

Sen the fox woke up to find himself alone. This was somewhat unusual, as his partner, Qima, was a fennec. Like most fennecs, Qima got cold quite easily, and he cuddled with Sen for as long as he could to keep himself warm. He must have had something important to do to sneak out of bed. Of course, it was quite late in the day now, almost certainly past noon. Sen must have slept like the dead.

It was an effort for him just to stand up. He ached all over, understandable considering his ordeal yesterday. Sen decided the first thing he needed to do was find where Qima had gone. The fennec had been terribly frightened when that wolf attacked them the previous day, and Sen wanted to make sure he was alright. Having lost his cloak in the excitement yesterday, Sen pulled on a pair of leather briefs so he wouldn't be completely naked. Then he set out into the village.

Sen learned two things in short order. The first was, much to his relief, that the wolf had been located and brought back to the village. He was currently tied up in a barn, no doubt angry, but no longer a threat to anyone. The other was that Qima had made his way to a nearby bamboo thicket, though he hadn't said why. Sen quickly made his way there, most curious as to what his friend could be up to.

He arrived at the thicket to find Qima kneeled over a mound of earth... And a local fox kit peppering him with questions. Typical Qima, he never could assert himself. Not even to a child! Sen decided he'd best intervene, or he'd never finish whatever it was he was doing.

"Hey, kit," said Sen, kneeling over. "Don't you think Qima might be a little busy?"

"It's fine, I don't mind answering questions. And this little guy, Marshall, he's full of them!" Qima replied with a chuckle.

Sen turned towards Marshall. "Well, Marshall, I'm going fishing with some of the other foxes later today. We wouldn't mind a little more company. Does that sound like something you'd enjoy?"

The kit nodded.

“Ok, son, why don’t you go ask your parents for permission? You can meet us down by the pond. I bet they’ll be real proud of you if you land them dinner!” Marshall nodded and ran off, leaving the two older foxes alone.

“Thanks, Sen. You’re so much better with kits than me. I never want to quash their natural curiosity, you know?” Sen knew, all right... Knew that Qima was a pushover. “I’m just about to start the ritual.”

Sen saw now that the mound of earth before which Qima was kneeling had a depression hollowed in the middle, like a bowl. Water had been poured into the bowl, perhaps from a brook that ran through the clearing. Surrounding the mound, several candles were planted. “So, a resurrection ritual. I assume this has something to do with our misadventure yesterday?”

“Indeed it does,” replied Qima. He pulled something out of a satchel and held it up for Sen to see. It was a bone. It was long and thin, and also yellowed and rubbery, probably from soaking in wolf bile for who-knows-how-long. Yet it clearly did not belong to a wild animal.

“You’re thinking that’s a fox bone, Qi?”

“I do believe it is, Sen. And I believe that whoever it belongs to - or I suppose, belonged to - might be the key to solving our lupine mystery. I just hope their spirit hasn’t traveled to the Beyond just yet.”

Sen was well familiar with the resurrection ritual, and in fact had been the subject on more than one occasion. It was harder the more damaged the body was, and hardest when there was no body at all. In this case, Sen doubted the fox’s original body was in any condition to be of use.

A moment of silence passed between them. “So why did you pick this place, Qi? Don’t you normally do this sort of thing in a church or something?”

“I prefer to work in a church or temple, yes. But there’s no private place in a small village like this,” replied Qima. “I think this clearing should offer a safe place to treat my

soon-to-be patient. I hope it's soothing enough, because I can't imagine this fox's last moments were pleasant."

"Well, I'll leave you to it, Qi, it sounds like you've got your work cut out for you. How 'bout a nice fish dinner when you're done with all this?"

"That I would very much appreciate, thank you," Qima said. With that, Sen stood up and made his way back to the village.

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He felt he should have known this fox. Towering over this small creature, though, all he could see was... prey. Yes, wolves ate foxes, they didn't befriend them. And this wolf was very hungry. He couldn't quite remember how he got into this situation, a defenseless fox within arms reach, not even running. He didn't care, either. Prey is prey.

The wolf was at least twice the fox's height, probably more. His head was considerably wider than the fox's shoulders, and his gaping maw could easily fit more than half the foxes body height inside. The wolf's stomach felt completely empty, but this fox would fill it nicely. He knew he had to move before the fox came to his senses and fled.

The wolf swiftly tackled the fox. He could see sudden fear in his prey's eyes. As their gazes met, the fox shouted something, but the wolf could not understand, and didn't want to. He drew the scent of his prey into his nostrils. The smell of his struggling, fearful prey was intoxicating. Rivulets of saliva dripped from the wolf's lips in anticipation of his meal.

He felt he ought to savour this fine dinner. He hadn't had fox in a long, long time. Had he ever? Surely he had, the scent was so familiar. The fox was wearing nothing but a red scarf, which was tied around his neck. The wolf worked his finger under the scarf and pulled it loose. He didn't want anything to get in the way of this meal.

He decided to start with the fox's paws.

Clamping his large hands around the fox's upper body, the wolf drew the paws into his huge maw. The fox struggled and kicked, but the wolf used his tongue and jaws to keep the

squirming prey under control. The fox's paw pads were surprisingly smooth, and they slid across his tongue with ease.

The scent glands in the fox's paws gave him a strong, unique flavour. It was at once sweet and musky, smelling somewhat like violets, but much stronger. Gripped by fear as he was, the fox's paws were slicked with sweat, which served only to further enhance their musky aroma. The sweat and saliva soaking the fox's paws spread the flavour across the wolf's tongue.

As much as he was enjoying the fox's paws, the wolf decided he needed to work the fox closer to his stomach. He drew the fox's legs further into his mouth, until he could feel his meal kicking the back of his throat. Regrettably, he had to release his grip on his prey to get the fox further into his mouth. He stuck out his tongue and slid it along the fox's back. When he released the fox, he could feel his prey's arms trying frantically to push his jaws open.

It was a futile effort. The wolf could easily clamp his jaws down on his prey to keep him from struggling. Most of the fox's body was inside the wolf's mouth now. The fox's head and upper chest stuck out of the wolf's mouth, cradled in the predator's tongue. He could feel the fox's hands pressing on the roof of his mouth, perhaps hopeful the wolf would not bring his jaws together and end him right here. Though the wolf had no intention of doing so. He was having far too much fun with his struggling prey.

In spite of his hunger, the wolf couldn't pass up another opportunity to get a good taste of his meal. The fox was practically cocooned in the wolf's tongue now, and drenched in saliva. The wolf savoured the musky flavour of his prey spreading through his mouth, and breathed the scent of his prey deep into his lungs. The fox was still wriggling in a delightfully vivacious manner, which served only to further spread his taste across the wolf's tongue.

The tip of the wolf's tongue was starting to get dry by now. He decided he'd best draw the fox a bit further in, so he could keep the entire body of his prey in his mouth at once. He tilted his head backwards until he could feel the fox sliding further down his throat. His prey kicked and tried to stop his descent, but he was so slick with drool that he slid down easily.

The wolf slid the fox down his esophagus up to his knees. It was a little harder for the wolf to breathe this way, but much to his relief, he still could. The fox let out a cry as he

slipped further down. The wolf continued to cradle the fox's upper body in his tongue. He wasn't ready to let the fun end quite yet.

He could now close his mouth completely around the fox to better savour his prey. Though shut in complete darkness between the wolf's jaws, he could feel his prey still trying to push his jaws open and escape. He was surprised by the fox's tenacity, but not disappointed. The fox's struggling almost made up for the lack of a chase in this particular hunt. He briefly considered letting the fox go so that he might stalk him properly, but the wolf was far too hungry to let this morsel go anywhere but his belly.

Indeed, his hunger was starting to outweigh the pleasure of feeling his prey trying to escape. It wasn't long before the fox's struggle began to die down. Perhaps he was exhausted, or had simply accepted that his fate was to be digested by this wolf. Yes, it was finally time to put the fox where he belonged. The wolf tilted his head back again, farther this time. He felt the fox slide further in, up to his hips. The wolf took a big swallow, drawing the fox further down til his waist was trapped in the opening of the wolf's throat.

He could feel the fox clawing at the roof of his mouth, trying to stop his descent. And the wolf thought he had no fight left in him! But he'd already made up his mind. The fox was a little large to travel down the wolf's throat, but the wolf thought he could manage with a bit of effort. He took another big swallow. The fox's lower body, gripped by his esophageal muscle, was pulled further in. The fox was up to his chest now. The wolf thought he just needed one more swallow before the fox would slide down to meet his fate.

One more gulp. The wolf could feel the fox sliding into his esophagus, the fox's hands trailing across the back of his tongue. Then his prey was gone, just a huge bulge travelling towards his stomach. It was a tight fit to be sure, and the wolf wondered if he might have made a mistake. Fortunately, the fox kept moving, pushed down further and further by the muscles in the wolf's throat. The fox still squirmed as he went down, and the wolf could hear the occasional muffled cry from the bulge travelling down his body. He wondered how the fox would react when he made it to his final destination.

Naturally, he didn't have to wait long to find out. The fox was expelled into his empty stomach before long. His prey immediately started struggling, perhaps having second thoughts about surrender now that he'd reached the end of the line. The wolf rather liked the

feeling of his prey struggling in his stomach, like an internal massage. His belly was already gurgling, releasing the juices that would soon turn the fox into wolf fat. There was a visible bulge in his belly where his prey struggled inside him, which occasionally moved as the fox futilely tried to kick his way to freedom.

This bulge was quite weighting the wolf down. He'd fallen prone to ingest his prey, but he didn't want to lay on his stomach, as it was quite sensitive with his meal inside. He flopped over on his back, rubbing his hands across his gurgling belly. He was satisfied, though he lamented that the fun with his prey had ended. He could still taste the musky flavour of the fox in his mouth, and his prey's scent lingered in his nose. Still, it was only a matter of time before his meal was digested. He knew there had to be more foxes in these woods. As he drifted to sleep, he wondered if they all tasted as sweet as tonight's meal had.

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Sen had nearly forgotten about Qima's duty as he fished the day away. He had helped the kit he met earlier, Marshall, cast his line and land fish. As he cast his own line, he regaled the kit and his other companions with stories of the myriad places he had been and people he had met in his many years of traveling the world. He always lost himself when he had a rapt audience. Kits especially loved hearing his stories of adventure, and he relished the wonder in their faces as he retold his favourite tales.

The distant sound of Qima's singing reminded him of the situation. He dropped his catch off at their hut, and made his way back to the clearing. He didn't much like watching the resurrection process. It brought people back from the inside out, and until the end, it was rather gruesome looking. He didn't know how Qima stomached it, but he supposed when you're a healer, you get used to that sort of thing.

By the time he made his way to the clearing, the singing had stopped. He could hear Qima's voice and another, unfamiliar one. He must have finished the ritual just in time! As he entered, he saw Qima providing his patient water. The fox was the deep orange colour typical of foxes in the area. Qima heard Sen coming and said to the fox, "Rowan, this is Sen, the one I was telling you about. I would never have been able to help you without him!"

"Th- Thank you," the fox croaked. He was clearly still quite addled from his experience.

“Rowan, I know it might be difficult, but I need you to try and remember what happened before you- before you died,” said Qima. “Do you know anything about this wolf? Anything that could help us figure out where he came from?”

The new fox groaned. “It’s all f- fuzzy, Mr. Qima,” he said. “I can remember being somewhere dark. From what you told me, I suppose I was inside this wolf, right?” Rowan whimpered. “I was so frightened, I could barely think. And I felt-” the fox squinted, as if groping for a distant memory. “I felt very foolish. Like I had made some sort of terrible mistake.” He sat up suddenly, and said “The wolf! Ah, by the Mother...” He buried his head in his hands. “I remember now, it’s my fault!”

“We’re not worried about blame,” said Qima, “we just want to know what we can do about him.”

“He’s not- he’s not normally like this. He’s my friend,” said Rowan. “He’s not even normally a wolf. We were building a new burrow for ourselves, and I thought- I thought if I tried some transformation magic, it might make things go faster. But-”

“You were playing with magic? Alone?” Sen interjected. “You nearly killed us! Imagine if we hadn’t survived our encounter with that wolf. Qima’s the only healer here, we’d all be halfway to the Beyond now. This friend of yours would never see you again!”

Rowan stared at the ground beside him. “I know, I- I’m so sorry.”

“Listen,” said Qima, “I think, given what Rowan here has been through, he’s suffered enough punishment. You certainly will not try anything like that again alone, will you?”

Rowan’s eyes widened as he looked at Qima. “Oh no, of course not! I think- I think I’m done with magic forever, truth be told. I- I had no idea something like this could happen.” he stammered.

Sen grumbled. “Ok, I see your point, Qi. But there’s still the matter of what we’re going to do with the wolf.”

"The wolf!" Rowan cried, "he's still out there, isn't he? Someone could be in danger right now and-"

"Don't worry about that," said Sen, cutting him off. "This wolf is tied up in a barn right now. He's no danger to anyone."

"Then I've got to help him! He must be so frightened, poor Trent." Rowan jumped to his feet, or tried to. He wobbled and fell over almost immediately. Luckily, Sen was able to catch him before he hit the ground.

"It'll be awhile before your strength comes back to you, Rowan," said Qima. The fennec offered his hand to the fox. "Let's all go together, I'm as eager as you to resolve this." With Qima supporting Rowan, the three foxes made their way out of the clearing and towards the barn where the notorious wolf was bound.

Sen could hear Qima's heart thumping as they made their way towards the barn. Though he tried to keep a brave face, the poor fennec must still be traumatized from his previous experience with the beast. "You can wait out here, Qi," said Sen, "I'll help Rowan inside and hopefully he can fix this mess."

The two foxes made their way into the barn, Rowan supporting himself on Sen's shoulder. The huge wolf was laid out in the center of the room. His arms were bound behind him, and his feet and legs were bound together. His captors had also wrapped a length of rope around his mouth to keep his jaws shut. The wolf was fully awake now, and clearly agitated. He snorted and struggled against his bonds as the two foxes made their way towards him. Just hearing the deep growls coming from the wolf's throat made Sen want to flee, but he knew he had to see this through to the end.

As they approached, Rowan separated himself from Sen and shakily made his way towards the wolf's head. "Don't worry, Trent, I'm here." He placed his hand on the wolf's forehead. For a few moments, Rowan remained in quiet concentration. Then, nearly instantly, the wolf was gone. The bonds that had once been holding the wolf fell limply to the ground. In his place lay, surprisingly enough, a dog.



He was a portly fellow, and appeared to be one of the shepherd dogs native to the midland prairies. Sen was quite surprised. "Hmf. I thought he was going to be a wolf. Since when can a dog change into a wolf?"

"They're closely related," Rowan said. Trent groaned and opened his eyes, staring up at the fox. "As a matter of fact- Ah, Trent, please tell me you're ok. I'm so sorry!"

The dog coughed. "I'm fine," he said. "What happened? Why is there rope everywhere? Did I miss something, uh, fun?"

"Well, you certainly seemed to be having fun with us," said a voice from the entrance of the barn. Qima made his way inside, feeling much more confident now that the wolf was cut down to size. "Do you remember anything about what happened to you? Mr., uh, Trent, right?"

"It's pretty fuzzy," he said. "I do remember- oh." He hung his head glumly. "I can't believe I ate you, Ro."

"Not to mention us," said Sen. "You're alright now, though? So we can put all this behind us? Forever?"

"Right as rain," he said. He stood up and dusted himself off. "Don't worry, Rowan, I'll take care of you until you've got your strength back. It's the least I can do."

Rowan grinned and gave Trent a big hug. "So glad to have you back, big guy." Rowan patted the dog's chubby belly. "Weird to think some of this is me now. I think I'd like to stay on the outside from now on."

"Glad you're taking this in stride, Ro. 'Least now there's a little of you with me wherever I go," said Trent. "We've got to thank you two, somehow," he continued, turning towards the other pair of foxes. "You've done so much for us. Why don't we have you for dinner once we're done with our burrow?"

Sen snorted. "Thanks," he said, "but I think all foxes present have been had for dinner quite enough lately."