

Surrender Your Mind



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Abstract

As cute as fuzzled prongs are, you should keep away from them at all costs. Kara learns why the hard way.

Alright this is random tele-
portation
stuff was getting old.

Kara was becoming slightly more used to the Spinetap Woods (emphasis on slightly). The trees with branches that bent like ribs started to become just a bit more familiar these days- or, were they days? She and River followed sleep schedules in lieu of a proper daylight cycle, so Kara considered them days. Hell, even if there was a sun, she doubted it would pierce through the soot-colored leaves of the canopy.

Honestly, she would be fine with the Feyweird being pitch black if it meant River wasn't at risk of disappearing at the literal blink of an eye.

He told her about that little quirk of this realm. Apparently it happened sometimes in the Feywild as well. It had occurred a handful of times before now, in fact. Kara was able to find him in a few minutes, usually he never got sent too far.

But, this... felt different. Maybe things felt too quiet. Maybe her heart was beating a little louder than usual. Maybe the Spinetap trees felt just a bit too suffocating.

Kara's gaze darted along the trees, scanning for any hint of something familiar. Alas, the spindly trees revealed nothing of the sort. She wandered aimlessly along, looking over her shoulder in intervals on the off chance she saw something.

Then, Kara flinched as she heard a noise some distance away. It sounded like a deer bolting from the spot, a flurry of swishing foliage and branches in its wake. She couldn't make out what the cause of the sound was, much less what would cause it to dash off, but Kara ventured a guess that she was too far away to do so herself.

At that moment, she realized, maybe it was River? "Is he around here?"

It was a shot in the dark, sure, but Kara didn't exactly have many leads to go off at



the moment.

Gathering her courage, she approached the direction of the noise. Her apprehension was evident in her clenched fists, but she pressed on nonetheless.

This was the first time Kara had spotted a clearing. A barrier of the woods, the caging trees giving way to something other than a stifling presence of their bone-like brethren. Perhaps she was relieved to be somewhere other than the woods. Area that upon closer inspection, wasn't too different from the mortal plane.

The fog made it harder to make out, but as she took a few steps into the field, she noticed trees and shrubs lining either side of her several yards away. In a weird way, it reminded her of the countryside that surrounded her hometown.

Kara's lone sense of comfort was short-lived as she spotted a small figure in the distance. She squinted into the fog, instinctively moving into a defensive position as she tried to make heads or tails of this thing.

What she ended up seeing was more surprising than any horrid Fey creature she could think of.

About ten feet in front of her stood what she could only describe as a fuzzy avocado creature.

Like an owl almost, ex-

cept in place of its head it had humble antlers, and instead of talons it had small hooves. In place of wings were tiny, perched arms, also with hooves at the end. Yet the most striking of all was the gaping pit in its center. Indeed, it was like a pit of an avocado, but Kara would describe it more like a void. Pure blackness from what she could see, all except for two bright beady little eyes.

It faced her, the way a deer would perk up and assess any potential threats. God, it was kinda cute, an adjective Kara would not have expected to ever associate with this realm.

Wait.

Hang on a second. This thing wasn't as unfamiliar as she initially thought, Kara realized.

River's voice echoed in her mind. She remembered him telling her about some of the creatures he knew about. He told her about these things, she remembered calling them 'oddly cute'. What was their name...

Fuzzled Prongs!

"Pretty cute critters for a place like this" she told him. She felt the same way even now, it just looked so innocent as it stared back at her. She figured it was probably more scared of her than she was of it, no use in standing around after all.

She couldn't.

From her head, to her tor-

so, to her limbs, to her fingers and toes.

She couldn't move.

As if she were petrified, her eyes the only remaining sign of life, Kara could not *move*.

Kara's mind was silent for a few moments. Her eyes frantically flicked in random directions, a silent plea for help as her body was barred from movement. The fuzzled prong stood motionless, keeping her locked in place. With no mouth, there was no real emotion that could be discerned from it. This couldn't have been some random Fey prank.

If she wasn't already paralyzed, Kara felt her blood freeze as she heard a certain clatter from the woods behind her.

Due to her line of work, Kara was familiar with the sounds of bones rattling against each other. The job of cleaning disaster sights was not one for weak stomachs. Over the years, it was a sound she knew well.

However, to Kara, bones signified death. Whatever was behind her was most certainly alive.

The rhythm of bones against the ground became clearer. To her horror, Kara's suspicions were confirmed as something began to approach her side. Her stomach nearly dropped out of her body when from just an arm's

length away, a giant lumbering dog skull came into view. It had two floppy ears, which unlike its face, were covered in silky, ivory fur. The head was at the end of an almost snake-like body, also covered in the same fur as its ears. The creature did not slither on the ground, as Kara learned the source of the sounds of bones, rather it walked along skeletal dog legs that sprouted from the sides of its body, resembling a centipede.

This realization sparked another memory. River told her of another creature that herds of fuzzled prongs flock to. A species known as a centipede hound was a somewhat common predator in the Feyweird. The only defense mechanism that fuzzled prongs had was their ability to paralyze people who peered into their core, which the beast took advantage of.

The centipede hound raised its head into the air as it craned its neck, fully coming to her view. Its eyes finally met hers, which Kara noticed hardly looked real at all. They didn't look like an animal's, not even a human's; it looked like nothing she had ever seen, like they were apparitions nestled into the darkness of its sockets. With teeth perpetually bared, it almost seemed as if it were smirking as it regarded its prey. Her eyes were glued to it, the

only indication of her terror. The only part of Kara's body that was moving was her engine, which was clacking violently as unreleased adrenaline coursed through her veins.

Kara could practically feel its sheer mass as it lowered its skull, now eye-level with her. In that moment, she could've sworn something from hell had bled into the Feyweird, staring back at her with eyes fit for a demon. Grey and lifeless, the reaper's watchdog provided a haunting final image for any unfortunate soul. Its pupils constricted, salivating in an uncanny grimace. Its jaw opened impossibly wide, and Kara felt bile rise in her throat at the sight of its maw.

It was closing in now. This was it. *To hell with it then.*

Its tongue emerged from behind its teeth. It slithered along the side of Kara's face, and she shut her eyes.

She held her breath.

She prayed it would be over soon.

She...

She could close her eyes?

As they snapped back open in shock, Kara was greeted with the sight of an empty field. No centipede hound, no fuzzled prong. As if nothing was ever in front of her, it was just empty.

Kara's body reacted before she could even process what just happened. She shrieked as she jolted backwards, landing

with a thud on the ground. The air seemed to ignite with the force of her movement, lighting little patches of fire around her. She hardly paid it any mind as her body shook uncontrollably, breathing shakily, out of time with her loudly clacking engine.

'What in the living god was that.' was her first coherent thought.

Was this yet another tactic this realm had of messing with her? Was there even a centipede hound in front of her at all?

No, that couldn't be, she felt its tongue. She felt like she was encased in stone. Like a sitting goddamn duck.

So then, why was she still here? Not in the belly of some accursed Fey mutt?!

Kara's mind was buzzing far too much to put anything together. Eventually she focused on the fact she was here, that she was alive. For a long while she sat there, talking herself down, trying to steady herself. Eventually her heart rate slowed to a steady rhythm, and took a deep breath.

"Need to find River." She said aloud to herself, still somewhat shaky.

Shaking off her remaining nerves, Kara rose to her feet. She turned to re-enter the Spinetap Woods, something in her gut told her River was there somewhere.

Please, be here *somewhere*. ♪