

# ***The Tales Of Chêne***

*A Furry Medieval Fantasy Story*

*Written By:*

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## Warning

This story is only for mature audiences **18 or older, anyone under 18 years of age should not read this story.** It is intended for mature audiences.

This series will contain the following:

- **LGBTQ content**
- **Sexual Content**
  - **Language**
  - **Blood/Gore**
  - **Violence**
- **Alcohol/Drug Use**
- **Uncomfortable Historical Themes**

If for any reason these topics make you uncomfortable, please do not read this series. Viewer discretion is advised. Otherwise, enjoy the story!

# Chapter

## ~One~

*The Miller, The Brewer, and the Cathedral*

I feel... cold... moist... a veil of darkness clouds my vision. I reach out, to never reach. I move my legs, to never bend a toe. I move my tongue, to never utter a sound. I move my tail, without the feel of the cool air gently flowing between its fur. I lay, without knowing I have went to rest. I feel sharpness, pain everywhere. I feel moist, yet dry. I feel as if I have reached eternal slumber, but no All Maker stand before thyself. Are my transgressions- many they are- not called to question? Is my salvation unattained, yet attained? No, none of these can be true, but I feel they are partially. What has become of me? It is then I feel warmth. Not of the Creator, not of my own blood. It's the paws of another, grasping my head, then my neck I feel two fingers caress from chin to clavicle. Do I hear... rejoice, faint laughter and crying of joy? It is then I feel tickling on my ear, the furs of my pointed ears feel tingly and I hear the voice of a man, an older man talk to me as I slumber...

“You will be ok my son, for the mercy of the Creator spares thou from the wrath of lifelessness. May our omnipresent Creator give you new life from weakness, and upon your wake shall he give you strength to live another life. My poor child, thou hast been through a lot during the Sabbath. On the days of rest ye has fallen to the blade and the fist but still clings to life. How I envy the young, the resilience of youth allows one to recover from the most atrocious of punishments. I have spoken much already, for it is time to awaken ye to his new life.”

It is then I feel... strange. My nose picks up a scent so foul I feel the very Gates of Inferno are in front of me. How foul, the stench of burning shite causes suffering within my very soul... I feel as if I may retch.

Suddenly, my eyes opened. I can see, feel, smell, hear, and taste. I feel alive once more, and as I loom upward I see a tall grey column, its gray stone bricks placed perfectly in sequence going upward of what seems several yards until a domed roof, painted with fellow animals and sights of angels envelop this brightly colored dome. Candlelight lights the room around me, the sounds of coughing, spattering of liquid, groans of pain, crying, and the very sounds of death loom around my ears. It is then I gain the strength to arise from my slumber, but as I do a guiding hand reaches behind my head and another helps lift me up, a pillow placed behind my head as I sit upright and look directly at two men in front of me.

An old grey wolf, eyes of blue as bright as the sky during midday, his coat grey and white showing his old age. His glistening white robes, adorned with embroidered red silks bearing a circle with a cross in the center. He is a high priest of the Temple of the All-Maker. In his hand he holds the foul smelling substance-burning sulphur. To my left, kneeling facing me is a man in a bloodied white coat, his brown pants also bloodied and torn, revealing his black fur underneath. I look upward and meet his gaze, a black wolf with long curly brunette locks gaze upon me. His brown eyes meeting mine and his concerned expression turns into a look of... annoyance?

“Lukas you dumb bastard, am I glad you are not food for worms and maggots. The Earth beneath us shall not know the taste of your rotting corpse just yet. I am glad you are alright, sadly we are not in a nightmare my boy.” says this older black wolf before me.

This man is Maximus, Max for short. Upon seeing his face, a swath of memories came forth. He took in my mother and I when I was just a kit. Refugees supposedly from the misfortunate circumstances of poverty. I never knew my father, I’ve always assumed he was a man looking for a quick willy wetting and did not care if he produce a kit. My mother was rather... honest about her past. Speaking of my mother...

“My mother? Where is she, where am I? Why am I in a... cathedral?” I ask.

As Max was about to speak, the High Priest places a finger on his maw and then turns to me.

“Young fox, you need not worry about your mother right now. She is... resting. Before your guardian chastises you I shall offer comfort where he offers insults in the very house of purity and divinity.” the High Priest turns his gaze from me to Max and glares at him. It is then Max gets up, and walks towards the opened large wooden doors several yards away from the High Priest and I. As he walks away I see him lean against the door, briefly matching my gaze before he looks away towards what I assume is a bust street outside. I then shift my gaze upon the High Priest again.

“My mother, she is resting? Why can I not recall what happened? Where am I at right now your holiness?”

“Lukas, you young man are in the Cathedral of Silver in the township of Argent, former capital of the Kingdom of Chêne. Your village, Little Leaf... was sacked. Nobody knows who attacked and why just yet... I wish I could offer more knowledge but this raid upon your hamlet was sudden and without mercy. Not one banner remained from the fight, for the enemy barely faced any casualties while your poor hamlet... suffered greatly. I do not wish to lie to you young man, for telling a lie is against my order. Your mother, she is... resting in peace I am afraid... According to your guardian outside the door, she died saving you from a mounted knight, the details are too graphic for me to say more... I am an old man and still the thought of blood and suffering makes my belly uneasy. Enough about me, I know you suffer greatly, but I must go unfortunately other patients require my aid. I will have Alterman Morris assist you further.” Then, the old High Priest gets up, his old bones wobbling as he stands and his old tail droopy and hairs flat walks away to another patient in the distance.

My mother... is dead? How... why... why did she have to die? Why were we attacked, the thoughts of my mothers face, her ochre red and sunset orange fur around her comforting blue hazel eyes, her graying Brunette hair atop her head. Her warm comforting voice, the memories we cherish most, all swarm me in a fit of madness and I feel so overwhelmed by this sudden news that I begin to feel tears ran down my fur. I never got to say goodbye, just like that I am departed by tragedy from my mother... The woman who sacrificed to make a better life for me, a woman who found joy in the life of a miller... I just, can't stop crying as I think about being a kit watching her bag the flour, measure it out for each household in the village, throwing the bags onto the cart to be sold and transported... how she used to make the best field peas with oatcakes, roasted eels with green sauce, she knew how to cook to feed a king... why are these memories so mundane coming to me now... Its a lot for me to process... As tears run down my face, I can't contain my despair my soul cries out for this to all be a nightmare, when will I wake up, when will my mother splash cool water on me to wake me up from a deep miserable slumber? When will Beauford come yank my lazy bones from my hay bed and make me awaken from slumber?

It is then a younger lion with barely a mane to show walks up to me, his brown eyes meet my gaze and he asks me a question.

“Are you sir Lukas of Little Leaf? I have come to care for you and another three people in my section. I know this must be a lot, while I have not experienced such a... tragedy I imagine it's quite terrifying... please rest sir... is there anything you need? Here, have my handkerchief sir, it's the least I could do...” asks Alterman Morris, well... more like Alterboy but alas...

“T-hank you Morris, I-I need some time to myself for now... thank you anyways...” I say, tears running down my face and making the collar of my bloodied white tunic wet.

As he takes his leave, I see Max walk towards me, his head shaking as he approaches me. He seems to be lost in his own thoughts as he approaches me.

“None of this makes sense, why would they attack Little Leaf, there is no strategic gain to it...Unless... no, no that can't be why nobody should know-” He looks upon me and stops talking to himself and speaks up. “Lukas, I... assume he told you everything? Give it to holy men to tell you everything plainly without censorship when it comes to tragedy or your sins... regardless I am at least glad you are alright. I know you are afraid right now, many thoughts must be running amok in that head of yours... Your injuries are not too serious compared to others i've seen, you were impaled partially by a lance but that is merely a flesh wound-”

“I WAS IMPALED??? HOW IS THAT MERELY A SCOFFABLE FLESH WOUND???”

“Shut it lad you know I used to be a footman in King William IV army... the lance grazed your lower right abdomen and luckily, it seems it will heal on its own, they put a lot of poultice and alcohol on that wound, clean bandages too you'll be alright. Otherwise you're just bruised. It's been a day and a half since you have laid here, and I highly doubt you'll be able to walk for another couple days. Anyways I know I am horrible at this... comforting speech whatever you may call it. Point is you're alive and still kicking around enough to recover. In the meantime, I have

business to take care of in Argent, connections to other millers and such ya know how it goes. I'll check on you whenever I can. By the way, your big black bear friend Beauford, survived. He is less wounded than you are, and has been helping wherever he can at the monastery on the other side of town with the other injured patients. When I see him I will send him your way. For now, rest and heal for what comes next will not be easy. I shall take my leave."

With that, Max walks out the cathedral and disappears into the bright light shining through the doors... Typical Max, old war veteran who will tell you how it is instead of well... what I should probably be told right now... I've stopped crying for now, he's... right. I need to rest and regain my strength and ill, deal with what happened to my mother... later I suppose I don't know I want to cry, scream, hit my head against the stone column I rest upon but I know this is... reality... not a nightmare nor a drug induced vision, but reality.

Minutes turn into hours as I lay down, drifting in and out of sleep. I drank small beer, and ate a mini loaf of manchet- a gracious gift of the lord of this town. Morris eventually walks to me holding a wooden bowl and wooden spoon in his hands as he kneels down.

"I bring you pottage made of beef, potatoes, mirepoix, and oats. May this pottage fill you up sir. Will you need assistance eating?"

"I think I can feed myself Morris, thank you young lion. Though I admit, after my dinner I may need to uh... urinate."

"Ah, no problem then sir, since you can use your arms I will bring a small bucket and let you fill it, and i'll cover you with a sheet and let you relieve yourself. At least it doesn't involve- black bile" the lion chuckles as he hands me the bowl and walks away. I eat my pottage, and as I finish the bowl I sit it down on the cathedral floor. I lay back, and as I try to relax I hear a loud booming voice coming from the door of the cathedral.

I look over and see a huge black bear dressed in a bloodied white tunic, unbuttoned to the last two buttons, his black flowing crown cut hair, his weathered brown floppy hat with a black raven feather as its plumage, those worn brown pants and leather work boots... yep that would be Beauford. I love the man, he is my childhood friend but does the guy not have an inside voice...he's bent over panting and breathing heavily the big bastard must have almost passed out from lack of air from running here. I am shocked he hasn't collapsed on the floor already.

As soon as he spots me, he runs towards me and as he does Morris steps in front of him. "Sir, this is my patient Mister Lukas, what is your business with him if I may ask? "

"This fox here is my childhood pal, I recognize his curly brown locks and emerald green eyes anywhere! When I heard he survived from Max I ran over here immediately! I brought him some spirits! My uncle Stephen runs an inn here and he gave me some spirits as a gift!"

"Sir... you do know this is a cathedral right?!? Yes we offer small beer, but the water here in town is not that clean and small beer is more appropriate than... spirits. Please lower your voice, or I will have the guards escort you out of here..." Morris glares at Beauford's gray hazel eyes.

"Fine... fine I will save the spirits for later and lower my voice, but never stop me from checking on my best bud, ok... pal?" Beauford bends down to meet the young lion at his height and glares at him. Morris rolls his eyes and scoffs before walking away, his tail hairs all puffed out from the incident.

Beauford then slowly descends to the floor, and sits criss-crossed as he looks at me. "I was worried about you Lukas, not gonna lie... things on my end are not great either... my uh, father died during the attack... It's... hard for me to think about just... I am happy that on this day I have not lost everything Lukas, I have you, and my extended family here in town, and I am grateful for all I have." I reach out my paw, and his paw grasps mine back and I look into his eyes, tears start

running down his face. As tears run down his, my own tears begin to run down mine once more.

“My friend, we have been there for one another through thick and thin, I am sorry for your loss, as I have lost my mother, you have lost both your father and mother. If I could move my legs, I would stand up and give you a big bear hug my friend. Here, lay beside me.”

Beauford then sits down on the cold stone floor beneath us and we continue holding paws, I place my other paw upon his and look into his big sad gray hazel eyes. His eyes always amused me, a deep metallic gray with brown and green. They are truly unique as he is unique to me. He is my friend, and nothing will ever change that.

“You are my best friend, and while we both are sad, let us rejoice in this moment in our shared gift of life. The universe has spared us, and in doing so we have the chance to find new life among the ashes of our past.” I continue to hold his paw as I lay my head on his shoulder, they are almost as big as the pillow I lay upon.

“Ya always have a way with words Lukas, \*wipes his tears with his free hand\* you sound like a bard with the words you mutter sometimes my friend. You are right however, I need to start thinkin’ about the future I suppose. I love you my friend, let us enjoy our company. Say, I am thirsty and kind of starving my friend, anywhere I can find food?”

I chuckle “Beauford you big bear always thinking about food and drink, your stomach always amuses me with how through the most emotional of moments it's lust to be filled brings you from the deepest feelings of melancholy. Here, I have half a small loaf of manchet and a partially drunken tankard of small bear, I am neither thirsty nor hungry, go ahead and have them.” I let go of his paw with both my paws I reach, one grabbing the manchet and the other grabbing the small beer.

Beauford nearly rips my paw off grabbing them both, and within one minute the whole tankard of small beer is drained and the crumbs of the loaf all over his

belly. I laugh as he brushes the crumbs on the floor, and silently belches. Here we lay in the comfort of one another for quite some time, I feel so tired. I think I will fall asleep.

*“L...Lu...Luk...LUKAS HOLD ON!” I feel a set of arms grasp around me and a feeling of two cushions on my back as I fall to the ground, as I do I feel the arms of this person grasp me tightly. This voice... mother? I suddenly feel a sharpness on my side, as if flesh is torn open. My flesh. I scream loudly and feel my Mother begin to breathe heavily, I feel wet, the smell of iron and dirt fill my nostrils. I feel her grasp on me begin to loosen, she lets out a faint breath and mutters something, I can’t comprehend it until she utters her last word. “I... love...you” before her grasp on me loosens, and she gives one last breath on the back of my neck. I slightly move my head to see a pool of red beneath us both, and a small tear on my right side in my shirt, blood leaking out. However, I realize most of that blood does not belong to me, but to my mother. Then, I feel her grasp suddenly released and pushed off of me, a strong cold metallic paw grabs me and turns me over. Above me I see a brown bear in armor, he kicks me in the belly and starts punching me. I do my best to block his hits, but he keeps hitting me and laughing before he stops and I hear gurgling. I look up to see this big armored bear gasping for air as a blade protrudes from his neck. In near moments, he collapses on the ground and I see a black figure above me. Max? It looks like Max, however once my adrenaline goes away I feel sharp pain all over, the pain overwhelms me so much I fall asleep...*

I suddenly awakened.

“MOTHER NOOO! PLEASE STOP-” I begin shaking and Beauford wakes up from beside me and holds my head. Then, Morris runs up to me and bends down.

“It will be ok Sir Lukas, it was just a nightmare. Here, you need to calm down, let me grab you some mint chamomile tea from the cauldron, you need to rest. Sir Beauford, I talked to the High Priest and he will allow you to stay here by your friend’s side if you help us around here. Sadly in the past hour a handful of people succumb to their wounds, and some more are being given their Last Rights

as their souls prepare to go to the afterlife. For now rest with your friend, there is nothing you can do right now.”

Afterwards, Morris brings me some tea. After I drink the tea, I start to feel more calm and I am assisted with relieving my bladder before I fall back asleep. No dreams this time, but after I awaken I see Beauford helping around the cathedral. Over the next two days, my wounds slowly begin to heal, and the cathedral staff treat me with poultice, fresh bandages, alcohol, herbal remedies of various sorts, but mostly with derivatives of poplar, which aids in my recovery by relieving my pain and reducing my swelling. Over these two days, I think more and more about my mother, the village, and my friends. I know this will be a tough experience to move on from, however I am grateful that Beauford, Max, and I still live. On my third day under care, I was able to finally stand up and walk around with assistance from Beauford. I am glad for my friend, and while I am terrified, I know the universe spared me for a reason, and now I guess... I shall see what the next chapter of my life unfolds to be.

*Fin~*

# *Chapter*

## *~Two~*

*Where The Silver Flows*

It has been three days since I was hospitalized at the cathedral, and today is the day I finally get out of the confines of the cathedral to explore the city of Argent. After a light breakfast of oat pottage and small beer, Beauford helps me finally rise to my feet for the first time in three days. I can still feel the bruises across my legs from being assaulted by the knight nearly four days ago. As Beauford holds me up, Morris hands me a pair of crutches to help me walk around. Apparently, as I was healing Beauford and a few of the church staff helped make me some crutches. As I held the crutches in my paws, and placed the cushions under my arms I felt so excited I felt I could run, but if I did I would end up back on the floor of the cathedral healing. It will take a few more days until I'm ready to walk on my own. After getting used to my crutches, Beauford walks up next to me, and gives me a gentle hug with his right arm.

“So Lukas, are you finally ready to see the world once more? I feel like a mother teaching her cub to walk for the first time!” Beauford then releases a roaring laughter that I swear might have woken up half of the sleeping patients. Afterwards, he releases me and we march forward. I have not been in the presence of natural light for nearly four days, and as I step outside I feel blinded by the ecstatic glow of the sun, feeling its warm embrace along my fur down to my skin beneath. I close my eyes to protect myself from its powerful assault on my face. After a few moments, I slowly opened my eyes.

As I opened my eyes slowly but surely my vision returned and I was met with a sight I will never forget. In front of me was a statue carved from marble, adorned with a crown of silver and emeralds, glistening in the midday sun. A plaque gilded in silver was on the base of the statue facing the entrance to the cathedral. Luckily, my mother secretly taught me to read and write. It is relatively uncommon for anyone from Little Leaf to be able to read and write, so I was a rare exception.

As I think about my mother, I started thinking about the nightmare I had and trying to remember what happened before I fell into a coma.

“Lukas stop staring off into nowhere and read this sign, I can't for the life of me read this!” Beauford commanded.

I use my crutches to ease myself a bit closer so I can read it. I squint my eyes trying to block out the sun's rays, I finally gain enough clarity of vision to read the plaque. "It says... 'The Cathedral of Silver was financed by King William II, and began construction atop of an old ruin, remnants of the pagans who resided here before. This statue commemorates King William II of Argent- Founder of the Emeraude Dynasty.' Huh... so this statue commemorates King William II!" I look up and see a statue of a fox carved from marble, the fox wearing a marble crown adorned with silver and a large emerald. These emeralds come from the capital of Glandshire, which is home to many emerald deposits found amongst deposits of iron and metallic crystals of silver that some alchemists and specialists at the university from the capital are beginning to call "chromium" which is what I heard a merchant travelling through Little Leaf tell me once when I was merely a teenager.

Little Leaf, it is all I can really think of at the moment. Home... well, it was home... I know Beauford is trying to cheer me on, and to an extent cheer himself up. However, my mind, despite all this just, can not help but wander back to home. This all still feels like a... nightmare turned into a dream. As I begin to think about home, Beauford tugs on my tunic sleeve.

"Lukas... take a look over there, to the right. That guy is being escorted by guards it seems? Who in the bloody Hell is that?" asks Beauford.

I look to my right and see four guards, adorned head to toes in composite armor- thick gambersons with padded trousers, chainmail coats, steel plate armor, and helmets with a brim adorned with big green feathers sticking out the top. They look like armored peacocks of sorts. In the middle of this congregation of large towering beastmen adorned like giant armored peacocks, stands a lion. He wears an emerald green and white sleeveless tunic embroidered with silver fabric in a crosshatch pattern on his tunic's shoulders. Underneath this emerald green and white tunic, embroidered with glistening strings of silver is a padded black gambeson and a thin sleeveless chainmail tunic underneath his normal tunic. His trousers black and adorned with beautifully woven oak leaves sewn out of silver laden fabric and his shoes are just as fashionable, being a red color adorned with

silver. On his head is a black chaperon embroidered with more oak leaves, composed of silver laden thread. As Beauford and I feel ourselves drawn to his flamboyant dress and his towering bodyguards, we notice he isn't walking towards the town square to the left of the Cathedral of Silver, but rather towards us? As he approaches his guards, who are holding halberds made of oak and steel, part their formation and the swaggering lion approaches.

“Hello you two, my name is Sir Leonidas V, Fifth Duke of Argent, and Member of House Gris. I know my approach may seem frightening, but do not fear. I am checking on the refugees from Little Leaf, and I just finished evaluating the refugees at the other house of worship- the Church of Gris. From what my sources said, you two are survivors of the attack and are among the first to be cleared medically. I know this may be a lot to ask, however I desperately need your assistance. Come with me, my guards will escort us to the Smoky Bear Inn, as I recall you- the big black bear- are named Beauford. Stephen has agreed to house you and your companion until I can come up with a solution to our... predicament. I need you two to accompany me to the inn. It is the safest place I can think of right now. Do not ask any questions until we reach the cellar of the Inn, do you understand me? Asks Leonidas.

I look briefly into his silver eyes, and notice his thick luscious pale brown mane alongside his beige and white coat, all so well groomed and luscious. I then make eye contact once more before responding.

“Y-yes sir, we understand..” I get so nervous that I swallow and start feeling my fur standing on end.

“Good, you two follow me, do not talk to anyone and pay no mind to anyone passing by. We must be urgent.” As soon as Leonidas finishes talking, one of his guards walks around us and urges us forward as Leonidas turns around and begins walking hastily, I try my best to catch up with my crutches as Beauford supports me and matches my pace.

We do our best to match the pace of Leonidas as the four large armored guards, all bearing halberds push us forward. It feels as if we are being escorted to

the dungeon to await a fate where our heads are severed from our Earthly vessels, but as far as I know we are not in any real trouble. As we pass by a few residences, I really want to admire the architecture of the infamous “City of Silver” -the former capital of Chêne- however we are rushed towards the inn that Beauford’s uncle owns. I can not help but feel my head beginning to drown in the unfortunate circumstances that have bested myself over this past week. Just days ago I was at the behest of Death, his gloomy gaze almost blanketing me in eternal despair. However, here I am now... alive, but this feels so...

“Hey Lukas, I know you are hurt but keep up will ya!” shouts Beauford

“Apologies Beauford, I-I’m sorry” I whisper to him.

We continued to walk in near silence for another couple of minutes until Sir Leonidas whispers to us “We are approaching, we are going into the cellar in the back you all keep close my other guards will watch for us while my personal guard Geoffrey will escort us to the cellar personally.”

Beauford and I both gulp, I can sense my best friend’s anxiety and we both can sense a feeling of apprehension writhing deep within us as we follow closely behind Leonidas as he walks between an alleyway with a sparsely cobbled road littered with old barrels, broken glass bottles, and other waste from the dwelling on the right. A three story wattle and dob residence with grey clay tile roofing towers over us to our right, and a cobbled stone and white plastered building painted with a deep red vine design along the outline of the plastered walls near the stone foundation and lacquered log supports of a two story building with a grey clay tile roof to our left- which I assume to be the Smoky Bear Inn owned by Beauford’s uncle-Stephen.

As Leonidas approached the back of the alley near the wall of Argent, the alleyway branched off in two directions- one to the right which seems to be the back alleyway behind a series of two and three story residences. To the left the back alleyway goes behind the Smoky Bear which then leads to the entrance of a small market place between a smaller gate that leads outside the walls of Argent onto a

bridge which leads to the mainland. The small city of Argent has a moat around the city walls.

- They enter the tavern and relax. The boyos meet Beaufort Uncle and wait until nightfall. Lukas and Beaufort beg and successfully convince the Duke and Beaufort Uncle to let Beaufort join them in the journey.
- At nightfall they enter the sewers through a passage and after a short walk the Duke presses a stone brick and a secret door opens up.
- They enter the secret room and see it's a safe room stockpiled with weapons, some dried foods, ale, secret documents, and the meeting commences as Lukas, Beaufort, and the Duke see two hooded figures in black robes with weird symbols on them- one codenamed Prophet the other codenamed Salvation.

I step forward into the saferoom inside the sewers with the Duke and Beauford. In the room lies several pieces of furniture, weathered wooden chairs whose varnish has been eaten away by the climate of the sewers, the stale air fills the room but is offset by the burning of scented candles. Other furniture that I immediately noticed upon stepping into the room are crates, a bookshelf with many old books nestled within, a rack of assorted weaponry on the wall facing the entrance, also nestled between the crates. A small wooden roundtable sits in the middle of the room surrounded by wooden chairs. However, what catches my attention even more is a shadowy figure in the corner of the saferoom. As I step further into the room the figure becomes more clear. It is a hooded figure, clothed in a raven black robe adorned with raven's feathers and black leather on the shoulders and waists. It appears to have a masculine form, wearing solid black pants adorned with pieces of black padding, black leather, and chainmail also painted black. His boots are also black as he steps forward into the dimly lit room. My heart begins to pound in fear, my mouth begins to slowly dry and I gulp, I feel the urge to back up and flee. As I look to my right, Beauford, who is supporting me, grabs onto my arm tightly, and takes a slight step back as if he may grab me by my arm and drag me away at a moment's notice.

The figure then walks forward once more, revealing a golden snout with whiskers and a slight presence of a golden mane, his remaining mane and eyes concealed by a beaked raven black hood. He appears to be a cultist, no no... perhaps an assassin? His regalia is a mixture, however, as perplexed by his outfit as I am about his intentions, he opens his maw and begins to speak in a flat, monotonous voice.

“My Lord, you bear the package I assume? For our... mutual client?” asks the mysterious figure. “Yes, I do. So they sent you? Who are you, you are not the person I met before?” asks the Duke.

“You are right, because our Prophet was the one who you originally met. Our Prophet ordered me to come here, for he is out doing other business for the Sanctuary. I am Salvation, for it is I who brings others close to the Abyss, allowing them to cross the veil of light and the Abyss. I was assigned because of my specialty, My Lord. It is my duty to bring the package to its desired recipient in exchange for ten thousand Argent Silver Crowns?” asks Salvation.

“Ten thousand Crowns??? I did not realize assassins and cultists charged Our Grace such a hefty fee for the package, but well...” the Duke looks at me and then to Beauford before shifting his focus back on Salvation. “I suppose given the circumstances and secrecy of the ordeal given recent events which I know your... ‘Sanctuary’ is aware of... it is necessary.” says the Duke.

“Those who do not know the way of the Abyss do not understand our way of life, but no matter it is not my place to debate with you as my client. This package I was told was a letter and I was informed rather late into the evening a day ago by our Prophet that these two young males- a black bear with grey hazel eyes and a fox with green eyes will be carrying this letter? Do these young men understand the conditions of the contract?” asks Salvation.

“Not yet, but that was why I brought them to this safe house in the sewers, I had to ensure nobody would follow us and I have not had a chance to brief them extensively on their duties. I will do so now however.” says the Duke.

The Duke then looks toward us, and motions us to come forward, Salvation remains in his position as Beauford, with a bit of hesitancy, walks me over to one of the chairs near a small roundtable in the middle of the room, and sits me down as he then takes a seat next to me as well. The Duke then walks forward and sits in the chair facing towards the weapon rack. Then, Salvation sits in the nearest chair after we are seated. In an act of trust, or at least I assume it is, he lowers his hood. Underneath Salvation’s hood is a golden maned lion with beautiful golden fur, almost glistening under the faint light of the candles. However, despite his majestic aura, his eyes and his face tell a different story. His eyes, which are brown and his face, covered in scars and one of his ears, clipped shows a majestic lion who has experienced a life of violence. His brown eyes are stone cold, showing no expression and when they move, they move as if a lion is stalking his prey. Its strange, he reminds me of Morris from the Cathedral, but suddenly my attention is grabbed by the Duke when he clears his throat.

“Lukas, Beauford, this is Salvation. He will be our contact I suppose from the Sanctuary. What I am about to tell you is top secret, but you both are involved whether you like it or not. You both have a part to play in this plot, and this letter I have in my possession contains something very

important meant ONLY for the eyes of the King, William IV. You two will be escorted by Salvation to the capital of the Kingdom of Chene, Emerald City. The journey from this sewer system beneath Argent to the capital will take a week on horseback, more time on foot. Along the way, you will run into two settlements- Oak's Grove and Fort Emerald.. The route you three will take is a less traveled one, being traveled primarily by peasants, monks, nuns, and the occasional merchant who travels from Oak's Grove to Argent then to the Fort to provide its soldiers with food, ale, and cider. They ship food to the fort once a week, and the caravans will sometimes allow travelers to ride with them if they have enough coin. You three will arrive in Oak's Grove within two days of travel from here on horseback. I will provide you three with two horses, I would provide three but I am afraid of having too few horses to spare if we need them given what happened in Little Leaf. You three will travel to the Golden Delicious Inn & Brewery. There will be a contact with the merchants, and you three will pay her the Crowns in this black pouch for transportation to Fort Emerald. You both will pose as young merchants with Salvation as your bodyguard. Your names will remain the same-Lukas and Beauford as you both are lower class young men and nobody will think anything of your names. Salvation will be given the name Robert, a former footsoldier in the King's army who is now a sellsword. Now, you three will change clothes before departing tomorrow morning. I must return to the surface, and return to my Keep before sundown. My guard outside the door will escort me to the Keep. It is here we will depart, I wish you three luck. May the All-Maker bless you three." says the Duke.

The Duke leaves the letter on the table, it being sealed with a green wax stamp with the insignia of an oak tree with a crown above its branches inside a circular stamp mold. Around the letter is two pieces of silver gilded cordage, threaded together and kept in place by the green wax seal. He stands up, and pulls the lever to the right of the entrance, the large false stone door sliding open, the sound of old metal and stone scraping against the walls and floor of the sewers echoes across the sewers as his guard quickly walks in and stands close to the Duke, escorting him towards the spiral staircase leading up to the Smokey Bear Inn's secret sewer entrance. Salvation then stands up, walks to the level, and lowers it which closes the door. Once the door is shut, he looks toward us both.

"Now, since the Duke is gone, it is best for us to rest and relax until daybreak. Our horses will not be outside the sewers until tomorrow morning. We will change our clothes and get rid of our old outfits tomorrow morning. Any questions?" asks Salvation.

"Yes, for starters, what the bloody Hell is going on right now?!? Just a couple days ago we were in the Cathedral and then we went for a day drink at my uncle's inn before I found out my uncle is an informant for the King and I feel like everything right now is confusing!?! How can two "lower class young men" fucking fulfil our new jobs as secret agents?!? None of this makes sense, I am the son of a fucking barley farmer and a brewer while Lukas here is the son of a mill wench and well, nobody even knows who his father is but regardless my point is we are

peasants! I don't even know how to read and im just a big fuckin' bear with my only talents being drinking and occasionally making women moan from my fat cock when im drunk enough!" Beauford shouts.

"Beauford! Lower your voice, and stop with the vulgar speech, and acting like a damned fool! Think, it does not matter now how we feel about this we are now roped into this game of Crowns and Pawns. We were made into Pawns, and now we must serve the Crown. This is how we have vengeance for our village being sacked by those Northern barbarians... we have to avenge our parents." I screamed at Beauford, I hate screaming at him, but he is making a damn fool in front of Salvation, wait no, Robert.

"Is that all of your questions, sir?" asks Robert, his expression remaining emotionless.

"Before my big dolt of a bear can reply, I suppose we are merely two confused young men who do not understand which place we have in this plot? We both just..." I then feel my hands begin to tremble, my throat begins to feel dry and I feel warmth spreading through my cheeks into my eyes. "Lost our families a few days ago, we have had little time to ponder back on what happened so we can put our sullied hearts to rest, and not to lie to you sir, we both are nervous and frightened at the prospect of embarking on this journey without even being able to see our parent's graves..." Beauford then scoots his chair over closer to mine and sees a tear drop down my face, wiping it away with his finger.

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