

# Will of Nature: Wild

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DM

**EoB: 4**

W: Hello there.

My name is Will, and I once thought I could be normal.

I'll leave it to you to decide what that may or may not mean.

As you will soon learn, I was an idiot.

I probably still am, but I've been told there is hope.

Regardless,

there is a world out there you're not prepared for.

I wasn't.

Nature has both a king and a fortress, a soul and an agenda.

They ruined me.

I.. I need you to listen to my mistakes.

I need you to see how I'm living now.

You're welcome to consider me crazy.

At this point it would be a luxury,

but I need to know I wasn't wrong.

Other than that, well,

I'm never sure how to end conversations like this.

You can't see me. I can't see you. So...

Metaphorical handshake?

Metaphysical hug?

Perhaps, you've already found the sense to run away.

Good choice.

How about...

## **Act 1**

There, let's begin

### **Sc: 1**

The wind sweeps over the desert, stirring dust and darkness. Resting on his hands, Will lies down and feels the breeze course through his spirit. Dipping his fingers into the nearby watering hole, he whistles. A thick wall of fog is covering the moon. Will opens his eyes, the mist covering the area around him. He scratches his forehead as different roars and howls tremble the landscape. He yawns as the shadows of massive beasts prowl, fly, and stomp within the surrounding fog.

A large serpent slithers past Will. Careful to keep its eyes shut, it begins to drink. A lion with the head and talons of an eagle lands, Will covering his eyes from the flapping of its wings. His body jumps slightly as a monster with antlers, scales, and fur lumbers to the watering hole. Dust gathering in his nose, Will sneezes. The eyes of the serpent at his side shoot open. Seeing its reflection in the water, it quickly turns to stone. Both other creatures staring at him, Will sits up and rubs his neck. Blushing, he gently pushes the statue into the water with his boot. The other creatures seem to sigh and step back from the splash. Their powerful necks reach back down towards the water.

Will closes his eyes again. Their ears all twitch to footsteps moving over a sand dune. Will senses one last burst of power, but finds himself alone, the fog gone. A group points at him from the distance. Soon, the barrels of several guns aim down at his face. Will reaches up to poke one, more guns appearing from the glaring soldiers. With nowhere safe to look, Will smiles and stands. As he is led away, he glances back. By the watering hole, there are no footprints other the soldiers and his own. The water itself is empty.

## Sc: 2

Will remembers the sensation of falling, the ground erupting underneath him in a cascade of debris and concrete. Having the flavor of his own blood, his throat fills with water.

Will rolls out of his bedsheets and over the edge of the suspended bedframe. Waking midfall, he attempts to catch himself. His fingers slip, and he lands on his nose. His eyes watering, Will mumbles with his face pressed down. W: "You win again, floor." The floor does not respond, and Will senses someone watching him. He sits on the cold stone and massages his nose. Moonlight falls on his back from the sealed window, Will gazing through his bars into the dark corridor.

The man is at the end of the passageway. His blue eyes and light complexion distinguish him from the dark and empty cells. The man tips his hat to Will. Will grunts, the hairs on the back of his neck standing up. The hum of static echoes out. Small currents of electricity arc from the man's fingers and across the cellblock. They wind around the iron bars, the fierce light revealing creatures huddled in captivity. Will sneers as the lightning crackles in front of him. He glances at the different spirits stirring in the other cells, at their pale forms and cruel hunger. Feeling their glares on him, Will shuts his eyes and grits his teeth.

When he looks out again, the prison is dark, the iron bars untouched. Will takes a deep breath and returns to bed. He does not look as the man shakes his head. Will hears his footsteps echo away.

## Sc: 3

In another country, a different man awakens in his bedroom. His servant kneels at his side, the warm glow of the morning covering the both of them. As the servant reaches out a crooked hand to him, the wrinkles of the man's skin unravel. His eyes widen and regain color.

His lungs expand and revitalize as he takes his first deep breath in years. The features of his face return to those of a young and healthy man.

Sitting up in bed, he tests the strength of the body he had once lost to time. Swinging his feet outwards, he puts pressure on his reformed muscles. Unsteady on his legs, the man walks to the window. He clenches and unclenches his fists before pulling aside the curtain. The glare of the sun overwhelms him, but the man nods. He laughs as his face contorts to the light. His servant bows behind him, and the man watches over his empire.

The workers in the field look up. Outside, his assassins and enforcers notice him. All his servants move to him and bow from the below the window. The more that gather and submit, the taller the man seems to stand. The man smiles, the world once more his.

#### **Sc: 4**

Will scowls at the uninteresting plate placed at his feet. Every day, the guards clanged about serving breakfast. Given the time, the quality of what they passed between the bars, every day, Will wishes they let him sleep in. Scowling deeper, he sits on the floor and raises a spoon. A shadow passes over him. E: "Good morning." Will glances up at Eliza. Considering she could not have been much older than him, he is not entirely sure what her job is. Given her friendly smile, Will bothers to look around. A vast desert covers the horizon behind the brick wall at his back.

Of the three prisoners he can see, one is fighting to get a spoon into his gloved hands. The food surrounding him appears a glistening gold. A woman crushes down her meal into paste. She uses the residue to add to a collection of scribbles covering her cell walls. Will reads of battles and disasters he had tried to fight against, of the future conflicts he can already feel building. They do not mention his name. The other woman unnerves him. Her back is to the bars, her arms

clutching a doll in the shape of a child as she weeps out a lullaby. The guard on watch seems bored.

W: "I'm seeing something different." Eliza shakes her head. W: "But... though everything still hurts, I can move well enough." Will looks at his own body. Though he heals quickly, that only leaves him with more scars. The aches within his muscles and bones still linger. W: "Though the world began to cave in, it didn't fall apart." His eyes narrow. W: "At best, I'll call it mediocre." Watching his raised hand, he mutters. W: "There's no hair in the food, but now I can't move my left pinky." Eliza sits across from him, the bars dividing them. E: "It seems I was wrong, but you don't have to stay here." Her eyes turn serious as she observes him, but Will looks away. W: "I've run out of creativity."

He taps at the iron bars. W: "These seem to be the only things I can rely on." E: "Even if they decide to kill you?" Will keeps himself from laughing. Every chance he had to make sense of those around him had crumbled underneath him. W: "What do I even have to cling to?" He tries to whisper. W: "So what if it does kill..." Eliza's fist slips in through the bars. It catches Will off guard, and his head snaps back. W: "Ow..." Blinking heavily, he lowers his chin. W: "The nose again..." He rubs his face and glares past Eliza. W: "Guard? Protect me!" Having seen the exchange, the guard only shrugs. The other prisoners are preoccupied with their own business. E: "I'm sorry, but it seemed as if you were going to say something irritating." Eliza shakes out her knuckles. She continues to frown. E: "Also, I owed you." Will cannot help but nod despite the pain.

Eliza gets to her feet. E: "I know why you don't want to take another chance..." Her voice echoes as she puts distance between them. E: "But if you try enough, it should go your way eventually." Her features soften as she waves goodbye. E: "Maybe one success is all you need."

The man from the night before is waiting by a door at the end of the cellblock. He is staring at one of the prisoners near Will. He nods to Eliza as she walks by. They both glance back at Will, but he lays down and stares at the ceiling. The same gray walls always seem to follow him. He raises an eyebrow. It remains a reminder that he has yet to make his life his own. W: "I guess I'll take that wager." Slowly, Will forces himself to stand.

### Sc: 5

Will follows the man into a small room with a silver table. No guards are on watch, but the man keeps his confidence. He points at a metal chair, and Will sits across from him, a metal hook embedded into the flat surface between them. E: "Hello." Will notices the man looks to be in his early twenties. Holding more experience, far more pain, the man's voice is low and steady. W: "What do you want?" Will tenses as the man reaches over to him and clicks his wrists into place. E: "An understanding. If you are to have options, there are questions we need to ask of you. We wish to first know you. We'd rather not make any judgements, yet." Will smirks. W: "If you're that interested in leaving a good first impression..." Will tugs at the handcuffs now chaining him to the table. W: "What's with these?" The man shrugs. E: "We know enough." Will's mouth opens. He closes it and nods once. W: "Fair."

As the man digs through the clutter on the table, Will tugs at the chains binding him. He does not feel them have any give. He looks at the man, but the man only pulls out a notepad. E: "You're welcome to try." Will chuckles. He sees the large nails binding him to the steel surface, another set of nails attaching the table legs to the floor. In one motion, Will focuses his strength in his arms and pulls upwards. He staggers as the table legs snap in two. The table swinging from his wrist, the chain and nails holding, the man watches the contents of the table spread across the room. W: "Huh." Somewhat impressed, somewhat embarrassed, Will does his best to find a

comfortable position to sit. The man picks up a pencil rolling by his feet. He helps Will settle the table into a level position.

E: “Tell me about the Doctor.” His eyes widening, Will nearly knocks the table over. His stare hardens, turning almost feral. W: “If I do, what will become of me afterwards?” Feeling a current of wind course through the room, Elliot smiles. E: “That will depend on you.” His own eyes almost glow, and the air in the room becomes even more chaotic. E: “Tell me about the Doctor, or return to your cell.” Will takes a deep breath. Where only he can see, a glowing symbol flickers in the palm of his hand. W: “He was like a father to me.” Will is not sure of what emotion hit him first, but a certain anger soon stood above the rest. He looks at the man, Elliot, as his hand moves at Will’s words. W: “He saved my life and gave me a chance when no one else would.” Will smiles. He may as well see what could happen next. W: “I despised him.”

### Sc: 6

**W:** The memories I’m about to share may appear convoluted, but I should start at the true beginning. **E:** Your childhood? **W:** If that is what you choose to call it... **E:** How old would you be now? **W:** Going with how my body feels, too old. Based off my memories, too young. Other than that, I’d say around seventeen. **E:** I see... **W:** You don’t have to look so upset. I don’t need you to pity me. **E:** I wasn’t. I won’t. **W:** Ah... **E:** I’ve spent my time sitting where you are now. Keep in mind, though you may have suffered alone, more than anyone else could understand, you weren’t the first. **W:** That I can believe.

I was born... diseased. Showing the luck I continue to carry to this day, my very body seemed to reject the idea of reaching a happy future. My parents noticed. They gave me away, and I found myself left to die in the corner of an orphanage. I won’t say I wasn’t ever shown kindness, but the caretakers knew better than to get too attached. No one wants a child they know



will die soon. **E:** Aren't you being too critical? **W:** Hmm... I don't think so. The strong, the ones who fit the mold, survive, and I wasn't supposed to live long enough to even have a memory. Then, the Doctor arrived one day... **E:** How do you know all this? **W:** Though I have great faith in my memory... mostly because the trauma will not leave me alone and so little of this went right... that is a good question. I went back to visit my old caretaker. When she was finally able to recognize me, she was almost moved to tears... She was happy to find me breathing again, happy to see me standing and walking my own path. It wasn't the worst feeling...

But, of course... **E:** The trauma? **W:** The trauma. The Doctor appeared at the front door one morning. He was glancing at the cloudy sky, looking back at a rolling fog that seemed to be following him. The caretakers let him in, and he immediately started searching. My caretaker told me he was careful to show up in his best suit, to place every word he spoke to the desires of those listening to him. His hair had greyed. He was half blind, but he was confident of his charm, of his agenda. The other caretakers were satisfied to get caught by his demeanor, his charisma, but the woman watching over me frowned. She observed him as he found his way to me... He made a promise then. He proclaimed he was a doctor who could create any cure. He said he was the one who could offer me a future, who could repair the flaws in my design. The other caretakers believed him. Even if they had any doubts, they didn't have another answer for me.

My caretaker led the Doctor to the door. He was carrying me in his arms, my cries as soft and broken as they always were. The fog was building in the area. A group of black birds were glaring at her from the nearby buildings. The Doctor bowed and stepped into the street. He gave one final smile, and my caretaker realized the cause of her misgivings. I was never an active baby. Skinnier and quieter than the rest, you could see the pitiful death I had approaching.

Looking at the Doctor's eye, she told me he was more dead than I was. He might have been able to save me, but he had abandoned his own future, his own cure. Though she was glad to believe in what he offered for me, she knew he was also a man who hated himself.

**Sc: 7**

**W:** In his compound hidden in the forest, he had gathered five of us. Though I arrived as not much more than a newborn, three of the others were barely children. The last one was younger than me. My first memory there involved a surgery, but the others told me I had been through several. They had been through several. What he did to us in his operating room wasn't physical. He did everything he could to respect our deteriorating bodies but didn't hesitate to pick apart at our souls. We were deceived. He couldn't cure us, but he could rewrite the rules of our power.

We were able to tell we weren't normal. Before we could even all walk and speak to one another, the five of us were able to see each other's essence, a sort of fog that could wrap and transform based on emotion and focus. Our disease had been born in our spirits, a strength we were conceived with that our small forms couldn't properly process. It should have killed us. It would have killed us, but the Doctor gave us the life we should have had... Huh? **E:** What? **W:** Nothing. I'm just not sure if I'm not lying to myself...

Anyway... when we were certain we wouldn't be in pieces by the next afternoon, we realized what a strange place the Doctor had brought us to. His complex had different floors. Within them he kept all sorts of creatures and ghosts and other things we weren't sure of. Rather than assistants, he had his ravens, powerful female spirits clad in golden armor, and golems, earth-made vessels that obeyed without question. As a group of young boys, we also explored how abnormal we were. One of us could mess with the powers of the rest of us. One of us could

never be beaten in a fight. One of us would never get tired or discouraged. One of us kept accidentally setting all of us on fire... at least, I think it was an accident... Maybe it was all unintentional... But he did really try to break my arm once... We had the most intense games of tag... **E:** Focus. **W:** Right. My powers didn't seem all that special. I would occasionally grow fur. I could sometimes mimic what the others did, but I could never do much beyond that.

While we were messing around, we also became more curious about the Doctor's secrets. He showed us compassion, did everything to make sure we watched over and valued, but he never spoke to us about the future. He never made it seem as if he was preparing to release back into the world or would find us each a proper home. The Doctor never talked about his past. As we grew older, we became aware of his anger, his determination. We all knew he had modified us to guarantee our survival. With new means to fight, we rebelled against our disease until our bodies corrected themselves. But, he didn't stop there. He called us back into his work place even when we had no fight to win, even when we could deeply feel how he tore through our spirits. The one of us who could disrupt power began training to attempt to steal the strength of another. The one of us who was undefeated soon began wrestling with large monsters. The one of us who had the most energy began being exposed to different extreme conditions. The one of us who could create fire began being forced to summon storms. He told me that I could do everything the others could. He said I was their balance, and he made me observe.

We began crying again. We asked him why, and he assured us he only meant the best... Hmph... When we first noticed we could see the auras of others, we quickly learned what feeling was attached to them. It also allows you to tell when someone is lying. He wasn't, but his goals clearly meant more than our sanity. Our childhood wonder falling to every scar, every battle he put on us, we resolved to endure. Whatever it might mean, it was obvious we were getting

stronger. The five of us decided to trust him. We would still gather together and play and laugh like no other children could. If he wouldn't say anything, we told each other of our dreams... for the future... **E:** You don't have to cling on to them forever. **W:** Someone has to...

The first said he was going to be a medic. He almost said doctor but stopped himself. He then went on and on while using big words I'm not sure he knew the meanings of. The second promised he would end up a famous chef. Though he seemed the most determined, we all quietly agreed he would give up first. The third didn't know what he wanted to do. He did say he would have only the prettiest of women, the biggest home, and would be more famous than any of us. Though ineloquent, he spoke of everything we knew would become important... sort of. The fourth... he wanted to be a superhero. He didn't give a reason why. He didn't say how, but we immediately decided then his idea was the best... **E:** And yours? **W:** I didn't get the chance to say...

DM

But, we tolerated the pain of each new day, kept our hopes for a world beyond the complex. One of us even used their power to make sure our dreams remained connected. We were content to try to keep living in our fantasy. We almost managed it. The dream died when one of us disappeared.

**Sc: 8**

**W:** The Doctor had two human assistants. They maintained distance from us, but served a large part in his research, had an investment to keeping us all alive. Even before that day, they began arguing with the Doctor. Much more so than us, he kept them at bay with his reasoning. He was able to lie to them, but he couldn't hide what he'd done. He didn't try to. After they had one last disagreement, the Doctor led us into an underground chamber...

What does a soul look like to you? **E:** A soul... There are too many things to consider, too many uncertainties. We can see a soul more clearly than the rest. It often shines more when we're younger. It's always the color of one's pride to live, the echo we leave behind. **W:** If you were to capture one? If you were to reduce someone to only their essence? **E:** A soul in a jar, a cruel but worthwhile source of power... **W:** The one of us who was most in touch with their spirit had lost their body. In the process of trying to steal everyone's strength, they no longer had their form. The Doctor left us alone to mourn. He didn't attempt to justify himself to our now group of four. Though we tried, we didn't get a response from our friend's container. He was nothing more than pure energy, and that was only the start.

We openly fought him, but the Doctor's ravens turned their weapons on us. They dragged us into the surgery room, into different cages. Everything we did well, the Doctor wanted us to be the best at. The one of us who had hardly ever been hurt became invulnerable. I found him one evening surrounded by broken tools. He was laughing, crying, as everything he tried to do to himself failed to make him feel anything. He begged me, a child younger than himself, to hurt him as I saw what it meant to build something immune to death. The one of us who could control the elements became a living natural disaster. He was the first to give up. He was too afraid of what he could do, was kept docile by medications. The one of us who was born a fighter became a singular army. Every day he had a new scar. The opponents he battled only became more absurd in their numbers and capabilities, but he stood above as undefeatable monster. Doctor did little to me, but that left me to process all their regret.

Doctor made it known that he was using us, and we were more bothered by how he openly showed his remorse. As he watched us squirm and scream against him, he never stopped trying to ease our pain. His constant kindness, that look of concern he'd have when he put us

through his nightmare, it didn't make anything better. It was worse. The entire complex itself was our prison, but we thought we were safe. Rather, we couldn't escape, wanted to believe he wouldn't need to take our lives as well. He... he... **E:** You don't have to tell me everything at once. **W:** I won't. I should at least answer your first question today. There... there comes a point when you need to make a decision, when no matter how young or weak you might be, you have to act. One of us, his... parents, those researchers, had died, so he was rampaging in way that kept evolving. The second, his body was trapped in time, and his mind could no longer develop. The third, his personality had vanished into his soul, but he left his power behind. The fourth, he had to be sealed away, or he would destroy everything.

As I found myself one day all alone, Doctor asked me to help watch over a transfer. Certain new creatures had been caught. Others needed new cages. There were a few other small details, but there was an opportunity. The ravens and the golems were preoccupied. The front gate, which we never could have hoped to best even together, was open for a moment or two. I also could see the keys to the other cells and cages. The job had almost been finished, and their guard was dropping. I needed to leave. I wanted to help them, yet I wasn't sure we had the time, the means... **E:** And? **W:** I could let them free to risk fighting our way out, or I could slip out alone... **E:** What did you do? **W:** I... ran away. I couldn't bring myself to do anything more. The others were told I was missing the next morning. I'm not sure what I left them to suffer to... They didn't mourn for me. I hadn't been taken from them. They knew I had abandoned them.

### **Sc: 9**

**W:** I didn't last long on my own. If anything, I went from one tyrant to another. The one who found me may have even been worse, but that doesn't matter now. I imagine we can discuss the time in between later. The Doctor was always watching me from a distance. He knew my

path from the moment I had stepped out of his complex until when I was forced to return there. If I had escaped when I was around five years old, I was sixteen when I saw his front gate again. In my years away, I had gotten stronger. I had tried my best to make peace with my abilities and the memories attached to them. I'd say I'd failed.

I was in the same corner of the forest, the stone compound more imposing than it had ever been before. The way those massive doors swung open did more to terrify the teenage me than the child who had become familiar with them. He had me in his grip again. Also, I was in a net. There was a large creature squirming around on top of me. It left some very symmetrical scars. I think I can show you... Almost have it... **E:** No need. **W:** Alright then... Flanked by his ravens, the Doctor walked out. He was in his lab equipment, his smile as hypocritical as it had always been.

**D:** "Welcome back." I glared at him and immediately prepared to fight my way to freedom. Given that my limbs lacked circulation, my body suspended at an unnatural angle, I don't quite think he was intimidated. **D:** "Release them." At a flick of the Doctor's wrist, the raven carrying us dissolved the net. I fell to the forest floor, the creature with me, large and crab-like, scuttling into a raven's grasp. I, eventually, took a battle stance. A wall of gold and death ensnared me, but that didn't matter. I raised my arm. The ravens immediately flew at me, too many to react to, the tip of their assorted weapons falling to a rest on my neck. The sun reflected off their armor and into my eyes. As the Doctor chuckled, I squinted and raised my hands in surrender. "So, where's my room?"

**Sc: 10**

**W:** My room presented a problem. Though no raven was left on guard, the excessive amounts of metal did an adequate job. The window was covered by an electrified and cursed iron

grate. The walls began with concrete and only became more durable from there. The door reacted only to the one who had closed it and would take a speeding train to form a light dent. There was some furniture to prevent the space from becoming an impenetrable vault. As it was, it was a high security cell with a chair or two.

Taking in my surroundings, I realized only the highest kind of intelligence would be able to find an opening. I remained confident. It would demand no less than perfect thought and instinct, and I was not that genius. **E:** Hmph? **W:** I know what I said, but I had other talents. With my return, there was a quiet excitement spreading through the compound that did not line up with my greater priorities. Rather than letting my captors build any momentum, I had to gamble everything now. I would master my escape through perseverance, brute force, and a natural inclination to break most things I touch... **E:** And? **W:** The next morning, a raven found me lying on a broken bed surrounded by shards of concrete. The room was both partially on fire and partially flooded.

### **Sc: 11**

**W:** The raven led me into the main chamber where a table had been set for three. Another raven with a crown and brighter armor than the rest was watching from the corner. A stone golem was carefully serving dinner, a steaming ladle balancing on its massive fingers. I smirked and then frowned, the circular gray room a familiar, hostile place. **D:** “Do you remember?” The Doctor was waiting at the head of the table. I approached the middle, and dragging a plate and chair along, I sat down as far away as possible. “My instincts are screaming, my entire body squirming.” I touched the skin along my arm. “I remember it like a bad rash.” The third chair was empty, the golem giving a clumsy bow and lumbering to whatever served as a kitchen. I stared at the Doctor, reintroduced myself to the range of hatred he glared into me. “What do you



want?" I snarled as I sat down, but the Doctor looked away. He was intent on enjoying his meal. I settled for keeping my scowl and ruining his atmosphere.

A hooded figure entered the chamber. I knew who it was, and I didn't want to look at him. "What did you want?" The Doctor pushed aside his empty bowl. D: "The means to finish the fight I started." He set down the napkin. D: "You can't leave a scientist on the verge of completing their greatest experiment, not when that new future is so close." Numb to whatever conflict I might cause, the hooded figure was eating silently. "Is that all this was, old fashioned world domination?" The Doctor observed me with his full attention. His hair was whiter. There were more wrinkles everywhere where wrinkles could form. The lone eye within his stoic expressions was pale enough to be considered unhealthy. D: "It's a part of it." There was a brief silence as we reacted to how the other had changed. I was enraged. The Doctor was more disappointed. D: "So many people wish to claim the world without ever realizing how far the world extends." He tapped his foot. There was a seam running down the floor, the ground beneath us two large plates sealed together. D: "My plan is simpler than you think. It's more extreme than you dare to imagine."

The metal around the complex was decorated with a variety of runes. They would cage any spirit, pacify any beast. The symbols on the floor glowed, a collection of monsters resting underneath. D: "Destruction and rebirth." The Doctor leaned forward. D: "I only want to make the best use of my life. I wish for you to do the same." His promise was that which no one in room believed. "Meaningful words for an ambition paid for in young souls, a dream built on their last breaths." I slammed my hand down but the table dented most in the middle. The hooded figure gripped the metal surface with more hatred than my fingers could have tolerated. "D: "But child..." As we were beginning to settle down, the Doctor chuckled. D: "Isn't

everything?" I stood fast enough to send my chair skittering back. "Of course not!" I felt the crowned raven reach for her weapon, and I let my energy fall. If the Doctor wanted to stand above me with his reason, I had to fight with logic before emotion. "Society molds us for its own purposes, but it doesn't define us. We might be born without a choice, but we find that power when it most matters." I clenched my fists. "You would say most live only to consume without thinking, only to be led, no better than a pack of dogs without a master." The Doctor raised an eyebrow. D: "Yes." Even the hooded figure nodded in agreement with him. "That's..." I tilted my head and wondered how far my faith in others reached. "That's not... entirely true. It's not enough to justify yourself." I decided to focus on my disgust at the Doctor. That, I was certain of.

D: "It can be. If a man desires to be a god, is he wrong because others stand against him, or because he fails?" The Doctor's aura trickled out of his eye. His memories and knowledge became miniature people and their homes. The ghostly replicas wandered through their past civilizations on the table before us. They fought whatever enemy was at their wall. They fought each other when their walls remained untouched. They loved that which they should have hated. They hated what they once loved. They always burned away, were born again each time as the eras and land shifted. The Doctor blinked, and it all vanished. D: "Don't lie to yourself, at least. Every man or beast always has a master. Whether it be society or their darker selves, their gods are empty." His half smile was cast through those centuries of pride. I smirked, and our auras clashed.

"And what you offered us was fulfillment?" D: "Mine is, was, a painful truth among golden lies. You would know, I will murder and betray. In building you, I will not bow." "Why should that matter to me?" D: "You have nothing to lose, but you still care." "But can that care even save someone like us?" D: "Not when your power would become a poison. I can't save

you, either. Removing your power would separate you from the one thing keeping you together. I can, instead, bring peace to all those like you.” “You will? When so many others have failed?”

D: “But they were fighting within the rules. Your every breath means we’re outside of them. The war I bring is special, beyond destiny. It will respect your intentions. Isn’t that what you want, rest for yourself and a second chance for those that remain?” “You don’t get to tell me what I want.” D: “But I’m aware of what you need. At the cost of your life, I can fulfill your deepest wishes.” “Through destruction and rebirth?” D: “It’s what must be done, us taking nature into our own hands. The miserable life you’ve led has a source far beyond humanity and reason. The rules that bind the burning sun and unfeeling moon have a cause.” “Her rule, the systems she represents?” D: “Of course. With your sacrifice, I can reach the root. I will kill the Alpha.”

He gripped at the table and stared at the ceiling as the boundary of worlds rumbled at his claim. My own senses were put on edge. “What would that do?” The crowned raven was on guard. She was gazing into the overlapping realm of spirits, but nothing was mobilizing against us. D: “Your ghost will tell you.” “What if you become worse than they are now?” D: “I don’t imagine I could. You would have to stop me first. If you don’t approve of something, change it.” The passion in his voice found me silent then. His smile reached the other side of his lips. D: “They fear what we could be together.” Looking at my feet, I spat out. “You mean how tall you would stand on our corpses?” Hiding something behind my back, I approached the Doctor’s blank stare. D: “For someone who should already be dead, who would never have had the time to even build a personality, you are far too arrogant.” I stopped and nodded. When he blinked, I lunged with my hand outstretched. If I was aiming for most anyone else, it would have worked.

D: “Why a spoon?” He caught my wrist. His glowing eye was reflected in the utensil stopped centimeters from his face. “You still deserve the slowest, most absurd, death.” The

Doctor shook his head. D: "There's something you're not understanding." He pushed me back with more strength than he should have left to him. I was in the air momentarily, but it was enough time for the crowned raven to move at me. She carried me to the wall. Her spear kept me pinned against it. D: "I only wanted to be civil with you." The Doctor rose from his chair. D: "I desired to redeem you." He walked to me, the other guest finishing his meal, the material of the spear in my shoulder only allowing me to yelp and squirm. D: "I never meant to hurt you." He watched my blood drip onto the floor. D: "Take some time to think. I need to prepare the surgery room." His eye scanned over me. It explored any flaws in my form, widened as he acknowledged me as the final means to his end. D: "You're..." His eye twitched, lost its color, and he turned to leave. D: "Incomplete." He spoke over his shoulder to the other guest. D: "When you feel like letting him down, reintroduce yourself." The figure rose from his chair. D: "Let him see what he could be a part of."

DM

The figure was pulling down his hood, and I ran through all the potential discussions in my head. There was only one person it could have been. Still... there were more scars than there should have been. Prototype stared at me, and all the confidence and wit I'd thought I'd managed to build failed me. I needed to say something, to start my path to forgiveness. My stomach growled instead. "Would you be a dear?" I sighed and avoided his eyes. P: "You didn't eat before attacking him?" Prototype's words were slow and measured. He didn't reveal anything as he moved to my untouched bowl. "Thinking things through never seems to be as important in the moment." I struggled to look down at my dangling legs while Prototype lifted the bowl on his fingers. He raised and blew on the steaming spoon. He smiled at me and then devoured the soup. "But..." He threw the spoon, and it bounced off my forehead. I closed my eyes, his emotions becoming clear. "Thank you." He left me hanging for a while longer. Do you... Do you have

nothing to say to all this? Why do you seem angry? **E:** Your Doctor... **W:** Please, don't call him that. **E:** Like any man turned tyrant in his delusions, there is still a purity to the truth at his core. **W:** Meaning? **E:** Our worlds and its structure is far crueler than you have yet seen. **W:** Again, meaning? **E:** Dwell on that yourself on your own time. Today, the dramatic moments are still only yours to tell. I can only be an observer for these moments here. For now, my anger is mine to keep.

### **Sc: 12**

**W:** I dealt with my rumbling stomach, a gaping wound in my shoulder, as I followed Prototype down the stairs. He was leading me underneath the main chamber as I listened to his thudding steps. I was unable to begin even a half-hearted discussion, once again at a loss for what should have been one of my better qualities. Prototype glanced back at me. His feral eyes pierced through my strengths and worries. He spoke first. **P:** "How often have you transformed?" I could hear the golem cleaning the table above us. "Of what I can remember..." The door ahead had no handle. It was a marked metal slab which Prototype rested his hand on. "Once." Prototype's back stiffened, and I needed to be careful to not ask the wrong question. "And you?" I asked the wrong question, and Prototype...

**E:** Wait. Why is he called that? **W:** Well... There was a point where we accepted the names given to us by the Doctor's wisdom and compassion. We abandoned those. We settled, instead, for the codenames he used. If there was very little humanity in the way he treated us, why should we act otherwise? **E:** It would have been an attempt to keep morale. **W:** You know that would be useless. **E:** Yes, but all that's left, then, is a cursed bravery. **W:** Maybe... But everything about that complex was cursed. Best to see the truth and plan within it...

Prototype flicked the door open. P: "Too many." There were cages built into the wall of the circular room, but the prisoners were numb to our arrival. P: "Outside of this place..." If slowly, the creatures noticed me. P: "What have you learned?" I looked at a group of humanoids with the traits of frogs. Their fingers stuck to the glass, their large eyes stirring in an excitement that could easily fall to fear. "They're cryptids." A ghost dressed as a pirate pointed at a wrinkled and stained map. A message of crusted blood below the X read, "HAVE YOU SEEN MY TREASURE?" I shook my head, and the pirate hovered back into his corner. "They're spirits." I stared at Prototype. My left hand grew claws. My right hand pulsed with energy, was almost transparent. "We're hybrids, an existence somewhere in between." Our eyes the same yellow, Prototype nodded. P: "Yes... So, someone out there was able to make you pay attention..." He started to chuckle but stopped as if the joy got lost at the bottom of his throat. "We have the most potential." I reached out to him. In a crowd where Prototype's dull stare was the most stable, I tried to give rise to hope. P: "We'll be the first to die." It was promptly destroyed, and Prototype ignored my hand.

P: "They're ghosts." Another spirit was staring at me, not with two eyes but with thousands. Each part of its glare attacked at my primal instincts, its intention to kill me with terror. P: "They're monsters." An unnecessarily large worm was hissing poison in my direction and trying to crack through the enchanted glass. Prototype scowled at me. P: "You're still an idiot." I pointed to him and then back at myself. "We're id..." He shook his head. P: "No." Despite the limited progress we'd made, aware of the bad memories we shared, Prototype retreated into himself. We weren't friends or family. His instincts were always searching for the best place, the best opportunity, to draw blood. I didn't appreciate how his focus hovered around my throat. I took a step back. "How..." I squinted. "When..." I hummed and stared at the floor.

P: “What? What could you possibly have to tell me now?” I smiled. “How are you?” I asked a good question in a wrong way, and Prototype made a face as if he was trying to swallow his tongue. “You seem as if you want to scream at me.” Prototype’s chest was shuddering. His cloak was left open, the visible and scarred skin along his torso like leather. P: “That’d be the start...” His body relaxed. P: “I’m not sure I do. What would it change now?” He saw my eyes wander towards the entrance to the next room. There was only one trapped inside.

P: “Do you want to see him?” When I didn’t respond, Prototype’s smirk dared me to follow him through another door. Before I could make the choice, the door opened on its own. R: “Is that him?” A boy peeked out. His mouth hung open, and he ran to me. R: “Hello...” He reached for my hand, but his fingers passed through empty air. “Did the Doctor ever throw a new name on him?” I hid behind Prototype. P: “We call him Runt.” I whispered while avoiding Runt’s stare. “Runt, Prototype, Doctor... was it always this disappointing? Where’s the creativity?” P: “Can you say that?” “At least I settled on a new name for myself.” Prototype snickered. He opened his mouth, but I mumbled out first. “Though does that make it worse or better?” P: “It’s not about creativity. Maybe he was just bad with names.” Runt tilted his head as Prototype pushed me away. He entered the next room. Runt jogged after him, but I needed a few moments to prepare myself. They were waiting for me inside. I’d already disappointed them once, so no harm in keeping them waiting for a little longer. Those few steps forward were some of the heaviest I’ve ever taken, and the door thudded shut behind me.

Prototype had his hand on the container. Though it appeared translucent, the container was made of an organic material. A faint glow cast out from within. Runt was kneeled before that light imprisoned in the dark room. P: “Did you know that his body stayed alive for a while even after the soul was removed? The connection between the two was lost not long after you

left. You missed the funeral.” They didn’t turn to look at me. “I’m sorry. I... didn’t do this to you, did I?” I felt too guilty. P: “You didn’t. If you had stayed, he might have killed you next.” Prototype’s eyes no longer wavered. “We could have fought together to escape, taken a gamble.” His body was one that could never be hurt the same way, a heart that was hardened in the most literal sense. P: “I would have...” He shook his head. P: “But that moment is gone.” The yellow light, pure energy swirling without escape, didn’t react to our words, our passion, or our presence. It once had features that still resembled human, a child. It didn’t anymore. “I could have tried.” The light wasn’t overpowering, but it burned my eyes to look at it. P: “I know. That I do blame you for.” Prototype’s harsh laugh echoed, and an aura of violence rippled off him. P: “You want to know how I’ve been?” There was a reaction in the room behind us, the creatures going quiet in the presence of a higher predator. P: “I’ve been through the worst ghosts and monsters.” He stepped to me. I moved closer to him. He had more self-disgust than hatred. My self-disgust negated my fear. Runt watched us, his yellow eyes matching ours. He touched Prototype’s arm. P: “Imagine the rest.” Prototype glanced down at Runt’s strained face. P: “Now, I can’t imagine much of anything.” After patting Runt on the head, Prototype left the room.

R: “How sad.” Runt’s shoulders dropped. “I’m going to need you to be more specific.” Prototype had shown a broken figure, but with him gone, the only despair left in the room was mine. “Why are you so excited to see me?” Runt’s small hands gripped my forearms. R: “We’re friends.” From our last meeting, physically and mentally, he wasn’t a day older. His smile was one that was content to not think too deeply. It wished for my happiness, and I had to push his hands away. “No, not anymore.” I rested my head on the container. Within it was the beauty of life in all its potential power, all its vibrant color, but all I felt was the silence of the dead. “You’re still a child.” I left Runt staring at the remains of a soul we once considered a brother.



He touched the container. R: "But I remember..." What he meant by that, I didn't have the courage to ask.

### Sc: 13

**W:** I knew the direction Prototype had gone, but I couldn't bring myself to follow him. I let my feet move on their own, let my eyes search for any weakness in the different halls I wandered through. The compound was larger than I remembered it. He had kept adding to it, needed more areas for his research and his experiments. I didn't have the courage to go into the lower floors. I could already hear him far beneath, his confusion, his struggle against the limiters on his mind and body. I looked at the cells I was walking by. A man with a fish tail for legs gestured to me from his submerged chamber. There was a wolf kept in a modified cage. Its ears perked, its body growing to push on the flexible iron grate separating us. I passed a woman who wasn't wearing nearly enough of any piece of clothing, whose features changed based on what I would consider pretty. They called after me, their natural pride abandoned as they pleaded for a help I couldn't give them. The passageway ahead ended at a single door. It wasn't any part of the compound I'd ever been to before. Judging by the age of the walls, it may have been one of the original rooms.

There was a raven placed on watch. Curious, I moved to the door and stepped past her. She turned to me. His defenders had no features, their blue swirling mass contained in feminine shell. Though the raven raised her weapon, she didn't stop me. I entered a dark chamber. A single beam of light seeped in from a crack in the ceiling onto two gravestones. Set on a hill, the letters were too worn to read, and my eyes fell on engravings carved into the wall. A spirit in the shape of a mountain was watching over a throne. At the feet of the seated king, five robed figures faced in different directions. A mass of little bubbles were underneath them. **E:** Bubbles? **W:** Is

what I thought at first. My eyes separating the faint light from the darkness, I saw a mass of engraved human heads. Below them, as if humanity's stare was funneling into them, stood five warriors. **E:** Alpha and Enigma. **W:** Oh, I know of them. **E:** The five heralds and their five champions. **W:** What do they do? **E:** The Alpha is not omnipotent. The strongest kings stand with stronger advisors. The five Heralds help her reign all worlds. Their five Champions keep the balance. **W:** What do the people have to do with it? **E:** You'll find that for every legend that is born in the spiritual dimension an equal amount come from the human mind. Creativity is a powerful, dreadful force, and every human possesses it. If all that energy moves on one direction, towards one idea, new life will rise. Legends eventually become myths to be told as stories. Their power is known to fade. However, the story can live first, and a new creature is born to claim its name. Their power can be infinite. **W:** That... is terrifying. Human panic or misplaced hope can take a physical form? **E:** Yes, but there are boundaries. Before humans create an unlimited god to explain why the sky rumbles, the five Heralds take those festering ideals and mold their five Champions to fit their worries. **W:** They give humans a limited god to worship, gods the Alpha can control... That is also terrifying. **E:** Indeed.

**W:** Well, as I was looking at the wall, the door opened behind me. **D:** "They think I faded away." The Doctor gazed upon the images, the peak of the strongest world. He looked above to a set of broken chains hanging from the ceiling. "Why didn't you?" The chains were decayed, covered in blood and rust. Sets of small grooves were carved into the ceiling. **D:** "I haven't left the legacy I've wanted to." The Doctor held up his fingers. I hadn't noticed before, but the edges were scarred. **D:** "I have only my revenge." He clenched his fist and raised it to his face. **D:** "Revenge on their tradition." The Doctor sneered at the Heralds. **D:** "Their fear." He climbed the hill under the watch of the stone faces of humanity. **D:** "Their hypocrisy." His voice echoed out

to challenge the Champions. D: "Their lies, and their victory." At the hill's peak, the Doctor glared at the image of Alpha and Enigma. D: "I hurt them." The fire in his tone died out. His gaze dropped to the two rounded stones at his feet. D: "Their world falls, or they remember me properly. I rule in their place, or they change their ways." One of the gravestones was smaller. It was the perfect size for a child. D: "There is nothing else." The despair and determination in his stance went well beyond me. In his weakness, I understood I was a tool in the final chapter of a long war. "But how did you survive?"

"Certain legends can prosper well into the ages, but the Doctor had spent centuries as only skin and bones. For lifetimes, he endured within complete darkness, his only company being the remnants of his failure. All he could hear was the dripping of his own blood. D: "I had a reason to. Their judgement was exile to a far off land instead of death." There was a deep madness in how he looked down at me. From what I could see, it was one he had under control. D: "It didn't work, and I've learned to hide from them. Though I cannot remain for long outside these walls." The runes around the complex may have kept us in our own space, but the Alpha and Enigma had an overwhelming presence. Their power was in everything, from every blade of grass to the very air. D: "Why do you survive?" We both accepted how impossibly small we were as he made his way downhill. D: "Why are you alive?" I hadn't seen starvation, or true isolation, yet the look in eyes was steadier than mine. There was silence between us.

D: "Very well. Then, I'll give you a chance." The Doctor touched his eyepatch. D: "If you can land a hit on my blind side, I'll let you go free." He was doing his best to be powerful and dramatic, but I wasn't sure I'd heard him right. D: "Or have you only been wasting the breath I gave you?" The only response I could come up with was to blink in confusion. The Doctor stomped towards me. "D: "Show me what reason you have to exist, to endure." It wasn't

until he was standing in front of me that I was able to chuckle. “What a daring attitude to have with your life’s work. Don’t regret this later.” The Doctor took a step back. D: “I can always gather more. Even the failures have a value.” Something moved in the corner of my vision. The raven by the door was now the one with the crown. She was the most powerful, however she was slow to peek in. “And here I thought you’d made me special, stronger than most others.” I tensed my body and let my nails grow into claws. “But, this is acceptable.”

The instant the Doctor blinked, I put all my power into lunging at his blind side. It would only take a cut from a glancing blow, a scrape from an otherwise perfect block to live under the sun again. The Doctor raised his arm on instinct. Something was shining under his sleeve, and my fist hit a wall of lightning. It didn’t electrocute me, instead absorbed my force. I slipped underneath and went for his ribs. The Doctor twisted his body in time to deflect my every blow with his other arm. He waited for me to slow down, placed his hand with the stored energy in front of me, and I was blasted back by my own strength. D: “Your worth is not something only I define.” I popped up from where I was sent tumbling into the ground. The Doctor was tearing open his sleeve to reveal runes engraved into arm. I felt a chill on my back. The symbols contained ancient and terrifying spirits. It wasn’t anything I needed to charge blindly into again.

Nodding, I swept my leg in a circle to stir up the loose earth. The Doctor was content to watch me run my hand, to send out my energy, through the cloud of dust. “Enhance.” I kicked up two jagged stones, caught them, and struck their edges together. The spark ignited the particles in air. At the moment of explosion, I threw both rocks to where I could feel the Doctor to be. I jumped into the expanding fire. The Doctor was containing the shockwaves before they could leave a mark on his body. He caught one rock and tossed it into the other, but that allowed me

the time approach him. I aimed a fist to burst the explosive bubble he was holding in his palm. My other hand was reaching for his throat. And... hmm...

**E:** A solid strategy. What's the issue? **W:** If I remember correctly, a horse hoof emerged from the runes on his arm and kicked me in the stomach. The Doctor sighed, thrust away the explosion to rattle a far-off corner, and quickly grabbed my wrist. One twist and shove later, I was staring at the ceiling. "I'm moving to crush half of your throat. Stop being so..." I spat out dirt and jumped up. "Casual." The Doctor scratched his chin. He shrugged as if there were no violent intentions between us. **D:** "But you haven't come close." He ran his thumb down his neck. **D:** "Start being a threat. Perhaps..." His pale eye flickered like when one happens upon a good idea. **D:** "Break through, or fall." The Doctor removed his eyepatch. From the chasm of his eye socket, a cold aura poured out. It circled around his feet, rose to cover his body, and spread out to arm's reach. Symbols appeared to form a barrier. The runes spun around the dome, the Doctor putting his hands behind his back. **D:** "Fight for your life."

Letting my aura run over my claws, I pushed into his shield, and it showed me his wealth of lost love and haunted pride. Most of my nails were ripped out of place, but glowing cracks formed in his guard. The Doctor closed his eyes. His defense was built on his flaws, yet even his doubts and regrets all fell in one direction against me. The blood vessels in my eyes started rupturing, but my hand slipped through the barrier. It crept towards his left side, and the Doctor even leaned in towards me. He smiled. His barrier, my hand, gave one last push. The full force of his power slammed into my outstretched arm, sapped away at my remaining strength. A simple cut would be all I needed to win, and my claw was trembling over his skin. My emotions held within my fist, there came the moment when one of our resolves would break the other. Before my lost love and haunted pride, I couldn't put everything together. When I should

conquer the past, had the future in reach, I found I couldn't push through. The Doctor's aura overwhelmed me, pushed me away. My leg buckled, and I fell to my knees. My own lack of energy kept me there. When I could look up, the Doctor was standing over me without his barrier.

D: "I would know everything." His fist crashed into the side of my head, and I returned to a familiar, horribly unstable reality. D: "You didn't risk enough to learn." As my chin bounced off the ground, I did, at least, receive an idea. Places I'd like to have seen, words I should have had the courage to convey, flickered through my cracked skull. Unfortunately, I couldn't get very far with a dislocated leg and the tongue I had bitten through. The Doctor gave another scowl. He cleaned the blood from his palm by summoning a current of water. D: "Take him to the operating room." The crowned raven at the door attempted to move to me. D: "No, not you." The Doctor shook his head, and her wings quivered. Off to search for her sisters, she floated into the hallway. A gaze filled with shame followed her before the Doctor covered his cursed eye with his palm. He no longer had any interest in my almost paralyzed form. He stayed near the center and gazed into the single ray of light leaking into his eroded past. I tried to do the same. Through the pain, I couldn't see much of anything. Two other ravens appeared to drag me away.

#### **Sc: 14**

**W:** The operating table was a large steel slab. The operating room was of the same simplicity. What gave the chamber purpose, power, was the runes etched into the walls, the single golden lance hanging from the ceiling. Before my consciousness steadied, the ravens chained me to the cold, scarred metal. The Doctor pulled down the golden lance. It was of the same design as those wielded by the ravens, and they shivered at the sight of it. D: "Leave." The blade became coated in a fog-like aura. I mumbled but was quickly left gasping. "As soon as you

let me..." The lance's shaft bounced off my chest as the ravens left the room. D: "I'd appreciate if you stayed quiet for this one." The energy around the blade spun to high velocity. D: "For such a precise art, the screaming can be a distraction." He plunged the edge into my chest, and I was proud to ignore his warning. Mostly, it just hurt. "Isn't it..." I gasped, the chains cutting into my straining wrists. "Always a distraction..." The blade stayed somewhere between my lungs, but its energy spread throughout my body. It infected my mind, and I felt a rush in my stomach as if I was plummeting down.

When I opened my eyes, the walls of the room had vanished. The complex was gone. Sprawling fields covered the landscape. The sky was a perfect blue, and the air was pure and refreshing. The Doctor moved the blade, and the environment changed. To pull me back to our reality, he called me through a living wall. D: "Until, for one reason or another, they go silent." Before I returned, he brought me to a stop at the boundary of the dimension of ghosts and monsters. Through the waves of energy, some of the Doctor's words broke through. D: "An alpha is one who finds a new way to sharpen their claws." There was also the sound of flesh being torn open. In a single moment, I was watching my heart beat outside of my chest. Above it, was the outline of my soul. As my heart twitched so did the core of my spirit. D: "Through blood or glory..." The Doctor's silhouette was caught within the light alongside me. He remained still as hands of pure power formed to interrupt us. They had conscious movement, their agenda to crush the unnatural. They broke apart, runes glowing somewhere in the distance.

D: "I don't know if your consciousness will survive." The Doctor tapped my forehead, offered some of his energy to pull in my scattered thoughts. The breath of the world running through left me little time to breathe on my own. It threatened to leave me with nothing, to make me a part of everything. D: "If your senses lose themselves to the other world, hear me now."

My soul was being pulled away from body. I saw my lifeforce in the stream with all others. It had its own role, its assigned rhythm. There were plenty who were more important. Those which were weaker had their own unique shape. The Doctor continued his work, and my aura broke through its position. It expanded, twisted, to steal the strength and destiny of those around it. D: “You are my final piece, the center of my last creation. We will break the natural design.” I’d say it felt wrong, but I was at the mercy of every emotion there was to feel.

D: “It will be a beast who will never lose, a spirit who can use any power as their own, an elemental who can mold the very earth...” At the end of it, there was a numbness greater than all feeling. My thoughts fell to the light, my reasoning was consumed by a white void. I felt a different presence interfere, then. D: “I can make it immortal. You will be its balance.” Far into the distance, the Doctor held his hand over my fading heartbeat. D: “Don’t be afraid to rest. I can still use you even if you’re ready to let the pain fade away.” Where I was, minutes passed by in seconds. Where I was, seconds passed by in minutes. D: “Sleep. You’ve earned it.” It was calm, silent, but not peaceful. D: “Whatever world you may return to, nothing will remain the same.” My mind shutting down, I could imagine the Doctor smiling. D: “Scream, and soon, they will scream with you.”

### **Sc: 15**

**W:** I woke up in my room. It had been cleaned and dried, however I ruined that by leaning over the bed and vomiting. I couldn’t see, could barely breathe, my ears didn’t function, and I wasn’t enjoying my own smell. I rolled over the other side of the bed, twitched on the floor, and from there, it was the worst night of my life. **E:** Good for you. **W:** What? **E:** It means by strict comparison your life has only improved... Or it hasn’t plummeted as far all at once. **W:** That doesn’t make me feel better. **E:** It was only an observation. Your healing lies far beyond



anything I could ever say to you. **W:** And that makes me feel worse, but that night, at least, I gained a new tolerance for pain. The Doctor had once more tore my soul to pieces, and I hated it more than I was expecting to.

In a body that didn't feel as if it was my own, I crawled to the corner. There was no visible moon outside the barred window. I was always able to see in the shadows, but now, I failed to make sense of my surroundings. I stared at the darkness where my hand should be. I tried to direct my flow of energy to soothe my aching nerves, but a current of wind formed instead. It slashed through my skin and clothing, blood splattering onto the walls. I yelped and moved to cover the wounds. I screamed and attempted to regain control of my strength, but the wind only got louder, began to cut into bone. I fell onto my side, my eyes glazing over. The Doctor had left someone outside of the room. I considered reaching out to them. However, I couldn't form words, didn't know what direction to move my hand towards.

The tears started to form. They dripped into the blood puddle underneath me as the misery kept me from losing consciousness altogether. I wasn't able to prevent myself from going into shock, and my instincts forced my systems to begin healing. The new level of spiritual connection he engraved into me kept me from dying from exhaustion. As my body broke and reformed in a cycle, I endured. The crowned raven stayed outside my door listening as I whimpered through the night. In those moments, in that fear, I wasn't sure what it meant to exist. My other powers mixing with the roar of the wind, I was afraid my own strength would eat me alive... You've gone awfully quiet. **E:** There's much to take note of. **W:** Such as? What all are you writing? **E:** Let it be a surprise.

**W:** I didn't have the most pleasant morning. I was unsure when I fell asleep, but I woke up in the same bloodied corner of the room. It took a while to reach the door. Though I was pale from blood loss, my body didn't feel feeble. My powers were stuck in an active position. It was still the lack of control, the drain from being unable to relax, and the required focus to prevent myself from cutting my body to shreds. I dragged myself to the inner chamber. The crowned raven had gone on ahead of me and was watching Doctor and Prototype begin their lunch. They had left me an open chair. A nearby golem had long since served my portion. Settling down, I tried to not show too much weakness. Whether I succeeded or failed, though they could feel I'd changed, the Doctor and Prototype didn't pay me any attention.

My focus shifted to my rumbling stomach. I cautiously raised my hand towards the spoon. I lifted it off the table and neared the bowl, desperate to not slice open a finger. I passed it through the soup and towards my mouth. I could almost smile. When it touched my lips, the spoon was cut in half at the handle. It clanked on the table and splattered. "Uhh..." When I reached for the rounded edge, I sliced my finger open, blood splattering onto the table. "Blood in the food..." When I reached for the bowl, a current of wind struck it. An edge of the bowl was split, and the contents poured onto the table. I placed my head on my hands. "I just want some soup..." I reeled back as I cut my forehead. Prototype chuckled. He tapped his spoon on his empty bowl and watched as I struggled to heal. "Why..." Wiping away the blood, I stared at the Doctor. He was more interested in the reflections in his spoon than any of my pain. "At least look at me." The Doctor glanced in my direction. He looked past me and snapped his fingers. Thudding footsteps echoed behind me as Prototype lifted his cup.

I rolled onto the floor. The golem's fist crushed my chair and the edge of the table. It started to follow me across the room as the Doctor yawned and stood. There were several things

I could have done to protect myself. None of them were working, so I kept scrambling away from the golem's awkward stomps. It wasn't aggressive in its hunt. It was sad in its misses but not relentless enough to guarantee its strikes. When the Doctor reached the other side of the room, the floor opened. The room hummed, the golem and I losing the space underneath us. On a better day, I would have managed a perfect landing. That day, I settled for turning to my stomach in a panic. I still hit the ground hard, yet it means I damaged my fingers and knees rather than cracking my spine. The golem fell like a comet crashing into the earth. At the impact, the captive monsters now around us scurried to the back of their cages. The ghosts seemed bored. The Doctor stopped the floor above from opening entirely, and Prototype stood next to him to stare down at me in a condescending way.

I was able to stand. My enemy, the one trying to rob my life, was stuck on its back like a turtle or a newborn. Groans rumbled from within its sealed stone jaw. Its gemstone eyes carried fear and frustration at its failure to find its footing. Cracks appeared in its stomach. With a target in front of me, I let my hand start to destroy itself. It was dangerous, but the wind made my claws sharper. I looked for a killing blow, ready to return the golem to the earth that had created it. The golem felt my intention. It squirmed in desperation. The golem's naïve habits, its simplistic determination, was a familiar presence. I faltered, and the golem thrust itself sideways. A large top weighing a ton or more spun into me. I dodged the first leg, even the second. Its swinging arm smashed into my ankle. While the golem managed to roll over, I was sent crashing down again. This time my face suffered the impact. I was reintroduced to my old friend, the lovely combination of exhaustion, broken bones, and head trauma. I could recover, but the golem sorted out its mess first. It hoisted itself up and thudded along to me. I couldn't defend myself. I was too slow, too wounded, and was lifted by the shoulders. Its sturdy arms crossed over my

arms and onto my chest. The golem tilted its head. It glanced up to the Doctor. He nodded, and the golem squeezed. There, I found another side to my old friend, internal bleeding.

The strength left my body. I couldn't transform, couldn't fight. The golem noticed. It whimpered at the pain its power inflicted on me. Before it crushed my lungs, it sent me a silent apology. It was enough for me to regain control. I would not die to someone concerned only with their own regret, someone who didn't mean it. Forcing my arms to move, I dug my claws into the golem's armor. I minced the ends of my fingers, but wind was forced into the grooves of the golem's shell. My anger found the slightest possible gaps in the stone towards whatever functioned as the golem's heart. Blood gushed out. The creature roared, useless defiance to the end of its life, and lost its grip as its limbs were severed. Before it could crush me, its armor shattered and spilt onto the floor. Though I tumbled down with it, I rose in victory and sent a current of wind and energy around the chamber. G1: "Why..." The whisper was faint, but it shattered my bloodlust. A small hand was peeking through the remains of the golem's arm. It was then I recognized the smell. A red pool was leaking from the golem. The blood I was standing in was not all my own, was human. The golem's final calls had been desperate human screams.

I kneeled and stared at my red reflection. The blood stuck to my fingers, seeped into my clothes, proof that I had killed what had been another lost soul. My anger sparked again. More than anything, I hated the strength of my senses, the way I could feel her trapped soul slipping from her body, how the wind wouldn't stop racing through my ears. I glared up at the Doctor, my claws broken and stained, my eyes inhuman. He only stared in return. Prototype sneered and looked away. "Say something!" My voice became more of a roar than a shout. The walls and the other creatures trembled to my power to copy spirits, to transform on my fury, and to move the

wind. The mechanisms under the Doctor's feet started moving, and the ceiling began to close in. As the light vanished from my trembling face, the Doctor nodded. D: "Let us learn what a beast can truly do." The gate to the other floor sealed shut.

### Sc: 17

**W:** Considering it now, my time with the Doctor seems fragmented. He wanted me to feel he controlled everything from my every meal to how I saw the sun rise and fall. He wanted me to live my cage, unsure of the passing moments, too afraid to explore my own power. **E:** Understandable. To control another's perception is to own their spirit. **W:** Understandable, but unethical... right? **E:** You were at war with him. Such things wouldn't matter. **W:** Huh... I can't say I disagree. I can't say he didn't have the advantage. He certainly didn't want to leave me the chance to think. He had fashioned together a checklist, of tests and medications, to ensure that I was ready. Through it all, I kept my awareness. More than a survival instinct, it was my one chance. If you want to understand the prison, look through the perspective of the warden. I discovered his wardens were blind. Without eyes, the raven's vision worked by recognizing the unique shape of a being's energy. If they couldn't feel you, you were invisible. While they were dragging me through every possible extreme, they held up a mirror for me to reconsider all I could be. While they kept me under surveillance, I watched their patterns and abilities. This routine, at least, was familiar. My breaking point wasn't as close as the Doctor might have expected. His own actions were not as precise as they were before. I wasn't ever as exhausted as he wanted me to be, and while he had his experiments, I formed my own.

I could combine my senses with the wind to see, to communicate, to a range abnormal even for us. If I could expand my energy, I could limit it. I learned how to minimize my aura. With the privacy that earned me, I learned how to make duplicates of my aura. They were frail

and weak. The two of them could be seen as an outline and would never match my appearance. They would serve their purpose. While I practiced moving myself as three separate bodies, the most ancient creatures trapped alongside me answered my calls. Their voices a centuries long echo, I relied on the wisdom of those that operated only on instinct. The layout of the complex, the habits of the ravens, was engraved into their souls. They whispered to me about a new set of armor large enough to hold multiple souls waiting in a hidden room. While the Doctor was preparing the final phase of his plan, a raven called me to dinner. To her, nothing was abnormal. She didn't see me and led my clone away. Having spoken to every prisoner from a distance, having peered into every dark corner, there was an opening to break to the outside. Hiding my energy, I took the chance. I had begun my second escape.

### **Sc: 18**

**E:** And how did the escape fail? **W:** Well, if you want to ruin any sense of suspense and also hurt my feelings... Prototype was stronger than I was prepared for, and it continues to be my own fault. I knew he could be the last line of defense. He wouldn't let me slip past. He was covering the terrain ahead, so I crouched down and went in the other direction. I should have been outputting no more energy than a small insect, but his figure launched itself into the treetops. P: "You didn't think you could crawl away again, did you!?" He bounded from tree to tree. His voice echoed out, and in moments, he landed in front of me. "I was hoping..." I stared at his eyes. As I stood, I realized how his unflinching gaze compared to mine. P: "How'd that go?" Prototype focused on a treetop miles away. I did the same and felt nothing at that location. "It turns out I only have enough optimism to reach the backyard." Eventually, the leaves shook, and a black bird soared into the sky. Prototype continued to look around the distant landscape.

Where his eyes fell, before my senses could narrow in, an animal moved, his awareness still above my own.

P: "To your credit, it's a big yard, and you do have a broken leg." Shuddering, I glanced back to the complex. My clone had been discovered sooner than anticipated. "I don't have..." In my distraction, Prototype stomped his heel down on my shin. The bone gave in easily, the jagged edge tearing through the skin. Though Prototype showed no sense of satisfaction, I resisted the urge to cry. "Well, if your business is done..." I hobbled my way to my feet and began my awkward hops to freedom. The leaves stirred above us. P: "I know how well you can run away." Prototype leaned against a tree as a raven plummeted down at me. I hit the ground, her spear splitting a tree at the base. P: "He wants to see how you fight now." Two more blurs crashed through the tree tops. "Someone's going to die like this!" Small animals scurried away as I rolled from side to side. The ravens had fallen on me like vultures. Slashing and stabbing into the earth, the glowing mob followed me along the forest undergrowth. Their weapons were going for my heart, and I remember Prototype mumbling to himself in boredom. P: "Then the one that dies is unnecessary." He smirked but had the courtesy to whistle. P: "But, we'll keep it personal." Two of the ravens returned to the sky. The last twirled its weapon, summoned a net from its aura, and watched me rise on one leg. "Okay..."

The raven attacked before I could get ready, not that I could put together a strong stance. Her swipes were wide and lethal. My dodges were clumsy and almost too slow. For my every attack, the raven was hovering out of reach, and at our current pace, she could pick me apart at her leisure. I stumbled below an attack aimed at my neck and reached into the wind around us, rolled away from the sweeping net. The raven flew back. She could see the current building around my hands, but I pulled the breeze towards myself with force. The raven was sucked in by

the gale, and I leaped with a hand outstretched. My claws stabbed into her soul among the metal. Though her form did flicker, my senses were overloaded. More than a puppet, the soul inside held on to its emotions and experiences, and they washed over me. Before I could crush her spirit, the net was covering me. The raven bashed the net into the ground, my body bouncing along. The fabric was made of solid aura. It cut into my skin and sapped at my power. While I struggled to determine up from down, the raven dangled me from her hand. She pulled back her spear with her other arm and began her lunge. I reached into the wind again and pulled in whatever object was closest.

An instant before I was impaled, one of the trees the ravens had torn down tumbled towards us. She lowered her weapon to protect herself, and the wood thudded against her palm. Slick off my own blood, disrupting her energy with my own, I slipped out a punch from the net. The raven's armor dented. She staggered, lost control of the net, had the tree slip from her grip as I landed. Tearing the fabric around me, I caught the falling log and swung. The raven's wings bent out of shape as she skidded across the forest floor. I hopped around to regain some form of balance while the raven launched herself at me in a crooked arc. She managed to block my second swing. Her blade shredded through the tree as she narrowed in on me. My weapon in pieces, I shattered the remaining stump into her. She staggered but reached out her arm. Another net appeared and was launched forward. As she tumbled around again, I looked down to find my good leg ensnared onto a tree. I tried to pull free but only had a broken shin as my other leverage. Shaking herself clean, the raven rammed into me. Her weapon found its target, and I had an energized blade pushing the last few inches towards my heart.

My hands pushing at the weapon's edge, my back pressed against the tree, blood and saliva leaking from my mouth. My mind became savage, useless against the pain. Prototype



shook his head. The other ravens observed emotionless as the strength left my arms. Those who had watched over me before I could walk or speak, they were ready to accept whatever happened next. I whispered through the darkness overtaking my vision. "Move..." My aura intensified and wrapped around me. I aimed everything I could do, everything I was, towards the raven. She appeared to have heard. She lessened the pressure on her weapon. As Prototype finally looked on with interest, her own arms fought against her. Before she could regain composure, my hands clasped the sides of her helmet. The spirit inside almost made a noise. The faint outline of a woman's face seemed to experience anger, pain, and then fear. My palms pushed in, and the helmet crumpled. The soul that escaped the creaking metal flowed into me, and my surroundings warped.

The forest transformed back into the complex. Its walls were not the dark decayed ones I had always known. A young Doctor was there, but there was a woman alongside him. She was holding a baby in her arms, and my perspective was standing alongside seven other female warriors. I blinked, and the Doctor was now by the operating table, the woman weeping at his side. The building shook as the Doctor wrestled with a swirling mass of energy. The baby was on the table when the Champions broke into the room. I blinked, and my view came from the ground. The operating room was in ruins. My stomach was torn open, and everyone else in the area was dead. Before my vision faded, the Doctor, his face bleeding, approached me with a scalpel. I blinked, and I was flying. The Doctor was marching, the seven other ghosts in armor around him. A spirit who been given a crown, better armor than the rest, was hovering alongside the Doctor. They radiated anger as we entered a grove surrounded by crystals. There, the four Champions stood with flickering outlines. Four of the Heralds rose in disgust. The fifth, the oldest man among them, shook his head. Between them was a beast I couldn't comprehend, a

monster I could only see in shadow. The Doctor charged. The land itself screamed, and, when I blinked again, I saw nothing but shadows and chains. From the darkness, I eventually saw an infant alongside four others. While they grew, suffered and were lost, a blinding light consumed me.

The raven's soul gone, I was sitting on the forest floor with an empty golden shell. Before I could process what my energy had done, what I had seen, I heard only the most sarcastic of applause. P: "You're alive." Prototype stood over me. He appeared as someone who had just received the most disappointing of consolation prizes. He was focused on the remaining ravens. He couldn't help but snarl at them, to look beyond them. They observed him without concern, and Prototype let his shoulders fall. As the ravens soared away with the armor of their fallen, Prototype pointed in the direction I had been planning to escape to. P: "I wouldn't go that way. There's a river or two you might have to jump across." He turned his back to me. He no longer had a reason to be on guard. He hated being outside. "Excuse me..." I raised my hand. "Sir? I can't move." Returning to the complex to heal was my only sensible choice. Assuming a raven wouldn't return to collect me, a beast roaming the forest would find me instead. "Carry me..." As I opened my arms over my crippled leg, Prototype turned back to face me. Though we were both abnormal, he looked at me as if I was less than less than human. "Like a princess." I winked. "Please?" He closed his eyes and nodded once. Prototype latched onto my ankle and began to drag me through the forest. Protecting the back of my head, I bounced along behind him. "I don't... feel... pretty."

### **Sc: 19**

**W:** Our routine was back to normal for the next day, though I was locked in my room overnight. He need not have bothered. It would take hours to heal. It was also the last day, and a

raven set me free for breakfast. Before she let me walk to the main chamber, she swiped her weapon across my arm. She accepted the blood distorting her blade. I then found the Doctor and Prototype finishing their meal. “Why is it soup again?” I sat down and had my bowl empty in an instant. While I was wiping my mouth, Prototype gestured to the golem in the room. He mimicked their stone hands trying to handle a knife or delicate ingredients. The golem noticed and mimicked his mimic. I stared at the golem’s innocent motions. It had no idea one of its kind was dead. I didn’t want to think about what could be at its core.

I looked to the Doctor. He covered his face with a collection of files and notes. I raised my hand to speak. He pulled his notes and files closer to himself. I slammed my hands on the table. The Doctor held on tighter to his files and notes. “Nothing?” The Doctor didn’t look at me. D: “This will be our last meal together. Let’s not waste time casting blame, besides...” He chuckled to himself. D: “What should you say, what can you do, to someone who knows they wasted their last chance?” I hung my head and sighed. “Maybe, tell me what happens next?” The Doctor looked over the paper to Prototype. D: “You get your wish.” On the final day, Prototype was busy playing charades with the distant golem. P: “There’s nothing that you could give me.” Under the Doctor’s gaze, he felt nothing, did not care to stop his game with the carefree golem. D: “Not even the chance to share with him the pain he left you to?” The Doctor looked at me. D: “As the final test, the two of you will fight. Perhaps, you can claim a victory for once in your life.” Under his watch, my disgust continued to grow stronger. “Proving myself your best puppet means nothing to me.” The Doctor rolled his notes together and placed them in his pocket. He started to nod. He stopped to glare.

D: “What does? When your eyes shut, never to open again, what will be the last image you see?” He let his aura leak to get Prototype’s full attention. D: “When your body stops, your

fists leaving your control, what meaning will you cling to?" The Doctor was wearing his lab coat. From an inner pocket, he pulled out a scalpel and angled it so we could see our own reflections. His scoff echoed within our silence. D: "Something must leave this place." The scalpel was stabbed into the table. D: "If it will not be your courage, it will be my war." The Doctor pulled himself to his feet. I remained seated with my doubt. Prototype's expression went from bored to an undefined degree of upset. He and I could only watch the Doctor's back, his every step heavy for a different reason. D: "All that's left is battle." The Doctor turned to face us. The runes on his arm, within his good eye, blazed to life. Casting aside our uncertainty, we let our own auras rage. They swirled to different tempos, lashed in different directions, but all three of our energies were of the same color. To our surprise, it was the Doctor's stance that broke first. Glancing up, he turned to face the door. He whispered. D: "I wanted you to succeed me..." If it was the final day, he left not with the confident strides of a warrior but with a spiritual limp.

The Doctor gone, Prototype clutched his face. On closer inspection, his degree of upset was fearsome. "Stare..." I leaned towards him and stood. P: "What?" I took a deep breath and puffed out my chest. "Teamwork might..." My gaze wandered. "Determination tooooo..." Unable to find the next word, I sat back down. "This is difficult." Prototype's downcast stare peeked through his fingers. P: "What are you doing?" "Trying to give a rousing speech. When everything important appears to have died, we tell each other to hope for victory." P: "Have you forgotten? We're less than dead." Prototype swung his arms out. The golem opened its arms at us from a corner. We were never far away from a raven. We could feel Runt feeding the creatures underneath us. P: "Perhaps there was a path where the dreams we spoke here were given their chance, but that story is over." In the power, the promise we could still show, all was stained by the Doctor's ambition. P: "The worst that can be done to you is being remembered for the wrong

legend.” Prototype’s fingers dug into the table as he pulled himself to his feet. P: “We’ll always be nothing more than pieces of that man’s shadow.” He started to walk past me. “Then we let him have his way?” I clutched onto his arm. “From what I have discovered, he intends to drain us and throw whatever’s left into a new armor.” Shrugging me off, Prototype crossed his arms and faced the wall. P: “It can’t use all three powers.” “With me, it can.” P: “It will die to the weight of its own strength.” “With Runt, it won’t. You know this better than I do.” Prototype raised an eyebrow. P: “What would he do with it?” Before I could answer, he sneered. P: “Why should I care? That’s not our world.” The shakes of his head were quick and violent motions. He seemed to want to be rid of something. He was sick of being at the mercy of curiosity and expectation. P: “It’s not mine!” His speech somewhere between a roar and a growl, Prototype’s teeth sharpened. “It could be. If nothing else, let’s thoroughly ruin his plans.” I tried to grab onto his cloak, but Prototype stepped back. He clenched his fangs and shook his head again.

P: “If I could have run, I would have done so by now. If he was afraid of us, he wouldn’t have left us alone to plan. We won’t be alive by tomorrow night.” He grimaced at a streak of gray hair hidden behind my ear. P: “If we are, we would die soon after.” For only being a few years older, his hair had white touches. Among the muscles, there were as many stretch marks as wrinkles across his body. “That can’t be it...” I shook my head but couldn’t think of what answer to offer. As the silence lingered, we finally focused to see how the other had grown. Where it mattered most, we hadn’t. P: “Maybe it’s not.” Whatever I had been through, it didn’t compare to his peak of mental and physical trauma. However, there remained a glint in his eye. There was something that had yet to be defeated. Looking upwards, Prototype smirked. P: “My last memory will find me tossing you around the arena...” He looked at the broken edge of the table. Near the center, he crashed his hand down, and the steel split cleanly in the middle. P: “He won’t need

this anymore.” Prototype walked away with his hollow success. I waited as the golem rushed over in a panic. Other than its useless attempts to put the table together, I should have been alone to choose my next move. I looked up. There was someone else in the room. The crowned raven hovered near the roof. Even without eyes, I could tell she was glaring at me. It was of a desperation, a secret, or desire she wanted to pass on. I lowered my head and went to my room...

What is it? **E:** Question, why did he not kill you then? **W:** His surgery room wasn't ready. **E:** Surely, he left it prepared. **W:** He wanted us to weaken each other to make his job easier. **E:** But the ravens together were superior to your teamwork. **W:** You don't know that. **E:** From what I've been told, I do. Why are you annoyed? **W:** Because I still can't quite accept it... Since I hadn't died in the last surgery, since a different path remained, he wanted to give us a final chance to stop him. It would either be our lives or his that survived the battle. **E:** Again, why give his plan a chance for failure? **W:** He said as much himself, didn't he? After living with it for so long, he wanted another end to his pain and anger. We had been built to his one outcome, but leaving a legacy created from his only his own negativity, only our stolen dreams, would haunt him. Before he took our strength to finish his war, he wanted us to fight him, to put him at ease or put him down... There was one night left for us to find our own possibility. It was a chance to prove him wrong.