

The three guards stiffened, their limbs locking in place and the irises and pupils of their eyes fading away to white as a single, bright green leaf landed on each of their fore-heads. Slowly they brought their feet down from mid march and stood at attention, silent, quiet, unmoving and unseeing. They were pretty impressive looking as far as guards go, two warthogs, a ferret and a tiger, dressed in velvet pantaloons, full steel breastplates over ceramic scale-gambesons that hung down to their knees. Their sleeves puffed out around the shoulders before being constricted under embossed bracers and steel backed gloves. Each guard was equipped with a pole-arm and a round pot helmet with crests of horsehair at varying length denoting rank or something. They looked impressive, professional, they hadn't stood a chance against the druid's mind controlling attack.

Vikris scampered forward from the shadows and stood looking up at them, the three foot tall red kobold waved his hand back and forth before their eyes then danced back presenting an inviting target, "What are you doing?" Aira hissed as he walked forwards to join the kobold, grabbing his shoulder to stop his antics, "You're going to give our position away."

"Nonsense," the kobold yapped, forked tongue curling out to hiss softly, "They are frozen, I still can't believe how flaming powerful those leaves of yours are."

"Well that's nature for you," the blue and white fox muttered, "She's powerful, besides these guards didn't have much in the way of willpower," he grinned down at the red kobold and flicked his fingers, grabbing a leaf out of mid air, "We could see how long your will lasts."

The kobold hissed and drew back, a clawed hand fingering the red gem at his throat, "Don't you dare, we're on the same team here, you still owe me a favour for setting you free."

"He knows," another voice whispered from the shadows they had been hiding in, "The fox took out the guards how lovely. But we're almost there. So shut up and move."

The newcomer was a wolf; from head to toes to long hair his fur was bright lemon yellow. He was wrapped up in a long, billowing cloak that seemed to stir and flow in a breeze only it felt; the outside was like void of heaven on a star-less night whilst any time they caught a glimpse of the interior they could see flashes of silver. Kaed walked over to join them, looking the guards up and down with a disdainful sniff, "These are some pretty crap guards for a mage's keep. Whatever, let's just get on with it."

Nodding his head Aira ordered the guards to hand over their weapons and then go to sleep. The weapons went to Kaed who vanished them into his bag of holding whilst Vikris scampered ahead. Crouched low the slinky reptile's grey and black leather armour and trousers helped him to blend into the shadows. He paused at the end of the corridor and felt around the edge of the door blocking their way, he used a small knife in the lock and a whispered spell and the glass slid open, leaving the actual door frame in place.

Kaed and Aira followed side by side, canine and vulpine alert, watching for trouble though they kept a wary eye on each other. The agreement that kept them working on the same team right now was thin, Aira disapproved of the yellow wolf's disdainful attitude whilst Kaed seemed to have decided Aira was too arrogant and stuck up himself. Vikris glanced back at them as they joined him and hissed softly at the pair, "Just can we please get through this without you two killing each other."

"Blame yourself, Vik. You're the one who brought the.. nature fox..." Kaed sneered, "He makes me want to grind my teeth, and you know exactly why."

"I owed you a boon, you told me to bring a team who could infiltrate this mansion," the kobold yipped angrily waving at the fox, "Aira is good at what he does, if you wanted a specific type of adventurer you should have said."

Aira said nothing during all of this just walked past the pair and down the short flight of steps into the courtyard garden that filled the centre of the large mansion. Pausing he took a deep breath, enjoying the scent of life, the power of nature quietly doing its thing. It was mixed with the faint tang of salt from the distant sea, an altogether pleasing scent. He looked across the courtyard toward the far wing of the mansion, the windows were all dark except for the faint light glowing through the large dome that according to Kaed covered the workroom of the mage who lived here.

"Well let's get over there, I can't sense anything untoward in the gardens," he peered through the dark, eyes glowing gently as he watched the moving patrols. All the guards were dressed the same as those throughout the rest of the house but Aira could use the garden itself to avoid them. "Follow me, I can get us across without meeting anyone, the plants will be happy to help."

Kaed and Vik followed the fox, the party moving in frosty silence, ignoring the path and heading out amongst the trees and shrubs that littered the lawns. Across the garden the trees and bushes rustled and shifted in the breeze but those moving out of their way shifted branches silently, bending around them to provide safe, secure, hidden passage across the grounds. Vik looked particularly uncomfortable as all the greenery came to life around them. He moved closer to the yellow fox, one hand fingering the heavy dagger hanging at his hip, he cringed as they passed under a stand of willow trees and only relaxed as the low hanging fronds drifted out of the way harmlessly.

"Why are you so jumpy?" Kaed asked in a soft voice as he strode after Aira, the rose bushes ahead of them parting out of their way. He adjusted his large red hat and brushed a hand along his cloak, hitching it up to keep it away from the bushes and their thorns, heavy boots softly thumping on the bare ground of their new path.

"Don't you find it unnerving that nature just bends over and does what he says? Trees and plants aren't supposed to just move because you ask."

The wolf grinned at the kobold, "Not especially, I enjoy being outside, nature is a friend to those who understand it."

"I prefer my nature to be underground, mushrooms, glowing fungi, copper and red leaved plants that provide deep, rich fruits. All this... is just ugh..." he gestured at the garden and hunched his shoulders.

"Don't worry Vik, I'll keep you nice and safe, I could provide greater protection if you swore service to me properly."

Vik snorted and shook his head giving the lemon fox a sullen glance, "I owe you a favour, I am not forswearing my master," he scampered forwards to catch up with Aira and slipped past the fox and stalked ahead. Kaed chuckled gently, the kobold was too easy to needle for fun. Soon enough however things got serious as Aira led them out of the last stand of trees and crouched behind a series of bushes. Beyond was the path that led toward the entrance to the domed wing of the mansion. Standing guard outside the doors where two huge, hulking golems, their magically powered bodies crafted from onyx, eyes filled with the infernal flame that was magically animating them.

"Well those could be a problem," Aira whispered, "I can't leaf them, Vik can you disable them?"

The kobold peered ahead, "I think so, Kaed, can you give me some cov....." he trailed off as he found himself staring at an empty patch of darkness where the canine had been standing. He looked around worriedly and then spotted the wolf a few feet away, cloak blowing in the wind, "What are you doing?"

"I can take it from here Vik, wait here like a good kobold, I'll be back shortly," his cloak span around his body and he dissolved into shadow-stuff. His whole body seemed to come apart, dissolving into a shade that leapt up into the air, arching upwards and over toward the dome atop the building.

"Oh hell no you don't," Vik growled, leaping forwards, trying to grab the last streamer of shadow stuff but the kobold was too slow and Kaed was away, lost in the shadows of the night in seconds.

"What the hell," Aira hissed as he pulled the kobold back into cover by his tail, "What is he doing?"

"Stealing all the loot is what he is doing, augh I should have known he'd pull this stunt. He'll have pocketed the good stuff before we can get up there," he pulled out his dagger and extricated a sphere of odd luminescent putty from a pouch at his waist, "Cover me Aira," and then he darted forward, bounding up the steps toward the golems in a spray of gravel.

The last guard fell, the ensorcelled blade of Vikris' dagger sticking out of the deer's chest as he toppled backwards. His halberd clattered against the marble floor and then there was silence for just a moment except for the click of Vikris' claws on the marble as he hurried toward the solid oak door that led into the domed chamber at the top of the mansion.

"Are you sure Kaed will be in there?" Aira asked as he hurried to catch up with the kobold, "I mean he could have nabbed what he wanted and left by now. We should consider cutting our losses and just leaving."

Pulling his dagger free of the buck Vik wiped it clean then resheathed before moving toward the door, "Even if he has gone there might be something useful we can still steal. I'm not letting that wolf be the only one to make anything out of this."

"Well ok, but looking at the calibre of the guards I'm not expecting there to have been much resistance from this mage," the blue fox muttered as he waited for Vik to check the door wasn't boobytrapped, "I mean how did he even do that shadow trick?"

Vik shrugged, "He's a sorcerer, they get weird powers, now then, be ready," he drew back and kicked the door open and leapt inside, rolling off to one side to avoid presenting a target. Aira went the other way and they both came up ready to fight! The sight that met their eyes was not what they had been expecting, the chamber under the dome was spelled for light and had been designed as a workshop for a mage. There were workbenches and a miniature forge, smoke in the air and the after-taste of magic in the air from a potent exchange of magical energy.

The real surprise however was Kaed, the yellow wolf was just standing about ten feet away; his hands above his head, body rigid, paws held flat and a look of alarm in his eyes. His expression was impossible to read because of the large crystal sphere that was stuck in his jaws. It was huge and looked like it was properly wedged in place, it was also glowing a rather cheerful shade of yellow.

"What the hell..." Vik muttered, momentarily stunned by the sight of Kaed seemingly defeated and immobilized somehow. He started to move closer but stopped, natural caution kicking in as he scanned the room, whoever had done this to the wolf was probably still around.

His caution was answered as a pair of big black hands slipped over Kaed's shoulder's and clipped a heavy collar about his neck. Magic sparked across his fur, a flickering green static that rippled down his body, it engulfed his clothing, dissolving the threads and leaving behind bare fur. It passed below his waist and just left smooth yellow fur behind, whatever enchantment was involved had just rendered Kaed very genderless and from the way his eyes had widened he had felt it.

"Mmrrhfff krrrisssssss...." he tried to shout something but the sphere lodged in his jaw made it impossible for him to speak, "Mrrkfasass resassssss."



“Oh dear, another person who cannot speak a proper language,” a smooth voice whispered, the owner of the black paws stepping out from behind the immobilised sorceror. They had grey fur and a sort of stooped gait which could have just been an illusion caused by their incredibly large black paws. He looked canine but his smile was much too wide, amber eyes cruel yet mischievous regarded them with interest. His legs were black as was his muzzle and the thick ridge of fur that ran from between his pointed ears down to the start of their tail was a deep pitch. His body, the shape of it, the length of his limbs, the size of his hands, it all looked wrong, he clearly wasn’t mortal.

“Hello there,” he addressed Vikris and Aira, “Welcome to my summoners sanctuary, I am afraid I have been tasked with the duty of keeping all intruders out of this place,” he walked off toward one side of the room, eyes firmly fixed on the pair, “I should however introduce you to him, he would be angry if I didn’t.”

He stopped before a covered sculpture and pulled a rope, the velvet drapes drew back to reveal another figure trapped and immobile much like Kaed. It was a short otter with long blonde hair and a crystal sphere wedged in his jaws. He was posed in an upright position, arms above his

head, collar fixed around his neck and a quick check showed nothing between their legs on their nude body.

"This is Jay, My Summoner and Master, say hello Jay,"

"Hrrrrrrrp!"

"Oh dear, master you really must learn to enunciate properly," the smirking grey critter reached up to stroke the glowing crystal, "Come now, try again, really try and make yourself understood. You know I am bound to obey your every word."

"Lrrffff rreeee rgrrrrrrrrrf!"

"Ah no sorry Master, I cannot understand a word you're saying, but don't worry, I'll sort these intruders out like I did the wolf, have no fear."

"Let me guess," Aira growled, pulling several leaves out of the air, "You called him your summoner, I bet he called you up and told you to immobilise any intruders without specifying that he wasn't an intruder?"

"Very astute of you," the grey and black monster purred, "Now I have a contract, an invitation to exist on this plane of existence and none of that annoying actually having to do what he wants getting in the way of my fun," he swept his hands wide and bowed, "I am Graezzit, of envy, of pride, it is my genuine delight to welcome you here. With four of your I can finally start to decorate this place as I want."

Aira growled and started to walk forwards, summoning more leaves, stringing them together in a razor sharp line of foliage that glowed with a bright green light, "Be silent demon, I think you are outnumbered and screwed, you may have got the drop on your master and our companion but we are more than a match for you."

"Oh now that is no way to talk little fox, but very well I was going to offer the chance to bargain but I can see you don't want to talk. No matter," he raised one hand and smiled as it was suddenly wreathed in violent green flames, "Let me show you the ingenious combination of enchantments my master invented."

He hurled the green fire and Aira dove out of the way, sending a stream of leaves straight at the creature. The fox suddenly squealed as the green flames burnt through the leaves and they all evaporated. It felt as if the magic had been snuffed out of them, his connection severed in a sudden magical backlash that made him stumble. He span around to face the demon and found himself staring at their chest. He was fast and had advanced on the fox whilst he was distracted, big black paws grasped his head and he spoke two words in a deep, dark tongue Aira couldn't decipher. His vision blurred, the world became a tunnel, a singular path that led from his eyes to Graezzit's, his voice was whispering in his mind, touching his soul, binding him, clouding his

senses. As suddenly as it started the world rushed back into his vision and Aira staggered backwards with a yowl, he tried to bring more of his magic to bear but suddenly found his body moving against his will.

The blue fox spread his legs, stood up straight and thrust both arms into the air above his head, he kept his hands flat and curled his fingers up as if he was ready to grip or carry something. He couldn't even tilt his head back to look, he was stuck staring straight ahead and with a whine he rolled his eyes to stare at Graezzit who was now standing off to one side.

"What did you do to me," he struggled to move, to rally against the spell holding him but he didn't understand what had been done to him.

"It's quite simple, I've placed a little spell on you, a Maximised Greater Geas, it's quite a difficult spell to master. But now your body will do exactly as I instructed it to do and nothing more it is no longer yours to command," he turned his back and walked toward the red kobold who was watching him warily. He hadn't attacked or tried to intervene whilst he was fighting with the blue fox, maybe he could deal with this creature, "So little lizard, you ready to switch sides and strike a deal with me? Kobold souls aren't worth much but I could always use another servant when I eventually wind up back in my home dimension."

Vik shook his head and raised his arms, crossed his hands at the wrist and started to chant, arcane words spilling from his tongue as he hastily cast a spell. Graezzit sighed and shook his head in disappointment then grinned widely and made an over-arm cast with his left arm, hurling a small silvery sphere of energy at the kobold. Vikris ducked out of the way and drew back, still chanting, but the sphere curved around and splashed over his snout. It tingled and the kobold coughed suddenly, interrupting his spell, he clawed at his neck in alarm as something lodged at the back of his throat and blocked his ability to breathe. It shifted, rolled forward and he took a gasp and tried to spit it out, tongue shifting beneath the odd thing blocking his mouth it suddenly swelled in size and pushed forward, forcing his jaws open. He squeaked in alarm as it lodged behind his fangs and forced his muzzle wide open, he could just make out the rounded side of a crystal sphere. It was blocking his whole muzzle, lodged in place and somehow bonded to his teeth, it made them tingle uncomfortably then began to glow with a warm, welcoming light. He couldn't cast any spells around it, he couldn't talk, couldn't cast, he was stuck.

Shaking his head in a vain attempt to dislodge the crystal he squealed as big black paws grabbed his head and forced it back. His eyes met Graezzit's and he shuddered as the demon laid the same powerful geas upon his body and with jerky, uncontrolled motions Vikris assumed the same rigid, arms above his head pose as Aira, Kaed and the hapless otter who had invented this peculiar form of incarceration. Graezzit laughed and moved off to cast another sphere spell at Aira, silencing the forest fox's protests with a big crystal sphere all his own. The demon picked the pair of adventurers up and floated them over to stand side by side. Once he had them settled down he picked up a pair of metal collars from a table and held them up for them to see.

“The final step in this little process is these delightful things, the master made them, they contain a bunch of very useful enchantments. Sustenance, stability, gender suppression, fabric destruction and a couple of epic level enchantments to reinforce the geas spell and suppress your wills from being able to counter it whilst leaving you quite capable of thinking and seeing,” he reached out and clipped them into place around the fox and kobold’s throats, the cool metal seeming to adhere to their skin and scales, green sparks of static crackling across their bodies.

The spells were so strange, Vikris squealed around his gagging crystal as his clothes dissolved and his gender was forcibly scrubbed. It felt wrong, a crawling sensation in his mind and at groin level and beneath his tail followed by a disgusting feeling of inversion, of warping and twisting and then nothing. He was quite naked, frozen, rendered magicless and trapped by the collar now snug around his neck. Graezzit stroked his muzzle and smiled almost tenderly down at the kobold then walked over to check on Aira, making sure the fox was properly screwed as well.

“It’s quite a delightful alternative to petrification, sure turning people to stone is nice but this way I get beautiful, full colour, living statues.” he smirked softly, “The collar will keep you alive, you no longer need food or water, nor will you pass waste matter. It’s very efficient and well the furniture doesn’t need clothing but it’d be so unseemly to display you with all those awkward reproduction organs out, so they also got rid of those for me too.”

Raising his hands Graezzit summoned his power lifted all four trapped critters into the air and began to re-arrange the room, using his demonic magic and a variety of magical trinkets that belonged to the mage to prepare suitable space for their displays. The otter jay and Kaed wound up holding up a large arched canopy that stretched across the throne the demon set up for itself on a dais beneath the dome. They were of a similar height and made a striking pair, brown and yellow fur on display, a symbol of his power that these two mighty mages had been reduced to little more than living statues.

Aira and Vikris wound up holding up a fancy plinth above the door leading out into the rest of the mansion. Vik’s pedestal was higher so he was at head height with Aira but otherwise there was nothing for them to do but hold their hands above their heads and support the stone arch framing the doorway.



Rolling his eyes Vik stared across at Aira and whined about the crystal sphere in his mouth, they were quite fucked and the kobold had no idea how to break free of all the enchantments piled atop him. They might be free if and when the demon was banished back to its home dimension but there was no guarantee it wouldn't drag them with it. Rolling his eyes Vikris watched as the demon stalked around the chamber, arranging it to his liking and then walked past them, heading out into the rest of the mansion, no doubt to subdue the guards and staff to his own purpose... they were very fucked.

~fin