

## 9.X Interlude - A Stunning Pair!

## !!! OPTIONAL BONUS CHAPTER !!!

It's both boring and a lot.

It didn't really fit into the chapter, dear reader, and for that I don't apologize because the narrative flow I hold above all else, however,

I would be remiss not to share with you what Crow and Finch's new outfits are like !!!!

So, here is a description of their new clothes!

(written as a page from Weasel's workbook ;) )

# Together

I imagine this ensemble as embodying that one phrase he was ever so fond of quoting:

"Nature made a mistake, which I have corrected."

I see in these two a great sorrow and shame, worn all across their countenance, and buried deep into the lines that make up their gestures. It is in their way of walking, of speaking, and even of looking, that their pain is clear. And in the way they stand and wear their clothes, it is clear that they have never felt the gentle embrace of threads that speak the truth within their soul.

This is a travesty.

There is no reason two bodies so unique should be made to suffer simply for existing in a shape unseen before. How could that not be clear to anyone? Our shapes are only the physical space we take up; there is so much more to us than that, and I will show them, with naught but my fabrics and my knife.

Now, where indeed to begin...?

Between the two is a contrast as stark as light and shadow. In the eyes of one is innocence, in the other's the horrors of the depths. Where one is cold and metal, sleek, and sharp, and pristine, the other is a grimy, messy nest of different fibers— both natural and not— as if the undergrowth itself had grown legs and placed itself inside my shop. One is tall and thickly made like a building's foundation beam, the other, meanwhile, is short and small like a twig from shrubbery. And yet in each one, where they might have some trait to match their body, the other holds it instead.

Finch, built as though to break the world apart, is gentle, and soft, and kind.

Crow, small and fluffy, holds an immense viciousness inside.

It is not that they are opposites; they are something so much more important than simply that. In every way, they are the other's complement, filling gaps where seemingly there might be none.

It is driving me mad, I think. The idea for an ensemble is so close to paw, bouncing on my tongue, but I cannot for the life of me find a way to spit it out onto the page and smear its colors so that it is plainly seen.

### **Crow**

#### *Client Preferences:*

- Fit

- "um... hmmm...." *she then stared at the ground for three entire minutes.* "I want to feel embraced at all times, and naturally, I need total freedom of movement to do my work. Also... I need the clothes to be, um, loose? But like, still, fitting— they can't fall off— but if it's really tight it'll bother me, um— anyway just be careful around these parts" *she then proceeded to point at nearly every one of her body parts. Most notably, though:*

- Wings

- Wings on arms (???)

- The four ears must be strictly avoided

- Upper chest

- Back of lower thighs

- Ankles

- Material

- "Soft. And warm. And waterproof. And um, I'm around a lot of fires. And sharp things. Is that important?"

- Statement

- "Huh?"

- *I provided a brief explanation.*

- "Oh!, Sometimes I want,
  - 'that cute girl is looking for something!' and other times,
  - 'was that a shadow?' and the rest of the time,
  - 'that's a very mysterious wanderer.'
- Special Requests
  - "I need a big and heavy cloak or I will die."
    - "Oh? What is it you like about the cloak?"
      - "The weight. And the, um... floof..iness? I like how it.. uh," *she waved her arms in the air and made wooshing noises, as if billowing out a flag.*
    - "And I need extremely secure pockets on the inside of absolutely everything. And I need holes cut in these places for looping bags and other things ... and here's how you make a pocket that can't be picked, by the by—"
      - *This was actually very insightful. Though, I have a feeling she has ways around these protections regardless...*
    - "And if it's not asking for too much, um. Could you fashion an eyepatch for me, as well?"
      - *I pressed on this, trying to get to the bottom of this need. Her eyes seemed functional, and one of them matched her partner's eyes.*
      - "Well, it's just... I'm not very good with my eye. It's a skill, you know. Seeing."
        - *She then proceeded to stare at me blankly until I broke the silence.*
        - "Right! Exactly. So I need to cover it most of the time. The eyepatch needs to be really soft, and not get caught on anything, and it needs to be really really dark on the inside. And I don't want to feel my eye touching it? Can you do that?"

# Finch

## Client Preferences:

- Fit
  - "It must not hinder me, ever. There are many cases where my body may cause clothing to rip, including, but not limited to, when..."
  - "... and also, my calves— their diameter is not fixed, as..."
  - "... now, with the shoulders in mind, you also have to consider ..."
- Material
  - "It must not make static. It must be resistant to extreme temperature changes. It must be resilient to scratching and puncturing, and in regards to noise output..."
- Statement
  - *She thought for many moments, then said simply,*
    - "I am yet living."
- Special Requests
  - "Pockets, lockets, and anklets have always intrigued me."
  - "Oh, and are you familiar with **Sympathy**?"
    - *I was not. I think I may have preferred to stay ignorant of this truth about the world.*
    - "I need a matching sigil on both of our outfits, in the most secure, though still accessible, location. The sigils simply need to be cut from the same cloth, and styled identically. As similar as you can make them."
    - *Pah. As if sigils spun by me would be anything other than twins.*

### ***Crow's Ensemble***

She stood, alone, admiring her figure for the first time in many whiles and countless moons. She had not ever been so happy to see her reflection, despite always seeking it out at every opportunity. Perhaps this is what she had been looking for all along— the missing piece to complete the picture in the mirror— at least, that's how it felt, and she felt it so strongly that she had to tear away her eyes before she began to tear up all at once.

But then, she forced herself to look back, to take in every piece of it, to absorb it fully, to know it as she wanted to know herself. For in these garments, she *was* herself, perhaps for the first time— if not, in a long time— so to know them was to know what she was and could someday be.

Her outfit was in three layers: the underwear, the overwear, and the outerwear.

For the underwear, she was given a fluffy white dress of light, lacy-silk fabric that stretched and slipped easily. Even trying to catch it and pierce it with her claws, she could not, for the fabric folded and slipped away, just as she did, effortlessly avoiding being caught on each and every thing. And, too, as she spun, and twirled, it moved along silently with her like her shadow, never raising alarm nor whining over how she moved. It was, truly, **pure bliss**.

And there was not a detail omitted— the dress attached not in the usual way— the one prone to slipping, and falling, with laces that might get caught on anything and come undone— but instead, the whole of it was stitched to a second under-piece, a full-body harness comprised of tight shorts (which squeezed ever-so-gently her entire thigh, all the way down to the knee, somehow tighter on the front of the lower thigh and looser on the back), an adjustment belt

(though with the fitting, it was ultimately decorative), and a tight, compressive sheet of stretchy, silky fabric that attached via suspender-like shoulder straps that met in an X at her lower back where they joined with the adjustment belt. The back of the dress and its underpiece, of course, were cut out in a scoop— allowing for her wings to stick out easily and fully, and the straps from the harness ran between them with plenty of clearance. The dress, of course, was sleeveless, allowing for her wingarms to stick out with no issue. And, too, the dress was covered with tiny and lovely details and patterns expertly woven into it— how had he worked so fast?— and no seams nor loose threads nor sharp and poking pieces troubled her at all. It goes without saying, of course, that the dress had many deep and sturdy pockets for countless trinkets to get lost within. And as though that was not already enough, the inside of the dress had little smooth straps and hidden buttons that could be pulled around and fastened to secure the dress's many frills and folds in any-which-way, need she make more clearance for herself in countless different activities, or want she simply to wear it in a different fashion. For obvious reasons, of course, the dress came down only to the top of her knees while fully unfurled, and as she twirled, marveling at the fitting on herself, the patterns— embroidered vines and delicate wildflowers— glimmered briefly as they were highlighted, then cast into shadow, by her turning and the way the light fell upon her. The vines and wildflower patterns grew up around the sides of the dress and met around her waist, then doubled back and wrapped up around her torso, much like the straps underneath, holding her tightly together.

For the overwear, she was provided with a thick, long-sleeve, dark-green button-back knit sweater with a cut that caused it to end just below her upper chest, covering where her dress ended and the harness underneath began. If she lifted her arms— and of course, no matter how high she lifted them— the bottom hem of the sweater never came up high enough to

reveal her chest, or harness, underneath. Instead of lifting, as would be typical, the displaced fabric simply fell and rolled smoothly back behind her, and when she lowered her arms, it all fell smoothly back into place. She had not thought she could tolerate long sleeves, but these were so spacious, like full caverns, that her wingarms and feathers had plenty of space to breathe. And the inside of the sleeves was so very agreeable, that even when it brushed against her feathers, it felt calming, and soothing, rather than an affront to her self. The sleeves tapered towards the end, just as her arms did, and they cinched gently around her wrists, providing a smooth seal that was hidden underneath a cuff formed by the end of the sleeve doubling-back, revealing the smooth-fuzz brown interior of the sleeve. The way the sleeve fixed, as well, was a very interesting thing indeed: it was not held in place by a fixed-circumference ring held just at the shoulder, no— instead, the sleeve had an extra, extra-wide base where it was joined to the chest-part, and within it, there were tiny and sturdy little buttons, neatly tucked away, to affix the sleeve's base at a number of different circumferences. At its widest, which was how she wore it now, the sleeve's base ran in a circle from underneath her chest fluff to the top and outer edge of her collarbone. At this width, and with the stretchy cuff of the sleeve, she could scrunch the whole thing up around her shoulder, and there, where the fabric bunched up, she could pull it further to distribute it around her upper chest. The bunching, then, appeared so intentional, and she could even fasten the inner button to tuck most of it away between her arm and side while also fixing the whole of it in place, giving her a tank-top of sorts, arms fully free. Finally, of course, there was the back of the sweater. With almost all clothing, her wings were in the way, and so she had a habit of cutting great holes and gashes in them to fit them on. But this sweater was different, made to form with her, and not despite her: each side had curving panels that split into a top and bottom half where they met the edge of her wingparts. Then, the four parts simply buttoned together at the middle of her back, wrapping around the base of the wing as a

side-effect. This, ordinarily, would cause great issue with the sensations of rubbing and friction on her wingparts, but Weasel, the great mastermind, had seen to this too. Everywhere the sweater might touch part of her wings was lined with *her very own fur*! The only sensation she felt, then, was the comfortable home-feeling of two bodyparts that were perfectly acquainted and, honestly, already best of friends.

For the outerwear, Crow was blessed with the most perfect of cloaks. It was dense, heavy, and both liquid and heat resistant for the tough cool-brown wooly outer layer that went all the way down to just above her ankles. Fully clasped together and closed up, the cloak made her look like a little brown ghost that had just freshly floated down from its grave. In the back, there were little flaps with buttons both above and beneath them so that they could be held open like little windows or sealed shut. Crow had grown used to keeping her wings under her cloaks, but it was so nice to fix up the little buttons and simply *pop!* her wings through to the other side, then furl and unfurl them freely, finally able to enjoy her two favorite things: a heavy cloak, and wings unbound. The inside of the cloak was filled with layers of fluffy down alternating with layers of soft, plush fur. *It was like wearing a pile of blankets!* And the whole of it was so quiet that even as she twirled and swished and jumped around, it simply followed along like her shadow, replicating her movements perfectly while trapping any noise deep within its many folds. It goes without saying, really, but the entire thing was filled so full with well-secured pockets that Crow could easily find herself carrying three or four times her bodyweight in trinkets she had tucked away into it and forgotten about. The body of the cloak also had numerous tucked-away straps, sturdy buttons, and snapping rivets that could be used to wear and secure it in a number of ways: it could be held open, or even worn around the waist, in the hotter months, or it could be sealed shut for rain and intense winds, or simply be bunched up and worn shorter for ease of movement. *Finally*, there was the matter

of the hood: the most important part of a cloak. The hood slid up over her head easily and hugged around the side of it with more piled, warm down that sealed up the empty space between her face and the hood itself. The top of the hood had four weirdly-shaped, pointy pockets that slid automatically over her ears, wrapping them up gently in a fur-bound embrace that simultaneously made them feel protected and as though they were floating around freely in the air. These little pockets could even be fastened shut, for extra protection, using flat, folded-away buttons on the inside of the hood. Each one was a different size, to match her ears, which were, of course, all a little different. The hood was completed with a half face-mask that dropped down from above Crow's forehead. It was easily fastened to the many slots carved out on the inside of the hood's lining— of course, not exposed to the outside at all— with the four large and sturdy buttons on either side of it. When fixed to her face, with the hood up, she was nearly unrecognizable— and, indeed, she saw herself as a 'mysterious wanderer'. It was *perfect*.

And last of all, her eyepatch. It was a luxurious, silky thing of a brown so deep it simply seemed black in all but the brightest of lights. It fit under her hair nicely and was secured to her head by three fixed straps: two of which disappeared around the right side of her head in parallel, and the third of which arced over her flesh eye before disappearing around the left side of her head and under her hair. All three straps met together in the back with no way to adjust them. It simply fit perfectly, with a very small amount of stretch so that it would not tear from being over-rigid. It felt like a warm hug, and her hair never got tangled or caught within it, nor did the straps run afoul of her ears. And, inside the eye, the seal was perfect: she could see nothing through it, and not even the slightest sliver of light slipped under the semi-sealed folded edge, where the fabric doubled back, then back, then back again, creating multiple layers of fabric seals around the eye, while the outside— the top layer of it— simply

appeared flat, save for the stylish same-color sigil of fluffy, cuddling birds embroidered into it. It was, in a word, masterwork.

### ***Finch's Ensemble***

Ah. So... that was what it was like, then, to feel again. It had been so vague, before, like knowledge so far out of grasp that the questions to find its answers could not even be formulated. But now, it was a clear and brilliant light that illuminated the inside of her, spilling forward to each and every tip of her being with its radiance, its levity, its clarity. This, then, was a way of being she could get rather used to.

It was soft, precise, and lovely, stitched in every way with care and concern for every fiber. Her outfit came in four pieces— her favorite number, and a nice coincidence.

The first piece was a pair of simple white cotton culottes that stopped just above her knees (which was probably for the best). The waistband was fitted to her torso with an adjustable black-leather cuff that fixed with silver rivets. The backside of the rivet that met her body, of course, was covered by a smooth strip of cloth so as to prevent any scraping and noise. Most importantly, even with the adjustable fixing, this waistband was *still* made from a stretchy fabric to prevent situations where a lack of prep time might cause the rivets to pop or cloth to tear.

The second piece was a special-made dust-brown shirt with no sleeves and a short cut that revealed her shoulders and midriff. This was, of course, for practical reasons— as certain configurations of her **pieces** would cause her shoulders and midsection to open up and reveal the machinery underneath. This 'cut-top', as Weasel called it, was embroidered and painted

with the imagery of spring. Twisting vines cracked open rocks covered in melting snow, revealing tiny verdant sprigs within. Watercolor mushrooms bloomed from embroidered bones, and half-frozen trees were cracked open to reveal dripping sap and healthy heartwood underneath. All together, it was the scene of a forest after a long and brutal winter, and still, it was **alive**, just as she was.

For the third piece, Weasel had weaved an entirely new kind of coat. It was light— as temperature didn't affect Finch— and only thick enough to be opaque, for privacy, and sturdy, for posterity. It was cleanly cut from a new bolt of dyed cotton, the color of which the dyemaker described as: "black." In the back, the coat fell down from Finch's shoulders all the way to her mid-calf. The bottom of the coat, as it wrapped around to the front, rose up and met in the middle just above her knees. The coat hugged her form closely when closed, and it was held shut by a line of wooden buttons that ran up the left side. Just above where the buttons ended, the coat cupped over her upper chest in a notable, though subtle way, much like a breastplate, and continued on upwards to wrap over her shoulders and around her neck. At the neck, the fabric folded back down in a tall, stiff collar that framed her equally sharp and pointed jaw. The shoulders did descend down into sleeves, but they were cut in a 'V' along the inside seam from her armpit down to the cuff. The inside of the sleeve had been dyed in such a way that it was patterned with detailed white eye shapes like the ones found on birch trees.

Finally, the fourth piece: simple black-leather elbow-length fingerless gloves. Each glove had a large triangular hole cut out from the palm, and they fit her arms perfectly, hardly bunching or wrinkling. Amazingly for leather, they were silent, too, no matter how she spun or moved her hands and arms.

