

## Joined

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by [spacedogfromspace](#)

### Summary

Vessa takes a long look at herself.

Vessa got up slowly, still tender from her surgery. Wearing nothing but her flimsy blue hospital gown, she grimaced at leaving the warmth of her bed-sheets. It was drafty in the room, and not just from the window. She almost changed her mind about getting up when her bare feet touched down on the chilly floor. But she was determined. Taking a deep breath, she planted both feet on the floor and stood, holding on to the edge of the bed for support.

Another deep breath, and she padded across the cold floor to the little bathroom that was attached to her private recovery room. Her gait was wobbly and she relied on her bed and the walls for support, but she pressed on. Some of her disorientation was due to weakness from her surgery, and having spent the last few days confined to her bed. But the rest came from the thick fog in her head that her brain had yet to learn to interpret. She knew, of course, what it was, but she couldn't expect her brain's chemistry and synapses to adapt quite so quickly. There was always an adjustment period with these things.

The lights clicked on automatically as she stepped into the little bathroom, the bright fluorescents flooding the sterile white space. She shuffled up to the sink and planted her feet firmly in front of it, leaning on the little counter to keep from toppling over.

Assured that she was steady, she turned her face upwards to look in the mirror, and drank in her features. She was small and sleight, looking even more so due to her hunched stance as she leaned over the sink. Her arms, left exposed by the short sleeves of her hospital gown, were well toned with muscle. Her face was narrow and bird-like, with a long narrow nose like a beak and large, dark eyes. Skin clear and the colour of jasper, with the familiar, unique pattern of dark rosettes dotting her temples and trailing down the sides of her face and neck and vanishing beneath gown. Long, black hair hung in stringy clumps—it needed a washing after all those days on bed-rest. She studied herself as if she had never before seen her own face. And in a way, she hadn't.

The face she saw in the mirror *looked* like the face of Vessa Taureel. But it was clear to her, in ways she could see but not articulate, that this face no longer *belonged* to Vessa Taureel. Now, it belonged to Vessa Nors. The face in the mirror was Vessa's, but it was also Imen's, and Haral's, and Neza's, and all the hosts that came before them.

As Vessa continued to study herself in the mirror, noticing the tiny changes that only she could notice—the faintest of crows feet at the corners of her eyes, the way her mouth sat slightly crooked on her face, the way her eyebrows were twitched ever so slightly higher—she started to feel the brushing of other consciousnesses against hers, looking through her eyes at her reflection and studying it in the same way she was.

At the sound of footsteps coming down the hallway towards her room—undoubtedly a nurse come to do her regular check-in—Vessa Nors took one last look in the mirror. She knew, with absolute certainty, that the face looking back at her wasn't hers. It was *theirs*. And Nors smiled.

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