

VERITAS FANTÁSTICA

The Chimera and the Sinner  
Part 1

Paul Andreas Wunderlich

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*Existencialismo*

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# Introduction to Veritas Fantástica and to The Chimera and the Sinner

Welcome to the series Veritas Fantástica. In this series, there shall be published all sorts of fantasy and science fiction stories, ranging from The Chimera and the Sinner, to other similar creations. The stories published will be both in the English and in the Spanish language. For example, another story published under Veritas Fantástica is “El Bastardo y la Medusa”, a story written in Spanish.

In this case, you are reading the first episode of The Chimera and the Sinner. Many more stories similar to this one will come, so if you happen to enjoy this one, be rest assured that your thirst for more fantasy and science fiction stories will be quenched.

Enjoy.

Paul Andreas Wunderlich.

# The Chimera and the Sinner

## Part 1

There was once in a distant world a land called Abfalbath, ruled by a cruel king who governed all. He not only governed by a strong hammer-hand, but also by inflicting fear and pain onto his people. He tortured all and none could escape his aimless wrath.

The lesser of his tortures was provoking hunger in his people and depriving them of water. About the greater of his tortures I dare not tell you, as they are most uncanny and could bring you ill dreams of fate.

Lugner the Trailmaker was his name, but he now went by Lugner the Sinner. He was banished from the Kingdom of Abfalbath, for he had sinned against his King. But how, you might wonder? You shall, in due time, realize how Lugner the Sinner's fate evolved to be.

Having been banished from the Kingdom of Abfalbath, Lugner roamed the Lands of Nothingness. They were called so because there was nothing to be seen in these lands, lest it be trees and wild animals; of these The Lands of Nothingness harbored many. Wandering these lands was his ultimate punishment, since the men from Abfalbath well knew that no one ever survived the harshness of these lands. They said to him during the process of his exile: "The animals will slay you, Sinner. They will feed upon your flesh and they will excrete you in their waste. You will become nothing more than the land's fertilizer."

"Oh no, that's not all!" said another guard, "The things that roam those lands include creatures like dragons and wraiths! He could be made into soup by the night-dwelling trolls! He is bound to a fate full of disgrace! Mind you, Sinner, never to return! And if you do, make sure it is in pieces."

By the faces the guards made while walking him towards the gates, and the by things they continued to say, Lugner concluded that there the creatures of the wilderness would kill him. His heart sunk at the thought of winding up in a dragon's stomach, impaled by a wyvern's fang, or turned into stone by the Medusa's stare.

Lugner had delved in the Lands of Nothingness for over a year now. He could not remember the time in its exactitude, though he always remembered the day when he was banished; that memory appeared to be timeless. He could remember vividly of how he was savagely dragged from from his family's warmth: the thing he regretted the most was having been unable to say a proper goodbye.

He remembered that moment with feverish clarity: His family and he were having tea and biscuits when the guards forced themselves into his house to take him away. The Captain who led the company, a fat man with a disgusting pie-shaped face, walked up to him while he was seized by the soldiers and said to him, "You, Lugner the Trailmaker, have been named from now on the Sinner, by the King himself. You are from this moment and forever onward banished from

Abfalbath. You may never return, lest it is in pieces. Do you mind? Excuse me, but I'm so hungry. Is it fine with you if I take a biscuit and a sip from your tea?"

The face of this Captain Lugner would never forget. The fat man would someday pay for his disrespect, or so Lugner promised himself. That promise was not so powerful, however, as the one he made himself to take his revenge upon the King. You may well understand that lurking in a land full of nothing but trees and animals made him forget most of the things he once knew; other than his memories of banishment, only his anger towards the King ever surfaced in his mind's eye.

After many days and nights in the Lands of Nothingness, Lugner learned the skillful avoidance of peril. He succeeded in learning the arts of survival after many near deaths, and was now savvy in the ways of the wild.

In one occasion he fought a Minotaur. It was an old Minotaur, one that had been cast away from its tribe, for now another dominant male was in possession of the females. The new male had exiled him after defeating him in a duel for power. The Minotaur tried to chop off Lugner's head with an old axe. By some unknown chance the axe bit his collarbone instead, and given the absence of sharpness in its blade, it merely chipped off a piece of bone. Lugner, having already survived an attack by a puma, was now prepared with more than mere self-defense tactics. He took the claws of the puma after skinning the animal, and with them he had built a powerful maul, with the claws protruding from its head. With that weapon, he managed to slay the Minotaur without difficulty, shattering the monster's skull into pieces.

In another occasion he confronted a mighty wraith while finding shelter from rain in a cave. The wraith was roaming around within the cavern, which it called home long ago before the Sinner laid foot in it. The wraith was not happy to have an unknown visitor and tried to kill him with its insubstantial touch. But Lugner was intelligent, and with fire in hand he managed to pin down the spirit, killing him with smoke and many blows from his maul. On that occasion he had to dispose of his weapon, given that the wraith had poisoned it with its wretched soul. It was not a problem for Lugner, however, for he had learned to move on after being faced by adversity many times before.

After mastering the ways of the wild, Lugner devoted himself to feeding the fire wells of his anger. With each passing day he swore vengeance against the King. The poison in his mind grew ever deeper, he so wished to resolve his pain; the one produced while imagining the King seated on his throne, laughing at his banishment. He had left everything behind, including wife and child, who were stolen from him for good. What became of them, he never knew. He wished he knew what became of them. At the very least he would like to have the notion if they were alive or dead. For all he knew, they could be dying in a dungeon or tortured by some despicable magician.

The suffering from missing his loved ones overthrew his anger. The poison of vengeance seeped through his soul like a coagulated cloud would conquer a mountain. With every passing minute he imagined having the King's head served to him on a silver platter, where he could spear him continuously with a fork and laugh in his face whenever he pleased. This he imagined so well he could smell and feel the blood running down his hands.

He grew evil from the inside as a consequence of lusting for such violence. The poison from his rage was far beyond the reach of the fingers of his consciousness, for he never felt it expanding, but it did, and continuously, diffusing throughout his body. The poison was slow to take its effect; he could not feel it when it came into play. When he took a potent dose of the

venom from his anger and desire for vengeance, it quenched his lusting at first, as do most things that eventually become the destroyers of men. But slowly, after taking a steady dose of it, his entire being started to corrode from the inside.

Lugner strolled along the forest with a fearless stance, but a keen eye could catch subtle signs of hesitation and nervousness in his movements. He feared no beast that could slay him easily with a single bite; he feared death by becoming prey no more. He now understood the cycle of life, and with that understanding the implication that he would become food, eventually. What he truly feared was the beast that lay dormant within him, which manifested itself as a dark presence in his mind. He knew he carried in his heart a weapon. He feared that he would eventually unleash it against the King, and his fear came from not knowing what he was capable of doing. Yet even in his fear he was already savoring the moment in his mind.

He feared this dark presence as such, but feared mostly its voice, since in loneliness it spoke softly to him, seducing him to undertake many cruel acts: he had taken many innocent lives by now, mostly animal lives, but lives nonetheless; with utter cruelty. In one of his acts of cruelty, he chopped a stag's four legs off and bound the wounds with cloths to prevent its death by bleeding. He left the legless body of the stag suffering on the ground, then watched as wild dogs sniffed it out and ripped it apart into food.

The voice from the dark presence spoke to him, day by day, corrupting his very essence: "Lugner, be not hasty in seeking vengeance. We must first evolve into a beast of significant power, then we must retaliate with all our force. Yes, Lugner, be not hasty. Be patient. Grow keen of senses, swift of movement; deceitful like a fox, misleading like the smoke. Become yourself."

Lugner tried to ignore this ill-natured voice. But with the passing days it grew ever stronger, and he found it more difficult to ignore. The voice ringed with a reverberating echo on all the possible places it could within his mind. He tried to repress it, but it was useless. He was growing used to the voice's unusual way of expressing itself — a loud hissing contained within a viscid murk.

One day, when Lugner was roaming the Lands of Nothingness, he perceived at a distance a beautiful white stone mountain. It glittered beautifully as sunlight bathed it with golden fingers. It shone.

Lugner had never seen such a sight, and immediately thought to himself that he must have a closer look at it. The dark presence within him sparked with life upon seeing what Lugner's eyes had caught. Thus the voice within him spoke with a seducing, yet soft-spoken tone, "Alas, Lugner, there lies a beauty yet to be discovered. Be the first to do so, and the riches that may come from such a finding may be overwhelming. Go now, and wait no more. There may lay our fate's resolution."

Lugner usually didn't heed much at the voice within him, now only during extreme periods of hunger and during endeavors of cruel intentions. When it came to life-threatening situations, Lugner thought his decisions over and over again, trying to apply the foundations of logic into his argument. But on this occasion, he found no way to dissuade the voice's reasoning: it did seem to have a point.

He strolled along the path, faintly marked by a track, towards the white Stone Mountain. He felt a rich wind curl along his face; the tingling it gave him was delicious, which made him forget about the possibility of a grave peril atop the landscape.

When he was close to the mountain, he peered from his position and saw a trail that led upwards to the summit. It seemed to be way too easy, he thought, and it seemed deserted as well.



*Men may have conquered these lands long ago and left it deserted by some reason or another; he thought, and they may have left many riches behind.* He also saw that above, at the tallest point of the mountain, there appeared to be some sort of building made out of the same white stone material.

He said to himself and to his voice, as if truly speaking to someone else, “I think that that mountain may be made out of marble. In the Kingdom of Abfalbath, marble is a well-regarded mineral, such that a man would give his youth’s life for a piece of it. It gives you the power of trade. I could beset the King with such a vastness of marble at my disposition. I could hire a brigade of mercenaries and storm the Castle’s forefront. This could be the savior of my fate.”

Lugner’s lust for revenge swelled up like a green, nasty worm with a bulbous slimy mouth; it shone with a greenish pale hue and its eyes glared with a dull red flame. The flame within the eyes of Lugner flickered and danced. His greed grew long and creepy, like a serpent, and his hands curled up like the claws of some disgraced demon.

He followed the trail upwards while imagining the things he could potentially find at the summit. His mind flew wild with many ideas, and he daydreamed his desires: He dreamed of sleeping with many women who worked day and night to keep him ever accompanied and pleased; he dreamed of having the Kingdom of Abfalbath under his feet; he dreamed of igniting the Castle’s halls with fire, and he enjoying the calamity in his visions. He fathomed a horrible dark-colored sky with his name written abroad and beyond it, with every man and women from the Kingdom chanting his name aloud.

When he finally got to the summit of the mountain, two large and powerful columns of white marble stood to greet him. The greeting was not a welcoming one, but one that wishes to provoke fear upon the newcomer. The wind rustled between the tall columns, mimicking a sound similar to a despondent voice — a hollow cry from depraved vocal cords, which whispered in a mutter the many ill things to come from this uncanny place.

Lugner hesitated one second before passing the powerfully built columns. Something within him told him that there was something amiss about his place. But when he thought of all the things he could have, especially upon seeing the vast amount of marble he could harvest from the site, he breeched the boundaries of the columns and passed beyond them.

As soon as he passed them, he started to hear someone weep with a sorrow so profound that nothing could possibly ever mend it. He tarried along, wondering whom the crying could belong to. He then heard some sound coming from above the column, which captured his attention and curiosity with a single whisper. When he turned around to search for its source he found a lovely face atop the column, peering at him from its highest point.

The face belonged to a beautiful woman, apparently in her twenties. Her eyes were as green as the emeralds of a tree possessed by moss. Her hair was brown like the shadow of bark. Her skin was fair, and it shone pale under the heat of the sun. Her lips moved with a peculiar cadence as she spoke, a detail that fascinated Lugner. “My dear man. How is it that you found my lair? I am so glad that you did, however, for it has been some time since someone has spoken to me, or since I have spoken to someone and not *something*. I miss the conversations of men; I miss the warmth of another being of intelligence. Although let me tell you right away, if you are a man who thinks about nothing other than stupid material things, be on your way. I only wish to speak with those who think highly of themselves, and to those who think beyond their dreams.”

Lugner was taken aback by the precious rusty voice of the maiden, and he responded, changing his posture to please her. “My fair lady, you are so lovely. One alike you have I found

only in my dreams. You are the fairest of them all, I mean, from the women I have seen, and I have seen many of them in my time. I am glad that you enjoy a good conversation. A good conversation is something ranked to be of the highest value. You may be rest assured that I will deliver you words you will enjoy. We may talk of many things, between life's mysteries and death's wings. Weep no more, for I have come to save you from boredom's paleness. Your companion I shall be named from now on."

Lugner smiled a crooked smile, for he felt that his words had effectively seduced the young lady. She blinked too many times for comfort, though she seemed to deem the flattery well. She responded, quite flattered, "I thank you my good man. You are kind. The world misses your sort as of late. You must be a woman's man, the type of man that takes good care of his loved ones. Come now and let's talk, with you I feel I shan't grow bored."

An uncanny feeling grew deep into the bones of Lugner, for there was something amiss in the situation he was in. He hadn't thought about it, but now that he started piecing together many bits of queer feelings, something came up within his mind to alert him:

There was no one around him but himself and this lovely lady. She was atop a column, a very high column to that; the lords know how on earth she got up there. The summit was ruins all about and there were some bones thrown around him. The bones were from many different animals, but some seemed to have belonged to humans.

He felt suddenly rushed by the notion to be on his way. He felt that he may have fallen into a trap, and he also noticed that the lady's face grew suspicious of him, for she now noticed that Lugner had figured her out, in some way: he blinked irregularly and his mouth moved in an equivalent way. He also had sweaty hands and feet, but this fact was not noticed by the lady.

Lugner said, trying to be casual in the matter, "Well, I must be on my way, my fair lady. The conversation we were bound to have sounded delicious, but we will have to wait for another occasion, my dear. Fare thee well!"

The Sinner started walking away from her, when he heard a loud noise of wings flapping, throwing gusts of wind, with both violence and elegance. That was when his heart froze and his mind paralyzed. Something landed in front of him, and now the lady's face was before his. He almost vomited in seeing that this lady was not a lady at all: her face and head were indeed human, but her torso, forelegs and hind ones were from a lion's. She had the wings of a gigantic eagle, and the tail of a black dragon.

She waved her tail from side to side, with playful curiosity. Her limbs were positioned as if they were powerfully wound coils, charged and ready to spring. He knew that death had come for him at last, and he awaited his fate.

The animal with a lady face said, licking her lips with a foul tongue while doing so, "My name is Virulentis the Chimera. I am no demon, so fear me not as such, nor am I a goddess of some strange sort, so pray to me not at all. I am but a product of ill fortune. I am and I live, nevertheless, and have hunger to quench alike any other being. You may become my dearest lunch today. That is, if you fail to succeed at my riddles. I always give my meals the chance to save themselves: it is a mechanism that enables me to find a worthy friend. If you live the contest, then I will tell you why I spared you, for it will be the sole purpose of keeping you alive. At any rate, it is time for you to meet your doom."

Lugner the Sinner trembled in fear, for he wasn't ready to die. Several minutes went by and he could not speak. He was frightened far beyond all reasoning, for he had never seen anything like the Chimera before. It took him several deep breaths to come to his senses. The Chimera knew all too well the reactions she gave to those who did not know her, and so she waited

patiently, knowing her prey would soon come around to reason. Lugner the Sinner touched his face and hands many times; he still could not believe what he was seeing. When he breathed in the scent from the Chimera's foul breath, reality struck him in the face and he regained his wits. With some return of his valor, he asked, "A Chimera, you say... Very well then, Virulentis, please do tell me, how may I spare my life?"

The Chimera laughed a horrible wretched laugh, which echoed many miles away and came back as a morped impaled sound. When the echoes of her laughter died down, she said, "In order to live, you must correctly answer my riddles, of which there are two. If you answer wrong to either of them, I will feed off your flesh. If you answer both of them correct, then not only will I tell you the story that made me be and the reason that gave birth to my riddles, but also give you freedom's fate."

Lugner was not convinced at all of the rules of the game, but he didn't seem to have an option in the matter, and responded as such: "Very well, Chimera, it seems I have no other choice but to be played by you as your potential meal. Ask away!"

Virulentis was obviously excited. Her heart raced and her eyes glared like a child's when receiving a candy bar. She sat down over her hind legs, and asked her first riddle with credible emotion, "What walks on four legs at dawn, on two legs in the afternoon, and on three legs in the evening?"

Lugner the Sinner had heard that riddle before in the taverns of the Kingdom of Abfalbath, so he had no difficulty in answering it, "What is man, of course. That was easy, Virulentis. Does all your prey answer as swift as I did? If that pleases you so, do find some pity for me and spare my life!"

The Chimera seemed to be bothered by his comment, one that made her feel stupid and used, and she responded, her tone of voice turning into a metallic bang, "Not at all. Until now, no prey of mine has ever answered the first riddle correctly. I guess they were taken aback by fear, so their tongues were paralyzed and could not talk. But you have some strangeness in you. You shine from within with an abnormal and vague power, a power of unknown origins. I will have to eat you to discover your power's taste. You have one more riddle to go, dear man. Be ready then for my wrath!"

Lugner the Sinner responded, losing some interest in the game, which he regarded to be quite old fashioned, "I seem to have no other choice, Virulentis. Come then and get on with it."

The Chimera thus asked the second riddle, bothered by the man's sudden loss of interest, "One sister gives birth to a second sister, and she in turn gives birth to the first."

Lugner felt a cold rush spear him, for he had never listened to such a riddle in his life. He trembled as he tried to solve it, but with each passing moment his nerves betrayed him. It was very difficult for him to do so, for Virulentis the Chimera was already salivating and licking her sharp teeth with a long forked tongue. Her eyes glared at him, and she seemed ready to spring. She moved closer to him, her powerful muscles contracting from the excitement; her tail moved from side to side. She was enjoying this very much.

Lugner was about to be eaten by the Chimera. She was so close to him that he could feel her terrible breath bathing him with its vapor. Under the weight of the stress from the moment at hand, many thoughts within his mind collided with the dark presence dormant there. The collision sparked an idea, one that shot out viciously and surfaced in the following words: "Night and day! Night and day! In god's name, don't eat me yet!"

The Chimera was already engulfing the Sinner's head with her powerful jaws, but she could not complete the bite. She had lost, and she knew it well. Although she was a monster, one thing she would never be is untrue to her word. That vow she would keep in spite of her rabid hunger, fulfilling the sole purpose behind the rules of her game.

Virulentis was in a rage. She had never been defeated before, and even though she knew she had to step away, she still desired to eat the man. She viciously pounced over the man and pinned him to the ground. She bellowed in frustration, exposing her fangs and jaws directly over the face of Lugner, her saliva dripping over his face and hair.

Lugner fought like a madman and withered like a worm stuck by a needle. His hands pushed upon the muscular chest of the lion's body, but it only served to enrage the monster even more. It wasn't until he lay still, drowning in her saliva, that the Chimera decided to let him go. She was satisfied, having overpowered him at least in this contest of strength.

She then regained her conscious-self and stepped away from Lugner. The man was drenched in saliva. He was appalled to see how the mucus had filled many of the cavities of his body, so he had to clean his ear canals and spit a whole gallon of bodily juices from the monster. He then proceeded to clean the saliva off his hair, which was a tangled sticky mess. Obviously regretful for losing her meal, but happy in another weird way for having overpowered him. She also felt she may have gained a friend, which compelled her deeply. "Very well. I should let you know that this is the first time that anyone or any prey has ever escaped my jaws by cunning. You have saved you flesh from being digested, and so I owe you a story and an explanation." She grumbled of a half a minute, eying him with disdain, as she still had that ravishing impulse to feed off his flesh and use his femur as a toothpick. When she understood that there was nothing to be done about the matter, she continued her explanation. "The story I shall tell you recounts of how I came to be the desolated, disgraced, and dissatisfied monster I now am. Afterwards, I shall tell you about my game, its rule, why I created it and the importance it harbors for my existence. In the end, if your presence still pleases me, I shall recount what I think of you and tell you your probable fate. One more thing before I begin my telling: Give me your name, please. I hadn't asked for it before, given the fact that you were likely to become my next meal, and no one wants to know the name of their meal. But now, that you are a friend and not food, I wish to know your name."

Lugner felt bold and satisfied. Not only had he defeated the Chimera with his intelligence, but he also gained a friend. The Chimera now spoke to him in a friendly manner, her tone of voice morphed into a high-pitched and friendly one. Her eyes now regarded him with respect.

Lugner responded, with renovated energy and bravado, as he never thought that a Chimera of her proportions would ever give him any respect, least of all regard him with an air of reverence. "My name is Lugner the Sinner." He said this holding the collar of his shirt, as if trying to convey his high social stature and great wealth, which was of course false. "I was once called Lugner the Trailmaker, but my trail was broken by fate. Now I go by the name of Lugner the Sinner, a story I may tell you later on, if you wish to hear it."

Virulentis eyed the man numerous times. Something about him didn't seem right, she thought. But alas, she had lost in her own game and owed him as much as she promised. She breathed deep several times, trying to find a scent of malice on the man; she found nothing but her doubts about him, nothing really helpful since she had those all along. When she finally felt comfortable, she began to tell her story.

“It was long ago, Lugner the Sinner, when I served as a maid at the Castle of the King in Abfalbath. One day, I overheard the King torturing the Queen. I saw his shadow as he cracked a whip and she screamed in pain. Her screams were deathly. I couldn't help myself and had to go and see what was amiss. I saw him in his true colors and, when he saw me, he took me by the hair and shook me like a toy, ripping hair off and spilling blood from the force of the pull. When he saw me quivering in fear, grossly humiliated and bathed in tears of spite, he looked satisfied and said, 'Alas, we have an intruder! This is quite displeasing, but yet, an opportunity to wreak some malice! Hello you little putrid rat! Hello vermin! You like to be called a rodent!? Do you like to spy on others to see their true nature! Do you like the malice I bear with honor and contempt!? Do you want me to blind you and torture you!? Rat! You dare cross me in my own castle! You filthy, loathing, foul, nasty, disgraceful, despondent, awful, noisy, fetid, revolting, disgusting, lousy, repellent *vermin!* You will be punished for spying on the King and his personal matters. I shall take you to the Chamber of Torture, where you shall learn to respect my space.' So he dragged me by the hair along all the passages of the Castle, using my body as a broom or a mop, humiliating me by calling me traitor, spilling my blood over the floor to let it dry out and be eaten by flies and rodents. He stopped halfway to the dungeons and held me by the hair, lifting me a foot or so off the ground, screaming as he did: 'Here we have a traitor! A rat! Look at her, her face is that of a rat! She smells like a rat! Lurks like one too! Let's see if she squeals like one as well!' He then proceeded to slap me twenty times or more on the face, I was struck dead by the humiliation! My family could not stand the sight of me and my friends fell ill from the news! I was destroyed!”

Tears of frustration and anger welled up in her eyes. Her claws ripped the earth and made the soil bleed fresh and humid dirt. After several minutes of venting, she managed to regain her composure and continued with her story,

“In the Chamber of Torture I was whipped until numbness overwhelmed me with the shadows of despair. For one month I was tortured so. Then I was placed in a cell in the dungeon, all by my own. I was deprived of food and water for almost a month, and survived merely because of the puddles of water that would form on the rocks in the deepness of my cell, as drops would drip from an unknown source, the only celestial friends I then had, seeping into my loneliness. Sadly, I saw how my hair faded away. He pulled on it so rabidly, that I lost pieces of scalp. I was doomed by ugliness's repugnance.”

“One day, I overheard the guards talking. They spoke of an Alchemist, of whom I had heard many depraving stories. You know, one hears a thing or two in the streets, or at the market or a tavern: the kind of stories one refuses to believe because of their depravity; they were so awful one would sooner believe anything else. The guards mentioned, while drunk of course, that I had been chosen by the lunatic, though they never said for what exactly. Every day I grew evermore depressed, knowing that a day would come when the Alchemist would seek my flesh for some ill purpose.”

“One day, three cages of wild animals were hurled into my cell by slaves. I tried to convince them that my cell was not the one they were ordered to leave the beasts in, but it was no use. For two days I dared not see what lay within them by the sound of growling and screeching coming from inside the cages. I couldn't fight the curiosity any longer; I had to look. I was driven to despair by what I saw: the first cage contained a starved lion about to die. He was suffering gravely and, upon seeing me, started pleading for death. Of course, I had not the grit to kill the animal, nor had I the tools necessary to carry out its wishes. I tore myself from its sight, killing its false hopes of liberation. In the next cage there lay a dead reptile. I studied it closely,

scrutinizing its physical properties, and discovered it was a dragon. It was black, with scales that seemed to be made out of some glassy rock, and it smelled rotten. A cloud of flies swarmed above it; I knew it had been dead for many days. In the third cage, a huge bird flapped its wings crazily when it saw me. It was an eagle, the biggest I have ever seen. Its powerful claws were trying to rip the metal bars off the cage. I felt profoundly compelled to help it, in any possible way, but it lashed out at me every time I came too close.”

“I, of course, was deeply troubled upon seeing what was enslaved by the cages in my cell. I had no idea of what was to become of them or me. I could only speculate on the possibilities, and none seemed to be one of good nature.”

“The next day the Alchemist came to see examine me at my cell. He was an ordinary man, or so he seemed to be, but he possessed a pair of eyes that glared evil from within. His presence felt like that of multiple beings and it was horrible to withstand. I would have been comforted by his movement, or something in the like, but he merely stood there, analyzing me. I felt raped by his eyes, ravaged by the deep cruelty there. After scrutinizing me with his pungent gaze for several hours, he took out a small piece of carbon and wrote something down over a piece of cloth. When he was finished he finally spoke these words to me: “Today, we shall chant the incantation of transmutation, with it we shall endeavor to make your body unite with the bodies of the animals in the cages within your cell. It is a difficult task to perform, but one that may yield me the creation I have long ago sought. Either you will become my Chimera, or you will die in the process. Be that as it may, you are my test subject and I will explore with you the universe of shadows and malice. Alchemy is a great sorcery, but one that needs to take the lives of its subjects. That is why few men ever delve into its nature. To wield alchemy is to wield souls; you should feel sacred amongst many other beings who do not have the privilege to be experimented with by such an admirable force.”

I was scared to death. My eyes sought a source of hope; I found none. By peripheral vision I saw and understood that there were other men in the room robed completely in black tunics, their heads and faces covered with hoods.”

“The Alchemist talked to them in words I could not comprehend. They sounded like the cavernous voice from a demon who has inhaled too much smoke in its lifetime, and thus his voice transformed into a metallic crisp darting sound. After the men laughed, the Alchemist stood at the center of the dungeon, his eyes glowing. The other prison cells were empty. In them lay only vestiges of the inmates’ cadavers, and even they seemed to quiver in the presence of the Alchemist. The man then proceeded to draw triangles on the ground, lit a candle within the corner of each triangle and, accompanied by the aid of the hooded men, they started chanting.”

“Spirits seemed to bow to his chant and shadows crept on the walls, emerging from nothing. The candles danced as if seduced by the pulsating of his vivid words. A blue hue encapsulated him, ever shining brighter, radiating malevolence as he continued chanting. Tiny specks of light emerged like poles; bridges of electricity formed around him. Soon lighting gathered and, with a sudden explosion, the product of the incantation came rushing towards me. I was surrounded by its cruel touch, entrapped by lightning’s strike. I felt my skin being ripped apart and realigned by some evil craft, destruction and recreation woven at that very instant. I bled, almost to death, but I was kept alive by an unknown mechanism. I heard the lion roar with pain, and the eagle flap with fear. Soon it was all over and it took me a while to wake fully up. I saw the Alchemist smiling down at me when I opened my eyes; I knew the meaning of the gaze he shot at me. It was one of triumph. When I saw my body, I was like this. I screamed, knowing I

was turned into a monster, transmuted into a creature that possessed four different species in one. I knew things would never be the same, thus I knew I was lost to this man's ill conjuring."

"The Alchemist approached me with a broad smile on his face and said, "You are my latest creation, my child, my love—my minion. I shall name you Virulentis, the venomous Chimera." I raged at him and, with my new and powerful jaws, I tore my cell into pieces, severing several teeth and wounding my gums, but alas, I gained my freedom at a cost—freedom always comes at a cost. The guards raced towards me, but I ripped them into pieces with a single slash of my claws, gashing a wound so deep that I could see their innermost vessels spew blood like a fountain. I confronted the Alchemist, who thought I would respect him as a father, or so his eyes seemed to say, but I felt no pity for him. With a single bite I ripped his head off and ate it. I had no idea of how powerful my newly acquired jaws were until I chewed down his skull like an apple. I fought my way out, clumsily running on all fours. I tried to fly but my wings and I were unacquainted, so it was difficult to take flight. I stumbled and fell many times. I had to stick my claws into the walls to climb towards the windows. When I got to them, I jumped down and by the actions of mere stress I learned to control my wings for flight."

"Since then I knew that I would forever be alone, for no man or woman would accept me for what I now was. So in solitude I found this abandoned ruin, once ruled by brave men, men who are no more. Here, in solitude, I made my den and I slew my prey. I devoured men or animal, whichever crossed my path. In loneliness I suffered, for everyone with whom I wished to speak, I also desired to eat. This was my curse. I was torn between starvation and loneliness. It occurred to me that I could develop a game, in which rules would bind me to respect my food. But there was more to it than just that, something I concluded after years of playing this game: it allowed me to respect myself by regaining self-control. You see, without self-control I was as much a monster on the inside as I was on the outside. No matter the outcome of my game I would meet my needs, by getting either food or company; I had nothing to lose and would give my prey the option to earn their fate. The game would provide me with the feeling of being just and of having self-control, which made me feel, in the end, that my humanity was saved.

"My game, as you clearly experienced, consists of two riddles. If the participant responds correctly to both I then spare its life, and although I know that I will forever hunger for his flesh, I cannot eat him or it, given that I am a Chimera bound by principles. This is how I devised to find a friend, and alas, you came along and survived my riddles. You, Lugner the Sinner, are my first friend in a long time."

Lugner was taken aback by the story of the Chimera, yet there was one thing unclear to him and so he asked, "What if your prey is an animal, devoid of speech and reason?"

The Chimera thought about the question and answered. "Some animals need not be asked any riddles, for as you say, they have not the power of speech or reasoning. Yet, some animals can speak, or at least make some sounds I can translate with magic. So some animals do have the chance to choose their fate. Other animals, those of lesser mental capacities, I simply eat."

The Sinner could scarcely believe what he had heard, and most of all, he was appalled to realize he could identify with the monster. He felt a cruel knot bind his throat and a metallic hand squeeze his heart upon hearing he was her first friend in a long while, which only served him well, for he was also in search of a friend. Moved by emotions he said: "It is a sad story, the one you have told. We have more in common than you think, Virulentis. Not only are we in search of someone to make us feel human and whole again, but we both wish the King dead. Together, we may plot our vengeance. We can succeed if we fight together; we will regain our honor."

The Chimera responded, enthused by the Sinner's proposal, "Aye, that sounds delicious. I would love to eat him, limb by limb. Yet, before we unite with a common purpose, I still have one promise to keep. I must tell you what I make of you and of your possible fate."

Lugner had no option in the matter, and was silent. He sat down beside the Chimera without fear, knowing that she was bound by her principles and would not eat him at any cost.

"You are a man of wild dreams. You have venom within you, the venom of self-loathing. You hate yourself and wish you were someone else. You envy many men, who you deem better than you, and your lust for power is great: Power you wish to hold to protect yourself and with it, you wish to become that dream, the thing you wish you truly were and never could become because of your wretchedness. You are a dangerous enemy to have and a treacherous ally. You reside on the edge of betraying all those who surround you, for you have gone to the extent of betraying yourself: this is the largest sin of them all. That is why you have been named a Sinner, is it not?"

Lugner was slapped in the face by the Chimera's words, and responded in an attempt to redeem his honor. "I was named a Sinner, since I defied the King. The King is considered god in Abfalbath, and so I betrayed god; I have sinned. As I have already told you, I used to be called Lugner the Trailmaker, but now my trail is none, for I travel the Lands of Nothingness as a drifter, and as a drifter I wish to roam the lands no more. With you by my side, Chimera, I will revert my name to something monumental. I will become the King's Bane."

Virulentis spoke with a mirthless smile, not knowing if she had found her hero or her slayer. "The King's Bane you shall be named. With this mountain of marble we may forge many spears. With things of value, as marble is regarded, we may hire a brigade of mercenaries, and gather a force strong enough to siege the Castle. Let us unite then in battle, King's Bane, I will aid you in your quest for honor! In doing so, I will gain my vengeance!"

The eyes of Lugner shined with a venomous light: green and tortuous, waxing and waning as if coming from a doubtful source. The voice within him, the one deriving from the dark presence within, spoke with an ill wind: "King's Bane is our new name. We shall take our vengeance, one that will taste sweet in the end. Then, we shall become the ruler of Abfalbath, and take everything for ourselves. The King shall become rubble. His ashes will be used to light the hearth in the cook's kitchen. He will never be remembered. But us, the King's Bane, we shall be legend in our rule. Our name shall light every street, every heart, and every mind with a honorable flame. Every man shall chant our song, the one we have still to make. We shall prevail, and everyone shall bow down to us!"

The wind sang in bereavement, a sound similar to the weeping of dying trees. The Chimera regarded the man she once saw as a meal, miraculously growing in size. He seemed much taller and stronger. He seemed to be a giant contained in the body of a man. Maybe it was her imagination playing tricks on her, but she could hear that something within him spoke of an ominous fortune to come. Only time would tell what would become of Abfalbath and herself, the Chimera.

**THE END**





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