

## June 2020 Writing Challenge.

Day 29

Theme: Flirtatious

Ourodas, the great serpent, had used his strange talent to shrink himself until he was little more than a worm in size. He'd been following an anthro bear for a while, now, one who was seemingly both lucky and resourceful, though he hadn't figured out her purpose. The explorer was seemingly lost from her original path, having been chased through the forest by many of the dangerous creatures that lay inside, even briefly snared by the mobile vines of some of the perilous flora, but she'd found ways to wriggle loose or strike back.

She'd had some near misses but seemed to have her wits about her, such as now where she stilled herself and fell silent just in time to avoid the notice of wicked fae creatures that lived here. They were dangerous creatures; those they didn't torment themselves they would often lead, or outright force, into a grim fate. Ourodas' own hunger was outweighed by his intrigue. Her success had him curious and he wanted to see how far she could go. There was only one other creature in the entire wood he considered on par with himself, and so he would bide his time and when the bear fell to something, he would swoop in and steal her for his own.

She'd stopped forging onward for the moment, having found a quiet copse with cover and shade. She'd scouted around the edge of it before finally returning after verifying there were no threats, and pulled out a notebook.

The serpent slid his ink blue body down the tree stump of the branch he had been resting on to get closer. The notebook was thick and well used, and taking desperate care to remain silent and stealthy, Ourodas drew close enough to be able to read what was being written inside.

It was a document about the wood's denizens! That explained a lot. So, she was less a traveller who was passing through here unknowing or unbelieving of the dangers, and more a field biologist. The notes she was writing were not just about what she had met, but also how to identify and avoid or even escape some dangers.

Ourodas realised now that it was likely she'd been here many times and escaped unharmed. However, he'd never met this creature before so perhaps he would be the end of the spree. A small part of him felt bad, if he devoured this creature in truth then all the knowledge

she wrote would go to waste. He would see how she reacted, and then decide whether to end her life or just drain her for energy and release.

She reached into her bag, pushing aside a flask as she found what she was after and then in one swift motion she stood, turned, and shot a dart straight at Ourodas. The serpent was quick enough to dodge the shot, fleeing upwards into the branches. His pride bristled at that, his instinct to flee had kicked in at the sudden move and the bear seemed to be looking around for him. No wonder she'd got this far if that was her reaction time!

However, there was nothing quite like Ourodas in the Yonderwood, he still had tricks up his sleeve. Enraged at having been scared by such an innocuous threat, he decided he'd had enough of waiting. The serpent quivered as he shot quickly down to the ground and then he adjusted his mass and size to return to his usual resting state. The bushes around him snapped as he exploded outward in size, going from a few inches to over forty feet, and coiling swiftly inwards to ambush the bear before she could reload.

"Shit!" The bear said, raising her brows as she leapt over the first floor-dragging coil, hopped over another in the air, but there was just too much snake suddenly bearing down on her to keep it up, despite her surprising agility. A coil seized around her waist, curling as it shrunk in girth, to wrap several times, and then she was thrown back to the centre of the area, landing amidst her own supplies still wrapped inside the snake's grip.

She'd kept her arms up, and so they remained free as she pressed into the scales, trying to push them off or tug herself out. To her credit she was also quick to move her arms from being snared whenever the snake tried. Yet he soon had her coiled from the chest down, letting her keep the arms she was so desperate to have free. He was certain she couldn't escape him now.

Finally he brought his head round, meeting her gaze and smirking visibly. "W-well, that's the look of an intelligent hunter, but you're certainly not nng... a silkin." The bear said, squirming still while fighting for breath. Ourodas wasn't constricting her properly, but he was giving the occasional toying squeeze. The silkin she referred to were yet another breed of giant snakes, capable of speech, that hunted in these same woods. "Can you... rrfh, can you understand me?" She asked. There was a certain calm in her voice, not the usual panic of prey.

"Yes." Ourodas replied simply before claiming the conversation. "I must say I am impressed by you. Navigating so many troubles as if you were born here, but alas, your luck couldn't last." He said, leaning closer. "Tell me, bear, you don't seem frightened, do you think you're safe?"

The bear just grunted dismissively. "Knew it was a perilous job, I've made my peace, no regrets, if anything here gets me then it's just nature having its way. Of course I'd rather keep living, but I don't fear. So, giant serpent, should I feel unsafe?"

The snake laughed slowly, menacingly. “Oh yes. I could crush you right here, swallow you in one swoop, I wouldn’t even need you unconscious for that. I’ve felt how strong you are, seen how fast, you cannot escape me, bear.”

“Bear sounds so informal, call me Meera. And while my acquaintance may be brief, do you have a name yourself?” She asked, seemingly unperturbed by his threats.

“I am Ourodas, little prey, now...” He locked eyes with her, using yet another inherent ability of his. His gaze carried hypnotic suggestions as he said. “Fear me!”

Her expression didn’t change, her pulse didn’t quicken, she quirked an eyebrow. Ourodas himself was perplexed. The only way his hypnosis failed was when his subject would never do such a thing. He sighed, perhaps this ‘Meera’ needed some time to realise how threatened she was. He squeezed with his body as his tail rose into the air, one more unique aspect of him blossoming into view as it split open, revealing a second maw that descended threateningly.

“Oh my, that’s impressive.” Meera wheezed on seeing it, even whistling appreciatively once she’d got a breath in.

“Excuse me?” Ourodas said, puzzlement clear in his tone.

“So, let me get this straight, Ourodas. You can change your size and seemingly against all logical possibility, your mass on a whim. All at once or piece by piece from how these coils changed. You have some kind of compulsion if you lock eyes? And you have a second mouth, though it doesn’t look like a head. You’re impressive.”

“W-what? Yes that’s correct, what of it.” He said irritably.

“You also like toying with prey, which, given the sticky feeling of this liquid...” She said as some of the drops from Ourodas’s frozen tail maw fell and impacted her shoulder. She’d already wiped it with a finger and was appreciating how it swiftly set, adhering to her touch yet retaining elasticity. “...means you like them squealing. Hunting isn’t just for your appetite, then?”

“What of it.” He repeated in a more frustrated tone. He didn’t know why he was conversing, he should just stuff her in one mouth or the other and be done with it.

“You’re strong, fast, intelligent... my, you might be the most impressive creature in these woods. And there’s even more to you, I’m sure of it.” The snake dropped his tail to the side. This was not going how he expected at all, and he would never admit as much, but the praise felt so sincere that he was moved by it.

“Oh, I see.” He said at last, coming to a different conclusion. “This is all for your book. What, do you expect to survive an encounter with me?”

“You’re certainly strong enough that you could snap me in half, as you say, but no, this isn’t me finding out about you for academic purposes, as useful a side benefit as it is to have heard this from you. I am genuinely fascinated!” Ourodas was confused by her words and his grip was slowly relaxing, subconsciously. Meera spoke up more “Do you have a lair for your use? Or are you nomadic? How do you protect yourself if you’ve eaten? I assume you can shrink to hide or grow to fight, but shrinking with someone inside you can’t be good for you.”

Her tone was very much phrased in getting to know him, and something else too. He paused, suddenly unfurling as he pulled sharply away. “Wait, are you flirting with me?!” He demanded. He was an apex monster to be feared, respected!

“Oh, no no, unless... would you like that? I would love to study and know more, of course.” She said, picking herself up and brushing herself off as if nothing had been happening at all.

“You know what? Forget this.” Ourodas said. His appetite had gone and even the sadistically playful motivation he bore had fled him. With no further word he turned, sliding into the woods.

Meera smirked, raising her book and turning to a new page. With the silkin she’d learned flirting was a quick path to stop all but the hungriest, the ones she met were narcissistic enough to take flattery as praise. Even so, to be let go by a silkin one had to bargain and plead and offer something better. It seemed this Ourodas was quite taken aback by sincere flirting. She wondered if it would work a second time, but from how quickly he left after stalking her for so long, she imagined he wouldn’t hurry back. She scribbled her notes in short form, though, not wanting to linger. Some other intelligent denizens of the wood were spiteful enough to inform other hunters of viable prey, and she didn’t want any further close calls today if Ourodas decided to give others her location. She gathered her things and prepared to return. Her appendices on the beasts of the woods were coming along nicely.