

“There we go, three bandit lords dealt with!” The fiery furred fennec said as she slung their identifying brooches onto the table.

The town’s sheriff picked up one, holding it to the light before letting out a relieved sigh. “Well I’ll be, you’ve done what so many others have said they’ll do only to lose. Well done adventurer- no, that’s callous, well done, Miss Fangsfall. The reward is yours, fully paid with this town’s thanks. Finally we can open up to trade with no worries. But tell me, what was your secret?”

“Heh, your other crews were big parties, right? The kind who chose frontal assaults? Well, those bandits had an informant in town, I found him, made sure he overheard the wrong information, then I just sneaked my way into their camp on his heels and took a knife to their ‘lordly’ throats while they slept. Of course I dealt with the informant too. Sure there’s still a bunch of bandits out there but you weren’t paying for them.”

“Without their leaders they’ll tear themselves apart or we’ll mop them up. You’ve done your part.” The boar replied. “That said, there was a missive from another town. They have some problems and from the sound of it, it could be another job for you?”

“Show me the letter, I’ll decide if it’s worth it.”

A recon mission. Easy enough to see through. Freya Fangsfall made her way to the woods, the nearby townsfolk had been disappearing, with attacks from strange creatures. Those who survived tended to escape relatively unscathed, implying to the hopeful elder that the villagers were unharmed but detained. They spoke of strange creatures, more bestial in appearance than humanoid, with more than one pair of lips spreading the rumour that the attackers had been were-skunks.

The notion amused the fennec, a lycanthrope was not usually something to be tangled with unprepared, even if it was an odd kind. She just couldn’t see the threat of a skunk, though.

In any case, her task was simple. Freya was to find out whatever she could, the location of the villagers, the true nature of the creatures or anything else of note and then report back. With the bounty she’d claimed she’d had plenty to spare even after buying this new outfit, dressed better for stealth than before.

Snug cloth hid her red and orange fur, muting them into dull hues. Only the most observant creature would detect her, she was sure of it.

She’d travelled quietly through the forest for an hour, finding only the mundane woodland creatures before she heard the first hint of something more. A creaking and squeaking sound, like a branch swept by a brusque wind. However the air was still, there were no trees rubbing over each other.

As she approached the source of the sound, sticking to the treetops, she heard more of them, not just more frequent but from multiple sources. Her hands brushed a branch out of the way to get a clear look, falling instead on something sleek and smooth, which let out an affronted and surprised squeak hopping a few inches away.

A black and white tail flicked her hand off it before the attached creature turned and let loose a sudden spray. "Ghh, go away! Ack gross!" Freya hissed, taking her free hand to cover her nose from what she suspected was the deterrent attack of a simple skunk. The half-step made her lose her balance and she tumbled from the tree, landing on the ground. In the chaos the affronted critter had vanished into the branches and she swiftly dropped prone to the floor, long ears flattening and thick tail stilling. Her commotion was unheard it seemed. She was still hidden from the source of the noises.

Her fur stood on end and her stomach twisted, grossed out by a chill, believing it to be the night air brushing over the wetness the skunk had left behind. More concerningly it tickled from where it had landed, she felt it brushing her knee and from her elbow up to the tips of her fingers on her right.

No hint of a vile scent had hit her nostrils, so she gingerly took her fingers away. A strange smell did seem to have wafted down from above, yet it hadn't clung to her. Still keeping her eyes peeled for anything to have noticed, she took a cloth from her satchel to wipe off what she could of the liquid. Her hand reached a thickness which seemed to bunch up before leaking over the top of the cloth and hitting her left hand. "Ugh, what-." She whispered, turning to look.

Thick blackness with an odd weight and shine had covered her arm and was spreading visibly. Growing from even the tiniest drop as evidenced by the spread on her left hand and the pools that had been mere droplets as she hastily tried to pull it away.

"What is this?!" She hissed into her thoughts, right hand reaching for her dagger, the thick blackness had bulked up her hand, resisting her attempts to bend the fingers, much less grip the handle. With an aggravated tut Freya took it in her left, pushing the knife point against the blackness. It bunched up around it, strong and resisting, refusing to let itself be pierced for a moment before the blade proved strong enough to cut in.

Yet even then the fresh spread moved to catch up and cover the damage, all while travelling quicker than she could. She heard a rustling from above, as the scent of the first skunk's attack had, unbeknownst to Freya, attracted more of them. They twisted their heads as if looking around before sensing her below them and with no further ceremony turned and sprayed.

The fennec acted on reflex, shielding her face with her left arm, feeling a fresh gout strike the limb and her body besides. The knife was caught in the solidifying liquid, pushed from her palm and then expelled! Her hands desperately fought to pick it up again but it was too late for that.

Her hands had been covered by large, puffed up facsimiles of paws, they didn't respond to her attempts to bend her fingers, she didn't even know where her digits stopped and the fake ones began!

Worse still the mass was spreading on, her right leg was consumed, with the encroaching weight meeting up with the latter salvo at the waist, then starting to crawl down the left thigh. It grew thicker as it spread, defying logic, confirming to Freya's mind it was some manner of magic or supernatural attack, yet knowing that did little to help her. Her eyes widened as -like the knife before it- her attire got caught in the mass and rejected from it, yet since it could only be stretched so far, the coating ejected torn scraps!

"No, no, come off it!" She growled, "This ain't right! Stop!"

The gooey layer reached the base of her neck, trying to spread downwards to meet up with the rest, it seemed. Her ears flicked, the noises she'd heard before had stopped, she'd been heard by what she'd been tracking!

Softly rounded shapes veered out from the darkness, humanoid but vaguely more bestial looking. She gulped, the were-skunks were taller than most others and as a fennec, she was already typically less than half the height of the common stranger. She quickly rose to her feet, turning to run, yet more of the small skunks lurked in her way. Seeing them in detail she now knew even they were unnatural. Their heads were too simple, lacking facial features as though they were an ornamental carving rather than a real creature.

While she looked about wildly in indecision the trickle of corrupting goo reached the base of her tail and then ballooned out at an alarming rate, swallowing it, covering it and rising to form the shape of a skunk's tail, complete with a central white stripe. The volume of it grew, rising enough to peek up above her head. The sudden push of it sent her staggering forward but this time her hands were too slow to block the shot from the newly affronted skunk.

More shiny thick glop shot over her head and ears, her useless hands trying to claw and paw it off. Yet soon she felt something new, a sudden sense of calm and also strangely fulfilling satisfaction. Her mouth and nose were by all appearances blocked over, yet she could breathe. Each breath however seemed all the more enthralling. "Mmmh- Mmmh!!" She grunted as the mass clamped her jaw sharply shut.

She felt a pair of hands fall on her, brushing against the tight, fully encasing suit. They hooked under her shoulders, lifting her short frame despite her rapidly weakening protests. And then the one who picked her up was in view, the rubbery skunk-mask shifted to put dim lenses over her eyes. Thin enough to see through, yet thick enough to tint the world and make eye contact with the other 'were-skunks' impossible.

This close, she could see the vaguest hints of the others' original species, a masked but rounded pair of ram horns on one, a stocky ursine build on another. Any doubts she held were brushed away, she'd found the missing villagers, or more importantly they'd found her. Another

pair approached, each taking a leg in hand and as the coercing intoxication took an even stronger hold over her, Freya leaned back and gladly let them. She kept herself under control insofar as she now desperately wanted to brush against them, to show physical affection. By the time they took her to the clearing it was all that was on her mind and from the squeaking that filled the air, -the same hint she'd heard-, it was all that the villagers thought too. Their latex skunk-coated bodies rubbing to pass on and fuel each other's comforting feelings.

She remembered nothing more beyond a haze of rubbing bodies, comforting each other. Her small size meant she spent quite a while buried and unnoticed in the tangle of them.

It felt like a daydream, that maybe she nearly imagined more of the latex covering spreading, falling off in the rubbing, congealing into blobs that formed the skunks that then moved on their own.

Whatever the cause, when Freya's head was clear enough to think, though still fogged and dazed, she felt a coarse brush on her body and looked up sharply. A trio of adventurers had thrown blankets and cloth as best they could to cover up the dozing naked forms in the glade, having to resort to a burlap potato sack for Freya, much to her chagrin.

"Who are you? What's the... mmngh... meaning of this." She asked, feeling exhausted, as though her sleep had merely been interrupted. Her muscles ached from overuse and already she struggled to keep her eyes open.

"You're safe miss. You and the rest of the townsfolk. We were hired to look into disappearances and werebeasts." He said, explaining his briefing but Freya had already slipped back to sleep before the first sentence.

No one affected recalled much of what had happened, all of them feeling they'd had a single wild night and being shocked to learn it had been weeks. The strange pack of creatures had moved on entirely, the only trace of their passing being stains in the torn clothing and a lingering scent in the glade that seemed pleasant despite the chemical nature of it.