

## Stinks of Misfortune

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*Content warning: Implied vore, soft vore, monsters, implied digestion, and silliness.*

“Hey, you’re that furfolk alchemist, ain’t ya?”

Stank groaned from behind the counter, rubbing his temples. Nothing good came of greetings like that. Especially not in this hellhole of a kobold city. Why did he even sit behind the counter when nobody came to actually buy something from him? Sure, just gawk at the skunk trying to sell potions. “Yes, and the name’s Stank,” he dryly remarked, not even bothering to spin on his seat to face the nasally voice with any degree of haste. The least he could do as a free person in Lark, despite his second-class status as a furfolk, was give lip to the damn kobolds.

“Whatever, don’t care,” the vibrantly orange-scaled creature chirped, sneering in return to the uppity shopkeep. “Got a business proposition for you. Probably should listen, unless you’d rather rack up debt running a shitty store and end up a slave.”

Money was money, Stank had to admit. Maybe this proposition wouldn’t be an obvious loss. So he shuffled his robes straight as he slightly sped up his turning. He put on his best dopey smile, let his morning coffee help lift his eyelids a bit, and faced his prospective hirer. “Right, sorry. What can I do for you?”

Stank’s eye twitched slightly. If pressed, he’d excuse it on the caffeine. But he immediately he could tell he was dealing with the worst type of kobold. Fancy clothes, gold jewelry, an expression full of disdain...a real First District high-and-mighty kobold. And yet they were also the best chance at getting any amount of livable money. Especially when you didn’t have to convince their egos that they needed to hire you because they were coming to you. This was going to take a lot of willpower.

The kobold jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “I want you to train my slave in alchemy.”

The alchemist looked up, finally noticing what should’ve been obvious if he hadn’t grown accustomed to looking down to kobold-level. Dressed in a professional-looking blouse with ruffled cuffs and collar, long sleek black pants, and a well-polished leather belt with a silver clasp was a furfolk of moderate size. At first glance, they seemed like a feline from their hands and face. The markings, tufted ears, and far bulkier tail, one almost as long and girthy as they were tall and wide, suggested something more squirrel-like. A hybrid, perhaps? Even if all that didn’t stand out, Stank couldn’t help but notice the curvy mark on the furfolk’s neck.

“Train her...to what end?” Stank inquired, squinting at the slave.

“To the end of alchemy, stupid!”

Stank grit their teeth. Subtly. Hopefully. “Yes, but for...what purpose?”

“For alchemy! Good grief, you folk are some dense types, sometime. No wonder you’re helpless without us.”

*Resist spraying this guy, resist spraying this guy, resist spraying this guy...*

“Um, Mr. Stank?”

The skunk let go of the tension in his body, the light, awkward voice snapping his attention upwards once more. The other furfolk grimaced. “I’m a quick learner, I promise. I just want to be able to make basic stuff for Mr. Bertram here and...maybe eventually learn to do some of those self-changing effects?” they explained, hands fidgeting with themselves all while they spoke. All it would take would be the hip sway and this secretary would be a stereoty—nope, there it was. They really were doing it. He couldn’t stop his green eyes from rolling in his head. “I know I don’t have very much magical potential, I was already tested. But if even the little I have can do something then I-”

“Look, I’m not really...a great teacher,” the skunk sighed, immediately knowing a bad idea when he saw one. “Never taught before!” A lie, but Stank really didn’t want this guy to realize he was the one tasked with reigning in the alchemical nightmare that was a certain fennec. “And I think it’s bad business to give away all your secrets to...”

“2 gold per day’s lesson.”

“Done.”

*Fuck.*

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*Okay, maybe this isn’t so bad.*

Stank strode forward through the tunnels with his newest apprentice. Wearing striped pants, a heavy brown coat, and belt pouches upon belt pouches full of beakers, vials, and bottles, most of them filled, the skunk and his grin almost looked like a dashing adventurer. At least Maven had been impressed. Then again, the paper-pushing squirrel-cat seemed almost completely ignorant of anything outside the First District, so maybe he could’ve worn a tablecloth, swaggered about, and gotten the same effect out of the alchemist-in-training.

Maven followed behind, still in that usual professional attire, looking at the raw cave tunnels that surrounded them just as much as anxiously keeping an eye on the broad black tail

and its two white stripes. The moss, bugs, and mushrooms around all were clearly things they'd never seen before outside of the alchemy lab or occasional science class show-and-tell. But gathering your own reagents was part of alchemy, and Maven had been acing every lesson thus far, so...why not give it a go?

"Now," Stank commented, "the interesting thing about these tunnels is damper atmosphere. There's just as much soil down here as there is stone. So..."

"...that means it's a prime place for reagents we'd not find in the dryer mining tunnels, right? And that they're less likely to be pushed into because of less stability?"

"Right! For instance," the skunk continued, pointing to a stiff rod with a bulbous head, "that is a very young tower-cap. As adults, they're one of the few ways to get anything resembling wood without an out-of-mountain excursion. And nobody wants to make an out-of-mountain excursion just to get some wood."

Stank paused, looking over his shoulder. "...for both meanings, I guess."

"There's a second meaning?" Maven asked, tilting their head.

The skunk genuinely didn't know how to respond to that. So he just continued walking.

"Anyway, we're here looking for some glowcaps. Their spores help intensify reagents for light-affiliated spell effects. Good way of intensifying actual light fixtures for the rich fucks too."

Stank missed his apprentice's blush, the squirrel-cat busy misunderstanding what "fucks" referred to while the skunk caught a glimpse of something. Rushing into the small side passage he bent down at a small cluster of glowing mushrooms. "These," he clarified. "Now, we could just take them, but, since we only commonly need the spores, I usually let them be."

Stank uncorked a vial and drew a small knife from one of his belt pouches. Maven carefully leaned over the skunk's shoulder to watch. "You take the knife," the alchemist explained, performing the actions as he spoke them, "and gently scrape the gills underneath the cap. Angle the handle of the blade down so you can guide what spores you dislodge into your vial. You'll generally want to get about...an eighth of a vial from each. You could get more, but that'd take too long. We don't want to dally..."

"Why's that?" Maven asked, slowly mirroring the movements on a glowcap of their own, collecting the spores inside one of their own vials. "The atmosphere is so...breezy and warm! Nothing could possibly be **that** dangerous here..."

Stunned, Stank let go of the glow cap and looked at the blissfully ignorant squirrel-cat already reaching for another glowcup. *What...did...did they say...no. No-no-no-no.* The skunk knew far better from experience, but the squirrel-cat didn't even seem phased. He didn't even need to feel his spike of white head-hair moisten from damp clouds or the heat tickle the back of his neck. He grabbed his *clueless* apprentice, stood up, and began running.

It was only after two seconds of lead that the grimacing, wide-eyed skunk looked backwards. As soon as he did, as if called into action by some universal law, it roared into motion: a massive, pulsing, semi-transparent worm that filled the entire cavern passage. Its innards rippled in anticipation, hundreds of sharp chewing at the open air, trying to trap in whatever prey it could inside its cavernous maw to gulp down towards a slow, agonizing demise. "What did you think made the soil here actually fertile?!" Stank shouted at the now extremely sheepish and blushing apprentice, the skunk almost impressed at how the squirrel-cat managed to look more ashamed than alarmed as he barely kept pace. "And **never** say that! We are alchemists! We already tempt fate enough, **thank** you very **much**!"

*Okay, so, one slip-up*, the skunk thought as they ran, gritting his teeth as he took a sharp turn, dragging the long-tailed apprentice along with him. *That's fine, still a good student otherwise. I can do this.*

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*You've got to be kidding me.*

"Hey, Stank!" Maven called, smiling and waving, "I found a nice lady living out here!" Sure, there was a smiling, innocent-looking kobold with squinched eyes next to them. And sure, there was an old stone hut haphazardly carved out of the cave wall. But how the squirrel-cat didn't pick up on the skulls on the stalagmites, the skull ornaments, and the lady wearing an apron with what was clearly dried blood on it was honestly beyond the alchemist's capacity to understand.

*How did they even **find** this lady?!*

"Heeeeeeeey," Stank greeted, once again providing the biggest, most not-nervous grin he could manage given the situation and the alarm bells ringing in his head. "So, uh, my apprentice and I are just looking for reagents and, uh...we really are running behind, so...we'll be off!"

"But I was just about to make pot roast!" the old kobold chirped, hobbling towards the entrance of her home. "Please do stay, I could always use the help."

"I am pretty hungry..." the *stupid, stupid* squirrel-cat said, "I'd be happy to help!"

**"NOPE!"**

Stank didn't even allow Maven in the door, seizing them by the neck and yanking them on as he began sprinting. Maven caught a glimpse of a surprisingly more wide-eyed, spry, and maniacal kobold scrambling futilely after them, screaming an unmistakable hissed cry of "Nooooo! My meeeeeeeeat!"

"We are doing survival training before we take you outside next, I swear, Maven," Stank bemoaned as they ran. "Lesson two? **Skulls** and **blood stains** means **no**!"

*This day can't possibly get worse.*

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*If I warn against it, it'll happen anyway. If I say anything, it'll interrupt us. But I just know this squirrel-cat is going to say it. I'm waiting for it now.*

Stank kept his grip on the squirrel-cat's sleeve, dragging them through the pitch black tunnel they'd found themselves in. The air was completely still and quiet as Stank used a match to slowly navigate the turns, looking for any possible incline that could suggest a way back to the more readable tunnels.

"...it's awfully quiet," Maven said.  
*I knew you would, you nutty fool.*

Stank slowly raised the match to Maven's face, looking them dead in the eyes. Maven's eyes drifted towards the way they'd came, but Stank raised his other hand and pushed the face back towards him. "...just know," Stank sighed, "that in this moment...I hate you more than anything else right now."

Stank blew out the match with a tired expression, letting both alchemist and apprentice take a deep breath at the faint glow that still illuminated them. The skunk grabbed the squirrel-cat's wrist. Maven at least had the wisdom to know what that meant. The two began sprinting as a roar shook their bones and two huge claws swiped where they had once been. The glow slowly pursued them as they bumbled their way through the winding passages. "Lesson three: let the eerie quiet be eerie quiet so we don't have fate throwing angler-bears after us!" the skunk groaned in exhaustion.

*This isn't going to stop here, is it, universe?*

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The two quickly dove back down into the tunnels as pink tongues lashed out, ribbits echoing through the tunnels as the pair sought escape.

"We just got back to the city! Why is there a pack of giant frogs?!"  
"I...I thought we were safe! I just said 'We made it!'"  
"I am writing down everything you should literally never say when we get back!"

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Skunk and squirrel-cat both rounded the corner as the strange moss began slinking along the ceiling after them.

**"The coast is clear?! The coast is clear?! Really?"**

"I looked behind us! How was I supposed to know to look up?!"

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The loud rumble of the pursuing monster didn't overpower Stank's enraged cry.

**"HOW DID YOU FIND ANOTHER TUNNEL WORM?!"**

"I didn't say anything this time, I swear!"

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Stank wheezed from behind his shop's counter, his cloak and belt tossed carelessly aside onto his table in the back room. His head was only held upright by its position against the wall, his shoulders limp and his neck loose from exhaustion. Across from him, on a near-ruined bench, sprawled the squirrel-cat, slowly lapping water out from the half-open water skin that laid just centimeters from their face. Their blouse was stained with sweat and they slowly rubbed a lump that had been made by the last of Stank's energy giving him a well-deserved slap upside the head.

"...okay, I get it now, universe," the skunk huffed aloud. "You gave me one student that causes trouble, and you gave me another one that finds it. This is my penalty for doing both on my own, I suppose."

"You have another student?" mewled Maven curiously.

"Yeah. Yeah I do," Stank muttered. "And I suppose, since you're both equally trouble, that it wouldn't contaminate either of you for you to meet."

Maven excitably bounced up, and leaned over the counter to give the resigned skunk a hug. "Oh, this is great! I always wanted a peer! I'm really looking forward to it!" Then, they skittered off to the door, only retreating to grab, seal, and stow their waterskin, and waved goodbye to their teacher. Stank tiredly waved as the squirrel-cat left and the door shut behind them.

"Uugh...what is it with this place and breeding a proclivity for stupid shit?" the skunk groaned, closing his eyes and shaking his fist at the sky. "I swear, it's everywhere."

At that, a splatter of fluid struck the tops of the skunk's knuckles. Stank took a deep breath, opened his eyes to see the slime that now coated his fist. He dropped his hand and just stared across the counter blankly. "...I'm not going to look up. But I'm tired, so fuck it. Do it already."

*Shluuuuur-SPLAT~*

The massive ooze creature slapped down atop the skunk, enveloping him in pure digestive slime. As Stank floated, suspended in the gelatinous gunk, his stare never left the door.

*My life stinks.*