

The More Things Change

by Maven Treecat

<https://www.weasyl.com/~maventreecat>

Content Warning: Object transformation, innuendo, silliness, implied vore.

"You want to transf-"

"Shhhhhhh!"

The red fox blinked at his adventuring friend, barely noticing the blush on their face as they flailed their hands in an attempt to quiet him. Maven often looked anxious and embarrassed, but they rarely *shushed* anybody over it.

"Not so loud, Oji," the squirrel-cat meeped, making enough of an effort to move Ojikori away from their small clerk office's door that the fox couldn't help but move along in pity of their friend's lack of physical strength. "I don't want people to know! *Epecially* not too many of the kobolds..."

"Why? Didn't you learn this was even a possibility *from* a kobold?" Ojikori asked.

Maven crossed their arms, looking away and leaning their butt against their neatly organized desk within the cramped closet-like room. "...yeah, but...I'm pretty sure Phife values fun more than a slave—current or not—getting a potentially risky power. And I'm not about to try and stop her..."

The fox snickered, especially after seeing the pout that got from the squirrel-cat clerk. "Right. And I'm guessing you ran out of other options for testing other than just snatching one your 'superiors' from off the street."

"It doesn't work on anything other than people, yeah..." the clerk muttered, choosing not to comment on the explorer's method of choice sourcing materials for his own proclivities. "It'd just be actual magic otherwise, instead of this...willpower thing. And I can't learn anymore without actually *doing* it. And you seemed the one of our party most likely to agree."

"What, couldn't convince one of your fellow clerks? Like the kobold paper-eater?"

"We don't talk about him."

"Or the kobold squirrel-cat eater?"

Maven's blush intensified as they gave a dirty look to the fox now stifling a guffaw. "Please do not refer to Mr. Bretram like that."

“Okay, okay,” the fox sighed as soon as he managed to suppress his laughter into a mere giant smile. “So...yeah! If it’ll help you figure out a new thing you can use, I can . Not like I have much to do at the guild right now.”

“...really?” his friend asked incredulously.

“I mean, yeah! Anytime you want to.”

The squirrel-cat’s large tail brushed against a stack of papers, only stopping its curious wave when the shuffle alerted its owner of the possibility their morning’s sorting might go to waste. Maven stood up, unintentionally brushing their chest against the slightly pudgy belly of the fox. “...well, this is my lunch break, so...could...could I try now?”

Ojikori’s ear flicked in mild surprise, but he shrugged anyway. “Don’t see why not!”

Maven swallowed nervously. “I...don’t really know how this will work. Like, length of time, how it will feel, what I can do...so, uh...you alright with that?”

The fox just nodded.

Maven shuffled around to behind their desk, scooching the chair out the mere foot of room it could before colliding with the rear wall and sneaking their lithe frame onto the revealed seat. “Right. Uh, well...one second.” From within their vest, they began to pluck out small vials of glistening, multi-colored liquids from small loops of stiffened fabric they’d sewn in, slotting each one instead into a tiny standing vial holder.

“Don’t have much magic myself, and magic’s the carrier for this particular willpower thing. So...have to scavenge back what little I have from these...” they explained, gesturing to Oji to take a seat somewhere. The fox chose the corner of the desk, scooting aside a small cup of pens and paper clips with their butt. It gave Oji a clear view of Maven bringing their hand to one of those plucked free vials and closing their eyes. It only took a couple of seconds, but it was obvious what was happening as the sparkles in the vial winked out of existence and the color paled.

Maven took a deep breath as they felt that tiny trickle of magic. Then, they looked to Oji. The fox couldn’t help but think of how strange a look it was on the squirrel-cat: their brown eyes were steady and focused, their face was set with determination, and their tail was eerily stilled.

Then the tail flicked, and Oji’s senses spun. He felt like he was tipping over, slipping from his seat on the desk’s corner and falling to the floor, but the impact never came. The fox had felt this once before, but this time the feeling was less disorienting, less insistent and selfish. It was as if his dizziness had a taste, and it tasted...sweeter.

"Can you move?" Maven asked, eyes still focused with intensity.

Ojikori dizzily looked to his left arm and shifted it around. It felt a little stiff, and the red fur had smoothed down and tanned into a burnt bronze color. "Y-yeah?" he mumbled.

"Aesthetic changes only at first," the squirrel-cat mumbled to themselves.

The fox's tail swayed, but then the explorer could feel it getting tugged down...and then he lost feeling entirely. He felt his arms hardening, shoulders locking up, and the fox's right arm began to sink into his darkening side. "F...feeling a little tight, Mv-*gblb*?"

Maven briefly looked concerned at the thick, black fluid that burbled out the corners of Oji's mouth, but, without breaking eye contact, they grabbed a heavily stained cloth and dabbed it at the corners of Oji's mouth. "Probably shouldn't talk now. Don't want to get ink stains on my papers. I'll ask you after," the squirrel-cat instructed, the voice unusually even like that of a manager.

Ink? Oji thought, looking down. The dizziness increased, and the desk was beginning to rush closer and closer. A shiny gold band stretched around where his hips used to be. Black, polished wood seemed to replace skin and muscle, but his innards felt as if they were straightening out into firm metal. His legs twisted around each other, and Oji fell onto his side; however, almost nothing else on the desk was knocked about; his entire body now took no more space than his fluffy fox butt had. "But w-*ghmmf!*"

The fox's words were cut off as his mouth stretched, a gold cap pressing out and forcing his head to tilt back. Tighter and tighter, stiffer and stiffer, smaller and smaller...and then Oji's transformation finished with a tiny clatter.

Maven picked up the pen, turning it between their fingers and especially looking at the gold fox's face that decorated the side of its top where the pocket-clip met the cap. Their expression slowly relaxed, a curious but anxious grin replacing that determined, dominant visage. "Looked like...four stages? About...20, 25 seconds. Assuming no resistance. And, as I thought, it's really hard to prevent the subject from shining through at least a little, even if you want to!" the squirrel cat rattled off excitedly. "I guess you'd have to *really* have a more powerful will and a stronger mental image for someone than they do for themselves to completely suppress their identity or personality. This makes sense! Now, about-

WHAM!

The office door slammed open, sending the squirrel-cat leaping out of their chair. An orange-scaled kobold walked in. "Hey, Maven, what's with these new forms?" he chirped, looking down at the stack of papers in his hand as he approached the desk and stepped up the

small platform to put him eye-level. It would have been eye-level, at least, if Maven were perching in their seat as usual. The kobold looked up...and even further up. "...do you always eat lunch on your filing cabinets?"

The spooked squirrel-cat cleared their throat, petting down their on-end fur with their free hand as they climbed down. "Yes! No! Sometimes," they squeaked, sitting themselves down in their seat. "A-and the new forms, Mr. Bertram, are for the new zoning system the council passed during their latest meeting. I tried to make them so we don't have to do too much resorting with all our existing zoning files."

"Right, right," he said with a nod. "So...what even is a 'mauve district' for?"

Maven gulped. "I uh...I don't know. But it's supposed to be near red districts."

"...we have a red district?"

The squirred-cat shrugged with a baffled expression. "And, if you want to know about the others... the 'presidential zoning' is just what we're calling the residential zones in the First District now, I think. And...I don't know anything about 'bacon zones'. I think one of the council members might've just got hungry when they were talking about making a new system? But I'm putting it next to 'agricultural districts' just in case."

Bertram looked at the sheet and nodded. "Right, right...well, it *is* a pretty good reason to make a district."

It wasn't.

"Guess the Council knows what they're doing!"

That's also being generous.

"Keep up the good work, Maven." The squirrel-cat's former owner and current boss turned to walk off and out, but paused. "Oh right! One more thing."

Their ears perked. "Yes, Mr. Bertram?"

Bertram reached over the desk and plucked the sturdy pen out of Maven's hands. "My best pen broke. Borrowing yours, thanks!" With that, he hopped off and strolled out from the closet. "Ooh, wow, is this made from towercap? Huh, wonder why there's one of those weird dogs on the top."

THUD-click!

Maven blinked and looked at their empty hand. All that fur and fluff that had been patted down from the startle started rising again as a chill ran down their spine. They looked back to the freshly closed door. And, as they began to sweat, a tiny whimper escaped their lips.

“...oh no.”

Bertram *flumped* into his own desk chair, still mildly grumpy from the morning’s bad news. The upper-class kobold actually had to come into work...to *do work*. It was clearly the grandest injustice for a rich kobold in the kobold-dominated city of Lark, especially one so lucky to have an actually productive, disciplined, and educated slave—well, no, *employee* now—to offload almost the entirety of his government work to. But one of Maven’s conditions for being retained as an employee was that he couldn’t make them forge his signature anymore...and, with the Council’s new declarations, he had a small stack to sign through.

The kobold had no way of knowing that the pen he twisted felt the strange sensation of its upper body being turned like an owl’s head...or that the pen tip and inkwell that emerged from its hiding spot was making something feel as though its entire insides were getting gently tugged down through its legs and out its toes. He certainly had no way of knowing those uncomfortable sensations felt *good*, either...almost as good as the sensation of feeling ink drain from its core as the kobold signed his name on page after page. And he definitely didn’t know the pen was somewhat aware of its surroundings, able to hear his grumpy complaints.

“Bacon district...great, now *I’m* hungry,” the leading bureaucrat muttered. It wasn’t as though he was *entirely* oblivious of his line of work; he knew the Council often made new rules just for the sake of using the power their age afforded them. “And there’s nothing to eat around here! ...nothing except...”

The kobold shook his head. “Hrmph. Really gotta stop thinking about that. Folks are gonna think I’m having a *thing* with them,” Bertram muttered, still embarrassed even alone in his office as the soul in his new pen squirmed with every movement of its tip across the various papers. “Why’d they have to go and put that in their new contract? ...right, just because they think of everything, I’m sure.”

He tapped the pen’s top against his muzzle thoughtfully, maw cracking a thoughtful smirk. “...maybe I could eat some other slaves *first*...then folks might think I just enjoy putting otherkin in their place! And then there’d be no problem getting that honey-glazed...”

Bertram groaned and clapped the pen down on the desk, the impact sending that trapped mind spinning. “Nope! Nope. Not thinking about that again. Just going to get a grilled stuffed beetle at the local eatery once this stack is done.”

A gentle rap against the outside of his office door, and the kobold took a deep breath. Only one person actually knocked like that in this office. "Yeah, Maven? C'mon," he called to the door.

The squirrel-cat pressed in, their tail *shuffling* through the tiny opening they'd made between door and doorframe. "H-hi! Mr. Bertram," they said, eyes immediately snapping to the pen on his desk. "Just...came by to show you the filing changes!"

"Oh, I'm sure they're fine," the kobold hummed with a shrug.

"Oh! Well, still, I made this cheat sheet. In case you need to find anything." Maven scampered up to the desk and placed the paper down in front of their boss. "You know, if a friend needs a favor or something. Look here," they began, pointing to one particular diagram they'd hand-drawn as their tail began to arc up, carefully sneaking around their arm and aiming to keep out of Bertram's peripheral vision. "This is for the new zoning laws. They're fitting between these categories. And..."

"Uhh, yeah! Gotcha, Maven," the kobold said. "Now, I'll just be..."

Maven's eyes momentarily glanced away from the paper to the unattended pen. Popping free from that golden cap, a red fox ear flicked into reality and tapped against the desk. Their tail jumped in alarm, instantly giving up the attempt to surreptitiously steal back their helpless friend. The squirrel-cat, in a moment of pure adrenaline, snuck a hand into their vest and tapped on a vial. The pen shuddered as it began to warp, the ear becoming transparent and shiny as the pen buckled and warped. "AND THE NEW FORMS are in the second drawer because I'm keeping the old ones for templates just in case the Council reverts their decision! Never know if the other offices are having enough trouble to cause actual problems," they gasped, pointing frantically with the other hand at their hastily-made cheat sheet and only barely managing to quiet their voice down again once they had momentum.

"...that...makes sense. Are you alright, Maven?" Bertram questioned, an eye-ridge raising skeptically at the squirrel-cat. "You seem more jumpy than usual. And that's saying a lot."

"Just...peachy!" Maven said, grinning in an entirely unconvincing manner as Ojikori continued to fluctuate and worm about. Each part of the fox was folding, stretching, shifting, reverting, and re-transforming at different times creating an unsettling mash of red and white fox with clear and hard material.

"...what's a peach?"

"It's a pink fruit that the books say sometimes grows outside!" the squirrel-cat yipped, now genuinely concerned the experience might be awful for their fellow adventurer. It wasn't...it was just very, very weird and strangely...

"Are...they a particularly calm fruit or something?" the kobold asked in confusion.

"I DON'T KNOW!" Maven squeaked.

Bertram sighed and leaned back away from the paper. "...okay, well, if you're sure! You're in a lot less often thanks to that Hearty Malt Reminiscence-"

"You mean the Heartland Milk Resistance, my adventuring job with the OWO?"

"Yeah that," the orange kobold said with a nod. "But yeah, want to make sure the time you do have here is productive....and, uh...good."

"Yessir! Thank you for the considerations," Maven said with an emphatic nod of their head.

Their boss reached for their borrowed pen, Maven's heart jumping as they realized too late what he was going for. They grasped around the object and accidentally folded one of the arms in. They paused at the strange *tap* noise that sounded out and lifted what they'd grabbed.

In his hand were a pair of oval eyeglasses with red and white frames and two hinged ear-pieces. He unfolded the arm he'd accidentally collapsed against the inside of a lens and held it up to the lamplight. "...what the..."

"Oh! My new pair of glasses! I was wondering where those went," Maven exclaimed hastily, tail swiping the glasses out from Bertram's hands and settling them on their nose, the arms tucking into the fur below their ears with a perfect fit. Ojikori had never given thought to sitting on the squirrel-cat's face before, but they also never imagined having Maven seeing straight through all of their body and innards like *this* either. "Thank you for finding them, Mr. Bertram! Alright hope the cheat sheet helps bye!"

Bertram watched the fur flee, utterly baffled at just what had occurred. It was only when the door was gently closed despite the clerk's expeditious retreat that the kobold felt a little less worried. At least *that* was in character for Maven. "...didn't know they even wore glasses."

Maven might've left a flying trail of papers had they not built up years of experience trying to be generally as little of an inconvenience as possible. Whatever paperwork did float into the air from their hasty clocking out was quickly returned by a grasping tail without a missed step. "Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!" the squirrel-cat seemed to say to their kobold co-workers they passed; who else could the furfolk clerk possibly be apologizing to?

Given how focused they were on their new glasses and those papers, it was little surprise that, after rushing out into the streets of Lark, that they finally missed something...by hitting it.

THUD! “Akk!”

The clerk and the misfortunate passerby both collapsed to the ground as various items scattered about onto the hewn stone ground. Maven was cushioned by their own floofy tail, falling back onto a mattress of pure fluff. The kobold was merely sturdy; they had to be, as accident-prone as they were.

“Oh, geez, I’m really sorry!” the squirrel-cat gasped, scrambling up and rushing to the elderly blue-scaled kobold to offer them a hand up. “Are you okay?”

“Yessum, fit as a hatchlin’!” the kobold chuckled as the furfolk hoisted him to his feet. “Not a single scratch. Not as fragile as you fleshy slaves, y’know?”

Maven didn’t bother correcting him as they brushed themselves off. “Are you sure? I’m really sorry again.”

“Mhm!” the kobold commented, bending down briefly to pick up something off the ground. “Let me just get my glasses and...huh.” He tapped the glasses he’d just then placed on his muzzle.

“What’s wrong?” Maven said, absent-mindedly picking up a nearby pair of glasses and their tote bag, their tail lifting the kobold’s own bag up to their hands.

“Hm...must’ve jostl’d my eyes pretty good,” he grumbled as he grabbed his bag. “Can’t see anything through these lenses. And the nosepiece feels weirdly soft too...”

Maven looked at the glasses in their hand. The square lenses and wirey frames were utterly unfamiliar to the bureaucrat. Slowly, they tilted their head up, wide eyes looking at the muttering kobold. There, upon his snout, perched the rounded, non-prescription lenses and that red and white frame...only now the bridge of the glasses sported two small vulpine buttcheeks, Ojikori’s emerging ass seated firmly upon the stranger’s face. A tail popped free, flopping down along the length of the kobold’s snout, white tip swishing in front of those flared nostrils and coaxing a small sneeze from the kobold.

Panic flooded the squirrel-cat’s brain once more, one hand slipping into their vest and the other thrown towards the increasingly conspicuous spectacles that risked making a spectacle of another kind.

"Hmm, who's your owner, big tail?" the elderly kobold muttered, shaking his bag at the large, blurry figure that could only be the rare sight of a furfolk walking about in the First District. He sneezed again as the tail tickled his nose even as it slurped back into that helpless rear once more, the glasses warping and slowly losing their transparency. "Need to know who's gonna be paying for my new glasses order and adding a bunch more onto your no-doubt sizable debt, *hrmhm*."

"V-very sorry, sir!" the submissive clerk squeaked, scrambling forwards and almost barreling into the old, rich passerby. The alarm only grew when, reflected in the last shine of those increasingly opaque lenses, Maven spotted their friend's embarrassed expression and those spirals for eyes. "H-here! Please try my glasses instead!" Their tail snatched the morphing mass away as they flipped the square lenses hastily onto the kobold's snout.

The blue-scale adjusted the 'new' lenses, harumphing as his eyes adjusted. "Hm! What d'y'know. These lenses work just fine," he mused. "Nice square lenses, too...pity they're from a furfolk. Still, s'ppose nobody'll know if nobody says." His eyes cast sharply to the squirrel-cat's turned back. "...right?"

Maven slammed their hand into their friend, feeling the tough hide stretch around their fingers and palm and creak from the snug fit. They turned around with a smile, wringing their hands together. "Y-yessir! Those are some wonderful kobold-made lenses, none better. They clearly were made exactly to your specifications, as befits your rank!" they flattered with full sincerity.

The kobold nodded with grin. "Heh. Y're a sharp one," he chuckled, resuming his usual mirth. "If only all you furs knew place like that. Off you go, then."

The squirrel-cat resumed their escape, their pace now tempered with caution in a particularly stiff speed-walk, wringing their hands with more and more intensity as if to smash the last changes of their friend into place with their other, unadorned hand.

Ojikori had certainly never expected to be filled by Maven, but he was forced to admit from that unique feeling that he fit like a glove...a red and white whiskered climber's glove.

Maven had intended to beeline towards the OWO, a safe place they knew they could debrief (or at least deglove) their friend and at least *initially*-willing test-subject. But they found it hard to say no, especially when the initial request for attention was a firm grip and yank on their tail.

"You! Weird fur thing!" the chirp came as Maven squeaked and reflexively turned to follow that casual manhandling's direction. "A moment!"

“Y-yes?” they responded, voice a full octave higher from the pain still echoing through the base of that enormous butt-anchored limb.

The tigger was a seated merchant, pink-scaled and grinning wide as only the happiest kobold could. Their booth, labeled “Rock-Hard Playthings”, was filled with an assortment of rocks and the occasional strange bucket of trinkets. “Sixen see glove!” she observed cheerfully.

Maven gulped, color draining from their face. “.g-glove?”

“Yes!” the kobold cheered again. “It like Sixen magic!”

They felt cold, colder than the under-mountain city usually made them feel. “I-it is?”

“Yes! It weird! Let Sixen see!”

Mouth agape, there was little they could do to stop the merchant from tugging the glove off their hand. They shifted uneasily as the kobold looked intensely at the red-and-white leather. From the sign and those words, they thought it was pretty clear what Sixen’s wares were. However, as they finally looked about the booth...Maven just felt confused. It...didn’t seem like her goods were transformed individuals.

“Hmm! Yes! Weird!” Sixen hummed, licking the glove. The squirrel-cat shuddered at the thought of tasting leather, but it was nothing compared to how Ojikori felt being licked in such a state. “...tastes like arcane, but is not! Life in it still...like druid magic! Even Sixen not make things like this!”

“Y-you haven’t?” the squirrel-cat commented. “But your items...”

“OH!” the merchant gasped, tossing the glove to the side of her table, “You have interest?”

“Are...the rocks magical?”

Sixen beamed. “No! They are good rocks, though!” The declaration made Maven look again at the plain stones that looked as if they’d been lifted from the ground nearby. “You like? Sixen may trade...five rocks for glove! Sixen want to take apart and study, yes!”

Maven didn’t want to think of what would happen to Oji if ‘taken apart’. “It’s...not for sa-”

“Hard bargain! Six rocks, and will add Sixen magic soap!” The kobold nodded with full confidence she’d made an impeccable deal. “You look like slave that gets dirty often!”

Maven didn't know how to take that. They especially didn't know how to take that when looking at the bar of soap, flecked with charcoal and scale-shavings. All they knew was this merchant wasn't going to let them leave without earning the glove. And already the squirrel-cat was beginning to see motion from the supposedly inanimate object, a tiny black nose twitching out from the garment's middle finger. They reached into their vest.

"Hmm, okay, okay. Sixen see you are discerning," the pink kobold spoke, voice full of approval despite the increasingly costly trade. "Sixen say....six rocks, soap, and metal clip!" She leaned forward, not even noticing the squirrel-cat's attention being primarily focused towards the cast-aside glove. "Metal clip go on food package...and amplifies flavor of food inside over twenty-four hours! Good for special occasions."

"Uhh...how about...instead of the rocks, six tindertwigs?" the well-dressed clerk offered.

"What! That is silly," the kobold gasped, shocked. "Rock *much* more special than tindertwig! Besides, you no know Sixen tindertwig. They only work underwater!"

"That...means they're all the more special!" Maven said, offering their best diplomatic smile. "Besides...I would not be able to carry such...valuable rocks in my bag as easily. It is a price I must pay for convenience."

"You generous! Sixen accept, weird fur thing!" the kobold eagerly clapped.

Maven nodded with a swallow. "Uh, then...if it's okay with you, as an extra, you could...bind my items up with that rubber band?" They pointed to the counter.

Sixen followed the pointed finger, looking at a red-and-white rubber band. "Of course! Only fair. Convenience for convenience!" she clapped, taking the band, stretching it wide a few times to test it, and then double-banding the elastic strap around the bundled items and handing the handy bundle off to the squirrel-cat. "Sixen pleasure! What name of weird fur thing? Pronouns? Species?"

"Uhh...Maven Treecat. They/them, I guess? Squirrel-cat. A pleasure."

Sixen waved as Maven shuffled guiltily off. "Maven! Is very good to meet you! Look forward to business more!"

Maven glanced down, his fellow adventurer now feeling his entire body pulled to an impossible degree, wrung around himself and full of tension that didn't usually come from exercise or even a fun romp. "...I'm...really going to need to go back and give her some money," they confessed to the bundle. "She...actually seemed nice. In a kobold way. I feel like a thief..."

Ojikori didn't have the capacity to bring up the squirrel-cat's talents with disabling locks and stealing things. It was probably for the best, especially as the merchant behind them began confusedly looking for where she'd put that glove.

Past the First District and its upper-class residences and stores, through the bazaar's more prestigious stalls and displays, the squirrel-cat slowly made their way down the tiered districts towards the Organization for Wayward Otherkin's more humble location. Their pace alternated between panicked sprints past kobolds who might've had reason to stop them and careful plodding to not draw attention or cause accidents.

Ojikori, however, could feel his tension building and building. He was doing his best to keep it together, but an increasing ache in his entire body started driving him to squirm and resist. The inexperienced transformer's effect started to wane as it had before. But the more he resisted, the more that pressure built and built. He could feel himself tugging against himself, harder and harder. He had to...he couldn't... he had to find release!

Strrrrrrrrrrch...

Maven's ear flicked, their attention drawn suddenly to their bundle. That noise was one a pencil-pusher knew well enough to suddenly feel terror. What would even happen to their friend in such a scenario? But they couldn't think of a solution. "H-hold it together, Oji...please..." they whimpered.

Strrrrrrrrrrr....

"Please? Oh geez, oh geez..."

STRRRRRR...

"Oh...heck."

POP!

Maven's newly purchased tindertwigs, clip, and soap clattered to the ground as they shoved their hand into their vest one final time. Their last alchemical extract drained of its magic as they desperately looked at the violently snapped-off band of elastic flipping through the air. They kept their eye trained on the tiny broken object as it tumbled, unable to justify not picking up their discarded items in order to chase after what observers surely saw as a now-useless office supply. They couldn't follow, not until seconds after it disappeared from view...

Twap! "Ow!"

Collecting the dropped items in their tail and racing forward, they found the source of the cry only a few seconds later. She was rubbing her head, jaw slack, and picking back up her veiled, witchy hat that misled many who did not know her actual profession. Maven did know, though; the druid was the *last* person they'd wanted to find. "....a-...are you okay Phife?"

The orchid-scaled kobold smirked. "Mm...that's not a very nice greeting, Maven," she hummed.

"S-sorry! I kind of...dropped everything and something got away from me!" they fibbed, eyes glancing around the ground immediately after noticing Phife wasn't particularly injured.

"Oh? It felt like a rubber band shot from a naughty hatchling," she pressed, eyes focusing in on the anxious investigator she knew. "Are you sure you weren't being naughty and hoping for an extended...vacation in my care?"

"Very!" Maven meeped, finally seeing what they were looking for and snatching it from the ground. They held up a tiny, folded-over mass of red and white rubber. "S-see? It was rubber, yes, but...just a kneadable eraser!" As if to demonstrate, they squeezed the mass in their hand, mentally apologizing to Oji for what must've felt like their entire self being humiliatingly mashed, kneaded, and massaged in an uncaring vice.

Phife watched, eye-ridge raised skeptically. Her skeptical look lingered, and Maven shifted with the knowledge that no one was more qualified to uncover their guilty experiment than the one he'd learned of this power from in the first place. "...well, you're *usually* an honest sort, Maven," she relented, "but you *did* make me drop this new gum I was trying."

"Gum?" Maven watched as the kobold leaned down and plucked a sizable chunk of drool-coated material from the dirty ground.

"Mhm," she said, wordlessly motioning her hand over the lump and coaxing *prestidigitation* to clean the substance of dirtiness. "Not really irrecoverable for a magic-user like me, but...now I have to live with the knowledge I'm chewing something that was on the city streets for the rest of today. And that is *really* unkind."

"I'm...in a bit of a rush, but...what could I do to make it up to you?"

Phife grinned, Maven's response all too predictable. "Swing by my place tonight. Cassidy can make do for *one* night, can't she? And tomorrow morning, we'll be even. Sound good?"

Maven's shift of weight to their side was just as much from embarrassment as it was nervousness. "O...okay. Can do, Phife."

“Good!” She popped the gum into the back of her mouth and began to chew, slowly and firmly grinding her rear teeth over the resisting material. “Have a good rest of your afternoon, and I’ll see you tonight,” she casually smacked around her current oral fixation before walking down the street, tail happily swishing from side to side.

Maven shivered as they resumed the final stretch towards sanctuary. “Only figures I’d end up on the receiving end after all this,” they relented to the eraser in their hand.

Inside Cassidy’s office at the Organization for Wayward Otherkin, the squirrel director off on business, Maven finally sighed in relief. “Thank goodness that’s over...I don’t have a single bit of magic left to keep you transformed! At least...it seems like it was lasting a little longer each time?”

They collapsed into the couch, tail dragging a chair nearby to serve as a seat for the red-and-white rubber. “I really hope nothing felt too bad...I mean, when I was changed, everything just felt...uncomfortable and alienating? But...I found it kind of...enjoyable in a way,” they confided. The sight of the rubber slowly beginning to grow and alter brought the squirrel-cat immense comfort. “Maybe it was like that for you?”

Maven might’ve gone on, except they slowly began to realize something was off. The mass grew no larger than a foot in height, and the texture of the red and white looked less fluffy and more...soft.

Their relaxed expression slowly melted away into a look of humiliated loss. With a final few *fluffs*, what was before them reverted to its original state. A small red fox plushie sat atop the chair, a small sign around their neck labeled with recognizable handwriting; it read, in Phife’s handwriting, “I’m a decoy!”

The office door opened, Cassidy smiling brightly as she put her bag up on the desk in the middle of the room. “Hi, Maven! Eager to help me out a little this afternoon again?” she asked, turning to the somewhat disheveled clerk that worked for her as an investigator. The perceptive squirrel, though, quickly picked up on the squirrel-cat’s expression. “...something happen?”

Maven’s tail slumped onto the couch cushions behind them. “Uh...” they quietly hummed, tenting their fingers, “...yeah. I think I might’ve...gotten someone e/se in trouble for a change.”

Cassidy put her hands on her hips and smirked knowingly. “Oh? And I suppose you’ve got a solution?”

The squirrel-cat rubbed the back of their head. "I...think I'm already committed to the solution. And it's...getting me in trouble. Again."

The OWO director chuckled and shook her head. "...some things never change."

Phife lowered herself onto her favorite seat with a satisfied sigh. She'd long lost count how many souls decorated her fancy hut, countless objects, toys, clothes, food items, trinkets, tools, and decorations entirely composed of the squirming selves of numerous unique and everyday individuals both. The only things that seemed to *not* squirm with a soul were the tiny plush animals fashioned after the species of her most enticing targets. Only one of her current collection of plush placeholders was missing.

"I so rarely get to be bad with you all, you know," she smacked, still grinding that same piece of gum between her teeth. "The trouble is you're all so fun and interesting and useful outside of my collection right now! And conspicuous, too. I have to be a good girl around you." Her reptilian tongue interrupted the chewing, rolling the lump out and away so it could curl around the gum possessively. "So I really have to treasure the time I do get to really *use* you."

The kobold reached into her mouth and plucked from her teasing tongue the drool-laden mass. Unlike Maven, her sense of transformative desire was both core to her and also keenly attuned after years of dominant delight; she could feel a fox squirming inside, too lost in the indescribable sensations of being something so entirely alien to a live, autonomous person. "...I occasionally get your bunny-cow friend," she said, fully aware of just how much awareness the adventurer had in such a state. "Your mouse friend isn't too hard to convince. The squirrel-cat visits whenever I've got just the right leverage, as you can obviously tell from my little game earlier. You, Oji? You're the second-hardest to snag."

Ojikori couldn't revert even slightly from this change, helpless except to drip with the druid's drool and be squeezed so pliantly between the kobold's fingertips. Phife's will was so crushing he was almost beginning to believe he *should* be just chewing gum.

Phife licked her lips. "I'm going to enjoy this rare opportunity. I might be changing a *little* for the better, but...in the end? The more things change, the more they stay the same. You and the rest of the HMR? There's no escaping being fantastic material for me to work with."

The fox began to feel himself shifting and changing yet again, his entire world and senses warped into an entirely new form beyond his ability to predict or control. *Maven's finding a new way to experiment*, he dizzily thought with as little decisiveness as possible.

Phife just cackled as she gleefully let her imagination run free. She had another toy to look forward to later that night, but she wasn't going to get tired of this anytime soon.