

AUTUMN KING'S TIDINGS: PART 1

Featuring: Jester (Leloko)

Jester was delighted--positively *jubilant*--at receiving an invitation from the great Autumn King. As he waved the mysterious little creature farewell his flowers bloomed in joy; petals spread wide, and rosy pollen scattered around as his tail swayed merrily.

He'd always heard the rumours surrounding the capricious king and the nights of revelry open to only the chosen few. Jester had long admired this unpredictable spirit, eagerly devouring every fable that featured him, and ardently prayed each year to be gifted that special envelope.

It seems at long last the king had noticed him, and Jester's tail thumped with excitement at knowing he would finally meet his idol. *Oh joy of joys! The 29th can't come soon enough!*

He held no worries about creating the 'perfect gift' – In fact, his gift had been ready and waiting for many years now.

Jester bolted home in a frenzy, beelining for the large wooden hatch at the side of his burrow, threw it wide with a resounding *thud* and hopped down into his secret wine cellar.

His prize lay at the back in the darkest, most secluded corner. Cradled alone on its own dedicated shelf lay a large bottle coated in a fine layer of dust. The glass was clear and thick, and etched into its surface were a myriad of vines and leaves.

When Jester picked the bottle up to brush away the dust, its contents made a deep glug, and as he brought the bottle out into the light, its rich red hue glistened. Jesters' special gift was to be this homemade lingonberry liqueur. Although Jester had been put-out at having to wait so long for his invitation, the passage of time had only improved his liqueur further, the flavours deepening as it aged. Now it was so thick that when one tilted the bottle it coated the glass, looking eerily similar to blood.

Over the years he'd learned that the Autumn King particularly adored gifts that celebrated the season, and Jester had spent countless hours picking only the most plump lingonberries he could find, infused the alcohol with seasonal herbs and a thick sweet sugar syrup. The flavour now should be strong and tart and sweet, and Jester was sure the Autumn King would appreciate the tongue-smacking concoction.

All he needed to do was prepare the finishing touches; *A nice little hamper and some treats to eat together with the Liqueur should be enough*, he mused. *And I know exactly who to ask!*

Jester stopped by the confectioners' boutique briefly, picking out a selection of indulgent bitter chocolates. Their scent was rich and sweet, the smoky aroma reminiscent of a bonfire.

He then scurried across the town square, kicking up leaves as he went, and before long found himself outside a rather shabby looking shop. The window was stuffed to the rafters with eclectic looking items, some functional, some decorative, but all clearly made from random odds and ends; It gave them an oddly cozy, preloved vibe that was very popular with the townsfolk lately.

This was Brindle's workshop; the oddball leloko an artist who specialized in crafting all manner of things from foraged materials; Nothing could be more fitting than their work!

As expected, when Jester let himself in, he was greeted with a cacophony of cracking noise as he walked in on Brindle in the middle of snapping up a large bundle of handsome-looking silver birch branches. The artist only noticed Jester when he caught a stray twig as it flew in his direction.

"Gosh, Mr. Jester, I am so sorry! There's just not enough room in the back, you see...I had to tend to them right here and it's usually quiet at this hour." Brindle was abashed and apologized profusely, scrambling out of their veritable nest. They'd been so focused on their work they failed to notice all the mess piling up around them. "Do give me a moment to clear this away, and I'll be with you shortly!"

After a brief lull and a cup of tea, Jester excitedly shared his ideas with Brindle.

"You'd like a wine basket? For the Autumn King? How cute, I would love to make one for you!" They chirped, orange flower blooming cutely, and they hopped from their stool to dig through a nearby closet. "In fact, i just got my paws on a large batch of straw from the most recent harvest; I think that will do wonderfully~"

The two leloko spent hours mulling over designs, Brindle's creative mind inspired by the auspicious event and going into overdrive. After haggling over the price--brindle refusing to take coin was always troublesome--Jester left, with Brindle's promise their basket would be complete in a week or two; It left plenty time for Jester to go about bribing and inquiring about where he might find the Autumn King's residence.

Sure enough only a week later, Jester received a message from Brindle; *Your order is complete! Come check it out! xx*

When Brindle pulled aside the blanket, revealing his handiwork with a triumphant grin, Jester still found the level of artistry surprising.

The hamper was a soft golden colour, the harvest straw still smooth and glossy despite its age. Brindle's nimble little fingers had weaved it expertly, creating ornate plaits across the surface, and decorated the handle with seasonal clusters of dried leaves and shiny berry sprigs. The shape was curved, loosely based on a classic cornucopia, and when stuffed full of goodies, became quite a spectacle to behold.

Jester, ruefully impressed, let brindle arrange the precious cargo, and they both sat back admiring the offering; Everything was picture perfect like a painting, and the large decorative

liqueur bottle, angled just so looked incredibly attractive nestled as it was between dainty chocolate boxes and cozy looking blankets. The decorative berries tucked here and there gave everything a mischievous pop of colour.

"...Do you think he'll enjoy it?" Brindle asked, eyeing the hamper nervously, clearly reminiscing on Bal's most recent accidents. "I know / would, but you can never know with that mantibab."

Jester grins, broad and sharp, his eyes alight with excitement and anticipation not worried in the slightest.

"Well, i certainly hope so~"