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## Tales from the Mystic Wolf Curiosity...

"Oooooohhh, Brisbane, lookit the cute kitty!"

The gigantic white-furred wolf tending the bar looked up from the glass he was cleaning and blinked a couple of times. "The what?" He turned towards the black-furred feline who was kneeling on the floor of the barroom, reaching out towards a ragged looking feral cat. "How'd that get in here?"

"Oh, don't be such a stodge, Brisbane!" The feline picked up the feral cat and held it close as it tried to struggle out of her arms. "Poor thing proly came in through the door with someone else. It's cold outside, and warm in here after all."

Brisbane scowled and examined the struggling cat. It was of average build and looked like it had been through hell. Its calico fur was dirty and matted in spots, almost bald in others. One of its ears looked like something had been gnawing on it, and its tail had been broken at least once. As he stared at it, the cat stopped struggling and stared back at the wolf with ice blue eyes and a helpless expression of resignation at being held by the perky feline. "I think it needs a bath, Kari," Brisbane began cautiously.

"Oh yes, and some food and someplace nice and warm to sleep ..." She continued to babble on and snuggled the cat, pressing it tightly against her breasts.

The cat seemed to sigh and relaxed a little, as if it knew that Kari wasn't about to let go of it. Brisbane arched one brow in surprise at the cat's attitude, then shrugged and went back to cleaning the glasses.

"Can I use one of the private washrooms, Brisbane?"

He paused again, casting Kari a resigned look. "You want to give it a bath *here*?" he asked her.

"Why not? I can do that while you get some food ready for it!"

"Food? Wait a second, what?"

"Thanks, Brisbane!" Kari leaned forwards and gave the stunned white wolf a quick kiss on his muzzle before she swept the cat off to the back room.

"Oh crud, what has she gotten me into now?"

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Personally, I think if Brisbane knew, he'd have kicked the cat out immediately. How do I know? Because I'm the cat. Sort of. It's hard to explain. I'm not supposed to *be* a cat, if that's any help.

It isn't? Hmm... Then I guess an explanation is in order. How much do you know about the other side of the Veil?

Hmm again... I don't want to go into *too* much detail, so I'll just give some summaries. Elves, Gnomes, Goblins and all that kind of stuff? Yeah, they're *real*, and they live on the other side of the Veil. Lucky them, huh? That's kind of where my trouble started. I'm a mage of sorts, and one of the more common practices amongst mages who deal with the Veil is a practice called "Favor Trading".

Basically, you ask one of the Veil's inhabitants for a favor. They, in turn, can call upon you for a favor at some later time. There's a lot of rules regarding this sort of thing, what can be asked for, valuation of favors, but it's kind of boring. Suffice to say I had to ask a favor of the Seelie Court some time ago, and it wanted payment. Nothing major, the Seelie Court likes to bring mortals into it's demesne to help entertain during parties and the like. I'm a storyteller, so that's what I did.

Nothing major, really, except that one of the guests at the party in question wasn't too keen on storytellers apparently. When the party was over, I got most of the way back to my own world before being accosted by said guest, who turned me into a cat and set the Hunt on me.

Did I mention that I've had a really bad day? Yeah.

The Hunt... Let me tell you, being stuck in a cat's body and trying to outrun a pack of Elfhounds is *not* fun. I'm not exactly in the best of shape, and the Hunt can take *days* sometimes. Running doesn't really work, nor does hiding.

Truth be told, I don't venture beyond the Veil often. Usually it's just for things like this - to cash in favors I owe others, or to visit my friends in the Labyrinth. What? The Labyrinth? Oh, that. You remember the movie by that name that came out back in the 80's? Yeah, they got it pretty close for Hollywood. Missed a few things, but what do you expect? Jared the Goblin King, for example, was an Unseelie elf. He's since been deposed and the Goblin King is a goblin again.

Oh, they don't like being called Goblins, in case you didn't know. It's a slang name for their species. They call themselves the Goh-Blenni, or the Goh-Blens. Easy to see how it got changed to Goblin, yeah?

Um, I'm getting off the point though. The Labyrinth was too far away, as were most of the other Veil locales I was familiar with. The only place nearby that I knew by reputation was the Citadel, which wasn't much help. By the time I figured that out, I'd already been on the run for seven hours and was getting really tired. I think it was by sheer luck that I remembered of a place near the Citadel that Kibbins, one of the Goblins I know, told me about.

The Mystic Wolf tavern.

I've never been there, but Kibbins told me that if you really needed to find the place, or if you really really needed a drink, *it* would find *you*.

Funny thing, normally when someone says that, they're trying to intimidate someone or crack a joke. This is the first time when it actually turned out to be true! One minute I'm running alongside one of the Citadel's walls, the Hunt *maybe* a half mile behind me, the next minute I'm in a tavern, surrounded by barstools and tables and the smell of good food that had my mouth watering...

... and less than a minute after *that*, I'm being called a 'cute kitty' and picked up by some anthromorphic feline with black fur, wearing a black miniskirt and crop top with her white hair pulled back in a long braid and the lights glistening off of the ankh earrings she's sporting - all six of them.

Of course I struggled! Why wouldn't I? The Hunt was after me, last I'd known, and I'd been captured! Wouldn't you try and run? Then I'm staring into the eyes of this *massive* anthro wolf, and then suddenly the catlady holding me is talking about food, and ... well ... um ...

Did I mention that this catlady was *stacked*, and she's hugging me to her chest ... Um ... Let's just say I calmed down *very* quickly, for a *very* good reason.

I think I have found a couple of interesting things out about housecats. First of all, being petted feels good. I mean, *really* good. Second off, the whole bath thing? I've been told it's because of some fur problem from back in the days of yore. Personally, I think it's more because when a cat is in water, it loses a lot of mobility, which is important to a cat. I suffered the bath happily though. It's not like the Hunt was going to *let* me stop and take a bath, right?

So then I'm being engulfed in this old fluffy towel, in the old classic bachelor grey color and rubbed dry, and picked up once again and squeezed against the catlady's bosom before I get set down on a bench next to a small dish of what looks and smells like morsels from someone's stew pot, and *damned* if it wasn't some of the best stew I'd ever tasted! Here I am, sitting on a bench in a tavern, eating stew meat and getting petted by some cute gothish catlady who is calling me a 'cute kitty' and a 'little fuzzy-wuzzy friend,' and you know what the worst part of all this is?

*I'm surrounded by mages and I can't tell them that I'm not supposed to be a cat!!!*

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"Ooo, I think he likes your stew, Brisbane!"

"Kari," the white wolf said with a smirk, "I believe this has been discussed before now. Any being that does *not* like my stew is either a Vegetarian, or has no sense of taste."

"Yeah, can't argue that. He's a sweet kitty, yes he is!"

Brisbane leaned down to look at the cat. "How can you tell it's a male cat?"

"I'm a cat myself. We can tell, trust me on this."

Brisbane nodded slowly as the cat looked up from the bowl of stew and rolled its eyes. He gave a start and stared at it. "Did ... did that cat just roll its eyes at me?"

"Did it?"

"I think it did! Can cats do that?"

Kari rolled her eyes. "Well I can, so I don't see why he can't."

But Brisbane wasn't convinced. *There's something odd about that cat*, he thought to himself, *and I want to know what...*

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This was getting me nowhere.

Yes, I now had food in my belly and I was clean and didn't feel like I was covered in half the fey forest, but I'd been tagged by the Hunt, and they don't give up easily. I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do, but I *knew* that the Hunt was going to find me here eventually, and I didn't want anyone here to get hurt because of me. Especially the catlady who was stroking my head at the moment.

I had to let them know that the Hunt was coming, but how? The idea came to me as the catlady was scratching my ears. I'm a cat, and that means I have *claws*! I had a stinking suspicion that the barkeep was going to be *really* mad with me in a few seconds. Leaving the stew where it was, I jumped atop the table and stretched to try and get someone's attention.

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Brisbane's brow rose as the cat suddenly jumped up atop the table and stretched. *What is it up to now?* he thought. Then he saw the claw come out and his eyes grew wide. "No! Kari, he's gonna scratch my tables!"

The catlady turned and regarded the cat. "So? You throw people through them sometimes. What's a couple of clawmarks?" She paused, however, as the cat extended only *one* claw and began to draw something on the tabletop. "Uhhhhh...?!?"

"What is it?"

"Uh, Brisbane? Iiiiiii think you might want to look at this..."

The white wolf came out from behind the bar, his ears brushing the heavy wood beams that held up the ceiling. He set his gaze on the table top and his jaw dropped. "What the heck...?"

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It was the only thing I could think of. I extended a claw and began to scratch the sign for 'danger' into the wood tabletop. The gigantic white anthro wolf behind the bar came out and took a look and just stared at it, looking really confused.

Confusion was *not* what I needed.

I sighed in exasperation, which as I was a cat came out as a mewl of annoyance. Reaching out the claw once more, I scratched the signs for 'transformation,' 'fey,' and 'the Hunt.' If anything, the expressions on their faces grew even more confused, and I proceeded to lose my temper.

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"MEOW! Meow, meow, meooooowllllllll, mroooooowwwwww fttftftftt!!!"

Brisbane cocked his head to one side, a look of utter incomprehension on his face. "There's something really messed up going on here and I have *no* idea what it is. I think we're going to need some help with this one." He turned away from the table for a moment and looked around the barroom, which was mostly empty due to the weather outside - wet, heavy snow that was falling from the sky in great volumes. "Scuze me, everyone! Attention! Does anyone here know how to read odd runes?"

The normal murmuring sound that formed the background noise of the bar fell silent. Several people got up and came over to the table, but most of them then shook their heads and went back to their own tables looking just as confused as the great white wolf. One, however, stared at the runes and began to swear under his breath. "Ohhhhh crap, crap crap crap *crap!*"

Brisbane clamped a paw down on the shoulder of the speaker, what is it, Malachie?"

The two-tailed Kitsune squirmed under that paw, a look of horror on his muzzle. "The Hunt is coming!"

"What?"

"The Hunt! The Wild Hunt! That cat isn't a cat! It's been transformed, and the Hunt is chasing it!" The silence that pervaded across the bar continued for a second, then panic broke out. People who had been drinking peacefully suddenly gathered their belongings hastily and prepped to leave.

Brisbane let out an angry growl. "Calm down, everyone, this is *my* bar, and the Hunt isn't welcome here. You'll be safe as long as you stay here, and when they come, I'll find out what is going on and take care of it."

It was a moot point. A split-second after he finished speaking, the door flew open with a crash of wood on wood and cracking glass. The sound of wood striking wood didn't bother Brisbane much, but the glass cracking could only mean one thing. Someone had damaged the stained glass in the Mystic Wolf's door. He turned to face the doorway, a faint red glow beginning to shine in his eyes.

With a soft shinging sound, a tall, slender fey clad in glittering golden armor strode into the room, the deer antlers on his helmet glowing a faint ivory tone. "We have come for the cat. We know it is here. You *will* give it to us, or share its fate."

Brisbane cast the fey an evil-looking grin. "... and just what would that be?"

"Death, of course," the fey replied with a smirk.

"Really," the wolf said as he stepped up to stand before the fey. "Death? Interesting that it takes the whole of the Hunt to catch one little cat. What has it done to you to deserve this fate?"

The fey's first mistake was damaging the stained glass. The second was daring to think it could throw its weight around while in the Mystic Wolf. Now the fey would make its third mistake, and as everyone who knows about magic knows, three is a very important number.

"Done?" The fey laughed, bright musical tones coming from its mouth. "It dared to mock one of the Unseelie Court at a Seelie Court function. It dared to think that its pitiful attempts at storytelling would be able to hold the fey in its thrall. It *dared* to think that its existence was worth anything to one of the fey, and so it shall die."

"That's all?"

"That is more than enough," the fey replied in a stern tone.

"That is why the Hunt is after one cat. Was the cat invited to this Court function?"

"Alas, yes, and I don't know *what* Amberion was thinking," the fey replied with a snarl. "Such a pathetic waste of mortal flesh was just *begging* to be fodder for the Hunt, and so it shall be. Now, will you hand over the cat or will you all become the Hunt's quarry?"

Brisbane's grin grew wide and he bent forward as if to bow to the fey, then suddenly shot a paw out and slammed the fey into the doorframe. "*Do you know where you are?*" he demanded of the fey.

"*W-w-what outrage is this?!?*" the fey demanded, utterly shocked by Brisbane's actions.

"You *dare* to come into *my* demesne and make demands? You *dare* to come here and demand the life of one of my patrons? *I* care not what one fey thinks! If this Amberion sponsored the cat to this Seelie Court gathering, then he must have had reason and I'll bet he won't be happy to find that the mortal he invited to the court has become the Hunt's prey!"

"*I'll have your head as a trophy for this affront to the Hunt, wolf!*"

Brisbane leaned down and growled at the fey, who went white under his helmet. "I ... think ... *NOT* ... You are in *my* demesne, fey, threatening those under *my* protection, acting like you *own* the place, and you have damaged my *door*. Any *one* of those three would be worth your eviction from the Mystic Wolf. All *three* however, warrants a *special* fate."

The fey's eyes went wide. "You would not *dare*! We are the Hunt! We ..."

"Are *trespassing*," Brisbane growled, "and making a nuisance of yourself, and *that* required a special fate for you," the white wolf finished. He picked up the fey and took several steps backwards into the barroom. "I hope your skills at *flying* are better than your *oration* skills," he said.

"*What?!?* NO! That's not necessary, really!" the fey began, hastily removing its helmet. Honest, Felgrim put us up to this! We're not really the Hunt, we just ..."

"You just decided to let a self-centered, arrogant *bully* determine your fate because *he* didn't like a story, is *that* it?"

"Y-yes, I mean n-no! I mean, wait, I-I-I can change the cat back!"

"Too late," Brisbane answered happily. "I think we can take care of turning the cat back without any problems. After all," he added, baring his fangs as he grinned at the fey squirming in his paws, "you decided to trespass in the Mystic Wolf. Most of our patrons are *wizards*."

"Oh crap ..."

"Say bye bye, little fey ..." Brisbane took another step back, taking him right up to the edge of the crystal bartop before sprinting forward. The fey let out a whimper as Brisbane swung him back, then *flung* him through the doorway at high speed. There was a rush of air, and then a loud clattering sound as the fey slammed into someone else outside the door, but strangely the sound of fey hitting the foot of snow that littered the ground was absent. A couple of patrons stared out the windows but saw nothing. One brave patron who happened to be near the door glanced out of it just before Brisbane shut the door and saw one of the walls of the Citadel, with a very upset looking fey lying prone on the ground in front of the stone walls.

"Blasted fey, cracking my window," the white wolf growled under his breath as he returned to the table. "Now, little cat," he began, glaring at the calico feline, "what do you have to say for yourself?"

The cat cocked its head to one side and said "Mew?"

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Well, this was an interesting turn of events. I didn't suspect that the hunt chasing me wasn't *the* Hunt. It explains why I was able to outrun them for seven hours, but that still left me as a cat, and I still couldn't talk to anyone.

I think the only good thing that came out of this whole episode was the catlady, who picked me up again and hugged me to her bosom. I was doing everything in my power not to purr as I was cuddled. Then the inevitable happened.

"I think I know what spell the cat is under. Hold on a second."

I blinked a couple of times, and before I knew it I felt myself changing back into *myself*, if you know what I mean. I went from being a housecat being cuddled against a catlady's ample bosom to being the *only* human in a room of anthromorphs and other-veil beings.

Oh ... and did I mention that my clothing did *not* accompany me on my flight from the hunt? Yeah. Make that a *naked* human in a room full of anthromorphs and other-veil beings. A naked *blushing* human. The catlady was understandably a little upset, but I suspect she was more upset at losing her cat than at suddenly finding herself hugging a naked, hairless ape.

Anyway, you wanted to know how I found my way to the Mystic Wolf, and that's how. Oh, stop laughing! It wasn't *that* funny.

... okay, maybe it was ...

Regardless, let me point out one thing. Curiosity never killed *anything*, except maybe seven hours of my time and one of the Mystic Wolf's tabletops. Brisbane is still a little miffed at me about that, but I did use my magic to repair the glass in the door and I set some specialized enchantments on the glass to keep it from breaking in the future, so he says we're even.

Kari is kind of a friend of mine, but she doesn't swing towards humans so I only get to look. I can live with that.

Sort of.

Personally, I'm beginning to wish I was still a cat, but I guess you can't have everything, can you? Besides, I don't think I could give myself a bath that way anyhow ...

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