

When Silence Is Broken

By Gus Prouty | 1535 words

Tom enjoyed people watching. Back in the old days he just never got the chance to do it much. Between all the sleeping, extorting villages for food, lounging, fighting dragon slayers, and basking he just never found the time for it. Not to mention he still tried to squeeze in the occasional nap every now and then. There was also the issue of most people not sticking around him long enough to be watched. UCO was different. Tom considered himself quite lucky for that fact. From his favorite spot, coiled snugly around the UCO bell tower, scaly head propped up on his hands; he could observe all the hustle and bustle of the campus center. Students of all ages' races and mystical backgrounds scurried to and fro, some typed into cell phones, others handed books off to familiars, pulled term papers from pocket dimensions, there were even a few with automatons that buzzed like mechanical bees behind their masters heads playing music. All told it was enough to keep tom entertained in-between afternoon naps.

Still lately an air of dread hung over the campus. Tom knew it had to do with the recent disappearances that plagued the school. Even in all his years tom had never seen anything quite like it. Worst of all there was no sent, not even a vaguest hint of bad magic in the air to go off of. It was enough to make even him uneasy. He shook his head slightly trying to clear his thoughts, long ago he had learned not to worry about thing over which he had no control. It was just a good way to lose sleep.

“Lazy bast...” a voice grumbled from below him. Case and point Tom mused as his gaze shifted to the young Japanese man stood below him. Kyou Kobayashi was the guardian assigned to patrol the bell tower. Kyou , as he never failed to remind people, was a kind summoner with an unpronounceable name from some far off eastern land. Tom didn't see how he was much

different from any other wizard, and never understood human's obsession with making a dozen names up for the same thing. They all reeked of magic the same way so why bother?

Currently Kyou was fuming over something a coworker had said over his ear piece. His long black cloak billowing in the wind as he tried to scowl despite his spirit partner Mana's best attempts at levity. Tom couldn't help but snort in amusement; he noticed the way they looked at each other, it reminded him of when he was younger and starting to approach mates for the first time. The pleasant memories weighed heavy on his eyelids and he hunkered down for a quick snooze. So he wasn't listing when Kyou got yet another call over his earpiece and he didn't see the way it caused him stiffened up his hand going instinctively to the hilt of his sword. But he did feel the winds change, and the sent they brought roused Tom from the precipice of slumber. Brackish water backed in the searing heat of summer. He didn't recognize it exactly, couldn't name the beast it brought with it, but he knew well enough what it meant. Battle.

"We have an angry Bunyip heading here fast. I'll starting clearing civilians you wake up the dragon, this is his kind of problem." Kyou commanded his partner as he was already sprinting towards the crowds in the HUB. Nodding Mana floated up until she was eye level with tom.

"Hey big guy, we got an outback sized problem headed our way, no time for your beauty rest." She shouted before stumbling back as tom's head jerked up into alertness.

"I know, I smelled, it already here." Tom spoke in a low rumbling tone. He tested the air in all directions trying to pinpoint the scent's direction.

“Good morning to you too” Mana muttered, already floating off to help Kyou with the students.

“It was” Tom growled eyes finally locking in on the creature that had disturbed his peaceful afternoon. It looked like a cross between a river otter and a tiger with dark matted fur and was bounding towards him at an impressive speed for something the size of a dump truck. Tom hissed a challenge and slithered to meet the Bunyip on the grassy lawn west of the bell tower. The few students unlucky enough to be in the way sprinted for the nearest building and the enchanted safety they provided. Soon it was just tom and the Bunyip rushing towards each other as fast as legs and coils could carry them.

The bunyip made the first move, bounding over tom and landing behind him. It gripped his tail in its mouth and yanked back, the sudden pull unbalanced him and tom’s upper body slammed into the ground. The bunyip leapt again intending to end this quickly by sinking its fangs into the back of tom’s skull. Anticipating it this time tom spun around and slammed one of his hands into the side of the bunyips face mere feet before its open jaws bit into him. Instead the creature only got a mouthful of sod. Capitalizing on this opportunity tom struck his head forward trying to sink his fangs into the things neck but it recovered too fast and twisted out of the way coughing and spitting out landscaping. The foes paused for a moment sizing each other up. The bunyip had him beat in terms of agility but tom was slippery and would be a pain to pin down.

The peace lasted only a heartbeat before the combatants engaged once again. Grappling together and just as quickly breaking apart as neither was able to keep a solid grip on the other.

As the bunyip side stepped another strike, swinging its claws at thin air occupied by tom's head a moment before a sharp pain shot up its side and it jerked its head towards the new threat. The shimmering ward that enveloped the student services building sparked and crackled under the beast's inadvertent contact. Enraged by this new invisible threat the bunyip turned and tried to pounce on the defensive spell, which snapped and wined under its weight. Sizing the opportunity tom rushed the creature body checking it away from the building and sending it sprawling across the greenery. Not wanting to lose his chance tom pressed the attack intending to pin the bunyip to the ground. But it was too quick rearing up on its hind legs to meet tom who was also raised up not unlike a cobra. Scaly clawed hands met massive paws as the two beasts collided, each trying to out muscle the other and force them to the ground.

Tom may have been larger but from this position the bunyip have the leverage and was slowly forcing him closer and closer to the ground. If he got pinned like this he wasn't getting back up and toms mind raced to find a way to turn the tide of this struggle. Than like a flash he had it, sweeping his powerful tail around himself, tom slammed it into the bunyips hind legs knocking them out from under it and sending both of the monsters tumbling off balance onto the ground. Tom however was prepared for this and without ever letting go of his grip on the bunyips front paws, quickly coiled around his opponent. Dazed and immobilized the bunyip could do nothing to doge tom's next strike as he finally sunk his fangs deep into the shoulder of the Australian monster. Pulling back tom held firm despite all manner of struggling as his venom took its intended effect. Soon the struggling of the bunyip became stiffer and more rigged until it

finally stopped altogether. Only the occasional wine from the now paralyzed monster indicated that it was still conscious.

Tom, spent from the battle, lazily unwrapped himself from the frozen bunyip and recollected himself a short ways off to watch over his captive. Soon enough the guardians would be along to take care of the mess and return the bunyip to where ever it came from. Tom almost snickered at the thought of the conversation the dean would no doubt be having with whoever was responsible for this fiasco. That was one man it was wise not to cross. Eyes already heavily with thoughts and musings, tom decided to take a quick power nap. You know in case the bunyip managed to regain control before it was removed. Tom's venom wouldn't ware off for a couple of days at least but one could never be too safe, and he was willing to sleep here for as long as it took. The sacrifices he made for his work. Just as he started to drift off the bunyip's wining started up again and tom snapped an eye open. Grumbling tom slipped a heavy coil over the bunyip's mouth weighing it shut and muffling any further disturbances.

"Hush" tom murmured head already nestled on folded arms. Eyes shut as he enjoyed his favorite perk of the job he inadvertently found himself in here at UCO. Finally he mused, sweet silence.