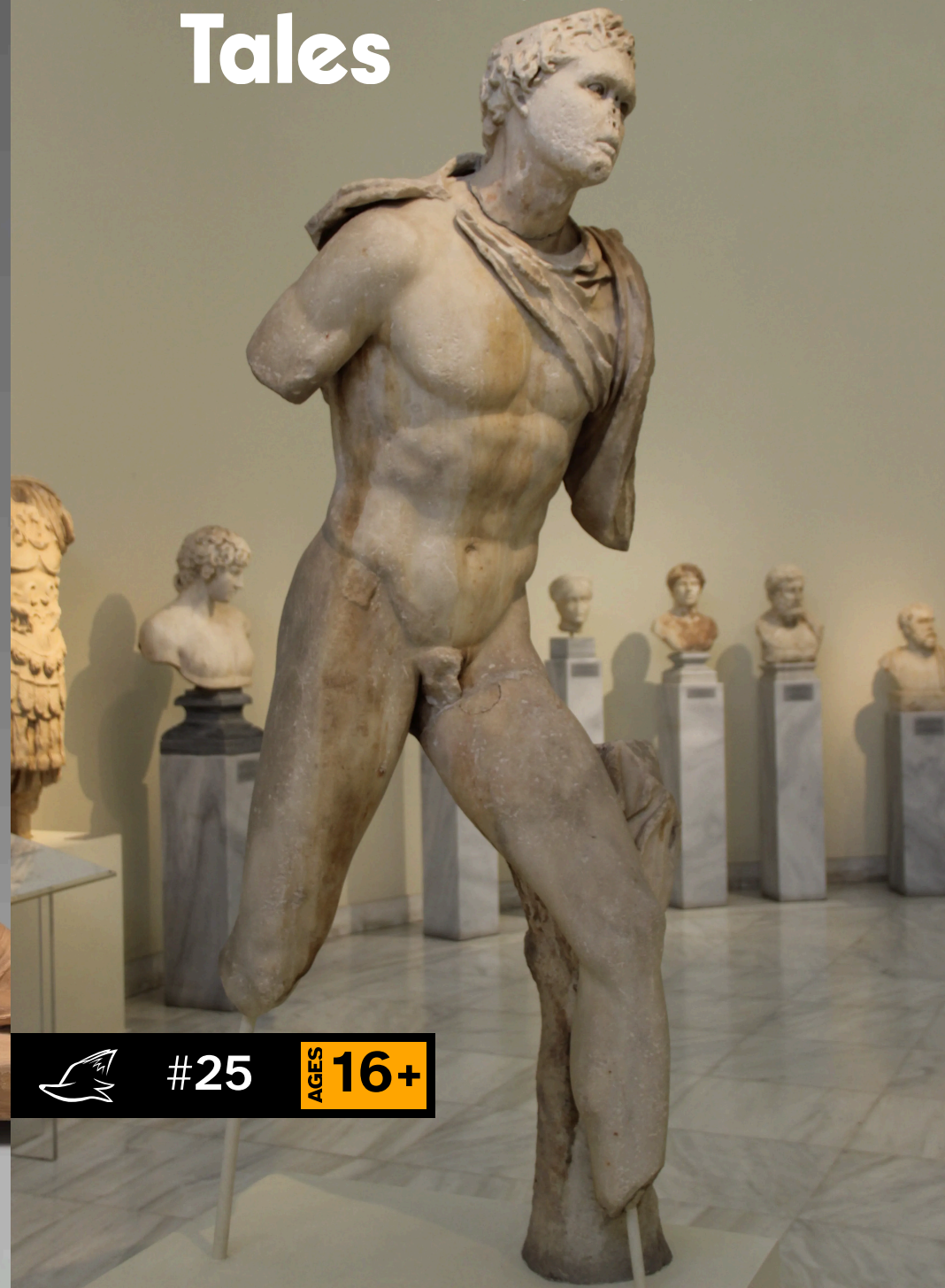




Nowhereverse Tales



#25

AGES **16+**

We exist in our space and time... and we are not alone. Beyond our world lies numerous others with their own histories and biologies. And between them all, where the walls grow thin and possibility seems endless, there is a lighthouse, sitting in the space between spaces.

Welcome, travelers and castaways alike, to **Nowhere**.

In this Issue

Our bodies are often referred to as works of art. (Or maybe that's just my evangelical upbringing.) And in many ways they are! Our many shapes, colors, textures; genetics flowing and re-forming into combinations both new and familiar.

The thing about art, though, is that it's up for interpretation. And while we are still researching new ways to re-interpret the art of our bodies, what if there were someone that took things more literally?

—Ronyo

To Be Magnificent

Madame Skarn is one of the finest sculptors around. Her chosen medium, however, is less conventional.

Rated Mature: gender disphoria, willing petrification, artistic nudity

A Proposition

Red finally forces themself to have a vulnerable conversation.

Rated Mature: sex mention, brief coarse language

Ask the Lighthouse

@MRD.0021—

Where did you escape from?

—Coda

The process that created us intended to make us tools. It was technology that was never supposed to be in our world, but we adapted. We have our autonomy, but it is an ongoing equilibrium that we as a collective will need to maintain for the entirety of our existence.

Outside of us, though, there are three groups: those that accept and live alongside us, those that fear us, and those that seek to control us. And when those last two groups began to overshadow the first...

42 offered us a way out. And we took it.

Ask your question at wndfx.link/ask

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Myron smiles; it's a cocky grin. "So they're into hot dads?"

"They're into you. And Jordan's wanted to climb you like a tree since we first met."

You can't even bring yourself to halfheartedly protest.

"So I've got their blessings?" Myron says.

Red nods. "If they were here, there's a chance we'd still be having this conversation."

Myron ducks his head. Is he... is he embarrassed?

He looks up at Red. "What about you?"

Red closes the distance between them and puts their hands on his chest. They're on eye-level with his pecs, and what beautifully shaped, firm pecs they are. Myron brings an arm around their back, and Red leans in.

"That night in the barn," they say, "I felt safe. I was sad, and angry, and just... everything. And you let me be that."

"Plus," they add, tapping Myron's chest and backing away a step, "I know you're not going to get attached."

Myron narrows his eyes. "Explain."

Red rolls their eyes. "I know you're not emotionless or some kind of machine, but you're not romantic, right? I know you care; that's what I—we-like about you!" They sigh. "And I've had to break a few hearts. I don't particularly want to break any more. Not if I can help it."

Myron nods. "I get it," he says. "So... now?"

"Absolutely not," Red says. They start walking back to the farmhouse. "We'd be picking mud out of our ass fur for a week and keep finding seeds in all sorts of uncomfortable places."

"That come from personal experience?"

"Yes. I can't even joke about it. Yes."



The Lightbringers will return

To Be Magnificent

Edward took the drink. "I'm not really a drinker," he said with an apologetic smile.

Madame Skarn sat down across from him and swirled her glass, a tall glass filled with ice and a pale yellow soda. "Yes, darling," she said with a brief adjustment of her mirrored sunglasses, "but I need you relaxed for the process."

Edward nodded and brought the drink to his lips before pulling it away, resting his arm on his leg. "I'm on a really empty stomach," he babbled. "Haven't eaten, like you said—"

"And now I need you to follow this last instruction." She took a sip of her drink and set it to the side. "Men of a certain type enjoy high-proof rum, and other men of a certain type *pretend* to enjoy it. I know you are neither. So let me suggest: it is medicine."

Edward nodded, steeled himself, and downed the rum in a single gulp. He didn't cough afterwards, but he did shake his head vigorously. "That'll put hair on your chest. Fingers crossed."

Skarn smiled. "That's the idea, darling. Now!" She took a longer pull from her drink. "I want to be sure we are on the same page with respect to this operation. You know I usually work with stone, yes?"

Edward was still feeling the burn of the alcohol on the backs of his eardrums. "Wait, those statues on the way in are...?" He felt the blood drain from his face.

"Yes, some of my finer work." She glanced at him and quickly relaxed her posture. "Oh, don't worry, it's all with permission. Some people enjoy the break from..." She trailed off, making a vague gesture with her hand.

"From breathing?" Edward supplied.

Skarn chuckled. "Yes, that will do," she said with a soft smile. "Only for a time, mind you. Then they go on their way and I find a new subject to sculpt." She turned to Edward. "But you are going to be a new medium for me."

Ed nodded. He swore he could feel his brain sloshing around his skull. "You said something about clay?"

"Yes, dear. One moment—" She turned around and pulled a lump of clay off a table behind her. "I once worked extensively with ceramics. Traditionally, mind you; not my usual methods. How is this for the texture you're looking for?"

Ed took the sample from her and ran his fingers along the waves and grooves. “That’s amazing,” he breathed. “How’d you get it to do that?”

“A wire brush and patience,” Skarn said with a winning smile.

Ed passed the sample back. “But you’ve never done a person with clay before?”

Her smile got a bit tighter. “I know the mechanics of it will work,” she explained. “But it required a certain amount of... *control* on my part that’s difficult to sustain.” She sighed. “I could only do clay with smaller creatures or those looking to become smaller creatures, and even then it might have involved getting there via stone anyway.”

Ed gripped his glass nervously. “So what’s changed?”

Skarn’s professional smile returned. “Well, I have an old friend who’s opened up a shop, and she thought these glasses would be just *perfect* for me.” She held up a pair of yellow-tinted glasses.

Ed chuckled. “They look like the blue light glasses I see at the gas station.”

Skarn made a face. “Yes, they are a bit... *practical*, aren’t they?” she said with a copious amount of disdain. She tucked the glasses into her apron, one arm nestled in her cleavage. “But they should do the job of regulating my power enough that, for you, we can go straight to clay.”

Ed smiled. “Well, that’s a relief.”

Skarn didn’t smile back. “There is one other thing, darling,” she said. “Normally, I would want you to leave your bindings in place so we can start the process closer to your ideal shape. But in your case, given the references you provided, I think it’d be best to have more raw material to work with.”

Ed’s smile got much more nervous. “Really?” he said. He closed his eyes and took a breath to slow his racing heart.

It wasn’t working. His breath got quicker; his grip on his glass got tighter. In a quick motion he put the glass to the side and shot to his feet.

“I’m sorry, this—” He shook his hands by his side. “Sorry, I...” He shook his head and turned away.

Madame Skarn rose and glided over to him, placing a hand gently on his upper arm. “I should apologize, dear,” she said.

Ed took a breath. “I was under the impression,” he said, slowly and with a tremor in his voice, “that I wouldn’t have to undress for the process.”

“Normally, yes,” Skarn said, quietly but firmly. “But I want to provide the body you *truly* desire.” She looked significantly to the side; Ed followed her gaze to several unopened bags of grey clay.

Red nods.

Myron just stood there, mouth open, for a moment before he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “What about your long-distance relationships?” he says.

“About that,” Red says. “Their names are Alec and Jordan, and they literally live in other worlds. Alec is a wyvern—dragon with two wings and two legs—and Jordan’s a human.” At Myron’s confused look, they added, “An elf but not magic.”

“The thing is, we’re in each other’s heads. We each see what the others see, feel what they feel. All the time, constantly.” They take a breath. “I know it sounds crazy—”

“No, I believe you,” Myron says quickly.

“—but it—you do?”

Myron nods. “That night in the barn?” He shrugs. “That came from someplace deep. So if you’re lying now...” He sighs. “The truth has to be that much worse, right?”

Red nods, and you feel a pulse of affection. “I love them,” they say. “I don’t think I can love anyone else as much as I love them.”

Myron makes a face... you’re not sure what kind, but it doesn’t seem good. “So, does that make me a consolation prize?”

Red freezes. “No?”

“So what’s different now than when you turned me down before?”

“It’s...” Red stammers, taken aback at the sudden turn in the conversation. “It’s been a while?”

“So I’m just conveniently available?”

Red throws up their arms. “If you’re not, say so!” They drop their arms and pinch the bridge of their nose. “This is harder than I want it to be,” they groan.

You can’t help the thought that bubbles up: that’s what she said.

Green stifles a laugh.

Fuck. You. Red says in your head, though you can feel their mirth beneath it. They look up to see Myron holding back his own laugh.

Red sighs, and it turns into a laugh. Myron steps forward with a chuckle.

“Really,” he says, arms open, “I just want to know that you, you know...” He gives a slight smile. “You want *me*. Not just someone.”

Red nods. “Absolutely.” They look him in the eye. “Alec thought you had a beautiful heart, that you were someone that cared and did what you could for those you cared about.”

“Thought?”

“Then they saw you with your daughter and got even more attracted.”

Last we left off...

About eight years ago, you found two other people in your head: **Eutychia** and **Alec**; to the three of you, you are **Red**, **Green**, and **Blue**. While you may never be together physically, you're determined to bring light to your respective worlds.

A Proposition

You slip your headphones on and pull up the most complicated-looking code you can. Green is doing the same with their own document. Neither of you are listening to anything in particular or actually working.

Red is leading one of the farmhands out to one of the fields. And they need all the support they can get for this conversation.

"Okay, what's going on?" the farmhand says.

Red turns around to look him over. It's the minotaur who started working on the farm not too long ago: Myron. The same one who comforted Red when they broke down back in the winter. The same one Red turned down seven years ago.

Myron gestures around them. "This field looks done."

"It is," Red says. "I just didn't want to have this conversation within earshot of anyone."

Myron cocks his head.

Here goes, Red thinks. You and Green send your support. Out loud, they say, "You're open to... to sexual activity, right?"

Myron narrows his eyes. "I don't just sleep around, if that's what you're asking."

"No, it's not—" Red sighs. "I'm sorry I ever said that. It was..." They groan. "Presumptuous? Rude?"

Myron shakes his head. "I already forgave you—" He stops himself and lets out a low bovine rumble. "And now I'm being presumptuous."

Red waves it off. "I know you don't just sleep around, but you're open to doing..." They curse their nervousness. "Stuff? With friends?"

Myron nods, still holding himself back.

Red dives in. "Are we friends?"

That takes him aback. "Of course we are—wait, really?" He gestures between the two of them.

"As you can see," she explained, "I do have supplemental material. But I've found that it should only be that: *supplemental*. In the past, when I've fashioned whole parts out of other materials, those parts would always feel lesser than others." She waved her hand. "We always made it work, but it would often involve multiple operations."

She turned her attention back to Ed. "I assure you, I see you as nothing but the perfect gentleman—"

"It's not about how you see me," Edward said, eyes closed and head bowed.

Skarn sighed. "It's about how you see yourself?"

Edward nodded. "I'm sorry—"

"You have nothing to apologize for, dear. This is, in fact, the problem we are here to solve, no?"

Edward nodded again. "I just don't know if I can—" His breath hitched. He shook his head. "Sorry, I think the drink's kicking in." He looked back to Skarn with a wet smile. "I'm a weepy drunk."

Skarn put her other hand on Ed's other arm, holding him arms length from her. "Edward," she said, her full focus evident despite the sunglasses. "I'm afraid I cannot be as soft as I want to be here. The materials I work with are firm and do not give easily; if I am to do what I do, I must match that. If this is a bridge too far, then we can discuss alternatives while the alcohol wears off and make plans for another day.

"However, I must tell you that I see the magnificent creature you desire within you. It is there, waiting to be released, to be realized. If you place your full trust in me, I give you my word that I will bring your true nature into the world."

Ed blinked and swallowed thickly. "I'm going to lose my nerve if I don't do this now," he said. "Yes, I trust you. What do you need me to do?"

Skarn smiled. It was a predatory smile, though not unkind. "As I said, darling," she said as she reached one hand to the back of her head and the other to her sunglasses.

"Trust me."

In the same fluid motion she undid the knot in her hair tie and pulled her sunglasses off. Her dreadlocks fanned out into a tangle of snakes that turned their gaze on Edward as she stared at him with yellow eyes. She shifted her lower body and brought her snake tail around to coil loosely around Edward's legs. Finally, she donned the special glasses, not taking her eyes off Edward.

Edward saw the snakes moving in his periphery, vaguely noticed her beginning to coil around him, but he couldn't take his eyes off of Hers. There was a subtle glow to Them—was there? Was it just his imagination? He looked intently, focusing...

*Your trust I have, my eyes you see,
Now match my gaze, focus on me.*

Everything outside of Her Eyes blurred. Ed couldn't bring himself to care; nothing else could be as important in this moment.

*Your thoughts grow slow, harder to find.
Your limbs grow still, tensions unwind.*

It didn't matter that he couldn't move. He didn't want to. He couldn't conceive why he would.

*But first you will, with utmost care,
Remove your clothes; strip yourself bare.*

He could move. He had to! The impulse took hold before he even realized what it was, his conscious mind dulled by the alcohol and his willingness to continue and his time staring at Her Eyes.

His shirt came off first. It blocked his view of Her Eyes for a moment, but it passed quickly. He stepped out of his shoes, barely noticing Her snake tail pushing them out of the way. He couldn't manage his socks without looking away, but she gently guided his gaze downward so he could finish removing them before standing him up straight again. He unbuttoned his jeans and let them fall.

He stared at Her Eyes for another moment, the last vestiges of panic and shame finally swimming to the surface of his mind. But they were quickly burned away by the force of Her Gaze, by the total surrender Her Eyes demanded.

"I trust you," he whispered.

The compression underwear fell to the ground. The binder went over his head and was left to the side.

Madame Skarn's smile grew. She slithered to the side and guided Edward to lay on a low table.

*Under my charm, here you will stay.
Surrender now, and become clay.*

Edward took a deep breath and held it for a moment, waiting on the precipice. With one last push from Her Eyes, he exhaled. And kept exhaling. He felt his limbs stiffen, frozen in place. The feeling traveled up to his chest, pushing the last of the air out of his lungs.

Sound muffled, feeling grew numb, his vision darkened until all he could see were the glowing yellow irises of Her Eyes.

And as his consciousness drifted, even They faded away.

.....

With cracks and groans, he flexed his arms and brought his hands in front of him. His fingers were thicker, capped with black hoof-like nails. He traced one hand up the other arm, feeling the fine fuzz of his fur before getting to his very well-defined chest, his pecs and abs present and substantial, but not grotesquely large.

Perfect. He never wanted to be a body-builder; he just wanted to be strong.

The thought made his tail wag. Just slightly, but enough to draw his attention to it. He looked over his shoulder as best he could to catch a glimpse of it, swishing back and forth. The act brought his attention to his muzzle and head. He held his hands to his face, feeling his wide nostrils back to his ears and up to his horns.

*My charms now gone, the clay made real;
Answer me now—*

"How do you feel?" Madame Skarn said, placing her sunglasses back on.

Edward took another breath and let it out slowly, letting himself fall into place in his new body. He smiled and spoke in a deep rumbling voice.

"Magnificent."



The Windfox Emporium is open for business

Skarn looked at the extremely diminished pile of Edward-clay left. The warning she'd given Edward at the beginning was no bluff. She'd fashioned body parts out of found materials before and cemented them to her subjects, but the result was always sub-par. And with the amount of dysphoria Edward demonstrated...

She sighed. The clay was going to have to come from somewhere. But where could she compromise now?

She shifted in place, the end of her tail annoyingly itchy. "Ugh," she groaned. "Is it almost shedding time alrea—"

She froze.

She looked back at Edward. Specifically, his head. And the impressive set of horns and hair she'd given him.

"Oh, I do hope this doesn't bite me in the arse," Skarn said to herself as she slithered forward and carefully began to break off his horns.

Time and space had lost meaning; even senses were strange, though he was aware. But he couldn't see or hear. Or feel. He wouldn't move, not that he could. He had no agency, no will, and he found that he didn't mind. He simply... was.

He did sense his mistress changing him. Moulding and shaping him into something new. He sensed her take the parts of himself that didn't fit, repurposing them into parts that did. He sensed her eye, her touch, her craft. Her pride in him, evident in every knead, score, press that shaped him.

He was hers. She was proud he was hers. And he... yes, he was proud to be hers. Proud to be her work of art.

*And now for this, the final touch:
Maintain your shape against this crutch.*

He still couldn't move. But there was some awareness of his body. And with that awareness came vague sensations of being held up by the barest of structures. It... wasn't enough. He could feel parts of him wanting to collapse, unable to support his own weight. And yet! His mistress commanded him to stay together, so he would.

*A moment more, we will not fail.
Regain your will and... inhale!*

He blinked. Blinked! He could see! And breathe? He took a breath... and kept going... Feeling returned to his face and chest, and what a feeling it was. He reeled from the sudden influx of smells, of feeling fur, of seeing from a taller perspective.

*Now feel your limbs, both old and new,
A different shape, yet always you.*

Madame Skarn collapsed in a heap of coils. She pulled off her new glasses and put them and her normal sunglasses on a table before picking up what was left of her drink. In a single motion she chugged the rest of it.

She rose and observed her subject. Edward lay perfectly still on the workbench, every detail of his body transmuted into divots, bumps, and curves in the clay. His mouth was closed, but his eyes remained open, staring into nothing. Skarn gently ran a finger over his eyeball, feeling the subtle changes in texture.

She ran a hand down the length of his body, getting a feel for the firmness of the clay she would be working with. She lingered on the more intimate areas, mostly (but, she would admit, not wholly) to consider how she would be changing them. She ended at the feet and confirmed to herself that they wouldn't be able to hold the weight of the body themselves.

"Well," she muttered, "at least you didn't ask for hooves." She bent beneath the bench and started turning a large crank. Slowly the surface began to rise to a more workable height. After a moment she locked the crank and slithered back to take in her project.

"Alright then," she said to herself, "time to work."

The first thing she did was grab a wire. Edward trusted her to get his shape right, and that started with removing the parts that didn't belong, followed shortly by redistributing mass to match his chosen physique. All of the shavings and excess went into a pile to the side.

By the end of the day, Edward was looking like an off-model Ken doll. Skarn wiped her forehead with the back of her arm and proceeded to vigorously wash her hands in her water bucket. She'd have to properly wash off later, of course, but there was only so much Edward-clay to use; the less that went down the drain the better.

Skarn sat on her tail, staring at her work in progress as she ate her lunch. She'd spent the morning working on Ed's head; working with clay certainly made pulling a human face into a bovine muzzle much easier. That left that much more time to work on the texture of the fur, the angle of the horns, and putting as much expressiveness in the face as she could.

After all, he was going to be magnificent, not terrifying.

She took another bite of her sandwich—tuna salad on wheat—and visualized the rest of him. The rough work she'd done yesterday was just that: rough. Now it was time to bring definition, class, *refinement!*

She picked up a scoring tool—essentially a leadless pencil—and slithered over to the bench. She quickly made a few marks in Edward's thigh and held the tool up to her hair.

One of the snakes took the tool in its mouth and curled back into the swarm. Skarn wet her hands and began digging back into the clay.

Madame Skarn slithered into her workshop the next morning and looked Edward over. She was always proud of her work—anything less than her best wasn't worth signing her name to—but the sheer masculine radiance she'd put into Ed's body was some of her finest work to date.

"So, just the tail, right?" Skarn mused. "That's a minotaur: body of a man with the head and tail of a bull." and fumed. "But I booked a week. Why did I book a week for this? Was it just the new material?"

She slithered to the back corner of the workshop where a simple desktop computer sat atop a pair of filing cabinets. She impatiently tapped the keyboard to wake up the computer and clicked through to find the email thread with Edward.

The first glances at the attached images made her heart sink. It was a Minotaur dressed in a flannel shirt a pair of overalls, and with hooves for feet... "Oh no," she muttered.

She scrolled down the thread and found a link to an online character creator. "Oh no, no, no..."

The page loaded, showing the same Minotaur. She clicked to remove the outfit. "No, no, no, no..."

The character's entire body—torso, arms, legs—was covered in short fur.

Madame Skarn slapped the makeshift desk. "Mother fuck!"

Madame Skarn hated weeklong projects. She specifically hated the Thursday of a weeklong project. And she hated weeklong projects for making her hate Thursdays. She liked Thursdays!

Lalaith

Hey, friend! Had a chance to try the glasses yet?

She heard her phone ping (with the special chime reserved for friends), and thanked whatever deity was listening that she hadn't gotten Edward-clay on her hands yet. She fed her pencil to her hair and fished her phone out of her apron.

Worked like a charm! Just trying to finish this by the weekend.

Oooooooo! Can I see?

"Only for you," Skarn muttered as she snapped a quick picture of Edward's current state.

[IMG_1394.jpg]

I'd forgotten about the hooves and fur until yesterday.

😏 Looks amazing as always, skaska!

Call me that again and you spend a month on my front lawn.

Have to catch me first. 😊

What's left to do?

Skarn looked down at the paper she'd been writing on.

Engineering.

I need to get him off the table and upright long enough for me to attach his tail and sculpt his derrière.

Other than that...



So basically all the fun parts. You got this!

Thank you, darling. Back to work I go!

