

“Alright, you nasty little furball, get out of here. Your kind has already caused enough trouble gnawing up the ammo for our catapults.” The elf glared at the kobold standing at the entrance to the barracks. He kept a hand on his sword, even though he doubted that creature posed any real threat to the order besides taking bites out of cannonballs. It only stood there, holding one of its paws in the other, making big eyes as if it was on the brink of crying.

“Why are you like this, mister elf? Why must you take out your anger on us?” The tiny creature squeaked out. Only then did the elf realize that it was gripping onto a bright yellow flower, the type that didn’t grow around the Grand Paladin Order anymore. Sometime warmed up in the elf’s heart as he thought about his time as a child, playing with his brother in the fields, but the frigid breeze returned quickly.

“Where did you get that flower?” The elf glared, ignoring the kobold’s questions. “If you uprooted the first bloom that we have had in decades, you ought to be thrown in a cell for the rest of your life.”

“N-No...” The kobold tucked its furry tail between its legs, rubbing one arm with the other. “I traveled far and wide to find this for you. I-It’s your favourite, isn’t it?”

The elf hesitated for a long time as the kobold held out the flower. He thought of taking it, remembering the time when his long-lost brother used to pick them. There was a summer when the two younger elves got into a fight with a catapult turtle, leaving him with a scar on his wrist and his brother with one above his eye, trying to look at some of those flowers. That warmth briefly returned again thanks to the memory, but then he just swatted the kobold’s hand, knocking the gift away.

“Not anymore. And how would you know that it was my favorite, little pest? You ought to get out of here before I get really angry.”

“You... you... you...” The kobold lowered its head, looking down at the flower that it had worked so hard to retrieve, now wilted on the dirt. “I-I thought that we could catch up... I’ve... I’ve missed you...”

Only as the elf watched the kobold turn away, to leave back to where it came, did he notice the mark above one of its eyes, where the fur wouldn’t grow in.

And once he fully processed what just happened, his brother was already gone again. Just like he was once, all those years ago, when the order mourned one of their elves being “stolen” by a pack of kobolds. His brother always told him how being a kobold didn’t mean being small, covered in fur, and eating rocks, but rather it meant simply... being a kobold. He thought this was nonsense at the time...

It was months later when the elf abandoned his post, fighting off a hoard of ageless husks, and instead tracked down the spot where he knew a pack of kobolds hung out. Once he got there, he set down his sword, knelt over in his heavy armor, and waited. The order would surely be disappointed in him for this, but he had finally realized what that emptiness in his soul truly needed. Perhaps he didn’t want to have a tail, or thick, flea-ridden fur covering every inch of his vessel, but he was finally ready to admit to what he truly was...

For years he had been angry that the pack of kobolds had “turned his brother into” another one of their kind, never considering that he was a kobold from the start. And now, he was about to experience that firsthand. He waited there for a long time before another kobold peaked its head out, and approached him with an open paw.

“Kobold kobold?...”

“Kobold kobold, kobold.” The new kobold nodded in return.