“I see,” said Doctor Jekyll. He took a short sip of his tea. “This is…quite a lot of information to take in. I confess, my friend, if you had attempted to explain the entirety of this to me before making your request, I might have been of a mind to refuse it.”

“My apologies, Doctor Jekyll,” said Nicolas. “That is precisely why I waited until after we had formed a contract. I must impress upon you — for a Caster like myself, a stable connection to this world is far more important than it is to someone like Sir Mordred.”

“I’m beginning to see that I understand a great deal less than I ever believed I did,” Doctor Jekyll replied. “Are you certain you would prefer someone like myself, however? I confess, I am no great talent as a mage. Perhaps my friend Victor might have been better suited to be your…Master?”

Nicolas shook his head. “A proper magus is no good for me, Doctor. He would have too many questions, too many demands. If you’ll forgive me the slight, Doctor, what I needed was someone who had only dipped a toe in the waters, so to speak. Someone who had enough knowledge to accept what I said, but not enough curiosity to ask for more.”

“Damning me with faint praise.” But Doctor Jekyll was smiling as he said it.

“I’m sorry.” Nicolas looked down, tapping the floor with a foot. “There was also the consideration of the ley line. Your apartment is ideally placed, giving me enough access to more than make up for your…more average reserves of magical energy.”

Doctor Jekyll laughed. “I should think my ego might not survive our partnership!”

“I meant no offense,” Nicolas rushed to say, “but I feel that I should be honest about these things with you, Doctor. You happen to be doing me an incredible service. I would be remiss to spit on that.”

“And I took no offense,” said Doctor Jekyll, reassuring him. “I am under no illusions about where I stand on the subject of magery, and in fact, I think I prefer your predilection for honesty on the subject. The greater offense would have been to pour honeyed words into my ear so that you might steer me about as though I were your marionette dancing upon your strings.”

“I’m afraid that’s not in my nature,” Nicolas admitted. “There was a man I was…never familiar with, I believe his name was Machiavelli? His way of thinking, I confess, is quite alien to me.”

“Yes, on the subject…” Doctor Jekyll set down his cup of tea. “I must assume it intentional? You’ve told me a great many things, and yet not one among them happened to be your name, or indeed any facts with which I might use to identify you.”

“For your own safety,” said Nicolas. “A Servant’s greatest weakness is his Master. I think it would serve us best if you pretended you knew nothing about them. In fact, it would be better if the idea of you being my Master never crossed anyone’s mind — no reason, in that case, for the enemy to target you for any reason in particular.”

“A reasonable enough precaution,” Doctor Jekyll agreed. “I confess, I don’t believe I would have the slightest inkling how to behave as a Master, nor what duties might be expected of me. I understand why you might be of the opinion that Victor would be less suitable to be your Master, but surely, whatever flaws he might have, his talent and wisdom would be of far greater use to you than I.”

“And that is yet another reason why I couldn’t, even had we not already made a contract,” said Nicolas. “Your friend is the more obvious choice. If the enemy is half as shrewd as I fear, then he will be an inevitable target for their investigation. I am not so confident in myself that I could overcome whatever was thrown at me in those circumstances.”

Doctor Jekyll looked down into his cup, smiling slightly. “And so I am the best choice merely because no one with any sense would believe me to be a valid choice at all.”

“I truly am sorry,” said Nicolas.

“Truthfully, when all is settled, you’re not asking all that much of me,” said Doctor Jekyll. “I am merely an anchor to tether you to this world, am I not? I need do nothing special, merely to continue existing.”

“With Sir Mordred to help, I should be able to take care of everything else,” Nicolas agreed. “As far as anyone else is concerned, you are merely the man kind enough to allow us to stay here for however long it takes to solve this case. No one need have any reason to suspect otherwise.”

“At this point, I suppose there isn’t anything I might do to change the circumstances whatever,” Doctor Jekyll said ruefully. He let out a quiet sigh and smiled, lopsided. “Might I at least have a name by which to call you?”

Nicolas relaxed, and at last reached for his own cup of tea. “Abraham. You can call me Abraham, Doctor.”

Doctor Jekyll inclined his head respectfully. “Then may this be a short but fruitful partnership, Abraham.”

“Indeed.”