

A Fox in the Works
A Change to Four
By: Fox Cutter

February 1st, 2020

"Look out!" Romana said as she sped around the corner, her body tucked low over her skates and her tail flying behind her. She leaned to the side, deftly avoiding a large bull-morph who had the misfortune to step in her way.

He shot off a few choice words at her retreating back, that she ignored as she wound her way through the Market. She easily avoided any further close calls with the pedestrians as the shops streaked past her.

The young lioness laughed happily to herself as she looped around a group of surprised looking otters. She adored the skates her Father had given to her for her twentieth birthday, just shy of a year before, and wore them as often as she could; much to the annoyance of Mother Oriana.

She turned in to a small side street of the market, coming to a quick stop when she found that it was a dead end. Turning around, she was surprised to find the store front of the familiar shop, hidden away from the rest of the market. It was always hard to find, moving around as often as it did.

With a snap of her tail she caused her skates to vanish, teleported to a small pocket dimension she had access to. They were replaced by a pair of knee high boots made of a fine brown leather with a small heel. They made a soft clacking sound as she fell the few inches to the ground.

She quickly summoned her staff, causing it to appear in the air in front of her. Catching it in her hand, she held it close as she pushed open the shop door. She stepped inside the shop, the sound of bells ringing out her entrance.

The shopkeeper was an old, balding human who stood a head shorter than herself. He was dressed casually, like he had only recently rolled out of bed. She had never bothered to ask why he never seemed to change his clothing, but she suspected it had something to do with his magic.

"Hello, Romana, what can I do for you today?" he asked, never bothering to look up from his work.

Letting out a humph in disappointment that her disguise spell had not worked, she walked up to the counter and smiled at the old man. "I'm looking for a strand of hair from a centaur's tail."

He looked up at her from over the edge of his glasses which seemed to be perpetually perched at the end of his nose. He thought for a few seconds before nodding his head. "I can provide you with that."

Romana let out a relieved sigh. That was the hardest part of her spell to obtain, and she had been searching for weeks. "That will be fantastic," she said.

She then moved her staff in the air, triggering a familiar spell. The jewel at the top of her staff began to glow, as a list wrote itself out in the air in blue fire. She studied it for a moment, mentally checking off what she already had.

"I will also need a pair of second level harmonic crystals, blue in color." With that said, she waved her staff and caused the letters to fall from the air.

"Won't you need a blood stone as well?" the shopkeeper asked, and then turned his back to her before she could answer.

"No, I won't," she answered as the human rummaged through the boxes that lined the shelves behind the counter.

With a snort he turned back around, a small bag that held a single coarse hair in one hand and a pair of deformed, egg- sized stones in the other. Both stones were colored blue, in fact a much deeper blue than she had expected. "Well then, I wish you well. Here is what you asked for," he said, then set all of the items down on the counter in front of him.

"Thank you; I think this will do," the young woman said, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a spell stone. She set it down on the counter next to her items. She had spent the last week making the stone just so she could sell it. It wasn't easy, but she was pleased with it.

He snapped it up into his fingers, and examined it as a jeweler would examine a fine stone. A smile crossed over his weathered face. "This will be more than enough. Where did you find it?"

"I made it," she replied, picking up her things from the counter and placing them in her pockets.

The old man nodded his head. "Come back anytime; for this I will let you have a few more items."

"I'll remember that," she replied.

He nodded, already focusing on something else that had grasped his attention.

Now that she had her items, she turned around and exited the shop. Once she was outside she sent her staff away and looked around to make sure that there was no one to get in her way.

Satisfied that it was clear, she took a few running steps and then jumped into the air. When she landed she was once more in her skates.

The young lioness slipped back into the flow of the market, not moving as fast as she had before. She was done now. She had gotten everything that she needed. It was no longer necessary to rush.

* * *

Romana slipped into her bedroom, having avoided most of her family while moving through the house. With a happy sigh, she closed her door and emptied her pockets, dropping her newly acquired items on the top of her desk.

She fell to her knees and began to search under her bed, her tail flicking in excitement. She pushed the containers under the bed around before she uncovered a small wooden box. She picked up the box and set it down on her desk.

With a wave of her hand and a few choice words, she canceled the spell on the box, allowing it to be opened. Lifting the lid, she added her new items to the others that were inside. She then closed the lid, restored the spell and pushed the box away.

Opening the drawer of her desk, she pulled out a well-used notebook. It was filled with many different spells, most of them unfinished. She flicked the pages until she found the spell she was going to do that night, and started to read over it. She wanted to be sure that she had everything correct. She wouldn't have much opportunity to check them while she was casting the spell.

She went through the notes. Having read them many times in the past few weeks it didn't take long to be sure she knew them. Even so, the suns had set by the time she was satisfied. She opened the top drawer and removed a box of white chalk. She then scooped up the wooden box, the chalk and her notes, and stepped out of her room.

The young lioness snuck quickly through the large house, being as stealthy as she could. She did not wish to be caught, as she wouldn't be able to easily explain what she was trying to do to her family, at least not until it was finished.

To her relief she managed to traverse the hallway without incident. Slipping inside her chosen room she closed and locked the door behind herself. Both physically and magically.

Letting out a long breath, she glanced around the room, making sure it was as she had left it. It was one of the house's three Great rooms, but many years before it had been converted into a bedroom.

The only person who had been in the room for the last few years was Romana herself. She had been spending her evenings there, first cleaning the dirt from the floor, then drawing a seven-pointed star at the center of the room. Each part of the star was filled with runes and words, arranged to help move and channel her magic. It was almost completed. It only needed a bit more work for her to cast the spell.

The floor was cold against her bare feet as she walked across the room. With it being officially empty, it wasn't heated like the rest of the house, and the hard wood floors held the cold like ice. What was worse was that she couldn't cast a spell to warm herself, not this time. Any other spells would get in the way.

She set her items down on a small table next to the star. There were already other items waiting for her there: A bottle of water, a small bowl, and a bag of herbs that had been ground into a fine powder.

Opening her notes she turned them to the page for the spell, carefully turning them until she came to the section that she would need. She copied down a few notes onto a clean piece of paper, then tore it out of her notebook and tucked it into the metal spiral that decorated her left arm.

Then, in what was a long-practiced move, she grabbed the bottom of her shirt and lifted it up over her head and threw it down onto the floor. She adjusted her sports bra over her fur until it was fitting her comfortably.

For a few moments she pondered what her parents would think if they knew she did much of her magic top-less. She found it simply more comfortable to work with just a bra and not have the fabric of her shirt get in her way.

The young woman removed a piece of chalk from her box and walked gingerly into the center of her star, making sure not to smudge any of her careful work. She settled down onto her knees and closed her eyes, pausing a moment to compose herself. The spell was long and complex, and she needed to be as relaxed as possible to perform it properly.

Slowly she slipped into a light meditation, running over the spell once more in her mind, making certain every part was exactly as it should be.

Once she was ready, she opened her eyes and looked down at the unfinished symbols on the floor. Brushing a lock of blond hair from her eyes, she called up her magic, infusing the chalk with it as she started to draw the last of the runes.

She worked slowly and with great care, making sure each one was perfect. It was exacting work, and even though it was only a few dozen symbols it took her over an hour until she finished the last one. Once it was done she took out her notes and checked her work against them, just to be sure.

A feeling of magic started to fill the air around her. It created a magical glow in the room, growing stronger with each passing moment until even her father would have felt it. It was tingling over her, lifting her fur as the lines of the star began to glow.

Romana stood up, arching her back a bit to relieve the twinge in her spine. Her muscles cramped for a moment, bringing a gasp from her before it faded away. The pain was half caused by spending the last hour bent over on her knees, and the rest was caused by the constant flow of magic through her body.

Rolling her shoulders a bit she walked back out of the center of the star and returned to the table. The feeling of magic lessened as she left the star. It was reassuring as it meant that no one else in the house would feel it.

She turned her attention to the wooden box, opening the lid and removing the seven blue crystals. With them in her hand she returned to the star, placing one at each of the seven points before returning to the table.

Next she opened the bag of herbs and poured them into the bowl. She took out the centaur tail hair from the box and a clump of red fur, which joined the herbs. The last item in the box was a long hollow reed, with which she began to stir the mixture as she slowly poured in the water. She started to whisper a long spell as she mixed the elements together until they had become a thick gray paste.

Finally came the part she wasn't looking forward to, but had to do. She took a step back and unfastened her pants, letting them drop away from her legs to join her shirt on the floor.

The young lioness pulled the reed out of the mixture, which came out clean. She used the tip of her claw to cut a sharp point at the end of the reed.

Gritting her teeth, she took the reed in her hand, then stabbed it down into her thigh. It wasn't hard, but still went deep enough to break the skin and draw fresh blood.

Romana used the bloody tip to stir the paste again, keying it to herself. Once it was mixed in, she set the reed aside and placed her hands into the paste, picking up a large handful which she began to work into the fur of her legs.

After half an hour of slow work she had covered herself from the waist down -- legs, tail, panties and all. It had started to dry in her fur, and was threatening to flake off if she didn't move fast.

Without much time left, she gathered up a large white stone and her bloodstone from the box, and then picked up one last piece of chalk. She took them all with her into the center of the star and sat down, folding her legs under herself.

She placed the stones into her lap and took up the piece of chalk. She reached out to the one gap in the lines that made up the star, and then connected the ends with a special symbol, sealing the spell. As soon as it was closed the magic started to flow around her.

The edge of the star began to glow a soft white color, the blue stones at each point flaring like candles. Flickering light seemed to flood the room, muting out all the other light sources.

Romana closed her eyes, taking the two stones from her lap and holding them close to her chest as she began to chant. The words flowed off her lips with practiced ease. The symbols in the star started to glow, light filling each arm, leaving only the center clear.

Her words grew stronger as she opened her reserves of magic. She felt the power flow over her body, her legs tingling with the magic as the paste started to glow with its own light. The points of the star began to lift from the floor, closing around her, stretching out and curving over her head until the points touched. The arms closed in tight around the young lioness until she was wrapped in the magic.

Rolling her head back, she opened her eyes, staring into the light that filled her world. A smile played over her lips as she took in a breath, then whispered the last word of the spell.

In an instant the magic tightened around her, pulling closer to her body and rushing into her flesh. It was pain and pleasure all at once, and Romana let out a strangled howl; the sound of which was swallowed by her magic. The light grew ever brighter around her, wrapping around her legs and tail, digging through every cell of her lower body.

Then with a flash the magic was gone, fading away and leaving Romana blinking in the sudden darkness. The spell was completed, the magic gone now that it had flowed in its charted course. Now that it was over she did the only thing that was left for her to do.

She simply passed out.

* * *

Sunlight -- that was the first thing that Romana became aware of. The light of the rising suns was shining down onto her face, warming her fur and the skin underneath. A soft groan slipped from her lips as aches and pains started to make themselves known. Her back was stiff, and one arm was pinned under her body. She lifted her free arm to block the sun, blinking the magic sleep from her eyes.

'It's morning,' she thought to herself, lifting up her upper body to pull her arm free. Pins and needles flooded over the fur as the circulation began to return.

"The spell!" she cried out as she started to fully wake up. She spun around to look behind herself, letting out a pleased yelp. Her whole lower body had changed into that of a full lioness. Four large feet were now splayed out under her added bulk, and her tail was flicking against the floor in the distance.

She moved one of her hands down her back, just touching the fur where her expanded body began. It was real, the fur tickled at her paw-pads as she stroked the new addition. She could not only feel her new body, but she could feel the touch on her new flesh.

"I did it! I'm a lion'taur!" she cried out, throwing her arms into the air. With a long whoop she tried to rise to her four feet.

Instead of getting up, she ended up kicking her four legs in all different directions. She only managed to roll onto her side, kicking away the remains of her ruined panties in the process.

A small grunt escaped her as she tried again. She hadn't expected it to be easy, but after spending years being able to naturally become a full lioness, she felt it shouldn't take much skill to master her new form.

With careful and deliberate moves she tried to pull her forelegs up to her body, just as she would as a normal lioness. Instead they both twitched a bit, but nothing actually moved.

The transformed 'taur frowned, and tried to move her hind legs, but had no greater luck. They did actually move, but not as intended, slipping more to the side than up under her belly.

Her tail tuft tapped the ground, showing her impatience. She used her arms to lift herself upward, then rolled her lower body into a more correct position.

All she succeeded in doing was to pin her paws under her new bulk.

Romana decided to ignore the problems with her legs and see if the spell had any other effects on her. After a few moments of investigation she found that her upper body had grown to match the scale of her new addition. Her sports bra was tighter than it had been the night before, and the spiral arm band was snug against her skin.

Satisfied for the moment, she looked around herself, searching for the two stones she had been holding during the spell. The blood stone was just out of reach, glowing a dull red in the sunlight, but the second gem was just within her grasp.

She had to lay her upper body flat to the ground to reach it, catching it with the tips of her fingers. She sat back up, rubbing her stomach where she had bent. It felt different than normal, her new build making it uncomfortable to lay like that now.

She looked at the stone, holding it in the light. The white of the stone was almost gone, replaced with a soft lavender color, highlighting the flecks of gold that still hung inside. Only a few spots of white remained in the stone, and they were quickly fading away as she watched.

Romana's ears twisted happily. The spell was almost done, and quicker than she had ever expected. She had thought it would take a full day until the last of the change was anchored. She looked deeper into the stone, searching for any further traces of white, but there was just the handful that had nearly faded away.

The moments ticked away as she watched the stone, her eyes scanning from one point of white to another, catching each one as it slowly evaporated from inside the stone. Finally there were none remaining, leaving just the lavender behind.

With a smile, she set the stone down in front of herself. It was the focus of the spell, the key stone that it all hinged on, and now that the color had changed the spell was complete. Not only was she changed, but her natural abilities had 'learned' her new form.

She turned to stroke her new flank with one hand as she closed her eyes. Her focus turned inside of her mind as she searched out the ability to shift from morphyic lioness to a full lioness. It was much the same ability that her father had, only weaker. She, Adric and Emmitt all had the ability to change from morphyic to non-morphyic at will.

As her mental fingers brushed the surface of her power, she felt the touch of a new form, resting with her others. With a simple push, she found herself sitting on her knees, bipedal once more. With a smile she returned to her 'taur form to be sure she could control it. Satisfied she put herself back as she should be.

There were a few moments of dizziness. Shifting so many times so quickly had been a fierce drain on her resources. She leaned forward a bit, her hands holding onto the floor as the room spun around her for a few moments longer than she had expected.

Shaking her head clear, she lifted herself to her feet. There came a few moments of unsteadiness, followed by a flair of pain down her back. She winced, touching the point on her back where the pain had originated. It was kickback from the spell, a side effect of using so much magic at once.

It had been her hope to avoid the pain, clearly it hadn't worked as well as she'd expected. From experience she knew the pain would slowly grow worse the rest of the day and into the next before it finally went away. It was simply part of the price of the spell.

She retrieved the remains of her panties from the floor, ripped apart by the addition to her body. She scolded herself for not bringing an extra pair.

Instead she slipped back into the rest of her clothing, moving stiffly as the pain increased. She gathered up the rest of her things. Of the seven blue stones, nothing remained but dust on the floor. The seven-pointed star had fared no better, having been erased by the magic.

There was no sign that anything magical had happened the night before.

With her box under one arm, and her notes under the other, she spoke the words that unlocked the door. She padded into the hallway, heading for her room. She wanted a nice long shower, some fresh clothing, and breakfast. A very large breakfast. It felt like she hadn't eaten in a month.

* * *

February 12th, 2020

Romana let out a long growl in frustration as she tried to move her forepaws under herself, only to fail once more. In the last ten days she had spent every moment that she could in her new form, but she hadn't even mastered the basic control she needed just to stand upright.

Today she was outside, under the noonday suns that flickered between the leaves of the trees above her. The backyard was safe enough for now, and the large trees gave her something to use for support.

She closed her eyes and rubbed her fingers on the top of her muzzle. She had promised herself she couldn't step back inside until she mastered at least standing up, but after four hours she hadn't moved.

The young lioness ran her hands over her large body, stroking the soft fur, a purr coming from deep inside of her. She found it exhilarating to be a 'taur. The body had strength and power to spare, she could feel it every time she tried to move, but it was useless to her if she couldn't even get onto all fours!

The only part of her new body that she had any control of was her tail, and there wasn't very much she could do with that.

Finally she let out a sigh and rested her head against the tree, feeling the rough bark on the fur of her cheek. "I must have screwed up the spell," she said under her breath. That was the only thing she could think of; it was supposed to have allowed her to use the body, not to fumble around like a child.

She tried to think of what to do, and who she could turn to. Little Fox was back on his world for a few more months, and Elena would simply tell her parents what she had done. They were the only 'taurs she knew. There was no point in talking to Salie, it was too late to fix the spell, and once again it would come back to her parents.

Closing her eyes she tried to think. After a few short moments she found herself starting to drift off into slumber, the exertion of the day having drained her. She tried to fight it off, not wanting to risk someone coming home before she could change back.

It came as a terrible surprise to her when she opened her eyes and discovered that it was already too late. Standing a few feet, her hands on her hips and her large skunk tail held in the air was her sister, Becky.

"And what is this about?" she asked her eyes tracking over the addition to her younger sister.

Romana blushed a bit, tucking her tail around her rump. "Hello, Beca," she said lamely, dropping one hand over her eyes. "You're back early."

She walked closer to her sister, an odd look in her eyes. "What exactly is it you have done to yourself here? With the four feet and all?" she asked with a smirk.

A blush crossed over her face as she pressed down her hand, blocking out the look on the skunk's face. "Just trying out a lion'taur form," the young woman answered after a moment, hoping it would be enough for the skunk to go on her way.

"Really? I'm surprised Salie would have taught you a spell like that. Last I remember she said you lacked the control to properly perform them," she said with a tisk, then placed a hand on Romana's shoulder.

"It's just that... um..." she paused, struggling to come up with some kind of response that didn't sound like a horrid lie. Nothing came to her.

Romana felt Beca's fingers wrap around her wrist and pull her hand away from her eyes. Blinking she found herself looking right into her sister's soft blue eyes, framed around the black stripe of fur that ran down her muzzle.

"Salie didn't teach you this spell, did she?" Beca asked in a soft tone, not accusing, but just curious. A curiosity that was reflected in her eyes.

"No. I made it myself."

"It looks good on you, but why the change?" she asked, dropping the lioness' wrist and taking a step back to look at her.

Romana frowned and dropped her eyes. She noticed in passing that Beca was wearing a knee length skirt. It was a change from the pants that she normally wore. "It's not that simple to explain."

The skunk huffed and settled herself down cross-legged in front of her sister, brushing her skirt out over her legs. "Mom, Dad, Rhea and Emmitt won't be home for a few more hours. You have time to explain as much as you wish to me, and I'll sit here, listening to it all."

Romana tried to shift her bulk, but only caused a twitch down her flank. "It's partly Little Fox's fault."

"Oh really?"

She paused, hoping that it would be enough explanation, but she could tell from the look of Beca's face that she would have to go on. "Yes, Adric and I used to watch him all the time when he came to visit. I'm sure you remember."

"I remember all three of us getting grounded for trying to ride him."

Romana laughed, the memory coming back to her in a flash. "After Adric and I discovered that we could shift, we both wanted to be 'taurs. I remember begging Dad to talk Salie into finding a way to change us. He didn't of course."

The skunk woman nodded her head. "So, how long have you been planning to do this?"

"Years," she admitted, glancing down at her large forepaws. "Ever since I learned my first transformation spell. That night I remember laying in bed, thinking about what happened, and that I

could use it to bring fruition to this dream. I toyed with it for a couple years, but I was never able to work out the details like I wanted."

"But now you could?"

She nodded her head. "I realized that I could use my natural ability, amplify it so it was strong enough that it would absorb the transformation spell. I wouldn't just be changing myself, I would be learning a whole new form."

"So you have control over this?" Beca asked, her large tail twitching over her back.

Romana smiled shyly. "Yes, I would demonstrate it, but I wouldn't exactly be decent," she replied, motioning to the neat pile that contained both her pants and her underwear.

The skunk girl chuckled softly. "I don't think I want that kind of view of my sister," she said, then shook her head. "I'm glad to see that your spell worked."

"Not completely, I can't move in this body," the 'taur replied.

"You're paralyzed?" A look of horror starting to build on her face.

Romana shook her head. "No, I just can't seem to control it." As an example she tried to stand up, which only resulted in twitching some muscles in her hind legs.

"Interesting," Beca replied, tapping her fingers together. "Maybe I can help?"

"How would you do that?" she asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

"By starting with baby steps," she said, standing up and brushing off her skirt. "Roll onto your side."

"What?"

"Trust me," the skunk said, walking to stand next to the 'taur's long body. "Just roll onto your side, and I'll show you."

Romana looked at her sister in curiosity for a few moments then decided that it would be best to trust her. "All right," she said. She then twisted her upper body around, using it to pull her lower body to the side, but it wasn't enough.

"You're going to have to push me," she said with a blush.

With a nod, Beca bent over and pressed her hands against her sister's large bulk, pushing against it as she slowly rolled over onto her side.

Much to her embarrassment, Romana let out a long purr at the touch. It was the first time someone else had touched her new form, and it felt fantastic, better than she had ever expected.

"There," Beca said, sitting down at the 'taur's forepaws. Gingerly she took one of the forelegs in her hands. "Ready?"

"For what? I'm still not sure what you are planning on doing," she asked, one arm resting on the ground, her palm propping her head so she could look over her bulk and at her older sister.

"Just pay attention to your body," she said, then started to pull on the leg, slowly extending it out to its full length.

Romana gasped as she felt the new muscles move for the first time. She could feel the power trapped inside, just waiting for her to learn how to release it.

"You can feel how everything is moving?" Beca asked, slowly pushing the leg back against her large body.

She nodded.

"I'm going to keep doing this for a bit. You need to concentrate on how the muscles move. While I'm moving them, I want you to try and move them yourself."

Romana nodded her head. "I see. That makes a lot of sense."

"Now hurry up and learn this. Everyone else will be back soon. We don't want them to catch you like this," the skunk replied.

"At least not until I can use it properly. Thank you for covering for me, Beca, and for your help."

"You're my younger sister, what else could I do?"

* * *

March 18th, 2020

Romana stared up at the roof of her bedroom, watching as the light from the rising suns slowly crept over the flat surface. It moved slowly, inch by inch, and she had been watching it for the last hour.

She hadn't slept at all the night before, and her stomach was starting to seriously bother her. She knew she was coming down with something, probably some sort of flu, but it had never been this bad before.

It also meant that she wouldn't be able to spend any time that day in her 'taur form, which disappointed her. It had been almost a month since she'd had an opportunity to slip into that body for more than a few moments.

It wasn't for lack of trying. Both she and Beca had been trying hard to arrange it for some time, but their plans had been thrown off by a surprise trip back to Earth. One of her cousins had gotten married, and everyone was invited.

The trip had been a grand old time. It was also the first time they had been able to go to Earth without disguises. The world had finally changed enough that they could safely go about in their natural forms.

Both Beca and herself had been looking forward to today. With three hours alone in the house they had lots of time to work on her movement. Now that looked like it might not happen, unless she managed to find a way to feel better.

She rolled over in her bed and wrapped a hand against her stomach, pressing firmly on it. She was starting to worry that the discomfort had been caused by all the food she had been eating in the last week. It felt like she was always starving.

As her belly churned under her touch she let out a grunt and gave up on trying to sleep. Rolling out of bed she stood up and found herself light headed. She held herself in place for a moment until it cleared, then pulled on her robe. Closing it over her body she wandered out of her room.

One hand was pressed against her belly, trying to hold it in place, the other was against her forehead as each step sent waves of nausea rolling over her body. She stumbled along, occasionally pausing to allow her body to settle before continuing on her way.

She was halfway to the kitchen when she felt her stomach roil around inside of her. Gasping slightly she rushed as fast as she could to the hall bathroom, then brought up most of her dinner.

Wiping her face clean she curled up on the bathroom floor. Whimpering softly, she felt the acid still on her tongue and lips. She tried to spit it off, but couldn't find the energy.

The cold of the tile floor was seeping through her thin robe and pulling the heat away from her skin. She whimpered again, trying to roll her body, but found she was too weak to move. Eventually she started to cry; She didn't know what was wrong with her, but she knew she had to get help.

A squeak came from the hallway, the sound of someone walking past the bathroom door. She let out a gasp, trying to call out for help, but only a long moan came out.

It was enough, as a few moments later the door was pushed open against her feet. The familiar face of her younger brother looked in, his still thin mane ruffled around his face.

"Romana?" Emmitt asked, looking at her for a moment before realization struck the teenager. "I'll get help!" he said, and then rushed out of the room.

She let out a soft whimper and curled tighter on the floor. Her eyes drifted closed as she shivered in the growing cold. Finally her awareness started to drift away.

The feeling of a hand on her shoulder and her body being shaken pulled her back from the darkness. "Wake up hon, wake up." It was the familiar sound of her father's voice.

Romana pulled her eyes open, trying to focus on the outlines of her father's face. "Daddy?" she asked, feeling so very ill.

"Stay awake, Romana, please stay awake. There's something important you need to do," he said, leaning in close to her, his hand stroking over the side of her face.

She blinked, trying to clear her eyes, but nothing came into focus. "What is it?" she asked quietly.

"Change into your new form," he said.

The young lioness looked up into his eyes, surprised that he knew about her change. Her first reaction was to deny everything. "New form?" she asked.

Her father nodded his head. "Yes, the lioness'taur. I know all about it. Please shift into it."

She gulped and nodded her head, shivering from how cold she was. She rolled over onto her side, trying to find it in her to shift. It was hard, so very hard, her body didn't want to move, and it wanted to change form even less. It took everything she had to force her body to change.

Once the change started it moved quickly, her body swelling out, her lower half expanding, twisting until she was a 'taur.

The pain in her body ebbed as the new form took hold, and exhaustion crested over her body. Letting out a sigh, she closed her eyes and quickly fell into a deep sleep.

* * *

March 20th, 2020

Romana's eyes flickered and slowly opened, the sound of distant conversation drifting around the edge of her hearing. She felt refreshed, like she had finally slept for the first time in a month.

As her vision cleared she found herself staring at a large window, which looked out onto a distant hillside. It was framed by a plain white wall, one that had never been in her room.

She tried to roll over, but found that her movement was restrained. Looking down at herself she discovered that she was in her full 'taur form, and she was lying in a special hospital bed.

"What happened?" she asked, searching her memory.

"I'm afraid you hurt yourself," a very disappointed voice said from the other side of the room.

With a gulp, she turned herself around as best she could. Her father was sitting in the room with her, his hands resting on top of his cane, and a look of disappointment on his face that matched the tone of his voice.

"Hurt myself?" she asked, blushing a bit as she looked down at her body. Only the simple hospital gown protected her modesty.

He nodded, brushing a hand through his short cut hair. "The spell you did; I'm not sure what happened, but it didn't just give you a new form. Instead it reshaped every part of you, including your soul."

She blanched, touching her hand to her chest. "My soul?"

"Yes, hon, you never really spent much time in your new form, not as much as you needed. You became soul sick," he said.

"Just like you." A sick feeling filled her stomach as she finally understood what had happened.

He shook his head. "Not just like me. Your shifting ability isn't as strong as mine, so you'll have to spend more time in this new form, with less leeway than I have."

The transformed lioness frowned and said, "Oh."

"We might be able to fix it, but we'll need Milgrove's help for that. Beca is trying to track hir down, but there's another problem we have to deal with first," as he spoke his face fell even further.

"What problem?" she asked, leaning closer to her father.

He sighed and reached out, placing his hand on her large flank. "Beca said that you can't control this body."

"I'm learning," she said with a long sigh of disappointment that Beca had told anything to her father. "It isn't easy, nothing is working the way I thought it would."

"Which was why you didn't spend a lot of time like this," he replied. "You're going to have to learn it, and learn it soon. Your mothers and I have been talking, and we've decided that physical therapy would be the best choice for you."

The young woman hated it when her parents made decisions for her behind her back. She was an adult, on every world they lived on, and they had no right to make decisions for her. She wanted to protest it, but decided to keep her muzzle closed; she knew they would talk about it later.

Her father gathered himself up a bit as he spoke. "You've also been form-locked. You are staying in this form until the doctors are satisfied that you have full control of it."

Anger flashed across her face, her ears pulling flat as she snarled. "You form-locked me?!"

"Yes. When I'm satisfied that you're well, it will be lifted. Until then, you will not be able to change at all."

Romana tried to gather herself, but the anger that was rushing through her made it hard to say anything. "I... I can't believe you did that to me!"

"And I can't believe you cast a spell like this on yourself without testing it first. You have no idea what it could have done to you, it could even have killed you. You know better than that," he said. There was no anger in his point, and the disappointment was gone as well.

She huffed and turned away from him. "I know it was dumb, but I wanted to do it, and I was sure it would be safe," she sighed, looking down at herself. "I was mostly right."

"That 'mostly' is the problem. I'm sorry, Romana, but it's for your own good, no matter how much I hate saying that," he said, placing his face into his hands.

She had nothing to say in response to that.

They sat in silence for a few minutes before her father stood up. "Your first session will be tomorrow, I'll be here for it," he said.

"I would rather go it alone," she said, turning away from him.

"Alright, kiddo, if that's what you want. I'm going to go. I don't think my being here is helping you any. If you need me, if you need any one of us, just call, okay?"

She still didn't say anything. After a few moments passed her father sighed and walked out of the door, his shoulders slumped over in sadness.

As the door closed behind him she dropped her face into her hands and started to cry.

* * *

April 16th, 2020

Romana rested in the warm water of the pool, her head lying on her folded arms, which in turn rested on the edge of the pool. She had her eyes closed, trying to block out the world around her, but the stink of the chlorine wouldn't be ignored.

She was waiting for the therapists to hoist her out of the pool, and she was feeling frustrated. She had nothing to show for a month of work, she couldn't walk, she couldn't even roll over all the way. The only reason she was 'standing', as false as it was, was the long brace that she was laying on, her paws just inches from the bottom of the pool.

"This is so fucked up," she said with a sigh. She hated being trapped; in the water, the bed, or in her own body. She just wanted to be herself again, just to walk on two legs and be able to move herself. She just wanted to be normal again, but her father had seen to that.

There was a splash as someone jumped into the water, the waves washing over her shoulders and soaking her hair. She snorted a bit and flicked her ears. "It's about time, I've been waiting forever," she said, looking up.

She had expected to see one of the physical therapists in the pool with her -- the better to strap her large body into the hoist. She was surprised to find that it was someone quite different.

"Bad day?" Adric asked, a small smile on his lips. Her twin brother, younger by only a few minutes, relaxed in the water next to her.

A mix of emotions crossed through her. She wanted to reach out and hug him, happy to see a familiar face, but she was also angry that this was the very first time he had come to visit. She knew that his classes would have prevented such a trip, but she thought he could make an exception for her as they hadn't seen each other since the trip to Earth.

Finally her happiness won out, and she wrapped her arms around him, pulling him to her chest. "I'm glad to see you, but what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in school?" she asked.

He returned the hug, holding her for a few moments before pulling back. "Class just started, so I had time to come and visit," the young lion looked over her transformed body. "I like what you've done with yourself," he said.

The young woman blushed a bit, and tried to move away, but failed completely. "I'm sorry you have to see me like this. I feel stupid about what I did."

"It does look nice on you," he said, pulling back a bit.

"Thank you."

Reaching out he placed his hand on her large flank. "Feels strong," he said.

"I wish I could show you, but I'm stuck here," Romana said, slapping at the water.

He nodded, the look on his face made it clear that he already knew what had happened. "That's terrible," he said.

"It is," she said, placing a hand over her face. She could feel tears starting to prick at the corner of her eyes. "I'm so angry about this. Angry at Dad for putting me here, for form-locking me, for leaving me stuck like this."

Adric nodded slowly, licking his lips before he spoke. "I see... well if it's any consolation, your breasts are bigger," he said.

The heat of the blush moved across her face so fast that she was surprised her fur didn't start to smolder. She looked down at herself, and at her exposed cleavage. For her sessions in the pool she wore a bikini top, as her normal one-piece suit wouldn't fit anymore, and it showed off more than she was used to.

Her brother chuckled a bit. "This from the woman who always wears sexy shoes."

"You have your way of showing off, and I have mine," she replied.

"That body is all about showing off. You really can't hide being a 'taur, not here, and definitely not on Hr'raal," he said, moving a bit closer to her. He ran a hand over her foreleg, stroking the wet fur through the water. "Once you get all the kinks worked out, I wouldn't mind being like this myself. Though not permanently."

"I think that can be arranged."

They shared a quick look for a few moments, but she couldn't think of anything more to say, and apparently he couldn't either.

A small smile crossed over Adric's face, then he took in a deep breath and dove under the water. She watched him move under the surface, his hands clinging to her front leg as he pulled himself deeper. Then, without warning, he started to tickle the pads of her feet.

Letting out a short gasp and a burst of laughter she pulled her paw away from his twitching fingers. "No fair!" she cried out, slapping water in his face as he surfaced.

He laughed, pushing his long hair away from his face and smirking at her. Water was running down his face and dripping from the bottom of his muzzle.

"Don't do that!" she snapped at him.

Adric's smirk grew wider as he pressed closer to her. "Do what?"

"Tickle me!"

He shook his head. "Funny, I thought I was making you move your leg."

There was a moment of silence before she looked down and stared at her feet through the rippling water. "I moved my paw," she said.

"Yes you did. The doctor was right; you do need a different kind of therapy. Being stuck in the hospital won't help you, you need something more personal."

Romana looked up at him. "What are you suggesting?"

Her brother tilted his head to the side for a few moments before smiling at her. "Your therapist thinks you'll do better in a familiar place with a familiar face. We can go to the lake house, you and me. He's willing to show me what to do to teach you how to walk again. I won't be alone, but it will be just you and me most of the time."

"Father wouldn't allow it," she said, pouting a bit.

"Who says we have to tell him," he replied, climbing out of the water and resting on the lip of the pool. He tugged at the legs of his swimming trunks, keeping them from sticking to his fur.

Romana sighed. "Everyone," she said.

"Sis, you're an adult, you can do what you want. Your therapist agrees with me, and won't stop you. To be honest, it was his idea. We don't have to tell our parents, we'll just nip off and they won't really know until you can walk home."

She sat in the water, digesting what he said, trying to decide if what he was saying was a good idea or not. It wasn't like being in the hospital was helping her, all she had succeeded in doing was sulking. A change couldn't hurt at all, and with his help she had done more than she had since the transformation.

"Well then, Adric, when do we leave?" she asked.

"In a few hours," he told her, picking up a towel and starting to pat his fur dry. "It's going to be a lot of work for both of us. I'll get someone to get you out of the pool."

She reached out, grabbing at his leg as he started to walk away. The younger man turned back to look at her. "Thank you," she said.

"I couldn't do anything less for you," he replied, a knowing smile fluttering across his muzzle.

* * *

April 27th, 2020

Romana flipped the pages in her notebook, looking over the notes and carefully written symbols of the transformation spell. She ignored the meal in front of her, as she had for the last hour, only occasionally taking a bite.

Tapping the eraser of her pencil against her nose, she stuck her tongue out slightly, trying to work out a complex part of the spell. She turned the runes around in her mind, trying to work out any interactions she might have missed.

With a flash it came to her, and she let out a pleased squeak. "That's it!" the young lioness'aur declared as she quickly adjusted her notes.

Adric looked up from his books. "What is it?" he asked.

A smile crossed her face. "Why the spell power was too strong in the magical attachment. This is part of why it didn't work the way I wanted it to," she said. Her smile fell a bit as she continued. "Now I just need to work out how I changed my soul."

Her brother thought for a moment, and then carefully closed his book. While she had been learning to use her body, a slow process, but one that was moving forward, he had been studying for his classes. He had already earned his Engineering degree, and was now trying to get his masters in starship design.

"Will that help you turn back?" he asked.

She paused for a moment, fluttering the pages of her notebook. "No, not really. I'm stuck like this until Dad releases the form-lock."

"Then what's the point?"

The smile returned to her face for a moment, her ears perking up. "Well, when I fix the spell, I can use it on you. It would be just another form, not like me."

The younger of the pair tisked gently. "Maybe you should have Salie look at it, she is your teacher after all," he suggested.

Shaking her head she set the notebook down. "No, no need. I can do this myself."

"Doing it yourself is how you got stuck in this form," he said, returning to his book.

"I'm stuck in this form because of Dad," Romana replied as she finally started into her meal. She stuck her tongue out when she realized it was cold. Crossing her forepaws, something she could now do, she pushed the plate away. "Could you reheat this?" she asked.

"Do it yourself," he said from behind his books.

"I still can't stand," she replied.

"Who's fault is that?" His voice was cold.

The young woman sighed. "What is wrong with you today?"

"I'm trying to get my homework done, and I need to concentrate," he replied. He was still hidden behind the book, but it was clear he was speaking through clenched teeth.

"And I'm going to need to get back to my room soon, I do need to work my legs," she said.

Adric snapped his textbook closed and glared at her. "Then either do it yourself, or wait until I'm done."

"We don't need the attitude," she snapped in reply.

He glared at her for a moment, then started gathering up his books. "If you want to talk to me, I'll be in the living room," he said as he climbed to his feet.

"Adric! What has gotten into you?" she demanded, trying to move to block his path. Her four legs moved, but not enough to move her substantial bulk.

The young man came to a stop, turning to look at her. His ears were pulled down into his black hair and his blue eyes flaring. "I'm a bit tired of you," he said.

"Of me?" she asked, surprised and slightly wounded.

"Yes of you, and how you are acting. You have done nothing but wallow in self-pity since we came here, and how it's not your fault."

"Well if Dad hadn't--"

Adric threw his books to the ground with a surprising amount of force. "Dad isn't the reason you are stuck on all fours. Dad isn't the reason you were soul sick to the point that you had to go to the hospital. You did this to yourself!" he bellowed out, using much of the lung capacity they had inherited from their father.

Romana pulled back, looking at her brother in amazement and horror. "But Dad form-locked me," she said in a weak voice.

"Because of what you did to yourself. Everything that has happened was because you did it to yourself, and I'm sick of hearing about how it's Dad's fault. You're not a child, so I suggest you start taking responsibility for your own actions," he said, gathering up his books and walking through the archway into the living room of the small house.

The young woman watched him go, his tail shaking in agitation as he vanished around the corner. She stared at the doorway, trying to understand the way he had been acting. Could Adric have been right? Could it have actually been her fault?

Leaning back she looked down at her body, flexing her hands until the claws slid slightly free. She didn't know what to say to him, how to make him feel better. She reached for anything she could think of. "I'll have Salie look over the spell," she said.

Her brother had nothing to say in response.

* * *

The day passed slowly for Romana. By late evening, she was still in the kitchen, and had been the whole day. She had managed to move herself around a little bit, and tried as much as she could to stand up, but she couldn't get all four legs moving in conjunction.

What was worse was that her stomach was growing persistent for food. It had started as a small ache, but was beginning to make her uncomfortable.

Her frustration was compounded by the fact that Adric had left a few hours before. The only comment he had made was the slamming of the door on his way out. She had tried to talk to him throughout the day, but it seemed to only cause his anger to flare, and now she was left in the failing light as the sun started to set over the lake.

"Damn it, Adric, what do you think you're doing?" she asked the darkening room, but no answer came.

Sighing, she looked to where the light switch was, only a dozen feet away across the tile floor. If she didn't want to be left in the dark, she was going to have to turn it on herself.

Slowly she started to move herself to it, first pushing with her hind legs, then pulling with her front. It wasn't easy, her upper body upset her center of balance, making her wobble, but she was able to move.

The young lioness marked time by the setting of the sun. She moved inch by inch as the suns reached the water, and slipped further behind the horizon. The night had finally fallen completely by the time the light switch was in reach, the only real light coming from the neighboring houses.

The lights flared on, bright enough to blind her for a moment. She brought her arm up to cover her eyes, blinking a bit as she adjusted to the sudden change.

She placed both hands on her face, panting softly. She was drenched with sweat; it clung to her body and soaked her fur. It had taken her as much work to move only a few feet in an hour as it had to run a mile before her change.

Leaning her upper body against a wall she let out a sigh. If she had known how much work it took to be 'taur, she might have had second thoughts about doing her spell.

Romana looked down at herself, pulling at her shirt, using it to fan herself a bit and try to cool off. Her tongue was starting to stick to the roof of her muzzle.

At least she had done it, she had actually moved herself. It would have been better if she was able to walk, but it was something. Something more than she had done since she had been changed.

Changed herself.

No matter what her Father had done, it would still have taken just as much strength to move across the floor. Even if she wasn't form-locked, even if she wasn't stuck as a 'taur; a form she had given to herself.

A spell she should never have done.

A spell that she had been so confident that she had right, that she had every single thing perfect, that she never really checked her work. A spell she didn't have the skill or training for.

A spell she had made.

Had cast.

Her.

All on her own.

The epiphany came like waves, crashing over her with growing force until it carried her away with them. She could yell and scream all she wanted to, but there wasn't any denying it anymore. It wasn't her Father's fault that she was form- locked, it was her own.

She twisted her body around until she could lay her head on her flank, feeling her body start to shake in anger, which moved into sobbing before becoming a simple cry.

* * *

Some time later she felt a hand come to rest on her back. Sniffing a bit she lifted her head to find Adric sitting at her side.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have left you here like that," he said, looking sheepish.

She looked at him for a few moments, wiping her face with the fur of her arm. "I'm sorry for the way I've been acting," she said.

Nodding his head a bit he held out a bag to her. "I got you some dinner," he said.

Romana looked down at the bag, the smell of the food wafting through the room was unmistakable. Hamburgers -- not the kind you could get on Earth, but something very close. She took the bag from him and peeked inside of it, her mouth starting to water. She was even happier to see that four of the burgers were resting inside of the bag.

"Thank you," she said, smiling to her brother.

He shrugged. "It makes apologizing easier. I shouldn't have yelled at you; I just got frustrated hearing you go on about how it's not your fault."

A frown played across her face, then the lioness reached out to place a hand on his shoulder. "But it is my fault. I've had a lot of time to think tonight, and you're right. This is my fault, all of it," she admitted with a sigh. Saying the words made her feel a little bit better, but not by much.

"It's good that you worked it out yourself. Your physical therapist wanted you to see a psychologist."

She blanched at the idea. Romana had never liked the family therapist, and was glad to avoid a visit to him.

Adric smiled a bit and stood up, looking back at the table where she had spent most of the day. "You moved yourself all the way over here?" he asked, a bit of surprise coloring his voice.

The lioness nodded her head as she unwrapped one of the hamburgers, tearing into it with zeal. She hardly took the time to chew the food before gulping it down.

He shook his head, a smile crossing his face as he reached out and ran a hand down her flank. "Did you actually walk?"

Shaking her head, she made a worm like movement with her finger. Her muzzle was far too full to allow her to talk at that moment.

"It's more than you've done in quite a while. I think you're going to master this yet," he said.

She nodded, and then gulped down the last of the first hamburger. "I could use some water," she said.

Adric hurried to retrieve a glass of water for her, handing it to her as she started on her second burger. "When you're ready, I'll get you to bed."

"Thank you," she said again before returning to her food. This time she went slowly, to better savor the taste of the burgers. She had no idea where he had gone to get them; they weren't something you could find on Prid, but she was thankful he had made the trip, even if it was out of guilt.

She thought as she ate, turning ideas around in her mind. That day, whatever its many problems, had been one of her best since she had been soul sick. If only because she had a simple drive to get herself moving. Something that she hadn't had before, when she had just been angry at her Father.

Now she was angry at herself, but that anger could be shaped into something constructive. Including some of the things she had been avoiding.

"Tomorrow, I think we should try some of the water practices," Romana said between mouthfuls.

He looked a bit surprised at this. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure," she replied, almost meaning it. She had hated her time in the pool, it was too small for her form. They now had the lake to use, and she could practice there.

Even if she had to wear a bikini,

* * *

May 30th, 2020

Salie tiskied a bit as she turned the pages in Romana's notes. The middle-aged squirrel mage looked both annoyed and disappointed as she read over the cramped scrawling handwriting. The tight look on her face made her look older than she really was.

Romana shifted a bit, feeling very uncomfortable with the occasional glances her teacher gave her. In addition her legs were starting to ache. She was resting with her rear on the floor, with her upper body propped up by her forelegs. She had enough skill to hold herself up, but wasn't quite up to walking yet. She could manage a few steps, but still needed support to move herself.

"You have created quite a mess with this spell," Salie said, putting the notes down and giving the lioness another critical look.

She blushed a bit and lowered her ears. "I know. I've been trying to work out what I did wrong, but I can't find it."

"I'm not surprised; you have a lot of complicated interactions. The seven pointed star configuration is highly unstable, and has a lot of interpositions between different magics. Not to mention you have the wrong closing symbol on the spell. It's too tight, it would create a resonance effect."

Romana closed her eyes and placed her hand over her face. The wrong closing symbol? That made sense. The type of magic she was using in that configuration would need a loose enclosure, one that would allow the excess magic to bleed out. She had been so busy trying to hide

the spell from her family she never thought about the effects of keeping all the magic inside. "Creating enough extra power to transmute my soul," she said.

"You never did pay attention when I was trying to teach you about your physical spell configurations," the older squirrel said with a sigh.

She said nothing.

Salie returned to the notes, spreading them out on the table in front of her. "From the look of some of your corrections you knew there was something wrong before you cast the spell."

"I had my suspicions, but I thought it was perfect."

"Hubris is the enemy of all mages."

The lioness' taur nodded her head and allowed her hand to drop back to the table top. "As you tried to teach me before," she said.

A small smile crossed her face. "I believe you have learned that now. Why didn't you at least allow me to look over your notes?"

"I didn't think you would have let me even try the spell. Then you would have told my parents," she said, bouncing her paws a bit to try and relieve the pressure on them.

Salie slowly shook her head. "I would not have approved, you are far too unskilled to safely create a transmutation spell. I would not have stopped you, but I would have insisted on performing the spell myself."

Romana folded her hands on the table top. "Things would have been better if you had. Though I doubt I would have been willing to admit it."

"The fact that you asked me to help shows me that you are learning. You've always had an issue with overconfidence. It's why you failed in some of your studies."

The lioness winced at the directness of her teacher's words, but said nothing to refute them. She had never looked at things in that way, but now that it had been said, she believed that it was true. "Maybe we should go over some of the parts I missed before," she suggested.

A smile played over the squirrel's muzzle. "Maybe we should, but that is for a later time. Today we have other things to work on," she said, emphasizing her words by tapping at the pages on the table.

Romana took a moment to allow her mind to drift back to the spell. "Do you think we can repair it?"

"I can't fix what you did to yourself, but I believe I can correct the majority of your errors, though I am confused as to why you mingled the blood magic with the runic?"

"I wanted to use my existing ability to shift forms. I can't learn new forms like my father could, I've tried. It was the only way I could think of to make it more than just a temporary transformation. That part actually worked, I can shift between forms at will."

The older mage leaned over a bit and took a look at the lioness' transformed body. "Then why have you not simply shifted into your normal form to meet me?"

"I'm form-locked until I can learn to use this body. I didn't get the instinctual parts of the spell down correctly," she admitted.

Salie flipped through the pages and shook her head as she read over the notes. "No, you had that correct, you even compensated for the integration of the blood magic. The resonance effect just shorted it out. Ironically, it's only because of the resonance that your spell worked in the first place. The parameters you have would never have allowed the connection to your natural shifting ability."

"Oh," Romana said, a little dejected by the news. "We can fix that, right?"

A short look of concentration crossed over her face. "No, we can't. You can't add abilities like that, your natural magic is counter to it. The only way to make any change powerful enough to work is to change your soul."

She closed her eyes a bit, and swore softly under her breath. "That's not what I wanted to hear."

"Why? Are you planning on using this again?"

Romana looked outside through the glass door, towards the dock where her brother sat, engrossed in a schoolbook. "I was hoping to. This was something we both wanted, at least when we were younger. I wanted to gift it to him."

The elder mage followed her gaze. "As noble as that maybe, you can't do that, not without what happened to you happening to him."

With a sigh the lioness nodded her head. "I can't let that happen to him. I suppose we can just make it a normal transmutation spell, maybe on an artifact?"

Salie pushed the notes around then nodded her head. "We can put it on an artifact, but you won't be able to cast the spell until your form-lock has been removed."

"That gives us time to work out the kinks," she replied.

"Yes it does," the squirrel said, moving the papers back into their proper order and pulled out her pen.

"One last thing," Romana said, reaching out to touch her teacher's hand.

She looked up, a bit surprised.

"Thank you for helping me, and for teaching me."

A larger smile passed over the mage's face, and she nodded her head. "You're welcome."

"Now do you mind if I lay down, I need to get off my forepaws."

* * *

July 8th, 2020

"Good morning," Romana declared as she carefully walked into the kitchen. She was moving one paw at a time, making sure each one was stable before she moved the next one. It was slow and complicated, but she was walking, and it meant more to her than anything else she had done in quite a long time.

She was just glad that the house had only a single story; she still wouldn't be able to manage a set of stairs. At least not for a few more months.

Adric looked up from his breakfast, his eyes dark from too little sleep, but a look of relief was on his face. He had spent the last week taking his finals and hadn't gotten a chance to see her.

"You're looking good," he said.

"Thank you," she replied, moving slowly over to the counter to make her own breakfast. "How did your finals go?"

"Not easy, but I think I did pretty well. I'm a little worried about my hypospace engineering class, but I should at least squeak through," he admitted.

"You'll do fine. I couldn't understand anything that you take, but you're smarter than me."

He shook his head a bit. "I'm nothing more than you are," he said, a touch of distaste crossing through his voice, but it quickly faded away.

"I couldn't do what you're doing. I couldn't even finish my own college classes," she admitted, walking over to the table and settling down next to her brother.

Adric smiled a bit. "You're a mage, you'll always have a job," he said, and then pushed his empty plate away. "I should get to bed. I was up all night celebrating the end of finals week," he said, standing up.

"Then I'll walk you to your room, now that I can do that," she said, offering him a hand.

He looked up at her for a moment, and then took her hand in his. Standing up next to her, he looked up into her eyes. "I'm proud of you. You had us all worried for a while, but you proved us wrong."

"I think I proved myself wrong as well," she said. Together they started walking back down the hallway, going at Romana's slow pace.

They were halfway to the room when they both heard a key turn in the front door. The pair of them stopped and Adric pulled away. "I'll go see who it is. Are you up to seeing anyone?"

A short nod of her head was the only reply he needed.

He nodded and let go of her hand then turned back and hurried to the living room. While he was gone she slowly turned herself around, her rear end scraping against the wall.

When she was turned about she was rather surprised to be face to face with Emmitt. Her younger brother was looking her over with a bit of interest on his face, his black mane pulled back behind his head in an attempt to hide how small it still was.

"You startled me," she said, smiling at the teenage lion.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well you are easy to sneak up on. I'm impressed with the body, but I never thought I would see you as a 'taur.'"

"I've been working on it for a while."

"It does seem to suit you. I'm glad to see that you're up and about. Everyone was worried about you. Dad, Mother Rhea and Mother Oriana were throwing a small fit when it came to what you did."

She nodded her head. "It was pretty dumb."

"Well you're better now. Come on, everyone is in the front room," the young man said before turning around and walking back down the hallway.

Romana shrugged her shoulders and starting after him, wondering who exactly 'everyone' was. She had her suspicions, but wasn't going to make a guess until she saw for sure.

She took it slowly as she walked into the room, not surprised to find that her father was sitting in a chair, talking softly with Adric. Emmitt had moved to the kitchen, making himself something to eat.

Her father stood up as she came in, resting much of his weight on the cane held tightly in his left hand. A smile quickly crossed over his human face as he looked her over. "Romana, I'm glad to see you," he said.

There was a moment of anger rising inside of her, but she pushed it back down. Even though she knew better, a part of her still believed that everything was her Father's fault. She fought that part down so she could return his smile, and not have it be forced.

"I'm happy to see you as well," the lioness' taur said as she walked to him, looking over his face and into his ice blue eyes.

He reached out and placed a hand on her shoulder. "Your PT was right. I'm so very proud of you," he said.

The lioness shook her head. "For hurting myself? That's not much to be proud of," she said.

"I'm proud of you because you have moved past that and that you can walk now," he answered, moving his hand to run it over her hair, pushing a few strands out of her face.

"Thank you," she said.

He nodded his head and returned to the couch. "I've removed the form-lock, you can shift again," he said. Relaxing on the couch he placed his cane on his lap, trying hard to hide the shakes in his hands.

A feeling of elation crossed through her as she touched her shifting power, feeling it move like it hadn't in many months. "Thank you," she said in a whisper.

"You earned it," he replied.

"I'm not as able-bodied as I should be. It will be months before all of my muscles return to full capacity. I'm looking forward to being able to run. I think that will be a wonderful experience."

Her father nodded his head and smiled at her. "You can do whatever you want to now. I'm not going to force you to do anything, and I'll admit I overreacted to what you had done."

"No, you didn't," she said, dropping her hind legs and relaxing her weight onto her rump, tucking her tail around her body. "You could have said it better, but you did what you needed to do, as much as I hate to say that."

Fox smiled at her and steepled his hands under his chin, resting the puckered scar that crossed the underside on the tips of his fingers. "You are a very strong woman, I'm glad to see that finally coming out."

"She's surprised all of us," Adric added.

"You can come home if you like. It was never my intention to exile you from the family."

"I never thought I wasn't invited, I just didn't want to, then it became familiar," she said, motioning around the room. "I think I'm going to stay here, at least through the summer. Swimming in the lake helps my strength."

"Then you may have to put up with the rest of us. This is a vacation house," he said with a thin smile.

"I would love that," she said, and meant every word of it.

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