your mutt."

"Eh?"

"I said, pick up your mutt."

Wilson raised an eyebrow before doing so.

"Why-"

Before Wilson could finish, Sabra grabbed him, bringing him up into the air again. Wilson did his best not to scream again but couldn't help but yelp as they ascended into the air.

"W-Where are you taking me?"

"Over the mountains." Sabra grinned. "I think the best place to start would be my home."

Wilson held tightly to Chester, not daring to look down for a few moments before he decided to glance, his eyes widening at the sight below.

Below him was what he could only describe as something he only saw in books. A kingdom with architecture reminiscent of Ancient Egypt, yet unique and upgraded in its own way.

"Welcome to Senen." Sabra smiled. "My humble kingdom."

"It's… wow." Wilson breathed amazed. A grin came to his face as he looked around. "This is incredible! It's a mix of old and new, it's like something out of a story!"

"That's what I've heard some of the little ones here call it."

They soon landed in a courtyard. Wilson looked around, seeing others like him with no pointed ears or wings and some like Sabra who did have wings and pointed ears going about their day. Be it socializing or getting chores done.

"Everyone you see here is either from The Constant or Earth or some other dimension. All had one thing in common and that was wanting to find peace amongst all the despair they were in."

"Goodness, so many people." Wilson murmured, frowning a bit. "So many who were suffering."

"But suffer no longer. They knew what they accepted when they decided to come here. All take care of each other here."

"Just like we do."

"Sabra! You're home!"

Sabra smiled as a woman older than him who beared some resemblance to the man came running over to him, hugging him.

"Indeed I am, Mother." He hugged her back before gesturing over to Wilson. "And I brought with
me a neighbor."

"Neighbor?" The woman looked to Wilson, surprise in her eyes. "What do you mean by neighbor?"

"As in, I found him here along with many others. Mother, the portal to The Constant has been reopened."

The woman's eyes went wide.

"Then what Rune said is true. There's a new ruler on the throne in Maxwell's place."

Wilson gave a bow.

"The ruler is my grandmother, Melinda Wickerbottom. I'm her grandson, Wilson Percival Higgsbury."

She smiled, giving a bow of her own.

"Queen Chione. Goodness, I didn't think someone would get Maxwell off the throne."

"Eheh… It happened."

"Well… I am both sad yet relieved someone did the deed." Chione looked him over. "So if you're the grandson of the current ruler, that would make you a prince. Looks like someone is on the same level as you, Sabra."

"Would seem so, even if I do go by king." Sabra smiled. "Regardless of titles, he and his people have a village set up on the other side of the mountain. That was what I found the night before. So, no harm has come to our world. Just new residents."

"Thank goodness." Chione sighed in relief. "I was worried Maxwell's old friend may have found a way in."

"Old friend?" Wilson titled his head.

"Well… maybe I shouldn't say that. He was never a friend. If anything he was one of the reasons Maxwell spiraled into insanity."

"Poor Uncle." Sabra frowned. "He didn't deserve that."

Wilson's eyes widened in shock.

"UNCLE!?" He pointed at Sabra. "YOU'RE RELATED TO THAT DEMON KING?!!"

Sabra was taken aback before laughing.

"Oh no no no no. Adopted uncle. He was part of my father's court in Egypt and I was generally very close with the priests. He was the one I was closest with though since my father trusted him so much."

"Not to mention thanks to him Aharon didn't have a breakdown when you were born."

"Oh yes I remember the story." Sabra grinned, making a face similar to Maxwell's. "And then he said "After all I've seen tonight, I never want to deal with that much blood ever again."

"Ah… The one time blood made him squirm."
Chione laughed.

"I shared his sentiment!"

Wilson still had an expression of shock on his face.

*Maxwell had FRIENDS who trusted him with their child? Enough that he was there when said child was born?*

*Oh stars and atoms I feel like everything I knew was wrong.*

Chione and Sabra looked to him, amused expressions on their face.

"We understand your confusion about Maxwell and we'll make this clear: What he has done for the past centuries was not excusable by any means but we will tell you this, despite all that he has done, we still care about him." Sabra's look turned serious. "But we do not want contention between us and your people or whoever else is out there. We just want to make things right."

Wilson shook his head, taking a deep breath.

"And while I'm still processing all of this, I don't wish to have trouble either. I would love to have allies in this world. It would certainly help."

"And we welcome those who don't bring trouble."

Wilson looked to Chione.

"Though, was the ambush entirely necessary?"

Chione looked at Sabra and smacked his arm lightly.

"You little mischief maker!"

"What? It was the best way to ensure he didn't use his weapon!"

"I swear, you're as bad Maxwell was back in the day combined with your father."

"Well hey, they were major influences on my life." Sabra shook his head. "Anyways, we got a lot to talk about Prince Wilson."

Wilson grinned sheepishly.

"Please, just Wilson, no titles needed. I may be a prince but I'd rather not use the title."

"Understandable. Shall we?"

"Y-Yes."

*This world just keeps surprising me.*
Wilson was utterly fascinated by the village Sabra had created for his people. The structures, and the people themselves. Most of the residents had pointed ears and wings and many were dressed from different time periods that he could recognize.

He was enthralled by everything. Even as Sabra lead him around, Wilson found himself looking from place to place as if he was a child discovering something magical.

Though he supposed it was truly magical.

"If I may say, Sir, this is amazing."

"We're equals, you can drop the "Sir" act." Sabra replied, expertly dodging a ball being kicked around by a group of children, kicking it back to them with a grin. "Heads up!"

The children cheered as one of them kicked the ball into another direction, running or flying off as Wilson noted some of them had wings on their backs.

Sabra chuckled, watching them run off.

"Even children?" Wilson raised an eyebrow, looking to him. "They even get them?"

"All can have it happen at any time. But remember - this place has been around for a long time. All of those children were born here to parents who already had the wings and the ears." Sabra explained.
"Ah, that makes sense."

Sabra nodded.

"Yep. I imagine your people could manage it as well but I'm assuming you are fine with staying as you are."

"More than fine and… I don't think I'd be capable. I have shadow magic and I am half Shadow Being er…. Fourth. Regardless, I have blood similar to those of the Shadow World or should I say The Constant?"

"Call it what you like. Shadow World, The Constant, it's all the same. So, your other villagers wouldn't be interested either?"

"No. We're content as are."

Sabra smiled, giving a nod.

"I understand. My advisor is the same way. He's full Shadow Being actually and didn't wish to undergo any changes. "I am what my people have been for ages. I see no need to change." as he put it."

"Hm, sounds quite wise."

"He used to be Maxwell's advisor actually." Sabra laughed a little. "He visited us quite a few times - he had a good leash on Max's temper when he was being stupid."

"Advisor… Well, it might amuse you that the current queen was once an advisor herself."

Sabra grinned.

"Ah, that's quite a turn. I would imagine Max had trained her well then long before he got removed from the throne."

"Oh quite. She's so powerful now, it's amazing. Took to it like she had always meant to be there."

"Well, least someone is in charge who can make things right." Sabra smiled gently. "Rune would be pleased."

"Is… he anywhere nearby? I would like to meet him."

"He's probably still in the record chamber going over things. I'm sure he can spare a minute."

Sabra lead Wilson to his palace, bringing him to a lower level where scrolls were stored on shelves, carefully organized and label. Among it all was a young man with dark skin and black hair, looking over some of them, humming a small tune.

"Rune, have a minute?"

The man looked up.

"Yes, My Liege?"

Sabra chuckled.

"Rune, please, just Sabra." Sabra gestured to Rune. "We have a guest from The Constant. Prince
Wilson Higgsbury.

"Prince?" Rune stood up, making his way over. "The current ruler has a son?"

"Grandson actually. He wanted to meet you."

Rune extended a hand.

"Pleasure to meet you."

Wilson shook his hand, bowing his head in respect.

"Pleasure to meet you as well." He smiled. "This is all just so amazing."

"Indeed." Rune looked at him carefully. "So you're the one who knocked Maxwell off his throne… Thank you. I was wondering if he'd ever be free of his chains."

Wilson rubbed the back of his neck.

"You're welcome. Honestly, I just wanted to free the man he was bonded to at the time. I admit, I did play his game for a bit. Tricked him into giving me more power than I knew what to do with."

"Now THAT was not mentioned!" Sabra nudged him a little. "To be honest, I wouldn't expect any less - given his love of games."

"I doubt he appreciated being sliced at but alright."

Rune chuckled.

"Maxwell sometimes got in over his head with games of chance. It was one of the few things that could bring some excitement into his life even if it sometimes blew up in his face."

"Like the time he and Father spent almost a full day playing Sennet, each one betting one of their finest cloaks. Neither wanted to lose."

Wilson snickered at the mental image of Maxwell sitting still and playing a game like a normal person.

_It's odd to hear something like this… but fascinating._

"Well… I'm just glad things are taking a turn for the better for my home. Maybe it can get back to how it was before Maxwell lost his mind entirely."

"That's what Grandmother intends to do."

"Good." Rune smiled. "The Constant is in good hands then… Though I must ask, do you know where Maxwell is?"

"We don't. He's been oddly quiet which is… strange. We thought by now he would've reared his head again since he swore he'd back on his way out of the throne room."

Rune frowned at this.

"I see… Well, wherever he is… I hope he doesn't decide to go through with it. He's so much better than that but who knows, maybe some time away from the throne and Their influence will help him."
"I hope so."

Sabra sighed.

"I was trying to find him the other night but I haven't had luck so far. Hopefully that'll change as I still have work to do."

"Speaking of… I would like to assist with that."

Rune hummed in thought.

"Well… we could always use more hands. Sabra?"

"By all means and you if ever need help with constructing things in your village we could help with building homes for new residents."

Wilson grinned offering a hand.

"It's a deal then. Plus, I'm sure my comrades would love to visit this place as well - if you're alright with that."

Sabra shook his hand giving a warm look.

"More than alright."

*I believe this is the start of something quite wonderful.*
There was no questioning that the new relationship between Sennen and the Light Village was proving to be a very helpful one. Many from Sennen were more than happy to help with the finishing of buildings in the village and those of the Light Village were eager to help in whatever way possible to help those still stranded in The Constant. It was wonderful that such a relationship bloomed so quickly.

*It speaks to times of old.*

Rune smiled as he entered the Light Village, looking around. The Survivors were busy at work with construction, helping new survivors settle into their new homes, with some assistance from those of Sennen in lifting planks.

He scanned the area for a few more moments before turning his focus to why he had decided to visit. He looked around till he finally spotted Wilson. He was currently speaking with a man with bushy blond hair, who had a bright red bandana tied around his neck.

Rune made his way over, clearing his throat.

"Excuse me, Mr. Higgsbury?"

Wilson looked over to him.

"Ah, Rune. Was wondering when you would get here." He turned to the man he was speaking to.
"Sorry to cut this short but I have an appointment with this gentleman here. Just keep up the work and if you need any assistance do not be afraid to ask the others for help. Okay?"

The man nodded.

"Will do."

They hurried off, leaving Wilson alone with Rune.

Rune smiled.

"I understand you wanted to speak to me in regards to special magic?"

"Yes. From what my grandmother told me when I told her you were still around, she said you were one of the most knowledgeable archivists Maxwell ever had. I was hoping maybe you might know a thing or two about reversing curses that were caused by The Constant or Maxwell's magic."

"As a matter of fact I do. I've been refining techniques to do so over the years because of the people we would be bringing back from The Constant. I can do so and it wouldn't be difficult - or painful. Whom is it?"

"Two people - a woman named Lucy who was cursed to be an ax after she fell into a coma and a little boy named Webber who well… I'll be frank - he's fused to a spider."

"I see. Not the strangest things I've heard of." Rune hummed in thought before pulling out a book from his bag, flipping through it quickly. "... Doable. I can change both back to normal with ease I just need to make a proper circle of healing. When would you like this done?"

"As soon as possible. Lucy's been like this for awhile and I'd like her to be able to walk around as herself again - and Webber he's still growing. I don't want any growth spurts making it permanent."

"Very well. Do you have any open quiet places where I can set up the circle?"

Wilson nodded leading him to a large space in front of the lake. "This is one of the quietest places we have here. Is this alright?"

"It's perfect." Rune set down his bag, pulling out materials. "It'll take me an hour to set up. Will you have the afflicted ready by then?"

"Definitely. I'll have them down here in no time."

"Perfect."

Wilson nodded.

"Thank you."

"Anything for an ally."

oooooo

Just as Rune said, he was done within an hour. The circle was properly prepared. Flowers of a light blue color with a gentle green glow were planted around it along with sunflowers. Candles were set up as well, symbols etched into the ground.

Rune sat in front of it, meditating quietly, waiting patiently for Wilson to arrive. Soon enough, the
man appeared along with Webber, WX-78 and Woodie. Rune opened his eyes, smiling gently.

"Right on time." He looked to WX-78 and Woodie. "Are they afflicted as well or are they kin to the afflicted?"

"Husband." Woodie said, holding up Lucy. "Lucy is my wife so I want to be here when she changes back."

"I AM HERE SO WEBBER IS NOT SCARED." WX-78 said, looking down at Webber, the boy grasping at his hand. "I AM NOT KIN BUT HE TRUSTS ME."

"And that is perfectly fine." Rune looked to the two before going up to Woodie, holding his hands out for Lucy. "Ladies first as they say… May I?"

Woodie hesitated a moment before handing her over.

"Please take care of her."

"Of course." Rune took Lucy gently into his hands. "Pleasure to meet you, Lucy." He said, looking up as if were speaking to someone in front of him instead of the axe.

"Pleasure to meet you too." Lucy said.

Rune made his way to the circle, setting Lucy down in the center of it.

He took a deep breath, stepping back to the outside of the circle. He raised his hands into the air, closing his eyes.

"Let what has been afflicted be cleansed. Let this curse leave them and pass from this world."

The flowers around the circle glowed brightly as the candles' flames changed colors. The lights from the flowers and candles moved to the center, coming around Lucy. The axe was lifted into the air, being bathed completely in light. The axe changed form within moments. What was once the silhouette of an axe, was now the silhouette of a young woman. The figure was brought down, the light dissipating to reveal a young woman with red hair tied into a bun, dressed in a plaid shirt and a black skirt. She had red patches on her skin, notably on her face and arms. She looked up, opening her eyes slowly, revealing they were brown.

Rune smiled, stepping back as the magic from the flowers and candles faded.

"It is done."

Woodie had tears in his eyes as he looked at her before she ran up to him.

"WOODIE!" She laughed throwing her arms around him. "I'm okay… I'm okay!"

"Oh Lucy! Oh my love!" Woodie peppered her head with kisses, hugging her tightly. "You're you again!" He pulled back gently, cupping her cheeks his hands. "Let me look at you… Oh how I've missed those eyes."

"Woodie." She bumped his nose with hers, tears streaming down her face as she cupped his face in her hands. "I… I missed this. I can… I can… Oh goodness…"

Woodie smiled softly, tears running down his face. He kissed her head.

"I missed you too. You're finally back in my arms where you belong."
"I can feel you… I can see you clearly. No more fog, no more being sick."

"No more chopping down trees."

"Well, least not with me as the weapon." Lucy relaxed against him. "We can do it together now. Just like old times."

Woodie sighed happily, holding her close to him.

"Darn right."

Webber was awestruck at what had just occurred.

"Whoa…"

Rune approached him.

"Are you ready?"

Webber couldn't help but cower a bit behind WX-78. Webber wasn't really one to be shy but Rune was a complete stranger and his red eyes, while gentle were a bit off putting.

"You don't have to if you're not ready yet." Rune knelt to his level. "But I promise it won't hurt."

Webber looked at him with a nervous look before gazing up at WX-78.

"And you'll stay?"

"I WILL NOT MOVE FROM THIS SPOT UNLESS YOU ASK."

"O-Okay."

Rune extended his hand to him.

"Shall we begin?"

Webber hesitated before taking his hand, parting from WX-78.

"We'll be right here Webber." Wilson smiled, ruffling his hair. "Promise."

Webber laughed a little, batting his hand away.

"Okay, Cousin." he looked up at Rune. "Hey um… Mister Rune? Can I make a small request?"

"Hm?"

"Can… And this is going to sound strange but… can I kind of… somehow… keep my powers? Like still be able to spidery things?"

Rune smiled gently.

"I think that can be done. It's part of you now so I can see why you wouldn't wish to part with it."

"A-And I like making webs and climbing stuff."

"Then I can most certainly fulfill that." Rune lead him to the center of the circle. "Now just stand here. We shall begin momentarily."
Webber did as told, keeping his eyes on WX-78 and Wilson. Wilson gave a gentle smile and WX-78… well, the best gentle look he could give with his optics.

Rune began his chant again, the magic coming around Webber. Webber was surprised how warm it felt as the magic enveloped him. It tickled too as things began to change. Fur disappeared, being replaced with skin. Eight eyes became only two and the only hair visible now was on the top of his head that was black in color. The magic dissipated as Webber was lowered down to the ground. No longer a spider hybrid, but a human child now stood in the circle.

Webber looked at himself, eyes wide.

"Whoa…"

Wilson clapped a smile on his face.

"Look at you! How do you feel?"

"Good…” Webber flexed his fingers a little grinning as he ran out of the circle. "Really good! Look! This is how I really am!"

Wilson ruffled up his hair. "I'm so glad for you."

Webber laughed a little before shivering a bit as a breeze picked up. Wilson hummed in thought before taking off his vest offering it to him.

"Here, borrow this for a bit. Don't want you sick now."

Webber nodded, slipping it on, sighing in relief at the warmth the vest still had.

"Thank you."

"Can easily sew you some new clothes." Woodie chuckled. "Just tell me what you like and I can make it."

"Thanks!" Webber looked over to WX-78, running over to him. "Well, how do I look?"

WX-78 couldn't explain the feeling he felt looking at the boy. Seeing he was back to normal and safe.

"You…” He patted his head. "You look great."

"Hee. Even for a fleshy?"

"ESPECIALLY."

Webber giggled before throwing his arms around the robot as best as he could hugging him.

"You're the best."

WX-78 lowered to his level, hesitating before bringing his arms around him.

"OF COURSE. I AM SUPERIOR TO ALL HERE EXCEPT THE QUEEN."

Webber laughed shaking his head.

"Of course."
"... AND YOU."

"Hee?"

Rune brought a hand to his chin, observing the two.

"Hm… What a strange automaton."

Wilson looked to him, crossing his arms.

"So I'm not the only one who thinks he's a touch strange."

"Just odd to see something like him existing. You… sure there's not something else going on beneath the plating?"

"There might be but I couldn't tell you. He won't let me get close with a wrench."

"I see… Well, a matter for another time. For now." Rune smiled, looking at the two he just cured. "It's a time to celebrate."

And what a time for it to be.
Nothing beat the feeling of being above everything else. Seeing the valley's dip and being able to make out the village from high above it.

At least, that's how Webber liked it when he climbed up the largest tree he could find, using the spider abilities he still had left. The boy sighed happily, feeling a breeze.

"WEBBER. THE FLESHBAG HAS TOLD YOU HE DOES NOT WANT YOU UP THERE."

Except for that.

"Aww I'm fine though!"

"WEBBER I AM COMMANDING YOU TO COME DOWN OR NO SWEETS."

Webber gasped before climbing down.

"I'm down now, see?"

"GOOD." WX-78 patted his head. "YOU MAY HAVE POWERS BUT YOU ARE NOT IMPERVIOUS TO INJURY."

Webber pouted, crossing his arms.

"I know, I'm sorry." He gave a sheepish look. "I just like seeing how it all looks up there. It's so
cool, like I'm a giant or something."

"IT CONCERNS ME."

"I know."

WX-78 shook his head.

"JUST… be more… CAREFUL."

"Okay." Webber tilted his head. "You feeling alright? You went quiet there for a second."

WX-78 blinked.

"I AM FINE."

Webber frowned a little.

"You've been doing that a lot more lately though."

"I… I'm… I AM fine."

So why do I not believe you?

"WX…?"

"LET US JUST HEAD BACK TO THE VILLAGE. I AM SURE FOOD WILL BE READY SOON."

"But lunch isn't for another hour-"

"THEN CHORES."

Webber sighed, starting to trudge back.

"I swear you sometimes sound like Father."

WX-78 froze up a bit hearing that.

"Kenny, it's time to get up my boy. The animals won't feed themselves!"

"Nooo, it's still dark out!"

"... THAT SO?"

"Yeah. He could be really bossy sometimes but I knew he meant well. He taught me a lot of things. Like taking care of goats."

"WHY GOATS?"

"They were useful, apparently. Mostly for the milk, though it didn't mean we didn't eat one every now and then or sold them to make some money." Webber explained, jumping over a fallen log with a small laugh. "And Mother would work in the garden. She'd have me help put the fertilizer out - it was really gross smelling too."

"I SEE… SO YOU LIVED ON A FARM."
"M-hm! Out in the countryside. There was city not too far away we'd visit sometimes. San… Francisco I think. Father thought at one point we could live there but decided farm life was the way since that's what he grew up with. Same with Mom and Grandpa."

"YOU HAD A GRANDPARENT?"

"M-hm. He was cranky and had a cat named Whiskers who helped take care of mice who wanted to live in the barn. He played chess too. He taught me actually! I'm not very good but I know how to play!"

"THAT IS INTRIGUING."

"Mm-hm. I like it. I haven't played it in awhile though. Wilson promised he'd play with me but he's really busy with Rune so he hasn't been able to… and Wendy doesn't like it." Webber pouted. "She says it's "boring"."

"HOW DARE SHE."

"I know right?"

"MAYBE I COULD PLAY. I DO KNOW THE RULES."

"Really?" Webber's eyes lit up. "You would play with me?"

"OF COURSE. IT IS A STRATEGY GAME, RIGHT? I AM EXCELLENT AT THAT."

Webber smiled, nodding.

"I'd like that. I'd really like that!"

"Then we… we will."

Webber tilted his head a little at WX-78.

"You got all quiet voice sounds a little echo-y too. You sure you're okay?"

This time, WX-78 couldn't deny it. He heard it too.

"I… I don't… DO NOT RECALL having… TECHNICAL difficulties."

Webber frowned, worry coming to his eyes. He took WX-78's hand with both of his.

"I think you need to get looked at."

"N-No…"

"Please… You've been acting weird for awhile now… Please?" Webber's lip quivered a bit as he looked at WX-78 with a pleading look.

"WEBBER I do not-"

"For me?"

"... FINE. WE SHALL LET THE FLESHBAG EXAMINE ME."

"C'mon!" Webber broke into a run, tugging the automaton behind him.
"Alright, there we are." Wilson finished up organizing some of his supplies. "That should do it for the day, then I can relax."

"Yes!" Abigail, who was helping him, cheered. "Play time?"

"Of course, Princess-"

"WILSON!"

Both looked up, seeing Webber and WX-78 approaching.

"What is it?" Wilson asked.

"WX isn't feeling too good."

"I AM NOT ILL. I JUST SEEM TO BE GLITCHING."

Wilson blinked.

"So… are you going to let me actually take a peek under the plating?"

WX-78's optics narrowed into what looked to be annoyance.

"ONLY... ONLY beCAUSE WEBBER REQUESTED."

Wilson was taken aback by WX-78's momentary change in voice volume.

"I see that's still happening."

"... YOU HAVE NOTICED?"

"I have." Wilson crossed his arms. "But I couldn't really do anything because you wouldn't even come within five feet of me if I had a wrench in hand."

"IT IS EVIL."

"Mm-hm. That's what I've heard." Wilson smirked a little. "So, you'll finally trust me?"

"ONLY BECAUSE OF THE BOY."

"Of course."

Wilson looked to Abigail.

"Sorry, one more thing sweetie and then we can play."

"Okay." She skipped over to Webber. "You wanna play while Papa does his work?"

Webber smiled a little.

"Yes, please."

She took his hand, leading him away.

"C'mon. I'll play chess - I like it, Wendy doesn't."
"YAY!"

Wilson chuckled before gesturing to the medical building.

"Right this way, WX."

WX-78 let out a frustrated sigh as he followed Wilson inside the structure, soon sitting down on one of the exam tables.

"JUST MAKE IT QUICK, FLESHBAG."

Wilson nodded, stepping out for a minute, soon returning with his toolkit.

"Alright, let's see what you've been hiding." Wilson pulled out a wrench, staring to undo the bolts on WX-78's chassis.

"PLEASE DO NOT DAMAGE ANYTHING."

"Wasn't planning to." Wilson said as he undid the last bolt.

WX-78 felt dread as Wilson removed the front plating. He looked away, not wanting to see.

Wilson's eyes were wide as he looked at the inner workings… He expected nothing but wires and gears…

But what he saw instead, looked more like something meant to support life.

"This looks like… medical equipment?"

"... WHAT?"

WX-78 couldn't help it as he looked down, his optics growing a bit wide at what he saw.

Inside the chassis, was a black mass surrounded by an exoskeleton made of metal. There were wires wrapped around the frame that fed into equipment surrounding the black mass. Small measuring gauges, pumps of some sort. It wasn't something Wilson had ever seen before.

Wilson took a step back, marveling at it.

"This is incredible." He remarked, grabbing up one of his clipboards, jotting down notes. "It's so different from anything I've ever seen! This… it's like it's meant to support a human life!"

"Support… life…" WX-78 said. "Life support…"

"Come on, stay with me!"

"My arm… It took my arm!"

"I know Xavier, I know but I can still save the rest of you and I got you a nice new arm here. It's weird but I promise it's going to work just as well as your old one. Just don't die on me!"

WX-78 clenched one of his fists slowly, looking up at Wilson with a haunted look in his optics.

"This isn't right…"

"Just hang in there. I know this isn't going to feel the best, but you're not going to live if I don't do this. I'm sorry!"
"What do you mean?" Wilson got a concerned look in his eyes. "Does something hurt?"

WX-78 felt at the edge of his chassis, tugging at it, startling Wilson.

"Get this off of me!"

"Whoa, don't do that!"

"I SAID GET IT OFF!"

Wilson tore his hands away from the chassis.

"I can get it off but not with doing that! You'll hurt yourself!"

WXX-78 stared at Wilson, desperation in his optics… and then Wilson noted something. He could hear what sounded like some panting from underneath the face plate. Not a robotic one but a human one.

"... WX… May I start with the face plate?"

He nodded.

"Please." He pleaded.

"Then I will. You'll have to hold still for me though. Can you manage that?"

"Yes."

Wilson got straight to work, undoing the bolts. Sure enough, under the plates was an exoskeleton like the one in the chassis save a few differences. To Wilson's surprise, he could actually see a human jaw exposed.

"Well?"

"Goodness…" Wilson murmured eyes wide. "Who on Earth would do this?"

"The man who saved my life."

"Huh?"

"There was a man… He and I got brought to The Constant at the same time. He was a doctor. We got into a scuffle with a monster and he had to do a lot of work to save me."

"Whoever he was, must've been a genius. To sustain you for this long and to keep you from having negative effects - aside from memory lapses…" Wilson sighed. "Though I can only guess the trauma is to blame on that last part."

"He had to replace one of my arms… Dr. Carter - that's what his name was… He was very determined."

"Carter..!?" JACK!?"

"Yes… He was at the magic show I was attending with… my son…"

"Magic show?"

"Yes…" WX-78 felt at the material and exoskeleton still cover the top part of his head. "Can you
please get the rest of this off?"

"Yes of course. Let me get a scalpel and some wire cutters."

"Please don't cut my actual face."

"Tch and here I thought you had some faith in me." Wilson murmured as he started to work at it.

WX-78 held still as Wilson got to work. It took a few minutes but soon Wilson was able to dismantle the exoskeleton and peel back the black material surrounding WX-78's head. Under it all was a man with copper colored hair and pale skin. He also had a short scruffy beard around his jaw that Wilson hadn't noticed earlier that was copper and gray in color. The man opened his eyes slowly, revealing they were a gray.

Wilson moved back a little.

"There we go. So, that's what you look like under all that metal."

The man coughed a little, giving a nod.

"Y-Yes…" He reached up, feeling his face sighing in relief. "Finally, that came off."

"If I had to guess, you were in there longer than the suit should've been on for." Wilson looked him over with his eyes, shaking his head a bit. "It's incredible, honestly."

"I just want to get the rest of this off. You can do whatever you want with the bloody suit just take it off!"

"Hold on now, just let me do a few checks-"

"Hurry it up then. I'd like to get to my…" He trailed off. "... My son."

Wilson frowned.

"I'll help you find him, I promise."

"You already did."

Wilson's eyes widened.

"Pardon?"

"Webber…"

It clicked in Wilson's mind.

"... This explains a lot."

WX-78 smirked a little.

"With him or me?"

"Both. The smirks definitely are the same and I can see where he gets some of his looks from… And it explains the protectiveness and why you insist on looking after him. You're his father." Wilson smiled gently. "And I bet he's going to be so happy to see you."

"As my actual self… I just… I don't know how I got under the impression I wasn't… human." He
looked to his robotic arm. "I mean… Only now do I remember who I actually am but…. I didn’t for all this time."

Wilson frowned as he got his tools again, working on freeing the rest of him.

"If I had to guess, it was the trauma of what you underwent and the insanity The Constant brings. You were under quite a bit of stress mentally and psychically."

"So I guess… the robot personality was a coping mechanism as some would call it."

"Most likely. Not sure where you got the name but hey, I’m not one to judge. Though speaking of names… I doubt WX-78 is your actual name."

"No… It's Xaiver."

"Xavier. I like that." Wilson replied, getting his flesh arm free and most of his chest. "Almost done. Though if that's your real name… Did you actually name him…?"

"No, no, that's a nickname. His real name is Kenneth… or Kenny as we liked to call him sometimes. He was so obsessed with spiders though, Webber became the other one he’d answer to."

"I see." Wilson chuckled. "Okay, before I get the rest off let me get you something."

Wilson hurried out of the room, soon returning with a set of clothes.

"You'll need these."

Xavier gave a sheepish grin, taking them into his hands.

"Yeah, probably a good idea."

Wilson nodded.

"I'll finish up and then while you get dressed I'll get Webber. Sound fair?"

"Sounds perfect."

oooooo

Webber was in the middle of making his move in a round of chess with Abigail when Wilson approached them.

"Huh? Hey, is WX-78 okay?"

"Yes." Wilson smiled a little. "Abi, I need to talk to Webber alone for a bit. Can you go pick something for us to do later?"

"Yes, Papa!"

Abigail got up, skipping off. Webber looked up to Wilson confused.

"He… is okay right? I know this. You get someone all alone so bad news can get broken to someone gently. Mama did it when Grandpa died."

Wilson shook his head, kneeling to his level.
"No, Webber. I don't have bad news, I promise. This is actually really good news."

Webber pouted a bit.

"Then what is it?"

"You've missed your father correct?"

"Ahuh. A lot."

"Would you like to see him?"

Webber gasped.

"He… He's here? When? How? And what about WX-78?"

"You'll see. Would you please come with me to the medical building?"

Webber nodded, taking Wilson's hand.

Wilson took his time leading Webber into the room Xavier was, just in case the man wasn't ready. Sure enough, he was sitting patiently on the exam table, dressed in of Wilson's spare outfits.

"Xavier?" Wilson asked.

"You may enter."

Wilson did so, Webber following, shock in his eyes.

"Webber, your father." Wilson said, gesturing to Xavier.

Xavier gave a small smile.

"Kenny…"

Webber ran up to him, jumping onto the exam table.

"Dad?" He touched his shoulder to make sure he was real.

"I'm right here." Xavier held an arm out to him. "C'mere."

Webber sniffled before throwing his arms around him.

"Dad…"

Xavier hugged him tightly, though minded the strength of his robotic arm.

"Oh, my boy."

"I missed you." Webber sniffled. "I missed you lots… Where were you?"

"Here this whole time." Xavier stroked his hair, getting a sneaky look. "I AM SUPERIOR AFTER ALL."

Webber looked up at him stunned before he grinned.

"That… is so neat!"
Xavier smiled softly, keeping his son close to him.

"It took me a bit to remember who I was, but I never stopped loving you Kenny. I'll always love you."

"Father…" Kenny buried his face in chest. "You're so cool."

Xavier chuckled, resting his head against his.

"I am the perfect the automaton so of course I am "cool"." 

"And silly… and hehe… I got into your study, finally."

"Naughty." Xavier held him closer. "Very naughty."

Kenny cuddled close nuzzling a little.

"You're naughty."

Xavier rested his head against Kenny's, sighing happily.

"I'm just so glad you're okay. I was so worried."

"Well, you don't have to be anymore." Webber kissed his cheek. "Because we're together now. Little weird now but together."

Xavier kissed his head.

"Not weird, just different."

Webber smiled nuzzling a little.

"And you're still scruffy."

"Darn right." He chuckled, nuzzling him. "Rah! I got you now!"

"Nuu!"

"Yess!"

Wilson chuckled at the sight, turning his attention to the armor that was now placed neatly on a table for him to examine thoroughly.

*I definitely got some research on my hands to do along with some questions to ask a certain ghost but for now…*

Wilson smiled, looking to Xavier and Webber.

*I'm just happy they found each other again.*
"You sure you're up for this?"

It was another outing to Sennen, Wilson this time being accompanied by Xavier and Webber. Xavier was giving Wilson a few dirty looks when he asked if he was alright when it was clear he was getting tired.

"I'm. Fine. I'm superior and need I remind you had no problem lugging around all that metal-"

"That had shock absorbers in your legs to basically drag them. I'm just making sure you're not going to fall over."

"I'm fine."

Webber took his hand giving a pleading look.

"He's just making sure, Daddy." 

Xavier's gaze softened ruffling up the child's hair.

"Alright alright. Sorry."

"Just fine… Ah here we are."

Webber was entranced immediately by the beauty of the small kingdom. The structures were
nothing he had ever seen before and he couldn't help but be awestruck by the residents who had wings.

"Wow…"

"I thank both of you for coming since I don't like traveling here by myself. I just need to speak to Sabra about arranging some rescue missions. You two may do what you like. Get to know the locals."

"Alright." Xavier replied looking around for a moment before seeing Webber was already running off. "GACK! KENNY!" He broke into a run after his son. "Don't go too far!"

Webber stopped in front of a stand full of fruits, looking at them with a hungrily.

"Look at these, blueberries! Just like the ones Mom grew! Can we get some?"

"Only if you promise to not run off like that again."

"I promise!"

Xavier smoothed his hair down before looking to the person running the stand. A young man with messy blond hair and wings.

"How much for the berries?"

"3 gold coins a bag, sir."

Xavier dug into his pockets, producing the required amount.

"One bag for my little boy then."

The man smiled, taking the coins before handing a bag to Webber.

"Here you go little one."

Webber smiled eating a few of the berries.

"Thanks! These are yummy!"

"Glad to hear it, though can't take all the credit. The woman I work with grows them. Quite skilled."

"Hm… Interesting." Xavier lead Webber off swiping a few for himself. "... Come to think of it these taste just like the ones Esme grew."

Webber fell a little quiet.

"You think she's okay…?"

Xavier lowered his head a bit.

"I'm not sure… considering the last time I saw her was when we were going to see that show and..."

"Hey! You have work to do it!"

"I'm taking the night off! I'll take care of it tomorrow!"
"Xavier-!"

"I said tomorrow!"

Xavier frowned.

"We didn't exactly end on a good note. We were having a bit of a fight that day since work was hard."

Webber reached up, taking his hand, moving closer.

"I'm sure she wasn't mad the whole time. Mama always got through it somehow."

"We never came home though…” He sighed. "I hope someday I can get to her again since the portals seem to be opened now."

Webber nodded, leaning his head against his father's side. Xavier brought his arm around Webber, stroking his shoulder.

"Hey, it'll be okay. She wouldn't want us to be sad either." Webber said.

"True… Heh, she was an amazing woman though. Married a crazy Scott who was dedicated to farm life even after coming to America."

Webber chuckled.

"And tough. "DON'T TOUCH THAT POT IT'S TOO HOT!""

"HA! Oh she was not happy about that incident. Cast iron pan in hand and all."

The two laughed, remembering.

"Kenny the kitchen's too dangerous, go bug your father, please. I don't want you hurt."

"Can I go into the study?"

"Sure!"

"ESME!"

"What a woman." Xavier shook his head. "Though I wonder how she would react to the arm."

"She'd make you take the big cast iron pot off the fire then. It can't get burnt."

"Good point! Though would she even let me touch her with it?"

Webber giggled, keeping close.

"I think she'll like it though. You're extra strong with it too so you could pick up heavier stuff."

"And I do remember when we would dance with the phonograph going. She loved it when I would lift her up."

"Yeah!"

"So… maybe she will."
Both jumped at the sound of crashing crates, seeing a woman's cart had been knocked over, a whole load of crates filled with oranges spilling out onto the walkway.

"Oh no!" She said, trying to gather up her oranges. "We really need to get this cart fixed. This is getting ridiculous."

"I'm sorry, just keep finding we need more things repaired over this." Another woman said, helping her pick them up.

Webber darted over, scooping a few up.

"Excuse me?"

The woman looked to him, a gasp escaping her mouth.

"Y-Yes, little boy?" she asked.

Webber's eyes were wide as he looked at her before shaking his head a little.

"Y-You dropped these." He held up the oranges.

She took them, her eyes still locked on Webber.

"T-Thank you…" She still stared. "I'm… sorry but um… Have… we met before?"

Webber looked her over, recognition coming to his eyes.

"Um…" He kicked the dirt a little, a nervous look coming to his eyes. "M-Maybe… My name's Kenny."

The woman had long black hair that was hanging off her shoulder in a braid. Her skin was tan and she had long wings on her back.

Webber knew her face though.

Could it be? 

"Kenny… As in… Kenneth?"

Webber nodded.

"Yup but my friends call me Webber. Cause I like spiders a lot!"

Tears started to well up in the woman's eyes.

"Webber… Could… Could it really be…?"

She brought hand to Webber's face, cupping a cheek in her hand.

Webber felt his eye sting with tears. He dropped the oranges in his arms, bringing a hand up to her cheek, his voice quiet as he spoke.

"Mommy?"

Tears streamed down the woman's face now as she immediately brought her arms around Webber
along with her wings.

"Kenny!"

Webber hugged her tightly, sobbing a little.

"It's really you, it's really you!"

She kissed his head, stroking his back.

"I'm here. I'm here. Oh, my baby."

"Mommy…"

Xavier was stunned at the sight before him. This woman… It… It was her. Different with the wings and new ears but it was her.

"Esme…?" Xavier said, moving closer.

Esme lifted her head up, opening her wings to get a better look at him. Her eyes grew wide.

"Xavier?"

He rushed over to her, kneeling in front of her.

"Y-Yeah… It's me." He looked her over, shock in his eyes. "You're here… You're…"

"Xavier…" She brought her free hand to his face. "Oh my goodness you're alive. You and Kenny, you're alive."

Xavier nodded before bringing his arms around her Webber.

"Oh Esme!"

Esme brought her wings around him, bringing her free arm around him as well.

"Xavier… Oh my gosh." She kissed his cheeks, looking him over. "It's really you… Oh my goodness."

"Y-Yeah… Oh my dear Esme, I'm sorry. I should've listened to you."

"No, no, no, it's okay. It's okay." She kept close to him. "I just didn't think I'd find you here."

"How did you get here? Did you make a deal with Maxwell?"

Esme shook her head.

"After you and Kenny disappeared it got tough back home. I wasn't sure what to do and… Oh Xavier my mind went places it shouldn't have…"

"Esme…" Xavier brought his robotic hand to her cheek, wiping away her tears. "I am so sorry I did that to you."

"It's okay." She leaned into his hand. "King Sabra came to get me before I did anything but… I… I…"

"Shhh…" Xavier kissed her head. "It's okay now. It's okay."
Esme kissed his cheek, closing her eyes, keeping them close. Her husband, her son. She had them back.

Webber cuddled up to them both, nuzzling his mother.

"Mommy, you'll live with us again right? We don't have to say bye?"

"We'll have to make some arrangements but... I would love nothing more than to be with you again. Just... Heh, glad you don't mind the wings."

"Honestly we're all kind of strange now." Xavier pulled back his sleeve, showing his metallic arm.

"Ahuh, ahuh look!" Webber gave her a big grin, showing some of his teeth were pointed little fangs now. "And I can crawl up walls!"

Esme blinked, staring at the two before laughing, bringing them close.

"What a family we make."

Xavier chuckled, nuzzling her.

"I've got a lot ot stories to tell you."

"Me too! Me too!" Webber chirped.

Esme giggled, kissing his head, then kissed Xavier's cheek.

"Let's get out of the road then and I can listen to all of them."

"Please?"

Esme nodded, going to pick up one of the crates. Xavier cut in, picking it up for her.

"Allow me."

She grinned.

"Strong as ever."

"Heh, if not more."

Webber gathered up the oranges he had dropped.

"I'll help too!"

"What gentlemen I've been blessed with."

*What a family I'm glad to have back.*
The Constant was still a world that was ever changing. A place that would keep shifting possibly for all of time.

And that meant that there were still people to find and bring to The Haven from whatever had happened to them, to bring them The Constant.

"Just a basic search mission. Anyone we find we bring back." Sabra told Wilson and Woodie as they headed through the portal, supplies in hand. "Best case scenario, no one's in trouble at least in this part. Worst case… Wilson, you know plenty of healing."

"Right."

The portal opened up to a large desert like area, full of tumbleweeds and cacti that adorned the place. Wilson and Woodie grimaced a bit while Sabra flew up, enjoying the warmth.

"Ah, reminds me of Egypt."

"Well, could be worse." Wilson shed off his vest, packing it away into his backpack. "So, where do we start?"

"Anywhere. I'll scout from above and you two look from the ground. If you see anything, just blow that whistle I gave you."

Sabra took off, leaving Wilson and Woodie to their own devices.

"Head north."

Wilson jumped, seeing Jack was present.

"E-Eh?" he whispered.

"There's a life line that leads there. Just head north and you'll find someone there."

"Thanks… Little warning next time?"

"Sure thing."

Jack disappeared into an orb before flying off.

"You feeling okay Wilson?" Woodie asked. "You were kind of jumpy there."

"Just taking care of some affairs." Wilson replied. "Got a little tip off from a spiritual friend of ours. We'll head north."

"Very well. Lead the way, Wilson."

Wilson nodded before he started walking in the instructed direction. It was quite the walk, especially with the sun beating down on both Wilson and Woodie but they kept their minds off it with conversation.
"So, Lucy is doing well?"

"Yep." Woodie sighed happily. "It's been nice waking up in the morning to see her lying beside me. She just looks so happy."

"I'm glad for you both." Wilson smiled. "Rune has been such a huge help and it's wonderful he could bring Lucy back to normal."

"It is." Woodie smiled. "Things are certainly heading in a great direction. Think Maxwell gave up on trying to seek revenge? I mean, you would think he'd strike by now. Unless he's too scared."

"Honestly, I don't think he had a leg to stand on vengeance wise. If he tries anything pulling him into the Light Dimension could finish him off." Wilson replied, checking his compass to be sure they were still heading in the right direction. "And I'm still cross at him for that whole varg thing."

"Don't blame you but least he's staying out of our way." Woodie rubbed the back of his neck. "From what Her Highness said if he tries anything she has a friend who is more than ready to deliver punishment but for the time being is leaving him alone since if he don't bother us then we don't bother him."

"Exactly."

The more they went on, the more they started to notice some odd… structures. Structures that looked like some kind of fallen creature made entirely of scattered bones and rocks.

"What in science is that?" Wilson whispered.

Woodie got in front of him as a new noise made itself present… Barking. Loud, distinct barking that they knew all too well.

"Oh no." Wilson gulped, as dozens of hounds emerged from the structures, howling and snarling. "RUN FOR IT!"

Woodie grabbed Wilson's wrist, making a break for it as a few hounds chased after them.

"TARNATION I THOUGHT WE WERE DONE WITH THESE MUTTS!"

"I THOUGHT WE WERE TOO!"

They scrambled up a boulder, looking down as the hounds tried to lunge up only for their claws to slip on the sandy gravel, sending them tumbling back down. Wilson growled, getting a blow dart pipe out of his bag.

"Why I oughta-"

Woodie grabbed the axe off his back, throwing it at one of the hounds, killing it instantly.

"Scram ya mutts!"

The hounds kept snarling and barking until a loud howl was heard. The men looked to where it came from, seeing a varg was atop one of the structures, staring down the hounds before they retreated.

Wilson narrowed his eyes, taking aim.

"Oh that is it-!"
It was then he noticed something. A small figure atop the varg's back, that was covered by what looked to be the pelt of some kind of animal.

Wilson lowered his pipe.

"Woodie… do you see something on that varg?"

Woodie nodded, squinting eyes.

"It… looks like… a child."

"And the varg isn't mauling it."

The varg gave a howl before starting to move away.

"That's it." Jack whispered. "That's the lifeline."

*Great… I might have to wrestle a varg away from a kid.*

"Well, guess we have something to follow. C'mon."

"Right."

Keeping an eye out for any more hounds, they went after the varg, seeing where it went. There was another structure, this one much larger to accommodate for the size of a child. The child in question slid off the varg's back, taking the pelt off as well.

"I think we scared those guys real good, Mama!" The child spoke, said child being a little girl with long messy hair and a grin on her face.

The varg noded, nuzzling the little girl, licking her face.

"Uwah! Mama!"

Wilson was dumbfounded.

"She's… kin?"

"Seems so." Woodie said, bringing a hand over his chin. "Hm… maybe it might have to do with whatever deal she made that landed her here in the first place."

Wilson ran a hand through his hair.

"And it seems she's alright for the most part. But this world isn't safe for a child, even if the mutts are handling her."

"We'll bide our time then. See if mama varg leaves her for a bit. I'd rather us not get mauled."

"You and me both. I do not want a second round."

Woodie nodded, getting in a bit of a protective stance.

"They'll go through me first before that happens."

Wilson squeezed his shoulder.

"You really are a good friend."
"I do my best."

_And so we wait_

ooooo

It wasn't until nightfall that the child left the varg's side, wandering out with a small spear in her hands that looked like it had dozens of hounds teeth tied to it to use as a blade. Her eyes were focused on a vulture that was sleeping nearby.

_Just a little more…_

She tried to swing at it but sensing the movement in the air, the vulture awoke, flying up, pecking at the girl instead.

"HEY! OW! STOP!"

"SQUAWK!"

"OW! HELP!" The girl covered herself with her arms, trying to get the pecking to stop.

SHINK!

"SCREEE!"

The girl moved her arms away, seeing Woodie had cut the vulture down with his axe, the man snorting a bit as the bird faded away, turning into meat.

"Stupid varmint with wings."

"Y-Yeah." She had a look of shock on her face. She had thought for sure, they had scared him and Wilson off with the hounds. "T-Thanks."

"You're welcome little miss." Woodie knelt to her level. "Got a name?"

The girl smoothed down her hair a little, a shy look coming to her face.

"N-Nancy." She mumbled, looking up at Woodie with wide eyes.

"Nancy, now that's a pretty name." Woodie smiled gently. "I'm Woodie."

Nancy smiled a little before looking to the meat that had dropped.

"Um… is that yours now?"

"When was the last time you ate?"

"Um… High noon." She murmured. "That was the last time."

Woodie looked her over. Her pelt hung off her like a coat and some kind of dress was under it… but she was swimming in it.

_Poor little thing must be starving._ He thought before offering her a hand.

"You can have it but how about you come over to the fire me and my friend have? We'll cook it up nice and make sure you get all you want to eat."
"Promise?" Nancy asked, getting an excited look in her eyes.

"Lumberjack's honor."

Nancy gathered up the meat and took Woodie's hand as he lead her to where Wilson had set up a temporary camp.

"I can't stay gone for too long." She told him, looking back at the bone structure. "Mama doesn't like me being out at night alone."

"Your mama has a good head on her shoulders then. But I'm sure she won't mind you eatin."

Nancy nodded, getting a worried look as Wilson looked over to them. She ducked behind Woodie's leg, peering out shyly.

"Well hello there. And whom might this be?"

"This here's Nancy. Hope it's alright, but I invited her to share our dinner."

Wilson chuckled.

"The more the merrier. Can't let a child go hungry after all."

Nancy looked at the two, a bewildered look on her face.

_Mama was gonna bite 'em... but they're feeding me?_

Woodie patted her head, handing off the meat to Wilson as he added it to the pot that was hanging over their fire.

"She was being pecked at pretty bad by a vulture." He whispered. "Stupid varmit wouldn't leave her alone."

"What provoked it?" Wilson asked, looking the girl over with his eyes, noting she had a few scratches from it, one over her eyebrow was bleeding a little.

"She's hungry."

"Of course." Wilson's eyes softened. He knew that feeling... And how it was for children who became trapped in The Constant.

_Wendy was doing anything she could to survive, even in the weather we found her in._

Nancy was crouched in front of the fire, holding her hands out to warm them up. There was a look of wonder in her eyes as she looked around the small camp.

"You like what you see?" Woodie asked, sitting beside her, a small bowl of healing salve in his hand.

"Mm-hm. It's real fancy." She giggled. She looked at the healing salve, a puzzled look on her face. "What's that?"

"Something to fix up those scratches of yours."

Nancy got a nervous look, tugging her pelt up over her head. Woodie gave her a gentle look in response.
"You don't have to, but I'm sure your mama would be mighty upset if we fed you and let you go back all scratched up."

"I guess she would..." She sighed. "Okay."

"There's a good girl. It'll sting a little but you'll feel better once you're all cleaned up."

Nancy gave him a doubting look before lowering her pelt, letting him run the healing salve over the scratches she had gotten. She hissed a little before settling down.

"There we are. All done."

"Thanks, mister."

Woodie set the bowl aside.

"Anytime, little miss."

It wasn't long after that they were eating, Nancy digging into the meal like she hadn't eaten in days.

"Nancy, can you answer some questions for me?" Wilson asked when she was done with her meal.

"Um. Okay." She shrugged, bringing her knees up to her chest, resting her head atop them.

"First off - was your um… Mother, ever a person like you?"

Nancy gave him a bewildered look.

"No. Of course not."

"I mean, was there someone else besides the varg you're with now that once took care of you?"

Nancy gave him another confused look.

"The orphanage lady. That's about it. Boy was she strict!"

So she's been alone growing up… Poor thing.

"I see. Alright… Well, how did you get here? Did a man make a deal with you?"

At this, she had a dark look come to her eyes.

"Yeah. A guy with long hair and this real fancy outfit. He was sitting on the swings by himself and I went to go say hello… He asked if I wanted to find a real family of my own so I said yeah… Then I woke up here. He said his name was… What was it?" Nancy put a finger to her chin. "... Castiel?"

So it wasn't Maxwell. He wouldn't curse a child - I would hope at least.

"Castiel huh? Did he leave right away?"

"Ahuh. Said "good luck kid" and left… It's been weird ever since."

"I see..."

"Castiel..." Woodie said aloud. "I thought only Maxwell could make deals."
"I thought so too but then again I remember Grandmother mentioning that others from the Constant can cause disruptions if they want." Wilson brought a hand to his chin. "I'll have to ask her if she knows anything about a Castiel."

"Good plan."

Nancy shrugged.

"I just wanna sick Mama on him if I see him again."

"Understandable. So you've just been here then... I'm just surprised how well you connect with the hounds and varg here. Usually they're not too kind to humans."

She looked down, fiddling with her pelt.

"That involves the deal too... but I can't say. Cause you'd think I'm weird."

"I don't know about that." Wilson crossed his arms. "Woodie and I pretty weird ourselves due to the deals we made."

"Indeed. Wilson has all this knowledge in his brain and has this other form he takes from time to time and during full moons or if I chop down too many trees I turn into a were beaver."

At this, she perked up, looking at Woodie in wonder.

"You change too!?"

"Yep. Big fluffy beaver."

She moved closer to him, an excited look coming to her eyes.

"I change too!"

"That so?"

"Uh-huh! I turn into a fluffy hound!"

Wilson's jaw dropped.

"Stars and atoms. She's a werewolf!"

"More like werepup." Woodie smiled gently. "So you get extra fluffy like me."

"Mm-hm, mm-hm!" She nodded, grinning, showing one of her canines was pointed. "And I get sharp claws and can run super duper fast! I can keep up with Mama and the others all night then!"

"Does it happen only during the full moons?"

"Mm-hm. It just sorta happens. One minute I'm me, next, I'm all fuzzy."

"I know what's that like. That's for sure." Woodie chuckled. "It's the same for me. One minute, lumberjack, next, burly beaver with buck teeth and everything else."

She giggled.

"That sounds neat! I wanna see! Are ya stayin' until the moons full?"
"Well…” Wilson hummed in thought. "I guess it wouldn't hurt. I just better let Sabra know where we are. One second." Wilson pulled a whistle from his backpack, blowing it loudly.

They waited a few minutes before Sabra came flying in, folding his wings behind his back as he landed.

"You found someone?" he asked.


The girl's eyes were wide as she took in Sabra's appearance. She jumped up, looking him over.

"Whoa… An angel!"

Sabra gave her a gentle smile.

"Something like that. Were there any guardians of hers?"

"Just a varg. Seems she's been given a similar curse to Woodie, only she's a were hound."

"Fascinating." Sabra patted the girl with one of his wings. "Are we planning on taking her back?"

"Well, thing is she'd like us to stay for the full moon since she wants to see Woodie change and I admit, I would like to observe this for myself but as for if she wants to leave the pack that is up to her."

She looked at them before looking out to where the mound was.

"Would I never see Mama again?" She asked, her voice getting a bit quiet, eyes getting nervous. "Do I gotta say bye forever?"

"Hm…” Wilson hummed in thought for a minute. Well… You still could visit if you wanted at any time you like. If we could bring them with us we would buuuut thing is vargs and hounds aren't exactly fond of me and would probably not be fond of those in the village."

"And Mama doesn't like you. She doesn't like people 'cept for me… But.." She sighed. "I wanna play with other kids. I wanna make friends too… but I don't wanna be alone."

"And you won't be. We'll take good care of you."

"Hm… I'll pick after the full moon. Deal?"

"Deal." Wilson smiled. "And whatever you choose, we promise we won't be mad."

"Okay!"

oooooo

It was a few days later when the full moon was to rise overhead. Nancy was a ball of energy the whole day leading up to it, trailing behind Woodie, asking him questions of all kind about his transformation.

It amused Wilson to see this. Woodie was good with children but he hadn't seen the man form a bond that quickly with one of them.

"What about fighting? Do you fight? Huh?"
"Only if I have to."

"Can you throw trees?"

"That'd tick off the living ones."

"Ooo!"

Soon enough, the moon started to shine overhead, illuminating The Constant in a gentle glow.

That was when the transformations began. Woodie's shift from human to werebeaver was one Wilson had come to recognize over their time in The Constant. His journal was out and his hand sketching as he observed Nancy.

Her form shifting, her skin becoming covered in a thick black fur. Ears forming on the top of her head until she fell onto her hands and knees...

Completely content, a hybrid of human and hound, her new tail wagging as she got up, running to Woodie, growling playfully.

Woodie looked to her, kneeling down, chittering playfully back at her, nuzzling her with his nose. She churred, nuzzling back, jumping back a bit before climbing onto his back, holding on with her small claws. They were pointed but not sharp enough to cause any damage.

"Rawr!"

"Incredible. She's just like a puppy. Full of energy."

"It's... adorable." Sabra chuckled, bringing a hand over his mouth. "Reminds me of the dogs I used to play with as a child."

Woodie chittered at her, running around a bit, Nancy squealing at the free ride she was getting to enjoy. She threw her head back, letting out a small squeaky howl.

Wilson chuckled at this, sketching down what he was seeing.

"That, is honestly adorable."

Woodie came to a stop, letting her down as she ran around him, looking at his tail before giving it a small tug.

Woodie yelped a little, his tail flipping up out of instinct, sending Nancy onto his back again.

She squealed, clinging to his back, nuzzling him, the girl making sounds similar to laughter as she did.

Woodie made his own impressions of laughter as well, nuzzling back, churring softly.

Such a sweet little girl.

Nancy gave him a grin, cuddling close. This was the most fun she had, had in a long time since coming to The Constant. Even with her pack, this was something different.

She was with someone who was like her.
The two played on through the night till the moon finally set and the sun started to rise. The two were back to their human forms in an instant, both feeling rather tired from both the change and the energy spent playing.

Woodie had Nancy cradled in his arms, nuzzling her gently. "You've got a lot of energy in ya kiddo."

Nancy yawned, blinking slowly as she cuddled close to him. "You too." She rubbed her right eye before burying her face a bit. "M'sleepy now though."

Woodie hummed softly, rocking her a bit until she was fast asleep in his arms, part of his shirt being hung onto in her hand. Woodie smiled softly, keeping her close.

"Wilson… I really hope we can take her home."

Wilson smiled gently. "I hope so too. You two have bonded pretty quickly."

"And she's a good kid. She doesn't deserve to be stuck here."

"We'll have to see what she chooses then after her nap. In the mean time, why don't you try to rest as well?"

Woodie nodded, lying down on a straw roll, keeping curled around Nancy, the little girl burying herself into his shirt.

_X__Boy would Lucy love a little girl like you for a daughter._

_Nancy wasn't quite sure where she was when she woke up. For a moment, she thought the previous night had been a dream and she was back in the mound, cuddled up to the varg who had taken her in. She smiled when she realized where she was. The little girl sat up, poking Woodie's cheek a little.

"Woodie, nap time's over."

"Mm… Five more minutes Luce…"

She grinned before giving her best impression of a hound's bark.

Woodie opened an eye, chuckling at the girl.

"Well hi there, little lady."

Nancy giggled, giving an innocent look.

"Hi! Didja sleep good?"

"I slept very good. How about you?"

"Yeah! Can we play more today? Please?"
"Sure thing though first we need to know what you've decided, little miss. Do you want to stay here or would you like to join me and the others in our village?"

Nancy hummed in thought for a moment before looking at Woodie with a smile.

"I wanna go with you." She said, her voice a little quiet. "I like playing with you, you're really nice… and you don't mind me being a werepup."

"Then welcome to the family." Woodie opened her arms to her. "Nancy."

Nancy squealed, throwing her arms around him, nuzzling as she went.

"I get a real family?"

"Sure thing. We're all family in the village. You can stay with me actually. My wife and I do have a spare room I could easily turn into a bedroom for you."

Her eyes went wide as she nodded quickly.

"Yes please!"

"Then it shall be. I know my wife would love you very much. Like you were her own daughter."

"And I'll be good, really really good."

He chuckled stroking her hair.

"I have no doubt. Let's get ready to go then."

"Okay!"

Woodie smiled, gathering up his gear and heading to where Wilson and Sabra were, Nancy sitting happily on his shoulders.

"We're bringing her home, fellas." he said, waving to them.

"Wonderful." Sabra smiled. "I'm sure the children will be delighted to have a new friend."

"Oh, the girls are going to be excited." Wilson chuckled. "Welcome to the village."

"Can't wait to see! And Woodie said I can stay with him!"

"Ah, splended. Well gentlemen, shall we then?"

"We shall."

They quickly packed up their camp, starting to make way for the portal. Before they left though, Nancy made one last visit to the varg, giving them a quick hug and kiss good bye before hurrying off to join the group again.

"I hope she wasn't too mad?" Woodie asked the girl as she rode on his shoulders.

"She just said to visit often." Nancy rested her head on Woodie's. "And if those humans do anything mean she would not hesitate to strike."

"Noted." Wilson felt at his neck. "Well, we promise you'll be well taken care of."
Nancy nodded, nuzzling Woodie.

"I trust ya."

Woodie smiled, nuzzling back.

Soon, they approached the portal. Nancy was in awe of the portal and even more in awe as the setting of The Haven came into view.

"Well, what ya think?" Woodie asked.

"It's so pretty!" she squealed. "I've never seen mountains like that and ooo that lake looks really pretty and ooo I haven't seen houses like that in forever! Which one is yours?"

"I'll show ya little lady."

Wilson and Sabra chuckled as they watched the two hurry off to Woodie's place.

"I get the feeling those two are going to be very close." Sabra smiled.


"Me too."

"In the mean time I need to see if Grandmother knows anything about a Castiel."

Sabra brought a hand to his chin.

"Some how that name sounds familiar but I can't seem to put my wing on it…"

"Well, I'm sure we'll know soon enough."

Sabra nodded.

"Right."

oooooo

"Lucy, I'm home!"

Lucy smiled at the sound Woodie's voice, poking her head out of the kitchen to see him at the door… along with a little girl on his shoulders. She got a surprised and confused look as she took this information in.

"Who be the little miss?" she asked, making her way over.

The girl hid her face a little in Woodie's hair, giving a shy look. Woodie patted her head.

"Her name is Nancy. We found her in the Constant and she could use a home. She's got powers a lot like mine and sadly doesn't have a family. I thought… it would be fine if she lived with us since we got a spare room and everything."

Lucy smiled softly.

"I don't see why not. The more the merrier, right?"

"Yeah!" Woodie lifted Nancy off his shoulders, cradling her in his arms. "See? I told you she'd say
Yes.

Nancy giggled, nuzzling Woodie before holding her arms out to Lucy. Woodie handed her over, Lucy holding her gently.

“So if we're living together… does that mean we're family?” Nancy asked, tilting her head.

Lucy smiled softly, hugging her a bit tighter. She looked to Woodie, her eyes getting a hopeful look.

“We did always want children.”

“And especially a daughter of our own.”

“E-Even if I turn into a puppy?”

“Fuzziness and all, Nancy.” Woodie stroked her hair.

Nancy nuzzled his hand.

“So… what should I call you guys then?”

Lucy smiled stroking her back.

“How about "Mom and Dad"?”

Her eyes lit up, nodding quickly.

“Yes please!”

“Then it shall be.” Woodie brought his arms around both of them, kissing Lucy's head along with Nancy's. "Which makes you, our daughter."

Nancy giggled, kissing his chin and then Lucy's, keeping close to them.

“I have a family… A real family.”

Lucy laid her head on Woodie's shoulder, sighing happily.

“And we have a sweet little girl.”

“That we do my dear.

*Just like we always wanted and so much more.*
"Alright, looks like we're done mapping this forest." Wilson said as he drew out the cliffside he and Willow were standing close too. The two were out on a scouting mission. They hadn't found anyone but it seemed wise to map out the area for future reference.

"Good, I don't think I can stand the sight of thick trees anymore." Willow tapped her foot, flicking her lighter off and on. "It's getting VERY tempting to set one of these suckers up in flames."

"How about we don't so we don't risk the chance of causing a mass forest fire?" Wilson put a hand on her shoulder. "I know it's been a long day for you, it has been for me too but if I promise you can make a big bonfire when we get back to the village will that help keep you from setting things ablaze?"

Willow hummed in thought before grinning, hugging him.

"A bonfire and snuggling with you and Delphi by it."

Wilson turned red in the face before chuckling, hugging her.

"Alright. I can guarantee that. We better start heading back now before dusk sets in. If we start now we should be able to get to the portal before night time."

Willow nodded, pulling away from him before running ahead.

"Race ya!"

Wilson laughed before following after her.

"Hey!"

Willow laughed, picking up her pace.

"Don't get cold feet now, Wildork!"

"Wasn't planning to!"

The two kept up their pace as they ran through the forest, not a care in the whole world and paying no mind to critters they passed by… or a cloaked figure that was following close behind them.

They soon slowed their pace, finding they were getting short of breath, forgetting how far the forest stretched.

"I… I'll still beat you to the portal when we get to the end of this forest. I swear it." Willow said, panting a little.

"Heh, we'll see." Wilson grinned, trying to catch his own breath.

They continued on, keeping close to each other… then they heard the snapping of branch.

Wilson perked up, readying his spear.

"Did you hear that?"
Willow narrowed her eyes, bringing her lighter out.

"Yeah. I did." She looked upward, trying to pinpoint where it was coming from.

*I have a bad feeling about this.* Wilson thought, keeping close to Willow.

"Lovely day for a walk, isn't it?" said a voice.

They whirled around, seeing the cloaked figure. The voice sounded male but they couldn't make out a face whatsoever.

Wilson and Willow kept their guards up, unsure what to make of the stranger.

"Who are you?" Wilson asked, narrowing his eyes.

The stranger shrugged.

"Just another person trying to get by in this Hellish place. What else would you need to know?"

"Yeah that's not suspicious." Willow growled. "A name would be preferable and taking off that stupid hood would be nice too."

"Oh no, this hood is not coming off. I'm trying to keep a low profile since I have people here who are not fond of me. Same goes for my name."

*Yeah, that's not making me feel more comfortable.*

Wilson kept closer to Willow, holding his spear up higher.

"What do you want with us then?"

The stranger grinned, showing his teeth had sharp canines.

"To see your death, oh dear Shadow Prince."

The stranger charged forward, a sword in hand, going straight for the kill. Wilson's spear was sliced in half in attempt to block the sword, thankfully missing him by an inch. Willow tackled the stranger away from Wilson, trying to get the sword out of his hand.

"Off me you wench!" The stranger said, throwing her, having her smash hard into a tree.

Willow cried out but quickly recovered, lunging forward again, moving to the side as the stranger sliced right at her. She shrieked a bit when it grazed her arm, growling as she once again went to tackle him.

"GIVE IT TO ME!"

"W-WILLOW DON'T!"

The stranger grinned sinisterly before knocking her back into a whole cluster of trees, hitting her with the blunt end of his sword, putting her into a daze.

"I guess if I want the prince dead, I'll have to get rid of his dog."

He produced a staff from his cloak that had a red gem tied to the end. Wilson's eyes widened in horror. He went in to tackle the stranger but it was too late. Flames flew from the gem and the trees
around Willow were set ablaze in seconds.

Willow's scream was heard before the roar of the flames drowned her out entirely. Wilson was frozen in place, his blood having gone completely cold. His eyes shrunk at the sight before him.

The stranger turned to him.

"Now… to take care of you."

Wilson stared at the flames for another moment before his gazed turned on the stranger. His blood was no longer cold. It was starting to boil, rage filling his blue eyes as his pupils became slitted.

"How dare you…" He said, practically whispered as shadow flames came around him, changing his appearance to his shadow form. "HOW DARE YOU!"

He charged straight for the stranger, summoning a sword to his hand, going right for his throat.

The stranger backed away, deflecting his sword with his.

"Temper, temper, Prince." The stranger taunted. "It's not very proper for royalty to lash out like you are."

Wilson snarled as their swords clashed again, pressing his sword against his, trying to disarm him.

"It's a good thing then I'm not a proper royal then." He hissed. "Now… I'm going to make this as painful as I CAN!" Wilson let go of the sword with his right hand, throwing shadow flames at the strangers feet, forcing him to jump away from him.

"Tsk, tsk, playing dirty now?"

"JUST SHUT UP!" He screamed, charging, his eyes filled with rage, the flames dancing around them. Wilson didn't care how much danger they were in right now.

He just wanted her.

The stranger laughed once again clashing swords with Wilson forcing him backwards.

"You can't stop me that easily Prince. You see… I know a lot about you. I know what hurts you."

"Silence."

"Maybe I'll find something else you're fond of hm? Make that vanish too!"

"SHUT UP!"

Wilson was trying everything in his power to get a blow in but the stranger kept blocking them with ease, still wearing the same taunting grin on his half covered face. This went on for what felt like forever.

The stranger stopped as he took note that the fire Willow had been consumed by was now out, the trees having fallen over, covering any traces of the woman.

"Well, seems her time was up and yours would be too but… I've come to the conclusion that maybe now isn't the best time to murder you." The stranger jumped away and up onto a burnt tree branch, grinning teasingly at Wilson. "I'll save THAT for another time."
Wilson snarled, jumping at the man, using shadow flames to get a boost into the air.

"NO! WE'RE SETTLING THIS NOW!"

The stranger shook his head before blasting Wilson in the chest with flames from his fire staff, sending the man back to the ground.

"I think you've got other things to worry about Prince. Including a funeral arrangement. But…" The stranger looked down at Wilson, seeing the man groan in agony at his burns before jumping down to him. He knelt to Wilson's level, allowing him to see his eyes a bit. They were an amber color and the scleras were black instead of white. "Know this is only the beginning of something else, Wilson Percival Higgsbury."

He backed away before disappearing from sight in a burst of shadow flames.

Wilson groaned, bringing his arm around his chest, looking around him at the destroyed forest. His adrenaline rush was gone, the weight of what had just occurred settling in.

"No…" He whispered, his voice shaking. "No…" Against his body's protest, Wilson forced himself to his feet, walking shakily to where the fire had begun.

She can't be… She can't… I can't…

He started moving away burnt tree branches, digging through the rubble as fast he could, having to stop every few minutes to hold his injury before starting again.

No… No no no no no. NO! NO!

He eventually came to a full stop, his injuries aggravating him too much. He fell to his knees, holding his chest, tears streaming down his face, biting his lip as his shoulders shook.

"Willow… No…" He threw his head back, screaming. "WILLOW!"

He fell to the ground, gripping at his shoulders, sobbing.

"Oh… Oh stars and atoms…"

The forest was quiet, the only sound he could hear was his own ragged breathing and sobs… Until another sound caught his attention.

Someone else making a sound of pain.

He quickly sat up, following the sound as best as he could.

"H-Hello?" He choked out. "Willow?"

"W-Wilson!" She called out to him. "Where are you!?"

Wilson picked up the pace, biting his lip to keep from crying out at the pain that shot up.

"I'm right here! Hang on I'm coming!"

Wilson scanned the ground, trying to pinpoint where she was.

"Wil…?"
He looked to the source, finding Willow caught under a huge pile of tree branches, completely covered in soot.

"Willow!" He hurried over, quickly getting the branches off her before examining her for any injuries, dusting the soot of her. "Where does it hurt the most? Do you have any serious burns?"

"My arm. Some parts of my head… I don't think I have any burns." She looked up at him, eyes widening in alarm. "Oh gosh, Wilson…"

Wilson kept his focus on her, his eyes widening in shock at her having no burns at all.

"How… How do you have no burns? You have scratches but no burns. Even your clothes are intact."

She shrugged a little, wincing. Wilson held her a bit tighter.

"Does it hurt to breathe at all?"

Willow shook her head slowly, confusion in her own eyes.

"I… I don't understand. That… That should've killed you. I mean, I'm glad it didn't but… but… OH I DON'T CARE!" Wilson hugged her close, crying out. "YOU'RE ALIVE! THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS!"

Willow hugged him tightly, burying her face, sniffling a little. She was shaking like a leaf.

"I didn't know if I'd still be alive. Wilson, that was terrifying."

"I know… I… Oh stars and atoms, Willow, I thought I lost you!"

Willow kept close to him, crying a little, burying her face in shoulder a little.

"Wilson…"

Wilson held her closer, unable to help the tears that were getting out.

*I almost lost her… I almost…*

He nuzzled her gently before kissing her head, stroking her back. His shadow form finally faded off, his energy waning.

"Willow… I… I…"

Willow nuzzled him in return, bringing a hand up to cup his cheek.

"I'm gonna be okay. So are you."

He nodded, his shoulders slumping. His injuries were still getting to him. He didn't want to let her go though.

"S-Still."

"Come on. We need to get you home."

Wilson nodded, Willow helping him stand, bringing an arm around him to help him walk.

"We… We need to figure out who that stranger was."
"We will after we get you treated." Willow helped him continue forward. "Now is not a good time to be forming a plan."

He chuckled tiredly.

"I think this is the first time you actually worried more about treatment besides the Deerclops incident."

"At that point you were already being a reckless dummy. My reckless dummy." Her gaze softened. "Let me worry about you."

"Only if I get to do the same."

"It's a deal."
Wilson cringed, gripping at the bed as Jack finished his work on his injuries.

"That should do it." Jack started wrapping bandages around Wilson's chest. "You'll need to take it easy for a month so the injuries can heal properly. Thankfully, you didn't suffer any serious burns so there won't be any scarring once you're fully healed."

"Noted." Wilson sighed, slumping his head into the pillow of the bed he was in. "Guess I'll have to worry about chores and other matters in the Shadow World later."

"Darn right." Jack gave a serious look. "You so much as try to get out of here and do something labor intensive, I'll come running in here and smack you so hard your head will spin. Got it?"

Wilson swallowed hard.

"Y-Yes sir."

"Good. Though, honestly, I don't have to do anything to keep you in line." Jack finished applying the bandages, putting away the tools before heading for the door. "I got two fine ladies and two little girls to do that for me." He opened the door, Cecelia and Willow coming in as soon as he opened it.

"Wilson!"

Wilson cringed.

*Oh no, Mother found out.*

Cecelia marched right up to his bedside, a look of utter fury in her eyes.

"What the HECK were you thinking!??"

"M-Mother, I can explain, honestly!"

"Do you even see what you look like right now?" She crossed her arms, as Wilson got an alarmed look.

*Oh no. Not the foot tap of disappointment!*

"Wilson." She narrowed her eyes.

Wilson looked at himself, cringing at how bad the injuries were. He even noted his favorite vest and shirt were laid out on another bed, burn marks clearly visible on both.

*I REALLY hope Woodie can fix those.*

He lowered his head.

"Mother… I'm… I'm sorry…"

Cecelia sighed, letting her arms drop, her anger being replaced with concern.

"It's okay." She reached forward, running her hand through his hair. "But I'm still going to worry
about you. Even if you're an adult."
"Mum…"
"But you are still a bad poofer."
Wilson groaned.
"Mother, not in front of Willow…"
Willow snickered.
"Poofer, huh?"
Cecelia grinned, ruffling Wilson's hair as the man tried to swat her hand away lightly.
"Yep. Cause he's got all this poofy hair. He was a little puffball when he was a lad."
"Mooother!"
Willow laughed, covering her mouth.
"That's so dorky and cute at the same time!"
Wilson turned bright red, burying part of his face in his pillow.
_Please, make it stop._
Cecelia giggled, smoothing Wilson's hair down.
"He's a good poofer. Sometimes."
"I'm remembering this next time you hurt yourself."
"Like you're in any position to do so. I love you, Wil… But it's my job to embarrass you too."
"M-hm…" Wilson sighed, bringing a hand over his chest.
_But who was that man we ran into? That's what I want to know._
"Stop."
Wilson blinked, looking to Willow.
"Huh?"
"You're thinking. Stop it."
"Willow, it's kind of hard not to think about what just happened. We need to figure out who attacked us and what their game is. There's clearly something bigger going on here that we don't know about yet."
Willow narrowed her eyes, making her way over to Wilson, sitting on the edge of his bed.
"We should be concerned, yes. But you know what I'm more concerned about?"
Wilson sighed, lowering his gaze.
"Me."

"Darn right." Willow tipped his chin up, kissing his forehead. "We'll catch that crook later but right now, you need to focus on healing. We'll let Wickerbottom know what happened and I'm sure Jack is going to look into it too but you are in no condition to do so yourself. For my sake please, just rest."

Wilson sighed, smiling a little, kissing her cheek.

"If you insist, M'lady." He cupped her cheek. "Are you alright?"

"I got a few scrapes but I'm okay. Jack was surprised at me not having burns but he just shrugged and figured it was some kind of shadow magic thingy if he had to guess. Weird things always happened when people made deals with Maxwell. Mainly people getting weird powers that would correlate to their deal with the guy. Like how you have your weird knowledge powers in regards to science."

He nodded, bringing his arm around her, trying to be careful.

"Very true and it's not surprising. I guess we would've found out one way or another." He nuzzled her, burying part of his face in her hair. "Just please don't scare me like that again. I love you too much to lose you."

Willow frowned, gently forcing Wilson to lay down, laying beside him, bringing her arms around him.

"No promises but I'll try my hardest." She cuddled closer, resting her head on his shoulder. "Is this okay?"

Wilson smiled gently, bringing his arm around her, stroking her shoulder.

"Perfectly fine, my dear."

She sighed happily, nuzzling him.

"Good."

Wilson sighed happily, keeping her close, blushing a bit.

"Long as you're comfortable too I don't mind."

"And I am." Willow kissed his cheek. "We'll get this figured out. So, it turns out maybe things aren't all well like we thought but least we know now. We'll get it solved when you're all better and we'll beat that guy within an inch of his life for what he did. Right now is just not the time."

Wilson nodded, holding her closer.

"You're right… I admit… I… I was really terrified today." Wilson buried part of his face in Willow's hair again. "I… I really thought I lost you for good."

Willow frowned, nuzzling him gently.

"I was scared you were gonna die." She whispered, keeping close.

"And I almost broke my promise again." Wilson stroked her hair. "I'm so sorry."
Cecelia kept quiet, sitting on the bed close to them. She wanted to speak but she felt now wasn’t the best time.

Willow nuzzled his hand, sighing a little.

"It's okay. Just… promise to not scare me so badly like that again?"

"I can promise to try. Willow… In that moment, I had so many regrets."

"Huh..?"

Wilson cringed a bit, getting an uneasy look.

"Just… We finally… I finally got the courage to tell you how I really felt only just a few months ago and… I... I really do love you with all my heart, Willow. You're a huge part of my world and… I… I would be devastated if I ever lost you. You mean so much to me and… I… I just feared I would never get the chance to… to take things further…"

Her eyes grew wide as she turned, looking right into his eyes.

"Further…?"

*What does he mean further…?*

Wilson glanced to the side.

"I don't know if I should even be talking about this. Like I said, we've only been courting for a few months and I don't want to make it awkward or seem like we're going to fast. I'm injured after all so maybe I'm not thinking right just… Ugh… I don't know…"

"Wilson, look at me."

Wilson did as told, Willow noting there was nervousness present in his blue eyes.

"Wilson, whatever it is you have to say, just say it. I don't care what it is. I just want to know what you would've been regretful about in regards to taking things further."

Wilson sighed.

"... By further I mean… us being more than what we are now. Not just courting… but… partners."

It clicked as she sat up quickly, giving him a stunned look. He gave her a sheepish one in return.

"A-Are you asking…?"

Wilson sat up carefully, taking both of her hands into his.

"Willow… you don't have to say yes but… Will… Will do you me the honor of being Mrs. Higgsbury?"

She squeezed his hands gently, an excited look coming to her eyes.

"Oh my gosh." She breathed. "Y-Yes! Yes!"

Wilson's eyes lit up.

"You… You will?"
"I do!" Willow planted a kiss on his lips, bringing her arms around him carefully.

Wilson's eyes were wide before they relaxed as he brought his arms around her, kissing her back.

Willow closed her eyes, sighing happily as they parted after a minute. Wilson pressed his forehead against hers, chuckling.

"You sure you want this crazy scientist?" He asked her.

"More than anything in the world. In all the worlds that could exist."

Wilson smiled gently before kissing her again, holding it a little longer than last time, sighing in content before pulling away gently.

"Thank you, Willow. I love you."

"I love you too, Wilson," Willow giggled, gazing into his eyes. "We're gonna get married."

"Yeah..." Wilson glanced behind him, seeing his mother had her hands over her mouth, tears streaming down her face. "Mum?"

Cecelia lowered her hands, a look of utter joy in her eyes.

"Oh Wilson... I'm so happy for you." She sniffled a little, wiping her eyes. "My baby's all grown up."

Wilson smiled, looking to Willow.

"Heh... That means you're getting a daughter in law now, Mum. I hope Willow is to your liking."

Cecelia smiled, making her way over, kissing Willow on the head.

"She's perfect."

Willow smiled, wiping a few tears of her own away.

"Thank you Cece. That means a lot.."

"Anytime."

"You're getting married, Papa!?

All looked to the doorway to see the twins were present, their blue eyes wide.

Wilson chuckled.

"I am."

They squealed, running over, climbing up to hug them both.

"THAT'S SO COOL!" Abigail squealed, hugging Wilson's arm. Wendy was hugging Willow tightly.

"Does this mean we can call Willow "Mama" now?"

Wilson blushed.
"I-If you want. I mean, once we are officially married she would be your mother by law."

Willow smiled softly, hugging Wendy close with one arm, offering her other one to Abigail.

"I already love you two like my own kids. So, why not?"

"Yay!" Abigail cuddled up to her. "Mama!"

Willow smiled, her heart warming up at being addressed as such.

"My girls."

The twins sighed happily, keeping close. Wilson brought his arms around them, kissing the twins on the head.

"Our girls."

Cecelia squealed, making her way for the door.

"I'll go tell everyone the news!"

Wilson shook his head before looking to his daughters and Willow.

"We're really going to do this. We're going to become a family."

Willow grinned.

"What a family it'll be."

"Can we be the flower girls? Please?"

"Yeah! Like for Aunt Charlie's wedding?"

"Of course!"

"Yay!" Wendy giggled. "We got plans to make then, Sis!"

"Yeah!" Abigail grinned. "And we gotta tell Webber too!"

"Yes!"

Willow laughed, ruffling their hair.

"So, this is what it feels like to be the bride."

"We're going to make it a good memory."

"The best!"

Wilson smiled, kissing Willow's head.

"And right now, I think that's just what we need."
Wilson was never really known for staying still for long periods of time. He could sit to rest for an hour or two but then he would be back up on his feet again, working on whatever he needed to tend to. He found he got twitchy if he didn't.

Which was what was making his current situation unbearable.

He wanted to get up and work but that would be unwise and the injuries on his chest were a perfect reminder of why he shouldn't.

His hands were grabbing at his sheets, trembling. He need to do something. He just had to.

_Maybe a small walk wouldn't hurt. Fresh air is always nice. Yeah. Always nice. I just... I just need fresh air. That's all. It'll be quick. Real quick._

Wilson sat up slowly, keeping a hand over his chest. It took a few minutes but soon he was out of bed and making his way out of the medical building as quiet as possible so as to not draw attention to himself.

_Just a quick walk. Real quick. Nothing major. Just need to clear my head._

Wilson brought his other hand to his head, rubbing one of his temples.

"Like this is going to solve it." said a voice. "You know what's really driving you mad. We need to find out who that man was. Till we do, we're not going to be able to make any progress."

"Perhaps." Wilson frowned. "I... I don't want to rush into anything though." He looked behind him, eyes widening as he saw no one was behind him.

_What the heck was that about? He winced as one of his injuries flared up. He shook his head as he continued on._

"You know, if you walk behind Wigfrid and Wes' house you'll find where she keeps her spare weapons. You could grab one and make it to the portal. No one would see it."

Wilson looked around, trying to find where the voice was coming from.

"Have you forgotten me already? Look at the wall, genius."

Wilson did as told, seeing his shadow, eyes widening as he saw the shape was slightly different. It had wilder hair and wore a different outfit that had pointy shoulders and had a sword in hand.

"We made a deal, remember?"

Wilson backed up shaking his head.

"N-No we did not. No, no, NO!"

The shadow shook as if it was laughing.

"You really did forget! That we need to work together to keep your sad little head in one piece."

Wilson brought a hand to his eyes, shaking his head, taking another look.
It was still there.

What's wrong with me..?

"Tch. I guess I was right, you are scared of being like Maxwell. You're scared of becoming me since that's what THEY would want." The shadow laughed. "Come on. It wouldn't be so bad to be something different. You could do so much more if you let me take the reigns. It would be fun."

Wilson shook his head.

"No... No!"

"I could easily take out that stranger. Come on, just this once."

"NO!"

Wilson fell to his knees, holding his head, the veins around his forehead turning black.

"No no no no! I... I can't! I'm not... SHUT UP!"

"Awww... Poor scared little Wilson." The shadow's voice went cold. "You really are pathetic."

"STOP IT!"

Keep it together. Keep it together. KEEP IT TOGETHER!

"You're just a coward. Why don't you walk off just like your old man?"

"SILENCE! JUST SHUT UP!" He screamed, tears running down his face. "Just please... Please..."

Wilson wasn't aware of someone watching him as they ran up to him. He had his eyes closed, tightly trying not to cry out again.

"Papa!"

Something was slipped over Wilson's head as some of the pain started to ebb away.

W-What's going on..?

He could hear the voice try to utter something as it started to fade. His eyes slowly opened, seeing his shadow was back to normal, crouched on the ground just like he was... and a smaller shadow kneeling beside him.

"Papa..?" Wendy tilted his head a little bit, worry in her blue eyes. "Are you okay?"

"I... I don't know..." Wilson glanced around, his breathing rigid, his body trembling. "I... I don't know what just happened I... I think..." Wilson brought his hands to his face. "I think I just had a panic attack."

Wendy frowned, stroking his back.

"Oh, goodness, Papa. I'm sorry." She looked around, realizing how long he must have been walking to get where they were. They were just behind their house in the garden. "Did you even remember walking all the way out here?"
"N-No, not really." He sighed shakily. "Something's wrong. I don't know what but it's wrong."

"Do you want to talk about it, Papa?"

"I… I don't even know where to start I just…" Wilson closed his eyes. "I just don't know if I'm losing my mind or I'm just… just… I don't know…"

Wendy kept stroking his back.

"What was happening? Do you wanna tell me? You don't have to if you don't wanna." She gave him a worried look. "Daddy says it's always good to let it out though only if you feel comfortable doing it."

Wilson looked up at her, staring for a moment before speaking.

"... My own shadow was taunting me. I couldn't think clearly or… anything. I just… I felt weak. It was mocking me. I… I… I don't want to lose my mind… I don't want to be like… I don't want to be what They wanted me to be."

"You're not gonna wind up like that." Wendy hugged him tightly. "You already proved you won't be like that. Remember that big fight against Maxwell? When you double crossed him?"

"How could I forget?" Wilson looked away from her. "I could hear all their voices at once… But… But somehow I didn't lose it. Y-Yet it still feels like… feels like…"

"Feels like…?"

Wilson lowered his head.

"Feels like I'm going to lose it at some point. You saw what just happened."

"I did and Papa… it happens to everyone. I just didn't think it was possible in this world too."

Wilson looked to her, confusion in his eyes.

"Huh? W-What do you mean?"

Wendy rubbed the back of her neck.

"W-When me and Abi first got sent to The Constant… We knew a lot about insanity. We didn't before - Daddy's a doctor but he doesn't deal with that stuff. He fixed the body, not the mind." She explained. "After a few days there, I started to get really bad headaches and Abi kept trying to get me to stop thinking about it. So, we picked flowers and I noticed it was helping me feel better."

"You never told me this."

"That was before winter." She reached up, touching the thing on Wilson's head. "I figured out making flower wreaths could help make the headache go away a little. See?"

Wilson gazed up, seeing the flower wreath on his head.

"My head does feel better… How did you know so much?"

"I guess it just came with our deal with Maxwell. Our own dark knowledge." Wendy smiled a little. "But that's not important right now. Right now, I want you feeling better."
Wilson smiled a little, kissing her head.

"How on Earth did I get so lucky?"

"I dunno."

He brought an arm around her, keeping her close, cringing as his injuries flared once more.

"Augh…"

"You overdid it."

"I did."

Wendy pouted before kissing his chin.

"I'll help."

"By all means."

Wendy took his hand, leading him out into the garden before laying him down in a flower bed full of blue flowers that had a faint green glow to them. She lied down beside him, cuddling close.

"I found these flowers help soothe pain and even help heal cuts. Discovered that when I cut my hand on a branch and was near a path of them."

Wilson stroked her hair.

"I am so proud of you. You really have been busy yourself, haven't you?"

"A little. I wanted to make our garden pretty and… well, I like finding uses for flowers. Some are good for healing like these, some are good for eating."

"You really are a good girl." He closed his eyes, sighing in relief as the pain in his body and his head started to fade.

"You're a good papa."

"Nah… just me."

Wendy smiled, kissing his cheek.

"And that's what makes you great."
Concerns

"Willow I need to work. Come on."

"If you get out of that bed I'm gonna hit you with my shoe!"

Willow sighed as she left the medical building, frustrated with her current situation. She loved Wilson, loved him with all of her heart... but his stubbornness definitely could be too much some days. Namely when he was still recovering and needed rest but still felt like he wasn't doing enough.

*I'm gonna sick Jack on him at this rate and he'll deserve it. Big knucklehead.*

Willow wandered for a bit before settling to sit by the fire pit, her chin resting on her knuckles. It was very tempting at this point to throw logs in there to get some anger out but they were a bit low this week.

"Cree?"

Willow looked to her side, seeing Delphi was sitting beside her, giving a kicked puppy look.

"Awww... Hey you." She picked up the baby dragonfly, the creature cuddling close. "I'm okay baby girl, just a bit frustrated with Wilson is all."

"Cree..."

"Men troubles?"

Willow jumped, seeing Charlie standing not too far from her, her arms around her swelling belly.

"Y-Yeah. Goodness you spooked me there Charlie. Should you really be up and walking? I mean, you're pretty heavy now."

"I'm fine, I promise." She gave a sheepish look. "And I can't sit inside all day. It'd drive me nuts."

"I feel you."

"So, what's going on?"

Willow thumbed behind her at the medical building.

"Dr. Higgsbury thinks he's fully recovered even though he can barely move."

Charlie shook her head, sitting down beside her.

"Just how Wilson is. Always wanting to be working or helping people."

"Oh, majorly." Willow shook her head. "He's such a dork. He forgets he's important too."

"Just how he's always been hasn't it?"

"Yeah... I remember back in The Constant he would always give me a hard time when I got hurt but it took me awhile to trust him fully with that stuff. Got into a big argument over it until he convinced me it'd be okay."
"And now look at you two. I've never seen two people so happy to just be next to each other."

Willow smiled, stroking Delphi's back as she thought over all those times before.

"He's something else. I've never met someone like Wilson. He's different from all the men I've known before." Even different from Walter.

Charlie gave a knowing look.

"That's how you know he's the one. When no other man would even compare."

"Is that how you feel about William?"

Charlie fiddled with her wedding band, a warm look in her eyes.

"Oh, yes. He's honestly the only one I'd choose. If given a choice I'd choose him over and over."

"Even after all that happened?"

"Might've taken me longer but the thing is William made an effort to make things better and he wanted this too so, even with all that happened, yes."

Willow smiled.

"Heh. That's pretty amazing Charlie… and plus, you wouldn't change anything because of your little one right?"

"Especially. I wouldn't trade my baby for anything."

"Does it ever feel… weird? To be carrying a baby all the time, I mean."

"I've gotten used to it at this point. I had a few rare days where I would be self conscious of the fact I've put on weight and look curvier than usual but then William would calm me down and would just say I'm still beautiful." She giggled. "I'd laugh but I knew he meant it and he's just as excited as I am about the baby." She brought her hand over her bump. "He was worried for abit but now he's pretty confident. So… it is weird but I'm used to it now. Know what I mean?"

"I get you." Willow grinned a little. "It felt weird at first but it's normal now." Her grin faltered a bit as she rubbed the back of her neck. "Sorry if that was weird to ask just… Wilson and I are well… We're gonna tie the knot when he can actually get his butt out of that bed and… yeah."

Charlie gave her a gentle look.

"I understand. You wanna know what you might be signing up for?"

"Pretty much. I haven't really been around babies since I was really little and I've never been around anyone who was having a baby…"

"Well, it's okay to ask." Charlie chuckled. "I'm a bit of expert on this as it were."

"Does it ever feel weird or hurt when the kid kicks?"

"Everytime." Charlie cringed feeling one. "And there it is. They've been really active today and last night was bizarre."

"How bizarre?"
"Lot of rolling. It got pretty bad before I finally could fall asleep."

Willow gave her a concerned look.

"You sure you shouldn't be on bed rest?"

"I prefer being out, it takes my mind off things."

"Well, maybe we should get William. I mean, if anything he should be with you."

"He's out right now with Woodie."

Willow moved to get up.

"Sit."

"Charlie…"

"I'm fine. Let's just keep talking."

Willow gave her a concerned look, Charlie looked tired and she could see her wincing from some kind of pain.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. Can we just please keep talking?"

Willow nodded, doing as told.

"So… yeah, I just hope Wilson can just stay till he's better. We'll catch the crook and we're already making active efforts. We'll get them."

"Just have to be patient and remind him that the best thing he can do is to just rest. He's been doing better though, right?"

"Oh yeah, just can't get out of bed for long. He's already been warned twice by Jack that if he catches him again that'll be it - wing to the head!"

Charlie laughed.

"That sounds like Jack alright."

Willow grinned.

"Yep! And I threatened a shoe at him this morning."

"HA! If you need to borrow a pair of heels I'd be happy to loan them out."

"I'll keep it in mind."

Charlie grinned before grimacing, bringing her hands to her stomach.

"Ngh…!"

"Charlie?" Willow got up, standing front o her. "What's the matter?"

Charlie looked up at her, tears were brimming in her eyes.
"Ngh… It wasn't hurting this much earlier…"

Willow's eyes widened, kneeling a bit.

"We need to get you inside. G-Get you some help…"

"O-Okay.. Mgh!"

"Easy, easy…" Willow helped her up, looping the shorter woman's arm over her shoulder.

She looked around and saw Wolfgang standing not too far from them.

"Hey! Wolf! A little help over here!"

Wolfgang perked up and hurried over.

"What's the matter?"

"It's Charlie. She's in some pain and I need to get her inside quickly."

"Allow me to assist." He picked Charlie up with ease into his arms. "Where to, Fire Lady?"

"Probably the medical building."

"Anyway I can help?"

Willow looked to see Wigfrid running up.

"Tag along. Don't know exactly what's going on but once we do then I can tell ya."

"Sounds good. Lead the way!"

Willow nodded, all of them hurrying to the medical building.

Charlie whimpered, trying not to cry out.

"Please, make it stop… It hurts!"

"Easy Charlie, we'll get ya help."

_I don't wanna have to bug Wilson but we don't have time to go grab Jack._

Wolfgang laid her down on one of the beds, holding her hand, letting her squeeze tightly, Wigfrid doing the same with her other hand.

"We got you, Charlie." Wigfrid said.

"What's going on here?"

Wilson was at the doorway now, concern in his features.

Willow turned to him, worry in her eyes.

"Charlie's in a lot of pain Wilson. We were just talking and… this happened."

"What!?"
Wilson hurried over, everyone making room for him as he went straight to work.

"How bad does it hurt?"

"Scale of one to ten? Thirty."

Wilson narrowed his eyes.

"Not good." He did a quick exam before standing up straight. "... Willow, get some hot water and a towel. Wigfrid, keep holding Charlie's hand. Wolfgang, I need you to run as fast as you can and get William back here."

"You got it." Wigfrid held Charlie's hand tightly as Wolfgang gave a salute, hurrying out.

Willow was a bit stunned.

"Willow, please!"

"A-Ah sorry!" She hurried to get the water, glancing back.

This is really happening. Oh gosh...

Charlie looked to Wilson.

"W-What's happening?"

"It's a month early but everything should be fine. The baby should be developed enough to survive."

Charlie's eyes widened.

"Oh gosh."

"Yeah, it's happening now." Wilson held her other hand. "I just need you to breathe and focus. Everything will be fine. I'm right here, so is Wigfrid and Willow will be here soon. William will hopefully be back here relatively soon but for now just focus on pushing. Okay?"

"O-Okay... Okay."

"There's a good girl."

Willow came back in, a bowl of warm water in her arms along with a towel.

"So is she really?"

"Yep." Wilson said, staying focused. "She's having her baby."
William was running as fast as he could back to the village. He didn't care that he was getting short of breath, he had to be there now, no questions asked.

*Oh, please don't let me be too late!*

He finally reached the area, his shortness of breath catching up to him but he still pressed forward till he was able to reach his destination that was the medical building. He practically knocked down the front door as he hurried inside.

"Where's Charlie?" He asked, wheezing a bit, looking around frantically. "I… I came as soon as I heard."

"Catch your breath, William."

William looked to his right, seeing Wilson standing outside one of the rooms, a big grin on his face.

William walked over to him, trying to settle his breath.

"H-How is she?"

"Healthy. Both of them."

William's eyes got wide.

"They're okay?"

"Yes. No complications." A gentle look came to Wilson's eyes. "Despite being a month early, you have yourself a healthy little baby girl."

A smile crept across William's face, tears stinging his eyes.

"A girl… We… We have a daughter…?"

"You do." Wilson placed a hand on his shoulder. "Would you like to see them?"

"Please?"

Wilson nodded, opening the door wider as quietly as he could.

"Just watch your volume, the baby's trying to sleep."

William stepped in quietly, peering inside. There, he saw Charlie sitting in bed, holding a small bundle in her arms, the woman having Willow and Wigfrid beside her, both taking turns cooing at the little bundle.

"So… cute!" Willow whispered, keeping her hands over her mouth to keep her squeal from being too loud. "Oh my goodness, she's so tiny!"

"Aye, but ströng töö!" Wigfrid grinned. "She will be ströng like a valkyrie when she gets älder."

Charlie giggled, rocking the bundle in her arms gently.
"When she's older. For now, she just has to worry about being my little flower bud."

Willow giggled.

"So cute." She looked over to William giving a grin. "And looks like the new dad is finally here."

"Y-Yeah." William rubbed the back of his neck. "I… I'm so sorry I wasn't here for when it was happening. I was helping Woodie with his log harvest then Wolfgang came running up to tell me what happened and… Oh, Charlie, I wish I had been here to help."

Charlie smiled gently.

"It's okay, William. It was unexpected and honestly, I think it was better you weren't here. I… may have said some things I don't think you wanted to hear."

"I could imagine. I remember Jack telling me stories of what my mother said to my father when I was born."

Charlie giggled.

"I didn't mean any of them though… Now, come here. This is something you need to see."

William made his way over, Wigfrid and Willow moving aside to allow him access to the bed. He got a better look at the bundle, his eyes stinging with tears again as his heart warmed up. In the bundle was a small baby girl with dark brown hair, fast asleep, clinging to the blanket wrapped around her.

"Oh my goodness." William sat beside his wife, his eyes still locked on the baby. "Charlie, she's beautiful."

Charlie smiled softly, gazing at him a little.

"Isn't she? She's perfect."

William nodded, bringing an arm around her and his child.

"She's so little. Goodness… I… I didn't think she'd be this small."

"You should've heard her earlier. She was screaming so loud. Wilson said that was a good sign her lungs were fully developed."

"Good, that means she didn't inherit mine then." William brought his hand up, stroking the baby's hair. "She took after you."

The baby nuzzled his hand, cooing a little, her hands moving some. Charlie giggled a bit.

"You know, you could hold her."

"C-Can I?"

"Of course. She's your baby too. Just mind her head."

William nodded, taking the baby into his arms, cradling her gently. The tears in his eyes started to slip out as he looked at his daughter, seeing her content in his arms.

"She… She's really here."
Charlie laid her head on his shoulder, some tears of her own escaping.

"She's everything I dreamt about since we found out. She's our baby girl."

"She is." William choked on his words. "S-Sorry I… I just thought we'd never get to have this yet here we are."

The baby yawned, huddling closer to her father. William chuckled a bit, kissing her head.

"I got you." He looked to Charlie. "Have you named her yet?"

She smiled, shaking her head a bit.

"Not yet. I wanted us to decide together."

"Well, we're together now. What shall we name her?"

Charlie stroked the baby's cheek with her fingertip.

"Let's see…" She looked at the rose pinned to William's suit for a moment. "Well, roses do mean a lot to us. Given you always gave them to me when we were courting and that dress Woodie made for her. So… how about Rose?"

"Rose…" William looked at the baby, smiling gently. "She certainly looks like a Rose. She even has the cheek color for it."

Charlie smiled softly, nuzzling his shoulder.

"She does. A little rosebud. Okay, so her first name is Rose. Your turn."

William hummed in thought before nodding to himself.

"Maybe Jacklyn as her middle name? After my brother?"

Her gaze softened as she looked down at their daughter.

*Jack was the reason we even met. If it hadn't been for him we might've never fallen in love. She might've not been here.*

"It's perfect." She whispered, her voice cracking. "A-Ah I'm sorry." She wiped at her eyes quickly. "Rose Jacklyn Carter."

"It has a nice ring to it, my dear." William kissed her head.

Charlie kissed his cheek.

"She's a little flower alright. Our new beginning."

William nodded, keeping close to his wife, letting her bring an arm around their child.

"Our little miracle."

Rose let out a small yawn, her eyes opening slowly, revealing they were green like William's.

"Buwah?" She looked up at her parents, blinking slowly before giggling.

"I think she's saying hello dear."
William chuckled, smiling gently, leaning in a little closer to his daughter.

"Hello, Rose. I... I'm your father."

Rose stared at him for a moment, reaching up her little hand, touching his chin. She let out a little squeal, cuddling closer.

"Buwah!"

William's heart melted, unable to help but chuckle again.

"Aren't you a little bundle of joy?" He leaned in closer, nuzzling her gently with his nose, eliciting a squeal from the girl.

"Agh!" She reached her hand up, touching his nose, grabbing at it a little. "Bah! Bah!"

"Uwah!" William laughed nuzzling her. "You little rascal!"

Rose squealed again, letting go, nuzzling back.

"Wah!"

Charlie smiled, giggling.

"She likes you already."

William held her close, kissing Rose on her head.

"And I love her so much already. I was so worried she'd... she'd not like me or be sick."

"Well, she isn't sick and she most certainly likes you." Charlie rested her head on his shoulder again. "Everything is okay, William. It's going to be interesting from here on but for now things are okay."

Rose yawned, curling up in his arms. William rocked her a bit, nuzzling his wife.

"You're right. Everything is okay."

Charlie nodded, closing her eyes.

"Hey... Can you hold her for awhile? I've been having a hard time keeping my eyes open since she came out."

William kissed her head.

"I'd be glad to, my love. You've been through a lot today. Just rest."

"Thank you." Charlie yawned, keeping close, bringing both her arms around William. "I love you."

William smiled gently, kissing her head again.

"I love you too Charlie. So very much. You are amazing."

Charlie was silent now, fast asleep against her husband. He glanced to Rose, seeing the girl was fast asleep as well, clinging to the lapels of his coat, a content look on her face.

He chuckled sighing happily.
Like mother like daughter.

Our daughter.
The month had been a stressful one. Worry was spreading through the village of the incident that had occurred with Wilson and Willow and the mysterious man. Plans were already being made and enacted, trying to find him but to no avail. Even with Jack it seemed like the man didn't even exist or rather, he was just too fast to be caught. It was frustrating to say the least.

This week however, was a small break from that.

"Feels weird to be doing this during such a stressful time." Willow said, holding still as Charlie made adjustments to her wedding dress. "I mean, I'm glad we're doing this but… I just feel like we should be staying focused and just do this wedding thing later."

"You two deserve a moment of happiness. You can worry about it after you've had the night of your life." Charlie replied. "If we waited to see what would happen William and I wouldn't be parents. Right Rosie?"

The infant nestled in a basket just gave a squeal.

Willow giggled at the infant.

"Hard to believe you guys became parents just a few weeks or so ago… How are you two fairing, by the way?"

Charlie grinned, finishing the adjustments. "We're doing fine. She likes to wake up in the middle of the night but William helps out a lot with her. She's such a daddy's girl."

"Well, glad to hear William is helping. She's so cute." Willow made a silly face at the infant, earning a squeal from her.

"Agh!"

Charlie smiled softly.

"She's a real sweetie. Such an easy baby. Loves cuddles and seems to be happy unless she's hungry."

"Then the wailing starts eh?"

"Whimpering mostly. We've gotten fast enough to make it before the crying."

"Got ya. Well, least she was a happy surprise and just in time for Wilson to help too."

"Yep." Charlie smiled softly. "Now, have a look."

Willow turned to the mirror in the room, a little baffled that the person looking back at her in the mirror was herself. Her long hair was let down and curled around her shoulders. She was dressed in a white dress that had a flame like pattern to the skirt. There was tiny pieces of red gem sewn into the pattern making it look like she herself was made of fire.

Not a roaring inferno but a gentle flame.

"This is me?" She asked softly, touching the mirror.
"This is you." Charlie looked at her, humming in thought. "Need one more thing though." She went through her things before pulling out a veil that was attached to a hair clip with another red gem. "Ah here it is!"

"Wow…” Willow twirled in her dress. "I… I never imagined I'd ever be dressed in something like this."

"Well, you're here now." Charlie smiled. "You look amazing."

Willow giggled, blushing a bit, looking at herself in the mirror again.

"Heh… Wish Walter was here."

Charlie tilted her head, curiosity coming to her eyes.

"Who's Walter?"

"He was a friend of mine back at the asylum. He was the guy who got me out of there actually. He was a kind man." Willow chuckled abit. "He would hopefully be proud of me for making it this far. I was hoping we'd find him by now."

Charlie smiled softly, picking Rose up into her arms.

"I'm sure he'd be so proud of you, Willow. You're making a life for yourself. I bet he'd be elated."

"Hopefully he will when we find him." She giggled. "Don't tell him but he kind of looks like Wildork."

"Your secret is safe with me and Rose." Charlie looked at her baby. "Right sweetie?"

"Bah!"

Willow tickled her under her chin as Rose giggled.

"Thank you, Rosie, for keeping auntie Willow's secret."

"Buwah!"

Charlie chuckled.'

"Well… You ready?"

Willow took a deep breath.

"I'm ready."

oooooo

"AAAAAHHH I'M NOT READY!"

William stared bewildered at the man in front of him. Wilson's hair was more wild than normal and his suit jacket wasn't even buttoned up properly.

"What on Earth were you doing before I got here?"

Wilson looked down at Chester.
"I don't know. What was I doing?"

The creature gave his best shrug.


Wilson inhaled shakily.

"Exhale. Slowly."

He did so, his shoulders slumping.

"Now, why on Earth are you worried? Willow is so in love with you." William asked, raising an eyebrow. Wilson sighed, turning to the mirror, buttoning up his jacket and fixing up his tie a bit.

"I don't know. It hit me this morning I'm marrying the love of my life and there's so much going on…" He ran a hand through his hair. "I'm excited but… worried I'll somehow mess it all up. I never even got close to this when I was trying to court girls as a lad! Most of them got scared off by those bloody demons I called relatives!"

William offered him a comb as the scientist continued to get ready.

"It'll be fine. Take it from someone whose been there. It seems terrifying now but when you see her up there, dressed like an angel - or a phoenix if you prefer, all of that will fade."

Wilson looked to him, getting a hopeful look.

"You think so?"

"I know so. She loves you so much, Wilson. She was so worried about you when you were hurt."

He nodded, laying a hand over his chest.

"I recall all too well. I'm just glad all is looking well so far."

William squeezed his shoulder.

"And we're all right here for you. So… Dr. Higgsbury." He grinned. "Are you ready?"

Wilson adjusted his cufflinks, looking at himself in the mirror.

"Yes."

It was now or never.

William lead the man out to the arch. An arch Wilson had built so many months ago for others that was now being used for him. Wickerbottom stood there, smiling gently, her book ready in hand.

William left Wilson there to join his wife, bringing an arm around her. Wilson took another deep breath, calming himself.

"It'll be fine, Wilson." Wickerbottom, touched his shoulder. "I know times are stressful but this moment is just as important. We need good morale."

Wilson nodded, swallowing hard.

"R-Right." He lowered his voice. "I just want to make her happy."
"And you're doing a fine job of that - but also remember, this is about your joy too."

Wilson nodded.

"R-Right."

It was silence for a moment before all turned to see Willow being lead down the aisle with Woodie, everyone oohing and awing at her dress. Wilson followed their gaze, his jaw dropping a bit at the sight of Willow's dress.

She looks amazing.

Willow gave him a bright smile as Woodie let go of her arm.

"Thank you."

"You're quite welcome, Ms. Willow." Woodie gave Wilson a grin. "Be good to her now."

Wilson nodded, offering his hands to her as Willow took them. He gazed into her eyes, Willow doing the same.

"You look beautiful, M'Lady." Wilson smiled. "Like a phoenix."

"Th-Thank you" Willow blushed a little, smiling softly. "You look very dapper. Quite becoming of a prince."

Wilson chuckled, blushing a bit himself.

"You know, marrying me will technically make you a princess."

Willow giggled.

"The princess of fire. I like that title."

"It suits you."

Wickerbottom chuckled, getting their attention.

"Ready?"

Both nodded.

"Yes."

"Then let's begin." Wickerbottom looked to the others. "Dearly beloved, we're gathered here for the union of this young man and woman. A day I'm sure we have all been looking forward to since it was made official. I know I have." Wickerbottom smiled gently at Wilson. "And now, it is time they took their vows."

Wilson took a deep breath. It was a simple thing but he still felt like he was going to trip if he wasn't careful.

"Wilson Percival Higgsbury, do you take Willow to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

"I do." Wilson smiled, looking Willow right in the eyes.

"And do you, Willow Ashworth, take Wilson to be your lawfully wedded husband?"
Willow grinned.

"Does fire burn? Of course!"

This woman is amazing.

Wickerbottom chuckled.

"Then by the power vested in me, I pronounce you, husband and wife. You may kiss."

Wilson grinned before kissing Willow, bringing his arms around her, Willow doing the same as everyone around them applauded.

They held the kiss for a moment before parting, Wilson lifting her up into his arms.

"Haha! We finally did it my dear!"

Willow laughed, hugging him tightly. "You're such a dork! But you're my dork!"

Wilson grinned, nuzzling her.

"And that's officially now too, for the rest of our lives. Think you can handle that?"

Willow nuzzled him, kissing his chin.

"I think so. You can handle your crazy fire wife?"

"I believe so. She's wonderful like that."

"Oh you."

Wilson grinned, looking out to everyone. He smiled gently at his mother and uncle, seeing his mother crying happy tears, Emmett side hugging her.

"He finally did it, Cece."

"Y-Yeah…" Cecelia sniffled. "He's all grown up and married."

"Married to a lovely young lady."

"My poofer's all grown up!"

Wilson blushed, shaking his head.

"Mum…"

"Mama! Papa!"

The twins came running up, bouncing in place.

"Willow's really our mama now!"

"Yeah! And she can move into our house now right?"

Wilson chuckled, setting Willow down so he could pick up Wendy. Willow doing the same for
Abigail.
"Darn right. We'll get the rest of her things moved in, in the next few days."

"YAY!"
Willow sighed happily.
"This is going to be great."
Wilson nodded.
"Indeed." His eyes got a little glassy with tears, quickly wiping them away. "Sorry I just… never thought I'd get to have this ever in my life."
Willow smiled softly, kissing his cheek.
"I get you, Wilson. It feels like I'm in a dream right now."

"If this is a dream, I hope to never wake."
The twins giggled, huddling close to their parents.
"It's better than a dream. It's reality."
Wilson and Willow hugged the girls tightly.
"And we love you very much."
"So, shall we go celebrate now?"
"There is a party, right?"
Wilson grinned.
"A party to end all parties!"
"Yeah!"
The twins hopped out of their arms, heading down the aisle, Wilson and Willow following, the rest doing the same.
Willow kept close to Wilson, sighing happily.
"I know there's a lot going on right now in The Constant but… everything feels great in this moment."

"I feel the same, my love." Wilson rested his head against her. "That all feels well right now."
"And for this moment, it most certainly is."
Maxwell sat by himself outside the tent. He was waiting patiently for a meal to finish cooking in the crockpot near the fire pit. He had a lot on his mind.

*Cato is on the loose… I can't believe he actually succeeded that scum. Yet here we are.*

Maxwell shook his head, looking to the entryway of the tent. He smiled a bit, seeing Scarlet playing with the giants. Mainly play fighting. It was amusing… and rather adorable.

"Alright, claws out, Maggie." Scarlet said, having her own shadow claws out.

Scarlet had named each of the giants, finding calling them by their monster names wasn't all that appealing. Maxwell didn't mind it and well, it seemed the giants took well to it.

Wynter the deerclops, Maggie the dragonfly, Cider the bearger and Gale the moose goose.

Maggie drew out her claws, swiping playfully at Scarlet.

"Rawr!"

Scarlet giggled, swiping back.

"That's it! Good swing, Maggie!"

"Rawr!"

The giants all looked to each other, all giving a sneaky look before pouncing on Scarlet, knocking the woman over, eliciting a laugh from her.

"Oh you silly little monsters!"

"Rawr!"

"Honk!"

Maxwell chuckled, shaking his head.

*Nice to see everyone getting along.*

He turned his attention back to the food he was cooking, checking it to see it was done now. He smiled, taking out the dish and putting it onto a plate.

*Honey ham is easy to make, thankfully. Haven't done this in centuries.*

He headed into the tent.

"Giants! Meal time!"

The giants all cheered before running towards Maxwell, eagerly digging into the food as soon as he set it down.

"Enjoy." He smiled before heading out of the tent again, sitting down on a bail of hay.

Scarlet soon emerged from the tent, smoothing her hair down as she went to him.
"May I join you?"
"If you wish."

She smiled sitting beside him.

"I do. Goodness those little ones can wear me down sometimes though."

"Just how they are." Maxwell chuckled. "They did the same thing to me when I first created them."

"Ah I recall those days. You were exhausted." She smirked. "But yet here we are once again with them like this."

"It's definitely been a change. Can't say I can complain either. They also seem to rather enjoy having real names now too."

"That they do."

Maxwell nodded, rubbing the back of his neck.

"I'm just glad they can be happy despite all that's been happening."

Scarlet nodded, giving him a gentle look.

"It's been insane but in a sense they also get to experience joy and get to experience being young again. I just hope we can put a stop to this soon enough."

"You and me both Scarlet…” He lowered his head. "You and me both."

Scarlet frowned, touching his shoulder.

"Is something else troubling you, Maxwell?"

"I just have a lot on my mind from Cato to other matters that have been weighing on me since I got dethroned."

"Like…?"

"... I'm not really sure what I'm meant to be or what to do anymore."

"You too huh?"

He looked up at her, stunned.

"What..?"

She shrugged looking up at the trees above them. "I no longer need to hunt. I have no purpose as The Grue anymore. I'm no longer her and I'm no longer fused to Charlie. It's odd not having that same purpose… You know?"

"It is. My whole life I was destined to be bound to the throne, to be a king." He clenched his hands into fists. "Or least feel like I was a king when in reality… I was no king. I was… and always have been damage control and I failed at that… or rather I could never be what I was meant to be."

Scarlet frowned, bringing an arm around his shoulders.

"Max, you were everything They couldn't have. You still found ways out of that room even when..."
you had to return. You created so many different things and lived different lives-

"Lives I stole with two exceptions where one was going to likely kill himself anyway and the other was literally about to jump." Maxwell sighed miserably, remembering those lives and hosts. "I lived through many nightmares as well. My only friend, one of the many I truly wish I could have back is gone forever and I couldn't do anything to help."

"Max, it wasn't your fault he died."

"Yet I still feel like it is. I could've been there. I could've stopped them. If I had just been faster Rune would've been able to..." He brought his hands to his face. "I just wish... it could've been different... Then again... with all I've done, it's no surprise I've lost so much of what actually meant something to me."

Scarlet frowned, stroking his back, keeping quiet. She wasn't quite sure what to say about this.

"And now once again something is out to take what means anything to me anymore. My giants... You... and as pathetic as it sounds, my own life." He sighed. "Feels like sometimes my creators are playing a cruel joke on me."

Scarlet hesitated before bringing her arms around him, catching him off guard. She kept quiet, nuzzling him gently. Maxwell had heat rush to his face.

"Max, you're not losing me anytime soon. I promise. I may have lost a fight to that scum but I don't plan on losing again."

Maxwell brought one of his hands over hers.

"I'm not letting that bloody monster get near you. Not if I can help it."

Scarlet kept close to him, her cheek pressed against his, feeling how warm he was.

"And I know you'll take care of us. But I'm not letting you fight alone."

Maxwell hesitated before nuzzling her in return.

"Scarlet... You are very dear to me. I hope you know that."

"I do." She huddled a little closer. "I've been your companion since you began existing."

"And I'd rather not lose that to someone like Cato." Maxwell had heat rush to his face once more.

What is wrong with my face? Why do I feel warm?

Maxwell shook his head, trying to brush it off but felt the heat return as soon as Scarlet rested her head against his.

"You're rather warm. Are you feeling alright, Maxwell?"

He nodded quickly.

"I-I'm fine, Scarlet. I'm perfectly fine. Just... body heat?"

Scarlet gave him a look, raising an eyebrow before shrugging, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Well, I rather like it."
"Heh..." Maxwell hesitated before resting his head against hers, slowly bringing his arms around her. "Never really been described as warm."

Scarlet sighed happily, huddled close to him.

"No one's told you then. Because you're rather warm. It's lovely honestly."

*Never had anyone say any of my traits were "lovely" either.*

"If you say so, Scarlet." He stroked her back, holding her closer.

Scarlet sighed happily, curling up a bit.

They heard the tent flap open as the giants crept over before climbing up to cuddle with them, squeaking a bit.

"I see our children missed us."

"Heh... Our children...?"

"Well, we're both taking care of them, aren't we?"

"I suppose."

Maxwell gazed upon, them relief in his eyes.

He had something to protect once more.

And this time...

This time he would not lose them.
Maxwell was keeping his wits about as he made his way through a forest area in The Constant, a sword in hand. It was pointless to sit and wait for Cato to come out. He wasn't sure where to start with searching for him but he figured walking around would be better than just sitting in a camp, waiting for hours on end.

*He has to be somewhere.*

Maxwell carried on for a few more hours before deciding to stop for a moment, resting on a tree stump. He wiped at his brow, sighing a bit.

*I hope Scarlet will be alright without me for a bit. She can handle herself just fine but… Cato got her before. I don't want that to happen again.*

Maxwell shook his head, getting up to continue on with his journey.

"You know, I have to admit, it's fun watching you go in circles like a dog chasing his tail."

He growled, looking behind him, finding no one there.

"Eyes up."

Maxwell folded his ears down as he looked up into a tree, seeing Cato standing on a branch, sneering down at him. Maxwell hissed a bit.

"You know, if you were really a man you wouldn't be afraid to face me on the same level."

"Ah but I'm not the same level as you, Maxy. I'm above you. I'm the man, you're the beast, so it only makes sense, don't you think?" Cato laughed. "Though I wonder if I should even call you a beast since that's an insult to the monsters around here and they're even higher than you!"

Maxwell snarled.

"Spare me the insults." Maxwell lifted his sword at him. "I know what you want, Cato. Let's just get this over with."

Cato jumped down from the branch, keeping his arms folded behind his back.

"Hm… I'm not sure if I feel like fighting you. Feels like such a waste of breath. Least… for the moment. I don't think you've been humiliated enough yet… Magnus Umbra."

Maxwell's eyes went dark.

"How do you know about THAT?"

"Oh, please, all the nightmare monsters talk about it. How much you hate being called that. I must say, it's fun to see get bristled up like a frightened animal. Really says a lot about you, Maxy, or excuse me, Magnus Umbra."

Maxwell bared his teeth.

"Don't call me THAT!"
"Hm… I'll call you whatever I like." Cato moved one of his arms from behind his back, summoning an odd looking sword that had red gems encrusted into the hilt to his hand. "Hm… to fight you now or to wait till you've really lost it. That is the question."

Maxwell growled, swinging his sword at him quickly. Cato moved to the side, dodging the attack with ease.

"Tsk, tsk, let's not be brash."

"FIGHT ME ALREADY!"

"Hm… I will, but not now. Instead… I think I know someone who will gladly give you what you want." Cato stood in a open position, a perfect opportunity for Maxwell to strike him down. Maxwell charged forward, Cato sliced behind him, opening a portal that was red in color, moving to the side as Maxwell fell right in. "I believe you might remember them!" He called into the portal before closing it.

Maxwell fell for a few minutes before landing on hard warm stone ground, his sword clanking at his side.

"Augh…" He groaned. "I swear I'll kill that man if it's the last thing I-"

"Well, well, what have we here?"

Maxwell froze up as he heard a deep voice speak. It was a voice he recognized but it was one he had not heard in over centuries.

He shakily looked up, eyes widening at seeing man who had small antlers growing out of his head and was dark in skin color, red war paint adorning his plump body. He looked at Maxwell with an amused look.

"So, this is the face you currently wear, Magnus Umbra?"

Oh. No.

Maxwell snarled, baring his fangs, giving a hiss.

"That is not my name," He spat. "And I intend to return from whence I came immediately-"

The man laughed a cold cruel laugh that made Maxwell shudder. It reminded him too much of a different time.

"Oh, Magnus Umbra, you surely jest when you say that."

"I… I don't..."

"Heh… It's so strange seeing you like this yet it seems natural for you. To be cowering in fear like the weakling you truly are. Aren't I right, my people?"

Cheers erupted around the two, Maxwell looking around him, seeing pigmen that were different from the ones of his world clad in armor. He then took note where he was laying. It was a flat plateau that had rings on each side… rings that were portals. His eyes shrunk as it sunk in.

_I'm in The Forge. The gladiatorial ring of lava._

He looked to the plump man, a pleading look in his eyes.
"Battlemaster Pugna we… we don't need do this. L-Let's be civil now-"

"Civil? HA! Laughable!" Pugna narrowed his eyes. "The king before you abandoned us. No scepter to provide whatsoever for our world that was falling apart. We were left to be eaten by the molten lava but we survived. We became stronger. Why should I be civil with an illegitimate creature he spawned?"

Maxwell snarled.

"His actions are not mine!"

"Ah but you see, Magnus Umbra, the way it works in regards to heirs is that once a king dies, his heir inherits everything, including his problems and well… since Tenebrae created you that makes you his son and by extension, his heir to everything he left behind. I mean, there was another but we all know how THAT ended."

Maxwell fell silent, his eyes wide at what had just been said to him.

He… He surely had not heard that right. Right?

"Excuse me?" He said in such a low tone that a normal person might've missed it. "What did you say?"

"You heard me. You're the son of the king who left us behind. There was another but last I remembered, he was on the brink of dying and leaving poor poor scared Magnus Umbra on his own."

"Brother… It hurts! IT HURTS! MAKE IT STOP! PLEASE HELP ME!"

No… No… Don't think about it.. Don't…

"Magnus… Please…"

Maxwell gripped his sword tightly in his hands, his eyes blazing with rage.

"FINE! You want a fight!? You have it! BUT LEAVE HIM OUT OF THIS!"

Pugna chuckled.

"Very well. I must say, it amuses me to see the will to fight in your eyes." He let out a boisterous laugh. "You shall fight in the ring then, Magnus Umbra, but know this, depending how it goes will determine an outcome. If you win, you may return to your world and we shall not bother you again, but if you lose, you shall be slain here and we will invade your world and conquer it."

Maxwell's eyes went wide.

If I lose that means I won't be the only one paying for it.

Images of Pugna and his troops coming through to The Constant flashed through his mind. No mercy to be found as they would trample through the land, destroying all who stood in their way before finally reaching Wickerbottom, overthrowing her and destroying the throne.

While he wasn't fond of the queen or her court… he wouldn't wish that on anyone and they had no part of this. This was a problem between him and Pugna, not them and Pugna.

… But that's what Cato wants.
Maxwell gripped tighter at his sword.

_Cato tricked me into that portal he opened. He may not be able to align himself or gain Pugna’s loyalty but he can still make use of him in other ways and this is it. Using me to rekindle a war that died centuries ago._

Maxwell growled.

_HE TURNED ME INTO A SCAPEGOAT, THAT SNAKE!_

"So, do you accept the terms of the challenge, Prince?"

Maxwell kept silent before looking Pugna right in the eyes, snarling.

"I will not lose."

"That's the spirit. Though, I will be fair in two regards." Pugna gestured to his attire with his club. "You should be properly equipped to battle so we shall take care of that."

"And the second?" Maxwell asked, raising an eyebrow.

Pugna grinned.

"Our gladiatorial battles are more amusing when it's a team of fighters rather than one. Thankfully, someone has kindly delivered five others like you our way that we've been dying to see enter the ring once you were brought to our world." Pugna leaned back in his throne, chortling. "It seemed absurd to wait but as soon as you were mentioned we were more than happy to agree to the deal he offered. He seemed invested in the idea of you being murdered by us before taking over your world. The others that will join you, not as much but he wouldn't mind seeing them go too. Either way, you won't be dying alone, be grateful for that."

Maxwell's eyes narrowed.

"Do you have any idea who you made a deal with?"

"No and I don't particularly care. I want you dead and for your world to pay for what was done to us. Now, enough talking. Troops! Prepare him for battle!"

Maxwell was grabbed on both sides by armored pigs, taking him to the one the rings on the plateau.

"He's using you! This won't end well for either of us whether I win or not!" Maxwell shrieked as he was dragged away. "YOU'VE MADE A DEAL WITH A DEMON!"

Pugna sneered.

"And now I'll extinguish one."
Wilson's head was throbbing. He wasn't entirely sure what had happened. Last he remembered he was doing a quick scout patrol around one of the areas of The Constant and the next, things went completely black. What was going on now was beyond him.

Everything around him was hot, as if he were near a pool of lava. There was ground beneath him that was hard and rough and was bit irritating to his skin.

He finally got his eyes to open, finding himself prostrated against warm stone ground. He glanced around, noting he was on a plateau of sorts and could see flickers of ember coming up from the edges.

His eyes widened, getting to his feet.

This… This couldn't be right. He was nowhere near the lava pools in the desert but this was nothing like it.

This resembled more so a description of Hell.

Fire and brimstone… Embers and ashes…

He looked around, confusion coming over him.

Why was he here?

"How did I get here?" He asked more so to himself than anyone else.

He wandered over to one the edges, his eyes growing wide at the sight of seeing lava below him. He stumbled back, tripping over his feet, falling over onto his back.

What is going on here?

He then took note his garb was completely different. He was wearing a fur vest along with dark leggings, arm guards, boots and bandages wrapped around his chest.

And what happened to my clothes!?

"Jumpy one, aren't ya?"

Wilson looked to the side, seeing a tall woman sitting not too far from him, clad in gold colored plated armor and chainmail, fiddling with a hammer she had in her hands.

She smirked.

"Get used to it."

"W-Who are you? Where are we?" He asked, terrified. "Why am I here!?"

"One, name's Winona, two, it's called The Forge and three, even I don't know."

"The Forge?" Wilson questioned, narrowing his eyes.

Winona nodded, twirling her hammer more.
"That's correct. The armor's for protection from the heat… or each other."

"Each other?"

"Look, I got put through some training and all I know is either we're fighting each other or we're working together. All I remember hearing is we're in a gladiatorial ring area. We're going to be fighting for our lives, whatever your name is."

"Wilson. Wilson Higgsbury." He frowned, thinking of the Light Village and everyone there. He hoped they weren't worried about him. "Look, I don't want to fight anyone. I just want to go home."

"Good luck with that."

Great. I promised Willow and the girls I wouldn't get hurt or die AGAIN and now that might happen.

"Are we the only ones here?"

"There are three others that I know of. My sister, Jenny being one of them… Then…" Winona's face was a bit red as she spoke. "Walter. He's a gentle guy, but ho boy get out of his way here in the arena, he will set you on fire and feed you to the pigs. Heh, kinda looks like you now that I think about it. And then there's Laika - she's some bug critter. I can't honestly remember what she said her species was called. She's a tough one though, helped fill us in on some of the stuff going on here. Main thing to know is here in The Forge, it's live or die by the sword."

Wilson leaned back against one of the pillars, slowly sliding to the floor, absorbing this information.

There were other people here. There was also an unknown species of creature he had yet to meet in this world.

And there was a high chance he was going to die.

"... I'm going to die." He remarked.

Winona rolled her eyes.

"Walter said that too."

"So… where are the others?"

Winona shrugged.

"Beats me. I just know the head honcho wanted us separated for a moment before we get thrown into the ring. According to Laika, the only way out is to win the battle together."

He swallowed hard, dread creeping in.

"Wonderful."

"Don't worry. I'm not one to turn on my teammates and neither is Jenny."

Wilson sighed shakily, looking around him again. He didn't see any means to escape… and if he could help find a way out…

"Alright. I have no other choice then."
Winona gave a bit of a smile.

"Hey, I got your back. I have full intents of getting out here. After all that training that nearly killed me and the others, there's no way I'm letting this be the end.

Wilson grinned a bit.

"Then, Winona, I'm glad to have met you. Let's get through this together." He offered a hand that she gripped tightly.

"Together."

oooooo

"Wait here till Master Pugna summons you!"

Maxwell was thrown onto the ground of a plateau by two armored pigs before they disappeared in a burst of dark black and red flames. Maxwell grunted as he made contact, groaning a bit.

"This is just undignified." He got up slowly, looking at the attire they had forced him into.

It was a deep purple blue hooded robe, clad with bronze plate armor on his chest and shoulders. His arms were wrapped in protective material, complete with gloves. He knew the attire. This was the garb of an alchemist.

_I remember many wearing this in The Forge back when it was less hostile. Even I know this garb well... as did... Him._

"You're new."

Maxwell jumped, seeing standing before him was a humanoid bug hybrid creature. The top half was human while the bottom half resembled something like that of a scorpion, legs and all. They were red and tan in color and were adorned with warrior garb. To anyone else, it was a strange new creature but to Maxwell… he knew exactly what was standing before him.

He narrowed his eyes.

"And I have not seen one of your kind in ages." He remarked. "Thulecitals are rather rare nowadays are they not?"

The creature's eyes narrowed a little.

"That was rude."

"That's what you are, aren't you?"

"Yes and you would be the first to actually know that right off the bat. The others I met didn't know what I was till I told them. So, how do you know about my people? Very few hoomons know of my people's existence."

Maxwell chuckled, looking away from them.

"That, my dear, is a very long story. You needn't concern yourself with it."

"Well, we're stuck here until Pugna calls us out. So, why not?"
Maxwell rolled his eyes, sitting down, cross legged.

"It really isn't any of your concern. We got brought here against our will and Pugna has full intents of murdering us so I don't see a point."

The creature tilted their head, giving a bit of a pout.

"I'm not here against my will though."

"... What!?"

"I'm here to represent my tribe. A hoomon came to our village saying the Ancient Gateway had opened again and someone had to be sent in to help defeat Pugna to keep a war from happening. I volunteered to go, being one of the best fighters of my village. I'm here to prove my people are still strong even after all these years…. And to protect some people that are important to me." Their eyes narrowed. "I won't let them get hurt!"

Maxwell's jaw dropped, pity coming to his eyes.

"Dear, you've been tricked." He could only think of one person who could do such a thing. "You cannot be here to truly represent."

"Huh?" The creature gave another confused look. "But Pugna does want a war. I'm here to help stop that from happening."

He shook his head.

"I'm the reason he's threatening war. But that man - do you know his name?"

"The man who told us of the Ancient Gateway being open? Cato, I think he said was his name."

Maxwell lowered his head.

"That man is a monster. A literal monster, young one. He is starting a war, not Pugna. He tricked you because of the grudge that man has with the other world. Don't you find it odd how Pugna has done nothing to your people for how long and now he wants fighters?"

The creature pondered this for a moment before a frown crossed their face.

"... It's a schism, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"Unfortunately. My name is Maxwell. Pugna and Cato both want me dead for separate reasons. Cato has been after me for centuries. So long ago your own parents probably hadn't been born yet. Maybe even your ancestors from prior to them hadn't been born yet."

"So, Cato arranged all this just to kill you?"

"Yes… and wreak havoc on everyone else. I apologize if this is how you meet your end, young warrior." He lowered his head.

Scarlet… please keep the giants safe if I don't make it out of here.

The creature was silent before tipping Maxwell's chin up.
"I shall go down fighting with you and the others then. We have been brought here unjustly and we shall not let us be slaughtered."

He was stunned, keeping quiet. He didn't think anyone would give him mercy. Or even be willing to give up their safety for his.

"Thank you... What is your name?"

They smiled.

"Laika. My name is Laika."

"Laika… Well, it was nice to meet you Laika. If we make it out of this, I have many questions for you."

"No if. We will make it out of this."

He grinned.

"It's a deal then."

oooooo

Pugna grinned widely as the crowds around the arena cheered loudly, all ready to see the fight that was to come unfold.

"Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!"

He could barely wait himself.

_Well, let's put on a show._

He raised his club.

"Bring in the gladiators!"

A ring one one of the ends of the arena lit up with black and red flames pluming out of it, fading off to reveal the six fighters, the crowd erupting into a huge cheer.

"Welcome, Gate Keepers!" Pugna announced, grabbing the fighters' attentions. They all narrowed their eyes at him, holding up their weapons. "Ah, save those for your competitors."

Wilson looked at those who surrounded them. He took note of Winona on his right. Next to her was a young woman who resembled her who he could only assume was her sister, Jenny. There was the odd creature Winona mentioned who was known as Laika and next to her was a man who bared a rather striking resemblance to Wilson himself but he would ponder over that later. He just knew that was probably the man known as Walter. The last person though… he couldn't make out a face. They had a hood on, obstructing their face, the only thing really visible being their rather pointy nose.

_Something seems familiar though but I can't put my finger on it._

Wilson shook his mind of it, looking to Pugna again.

Pugna sneered at them.
"You shall face our trials. If you succeed, you may leave in one piece. If you lose, you shall meet your end and The Constant shall be ours!"

*The Constant? What does he want with The Constant?*

"Not today, Pugna." Laika said, holding up her weapon. "We shall win!"

"We'll be the judge of that." Pugna waved his club.

"Warriors! Release the pigs!"

Fizzing was heard, the fighters whirling around as they took note of the three rings on the other ends of the arena that had embers coming off them. Then, in a sudden burst of sparks, creatures with sharp blades coming out of their nostrils appeared. They snorted before charging at them.

"SCATTER!" Winona shouted, the six splitting off into groups of two, taking on one of the three creatures together.

"SHOW 'EM NO MERCY!"
Paradise Hell

William had been intending to only go into The Constant with Wolfgang and Wes to search for Wilson after he had disappeared.

That was all he had been planning on doing. He had full intent on going straight home to his wife and child as soon as he was done. But when he was approaching a body of water someone had pushed him in…

The water hadn't been water. It was a portal that sent him tumbling and spinning through into another area entirely. He woke up, feeling the sun beat down upon him, hearing the sound of the tide rushing in and out.

He was on an island, alone. He slowly sat up, taking in the area. There was a large outstretch of ocean, something he hadn't seen since Earth. He couldn't make out any other islands from where he was either.

There didn't seem to be a boat either.

... Oh no...

No.

NO!

William was on his feet in seconds, sprinting to the edge of the water, looking down into it, horrified.

"No, no, NO! HELLO!?

It was pointless. There was no way anyone else had known what happened to him.

"SOMEONE!? ANYONE!?"

Yet he couldn't help but call out. He brought his hands to his head, anxiety starting to creep in.

No no no no no! This can't be happening! This can't be!

A squawking of a bird caught his attention. He turned his head, seeing a red parrot wearing a pirate hat, sitting on a broken part of a sail.

"Rarwk! Lost at sea! Lost at sea!"

William stared at it, walking closer to it.

"Yes, and?"

It looked right at him and he swore it sneered.

"LOSER." He squawked before flying off, leaving a few red feathers behind.

William's eye twitch before letting out a frustrated scream.

"Can I step back into The Constant for ONE second WITHOUT getting into some kind of
He fell to his knees, bringing his hands to his face.

Where the heck am I anyway?

He brought his hands away from his face, looking around. It was a tropical looking place, complete with palm trees and ocean as far he could see. He searched his memory, trying to see if anything from his time with Maxwell that could help. It clicked after a moment of pondering.

"The Fire Lands." William's eyes shrunk. "I'm in the Fire Lands… the tropical part of The Constant… I am far… far from home." He hung his head. "Perfect."

He shook his head, getting up.

"Well, no use complaining. I need to find my way back."

For Charlie and Rose's sake I have to.

He looked around, trying to figure out what he could do with what he had. He froze though as he heard loud thudding coming towards him

That… doesn't sound good.

The trees began to shake before a monster made of palm trees came barreling out, roaring at him.

William screamed before making a run for a it.

NO NO NO NO NO NO NO!

He gasped as the monster grabbed him, lifting him up to its face. William trembled in fear, looking into the creature's blank dark eyes.

"U-Um… N-Nice tree guard."

The tree guard snarled before tossing him off the island, sending him flying straight in the ocean.

William slammed into the water hard, making a huge splash. He gasped for breath as he tried to keep above the water's surface. He kicked his legs and moved his arms as hard as he could but he could feel the shadow hands coming around his neck and body, choking him of air as they started to pull him under the water.

"He… lp.. HELP!" He screamed with the breath he had left before he was pulled under. He was doing what he could to not breath in water but it was becoming harder and harder to keep his mouth shut. His air was fading fast and as was the light above him.

Someone... Please...

His eyes started to slide shut.

Charlie... Rose... I'm sorry...

Something grabbed onto him, pulling him up back towards the surface before he could black out. He coughed and sputtered, not even having a chance to react before another set of hands pulled him hard onto a small boat.
"Nice save there Jack, looks like it was this guy's lucky day."

*Jack..?*

William's vision was blurry, his glasses completely soaked with water, making it hard to see. He could make out two figures but he couldn't see them very well.

"Hang on a second." One of the figures took off his glasses, wiping them quickly before putting them back on his face. "There."

His vision cleared, his eyes widening as he saw his brother standing before him with a young woman with dark skin and hair that was tied into two buns on her head.

"J-Jack?" William finally said, confusion in his eyes. "H-How did you find me?"

Jack gave him a small grin.

"Actually, this was more of a coincidence. I'm the reaper for all of this world. Not just the area you're familiar with." He nodded to the woman. "She can see spirits so I sometimes come by to visit with her. We saw you get thrown into the water and I just reacted."

"I-I see… How long have you two known each other?"

The woman shrugged.

"Awhile now. He's a nice dude so he just comes to hangout with me from time to time when I'm out surfing the high waves by myself. He also keeps me from wanting to murder Warley and Woodlegs when they're being dumb. Oh! Name's Walani by the way." She held out a hand. "Nice to meet ya dude."

William shook her hand, still bewildered at this whole situation unfolding before him.

"William Carter. N-Nice to meet you Ms. Walani."

"Gah none of this miss stuff. Please."


Jack smiled, giving a nod before it faded, concern in his eyes.

"So, now, let me ask you some questions."

William braced himself as he saw an all too familiar look come to Jack's eyes. That was a look he had come to dread.

"Anything hurt? Feeling dizzy? How many fingers am I holding up?"

*Jack's medical barrage. GAH!*

William made sure to breathe before answering as to not come off as annoyed.

"Sore all over from the landing in the water, slightly dizzy from the lack of air and you're holding up three fingers, Jack."

Jack nodded to himself, his gaze softening before he sat beside his brother. Jack stroked his back.
"Take a deep breath and exhale it slowly. The soreness I can't do much about but at least it's not enough to cause you any injuries."

William nodded, catching his breath.

"I'm just glad you guys saw me. I don't even know how I got here. I just know someone pushed me into a portal and the next moment I found myself here." William lowered his head. "And now I need to get back to the mainland. I need to get home to Charlie and Rose."

Jack frowned, bringing an arm around his brother.

"I know, Brother. Don't worry, we'll get you back. Right, Walani?"

"Yeah. I'm sure Woodlegs would know something so, no worries, dude. We’ll get you back to your fam."

William closed his eyes, bringing his knees up to his chest.

"Charlie is going to be so worried. She only had our child a few weeks ago. She needs me to help take care of her."

"Ah, you're a brand new daddy, huh?"

William nodded.

"Yes. To a little girl named Rose."

"Well, then I'd be more than happy to help you get back to them. Like I said, I'm sure Woodlegs probably knows somethin'." Walani gave a bit of a smile. "But the least I can do is take you back to my camp to get dried off and some food in the meantime."

William smiled, giving a grateful look.

"I'd really appreciate that. I'm starved."

"And I don't want you getting sick, Will." Jack brought his cloak around the man, William relaxing, some warmth come back to him.

William closed his eyes, sighing a bit.

"It's been so weird. First Wilson disappears and now this."

"Wilson's missing?"

"Disappeared before I did."

"Hm…" Jack closed his eyes, focusing for a moment. "... I sense his presence somewhere but its faint. Like something is blocking my senses."

"At least it's not dying… I hope." William shuddered. "The thought of him dying after everything he's been through…"

"Oh, he better not!" Jack narrowed his eyes. "Not if I can help it."

William nodded, shivering as a sharp wind picked up. Walani released a sail on her boat, directing it towards another island.
Jack gave William a concerned look, bringing his cloak around him more.

"Easy now."

"Reminds me of that time when we were lads. Remember that time when I was four and I snuck out during that really bad thunderstorm to play in the puddles?"

"Oh, I remember. You were in bed for a whole week but you had no regrets that time."

"None." William chuckled, keeping close to Jack.

Jack smiled gently, resting his head against his brother's.

"None at all. I'll keep you from getting sick this time though."

William closed his eyes, relaxing against Jack's side. Despite the situation he was in, he had missed spending time with his brother.

Walani smiled at the sight.

"So, this is him huh? Glad to see him not being a dumb dumb anymore."

Jack stroked his shoulder.

"He's been doing a lot better since he had Maxwell separated from him."

"Well, good to hear it. A brother of yours, is a friend of mine."

"Thank you. I'm sure he'll get along fine with everyone while we figure this mess out. I'll speak to the queen once we get him settled."

Walani smirked a bit.

"You know, I can handle him."

"... Let me be his brother."

"Alright, alright." Walani chuckled. "Hang on tight fellas, high winds ahead!"

Jack laughed as the wind blew through his hair. William smiled, keeping close. He wasn't quite sure when it happened, but he wound up dozing off. The rocking of the boat mixed with the warmth. It lulled him right to sleep.
Wilson panted as the creature before him dissipated into embers. He was short of breath from shooting so many blow darts at it and the others that had accompanied it.

"Don't rest yet."

Wilson looked to his side, seeing the hooded figure.

"It's far from over."

Wilson nodded.

"How… How many are coming?"

The hooded figure lowered his head.

"I'm not sure but knowing Pugna, it will be a lot." The figure looked to him, noting Wilson had cuts on his on his legs and one across his chest. "Tell me something, how good are you at magic?"

Wilson gave a perplexed look.

"I only barely started learning. Why?"

"Well, if you happen to be good at healing as well." The figure looked to the side, seeing a staff with a blue flower tied to it stuck in the ground.

Wilson followed his gaze.

"I'm afraid to ask."

The figure picked up the staff, tossing it to him.

"Get to work or we're dead."

The figure ran off without another word, quickly petrifying a wave of creatures as they came out from one of the gates with his spell book.

Wilson looked at the staff, gulping as he tried to figure out how it worked. He could see one of the sisters, Jenny, stumbling as a pit pig slashed her leg.

"AUGH!"

I need to help them. Come on… Please.

He focused, raising the staff above his head as bright green energy shot out from the top of it, flowers blooming around him.

Winona took note of this, quickly lifting her sister into her arms.

"Hang on, Sis, we'll get you fixed up in a jiffy! The guy figured out how to work that staff I got to train with!"

Winona hurried over, sighing relief as the flowers took their effect, her wounds fading as well as Jenny's.
"Nice work, Doc!" Winona said, giving Wilson a thumb up.

He grinned.

"Anything to help out a teammate."

"Behind you!"

Wilson looked behind him to see a pit pig attempting to charge him. He pointed the staff at it as more energy shot out, more concentrated than before, killing it.

"Huh, these don't drop food. Weird."

The hooded figure, Walter and Laika soon came running up to the circle of flowers, relaxing as the effects took hold.

"I see we have a healer. Good." Laika smiled. "This will be a huge help."

"Usually I have to do that part." Walter sighed in relief.

Wilson sheepishly grinned, rubbing the back of his neck.

"I'm used to this, honestly. I'm the doctor for my village."

"Just be sure to keep it up." the hooded figure said, looking at the rings, seeing sparks flying. "We've got more monsters coming."

Wilson narrowed his eyes.

"Right."

"Just do one thing: Stay out of trouble." Winona said before heading over to another gate, Jenny hurrying after her.

"And if anyone dies, don't worry - it's easy to fix." Walter replied.

Wilson was concerned at this and went to ask him before he too ran off.

Wilson shook his head, keeping his staff ready. He watched as his comrades took on the same creatures from before. The hooded figure petrying them, Winona slamming into them with her hammer, Walter hitting them with hot darts, Jenny distracting some while Laika skewered them with her spear.

He wasn't sure what to do but do as he was told, keeping to the center of the ring with his staff. It hurt to watch them get injured though, worse than he had ever seen in his time in The Constant.

"Wilson!" The hooded figure called. "Summon another flower ring! We need to heal before the next wave comes!"

He jumped but did as told, summoning another flower ring as everyone hurried to the center. This time, the hooded figure was also sporting some pretty severe injuries but they were healing right up.

"Is everyone alright?"

"Hanging in there." Walter panted. "That was a lot of pit pigs."
"So that's what those things are called."

"They're only the grunts. The real challenge will be showing up soon." Laika growled. "I've heard of the old tales. First pit pigs, then snortistes, then scorpeons then borillas then… the champion, the boarrior."

"Great. How do we defeat those?"

"Watch and learn." The hooded figure retorted before getting the attention of a pit pig, running back into the circle as the creature fell asleep immediately. "This is how."

Laika nodded.

"Sleep and then slay. An old tactic." Laika grinned. "Shall we everyone?" She noted the sparks of the rings flying again.

"We shall." Walter adjusted his armor. "Team up Laika?"

"Team up!" She squealed.

Aww…

The fight continued as the other creatures Laika mentioned showed up all in the order she had stated. Wilson kept his distance from the fight, maintaining his healing circle for the fighters to return to for when they were injured. There was a dull pain in Wilson's head but he ignored it for the time being, focusing on keeping his teammates alive.

The pattern continued of the fighters, killing as many as possible before returning to the healing circle. However, when the scorpeons came, that's when the pattern broke a bit.

"AUGH!" Jenny fell to the ground, holding her chest, frothing a bit at the mouth.

"JENNY!" Winona shrieked before snarling at one of the scorpeons. "YOU BEAST! YOU POISONED MY SISTER!"

Winona took them on, getting them away from her sister.

"Wilson! Revive her!" Laika called over her shoulder, distracting scorpeons to keep them far from Jenny.

"Revive?" Wilson looked to Jenny, hurrying over to her, realizing quickly that the poison had done its job. She was lifeless on the floor, eyes glazed over with death. His hands shook as he summoned energy, sending it right into her.

"P-Please work… Please."

I don't know half of these abilities... But I am The Prince. I have to help!

The energy did its work, color returning to Jenny's skin, her eyes having life in them again. She quickly got back up, sighing in relief.

"Thanks, Doc. You're the best." She picked up her darts, heading back into the battle. "COME HERE YOU MONSTERS! JENNY HAS SOME DARTS WITH YOUR NAMES ON THEM!"

Wilson was dumbfounded, looking at this hands.
I... I just brought someone back from the dead.
I.
Just.
Brought.
Someone.
Back.
From.
The.
DEAD.

He didn't have much time to think as Walter hurried by him, trying to avoid a scorpion before he too fell. Wilson quickly revived him, sending him on his way, his mind going at a slower pace than his body. It was like he was on auto-pilot now.

I can revive the dead.

I CAN REVIVE THE DEAD.

A huge roar broke his focus as huge apes came onto the scene.

"Wilson! Stay in the center!" The hooded figure barked. "You do not want to know what it's like be hit by a boarilla!" The hooded figure ducked as one of them tried to hit him. He looked around, noting a staff on the ground that had a red gem in it. He smirked, quickly, lifting it into the air, summoning a meteor from the sky in a flash of light, stunning the boarilla.

"Got ya." He grinned.

Wilson tried to keep aware of his surroundings and his healing circle up. But his headache was getting worse. He took a moment, placing one of his hands to his head, stepping out of it.

Before he knew it a boarilla had smashed the ground, causing it to crack and send him flying into the air.

"AAAAHHHH!"

"Wilson!" Winona shouted.

The hooded figure worked quickly, raising the staff again, shadow clones of himself flying into the air, bringing Wilson down to safety.

"I got him!" He shouted.

Wilson gave him a grateful look, sighing in relief.

"Thank goodness."

The hooded figure nodded, focusing back on the battle, not noting the figure behind him. Pugna smiled as the figure raised its weapon.
"Destroy him, my champion."

Wilson's eyes widened as he saw the weapon come down.

"LOOK OUT!"

It was too late.

The hooded figure gasped as he was hit by a club that was made from the horn of some beast. He was sent flying, skidding across the ground till he finally stopped at the edge of the arena.

"Grand Boarrior." Laika whispered, terror in her eyes as the sight she had beheld.

The Grand Boarrior roared as it gunned for the others, swinging its clubs at them.

"RUN!" Walter screamed. "EVERYONE RUN!"

Wilson gulped, moving towards the hooded figure, noting he wasn't moving much.

"Hang on!"

"Wilson, just revive him later!"

"NO!"

"WILSON DUCK!"

Wilson did as told, avoiding a club that swung right over his head.

"Whoa!"

"Hey, over here ugly!" Jenny called, shooting a dart at its head. "I'm much more interesting than that guy!"

The Grand Boarrior roared before coming after her, leaving Wilson to revive the hooded figure.

Wilson went to do so but stopped as he saw them slowly getting up, their body shaking.

"Augh… Hurry and summon a circle… quickly…” They said, coughing up blood. "Augh… Please…"

Wilson did so concern in his eyes.

"You need to stay down. I'll guard you. Your organs are probably-"

"Shutting down as we speak. I'll be fine."

Wilson narrowed his eyes before summoning a circle around them, the man sighing in relief as the effects from the flowers took hold. He moved to go out but Wilson put an arm in front.

"Stay. You're not better just yet. I can see it your stride."

"They won't be able to handle it without-"

"No. I am not having you dying after that."

"Get. Out. Of. My. WAY!"
The man pushed his way through, going to cast a spell before he was knocked by an earthquake the Grand Boarrior caused, sending both him and Wilson flying and onto their backs.

"NGH!"

"AUGH!"

The figure was sent flying towards the edge closest to Pugna's throne, the battlemaster laughing at his misfortune.

"What's the matter, Prince? This too much for you to handle?"

Wilson looked over, confused, but the hooded figure snarled before he could say anything.

"I'm… not… down… yet… Pugna…"

"Ah, but you're weak. I'm not surprised though. Like father like son. Heh, you really are Tenebrae's heir. When the tension is high you crack and are nothing but a weakling under all that confidence. You're just like him, Magnus Umbra."

The hooded figure gripped at the ground.

"Shut up…"

Wilson looked up, confused.

Prince…?

"Wait what…?"

The hooded figure let out a growl.

"Shut up… Shut up.."

"You're going to lie there while people are dying. Just like all those years ago… with Lux."

The ground beneath the hooded figure's hands cracked as he gripped at it, his fingers becoming long gray claws. He lowered his head, a growl building up in his throat. Cracking noises were heard as his body changed. His feet became large and claw like, a tail grew out… he lifted his head, showing white glowing eyes were beneath the hood.

The fighters stopped in the battle, as did the Grand Boarrior, all in shock at what was happening before them.

"What the…?" Winona whispered.

"I thought… I said…" The hooded figure whipped around, the hood coming off, revealing a face that was gray in skin color with the rest being made of varying shades of dark shadow flames. "YOU LEAVE LUX OUT OF THIS!" He shrieked at Pugna, a roar leaving his mouth that was deafening to anyone who could hear, making them cover their ears immediately.

Wilson cringed, doing what he could to protect his hearing. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the sight though. What… was this thing?

The once hooded figure let out another shriek before going straight for the Grand Boarrior, digging his claws right into its armor, slashing at it a million times till it fell to the ground before the
fighters, its clubs falling to the side.

The creature panted before letting out another shriek, stepping on the head of the now slain Grand Boarrior. The others backed away, not sure if they should be fearing for their lives.

The creature looked to the others before looking to Pugna, growling at him.

"It's over Pugna. You've lost. Now keep your end of the bargain!"

He growled. But a deal was a deal. He raised his club.

"Guards! Open the gateway!"

The way they had come in came a lit with dark flames. The figure made his way over, gesturing for the others to follow. They didn't dare question.

They passed through the flames. The area around them became cooler as the scene changed from one of molten lava and stone to one of wet stone and caverns. They were on a platform that had a large portal on it that was now powered off, the way behind them closing.

"We… We survived…" Jenny sighed in relief, before looking at herself. "And I got my old clothes back!" She grinned, twirling in her now restored skirt. "Thank goodness!"

Winona grinned a bit, adjusting the bandana on her head.

"Heh… Neat."

Wilson looked at himself as well, seeing his regular attire was now on him. He sighed in relief, adjusting his gloves.

"Glad I didn't lose these."

Though his relief soon faded into curiosity, noting the creature still looked the same as he had in the ring save now he was in a different garb entirely. He was now adorned with a cloak and crown, something that was fit for a prince. Laika was looking up at him in awe and wonder before she bowed.

"I owe you my life, Magnus Umbra. I am honored I got to fight beside you."

He gave her a gentle look, bowing in return.

"I was honored to fight beside you, Laika. Your people will be so proud of you I assure you. You are now a champion of the Forge."

Laika looked up at him, her face beaming.

"Thank you."

He nodded before cringing, his form shifting. His tail dissipated, his claws became normal hands, his garb faded into that of black slacks, a light purple vest, tie and a dark purple trench coat, shadow flames became silver hair and dark grey skin became flesh colored. Once it was over he fell to his knees, panting.

"Augh… I haven't taken that form in years."

Laika knelt beside him.
"You poor thing."

Wilson hurried over to see if he could help, his eyes widening as he realized he recognized the man before him, albeit he looked rather different from the last time he saw him.

"... MAXWELL!??"

Maxwell looked up at him, an exhausted look in his features.

"Nice to see you again too, Higgsbury." His eyes rolled into the back of his head before he fell over groaning.

Wilson knelt beside him, pushing aside his disbelief looking him over.

"And he's completely unconscious. We need to get him somewhere safer so I can get a better look."

The others came running over.

"I'm going to say this now, I'm willing to help but I've got quite the word to have with this man."

"As do I." Jenny said, crossing her arms.

"Same." Walter narrowed his eyes. "But… we do owe him for letting us not die so best to return the favor."

Wilson nodded.

"I know place we can go." Laika said. "I know some people who have equipment that could help."

"Let's get him there then."

Winona stepped up, rolling her sleeves up.

"Let me carry him."

Wilson nodded, stepping back, allowing her to do so. He looked to Laika.

"Lead the way."

Laika nodded, heading down a path, the others following right after her.

Wilson took a deep breath bringing up the rear.

There was still much he had to learn about this world.

And he was going to find out.

But for now, I need to heal.
An Unlikely Alliance

Something was amiss in The Constant. Wickerbottom just couldn't figure out what it was though and why it was happening.

First we have a dangerous stranger appear, then Wilson goes missing and William not too long after? What is going on here?

She sighed, rubbing her temples, looking down at the Codex Umbra before her on the desk she was sitting at. She was hoping maybe there would be some answers to the current situation but yet she started to wonder if it was just a waste of time.

Ugh… I can't think straight. This headache from the nightmare monsters is killing me so clearly something is bothering them and with Wilson AND William going missing just as this is happening there is probably some connection.

"I see you're aware of the situation too, aren't you, Your Highness?"

Wickerbottom's head snapped to the side, seeing a woman who resembled Charlie approach, with smaller versions of the giants clinging to the ends of the skirt of the dress she was wearing. Wickerbottom didn't need to ask questions to know who this was.

The Grue... But why does she look so different now?

Wickerbottom shook her head, raising a hand to defend herself with magic but then took note of Scarlet's stance and expression. She showed no sign of hostility. Instead, she saw sorrow in the woman's amber eyes and her stance was more so protective of the little creatures grabbing at her dress.

"Why have you come to me, Grue?" Wickerbottom asked, standing up fully.

"Scarlet." She corrected. "My name is now Scarlet."

"I shall respect that but answer my question." Wickerbottom narrowed her eyes. "Why have you come here?"

I'll ask about the changes later.

Scarlet was silent, staring at her before bowing in respect.

"Your Highness... I am in dire need of your help. Something terrible has come upon our beloved Constant."

Wickerbottom eyes widened.

"Pardon?"

Is... Is she serious?

Wickerbottom stared at her for a moment, seeing no falters in Scarlet's pleading look.

... She's serious.

"This isn't a trick, Your Highness." Scarlet bowed again. "I was never one for tricks. That was
Maxy's style, not mine. What I speak is the absolute truth." She looked Wickerbottom directly in the eyes. "Does the name Cato ring any bells?"

Wickerbottom's blood went cold. She hadn't heard the name in over 20 years.

"Yes." Wickerbottom said, practically hissed. "What about that snake?"

"He's come back. He finally broke the man he's been trying to fully possess for the past nearly 30 years. His power combined with that man has given abilities like Max and I have never seen. It's bad, from combat magic to teleportation. He might even be stronger than Maxwell ever was during his time as king but regardless, if that's true, he is posing a threat against us. I don't know what his plans are but some things are clear. He wants Max dead and he wants the throne and he will do whatever it takes to get it."

Wickerbottom remained silent, taking all this information in.

_The headaches the nightmare monsters have been giving me… The stranger… The sudden disappearance of William and Wilson… Cato resurfacing just as this all happens._

Her hands clenched into fists.

_That heartless monster! He's trying to start a war!_

"I know we're not allies of any sort but I beg you, please, help me." She looked to the giants at her skirt, kneeling to their level, holding them close. "Help us. Maxwell has suddenly disappeared and we fear Cato has done something to him. I haven't been able to find him anywhere. I can't sense him. I can't afford to lose him. I need him and our giants need him. Cato is not just a threat to us, so please… just this once, I am willing to let by gones be by gones if it means I can get Max back and we can defeat this monster once and for all. It would benefit both of our causes if we do."

Wickerbottom thought about it for a moment before kneeling to Scarlet's level, helping her to her feet.

"We both have scores to settle with that snake. I see no reason for us not to work together."

Scarlet's eyes lit up, tears brimming in them.

"Thank you… Thank you, Your Highness. I'll do whatever I can."

"Which I'm sure is plenty." Wickerbottom looked her over. "Seems you have new powers yourself, considering your appearance."

"Courtesy of my King." Scarlet smiled, fingering her dress. "As his knight and queen, it only makes sense I'm well equipped. Still figuring out the new powers though."

"I think I could assist." Wickerbottom smiled, looking to the Codex Umbra. "That book might have some answers we're missing."

Scarlet nodded.

"I believe so. Maxy had quite a lot put into it. Spells I don't think he even recalls putting in there."

One of the giants tugged at her skirt, Scarlet picking them up quickly.

"Shh, Wynter. I got you."
Wickerbottom eyed the giants, humming in thought.

"Would they like to help too?"

The other giants below all squeaked, jumping up and down.

"They do but they're still so weak and Max has been worried about their forms staying stable. Cato did quite the number on all of them."

Wickerbottom picked up the Codex Umbra, eying the page she had been looking at.

"Well… the page I was on mentioned some transformative spells and some others that might be useful if done correctly. I wasn't sure about attempting them since one magic user, even a queen might not be able to pull it off… But two magic users who just happen to be queens…"

Scarlet grinned, her fangs showing.

"I like the sound of that." She looked to the deerclops fawn in her arms. "What do you say?"

He nodded, squeaking quietly.

"He says let's do it." She set him down, going to Wickerbottom's side, glancing at the spell. "Let's see now." She closed her eyes, focusing as shadow magic gathered in her hands.

Wickerbottom did the same, chanting the spell in the book in the ancient tongue, Scarlet joining in. Once the chant ended, the magic came around Wynter, his form being engulfed in the magic.

He became completely black as his form changed. His legs became longer and as did his arms. His form as whole grew bigger but not into a form that was familiar to anyone. His form soon landed on the ground, the magic around him dissipating to reveal what he had become.

Scarlet and Wickerbottom couldn't believe their eyes. Before them was a young man who was taller than both of them with snowy white hair and antlers growing out of the top of his head. He only had one eye visible, his other covered by his bangs. He was dressed in a coat that was a pale blue grey in color and had a furry collar. He opened his one eye slowly, looking to the two women, worry present in his features.

"Did… Did it work…?" He spoke, covering his mouth, surprised at being able to speak. "W-What happened…?"

Scarlet covered her own mouth, stunned, relief in her eyes. Part of her had been concerned something would happen to him.

"Oh, Wynter, thank goodness!" She went up to him looking him over. "Look at you.. You're a human -erm sort of."

Wynter looked at himself, shock coming to his one eye.

"W-Whoa… I… I… I wasn't expecting this."

Wickerbottom brought a hand to her chin.

"Seems the spell we used chose the next best stable form for you. I was expecting your original giant form but guess this was the one we got. You might be able to shift to your true form but probably not for very long. Either way… Seems you've now become a man monster hybrid. Heh… You kind of resemble Maxwell now that I think about it."
Wynter rubbed the back of his neck, pausing as he looked at his hands, mesmerized.

"Y-Yeah… I guess so."

"He does take after his father." Scarlet remarked fondly. "And I don't think I would've liked it if he was a giant right off the bat. I've gotten pretty attached."

"Mother…"

Wickerbottom chuckled.

"I see your relationship with Max is more than a knight now. This is quite a surprise, especially the relationship you now share with the giants."

"It was odd at first but… we realized how much we actually cared about each other. I was mad for a good while at Max but I couldn't stay mad forever. He's all I ever had and… anything that happened, I don't excuse him but he's trying to be better than he was."

"Considering you stand here today looking to get him back and protect him."

Scarlet smiled, a gentle look in her eyes.

"Yes. He's my everything." She looked to Wynter and the others. "They're my world."

Wynter smiled, bringing his arms around her.

"And you're our world, Mother. Both you and Father."

Scarlet nuzzled him, kissing his head.

"And we love you very much."

The other giants came up to Wynter, looking up at him in wonder before looking to Scarlet and Wickerbottom, pouting.

"I guess they want turns too."

"Indeed." Scarlet pulled away from Wynter, grinning at Wickerbottom. "I believe we have work to do."

"We do. I'm going to need your help with someone else in regards to shapeshifting but we'll start with your children. Then after we get some other matters settled… We hunt down the snake. Deal?"

"It's a deal." She looked to the giants. "Alright little ones you ready?"

They gave a loud squeak.

"Let's do it!"
Residents of the Underground

It was dark underground in the caves. Yet somehow, the Grue didn't attack them like Wilson thought she might, now that she didn't have Charlie making her hesitate.

Laika guided the way easily in the dark, sometimes climbing along the cave walls to get her momentum going.

Maxwell was still unconscious, though not without sounds of pain whenever he was jostled by any of their movements.

"I swear when we arrive to wherever Laika is taking us he's getting a full once over." Wilson said.

"Ah, angry medic. Know that one." Winona chuckled, looking down at the unconscious man.
"Geeze… I didn't realize it was him under that hood. I never knew he could fight like that. Charlie always described him as calm and charismatic in her letters."

Wilson stopped completely, his eyes going as wide as plates.

"EXCUSE ME!?" He yelled as it echoed down the cave wall.

"Yeah." Jenny looked behind her at him. "Our sister was always talking about him. I got to meet him a few times but Winnie lived out in the sticks."

"It was a nice cabin!"

Wilson looked at both of them, noting their eye colors were very similar to that of the Charlie he knew very well.

"This sister of yours, brown eyes, always wears her hair in a specialized bun of sorts, is rather short and wears a rose in her hair as well?"

"THAT'S THE ONE!" Both women responded, stunned.

"How do you know?"

Wilson gave a sheepish look.

"She's part of my village."

Winona and Jenny looked at each other before looking to Wilson, nearly charging the man as they stepped in front of him, giving him what could only be described as death stares.

"WHERE IS SHE AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HER!?"

Wilson held up his hands in defense.

"She's back at the village I live in and I haven't done anything to her, save change her back to normal from being the Grue which was a while ago. She's perfectly healthy and taking care of a newborn."

Winona looked to Jenny who grabbed Wilson by his vest, shaking him rather violently.

"UWAH!"
"WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY THAT BEFORE!?!"
"UWAH! I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE RELATED!"
"WHAT IS IT? BOY? GIRL?!?"

Yep. Definitely Charlie's siblings. They scream like she does!

"Can you please let me go!? I'll tell you everything but you're making it hard to breathe!"

And strong just like her despite the shortness for this one!

Jenny set him down, taking a deep breath.

"Sorry just… I haven't seen my sister in years and only now do I hear she's okay and well."

"We thought she was gone for good." Winona sighed, glaring a bit at the man in her arms. "We thought he had done something horrible to her and we were right but I guess… things worked out because of whatever you did." She looked to Wilson. "Though back to Jenny's question. Boy or girl and more importantly, who's the father?"

Wilson dusted himself, off, clearing his throat.

"It's a baby girl named Rose and the father is William Carter, Charlie's husband."

They looked to each other silently.

"... WE MISSED THE WEDDING!?"

Wilson clamped his hands over his ears.

"Ah, ah!"

"Gosh dangit Charlie!" Winona shook her head. "She is SO giving us all the details when we see her and I call dibs on holding the baby first Jenny!"

"Oh no, I get first dibs!"

"Oh no, I'M the oldest."

"And I'm going to be making that baby most of her first clothes when I get ahold of some nice fabric and thread!"

Wilson groaned, bringing a hand to his face.

This isn't ending anytime soon, is it?

"Just let them talk."

Wilson looked behind him to see Walter, giving a grin, chuckling.

"It's just sisters being sisters."

"You got any yourself?"

"One."
"I see…" Wilson couldn't help but stare at the man.

It was still baffling to see what could pass for a twin of himself if it weren't for the minor differences from the color of his hair, eyes and height.

"Something the matter?" Walter asked, tilting his head. "You're looking at me like I have two heads."

"Are we sure you're not my doppelganger?" He asked, giving a genuinely curious look. "We look so similar."

"That's something I was wondering about as well." Walter brought a hand to his chin. "I just wasn't sure how to ask without being rude. Though I admit, you remind me of my Uncle Percival. He had eyes like yours."

"E-Excuse me?" Wilson's eyes were wide. "Percival… Higgsbury?"

"Yes! That's the one! My mother is his little sister."

Wilson was silent for a moment as it clicked in his head.

"That's right, Annalise Higgsbury. Much much younger than Percival but she had a baby when I was around 8 years old." Wilson's eyes got wider. "That was you!"

Walter rubbed the back of his neck.

"I would confirm that if I could even remember the day I was born. Regardless, Mother always mentioned my cousin's son, Wilson, since Percival talked about him so much."

"Y-Yes, that was me. Percival helped my mother raise me." Wilson adjusted his gloves. "This is quite the surprise."

"No kidding but that would explain why we look alike, especially in the hair department. It's the Higgsbury genes as my mother would call it."

"Quite." Wilson chuckled. "So that makes you my first cousin… though honestly let's just keep at it cousins since we seem to be close in age."

"Agreed. Besides, my actual cousin is way older than me so honestly he's more like my uncle." Walter chuckled, rubbing his eyes, wiping away a tear. "Oh man, when I find Willow I need you to meet her. She'll flip seeing a copy of me!"

Now Wilson got a stunned look again.

"... Does she have pigtails most of the time, carry a lighter?"

"Her hair was usually down when I knew her but yes..." Walter's eyes grew wide as well. "... No way."

"I met her a while ago and well… we've been companions for quite some time now. She's also back in the same village Charlie is."

"Hah." He laughed. "Well, I'm so glad to hear she's safe. She's like a sister to me - surrogate sister."

"This… Explains a few things."
"Like what?"

Wilson rubbed the back of his neck.

"I can't really think of all of them at the moment but it would explain why she probably trusted me so much when we met… Ugh… So many questions. Regardless, I assure you she's safe and sound. I've been doing my best to help her both physically and mentally. Last thing I'd ever want is for her to get her." Wilson smiled a bit. "She means too much to me for me to allow that to happen."

Walter smiled, giving a grateful look.

"That's a relief to hear. I can't wait to see her again."

"Don't know what she'll do with two Higgsbury "dorks" as she prefers."

"We'll find out."

"Hey guys!" Laika called out. "We're at the end of the tunnel!"

"Thank goodness, I was getting claustrophobic." Winona sighed in relief, picking up her pace. "Race ya Jenny!"

Jenny laughed, following after her sister.

"You got a dead weight I'm so gonna beat ya!"

Wilson chuckled, looking to Walter.

"Just so I'm not stunned again is there anything else I should know about anyone else? Because I've found out two people are related to woman back in my camp and that I have a cousin who just happened to know the woman I love-" Wilson brought a hand over his mouth. "I mean care about."

Walter hummed in thought.

"Well, I was the kitchen boy for the asylum Willow was trapped in. She didn't make the deal with the devil over there. I did."

"I see…"

Walter nodded before smirking.

"And don't think I heard that last bit. So… you two are courting?"

Wilson turned bright red before slowly nodding.

"Actually… We're married."

Walter's eyes widened in shock.

"EH!?"

"Y-Yes!" Wilson braced himself for another reaction like Jenny and Winona's… only to have Walter burst out laughing.

"Of course! Of course, that spitfire would get married and I miss it!"

Wilson chuckled, grinning sheepishly.
"Well, she is quite the woman."

Walter grinned.

"I agree and thank you caring for her when I couldn't and... I'm glad she has someone special in her life but know this." Walter gave a mock glare. "Make her cry, you better watch your back for flying frying pans."

Wilson swallowed hard.

"Y-Yes-sir!"

"Good." Walter laughed. "Now, come on, let's get out of this tunnel!"

They hurried out, soon finding themselves on a plateau that was surrounded by massive caverns and had light pouring in from the surface through cracks in the ceiling. Wilson took note of what was on the plateau. There was small base set up with a cabin made of stone and wood. Around the cabin were gardens, a dedicated research area with a science machine and alchemy engine. A nice humble little base.

The others were waiting at the gate entry of the base as Walter and Wilson approached.

"You two are so slow." Jenny giggled.

"What, we were just enjoying the scenery." Walter grinned.

Laika giggled.

"You hoomons are silly. I'll go see if my friends are home."

Laika climbed over the gate, making her way over to the cabin before knocking on the door.

"Robert? Andrea? Are you home?"

The door opened as a man with dark hair and glasses appeared. He smiled as he took her image in.

"Laika, so good to see you. It's been awhile!"

Before Laika could response, a little blur rushed past the man as Laika caught a very excited toddler.

"AUNTIE LAI LAI!"

"CIEL!" She laughed, holding the child close to her. "Oh, I've missed you!"

"Missed you too!"

Laika sighed happily, before looking up at Robert.

"Ehehe? Sorry to drop in like this, but have an emergency."

Robert followed her gaze to the group, his own eyes widening.

"Survivors... More of us."

"Yeah, I met them where I was. One of them you might recognize. Hey, Nona!"
Winona stepped forward as Robert let out a sharp gasp.

"Get him inside now!"

They hurried inside, Winona laying Maxwell out on the bed where Robert's supplies was. The man hurried about, grabbing what he could.

"What on Earth happened?!"

Wilson hurried forward, getting right to work with examining Maxwell's injuries.

"It's a long… very long story. For now, let's just focus on work."

"Very well." Robert nodded, assisting Wilson in his task.

Laika came forward, Ciel on her back.

"Alright, anything else I can do to help?"

"We need some hot water. Can you get that going?" Wilson asked as she hurried to do as asked.

Wilson rolled his sleeves up more, getting right to work.

Alright, just time to be a doctor.

Wilson got right to work, examining Maxwell's injuries. He had bruises on his chest, indicating minor internal bleeding and his arms had cuts on them, likely leftover injuries from his battle in The Forge.

*Good thing he's unconscious. This will not be a pleasant treatment.*

"Here." Robert offered him the tools he needed. "Do what you need to do."

"Thank you." Wilson got out what he needed, starting the treatment. "Do you happen to have any healing salve or honey poultice?"

"I do. I'll go get those right away." Robert nodded, hurrying off.

Wilson fell quiet as he worked, trying to process everything. Here he was, helping a person whom a year ago he would've had no problem with leaving somewhere to die.

*But he helped me… And he saved my life. I owe it to him… and I was never ruthless anyways. It's not my nature.*

Robert came back, joining him as they finished patching Maxwell up.

"Thank you."

"Anytime. Quite the surprise, honestly."

"And I apologize for barging in."

Robert smiled.

"Nonsense. Friends of Laika are friends of mine. Besides… I know a Higgsbury when I see one."

… I'm just getting all kinds of questions answered today.
Where am I…?

Maxwell wasn't sure where he was. All he knew was how sore and tired he felt.

Wherever he was, it was soft and someone had covered him with some type of blanket. He could faintly hear voices.

What's going on...? Come on, open your eyes...

It took him a minute or so before he could finally force his eyes open, seeing he was in a room filled with alchemic equipment along with a fairly extensive lab set up. He could see an open door leading to a living room that was lit with glowing crystals.

"Where…?"

"Maxwell?"

He looked up, seeing Wilson standing over him, worry in his eyes.

"With us?"

Maxwell nodded slowly.

"Mostly... Where are we? What happened?"

"You fell unconscious when we left the Forge. Laika lead us down to some people she knew who said they could let me treat you in their home. You had some rather severe damage, Maxwell."

"How bad...?" Maxwell coughed a bit. "Ugh... How do you humans deal with pain?"

Wilson shrugged.

"A lot of means. Some worse than others." He grabbed a glass of water, handing it to him. "You had internal bleeding, your arms were full of cuts and you had some good slashes across the chest as well. Honestly, I was surprised nothing was broken."

That sounds familiar...

"I am stunned he didn't manage to break your arm during that scuffle, My King."

A little TOO familiar.

Maxwell took the glass, sitting up, downing the water quickly.

"Well... I'm alive... Thanks to you, I'm assuming."

... NOW I OWE HIM TWICE! DANGIT!

"Yes." Wilson grinned a bit. "I have learned quite a few things. Especially from someone you're familiar with."

"I'm mildly afraid to ask."
"Robert Wagstaff ring a bell?"

"Oh." Maxwell visibly relaxed. "Ah, he's a good one… So, what else?"

Wilson shrugged.

"Well, you're alive and now that you're awake… I've got quite a few questions and as do my companions but I get to go first."

Maxwell sighed.

"Seeing as I owe you for saving my life I shall answer whatever questions you have for me just keep them short. 20 words or less."

Wilson smirked.

"Very well." His expression turned serious. "Why did you get drafted into The Forge and how did we get involved? I haven't seen YOU in over nine months!"

Maxwell rubbed one of his temples.

"And I was doing so well with a keeping a low profile." Maxwell sighed. "I was brought to The Forge by an old enemy of mine who is bent on me being dead by any means necessary and as for why he brought you and the others, I'm assuming he's just having his fun when it comes to the other four but you, he probably wants you out of his way."

"Because now I'm the Prince and not you. Though Pugna either doesn't care or he didn't know that there was a new Queen in power."

"Oh, he didn't know. And to be frank, did you WANT him to know? Because I was under the impression you were a reluctant royal."

"I would rather he didn't but what confuses me is why he called YOU "Prince". You've never held that title in your life… Right?"

Maxwell groaned.

"Technically I have but not for very long and he honestly was calling me that as a means of insulting me rather than just addressing me by a title."

"Ah." Wilson narrowed his eyes. "One final question… Well two. Though…" He eyed Maxwell's hands. "You have to promise to not strangle me."

"I'm too sore to do any attacking. You could say I look like something that came out of a tomb AFTER a flood and I wouldn't be able to."

Even with that, Wilson still took a few steps back.

"... Magnus Umbra?"

Maxwell tensed up at this.

"... You have no idea how much I resent that name." He gripped at the blanket, glaring at Wilson, a bit of a white glow to his eyes. "You so much as call me that again I will guarantee to strangle you later when I'm not weak, Scientist."
Wilson narrowed his eyes.

"If you try, I'll give you another incision like I did last year. I will respect your choice - but I will defend myself."

Maxwell snorted, the glow from his eyes fading.

"Fair enough… What about the name are you curious about though since you dared to bring it up?"

"Because of the other name you had a meltdown over and gained or at least worsened your injuries by hearing mocked."

"Spit it out Higgsbury."

"Lux."

Maxwell froze up, lowering his head, his hands for a moment taking on their shadow look again.

"Brother… Help me!"

Maxwell took a deep breath, pushing that memory from his mind, getting his hands to change back to normal.

"… Magnus Lux was a being who existed long before any of you came along. A friendly spirit of light. Very child like yet mature. Knew how to be serious but always loved making others laugh. He was smart but also naive… He was innocent." Maxwell closed his eyes. "He did nothing wrong…. Nothing."

"Lux, just hang in there! I… I can fix this!"

A tear left one of Maxwell's eyes.

"Yet those monsters that were supposed to be loyal to me attacked him when we fought with Pugna." He gave a bitter laugh. "We were defending Them yet They turned on us because They hated the light…"

Wilson frowned, sympathy coming to his eyes. He laid a hand on Maxwell's shoulder.

"I am so sorry for your loss Maxwell. I'm sorry I pried."

"Wasn't your fault They tried to kill him." Maxwell's shoulders shook a bit. "I did what I could but in the end I couldn't get his body to stabilize… He's still here but I can't talk to him. He just provides power to those he possesses." He let out another bitter laugh. "I forgot how much it hurt losing him… I guess I do know how William felt when I took Jack from him… Haha… I was no better than the monsters that took Lux for me…" He held his head. "They made me think I was king but I never was… I could never be king. I was… and will always be the one to clean up Tenebrae's mess."

Wilson frowned, going quiet, there was still questions he had… but he didn't feel right asking.

It would be like kicking someone when they were down.

"I'm sorry."

Maxwell sighed, bringing his hands away from his head.
"It's just the life I was given... Do you have any other questions, Scientist?"

"None. Well... One. Do you want anything to eat?"

Maxwell thought about it for a moment before answering.

"... Soup. Just something warm, please."

Wilson nodded.

"Right away."

There was some noise outside as both looked to each other confused.

"I KILLED IT, FINALLY!" Laika was heard yelling.

"... I'm going to go find out what that was about."

"Probably whatever's for dinner then."

Wilson nodded before leaving the man by himself. Outside, Wilson saw Laika standing over a plant that looked like it had legs and arms that was lying on the ground with x's for eyes.

"Haha! The annoying thing has been slain!"

Wilson got a bewildered look, grabbing a stick and poking the plant.

"What... was it?"

"Mandrake." Walter answered, picking it up by the leaves. "Great plant for healing properties but heavens above are they annoying when they're still alive."

"Quite." Robert had his hands over his ears, moving them away. "I can finally hear myself think. Looks like Mandrake soup tonight. Andrea will be quite pleased she didn't have to hunt it this time."

"And Maxwell did ask for some soup. If it has healing properties it should help his recovery as well."

"And when you're as beaten up as he is sometimes that's all you can handle."

"So, he's awake huh?" Winona cracked her knuckles. "I wouldn't mind having a word with good ol' Needle Nose about what he did to Charlie."

"As would I." Jenny said, crossing her arms.

Wilson crossed his arms.

"Alright, what are your blood types then?"

They gave him a confused look.

"Because if you insist on causing him harm, I'm going to ask a pint of blood from both of you to put back into him then." He gave a look that read DOOM. "Try me."

Robert narrowed his own eyes.
"And if you wake Ciel up from his nap with violence, I will gladly throw you both to the cave spiders."

Both sisters found themselves stepping back, cowering a bit.

"Geeze, you remind me of Jack!"

Wilson grinned.

"Good."

"Fine, fine, we'll leave him alone." Winona gave a frustrated sigh. "But I still want answers for some stuff. For now, I'll help make dinner."

"Same."

"Then right this way ladies!" Walter called as he headed inside to the kitchen.

The sisters headed over, Laika joining them as well. Robert kept off to the side, chuckling.

"What an energetic group."

Wilson chuckled nodding in agreement.

"They'll be quite the addition." He looked to Robert. "So… you know you could join us up there."

"I appreciate the offer, but this place has become my home. Not the ideal place to start a family, but my wife and I are happy here. Ciel's thriving. Everything we have here, from the garden where my wife performs her spells, to our humble little home is all we need." He explained. "Leaving… would be leaving a piece of us behind too."

"I understand." Wilson smiled. "I just thought I'd offer."

"Thank you." Robert chuckled, getting a better look at Wilson, shaking his head. "It's unbelievable."

"What?"

"Sorry just can't get over how much you look like Percival."

He grinned sheepishly.

"All good honestly… I didn't realize he still had people he knew around… Especially so… young?"

Robert laughed.

"I'm actually in my 50's. I was 18 when I was under his teachings. I just look young thanks to Maxwell rejuvenating me a little after he saved me from a factory fire about two years ago by this world's standards."

Wilson gave a curious look.

"He's… more than meets the eye isn't he?"

"How much did Percival tell you about when he met Melinda?"
"He couldn't tell me much since he left out the fact Grandmother was from another world."

"Understandable, especially with what happened to Ed." Robert sighed. "Tried to cut ties as much as they could yet it all came back anyway." Robert shook his head. "Maxwell is an interesting fellow. He has a kind side but the smugness does cause problems… but he isn't without mercy, however. He gave me a chance to live and saved others. But I know he's also done awful things. I was not blind to this. It seems it's changed however."

"He had a bit of a fall from grace as it were." Wilson rubbed the back of his neck. "I don't know if you know this but Grandmother is queen the now."

Robert choked a bit, looking to Wilson.

"You're joking."

"I'm not."

Robert was silent for a moment before he started laughing.

"Well I'll be darned! Maxwell's old archivist succeeded him!"

Wilson laughed.

"And she has the Codex! It only responds to me or her now!"

"BAHAHAHA!" Robert wiped one of his eyes. "Well, what a twist of events. I'm sure she'll do a great job as queen."

"She has so far but now we just have another situation on our hands." Wilson brought a hand to his head as he realized something. "Doh! I forgot! I didn't even bother to ask Maxwell who brought me and the others to The Forge! He mentioned an enemy of his drafted us but I didn't get a name!"

"Well, better late than never. Go ask him."

Wilson nodded, hurrying back inside, hearing laughter coming from Maxwell's resting area. Sitting on the bed, as Maxwell created and played with shadow images, was Robert's young son. Maxwell had a gentle look in his eyes as he created his illusions. Ciel's elongated ears twitched as he squealed, clapping.

"More! More!"

"As the young man wishes."

"Maxwell?" Wilson asked, trying to hide his surprise at the interaction. He supposed it shouldn't have shocked him as much since Sabra mentioned to him many times by now how gentle Maxwell had been with him as a young child… It was still bizarre.

"Is soup ready yet?" he asked, not even looking up from his creations. "Because if not, I have a performance to finish."

"Yeah!" Ciel giggled.

"Not yet. I have a question."

Maxwell gave him a look that reminded him a bit too much of when the children at the camp were scolded. Ciel's ears folded down as the illusions vanished, a similar look appearing on his face,
making Wilson wince.

"Another one?"

"I meant to ask earlier but I got caught up in my other questions. Who was the person who sent us to The Forge? What do they want from us?"

Maxwell sighed, setting Ciel on the floor.

"Go see if your mother's returned from foraging yet, hm?"

"Okay…" Ciel sighed, heading out of the room. Once they were sure the child was out of sight, Maxwell looked back to Wilson.

"Okay, I can answer that." His eyes narrowed. "His name is Cato and what he wants is this world to bow down before his feet whether he has to force it do so or not."
"Bon appetit everyone!"

William sighed happily as he dug into his meal. It had taken him and Walani quite a while to reach their destination but now they were all settled into the camp she and her companions had set up. He was never more grateful for the taste of soup.

"Ah… this is great." He looked to the chef of the camp. "Merci, Warly."

Warly grinned, serving up everyone else.

"De rein." He handed a bowl to Walani. "Here you go, Walani."

"Thanks, Warly, you're the best." Walani dug in, grinning at the taste. "Perfect. Much better than what Woodlegs tried to cook last week."

"Yar! I've never cooked a doydoy before! Not my fault I gave us food poisoning!" Woodlegs crossed his arms, giving an annoyed look. "I'm a pirate not a chef!"

Warly rolled his eyes, giving him his share.

"You said the same thing when you tried cooking wobsters. Both times raw beyond belief they could've just walked out of here."

Woodlegs grumbled, taking his share.

"Stupid things were trying to kill me last time."

Walani snorted.

"Had to call upon the wobster killer that is Warly before they got your beard."

Warly rubbed the back of his neck.

"Not that nickname again."

"What? You are!"

William snickered.

"You certainly are a lively bunch aren't you?"

Walani grinned.

"Usually. Should've heard Warly the first time something raw was served."

Warly grinned, sitting down with his bowl of soup.

"I was not going to let my companions eat and get sick let alone settle for rubbish. They deserve the best to eat, everyone does." Warly dug into his soup, sighing happily. "Ah… Just the right amount of seasoning."

"This is very good." William nodded. "Probably some of the best I had."
"Merci." Warly chuckled. "Still striving to improve but that's the life of a chef. Well, least for me that's how it is. I didn't get to eat a lot of good food growing up so it's why I won't settle for less than excellent quality."

Walani elbowed him a little in the stomach.

"But you are willing to accept when sometimes simple is all we got right?"

Warly grinned sheepishly.

"Ehehe… Yes. Did I mention I'm still sorry about snapping at you about rations?"

"You have and I still get to hold it over your head, dork."

William snickered.

"Dork is something that seems to go around survivor camps."

"Who's the dork of your camp?" Walani asked.

"Well, I wouldn't call us a camp. We're a village now but as for who holds the title of dork… sometimes it's me, sometimes it's our leader, Wilson, then sometimes it's just anyone who did something stupid or silly. It gets passed around."

"Got ya." Warly got curious look. "How many people are in your village?"

William hummed in thought for a minute, taking a moment to count up the people back in The Haven.

"Hm… About 17 people including myself. Our most recent addition being my daughter. That's just the village. There's a whole city of people, ranging in the hundreds."

"Wow, that's a lot!" Walani exclaimed. "And there are no monsters?"

"None that we know of. We brought some animals in from here like beefalo but aside from that, none."

"Lucky. We still get hounds."

"Well, you are welcome to join us in our village if you like. I'm sure Wilson would be more than happy to build you guys houses to live in."

Woodlegs gave a smile before shaking his head.

"As nice as that would be these islands here are me home."

"Huh?" William got a confused look. "But… isn't it dangerous here?"

"Yar but I can handle it. I have been for the past who knows how long. I was brought here as a young aspiring lad and have been sailing these seas ever since. I know this place like the back of me hand and am the best sailor King Maxwell ever saw!"

William was taken aback by this before something rushed to his head. A vision flashed before his eyes of a much younger version of the man standing before Maxwell, shaking hands with him.

"I'll come back every so often to rejuvenate you. All I ask if you keep sailing around and mapping
"these lands out for me."

"Ye got yerself a deal, Yer Highness!"

So he was one of the few who came willingly and happily to this world...

"Actually." Woodlegs said, breaking William out of the vision. "Ye look awfully familiar now that I look at ye."

William got a nervous, look, fidgeting with his glasses.

"W-Whatever do you mean?"

I know exactly what he means! He's probably seen him not too long ago!

"Yer facial structure..." Woodlegs scratched at his beard. "If not for them specs, I would just think yer Maxwell."

Warly's eyes got wide at he looked at William, the man shrinking back.

"Come to think of it he does."

"I-It's hard to explain. But I..." William swallowed hard. "I..."

Oh, please don't turn on me!

"It's because Maxwell and him were once joined together." Walani said casually. "Maxwell possessed people and some other kind of weird hoodoo so he could do what he did and William happened to be one of 'em. They ain't fused together anymore so this guy isn't Maxwell. He's just William and that's that."

Warly looked to Walani dumbfounded before looking to William.

"That's... basically it." William said. "I mean I wouldn't word it like that but... that's what happened."

"Goodness..."

"I-I am sorry though for any grief that I may have helped cause you all though by bringing you here."

"Grief? Hardly." Walani chuckled.

"Huh...?" William gave a confused look.

"Well, some but Walani isn't joking." Warly gave a gentle look. "We were brought here because we wanted a new start and well... Maxwell came at the right time for all of us. This place here, while rough and tumble, has been something we've appreciated very much. Maxwell gave us all the second chances we were looking for. A new home... and a family." Warly looked to his companions. "We couldn't be happier."

"Darn right." Walani smiled. "So... you got nothing to be sorry for, William. If anything, you did help bring us together. So, honestly, we just owe you a thank you." Walani got up, going over to William and squeezing his shoulder. "We cool, okay?" Walani held up a curled up fist to William.

William looked at the fist, unsure of what to do or least unsure if he should duck or not.
"Bump your fist with hers." Jack whispered into his ear. "I know it's strange but it's just something Walani does."

William nodded, doing as told.

"Y-Yes, I supposed we are "cool"." 

Walani grinned.

"Good. Now, let's see about getting you back to your fam on the mainland."

"Appreciate it."

"Yar." Woodlegs hopped up. "I know a way back to the mainland but it's going to take quite a bit of time sailing wise and we're gonna need a bigger boat." He grinned. "Thankfully, I got me a bigger boat."

"You don't get seasick, do you?" Warly asked. "Because something tells me it's going to a long trip."

William shook his head.

"No. I've sailed continents and came out just fine."

"Good to know." Warly got up. "Though before we do any sailing, we're gonna need to stock up on food that will last a week."

"Nar, just three days." Woodlegs grinned. "Ya see, we're not looking for land."

"Then what are we looking for ya crazy coot?" Walani asked, crossing her arms.

Woodlegs grinned.

"A portal, lassy."
Wilson sighed in relief as he climbed the rope ladder leading him up to the surface once more. He squinted a little as his eyes adjusted to the change in light but he was oh so relieved. He took a deep breath of fresh air, savoring that moment.

"Alright, the coast is clear! Come on!"

The first one out was Jenny who quickly pulled her sister up.

"Oh man, I thought we'd never get out of there!"

"Right?"

Wilson chuckled a bit.

"It was a long time for you all."

"Yep and man I can't wait to see Charlie." Winona grinned. "We'll see her soon, right?"

"Oh yes. I think the first order of business will be to head back to the Light Village. We need to regroup before we begin the hunt for Cato. We have some friends there that could be a huge help in finding him and detaining him."

"It would probably be wise."

Maxwell was the next come up, Walter helping him walk.

"Though don't expect me to join you there. I step in there I die."

"Are you sure?" Wilson raised an eyebrow. "You're standing in this light and not dying."

"Different type of light." He scoffed.

*Besides… there's nothing welcoming there.*

"If that's how you feel."

"And I need to find my OWN people."

Wilson blinked.

"Huh? I thought you were by yourself."

"I'll explain when we find them. Let's just keep moving."

"Good luck!"

They looked down below, seeing Laika, Robert, Andrea and Ciel waving to them.

"We'll be here if you need anything!"

"Thank you!" Wilson called, grinning. "Alright, let's get moving."

Everyone nodded, following behind him.
"Shame they couldn't come with us." Walter frowned, looking back.

"Robert has no pieces in this game." Maxwell retorted. "They shouldn't be involved if they don't have to - and Laika has a family who I'm sure miss her dearly."

Walter looked to Maxwell.

"Not to be intrusive or anything but… do you know them personally?"

Maxwell glanced to the side.

"I've known Robert since he was young man. He was one of the few humans who did research for me alongside his mentor. I made a deal with him awhile back to save his life in exchange he would explore the caves and map them for me and fill me in on what has been happening down there. Andrea, she was one of my subjects and Laika… don't know her personally since I just met her but she doesn't need to be involved this nor do her people. The last thing I want for them is more grief."

Walter raised an eyebrow.

"You seem to care a lot, for someone who finds being called heartless a compliment."

Maxwell flinched at this.

"I'm actually allowed to change. Do you not believe people can grow?"

"Most certainly." Walter's look turned gentle. "I saw that with Willow in a place where people kept telling me no one staying there would change. Yet she defied that." Walter looked to ahead. "Then again, you were the reason I got her out of there so… I still owe you my thanks. Even if things turned upside down for awhile."

"Well… what they were doing to her wasn't real healing. It was barbaric. Reminded me too much of things I saw in the past."

"Well… thank you."

Maxwell was silent, processing what had just been said. He had not heard those words in a long time.

"... You're welcome."

"SHRIEK!"

Everyone covered their ears at the sound of a high pitched shriek.

"What in the bloody world was that!?" Walter asked.

Maxwell's eyes were wide.

"Maggie." He whispered, pulling away from Walter, dashing towards the source. "Maggie!"

"H-Hey!" Walter chased after him. "Wait up! You shouldn't be running on your own just yet!"

Wilson shook his head before following after, finding it hard to keep up with Maxwell.

_For someone still healing he's fast. And who's Maggie?_
They soon came upon a clearing, seeing five people fighting against one person in a cloak who was surrounded by nightmare monsters. They were currently at a stand still, trying to find the next open opportunity to strike one another. What was notable was how strange four of them looked.

One was a young man with antlers and pure white hair. Another was a young girl with dark black hair and bug like wings on her back. The third was a boy covered in black and white fur and had long claws coming out of his hands. The fourth was a young woman with moose like antlers sticking out of her head and had wing like arms.

The fifth member of the group wasn't strange in the way the others were, but what was shocking was how much she beared a resemblance to Charlie.

"Sis!?" Winona gawked. "What she doing here? I thought you said he was back in your village, Wilson."

"She is." Wilson was dumbstruck. "I… I don't think that's her."

"Scarlet!" Maxwell ran towards the Charlie clone. "Scarlet!"

Scarlet looked to him, eyes wide before relief seeped in.

"Maxy…"

The cloak figured turned his attention to the two.

"So, you survived." They chuckled. "Impressive. Guess you're not like your old man after all, Magnus."

Maxwell growled, glaring at the cloaked figure, getting in a protective stance in front of Scarlet.

"Oh, of course you run to protect your useless knight."

"Don't talk about my QUEEN that way!" He snarled. "Or my family. EVER, Cato!"

The others were dumbfounded at what was happening before them.

"What… the heck happened while he was in hiding…?" Wilson gawked.

Maxwell… THEE MAXWELL. A family man!?

"I am so confused." Winona scratched her head.

"Me too." Jenny tilted her head. "I thought he didn't care for anybody."

"Well… like he said, people change." Walter crossed his arms.

Cato scoffed.

"I'll talk about you and your "family" however I like. Especially after what YOU did to ME so many centuries ago." He laughed. "I think I'm done playing. It's time you met your end, Maxwell. After all, nothing would be more satisfying than to murder you in front of your mutts, your dog and The Shadow Prince."

Maxwell readied his hands, summoning shadow flames to them.

"You want a fight, I'll give you one."
The other four people looked to him, worry in their eyes. Same for Scarlet.

Cato sneered, charging right for him drawing a sword.

"I'll cut you where you stand!"

Maxwell whistled.

"Time to practice what you learned boys and girls!"

The girl with fly wings came swooping down, claws ready.

"TAKE THIS!" She shrieked.

Cato smirked, whistling as a terror beak came to his aid, tackling the girl away from him.

"You forget, I'm not alone."

He grinned as he saw the other three charge him, having nightmare monsters counter them with ease with a simple whistle. He glanced to the bystanders, seeing them ready to leap into battle.

He clicked his tongue.

"I just want this to be you and me, Max. I'd rather not have interference. Thankfully, I have a way of making things easier."

He began to whistle a tune. Soon as it began, the others found themselves frozen in place, unable to move. All but Maxwell and Cato could move.

"W-What is this?" Wilson growled, trying to get his body to move.

Maxwell was wide eyed, looking to Scarlet, seeing she was struggling as well.

"What… did you do!?!"

Cato laughed.

"It's amazing isn't it? I almost began to think trying to possess this human mutt was a waste of time but then… Oh, what powers lied within him were an amazing discovery. Who knew music could be such a powerful weapon!" He grinned. "And no worries, I can unfreeze them once I whistle a certain note. For now, they're just stuck for as long as I like."

Maxwell growled.

"You know, after all these years I didn't think it was possible for you to get worse… Yet, you've proven that all wrong. This is just down right vile, even for you, Cato!"

Cato laughed.

"Even for me? Oh, I don't think I've done enough." He told him, raising his weapon. "I think I can escalate it even more. First with you. Then with The Prince over there… and one by one your little family can watch as I slaughter them."

"You'll have to go through me first. It was our fight to begin with." Maxwell summoned a sword to his hand. "So, let's just finish this."
"I couldn't have said it better myself, Your Highness."

The two charged each other, swords clashing in an instant as they met. Maxwell sneered at Cato, while Cato grinned widely at him. The clashing of swords was all that could be seen and heard for those watching.

"Still spry for someone so old and not to mention fresh out of the Forge." Cato chuckled. "Guess you still have some tricks left."

"Plenty." Maxwell narrowed his eyes, trying to go in for a killing blow.

Cato grinned, dodging with ease, hitting his sword hard enough to knock it out of Maxwell's hands.

"Sadly." Cato chuckled, whistling a high pitch note that caused Maxwell to freeze up, a gasp soon leaving him as Cato's sword pierced through his chest. "I still have plenty of my own that you don't know about."

Everyone watched in horror as color left Maxwell's face. His eyes became lifeless before he fell to the ground, limp.

"NO!" Scarlet shrieked. "MAX!"

"FATHER!" The other four screamed.

Cato grinned as he pulled out his sword, stepping on Maxwell's chest.

"Finally… The old king is dead." He threw his head back laughing. "He's finally dead! Victory is mine!"

Maxwell… No… He… He can't really be…

Wilson was in total shock. He was the witness to something he never thought he'd ever see in his life. Something… he never thought he would feel so mortified to see happen.

Cato chuckled before looking to the rest all around.

"And you are all next." Cato pointed his sword towards Wilson.

"Starting with The Prince."
"Starting with The Prince."

Wilson growled, narrowing his eyes.

*I have to move. I have to get out of this.* He struggled trying to find a way to move.

"Blast it all."

Cato snickered.

"You want a fight too? If you insist." Cato charged, whistling as Wilson was just barely able to dodge his sword, his side being slightly knicked by the blade.

"Ngh! You little..." He growled, summoning shadow flames to create a shield that the sword bounced off of. "Show your face, you demon!"

Cato backed off.

"Hm... Should I?" Cato hummed in thought. "I'm not sure you'd want me to. I mean, I'm known to scare even grown men with my looks."

Wilson snarled, summoning his sword.

"If you're going to kill me I deserve to know the face of my murderer."

Cato was silent before grinning.

"Very well. If you insist, oh Great Prince." Cato grabbed at his cloak, throwing it off entirely to show his whole body.

Underneath it all was a man dressed in an outfit suited for a count. It was a deep red and black suit with a ruffled tie.

Wilson froze as he saw the man's face.

He had wild black hair with silver streaks in it and his eyes were amber in color. The most shocking thing of all... the man's facial structure. It was a perfect match to Wilson.

"Surprise." Cato smiled. "Remember me, Wilson?"

Wilson's breath hitched as he tried to force down the flurry of memories that came through. Most of them the worst he could remember.

"*Father, Father, look what I-*"

"WILSON STOP BOTHERING ME WITH YOUR NONSENSE! SCIENCE IS A HOPELESS PROFESSION SO LEAVE ME ALONE!"

"Father...?"

Wilson took a step back, horror in his eyes as he stared at Cato.

"Father?"
Cato took his shock as a chance to lunge at him, Wilson barely having a chance to respond, their swords clashing.

"Missed me?"

"NO!"

"Aww… I'm hurt, Son." Cato grinned. "I thought you would miss your old man. But then again, I guess you have every right to hate me. I mean, I don't like you much either, so, it only makes sense."

"SHUT UP!" Wilson slashed at him, Cato jumping back.

"Now, now, Son, let's not be too violent."

Wilson was growling now, his shadow form starting to take form.

"You're not him… You can't be him!"

"Oh, but I am." Cato grinned. "Just as you remember."

Wilson's shadow form took over as he forced Cato back, moving to jab him with his sword.

"LIAR! My mother would never love YOU!"

"Oh but she loved me enough to keep me around. Enough that it broke you. I bet she did it on purpose. You're just a runt."

"Cecelia, when is that boy going to grow?"

"What are you going to do, Cousin, cry for your father? He's not here anymore!"

"He's just a runt. Nothing special."

"Shut up… SHUT UP!" Wilson tried to jab again, only for Cato to knock him back, sending the man rolling to the ground.

"Heh, once a runt, always a runt." Cato stepped onto Wilson's chest, bringing his sword close to his throat. "I should put you out of your misery before you make a bigger fool of yourself."

Wilson struggled to get up, unable to tear his eyes away from Cato.

"Father… Come back… Please come back!"

Tears stung Wilson's eyes.

"Father…"

Cato went to bring the sword down, only to be stopped by a burst of shadow flames.

"LEAVE HIM ALONE, CATO!"

Cato rolled to the side, snarling towards where the flames came from.

Wilson looked to the side, eyes widening at the sight of William in his shadow form, a determined look on his face.
"William!"

William hurried over to Wilson, helping him up.

"Sorry for being late. Took quite a bit of time to make my way back here and then I had to figure out where you were and you get the idea."

Wilson wiped at his eyes quickly.

"Thank you, my friend." Wilson growled. "Shall we?"

"We shall." William summoned his flames around himself. "Let's finish him!"

Cato snarled at the two, nightmare monsters coming to his aid.

"I'll end both of you!" He hissed, letting out an animalistic shriek.

"We'll see about that!"

William set his flames towards the nightmare monsters, sending them flying as Wilson charged for Cato, the two getting locked in battle again with their swords.

*I have to stop him. This isn't the man my mother fell in love with. This… This isn't my father. Not all of my memories are bad. There were good ones too!*

Cato sneered at him.

"For a runt, you just don't go down easily, do you?"

"No, I don't. I'm just stubborn like that. Helps that I have friends to pull me up too." Wilson knocked him off balance. "After all, I never imagined myself doing everything alone."

Cato quickly blocked his advance, snarling.

"Then what would you do if you were alone?"

"Let's not talk like that now." Wilson grinned, showing his own pointed teeth. "I'm never alone. Even when you think I am… I'm not."

Wilson moved quickly, knocking Cato down, holding his sword close to his face.

"And I'm not going to kill my father to kill you. You've done enough."

"Then what will you do?" Cato sneered. "You let me go I'm just going to cause more damage and there's no saving the man you seek. He's dead!"

Instead of getting mad, Wilson started laughing a cold cruel laugh, one that William recognized as he suppressed a shudder.

"That's what… Hahaha! That's what Maxwell said too!" He grinned. "And I managed that just fine!"

Cato's fierce demeanor faltered for once, fear showing briefly in is eyes.

"Ah, there's your fear." Wilson grinned. "I may not have the Codex with me this time but thing is… I have someone here who once relied on it who has the whole thing memorized." He looked to
William. "William, if you please?"

William stepped forward, raising his hands as shadow hands came out of the ground, grabbing Cato away from Wilson.

William took a deep breath before speaking in an unknown tongue. Something he hadn't done in years. Cato tried to struggle his way out but to no avail as the the hands consumed him as he screamed.

The hands soon came apart, Cato in one, in an unstable human form and the other holding Wilson's father who was now unconscious. They were dropped to the ground, Edward on his side and Cato on his knees.

The man panted, trying to keep his form stable but was quickly failing. Pieces of him were made of shadow and resembled that of a nightmare monster. He looked at Wilson, using whatever strength he had left to lunge at him, claws raised.

Wilson thrust his sword right into his chest, giving him a cold look.

"Checkmate."

Cato let out an agonized shriek as his form broke up completely, dissipating into nothing but smoke. Gone for good.

Is it over…?

The remaining nightmare monsters retreated and those of them around were set free of Cato's spell.

"Oh, finally." Winona sighed in relief before hugging her sister. "I thought we were done for."

"Thank goodness for Wilson and that other guy." Jenny hugged her sister tightly.

Wilson grinned sheepishly, looking to William who wore a similar look. Both turned their attention to where Maxwell's body was, frowns crossing their faces as Scarlet was holding the upper part of his body in her arms, their family gathered around him.

"Max…" Scarlet sniffled, pressing her forehead against his. "Please, wake up… Please…" She pleaded, tears streaking her face.

"Father…?" Maggie sniffled. "Father, wake up, please…"

"Don't do this to us. You didn't even get to see us one more time. Not without fighting."

William walked over to them, kneeling down in front of Scarlet, looking at Maxwell's body. It was chilling to see him like this.

"Please…" Scarlet looked to him. "Do something. You were bonded to him. You have to know something. Please. I'm begging you. Bring him back." Tears were streaking her face. "I know you and him didn't get along but… I… He wants to make it right. He even started with just trying to get rid of Cato. Please… just please, revive him!"

William winced, looking down at Maxwell's body, seeing the lifeless eyes looking back at him.

… I have to try. I may not like him… but he has a life. He has people who need him.

William closed his eyes, placing his hand over the injury, focusing as he summoned his shadow
"I'm not sure if this will work… but it's worth a shot."

He searched his mind for anything to fix this, then something came. He raised his hand up, a strangely shaped heart appeared in the palm of his hand. He winced a bit, feeling some of his energy being drained from him but he kept his focus before placing the heart inside Maxwell's body, his wounds healing instantly.

Color returned to Maxwell's face as well as life to his eyes before a gasp escaped his mouth, coughing a bit.

"Ngh… What happened…?"

"Max!" Scarlet gave a relieved look, kissing his head. "Oh, thank shadows. I thought… I thought I lost you."

"Scarlet…?" Maxwell had a confused look. "I thought… that snake…"

"He did but…" Scarlet looked to William. "He… He brought you back."

Maxwell looked to William, surprise in his eyes.

"You…?"

William smiled sheepishly.

"You helped us. It only seemed right." William rubbed the back of his neck. "Plus, wouldn't be right to leave your family here in tears."

Maxwell nodded, not quite sure what to say to him.

His mind however… did.

OH, GREAT, NOW I OWE HIM TOO!

"W-Well…” He cleared his throat a little. "Thank you… Thank you very much."

"Y-You're welcome." William smiled a little. "You didn't deserve to die so… I don't see why you should've had to pass."

"Please pardon me if I'm still stunned."

Scarlet hugged him tightly, kissing his head.

"Oh, you hush."

Maxwell chuckled, kissing her cheek.

"Scarlet…"

"Father!"

The giants gathered around, hugging Maxwell carefully.

"You're okay!" Maggie said, nuzzling him, purring a bit. "You're really okay!"
"Father…" Wynter sighed in relief, resting his head against him.

Maxwell brought his arms around them.

"Look at all of you. So different now… I like it."

Gael grinned, nuzzling him.

"Mother fixed us up along with the Queen. They made us like this."

"I can tell. You got your mother's smile my dear."

"What'd I get, what'd I get?" Maggie asked.

Maxwell smiled.

"Definitely her energy - and her nose."

Maggie giggled, huddling closer.

Maxwell brought his family together, sighing in relief. They were all here and Cato was gone. All was well now. He looked to William again, nodding to him.

"Thank you, again."

"You're welcome."

Maxwell smiled a bit before focusing back on his family, relaxing entirely.

William smiled before he looked over to where Wilson was, seeing the man looking at his father, shock still present in his eyes. William walked over to him, kneeling next to him.

"You going to be okay?" he asked.

Wilson nodded before shaking his head.

"Yes… No… Maybe? This is all just a shock… And some bad memories." He sighed, looking at Edward carefully, seeing the marks Cato had left on him were gone for the most part. "Not to mention… I don't know what he really thinks."

"Wilson…"

Wilson shook his head.

"I guess we'll find out when he wakes up but right now I think we need to get him some medical attention."

"Maybe we can help?" Winona offered. "I mean, I know he tried to kill us but I know that wasn't really the guy here, some other mumbo jumbo but hey, we owe it to ya for helping so much."

Jenny and Walter nodded.

"Just tell us what do and lead the way."

Wilson took a deep breath.

"Alright, for the injuries, we're going to need spider glands. I'll need something to supplement for
bandages as well. Also, Winona, you're good with your hands, I'll need a stretcher so we transport him without being jostled."

Winona saluted.

"You got it." She looked to Jenny. "My sis and I can make one easy peasy."

"M-hm! Let's get to work, Sis!"

The two took off without another word.

"I'll take care of the glands." Walter said, hurrying off as well.

William hummed in thought.

"I'll see what I can do for bandages."

"And... we'll help however we can too." Scarlet said.

Wilson sighed in relief.

"Thank you." He looked to Edward his gaze softening a bit.

*Don't worry. We'll have you well in no time... and oh wait until Mother sees you. She'll be so happy.*

*Even if you're not happy to see me when you wake up...* 

*I'm happy to see you.*
A Long Awaited Moment

Where... am I...?

Edward could hear the sound of birds chirping, leaves in trees shifting from a breeze that was blowing through the air. Sounds he hadn't heard in years. These weren't sounds in the asylum. No rats… no dripping water… no screams… That couldn't be right.

His eyes slowly opened, finding himself in a small bedroom. It was ornately decorated and well lit by the window beside his bed. This was definitely not the asylum.

He sat up slowly, feeling sore and froze for a moment as he took note he was in a proper set of night wear instead of his asylum attire. He looked around till he spotted a mirror in the room, seeing his reflection staring back at him. His hair wasn't long and matted anymore and was instead back to a proper trimmed length and brushed. His beard was gone too, having been properly trimmed into a goatee.

Am... I dreaming...? This... This can't be real.

Another thought crossed his mind.

Or... am I dead and this is how you wake up in heaven?

He didn't have another moment to think as the door to the room opened, an elderly woman in a black dress that had raven feathers sewn into it entering. Edward's eyes widened at the sight of her. She may have looked a bit younger and a little different now but he knew her face anywhere. A face he thought he'd never see again.

"... M... Mother?" He said.

Wickerbottom smiled, making her way over to him.

"I thought I heard noise. So good to see you awake."

Edward's eyes still had a look of shock in them as he looked her over.

"G-Good to see you too. It's been so long... I thought... I..."

Wickerbottom sat on the edge of his bed, taking his hands into hers.

"It's okay, Edward. Everything is okay."

Edward's eyes got misty.

"But... how... I... I thought... Cato... He..."

"He's gone now." Wickerbottom squeezed his hands. "Gone for good and you're now free and can live your life again."

Edward lowered his head.

"To a point... I can't pick up where I left off. Cecelia... Wilson... They're..."

Wickerbottom tilted his chin up.
"Edward, what did that snake feed you?"

"Mother… My wife is missing… My child is dead. What is the point…?"

"That's not true, Edward." Wickerbottom stroked his cheek with her thumb. "Far from it."

Another person entered the room, a man with dark black hair in a purple vest.

"Your Highness, the prince is here along with his mother."

Edward's eyes were wide as he recognized the man.

"S… Sebastian?"

Sebastian grinned.

"The one and only. Shall I get our guests?"

"Yes, please." Wickerbottom said.

Sebastian hurried off.

"Your Highness…?" Edward looked to his mother confused. "I'm confused."

"There's a lot to get you caught up on but first, you have two people you need to see."

Sebastian soon returned, a young man with wild hair dressed in red vest right behind him along with a woman with long dark hair in purple sweater vest.

Edward's eyes widened as he recognized them.

"Oh my stars…" He whispered. "W-Wilson… Cecelia…?"

Cecelia had tears in her eyes, nodding as she made her way to him.

"It's us. We're okay. Oh, Ed… I never thought I would see you again."

"Me either… Cece…"

"Ed… Oh, my dear Edward!" Cecelia threw her arms around him, sobbing. "You're okay. You're…" She buried her face in his chest. "Edward…"

Edward buried part of his face in her hair, holding her close.

"My dear Cecelia." He kissed her forehead. "My one and only love."

Cecelia sniffled, cuddling close to him.

"My dearest… My husband."

"Shh.. I'm here now. It's okay, Cecelia."

Edward ran a hand through her hair. He couldn't remember the last time he was able to hold her like this without having to worry about Cato whispering in his ear. But now… it was all clear in his head. No one to manipulate him. No one to possess him. Just him.

Edward nuzzled her gently before looking to Wilson, the young man keeping quiet and watching
the two. Cecelia pulled back a little, looking to their son, Edward following her gaze.

"Wilson…" Edward started. "I… goodness… Look at you. You've gotten so big."

"He's not a little poofer anymore."

Wilson groaned, putting his face in his hands.

"Mooother!"

"Eeh? Sorry."

Wilson shook his head before looking to Edward, a bit of a nervous look in his eyes. He still wasn't sure what Edward thought of him.

He just hoped it was a good impression.

"H-Hello. It really has been a while, hasn't it?"

"It has… and… I'm sorry I couldn't be there." Edward lowered his head. "That I couldn't be there for you. To see you grow up into the man I knew you could be. I am so… so sorry."

Wilson had tears come to his eyes. He honestly hadn't been sure of what to expect… This wasn't what he expected.

Wilson made his way over, sitting on a chair beside the bed.

"I forgive you."

Edward's head snapped up stunned.

"Huh?"

"I forgive you…. There was a lot going on… You were possessed, you… you weren't the one yelling or being cruel back then.."

*I guess trying to give some last good memories didn't work like I hoped.*

"And I wish I could've been able to stop him from saying those things… Wilson, you are everything to me. I did everything I could so I wouldn't hurt you… but I still did. And for that, I am so, so sorry."

"Father…"

Edward extended an arm to him.

"Wilson…"

Wilson brought his arms around him, sniffling a little. He couldn't believe it still. But there he was. With his family, right here beside him.

Edward held him close, resting his head against his.

"I love you so much, Little Will."

"I love you too."
Edward smiled, keeping close, looking over to his wife, holding his other arm out to her.

"I know you want in too."

Cecelia smiled, bringing her arms around them both, kissing her son's head.

"It's all okay now."

Wilson nodded sighing happily.

_It really is._

Wickerbottom kept off to the side smiling at the sight.

_Things will never always be perfect... but at least when storms pass there are those quiet moments that let us know that peace can still be found._
Maxwell was sitting quietly in the gardens of Wickerbottom's private home. A place he never thought he'd see himself in but circumstances in mind, it wasn't too much of a shock. He looked over to his family, seeing the giants curled up around Scarlet, the woman fast asleep with them. He smiled a bit before looking up at the sky, his mind swimming with many thoughts. Not really sure where to start.

"It's strange how everything turned out."

Maxwell looked behind him, seeing Wickerbottom standing behind with Jack at her side.

"If you're here to slice my head off by all means just get it over with. " He said, ears flattened as his eyes landed on Jack.

Jack sighed, shaking his head.

"Had it been even six months ago I would have. Without hesitation. But that would be out of anger and against my job as the Reaper."

Stop talking like Lux...

"Alright… Then why are you here?"

"Just checking on you." Wickerbottom said, sitting beside him. "A year ago I would think you'd still a threat but yet here you are. You helped defeat Cato, bring my son back and are now taking care of those I wasn't able to under my reign. You're far different from the king I saw on the throne so long ago."

"Times change." Maxwell said, not looking to her. "I'm still trying to understand it myself. I've… never really had so much choice in my life that it never occurred to me being king wasn't… really being king here."

Jack looked to where Scarlet and the giants were.

"And then you started a family."

"Yes, yes I did. I have two lovely daughters and two wonderful sons."


"Trust me. I didn't either."

"So, where are you planning to go from here?" Wickerbottom asked.

"Not sure. I don't really have anywhere else to go but… maybe just… travel with my family. Find a place to settle and stay out of your way which by the way, I have not intentions of causing trouble. Any plans of revenge died quickly since I found it pointless. Maybe I'll reconnect with the Thuelcitians down below."

"You could or you could also make your own homestead."

"Perhaps, but maybe in a different part of this world. I did want to show the giants the Fire Lands."
"Then do as you please. Just no trouble."

"I can promise no major trouble but shenaginas, not so much." Maxwell chuckled. "I get bored."

Jack smirked.

"I make no promises to get even then."

"Consider it done then." Maxwell smirked at Jack before looking to Wickerbottom. "What about you though? You do know the gateway has been opened again, yes?"

"Wilson told me." Wickerbottom said. "I've been speaking to a colleague about the matter and we have plans to visit the other realms. We've got a lot of work on our hands and the last thing I need is a war."

"Well, don't expect me to get involved. I was almost killed by Pugna and I don't think he'd let me go so easily a second time."

"I'm aware. Which is why I'll be training Wilson to be the new master of the gateway."

"He'll be good at it. Just don't let him turn this world into some crazy science project."

"I don't need to do anything in that department. I have his mother and his wife to do that for me."

Maxwell blineknd.

"He's married?"

"Yes. To Willow."

"... Well, saw that one coming to be honest."

Both Jack and Wickerbottom laughed.

"They did make it pretty obvious, didn't they?"

"With the way he looks at her? Of course!"

Maxwell chuckled.

"How things have changed." Maxwell looked outward again. "A year ago, I wanted to see you all dead and now... heh... I don't really mind you folks being around. I just want to have my own life. Retire I guess."

Wickerbottom chuckled.

"There's nothing wrong with that Maxwell. Things change."

"And I do believe you'll be a better queen than I ever was a king."

"That's quite a compliment coming from you."

"Yes, I don't hand them out regularly." Maxwell smiled a bit. "I do you wish luck with the other dimensions. I'm sure they'll listen to you more than they did me but still, luck be with you."

"I appreciate that."
Maxwell nodded.

"So… Jack. Since we have an official declaration of shenanigans, I guess I'll be seeing you around in my travels?"

Jack grinned.

"But of course. And keep you from causing too much havoc."

"It's a deal."

Wickerbottom shook her head.

*Business as usual I suppose.*
The Schuyler Sisters

It was a relief to be able to leave The Constant. To no longer have to fear being hunted. To no longer have to hunt for pure survival. To no longer be forced to fight in the Forge.

"So, you two will be able to manage on your own?" Wilson asked, leaning partially out of Wickberottom's home, intending to go back in to spend time with his father while he recovered.

"We'll be fine. We'll harass William into showing us around." Winona answered.

"And then we'll hold that baby niece of ours." Jenny grinned.

"Just don't squish her."

"Noted."

Wilson nodded before heading back inside, the two sisters going off to find William. They found the man practicing magic not too far from the house, content where he was.

"Hey, you!"

William stiffened up, looking to them.

"Oh… Um Hello… Pleasure to see you again Jenny… and uh… pleasure to meet you for the first time, Winona."

Winona grinned, offering a hand to him.

"Pleasure to meet you too, brother in law."

"Eheh?" He shook her hand, a nervous smile on his face. "N-No hard feelings?"

"Eh, still got some things to work through buuuuuuut." She smirked. "You're married to my sister and I'd rather not have her crying when I see her because I broke you or something over some anger. Besides, mine is more directed at Maxwell than anyone else."

"Same for me." Jenny chuckled. "Though, speaking of our sister… Would you care to show us to her, perhaps? Along with our niece."

"M-Most certainly! Right this way, ladies."

They followed behind William to an archway. They were a little confused by it but didn't question it as William walked through, heading to the other side. They walked through as well, their eyes meeting the sights that was the Light Dimension.

"Welcome to our home and now your new home is you wish to stay." William said, gesturing to it all.

"Our sister is here. Heck yes we're staying." Winona retorted but couldn't take her eyes off of it. "Amazing."

"Goodness, it's beautiful."

"Shall we continue on then?"
"Yes, please."

William nodded, leading them to the village. People were busy at work, going about their day making new houses or just doing chores. William kept his eyes on where his place was, smiling as he saw Charlie sitting on the porch of their home, rocking little Rose in her arms. A frown crossed his face though, seeing she had slight worry in her eyes.

"Wait here." He said once they got close enough, hurrying over to her. "Charlie!"

Charlie's eyes widened, looking up.

"William!" She jumped up, holding the baby close to her. "Oh. thank goodness!"

He brought his arms around her, kissing her cheek.

"I'm so sorry, it was an accident…"

"I don't care, you're home now!" She peppered his face with kisses. "I was so worried but oh, thank goodness."

"Wah!"

"Oh, and Rosie missed you too."

William chuckled, looking down at their child.

"Sorry I was gone so long, sweetie." He kissed her head. "I'm home now."

"Aguh!"

Charlie giggled, nuzzling him, a puzzled look coming to her face.

"And… you smell like sea water?"

"I promise, there's an explanation for that but there's something else you need to know."

"Hm?"

"Well, while I was out and while Wilson was out, we found other survivors. Two you know very well, actually."

William looked over to Jenny and Winona. Charlie followed his gaze, eyes widening.

"No way…"

Jenny and Winona had relief in their eyes.

"Hey, Charlie."

"Sis!"

Charlie handed Rose to William before running up to her sisters, hugging them tightly.

"JENNY, WINNIE!"

"Oh, our little sis!" They squealed, hugging her tightly.
"Oh, so good to see you!" Jenny laughed. "And you're okay!"

"And married!" Winona chuckled. "Way to pull a fast one on us, Sis!"

Charlie giggled, giving a small grin.

"What can I say? I couldn't wait!"

"Yeah, clearly." Jenny nodded over to where William was. "Not just married, a mom too!"

Charlie gave a sheepish look.

"She was a surprise alright."

William smiled.

"Indeed."

"Bah, bah!" Rose gave a delighted squeal, seeing the new visitors, reaching her hands out. "Abah!"

Both women felt their hearts melt.

"Can we…?" Jenny asked.

"By all means. Just. Share."

Charlie got out of the way as Jenny and Winona went up to William, both giving each other a brief glare.

"I'm the oldest."

"I'm the most talented."

Rose giggled, clapping her hands.

"Aguh!"

"... Okay, Winnie, you can get her first."

"Yes!"

William chuckled, handing Rose over.

"Mind her head now."

"Of course." Winona held her gently, trying her best not to squeal. "She's… so… tiny. I remember Charlie being this small!"

Rose giggled, looking up at her aunts curiously.

Jenny covered her mouth, trying not to squeal too much.

"She even has Charlie's smile. It's so sweet!"

"BAH!"

"Nawww! Who's our little niece?" Winona tickled Rose, eliciting a squeal from the girl. "You are!"
"Uwah! Bah!"

"And whose a total cutie? Who's a cutie? Rosie is!"

She squealed, wiggling a little, laughing.

Charlie smiled watching them as she hugged her husband.

"Isn't this great?"

"It's wonderful." William brought an arm around her. "Sorry I made you worry so much, Charlie. I really didn't mean to."

Charlie laid her head on his shoulder, keeping close.

"It's okay, William. I understand. Things just happen."

"I promise, I'll tell you the whole story. For now, I just want to rest with you."

"And I can most certainly help with that." Charlie kissed his chin.

William smiled.

"Thank you… I have another trip in my future but I just want to be with you right now and our little girl."

"And your not leaving any time soon, buster." She pulled on his suit collar a little, kissing him on the lips.

William kissed her before resting his head atop hers.

"I just want to be home for a good while."

"And so it shall be."
"Alright, we're almost there."

Willow giggled as Wilson lead her along, the woman currently blindfolded.

"Wilson, this is stupid. Can I just take this blindfold off now? I hate not being able to see."

"No, no." Wilson chuckled. "It'll ruin the surprise. Plus, I don't want you to see it first."

"Oh? Then what I do first?"

"You'll find out."

Willow rolled her eyes, following Wilson along. She wasn't sure where they were at the moment but… she could hear the distinct sound of crock pots at work with food and a familiar scent was in the air. It was a warm spicy scent, something she recognized as spicy chili but it was different. Like something had been put in the recipe to change it up.

Then, she heard someone humming a tune. It was from… a ballet. The Nutcracker and the pitch of the voice.

… *No way.*

"... Wilson, did you find someone while you were out?"

"I did." Wilson undid the blindfold. "And he really wanted to see you."

The fold came off and standing before Willow was Walter, the young man holding a bowl of spicy chili to her along with a small watermelon.

"Long time no see, Willow." Walter smiled.

Willow's eyes went wide, silent as she looked him over before looking to Wilson.

"T-This isn't a dream…?"

"You're awake, my dear."

She looked to Walter, a squeal escaping her as she ran up to him.

"WALTER! Oh my goodness!"

Walter laughed, keeping the food from falling as she threw her arms around him.

"Whooa!"

"I missed you!" She looked up at him, her eyes misty. "I thought I'd never see you again."

"I never stopped looking." Walter carefully set the food on a table before bringing his arms around Willow tightly, resting his head against hers. "Oh look at you. You look so much better than when I last saw you."

Willow nodded, burying her face in his chest.
"Y-Yeah… I've been good. I've been eating and I survived and… I'm… I'm okay. I promise I haven't burned down anything big."

Walter stroked her hair.

"I believe you. You've done some growing up. Including…" Walter smirked, eying the ring on her left hand. "Finding someone very special in your life."

Willow smirked, nodding her head over to Wilson.

"Yeah, I like the tall dorky types."

"Hey!"

"Love you!"

Walter chuckled, ruffling her hair.

"Still the same as ever. I'm proud of ya, Willow. Really."

Willow giggled, batting her hand away before hugging him again.

"Sorry just… I haven't seen you in so long."

"I know." Walter nuzzled her. "I know."

Willow nuzzled him, sighing happily.

"I'm just so happy." She kept close, burying her face a bit. "No more doctors or shots or… or any bad stuff."

"No." Walter stroked her hair. "Everything is safe now. I'm safe, you're safe. That's all that matters, Sparky."

"Waltermelon."

"Heh." Walter gave a sneaky look. "So… when I can expect to be an uncle?"

Both Wilson and Willow turned bright red, stammering. The two exchanging looks.

"Well, I um-"

"Well, you see-"

"WALTER!" Willow smacked him lightly on the arm. "We haven't even THOUGHT about that!"

"I'm just saying! I wouldn't mind a niece or nephew!"

"You dork!"

"Yes, yes, heard it all before." Walter grinned before pulling away, picking up the bowl of spicy chili, offering it to her. "Peace offering?"

Willow took it, taking a big bite.

"... Mm.." She sighed happily, savoring the taste. Just as good as she remembered it. Smokey, spicy, a small touch of sweetness to counteract the burn. "Amazing."
"Glad to know I still got it." Walter looked to Wilson. "And I gotta say, your husband is quite the man."

Wilson rubbed the back of his neck.

"N-Nah…"

Willow smiled.

"He is. He kept me sane and helped me get all those urges under control."

"I-I just wanted to help." He smiled sheepishly. "I can't stand to watch anyone suffer."

"We're in agreement then." Walter gave a mock serious look. "And if you make my sister cry, I'll be putting you in the stew."

"Wilson Stew. Sounds terrifying."

"As it should."

Willow smirked, setting her food down before bringing them both into a tight hug.

"You dorks."

"Your dorks."

Willow sighed happily, nodding as she looked at them both.

"Right where you belong."
The Lost Time

The defeat of Cato felt like a distant memory to those in the Light Dimension. Not much time had passed since his fall but with how matters quickly went back to how they were before from rescuing other survivors alongside Sabra's team to getting chores finished around the village, it was like the whole incident was just a bad dream.

Wilson was thankful it was over. He was still trying to process all that had happened and what was happening now but he was thankful he wasn't feeling paranoid anymore about someone who could possibly bring harm to those he cared for. There would always be danger when venturing into The Constant but least it was danger he and the others could prepare for.

And with Maxwell turning a new leaf, he's no longer a concern anymore either.

"We'll keep out of your way but don't expect complete peace." Maxwell said as he slung a bag over shoulder, his family gathered close to him. "We may not want to cause trouble anymore or wish harm on any of you but we're not above harmless pranks."

"Noted and it wouldn't hurt to see you once and awhile." Wickerbottom said, chuckling.

"Heh, maybe. But for now, my family and I need a vacation. If you'll be needing us, though please don't need us, we'll be in the Fire Lands."

"Um… While you're there, could you maybe say hi to Woodlegs and his crew for me?" William said, giving a sheepish smile. "They helped save my life and I want them to know that if they're interested we can bring them to the Light Village for a visit if they like."

"Sure. I owe the man a visit anyway." Maxwell chuckled, turning away, his family and him heading out. "Till we meet again, Survivors."

Wilson shook his head, closing his journal, standing up from his desk.

It was so strange to see that but… I guess anyone can change. Even Shadow Kings.

Wilson headed out of his house, deciding he needed some fresh air. It was around dusk in the Light Dimension. Villagers were settling down for the day from chores, enjoying the beauty of the sky and winding down for night activities.

Wilson watched this for a few moments before the sound of a violin caught his attention. A familiar tune he thought only he himself knew how to play being heard. He followed the source, finding Edward in the garden of his home, practicing with a black violin, the man swaying as he played.

That was another thing Wilson was still processing. Having his father back. For his whole life he never thought Edward loved or cared about him and had left because he wanted nothing to do with their family but now here he was. Happy to be with him and Cecelia and trying to make up for lost time. While Edward had said to Wilson's face, he still was unsure if Edward truly did care for him. The years had done their damage

Wilson crept up quietly towards Edward, not wanting to disturb him in his playing. Wilson wanted to keep hearing the song he was playing. He had played the tune himself so many times and it was something that just made him feel calm whenever he did even if he didn't know the name.
Wilson sat down on a bench, letting Edward finish his song. Once Edward finished, he opened his eyes, jumping a bit at seeing Wilson present.

"Oh, Wilson, didn't see you there. Didn't think I would have an audience."

Wilson gave a sheepish look, rubbing the back of his neck. There was a nervous look in his eyes.

"Sorry for startling you. I heard you playing and... well, I recognized the song. I was hoping you... you could tell me the name."

Edward smiled, chuckling a bit.

"I guess that much time has passed you wouldn't remember. It was the song I wrote for you, Wilson. The Scientific Symphony."

Wilson's eyes widened.

"What's my song called Father?"

"It has no name yet Little Wil. I want you to name it. It's your song after all."

"Hm... I know!"

"That's right... I called it that around when I was getting into science."

"Yep." Edward had nostalgic look in his eyes. "You were so excited to name one of my pieces, especially since it was special to you. It wasn't for the world it was only for my Little Wil."

Wilson nodded, nostalgia coming to his eyes. The memories were a little fuzzy, a little faded, like an old record. But the feeling was still there.

"Do... you remember when I was four, you were playing the piano for mother and I got ahold of your muted trumpet?"

Edward laughed.

"Oh yes. You blew so hard I was worried your voice would become a trumpet."

Wilson laughed.

"Oh goodness I remember that! Then Mother couldn't stop laughing, I thought she was going to fall over!"

"Good thing she had me to lean on." Edward chuckled.

"Indeed." Wilson wiped some tears from his eyes. "That was so long ago yet... I remember it."

"Which I'm glad. I was hoping at least some good memories would remain after I left." Edward's smiled faltered a bit, glancing away from Wilson a little.

Wilson frowned, looking down, drumming his fingers on the bench.

"Father... You wanted me right? You... You weren't mad that I was always small for my age, or that I wasn't very strong?" He asked his voice quiet. "I know I was a runt, I know I was annoying
"Why on Earth would you even call yourself those words?!"

Wilson's head snapped up to see a worried look in Edward's eyes as he looked at him.

"I… That's what I was! Just a mistake!"

Edward shook his head, walking over to Wilson, sitting beside him, placing a hand on shoulder.

"Wilson. You are NOT a mistake and you never were." Edward said with a firm tone. "You were one of the best things your mother and I could've ever asked for. I was so happy when you were born. You were MY boy. Yes you were small but I didn't care. I still loved you then and now. So, stop picking my Little Wil."

Wilson's eyes were wide, stunned before he smiled, his eyes a little misty.

"Father… That.." He wiped at his eyes his voice shaking a bit. "That means a lot."

Edward gave him a gentle look.

"You're my son. You're everything I wanted and hoped for in this life. You're everything I was trying to fight for. So I could one day come home, to you and your mother."

Wilson smiled a bit, unable to help the tears that started to spill over.

"Father…"

Before Wilson could help himself he threw his arms around Edward, hugging him tightly. Edward returned the gesture, stroking his hair.

"I'm sorry I took so long to get back. I wanted to see you grow up so badly but Cato…” Edward held Wilson closer. "I'm just happy I can see you now."

Wilson nodded, tightening his embrace, hiding his face a little. He had been hoping to hear those words. To know he had been wanted and that the Barlows were in fact wrong.

"I'm happy too, Father. I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize for anything. You did nothing wrong my boy. Nothing at all."

Wilson smiled, looking up at Edward. Edward smiled back.

"You've truly become something amazing my boy. I mean, I'm not entirely sure what a Gate Keeper is but from what Mother described it sounds pretty important."

"It is and honestly I'm sort of terrified to begin training on that." Wilson rubbed the back of his neck. "I do want to do my part but I just worry about not being a good diplomat since that's basically the job. Yes Grandmother will still be in charge as head Gate Keeper being the queen and all but I'll be second in command. I don't want to undermine her by saying something that'll upset the others."

Wilson brought a hand to his face. "Honestly the fact there are other worlds to delegate with is just overwhelming to even think about."

"You'll be fine, Wilson." Edward squeezed his shoulder. "You pick up on things pretty fast when you put your mind to them and everyone is here to help you on your way. It's not something you have to face alone."
"True." Wilson smiled. "Something I know I'm truly grateful for."

"And if the other Gate Keepers from those other worlds give you hard a time just sick Cecelia on them. She'll set them straight."

Wilson snorted, bringing a hand over his mouth.

"F-Father!"

"What? She packs quite the punch when her baby is threatened."

"True but still!" Wilson laughed.

"Then again I think all your new friends would come running if something happened. Am I right?"

Wilson nodded, chuckling.

"They would. We all look out for each other like family. One falls, we all hurry to help them up."

"Then I don't think you have anything to fear, Little Wil." Edward smiled softly. "You have everyone here to help you and you most certainly have me to help as well."

Wilson had a warm look in his eyes, hugging Edward again.

"That means a lot, Father. It really does."

Edward brought his arms around Wilson tightly.

"You've done some great things and I'm sure you'll continue to do great things."

Wilson nodded, sighing in content, keeping close.

"That's what I intend to do. I just want to help everyone I can. Be it as a diplomat, a warrior, a doctor… Whatever they need me to be, I'll be there."

"And you'll have everyone by your side. People listen to you, son. You have a good heart."

"Thanks to you and Mum."

Edward ruffled his hair up, eliciting a laugh from him.

"UWAH! NO!"

"Poofer son!"

"FATHER!"

"Got ya!"

Both shared a good laugh, keeping close to each other before finally calming down, both content to be with each other.

"So… how about we go ask your mother what she's planning on cooking hm? I haven't had her cooking in years and I'm eager to know."

Wilson smirked.
"Let's go see. I heard something about chicken and dumplings."

"Let's go give her a poke then."

They headed off, the two content to be at the other's side.

It's still a long road to recover. But we'll get there...

And I'm loved…

I'm really loved.
They were alone in their world. Just the two of them and their music. A violin duet that Edward thought he would never get to have the pleasure of doing in his life. He smiled as the song finished, looking to his son who had a content expression on his face.

"You still have it." Edward chuckled. "Even after all this time."

"You can blame Mother for that." Wilson said.

"Guilty as charged."

Both men smiled, looking to Cecelia who was sitting on a blanket with the twins curled up beside her, both fast asleep.

"I'd expect nothing less." Edward looked to Wilson. "I'm just glad you didn't wind up hating music because of me."

"Hard to hate it when it's everywhere." Wilson shrugged. "You just can't escape it, even in a lab."

"Very true. Music, if you ask me, is part of life."

"I could agree."

It had been a few months since Edward had been freed from Cato's grasp. It was still bizaare to Wilson to have him back in his life again but… he couldn't be happier.

"Alright, if you two are done playing how about some lunch hm? I don't want my meatball sandwiches going to waste."

"Yes, Dear."

"Yes, Mum."

They sat down on the blanket with her as she pulled the sandwiches out of the basket, handing them over.

"So, you wanted to tell us something, Wilson?" Cecelia asked as the men dug into their food.

Wilson nodded.

"Just waiting for Willow to get here. I'd rather she be here when I tell you what I want to tell you."

"I see." Edward chuckled. "Where is she?"

"With Woodie. He had something for her that she wanted to pick up before coming over. She shouldn't be long."

"Very well." Cecelia giggled. "Is it something big?"

"The news? I suppose." Wilson said between bites. "To me, it's certainly big and was honestly hard not to talk about."

"Oh?"
"Well… Mainly because we wanted to wait at least… three months to be sure it was actually happening."

"Three months?" The two exchanged a look.

Wilson chuckled, a grin on his face, keeping quiet.

Soon enough, they saw Willow hurrying over to their spot, wearing a new dress that was red and pink in color, an excited look on her face. She looked to Edward and Cecelia, giving them a nod.

"Hi, sorry I'm late. Had to make sure it fit."

"It's fine dear." Cecelia smiled. "Wilson was just telling us you had some news you wanted to share."

"I hope he didn't share too much." She elbowed her husband lightly. "I know he was super excited."

"Aww Willow have more faith in me." Wilson gave her a mock pout. Willow hummed in thought before she smirked, kissing his cheek.

"Alright."

He chuckled, bringing his arms around her, pulling her down in front of him.

"You look beautiful in that dress by the way."

"Thank you. Not… showing too badly?"

"Willow, you know that doesn't matter to me."

She giggled, huddling closer.

"Oh, you."

Wilson smiled, bringing his hands around her stomach… that Edward and Cecilia couldn't help but notice was bulging a bit.

"So… the news?" Cecelia asked.

_Are they…?_

Willow and Wilson grinned.

"We're going to have a baby." Willow said giggling a bit.

"So, in six months, you'll have another grandchild." Wilson continued, kissing Willow's head. "We've been so excited."

Cecelia brought a hand over her mouth.

"Oh… My… Goodness! Wilson, that's wonderful!"

"Congratulations, Son." Edward smiled.

"WHAT!?"
The twins were wide awake now, having clearly heard the news.
"We're gonna have a sibling!"

Wilson nodded.

"That's right." Wilson rubbed Willow's belly. "They're right here."

The girls hurried over, huddling on either side of Willow, trying to get a listen.

"So cool!" Wendy squealed. "We're gonna be big sisters!"

"Eee! Another baby!" Abigail giggled. "We'll help a lot!"

"I know you two will." Willow brought her arms around them, sighing happily.

Edward smiled softly, squeezing Wilson's shoulder.

"I'm so glad for you both. Congrats Wilson."

Wilson had a touched look in his eyes.

"T-Thank you."

Cecelia leaned over, kissing Wilson the forehead before kissing his cheeks.

"You're going to be a great father. I mean, you already are to the twins but with this new baby you most certainly will be as well."

Wilson chuckled, getting a sheepish grin.

"I'll do my best."

"You'll do just fine."

"Well… There is something I will need help with." Wilson looked over to Edward. "I'd love to have the sheet music for The Scientific Symphony… If you could write it down and show me."

"Of course." Edward smiled. "I'd be honored, my boy."

"Thank you."

"Awww I can't feel any kicking." Wendy pouted.

Willow giggled.

"Not yet. Have to wait another month or so for that."

"Aww. Can't you use magic to make it happen faster?"

"Some things magic can't do." Wilson laughed. "But it's plenty of time to help make up the nursery… and some help decorating it."

"Ooo!"

"We wanna help!"
"By all means."

Edward chuckled, bringing his arm around Cecelia.

"Reminding you of anything, Cece?"

Cecelia nodded, tucking her head under his.

"It does. Reminds me of when I was pregnant with Wilson." She smiled, a nostalgic look coming to her eyes. "Remember how you kept listening for him those first few months?"

"I remember, just waiting to hear him… and scrambling to write a song for him."

"I think that's the craziest I ever saw a song make you."

"I just wanted it to be perfect. For my Little Wil."

Cecelia nuzzled him.

"And now look at him."

Edward kissed her head, looking to their son and his own little family.

"He's really turned into an amazing young man."

"He really has."

*And we couldn't be prouder.*
"I don't know if I keep doing this."

"You'll be able to, Wilson. It was just your first time. You'll get the hang of it.

Wickerbottom and Wilson were currently on their way to the portal, the man wearing a tired look on his face.

"I appreciate your confidence in me just… Me, a second in command diplomat for a world that I'm still just barely starting to understand along with so many others… What if I cause a mess?"

"You won't." Wickerbottom placed a hand on his shoulder. "I paid attention to how the others looked at you and I saw respect from them as you spoke your part in our dealings with them. Everything will be fine. There will be bumps but you will get a handle on it, I promise."

Wilson smiled, placing his hand over his grandmother's.

"Thank you, Grandmother."

"You're welcome." Wickerbottom smiled. "Now, I believe you have a family to tend to. We'll worry about speaking with the other diplomats at a later date."

"Right. I'll be off then. What are you going to be doing?"

"I'm going to pay a visit the Fire Lands. Need to check in on our crew there."

"Of course. Tell them I said hello."

"I will. Now, go."

Wilson nodded, heading through the portal. He smiled, looking upon the ever growing village in the Light Dimension. People were happy at work or play, enjoying the beautiful weather of a summer day. He sighed in relief, happy to be back in the peacefulness of a place he now found himself happily calling home.

He made his way through the village, waving to those who greeted him till he finally reached his house.

"Willow! I'm home!" He called as he closed the door behind him.

"Welcome home!" Willow called from somewhere in the house. "Just tending to the garden!"

Wilson chuckled, starting to make his way there though stopped as he heard a soft whimpering. He quickly hung up his bag and hurried to another room where a crib was. There in the crib, was a little baby boy with messy brown hair, his amber eyes on the verge of tears.

Wilson frowned at this, reaching into the crib and pulling the baby into his arms.

"Oh sh sh sh… It's okay, Hayden." Wilson said softly, rocking the child. "No need for tears."

"Aguh." Hayden grabbed at his coat, sniffling a bit. "Bah."

"Shhh…” Wilson hummed softly. "I know, you're just waking up but you're okay and I'll get you
some food too. Just please don't cry. It's breaks your father's heart when you do."

Hayden looked up at Wilson, hiccuping a little but his sniffling stopped. He cuddled up to his father, giving a pout.

"I know, little one, I know. C'mon." He carried him out, holding him close as he went to the kitchen, grabbing a bottle. "Here, got just the thing."

Hayden grabbed at the bottle as soon as it close enough, drinking the contents as quickly as possible, a happy look on his face. He calmed as he finished, sighing happily, cuddling up to his father.

"Aguh…"

"There we go." Wilson smiled, setting the bottle down, keeping Hayden close. "Let's go see your mother now."

"Bah."

Wilson headed into the garden, seeing Willow was gathering up some strawberries from the garden. He smiled, moving over quietly before bringing an arm around her, kissing her on the head.

"Hi." He whispered.

Willow giggled, kissing his cheek.

"Hi yourself." She grinned. "Finally done negotiating?"

"Yep. Not bad for my first run, according to Grandmother. The other diplomats seems to like me… Well, save Pugna but his son likes me at least so… I think that's something."

"Pugna's an old crankshaft, so it's best the son does like you. I do hope they are being nice or they'll get a flaming shoe to the face."

"T-They are. We're just mainly doing progress reports and letting others know if there is anything amiss. Few problems here and there but we're doing well. Still have to connect with the other dimensions. Working on it though."

"Good." Willow smiled, noticing Hayden was in Wilson's arms. "And I see our little flame is awake."

"Yep, he was crying for food when I walked in. I got it taken care of though."

"Thanks for that, I put him down for his nap a while ago."

"He was just waking up, guess he heard the door open."

Hayden giggled, reaching out for her.

"Aguh!"

Willow picked him up, holding him close.

"Oh my little boy. You're getting so big."

Hayden cuddled close, holding onto her shirt.
"Buwah."

"Wilson, look at him!"

"He's adorable!" Wilson said, laughing, kissing Hayden's head. "Our little boy."

Hayden squealed, nuzzling Wilson.

"Baba!"

"Hard to believe he's gonna be an adult eventually. I want him to stay little."

"I'm sure Hayden would disagree. Best to enjoy the time we have." Wilson ruffled his hair a bit.

"Baba."

Wilson smiled, bringing both his wife and child close.

"You know… being you with after all is said and done, really does make the days easier because I know I have you to come home to."

"Oh, Wilson." Willow kissed his cheek.

Wilson chuckled.

"Now… Where are our girls-"

"Papa!"

Wilson fell over as the twins tackled him, hugging him tightly.

"You're finally home!"

"You were gone for so long!"

Wilson laughed, hugging them both back.

"Sorry, lot of work had to be done. I promise this won't happy everyday."

"Good!" Wendy nuzzled him. "Having you gone all day is no fun."

"Not at all." Abigail said, pouting. "You'll read to us tonight?"

"Of course. Long as you don't mind helping get your baby brother to bed."

"We never mind that!"

"He's our baby brother, why wouldn't we wanna help?"

Hayden giggled.

"Aguh! Bah bah!"

"Aww! There he goes being cute again!" Wendy moved away from Wilson, tickling the boy a little. "I swear he's the cutest baby brother ever."

"He's one of the best baby brother's ever." Abigail added, kissing Hayden's head.
"Heee!" Hayden giggled.

"Hey, Papa, can Uncle William and Auntie Charlie come over for dinner tonight? I'm sure Hayden would love to see his playmate." Wendy asked, batting her eyelashes.

Wilson got a knowing look.

"You just want to play with Rosie too, don't you?"

"Maaammmaybe."

"But can't they, please?" Abigail gave another pout.

Wilson chuckled, patting their heads

"I'm not against it. Willow?"

"The more the merrier." Willow smiled. "I'll make some really good pasta with some garlic bread. Sound good?"

"Sounds wonderful." Wilson drooled a bit at the thought. "I haven't really eaten much today so something filling sounds amazing right about now and I'll help too."

"Good." Willow kissed his cheek. "I'll go get the kitchen ready. Girls? Can you keep an eye on your brother?"

"Yes, Mama!"

The girls hurried off with their brother into another part of the garden, getting some of Hayden's toys before playing with him.

Wilson chuckled, watching for a moment before turning his attention to Willow who was making her way inside. He snuck up behind her, bringing his arms around here, kissing her cheek.

"Well, you're extra cuddly today." Willow giggled, kissing his cheek in return. "What's the occasion?"

"Can a man just love his wife because she's just amazing in everyway?"

"Oh, you." Willow nuzzled. "I need to go to the kitchen now."

"One more minute, please." Wilson held her closer. "I missed my wife."

Willow rolled her eyes but couldn't help leaning back into him, sighing in content.

"You dork."

"Your dork."

Willow giggled, kissing his cheek again before parting.

"Come on, we got work to do."

Wilson nodded.

"That we do."
Like we always do.

Together.

THE END

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