

"A squagon has managed to cross over to the human realm. All members of capture team SPAN report for duty in portal room 5", blared the speaker in my room. I hadn't even bothered to go to sleep this night; it was the moons perigee.

I glanced at the digital briefing on my phone while I put on my clothes. *A squirrel dragon, squagon for short, is a docile but very powerful wild magic creature. It read. Their powers are a gift from the original fey and are very unpredictable. They generally don't use their magic excessively, but under no circumstances should one be agitated or endangered. Defend from earth predators at all cost.*

Right. This was a job that needed haste. I threw on my uniform and flew out the door.

As I hurried along to the portal room, I saw some of my colleagues already standing at the ready. In total we are a squad of 5 people. Me and Mark are the scouts. As elves we have the speed and the wings.

Then Riley and Carme make up our front line. They are part of our shapeshifter department and make a good team. Riley has mastered the forms of lion and mouse, whereas Carme can transform into a bear, frog or shark. Of course they can take any form they like, but learning to control an entire new body structure is a time-consuming process, so most limit themselves to two or three forms.

Lastly we have Timur, the team leader, an older sphinx. Valued for his experience, but pushing retirement. It is also Timur who gives us the mission briefing: The squagon crossed over by its own power, meaning it was probably searching for something or someplace. This generally means they found a nice habitat in the human realm, so prepare for forest or jungle environments.

We each strap on our gear and get ready for the portal.

"What the hell, inside a human house?!" hissed Carme as we emerged from the portal. Unfortunately they had been in bear form, but when I looked back they were already shaped a frog, the last of the fur sinking into the now slimy skin. We had expected wide spaces. Behind me I heard Timur give quick orders: "Go scout out where the human is. We'll need to find a safe place to set up operations. Until then complete silence." Mark and I looked at each other and nodded. Even though it was rare, we had been trained on common layouts of human houses, and went to work. We were small compared to humans, but we'd be able to search the house in no-time.

The house was dark but the moon shone brightly on this particular night. In the pale light I was able to identify rooms with speed. I'd first found the living room, checking under couches and in the cabinets. There was no trace of the squagon, but there were some structures that seemed built for an animal of similar size, probably a cat. That

scared me. If this cat chose to attack the squagon, only disaster could follow. Still, I smiled for a bit, Timur would absolutely love this place.

Shaking off the image of a grown sphinx playing with cat toys, I sped up my search and entered a room through the slightly cracked open door. The bedroom lay beyond and atop the bed laid two creatures. A human and the small rodent-like squagon. Even though a squagon is scaly and has a bushy thorny tail, it can still be very soft if it wants to be. My observation of the squagon was rudely interrupted by movement. The human shifted in the bed and did not seem to be as fast asleep as I had hoped, making unruly movements and noises in what had to be a very uncomfortable dream.

The squagon nuzzled close and my heart jumped. If the squagon awoke the human, it would surely discover both myself and the squagon.

"The absolute opposite happened, however", I reported to Timur and the others, who had settled safely in the garage. "The situation is now clear and the human seems to be fast asleep. The only problem is that the squagon has taken to lying on top of the human."

"That explains the crossover at least." Timur noted. "Dreams are the humans last connection to the fey realm. With the moon at its closest point, the barrier is smallest and the squagon was able to sense a nightmare and felt it could help."

"Graceful as it may be, how are we going to clean up this mess?" Carme asked. "We can't scare the bugger and can't wake the human, but every minute we stay risks discovery. I don't think a bear will be very useful in this."

"No need. We'll set a trap right outside the door. Riley, go warm up your mouse form."

We had the setup ready in no-time. Timur stayed behind preparing the return portal, while the rest of us gathered just outside the bedroom. Riley in their mouse form entered and went up to the squagon, nudging it playfully. The squagon returned in kind, and they both skittered around chasing each other. Riley expertly steered away from the human and moved towards the door. Right outside we had left strawberries coated with tranquilizer and Mark and I were carrying a net to scoop up the creature. Riley approached the door but the squagon didn't follow. It looked questioningly back to the human it had comforted and seemed to lose interest in the play.

Mark and I panicked, but beside us whispered a hoarse froggy voice. "Open the door. Slow but Wide. Now!". We did, somehow avoiding the squeak, and when I looked back around I was faced with the shock of a lifetime. The creature in front of my eyes had the proportions of a bear, but a smooth human skin, human hands and feet and it wore the face of the human lying just a few meters away in the bed. If ever there existed an

unholy abomination, this was it, but it seemed to work on the squagon which inched closer to the doorway.

Mark reacted instantly and picked up one of the strawberries we had placed on the floor and set it down in the palm of Carme's hand. Carme lowered their hand to the floor and offered the berry to the squagon. We all held our breaths and for a very long second it seemed that the squagon would not take the bait. Then it hopped into the hand and ate the strawberry wholeheartedly, falling fast asleep almost immediately.

We breathed a sigh of relief. Mark and I laid down the net on the floor and Carme moved to put down the squagon in the net.

It happened almost in slow-motion. Carme was obviously not used to the shape of the humanoid hands and feet and lost their balance, crashing towards the floor. In the fall they distorted their body as much they could trying to soften the landing, but still came down hard with a loud bang.

We scrambled onto our feet and mad dashed towards the garage, not wasting a breath. Carme had turned to frog and we carried them in the net as well. The net was heavy, but adrenaline and panick gave us all the energy we needed in this moment. As we entered the garage Timur looked confused, but was ready as a leader should, opening the portal and letting us all through.

We had made it. Now, truly, we could breathe a sigh of relief.