

*"There is a kitten's tale about-"*

*"No matter what it is, there's always a 'kitten's tale' about it, isn't there? I really do think th- ow!"*

*Quiet, giggling laughter, soft like the wind in the trees, sweet like marigold on the air, soothed the annoying sting along his side where the back of her paw had hit. Lortian leaned back where he sat, sand of the lakeshore spreading out beneath and between his fingers, and pulled in a low breath. Sure, there was marigold on that air, and the slightly cloying scent of the moss and algae along the water. Above all of that tingled a new scent as well, or at least one that was new to him. The wood elf licked his lips, breathed it in, swallowed. The wind carried it.*

*"There is also a kitten's tale," he could feel her eyes on him even without looking, "about why you furless ones have such trouble keeping your mouths closed. But that is not what I wanted to say."*

*The sun continued on its slow descent towards the trees along the horizon, painting both the sky and the rippled water of the lake in pink and orange and pale violet. Lortian thought he had appreciated the sunsets before, but ever since he had started watching them with her, an entirely different kind of appreciation stirred in his chest whenever he thought about them. Sometimes it took him an extra hour to fall asleep at night, simply because his mind continued dancing through the trees alongside her even after his body had stopped.*

*Not even a foot away from him, her short tail just barely flicked against his lower side and made him jump. He could feel her smile then, too, and when he looked, he found he was right. Golden eyes glittered like the sun off the water. Rayya licked her lips before she continued. "There is a story about one of our kind falling in love with one of yours. It has two endings: the one that is told to kittens to frighten them away from you, and then the one that is actually true."*

*"Can you tell it to me?"*

*The lynx looked back over the water and pulled her legs closer to her chest, arms resting atop her knees. That slight adjustment brought her scent to him again, almost imperceptible among everything else. Sometimes he wished he had the wilder's sense of smell: a full week seeing each other when they could, and Lortian could just barely identify her scent even when she sat right beside him. When he did find it, though...*

*"He was a human, and she a wolf. Brown hair on him; white fur on her. He was the earth from which her flowers blossomed, and she the snow to cool the pain that burned inside of him..."*

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*Lortian sighed and bumped his head back against the trunk of the tree the bark soft and cool to the touch. Another week since then of sneaking out from his work on his father's estate to come out here to the trees and the flowers and the wind, and to dance among them... and with this lynx wilder, too, who lay with her head in his lap and her arms draped over her chest, totally relaxed. At least as far as he could tell: their mannerisms, he'd found, were often quite different from his own.*

*Wilder – that's what he called the type of person halfway between human and animal, fur and ears and teeth and tail. Not just himself; that's what everybody called them. Everyone in civilized society-*

He looked down at her, and she up at him. Puffy cheekruffs, long ear-tips sticking out, whiskers hanging down. A little pink tongue flicked out across her lips, and then, Rayya smiled at him and shifted her head in his lap.

*Civilized.* The wood elf rolled his eyes at himself. These past two weeks he'd learned so much, both from and about her. The treedancing, which he was raised thinking was a tradition unique to his own culture; hunting and pathfinding, foraging, deepening his own connection to the land and the spirit of nature that pulsed through it with each footstep. All his life until two weeks ago, he thought he'd had all of those things figured out... and then Rayya came through the trees like a ray of sunlight.

Or, rather, like an arrow thunking into the trunk beside his head. She'd also shown him how to shoot like that, of course.

Every night the two of them came here to this lake to watch the sunset, and then every morning, they met in this spot to continue their day. Lortian used to have a hard time believing there was enough to *do* in the forest – and then every time the thought crossed his mind, he'd look up and see the darkening of the sky, or feel the soft warmth of her fingerpads closing around his wrist to pull him somewhere else.

His father had started questioning him about it, too, and he'd come to Rayya for an excuse to feed him. The wood elf softly chuckled to himself, remembering that conversation: she'd suggested – or threatened; sometimes it could be hard to tell – that she come back home with him, just under six feet of forest cat with her tall ears making up the difference and more than enough muscle to best the young elf in every contest of strength they'd played between the two of them. That would certainly be something to see.

Not that it would ever happen, of course. He knew very well his family's... *opinions* on wilders. He'd needed an excuse simply because they would have punished him deeply, had they found out he'd been spending time with one and becoming friends. That's what it was, too: he trusted her. He enjoyed her company, and seeing her brought a little more light into his day. A light breeze danced across the water and through the trees; the elf sighed again, then lowered his hand from behind his head to rest his arm across Rayya's lower body, sprawled out away from him. She shifted just slightly with that touch.

"Lortian." Her voice vibrated gently through her chest and along his arm.

Out over the lake, a bird – he couldn't tell which type from here – dove down, skimmed the surface, and angled back up in a smooth, steady arc. After a moment he looked down at her, heart already thumping in his chest a bit; he felt he knew what she was going to say. Usually it was Rayya who initiated the physical contact between the two of them... and Lortian had been thinking about something small like this, like resting his arm on her, for the past two days. And like all of those other touches, her fur felt short and soft, her body warm and firm beneath. Slowly rising and falling, rising and falling with her breathing.

"Mm?"

"I like you." Again she licked her lips and blinked, whiskers briefly tacking forward. "A lot. Do you know that?"

That was another difference he'd figured out: the wilders tended to be a lot... *less modest* about a lot of things. Affection and feelings, for a few. "Yes." Suddenly it felt as though the skin of his arm might char, resting across her lower chest. "I can tell you do."

"Whenever I mention it, you act like – like it brings great embarrassment to you. Look, there-" The lynx sat up, remaining close to him. He swallowed again. "You look like an egg knowing it is about to be boiled."

Lortian brought his arm back into his own lap, then briefly recoiled at the warmth her head had left there. "Rayya, it's..."

"Are you embarrassed?"

Easy answer. "Yes. I am."

"Of me?"

*That* was a tone of voice she didn't take often with him. He looked at her again, and saw that her whiskers had lowered back down, though pulled back somewhat. "No. No, that's not it."

"You avoid my questions and thoughts like a weasel from a wolf. Listening to you speak, and hearing your answers, I would think..." Rayya frowned, looking down at the sand between them for a second. "I would think that you do not like me back. But you still come out, every morning, and smile when you see me. I have seen that kind of smile before, Lori."

*Lori.*

"You are happy to see me, and you hug me, and we dance. Sometimes it is not *true* dancing; sometimes it is."

"Rayya..."

She tilted her head, just a little bit, and adjusted how she sat. Her other paw came down to rest on his hand, slightly-calloused pads on smooth skin. "You are the snake that cannot stop eating: caught between fulfilling his need and tearing himself apart. Is that it?"

So many things filled his head whenever he looked at her, not the least of which was the nervousness stemming from his upbringing and his family. Before he knew what he was doing, he squeezed around those fingers – which brought her smile back, though only slightly. That in itself was enough to warm him, and in that moment, the rest of his anxieties melted away. She'd leaned in a little bit closer, and with so little space between them he could actually pick out her scent, high and clear, the faintest bit musky. Sometimes that scent lingered on his clothes after he went home.

Then he realized what he was thinking, and what he was doing. The wood elf turned his head and coughed, forcing himself to look out over the water again. It hadn't been something he'd brought up with her before.

“Well, it’s... Rayya, I *do* like you. I don’t think you need me to tell you that.” Beside him, the lynx muttered something to herself in her native tongue, which to him sounded like an equivalent of a snarky *you don’t say*. Despite himself, he smiled. “But, I mean... it’s socially unacceptable, you know. It would be.”

“What would?”

“You and-” He tripped over the words. “You and I. Us. And then there’s the... the whole... um...”

Out of the corner of his eye he noticed her nose twitch, and then again. They had a peerless sense of smell, the wilders: she’d embarrassed him on a few different occasions with that. Good thing her head was no longer in his lap. Gods, how was he supposed to say this?”

“Well, see, I don’t think I... would really... *like*...”

“Me?”

“No, no! Not that! It’s – well, during the, *you know*, with a – someone else, I don’t think I’d like to be the... the one who... does the...”

That head-tilt deepened. “You lay with other men.”

“What? No! Well – *maybe*, but I mean specifically, with a... woman, I think I...”

Rayya gave a nonchalant shrug. “Lori, do not worry. It is complicated. You know, my first kiss was with a woman.” She squeezed his hand again. “And my second. And my third.”

“And your fourth?”

“No.”

“No?” Lortian blinked and looked over at her.

She was facing the lake; it took a moment for her golden eyes to flick his way. “My fourth was you.”

He remembered that, *very* clearly. The shivers it had sent down his back, and the warm flutters in his chest even though it had hardly lasted a second and a half... the smile she’d had afterwards still hung in his mind, too, a lovely image burned into his thoughts.

“Was I your first?”

The elf shifted again, leaning more fully back against the trunk of the tree with his hands propped against the smooth, soft sand. “Yeah. You were.”

Rayya remained silent for a moment, though he resisted glancing over to get a look at her face. A moment later he felt like he really should have, though – since right then both of those strong paws affixed to his shoulders and yanked him forward away from the tree, then pushed him down so he sprawled out across the sand. His breath left his body in a fast puff, and before he had the chance to

catch it, all of that densely-muscular lynx pinned him down to the shore, paws on his wrists above his head and legs across his, the simple hide covering she wore around her chest hanging precariously.

All he could think to do was... well, nothing. Past experience had taught him already that he couldn't squirm his way out of Rayya's grasp, especially with her in such an advantageous position as *this*. So instead he just watched her watch him, golden predator's eyes flicking carefully back and forth across his face. Her nose twitched as if she caught an interesting scent-

-which, she probably *did*; one thing that kept Lortian's cheeks burning was the awareness of what her physical closeness did to him and his body-

-and she tilted her head again. "May I ask you something else, Lori?"

"I don't..." He gave a weak struggle, and sure enough, those paws clung tight. "...don't really have a choice, do I?"

"I was your first kiss." Rayya pursed her lips and shrugged, as if waving that off as something small, inconsequential – though her ears, her short tail, her eyes, suggested she felt otherwise. Especially her eyes. "I would also like to be your *first*."

Yet again Lortian was about to ask about that, and then yet again, she gave him no chance to do so. Paws still keeping his arms pinned above his head, the lynx lowered herself down and – and pressed herself against him, her lower body covered in a similar simple wrapping of hide. Despite that, the first thing to reach his senses other than his own strain and squeeze and throb was an intense, concentrated heat, growing warmer the longer she remained against him.

A bit... wet, too, coming into his notice when she gave her hips a little churn. The elf swallowed.

"W-well," he began, "I-"

"Do you like this, Lori?" She adjusted her position a bit, squeezing his legs between her knees so she could more easily rub her lower body against his. After a few seconds of that, the lynx then brought both his arms up above his head so she could keep them still beneath one paw, and ran the other down his chest; the feeling of calloused pads and sharp claws, just barely tracing along him through his shirt, made him shiver all over again. "Your kind... baffles me. With my own, we can tell when someone wants us. With you, I *think* I can smell it on you... I know your body does. But I want to ask." That paw above his head picked one of his hands away from the other, to bring it up to her chest – and right beneath that hide wrapping. Lortian swallowed: hot, soft flesh beneath smooth fur, heavy weight of her breast in his palm. After a moment he realized she no longer held his hand there. "Do *you* like it?"

Just as she said, his body responded in turn: every time she grinded down against him, he lifted up and pressed right back. A squeeze of his hand around that weight, a slight movement so that her nipple lined up between his fingers, a gentle rolling back and forth over that point of soft, warm flesh... and he slid his other hand down from above his head to rest along her waist, fingertips just barely teasing at the rim of her clothing.

What an odd mixture of feelings. There was definitely the attraction and the arousal, and the nervousness still thrummed in his chest and his throat, but just the fact that it was *her*, that it was

Rayya... Lortian forced himself to look up and meet her gaze, and found it to be easier than he'd expected.

He pulled in a breath, licked his lips, swallowed, let that breath out. "Yeah. I think – I think I *do* like it."

That answer brought a satisfied purr from the lynx's throat, rumbling down through her chest so that he could feel it in his thumb cupped around the side of her breast. A little bit more adjustment with her straightening up above him, his hand falling down towards her flat belly – with strong lines of muscles hidden beneath the smooth fur – and some working at that hide, and... next thing he knew that scrap of clothing had fallen down away from her body and across his own chest, leaving her naked from the waist up.

"See?" That paw closed on his hand again, guiding him slowly around and up her body. He'd felt her before, sure – that was just a natural result from their time spent dancing among the trees - but never really *felt* her. Not like this. "That is not so bad, is it, Lori? *With a woman*, paah. I can *show* you a woman."

Words failed him then. He resigned himself to watching her, half-propped up on his other elbow while his one hand continued to trace and circle along her almost-bare waist. Golden eyes remained on his face as Rayya reached down, took his wrist in her paw again, and showed him what to do: this time she had him lift up beneath the front of her skirt (that was the best word he could think of for it), brush against a thinner, softer fabric beneath... and then press more firmly in, against that hot slickness that he'd felt against his own burgeoning arousal a moment ago.

"Go on," she purred. "I will not hold your paw through all of this. The kitten must learn to walk on its own."

Another swallow, another lick of the lips, another sigh. It wasn't so hard to curl his fingers around behind that fabric, to brush his knuckles back up against warm, wet lips beneath... and then it also wasn't hard to have her squeeze his wrist, and move him to tug that fabric to the side out of the way. Not hard at all. Lortian guided himself from there, angling his hand back and up to run a pair of fingers along that slick slit, to gently feel along the silk skin and dripping desire... to send little shivers and jerks through the lynx's body above him, he'd found.

Her paw pressed down against his chest, retractable claws poking through the fabric of his shirt and into his skin. Lortian didn't mind, though; there was one spot around there, a little point of flesh right at the peak of those lips that *really* made her squirm and shiver, and one time along the way even buck her hips down against his hand. Fingers touching, pressing, exploring... finding a space, slipping up between squeezing walls, warm flesh. Rayya's entire body tightened on top of him again...

...and then as if his knuckles pushing up against her hit something just right, and maybe it did, she moved back along his thighs and swiftly busied herself with yanking his pants down his legs. The elf raised his hips, reached up to brush a lock of sun-yellow hair out of his eyes – and then stopped there, the scent of Rayya and of rich wild arousal suddenly flooding his senses. His fingers glistened in the evening sun; a little bit of that slickness clung to the side of his forehead where he'd touched.

And then the feeling of that same hot wetness drawing up along the underside of his length threw him back into his present circumstances. His eyes flicked over the view in front of him: Rayya with her legs

back and one paw keeping his cock angled up towards her, *her* eyes half-lidded and maw open, ears splayed, whiskers relaxed... and then everything tensed up all over again as soon as she started to lower herself down onto him.

The *feeling* of that... his back arched and he lifted up into her again, trying to sink his way deeper into that warmth, that heat, that squeezing slickness. Rayya bore down on him in much the same manner, steadily pressing down until she'd gotten him fully buried inside of her. No longer did he notice the approaching chill of the evening, or the whispering of the wind in the boughs overhead, or the scent of marigold on the air – though admittedly *that* one had ended up buried beneath another stronger, more pressing aroma.

Speaking of *pressing* – now the lynx had both her paws on his chest, one over the other, squeezing down against him so she could push herself back and grind her hips to his, him still hilted inside of her. The heat of those eyes, the warmth and weight of her body on his, the *knowledge* of what they were doing... hard to focus on any one thing, especially as Rayya pushed her claws against his chest and started to pull herself slowly back up, but Lortian felt fairly certain he was enjoying this.

Rayya felt similarly, of course. That much was clear in the shivering that continued to rack her body, as well as the ragged panting and soft moaning, and the rhythmic squeezing around his length each time she pressed down against him. Again and again, that feeling bouncing up through his body and leaving his parted lips in a shaky, breathy moan; steadily the lynx picked up speed and force, working her hips forward and back in that rhythm, slapping her thighs against his, digging her claws into his chest. Lortian's eyes fluttered shut, and he tilted his head back... only to have it tilted forward again with one of those paws firmly buried against his hair.

Then there was another kiss, smaller firmer lips on his, sharp needlelike teeth against his tongue, soft wet sandpaper pressing its way in. *Hungry* – that would be the best way to describe how she kissed him: digging in, sucking along his tongue, trying to pull it into her own mouth. Swirling her own against and under his lips, breaking the kiss to catch her breath, diving right back in... pinching his lower lip between those sharp fangs, tugging back a bit, letting go. Beneath all of it she still worked her hips against his, riding him down into the sand.

His hips kept on going after she abruptly stopped, squeezing him down with surprising strength; he could feel the fast-approaching peak of his orgasm, urged and goaded on by that sweet, slick clenching around him. Openly panting, Rayya drew back out of the kiss and licked her lips.

"You already belong to the trees," she murmured, then tilted her head and sank her teeth into the side of his neck, *just* enough for him to feel the breaking of skin. The elf sucked in a gasp through clenched teeth. "I can make you belong to *me*, too, Lori..."

What would his father, what would his family think? Could he really continue doing this with her? Lortian swallowed and squirmed, feeling the slow, warm trickle of blood down along his neck, and settled his hands on her thighs. Nothing had happened yet: he could still stop her, could still get up and go home with his dignity intact... until she started right back in her rhythm, that was. And that sweet feeling, the scent of musk and arousal and *her*, of Rayya, started to swirl around his head again and purged those thoughts from his mind.

All of that was silly. Stupid, inconsequential. *This* was what he wanted, all in his body, his heart... his mind. The lynx's paw squeezed on his shoulder with her riding, bouncing his body gently forward and back across the sand; Lortian pulled in another gasp, this one slower, lower, sweeter; she clenched around him again, slowed her pace a bit, deepened her thrusts on him as if she could feel his approaching peak. She probably could, truthfully.

A pulse, a squeeze, a shock – and next thing he knew Lortian was digging his nails into her thighs much the same as she dug her claws into his shoulder, lifting the lynx's lower body up off the ground with his bucking into her. Quiet panting turn to louder, voiced moans, and the pleasure of his orgasm rippled and bounced through him and into her: Rayya wrapped her legs down underneath his and squeezed tight, keeping the elf buried inside of her as he unloaded, ensuring that she drew out every drop.

For a moment his entire body remained tensed, like a string pinched and pulled at both ends; then he relaxed, the satisfied exhaustion crashing through him in waves. Still Rayya remained down on him, the last twinges of his peak echoing out through his body, and his length still buried inside of her. She gave a few more small bucks, then started to pull herself back up... and smiled with Lortian's shivering moan from the feeling.

Still, though, she hadn't finished with him. The lynx leaned forward over him, one paw on his shoulder and the other tilting his head up to face her, other leg drawn up over his body. This wouldn't be the first time she'd pinned him to the ground like this – but last time her breasts hadn't been hanging down in the air above him, and he wasn't tingling all over with a strong orgasm brought on by her, and he couldn't taste and smell her on his face like this.

She watched his face for a moment, claws lightly tracing over the line of his jaw. "See?" Her little pink tongue flicked out over her lips. "That was not so bad. Afraid of nothing, this kitten. I think... you might even have liked it."

Lortian swallowed, wetted his lips, swallowed again. Then, still panting, he nodded. "Yeah." His exhaustion audibly weighed down his words. "I did. A – a lot."

Tiny little *mrowr*, followed by a nuzzling, a nipping, and another kiss at his neck, right along the spot that stung and throbbed quietly. The elf squirmed.

"Ah..." She poked at it with her fingers, making him wince. Was that saliva or blood? "You will want to cover that up..."

Lortian made his way back through the woods later that night again feeling a torrential mix of different things. The nervousness and reluctance, the conflict, something that bordered almost on guilt... and then the brighter, fuller feelings that always bubbled in his chest when he danced with that lynx. Tonight had been a different kind of dance, and if anything, it instilled those feelings even more solidly.

There *would* be a tomorrow. The elf pushed a tall bush out of his way and stepped over it, the lights of the estate coming in across the next hill; then he reached up, scratched at a spot under his nose... and suddenly found himself thrown back for a few seconds to when she'd first pushed him down and tugged his hand between her legs, when he could feel her shaking and squeezing above him beneath his exploring fingers. There would definitely be a tomorrow.