



THE PROCEDURE

A Subhuman Vignette

Xen Sanders

AS THE NUMBING HAZE OF the anesthetics descended, Roman thought, *This is the right thing to do.*

He stared up at the harsh disc of florescent light overhead, burning stark on his retinas and imprinting his vision with halos. Past the searing brand of light, the surgeons were only dim shapes, so indistinct he could hardly tell they were human. Good. He didn't want them to be people. He didn't want to think that one human being could cut another apart like this, take them to pieces and put them back together like a jigsaw puzzle, or he wouldn't be able to go through with it.

"Take a deep breath and count backwards from ten, Mr. Xin," one of those blurred, dark shapes murmured. Through a rubbery filter of numbness, something faintly stung his inner elbow. The IV. The steady beep of the heart monitor jumped, then settled. "When you wake, it'll all be over. You'll be a new you."

A new you. He inhaled slowly, throat closing against the sterile medicinal stink of the plastic oxygen mask, and closed his eyes. Nerveless lips moved, mouthing *ten...nine...eight...seven.* A different Roman. A new kind of animal.

He doubted it would change much.

Maybe he was undergoing the wrong surgery. Maybe he should be underneath the neurosurgeon's knife instead, while they snipped synaptic connections and cut out every piece of his

brain that clung fast to who and what he used to be.

Six...five...four.

No. *He was doing the right thing.* He didn't want to be this man anymore. Didn't want to be human anymore. The only way to do that was to shed the serpent of his old skin and move on. Start a new life.

Three...two...one.

Still, as he let himself sink into cool, blessed darkness, he wondered if the world would look any different through his new eyes - or if he was forever damned to see his life through a veil, everything coated in a patina of ash.

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