Parah flopped onto their bed. The day was growing short and despite all this time, they'd barely practiced at all. They were never going to find their true self at this rate. But, now was no time for worrying. There was still some hours left in the day till the stars scattered themselves across the sky and the moon hung over the horizon. The young summoner brushed back their snow-white hair and adjusted their cloud-like robes, obscuring but fluffed with golden accents akin to filigree and stood back up from the comfortable nature of their bed and took a deep breath.

“Alright, I can do this. I could always do this and I will,” there was an uncertainty in Parah's voice. Drawing their hands in circular motions and uttering words of power, they began to weave the wild and chaotic magic bound to them. A courtly symbol on their right hand glowed gold across their doe fur colored skin as they channeled the magic and when the spellweaving was finished, there was naught to show for it, naught but a deer-like humanoid figure behind them. It stood unnaturally tall with horns akin to a moose but the kindness of doe eyes starting back at them. A dress flowed across its form the color of a lotus during bloom, while a single piece of fabric was wrapped elegantly across its horns, and the same symbol that glowed on Parah's hand glowed on its own.

Parah stumbled back onto their bed in surprise as they saw the figure. “Certea?” they said.

“Yes?” she replied.

“Why are you here? I didn't summon you!” Parah said with confusion.

“Ah, but you did. You must have failed whatever you were attempting, Parah. There is no shame in that however, we all take time to blossom,” Certea assured them.

“You still have the courtly manners thing going on,” Parah huffed.

“Do you dislike my reassurances, Little Blossom? I merely am trying to offer you a modicum of confidence, denial of such will get you nowhere.”

“Yeah, I know, I know, just… I wish I could master this already. My mom was so talented at shapeshifting, but me? I got a knack for this as much as the local archmages have a knack for deceny. All to say, sorry for saying that. I know how you were back in the First World, I just wish I could be anything other than well,” Parah gestures to their body, “this!”

“Your apology is accepted. Though hatred of oneself isn't going to help you progress further. Some confidence in your skill is required for anything, whether it be love, life, or magic.”

Certea leaned her great form down to sit next to Parah on their bed and offered a comforting hug of support as she wrapped her arms around them. “Know this, Little Blossom. If you wish to bloom, focus first on what you wish to become.”

Parah thought for a second about what they could be, running through animals within their mind perfect for some sort of *animal form* spell, then turned to Certea.

“Well perhaps a bird? You could see Quantium from above that way,” Parah exclaimed.

“Flight may be difficult to manage as your first transmutation,” Certea said.

“Then how about a turtle? They're sturdy and can handle the water well.”

“Perhaps something that is merely land based, don't you think?”

“Hmm, well then I could try a dog? Dogs shouldn't be too hard at all,” Parah mentioned.

“You make a fair point. Attempt it so.”

With renewed confidence, Parah got up and began to channel magic once again, focusing with their all on the perfect form of a dog within their mind. Four legs, a wagging tail, floppy ears, muzzle, that's what they needed. Their hands began to weave the shape of the animal in the air in front of them as the symbol on their hand glowed brighter and brighter and when they finally finished the incantation and opened their eyes to see their new form, nothing seemed to change. Their hands were still skin and they still stood on two legs, though Parah heard Certea chuckling behind them.

“What is it?” they huffed. “Laughing at my failed attempt?”

“No! Not at all,” Certea exclaimed. She tried to hide the laughter, but her hand did little to save her in the regard. “It's just… well, look in the mirror,” she told them.

Parah crossed their arms and rolled their eyes, walking up to a nearby mirror attached to a desk. The ivory mask that obscured their features laid upon it. The mask itself was featureless, malleable, and the blankness stared at Parah discomfortingly from the mirror, however, they also noticed something about themselves in the mirror. They noticed two dog ears flapping with every subtle movement they made with their head. Parah pulled one up with their hand then let it flop back down as they inspected it and sighed.

“Well, I guess that's a start.”

“It's cute and much better than your prior attempts, Little Blossom. I'm impressed already!” Certea said.

With a flick of their hand, Parah dismissed the spell and regained their normal ears back. “What went wrong?” they wondered aloud.

“Perhaps you should pick an animal with a stronger connection to your spirit?” Certea suggested.

“But what?” Parah asked.

“Well I have one in mind,” Certea said as her eyes drifted to the bed's mantelpiece.

Soon, Parah's eyes drifted towards it as well. The mantelpiece had the image of a fierce jackal inscribed into it. The very same animal their mother took upon to demonstrate their magical prowess and to defend others when required. It was almost like the family emblem at this point, their mother adored it so much and perhaps that's exactly the connection they required if they were going to successfully shift with their magic. They were already able to get canine-like ears, so all they had to do now was focus on that aspect and continue downwards. Easy. Maybe…

“I think I know what to do,” Parah announced.

“I imagine you had the same thought as I then, didn't you?” Certea responded.

“It's likely. I intend to try and shapeshifting into a jackal just like my mom. If I focus the magic properly, then all should go right!”

“Then try your best, Little Blossom. Your confidence seems much more firm this time around.”

Parah took a moment to imagine the animal within their mind as they began the incantation. Quadrupedal, a short haired coat of fur the color of mud and sand, long pointed ears, and a bushy tail like that of a fox's. Twisting their hands, the magic began to flow and this time they could feel their body changing. They could feel their ears shift and change their position on their head and tail to sprout from near their spine. Only a few moments longer, they knew in their heart that's all it needed. Parah focused harder as they could feel their shoes become ill-fitting as their feet became digitigrade in shape and their face shifted to a muzzle. Slowly, their body grew warm and their skin soft as fur began sprouting outwards and covering them. Yet, right then, their concentration was broken as they heard the falling of a single coin out in the hall, their senses heightened from their animalistic form.

“I was so close! Dang it, if it weren't for that interruption,” Parah lamented.

“You certainly remind me of some fey friends looking like this,” Certea pointed out. Instead of becoming a full fledged jackal, Parah's appearance was like that of the infamous jackalwere, an anthropomorphic version that stood on two legs and looked gangly in their current outfit.

“Guess I'm lucky the equipment absorbing portion of the magic didn't trigger yet, but now I fee like I may rip my favorite pants if I move weird,” Parah sighed.

“This is progress however, the magic seemed to be waning when you lost focus either way. It's unlikely the spell would’ve reached its conclusion,” Certea commented.

“Then what am I doing wrong? Maybe I shouldn't bother with this magic at all!”

“Now, now, you can give it one more try I think. Though you may want to make yourself less furry first,” Certea joked.

Before any buttons could go launching of their attire, Parah waved their hand and dismissed the spell once again, setting them back to square one albeit with slightly stretched out clothes now.

“So, what do *you* think went wrong, Certea?”

“Well, though you were fairly confident at first, it seems your confidence alone wasn’t enough to forge the connection to the spirit of the animal.”

“Forge a connection to the spirit of the animal?” Parah asked.

“Shapechanging requires forging a path to that particular animal's aspects and though many who are experienced can do it without thinking, novices such as yourself need that connection.”

“And why didn't you mention this first?”

“I thought you’d be able to form a tie with your earnest desire, but it seems it might require more,” Certea then thought for a moment. “It seems the jackal went so well because of the tie between it and your mother, perhaps if you focus in on that aspect instead?”

“Rather than the animal itself?”

“Exactly!” Certea exclaimed. “Perhaps by focusing on fond memories you have of your mother and how she shapechanged, you can unlock the right connection to do it yourself. If it fails, we can call it a night. That sound good?”

“It doesn't hurt to try. Let me give it one more go.”

Parah readjusted their clothes so that it fit well enough and brushed off any remaining fur, then got into position. Reaching deep into their memories, they searched for the one memory they knew in their heart would let them shift into the shape they knew they could be.

The memory they found deep within their wellspring of thought was of when they were a child in this very same house. There they stood in front of their mother, as tall as a spire in Parah's young mind and as kind and sturdy as an ageless nymph. The young woman, grabbed Parah's hand and flung them upwards as she effortlessly shifted her body to a jackal as enormous as Parah imagined her to be. The young Parah then fell from the sky upon her back and the two raced across the city of Quantium. Floating spires reached for the sky around palaces cackling with arcane energy as blue as the Obari ocean nearby. As they ran pass the market, filled with fish and people haggling merchants as their stalls, they passed through great gates that guarded the city against the dangers of the Mana Wastes and the nation of Geb off in the horizon. From their mother's back however, they saw the towering quantium golems made eons ago. Two creatures made of a smoothed stone-like material made of magically interlocked obelisks, shining ruby and emerald respectively, the blades they wielded putting dragons to shame. Parah’s mom then licked their face as they looked on in wonder at the golems and they let out a laugh as they then cuddled their jackal shaped mom, petting her fur.

“I think I'm ready to go now, mama,” young Parah said. Without another moment, their mother carried them back through the city and then back home where Parah crawled off her back and on to their bed. Their mother returned to their human form and tucked them under the sheets.

“Did you have a good day?” she asked.

“Yes! Yes! I did,” they replied. “I want to be able to become animals like you one day and go on sooooo many adventures.”

“Ha, maybe one day I'll teach you how to become all the animals just like mama one day. But no matter what, remember this: the magic is within *you*,” she said as she pressed a finger near their heart. “Now goodnight, my sweet Parah.”

“Goodnight mama,” Parah replied as they drifted into sleep. Then… they awoke.

When Parah opened their eyes, they were much lower to the ground. They looked down and saw their hands had become paws and there was a snout extending from their face, all covered in fur the color of the sandy dunes of the Mana Wastes.

They did it Parah now realized. They actually did it. They shapeshifted. They jumped up and around in joy in their jackal form, bounding around Certea. Though they couldn't speak words, they let out joyous howls instead. A part of Parah wishes they could stay in this form forever, but there was so many new shapes still to explore and they couldn't do that without their hands and words. So, after enjoying this body for a fee moments, they then sat down on their hind legs and whisked their front paws around a bit until they were able to dismiss the spells and immediately shift back into their humanoid form.

“Congratulations! You did it,” Certea said as she wrapped her arms around Parah in a hug. “I never doubted you!”

“T-Thanks,” Parah said. “You're hugging… a little… tight… though.”

“Oops! Sorry, got a little carried away there,” Certea apologized.

“It's alright, I’m happy about it too! I can't believe I actually did it and I never could’ve without your guidance, Certea.”

“It's in my best interests as your eidolon and I'm proud of you for finally achieving it.”

“There's so many more shapes to explore now and I can't wait to shift into them too! But I’m feeling a little tired now after all that casting, so I think I'll get some rest now if you don't mind?” Parah asked Certea.

“Not at all, you have a good night's rest.”

And with that, Certea disappeared in a puff of glittering dust as she was dismissed. Parah stretched outwards and looked back into the nearby mirror. This time, seeing that mask, they didn't feel wrong, for the first time they felt a little right in fact. They'd finally found who they really are within and that felt… comforting. But there was still so many things to be, but for now they crawled into bed and smiled. Everything finally felt within their reach.