

Treetop Shorts Collection
Network Maintenance 1

By Smokescale Aquatos

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"That's three node clusters down, three more to go. Everything's looking good so far." Jace mused to himself as he disconnected a few cables from his laptop.

He put everything back in his pack and slung it around behind him, adjusting his harness. It was odd to see someone performing network maintenance in rock-climbing gear, but this wasn't an ordinary place. The fennec fox strapped his helmet on and opened the door. Outside the immaculate 'node room' was a narrow deck. He walked out on to it before closing and locking the door. Only his keycard and a handful of others would open it. That level of security was a little superfluous. The real trick to preventing unauthorized access was where they were placed.

Jace looked down over the railing at the gardens far below. He congratulated himself for getting through half of the main nodes before lunch. He walked to the un-railed side of the deck and lifted two safety lines to a wheeled mechanism resting on a steel wire hanging just below chin height. The karabiners clicked home and he gave the two ropes a good tug. He was secure. From there, he gently lowered himself out over the expanse between the trees, held up by the access line. The harness pulled snug around his legs and chest, supporting him exactly how it always had. With a firm kick off the trunk of the tree he was leaving, Jace zipped along the steel line, shouting happily as he did so. For a computer expert, he sure was an adrenaline junkie.

The gentle downward slope of the line kept him propelled for quite a ways, bringing him to finally rest at the midway point between trees. He looked up, viewing the underside of the sky-bridge he was traversing. He had reached the end of this line and needed to switch to the next. The fox reached out to a nearby anchor bar and took hold of it, dragging himself over. One karabiner was switched to the new support, then second. As soon as his weight was off the first line and the slide he had ridden was secured to an anchor, the metallic post it was attached to retracted up into the ceiling slightly. Now the line would slope downwards out to the node room. Jace slid himself over to another metallic post and began changing over to it, hooking onto a second slide.

The midway point was necessary. It kept the main support line from running too long, and in turn anyone from picking up too much speed as they zipped along. Once he was securely fastened for the next leg of his trip, he yanked himself forward on one of the many handles available to him. They ran the length of the main line, just overhead, in case he needed another good push. He howled in delight again as his need for precarious speed was sated. The wind blew past him briskly, his uncovered limbs drinking in the cool rush as he sailed effortlessly along. How Smokey was okay with this whole idea baffled quite a few people. But then to someone who could fly, it didn't seem all that crazy.

Jace zipped along his merry way, approaching the main tree before he felt a sudden jerk. A downward lurch shook him from his reverie. One of his safety lines had snapped. He collected the end still hanging from his harness and gazed at the frayed end. The fox swallowed hard and looked up, seeing his second line in a similarly worn state. How had he managed to get so far along and not notice he was working with equipment ready to fail? Slowly, Jace reached up to take hold of the side of the rope opposite the impending break. Just as he wrapped his fingers around it, the line snapped. His grip failed and Jace began to plummet. His playful, boyish howl was now a fearful cry desperate for help.

The fox flailed his arms and legs as he dropped, staring down at the ground so very far below, but racing up to meet him. In only a few moments, he was passing through a portion of the lower canopy. The smaller trees were still an impressive size, but dwarfed completely by the few used to hold the inn aloft. Their outermost twigs and foliage slapped harmlessly at him as he dropped, more an annoyance than anything else. The thicker branches would be next and they wouldn't be so kind. Just as a particularly large limb loomed before him, the fennec yelped as he felt something wrap tightly around one of his ankles. It drew up snugly and slowed his fall with a sharp yank. It wasn't enough to pull his leg out of socket, but it certainly wasn't too far off.

The world had stopped. Jace sighed in relief and reached up to rub his affected leg. The pain would go away soon, but it was quite present at the moment.

"That was a little too close." The fennec said and relaxed visibly.

As he looked to see what it was that caught his leg, his suspicions were confirmed when he saw a green vine wrapped tightly around him. He chuckled and let his head dangle. His guardian angel was watching out for him after all. Slowly, the vine began to retract, pulling its catch up along with it. Jace left the canopy of the undergrowth, headed back up towards the larger trees above. As he was drawn upward, several more vines reached out and curled loosely about him, cradling and hoisting the fox in a more comfortable position. Soon, he was lost amidst the foliage, still well below any of the habitable portions of the Inn. It was rather nicely private.

A gentle breeze passed through the leaves, relaxing Jace even further as he was settled atop one of the broad limbs. The central tree always had a way of making anyone feel small. For Jace, it was a comforting sensation. The strong, steadfast trunk stood proud and tall, promising to protect anyone within its reach. The fox sighed and sprawled in the little nest of vines under him. As he lay there, one of the vines above dipped down towards him, carrying with it an apple, not of the tree he was currently in. The fruit was dropped against his stomach and he snickered a bit.

"Okay, okay, I guess it's close enough to time I might as well take my lunch break." He collected the apple and took a strong bite out of it.

It was fresh from the autumn quarter, ripe and juicy. Casually, he finished off the little snack the plants had been kind enough to offer him. The core was whisked away somewhere unseen in just the same way the apple had arrive in the first place. It was quite a lovely way to spend his lunch.

As he relaxed again, he noticed the vines becoming more active. A few began to slip up under his shirt. Others began trying to unfasten his harness. Another group began fondling with his trousers. It seemed he would have to pay for the rescue. Knowing how payment was to be exacted, he didn't resist. The smooth, green tendrils moved about slowly and tenderly, caressing his figure as he was undressed, even cupping gently against his groin once it was exposed.

Jace chuckled and gave himself to the nest, closing his eyes and relaxing, "I know what you're looking for. Just... go easy on me, okay?"

A soft squeeze came to his groin, making him shudder a bit. He inhaled sharply as the amorous plants fondled him. It gave them the opportunity to explore a little further. A single vine, coated in a sticky, sweet nectar, prodded gently at his lips. Jace grinned softly and slipped his tongue out, running it along the almost candy-like ooze. With his interest gained, the vine pushed forward ever so softly, entering his mouth. The fox sealed his lips around it and suckled away, drinking the delicious resin. His legs began to spread as he felt the mass below folding itself over against his groin, wrapping around his steadily growing length. A flower-like formation bloomed from one of the folds of the vines and slowly engulfed the gently throbbing spire. It was strangely warm to the touch and delightfully slick.

The fennec didn't have to do anything really. The nest was doing all the work, giving him a lovely drink while tending to his other needs. As he relaxed even further, perhaps an effect of the nectar, he felt a pressure against his rump. Another vine, coated in the same sticky ooze, pressed against the pucker hiding just under his tail. Jace grunted and tensed softly, finding his arms and legs restrained now. It wasn't unexpected, nor was it necessarily undesired. He just hoped it wouldn't be too rough. A steady push came behind the intruding vine, gently working this way and that against his anus until it managed to slip its way in.

A low moan claimed the fox. The moment his jaws parted wider, the vine at his lips pushed deeper, slipping towards the back of his throat. Every inch that wormed its way down his gullet was coated in that same lovely moisture, encouraging him to lick away. The tendril below pushed deeper into his rectum, turning slowly as it navigated his insides. The fennec squirmed and began trying to thrust into the odd blossom wrapped around his length. The rigid thing pulsed and drooled freely into the petals. The bloom began to suckle gently on him, drawing away any musky leavings he might provide. The rest of the nest began to wrap around him, squeezing and kneading softly into his form. It was akin to a sensual massage, except they were violating his tender backside and filling his throat.

Again the fox groaned, his noises muffled by the vine lodged in his mouth. He could feel it continuing to push onward, turning over on itself down in his stomach. And it was still dribbling that sticky, sweet nectar. A soft bulge formed in his abdomen, both from the vine sliding down his throat and the one still sliding up into him from behind. Eventually, when he had developed a rather noticeable paunch, the inward progression stopped. What came next was an undulation.

The vines in both ends began to ripple, growing thicker, then thinner, in waves. Each time they stretched outward, it gave the fennec reason to tense again. The motion of the waves moved down along the tendrils, disappearing into his mouth and under his tail. A new tightness began to

form in his belly as he realized what they were doing. They were pumping the nectar directly into him. He shivered and squeezed his eyes shut as his tummy continued to expand ever so slowly. There was nothing he could do. He was at the mercy of the nest. And he wasn't altogether unhappy about it. His shaft bucked powerfully, threatening to unleash its own sticky blast but it never seemed to come. The nest wasn't letting him. A single vine was wrapped tightly around the base of his length, making sure he couldn't find release until it was ready to let him.

The whole experience lasted for a good ten minutes, Jace's abdomen swelling larger and larger ever so slowly until he looked as if he were nine months pregnant. As he waited for everything to finally settle down, he felt a sizable bulge press up under his tail. It was about to deposit something fairly large inside him, and he would have to stretch to let it in. He grunted and arched his back, trying to relax enough to let the vine do its work. The swell had to be the size of a canary melon, a large one. The tapered end began to wedge itself into his backside, making him thrash about a bit more. Jace flexed his legs, huffing and squirming, actually trying to push himself down onto the swell. Inch by inch it slipped in, spreading him wider with every passing moment, until at last, he could feel the curve of the other end, tapering back down. It slipped the rest of the way in with a firm pop, giving his tummy reason to swell just a bit further.

The fennec's entire form tensed powerfully as the vine wrapped around his length finally relaxed, permitting him the release he so desperately needed. A heated blast soaked the inside of the bloom surrounding his aching shaft, drinking vigorously of his seed. He panted and bucked his hips feeling the vine retreating from his throat. When it finally pulled free, the fox gasped loudly, at last able to drink deeply of the fresh air. The vine inserted below did not withdraw. It remained firmly tucked under his tail. He could even feel the odd lump slipping this way and that around inside him, no doubt trying to reach the end of the tendril so it could be properly deposited.

"Oh god... if that's your idea of going easy on me... I can't even begin to imagine what the rough stuff must be like!" Jace allowed himself to cackle tiredly.

A new squirm claimed his form as he felt the motion inside hasten. It must be near the end. Eventually, he felt a strange plop deep in his belly and he sighed softly in relief. Slowly, the invader began to withdraw, still pumping a few little spurts of the sugary, syrupy stuff as it retreated. After a good five minutes of the agonizingly slow process, the vine removed itself completely. Jace shivered and clenched tight. He didn't want to lose any of the gooey contribution he'd been filled with. He knew what it was for.

A soft push from behind sat the fennec up. His belly sloshed audibly and he brought his hands to rest against the bloated dome. He was certainly satisfied, for the moment at least, and in a very receptive mood. That sweet honey, whatever it was, sure had a powerful, intoxicating effect, not necessarily to make someone drunk, but certainly to alter their mood.

Jace giggled a little as he squeezed his tummy, reveling in the sensation of being so full, "I look like I'm gonna be a mommy."

A few of the vines joined his hands, folding against his domed middle and stroking along its surface oh so tenderly. As they kept him placated in such a manner, the nest began to hoist him

up once more. He didn't even seem to notice it until he spotted a rather large flower blooming on a branch not too far away. It was enormous, at least eight feet across. He knew what was coming and he cackled all over again. The vines wrapped about him to support the gravid fox, curling him up in a ball around his belly. Jace continued to giggle as he was dipped lower into the petals of the enormous flower. Once he was settled inside, the blossom closed up around him, sealing up tight. His voice grew quieter and more muffled.

Only moments passed before the flower blossomed again, opening to reveal not the fennec it had closed up around, but a dragoness of lovely jade. Shi was taller than the fox, and possessed a similar build, slender but healthy. Her pale green hair draped down over her shoulders, adorned with a multitude of small, white flowers. They weren't just styled into her mane, they grew from it. The lady sat in the center of the bloom, caressing a heavy swell in her middle. Shi sighed and squeezed the dome, feeling Jace turn and squirm about slowly inside. A robe was dipped down towards her from above by the vines that had dropped the fox into the flower earlier, and Shi slipped into it. It was a simple toga, covering her form easily enough, fox-filled belly and all.

Once Shi was dressed, the dragon, who seemed to have power over the plants, was lowered down to the gardens below. Shi cooed as the weight of her passenger settled in the center of her being.

"How many times have I told you to check your gear before going out? This is what... the fourth time you've had a line snap?" The dragoness seemed a little cross with Jace.

The hidden fennec giggled through his nectar-induced fever, "I know... sorry Carmel. But you caught me at least."

"Yeah, I caught you... this time." Shi frowned a little, hugging her belly protectively, "What if I can't catch you the next time?"

Jace stretched a bit, making the dragoness shiver from the expansion of her tummy, "Then I hit the ground, The Promise catches me, and I wake up in bed. How'd you do that by the way? Weren't supposed to be over on the other side of the garden? In the winter quarter?"

Carmel frowned and wrapped her arms around the great bulge, trying to compress him a bit so he couldn't distract her, "I see and feel through the plants, remember?"

The fennec relented in his stretching and went back to fawning over his own swollen middle, "Yeah, but don't you have to focus or pick an area or something?"

"Whenever you do maintenance on the nodes, I keep an eye on you. Just in case." Carmel began to walk, her pace slow and deliberate under the weight, but not so slow as to hinder her too much. The gentle bounce would no doubt soothe the fennec, possibly to sleep.

"Aww, you were worried about me? That's sweet of you!" Jace was still deep in the effects of the euphoric ooze bubbling away inside him.

Carmel blushed ever so softly and stroked along his ample tummy, "Of course I worry about you. And if you can't learn to check your gear before going out, then I guess I'm just going to have to figure out a new punishment for you. I can tell you're actually enjoying these little sessions with the vines now. I'm starting to think you might be doing it on purpose."

"What!?" Jace gasped, "Me? Get myself into trouble just so you have to save me and 'punish' me for it? Perish the thought!" He cackled, squeezing his own tummy. He was indeed beginning to relish the whole experience.

"Well, since you're so tempted to put yourself at risk, maybe I should keep you in there for a week or two. Maybe that'll teach you a lesson." Shi gave his tummy a firm but ineffectual slap.

"Aww c'mon honey. I've got three more node clusters to get through, not to mention all the Annexes. I've got my day completely booked. My belly I can work with. Your belly... well, it's kinda hard to see through, and it does kind of crush my typing speed." The fennec teased.

"I don't care. If I have to, I'll finish the network maintenance for you. You can walk me through it." Carmel huffed a little, crossing his arms and glaring down at his vast stomach.

"Oh come on, it's not like whatever might happen can't be undone." The fox had a point. He just didn't realize that his savior was trying to make one too.

Carmel pouted then sunk into a more serious tone, "I know The Promise would catch you and bring you back... but... it's a personal thing. I really don't like seeing or hearing about people falling from up there. If I can keep it from happening, then I'm going to do whatever it takes."

The fox nuzzled softly against one of the hands resting just on the other side of the slick, smooth wall holding him in, "Does that have anything to do with why you and Smokey are so tight?"

He knew it did, he just didn't know how. And he often tried to coax the explanation out of him.

The jade lady looked off into the distance as Shi was forced to think about the topic. Shi usually danced around the matter, not really wanting to discuss it, "If I say yes, will you drop it?"

Jace's mind was just clear enough to let him continue to battle away on the girl's willpower. He pressed out gently again, this time giving him a loving kiss from within.

"Honey, if we're going to be together, you gotta learn to trust me. Not necessarily about the whole falling thing. I mean about trusting me enough to let your guard down and share with me."

Carmel closed his eyes and sighed, "I just... It's not something I like recalling, okay?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't know it was such a bad subject." The fox said with a whimper. That was new, and it made him feel bad for having pressed.

The dragoness shook hir head, "I mean... it's hard for me to talk about. I want to share but it's a long, complicated story. It probably would be better if we involved Smokey in the discussion. Personal experiences and all."

"Only if you think your brother would be okay with it. I've tried getting him to clue me in but you two are just so cagey about it." He paused, nuzzling softly against the wall of the womb housing him again, "I don't want to make either of you uncomfortable."

Carmel shook hir head, stroking over the spot where shi felt his affection, "No, you're right... I need to share more with you. We're together, and that means we shouldn't keep secrets." The jade lady smirked softly, "And he's not my brother, at least not right now. It's kind of nice having a big sister."

Jace chuckled, "Right, forgot. Only happened a little while ago. How's Smokey adjusting?"

The green dragoness turned and began strolling back towards the central tree, aiming to head up into the Inn proper, "Well, the first couple of days were a little exhausting for hir. A couple of the guests took a special interest in hir and you know how shi is... shi can't say no to keeping guests happy. But after shi managed to stop walking funny, I think shi's started to settle into it, even like it. In fact, this might be a really good time to try and get hir to open up about that part of the past."

The fennec nodded with a happy little giggle, still fawning over his own bloated tummy. He wasn't about to admit it outright, but he found being this round rather fun.

"Alright, if you think shi'll be okay with talking about it, then lead on!"

The jade lady nodded, picking up a bit of speed as shi walked. Hir tummy swayed and bounced with each step, and hir hands remained pressed against the grand dome, stroking over it tenderly. Oh how shi enjoyed keeping hir boyfriend pinned inside hir like this. The temptation to just keep him was far too powerful, yet shi somehow found the will to let him back out every time.

Of course, it often took a few days before shi finally got around to doing it.