

Chapter 1

"When you said Trunnion and you had a situation on your hands, I did not quite expect..." The situationally named Robert Bumaro began, "... *This*." He said, staring at a big lump of fur on the ground, which let out loud, rumbling snores as it slept.

"I know, I know," Hedwig replied, she was still looking at him, and decidedly not the thing sleeping inside her cabin. "I just didn't want to send over the details, in case someone else would read them. And plus, I needed you to come quickly, which you usually do when you don't have all the information." She shrugged, smiling. This did not spark confidence in Bumaro.

"Yes, because usually when you do that, you're the one getting into trouble."

"That's rude, it's not *always* me!"

Robert Bumaro sighed, and shook his head. "Moving on, are you going to tell her about..." He gestured to the intentionally isolated cabin. "Your '*disease*'?" He used the word 'disease' very generally here, because Hedwig could not actually get any diseases or viruses, something she was rather quite proud of, along with many other Maxwellists. It just more so happened that some of her functions resembled a disease, no doubt a result of her import from the real Saint Hedwig.

She shook her head almost immediately. "No? Why should I?"

"Well, because she would most certainly have questions about why you own an off-the-grid cabin with dozens of chickens, many of which *already* have bite marks."

"*Her* questions can wait," Hedwig replied, "until after *my* questions. Besides," she lowered her voice a tiny bit quieter. "I'm not even sure if I can trust her yet." She spared a glance over to the werewolf, which was still sleeping like she had never gotten a good night's rest (which might be true, neither of them knew enough about werewolves to confirm that though).

Hedwig was about to continue saying something else, when Trunnion shifted suddenly in her sleep. The two of them stilled, and remained dead silent. Even if they were her 'friends' (Hedwig was the only one who called them friends), she did not seem to recognize the two of them in this form. She was also very, *very* snappy. Hedwig did not want to end up like one of the chickens she had just been fed, or maybe some kind of chew toy, and she doubted Bumaro wanted to either.

Hedwig was also thinking about something. It made sense how she was a 'vampire', in a very general sense of the word. She had gained it through her port of the real Saint Hedwig, who was a true vampire. Though she wasn't intentionally built this way -- matter of fact, she was pretty sure Saint Hedwig wanted to make her because there was a possibility of her existing not as a vampire. Though, of course, as luck would have it, that didn't quite work out.

But as for Trunnion... She couldn't come up with any such reason. A werewolf was just something that did not seem compatible with any sort of machinery. And yet, here was Trunnion, lying on the ground of her cabin, eating her chickens, fully transformed into some kind of wolf thing.

It was part of the reason she wanted to talk with Trunnion so much, and, unlike other times, she wouldn't have anywhere or any other explanation to fall back upon, it would be the perfect opportunity to interrogate. Though, a little voice in Hedwig's code pointed out something which might make getting answers a little difficult, which is that: this seemed new.

Trunnion hadn't started disappearing on nights out until a couple months ago, and even then, she was sloppy. She obviously wasn't used to doing it, because everyone noticed when she left, and when she started acting strange (becoming, somehow, *more* irritated at the drop of a hat, being anxiety-ridden over practically everything, and *especially* uncomfortable at night). It was hard *not* to notice! That seemed to suggest that, if all those times she disappeared were due to wolf-related issues (which they likely were), that she wasn't a werewolf until recently.

But that just left more questions for Hedwig. Questions that, unfortunately, Trunnion most likely wouldn't be able to answer.

"Hedwig." Bumaro said suddenly, though he was still whispering. "I do need to go back, and make sure the guests are being handled well... And that no one's stealing anything." He nodded his head towards the lump of fur and nightmare fuel. "Call me when she wakes."

Hedwig smiled. "Of course."

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Hedwig watched her faithfully, as the moon went down and the sun went up, and as Trunnion slowly began to detransform (was that even a word?) from that wolf. It was a slight surprise to Hedwig when she found that, after Trunnion turned back, she was completely and utterly naked. But, after she calmed herself, it did make sense. It wasn't like the transformation was exactly clean. (*Oh dear WAN*, was Trunnion going to blame Hedwig for her missing clothes?!)

Wanting to avoid the eventual argument from getting even angrier, she bundled up Trunnion in a very thick and wide blanket, which seemed to cover her entire body twice over. Hedwig chose that one because she hoped it would be enough for Trunnion to not be completely humiliated at the prospect of someone seeing her unclothed. But then again, she couldn't be sure *how* Trunnion would react in the first place. Wasn't she naked as a wolf? How long had she already been running around naked?! Or did fur omit nakedness?!?

She decided these probably weren't normal questions to be asking about a 'friend' (*co-worker that hates her*), and sent Bumaro a quick text about how Trunnion wasn't awake yet, but '*had returned to normal proportions*'. His only reply was 'Good.', but that was pretty in-character for him. She had also prepared some more chickens for slaughter, just in case Trunnion woke up and still had an appetite. While she didn't think that would be the case, seeing as the boiler engine might not agree with fresh cut meat, it didn't hurt to be prepared.

Now, she just had to wait.

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As it turned out, after the sun had risen and Trunnion returned to her previous body, it didn't take very long for her to wake. Though, she awoke very slowly.

First, she opened her eyes (or rather, one eye), but only slightly, and immediately closed them after. Then, she pulled parts of the blanket over her head, and when Hedwig went over to get her up, she only got a mumble (completely incomprehensible) in reply.

Hedwig had already sent a text to Bumaro, but now she worried that Trunnion was going to go back to sleep before he would even get here. To ensure that wouldn't happen, she would unfortunately have to do something that would jar her awake.

Hedwig returned to Trunnion's side, and crouched next to her. She shook Trunnion a couple times, though she could tell by the way she was breathing that she was still awake (why did the Standardized Orthodoxy members even need sleep processes? Hedwig didn't know. Something about '*the conversion of the human brain to a body processing at trice the speed of the previous*'). Of course, Trunnion only mumbled 'just a little longer' back at her. Hedwig sighed, hoping heart attacks weren't a worry for the Standardized.

"Trunnion." She began, carefully and quietly. "I know... You're a werewolf."

It took a few seconds for any sort of response, but Trunnion turned over, and stared up at Hedwig with wide eyes (or, well, eye).

"You..." Trunnion stammered a bit, which had the unfortunate result of ear-grating sounds of mechanical clashing. "*What?!*"

"Yes, you transformed in front of me last night, then tried to bite my hand off. Don't you remember?" Hedwig shook her head then. "Actually, no, you probably don't. Who knows how full-body transformations of that kind could affect memory?"

Trunnion was dead silent. She still seemed not to have gotten over the mortification of having her 'secret' (was it really a secret if practically everyone in the Church knew she was acting 'off?') found out.

Hedwig sighed. "Well, I called Robert. He knows too, by the way, and he's coming back. Just stay here and stay awake, because I – or, we – have some questions for you. Unity, and all that. We can't exactly trust you if you've been trying to hide something like this." Was she rambling again? Probably! She knew Trunnion hated it when she rambled, but she really couldn't help it! (Probably another mannerism from the original Saint Hedwig...)

Trunnion nodded, grunting out a 'fine', before visibly gazing around the room.

Hedwig stuck around the entrance to the cabin, waiting for when Bumaro would finally arrive (which seemed to take an eternity, though her clock said otherwise).

Eventually, she saw him in his black-colored robes out in the woods, making his way towards the cabin, and quickly opened the door to let him in.

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The silence was thick. Trunnion refused to meet either of their eyes, and the two of them were still thinking out the best line of questioning to begin with.

Bumaro, being as he was, started out bluntly. "So, how did this happen?"

Trunnion finally seemed to turn her head in their direction, but didn't maintain that eye contact. She grinded her teeth furiously (or anxiously? Anxious and furious looked the same on her), which let out another ear-grating sound.

"Were you bitten?" Bumaro pressed, though Hedwig thought that might not have been a good idea. (Then again, could any of this be classified as a 'good idea'?)

"No." Trunnion said, quickly and forcefully. Notably, she didn't give any elaboration.

Bumaro cocked his head to the side. "Then," he began, neutral as he ever was. "how did this happen?"

"I was born with it." She still glanced around, which led Hedwig to believe she might not be doing it to figure out where she was anymore. (Looking for an escape plan or if someone else was watching them?) "And," she added with a sigh. "the only one in my family to present it."

"Your family didn't know--?"

"No!" She snapped. "They *knew*, they *knew* alright! Those --" She cut herself off, seeming to remember that she was a member of a prestigious Church that did not appreciate members with anger issues. Though Hedwig could barely make out her mumbling '*those damned bastards*' under her breath.

Hedwig and Bumaro kept quiet, letting her calm down on her own.

When she seemed sufficiently relaxed, Hedwig decided to ask her own question. "But, you didn't seem like you were a werewolf before now, what happened to make the curse come back?"

"*I don't know!*" She growled out again. Apparently, Hedwig had misjudged her, or perhaps her question was infuriating enough. "That's what I've been trying to figure out this *whole damn time!*"

Hedwig was about to jump in, to make an attempt at fixing her own mistake, but Trunnion continued ranting, almost yelling. "I don't know what's *wrong* with me, I thought it was fixed! I got standardized because I thought that would *fix it*, and that I'd *never have to deal with it again!*"

She took in a deep breath, grinding her teeth, pulling at her chain hair, "But no. No.. It... It *didn't turn out that way*. Because *of course*, God would never make anything that easy." Her voice quivered in such an uneasy way, and Hedwig found that she was firmly sympathizing with her for once.

Hedwig stayed silent for a moment, forming her thoughts and predictions in her code, and deciding the best course of action. Eventually, she gathered up enough courage to say "I understand, Trunnion."

Trunnion was breathing heavily, most of her face became obscured by her hands, as she seemed on the verge of tears. "What," she growled, "in the *hell* could you possibly understand." She said it more as a statement than a question.

"A... Lot more than you might realize." Hedwig flicked her eyes towards the ground. "Listen, I know we kind of don't like each other but... I *do* understand, I really do. Because I'm – well," She paused, Bumaro was looking at her quite thoughtfully, and Trunnion was only paying the barest amount of attention, most likely lost in her own mind. "I'm a 'vampire'." She added quickly, "*Technically.*"

That seemed to snap Trunnion out of it almost immediately. "You're a *what?!*" She perked up, her full attention turned towards Hedwig. "How in the name of God are you even – ?"

"Hm. Funny, we were just asking you the same thing." The smile on her face could seem almost uneasy. She didn't like these types of questions, because no answer she gave could ever be seen as 'suitable' or 'satisfying' enough, not even and especially to herself.

Trunnion blinked. "Right." She mumbled out (why was she mumbling so much? Trunnion used to always speak clearly and concisely even when filled with anger), before continuing. "But

I mean – how does that even work? I thought all you Maxwellists couldn't get diseases and that was part of *the point*?"

"Well, we *can't*. But this seems to be the result of copying the original Saint Hedwig... Who I only found out was a vampire as well because of this."

"Wow." Trunnion scoffed, sarcasm dripping off her metallic voice. "We're all just a *great* batch of Mekhanites, aren't we."

Seeing a chance to change the mood, she said, "Hey now, *Robert* hasn't shown any display of being a supernatural creature!" Hedwig gestured, but then turned to look at him, narrowing her eyes in suspicion. "... So far."

"Tch, with our luck, he may turn out to be a *ghost*."

Bumaro blinked, looking between the both of them. "... You two do realize I'm *right here*, yes?"

Hedwig turned back to Trunnion, completely ignoring his response. "I haven't gotten any signs like that, but who knows? ... He *does* seem to appear out of nowhere." She put her hand on her chin thoughtfully.

Then, an amazing thing happened, Trunnion *grinned*, from humor! Teeth and all! It was short-lived, but it definitely still happened, Hedwig had gotten a picture of it (like she did with everything... Because of quite literal photographic memory).

Everyone went quiet for a moment, before Trunnion shot out another question. "... Does this mean you won't tell the Orthodoxy?" She sounded much more reserved, and was nervously looking down at the floor.

"No, why would we?" Hedwig replied.

"Well -- I don't know. Just, don't tell anyone. If it comes up. For any reason." She quickly tacked on a "Please."

"Sure, just so long as you don't tell anyone about me."

"Deal." She quickly agreed.

Everything went quiet again, and Trunnion sighed, shifting around in her giant bundle of blankets. Then, she noticed something.

"... Where are my clothes?"

"You tore through them when you transformed." Bumaro replied.

"*Damn it!*" She cursed. "And I actually liked that suit too..." She grimaced, looking displeased, annoyed, embarrassed, and tired (though she just slept, Hedwig didn't know why she looked tired – or perhaps werewolf naps just weren't that restful). "Do either of you have any – clothes I could borrow?" She gritted out, like asking for an extra set of clothes was the most embarrassing thing in the world.

"Oh, I have some spares over here, though I don't know if they'll fit you."

"That's fine. Just as long as I'm not *naked*." She mumbled out the last part. (Again! With the mumbling! What was up with that? Hedwig would have to figure this out eventually.)

It was quick work for Trunnion to put on the clothes. Predictably, since Hedwig was a little taller and skinnier than Trunnion, it was a bit baggy on her, but, it worked fine.

Hedwig had to be the one to lead them out of the woods, seeing as Trunnion had never been here and Bumaro rarely visited. (He had conceded to Hedwig that yes, text messaging was a very convenient tool. Not that he used it much.)

When they were back to the outskirts of the city, all of them went off in different directions. Bumaro, probably back to the after party that Trunnion had incidentally crashed for only Hedwig. Trunnion, most definitely back to the Orthodoxy's factory... Somewhere in this town, and probably just so she could get out of Hedwig's clothes. And Hedwig... Back to the cabin, because she realized she hadn't eaten herself. (Oops! Not her fault! There was kind of a giant wolf that she was worrying about more!)

But Hedwig was also thinking up so many other questions. She had thought she was just a fluke – that WAN might have been trying to teach some lesson to her or the original Saint Hedwig specifically – but if Trunnion was and is a very similar type of creature... What could that possibly mean?

Chapter 2

Rain fell lightly from the sky, and on the sidewalk of a street, a figure stood at a bus stop. She was glancing between something pulled up on her phone, and a cafe on the other side of the street.

She was... Confused, but she was pretty sure this was the right place. To the left was some abandoned office building, and to the right was a car workshop. Behind her was an

unopened business undergoing maintenance, and so she did not think any of these places would make more sense.

Defeated, she sighed, and finally decided to enter the place. Worst case, she was somehow wrong, but could still get coffee.

Inside, it wasn't too crowded, seeing as it was raining. A bored man sat at the register, and didn't even take notice of her. She began scanning the room, looking for her sister, only to have her attention caught by a hand waving her over. Bingo.

"Well, hello there." She smiled as she approached. "This place isn't your typical style, usually, you prefer something way quieter."

"Hello to you too." Saarn sipped on a hot beverage she had in front of her. "It's not, but I thought it would be nice." She said, "It is something important, though. And you might want a coffee."

Lovataar raised an eyebrow at that, but, with a slight hesitancy, took a seat across from her.

"I already ordered one I knew you'd like." She slid a still-hot cup of coffee towards her.

"Hm, that's very thoughtful, especially for you." Lovataar smiled, and sniffed at it. It smelled, well, like coffee. "Are you trying to get on my good side?"

"Partially. But it's also been a while since we've seen each other, hasn't it?" Lovataar might've been confusing the look on her face, but she seemed almost... Sad?

"Yes, yes, I suppose you're right." She idly stirred the cup. "But surely you must want something from me."

"I do." She admitted. "I have... An offer." Her tone suddenly went lower, quieter. She leaned slightly closer to Lovataar. "I think I have a way to bring them back."

Lovataar spent a few seconds puzzling over who 'them' was, but then, she stiffened, completely stunned. "You're joking." She replied, deadpan.

Saarn quickly shook her head. "Just listen. Orok and I, after they died – we've been having strange dreams. Not really dreams... Visions, more like. I was the only one with them at first, but then Orok started complaining about them too, recently. And, after that, I went searching." Her voice had dropped to a whisper now, her eyes burning right through to Lovataar's soul. "I found my answers, and I have a way to bring them back."

Lovataar barely reacted, at a loss for words. She blinked a couple of times, pondering over what Saarn had said. After a few more seconds, she replied. "I'm sorry but I just... Cannot believe this. I miss them, too, just like the rest of us but –" She paused, glancing away from Saarn and her murderous eyes. "we don't even have their body anymore. And ultimately, the nälkä are just far too scattered right now to even consider this."

The silence dragged on for far longer than what could be considered comfortable. Lovataar sipped idly at her drink, and Saarn was... Contemplating? Lovataar was at a bit of a loss to figure out what that expression meant.

Finally, Saarn sighed. "That's fine, then. I can just do this myself." She swiftly stood up. "Thank you, for meeting with me anyways."

She left without another word, plunging Lovataar into anxiety. Afterall, there was no way that Saarn would just give up that easily -- no, she'd get what she wanted, even if she had to brute-force it. And more often than not, that 'brute-forcing' would always end up with someone hurt.

She would have to keep an eye on her.
