

Fae Bargains
A Managing the Vampire's Mansion and Hall of Blood and Mercy
crossover short
By K. M. Shea

The Paragon waited until he turned onto the road and Beckett Kinge's land faded from the rearview mirror—the vampire was territorial enough that he suspected if he stopped any earlier, Beckett Kinge would come out to investigate—before pulling over.

The Paragon adjusted his spectacles. "Aphrodite."

His pet made no answer.

He twisted in his seat and turned around to peer back at his cat, strapped in her baby car seat. "Aphrodite, is there something you wish to tell me?"

Aphrodite, in all of her gorgeous beauty, meticulously licked between her pink toe beans of her right paw.

"Why did you reject my choice of Perfect Hair Tea and instead give Abi and Beckett Kinge Poetic Similes for Unromantic Dolts? Beckett isn't going to drink the tea, and I imagine Abi would prefer to have perfect hair for several days than walk around saying similes for a few hours."

Aphrodite stopped licking and stretched her paw out.

The Paragon had to recline his seat to reach it, gently clasping her paw between three fingers. "Yes, thank you for your feline blessing. You are such a beauty. But, my pet. Why Poetic Similes for Unromantic Dolts?"

"*Mmmert!*"

"Hmmm." The Paragon eyed his cat. "You really are a helpless romantic. You know even if you were to dump a forceful confession potion on that pair, they're about as amorous as steel."

"*Mmert.*"

"If you say so." The Paragon sighed, then dug his cellphone out, pressed a speed dial button followed by the speakerphone button, then pulled his car back onto the road and cruised on.

The phone rang for several moments, and the Paragon glanced in the rear-view mirror to confirm Aphrodite had returned to cleaning herself—this time using her paw to scrub at her whiskers and face.

"*What do you want?*" said a sullen, familiar voice on the other end of the phone line.

"Killian, bestie!" The Paragon crowed. "I got what you wanted: one photo of Beckett Kinge and his human house manager. She's a cute little thing, serious enough to rival that Second Knight of yours, but Aphrodite approved of her."

"*Send the photo.*"

"Hah—no." The Paragon scoffed. "I'm not sending it until we're in person and I have your promise for that favor."

"*Fine, fine. Though I already warned you I'm not killing anyone for you.*"

The Paragon rolled his eyes. "Why would I waste a favor from you on something like *that?*" He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. "I do already have a couple ideas, though. Maybe I'll make you hang out with me all day long on best friend's day! Or I'll record you calling me your bestie and make that my ringtone—that one was your wife's idea."

"*Of course it was.*" Killian's sigh was audible over the phone.

“You know, I’m impressed you were willing to make such a trade just for one measly photo,” the Paragon continued.

“A photo itself might not be such a big deal, but it’s the woman in the photo that makes it worthwhile. Beckett Kinge has been a hermit for generations. Although he’s got the power and bloodlines to have a Family of his own, he’s been hiding away in that mansion of his for decades. Nothing has been able to pry him out of it, at least nothing until that house manager.”

“Ah-hah. And you—having experienced something similar but in a different flavor—see the significance of what she could be and could mean to him?” the Paragon asked.

“Yes. She could be his One, or he might go against all of his anti-work rules and make himself a political force in the area just so he can turn her into a vampire to be assured of her safety.”

“How noble.”

Killian was silent, likely because normally he’d scoff, but in this case that would be the proverbial Northern Long-eared Bat calling the Tricolored Bat, a bat given everything he’d done since encountering/falling in love with Hazel Medeis.

The Paragon adjusted his car’s lights. “So you’re feeling nosy and want to see what this woman looks like?”

“He was never going to send an image of her by his own will or accordance.”

“True that.”

“Have I told you recently I detest the way you speak.”

“Not recently, no.”

“Well I do.”

“Noted!” The Paragon chortled as he switched on the blinker to make a turn. “Are you sure you don’t want to meet me up here in Timber Ridge? It’s a charming place. Hazel would find it adorable.”

“Absolutely not. If I have my way, Hazel will never set foot there.”

The Paragon made a “tsk” noise while turning the wheel, before straightening the car out. “Afraid she’ll see the werewolves wandering around in their wolfy form and find them cuter than you?”

“I am not cute, or worried about being found cute,” Killian sullenly said. “But I am concerned that seeing Alpha Greyson in his fluffy form might sway her to vote more favorably for wolves in future Midwest Regional Committee of Magic Meetings.”

“Ahhh, did that hunter mate of Greyson’s, Pip, try selling you a poster of his wolf form, too?”

“Yes.”

“Figures. She is quite the shrewd businesswoman. I’m not surprised she’s tried hawking Timber Ridge wares in Magiford. Regardless, you don’t need to worry. Hazel would vote favorably for the werewolves just to spite you for being extra annoying during meetings.”

“I’m not annoying. I play devil’s advocate for the good of the committee.”

The Paragon rolled his eyes. “Oh, yes. It’s for the good of the committee. Not because you enjoy being argumentative.”

“Considering you go on so much about being such a close friend of mine, you are abusive in your language.”

The Paragon sat up in the driver’s seat, brightening. “You mean you admit we’re friends?!”

“Whatever. Why are you going up to Timber Ridge, anyway?”

“I like visiting it, particularly with the Night Court—they are a hoot. But the real reason for this visit is that I’m bringing Aphrodite to see how she’ll take to the wolves. If she’s okay with it, we’ll visit again in December so we can take a photo with some of the werewolves for our Christmas card!”

“*Mmmert!*” Aphrodite graciously piped in from the backseat.

“*I regret asking,*” Killian dryly said. “*Regardless, notify me when you’re back in Magiford so we can meet up.*”

“Will do, Bestie!”

“*And Paragon...*”

“Yes?” The Paragon glanced at his phone, curious.

“*The photo...*”

The Paragon grinned and guessed what Killian wanted to say but was too stiff necked to do so. “You’re welcome, Bestie!”

Killian immediately hung up—which didn’t surprise the Paragon in the least.

“He might have rudely ended the call, but it’s clear he was thankful. One day, Aphrodite, he’ll soften enough to say his feelings,” the Paragon announced. “Killian’s rudeness aside, today has been a wonderful day! We’re on our way to Timber Ridge, Killian owes us a favor, and you even played match maker. Maybe. If those two actually look at each other.”

The Paragon considered Beckett Kinge and Abi as he drove, mentally reviewing the pair’s mannerisms and interactions. “Maybe there’s hope for them. They’re just...quieter in their affection than most couples we know.”

Mmert.”

The Paragon chuckled. “You said it, my beauty!”

The End