The witchers' grapevine
by Ledgea

Summary

This one is going to be a collection of drabbles pertaining to my other stories "The witchers' stalker" and "The bard's daughter".
It'll contain everything you ever wanted to know about gossiping witchers and never dared to ask.

Beware of crack :D

Notes

Okay, so the first chapter is set in spring just after the winter Jaskier spent in Kaer Morhen at the end of "The witchers' stalker".

See the end of the work for more notes.
"You're lying," Coën says to Lambert, disbelief clearly written on his face.

"I'm not," Lambert argues before taking a seep of his beer all the while glaring at his drinking companion.

Coën shakes his head and smiles wryly at his friend.

"You're trying to convince me that your brother, who according to you is - and I quote you here - the grumpiest grump who puts every grump of the continent to shame, looked for the Stalker and dropped unexpectedly in on him eight times last year. That's just not possible !"

"It is !", Lambert persists, "I don't know how he did it but it's the truth."

"You've got a bet with Aiden running ?"

"No ! Okay, yes, I have but it doesn't have anything to do with it. I swear it's the truth on... on your beard !"

"You hate my beard," deadpans Coën.

"Yes, but you like it !"

"That's not how it works," sighs Coën while he pinches the bridge of his nose, "Now stop trying to convince me that your team is winning the "Stalk the Stalker" game with your lies or I'll find a way to pass a motion so that the Wolf school team will have to start with minus five points in the score."

"You can't do that," splutters Lambert angrily, "that would put us behind the Cranes !"
His last angry shout garners them a mean glare from the barkeep and some barmaids hurry out of the dining hall, disappearing in the kitchen.

"Calm the fuck down, you prick, or you'll get us thrown out. And exactly, that'll teach you to follow the rules and the value of honesty when dealing with your friends."

Lambert just glares at his companion, leans against the wall behind him and crosses his arms over his chest. He starts to sulk. Coën rolls his eyes at him.

"So, what's the other thing you wanted to tell me ? You said you had two exciting news... Come on," the Griffin cajoles the Wolf, "unless it's false too."

"You know what, my friend," Lambert leans forward with a mocking smile on his face, "I learnt the Stalker's name over winter but I'm not in a sharing mood anymore."

Coën's smile turns smug.

"Oh, I know that the Stalker turned out to be Jaskier the famous bard. I saw Aiden over winter."

"For fuck's sake !", Lambert curses loudly.

The Wolf witcher scowls at the Griffin, finishes his drink in one last big gulp and gets up to leave. He crashes his hip violently on the table and Coën's drink is knocked over by the movement.

"You're a real piece of shit, you know", the Griffin yells after Lambert who doesn't bother to turn back and raises his hand in a crude gesture. "By the way," Coën continues, "Aiden told me that he was headed to Kovir this year if you're interested !"

Lambert doesn't answer the other witcher and heads out of the door. Coën shakes his head fondly after him and orders another drink that he'll finally be able to enjoy in peace.
The cats are jackasses

Chapter Notes

The cats are jackasses or how the rules about motions’ validation in the grapevine came to be!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You know,” ponders Mal, the leader of the Caravan of the Cats, one evening, “if we play this right, we could add a few fun motions to the grapevine. After all, there clearly is more than three of us so we could easily second each other’s motions.”

“Oh, that’s a wonderful idea,” interjects Jayn, “I want every witcher from another school than the Cat to offer us a beer and a meal when they come across any one of us!”

“Seconded !”, is yelled from two different points of the Caravan.

“If one of us arrives at an inn and another witcher has already booked a room, they have to offer it to us”, adds Del from his spot next to a fire.

The several “seconded” that follow come from at least four different witchers and Mal smiles and shakes his head fondly at his brothers’ antics.

“I want the others to offer us back rubs”, Pierre says decisively.

“And foot rubs too,” Mal adds with a shit-eating grin.
The multiple “seconded” that follow are so loud that a few birds leave their trees in fright.

“Make them pay for a day at the brothel for us too,” Jayn continues.

“Seconded!”, the motion is approved unanimously and enthusiastically.

“I want them to give me some apple pie. I love apple pies!”, Aiden says next whistfully.

And his brothers second his motion, because they maybe were waiting for something funnier or more dramatic to be added to the list but they are nothing if not supportive of each other's quirks. And if Aiden wants apple pies then he'll get some apple pies.

Letho is getting gloriously drunk with Lambert in a decrepit tavern in the middle of Aedirn and is sharing the latest news he got with the Wolf.

“And the fucking Cats want back rubs and foot rubs now! Say that their motions are legit because they were proposed and seconded by three different people in total, I say fuck them and their stupid weird requests.”

Lambert hums and then corrects his drinking companion with a mean smile, “I say that every cat should go fuck a Bruxa. And then go get fucked by an archespore.”

“I totally second that one,” Letho says and raises his tankard to give a toast to Lambert's wonderful idea.

When Lambert meets Ivo of the school of the Bear a few weeks later, he hastens to share his motion with him to get it seconded again. The other witcher doesn't bat an eye at his idea and
endorses it wholeheartedly.

When Coën hears about the stupidity brewing in the grapevine, he decides that some rules need to be implemented to try to control the chaos that is spreading. Emphasis on try, he knows his brethrens, he won't be able to suppress all the stupidity but he can curb it a little, maybe.

After all, he doesn't want to have to go fuck a Bruxa or to have to go get fucked by an archespore the next time he pisses Lambert off and two other idiots decide to second his new motions. And he is sure that he isn't the only witcher in that case.

So he drags Heyn, who brought him the latest news, to the nearest witcher they can find. They are forced to travel together for a month before they stumble upon a harried looking Auckes.

“I'm trying to avoid a Cat here,” the Viper tells them looking around the tavern they are in suspiciously, “damn fucker wants me to give him a foot massage and he won't stop following me!”

“So,” Coën starts firmly, “we might need to implement some rules here because it's starting to get ridiculous. I suggest that, from now on, to validate a motion, it has to be proposed by a witcher and seconded by two others who all come from different schools. That should help with the foolishly stupid motions.”

The Griffin then hums and adds firmly, “And we forget about every motions passed before this one. And a motion can only concern the gossip part of the grapevine. And it has to be non threatening”

The Griffin lets out a sigh and asks his companions, “Did I miss something ?”

“I don't think so,” Heyn answers him, “and I second your motion.”
Auckes follows suit and they get drunk together to celebrate what feels like a victory. Coën still broods a little and asks himself why must he always be the responsible one? All of this policing is starting to get exhausting and he fears that he might develop a permanent headache. He hates his brethrens sometimes.

Chapter End Notes

I love the Cats! I made them weirdly scary and that's how I like them :D
Eskel is sitting in a shitty tavern with a leaking roof in Redania nursing a beer when he sees another witcher entering the establishment. The man is dripping wet, shakes himself on the doorstep and heads to the bar to order a meal, it looks like.

The woman tending the bar points her finger in Eskel's direction and he sees the other witcher look at him and head in his direction. The Wolf now knows about the grapevine, thanks to Lambert, but he is still surprised when the witcher, a Viper, takes a chair and comes to sit with him. Eskel completely freezes. The Viper looks at him in silence for a moment and nods in thanks at the woman who brings him a bowl of stew and an ale.

He swallows a mouthful of stew and starts to speak when he notes that Eskel is starting to squirm in his seat and still hasn't said a word.

“So, you're a wolf. Lambert's brother, right ? Eskel ?”

Eskel can only nod dumbly and scratches at his scars absently. The man doesn't offer his name and Eskel wonders if he is supposed to guess too. Lambert might know all the witchers but Eskel sure as hell doesn't and he's not in a mood for a brawl if the man takes offense if his guess turns out to be incorrect. So he stays quiet and takes a small sip of his drink every thirty seconds, he's counting the intervals in his head.

The silence is starting to get uncomfortable and Eskel doesn't know how to breach it. He's not sure that talking about the weather would be an improvement over the quiet and he has nothing he wants to share with an unfamiliar witcher. The Viper finishes his meal, sits back on his chair and looks at him weirdly.

“Are you mute ?”, he asks him slowly with a frown on his face.
Eskel should deny it but he's counting seconds in his head and reaches twenty-five and doesn't really want to begin a conversation with the other witcher so he just nods stupidly. And then drinks another sip of his beer when he reaches thirty.

The Viper narrows his eyes at him and lets out a long sigh. It takes Eskel a minute to realize that he just confirmed that he can't speak. He despairs internally. Why did he have to nod? Why can't he be more charming? Or even normal? He's not so clumsy usually. He finishes his beer exactly three minutes later and fiddles with his empty glass. He holds out three more minutes before he can't take the silence anymore.

“So, weather's nice?”

And he blushes two seconds after opening his mouth. The Viper just snorts at him and looks pointedly at the puddle next to their table who continues to grow steadily because the roof is still leaking rain water right next to them.

Eskel is so embarrassed by his blunder that he gets up quickly, bumps in the table in his hurry and trips over his own feet on his way out of the inn. He hears the Viper's laugh all the way to the stables. He saddles his horse and heads out of the village under the heavy rain. He's better off continuing to avoid other witchers, he decides. And he really hopes that the story of this encounter is never going to reach Lambert's ears.

It takes two years for Lambert to hear about the meeting. He takes great pleasure in informing Eskel that he met Serrit and that the Viper told the other witchers that he thought that the Wolf was addled. Eskel blushes and splutters when he hears that last statement. The mocking laugh of Lambert follows Eskel all winter throughout the keep and he learns that even if he tries to beat his brother black and blue, it doesn't stop his taunts and his tiresome habit of sneering at him.

Chapter End Notes

I love awkward Eskel :p
When Mal rejoins the Caravan a month after leaving on a contract, he finds utter chaos. Jayn, who
he left in charge, has decided to set the Caravan near the sea between three decently sized villages.
The villagers apparently took offense to that fact and decided to bribe the Cats in hope that they
would up and leave.

It had the complete opposite effect. His travel companions are taking bets about bribes and are
fighting over apple pies slices that are to die for apparently. Mal is just relieved that it didn't occur
to the villages to band together to attack them. The witchers are good but even they would have
trouble fighting against three villages' men.

So when he comes back, he finds Aiden, stuck in the highest tree in the vicinity, hoarding apple
pies while three of their brothers try to steal them from him and a new cart ladden with cloth, flour
sacks, some potatoes, fresh beans and even a wine barrel. A pig is being roasted over a fire and
what he really hopes is a whore – otherwise the clothing is utterly improper - is making himself
comfortable in the middle of the witchers' camp. He wonders if it was such a good idea to take that
contract and leave the Caravan alone for a month.

"Jayn ! What the fuck happened here ?", he growls at his second when he spots him near the pig.

"Oh, Mal ! You're back ! Everyone, Mal's back !"

A few witches stop what they are doing to wave at him but he is mostly ignored. Jayn then
explains to him how this clusterfuck came to be and Mal orders for the camp to be taken down
immedialy. He has to contend with several vocal complaints and it is finally decided that they
wouldn't leave before tomorrow to have the time to eat the damn pig and for Aiden to come down
from his tree. Mal shakes his head and ponders the idea to begin a solo career, it would probably
be less ridiculous.
He learns that the Caravan met the Stalker again a week before his return and that the man is, in fact, Jaskier the bard. Yes, the one who composed the stupid helpful song. He is astonished at the news and weirdly disappointed that he missed the man.

In the morning, Mal has to rouse his companions at dawn with some well placed kicks. He fights with his brothers about the whore who, despite his orders, ends up ladden in a cart and brought along on their journey. They abandon Aiden in his tree because he doesn't want to get down with his two remaining apple pies. Mal raises his arms to the sky in exasperation and yells at everyone until everything is ready. They depart two hours after the sun came up and head north.

It doesn't take them long to realize that something is weird. When they come across people, they point at them, whisper behind their hands and laugh at them. They do not take kindly to the mockery and a few travellers end up dumped in ditches with a few nasty bruises.

It is Jayn who finally discovers what this is all about. He comes back from a village, where he went to look for a contract, two weeks after their departure, with the news that the bard passed through here with another witcher a while ago.

Mal then orders the Caravan to head east because if another witcher went north, they will not find new contracts there. And as they force the horses and the carts to change direction, Jayn comes up to him and clears his throat.

“I know what all the pointing is about.”

Mal hums and waves his hands at him to continue.

“So the bard passed through here and he sang a new song. A new song that says that witchers’ seed can make trees bloom and fields give twice as many crops as in a normal year.”

“Witches' seed ?”, asks Mal dubiously, he raises an eyebrow and throws a pointed glance at Jayn's crotch

“Yes, it's totally what you are thinking about,” says Jayn with a shit-eating grin.

“Oh, for fuck's sake, why ? Why the fuck did he think that this would be a good idea ?”
And he may be whining a little but no one will ever bring it up if they know what is good for their health. Jayn scratches his head and answers slowly:

“Well, you know how we told you that the bard was brought to us as an offering? Did we explain to you why the villages were trying to bribe us?”

“To make you leave,” Mal grunts with a wrong feeling.

“Well yeah but they wanted us to leave because they thought that our presence would make their crops wilt and their fruits rot. And Jaskier was clearly annoyed by being brought to us bound as a sacrifice so I think that he did it to fight these stupid rumors.”

“And people believe this crap?”, Mal asks with disbelief clear in his voice.

“I don’t think so,” Jayn says thoughtfully, “they mostly find the story funny. Even if I saw one or two people looking thoughtfully at me.”

“You know that everything could have been easily avoided if you had just gone away,” Mal says while pinching his nose.

“Yeah but it was fun watching the humans squirm!”

“I hate you. I’m never leaving you in charge of the Caravan again. And you, Pierre, stop making doe eyes at the fucking whore and steer your damn carriage correctly, you shit head!”

And as Mal tries to organize the Caravan into something looking more or less like an orderly convoy, he vows to never leave those stupid good for nothing fuckers alone again. Clearly they need constant supervision.

And he hopes that that damn new song will soon be forgotten and that nobody will take it seriously in the meantime. And the next time he’ll see the bard, Mal will shake his hand to thank him for *Toss a coin* and then break his nose for this new monstruosity of a song. It’ll only be justice, he muses while a predatory smile appears on his face.
It takes a few years for Jaskier's song to spread across the continent but spread it does. People tend to laugh at it and take it as a joke but the rumor that witchers make crops wilt starts to reach Jaskier's ears less and less so he still takes it as a win. Geralt still glares and scowls heavily each and every time Jaskier sings it but he doesn't try to stop him from sharing it anymore.

And eight years after he first came up with the song, Geralt and Jaskier stumble upon a small town in Lyria where people accost the witcher in the streets at every turn to shake his hand. Some men even clap him on the shoulder and a few women openly wink and glance appreciatively at him. Jaskier is a bit jealous of the attention his friend receives, if he is being honest.

Geralt is suspicious about the very kind welcome he gets and his suspicion doesn't lessen when Jaskier bullies him into entering a tavern and the witcher is offered a free drink by the barkeep. Jaskier has to pay for his and he glares at the owner when he joins Geralt at his table. The witcher is sniffing his wine glass carefully and when he's satisfied by his investigation, he takes a slow sip of it.

"Fuck!", he then exclaims.


"It's the good stuff. The very good stuff."

"He gave you a glass of good wine?", Jaskier rants, "Why did I have to pay for mine? Life's so unfair. Did you save the mayor of the town or something in the past?"

"Not that I can remember. I'm clearing this up, wait here."

Jaskier watches Geralt stalk to the bar and he sees him address the barkeep with an impassive face, which is better than the scowl he usually reserves for strangers, Jaskier thinks. He then steals the witcher's wine glass and shit, it really is the good stuff. He sips at it slowly and watches Geralt from his place.
He can see his friend's profile and spots a blush appearing on his cheeks and oh, everything that makes the witcher blush has to be forth knowing. Jaskier debates going up to the bar too but chooses to finish the wine, he won't have another chance to drink such a fine wine for a while.

Geralt comes back to their table with cheeks still slightly pink, a loaf of bread and some cheese. Jaskier makes grabby hands at the food and the witcher deposits everything in the middle of the table. The bard doesn't wait a second before swallowing a large slice of the freshly baked bread. He lets out a contented sigh because the food truly is delicious.

"That a gift too ?", he mumbles around his mouthful.

Geralt nods and glares at the food like it offended him.

"Yous should try it. The bread is still warm from the oven. Come on, the food didn't do anything to you !"

The witcher finally takes a slice of bread and a piece of cheese and eats it slowly. He's relishing it, Jaskier notes.

"So, what did the barkeep say to you that got you blushing so handsomely ?", Jaskier asks with a grin.

"Fuck off !", Geralt growls at him.

Jaskier just continues to smile at the witcher while he nibbles on cheese and drinks his friend's wine. Geralt steals his ale in retaliation and when the bard just continues to stare at him, he crosses his arms over his chest defensively and scowls.

When Jaskier has eaten his fill, he pushes the cheese and bread at Geralt and the witcher finishes everything in a few minutes. He then gets up, grips the back of Jaskier's doublet and drags him to the door.
“What ? Geralt ! Where are we going ?”

“We're going to check the village's orchard now.”

“Why ?”

Geralt doesn't answer him, takes Roach's reins in his hands and walks towards the edge of the town. Jaskier follows him. The people wave at them and continue to accost them to shake Geralt's hand. When they approach the outskirts, the townspeople stop to stare and point at them. It unnerves Jaskier a bit. Geralt scowls even harder.

When they arrive at the orchard, the trees are thriving. Every last one of them sports a truly considerable amount of fruits, their leaves are green and there isn't a single dead tree. The wind is whistling softly and Jaskier can hear the sound of a stream nearby. This place is so calm, he thinks, unnaturally calm.

When he looks at Geralt, his friend has his eyes closed and a hand on his medallion. There is a frown on his face. Jaskier lets him be and wanders further into the orchard. All the trees are flourishing.

After a few minutes, he finds the most magnificent tree of the orchard. It's a massive pear tree sporting an unholy amount of fruits. Its branches are hanging low but the tree is sturdy enough that they won't break.

Jaskier plucks a pear from the tree and it is the tastiest fruit he has ever eaten. He eats a second one immediately after finishing the first and offers one to Geralt when he joins him. The witcher looks at the pear weirdly and gives it to Roach who munches on it eagerly. Jaskier chokes a little.

“What ? Are they poisoned ?”

“No,” is Geralt's curt answer.

“Then what ? Will you finally explain yourself ?”, Jaskier asks exasperated.
“The bar owner asked me if I was interested in renewing the blessing on the orchard.”

Jaskier lets out a small laugh.

“By blessing, you mean ... ?”

“Jacking off to a bunch of trees. Yes.

“Oh, sweet Melitele that is wonderful. Did he offer payment too?”, Jaskier asks with a shit-eating grin.

“He did,” Geralt confirms seriously, “and he wanted to know if I was amenable to allow an audience to be present while I ... perform.”

Geralt announces the facts with such a disgruntled face that Jaskier can't stop the laugh that escapes him.

“Oh, Gods, that is truly the best story I've heard lately,” Jaskier says between giggles, “but wait you say renew as in...”

Geralt lets out a long suffering sigh and rubs his temples.

“Yes. Apparently there was a drought last year and when in desperation, the villagers asked a witcher to bless their trees, the man did it against remuneration and since then the orchard is flourishing.”

“Oh ! It gets even better ! But how did he manage the flourishing part ? I mean, as far as I know, it was only a rumor that I created.”

“The orchard is enchanted. My best guess is that he got a spell from a sorcerer, did his... deed against that pear tree, that's where the spell seems to be the strongest, and then left the enchantment on the whole orchard to make it look like he really offered a blessing to the trees.”
“How do you know that he really did... perform?”, Jaskier wonders, “he may just have placed the
enchantment without anything else.”

“The barkeep told me,” Geralt says with a grimace, “he had two witnesses with him.”

“Witnesses ?”, Jaskier asks dubiously.

“Well, help really. People volunteered for the job.”

“Oh Gods, he spent a very good moment with gorgeous attendants, got paid for it and now the
orchard is thriving. I'm going back into town, I want to know more ! I need to know more ! That'll
end up in a song !”

Geralt sighs again, catches Jaskier by the back of his doublet and drags him towards Roach. He
then pushes the bard up in the saddle and leads the horse in the opposite direction of the town.
Jaskier whines and tries to get down but Geralt prevents him from moving and walks at a steady
pace towards the end of the orchard. Jaskier slumps in defeat in the saddle.

Unfortunately for the witcher, they encounter some people at the other side of the orchard who
beam at them. They accost Geralt, offer him fruits and ask about the blessing. Geralt has his mouth
full so Jaskier takes it upon himself to answer.

“Fear not, dear people, the blessing has been vigorously and scrupulously renewed by your humble
servant Geralt of...”, the rest of the sentence is lost behind his friend's hand, which he clamps hard
over the bard's mouth after getting up behind him in the saddle in a hurry.

The townspeople thank them merrily nonetheless and promise to spread the tale of the blessing as
far and as wide as they can. And when Jaskier turns back his head to look at Geralt behind him, his
features are contorted in such an expression of horror that the bard can't help but giggle.
The sounds he makes are still muffled by the witcher's hand over his mouth, which doesn't prevent him from waving enthusiastically at the townspeople, even as Geralt orders Roach to make a run for it. Jaskier is a bit disappointed that his friend won't let him go back to the town, because he wants to know the name of the first witcher - the man has to be a genius – but he is sure that he can compose a song worthy of admiration with the details he possesses nevertheless. And he can always embellish the story if he finds it lacking, he's a bard after all.

It takes two years for the story to reach Lambert's ears. Geralt hasn't even set foot in the keep yet, he's still taking care of Roach, when he hears his brothers' hurried footsteps, he's the last to arrive this year. Lambert and Eskel stop at the entrance of the stables and lean each on a side of the door with shit-eating grins. Geralt has a bad feeling.

“So,” Lambert begins without even greeting him properly, “I hear that you're humping trees now.”

“Oh, fuck off, Lambert,” he snarls at his brother before storming out of the stables.

He elbows his younger brother harshly in the ribs when he passes by him and glares fiercely at Eskel. It doesn't stop them from erupting into peals of laughter and Geralt leaves the two assholes with a last rude gesture thrown behind him. They're not worth it, he thinks for himself, it's not worth it.

Chapter End Notes

And Jaskier's song continues to cause trouble.
Vesemir is in the middle of Temeria, clearing a cave of three fleders. As soon as the last monster looses his head, he extends all of his senses to make sure that none survived. To his surprise, he hears a soft breathing sound and goes deeper into the cave with his sword still raised in front of him.

He ends up in another cavity and spots bones on the ground. He steps into the new cave, walks on the bones that turn to dust beneath his feet, and heads for the farthest corner from the entrance where the sound is coming from.

He widens his eyes in the darkness and spots a dark shape slowly breathing. He extends his sword but the lump doesn't react to the touch of the blade. Vesemir frowns and bends down, he touches the shape and is surprised to find a smooth neck with a slow but steady heartbeat under his fingertips.

He pats the lump before him, grabs one of its arms and slings the person over his shoulders. He grunts under the weight and heads for the entrance of the cave. He keeps his senses on alert but doesn't detect another creature and lets out a sigh of relief when he reaches the forest again.

He deposits his cargo, who turns out to be a young man, under a tree and goes back to his horse to fetch his waterskin. He opens it and slowly pours water in the man's mouth who starts coughing. Vesemir feels his head and finds an ugly bump that he cleans, before washing the blood and mud from the man's face.

The witcher then goes back into the caves, collects a monster's head and burns their remains. He then makes his way out again, ties the head to his horse saddle and takes a stand next to the still unconscious man.

When he finally hears the man's breath quicken, Vesemir takes a few steps back and waits for his guest to wake up. It's a slow process. The man blinks several times, winces and his hands go up to the bump at the back of his head before he squints at Vesemir.
“Uh,” he says, “You're a witcher.”

Vesemir rolls his eyes as the man states the obvious and rummages in his saddlebags to find some dried meat to offer to him.

“Yes,” he says and hands the meat and his waterskin to the man who accepts the items with a smile, “I'm Vesemir, a witcher of the School of the Wolf. I saved you from some fleders.”

“Oh, so that is what they were! Then I thank you, master witcher! But I'm afraid that I don't have anything to repay you with.”

“No need for you to offer me a reward,” Vesemir says and shakes his head, “The alderman from the nearest village issued a contract for the monsters and I already was promised a good sum.”

“But I insist, master witcher,” the man says and gets up slowly, “After all, you just saved my life!”

“There's really no need,” the witcher argues.

“Maybe the law of...”

“NO!”, Vesemir interrupts him abruptly, “No, thank you mister...?”

“Jan.”

“Then no, thank you, master Jan, I have everything that I need,” Vesemir says and goes back to his horse. “I can bring you down to the village, if you want?”, he offers.

Jan nods and follows Vesemir down the hill where the cave is located. The man is stumbling behind the witcher's horse and Vesemir has to steady him a few times lest he falls and breaks his neck. When they arrive at the edge of the town, Vesemir turns back to the man he saved and nods at him.
“I’m heading to the alderman, then. I wish you a long and fruitful life, master Jan.”

“And I thank you for your help, master witcher,” Jan says respectfully, “But I can't decently let you leave without a reward! Maybe a free meal at the inn? I just recently acquired it, it won't be any trouble! Or do you require a room for the night perhaps?”

Vesemir furrows his brows and contemplates this man, it's rare that he finds someone willing to offer him room and board for free. He's tempted to stay the night but decides against it lest he finds the illusion of friendship shattering quickly. In his experience, these feelings never last long where witchers are concerned.

“No, thank you. I must take my leave quickly.”

“Then allow me to rename my inn *At the Wolf’s* in honour of your school! You'll always be welcome when you travel across Temeria!”

“That's... I can't accept that,” Vesemir splutters, “You don't need to do that!”

The man frowns at him and crosses his arms over his chest.

“Then I'll name my establishment *At Vesemir's* and I won't hear another word about it! That's decided! And of course, you and your brothers will always be welcome in my home, I swear it on my name.”

“That's a very kind offer, master Jan,” Vesemir says, “And I can't insist enough that you shouldn't feel obligated to follow through your decision in any way. I didn't save you for a reward!”

“And I would feel horribly bad if I didn't show you my appreciation properly, master witcher. I'll never be able to thank you enough for saving my life.”

Vesemir then watches him leave after they exchange friendly farewells and wonders if the man will keep his word. He doubts it. Vesemir shakes his head and goes to see the alderman to collect his payment.
Vesemir never forgets about Jan or his promise. He usually avoids this part of Temeria in his travels, because he doesn't want to be disappointed when he inevitably finds out that the man broke his promise. But he still remembers it nevertheless.

And six years later, he's in the village's vicinity again and decides to check in the inn. The village hasn't changed much and he finds Jan's establishment easily. He stares in amazement at the inn's sign that reads *At Vesemir's* for a few minutes before shaking his head and dismounting. He didn't expect that.

He ties his horse to a post next to the inn's door and enters the establishment warily. He only takes four steps inside before Jan recognizes him and comes up to him with a big smile on his face to shake his hand. He then introduces him to his wife and his two children and sits him at a table next to the fire.

Jan's wife thanks him warmly for saving her husband and places a steaming bowl of stew with a tankard full of their best beer in front of him. She then assures him that he won't have to pay for anything and squeezes his shoulder as she leaves him to go back to the bar.

Jan joins him with his youngest son half way through his meal and tells him about the latest gossip in the village and the new stable that he plans to add at the front of his inn in a few months. When he finishes his stew, Jan calls for two slices of pie to be brought to them and they share their dessert in companionable conversation.

It's one of the weirdest meals of Vesemir's life but he can't say that he hates it. Jan is polite, friendly and acts like they are old friends. He even plops his young son on Vesemir's knees at the end of the meal and then proceeds to tell him how the witcher saved his life. Vesemir finds the tale heavily embellished but doesn't correct the innkeeper and decides to enjoy the warm welcome this family is gifting him.

It takes a few decades but word goes around the grapevine after Letho saves the third generation of the family. Witchers soon learn that an inn exists in Temeria, where they can find comfort and where they'll be welcome with open arms. And little by little, witchers become more familiar with the family owning the inn and Jan's descendants never forget their forebear promise and they keep honoring it.
After Letho takes the kid away, Lambert can't stop thinking about what Fiona said about marriage. And he considers introducing Aiden to the pricks that pass as his family. Because apparently, if he wants to be married for real, his brothers and his mentor need to know. And he won't ever admit it out loud, but he maybe would like to be able to call Aiden his husband too.

With his mind made up, he turns back two days after leaving the Cat and goes after him. It takes him four days to catch up to him. Lambert sees Aiden's eyes widen when he spots him and his lover immediately comes up to him and hovers. He takes him in and squeezes his arms.

“I'm not hurt,” Lambert growls at him.

“Then what are you doing here ? We weren't supposed to see each other again before next summer,” Aiden says with a concerned face.

Lambert opens his mouth and then closes it again. He averts his eyes and glares at the ground. He doesn't know how to ask Aiden if he even wants to go to Kaer Morhen with him this winter, and doesn't want to appear clingy or for his request to be denied. *Fuck, he thinks, fuck, I didn't think this through.*

When he looks back at the Cat, Aiden has his arms crossed over his chest and is smirking at him. Lambert shoulders past him without a word and Aiden wordlessly starts to accompany him. It takes him an hour before he breaks. He can't bear the silence anymore.

“Would you like to come to Kaer Morhen with me ?”, he asks and adds between gritted teeth, “This winter.”
“What brought this on ?”, Aiden frowns at him.

Lambert stops abruptly and scrubs his hands over his face. He mumbles an answer behind his hands and Aiden asks him to speak more clearly with a smile on his stupid face.

“According to the kid, we're not really married because my family doesn't know about us”, he rasps, “And I know that you'd like to be introduced to them so...”

Lambert shrugs and when he looks back at Aiden, his smile has disappeared and his lover is frowning at him.

“I don't want you to do it just for my benefit. It won't be pleasant if you feel like... like you have to do it and not like you want to.”

“Oh, for fuck's sake,” Lambert exclaims angrily, “Just say yes you stupid mosshead, I wouldn't be asking if I didn't want to do it ! Would have thought that you knew me better than that by now ! And stop beaming at me, you're being creepy, asshole !”, he rants.

“I'd be delighted to accompany you to your home, darling. It'll be my pleasure.”

Lambert allows his lips to pull up into the tiniest of smiles and lets himself be manhandled into a tight embrace. He missed the Cat, he realizes, even if they have been parted for only six days. But he'll have all winter to spoil and to enjoy him. If they don't tear each other's throats out. If the other wolves will allow a Cat to enter their den. If they manage to stay alive until winter. If... His worried musings are interrupted when Aiden kisses him and he lets himself bask in the moment.

They spend the rest of the summer and the beginning of autumn apart and reconvene next to Ard
Carraighe. The air is chilly now and there's mist most of the mornings. Snow doesn't fall yet but it's a matter of weeks before it arrives.

Aiden lets himself be lead north and Lambert frets all the way to the keep. He doesn't know how his family will react and it makes him nervous. He doesn't know what he'll do if Vesemir refuses to offer shelter to Aiden for the winter. Well he knows that he'll go back down the mountain with the Cat, but he doesn't know if he'll ever want to come back.

And a large part of him hates Kaer Morhen fiercely, but the old fortress became something like a home these past years. He'll be loathe to loose a secure winter shelter too. And he feels like he is owed a part of the keep. He bled in it and trained in it and was changed by it and he hates it sometimes, but he pushed past everything and he became a wolf witcher anyway and is walking his Path, and so the keep is also his and he can damn well invite whoever he wants to share it!

It's his due, he tells himself vehemently over their days of travel. He practices his speeches to convince Vesemir to let Aiden stay, and the ones he'll deliver if they are forced to leave, just in case. Aiden doesn't comment on his sour mood and just stays close to him. The Cat lets him initiate bar brawls and doesn't step in until they have to leave before the guards are called. He seems to understand that Lambert needs to let his frustration out one way or another.

Lambert spent so much time imagining all the ways this encounter could go wrong that he's not prepared for what really happens when they reach the keep. It's all fucking anticlimatic, if you ask him.

The gates of the keep are open and they enter the courtyard with all of their senses on alert. They can't hear a damn noise. The stables are empty when they settle Lambert's horse in it, so none of his brothers are here yet, but Vesemir's mount isn't here either and the Wolf frowns at the empty stalls.

The bellow Lambert lets out when they enter the keep doesn't get any answer either. They leave their packs in the hallway and unsheathe their swords because they don't know what they'll find. Lambert takes the lead and they head for the kitchen first.

He pushes the door open and takes a long sniff when he enters. No blood, no piss, no shit,
everything's almost normal except the hearth is cold and there's no hot meal prepared for them by Vesemir.

“Lambert,” Aiden calls, “I think that you might like to read this. I found it on the table.”

Lambert stalks back to Aiden and rips the parchment from his hands. He snarls as he reads it because it is written in Vesemir's hand and addressed to him and his brothers. The old man informs them that he left the keep so that he can enjoy a peaceful winter for once. He says that he'll come back in spring and that he is looking forward to see them all next year.

That's bullshit, Lambert thinks and rips the piece of parchment to shreds.

“Ah, I wouldn't have done that,” Aiden comments from where he is leaning on the table with a smile on his face.

Lambert only grunts and stalks out of the kitchen to search the rest of the keep. Better be safe than sorry.

“Lambert !”, Aiden shouts and scrambles after him, “Did you see the other side of the parchment ? The one where there was a list of tasks ? Because I don't think that I can remember them all now that the parchment is scattered in tiny little pieces on the floor. And I'm not doing a puzzle with it !”

“If the old man wanted us to perform tasks over winter, he should have been here to tell us !”, Lambert rants while he stalks upstairs.

“Oh ! You're angry. Angry that he isn't here ?”


“I'm not!”

And yes, maybe he is angry at Vesemir for not being here. He spent weeks, even months, preparing himself for this encounter and the old man isn't even able to be present for it. Of course he's angry, it's a... a... a mark of disrespect. And okay, sure, he didn't send word ahead but he didn't think that he had to, the old Wolf never leaves the keep usually.

“It still leaves your brothers,” Aiden says in a soothing voice, “They're bound to arrive in a few days.”

Lambert stops abruptly in the middle of the stairs and Aiden walks straight into his back.

“Ouch. Lambert, darling, can you just calm down a bit, please?”

“You're right,” Lambert sighs, “The fucking tossers are going to arrive soon. And I can introduce you to them.”

He takes Aiden's right hand in his and squeezes it tightly because he is now trying to imagine everything that could go wrong with Geralt or Eskel.

“Stop fretting,” Aiden laughs, “And come on, we have a keep to inspect before we can finally eat. And I'm starving so get to it. Are there rooms in this corridor?”

Lambert smiles, steals a kiss and drags Aiden further into the keep.
The Wolf's mood turns sourer in the two weeks they spend alone at the keep. The first snow arrives three days into the second week and none of his brothers come home. Not. One. Of. Them. He hates them. For once that he has something truly important to share with them, they can't be bothered to come home.

His frustration is taken out on the training dummies and that one bear that he completely butchers during a hunting trip. Aiden mostly lets him stew in his feelings and brood when he feels like it, even if he insists about sharing meals and a bed at night.

But Lambert can't force himself to be of good company these days and is mostly monosyllabic. His attitude grates on Aiden's nerves, he knows it, and he's certain that it won't take long for him to snap.

And snap he does four days after the first snow falls. Lambert is once again outside, shovelling snow left and right that really doesn't need shovelling at all. But he imagines his family's faces when he has a big pile of snow before him and delights in striking it forcefully with his shovel. It does scatter snow everywhere but at least it allows him to take his anger out at something that doesn't mind it.

“Lambert ! Can you come inside ? Lambert !”

Aiden's shouts stop him mid-strike and he scowls heavily at the snow, kicks it one last time for good measure and goes inside.

“What ?”, he snarls.

“Do you plan to spend all winter in a foul mood ? Because we could be doing things far more pleasurable than shovelling and kicking innocent snow.”

“I'm sorry,” he apologizes in a grunt because it's true that he hasn't been the best of companions lately. “I'll go put the shovel away and then we can... hum, find something to do ? Together ?”
He ends his sentence in a question, because he can't fathom why Aiden would want to spend time with him while he's in a mood. And to be fair, Lambert has no idea what the Cat would even want to do. Dusting together isn't more fun than dusting alone after all.

“Something ? Together, he asks dumbly,” Aiden mutters at the ceiling and then points at him, “You're unbelievable. You are going to finish shovelling the damn courtyard to dispose of the rest of your pent-up frustration and you better come in with a smile and a sunny disposition when you are finished.”

“I've never had a sunny disposition in my life,” he mumbles before shutting up when Aiden growls at him.

“I am going to finish cleaning the kitchen's hearth and then I'll prepare a light dinner that we'll take downstairs in the hot springs with us. Sounds good ?”

“We're not allowed to eat in the springs,” Lambert informs him.

“And who will stop us ? Nobody's here.”

Lambert gapes at him and feels like he actually wants to smile for the first time since he arrived.

“You know, I'm finally starting to see the good sides of being here alone,” Lambert says slowly.

“ Fucking finally !”, Aiden says with a relieved sigh. “And when we are finished downstairs, we're going to go to your room and thoroughly enjoy ourselves.”
“That sounds like a wonderful evening.”

“Glad you think so. And the next time you feel like wallowing in your anger or frustration, you come to me and we’ll pick one of your brothers’ rooms to... desecrate. Now, off you go, your courtyard won't clean itself alone.”

And Lambert goes back outside with a spring in his steps. He's not smiling yet, but he is almost sure that he'll end up there by the time he finishes shovelling the snow from the courtyard. And if he curses a little or gives a few good kicks to the snow piles, well nobody's here to scold him about it.

When Vesemir comes back to Kaer Morhen after a relaxing, and especially quiet winter, he finds the keep empty. He saw tracks on the path leading up to it so he knows that some of the other Wolves were home this winter, but they have already left by the time he arrives. He's not especially disappointed, he'll see them next year and will be able to enjoy some peace and quiet for a while longer.

He settles his horse and notes with appreciation that the roof of the stables has been fixed and that the stalls are all clean. When he comes back out, he spots a new big wood pile in the courtyard and the old forge seems to have been cleaned out. He frowns a bit because the east wall hasn't been mended like he asked, but he can see that someone built a new meat dryer and that definitely wasn't on the list.

He finds all the tools cleaned and tucked away in their shed and there's no weapon left outside in the training yard, so at least his mentees made an effort to clean after themselves. He finally goes inside and nothing seems out of the ordinary. The floor doesn't look like it has been dusted in a while, but he knows that Geralt, Eskel and Lambert hate this task so they may have skipped it. He takes note to do it soon.

He first goes to the kitchen and the first thing he notices is that the room stinks faintly of sex, of Lambert and of someone who is unfamiliar. He curses because the rule that states no sex in the kitchen exists for a reason and he wonders why Geralt and Eskel let their little brother do as he pleased. Maybe he did it after they had already left?
He opens wide the sole window and the door and leaves the kitchen to air itself out. He'll come back when it'll be more breathable. He goes upstairs, checks the library, whose books have been dusted, but the room itself stinks of sex too and Vesemir starts to grumble in earnest.

His next stop is his room on the first floor and when the stench of Lambert intermingled with the one from his unknown companion assail his nostrils yet again, he curses the brat out loud and vows to give him the correction he deserves next winter. He strips the covers and the sheets of his bed, which of course haven't been cleaned, and leaves them in the corridor.

He continues his check of the keep and finds Lambert's sex stench in every room he opens. He apparently visited the armoury and Geralt's and Eskel's rooms too. Lambert's own room has been aired and the sheets washed before he left, surely as a heartfelt fuck you for whatever imaginary slight they have caused him, because the scent isn't as strong there.

Vesemir pinches the bridge of his nose and massages his temples and wonders what he did to deserve this. Maybe going away wasn't so good an idea. He's totally starting to regret it.

When he finishes his tour of the keep and comes back down with a heavy armful of laundry to do, he's pretty sure that Lambert and his unknown guest were the only visitors this winter. Geralt's and Eskel's scents have all but disappeared from the keep and he doesn't think that they would have been foolish enough to let Lambert leave last.

He checks the hot springs, but unsurprisingly they bear Lambert's and his companion's smell too. Vesemir growls at that because he can't fucking air the hot springs and everything looks pretty deliberate to him.

It'll take a few more days for the scent to properly disappear and he wanted a hot bath in the evening. He'll have to think of a good revenge to enact next winter. He dumps the dirty laundry on the floor and leaves because he can't deal with the stench right now.

Vesemir goes back to the kitchen, which already smells better, and heads down to the pantry where he prays Lambert didn't spread his scent too, because that would just be unsanitary and disgusting.
Luckily the two pantries are untouched and he can even see some new dried meat that Lambert left here.

There's less of a dent in the alcohol supply that he thought he would find, and that is a nice surprise too. It won't save Lambert from his wrath when he comes back next winter, but Vesemir can still appreciate the gesture. He takes a bottle of wine upstairs with him, because he desperately needs it, and spends his evening bemoaning Lambert's flaws and cursing his name back and forth.

Chapter End Notes

I read plenty of fics where a witcher takes a friend/lover up to Kaer Morhen for the winter (usually Geralt and Jaskier), which I love, and well, Jaskier got to visit too in the first part.
But I wanted something different for Aiden and Lambert and that idea came to me and made me snicker so... here, hope you enjoy!!

End Notes

I'll post new chapters as they come but it won't be regular.
I'll update the tags with each new drabble too!
See you soon.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!