

Jester's Bliss, Part 2

CD Regan

This was not the kind of fur that was worn as a second skin, as a coat would be; this was taut with strength and the mass that was beneath it. As she moved, she tried to put a shape to this form. Maybe a bear? Whatever it was, it was between she and her screaming daughter.

She found her knitting needles. "Mommy, where are you??" Swiftly, Melinda's memory placed before her some knowledge about bear hides being difficult to penetrate. She would not be able to do any damage with a knitting needle unless...

She found the book she was reading. A good, heavy book.

Melinda hammered the needle into the furry dark wall before her. Something gave. At first, she thought the needle might have punctured through the book rather than the hide. There was no sound. No reaction from the beast.

"Where was Daniel?" was the last thought she had before she was knocked out of the cart onto the ground outside.

The impact of her head hitting the dry earth shot blades of light into her eyes. As she tried to blink them away, she heard the springs of the cart creak heavily. Kimberly's screams were held back by... a large hand? Kimberly tried to scream, but the strong seal over her mouth only allowed out vibrating farts of tone. A bear wouldn't bother to cover its prey's mouth, nor would it be able to do so, traveling on all fours as it would. Only a hand could do that. Weren't humans the only animals that had hands that could do that?

Melinda's eyes began to cool, and the outline of the cart slowly began to shine from the splinter of moonlight above. The springs grinded deeply as a form began to grow out from the back of the cart. A halo of fur emerged. The cart flinched away from its weight as the creature slid to the ground. The heavy impact on the dust drove a pebble onto Melinda's cheek.

In the faint silver light, she picked out glints of reflections within the dark furry halo. Were those eyes?

The root that Bilal was sucking on was buried deep with the rest of the story. He dug for more. The clay layer in this place pushed hard under his nails, just enough to make that sharp aching feeling that reminded him of his childhood.

There it was. There was the patch of root that held the tale in its fibrous core. Sniffing deep, Bilal moved his face closer.

Dangling from the hairy shape was the fluttering of Kimberly's feet, and the hem of her frock which caught the moonlight. Melinda scrambled backward on the ground, her eyes sending her body an overcoming wave of fear. The creature stepped forward once, bent low, and moved to face Melinda. Its breath crawled into her nose and injected into her the taste of grey decay. Kimberly flinched, inches away from maternal safety, against unyieldingly powerful limbs.

Melinda, frozen, uncomprehending and humming with terror, felt her legs go cold and numb. Her heart was throwing itself violently against her breastbone, flooding her arms with idiot power. The dark face loomed closer. Kimberly kicked forth another attempt at screaming and only a puff of air squeaked out. Melinda's hand clenched into an uncompromising fist and flew in the direction of the dark.

Her fist slammed hard against a soft wet click of cartilage.

The mass of fur stood frozen for a moment as Melinda, twitching from fear, waited for violence to come to her hundredfold. The mass stepped back. Kimberly was silent.

The beast swelled. Hunching back, it built power into its haunches, and began to twitch with what Melinda anticipated to be rage. Melinda tried to hide inside of herself, averting her eyes, anticipating a painful goring.

The beast sneezed. A spray of mucus spattered against Melinda's ankle.

It sneezed again, and continued to sneeze. Violently. It dropped Kimberly so it could hold its own nose.

Kimberly found her mother and grabbed tightly, burying her head into her mothers breasts, making no sound.

The beast's sneezing continued as it loped away, each explosion of its face shaking the path of its retreat.

They sat silently, holding onto each other. There were no sounds other than their stuttered breathing. In a moment, Melinda realized that her inevitable violation was at least postponed, scrambled in the dark to find a rifle. Kimberly clung to her body like a marsupial infant as she searched under the wagons.

Melinda and her daughter waited for dawn in a tree. As the blue before sunrise filled the sky, she could see what was left of the party. Many of the wagons were shredded, their contents littering the ground. There was no sign of any bodies anywhere, although patches of blood spattered the ground, and in places, the wagons.

Kimberly had fallen asleep in her mothers arms. She allowed herself to be separated from Melinda's grasp only long enough to be raised into the tree. She now rubbed her eyes, awakened by birdsong from a nearby branch.

Balil spat.

He climbed out of the shallow hole and noticed that the world had begun to warm. He looked up at the tree and sniffed at the bark. Lavender.

The day was beginning, and he needed sleep. The nearby towns knew the circus had arrived and they would be coming tonight. Balil stomped at the ground a few times and headed toward the tents.

End.