

Content Warning: Inflation, Berry, Off-Screen Weight Loss, Juicing, Deflation

Windy fall days in Glowshire Forest were a flurry of colored leaves, speckled in the canopies above until they drooped toward the dusty paths below. Such tranquility could have made for the perfect nature walk, given its proximity to the nearby rivers. Unfortunate for those who weren't adventurers - the forest was infested. Beneath the marigolds and crimsons of autumn, a fuzzy gray claw poked its way out from below. A throaty, rumbling growl drowned out the rustling leaves as it lunged out from its hideaway. Its legs were contorted backward, ribcage jutting out like a bear trap, mouth frothing with bubbly saliva. Its trudge was one back leg first, one front leg second, while it dragged along its last back leg. The face of the beast was short snouted, with a jaw hinged only by the right side of the face. This beast was already injured by the time it got into those leaves, yet the fight wasn't done. It foolishly tried to limp back to the fighter that had a hand at it. A flawless swing of a greataxe to the neck catapulted the head of the monster into the treeline nearby. A hollow *thunk* echoed when the head landed on its side, snaring with its teeth instinctually, until the beast realized there was no more fight left to give. The wound belted out black vapors, the body itself quickly evaporated after. Some immature summoner or agitated wizard lord had decided to fill the forest with mystical beasts, and the last one listed had just been slain at the hands of a messy haired fighter.

Stray strands of black flapped in the wind like a banner. Her saturated, purple overcoat drew attention to her upper torso, the lines of silver buttons that slid up the middle and left side seemed excessive in volume. Her sleeves were torn just below her biceps, which let metal shoulder pads rest atop beneath strands of black moppiness. Dark pants fully hid her legs, with leather boots at the bottom shielding her from the ground below. Some would mistake the general make of this uniform for military garb, while others would recognize it for what it was; the outfit of a combatant. A mighty heave slung that greataxe over her shoulders, and safely on her back. Her mission was over. In its conclusion, she silently reveled in the wondrous silence after victory. The black hair that draped over her right eye sometimes flickered over to her left, that brown crystal-like iris scanning about the area for anything else. Nothing in the shadows of the trees above. Nothing that moved in the leaves around. Time to go.

She embarked on her return with poise, barely a scrape into the ground beneath her feet. Her return would have been quick, had she not felt a prick in her forearm. Perhaps she should have scanned her surroundings more thoroughly, but that didn't matter at the moment. A small prick like that could have only come from one source. Her fingers slid around the shaft of the projectile before the warrior yanked it out. Held up to her visible eye, she could confirm her suspicions. A blowgun dart, coated in a liquid that glistened a curious purple in the dappled light below the trees. Usually one would want to conceal their poison, unless they were some kind of creature who cared not for subtlety. From the chitters behind the brush, and the crunch of leaves, it sounded like just what the fighter thought of. Pointy ears, green skin, lack of style. Feral goblins.

Casual like a morning routine, the woman readied herself for a brawl and swung her greataxe to the ground. Light on her feet, she propelled into the bushes to swipe her weapon,

blunt end, into the goblin's side. It was an attempt at a warning strike, if they wanted to poison her, they wouldn't get at her body for a while. That impact careened the goblin twelve feet away, screeching, into a pile of discarded leaves. Three shaky-handed goblins slung stones from their slingshots, and yet they pinged off her flesh uselessly, a dark streak rampaging toward them with an imperious, cold eye. What perplexed the brawler was a lack of sharp-edged weapons. Swords, bows and arrows, daggers, spears even... These little creatures were left with toys in comparison. It was unbecoming of the forest vagabonds. Reasons for such didn't cross her mind, she was too busy swatting away the crowd. It was her sixth goblin up that she noticed the weight of her arms had made it harder to swing upward.

Usually something of that caliber called for immediate investigation, though she was sure to punt away another one of her ambushers prior to investigating. What greeted her eye was an unusual indigo cylinder in place where her left arm should've been, swollen and hard to move. If anything, the limb began to push itself upward, while the victim it was attached to started to feel it. From the burning spot in her arm came a cold sensation, not akin to the nipping of frostbite or the lifeless chill of a corpse, but akin to a chilled beverage. A tingling in her body that followed along up her puffy shoulder, and encroached on her chest. A simple tug on her undershirt revealed that her slight suntanned skin had been bleached in that purply-blue hue, and it wasn't done with just her arm. That swollen sensation flared up wherever the indigo touched, and it spread feverishly across her. Quick to realize the trouble a heavy weapon would get her with a swelling body, she dropped her greataxe and opted for a handaxe she kept in her coat. Swing, swing, swing, she'd whack whatever goblin would be dumb enough to jump at her. In response, her body punished her with the same, blue inflammation as her left.

That puffiness began to affect her legs, her abdomen, her...chest. She grit her teeth, but it was impossible to take her as an intimidating foe when she swung with her body, rather than her arm. Soft slonks and glubs sloshed around her body, while more of her skin turned purple, to indigo, to a saturated blue. Her buttons pressed tighter across her body, the constriction making it harder to breathe. The scant few goblins that remained standing snickered and chittered, speaking in their tongue toward one another. Growling, the fighter tried to bite back at them, after all, she could speak the goblin language. She nary got a word out before the rash spread to her cheeks, which swelled up to hold whatever liquid had been produced inside her. Her tongue was burnt by the produce, hotly acidic and tooth-achingly sweet. The potent flavor of blueberry juice made her nearly gag, while her body rounded and puffed out more and more. She looked overweight for certain, but the moment her body had swollen to that level, her chubby look became more...round. Her limbs began to sink into her more ball-like form, which left her balance unstable and uncertain. Her undershirt stretched out and tore up to free her chest, the jacket tore up around the puffed out limbs, and her poor pants shredded apart at the dome leg base. The brawler fell to her groin, her knees slipping into her rotundness.

The goblins scampered out of the way for another figure to step past the shadows, and all that strong woman could see was a head of silver hair, golden eyes, and a black set of robes with yellow symbols all across it. That was all she got to see, until that figure kicked her in the side. Out from the brush the now useless blueberry of a fighter rolled, her form awkward and

lumpy but not yet round, until gravity pulled her down the slight slope of a hill. Defeated by a nonlethal level of cartoonish violence. That greataxe left behind was chucked down the hill with her, after considerable struggle to swing it on the remaining goblins' part.

In the shadows, the silver haired woman dropped a leather bag that rattled profusely, silver coins spilling out onto the ground. Almost immediately, the goblins rushed to scoop up their earnings and stuff it into their hide clothing. "Those silly canine illusions were enough to keep her out here." The woman chuckled. "So exhausting, making them feel lifelike. Even so, she fell for it hook, line, and sinker." In her hand was a blue dart, similar to the one that was shot into the neck of the woman from before. "I've got what I need. May we never meet again." There was a yappy yip from one of the goblins, most likely they translated the woman's comment to the others. Just like that, she was gone, off to where she originated from.

Tumbling down the hill, the plump orb built up speed with every thump against the ground. The shape she'd taken on was similar to an orb, aside from the several divots and curves that formed all around. Her chest had swollen outward, that once ab-riddled stomach now a humiliating muffin-top in her outstretched pants, her hands and feet sunken into her taut flesh. Being as round as you were tall wasn't necessarily fun, though the aggravation came from feeling the juices in your body working to make you bigger. Off snapped her belt and her choker, her bright purple under-shirt rolled up under her massive chest, pants no more than panty shreds, and as for actual underwear? Well, not like she wore any to begin with.

Spin, spin, spin, her accelerated descent only continued while the cliff grew closer. The hill had a dropoff point on a few ends; if she were to fall from there now, she could get impaled by a tree below and pop like a water balloon. She didn't know what hit her when she felt something scratchy wrap around that bloated ball of a body, a similar feeling tugging at her sunken-in foot. The tension slowed her down, just enough to where half of her teetered off the cliff, dripping juice slowly to the rocky soil below. Whatever caught a hold of her kept her from falling for the time being, but her slow growth only meant her restraints would be temporary. Her eye fixated on the drop. The world stretched deep below her vision, even if she could only see past her bloated cheeks, the trees melted down for miles upon miles. Wind became harsh whistles, her pupil shrinking to a pea-size, air through her nostrils growing tight, and if the back of her throat wasn't backed up with juice she'd be gagging. She tried to scream, but the juice in her mouth muffled all sound.

Suddenly, this lady felt like a twenty ton brick. Her mind began to race. Her panic had only loosened the bondage she was trapped in, pure adrenaline giving her enough energy to sway herself left to right. This wasn't how a fighter should go out, this wasn't how she should go out! The utter panic made the grip on her foot loosen further, further, further! Fortunately for her, another thin set of strands wrapped about her bloated body. All that bondage was enough to slow her speed to a crawl, and even keep her pace consistent during her second descent. The tumble she had was leagues better compared to what would have happened before- she bounced from cliffside safety net to cliffside safety net, soft flesh indenting and gurgling against

each wall. Finally, her abdomen met the ground with a resounding *THNK*, followed by galunking and glorshing of the liquid buildup inside her body.

Birds sang far above the canopy, a pond not too far away splished gently, the ambience of nature filling in all the dead air. Tons of nausea and adrenaline ran through her system, her breaths coming out short and hyper. Her eye caught a glimpse of some kind of figure approaching her. They looked short, they looked humanoid, but everything was a blur. By the time her breathing regulated, she could finally get a glimpse at the young man that stepped right in front of her. Rather, she could get a look at his foot. It was around then she also realized her body had stopped growing in size, thankfully for her. The berry was set to her side, strands of black hair falling over both of her eyes. Her savior heaved and hoisted her ninety degrees counterclockwise, then rested the berry onto her breasts. He stood above her head, then leaned down to squeeze the woman's cheeks. The force had her spew out a plentiful stream of blueberry juice onto the ground, though it freed her mouth finally.

"What the hell was THAT for, asshole?!" Roared the fighter before a wet, hacking cough overtook her. Her husky voice was gurgly, like every part of her body was soaked in blueberry juice. "You don't just hang someone from a fall like that! I'd deck you if I could!"

"Usually people appreciate getting their lives saved." The young man chuckled, before he stood over her and squatted down to look at her. "But I guess you aren't like others, are you?"

She got to see his face, messy brown hair signifying an unkempt boy, with a hood thrown over his head. The point of his elf ears were barely visible in comparison to his bright green eyes, stuck in such baggy clothes. A yellow shirt, a pair of gloves, belts across his chest, baggy peasant pants, worn out boots. The fighter immediately clocked him as a drifter. To give her some amount of decency, he pulled out a black tarp he kept in his bag, then threw it where her pants had torn apart. It'd keep her nether-regions concealed from the elements, but the humiliation of being in this state didn't disappear.

"I didn't *need* your help." The helpless berry denied, "I could've handled things just fine."

"Uh huh, sure you coulda." The smug boy crossed his arms, then walked around the berry girl. The woman tried to crane her head to follow his revolution, but the swollen tension of her body made it outright impossible. "I bet you would've knocked them senseless, done them in with one fell swoop, made it all seem like you were a knight from a bard's tale." He squatted back to her. "But where's that power gonna get you if you're big, blue, and useless?"

What threw him off was the woman spitting juice right at him. Thankfully, he was fast enough before it hit his skin, and instead, let it hit his only gilded shoulder pad. The angry glare from the lady made it perfectly clear she didn't like being toyed with.

“Hey, calm down!” The boy stomped his foot, his crooked smirk slipping off his face. “You realize how infectious that stuff is? One drop on your skin, and you turn someone into a blueberry!” He pulled off his shoulder pad and chucked it to the side. “Now I have to get me another, thanks for that. That’s two favors you owe me now.”

“Owe you?” The fighter grumbled. “I don’t owe you shit, kid.”

The young man tsked slightly, then brushed his hair from his side. “First off, I’m not a kid.” He corrected, “I’m eighteen years old, I’m my own free man. Second off, I feel like saving you from becoming a giant blue spot on the ground is more than enough to feel entitled to something.”

“Yeah, and I feel like you’re owed a knuckle sandwich.” The grump tried to flail her fist at the young man, but to no avail. By that time, the warrior’s axe blurred past the boy’s back, at last lodging itself into a nearby tree with a mighty *CUH-RRRACK!* A crash that made squirrels scamper away. The berry’s savior flinched in shock, took a good long look at the weapon, then glanced back at her.

“Ah. Now I get it.” His smug grin flashed briefly. “Power Fist, huh?” The ousting genuinely surprised the blueberry, who stayed silent throughout his response. “Yeah, I know about you dorks. Been chased by a few of you already...” He squatted down to get a better look at the berry, resting his elbows on his knees. “Don’t think I recognize you, though. Which means you might not recognize me, so...” Off came the hood, which didn’t really obscure much. It just let his locks blow along the wind freely. “Mars. Mars Nebula. You might’ve heard the name?”

The fighter closed her eyes for a bit. “Not really.” She admitted, “Maybe you’re a low-rank bounty.”

“Harsh.” Mars sat down, and leaned his lanky weight onto the ball behind him. “If I’m low rank bounty, then you guys must not have much to do with your free time.” He swiveled his head around slightly. “Alright, your turn. Isn’t it customary to exchange names?”

She angrily sloshed about, and bumped him off her body. “It’s Brigid.” She coldly responded.

With a swivel of his hands, Mars leaned over to request more. “Brigiiiiid...?”

“Brigid Linebeck.”

“Brigid Linebeck, eh?”

“You got a problem, kid?”

With his ego bruised enough times, Mars stood back up. "Once again, I'm not a kid, lady." He put his foot onto Brigid's sloshy abdomen. "You're in no position to talk anyhow, you're only a year older than I am, right?" A moment of silence lingered in the air. "Yeeeeeah that's right, Brigid *Verona* Linebeck, I know you're the darling starchild of your dad's merc guild. What a blunder of a mission, huh? Bet you'd get demoted if you weren't so high up in the ranks."

"Shut it already!" She shook her body some, and got Mars's foot off her side. "How in the hell do you know about me?!"

While Brigid yelled, her sassy savior started to slink up a tree. "Was thinking about robbin' ya." He admitted, "Thought the hair over your eye meant you lacked depth perception. Then I saw you chop those wolf...things. Honestly, I was gonna cut my losses and run. That's about when I heard you swelling up like a blueberry. I thought, hey, might as well get something out of this after all."

"So you had every intent to rob me."

"Yup." Mars's quick response to Brigid was cut off when he picked an apple out of the tree, lazily laid in its natural hammock of trunk and branch, and chomped down into it. "Buhd lh dihdn'dt."

With a roll of her eye, Brigid glanced up to Mars as best she could. "What reason have you given for me to trust you up until this point? How do I know you're not gonna rob me again?"

"Hey, lady, do you see any other lending hands out here? I'm pretty much the best you're gonna get for a while. Want me to just leave you?"

She actually considered for a moment, she wouldn't lie. "...Fuck it. I don't have anything else better to do."

"You owe me then." Mars slipped out from between the tree, then leaped down to the ground. With a light *ploomf*, he bit into the apple one last time, then chucked it aside. "Ahfder we gehd shed uhp ahd gamp, I'll expshlain efferyfing."

Mars took his hands to Brigid's left side, cautiously rolling her throughout the forest. It wasn't particularly a pleasant feeling, being pushed along by this guy that went up to her chest on a normal day. What made it a little less humiliating was the fact it was just the two of them- her, and this stranger with ulterior motives. Spinning, spinning, spinning, the forest floor was above her one moment, to the side the next, and uncomfortably pressing into her cheeks after that. What made the rolling entertaining was only the imagination Brigid had stirred up to keep herself preoccupied, though she had to blow her hair to the side again when it tried to intrude on her vision every so often. The trees around her could be used like posts to leap from to gain ground on an enemy. Such entertainment left when they exited the forest, as it was back to boring, rolling, boring...

Autumn winds blew in the shivering town of Lindsdale, set upon a lowland surrounded by rocky hills and sparse mountains. There was but a single soul who dared step out so late into the night, with the moon stretched far overhead. Empty streets had trails of sparse, orange flickers from lanterns hung from posts. Weaving past the populated wealthy district, church buildings that dominated the skyline along the hill. Going down the grassy rise, the poverty stricken townsfolk turned in for their nights of exhaustion. One could only thrive in this district if they had the right amount of coin to their name- services here catered to a wealthier demographic not just for quality, but for the privilege of associating a name to the service. Neptune was more than thankful to have brought a considerable amount of wealth with her, not enough to be a worry if it were to disappear, but enough to let her adventure be a little more lavish.

Her hands gripped into her chubby belly, her flesh squished lightly in her grasp. She glanced up toward the mirror to get a better grasp of her changes. A glow up from how she walked into town for sure, but definitely still a bit much considering what weight did to her. Those hips of hers hugged her new dress, and her chest pushed along the cleavage window. Her star-shaped locket was pocketed away for the time being, just to let the new, green dress she had get its chance to shine. With a hairband, black with gold yellow star prints, a choker with much the same colors, and ornate earrings to match, she appreciated the green and light green embellishments along her body. Dark green hearts lined the side, while moons, stars, and bright shimmers proudly displayed along the lighter segment. There was, admittedly, a pretty useless belt that hugged under her chest and above her stomach, but that was just something she thought would be nice to have.

"You're certain you can't make me just a little bit slimmer?" Neptune turned to a pruned, whiskery man behind her, adorned in similar golds and greens as she was.

"Any more weight, and I fear the dress will become no more than a slip on." Spoke the raspy man, "Of course, such could be fixed with a...generous donation to the church."

Neptune knew better than anyone how corrupt churches worked- that was sort of why she hated going to one. It was short notice, and one of the only clerics this side of the continent that could help her that she knew of. "Then I think this is fine." She sighed, better for her to stand her ground than get nickel-and-dimed. "Thank you again, sorry for taking up so much of your day."

"By all means, Ms. Nebula." The pastor stepped back, and slowly swayed his hands toward the door. "Your patronage to the Father of the Fields has been plentiful already. Enjoy your time in Lindsdale."

Departing with a courteous bow, Neptune gracefully walked out of the church, from the nice, lavish foyer adorned by paintings of chiseled, godlike figures, to the rosy-cheek inducing gales of the outdoors. Her eyes darted around as she got a bit further into the town's square, then hid behind a flower shop, pulling her bag up just below her chin. Ruffle ruffle, after some reaching, she found a candy bar she'd saved for a stressful situation. Despite having a pouchy belly from when she could remember, she wasn't that big of an eater in most cases...but how could she resist the creamy sweetness of chocolate? Without many melted bits to it, at that, despite being in her bag for at least a couple weeks. She tried to unwrap it, carefully at first, just to unwind.

"You know eating chocolate's not a crime, right?" A mocking, somewhat flamboyant, albeit a tad deep tone came from the darkness to intrude on Neptune's downtime.

The click, clack, click from her left made her swivel over, before a figure emerged out of the shadows. It was a sight to be certain- a luxurious, long, pink dress coat with coattails at the end, paired with a pink bowtie, white pants and dress shirt, a black and yellow cane, pink and white hat... the red, long nails gave Neptune's plain nails a run for her money, along with the makeup done up on his face. A red thunderbolt rested beneath his sky blue eyes, though those pools clashed with the red eyeliner. Neptune's guard was immediately raised when she saw his hair. The familiar pairing of brown, white, and pink threw her for a loop, almost enough for her to miss those big lapine ears that stuck out above his head. Her hand cautiously reached toward her warhammer. The stranger tsk'd at her alertedness.

"You know what *is* illegal though? Attacking an unarmed individual in the dead of night, unprovoked even?"

All Neptune needed to do was glare at the man's cane, then fully hoist out her warhammer from her bag. "You're not unarmed." She growled, "I recognize a concealed weapon like that anywhere."

The night's buzz filled the silent gap, until the man pulled on both ends of his cane. Neptune's assertions were proven correct in that brief glimpse, there was a blade hidden within the cane this half-bunbid had carried around. Having proven her right, the stranger clasped his cane shut and set his weight onto it.

"Even you half-elves have such sharp eyes!" He complimented, craning his head to the side with a smile. "Unfortunately for the both of us, I'd rather not pick a fight with such a lovely woman if I can help it."

"Then cease the flirting and start talking." Neptune demanded, "I wouldn't set my trust with a man like you this late at night."

“Oh come on now.” He outstretched his other arm. “This is my most popular district. I’m a catch here, y’know.” He looked the woman up and down, then smirked. “Yup...you look like one of hers, alright.”

With an irritated huff, Neptune began to walk away. “If you continue to be this cryptic, then I want nothing to do with you. I’m on a quest to head home, and you don’t know how much desert I have to trek just to-”

“And miss your chance at taking down the big, bad, massive Queen Cream Cake?”

That response threw her for a loop- she had to stop and think about what was just proposed to her. Windy howls disturbed her mind. It was all like crackled, distorted buzzes to Neptune.

“Ah, caught your ear?” Teased the man. “See Neptune, we’re climbing towards the same goal here. You want the wicked woman punished for her crimes against your body, I want her punished for her, well... *actual* crimes.”

Furious, she spun around to see that the stranger was not even eyeing her. “So attempted kidnapping and brainwashing isn’t a crime?!”

“A lot less so than causing an international incident.” He commented, which led to no response from the cleric. “You must have missed it? The howls of possible war with Kyodania? The only thing that can curb them is the Princess’ safe return, and the kingdom has only one culprit. Us innocent citizens of Serenata.”

She huffed a tad at the remark. “If I were to get involved, I would involve the Republic of Veni, wouldn’t I?” Her comment was slightly unexpected. “If you couldn’t tell, I’m not of Serenata.”

“I couldn’t in fact, aren’t Veni’s elves more blue?” The rabbit remarked. “You’re pale like a marshmallow. Hardly a hint of your sea heritage on you.” It left Neptune silent, hardly able to comment on this man’s observation of her heritage. “Plus, a woman such as you would oh-so love to be a do-gooder, am I wrong? Your heart beats for the thrill of an adventure where you are the hero, and you get to rub your altruism in the face of such a dastardly villain.”

“Could you please quit the theatrics and start talking normally, please?” Neptune begged, then turned back around, nose up in the air.

Almost as annoyed as she was, the man dropped the act, cane tapping harshly against the pavement tile. “Look. Crown-Princess Raiko was kidnapped by her a month ago, right? Nobody knows it because nobody but us know she exists. That and her little gang. With me being me, I can’t go and save her on my own. I’m out here preventing war, and I can’t find anyone to take me seriously...” He turned about ninety degrees to look at her from behind.

“Then there’s you. You came into town filling a whole carriage, looking to get slimmed down, right? I only know one woman who can make someone that big in that short amount of time, and she’s more of a threat than you think she is.” He stepped closer, and put his shoulder to Neptune’s. “All I’m asking is a bit of help here. Build us up a band of misfits who can’t be traced as a political uprising, free the princess, take her home, and the people of Serenata can sleep calmly knowing they won’t get drafted into war. If you want to be dismissive, that’s fine.”

“I’m not...dismissive.” Neptune admitted. “I just don’t see why you want me.”

“You’re standing here.” The rabbit man simply answered. “You aren’t her maid, prancing around her castle ‘working’.”

The faint flicker of a lantern around her gave Neptune the concentration she needed. She let the pros and cons get weighed around in her head. Join this stranger, kick the ass of the woman who kidnapped her, save the princess of a foreign nation, meanwhile the cons were...well, if she were to be defeated, it was another trip here, and another hundred silver-coin dress down the drain.

“Fine.” Neptune agreed, then turned her head over to the rabbit boy. “But only if I get to know your name. Only fair since you seem to know mine...”

“Surprised you hadn’t heard of me.” He teased, tongue poking out through his lips playfully. “People call me ‘Elias’, but that’s my stage name. You may call me Dianthus Dreyer if you so wish.”

There was a brief pause, before Neptune shook her head and sighed. “I...do not wish. I wish you would stay silent for the rest of the night.”

“Let’s reconvene here in the morning, Father Garter...owes me a little something.” Elias tapped Neptune’s shoulder with the rounded off end of his cane. “Our next stop will be the quiet town of Bristleburg, so prepare for more fields.” Before he strutted off, he raised his head and turned to the cleric. “Oh, and I would do something about that display of yours.”

“Pardon?” Neptune flinched back.

“You’re a walking fashion disaster.” Elias flicked his finger in her direction. “The belt is fine, but that dress is gaudy as the hells. A headband, too? Really? And those earrings are just beyond extra. What’s with those rings too big for your wrists, do you need to be weighed down? And that cape...”

“Don’t you dare insult my cape!” Neptune gripped onto her pine and olive colored drape that hung behind her. “This cape is made out of fine material!”

“Actually, I was about to say that your cape’s the only thing that works for you.” Elias put his hand to his hips. “A woman of YOUR status can afford a makeover, can’t you? Maybe think to lop off that back end of your hair, too. That’s prime for being grabbed and pulled back.”

“So what would you suggest then?” Upset, the cleric folded her arms together. “Your outfit is loud and obnoxious, what’s so different about mine?”

“Something more subtle.” Out came a small notebook from Elias’s back pocket, followed by a piece of graphite. “Something that blends in with your cape rather than stand out. And if you have to keep something, keep that choker and belt, too. The loops are neat, but you have to shrink them down a tad. You’d be left looking like...this.” The little diary was handed off to the subject, who scanned over the impressively swift doodle. “Look around for a half-felinis with a butt wide like yours, he’s competition here, but he’s great with a needle and thread. He’ll have plenty of outfits that fit your star-studded theme. Now...let us retire.”

A spin of his hands and a proper bow, that was what Elias left Neptune off on. One foot in front of the other, he strutted off, heels clacked into the night. That rabbit was a ridiculous display, something Neptune loathed in part. The only comfort she could have in being associated with him was that he seemed to also be an enemy of her royal highness-to-be. Having an ally would make things relatively easier, but she got the feeling that this was going to be an uneasy alliance at best. Maybe... The night only grew colder, Neptune flipped open the little booklet she was handed with the idea of who she would have to find next.

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South of the city by tens of miles, the unlikely duo had retired for the night in a clearing. The crackle of fire was particularly a welcome one. Mars enjoyed the warmth of the flame that flickered up into the air, and getting to a safe spot meant stripping down to casual clothes. His baggy vagabond clothes hung over a clothes line, soaked after a light wash. His casual commoner’s shirt and pants made for more breathability, though the yellow striped arm warmers helped warm up those bony, bare arms of his. Mars would have let Brigid enjoy the heat too, but hot temperatures and berries made for baking, not for comfort. The little bit of heat Brigid did get while being used as Mars’s back rest was the only comfortable thing about her fruity conundrum, though only for the fact that there was more of her to feel warmth. The night was relatively calm, aside from idle banter between the two, but Brigid finally got what she wanted; some answers.

“What do you mean I’m not the first one you saw?” She squinted to her right, in a pitiful attempt to glare down at the rogue.

“The priest guy I’m taking you to’s seen one before.” Mars admitted, while he watched the fire dance and flicker. “Some lady from Gorgantum Town or whatever ended up as a giant blueberry. Some dude without gloves tried juicing her by hand?” He snapped his fingers. “Blue and swollen in like, ten seconds.”

That gave Brigid something to think on, how this was more than just a couple of rambunctious goblins. “This isn’t an isolated incident then.”

“Not. At. All.” Mars agreed, hands behind his head. “Nobody knows who’s doing it. Some people wanna say it’s the church, just so they can get more blessings and purifications, but that’d wrap things up way too easily. Besides, for as money-hungry as they are, I don’t think they’d willingly endanger people...just upcharge them more than the same spell you’d get somewhere else.”

“If the church was the culprit, that also wouldn’t explain why they go so far out from Lindsdale.” Brigid plotted aloud. “Lindsdale is two days away by foot, one by carriage. You would want to affect people who were nearby if you were going to scam them out of their money.”

“So it can’t be Father Garter. Nobody else in Lindsdale is known for having fruity magic like that, either. One guy in the procession actually got hit by one of those blueberry attacks while he was out of town, actually.”

“Well then, genius, how about you give me an actual plausible answer for who decided that making people into blue balls was a great idea?”

Mars let that question rest for a bit, before he broke a nearby branch and chucked it into the flames. “How should I know?”

“You’re in contact with the literal example of a corrupt priest. Excuse me for assuming.”

With a tap of his chin, he came up with an answer. “There’s ONE possibility but like, they’re kind of dormant and it’s a shot in the dark. Ever read ‘Beware, the Children of Circe’?”

“...What?”

Brigid’s stunned confusion was probably the most emotion she’d shown thus far, outside of yelling and droning. Mars followed up soon after. “Well, okay, it’s this book about this cult, yeah? This cult of people who worship the goddess of magic respectively, but take things way over the line. Not like, blood sacrifices and stuff, but more along the lines of, y’know...kidnapping people, putting them in pig costumes, mocking them-”

“I’m failing to see the connection here.” Brigid griped.

Mars sighed, then sped along. “At the end of the book, it’s revealed that they were using people they kidnapped as berries to fill up their big blueberry juice fountain that they did... something with. I’m thinking maybe some idiot decided to take that, and do it for real.”

“...Don’t tell me you occupy yourself with smut.” A sassy comment like hers lacked any proper delivery, just another flat line along with her other remarks.

“It’s not smut, just a weird-ass story. Might not even be true for all we know.” Mars stood up afterwards, then rolled his left shoulder around. This had already been one hell of a day, having met a new person, saving their life, readying them up to get them out of their condition, but there were still a couple things he needed to do. “Anyways, just a reminder that you owe me, yeah?”

“This again, hm.” Brigid would’ve put up a fight on the remark, but the day had her worn down.

“I’m saving your life, AND getting you juiced. Plus, you still owe me for that shoulder pad. I take silver, gold, or the trade equivalent.”

“How about you just tell me what you want already, kid?”

“One, not a kid, two, gladly.” Mars smirked, then pointed upward. “One, I want off your dumb bounty list, you guys make it hard for me to do anything without looking behind me every ten minutes to see if a HALF ORC is breathing down my neck.” Up went his middle finger after, a mock peace sign of sorts. “Two, I need your help in finding someone. Someone very special.”

“I’m not a matchmaker.” Brigid grumbled.

Mars shook his head, then stepped in front of her. He pulled out something from beneath his shirt, then let it hang from his neck. With the click of a button on the edge, that star-shaped locket opened, where a girl’s portrait remained. “Who I’m looking for isn’t a soulmate.” He explained, “She’s my older sister... I’m thinking now, with your help, I can...”

“I’ll do it for the locket.” bargained Brigid.

Mars considered it for a moment, that was one hell of an offer he didn’t want to throw in her face. Plus, this woman was very much *not* the type to usually bargain, so this meant such a virtuous task wasn’t worth its salt outside of incentive. With a heavy breath, he nodded. “It’s not real gold, I don’t think.”

“I know a guy who’ll make use out of it anyway.”

The only sound that lingered after that was the fire’s crispness, of which, Mars returned to. With his head tilted along the base of the blueberry’s roundness, he got a great view of the stars. One or two constellations could be seen from in between the reds and oranges, cascaded by shadow in a purple and violet veil. He closed his eyes, and tried to visualize what his sister would be like now. Maybe she kept the ponytails, maybe she cut her hair short, maybe she was strong, or lithe... Was she covered in battle scars like the berry behind him? Was she a theater

star? Did she pursue magic like she originally hoped for? So many questions, so few answers. He knew he wouldn't get anywhere just speculating, but who knew? Maybe she was closer than he thought she was.

"Her name's Neptune by the way." Mars added in, slightly turned to face Brigid. "Neptune Nebula. She has a matching locket."

Brigid didn't say much after either. It was hard to really get enjoyment when it felt like every part of you was underwater and weighed down. The little control of her body she had now was her lips, her eye, and maybe flapping around her hands and feet. Maybe a couple muscles too, since she could still sway. This would be a story she'd love to forget, hopefully never have mentioned to anyone else in the Power Fists. How would her step-father react? How would her trainer react? The other lieutenants? Maybe the best thing she could've done was just not think about it at all, and instead, let her mind be at ease. Just blank out, and try to get some sleep. Uncomfortable sleep, on her belly...well, not like sleeping on her back would've been better. Her side wouldn't have made much difference either. Eventually, after a grand total of ten minutes of quiet, the closing noise of the night was heralded by the sizzle of a fire being smothered by a rock, to avoid drawing too much attention in the late hours. Brigid would get the rest she needed, while Mars provided watch duty in between sleep, the only way a man on the run knew how. With one eye open.

Daytime in Lindsdale was much different than the unspoken hours of night, especially in the wealthy temple belt. Rich religious folk could congregate amongst each other however they pleased, without a care in the world to how anyone thought of them. They knew they were in their gods' graces. The only thing that could interrupt their chirpiness was the odd sight of a ginormous, blue sphere, being pushed around in the street. Many stepped out of the way, as it was guided toward the biggest church in the district; the Church of the God of the Harvest. The interior was grand, a testament to the devotion many had to the reptilian god. There he was, painted in stained glass at the furthest window. Wide colors of green and cream yellow contrasted greatly against the drab, boring, dull browns of the wood this church was crafted from.

"Did you seriously not think to put a tarp over me or something?" Brigid grumpily hissed at Mars. She was humiliated being paraded around so publicly through town, eyes glued to her in wonder, confusion, disgust even. Snide comments made about her figure, belittling ones that dared not recognize her humanity, or perhaps weren't even aware of it. Stuff like this usually didn't hit Brigid- her step-father used to say something to the effect of 'comments like those to her were like water rolling off a duck's back'. What she wouldn't give to be back down to normal and be done with this. Her skin felt so firm to the touch, no room to push down without fear of rupturing her. From the first day to now, she'd grown at least a good four inches in radius, proving her body still had some give left in it at least.

Mars huffed, a little annoyed. "I don't exactly have 'big giant blueberry woman tarps' on standby." He fussed back, "We're literally a few steps away from the church, you'll live."

"Stop...talking to me." Brigid warned under her breath. "People'll piece it together."

"Then how about you stop talking to me?!" Mars's own whisper was more like a low yell. "You're the one initiating the conversation!"

"Well, I--"

"I see you have brought another to my domain." The two's banter was cut short when the voice of the elderly, wrinkly half-elf overpowered their argument. The leader's eyes had a fierce, red glow to them that could cut through one's fortitude like a knife. He affixed his gaze to Mars, lacking emotion. "Mars."

"Father Garter." Mars nodded up and crossed his arms. He's been in the presence of this man a couple times before, not at all phased by his intimidating stature. "None of your 'pardons' I'm afraid, maybe next time though."

Father Garter stepped around the blueberry, and eyed her up and down to be sure of what he was presented with. His clacking, wooden heels echoed about the hall. "A mercenary." He sniffed. "And you brought her in good timing. Left to her own devices, it could have been mere days before rupture."

"Yeah yeah yeah," Mars pushed Brigid over to the holy man, who caught her with surprising reflexes. "The Holy Special, if you please."

The man rolled that giant blueberry around back. He took his sweet time, though was sure to knock his knuckles along each window nearby to his church. Behind that massive temple, a wooden stage had sat in the open elements. While ornate and designed with grand weight in mind, a makeshift ramp had been left there in place of the last berry. Before Brigid was hoisted on stage, other men began to spill outside. Many had on long robes, many were tall and strong, though through the half elves, humans, and even a half orc, there was still one blue man.

"Now that we have all of our brothers on beckon call, your healing process shall be more effective." Father Garter promised, while the other church goers pushed her up. "Please excuse Brother Althus's appearance, he is still recovering from his own produce-related experience."

"I think Mars already mentioned him." Brigid recalled while she was put in the middle. "Alright, you gonna start juicing me, or what?"

The brothers of the church began to circle Brigid and chant, while Father Garter shook his head. "If we begin draining you dry now, you will simply begin the growing process anew."

He explained, "We have come to realize that your affliction, it is that...of magical origin." His wispy words and raspy voice were like oil and fire. Sure, they went together, but you didn't exactly want the results. "You are a victim of the dart as well, are you not?"

"So you have to do a whole ritual?" Complained Brigid. "Great, just what I want. To be in the spotlight for a moment longer."

Ancient words were passed along brother to brother, neither of them looked up from their hand clasped prayer, they just circled and chanted. Their hymn slowly proved effective in some regard, Father Garter watched while Brigid's skin began to lighten. From that potent, dark blue, it started to shift into a more bright purple glow. With the slight raise of his hand, the brothers in unison stopped their chant. Blue faded further away, it started with her nose, and spread about her body. One could find a similar visual when a droplet of gin was put in their water, how the color filled the clearness. Though, one could presume this was more a reverse of that.

"Brothers!" Garter shouted among the small crowd. "Strike while the juice is pure and uncontaminated."

All of the men turned to Brigid, who simply watched while they grabbed onto her body at various parts. They stepped closer, pushed inward, and already, Brigid could feel the buildup inside of her get tighter. It was a nagging, incredibly tense pressure that she was not used to, something that even being underneath weight wasn't comparable to. If she had to compare it, it was like becoming the water balloon one would squeeze in their hands.

"You may feel...uncomfortable." Garter attested, at least having the decency to sound somewhat apprehensive. "The juice inside of you must come out in a number of ways. There are certain spots of the body where they have built up the most, and we aim to empty you out the best we can. Not a drop left."

The pressure built up in Brigid's mouth, and out from her maw spilled dribbles of dark blue liquid. Her nipples began to spew the same, thick blue liquid that gurgled out her throat. It plopped down onto the ground and sprayed about the clergymen's robes, though considering the pressure, there was no doubt there was more to it than the fighter initially thought. She didn't realize how quick her deflation was, not until she could feel air on her limbs, even if it was just a bit.

Garter crossed his fingers, then lifted his head up again. Beneath his shock of curly hair, his face was doused in drippings of blueberry juice. "We are not over the halfway point yet." He grimaced, "My greatest recommendation is to turn your head and think different thoughts."

Part of Brigid felt relieved that she got the attention she so deserved, not only that, but she got to see parts of the purple begin to fade back to her normal skin tone. Though, she definitely felt weird when juice sprayed out of her navel. Was that even anatomically possible? She had to guess anything was possible when you were cursed to look and feel like some kind

of mockery of a berry. The underwater sensation started to lighten, she could finally move her limbs around again at the very least.

'It'll be over soon,' she thought, 'I'm gonna be actually walking out of here soon...'

The clock ticked by, morning went to afternoon, and people had moved along and crowded the streets. Idle chatter filled Mars' left ear, while he focused on a brick wall ahead of him. Bored out of his mind, he had grabbed a rubber ball left in his pouch to toss about. Thnk, thnk, thnk. The repetitive sound was almost worse than silence, but at least it got his arms moving around. Waiting on the holy and thou was like biting into gold pieces to see if they were wooden, teeth aching annoying. Clacking from a nearby direction made his ears twitch up, someone with familiar footsteps was coming from just out of view. His green eyes fixated on the figure, shocked to see him. He slipped his hand closer to the door to slide back inside, but-

"Yoo-hoo, Marsy~!" Too late. The sing-songy voice of the flirtatious twink rang out in the crowded main street.

People gave second and third glances to the scantily-clad half-felinis as he passed. Plum hair and tail, with a metal clasp that gave his tail tip a coral-pink hue, a similar hue one could find in the back of his hair that faced the world. A cat bell dinged from the collar around his neck, his leotard left little to the imagination, including the bulge around his front. His sleeve-held arms were held to his sides, hands affixed to his hips when they had nowhere else to be. The leotard ended off in a wedgie, tightly clamped like panties on his wobble-wagon ass. A width of tush that not even his hands could reach the arch of, accentuated by binds of silver that hugged the spot where thigh met rump. To top it all off, he had cute little boots that clacked with each step. His olive skin and red eyes just seemed to top off this strawberry lad. Charlan Yarrow, Lindsdale's man of the night, dancer extraordinaire, and loving seamstress. It was hard for Mars to talk around Char. He was flirty, loved pressing buttons, and loved even more to throw his weight around. Mars was very much *not* that. He wouldn't consider himself a lone wolf, but he definitely didn't connect to people like Char did. They weren't total opposites, but they could clash at points. Why did Mars try to hide this specific encounter? There was an awkward feeling that bubbled up inside him whenever he was near Char. He couldn't put it to a singular word, but whenever the half-felinis brushed his hips to the half-elf's, Mars's stomach did somersaults. He knew Char just enough to be on a first name basis, but knowing *who* Char was deep down was something he hadn't gotten through.

"Heyyyy Charrrr..." Mars awkwardly waved his hand up to greet the young man.

Char flapped his hands under his chin to prop his head up, a big smile on his face flashed those sharp rows of teeth. "Aw, no enthusiasm for me?" he giggled. "Marsy, you gotta learn how to congratulate a guy better than that!"

A little annoyed sigh left Mars. Right, the guild Char helped kickstart in town. Placed between the wealthier and less fortunate districts sat a guild that operated on smaller, much

more frequent requests. Basic errand boys for the city, either through physical labor, beating some monster, or in Char's case, putting everything through an artistic lens. For extra coin, company too.

"Do we really need to talk about that now?" griped Mars, hands on his hips. "I've got at least three guilds from this kingdom and the next who want me locked up."

"You know I'd NEVER cuff you!" Char giggled at the absurdity, then paused for a moment, a finger pressed inquisitively to his chin. "Well, not unless you asked really, really nicely..."

A blush flared across Mars' face, his eyes fixated away from the flirt. "Wh?! That's...that's weird, man..."

"It pays to be weird~" he responded, then wobbled over with curious eyes. "You know, I can't place heads or tails on you! You don't seem interested, but you don't seem *not* interested." He wiggled his butt, just that little bit of movement for his wobble wagon clapping it together. "Is there something secret you're not telling me?"

"I'm guessing this is a friend of yours?" The sound of a tough feminine voice and footsteps pulled Mars's attention away from Char.

Wrapped up in a white gown, Brigid was left with spare worship robes and sandals just to stay modest. What made modesty harder, however, was the fact her chest had swollen past the size of her own head. Tinges of blue indicated that the blueberry magic just needed to work itself out of her system from this point onward, now much too minute to even bother expending more magic on. The rest of her was back to normal, that's all the warrior cared about. Back to her toned arms, peach skin, and wavy black hair. Char whistled, then joined Mars in observation.

"Oh, I get it now." he giggled. "I've gotta tone my arms! Do some curlups, some leg stretches. Aw, Marsy, don't tell me I need to lose the love seat!"

"...A past ex of yours, then?" Brigid cleared.

"No, just..." Mars clenched his fists, frustrated with how he felt. "A friend. A very flirty friend."

"Friend zoned? I'm hurt!" Char played up the wounded lover act. "Though that's the first time you'd ever said I was a friend, at least there's progress there! Would you like..." Char stepped back at least four steps, his tush wobbling like sheet metal. "Some space?"

The gap between Mars and Char was filled up by the warrior, who had a stern glaredown of the half-felinis before her. "Maybe he doesn't want to talk to you right now." she suggested. "Maybe try writing a letter."

"Tck...did they seriously run out of fashion disasters and leave you with a table cloth?" Char pointed to Brigid's getup, trotting up to her to muse over the dull beige of the prayer garb. "Look at this faux pas! A Power Fist's meant to look cool, right? Your features are so defined that formless schlock could never match the beauty of the wearer."

Brigid's eye opened wide. Lindsdale was one of few towns where Power Fists could come and go easily. Nobody would bat an eye to a half-orc or human sporting purple with a weapon thrown over their back. The uniform, however, was all someone would have to go off of recognizing a Power Fist. Out of it, it was an impossibility. Instinctively, Brigid gripped Char by the neck and pressed the hip-plapping flirt up to the wall. "How do you know that?"

"H-Hey, lay off him!" Mars came to his defense. "He's just nosy, that's all!"

Char cut right back in, smiling from ear to ear in a decidedly feline fashion. "Brigid Linebeck? Come on, I've at least heard what you've done for the place." Somehow, he didn't lose his cool while being grabbed by the throat. His tail was even wagging, the metal ring making a pleasant humming sound as it shook. "Beating up monsters and thugs's what inspired me and my own group of do-gooders to form a guild in town! Surely you've heard of us, the Kitty Comets?"

She ignored his irrelevant question. "Alright then. What've you got for me?"

"Enough clothes to make you seem like the true merc you wanna be~ I can even throw in a hair cut!"

Down went the kitty from the mercenary's grasp, who barely reacted to having unrestricted airflow back. She put her hands on her hips, then glared down at him. "...Show me what you've got."

"You'll have to follow me back to my shop." Char insisted with a smirk. "I've still got plenty of stock in your colors. I'm sure I can sew up something that will make sure... well, you're already very pretty, but I know I can make your complexion sing." The felinis' eyes narrowed in delight as Brigid scratched her cheek, perhaps hiding a blush from view of the boys. "Nothing in green though, that lady from a while ago swooped up everything cute." It was then he turned over to Mars, left hand folded under his right elbow, right hand pointed to his cheek. "Y'know, she kinda looked like you. Scratchy cheeks, fair complexion, I think you two share the same natural blonde."

That set the rogue off. He blinked from shock, then swished over to invade Char's personal space. His gloved hands gripped into the kitty's shoulders. "Wait, what?!"

Brigid blinked. "Is she the woman you're after?"

"She's gotta be!" insisted Mars, "Tell me everything about her, now!"

"Goodness Mars, what a grip!" Char snickered. "Fine, fine~ But you gotta make me one promise."

"Anything!" Mars gripped Char's shoulders tighter.

"One date, one day of my choice~"

"...w, with Brigid, right?"