

WITNESS MARKS

"Eventually, we just followed them into the mountains. There was nothing going on in town, anyway. Did I say *tail*? I meant *trail*."

Maude could see two gashes atop TAB3's bald head. Healed now, but clearly the rough-hewn evidence of some severely memorable trauma. Like a comically botched restoration job, or maybe a giant snake had taken a bite out of his skull.

"Dragon, actually," TAB3 corrected her.

Pause.

"Oh, I'm telepathic. Telekenetic, too. Inherited my Mom's powers."

"Even though *I'm* your biological mother," Maude said.

"Kuzuryu works in mysterious ways."

Maude could feel her ovaries hardening even as the boy spoke. The mere mention of TAB2's second wife, Eva Bright, had put her right off her morning tea. She tabled the saucer and cup, inadvertently nudging her signed copy of WITH QUARTER NEITHER ASKED NOR GIVEN: A SEXUAL BIOGRAPHY OF X-MEN WRITER CHRIS CLAREMONT, which promptly fell face open onto the floor.

Maude hated family stuff.

MISTAKES ARE THE BEGINNING OF SUCCESS

"We wandered up the mountain. Slowly, at first, but nobody seemed to object, so gradually we accelerated, amassing supply chain contacts and political influence, soon surpassing the speed of what is understood to be strictly legal business. Thankfully, the mountain was beyond the reach of government regulation."

Dead air.

"Yes, Plinth was fond of that joke as well," Maude allowed, and let the chapter close.

"So, we found the green door. It kept on getting darker and darker all around the path. Soon, *everything* went dark. The whole world. Togakushi, whatever. We knocked, but the old crone wouldn't open up."

"How did you get her to come out?"

"We had to trick her."

DREAMING GIRL

Maude felt like she couldn't wake up. Someone was pounding at the door.

"FUCK," she said, as she lifted the latch and light flooded in.

It was her son.

Holding a mirror.