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Mehl's wings flapped as she flew through a bright blue sky, dancing around fluffy white clouds with the grace of a creature that had mastered this domain. She felt her tail trailing behind her helping guide her airborne movements. It was euphoria in every sense of the word. True freedom.

An odd song started permeating the air around her causing the world to start to distort. She lost control of her flight and she began to fall into darkness.

Her eyes then opened groggily to reality as she reached for her phone to shut off the alarm.

With a heavy sigh she got out of bed, adjusted her dragon t-shirt and black sweat pants, and made her way to the bathroom of her small apartment. She took some time to rub her shoulders as they ached a little. Not from any sprain or injury but rather the feeling of appendages that weren't there. After some morning relief she took a glance at herself in the mirror. The hormone medication was starting to show signs it was making her skin softer and giving it a more feminine touch. Still none of that would change the fact that the face in the mirror was still not the one she wanted to see looking back.

Walking back to her room she grabbed a brush and started to fix up her long, brown hair. She knew she should probably do this in front of a mirror but she would rather avoid looking at herself more than she had to and she had gotten fairly good at doing things purely by touch. Once things were straight enough she took a seat in front of her computer, booting it up from sleep mode, and adjusted herself in her seat as she started her waking routine. A routine which consisted of turning on youtube and also the messenger program to chat with her friends. The majority of them were furies of various varieties but there were a few friends that had a different shared connection with her.

On the surface she was just Mehl, a trans girl living a mundane reality. But beneath it all she believed she was more. A creature only spoken about in myths and fables. In her mind she was Mehlaphuse, a gold dragoness. Lithe, regal, and proud. Everything she wasn't in the real world. And while hormones and surgeries could bring her closer to the

gender she was, it could never truly relieve the feeling she was born the wrong species.

Fortunately she found she wasn't alone. She met others who felt the same way and even formed strong connections with two particular kindred spirits. One was Ravtrag, her now boyfriend, whose dragon self is a gold maned red eastern style dragon with 6 wings. And another was Davwyn, a very close friend, whose dragon self is a small red dragon. Together they were the "Dragon's Three" among the local furry group for they rarely appeared separate from each other. And Mehl honestly couldn't see the world without them these days.

She selected their personal server and specifically the private chat for just the three of them. Nothing had been said since last night so she decided to see if they were around. Sometimes they did show as offline and were around on mobile while other times they were set to online but were nowhere near their keyboards. So it never hurt to poke about and see if they were around.

Mehl 12:13 PM

Rawr!

It was her standard greeting, especially when she didn't have anything particular to say at that moment. But all her friends understood that, including those two.

Davwyn 12:16 PM

Murrrp!

Ravtrag 12:17 PM

Mrew~

Mehl smiled. She was happy her friends were around. Granted Dav would be at work right now so was likely on break. As for Rav it was always a toss up whether or not her boyfriend was busy.

Mehl 12:17 PM

How are my dragons today?

Davwyn 12:18 PM

Doing good. How is the Mehls? *nuzzles up at the golden snout*

Mehl 12:18 PM

I am also doing good. *prrrms and nuzzles back at the lil red snout*

Ravtrag 12:20 PM

Doing alright here. Just had lunch. Might do some sketching later.

Ravtrag 12:20 PM

Also good luck on that interview today. *gives his Mehls a smooch*

Crap! She forgot about the interview! Quickly she checked her Calendar. Fortunately after checking that as well as the bus route there she concluded there was still time left to shower and get something quick to eat before she had to leave.

Mehl 12:23 PM

Ack! I almost forgot! Thank you for reminding me, love! I gotta go and get ready! Talk to you both later! *gives her Ravs a smooch back and Davs another motherly nuzzle*

Least she shaved already but definitely needed a shower. Rushing back into the washroom she turned on the water, adjusted it to her liking, and turned on the showerhead. The shower was a quick one as she had no time to enjoy it. Almost forgot to wash her hair too. After that she dried herself the best she could then headed back into the bedroom. Pouring through the closet she managed to find some decent blue slack pants and a presentable white top. She did think about putting on a nice dress and her dress pants instead but decided against it. Now wasn't a good time to try to pass as feminine. Finally she went down and made herself a quick sandwich before rushing off to catch the first bus downtown.

“That was a fucking waste of time! Looking for more experience, my ass! What sort of experience does one need for an entry level job?”

Mehl sighed and chugged back a soda she bought at the nearby corner store she stopped at on the way home. Sure it meant having to walk a few blocks the rest of the way but at this point she needed the sugar to soothe her anger. First job she came across where her electronic repair education was perfect for and shot down cause the interviewer didn't think she had the skills for it. It frustrated her to no end considering the posting itself stated that she just needed the education OR on hand experience. It also left her feeling defeated.

At this point in her life she was starting to feel that only jobs that barely pay the bare minimum of wages would be open to her. Jobs with tasks so mind numbingly boring that being stuck doing so for hours would stress her out. And she had already done such jobs in the past after graduating high school. She just couldn't go back to such a job. Not again.

She was so distracted by her own thoughts and depression that she unfortunately didn't see the man in front of her carrying a bunch of boxes. Her open drink splashed against her chest while boxes went tumbling out of the man's hand before she could react.

"Oh shit! I am so sorry! I didn't mean to!" She quickly sealed up her bottle and put it to the side on the sidewalk before moving over to help pick up the boxes. She prayed nothing fragile was in any of them. She gave the man a brief glance before helping him with one of the boxes.

He was an elderly gentleman. Possibly in his mid 60's or maybe late 50's. What little hair remained on the sides of his scalp was as white as could be while his full mustache and short pointed beard were grey but had signs those hairs would be white soon too. He wore a fancy pair of spectacles over his aged greyish blue eyes with a gold trim that looked more stylish than practical but she wasn't going to judge. Of course those glasses clashed very much with the casual attire he was wearing. A shirt that said "*Don't bother me til I have had my wizard's brew*" and a pair of jeans was not a look she'd expect to go with gold rimmed glasses that looked like they would belong to a man wearing an elegant bed robe while reading a book in a mansion's library. He also sported a rather curious necklace made from some sort of crystal she didn't recognize, neatly carved in a conjoined prismatic shape . And yet all tied together with a simple string.

"It is quite alright. I should have carried one box at a time to avoid blocking my own

view. Just in a rush to get myself all settled in, you know.” The elderly gentleman said kindly as he picked up a box while Mehl grabbed another. “Besides it is just loose fabric in these boxes anyways. Nothing to concern yourself with harming, miss.”

Mehl got a little stunned by the “miss” comment but quietly accepted it. She didn’t think she passed at all to be called that from anyone. Could just be his eyesight though, she thought to herself, as she carried one box inside the building.

She had passed by this place a few times but never been inside. Granted it was because since she moved into the neighbourhood the place always had a “for lease” sign out front for over a year. It was a rather older looking building. Wooden plank walls instead of stucco or drywall. Two stories tall and had more of a residential house feel to it than one you’d expect a business to reside in. Though the windows on the main floor had telltale signs that they were used for display before with empty lighting fixtures on the window sill ceiling. Upstairs could be for living in since there were some places in the city that were made like that. She guessed with the mention of fabrics this man was some sort of tailor. Made her curious as to what he planned to turn this place into.

Once she stepped into the main room did she get a good idea of what this gentleman made. Costumes! Rows upon rows of costumes lined up on clothing racks rowed up nicely in the room. Speaking of the room it was rather surprising for everything to look all set up like he was ready to open any day now. The interior walls were polished to a fine shine. The floor had a beautiful patterned brown and beige carpet that looked brand new. The counter near the entrance also had an old fashioned register that looked polished up real good. Must have been setting up for a while though she could have sworn that the for lease sign was still up yesterday when she walked by towards the corner store last night.

“Wow! You got quite the collection here.. Umm... sir.”

“Jergo. Oh, you can set that one next to the others in the corner there,” he said pointing to the boxes in the back corner. “Also thank you for the assistance. It was very kind of you to do so.”

“Well it was the least I could do after bumping into you like that. I’d be an inconsiderate jerk otherwise. Or at least feel like one for the rest of the day.” Mehl said as she gently put the box down beside the rest. “Again, real sorry about that. My head was somewhere else instead of pa-”

“Apology accepted!” Jergo cut her off and gave her a light pat on the shoulder. “No need to go into a whole story about it to explain yourself. It comes off as pleading and over a small mistake no less. Besides there was no harm done as I said so no need to worry yourself.”

“Sorry...” Mehl replied sheepishly which brought a sigh out of Jergo.

“Please, there is no need to apologize any further. Look, how about we take some time to relax.” Jergo said and took Mehl’s soda from her to set it on the cashier counter. He then walked over and took notice of the stain on Mehl’s shirt. “You know if you don’t mind I could remove that stain easily for you. I got something in the back that will clean it in a jiffy.”

Mehl looked down at her stained shirt and shrugged. “I mean thanks for the offer but I would rather not impose on a stranger. Besides I really rather not be topless while you are fixing up my shirt.”

“I understand that. That is why I have a small offer. I’ll clean up your shirt and while I do that you can wear a costume of your choice. Though you have to give me your thoughts afterwards. No matter how critical. An artist needs to know they are doing a good job and won’t know if they don’t get proper feedback.”

Mehl was taken aback a little by this strange proposal. But then again some of those costumes did look fun to try on. Especially the more anthropomorphic full body costumes she spied on one rack. It couldn’t hurt to try one on right?

“Well... I guess if you don’t mind I could try on a costume for a bit. Just don’t worry too much if the stain doesn’t go away. Honestly not too fond of wearing this shirt anyways.”

“Oh, and why is that if you don’t mind me asking?” Jergo asked as he wandered over to the costume rack Mehl was eyeing, fingering over the different outfits.

“Well besides the fact it doesn’t fit my particular style it just...” Mehl let out a heavy sigh. “It just reminds me of my failures with getting employment.”

“Well now I’m sorry for bringing up something unpleasant.” Jergo said as he pulled out a

suit. It looked like an anthro iguana costume with a rather bright green colour palette save for the tail end which had black stripes. “I have a feeling you are one for scales, yes? Feel free to choose another if I am wrong.”

Mehl took the hanger out of the elderly man’s hands and gave it a once over. The material on the outside felt very smooth to the touch and the padding on the inside was certainly high quality. The attached head was amazingly done too and almost life-like. She was honestly stunned by just how high quality it all felt and appeared.

“This is certainly amazing craftsmanship. I’m surprised you are just selling this sort of stuff and not working in movies or something with this level of quality.”

Jergo smiled and waved his hand dismissively. “Please, you are far too kind. Plus I find the idea of working for movie studios and such to be rather dull. Having someone else dictate what I create would take joy out of the craft. Besides I feel the public deserves something more than the cheap, overpriced, mass marketed crap.”

“Well you have certainly sold me on trying this on.” Mehl said and looked around. “Now where can I-”

“Oh, just under the stairs there.” Jergo pointed to a door beneath the stairs leading to the above floor. “I converted that storage space as best I could muster into a makeshift changing room. It will do til I can get some renovations done to this place. Do mind your head in there.”

Mehl followed Jergo to the changing closet (cause that totally wasn’t a room). Peeking inside showed it was rather cobbled together with a body mirror on one wall and a random bench along the wall opposite to the door. It certainly was cramped but Mehl could still make use of it. Stepping inside she took the costume from Jergo and closed the door. From there she removed her shirt and pants, passing her shirt through the door, and then finally sliding her feet into the costume first.

The comfort from this suit was just sublime. Felt like slipping on the most comfy full body PJs she could ever wear. Her hands and arms went in next as she pulled the costume up over her shoulders, taking note of how flexible it all was. She took off her glasses and put them gingerly on the bench before sliding the head on which fit over perfectly. Now that she thought about it she wondered how Jergo guessed her size. She shrugged it off to

tailor instinct and finally zipped up the zipper on the back albeit with some difficulty. Gonna make this one of her criticisms for sure once she was done playing around.

Upon the zipper meeting the top Mehl felt a pang in her chest. It was like she was hit with a strong electric shock that almost knocked her off balance forcing her to balance against the mirror. With a gasp she took in some deep breaths and regained her composure. Quickly she checked herself for any signs that she just had a heart attack such as making sure she still had feeling in her left arm and also checking her pulse. She looked herself over in the mirror just to check if anything visually was wrong and - wait...

Did the costume just blink?

She stared intensely at her reflection and blinked one eye. Sure enough the same eye blinked back. But that shouldn't be possible. Curious she took a finger to the eyelid and gently pulled it down before quickly pulling back as it felt far too much like she was touching her actual eyelid.

“What the actual fuck?” Mehl looked over her entire body and noticed how much more real the scales looked. On top of that she couldn't help but notice the tail was wiggling on its own and she could feel it brushing along the floor. Looking back at the mirror she decided to do one more check. She opened her mouth as wide as she could to see if she could see herself inside. Sure enough all she could see were pointy teeth, a long tongue, and the inside of a rather real looking maw.

“Ok! Nope! This is too real!” Panicked, she reached behind her neck searching for the zipper. Her panic was beginning to spike when she struggled to find it but upon feeling the familiar touch of a metal zipper tag brought swift relief. Quickly she pulled it down enough she could take the head off to find that everything was normal. Just a normal human head underneath and the costume looked and felt like a costume again. She even just noticed her eyesight was blurry again which means during that moment she didn't need her glasses which was beyond bizarre.

She held the mask of the costume in her covered hands, examining it for anything odd but couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. She debated taking the whole thing off and shrugging it all off as some mental hallucination and yet as she held the mask in her hands something inside was saying to put it back on. In the end curiosity won out and she slipped the mask back over her head, took a deep breath, and brought the zipper to a full

close once more. Again there was a pang in her chest but not as strong as the first time. Still it made her shut her eyes for a moment before opening them again to see an anthropomorphic iguana staring back at her. She was just about to take the time to examine herself without freaking out this time when a knock at the changing closet door startled her, causing her to bonk her head against the bottom of the stairs behind her.

“Ow!”

“Is everything ok in there? You have been in there a while and I thought I heard shouting earlier.”

“Huh? Uh yeah! Everything is ok! Just.. umm... had some zipper difficulties.”

“Well come on out and let's see! I can adjust it if needed while it is on you.”

“Alright! Alright! I'm coming out!”

Mehl took a deep breath and stepped out of the changing closet. She could feel the tail (her tail?) drag along the floor and the wooden floor boards beneath her feet as she walked out. She did have to admit to herself that actually feeling like she had a tail felt a little euphoric to her. Still she also felt nervous as Jergo looked her over quizzically like he was trying to puzzle something out. He then moved behind her and ever so slightly adjusted the zipper. And just like that her perspective shifted. She no longer felt aspects of the iguana suit like it was her own body but just a rather snug and cozy costume again. Her vision blurred and very lightly distorted behind the costume's plastic eyes. And that euphoric feeling was replaced by a quiet longing.

Frustrated, Mehl unzipped the costume enough to slide off the head again. “What did you do?”

Jergo just gave her a confused look. “Whatever do you mean? I simply fixed the zipper head as it appeared to be catching near the top. The last thing anyone would like is having their skin pinched by an uncooperative zipper. Especially behind the neck.”

“No, you did more than that! When I fully put this on I swear I literally became an iguana but then you touched the zipper and now just - GAH!” Mehl put the head on again and zipped it up but nothing happened. She tried twisting the zipper head around but Jergo

pulled her hands away.

“I think you spent long enough in that costume, my dear. Clearly you are not getting enough air in there to start thinking that the costume became real while wearing it. I do pride myself in my work but that is beyond my capabilities. Let alone possible in general.” The elderly man rolled his eyes before handing Mehl her shirt she passed to him earlier. “Anyways your shirt is ready to put back on and unless you plan on buying that costume I would politely ask you remove it before you begin damaging it.”

Mehl wanted to retort back but with words failing her she just took her shirt and walked back into the changing closet defeated. She knew something was up with this costume. Maybe the others too. She knew what she experienced and she knew Jergo did something when he touched the zipper head. But unless she found some sort of definitive proof it wasn't like she could confront him on it. Still since his store wasn't far from where she lived she could try keeping an eye on him. Maybe when she wasn't so strapped for cash she could buy a different costume from him to see if she wasn't just crazy after all.

Soon she stepped back out in the clothes she came in with, shirt cleaner than before, and costume under her arm which she promptly passed over to Jergo. “Okay, here is your costume. Thanks for cleaning up my shirt and letting me try that on. Wish you luck with your business.” She said, trying to sound positive but she could tell it was coming off rather dry.

If Jergo noticed he wasn't showing it. “And thank you for helping me with moving some of my stuff in. By the way, before you go I do have something to ask of you?”

At this point Mehl was feeling a little suspicious of Jergo but she'll bite. “Alright. Ask away.”

“Well I was just thinking while I was cleaning the stain off your shirt that I could use a bit of help with my shop. Nothing special, just someone to keep an eye on the front, work the cash register, and do a little cleaning. You wouldn't happen to have some experience working a cash register at all, would you?”

Mehl was a little taken aback. “I mean I have worked as a cashier but not with anything that old. Also hold on, are you... offering me a job? Like just after we barely met and haven't even had a formal interview?”

He nodded. “Well you did mention before you were struggling to find a job and you seem to be a good egg. Besides it is also not exactly cheap to put out hiring ads and all the time needed to go through the whole process. So I feel it is worth the risk hiring on the spot. What do you think?”

Mehl did need the work but she wasn't gonna jump in without asking a couple questions first. “What would the hours be?”

“6-8 hours part time. Weekdays only. No earlier than 9 am and no later than 8pm.”

“Holidays off?”

“And you can request days off provided you give a good reason and also an adequate amount of time.”

“Last question and don't take offence but... what is the pay?”

“Twenty per hour.”

Her eyes widened upon hearing that. Twenty Dollars per hour? That was definitely a good chunk above current minimum wage even for part time hours. She wasn't sure how long she stood there slack jawed before she regained her composure and made her decision.

“Well in my current position that is an offer I would be foolish to refuse. Alright, guess the actual last question, ignore what I said before, is when do I start.”

Jergo beamed at that response. “Excellent! I still have some things to set up, so how about next Monday at 9?”

“I can manage that. Just let me give you my number in case you change your mind or something comes up. You have a phone number I can get back to you too? Just in case.”

“I have a cell number. I am no old fossil despite my aesthetic choices.” Jergo chuckled as both exchanged numbers and then shook hands.

After that Mehl left the store with a spring in her step. Sure, she still was suspicious about Jergo after the whole deal with the costume but gaining a job at a fun store like that plus with a wage that, at the very least, will keep her from starving is rather more important. So she was willing to put that oddness away for now. She did still plan on keeping a good eye on the old man. But for now she lets herself wallow in happiness for once. She certainly will be telling her friends the good news once she gets home.

Jergo, meanwhile, watched Mehl leave before worryingly checking the costume he was still holding. He got lucky he was able to play things off but it was far too close a call. He was glad she took to his job offer so easily otherwise he would have had to come up to keep her eyes off him while he kept his own on her.

In truth the costume was ensorcelled but the magic was only supposed to apply a light illusion to make it look more real. But what he saw while she wore it before he broke the weave of the spell was much stronger than intended. Almost a full transmutation even. Checking the weave with his spectacles showed no sign of tampering and the spell was woven in correctly. Which only left Mehl. There was something about her that affected the spell in some manner. He did notice the moment she stepped out of the changing room there was a glow to her core that the suit's magic appeared to be latching onto. But again that made no sense. No creature's core essence could affect magic like that, let alone a regular human.

Hiring her on was his best bet to keep an eye on her and examine her without suspicion. In the meantime he'll have to check his books and notes for any phenomena like what they both just experienced. After he unpacked of course. Can't exactly go over his notes while still living in boxes.

And here he thought his retirement was going to be boring.