

The Interview...

His eyes follow me from across the bar, watching me as I slip away from my friends. His eyes smile and he gives the bartender a knowing nod, directing him without the need for words. He blinks in response. Twice. Affirmation. His prey selected, the bartender turns to the smiling young spectacle of feline grace. The king of beasts, his glass refilled turns away, sliding three bills into the tip jar before sliding away, back into the comfort and security of his friends. Still the eyes follow him, waiting.

Time passes, and one by one, the lion's friends head home, until he alone is left, unnaturally energetic, not knowing why either as he heads over to the bar tender, a smiling and happy Collie who refills his soda while tending to several other customers, all the while letting his eyes flit back and forth to the eyes in the corner, who direct his very actions. The eyes close. A head nods, and the bartender moves sluggishly, carelessly bumping the lion's glass until it hits the floor. Grinning sheepishly, he grabs a towel and begins to clean up the mess. Noticing the lion's displeasure he fetches a new glass from the bar behind him, fills it with ice and pulls out the soda dispenser.

Nodding apologetically the collie hands the lion his drink. Giving him a warm smile he accepts it and meanders back to his table, still unaware he is being watched by several beings now, all of them intent on making the lion theirs before the night's end. Sipping at it, the lion starts to look about, surveying his prospects for this particular evening. His sight falls on the pair of shadowed eyes and he smiles. Approaching, he sets his now empty glass on a nearby table, stumbling just a bit as he passes, knocking one of the chairs over yet not seeming to mind the noise. He doesn't seem to notice that the bar was nearly empty when he started, and that the door is now locked and bolted, the bar empty save for the mysterious pair of eyes and the bartender, now tending to the myriad bottles and empty glasses strewn about.

A white furred hand extends past the darkness, "I understand you applied earlier in the day," a silky smooth voice purrs, "for a job at one of my establishments." He lets the lion's eyes adjust for a few minutes, giving his mind time to realize to whom he is speaking to.

"Well?" the voice purrs, "I do have an opening," the voice is paced, slowly...methodically, "but it means a bit of travel. You may be working at several different venues." The eyes observe the lion's reactions to his offer, "You may need to be in several different positions," the voice insinuates, "And your wardrobe will have to match each location." The eyes settle on the lion's as he gauges his response.

"Well I suppose I could be open to changes," spoke the lion, warily, "But I think I'd like to try a dry run. Do you think you could, accommodate me?" The lion grinned as he said it, as if amused by his own entendre.

The eyes closed, the muzzle attached to them nodding in acceptance, "I believe we can arrange that." A white furred paw motions to the bartender, who is now finished with his duties and stood behind their table.

"Yes sir?" the collie inquires, "How can I serve?" The line causes the lion's face to wring, curious. He turns to watch the collie who still looks presentable despite having worked a good 8 hour shift now. His bartender's uniform, complete with towel, seems pristine, and the tight pants he wears highlight his taut bottom and long slender legs.

"I need two drinks, one coke, and one spring water. The coke is for our guest here, and the spring water's for me." The eyes lock on the collie, who nods.

"Yes sir. Anything else, sir?" The collie's eyes never waver. His body never budes.

"Yes, I'd like you to show our prospective applicant about to some of the bars after I'm finished with him. Would you mind doing that?"

"No sir, not at all. Would this be tonight sir, or tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow. For tonight, remain here and I will be with you once I'm finished with him." The voice adds a hint of menace to punctuate the last statement, sending a shiver down the lion's spine.

"Yes sir."

The lion's ears perked as the collie bows out, "Will I be required to address you as such?"

The shadows produce a large muzzle of a white tiger, which smiles to reveal a set of pristinely white and sinister teeth, "Why yes, if that is what I require of you." The tiger pauses as he watches the way the lion's features change as the younger feline thinks over the offer. The lion's eyes stay closed for a while, before finally opening and looking straight into the tiger's.

"Will the pay be good?"

"Yes. And I believe we can work around your school schedule, neh?" The lion blushes as he realizes he had indeed written that on his resume, along with several of the other pertinent details of his life. Not that he had much of one, anyways. High school, college, they had both been good to the lion. He had not wanted for money until recently, when the last of his parent's college savings fell through, and had resolved not to indebt himself to anyone before he finished his last semester.

The lion pushes the growing feeling of embarrassment down into his gullet as he continues to stare directly into the stark green that was the tiger's eyes, "Then I accept your offer," he pauses a moment, considering, "sir."

The tiger's smile broadens as wide as it could go, "Excellent," he purrs, "Now as to your positions," his voice pauses a moment as the collie behind the lion places his hand on the feline's shoulders and starts to massage, "before we go into them, I think you should relax. I know my style of interview is rather unorthodox and tends to get people a bit...wound up."

The tiger pauses again to watch the collie hunker down on the lion's neck and shoulders, putting his agile hands to work far different from that of bartending, and yet, so similar. The hands move with the grace of a dancer along the lion's shoulder-blades, kneading and pressing into the knots that have built of over the course of a long night of anticipation, and eliciting slight gasps as the lion closes his eyes in order to fully experience the relaxing waves rolling down his spine.

A chuckle emerges from the tiger's lips, "Talented isn't he?" the tiger says in that silky smooth voice as the collie continues, "He is one of my highest paid bartenders, and highlights at some of the other clubs I own as a dancer," he pauses again, "As I hope you will be too. But before we go any further, I do require one more rather...unorthodox test of any of my employees."

He holds up a large crystal, "I need you to look at this for me, and find the flaw, if you can. Some of my higher paying customers sometimes pay in jewels, and I need to make certain you know how to evaluate them." He places the crystal, which sits flat on the

table, the light of the bar striking it just so, and watches as the lion opens his eyes, staring down into the depths of the crystal.

"I'm not sure I see anything," the lion says after a few seconds.

"You have to look closer, kitten," the tiger purrs, "it's there, you just have to focus your mind to see it."

"That's it...relax and focus on the crystal." The voice is as smooth as silk now, and low, the collie's hands have ceased their massage and only delicately stroke the back of the lion's neck, "relaxation and focus are the only ways to see it, kitten."

The tiger watches with satisfaction as the lion's brow furrows then goes flat, his eyes dilating just a tad as he sinks a little into his chair, "I think...I see it." He says, not seeming to notice how quiet his own voice is.

"Good boy. Now I want you to look deeper. Relax further." The voice flows like the water of a brook, smooth and full of promise, yet silent, barely audible, "It's okay if your eyes feel heavy," it suggests, "It's alright."

The tiger smiles and continues as the lion blinks, shaking himself slightly as he continues to stare, rapt, at the crystal, "Let your eyes get heavy...soo heavy that they close...and open. Each time it gets a little harder to open them...and a little easier to let them...stay closed..."

The voice is slow now. Methodical, "It feels so good to close them...to let all your cares slip away." The tiger continues to watch with a growing feeling of satisfaction as the lion fights with all of his remaining might simply to keep his eyes open. Soon the conquest will happen. Soon the prey will be caught.

The lion's eyes finally close, slipping shut as he breathes a soft sigh and sinks limply into the chair. The collie continues stroking the back of his neck, awaiting his next order.

The tiger's gentle purring voice continues to speak, letting the soft syllables drift to the lion's ears as he himself drifts deeper and deeper into his own mind.

In this mind, the lion finds himself at the top of a flight of stairs and at the bottom, a large feather bed. The lion feels so tired and needs to rest, so he takes a step down the stairs.

"One."

A familiar yet distant voice calls. The lion thinks of its significance for a moment, but is quickly drawn back to the stairs and the bed. After all, it would be terrible to misstep and tumble so far, far down.

"Two."

Another step, another voice. This one seems a tiny bit softer than the last.

"Three."

The lion speeds up, feeling an ache in his calves as he takes another step towards relief and relaxation.

"Four...Five."

The lion's mind marvels at how tired it feels. Only half-way to go and it feels like miles still. The voice counting is all but forgot now as the lion is completely fixated on the steps...and the bed.

"Six...Seven."

Each step is an effort now. So very difficult to move even the smallest muscle, yet the lion must prevail. The king of beasts may not falter.

"Eight...Nine..."

It's all the lion can do to stay standing now. His mind sways on its feet, as one more step takes it to blissful unconsciousness and sleepy obedience. There's another voice now, telling his mind things, but the lion doesn't seem to mind. It's all background noise at this moment, food for his subconscious.

"Ten."