

It was nice to be back in familiar territory. Qima the fennec had been away for months, lending his healing skills to the sick and injured in the big city. As much as he liked helping people, city life was too noisy and hectic for the fennec. Far, far too noisy with ears as big as his.

As he packed his meagre belongings, he knew just where he would go. Senwick the fox was his closest friend in the world. Unfortunately, Sen hated cities even more than Qima did. The two hadn't seen each other since Qima left, and he was anxious for a reunion. He wondered what Sen had been up to all these months.

Qima relished the warm summer breeze through his fur as he reached Sen's house. It was a fairly simple design, dome-shaped and clad with wooden shingles. It was also windowless, with only a covered ventilation hole at the top of the dome, and partially set into the ground. Popular features in fox homes for longer than anyone could remember. The door was propped open, so Qima made his way right inside.

"Sen? Are you home?" he called.

"Qi!" cried Sen, as he dashed into the main room, "You're back! Did they finally let you go after you fixed every stubbed toe and sprained pinky in the city?"

"Oh yes, everyone in the city is *completely* healthy now," Qima replied with a grin. "Or maybe I just missed my dear partner so much I begged off to see him again. Whichever you prefer."

"I think you just wanted to run around wearing nothing but a cloak again. I can't believe they make you wear clothes all the time in the city. I hope you'll be staying here for a while, Qi."

Silence fell between them. Sen looked away sheepishly, not at all typical behavior. "Is something the matter, Sen? I'm not leaving any time soon, if that's what you're worried about. Plenty of need for healers out here, too."

"Oh, no, nothing wrong. It's just, ah," Sen stammered, "look at this." He turned around and pointed to the base of his tail.

Qima cocked his head. "Well, your rear end looks as good as ever."

"No! Not that. But thank you," said Sen, "Des gave me this, a tail ring, right here."

Qima walked up to get a closer look. The tail ring was made with three golden bands twisted together. A gem was set in each one. A lovely piece of jewelry, however... "If Des gave you this, it is definitely not a normal ring."

Sen chuckled. "You know her well. She's been giving me a hard time lately. She says I'm not predatory enough. As if I didn't hunt rabbits all the time. But no, apparently it only counts if you run down prey with your teeth. Can you believe it?"

Qima could believe it. Des was a most predatory wolf. Not cruel, necessarily, but she was domineering. "Hmm, and here I thought she liked her friends to be obsequious."

“There you go with your fancy book-learnin’ words. It’s not that, though. She says I’m a disgrace to carnivores everywhere. That I’m practically a rodent. That I should have my teeth removed and replaced with rabbit jaws. On and on. Finally I told her if she really wanted me to be predatory, she should gimme some help,” Sen said, “and this is what she came up with. Why don’t I show you what it does?”

Sen dropped down on all fours, and in the blink of an eye, shrank down to a much smaller size. His body was reconfigured as well. He was a feral fox now, staring up at Qima. “Neat, right? I don’t need anyone else to do this for me now. I know you can do this on your own, so why don’t you join me?” asked Sen, “Oh, but take off all your jewelry and leave it here. For safety.”

Qima shrugged and began removing his earrings. “I suppose one of those jewels lets you transform. What are the other two for?” asked Qima.

“Why don’t we leave that as a surprise for later, Qi? You won’t be disappointed.”

Within a couple of minutes Qima had assumed his feral fennec fox form. Sen was normally quite a bit larger than Qima, but in this form, Sen loomed over the fennec. It was slightly intimidating.

“So, Mr. Predator,” said Qima, “What do you want to do now?”

Sen grinned. “I’m going to give you a head start, and then chase you down. That’s what Des always does with me.”

“Sounds fun, Sen,” said Qima, “What are you going to do with me when you catch me?”

“Oh, Qi, then we’ll have some real fun. But let’s take this one step at a time.”

“Fine,” said Qima as he turned toward the door. He shook his tail at Sen and taunted, “You have never hunted a fennec, though. Catch me if you can!” and with that, he zipped out the door in a flash.

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Sen ran right for the door, but Qima was already gone. Fennecs really *were* quick. He couldn’t hope to catch a fennec fox through speed alone. He had to come up with a plan. But first, he had to figure out where Qima went.

Fortunately, being on all fours has its advantages. He was well acquainted with Qima’s scent, and picked it up easily. Sen set off into the woods, hot on the trail of his partner.

Sen had little trouble finding Qima, but catching him was another matter. Every time he approached the fennec’s hiding spot, Qima ran off laughing. Sen supposed those big ears meant no one was going to be sneaking up on that fennec. He was going to have to catch his prey like foxes always have: by ambush.

Sen knew there was a lake nearby, and he led Qima in that direction. Before long, the fennec was hiding in the reeds along the lake's bank, in front of a big tree. Sen approached along the bank, padding across the mud as quietly as he could. When he heard the reeds moving as Qima fled, he circled back around the tree and leapt...

Right on target! Qima let out a cry as Sen crashed down on him. The fennec wound up on his back, with Sen's chest pressing down on his belly. For a few seconds, the only sounds came from the frogs singing in the lake and the heavy panting from the two foxes after their chase. They gazed at one another as they caught their breath.

Sen moved his front legs together to cradle Qima between them and brought his face closer. "Looks like you aren't as quick as you thought, Qi."

"Hey, it wasn't fair. If we were in the desert you'd never see me again," said Qima. "Now that you've got me, foxy, what are you going to do with me?"

Sen's tongue lolled out of his mouth. He took a long lick up Qima's chest, up to his chin. Funny, he had never realized just how... appetizing his partner tasted. Sen Licked Qima again, from his nose upwards across his face. "Now we're going to have some real fun, Qi. Now, you're my dinner."

Qima blinked disbelievingly. "That- That was not the kind of fun I had in mind. You didn't say anything about THAT when we started this. Y-you wouldn't tear your own dear friend limb from limb, would you?"

"Of course not!" said Sen, bringing the tip of his muzzle alongside Qima's, "Des always tells me it's most satisfying to swallow prey alive."

"Oh that's- that's so much better," said Qima covering his face with his paws. "So I'll get to s-suffocate instead. Or m-melt. Way better than being t-torn apart."

"That's what the other gems are for, Qi! One will sedate you so you won't feel any pain, the other will let me reform you when we're done," said Sen. His stomach was starting to rumble. He could feel himself salivating. It was beginning to drip from his mouth onto Qima. "Des has done it with me plenty of times. It doesn't hurt at all."

Sen suddenly realised just how hungry he was. He felt like he was starving. Was this a side effect of the transformation? Des didn't say anything about it. No surprise, really, she probably thought it was more amusing this way.

"Ok, let's do it," said Qima, "as long as you promise it won't hurt."

"Oh, it won't," replied Sen, "I'm glad you agreed, so glad. I can barely keep from devouring you right now. Whole, alive. Ahh, yes, warm, wriggling. Feeling you struggle as you-"

"Sen! Less talk, more action. Let's get this over with!"

Sen laughed. Then Qima's world went dark as the fox's maw engulfed his face.

Sen was ravenous, but he still had to be careful. He didn't want to injure Qima. He at least had enough self control for that. The fennec began to struggle as Sen drew him further back into his mouth. He wasn't sure if Qima was playing along, or if he genuinely had second thoughts. Either way, it was too late now. He wasn't going to leave until Qima was in his stomach.

Once Qima was far enough into his mouth, Sen lifted his head and slid the fennec back until he could feel his cold nose against the back of his throat. He wanted to make sure both of them had plenty of time to enjoy this. He let Qima slide in little by little. He ran his tongue along Qima's body, savouring the flavour and aroma of his partner.

Sen's throat stretched as Qima slid farther in. He could feel the hot breath from Qima's panting travelling down his esophagus, and the prickle of the fennec's whiskers as he continued his slide. Sen's throat stretched even more as his partner's shoulders disappeared into it. The fennec was drenched in saliva and sliding easily.

Sen continued to run his tongue over Qima as the fennec slid further in. He wanted to absorb every bit of flavour he could before the fennec began his final slide into Sen's belly. Qima was up to his waist now, and Sen could feel his esophagus stretch as Qima travelled down it. Qima's paws continued to kick helplessly in the air as his haunches disappeared down Sen's throat.

Sen wrapped his tongue around Qima's rapidly disappearing paws, desperate to get one last taste. Qima's soft, velvety paw pads were covered in sweat, giving them an extra strong flavour. Sen's throat continued to squeeze Qima, drawing him further in until his paws were out of reach. They finally disappeared down Sen's throat, toes still squirming.

Sen's throat bulged as Qima was squeezed towards his stomach. Sen thought it would hurt, but the feeling of the wriggling fennec was delightful. Sen tried to slow Qima's descent as best he could, so both of them could savour the feeling. At least, he *hoped* Qima was savouring it.

There was no stopping Qima's descent, though. Eventually, the fennec made it down to Sen's chest, and finally squeezed into his stomach. Sen decided it was time to activate the second jewel. He reached out to it with his mind. To his surprise, it was barely more difficult than moving a muscle. "Hey, Qima? Can you hear me in there? Give a couple of good kicks if you can."

Sen felt two thumps from inside his stomach. "Okay, you shouldn't feel any pain in there. If you do... I guess cause a ruckus and we'll hope there's enough of you left to get out of there."

In spite of his concern, Sen was feeling quite good with his fennec meal inside him. He started making his way home, his full belly sloshing to and fro as he walked. "You're quite a meal, Qi. We need to find some way to talk while you're in there, it's a little lonely like this." It was a slow walk home weighed down like that, but Sen made it as the sun went down.

Sen lumbered inside and flopped right down on his bed. He rolled onto his back and ran his paws over the bulge in his belly. His stomach was churning and gurgling, absorbing his meal. He was exhausted after the whole ordeal, and drifted off to sleep thinking of Qima, wondering if he was enjoying the whole experience as much as he did.

Sen dreamt that he and Qima were running together in their feral forms. They ran across forests and deserts, chasing and frolicking with one another. Minutes, hours, days, it was impossible for Sen to tell how long they ran like this. Finally, Qima stopped and turned towards Sen. "You were right, Sen, this *is* fun," he said, words that jolted Sen awake.

The dream filled Sen with a strange sense of loneliness. He sat up on the edge of his bed - or tried to. He was still in his feral form so he plopped to the floor. Reassuming his natural form, he stood up and leaned against the back wall. Though the vent in his ceiling, he could see the first glow of daylight crawling across the sky. He decided it was time to use the last gem on his tail ring.

Sen closed his eyes and reached for it with his mind. Once again, he found it easily. He then imagined Qima, with as much detail as he could. He imagined his partner curled up in bed, safe and sound. He saw a flash of light through his eyelids, and when he opened them, there he was. Just as he had imagined him, Qima was curled up on the bed, fast asleep.

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Sen must have been exhausted from their game, because he was still curled up around Qima when the fennec awoke. By the time the two of them finally got out of bed together, the sun was already high in the sky. "I could really go for some breakfast," said Sen, as soon as he was on his two paws, "Or maybe lunch, whichever is closer."

"Are you seriously hungry? I thought I would be more filling," said Qima.

"Oh, you were. But when I reformed you, I suppose the... you, had to come from somewhere. It came right out of me. I'm starving!"

Qima chuckled. "I suppose that whole affair was not good for a meal, but I thought it was fun. You know, Sen, you are quite cute when you are predatory. I would certainly not mind seeing that side of you more often," he said, "Plus, your dreams are great. Sorry for scaring you back there, by the way."

"Dreams? Oh, so that really was you! Well, if you want to see this side more often, I've got to say, I'm more than willing," Sen said with a toothy grin.

"Just promise me one thing," said Qima, "One day, I want to show you how predatory I can be."