

The Sign

Siggy Commission for PandaKnight

Imagine a village built in the safety of a thick humid forest chock full of beasts that the locals have learned to live with where you've got a stuffy group of old timers preaching tradition and a never-ending crowd of small rowdy kids.

And besides tending to the crops...preparing for the rainfall season...and maybe fishing? There's nothing much else to do for anyone unfortunate enough to live out here, unless of course, you plan out your own schedule; like training with a hefty wooden stick in lieu of a sword, or running plenty through the dense foliage and tricky roots jutting out of the ground like traps...and a little bit of reading about the greater world outside from books many travelers in the past have left in our little community.

The world we live in was an especially cruel one...a world where you don't even get to decide your own worth until you come of age. That's when you're given your Sign; a nifty little thing that bestows skills and traits that differ for each individual. Of course you've got overlaps in skill sets that invariably give us our Knights, Blacksmiths, Wizards and Archivists, but that's why you've got people training hard to improve their chances with the notion that if you work hard at a specific line of work, like sword training in preparation for a Knight Sign, then when you finally reach that ripe young age of 20; voila, you've got what you want.

Of course it's a tried and proven fact...but that doesn't sound too real when you're someone like me; a Fluke.

I've wanted to be a Paladin for as long as I could remember, ever since that time when I was a youngling held in Ma's hands when a detachment of knights from the Empire had come by bartering for food from the village leader to fill the weary soldiers bellies after dealing with a mythical dragon near the foot of the volcano to the north. With how far they were from any town and ours being the only one so far out from the Empire's reach, of course we couldn't just let them be and starve. And they did just take out a dragon after all, those things could turn lush forests into ash strewn wastelands in one night.

I wanted to be like them someday; riding horseback in chipped battle scarred armor that exuded nobility and perseverance, wielding giant lances that could pierce through dragonhide in one powerful blow. And so I did the best I could with what little I had lying around this ramshackle village I called home; riding boars in place of horses, training with the large wooden sword I had fashioned for myself before moving on to a mimicry of the lance with some mentoring from my gramps who had some measure of experience with the weapon. Hoping it'd all pay off when the day finally came to get my Sign...eager to see the brand of Paladin appear on the back of my hand.

Little did I know then how cruel fate could be when it came to hurdles in life...

The Sign

It's my fifth day inside my room and I haven't done anything productive...not since that disastrous 20th birthday of mine and the ridiculous Sign i'd been given. My parents don't know what I am but they know enough to realize I didn't get what I've been training for these past 16 years. Staring lifelessly at the heart shaped brand seared into the back of my hand. Thankfully It was only there when I wished it to be to check on my list of skills and traits because if not, everyone would instantly know of my predicament.

When people got Signs that didn't seem to fit their stature, build or gender, they would be classed under the label of a Fluke, with the only hope of turning their lives around being severely tough training in the opposite direction where, unlike the lucky few blessed with the skills and techniques to excel in that field, they'd be stuck trying to learn from the bottom up to the very top. Many Flukes almost never bothered and just went with the flow, a little bit saddened but thankful they'd gotten something like Silent Step or Axe Mastery.

But when I look at my Sign? I just don't know what to feel...

Sombra; a strange Sign with a list of skills that seemed to benefit cowardice with a base skill set of sneaking, dagger crafting and lockpicking...something I clearly wasn't too eager to find out about. This was worse than any ordinary Fluke, this was a disastrous matchup...

By the time nightfall arrived for the fifth time, Ma had picked the lock to my room, joining me by the bedside in an attempt to comfort me for all the good that was worth. She was a great parent; the best anyone could ask for and had been by my side constantly ever since Pa had been taken from us defending the village from a beast attack. So the least I could do was listen to what she had to say even if I felt like it wouldn't matter much at all.

But instead of the usual words of comfort offered by a worried parent, Ma had something more to say, directing my attention to a 'man of science' she had known many years ago when she was a wandering adventurer making a name for herself alongside Pa, that was when she'd met this quirky alchemist going by the name of Wilford, a well known name in the field of Sign research and development, looking for the secret behind what made them work.

“If you pay him a visit...I'm sure he'll be more than happy to help! Just show him this ring...and he'll know what it means.”

And so, after paying for a seat on the next carriage outbound to the town of Ravendale where Wiford lived with enough rations and gear for the trip back and forth, i said my farewells, promising a quick return as Ma saw me off at the village exit...as dampened as my spirits were, a part of me couldn't help but be excited for

the journey ahead. This was my first time stepping outside the expanse of the forest, to see what lay beyond the dense trees was an exciting prospect I had hoped to see on better terms.

But before then, we still had a couple of hours worth of travel until we broke through the forest and out onto the verdant plains beyond. So until we did, the ones who could fight took shifts doing guard duty, including myself; keeping constant watch on the flank while a watcher led the way, looking for pitfalls, obstructions or monsters. While I had notched a couple of kills under my belt, they were mostly just vermin ranging from giant rats, with the most dangerous kill being a Wilderbeast that had broken through the defensive line, forcing me to resort to using the skills given to me by my less than satisfactory Sign; throwing the precious knife I had been using to carve my wooden creations straight into the creature's eye before slamming it home through the soft tissue with a quick jab against the hilt sticking out of its diseased yellow eye, watching it howl in pain before falling to the ground twitching and foaming at the mouth.

I would've been torn apart by the Wilderbeast's razors if I hadn't had the Sombra Sign then, because the unwieldy sword given to me by the village blacksmith for protection would've bitten into the trees instead, leaving me open for one fatal bite to the neck. But I was still alive, shaken and very out of breath, but alive...thanks to the Sign I still very much despised.

Apparently having killed enough, I was greeted with a tingle in my wrist, raising my hand up to check on my Sign as a word manifested on the palm of my hand; **Nimble**...didn't that mean something related to flexibility? Or maybe it was how fast one could move? With the limited knowledge gleaned from the community school and books I could find lying around the house in Ma's study, big words like these were a mystery to me.

I would find out the meaning behind that word soon enough after the carriage had stopped to make repairs for a broken wheel. Instead of simply hopping out the back like I had been doing for years, I slid down the wooden ramp without making a sound, landing in such a way that instantly had me moving forward again, it was like my body was instinctively trying to make any movement efficient and quick; not wasting a second with every move made for a purpose in mind. It felt both wrong and natural to me all at once when I soon found myself seated back in the carriage when I would still be busy wringing up my pants behind the trees.

“You'd better not be gettin' any funneh ideas bout thievery back there son...”

Apparently having been mistaken for a thief, I'd decided to ask the gruff old man who was apparently a Berserker on what the word meant much to his surprise when I told him I wasn't given a Thief Sign.

“That just means you be quick on yer feet! With nuff practice, it'd eventually letcha be silent as the shadows too! What Sign didja even get anyways son?”

Refusing to answer with a dismissive sigh, I was left alone to ponder what the old man had just told me about my skills. Being fast *and* silent? As much as I'd prefer going toe to toe with a large beast with lance in hand...taking the quick approach; sneaking up to an enemy and ending them before they even knew it? I had to admit then that the idea had its merits.

The rest of the journey from then on would be a relatively uneventful one after everyone had packed up and the carriage was moving again, with no more attacks from the local wildlife, I was free to get some shut eye.

Until I was awoken by a bright ray of light shining directly at my face, blinking my eyes open to glimpse an endless expanse of blue and green with the distinct silhouettes of mountain peaks cresting just beyond the very edge of the plains. My first view of the world outside the natural barrier that had kept us safe and imprisoned for all these years.

Needless to say; i spent the next few hours taking in the radiant fields and the strange creatures that inhabited it. Watching small rodents with large floppy ears race about the fields with distant shapes in the skies above, screeching loudly as we passed by underneath them.

“Enjoying the view son? It’s nice’n all, but when yer get more experienced nuff ta really go far? Lemme tell ya; there’s some mighty fine views for yer to soak in out there!”

Muttering silently to myself as the boisterous Zerker goes on about his life experiences, I simply lay back under the shade with my hands around my head, shutting my eyes with the gentle rocking of the carriage and the soothing smell of the fields around us soon putting me back to sleep...

Ravendale

Stepping off the carriage and saying goodbye to the merchant, his bodyguards and the other passengers, I wasted no time in looking for the whereabouts of Wilford, taking the time to stroll through the streets of Ravendale with my hood constantly up, something that brought me comfort now ever since I had been given the Sombra Sign. It was like I couldn't stand being exposed in the open with a crowd of people surging by. But I wasn't going to let that dampen my spirits as I explored the town, watching the alchemist brew his potions, the many market vendors advertising their wares and the shady group of people hustling someone into an alleyway away from prying eyes...

Now that didn't seem quite right in this nice little town...

Following after the group, I eventually manage to sneak close enough to hear what the men are talking about, shouting about 'unpaid debts' and a 'senile old man'. It was a one sided affair from what I could see, the man was at the mercy of his tormentors; outmatched and unarmed, it'd be suicide to stand up against three burly thugs with armor and menacing swords held tightly in their hands.

But I couldn't just let this play out without doing anything, my Ma raised me to be a good man, and while my dreams of being a Paladin upholding justice might seem far off, I wasn't about to just let this man die.

Before I knew it, my feet were already latched on to the walls, scaling silently up the bricked surface before landing atop the ringleader's head with his neck wrapped around my legs. It didn't take much more than a simple twist of my hips to end his time on this earth before a swift blow to his underlings neck sends him spiraling to the muddy floor, hitting the ground at the same time as his buddy with the seemingly innocuous man having launched a spell of his own, landing it right in the middle of the scumbags eyes.

In less than a second, I stood amongst corpses, shying away under my hood as another tingle runs up my arm. But before I could take my leave, the young man ran past me, landing his unexpectedly large hands over my shoulders and stopping my retreat, glancing down in preparation for yet another question about my Sign.

'W-Wait! Don't go just yet! I must thank you for saving me!'

Telling him It was alright and slightly relieved that he wasn't going to pry into my own problems, I again tried to slip by, only for him to sidestep and block me again...it was starting to get on my nerves.

"But there must be something I can do! A-Anything? Giving directions would be the least I can do for you!"

Contemplating his offer, I realize he might make the search that much quicker if he really knew the town well enough to offer directions. Sighing, I dropped Wilford's name, asking if he knew where the famed scholar lived. Only to notice his bright face darken with suspicion with his naive little eyes turning into alert yellow slits.

"Why? Who is he to you?"

Gulping a little and choosing my next words carefully, I explain my situation as a Fluke and how my mother had known the man in their youth, showing him the ring she had given me with his suspicions put to rest, judging by the smile that had washed away the serious look...careful to omit the name of my Sign.

"That's my Master's crest alright! I guess you're pretty lucky to have come upon me in my hour of need. The names Alexiel, I work under Wilford as his apprentice and fellow scholar in the field of Signs. Come on, I'll show you where we live! Maybe this will pump some life back into old Wilford~"

Musing the coincidental encounter while doubting his inability to defend himself, I greet him with a curt reply before agreeing to his offer, tagging along rather silently as he drones on about Sign research and the many accomplishments his Master had achieved. Many of which I simply had no reaction to...

"I'm not from the Empire...Ma and I live in a secluded forest community...this is my first time outside." Figuring that was enough to get him to stop, Alexiel instead begins to pry into my personal matters as much as I disliked it. Revealing my Sign to anyone besides Wilford was the last thing I wanted to do.

"Well now...that's surprising! If you want I'll show you around after your meeting with Wilford...not a really talkative one are you?"

Nodding shyly while lowering my hood even lower, the rest of the journey falls silent. I don't know what was bothering me but just having his eyes fall upon me was enough to get me cowering away. The only time I felt comfortable was in the heat of combat...like the three terrified eyes looking at me earlier in the alleyway...but it wasn't that bad back on the carriage, it was only after entering the town...and getting into that fight, which reminded me of something else as I glance down at the word on my palm after being sure Alexiel wasn't watching.

Seductress...that word didn't bode well to me at all even if I didn't understand what I was looking at.

Arriving at the end of another alleyway, Alexiel steps forward before muttering something under his breath before placing his hand on the smooth wall. Revealing a homely front door as I watch the stone ripple before

reforming into hardened wood and metal. Definitely the hideout of someone who seemed to be in the eyes of less than reputable individuals.

Which made me wonder what would've happened if I'd refused Alexiel's offer and ended up wandering around Ravendale forever. Snapping me out of my daydreams though, the spritely young man calls out from within the building, ushering me inside before sealing the entrance again.

"Wait here, I'll go get some tea ready and call Master down. In the meantime...we've got some books lying around. If you're interested, make yourself at home!"

Watching Alexiel vanish deeper inside the homely building, I seat myself by the fire, setting down my rucksack with a sigh as I rest my weary behind on the soft couch, instantly feeling relieved after being left alone once more.

That was when my eyes reflexively locked on to the image of my Ma on a large canvas hanging over the fireplace. She was younger, but it was definitely her, craning my neck up to inspect the giant portrait, eyeing a joyous celebration over a dinner table with both Ma and Pa, and who I assumed to be Wilford. Whoever painted this picture must've been an incredibly talented one to capture this much detail, even magicians skilled in the art of painting would have trouble replicating this much detail and accuracy.

"That there's my best piece...painting from the heart and soul boy...so, you're really him then? Melissa's boy?"

Sombra

Wilford Alberton was an...eccentric individual to say the least. Energetic and just as spritely as Alexiel was, the surprisingly active old man was a ball of energy, recounting his youth as an adventurer with Ma and Pa when they were a trio; taking down criminals, conquering dungeons and strange new lands and their many other fantastical experiences. The fuzzy warmth he radiated made him feel like the grandfather I had always wanted...that I never had.

By the time he'd reached the end of his tale, the timekeeper on the wall pings with the coming of nightfall and Alexiel having fallen asleep at some point with a half empty cup of tea cradled gingerly in his hands. Just a slight nudge and it'd go free falling through the air...

“Ahh those were the days! Melissa was a feisty cracker back then...didja know your mother was a Zerker? Ha! She pulled poor Peter by the nose whenever she went...that painting...was when the two of them came clean with their plan to get married, by then, you were already sleeping away snug in her belly...we all went our separate ways afterward; I had my research to continue, and they had a life to live with each other.”

Setting down his mug, his forlorn look fades with a serious fire, drawing his attention to me before slapping Alexiel hard on the back, spooking him awake and predictably sending his drink flying, luckily for him, Wilford catches the hot tea mid air before directing it to his own cup, leaving his apprentice to clean up the empty one on the floor.

“So...let's get down to business then...Alexiel here tell's me you're a Fluke? Doesn't seem that big of a problem to come crawling all the way out here to Ravendale...especially considering the circumstances i'm in...”

Sighing, I begin explaining how it all started; from the point I started training to the day I received my Sign, and after showing the brand to Wilford and Alexiel, the looks on their faces told me this was something big, urging me to continue up till I'd met the apprentice.

By the time I was done, Alexiel had a nervous look on his face and Wilford was looking anxious and strangely eager, like he'd just made a major breakthrough in his studies.

“Boy...do you know what the Sombra is?”

Shaking my head and being chilled with the way he spoke the words, Wilford leans in, dropping a shocking revelation with Alexiel likewise, listening attentively with a look on his face that suggested he might already know what his Master was about to say.

Learning about Signs under an entertaining tutor like Wilford was the stuff of dreams to me, so when he started explaining the different terms all based on his findings, I was more than eager to listen. According to him; Signs were split up into different ranks that determined their worth and power: from Minor at the bottom all the way up to Divine at the top

And what he had to say about mine was mind boggling to me. All this time I'd thought it to be nothing more than a Sign for the weak and cowardly, never hoping to match up to a Paladin, but what Wilford had to say about the Sombra had me in disbelief.

"So to sum it all up: you didn't start off with a Minor Sign at all...god or whatever the hell is in charge of the system decided to jumpstart you with an Exalted Sign...just one step shy of the highest attained only by the stuff of legends...but this ain't something to be proud of son, have you felt anything weird? Side effects? Strange things in your vision? Headaches? Anything like that?"

Looking up into his wide eyes as Wilford suddenly lurches forward to grab at my shoulders, I remember the strange feelings plaguing me the moment I arrived in town, unable to be around a crowd without a suffocating sensation wrapped around my throat.

"Take off your clothes son, Alexiel! Prepare the baths with the medicine!"

"Y-Yessir!"

Running off to presumably prepare what Wilford had asked for and leaving me alone with the elderly scholar, I proceed to do as he asks, slipping my cloak off before gingerly removing my tunic...

'Wait...when did I-'

"Finally noticing the changes son? The Sombra Sign...it's one of the rare few Signs exclusive to a certain gender...that gender being female...and with your weak human body bearing the might of an Exalted Sign without tasting the effects of a Minor one? It's like a fancy gown turning a butt ugly wench into an elegant refined lady to fit it!"

But if that's true...and the Sombra Sign was meant for women...then did that mean I was going to become a girl? But even as my mind tried to deny it, Wilford's words were already proven through with my wide eyes still locked onto my slender torso; wiped clean of all the muscle I had earned from years of training as a kid. The dark tan over my hide already beginning to fade over into a light shade of orange brown...

"If you told me you were a twenty years old boy I'd be hard pressed to believe you with a girly face like that...your stache...did it start growing yet?"

Raising my hand up to caress my chin, I realize the prickly beginnings of my manly beard were no longer there, feeling alarmed as I scraped the smooth skin where sharp rough pin prick facial hair should've been.

"That's only the beginning...over time, the current you will become a thing of the past; you'll grow teats, your sturdy figure will mellow out and that thing I'm sure you're proud of between them muscly legs will become the passageway for new life to crawl out from...and with the Sombra Sign in play? Boy...you'll be a banging babe in a few weeks time...no offense intended course."

"B-But can it be reversed?"

Shaking his head firmly, Wilford rubs my shoulder in a comforting way. Scoffing in a way that seemed to imply some measure of disappointment in himself.

"I'm 'fraid there's no way to reverse the effects. You weren't the first...and you most certainly won't be the last. All these years spent traveling, meeting exceptional individuals and discovering especially quirky ones like you...and all I've ever managed to do was to categorize Signs, never being able to help realize why we're all ruled by this system...but I guess that's just how life is huh? Now come along, let's get you to the baths, I'm sure that boy's done by now."

Escorting me from the living room, Wilford stops by the entrance to the baths, kneeling before looking at me in the same way he did when I'd first met him, with a knowing look on his face and a glimmer of hope and expectation in his azure blue eyes.

"Listen boy, the Sombra's are a rare commodity; mistresses of the dark with the terrifying ability to end life with a single stare, or so it's said...which is why the people who bear it are also a popular target for all the wrong reasons. Once you're finished bathing, write home to Melissa, you're going to be staying here with Alexiel and I watching over you. Until you learn to master the powers bestowed upon you, you can't leave here, understood?"

Frowning, I glance down at my hands, eyeing the now powerful yet terrifying Sign on the back of my hand. Swallowing my hesitation before agreeing much to Wilford's delight.

"Don't worry, you're in good hands here...Alexiel's like you so he'll make an excellent mentor to seek advice from once you're done with the baths, itll help speed the transformation up so you don't take weeks to change."

"Wait...you mean Alexiel..."

Grinning at my look of shock, the wise old man nods his head in confirmation...

Alexiel

I wasn't expecting the encounter in the alleyway to play out like that at all.

It was supposed to be a simple trip down to the market for some ingredients to restock the kitchen with, so when those three thugs had a knife to my back before hustling me down an alleyway, I was more than eager to get it over with.

But I had to be led away from the public eye; to where these ordinary hoodlums wanted me. With my convincing act of a weakling apprentice keeping their guard down, I was more than ready to reduce them all to ash.

Until he appeared; appearing like a reaper from the shadows with his cape adding to that effect, snapping the neck of the leader before jabbing one other in his vital points resulting in a swift knockout blow

I was barely able to stop myself from reducing my new comrade to dust before changing course for a Lesser Earth spell to spear the last one through the head with. Once the bodies were laid out on the ground, I wasted no time in showing him my thanks.

Or at least, I thought he was a boy. Once I got a look at the face under the hood though, I had to assume she was a girl. Until she introduced herself as the son of someone my Master: Wilford, was acquainted with in the distant past, correcting my assumptions yet again before I led him back to our humble abode, thankful I didn't have to resort to violence with the increased violence against Wilford and his associates in an effort to take him out.

I figured he wasn't too good with people since he didn't want to talk much, so it was surprising to hear he was 20! He barely even looked the part with how soft his visage was and how lean and feminine his body appeared under the thick cloak. And as I surmised; Master had tons of fun recounting his stories to the son of a woman he had traveled with when he was younger.

Until things got weird...and a little too familiar for me once he revealed what was plaguing him; the Umbra Sign...something so rare the few that existed today were spoken of only in hushed circles within royalty for their fearsome abilities that catered well to their reputation as blackhearted assassins.

With a command to prepare the baths with the 'medicine', I instantly knew what Master meant as I hurry off down the halls and into the shower, preparing a tub filled with water before heading to the distillery and unlatching the lock on an old crate that hadn't seen use in a good while...ever since Master had finished my transition...reminiscing on my past as I poured liberal amounts of the magic powder into the water.

I wasn't always a scholar...and I most definitely hadn't always been a man. Ten years ago; I was Christina Sylaria, a noble born lady destined to inherit the household and title as their sole child. Trained, tutored and groomed to be the epitome of feminine beauty and elegance in preparation for the coming of age ceremony when the Sign would manifest. It was a life of boredom locked away behind marble walls. But I had to respect my parents' wishes. I couldn't just roam and do as I wished, not with their reputation to uphold.

Only instead of the Sign of the Lady my parents had been expecting to see, the one that had scrawled itself on the back of my right hand was enough to fill my parents with concern, bringing me to see Wilford, who had made a name for himself setting up the Categories which we all use to classify Signs today.

I was a Fluke...but with a Sign far greater than anything we all expected. According to him, it was the Mystic Sign; a theoretical sign in the Exalted category bestowed upon Mages who had mustered the experience and tenacity to rise up past their Minor rank all the way up to the second highest.

That is to say; I was the first to do so entirely by chance. But my parents didn't want some all powerful magic user whose skills and power were still up for debate.

After being told there was nothing they could do to remove or change the Sign, they'd simply left me there at Wilford's place, paying him to keep silent. But he wouldn't accept it, berating them right in front of her eyes as they stormed off in a fit of rage, denouncing the famous scholar and threatening him for his folly.

Normally, a child would've felt abandoned, shocked that their parents would so easily give them away when they had no worth. But I was different; they'd treated me more like a doll to butter up as the next face of the family, and while I was definitely hurt to hear them say the words, the happiness at finally being free outweighed that pain as I watched my former family walk off into the night with Wilford's hand around my shoulders in a comforting hold.

From then on I'd spend my time learning under Wilford, my new foster father who would teach me every single spell under his belt and only ever proving his theory correct; that'd I'd been given a Sign meant for only the most experienced and long lived mates as I mastered spell after spell with some effort in controlling my output, I could even mix and blend spells together much of his shock and awe.

That was when we noticed something off about my...body. Ever since the Sign had manifested, I was growing taller...larger...than any girl my age should have. I tried to keep it a secret but eventually I couldn't hide it any longer.

Because how would you explain growing a beard when you're supposed to be a twenty year old girl raised to be a fine lady?

Wilford wasted no time in looking into my condition, asking me questions about my skills and traits while running tests on blood samples, before eventually realizing the Exalted tier Sign of the Mystic was the true cause. Surmising it to be one only meant for male mates to attain...and with me being a girl? It was correcting that 'mistake' the more I learned and gained levels.

I never was one to be too attached to my looks...in fact, I hated standing still in the mirror, being ogled and fed presumptuous lies about my appearance by the many handmaiden back at the Manor. So being told I was going to end up a man wasn't too alarming...but it certainly was an eye opener into the other side as I transitioned along with some help by Wilford, who had concocted a medicine to help speed up the transformation.

So by the time my former family had seen fit to order a hit on Wilford's establishment, I was no longer Christina Sylaria but the simple assistant for Wilford, fending off the attack with my enhanced magic reducing the assassins and mercenaries to ash. It terrified me to see living people reduced to twitching skeletons at first, but it was a necessity I soon got over ever since moving to our nifty little hideout. Killing anyone who would dare to harm a single head of hair on fathers head.

Years later, and I no longer felt disturbed with my new appearance, it helped with intelligence gathering too since the passing of Christina had made the rounds among the townsfolk in Ravendale and my new appearance helped erase any suspicion. Still, it felt weird to hear people casually talking about my exaggerated 'death'.

And now here I was, preparing the same medicine that had turned me into Alexiel for yet another case of a Sign gone wrong...

Spinning round to a knock on the door, I welcome the young man inside, ushering him over to the tub as I help him out of his clothes. As weird as this was, I was curious to see how the Sign of Sombra would affect him. I only ever heard tales from the Head Chef years ago, but they spoke of them as the epitome every assassin strived to be.

'The tales say they seduce men silly with their bodacious figures before slittin' their throats, with married men being punished with the removal of their nads if they fell for their whims! Mighty frightenin stuff!' Were the exact words I remembered as I directed him to the tub of water, engaging in small talk with him to ease his mind.

“So...what’s your name? You never did tell me when we first met!”

“It’s...It’s Vincent...”

“Well Vincent...step in! We’re gonna need a new name for you when you’re done though...easy does it now...”

The effect was almost instantaneous as I helped him into the water, wincing as his toes, feet and eventually legs submerged, arching his back with a pained cry escaping soft lips. Unlike me, his transformation was already well underway by the time he had arrived. So watching him arch his shapely back while hugging his slender arms around his torso in bouts of what I could only assume to be pain was an arousing sight to say the least...

“T-Try to stay still, let the medicine soak into your body, it’ll be...faster...that way...”

In my years as a man, I’ve only ever gotten erect from my morning wood but that would pass, worryingly as I watch him continue to shift and contort in the water? I find myself growing painfully hard, frowning as I watch his muscle flex and shrink, leaving behind toned flesh beneath supple skin shining delectably in the cool morning light peering in from the windows.

Another cry, this time being one of ecstasy erupts from fuller lips, sending another wave of water splashing as dainty legs come free from the tub, tiny toes tingling in pleasure as the boy...could I even call him that anymore..slides into the water, soaking his torso with a sharp gasp of surprise, leaping back out in a sudden spasm with a shapely butt revealed to me, he couldn’t run, not now.

And so I do as Master told me to, gripping onto his slender hands and pulling him back into the tub despite his resistance and clearly feminine squeals, although his reduced musculature made it an easy job to restrain him.

“S-Stop struggling! You need to go through with this in one sitting! We can’t risk side effects!”

What wasn’t easy however, was how close he now was, sending more water splashing over his body as I rub him down in places he couldn’t reach; soaking his hair that wasted no time in lengthening into radiant locks of silk beginning to dye itself a brilliant ink, massaging his chest as they eventually fill my hands in buoyant breasts tipped with hardened nipples and finally, washing his face as I watch the last of his manliness ripple away under the emergence of a stunning beauty. She had come in here looking like an effeminate young man, but now? She was a drop dead beautiful woman.

But as her violet pink eyes lock onto mine, I realize something was wrong as a cold sensation creeps up my spine, unable to move my own body as I find myself grazing her breasts, moving down past her tight navel to cup a handful of water before bringing it up to her mouth and feeding it down her waiting mouth, watching as her slim neckline bulges with the movement of the fluid running down her throat. Her powers were running rampant.

"St-Stop this...you're...not supposed to-"

But before I can continue trying to plead with her rational mind if it even existed, the newly born seductress shifts around in the pool, prostrating herself before me as she spreads her fattened legs apart, revealing the tiny manhood still standing defiantly where her vagina should've been. The last stain on the magnificent painting that was her body, the lustful look on her face was all I needed to know what she wanted of him...not like I could do anything to resist.

Reaching out hesitantly, I grab ahold of the erect dick in my large hands, jerking it off while being graced with pleased moans and erotic sighs as her childbirthing hips trash and jerk around in the water, serving to lubricate the member as I feel it shrink in my grip, finally giving up the fight with a small dribble of semen standing my hands before my fingers are no longer wrapped around anything. Watching mesmerized by the strangely curious yet gruesome sight of a dick sliding back up inside of a newly opened slit, not noticing that her mystic hold over me had faded at some point as I continue to push and prod at her thick labia before eventually pistoning my fingers in and out of her. Forcing pleasant cries and ecstatic moans of raw pleasure out of the voluptuous babe before me.

But right as she climaxes with a guttural scream and a splash of thick precut soaking my hand, the bathroom around us fades to darkness, trapped in an empty space before an ominous purple light shines down from above, revealing...a bedroom? Was this an illusion?

But I could feel the sheets under me, and the warmth of the nearby fire. And the Sombra bearer was still with me, crawling over with a seductive face as she tucks a strand of hair behind her ears while eyeing my erect manhood, realizing I was now naked.

"W-wait! We can't be oh...oh god!"

It was too late to do anything as she lunges forward, catching me off guard while I tried to stand up and off the sheets, only able to make it kneeling up before her amazingly soft and warm mouth was wrapped around my cock, forcing me still as I try to get her off of me by tugging at her head. Realizing how much



worse I was making it look as her muffled moans and groans grow louder, looking up at me with a pleading look from below with her lips stuck fast to my member. I was causing her abit of pain apparently...

And so I acquiesce, letting go of her soft hair as she moans in thanks, resuming her blowjob with gentle bobs of her head, moving back and forth with an erotic groan filling the room everytime she got too eager and the head of my member bumps into the back of her throat. But within that short frame of time; she no longer made such mistakes, wrapping her tongue around the heated rod in an effort to milk me faster, no longer choking whenever it got too deep as her gag reflex all but vanishes.

"I can't...hold back! I'm gonna...gonna come!"

Exhaling as if on purpose to tease my already pent up dick with a burst of hot air, I feel my body tense as I grab her head, forcing her to take my first ever load while ignoring her muffled screams of surprise and her efforts to break free...

'You only have...yourself to blame...'

Veronica

My name is...or rather was Vincent. I was raised an ordinary, upstanding boy in a secluded village far off from civilization, eagerly awaiting my 20th birthday in the hopes of being given an amazing Sign; a powerful symbol at the back of our right hands that would serve to determine where one went in life. But after receiving a strange Sign I thought had been meant for cowards, Ma had directed me to travel to a nearby town outside the forest that had kept us safe, to a friend of hers that could help.

And now? After making it this far and meeting Wilford in the flesh? I've taken on the new name of Veronica, to match my new appearance.

Apparently the strange Sign I had perceived to be a weak one turned out to be a major one in the ranking; an Exalted tier Sign known as Sombra. And because I had essentially been 'promoted' without the proper skills and experience, the Sign was forcefully changing me to fit its parameters...with the most important one being my gender; Sombra bearers were female and so Wilford had directed me to take a bath under the supervision of his assistant Alexiel, who was also a Fluke with a similar situation in the past.

It was during that bath when I finally figured out the meaning behind the words I had seen earlier back as I underwent the transformation under the watchful eye of Alexiel whose intense stare only served to fuel how amazingly good it all felt as I watched my old body fade away under the cold water with pendulous breasts emerging from my chest and a tight core that ached and tingled with each movement. **Seductress**; a trait that allowed for total and utter domination over the minds of men with very few being capable of resisting.

While espionage and assassination was a main focal point of the Umbra Sign; seducing men and successfully baiting them to bed was also a parameter in gaining exp, so once Alexiel had fallen for my newfound beauty and the corrupting temptations of the flesh, he could not resist as he mindlessly followed my whims. But the fault didn't lie with him...at least...not entirely.

At some point during the transformation, I think it was when I tried to run, my mind blanked out, only able to watch through hazy pink lenses as my body casts an enthrall spell over the unwary Alexiel as he tries to keep me inside the tub. I was screaming for him to stop, to wake up, but the man could do nothing but obey as he feeds my body the strangely sweet transformative fluid, feeling it coursing through my body and accelerating the changes as my already enormous teats inflate a tiny bit more alongside the expansion of my wide set hips. And my voice...as embarrassing as it is to say it, was nothing short of an attention catching soprano.

But it was nothing compared to what came next as my hollow body forced him to jerk me off, climaxing in a white hot surge of fire in my mind as I glimpse my manhood being sucked deep inside my steaming belly,

feeling a strong kick where I now knew my womb to be. That was the last thing I could recall clearly before blacking out.

Needless to say, it was a rude awakening to feel a rough grip on my head holding me in place as something hot, sour and yummy slides down my throat with the collapse of the magic spell, coughing up thick loads of spunk as my lips come free from Alexiel's erect cock with a wet pop, spying Wilford standing by the bathroom door with a look of relief on his face. According to him, I had enveloped Alexiel in a mental projection after I had fainted, during which my unconscious body had acted on instinct to finish seducing the only man in the room with an obvious erection in his pants.

“If I hadn't stopped you, you might've killed him...or worse if the tales about the Sombra's test of infidelity are true...”

After that embarrassing moment and tending to an unconscious Alexiel, it didn't take too long for my mind to get acclimated with my body since the Sign was helping out in that regard, quickly rewiring my brain to think, act and dress like a lady. But besides being unable to walk without swaying my broad hips and dressing in semi revealing clothes that allowed me the freedom of movement, the rest of my mind was thankfully left intact. After writing up my letter and being careful to include a fair notice on my drastically changed appearance, I had the letter stamped and sealed before entrusting it to Alexiel for delivery to the post office.

My life after that day would fall into a simple routine of waking in the morning to train with Alexiel, who had become rather nervous around me with Wilford supervising from a safe distance in case anything went wrong. I say training, but all it really boiled down to was using the poor assistant as a target dummy to land a hit on who was by no means a slouch himself, casting magics in a way I'd never seen before that were incredibly hard to dodge or dissipate. But evidently, he'd never dealt with enemies of the feminine persuasion before because all it took was a simple shadow step behind his back before sending a hot whisper down his ears to knock him on his butt. But that would soon wear off after the first week ended, with Alexiel gaining a resistance of sorts to my alluring voice, it was fun while it lasted I guess.

On the plus side, I no longer felt anxious when looked at in the eyes or whenever I wasn't wearing a hood to hide under. Wilford had explained it as my mind settling into the changes afforded to me by the Sign but a part of me felt that it was because I had grown accustomed to being around him and Alexiel. They were like the father and brother I never had....in Wilford's case, the father I had lost too early...

But as the days flew by into weeks and I continued to gain experience through training, something else about Alexiel had piqued my interest, more specifically what Wilford had told me about him right before the bath on that fateful day. There were plenty of opportunities to ask him about it during the times we spent together in the privacy of a room as he helped me through the ins and outs of being a girl, like learning to

wear a bra, how to insert my tampon or keeping my hair nice and silky since...he was one...but I just couldn't bring myself to. Instead, listening to his remarks about how he'd be super envious of my hair if he were still a girl.

It was a funny affair to realize I no longer cared much about not getting the Sign I wanted weeks ago, mental reconditioning or not, I just couldn't be bothered to feel sad now whenever I think back to how bitter I was on my 20th birthday.

And so I'd paid him a visit at night after finally mustering up the courage to do so...catching Alexiel red handed in the middle of a masturbatory session as I decided to play a prank on him by shadow stepping right out of his bed, only to have his dick pressed up against my face when I jumped out from the sheets with a boo...so that was why he'd been retreating early every night despite my insistence for evening practice...

"G-Good god! Where did you even come from?! Use the door you imbecile!"

After an awkward exchange of apologies and a moment of silence, I took the initiative in probing Alexiel, sheepishly asking what Wilford had meant when he said he was in the same boat I was.

And so he retells his life story as we settle down comfortably on his bed. Everything from his birth as Christina of the Sylaria family to the Sign of the Mystic appearing on her hand that flipped her life upside down. It sounded tragic to me, but unlike my initial disappointment, Alexiel had no qualms with the loss of his nobility because of the Sign. If anything, he was a happier individual because of it.

"Being born a noble isn't all it's made up to be...compared to being locked up in a literal enclosure? Being free to wander, do research and fling magic at assholes who'd dare disturb me and Master is a blessing!"

That left me conflicted a little at how easygoing he seemed to take his transition. Here he was jerking it when I still found it a little strange to stare at my own naked body in the baths, much less fingering myself no matter how needy this body felt at times.

But he must've noticed how awkward I was feeling because I didn't know he had sidled up closer to my side until I felt his hand on my bare shoulder, jerking my head to face him as another pang of need runs down my body, building within my breasts as I shiver at the feeling of my nipples hardening into solid buds with my lower lips growing damp at the sight of his handsome face so close to mine.

Try as I might to deny the fact, I couldn't run any longer after feeling the same electric shock I felt whenever I landed that final blow during our training sessions together underground where we could fling spells and swing away in the safety of Wilford's magically reinforced training chamber. Whether it was because he was

the man whom I accidentally gave up my oral virginity to or because he was someone in my shoes that had shown his support for me in the short amount of time we were together? I just wasn't sure...

"Hey...Veronica? Ever since that time in the baths...when you accidentally had me enthralled...I just couldn't stop thinking of you...of your face when you...ugh, this is stupid, just forget what I said."

But before he can back away, my hand moves to intercept his broad shoulders, stopping him cold as he turns around in surprise...an opening I gladly take as I put my Seductress trait to good use alongside a bevy of other skills I hadn't told my mentors about.

By the time I pulled away from the deep masterful kiss I had initiated with my soft lips planted against his, the both of us were heated and wanting, panting in labored breaths with our faces turned a deep red. A tent in his pants and a stain on my own...

I forget exactly what I'd said to him in that heated moment but I'm confident it was more than a simple throwaway line in the spur of the moment if it got him riled up enough to tear my nightdress off in one go before pinning me to the bed with his massive frame. That was the first time in my short 20 years of existence that I'd felt so thrilled...so excited! As I laid there unmoving with Alexiel's large hands tenderly running down my shapely breasts before coming to rest on my natural handlebars....but they were trembling in hesitation...



"Are you sure about this? I mean...we haven't even gone out yet? I'm not sure if it's alright to be going this fast!"

Giggling in that mischievous fashion I had developed after hearing one too many jokes from Wilford, I had to phase my arm free from his grip before placing one firmly on the shaking hand clinging to my soft skin, which had since lost its tan in exchange for a creamy vanilla coloration with my other hand on his cheek. I peck him tenderly on the nose before falling back onto the bed with my flowing pink hair fanning down around me. Before I notice something hard pressing into my itching navel, unable to help it as I reach down to stroke at his aching member...the poor thing looked so painfully suffocated in his pants, so I did what was natural and slipped it free, wetting myself at the sight of the engorged dick pulsing right above my empty snatch.

**"The words coming out of your mouth...and what your body wants...are two very differ-AHN! ALEX!
S-Stop it!!!"**

I swear that was the only time I'd ever seen him move faster than I could react, instantly maneuvering to line his dick up before thrusting forward, tearing my hymen and filling me up with his pecker knocking at the door to my womb in one go. It felt like I was being split in half, but the pain eventually gave way to mind numbing pleasure as I lie there, squealing and moaning in a voice that until recently, I never would have imagined coming out of my own mouth.

Either he was a practiced lover, or Alexiel knew more than he was letting in on about the female body as he dominated me in bed; leaving me unable to make a single move as he pinches my nipple, rubs the area just below my navel that bulges every single time his oversized dick rubs up against my womb and the hot arid breath he ran down my neck that always made me squeal and contort my body in lust without fail. All while I laid there screaming and moaning out loud, covering my face in shame every time he stared at me.

I'd barely heard his warning before the climax arrives in the form of a searing wave of semen filling my womb before coating the rest of my spasming innards in its warmth, barely clinging on to consciousness with my legs twitching in the air and my weary back arching in an impossibly erotic fashion thanks to my newfound flexibility as a Sombra.

I almost fell asleep in Alexiel's arms that night, feeling at peace with his large and equally sweaty body pressed up into mine with his warm seed still leaking from between my aching legs...until the wall to his room explodes from an outside force, shielding me from debris with his magically reinforced body before he conjures enchanted clothes for the both of us. And unsurprisingly, his fashion sense was nothing to scoff at; gold embossed mage cloak for him, and a lithe midnight black one piece dress for me, complete with black stockings, long gloves and a tight choker with purple pink highlights to match my eyes and hair...all while remaining skin tight and open enough to give me all the room I needed to move freely in combat...how thoughtful.



But I wasn't going to let Alexiel do the fighting for me, not right after making me feel that good at least as I held my hands out to ward my new boyfriend away from the group of mercenaries and assassins. Maybe once this was over and we escorted Wilford to safety, we could go out on a date instead of sparring...and maybe introduce him to Ma! But for now, we had pests to deal with.

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On that night, the legend of the Sombra would soon prove to be true as the men draw closer toward the pink haired beauty, underestimating her looks even as a symbol appears atop her forehead, clutching a hand over her left eye as the other transforms into a serpentine shape before a bright flash fills the area...

But without any survivors left to tell the tale, the rumors and speculation behind the validity of the sombra was still up for debate to this very day...

THE END
