

Lerric straightened up, his ear twitching. Had he heard something. He shifted about, listening intently, there again, something was moving in one of the rooms below him and the sound was conspicuous in how muted it was. If it was the house settling it wouldn't be that soft, if it was one of the maid staff in his employ they'd be more obvious.

As quietly as he could he slipped out of bed, foot skipping past the floorboard that was prone to creaking. Soon he was at the top of the stairs, whenever he heard the faintest rustle he took another step down.

The house was dark, far enough away from any street lights or late night traffic that only the moon offered illumination. The intruder obviously wanted not to be noticed, yet still they couldn't rein in their own excitement, their tail waving around. They'd found one of the storage rooms, not much of value or treasure but still containing some oddities. That was good, it would hopefully distract them.

The wolf crossed the hallway, reaching the point he could see the hindquarters of the intruder. A bag lay open at her feet showing a few of Lerric's belongings, some ropes and kinky items were the most eye-catching, not things the thief had brought but rather items they had pilfered from the store room. His chest wanted to burst, he hadn't realised he'd been holding his breath all that time. He took in a suck of air to shout, to spook the intruder as he lunged.

At that first hiss, a feline tail grew seemingly fatter in reflexive response, by the time Lerric roared and pounced the tail's owner was ready enough to turn, stepping back to the wall. "What the-" She gasped under her breath, more annoyed than anything.

The cat was quick but the surprise at being accosted gave Lerric an advantage, which his own speed and surety more than made up for. His hand seized one of the ropes that was lightly spooled. He caught a swinging fist and met it with the now loose strands.

"Get away!" The cat yelled, no longer keeping quiet, mind spinning as the wolf grabbed her and forced her arms behind her back. "Get off me! Get off!" She demanded, bucking but the leverage remained on the wolf's side. His arm went around her waist, gathering the rope and then hauling back with it.

"You're making a lot of noise for a sneak thief!" He said with a throaty growl, flashing his teeth. She let out another squeak showing that something in his tone had at the very least rattled her.

"Look, we can talk! I give up, okay?", gasping with growing concern as the rope stretched around her chest and started to tangle with her arms, true to her words she held herself from fighting back.

Lerric worked quickly, the strands biting into her top, then in seconds snaring her arms, yanking them into a harsh boxtie, held by the coarse ropes. Inwardly the cat was worried, hoping the raw strength of his binding was intended as part of the punishment and not from the wolf's

passions taking hold. Her arms tested the ropes, they barely had room to creak, showing beyond a doubt she was definitely secured. A small nagging worry said she should have fought better, if this man was dangerous then she was in trouble.

“Come along now.” Lerric said, tugging a tense stretch of rope between her shoulders. “This isn’t the room we use to accept guests at these late hours.”

“Here we are, the Unwelcomed Guests’ Room” he said as he led the cat in front of him, one hand gripping the ropes, the other steering her by the shoulder down the steps to the stone basement.

She said nothing but her tail quivered as a sign of her worry, just where was this man taking her, what did he have in mind for her?

“Nervous? Well, you’ll feel right at home in just a moment.” Lerric remarked. The words were followed with a shove that set the cat staggering forward. He took the time to grab some ropes that hung from rings embedded in the ceiling and chased the harness at the cat thief’s back, lightly tethering the boxtie to the ropes. “Now, behave yourself and don’t fight.”

The cat stiffened but did as demanded, grunting and bracing herself as his hands brushed her ankles and tapped her hips.

“You thieves do love to hide tools in secret pockets. I’ve also met a couple who gave up fast thinking they would turn the tables later.” He added as a partial explanation, hands patting down and assessing her jacket. “Now, the other half.” He said when satisfied there were no surprises she could reach. His eyes spotted a couple of strands to tighten even though she’d have been kept bound after an hour of squirming. With that other half assessed, Lerric turned back to the ropes, giving one last harsh pull so they bit more than before and then pulling the slack through the ceiling rings until her contact with the ground shifted

The thief’s heart pounded. “What are you going to do with me?” She groaned, gritting her teeth.

“We’ll have to see what you’ve earned, once I take stock of exactly what you were trying to steal. Then we’ll wait to make sure no accomplices or friends will miss you.” Lerric replied in a totally measured and calm tone, grip moving to her knee and then pulling the leg up suddenly. He worked hard and fast, sliding the limb into a sling of rope then tightening it over the thigh, weaving it to the shin.

“Miss me, what does that mean!?” She demanded, throat feeling suddenly dry. The cry was totally ignored as Lerric gathered more rope and took it to her other leg, binding the thigh while it was stretched forward then once again hefting the limb to snare up the shin, the wolf confidently able to bear all the weight that the ropes weren’t carrying.

While it was a quick job, it was still artistically pleasing to his eye and importantly, secure. If he'd backed off at any previous moment she might have had a chance enough to free herself but suspended fully in the air, that chance was virtually zero.

"I don't need you to let me go but please, don't hurt me, don't..." She gulped, forcing moisture back to her throat to be able to whisper. "Don't kill me."

Lerric quirked a brow, he wasn't intending on doing so. "What should I do to punish you and make sure you don't steal again, then?"

"I'd rather remain tied up and kept as a prisoner here until you're convinced I've changed than be killed for what I've done."

"And what if you don't convince me, ever?" Lerric asked, hands folding over his chest as he looked her up and down.

"Then keep me bound forever if you have to!" She insisted, her mind reeling, she needed to shake the all consuming threat of death, if she agreed to that much she could always negotiate later, after all.

"I do seem to attract people that ask for that." He said with a smirk. There was a thumping sound from above which made Lerric look upwards. "Ah, seems like our little scuffle woke some of the maids. I'll have to make this quick..." He said, his own expression changing. A quick flash as his eyes met confused the thief, there seemed to suddenly be a mote of pity?

"I won't lie to them, I-I'll explain what happened." She said.

"No, you won't." Lerric replied, raising a knotted ball of ropes. The thief looked confused before she realised, her mouth opening to accept that gag. Two strands wove behind the back of her head and then over the top, locking it in place. The wolf pinched the gag with his claws and pulled, satisfied when it didn't shift.

"I'll tell the maids, so I guess, goodbye for now as they'll no doubt send me to bed and finish up here."

The cat's mind swam as Lerric turned about and left, taking her clothing with him. The look of pity was confusing, she must have misread it in the dim light, perhaps he felt sorry for disturbing the maids. The other thing on her mind was that he mentioned 'attracting others', given that there was no one else in the basement it seemed he'd either let them go or at least given them better accommodations.

She hung there for several minutes, the ropes letting her sway yet they kept her from struggling effectively.

Soon she heard movement again though not of Lerric, instead several figures were stepping down to her, the maids he had spoken of, or at least some of them. Tall, with stern expressions, carrying lanterns that cast greater light to her surroundings.

The cat peered between them, watching the one that drew closest to her. Her head followed as the figure started to walk past before her eyes were seized by something she'd not seen before yet was now unmistakable with the light pushing back the dark. Holes in the ground, evenly spaced square holes. Some with heavy looking stone slabs above them, like plugs.

The cat didn't know what that meant but she got an ominous feeling.

"Mmmh, hmmhmm." She mumbled looking at the maids. None of them responded, none even met her eyes, instead together they surrounded her to continue and finish what Lerric had started.

The staff brought a fresh load of tangling cords, made of a softer, more pleasant rope for long term wear. They tied her up anew, building on what lay before. Each of them was a match for Lerric's speed and efficiency. With how many of them there were it meant in seconds the ropes had been doubled all over with additional coils tied over her thighs, shins and waist. The maids yanked hard, squeezing her body between all the strands, making her groan into the gag. The ropes were woven on, binding even her tail then looping to snare her central toes on each foot.

The cat sighed out a "Mmmh, mmmmhghhh." The maids were like robots, not replying, not responding, terrifyingly efficient in their methods of tying her up. At least they were experts, she consoled herself. No risk of mishaps or loss of circulation, at least she hoped.

Her toes curled as their hands turned in unison to the ropes that suspended her from the ceiling, detaching them and removing extraneous parts of Lerric's work. She tried to keep from wiggling too much, yet her reflexes still caused a little squirming as the tall, strong women adjusted their grip.

She wasn't being placed down, instead she was being carried. What did it mean?

One of the maids drew herself up to her full height, harsh eyes locked with hers as her voice spoke in neat, clipped tones. "Unknown thief. For the crimes of breaking into our employers' house, trying to take his possessions and disturbing him in the night, you will be punished. You will join the others like yourself, kept in the pits of punishment and by your own words you will remain bound forever."

"Mmmh?! W-whhhm?!"

The maid nodded to her fellows, the sentence had been read, so to her there was nothing more to say. She was carried by arms under her body and hands holding the loose strands of

rope, the latter of which were raised, tied into a ring directly above one of the pits. “Sthhh, s-sthhh! Whhh! Hmmmh!!” She groaned in desperation, eyes wide, panic chilling her and even bringing unprompted tears to the corner of her eyes.

The maids didn’t care even a little, instead they just secured her, angling her so that she was held in that near hogtie, back straight enough to serve as a table. The maid’s didn’t need any communication, they knew this part well, breaking the clasp that held the block of stone up in the air. The cat dropped straight down, the walls of the narrow pit rising around her, only to crash above as the stone fit perfectly into the hole.

In that single second the light vanished, pure darkness, entombed on all sides by stone and still bound in the air where her now fully panicked struggles didn’t even rock her enough to touch the claustrophobically close walls.

“Mmm! Mmmh-mmmhshhhhh!!” She whimpered, too tightly confined for the sound to echo, too solidly sealed for it to be heard above. For the longest time she thought she heard only silence, until, perhaps through some minute fracture in the stonework or just that the walls between pits was thin enough, she thought she heard the faintest sound of other whimpers.

The others who had asked for imprisonment over death, now locked away in a fate worse than it, surrounding the cat whose gagged wails would just be one further murmur among them.

On the floor above her, the maids were already making sure the latest pit to be filled was secure. Any thoughts of negotiation the cat might have had were mooted, she would never be lifted from the pit nor ungagged to sweet talk her way to leniency.