

Artistic endeavour

Had it not been for the soft classical music that played over the speakers, the museum would have been completely silent. Violins and cellos joined to create a melody that, when paired with the pristine checkered marble floors and clay hued walls of the gallery, did away with stress and worries. It left the visitor free to contemplate and admire the exposition, or merely relax a bit.

Midori walked in silence through the entrance hall, with one goal in mind. To find the one that had drawn her attention, and see if she really held up to the magnificence that she displayed on the poster. Not that she would ignore the rest of the collection, of course not! But among the rest of the posters, which displayed other pieces, this one had completely enthralled her. The vibrancy, the glimmer, the beauty... she needed to see her with her own two eyes.

Visiting the museum had been one of those things that constantly got thrown in the back of her “to-do” list. The building was right there! But after seeing those promotional posters, she had decided. Now or never. No excuses. So she had spent the day at the museum, visiting the place and fully appreciating the pieces it displayed, regardless if the exhibition was permanent and the temporary. And, of course, she had saved the best for last. The delectable dessert for which there was always a separate stomach.

The wing the exposition had taken residence in was... smaller than expected. It was something that actually made her heart sink a bit. A central corridor, wide and spacious, stretched before her. It was divided by two benches in the middle, just in case someone needed to rest. And in the far end wall, a large glass window allowed the natural light to illuminate the area. Four alabaster door frames lead into several rooms that branched off it, each of them an isolated space from the contiguous one.

Her echoing footsteps, and the absence of visitors was a sight that left the blonde fox girl scratching her head. Maybe she had just come at a bad time? She couldn't have been the only

one drawn in by such alluring pieces, right? Unsure of where to start, she looked around, hoping for anyone that could guide her.

– Hello?

Her voice echoed through the gallery, breaking the silence for the briefest moment. They hung in the air, fading slowly, leaving her in complete silence and solitude. Four frames awaited for her choice, to be graced with her presence, looming tall and inviting. The answer to her words, however, came from behind her. Her vulpine ears twitched and turned at the noise, hurried clacking footsteps mixing with the rustling of clothes and a light panting breath. The arrival stopped for a moment, but would not fool her, hearing how the cloth was straightened and the composure regained.

– Apologies, I stepped away for a moment.

The rich and melodious voice filled her ears, as Midori struggled not to ogle the woman that spoke to her. Tall and lean, she moved with elegance and grace, without making the faintest sound, unlike a moment ago. Her auburn hair was combed in a beautiful coiffure, a single playful lock hanging free next to her ear. It, along with her fair skin and hazel eyes, beautifully contrasted with her white gown. The woman's full lips curled in a kind smile.

– Thank you for visiting my exposition. -The woman said, giving Midori a small bow.- My name is Arete.

– Pleased to meet you, Miss Arete. -Answered Midori, giving a curtsy bow back.- I'm Midori!

– Am I correct to assume you have come to visit?

– Visiting this museum has been delayed long enough, and the promotion certainly looked great. So I might as well grace this exhibit with my presence!

The sculptress smiled at her claims, letting out a gentle chuckle.

– I see. Well, Miss, since that is the case, would you be interested in a special tour by my hand?

– Oh-ho! A personal guided visit, by the artist behind it all? -Midori said, puffing her chest.- Of course! It's not everyday that someone like me pays a visit!

With a sweet smile, Arete guided Midori towards the first room, the one to their right, as a rich aroma surrounded them. The artist towered over the petite woman, her strides ample and graceful. But Midori didn't seem to have a problem keeping up, her attention being elsewhere.

The piece before her had the blonde fox girl staring intently. On top of a square pedestal, being part of a wider one, and walled by a low glass wall, stood two statues. The podium took the middle of the room, receiving the full light of the ceiling window above, leaving a corridor around them for visitors to walk around. Two nude women faced each other, one creamy white and one black, almost jet black. Midori tried to come up with some word in her mind, something that felt right to describe them. Gorgeous seemed the right one. Beautiful and sexy, with curves and assets that were proudly on display.

Both women had their hands on their hips, legs slightly spread and firmly planted on her floor. Their puffed chests, displaying incredible roundness, collided against the other in a show of force. Upon a closer look, they even had nipples, jousting against its rival in the clash. A stalemate where none would cede, their playful and cocky smirks, along with their blank eyes, boring deep in the rival's face.

From a distance, they could seem almost a perfect mirroring image, down to the medullary rings, had it not been for the finer details.

The creamy white one had her hair tied in a short ponytail behind her head, the ebony one had an elegant bun behind her, two locks spiralling down the sides of her face.

The hands of the white one were clenched fists on her hips, while the ebony one was content with placing them there.

The crown of the white one was smaller, but it more than made up for it by being taller, the top being a ring of pointy spikes. The ebony one compensated its lower height by being wider, rounder, almost like a castle wall.

Unconsciously, Midori leaned forth, one hand on the glass wall while the other stretched towards the statues, trying to reach for their smooth surfaces.

– The display is not to be touched. -Said Arete's melodious voice.- In the museum, that is. If this was my studio, I would gladly let you explore their forms though.

Thanking that she had her back towards the artist, Midori blushed for a moment, paralyzed in place. The pose already was telling enough. She quickly recovered though, retreating her arm and puffing her chest.

– Such generosity! I'll find a way to thank you!

Arete chuckled at that, joining her by the statues.

– Melissa and Melita. -She recited, her finger pointing at a small golden plaque facing the entrance.- What do you think?

– They are beautiful. -Said Midori, now in a less haughty tone.- But why choose wood?

– It is widely used for chess pieces and sets. Maple and Ebony woods in particular, so I thought it would be fitting.

– Down to the floor pattern. -Noted the fox girl, earning a chuckle from the artist.- But the detail is... exquisite! It must have taken so long and so many tries...

– Well, it did take a long time to find the models, yes. -Arete smiled, warmly.- But it was them who found me, and who allowed me to work my magic.

– They must be really satisfied!

– Yes, yes they are.

The two remained in silence for a brief moment, simply appreciating the beauty of both queens. They were locked in their personal feud, trying to triumph over the other, but frozen in a stalemate that would never end. Although they didn't seem to mind, if one was to judge by the smirks in their faces.

– May I share a secret with you? -Said Arete, leaning towards Midori.

– Details not known to the wider public? -Smirked the fox woman.- Tell me.

– I dream of creating a whole matching set. Pawns, rooks, knights, bishops... the whole thing.

– Oh my. -Midori smiled, covering her hand with the sleeve of her green kimono.- That's quite ambitious... and a crowd to find.

– It is. -Sighed Arete.- But it remains a dream nonetheless.

The tour continued, as the artist and the visitor exited the room. It was a short walk across the hallway, entering the door frame that stood across the one they left behind.

A lone statue greeted them, standing in the middle of the room. The pedestal was identical to the one before: a small square that held the statue on top of a wider one, a low glass wall separating it from the passage around it.

The piece on display was almost intimidating. A towering woman, amazingly beautiful, that, no matter where she looked, seemed to have it all. An hourglass figure? Check. Lean limbs, perfectly posed? Check. A delightfully ample and full bust, balanced with a peach-like rear? Check. An almost hypnotic beauty, with that kind smile in the lips, that could easily keep her staring for hours? Check. Even her hair, a cascade of graceful waves with a single lock straying in front of her shoulder, seemed to have something special to it.

– Olivia. -Arete read her name on a small golden plaque in the glass.- One of my oldest muses, and a recurring one.

– I... I- I can see why. -Said Midori, her eyes squinting over every detail.

The statue was a marble beauty, taking after many masterpieces she had long seen announced, exposed in other museums or knew about. An carefully well-polished piece that seemed to almost reflect the light that fell on her through the skylight. Pristine white stone, having the occasional dark vein that ran over her body, zigzagging and branching off only to criss-cross on occasion.

Her eyes were on her pose however. Her right arm ran along the curves of her figure, covering her crotch, and safekeeping her intimacy. The left one bent and covered her bust, holding the nipple of one behind it and the other behind the fingers. She squinted, trying her hardest to make the most of every minute detail. Focusing on her left hand, there, among the fingers, was-

– Is that-

Arete merely looked away, not saying a word. Midori could feel a light blush on her cheeks. She was almost sure she could see the shape of the nipple among the fingers, peeking from its shelter. And wasn't her hand holding on a bit too... tight to the breast? Her eyes immediately traced the other arm going back to her crotch. The statue had her hips slightly cocked to the side, so no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't fully make the shape of her hand. Could she be...?

She looked at Arete, who said nothing, but was looking at the marble statue with a playful smirk. And now that she had a second look, her smile seemed... playful. Almost as if it could read her current thoughts.

– Is she? -Midori asked, not taking her eyes off the statue.

– She prefers to leave it up to each visitor's imagination. And so do I.

– Well. -Midori harrumphed.- I believe that there is no harm in sharing, is it? You are giving me a special tour, after all.

There was a moment of silence, as the sculptress shot her a side-eye glance, her expression stiffening for a moment and making Midori regret her words.

– I- I... I apologize. -She immediately said, trying not to stammer.

The artist glanced back at the statue, her eyes fixed on her blank stare, almost like she was trying to guess what the statue's answer would have been.

– Don't stress yourself. -Said Arete after a sigh.- I understand your curiosity, but stand by what I said.

– I understand. -Nodded Midori.- I- I apologize again. I didn't mean to be rude.

– It's fine. Plenty others have been far more insistent, and far worse when faced with rejection. But please, respect her wishes.

– I do have another question. If I can?

– Ask away.

– You keep talking about *her*. As if she was a living being. Why?

Arete remained in silence for a moment, again looking at the statue as if she was looking for advice. As if her marble lips would move and articulate some revealing words that would shatter her world. There was no such answer, just her playful and teasing smile, perfectly carved in white marble.

– Every muse that I sculpt is very close and dear to me.

– Ah! So you see them as extensions of each of them! -Midori said, her vulpine ears perking up.- I understand! Just like the two before, she must be very proud!

Arete relaxed at her answer, giving her a small smile.

– She is. But she is the one I’m closest with, and I wish she spent more time at the studio than on display.

– Of course, it is only natural! -Midori puffed her chest, her ego inflating once again.- If I had such a beautiful thing of myself, I would keep it for me all the time!

The petite fox girl smiled proudly, trying to stand as tall as she was, her ears standing and fluffy tail waving with natural ease. Arete glanced at her, one thin eyebrow arched, but made no comment, instead walking with her out of the room and into the empty hallway.

– Is it a single statue per room?

– It is. -Nodded Arete.- Disappointed?

Midori remained quiet for a moment, carefully weighing her words before answering.

– I... am. -She sighed, defeated.- But it’s because of me. I started having all these ideas in my mind, about the gallery being crowded with beautiful statues to look at.

– And it has failed to deliver? -Said the sculptress softly, sitting on a bench, the side opening of her dress allowing her to cross one leg over the other.

– No, no, no! - Answered the fox girl frantically- I... I can see exactly what you are going for?

– And what would that be?

Midori’s mind raced, trying to find something that would help her out of the hole she seemingly kept digging herself in. Arete looked at her inquisitively, with curiosity, and her pose seemed rather relaxed. The fox girl held on to her blonde tail, running her hands through her fur. It sent small chills down her spine, but it gave her a pondering look, and a bit of time.

She thought of everything until now. The statues, their materials and their poses. The person behind it. The promotional material and the reason she had been drawn in to begin with.

– Variety. -She blurted... even if she did not intend to.

The sculptress reclined against the back of the marble bench, the only physical boundary of the hall that split it in two.

– Truth be told, I *do* plan on adding more pieces for the exhibition. But models have their own lives, so it will be a gradual thing. -The woman said, her gaze directed upwards, lost in space.- So I would encourage a return after some time, to see how the collection has grown.

– How long will the exhibition remain on display?

– A whole year.

Midori slowly walked towards the bench, ears dropping a bit and quietly sitting down. Maybe she had been a bit too hasty. Maybe she should have given it some time. But how was she supposed to know? The flyers and promotional material never said anything about the exhibition being year round! ...or maybe it did and she had not read it all, she had to admit to herself. The sight of that figure had been a little too eye-catching, and eagerness had gotten the best of her.

– I-

– You are right about working with variety. -Arete said, looking at the wall.- And I want each room to have its own distinctive material.

– That sounds great! -Midori said, perhaps a bit too enthusiastically.

She did manage to hold her fluffy tail between her hands, but was unable to hide her ears perking up. Something that earned a smile from the artist.

– I do have a question. If you add more statues to each pedestal, that would mean the glass would have more small plaques that display the name of the model, right?

– Indeed.

– Wouldn't that cause confusion? -The fox girl asked, looking at the artist as one ear dropped to the side and the other remained tall.- How would the visitors know who's who?

– A valid question, and one I did think about as I worked on the current pieces. But then a thought occurred, what if it was left vague on purpose?

– A guessing game?

– Correct. -She said, giving Midori a smirk.- Take into account different aspects; The pose, the expression or the material. And guess who is who.

– Then I have an advantage over others.

The fox girl smiled satisfied, standing up from the bench. Arete followed suit, straightening her dress.

– One last model to meet.

– One? What about the other room?

– The one on the left remains vacant for the moment. Hopefully it won't remain long.

– Oooh! -The fox girl cooed, covering her smirk with the sleeve as they walked.- Any teasers you can share?

– A graceful ballerina of clear blue glass.

– Stained glass?! -Her enthusiasm got the better of her, trying to look dignified a moment after.

– Yes.

She looked at the empty room, Midori following her gaze. An empty pedestal stood there, waiting patiently. A large square that stood on the checkered floor, with a smaller one on the very centre of it. All of it illuminated by the cascade of natural light that came from the skyglass above.

– It's going to be so grand...

– Oh? What are you imagining?

– Stained glass under that light, filling the room with so many colours... -Midori sighed, looking at the empty room with almost dreamy eyes.

Unnoticed by Midori, the artist was looking at her down the corner of the eye, her lips curled into a small smirk. She quickly regained control, setting a hand on the blonde kitsune's shoulder and snapping her back to the gallery.

– Well then, let me present to you Zennith.

The hand on her shoulder gently guided her, spinning her around and having her walk through the alabaster door frame as Midori's eyes set on the statue. Her pupils widened as she wagged her tail behind her. What little self control remained, managed to have her hands clasp and her fingers interlock, all covered by her kimono.

An amazonian woman with wild long hair stood in the centre of the room, two long horns coming from over her temples and curving forward and slightly upward. Paired with the lean tail with a small tuft at the end behind her, it made her nature clear. She had a sculptural physique, with noticeable and toned muscles on her powerful limbs, a beautiful blend of an athlete and a bodybuilder. Something that could easily allow her to win any competition with ease. Weightlifting? No trouble. A marathon? Piece of cake. Striking a pose? Dreamlike.

The kitsune's eyes devoured her sight, trying to be everywhere at once as she walked around her. She had been transfixed by her abdomen, perfectly sculpted into a six-pack, moving to her left arm, hand planted on her slightly cocked hips, and from there to a shapely rear, to end with the lean silhouette of her bovine tail. Then went back to her legs, powerful and muscular

pillars of metal that ended in hooves, holding her mighty figure on top of the pedestal effortlessly. But, no matter how much she tried to resist as she made a full lap around her, her eyes inevitably were drawn to the bust. Two big and round orbs of metal, delightfully smooth looking and polished, each crowned by a nipple.

It was a good thing Midori was holding her hands under her sleeves, keeping them concealed, as it allowed her to keep a modicum of dignity. But there was no hiding her amazed gaze, her wagging tail, and her light panting breath. She wanted to climb on the pedestal, to touch and to caress. The right arm, flexed in a boastful display, made her want to so badly. Even the statue's confident and proud smile seemed to challenge her to do so. To come closer and touch.

The golden minotaur was tall by herself, but to Midori she was so much more. A gleaming and resplendent metallic colossus, so immense that overshadowed even the room itself. A masterpiece that seemed to capture the light that bathed her from the skylight above, only to exude a golden triumphant aura around her.

The clacking high heels of Arete filled her ears, but she paid no attention, even when she put a hand on her shoulder.

– Did she live up to your expectations, Miss Midori?

– I- I... might be out of line, but I don't know what else can share the pedestal with her. She's just...

Words came and went through the fox girl's mind. And none seemed to do the golden minotaur that stood before her justice. They weren't enough to stack up to a mere fraction of her. She could only watch, mesmerised by the golden mountain of power and beauty that dwarfed her petite shape.

– I don't have words. She's... magnificent. -Midori breathed, enthralled by the golden figure.- Like a hero of myth.

– I'm elated to hear she has your approval.

– Miss Arete, there is something I want to ask you. How much for a replica?

– Oh. I'm flattered, Miss Midori, honestly. But-

– Money is no problem! Say whatever sum you need! -Midori blabbed.- What am I saying? The details! She must have taken... how- how long did you need to sculpt her?

Arete merely smiled sweetly, seeming to radiate elation and satisfaction herself. She let the petite fox girl go on and on, about everything that crossed her mind. A constant barrage of questions that seemed to never end. About the time it had taken. About the process she had used to achieve such a result. About the material used. About the model herself. All mixed with the longest and most varied list of flattery and compliments she had heard. There even was a bit of space for the other statues she had shown her.

Eventually, Midori's breath ran out, leaving the petite blonde panting and giving her an opening.

– Miss Midori, I have no words to express my satisfaction. -She said, her voice barely containing her own joy.- Therefore, I have a proposal for you.

– Oh-ho! And what would it be?

– I would greatly appreciate it if you visited my studio as soon as possible, to talk about possible business opportunities, and to show you how I make my statues.

– Miss Arete, it will be an honour.- Midori said, giving her a small graceful bow, while her self-restraint barely achieved the herculean task of keeping her gleeful eek mute.

Midori wasn't exactly sure what she thought the sculptress' studio would be. Perhaps that, a studio. She imagined a great and ample space, located in the heart of the great city, maybe something like a pavilion regardless of its size. A place that could be easily accessed while

the artist worked on her next piece, while allowing her to display her progress to the occasional visitor. And Arete's studio followed those thoughts almost perfectly, but still managed to somehow surprise her.

A detached building made of white stone, or at least cast in it, surrounded by a garden with colourful and vibrant flowers. The whole left wing of the house had large windows and large skylights, being ample and spacious, from what she could glance. It probably allowed her to work on her pieces. The right side was far more regular, and remarkably similar to the second floor. Smaller windows with curtains that gave it some privacy, but still kept the place well lit.

Walking the path to the door, scents and aromas of flowers lingered on her kimono courtesy of the garden around her. A sweet and pleasant blend. It was something picturesque, and she could see it as an impressionist painting. A path that led to the white shape of the building, slightly distorted by the light, over a green canvas, splashed by dots and traces of colour. The wall that surrounded the whole thing being the firm and wooden frame that gave it the final touch.

The road bifurcated, a wide path to the left, to the far end of the wing with large rooms. Wide enough for a car... or a truck. Her steps veered right though, towards the entrance door, flanked by two round pillars. And as she approached, she could hear voices inside, Arete and someone else. The door opened before she had a chance to ring the bell, a woman talking with the sculptress.

– I'll keep in touch, and once I am certain everything is set, I'll call again. It shouldn't take too long.

– I appreciate it. -Answered Arete from inside.- I look forward to working with you.

Midori quickly took a couple of steps back and to the side quietly, looking dignified and masking her indignation just in time. How rude! Walking away not looking what was before her!

The woman, a tall and slender brunette that towered over her, gracefully walked by. She did so with such grace and rhythm, almost like a ballerina that moved on her tiptoes by nature, the short ponytail bobbing up and down as she did. She radiated satisfaction, giving Midori a small smile as she passed her. A gesture that the fox girl answered in kind. What this woman had on grace and looks, she clearly lacked in manners.

– Miss Midori. Please come in.

The petite kitsune puffed her chest in satisfaction, taking her invitation and stepping through the door.

– I hope it was not too much trouble finding the place? -Asked Arete, closing the door behind her.

– Not at all.

– That's a relief to hear.

– It is a lovely sight on the outside. -Smiled Midori.- Is it wholly dedicated to your craft?

– The lower floor is.

She looked down the hallway, which split into three. A circular staircase that went up at the end, with a window on the wall that let the sunshine in, and a turn both to the right and left before reaching it. She wanted to ask more, about the upper floor, but decided otherwise. Instead, Midori straightened her green kimono, the same one she had used when visiting the gallery, and made sure her long blonde hair looked presentable. She quietly repeated the motion with her tail, running her hands and combing it to perfection, making sure it had not one hair out of place.

– Should I wait or-

– There is no need. In fact, we were waiting for you. -Smiled Arete.- Please, follow me. We are about to start.

The sculptress guided her down the hall gracefully and in silence, with Midori following her in tow. Their steps echoed in the marble tiles, the walls having a comforting cream colour while displaying several small pictures. A series of colourful potted plants, the same plants by the passing glance she spared, on different spots. All alone on a shelf, next to a sunny staircase, surrounded by fruit on a table in the middle of the room...

Turning to the left, a wooden door awaited them. Her ears twitched, hearing more voices inside, which did stiffen her lip a bit. Maybe it was not as special of an invitation as she had first thought...

Nonsense! She had come to watch how she made the statues, right? Of course it made sense for models to be there! No need to get fuss over it. Besides, what better way to attract potential backers and patrons? The sculptress had gathered the models here, just for her to watch her at work! She would see the inner workings of Arete's craft. What laid behind the curtain! How could she not feel honoured after that?

Her lips softened, curling into the tiniest smirk for a moment.

The door opened without a sound, barely letting out a creak, it grew darker the more it opened, the contrast making Midori squint. A corona of light seemed to surround the sculptress' silhouette as she walked in, like a goddess stepping into her creation. Midori steeled her nerves and stood as tall as she could, following her quietly walking into the studio.

It had been blinding at first, the large glass walls that took much of the walls clearly doing their part in spades. A fair exchange, offering beautiful sights of the garden around the house, while allowing the light to flood in. The one exception was a canvas that blocked some of it, but its effort was futile at best.

A single easel stood holding blank pages of different sizes, accompanied by a trusty stool, its inseparable companion. A modern and simplistic wooden table stood silently close to her, a large folder on top of it, and further away, a few seats lay scattered around the room. An additional couple of stools here and there, their brown leather contrasting with their silvery chrome metal. To the side stood a pair of dark leather armchairs, sleek and modern,

comfortable looking despite their square shapes and sharp angles. All of them being carefully placed so as not to block the windows.

Unconsciously, she directed her sight to the far end of the room, the wall having been turned into a large double edged door with similarly large windows. An easy way to load or unload the precious works. Speaking of which, there were... none.

In fact, the room had little else. For being dedicated to sculpture there was a notable lack of materials around. She expected blocks of stone, with chisels and hammers; tools to work with metal, or gouges and wood.

That did not mean it was empty. No one said a word, but Midori stiffened under the gaze of the three models. Three humans.

To the side was a tall and lean brunette, her raven hair and revealing gown greatly contrasting with her pale skin. The dark straight curtain and indigo dress gave her an aura of elegance and formality, only exalted by the light that bathed her. From her place next to the window, she had been gazing at the garden, and now spared a glance at Midori. Had she been watching when she had first arrived? Probably. But now, under the scrutiny of those icy blue eyes, the petite fox girl felt like she was inspecting her very soul.

The other two, closer to the centre of the studio, were the complete opposite, two bombshells that wore nothing but bikinis and sent teasing smiles and looks her way. A shorter woman, her hair tied in a long braid, and dyed in a metallic yellow-ish hue. Not gold but that gleam was definitely metallic. She strutted around with her toned legs, her hips swaying exaggeratedly as it did so, but making sure her peach shaped rear was very much on sight. A round and smooth ass, that made up for her rather modest bust.

Midori would not hold it against her, managing to keep her hand from reaching for her own rather flat chest, but her eyes were inevitably drawn to the other woman. And the antics of her partner were easy to understand.

A tall and beautiful woman, her long and wavy hair dyed into a gleaming grey. Even with the distance, she looked almost as tall as the golden statue she had idolized during her visit, and she radiated confidence. She flaunted her beauty with little care for modicum, making sure her generous and ample bust bob and bounce with every tiny move. Whether it was on purpose or not, Midori did not care, trying her best to watch the models with utmost respect.

She did feel a warmth on her cheeks though, and that reddish hue she could not hide.

– Thanks for waiting, ladies. -Spoke Arete softly.- This is Midori, who will be accompanying us and watching how I work.

Midori bowed carefully, receiving what she expected on each end. Warm smiles and waves from the duo, and a small nod of acknowledgement from the elegant woman.

– Please take a seat.

Doing as Arete told her, she made her way to one of the armchairs, trying to appear composed and in full control. No wagging her tail, standing as tall as she could seem and with a flawless poker face as she glanced around again. She reclined lightly on her seat, the tail curled next to her, arms folded in the kimono's sleeves, and one leg crossed before the other. She thought of saying something. Throw a challenge to Arete, a demand to impress her or something similar. But she kept her mouth shut.

The artist sat down on the stool, going through the last moment checks. Iron grip on the pages? Check. Proper height? Check. Plenty of light? Check. Breathe in, breathe out. A way of doing away with nervousness as any other, Midori guessed. But a woman of her talent? Someone who had been able to sculpt such a golden beauty?

– Please, stand before me and strip.

Midori's ears stood up, as the two babes did as asked without saying a word. Their movements were soft and calm, untying their clothes and letting the bikinis fall to the ground without a sound. The silvery one gave a bright smile, while her peer seemed a bit nervous. Just a bit, managing a small smiler of her own after swallowing.

Arete reached for what looked like a large charcoal. It could be the light or being a bit far, but it seemed... different. Too smooth and long. No chance it did not break. Her ears twitched at the sound, the grazing of it against the paper. It didn't sound like it either... With precise movements and firm pulse, the fox woman tried to picture the result of the traces in her mind, but two gasps quickly took her attention elsewhere.

It had not been out of distress or similar, but the two models posed without a word.

The busty one cocked her hips slightly to the side, while puffing her magnificent chest forth. The small bounce almost made Midori's poker face crack. Almost. She put her hands behind her head, sinking them into her hair as she gave a teasing smirk and a playful wink.

Her partner turned around showing her back and rear to Arete. She stood as tall as she was, still being overshadowed by her busty friend, as her arms moved down her figure. It was quiet and careful, going all the way down her trunk and hips, reaching for her plump butt. Not a firm grab, but rather lifting it a bit. She looked over her shoulder, her lips curling into a smile, now with matching confidence, and even winked at Arete.

The sculptress smiled back, nodding in satisfaction, as she kept working. There was not a word, Midori's eyes going from Arete to the models and back.

Both women looked gorgeous, their poses exalting their physiques. The busty one in particular was hard for Midori to look away from. But there had been something odd in their movements. The whole thing had been too... precise? Yes, that was it. Even as she looked intently, barely blinking not to miss detail, both women barely moved since that moment. They held their poses flawlessly. There was not a twitch on their bodies, not even the slightest one.

Midori's glance went up and down their figures, from the head of the dyed blonde to her rear, jumping to her partner's figure. From her hips, slightly cocked, she moved up, following her curves and into her bust. Such a lovely sight it was, the fox girl having to put effort into holding a sigh. Moving upwards, she looked at their faces. They were smiling, almost like a teasing invitation to take a look from a different angle. But they seemed... frozen. Squinting, she tried her best to stave off a glint that hit her in the eye. Were they even blinking? That was something they had to do, right?

She had to close an eye as the glint only grew stronger, putting a hand in the way. No way the dye was that- her ears twitched. There was a humming that filled the room, as if someone was making a metallic sheet vibrate lightly. Holding a hand before her eye, she focused on their hair. It looked metallic, too metallic, reflecting the light that seeped into the studio and exuding an aura around the women. Something that only seemed to grow stronger, just as the

humming did. Her body tensed lightly, not wanting to take her eyes off the sight, but wanting to ask.

A firm hand on her shoulder stopped her, Midori glancing sideways. The elegant woman, somehow, had managed to reach her side without making the smallest sound. Now she sat on the armchair's arm, giving the fox girl a surprisingly comforting smile and a warm glance. One finger on her lips, that was enough, Midori focusing on the models again.

It was something slow and steady, but the metal seemed to spread over the forms of the two women. Their pale skins changed, taking the sheen everywhere at once. It didn't spread in a single direction, like a wave would, but rather all of them seemed to just... change. Their skins became firm and smooth, shining under the light and only strengthening the glowing aura that seemed to envelop them. Every tiny part of them, slowly but surely, changed into alluring metal. Down the corner of her eye she could see Arete, her traces on the page transforming the two models. She had to stop herself from standing up and walking, to take a closer look.

The humming that filled the room sent chills down her back, and she meant it in the best possible way. She clutched her tail between her hands, sight glued to the women; Their impossibly smooth bodies, polished and taken care of to perfection.

Following the figure of the yellowish one, she went from her face to her rear. Her pupils vanished, leaving a blank stare that nonetheless kept the warmth alive. The form of her arms framed her lean body, reaching for the round and plump butt she now held on display. With its yellowish hue, it was alluringly polished, and Midori was certain she could make her reflection on its smooth roundness.

Her heart beat strongly on her chest as her sight jumped to the other model. She was a gleaming polished grey, not quite silver, as she had first thought, but gorgeous all the same. The fox girl moved quickly up her figure, reaching for the alluring bust that the woman boasted. It was beautiful. A pair of smooth and polished orbs, defying gravity and enveloped by an aura of seduction. She was gorgeous. No wonder she had that smile and wink on her face. A dare and a confident display, all in one. And Midori wanted to touch them, so very

badly. To confirm if what she was seeing was real. She managed to hold on to her façade, not blinking once while clutching her tail in her hands.

The gleam that the two models shone seemed to grow stronger and stronger, blinding her. She squinted her eyes. She tried to glance a bit sideways. She held a hand before her, trying to take the sight in. Both beauties, fully claimed by the metal, and filling the room with radiance. But, unlike them, she had to blink. And when she did, the spell seemed to fade, the metallic hum dying down slowly. The ringing still persisted a bit on her ears, and was etched in her mind.

Was this what the golden beauty at the museum had gone through? She tried to imagine the scene, the minotaur woman holding the pose as she turned to gleaming gold. A thought that made her heart race.

– What do you think so far?

Midori looked to the side, to the elegant woman. The artist put the wand down, taking the page off and walking to the nearby table. She opened the large folder, picking a pencil and writing something on the picture before putting it in. A treasure trove that she could only dream of. But, keeping quiet, she could feel Arete's interest in her answer.

– I... Are... Are those really them? -Midori asked.

– They are. -Answered the woman close to her.

– Do they have a name?

– Melitta and Melissa. -Smiled Arete, walking to them. - But, for the next year they will be titanium and brass.

The sculptress let out a defeated sigh, while the elegant woman chuckled. Midori glanced back at the statues again, admiring their physiques.

– I can guess why. -Midori said flatly.- Where will they be exposed?

- Next to Zennith. I plan on having each section of the exposition be distinct.
- That sounds promising. Very promising. -Said Midori, her ears perking up and unconsciously wagging her tail.
- I assume you show interest in this business then?
- Yes. -She answered, trying to remain as composed and aloof as she could.- But I... how... how would the material be decided? And the pose? And where would I be displayed? It can't be anywhere!
- If I may. -Intervened the elegant woman.- The first three are entirely up to you if you wish so. Arete is more than willing to assist and suggest though.
- Then she- -Midori cut mid-sentence.- The statues *chose* all of it?
- With more or less assistance from our dear sculptress, but yes.
- I... I need a moment to think.
- I understand. -Nodded Arete.- In the meantime, shall we continue, Cecilia?
- Of course, dear.

The woman slipped off her dress seamlessly, leaving it crumpled on the floor. Her high heels were next, let behind in the next couple of steps. All without sparing a glance.

She was beautiful, with natural curves and a grace that reminded her of the woman from before at the entrance. She walked slowly towards the two metal statues, her dark silhouette against the light making her long hair look like a veil flowing behind her.

- As you explained? -Asked Arete.

– Indeed. -Cecilia answered, caressing the ass of the brass statue before moving to the titanium bust.

Arete merely nodded, walking to the blank canvas that was to the side. She lifted it up and brought it to the centre, where the woman and the statues were.

– Hold on to it for a moment, please.

– Of course.

Cecilia held the canvas vertically, tall enough to match and even surpass her height. Even if it was by the barest of minimums. Meanwhile Arete managed to move the statues, dragging them backwards to make some room. It was something natural, but seeing the sculptress plant her hands on the bust, or press the brass rear against her made Midori green with envy inside. The canvas had a single diagonal leg behind, allowing it to stand vertically with minimal effort.

– I know you had a pose in mind, right?

– That is correct. -Said Cecilia, gracefully stepping in front of the blank canvas and double checking it.- Being granite in a more explicit pose was fun, but this time I'll be more refined.

– By all means.

As Arete sat back down before the blank paper, Cecilia posed for her. She cocked her hips slightly to the left, left arm surrounding her belly and curves, the hand just out of sight for the artist. Moving her head slightly to the right, she curled her lips into a smirk, her index finger on her lips. A way to ask for silence, or, if going by her glance, a gesture of amusement.

– Ready.

Midori, seeing things from the side, blinked. She expected something more... grandiose? Pompous? No, that last word didn't sit right. Something more... elaborate? Yeah, that was it. But simplicity had an elegance of its own, she guessed. Arete seemed to agree, as she started

working on her end. But, after a couple of traces, she stopped. She motioned at the fox girl to approach.

– Midori, please, come here. You will have a better view.

She did as told, standing from her seat and walking to her side.

– I want you to think about yourself. A material and a pose.

– What about a place to be displayed on?

As she spoke, each word sounded less and less believable, her mind thrilled at the thought, but still needing a moment to fully realize what she was doing. A chuckle interrupted her thoughts, as Cecilia sent her a knowing glance.

– I believe Arete has that clear.

Looking at the sculptress, Midori got no answer, the woman going back to her work. She did catch a glare the artist shot at the model though. Wand in hand, she started tracing again. Short and firm strokes, one after another, making the spaces between vanish, connecting the traces and giving uniformity and continuation. With each new motion, the artist gave shape and form to the silhouette on the paper, until the figure of Cecilia became more identical. The hourglass shape and natural beauty, perfectly captured in the pose, now sharing the stillness she had witnessed before.

Arete kept working with dedication, making sure the shape was uniform and firm before moving to the details. The definition of the limbs, down to each individual finger and toe in sight. The expression on her face, her smirk and glance a blend of haughty confidence and sensual allure. And then came even her most intimate details. Midori could not help but fidget a bit in place as the artist worked on the crotch and nipples of the woman, taking what seemed to her a bit too long. She glanced upwards, to the model, but her confidence and allure unbending. Although she was not sure the woman was able to move...

There was a light rustling that filled the room, her ears twitching at it. It was not paper, the traces on it clearly audible for her. It was different, like someone was doing something with cloth or a similar material. Shifting her weight a bit, Midori reached for a stool and sat close to the artist, watching her work. Still, her glance constantly went to the art pieces in the back, their gleam always in her sight and a temptation to look at.

To be transformed into a statue, put on display and admired by all. What was there not to love? She, Midori, could finally flaunt her beauty with no inhibitions or restrictions for the world to see! But what pose? What material to choose? Her eyes went to the work in progress of Arete, the model captured perfectly down to the most minute detail. And a quick glance to the woman only confirmed that. Something elegant, like Cecilia? Or maybe something more daring? She thought back to the golden beauty that had caught her eye. Her muscular build, her alluring breasts. All of it in gold. Her eyes instinctively went to the two nearby metal statues, to the titanium tits and the brass rear. As much as it pained her to admit, her petite figure was... not as impressive.

Her eyes went back to the elegant model, to Cecilia. Arete was giving her body colour and texture on the paper. Her pale skin and dark hair, along with her pose, was all flawlessly translated both in paper and where she stood. Yes, that could be it. What she lacked in physique she could make up with presence. One hand on her hip, and the other... the other at the side, nothing fancy. Simplicity would do her good after all. No tricks to look beautiful. A glance over her shoulder, to reassert herself, and that would do.

Besides, she could always ask Arete for advice.

Speaking of, she was very skilled. That she was able to display her works was all the proof she needed. But seeing her work like this really gave Midori newfound appreciation. The artist captured everything perfectly. The model's beauty and pose, down to the tiniest detail. The subtleties of her expression, confident and a bit full of herself. Every tiny trick of the light and shadow on her body. The stillness of the woman, almost like she belonged in that canvas. Nothing went past her. The velvet curtains that acted as a background were beautiful, their colour rich and a fitting for Cecilia. Shame that-

A quick glance showed how the canvas made her realize, and she had to stiffen a chuckle. Of course. Each stroke she gave, each detail she added on paper appeared on the canvas,

enveloping the model's still form. Maybe if she had remained on the side she would have noticed when Cecilia had been sucked into it. But from her place, next to Arete? No chance of noticing.

– Where will she be displayed? The empty room? -Midori said quietly.

– No, she'll be on the main corridor, along with any others like her.

– What of the empty room?

– You will see. -Chuckled Arete.

She let out a small sigh, admiring the woman and the forming background and going back to herself. As for the material... her gaze wandered over the different pieces. Titanium. Brass. Cecilia's canvas. She recalled those on display. Wood. Marble. Gold. Stone or similar? Check. Something exotic, wood in this case? Check. Metal? Check. And now Cecilia covered the illustration side of things.

– Having difficulties with yourself?

– No. -Said Midori a bit too quickly.- I have the pose all set.

– But? -Asked Arete with knowing tone, continuing her work on Cecilia.

– I can't quite make out the material. -Midori admitted, her ears dropping.

There was a moment of silence, only broken by the rustling of the canvas and the strokes of Arete on the paper.

– Well, what did you have in mind? Something that might serve as a jumping point.

– Green. -Midori blurted out.

– Hm... that can do. What do you think of emerald? Polished, gleaming and a touch of transparency.

Midori's thoughts whirled at the suggestion. It was alluring. Beautiful. And certainly fitting for her! But there was something that didn't sit quite right.

– I'm not sure. -She said, trying to turn her thoughts to words.- I love the sound of it, but I think...

– Yes?

– There might be some... overlap? Yes, that's it.

The artist set her wand down, clasping her hands overhead and stretching her back. Cecilia was now part of the canvas. A gorgeous depiction of a pale skinned and raven haired beauty, whose pose tried to convey the elegance and poise she had previously shown in the studio. A mixture of complete confidence in herself, and a mischievous tease, as if daring the beholder to look her in the eye. Doing so sent a chill down Midori's back, all the way to the tip of her tail, which she wagged to shake it off. It was like the woman was waiting for her to continue too, to see if she lived up to it.

Midori, mesmerised by the display, was quiet for a moment, taking in the elegance and the presence of the painting.

Arete turned her head to Midori, an eyebrow arched.

– Carry on.

– I- What I mean is... -Midori said, her heart pounding and unable to take her eyes off Cecilia.- You wanted each room to have a distinct material, correct?

Arete nodded without a word, taking her recent work and putting it in the folder with the rest, but her lips did show the smallest hints of a smirk.

The blank page sent a shiver down her back. It was for her, her own page. And it would eventually be stored with the rest.

– Well, nice and fitting as a gemstone like emerald may be, it might be too similar to the room reserved for marble. More so if it will remain for a full year...

Even now, she was having a hard time believing those words. Not that she was in disbelief, but she needed a bit more time to try and wrap her mind around it. On the outside, she was aloof and thoughtful of the year ahead of her. What would entail, and what would eventually come after it. Inside, she was trying to keep her excitement and heartbeat under control. A full year! As a flawless piece of art! To flaunt her beauty!

– And what do you suggest to make a difference?

Holding her composed façade, Midori's eyes darted around the studio. From Cecilia, transformed into a gorgeous painting, to the two metal beauties, gleaming in the sunlight. She thought back to the display. The different pieces. The gallery itself, how each room had a skylight that showered the statues with light. She thought of Zennith, the golden minotaur. The golden aura that surrounded her. The power and confidence she irradiated. The beauty that had drawn her in.

She wanted to stand out on her own. She wanted to draw attention and be admired. She wanted to fill wherever she was displayed with her own gleam and shine.

– Glass. -She blurted out.- Green stained glass.

– Lovely choice. -Arete smiled, her hands giving a small clap.- And I appreciate that you have stuck to the original intent.

Midori blushed a bit, slowly disrobing herself. She loosened the sash that went around her waist, carefully folding it before repeating the same with her kimono. The green cloth slid easily, folding under her hands and leaving her bare. The studio did feel a bit chilly, but it would not last. Her wooden sandals and small pendant around her neck were next, set on top of the small pile on her hands. The purse was the small cherry on top, the small golden filigrees it had gleaming with the pendant.

– Could I have a paper and pen for a moment? I would like to leave some instructions if it's not much trouble.

– Of course.

The artist walked to the table quickly fetching a blank sheet and pen, nothing fancy about these. Breathing deeply to hold her pulse steady, Midori wrote a series of names and phone numbers, as well as a direction. When she was done, she folded the paper, putting it on top of the pile.

– Please, have this delivered to my direction. -The foxgirl said, handing her belongings to the artist.- The names and numbers belong to my friends, let them know where I will be, and that they are free to visit.

– I will.

With that taken care of, Midori walked to the centre of the room. The two statues and the painting seemed almost to be waiting for her. Cecilia in particular seemed most interested, or that was the feeling the fox girl had, even if the painting was not able to show it. The chilliness faded, the warm caress of the sun taking its place, almost like a reassuring embrace. Her heart pounded in her chest, not out of fear or dread, but excitement and a bit of disbelief.

Inhale. Exhale.

Inhale. Exhale.

Steeling herself, she struck her pose. She stood tall as she was, her hair cascading down her back. Left arm flexed, with the hand closed and with the back against her hip. Right arm hanging limply to the side. She wagged her tail, something she wouldn't be doing for a long while, and curled it around her hip, covering her crotch. It was close to her hand, and it was so very tempting to alter her pose just a tiny bit, but she resisted the allure. Instead, and before she started changing her mind, she looked over her shoulder with confidence, almost daring any that looked her way to meet her stare.

– Ready.

The sculptress didn't need to be told twice, picking up the wand and getting to work.

Midori felt the effect instantaneously, almost letting out a gasp. One touch, followed by another, and another. They came and went, steadily moving all over her body. She could feel it on her trunk and on her limbs; on her rear and on her shoulders. Light tugs and touches on her hair and on her tail, and eventually on her face and ears. It was like someone poking her on the cheek, or touching her hair and tail a bit too roughly. She wasn't worried about breaking the pose though, as she could not move any longer. She had tried moving her head a bit, but now the light shone directly on her eyes. Not that it was too terrible, but it was a bit of a nuisance. Oh well.

The touches grew stronger, more uniform. It was less of a poke and more of a caress. An expert hand that moved around her form, getting to know it closely and intimately. The length and nimbleness of her limbs; The smooth texture of her hair and tail; The curves of her body and rear. Arete was fully immersed in the process, the eyes of the woman darting back and forth between her immobile form and the paper she was being portrayed on. And as her figure became more defined on paper, the more resolute these caresses turned into. Not something rough, but as moves that knew exactly where and how to touch. What details needed smoothening or a bit of extra attention.

She felt it on her hair, from the fringe all the way to the lock that had gone astray, curling and falling over her shoulder into her clavicle. Arete worked to detail in paper as much as she could.

She felt it on her ears, on the small tufts that poked from inside of them.

She felt it on her tail, although this was a more loose one. Broad and general strokes, but with enough detail to know it was a mass of smooth and combed hair. Not that she would hold it against her. She couldn't even imagine how much of a torture would be to get into the tiniest details.

Arete seemed satisfied with the pose, shifting on her seat as she carried on. Midori's heart skipped a beat, as a faint sound filled the studio. It was hard to perceive at first, a hum that the fox girl heard coming from her, but it was steadily growing louder. A melodic and

musical hum, like what one could do with wet fingers and glass cups, rang in the otherwise silent room. And as it did, Midori felt Arete transform her.

With her fixed sight, she could not see her body change, but she could imagine it. Her pale skin and blonde hair and fur, changing hue and texture. Following her own tune, and under Arete's direction, it all shed its former colour, embracing a rich and beautiful green. Her form hardened into flawless and smooth glass, impossible to be sculpted through conventional means. Her tail hardened into a mass of glass, losing definition while it curled around her hip. And still, she could feel the artist at work, giving some waves to it so it was clear what it was. Her hair did similarly, although it was much more defined and detailed, being able to feel more locks against her body. She could feel her sight blurring a bit before becoming perfectly focused again, imagining her eyes giving a blank stare and her expression fixed for good. And her ass, her round and shapely rear, now turned into smooth green glass.

Standing as she was before the statues and the painting, so the more she transformed, the easier it would be to see them through her. But Midori gasped in delight at something else. A warmth that filled her, making the previous embrace seem so little in comparison. The light went through her, making her imagine the colour that she cast on the floor next to her. Not quite the golden aura Zennith had, but it gave her a bit of mystique. Something delicate and beautiful, able to project such beauty.

With the hum ringing in her ears, if she could, she would have sighed at the image in her head. No chance though, as she was not able to tell exactly the moment she had stopped breathing. Her heart beat no longer either, but she was alive. The warmth that filled her, along with Arete's strokes made her feel ecstatic. A massage given by an expert masseuse that knew exactly where and how to touch, and a calming heat courtesy of the sun. She felt better than ever. In fact, she struggled a bit to remain fully awake, but she managed. There would be time for a nap later.

The touches on her body grew more sparse and light, the humming slowly fading away too. She had no way of knowing how long it had been, but it seemed the process was coming to an end. Some finishing touches, here and there, and she was fully transformed.

Arete set the wand down, stretching as she had done before. Midori could do nothing but watch as she took the paper sheet, her picture, and kept it safe in the folder along with many others. It could be just her but she was overcome with a feeling of belonging. She was in the same collection with Cecilia, with the titanium and brass duo next to them, with the wooden queens and the marble beauty. With Zennith.

—Let me take a closer look. -Said Arete as she walked over to her.- Just in case.

Each footstep the woman took, each word she spoke reverberated on her glass self. No matter how light it was, it made her tremble with delight. The sculptress gave her a kind and warm smile, walking out of her sight. She could hear her inspecting the other art pieces. Cecilia the painting; Titanium and Brass the metal women. She could feel her gaze on her, inspecting Midori the glass statue.

— For the next year, these will be your places: Cecilia, you will be in the hallway. You two will keep Zennith company in the metals room. And you, Midori...

Arete set a hand on her shoulder, making Midori squirm and gasp in her mind. She could feel everything, the soft and delicate skin of her hand on her, and the warmth that radiated from it and faded.

— You will be the first in the empty room. -She whispered in her ears.- Right across Zennith~

Arete retired her hand, walking away and leaving the three works of art behind.

— Now, if you excuse me, ladies, I'll arrange for you to be transported to the museum tomorrow.

Midori could feel the other three presences nearby, but out of her sight. Not that she cared at the moment, overjoyed as she jumped in her mind. She would have a whole year to keep her eyes on her. On the golden beauty that had lured her in to start with. Midori squealed and giggled in her mind at the prospect. A year. A whole year! Yes! Yes! Yes!

Midori stood tall and proud, having been placed on the pedestal of the empty room, now standing on the very top of it, the small square that acted as a place of honour. It had been a couple of days since, being able to keep track thanks to the days visitors came to see her. Well, her and the rest.

She had no company for now, but Arete had let her know that she would in little time. The woman that had almost collided with, out of everyone. She had seen her twice already among the visitors, and she had been so enthralled by her that she was going to join her. A light blue glass statue, a ballerina frozen mid-dance. A matching little golden plaque next to her own in the small glass wall. Hmph! The woman certainly knew her tastes, so she could forgive that little incident. It would have been nice to remain on her own a bit longer, filling the room with her verdure, but if her sculptress said so, she would not oppose her. Not that she could.



Being on display was lovely. Hearing every comment, no matter how quiet the voice was, and feeling every glance on her and through her. She was bare as she could be, but not many dared to meet her blank eyes. The reverberation of words and steps on her skin, the rustling of cloth was the cherry on top, sending pleasant shivers through her.

The skyglass over her showered with light, filling her with a pleasant warmth that could sometimes lull her to sleep even. If it rained, the sound of raindrops reached her and even made her shiver a bit. She could only wonder what would happen with a storm. More so if it was at night. The gallery, completely dark, lit up only by fleeting lightning and squirming under booming thunders.

But, the most important part, the one that made her glass form tremble in delight, was across her. Zennith, her pose triumphal as always, radiating allure and confidence. The golden woman looked at her, and Midori looked back. Maybe it was just her, but she felt challenged, as if the golden minotaur woman dared her to beat her. To attract more glances, more visitors, more comments than her.

A tall order, but a challenge she would gladly take on.

Had it not been for the soft classical music that played over the speakers, the museum would have been completely silent. Violins and cellos joined to create a melody that, when paired with the pristine checkered marble floors and clay hued walls of the gallery, did away with stress and worries. Understandable, since the museum was yet to open for the day, but it created a lovely ambience all the same. It left the visitor free to contemplate and admire the exposition, or merely relax a bit.

And speaking of which, last night, a question had wormed her way into her head. Would her friends pay her a visit? They knew where she was, so she had a sneaking suspicion that sooner or later she would see them show up. And then what? What would they say? Compliments and admiration, of course! And who knew, maybe some even dared to join the exposition for what remained of the year.

There was plenty of time, and as far as Midori was concerned, she had excellent company for the duration of her stay. But maybe, just maybe, she could start working up the courage to

approach Zennith eventually. For now, she was content watching, ogling her golden form, one that overshadowed her two companions for the glass statue. After all, she had a whole year ahead of her.