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“Oh god, oh god, oh fuck, oh god, shit, fuck, fuck, fuck.” The cat panted as he looked over the blackened skeleton laying face down in the black soil, right at his feet, one smoldering arm still outstretched in a blackened, skeletal claw towards the cat’s ankle. Steam in the color of greenish white vapors floated upwards out of the now burned out eye sockets of the former anthro ox. On top of the ox’s head, between curling horns was a jaguar mask. No... it wasn’t a mask, it was the severed head of a jaguar, anthro or feral, the cat panting and cursing on the ground couldn’t tell. He crawled on his back and rear, till he was sitting against a thick tree. Everything in the jungle was black as night and the noise of the jungle was now dead silence save for the sound of steaming vapors of cooked to ash meat. The cat’s hands felt ice cold, but when he lifted them, green flame was enveloping them, sizzling away the dirt and mud, forming up like miniature campfires in the palms of his hands, lances of the flame danced and twirled around his digits, casting emerald light out into the jungle. And reflected back in the dark depth of the jungle was the eyes. They watched, they chanted, and shadowy hands drew their black stone knives and macuahuitls, the obsidian blades still drenched in a dark dripping crimson.

“Get back!” The cat growled, and they didn’t stop, the blades came closer becoming figures dressed in the skins of jaguars. The stone blades and swords came for the cat’s neck and heart. “Get the fuck away from me!” The cat screamed in fear, eyes blurred with tears, and the jungle lit up in a conflagration of balefire, burning trees, animals, the eyes, the jaguar... skins... the skeleton, the shadow figures, all of it away.

Kingman woke up with a startled look and panted, his chest was heaving up and down, cold sweat matting his facial fur. The rhythmic sound of hooves, clopping along on a dirt road, and the gentle sway of the fancy carriage had put him to sleep, and now he was listening to the sounds, and feeling the sway once again, sending a wave of relaxation through his body.

“My, my, son, you seem to have had a rather awful dream.”

Kingman’s teal eyes turned to look at a friendly looking mink dressed like an Anglican priest. The outfit did little to hide the mutated bulge along his sides and back, and to the untrained he looked a bit... otherworldly, like an eldritch horror had modeled itself onto the kindly frame of Mr. Rogers. But Kingman knew Rudy Nettlefisk well enough that his outward appearance didn’t

bother him in the slightest. He instead smiled and set up right, rubbing blurry, wet sleep from his eyes.

“Yes father...” He sighed. “...it was certainly that.” The cat groaned and passed his hands through his hair, to quickly comb the long black locks.. He had fallen asleep far too easy for his liking, but Kingman’s job of being a private investigator, one that specialized in proving infidelity, of his client’s spouses; and being the Bureau of Superheroes’ only necromancer, and former member of the Inquisition, meant that little things like eight hours of sleep a day were more like four when the day was being generous. And sleep was often put at bay by a lot of coffee, and fursions of one stripe or another trying to punch his head off.

“Would you like to talk about it?” Father Nettlefisk asked with a smile, he lightly tapped the bible he held on his lap, with the palm of one of his ‘extra’ limbs.

“Eh... not the fine details, but it was a... uh... you ever get a dream of something you did in the past, but it’s fancier then the way the nitty gritty of it went down?” Kingman asked.

“Of course.” the mink responded, giving him a genuine look of interest to continue.

“That...dream was still as horrifying as the real event, just... worse.” Kingman reached inside his coat, and found a cigar there, and drew it out. With a burst of green fire from his thumb and pointer finger he made a small blaze to light the cigar, puffing on it to turn the burning tobacco from green to a dull red. When he pulled his fingers away and brought more oxygen to the blaze, embers of orange, and yellow came to life. Kingman leaned his head back and blew a plume of greenish gray smoke out the carriage’s window and purred.

“Those things will kill you.” Father Nettlefisk remarked, and Kingman sat up, one eyebrow raised inquisitively, as if about to remark on the absurdity of the statement. Two sets of palms raised in supplication, and the mink smiled. “I know, I know.”

Kingman chuckled for a moment and drew in another puff and relaxed. “Simply amazing don’t you think?” the priest asked.

“What is?” Kingman remarked.

“Your balefire... spiritual flame correct?”

“Yes. I think it’s also called Saint Elmo’s fire by some, soul fire, the flame of the necropolis.” Kingman remarked and casually brought up a small blaze to dance from pinky, ring, middle, and pointer fingers, before moving to send the moat of fire, no bigger than a pencil’s eraser, back down the line of fingers, and again, before snuffing it out with a clench of his hand into a fist around it.

“Yes well... it burns cold, yet you can start real, physical fires with it.” Father Nettlefisk pointed out.

“Well, yeah...” Kingman remarked and drew another puff on the cigar, still mindful to exhale out the window, so as to not bother the mink as much.

“Don’t you find it amazing?”

“I suppose... never thought about it that much, I guess fire burns and acts like fire, no matter the source. I can even melt ice with it.” Kingman shrugged nonchalantly.

“Besides, considering what you can do, my balefire is a parlor trick.” Kingman added.

The priest looked a bit grim and matching Kingman’s previous shrug, and let out a sigh. “I suppose, I never thought about it that much.”

Kingman gave the priest a side eyed look and then both burst into laughter.

The driver of the horse drawn carriage looked over his shoulder, the elderly raccoon rolled his eyes and checked his gold pocket watch. “If these are the best experts in the supernatural, we may all be damn well doomed.” He muttered under his breath.

New Wood Mountain Inn was built 1905, at the time the three story building sported one hundred rooms, and an underground wine cellar, gaming hall, and a small theater. Nestled deep in the Appalachian mountains, it was secluded, exclusive, and a luxurious temporary abode for the wealthy railway travelers to hide away while leaving none of the comforts of home. The Inn had sheltered some of the most famous musicians, actors, magicians and all sorts of entertainers from around the world in the early twentieth century, and guests dined on dishes prepared by the finest French culinary artists. Each room had for their time, state of the art heat radiators, running water, hot showers, and the finest beds made by local craftsmen. A night’s stay, roughly translated to modern times inflation, would have been about four hundred dollars a night. Today, it was one hundred and twenty five, but there was a continental breakfast and supper provided.

While the appeal of New Wood Mountain Inn had been its bastion as a luxurious hideaway for the wealthy, the current purpose of the Inn was far less romanticized.

Kingman looked up from the brochure, comparing the photograph on the front of the brochure with the real inn. Compared to a luxury hotel... hell just a nice hotel, the inn was... modest. It had a fresh coat of white paint now, but the roof looked like it needed some attention. He looked at the building and back to the brochure. While far from dilapidated, the Inn had spent several years in the 1940s through the 70s empty, mostly due to passenger rail becoming nearly extinct

in the region, and several more decades as a place deep enough in the woods, that criminal types had 'borrowed' it to use for everything from moonshining, illegal gambling, and prostitution. And if the rumors were to be believed, violent mafia murders.

At some point in the 1980s it had partially caught fire, and in 1990 instead of tearing the building down, it was seen as a better financial investment to have the place restored, and put on the National Register of Historic Places. By 1995 the Inn was reopened, and its main draw for guests... was to live like it was 1905 all over again. No televisions, no radios either since the first public radio broadcast wasn't due to happen until 1906. In fact the only real draw was living out in the woods, on top of archaic steam boilers, sitting in candlelight, and reading. It also made for one of the 'go to' places for the elderly to retreat from all the 'young folk' places in the area further down the mountain.

"Oh goodie." Kingman huffed sarcastically as he ground the stub of his spent cigar into the dirt road.

"Cheer up." Father Nettlefisk clamped one of his arms on Kingman's shoulder. "With no electricity, or modern distractions we can just focus on the natural beauty God has given us."

"Goooooodie, we can do that after dinner, maybe even after doing the job we were called out here to do." Kingman huffed. 'Four hours up a mountain, in September cold, by horse-carriage no less, to a place where I don't even have cellphone coverage... joy.' Kingman thought to himself. He wasn't exactly tied to technology, he'd lived as an acolyte under Inquisitress Kreszentia for a few years, and a lot of that time was spent in remote places where modern plumbing was akin to witchcraft. But he'd gotten used to some comforts as a member of the Bureau.

"We have plenty of time, and just to think, it's essentially a week's vacation." the mink pointed out as he slung a luggage case over one shoulder.

"I'd rather not spend a full week out here Father, besides the closest town has a real Irish pub." Kingman smirked.

"Lead us not into temptation son."

"Aye laddie." Kingman replied in a thick and extremely fake Irish accent.

Rudy Nettlefisk rolled his eyes and bent down to pick up a large steamer trunk.

"Let me give you a hand with that." Kingman offered and Father Nettlefisk raised a palm.

"On the subject of hands... laddie." The mink reached down while with a couple tentacle tendrils and easily hefted the entire steamer trunk onto his shoulder. "I think I'm fine."

“Suit yourself.” Kingman smirked, all of his belongings were nestled in the magical rosarius around his neck. So he had no need for containers for clothes, or gear. So he busied his hands by shoving them into his pants pockets and scowling, he was already craving another cigar.

“You really should take this as an opportunity my friend.” Father Nettlefisk spoke, slightly grunting from effort.

“Yeah?” Kingman remarked as he fell into step with the mink, heading towards the front door.

“A place like this can teach patience, and allow you to slow down, and recoup from the rigors of city life. And...” he shrugged, his eyes darting to a slim otter woman, dressed in a white bustle dress of the time period, matching white hat, complete with a dainty white umbrella and dress gloves and very poofy shoulders. “...you’ll find something rather pleasing to admire.”

Kingman noticed the beautiful otter who turned to wave at them. “You may have a point.” He smirked for a moment. And she was the only furson he’d seen around the premises that was clearly under fifty.

The otter woman folded the period piece umbrella and walked up to Kingman and Rudy, extending a hand to both. “Well I take it you two are the...um... ghost exterminators from the Bureau?” She didn’t pay much notice to the priest’s extra limbs, though when she touched Kingman’s hand she jolted a bit in surprise, while Kingman’s fur stood on end, and then she nervously giggled. “Static electricity is bad here it seems,” She added. Kingman smirked, “I guess so.” He continued a friendly smirk, immediately finding her quite likable, and she had a very charming deep southern accent. Kingman almost could hear her saying ‘I do declare’ in his head. He decided to try and impress her.

“Well we are from the bureau, but ghosts rarely need extermination, the typical ghost is just a psychic manifestation of extreme emotions imprinted on a location, furson or object, kind of like a supernatural photograph or film being projected. And even the spirits, who get confused with ghosts, are not likely to have enough manifested ectoplasm to interact with the physical world unless some real serious power is getting thrown about. And of the actual dangerous kinds of intangible...”

“Ahem, well what my friend here is saying is if there are ghosts here causing the issues you’ve described, then eradication may not be as necessary as placation and peaceful coexistence.” Rudy interrupted Kingman’s speech on ghosts and the otter woman’s eyebrow raised in curiosity. “Oh? Well... that’s... um... good to know, I actually would hate for any violence to occur here, but with everything going on, and the holiday rush about to begin we need the inn up and running without the current... eh... disruptions.” She spoke and rocked back and forth on her heels, making her slightly exposed cleavage sway just under Kingman’s gaze. He had to tear his teal eyes from their ‘observations’, and look into her deep brown eyes. Her fur was sleek, dark, chocolate brown, with honey tan accents. She wasn’t as thin as most otters, but she

didn't look heavy either. She also had short auburn hair that while Kingman liked women with long flowing locks, he found the short look, framing her to be very...adorable, in its simpleness.

All in all, Father Nettlefisk was right, everything about her was pleasing. Even the scent of her perfume was just at the right level, a type of lavender maybe, that wasn't too strong to overpower a room, or so weak it was barely there.

"Mr... Highborn is it?... Mr. Highborn?" She replied, getting Kingman's attention back on what the otter was actually saying.

"Oh... yes." He spoke.

"Great, I'll show you to your rooms and we can discuss everything at dinner then." She smirked and turned.

Kingman looked over at Rudy who rolled his eyes and shook his head once the otter couldn't see them.

Candlelit dining wasn't necessarily something new for Kingman, now dressed in a burgundy suit, with a light seafoam green dress shirt, with silken frills, and gold embroidery but it was the first time that it wasn't a formal date, or time in a 'charm school' learning how to play at diplomacy and seduction. Or if the power went out. He eyed the flame flickering at the top of one of the candles, wax liquefying and rolling down the very pale pink candle into the holder's base. He started to think of familiar meals by a roaring campfire with the Inquisition. The smell of pine and cooking fish or other small woodland critter. Perhaps Father Rudy had a point that he was missing the simple life. By the time he'd gotten settled in his room, he was trying to set about investigating, but Rudy had stopped him, and insisted he sit down to a meal with the inn's newest owner, who was coincidentally the nice young otter.

The other first for Kingman, was this was the first time he'd had fried chicken, corn bread, and pinto beans for a candlelit supper, all good southern comfort food, but not what he expected for a 'luxury retreat'. Not to mention several folk at tables were not currently dressed in their finest garments either, opting for the comfort of sweatpants, loafers, and t-shirts. In fact Father Nettlefisk was sitting across from him, smiling, one set of hands laced together under his chin. It was a wonderfully silent way of the mink telling the mountain lion 'I told you so' when he'd seen what the cat was going to wear for the evening meal, and had mentioned it was too much, way too soon. Especially if he was wearing it to impress the otter, which Kingman had embarrassingly forgotten her name, and Rudy had to remind him. "Bridgette Wright."

Adding more to the mountain lion's disappointment though, Ms. Wright was late. "Strange, don't cha' think?" Kingman asked Father Nettlefisk between bites of chicken and corn bread. Letting some table etiquette slide since everyone else was just going to be... 'normal' tonight.

“Perhaps, but she may have had business matters come up, there’s more to running an inn like this than keeping dates.” the mink replied.

“Perhaps if they had a clock that wasn’t from the time of the dinosaurs.” Kingman grumbled.

“Perhaps.” Father Nettlefisk compromised, sensing the disappointment in the cat’s body language.

“Furthermore, the ghosts that should be here aren’t.” Kingman added.

That made the mink’s eyebrow raise in surprise. He knew the mountain lion was sensitive to spirits and otherworldly entities, but he hadn’t been here for a better part of half a day. Let alone seriously looking for signs of their presence. And he had insisted Kingman hold off on getting to work.

“Are you sure?” the mink asked in surprise.

“Positively... or at least ninety percent sure.” Kingman sat the remains of a chicken’s leg bone down and swallowed. Then held up one finger.

“In 1928 the local sheriff’s deputy was shot and killed on the grass outside, during a picnic. Allegedly done in by the husband of the wife he’d been um... seeing on the side. He survived long enough to crawl into the lobby, and die by the fireplace.” Kingman pointed with his fork towards the lobby and fireplace gently illuminating the room and providing heat. He then continued holding up a second finger.

“There’s the lonely man, a figure by all reports, who has never hurt anyone, and only appears in room 205, he comforts sad or hurting women who often for some reason or another, think he’s their husband but when they realize he’s not, he vanishes. And oddly this thought falls on unmarried women as well. From what I gather, he was a heartbroken fella that got off the train, came up to the room and died of a heart attack.” He then raised a third finger.

“Then there’s the lady in white, which I believe Ms. Wright was dressing up as while welcoming guests today. She manifests in room 307... allegedly wanders the halls and kitchen on the main floor, often turning on the gas stoves in the kitchen. And sometimes takes walks on the grass, and down the horse carriage path.”

“What happened to her?” Father Nettlefisk asked.

“No one knows. There’s only been two known reported deaths in the hotel, the unnamed old man in 205 and the sheriff’s deputy. I’ve heard tales of sounds of sobbing and crying on the third floor and kitchen, and the door knobs in 205 jiggling but... there’s never been much detail on who or... what she is.” Kingman sighed.

“Nevertheless. We are in Room 206 for a reason. And I should have been able to use my ghost sight to see them. I tried to sense the gathering energy of spiritual manifestation, but there’s nothing, no ghosts, spirits, or anything from the spooky side of the fence.” He remarked with some concern. “And that’s odd cause almost every building has some trace of the echoes of life, even if it’s not enough to manifest a ghost.”

“Could someone have beaten us here then? Exorcized them?” Rudy asked as he rubbed his chin in thought.

“That’s the other thing. The bureau gets reports from the last few weeks, of fursons getting pushed down the stairs by invisible assailants, vivid nightmares, half the staff has quit over phantom scratches, and one furson hospitalized when a hot frying pan was launched from the stovetop and struck her face. All of that is...”

“...major power displays for a couple of previously benign spirits.” Rudy remarked finishing Kingman’s sentence. He picked up his fork and ate for a moment then added. “That kind of power would leave a residual trail wouldn’t it?” Rudy asked Kingman and he nodded. He was starting to put the whole ‘chastise Kingman for not listening’ on the back burner.

“Exactly. Even if someone did hear about the sudden change and remove the suddenly hostile spirits, I’d have felt... something the moment I came in the same door the sheriff crawled through. That’s a major threshold, and one a spirit is keyed to passing through. It’s like someone or something has... uh bottled them up, and cleaned up the spiritual side of things.” Kingman huffed. “And dangerous... unlike the movies you don’t trap ghosts in a place they can’t escape from, it’ll drive them mad.”

“Or perhaps this place is actually rather mundane all along” Rudy hoped.

“Yeah... maybe, I need to sweep this place from top to bottom though. Interview everyone.”

“We can’t go interrogate every guest over these kind of things.” Rudy countered.

“Why not? It’s why we’re here.” Kingman argued, though he kept his tone down.

“We’re hear to help these people and put them at ease.” Rudy reminded him.

“And we do that by investigating while the iron is hot.”

“What about using your own ghosts?”

“I’d rather not, if something is trapping and wiping all traces of ghosts away.” Kingman said and shook his head in frustration.

The two ate some more in silence, and while none of the other guests noticed, the mink caught Kingman's eyes shifted around every few seconds, his teal eyes flashing with quick emerald lights, that the mink knew was Kingman's 'ghost sight', still checking for something amiss in the inn, seeing what others couldn't. Rudy shook his head, the cat, when presented with a problem, wanted to solve it. He wanted to solve all the world's issues before bed. It wasn't a healthy way to live. The mink thought.

As he got lost in thought, debating about what best to say to his friend, the relative silence allowed Rudy to also hear some of the other guests speaking in low hushed whispers. "What's with that weird guy?"

"They let people like him in here? Did he wash those... things?"

"Sush, you can see he's a priest."

"Obviously fake dear, no church would have that.... Thing."

"But those... are those tentacles?"

"I bet they're some sort of..."

Rudy fidgeted in his seat, one of his tentacles accidentally bumped the table, sending his water glass tumbling down to shatter on the floor.

The hushed whispers became a cacophony of remarks, insults, and prodding inquiries about the unusual looking mink. Rudy's smile and thoughts on the discussion at hand slipped, and he frowned a bit, and started to try and force a smile. "It's alright folks, I'm just a bit clumsy and..."

"Excuse me folks, would you mind keeping your prejudices inside your thick skulls." Kingman growled, cutting off his friend's attempts to smooth things over. The mountain lion had sat up with his arms folded across his chest and he was rolling a cleaned chicken leg bone in between his lips like a cigar.

"Really it's quite alright they don't know." Rudy blushed a bit, and tried to smile.

"Okay, then I'll make sure they know." Kingman stood up and put his hands on the table, looking at the surprised guests.

"This man is a goddamn hero... excuse my French, and a good friend of mine. And while someone or something is causing disturbances here, interrupting your oh so wonderful stay in Banjo Bum Fuck, USA. The only fursons around qualified to keep you safe and sound in a roughly two hundred mile radius are sitting here, having polite dinner with you." Kingman growled, he hated that people treated Rudy differently because of what the Calypso Blue virus

had done to the mink's body. He also hated how heroes with 'dangerous' powers or looks were treated. It just got under his fur quicker than most things could.

"I'll have you know I will not be spoken to by the likes of..." a elderly scottish terrier man said and he started to stand up.

"I'll speak to you however I please. If you would like a more polite conversation you can start with an oh so formal request for an apology to my friend here." Kingman huffed. The mink pressed his palms to his face to hide his expression of disapproval.

"Apology for what? Speaking the obvious?" the terrier barked, his gray bushy mustache twitching.

"Obvious? So you know about the victims of Calypso Blue?" Kingman moved towards the terrier and stood over him as Rudy groaned and started to speak. "Kingman I don't think we need to..."

"I uh..." the terrier stammered.

"Families devastated, lives lost, the fear and unrest afterwards, all of that so obvious that it gives you the right to pass judgment on a survivor? Would you gossip like this about a cancer patient?" Kingman clenched his hands into fists so hard his knuckles popped. "What gives you the right?" He growled as some of the staff looked back and forth nervously. If a fight broke out, police were a long way off.

"Well I'm just..."

"Apologizing." Kingman interrupted. The mink felt the fear aura building, and felt Kingman trying not to outright activate and panic everyone in a thirty foot radius for no reason.

The terrier gulped as he looked into a swirling sea of green fire in the eye sockets of the mountain lion.

"Too right, sorry..." the terrier turned and looked at Rudy and saw the pain, embarrassment, and the forced smile. "I'm sorry sir."

"Apology accepted... it's in the past now." Rudy sighed with relief.

As the terrier sat back down, clearly frustrated and Kingman took his seat again as quiet murmurs erupted around them. The mink leaned over and let out a heavy sigh. "Next time you want to scare someone, just pull out your gun."

Kingman smirked. "Sorry I don't like gossiping bullies."

"So you bully the bullies?" The mink remarked.

“That was the plan, yeah.”

“You know what they say about those that rule through fear.”

“I was defending you. Machiavelli can bite me.” Kingman grumbled.

Rudy Nettlefisk put his hand on the cat’s shoulder. “While I appreciate where the thought comes from, I do not need defending. I need my friends' support in those times.”

“Still.” Kingman started.

“Do you really think you changed anyone’s mind?”

“I’d hope.”

“Are you sure?”

“No... but people shouldn’t...”

“They shouldn’t... I agree, but that’s furson nature, and it’s God’s will that we forgive the transgressions.”

“Yeah... turn the other cheek.” Kingman conceded.

As Kingman started to relax, a female voice came from behind him.

“More chicken gentlemen?”

Kingman turned and saw the otter woman, now dressed in a white business suit, holding a server platter with more pieces of fried chicken.

“Oh... wow... yes please, Ms. Wright, that’d be delightful.” Kingman purred in a pure polite tone and one eighty of his previous tone, and Rudy snickered behind his hand, turning away as he saw the mountain lion’s excitement at getting food from a beautiful woman.

After dinner and polite conversation, Ms. Wright sat at the table between Kingman and Rudy. The rest of the guests had gone back to their rooms, or eating dessert, or were outside enjoying the mountain scenery. “I never really got the chance to say thank you for coming out here.” The otter spoke softly, her head slightly bowed.

"It's alright it's our job ma'am." Rudy spoke softly, while Kingman watched the otter, hands propping up his chin as he leaned a bit on the table.

"So where do we start? This inn has been in my family from nearly the start." Ms. Wright asked and nervously rubbed her right hand along her left arm.

"The best place would be the first act of violence that you believe is attributed to the ghosts in residence here." Kingman spoke softly. "From everything I've gathered, no one has ever been hurt, or had anything more than a bit of a startle from these entities in nearly a hundred years, so knowing the details in exact order helps."

"Right... well... a lot of folks don't want their names revealed." Ms. Wright pushed her plate away and pulled out a folded piece of paper, on it was a list of events. Kingman and Father Nettlefisk listened intently as she began to speak.

"One of our most frequent visitors claims she was pushed down the stairs when she was coming down to the lobby, however no one saw anyone do it, and she was quite elderly." The otter sighed.

"But I trust this woman, and she said she felt hands on her back, and she broke her leg and nearly her neck. She also claimed to hear a soft cackling laugh, like that of a child's. And because it's officially an accident, the inn paid for all of her medical bills."

She then sighed. "Also this inn doesn't allow anyone under the age of twenty one to stay in a room, so she couldn't have heard or been pushed by a child."

"Go on." Kingman remarked. He was all business now, Rudy noted, he wasn't eyeing the otter's cleavage or rambling about himself... that was good.

"And then the staff... our entire cleaning staff is down to just three people right now. One said her dress was torn in the bathroom, and others have claw like scratch marks on their arms and back, and some of them are thinking of suing the inn for not having hired a security firm to catch the furson doing this."

Kingman nodded as he listened, and rubbed his chin. "Those cost a lot of money."

"Right" She agreed quickly

"And the report mentioned someone being rushed to the hospital." the mountain lion added.

The otter shuffled uneasily and rubbed at her arm again, then sighed. "Yes, it's rather worse than the report, she's very proud and didn't want to say anything, she's battled depression and has self harmed before so everyone thinks..."

“...that she did it on purpose... striking herself in the face with a frying pan... that’s a bit absurd to assume.” Rudy added.

“Well, yes, because I saw it personally. What she told the police was true, the frying pan lifted up from the stove and was swung at her by... something. And what no one knows is... well... he... it... whatever it was, kicked her while she was down... and I couldn’t stop it.” Ms. Wright quivered and whimpered.

“He?” Kingman questioned.

“Yes...” Ms. Wright let out a defeated sigh.

“How do you know this... invisible attacker was a he?” Kingman prodded and he noticed her shuffle again.

“He wasn’t entirely invisible... I saw... his shadow... and heard him laughing too... like a demented child.” She hugged herself and rubbed her arms. “Of course the police ignored that too, and said both of us were delusional from stress.”

“That’s typical police.” Kingman sighed.

“This isn’t the...ugh... Ms. Wright, would you please show me your forearms?” Rudy asked firmly and seriously.

“I don’t think...”

“Ms. Wright, come on, you’re favoring your arms and giving what you’re telling us.” Kingman spoke softly, ignoring the fact Rudy had cut him off... the mink was right to he had to mentally admit.

“Alright... well... with so little staff I had to pitch in cooking and...” She drew her white suit’s sleeves up, revealing white gauze stained with deep red, horizontal marks.

“Son of a bi...”

“Kingman.” Rudy cut him off before he could finish the curse. But both knew knife wounds when they saw them.

The otter sat in silence and pulled her suit’s sleeve down. “Ms. Wright, I think we should evacuate this place and get you to a hospital.” Kingman spoke and looked over to Father Nettlefisk who nodded in agreement.

“No. I can’t leave, and if this place loses any more guests, we’re going to fold, the inn’s been treading water for years, an evacuation... over... ghosts... we’d be a laughing stock.” She

stammered, but the resolve in the otter showed as she bawled her hands into fists. “Especially since before the benign ghosts and idea of being at a haunted inn brought in a good bit of fringe investigators and income.”

“I understand that, but you’re injured, and we’re professionals.” Kingman tried to argue.

“Besides this is starting to sound like it’s not your original...guests’ doing.”

“I... knew that... this is something new, but everytime I talk about it, furson’s think I’m crazy or trying to advertise the inn...” She shook her head and stood up.

Father Nettlefisk stood up and gently reached out to place a hand on her shoulder. “Rest child. What else has this invisible assailant done to you?”

“I... I won’t talk about that...or myself, just... please if this isn’t a ghost... find what it is and get it out of the inn, it’s more than just a business to me, it’s... home.” She smiled and looked at them with hope in her eyes.

“Okay... fine... but you’re staying with us, let’s head up to our room, I’m no doctor, but I know my way around a med kit.” Kingman relented.

“We should also change into more appropriate attire for field work” Father Nettlefisk added.

“Yeah... that too.” Kingman agreed.

“Okay, I’ll tell you more upstairs so as to not worry anybody.” Ms. Wright admitted.

As the three started upstairs, Kingman’s water glass, left on the table alone, shuddered, lifting a few feet up into the air, and then shattered sending glass and water out in a wide spray. An elderly pug woman screamed as the shard of glass whirled into her cheek. Immediately Kingman stepped in front of Ms. Wright and Father Nettlefisk put his misshapen back to her’s, protecting the inn’s owner from both sides as giggles filled the air. “Freedom!” a tiny voice cackled in delight. Kingman’s eyes flashed green, and little giggles filled the room as guests ran for the exit or up the stairs in a panic.

“Ah shit...” The mountain lion cursed and this time Father Nettlefisk didn’t chastise him for it.

“What is it?” The mink asked nervously as Kingman’s eyes flashed bright green, and became two orbs of flame.

“It’s a Quasit” Kingman growled, as the little critter with a broken mole’s nose, a donkey’s tail, and bat-like wings chased a guest, pulling her hair until she made it to the door. The foot tall demon released its grip as she made it to the threshold and escaped outside. It hissed and fumed at the door frame. “Try again. Try again!” It cackled. Okay that in of itself was weird, the cat thought as he held up his palm, thresholds kept things ‘out’ not in, it should have let the

flying, scaly turd out and sealed it from ever coming back in. The small demon looked at the heroes and spanked itself in taunting mockery, clearly just in it to cause fear and carnage till it exhausted itself.

“I can’t see it.” Rudy huffed, though he could hear it.

“Allow me.” Kingman sent a ball of fire not directly at the flying demon, he knew it was far too quick for that, but instead set right below the imp, causing fire to leap up and frame the physical space where the creature was. “Holy.” Rudy blinked in surprise at the creature frantically beating its legs and fluttering in the air as green flame started to frame its form.

“Rudy! Crush it before it escapes!” Kingman hissed. And the priest smiled.

With the flex of a tentacle the demon was caught in an invisible grip of intense gravity, its wings slammed to its side and it plummeted squealing into the fire. The creature’s natural invisibility failed as it died, and sizzled as green flame started to turn to a smoldering red... then deep orange... as the nearly two hundred year old rug where Inquisitor placed his balefire caught fire for real.

“Oh come on!” Inquisitor roared and pulled a tablecloth off one table and began batting the flames down. Ms. Wright rushed back into the kitchen and returned with a fire extinguisher as the mink used his many appendages to dump every drinking glass he could get on the fire. It was frightening at that moment, but the blaze was soon doused in chemical fire retardant, while the demon’s body dissolved into ether. All that was left behind was a little red, ruby collar.

“Mr. Highborn, could you tell me what exactly is a Quasit?” Ms. Wright asked while nervously rubbing her arm. “In a minute.” He remarked, slightly ignoring her as he picked up the collar with a napkin. Rudy looked over his misshapen shoulder at her about to explain when he noticed her newest injuries.

“You have been burned Ms. Wright.” He pointed at the tips of her hair just above the right eyebrow and a spot on her forehead now burned to expose reddish pink skin underneath. The smell of burned hair was now obvious to all three. “Oh dear... I must have gotten careless.” She touched the spot of bare, singed skin and gasped. “Ow.”

“We should get you to a doctor.” Rudy added as he handed her a wet napkin to put on her burn. It thankfully looked like it wouldn’t blister, the contact with fire had to have been brief.

“No... what was that thing?” she repeated.

Kingman huffed and sat down in a chair, backwards, so his arms rested on the back. “It’s a bit complicated, but I guess we should fill you in.”

"A lesser servant of the Enemy. And as with most of its ilk, actually quite weak, so it relies on trickery to fill us with fear and doubt. Think of it, aside from its invisibility, has it done anything that a normal furson is incapable of?" Father Nettlefisk spoke in answer to Ms. Wright and to confer with Kingman.

"Quasit activity does get confused with poltergeist activity... and they like to go after easy targets, women, children, pets...the elderly, where there's lots of peace and tranquility around to be disrupted" Kingman looked at the rug as guests started to return, and most of them were carrying bags, preparing to leave.

Ms. Wright had spent the better part of the day begging guests to stay, but refund after refund, an ambulance call for the injured pug, and multiple trips of horse carriages to take guests back to the cars at the base of the mountain, had made the otter woman's composure start to break. She had to frequently hide the fact she was crying.

"And this is why I hate demons... even when they die, the damage they do... is..." Kingman gritted his teeth as he locked eyes with the terrier that mocked Rudy's looks earlier. He too was checking out, and the canine turned his nose up at the mountain lion as he left.

"I know... you're not in the Inquisition anymore, you can't pull out your gun and force everyone to stay for Ms. Wright's sake." The mink sighed and put his hand on the now spiked pauldron of the armored, heroic necromancer...the Inquisitor. Father Azathoth, with his blue outfit and elder sign symbol on the hood of uniform, now struck a more serious and intimidating stance, but the reality was for Inquisitor and Father Az, hiding identities was just not possible, instead the uniforms, Inquisitor's spiked armor, and Father Az's suit, meant that they were all business now.

"You sure? Doesn't have to actually be loaded." Inquisitor half joked.

Father Az's tendrils rippled for a moment, his body language showing as much agitation as Inquisitor was expressing.

"Yes." He replied and watched as Ms. Wright approached. Her hair was a mess, she looked tired, and her arms and forehead were now properly bandaged. Her singed fur and hair didn't help the haggard look either.

"There has to be a summoner here." Inquisitor whispered and Father Azathoth nodded in agreement. "Taking advantage of ghost stories while having his or her pet do damage to this place."

"The enemy is insidious." Father Az sighed.

"I want to keep them all here till I interrogate every last one of them." Inquisitor growled.

“Unfortunately we can’t... not unless we have probable cause.” The mink hated this too. He agreed with the Inquisitor, but rules were rules.

Inquisitor was about to argue again when Ms. Wright walked over, trying to force a smile... and failing. “That’s it... only a few guests stayed... at this rate I won’t be able to keep the lights on or pay the staff.” She crumpled into a chair and put her head into her hands. Inquisitor could hear her choke back sobs.

“Yeah... well... we’re staying as paying guests too.” Inquisitor remarked.

“You don’t have too.” She replied and the mink raised his hand in interjection.

“We want to.” Father Az said firmly, and it made the otter smile and wipe away a few more tears.

Inquisitor smiled as well and then added. “So... mind if I ask something?”

“Yes?” Ms. Wright replied tentatively.

“The guests that are staying, would you mind if we interviewed them?” Inquisitor spoke as he rubbed his chin in thought and looked over to Father Az. He nodded in agreement. Interviews were not interrogations and if people were staying, the worst they could say is no.

“I guess so.” Ms. Wright rubbed at her arms suddenly nervous. Father Az’s tendrils twitched again as if ice water had been dropped on their tips.

Despite being a professional investigator, and Father Az being a well trained bureau operative, the guests that remained had nothing on them that was suspicious, they were thankfully the kind of elderly denizens that didn’t care if a typhoon, an earthquake and a kaiju showed up at their front door, they weren’t budging from their vacation.

Inquisitor liked that stubborn curmudgeon mentality. It wasn’t the smartest mentality, and natural disasters took their biggest tolls on fursions like that, but he respected the balls it took to stand their ground even when things showed up that they couldn’t possibly stop. And especially if those things were supernatural in origin.

They came up to room 308 and Ms. Wright knocked on the door. “Mr. Delgado?” She called out and there was no answer. Immediately Inquisitor’s fur bristled, and Father Az looked at the feline. “You feel it?” He whispered.

“A sudden wrongness... yeah. Been feeling it since we cooked the Quasit” Inquisitor whispered back as Ms. Wright knocked again and repeated the question.

"I don't like that I didn't sense it before." Inquisitor trembled.

"Strange, Mr. Delgado has been here for a while and he always answers the door." The otter spoke to the heroes and knocked again.

Father Az nodded. "Supernatural masking?" It seemed an awful lot of trouble, but he was already guessing where Inquisitor's wheels were turning towards.

"Ms. Wright, could you just unlock the door?" Inquisitor looked at her and she shook her head.

"I value my guests' privacy. And Mr. Delgado has been normally pretty friendly but he preferred his privacy when his room door was closed."

"I think this should be an exception." Inquisitor felt energy stirring behind the door.

The otter hesitated and took out her keys looking them over. "Mr. Delgado, this is Ms. Wright, I have two gentlemen from the Bureau of Superheroes, they need to check out the room...I'm... I'm coming in." She put the key in, and Inquisitor's fur stood up so much he looked like a startled alley cat. "Stupid Inquisitor! Stupid!" he yelled mentally at himself and started towards Ms. Wright. "Wait, don't!" He called out as she turned the key, the door groaned, she stopped, and Pandora's box opened right in their faces.

"Ms. Wright!" Inquisitor shouted as the door blew off the hinges and took the otter squarely, knocking her off her feet, and slamming her against the far wall so hard it cracked, along with the sound of bones popping. Immediately there was a cold rush and unholy cry of pain and agony that filled the halls. Inquisitor's eardrums burst while Father Az, less sensitive to the supernatural wail, dropped to his knees and covered his ears. The flame of every candle sconce along the walls of the hall blew out, plunging the floor into darkness. Both felt something cold rush past them along the wave of psychic agony until, no longer contained, it was free to dissipate.

"Turn that music off!" Some old guest said from behind his locked door.

Motes of blue and green light rushed past Father Az as he held his hands to his ears, while Inquisitor's eyes flashed with green flame. He watched the cat mouth words that made his skin crawl and knew the cat was using necromancy to reknit his eardrums even as blood poured out. And in the next moment, it was over. Inquisitor shuddered and dropped to one knee. "Holy mother of fuck!" He screamed as his ears rang like church bells played by a mad speed DJ.

Father Az groaned. "Lan... ah forget it... check on Ms. Wright." He didn't mean it as an order, but the Inquisitor didn't argue. He got up and tossed the wrecked door aside and looked her over. "She's knocked out, but alive." He then turned to peer into the room... and he nearly vomited at the sight.

Francesco Delgado really filled out a room, Inquisitor thought with a bout of dark comedy, a few moments after, when he got his brain and stomach to stop fighting to run down the hallway. Bits of the marine iguana were on the ceiling, the bed, the dresser, the ground, the steamer trunk at the end of the bed, and over the bathroom door as well.

The room's wallpaper was scratched with a ritual knife, still clutched in a flayed, skeletal claw. The scratches were dark runes, for summoning, binding, and turning the room into a supernatural prison of sorts, made to 'pluck' the room partially out of the material plane. The carpet had been pulled up, tossed aside against the radiator heater, and on the hardwood floor was a summoning circle drawn in furson blood, salt and powdered limestone. It was pretty standard except for a tiny footprint's mark on the floor, breaking the limestone outer ring.

"Now we know where the demon came from." Father Az spoke and Inquisitor turned blankly, cupping a hand to his ear. The mink repeated a bit louder and sighed as the mountain lion wiped blood out of his ear. The necromancy he used to patch his wounds never really 'lasted' on living things, and so he was experiencing his ear drums bursting... healing, to bursting again... healing... to tearing... healing... and so on until he'd be recovered.

Along with the burst eardrums, Inquisitor's balance was so bad he had to summon his hammer to use as a staff just to fight against his wrecked equilibrium. "Tortured...psychic death scream..." He growled. He didn't mean to shout... but he was.

Father Az nodded. Two sets of shackles were nailed to the door side of the room's wall. And the wall connecting 308 to 307 had a chunk of the wall paper pulled away, wood was broken, and it looked like something had been trying to dig through the side of the wall. "How did nobody hear any of this?" Father Az spoke.

"Huh?" Inquisitor replied. And the mink repeated it louder and closer to his ear.

"Ah...um well..." Inquisitor rubbed at his ears. "Because this room from the inside, wasn't inside the inn" the mountain lion remarked and Father Az surveyed more of the grizzly scene. He didn't question that, the markings on the wall were terrifyingly familiar and it made his fur want to crawl off his body, especially when he noticed... "The shackles." He pointed to them so the Inquisitor could see them. He went over and inspected them. Then cringed. "Ghost dust, he was holding the two ghosts prisoner. And inside an extra dimensional space at that."

"Can that actually be done?" Father Az shouted so the Inquisitor could hear. He let out a 'gah oowwww' noise and shook his head. "Ah... hearing is back for a bit... ah...owww..." He whimpered and Father Az repeated softly. "Sorry, can that actually be done?"

"Yeah... uranium and a few other elements equals ghost dust, plus runes etched into the cuffs, you can hold a ghost with ease, drive them mad by not letting them repeat their memories."

Inquisitor groaned and shook his head as he leaned on his hammer. His balance was going again. Father Az looked at the shackles. Like Inquisitor he knew ghosts weren't the 'actual' souls of the departed, but instead an echo of that soul's life etched in a physical place. It was like a photograph or film reel, a negative laid over the real world, played over and over again. They would fade over time unless anchored, and the more intense the moment, the more thoroughly anchored in place the ghost would be. Holding a ghost in place then would be like tearing the film reel as it tried to roll through the projector or rip the edges of a photograph, little by little, fraying it at the edges. Ghosts may not be totally sentient beings but it was still a lot like pulling wings off a fly. Fly may not be able to scream or beg for its life, but pain was pain.

"So that blast?" Father Az replied.

"Yeah... two ghosts' dying screams, held in place by this room's seal. When the door opened, the seal on the room broke and we got hit with it at full concentration." Inquisitor groaned and rubbed his ears again... they were starting to bleed again. He cursed under his breath.

"Making matters worse... whoever took out Mr. Delgado here, knew someone like me might be drawn in."

"Why's that?" Father Az said and when Inquisitor didn't hear him, he shouted it.

"Ah... uh... well, they took his lower jaw bone, so I can't really ask his corpse about this either." Inquisitor growled.

"Might as well search the room." Father Az spoke and shook his head, he opened one drawer of the dresser with his gravity and his stomach felt like it was going to do a flip. The bible, the book of his faith, was on the top shelf and torn to shreds so that just the leather cover remained somewhat intact.

Father Az's tendrils tightened and flexed as he looked at the desecration. "Destroyed Bible. I have a feeling that we're dealing with somebody who's devoted themselves to the Devil. Or maybe a vampire - there's been word going around in Colmaton about one that conducts some rather sick and twisted experiments in the occult."

Inquisitor sighed. "Devils... Demons... Any number of the fallen really, or a dark god, but yeah. I heard about that too. Heard some freelancer has been on that case, and I haven't had the time to talk with them."

Inquisitor then looked at the summoning circle and noticed the break. "Well that makes a theory."

"Huh?" Father Az asked as he gently looked around, continuing to use gravity to pull drawers open, without contaminating a crime scene.

“Looks like Delgado’s familiar betrayed him. He summoned something here to bargain with, but the Quasit broke the summoning circle and must have escaped. Delgado shuts the door to keep the thing he summoned...trapped... it redecorates the room in response, it can’t escape, and even tries clawing through the walls to no avail... maybe it lost steam and went back to the abyss.” Inquisitor replied.

“Let’s check the other rooms just in case...” Father Az spoke as a tentacle reached down and plucked Ms. Wright’s keys from the ground.

The Inquisitor stepped into room 307. Despite the debris it was largely untouched, a lamp was knocked off the table and oil was soaked into the carpet. This was of course the legendary ‘white lady’s room and it looked empty, like an unused room would, cleaned only occasionally, it had only a few pictures on the wall. He walked up to one and wiped the dust off of it.

“Nothing in 309, and it’s the last room on this hall.” The mink spoke as he closed the door on an empty room, as he walked back into the hall and upon hearing no response from Inquisitor started to repeat himself.

“Um... Father... you might want to get in here, and bring Ms. Wright.” the mountain lion spoke in a nervous tone.

Father Az turned to leave 309 and went back into the hall where he’d left Ms. Wright, a spare pillow from another room had been used to prop her head up, except that now, she was just...gone. “She was right here.” He remarked and then called for her.

Barely hearing it, Inquisitor shook his head. The church bells had downgraded to constant humming but he noticed the alarm in Father Az’s voice and hobbled through the broken wall to find the mink opening the doors to the other rooms, calling for ‘Ms. Wright.’

“I don’t think you’re going to find her Father.” Inquisitor groaned. Father Az turned to see Inquisitor hold out a picture frame.

“Holy Mother of God.” Father Az stammered. “I believe we absolutely must find her now.”

“Yeah...crap.” Inquisitor groaned as they both looked at the photo.

It was a photo of the New Wood Mountain Inn, and several men and women were in period clothing. The caption below was written in ink. “New Wood Mountain Inn Grand Opening 1905.” And at the center holding a pair of scissors, with large ribbons at either side of her feet, was an otter with short hair, dressed in all white. She was smiling as another otter had his hand on her shoulder, embracing her so they were standing side to side.

As the mink and mountain lion stared at the photograph, in that monochrome off yellow color, the glass on the frame cracked, and the floor shook and shuddered. Someone down the hall screamed. "This is bad." Inquisitor remarked.

"Is she behind this?"

"Don't think so... but... don't know." Inquisitor heard the scream, and Father Az was already ahead, rushing towards the sound of one of the elderly people they'd just spoken to earlier.

Inquisitor hissed and began to hobble after. Sometimes being sensitive to these things was annoying. But then again, why hadn't he sensed her as a ghost. Why would she kill Delgado... no she couldn't have killed Delgado... and the Quasit... So much didn't add up, and someone needed him to be acting now, and playing detective later.

When Father Az kicked the door of 303 open, he found the elderly pheasant woman trying to pull her husband's hands away from his neck, the old man was gagging as he choked. The room was pitch dark, with two freshly snuffed candles on the nearby nightstand. The old man thrashed back and forth looking up at the ceiling, grunting hard as he kept choking himself, apparently by his own hands. "Sir please don't do this!" Father Az's tendril wrapped around the old man's arms and began to pull at them until Inquisitor stepped into the room as well. He immediately went to his ghost sight and saw the black...creature trying to go down the open mouth of the elderly bird.

"Father Az! Don't pull his arms away he's...shit!" Inquisitor hissed as the mink's tendrils pulled the old man's hands away and he instinctively took in a deep breath, allowing the mass of shadows from the entire room dive into the man's beak, and down his throat.

Immediately the old man began to laugh and swatted Father Az into the Inquisitor, the mountain lion caught him and grunted as he hit the hallway wall. "Edward!" the old woman cried out and she was slapped to the ground, immediately knocked unconscious. Inquisitor was helped to his feet by one of Father Az's tendrils as the mink immediately became weightless and floated a bit off the ground.

"Urrgh... What is it?" Father Az coughed.

"Oh what am I indeed? Would you care to tell the class Inquisitor?" The voice that spoke through 'Edward's' body made Inquisitor's skin crawl. It was an almost cliché British accent, the one spy movie villains always had.

"A shadow demon..." Inquisitor groaned "...and if we kill it now, we'll kill that old guy."

"Very good... very good. Now would you be so kind to fetch me the White Lady? My master would quite like...or should I say...? Love to have her for dinner." The demon spoke and sat on the edge of the bed, crossing one leg over his knee. He immediately shuddered as the old

man's joints caused the demon pain to move, but he was confident, he didn't need to possess another body at the moment.

"No. Why did you murder Delgado?" Inquisitor growled.

"No?" the shadow demon laughed, and brought the old man's hand up to his mouth and bit down hard, and began to chew until the hand bled. The demon hissed in pain then and smiled. "How about now? Care to bargain?"

"No." Father Az spoke and held out a cross towards the demon. It recoiled in the old man's body, turning its head away. "That may expel me, but you can not kill me that way, priest. I am far above your god's symbol"

Suddenly the demon felt a wave of heavy gravity pinning its arms down, keeping it from further self harm. It grunted and laughed.

"I know. But that's what Inquisitor is for." Father Az began to chant and the demon laughed,

"Owww that tickles." He taunted until Inquisitor smirked, "Yeah that's what I'm for." He grabbed the rosarius and summoned his grenade launcher, flicked open the breach and dropped a shell in.

"Inquisitor!?" Father Az looked surprised.

"Trust me."

He pointed the weapon at the old man. "Get out or this is going to hurt." Inquisitor growled. "Fair warning."

"Fair warning? You'll kill me and this old wench?" The demon tried to kick the old woman but couldn't move his foot.

"Better that than a free Shadow demon." Inquisitor replied with a smirk.

The demon's eyes, inside the old man flicked back and forth. "I'll call that bluff."

Inquisitor smirked. "Suit yourself. Father...eyes closed."

"Wait!" The shadow demon grunted. "My... previous employer was sent here to prepare the way."

"The way for who?" Inquisitor growled.

"Why you of course." The demon chuckled.

“Careful. You know these things lie.” Father Az never took his eyes off the demon possessing the hold man.

“Why would I lie? Me and the lesser being had found a smorgasbord of souls to torment, and the bastard wanted to play as malevolent... spirits until you arrived.”

“And what do you want now that your master is dead?” Inquisitor calmly questioned.

“Peace and freedom for all fur kind of course. You should let us have this place to despoil dear child playing at godhood. Kill the priest and we can rule this inn together... split the otter whore between us.” The old man chuckled before hacking and coughing.

“Father Azathoth, do me a favor and close your eyes.”

To the demon’s surprise, the mink had full faith in the mountain lion... and did so.

It was all the warning the mountain lion could give the mink and he did so as the round was launched from the grenade launcher. The 40mm round launched from the gas powered weapon and sent the round into the drywall behind the demon. It laughed in triumph... right until pure ultraviolet, purifying sunlight ripped out of the shell, illuminating the room. The demon hissed and screamed, and flowed out of the old man like black oil, the light forcing it towards the closest shadow as it did Inquisitor with his eyes burning green with spirit sight, swung his hammer down, and the holy weapon hit the demon hard. It screamed and coiled around the hammer and was engulfed in green fire that ate away the demon’s body as it touched the holy hammer and was boiled to dust as rays of the sunlight round touched it.

When the light died the demon was gone, and most of the third story floor where the hammer struck the ground was gone with it.

Another scream sounded and it made Inquisitor’s fur stand on end... it sounded a lot like Ms. Wright’s voice.

“Damn.” Inquisitor huffed.

“Did you kill it?” Father Az blinked as the old man slumped towards the big hole in the floor. His tendrils shot forward, catching the old man and his wife, and dragged them out of the room to the relative safety of the hall.

“For a thousand years and a day... or until someone resummons it by its true name... yeah.” Inquisitor sighed.

There was another cry and scream of pain as Father Az turned to follow the cries of pain. “...Aren't you supposed to be restricted to beanbag rounds after the spider incident?” He called back to Inquisitor.

“Uh... you saw nothing.” Inquisitor waved his hand like he was doing the Jedi mind trick. It wasn't that long ago he'd used his Denel Y3 AGL to destroy a plant overrun by spiders, grown giant on vats of chemical growth agents. Much to the chagrin of one heroine by the name of Chemigal.

He hadn't told anyone but he begged, pretty pleased, and annoyed Chemigal into making him nonlethal and specialist rounds for fighting criminals and handling certain demons and monsters... and they didn't go boom either, so Betsy Ross couldn't chew his head off.

Father Az and Inquisitor found Ms. Wright in the kitchen, the smell of gas hit them almost immediately. Her right hand was broken, the thumb jutting at an unnatural angle.

“Please... leave me... this place is ruined now.” She sobbed and put her back against the wall and slid to the floor. “I'll finish it this time... so many times I wanted... to...now I'll do it.”

“You're not from the material world are you?” Inquisitor spoke softly

“Why does it matter?” She sobbed and as Inquisitor approached, one of Father Az's tendrils blocked him. “Look at her other hand.” It made the Inquisitor tremble. It was a lighter, one used for lighting the gas cooking stoves. If she clicked it... the kitchen would go up along with everyone else inside the inn.

Inquisitor cringed. He was... mildly fire proof given his own control over balefire, but that wasn't going to stop a pressure wave of heat, nor the shrapnel of an explosion.

“You've been alive a long time, haven't you nature spirit?” Inquisitor spoke in a flat, accusational tone that made her look up. Father Az gave him a 'Are you crazy?' look as he stepped past the tendrils into the gas filled room.

“Too long.” She admitted.

“You wanted me and Father Az here for a reason.” He spoke and coughed as he reached one of the stoves. She tensed, then relaxed as he turned one off.

“I want to die.” She cried.

“No...child. You wouldn't have called us here if that was the case.” Father Az spoke and she laughed.

“Your god’s priests called me an abomination and chased them from the old country with a torch and ax. And now, every harm to the inn is a harm to me.” her words made Father Az stutter, and he blushed in embarrassment and looked away. “That’s... well you have a right to be bitter there, but I believe in love, not hate, no matter what one’s circumstances of their creation be.” The mink spoke softly as Inquisitor sighed, turned off the last stove and held out his hand. She reluctantly put the lighter in his palm. “I failed again.”

“Nonsense, but it also sucks you stayed so long you became this place’s *genus loci*.” Inquisitor added. “Every harm done to this place, is done to you, correct?” he repeated and she nodded. “I noticed it... after he...” She admitted with a guilty look on her face.

She sighed. “And I know everything that goes on in the inn, every need and desire to make this place a resort for the weary.” She put her head into her forearms. “Or at least I used to.” She began to sob as Inquisitor put his back to the wall beside her and slid down slowly.

“Yeeeeeah. I saw your room, pictures of this place, as it ro...as it aged, you aged. There was an elderly otter woman, Abigail Wright... and when this place was restored, Bridgette Wright...”

She laughed. “And Susanna Wright... And then there was just... me... no name, just a form that drew the attention of a man with a peaceful vision, to build a place of rest, comfort and healing.” She cried as she smiled and wiped a tear away. Instantly Father Az got it.

“You fell in love... but he aged... and you did not.” He rubbed his chin and then shook his head. “Poor child, I’m so sorry that such a burden falls on you. Spirit of this inn or not.”

She shuddered. “For a time, when the sheriff and Fred... when they left... their ghosts were constant, if predictable company. Neither harmed the guests and it was always amusing to see the sheriff outside... I would walk with him, he wasn’t much for conversation but Fred... poor man, came all the way from the old world... Italy I believe, he couldn’t speak the language, he was a...I think you call them mail order... spouse... but his partner did not arrive. I let him stay as long as he lived. He was so funny and made everyone happy, but no one knew he had... but I did... And I couldn’t bare to tell him and cause him to stop making others happy.”

Inquisitor and Father Az listened, while Father Az opened a nearby window to vent the gas.

“And the young lady that self harmed... you were fond of her because you did much the same when you became depressed.” The mink added, and she nodded again. “I believe your psychiatrists call it... manic depression with... suicidal thoughts.”

“I didn’t realize spirits could...” Father Az spoke and Inquisitor shook his head.

“Spirits are living...incorporeal things... she formed a body out of will and needed to connect... that’s impressive.” Kingman smiled.

“Impressive? Everyone I care about dies gentlemen, I’m nothing more than a flesh and blood representation of wood and dirt.” She spat in disgust.

“Seems like your made of some water too.” Inquisitor dryly remarked and smirked. When she looked at him he flexed his eyebrows up and down, and made her giggle. “Haha... yes I suppose so.”

“That does bring us to the man in 308 though.” Father Az hated to bring her mood back down, but they did need to know as much as possible.

She sighed. “When he arrived several weeks ago, he was just a very secluded but kind man, he took his meals via room service, but he never missed a payment, so I had no reason to pry into his life.”

“But as a genius loci you should have noticed him tearing up the room.” Inquisitor spoke honestly.

She nodded. “He...he didn’t do that at first. I didn’t even realize something was wrong until my frie...until the ghosts vanished and fursons started to get hurt. That’s when I called.” She sighed. “I called the bureau for help, and felt something was wrong, but I was scared. I didn’t want to run a guest off, it’d... I needed all the guests I could get.”

She looked away embarrassed. “I’m supposed to be omniscience to everything inside this inn and on the front lawn... but I was blind until it was too late to act.”

“And that brings us to the why.... This Mr. Delgado summoned up a Quasit, and then a shadow demon, using tortured ghosts as the lure... that’s the part that bothers me. The Quasit couldn’t leave the threshold of the inn, and the shadow demon is only thing that could kill a furson from the inside out, and be that smart to mutilate the corpse.”

“Smart?” Ms. Wright and Father Az looked at Inquisitor.

“Yeah...I can use my powers to speak with the dead... not the soul of the person... just the corpse itself. Buuuuut...” Inquisitor sighed. “He has to have everything intact for speech... no jaw... no flesh...”

“Dead men tell no tales.” Father Az finished and Inquisitor nodded. “Yeah. And that shadow demon was trying to escape too, it couldn’t until all the candles blew out in the hall. The old man was smart... he felt it trying to crawl into his throat and blocked the shadows by physically choking himself...”

“And I let it right in.” Father Az sighed in defeat.

“You couldn’t have known the possession vector.” Inquisitor reminded him. “Just be glad it couldn’t jump inside us.” He ran his hands through his hair.

Father Az shuddered. “Wait why couldn’t it?”

“A holy man and a necromancer. Your faith would tear it apart... and the collected spirits inside me would feast on it like a piranha on a bleeding cow.” Inquisitor remarked.

Everyone was silent for a moment until Inquisitor spoke again. “Won’t know everything for sure, but I’m going to call in the Bureau forensics.”

“Good idea.” Father Az remarked.

“And... I’m calling in a friend for his networking skills.” Inquisitor smirked and Father Az bristled. “You don’t mean.... Him?” the mink went white with nervousness.

Kingman Highborn’s Atlanta Apartment:

Loki the house cat sat on Kingman’s leather couch. The feral feline laid on his back chewing on a slice of pizza, while the remote rested on the nearby mahogany coffee table. He may have looked like a perfectly normal pet siamese, but Loki... one of the shards of the god of Mischief and Fire. He was Kingman’s familiar, and advisor, but as the prankster god, he’d been banned multiple times from the bureau headquarters. Every April 1st especially when he’d play an epic prank for his friend’s amusement. Some of which involved everything from causing every bureau hero and heroine to swap genders, to changing the dress code in the bureau rule book, for all bureau members, male and female, to adopt the Japanese sailor fuku as official uniforms. And one day changing everyone’s fur to various shades of green.

When the phone rang, the house cat groaned. “Uggggh I hate Mondays.” He rolled over, burped and pressed the green button. Suddenly Kingman’s voice came through his own mouth. “Cat’s Eye Private Investigations, this is Kingman Highborn speaking, the greatest detective and superhero in the world.”

“Do I sound like that?” The voice replied.

“Oh it’s you.” Loki groaned.

“Yeah it’s me.” Kingman replied.

“What’cha want boss?” Loki sighed as he looked at the television, playing the current season of fursons getting smacked in the nuts by foam devices and flung into water.

“I need you to get me Beyla’s number. I got an Inn that needs saving.” Kingman chuckled as he heard the sudden terrified sound of choking on the other end of the phone.

A few days later...

“Well that went better than expected.” Kingman smirked at Father Az.

“I don’t think alcohol is going to solve Ms. Wright’s issues.” The mink glowered a bit, but he had already guessed Kingman’s intentions.

“Not alcohol... mead... and bees are the best carpenters that ever existed.” Kingman was interrupted by a cough.

“Second best carpenters then.” the mountain lion held up a hand in admission of the mink’s silent point.

“And how does this Beyla help protect this place?”

“Father... have you ever been stung by a bee?” Kingman smirked and the mink shook his head. “No I have not.”

“I have... and it’s not something I go... let’s do that again! After it happens. Plus Ms. Wright is going to have lots of friends, and guests now. And this can finally be a good resort for bureau members too.” He added.

“Still...” Rudy sighed as he had his reservations about adding a meadery and tavern to the inn. It was also going to get the building taken off the national register, especially with the upgrades in electricity via renewable energy, and internet.

Kingman patted Rudy on his hunched back. “Relax. Beyla scares Loki half to death, so she can’t be all bad.” Rudy sighed “I suppose.”

“You could say she’s the only furson that can make him bee’have.” Inquisitor smirked and the mink groaned, and facepalmed with both hands on his right side. But he was smiling underneath his palms.

When the front door opened the two heroes stood up and saw a tall red furred vixen, in a yellow business suit with black stripes. She wore dark sunglasses, and turned around several times one way, then the other, her long furry tail swishing back and forth. Her bright red hair on her head whirled back and forth, and the only hint she was a goddess, besides her radiant beauty, was the second pair of arms tucked behind her back. “...you’ll find something rather pleasing to admire.” Kingman reminded Rudy as he pushed the mink’s chin up to close his open mouth.

“Excuse me, Inquisitor.” One of the bureau forensics heroes tapped him on the shoulder. “Yeah?” He remarked. “We found something under the floorboards in 308, you need to take a look at it.”

Kingman turned to Rudy, “Go say hey, and take her to Mr. Wright.” Kingman smirked as Rudy blushed and stammered.

All of the third floor and attic had been turned into the law enforcement and bureau’s forensics investigators. Unfortunately Kingman was great at the supernatural and finding details, but the actual lab work was beyond him. It was another reason he valued Chemigal so much, much to her chagrin. And much to his disappointment, she wasn’t here. The Room 308 had been taped off and guarded. Delgado’s remains were being categorized into plastic evidence bags, and he had no doubt they’d find drugs, probably a lot of odd animal blood samples... and maybe they’d even be able to find out what he looked like before being outwardly... exploded off his skeleton. The room brought Kingman’s mood down. He’d spent the past few days entertaining Ms. Wright to keep her distracted, and keep her happy, even while she knew law enforcement would be crawling all over her true self.

“We found this in Mr. Delgado’s steamer trunk.” The forensic’s officer handed Kingman a plastic bag. He nearly dropped it.

It was a jaguar’s head... turned into a mask. On top of the mask was photos of him and the Atlanta Bureau, Carolina Cougar, Brier Bear, Brier Rabbit, Brier Fox... and more of his close friends. Betsy Ross, Slipstream, Chemigal, Computer Mouse, Combat, Slipstream, Voltage Vixen and Miracle.

“What does this mean?” the forensics agent asked nervously as he saw the sudden scowl and felt the icy cold pressure of Inquisitor’s fear aura starting to activate.

The mountain lion forced it down, and handed the mask back to him. “It’s a heartfelt message” Kingman grit his teeth, and green flame enveloped his right fist.