

Strolling away from the encampment he'd made with his apprentice deep in the forest Kaed stretched his arms above his head, arching his back as his tail swayed back and forth. He'd slept most of the day, this current step in his existence was quite pleasant; his apprentice was a kobold and a sorcerer like himself and the wolf took great pleasure in teaching him. It helped the kid was smart and had chucked in his ties to his ungrateful clan to learn from Kaed. Lowering his arms Kaed paused to admire the way golden orange beams of light lanced through the ancient tree trunks to illuminate the forest with the last rays of the setting sun. Adjusting the brim of his hat the wolf grinned happily, it felt good to enjoy the warmth of the sun against his body.

It was unnatural, at least as far as his undead kindred were usually concerned, sunlight was anathema to his kind. Not him though, he was at home in direct sunlight as he was at the dead of night. Climbing over a rock the wolf paused by a pool of perfectly still water, looking in at his reflection. That was another conceited legend he refused to be bound by. All this living wild in the woods hadn't really impacted his appearance, his nearly six foot tall body was trim and fit, natural lupine frame blessed by muscle but not over-buffed with excessive musculature. His fur was a bright lemon yellow, thick and shaggy with long hair curling around his shoulders. He'd managed to keep it clear of leaves and forest detritus though he paused to pluck several twigs out of his tail fur before baring his teeth in a satisfied smirk. His decision several centuries ago to dispose of clothing was still the right choice, it left him with more options for moving around and scaring the crap out of people. It helped of course that he'd done away with the now redundant objects that most males wore trousers to hide. They were unnecessary now, a holdover from when he'd been alive so he'd adjusted his body to remove them and kept the hat as his only fashion accessory.

"Not bad," the wolf murmured, turning away from the cursory examination of his body, it was mostly new and he'd not seen it properly since he finished growing a new one. An accident with some gnolls a few months back had left him as just a head that his apprentice Erin had been feeding. It was good to be back on two feet and so Kaed was going hunting, he'd toyed with the idea of drinking from his kobold apprentice. His blood was rich and full of youthful flavour but he didn't want to mess with the kids mind by doing that too often.

Sampling the scents of the forest Kaed's nose distinguished between animal, plant and yes there, the scent of leather, oil and smoke. Loping forwards Kaed raced through the woodlands, picking up speed as he followed the trail against a backdrop of deepening twilight. The forest transformed itself, ancient trees, moss, vines and thick shrubs shed the air of quiet majesty and adopted a far more sinister appearance, he loved it. Kaed must have run for nearly forty minutes before the heavy scent of fire and people was strong enough to indicate they were close. The wolf slowed down, flitting from shadow to shadow as he approached the camp where his prey were waiting.

It was a pair of travellers; a black and yellow scaled skink wearing light silk robes marking them out as a priest of mage of some sort. His companion was all bulky muscles and mail, weapons and acrid mammalian stench. She was a wolverine Kaed thought, that member of the mustelid

that was mostly murder claws and bad temper. Still they would do, they were alive and Kaed could smell them from here, he was even salivating a bit in anticipation. So wasting no time Kaed dissolved into shadows and whirled forwards, sliding out of the skink's shadow as it was cast by the fire.

They were good, well trained but not good enough; the wolverine had a large dagger out in seconds but she was too slow, one of Kaed's paws closed around the reptile's throat, choking him, cutting off his attempt to cast a quick spell. The wolf pulled them around with him as he kicked the wolverine square in the chest sending her flying into the tent. Pulling his prize in close Kaed stared into the skink's eyes and grinned at the terror oozing out of them, he could feel their pulse hammering away against his hand as he choked off their air.

Sadly miss wolverine didn't have the courtesy to stay down, she came roaring out of the collapsed tent, massive broadsword held overhead. Kaed watched her for a moment then flicked his free hand at her and skimmed a spell through the air into the enraged she-beast. She yelped in shock as blue light engulfed her body; her sword slipped through suddenly nerveless fingers the blade thumping into the ground. Armour rattled as it fell off a body that was suddenly too small for it as she shrank, the blue light causing her thick fur to change. It smoothed out, took on a velvety texture as glass beads replaced her eyes and lines of stitching spread across her body, holding her new stuffing inside. With the wolverine disabled Kaed turned his attention back to the trembling reptile and smiled at them, laughing at the incredulous look on his face.

"What?" he twisted his prey's head around to look at the confused plush wolverine sitting in a pile of armour, "You never seen someone violated by having their natural body ripped away from them as their flesh was transformed into lifeless cloth their soul was now bound too?"

The priest or mage shook their head, shaking in fear and Kaed pulled them in against his body, wrapping their arms about his waist, "Well now you can die happy having seen it first hand."

The skink's eyes widened in terror, his scent spiked with fear and Kaed released his grip allowing blood to rush toward the oxygen starved brain of his captive. It never reached it's destination, the wolf plunged his teeth into the reptile's neck and intercepted that rich flow of life. It was cooler than what he was used to, thicker too but it was just as delightful so Kaed swallowed and kept on swallowing, mouthful after rich, life giving mouthful. The skink grew limp and moaned softly, first in confused pleasure then in shuddering, heart faltering terror before falling silent. Their body grew limp and heavy and as the rush of blood dwindled to a trickle Kaed released him to fall with a thump to the floor.

Wiping his mouth Kaed sighed happily then turned toward the wolverine, he knew the fire light would be making his eyes glow and he didn't care. Stepping over the dead husk the wolf grabbed the fluffy toy and lifted them up to eye level, "You were a crap bodyguard," he commented maliciously then tossed the toy into the heart of its own campfire and watched its fabrics and stuffing explode into flame.

Walking away from the fire the wolf headed in the general direction of their camp, it was a pleasant night, warm, balmy and the land was alive with the sound of animals. He was in no rush to get back, his apprentice could look after himself and he needed some time to plan what to teach the yellow kobold next. After about ten minutes however something changed, Kaed felt the forest twist, it was nothing physical but something was impinging on his magical senses, causing his hackles to rise as he looked around warily. The animal noises were dying down, the branches and leaves were rustling in the wrong direction, it all felt odd. Moving warily forwards Kaed searched with his mind, utilising his otherworldly senses to augment and supplement his nose and ears. He was a wolf and prided himself on excellent hearing and a sense of smell no one could beat; but they paled in comparison to the magic he wielded and the blessings his vampirism bestowed.

Whatever was happening was subtle and strange, the forest path continued ahead of him unbroken and steady but things felt off. Walking forwards Kaed frowned as different types of trees started to appear alongside the stately oak and birch and elm. Strange plants with shimmering fans of copper coloured leaves stood amongst the other plants. Turning around slowly Kaed frowned as he spotted something impossible, the darkness was fading, light was shining through the trees as if the sun was rising! Dashing ahead Kaed darted between two whip thin trees and found himself standing atop a hill, the forest ended to either side of him and the sun was rising above the mountains to the east!

Except it wasn't the forest he had been living in and it certainly wasn't his sun! It was a bright blue-white glow and the sky was turquoise! Turning around with a curse Kaed tried to go back but he could feel the path now. It was snapping around like an eel, retreating, closing back up, sealing him off from where he had been. Whatever spell or magic had been deployed had used the life of the forest to bridge the gap between there and here and now it was closed. Turning around Kaed glared down the valley at the building lurking at the bottom; it was a very large castle built on an island in the middle of a lake. The rising sun was glinting off stained glass and lead lined windows whilst the soft sandstone of the walls and keep seemed to blush with a rosy tint under the rising sun. Every rooftop was different, the tiles were green or red, yellow or pale rose, crystals shimmering with warm inviting light. It looked like the sort of thing a dragon might build if he wanted a castle or a fairy tale princess. As he watched this sparkling castle the drawbridge lowered as if inviting him to journey down and enter.

"Bugger that," Kaed growled and turned his back on the stupid place and stalked off into the trees, he had no intention of going anywhere near that place.

The trees were all tall and thin, their branches waving back and forth and the forest floor was carpeted in massive copper ferns. It was surely quite lovely but Kaed didn't care, stomping along the wolf started trying various magical tricks to go home. He didn't get anywhere, his spells worked but he couldn't seem to reach out, he couldn't even mind talk Erin which was alarming. Looking up as the trees thinned out Kaed stopped and stared, he was back in the

valley, just further down, closer to the castle. Looking behind the wolf glowered at the trees and marched back into them, paying attention this time to where he was going. Ten minutes later he walked out of another stand of trees even closer to the eyesore of a castle than before.

Growling heavily the wolf marched down the hill toward the garish drawbridge, he was going to throw a vampiric fit in the face of whoever was messing with him like this. He didn't use the drawbridge, it was obviously a trap, the wolf let his body dissolve into shadow stuff and waltzed upwards over the walls and through an open window in the main keep. He found himself on the upper gallery level of a long hall that stretched the length of the keep. The gallery was a mixture of magnificent stained glass windows and large oil paintings whilst the floor below was full of small pedestals and tables. The hall was full of objet d'art; sculptures, jewellery, weapons, pots, urns and solitary jewels perched on pedestals.

"Well Bungle, I win, you owe me," a voice announced with a chuckle and Kaed turned to glare over the railing at the source. It was a grey and white wolf lounging in a large armchair in front of a fireplace, the wolf raised a tea cup in salute to Kaed and the lemon wolf growled back at him.

"What the hell is going on," Kaed growled as he vaulted the gallery railing and dropped into the hall below. He landed on a large rug that depicted a purple dragon coiled around a massive iron spire and glared at the wolf then shifted his gaze to the person sitting opposite him as he spoke.

"I just had a little bet with Forest is all," the brown bear murmured as he set his glass down, "I said you'd come in through the front gate, Forest said you would never do that," as the bear stood up Kaed frowned, he had a long black and white skunk's tail instead of the traditional bear nub. Shaking his head Kaed growled and attacked, hurling spells at the pair designed to render them cooperative and obedient.

He gaped as his spells fizzled, fading away to nothing and the bear shook a finger as he walked over to Kaed, "Bad wolf, no magical attacks, now come all will be made clear soon! My name is Bungle and I am the Collector, this is my friend Forest," the grey and white wolf raised his tea cup again, "He is a fellow collector though his field varies from mine."

"Fine," Kaed growled, "Why am I here?"

"All will become clear soon, now come along like a good wolf there is so much to show you," the bear ambled off and Kaed followed, he didn't really have much choice. The other wolf joined them as the bear-skunk led the way across the hall and Kaed frowned at him before stopping to look at a miniature model of a windmill inside a glass bell-jar.

"Beautiful isn't it?" Bungle enthused as he returned to stand next to Kaed, "That is the Jamovin, first ever Windmill in that style, it was such a delight to get my paws on it but we are not here for that," tugging at the wolf's arm Kaed let himself be drawn away toward a side door.

“He really is a very avid collector,” the wolf murmured, “He has been collecting rare and exotic objects for ages now and you caught his attention. He said he just had to have you here you see and I agree you are a very unique individual Kaed.”

Walking through the door into a long gallery lined with portraits Kaed glared at the shorter wolf, “If he wants to hire me to collect something for him he should sod off, I don’t work for people. I’m also not a thief.”

Sliding a hand around Kaed’s shoulders the bear turned the wolf with a firm grip and shook his head, “No you have this all wrong Kaed, I didn’t bring you here to hire you, I have something much more important in mind.”



Frowning at the large empty frame in front of him Kaed stared at the canvas for a moment then his mind registered what the plague said “**Kaed - Lemon Wolf**” and he span around, pulling himself free of Bungle’s grip, ready to punch the smirking ursine in the gut. He never got the chance, something clamped down on one shoulder and both of his ankles.

It was a pair of huge clawed hands made from canvas. They had bulged out of the empty picture frame and grabbed hold of him and were pulling him into the canvas!

Yelping loudly Kaed struggled against this peculiar magic, attempting to pull himself free but the hands were relentless and his magic still wasn’t working. Sparks sputtered from his fingers, his energy was gone and inch by inch the wolf’s lower body sank beneath the surface of thick canvas. They changed, looking down Kaed could see his legs, move his feet, wag his tail but they looked like they had been painted from oil and set on the canvas.

Grabbing the edge of the frame with his free hand the wolf met Bungle's gaze then shot an imploring look at the grey wolf, "Why!" he gasped as he was pulled further beneath the surface.

"Like I said," Forest laughed, "Bungle collects exotic and unique objects, you're one of them."

"You are going to look stunning," Bungle reached out and started to pry Kaed's fingers loose, ducking his head out of the way as the lemon wolf snapped his jaws at the bear's ears, "None of that, bad wolf."

The bear pried the last of Kaed's fingers free from the frame and held onto the wolf for a moment and smiled at him, "You are so magnificent, welcome Kaed," he then let go and the peculiar clawed hands yanked him backwards.

"No!" Kaed yelled as the canvas closed over his head like water and Kaed found himself trapped inside a dark space. He was just floating in mid air, he could move his limbs but he didn't actually move anywhere. His position was constant, floating in front of the open space that looked out into the gallery. Bungle and Forest were looking in on him and with a growl Kaed gave them both the finger.

Bungle clapped in delight before settling down on a bench to admire the painting. Forest walked off out of sight and Kaed looked around, he could just make out other portraits, other people trapped and held in picture frames. This couldn't be happening, he had to escape... there was no way he was going to stay here and be *art*!

"Welcome Kaed," the bear-skunk said with a smile, "You are magnificent, just the sort of exotic item I like but I am afraid this movement will not do," he lifted one hand and made a slight circular motion. Kaed yelped as the darkness inside the picture frame started to move, it pressed against his body, forcing his limbs to move against his will. Struggling against the unseen forces working against his body the wolf found himself adopting a stupidly heroic pose!

With one arm on his hip the wolf held up his other, a glass like silhouette forming out of the darkness that he was made to hold. Turning his shoulders wolf held up the glass, head turned as if he was talking to someone over one shoulder. The shadows kept up the pressure, holding Kaed in place, making him stand still, holding the stupid pose, his muzzle half open as if he was talking.

Struggle as he might he couldn't move, he couldn't even shift his eyes to look at Bungle, he had to stand there and wait until the bear moved into view. He smiled up at Kaed inside his new prison and winked, "You are looking fabulous, I can't wait to show everyone around, I have a few friends visiting tonight, you will be brilliant like that and none of them will know you aren't anything more than an oil painting."

Kaed watched the bear walk off, promising that when he got free of this he was going to skin that bear! Escaping might take awhile but sooner or later he would break free or his apprentice would find him and then this bear would find out that he had just messed with the wrong wolf!

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