

Expanding Horizons: Enchanted

Chapter 51

They stared at one another. Minerva felt her body tense with anticipation. Her horns itched as if trying to sense the wind. All the while, Marci's arms glowed white-hot with encircling flames.

There was no warning when Marci lunged. Grinning ear to ear, she sprang forward and closed the distance between her and Minerva in an inhuman amount of time. Steam hissed from her joints and pores to propel her across the ground. Minerva had time to only shift her expression when the blazing comet assaulted her.

THUD!

"A-Ack!!"

She was slammed into a tree several meters away. Air danced around her dangling feet as Marci held her against the trunk by her neck. Scales hissed under her boiling fingers. Even with their protection, Minerva could feel the pyromancer's flames burning.

"Come now~ *Is that all you've got?!*" Marci laughed and tightened her hand. Minerva squeaked as her air supply was cut off. Their fronts pressed together when Marci leaned in and hissed, "*Such big talk, for so little--*"

Oceans of muscle flexed in Minerva's draconic lower half. Arching her back, she coiled her tail and legs until her soles faced her prey's abdomen.

They struck with the force of a cannonball. Any words left in Marci's throat came out in a wet gasp. Her hand released in favor of protecting her midsection as she slid back several feet and doubled over. A trail of spit stretched from her lips as her diaphragm heaved in pain. Scratches ran down her stomach where Minerva's clawed feet had left their mark.

"You... Little..." She spat. *"I'll--"*

Her eyes widened. No sooner had Minerva's feet touched the ground than they were launching her forward. A blur of red shot across the forest floor with claws outstretched and eyes glowing red.

She swiped at the enemy. Claws cut through empty air. Marci dodged backward with enhanced speed of her own.

"COWARD!" Minerva roared.

A chase began. Air shimmered in their wake as the duo collided and dodged across the clearing. Nearly too fast to keep up with, the forest of fairies watched as scorch marks and gouges appeared on tree trunks to mark where they'd been.

"Cowards live!" Marci teased. *"It's the brave who die."*

WHOOSH!

Marci kicked in a wide arc. A mass of flaming flesh caught Minerva in her side and sent her hurling into a tree. She slammed against it, but latched onto the bark with flexing claws. Her tail thumped against the wood as she watched Marci's movements below.

“Aww, don’t be like that!” The madam chided from below. “Do I have to come up there myself, little dragon?”

Minerva huffed and watched smoke plume from her nostrils. The last strike still ached against her ribs where Marci’s knee had rammed into her. Even with her enhanced transformation, the brothel owner was a force to be reckoned with. She racked her mind for any quick spells that might help, but none came to mind.

A smirk crossed Marci’s face. She stepped toward Eris’s motionless body. “Or... Shall I check on our red-headed patient?”

“YOU’RE NOT TOUCHING HER AGAIN!”

Rage blossomed within Minerva’s gut. It boiled into an overwhelming heat. Pent-up like a spring, she burst from the tree trunk toward Marci with a force that shook the forest. The woman prepared herself and blocked her vitals, hunching down to make herself smaller and ready a counterattack.

No strike came. Minerva landed and danced behind her in a flash. Two scaled hands wrapped themselves around Marci’s hair and gathered it into a bundle. She roared and fell from one foot onto the other, letting her momentum carry her and Marci’s weight into a spin.

“AaaAAHHHH!!”

Wrathful pain erupted into a scream when Marci’s feet left the ground. She whipped through the air in a blur of white and red as Minerva spun on her heels, before the sorceress released her grip and the tension vanished from Marci’s scalp. Air whistled over her body when she flew like a rock from a slingshot. Thunder clapped when her flight ceased with a cracking thud against a tree across the clearing and collapsed at its base.

Marci groaned from where she’d landed. Ribs popped back into place along her spine and her joints throbbed. Twice the wind had been knocked out of her, and this time her vision was blurry.

Waiting back at the launch sight, Minerva let tufts of brown hair fall from her fingers. A thirst for vengeance roiled within her core. She inhaled, feeling her belly swell with rage. Her body felt ready to explode with sudden pressure.

Draconic instinct told her to open her mouth.

FWOOOOOSH!!

Dancing flames of bright reds and yellows poured from her throat. Marci’s eyes contracted at the sudden brightness before the inferno fell upon her. Branches shivered from a rising plume of heated air billowing around the base of the tree.

Minerva’s feet slid back in the dirt. The eruption of fire from her mouth was unwieldy and as powerful as it was engulfing. She could see nothing beyond the ocean of flame leaping from her belly.

It started to waver. She couldn’t maintain it for long. Like a singer holding a note to their last bit of breath, Minerva’s flames weakened and shrank until her mouth went dark. She fell to her knees amid gasps for air. She hugged her belly where heat still rumbled. Her abdomen wasn’t

covered in the red scales spreading across the rest of her body, but it didn't feel like skin. It was tougher and capable of handling the small explosion she'd just created within herself.

Sweating from her own attack, she looked at the base of the tree. Charred carbon left the area black. Embers pulsed through the tree trunk where it remained alight. In the center of the destruction was a hunched figure. Stumbling with a limp, she rose to her feet. Redness flushed her skin with some patches red as an apple. A trickle of blood ran down the side of her head. Firebrand tattoos pulsed over her body with unwavering desire to fight.

Ash tumbled off Marci's shoulders as she struggled to stand up straight. One hand held her bicep and she winced. A dull laugh cracked through her chest between coughs. "I can't remember... the last time I got burned..." Madness swirled in her eyes and venom dripped on her words. "I'd forgotten how much it hurts. *You'll pay for that.*"

Marci flicked a finger.

POW!!

"*Ngh!*" A punch hot as magma struck Minerva's face and sent her stumbling. She looked up to see Marci grinning but found no clue as to the source of the attack. Spitting blood from a split lip, she growled, "What did you--*NGH!!*"

POW!

Another came and struck from behind. The sorceress fell on her face as pain burst on her ribs.

"Come on, dragon! *Fight me,*" Marci taunted. She flicked three more times.

POW POW POW!!

Each one landed a body-rattling explosion against Minerva as she struggled to stand. The force rolled her across the ground like a rag doll. After the last, she darted quickly to the side and used her momentum to land on all fours.

"Not fast enough~"

POW!

Marci flicked and another attack landed between Minerva's shoulder blades. They seared even with her scales and she winced at the heat creeping into her body. Through one eye, she saw movement above her head.

There was a collection of floating balls of fire, each roughly the size of her fist. They floated like spirits. Marci flicked. In the blink of an eye, one of them shot toward Minerva like a meteor. There was no hope to dodge at such close range and she fell back to the ground with dirt in her teeth.

"*Nnnghhh!!*" she roared from the dust.

Marci cackled and continued her assault. "What's the matter? Can't handle a few will-o'-wisps?"

POW!

POW POW!

They came one after another now. Each wisp landed like a hammer to engulf Minerva in smoke and cinder. It was enough to disorient her. Desperation beat out fear and pain. Clawing at the ground, she lunged forward into a run if only to get to her feet. The wisps followed with some striking around her feet to send chunks of debris and blind her with smoke. Minerva knew she needed only a moment's chance.

With a split second of distance gained, she turned on her heels. Sparks ignited in her belly. Heat and pressure expanded within her. She felt her stomach bloat with fire and stretch like a balloon before her throat warmed and glowed red. When heat tickled her tongue, she opened her mouth to blow away the balls of fire with her own inferno.

"Ah ah ah~ Not so fast." Terror leaped when Marci's voice whispered in Minerva's ear. She'd forgotten to watch the pyromancer. Appearing behind her, Marci's arms lashed out fast as snakes, one binding Minerva's arms behind her back while a hand clamped itself over her mouth. *"Let's put a lid on all that fire and see what happens, shall we?"*

Rrrmmmbbbllll

Minerva's eyes widened in fear. Her body couldn't stop the attack once it'd begun. Fire raged in her belly with nowhere to go. Tension spread across her abdomen. It began doming outward at the expanding heat.

Strrrrtch!!!

Panicking wheezes escaped her nose. She squirmed, watching her belly expand inches by the second. Dragon fire burned within her looking for an escape but Marci's hand held firm even as her body started to shake. Within moments, her abdomen had stretched to resemble a woman overdue with child. It jutted forth with an airy weightlessness and rumbled like thunder.

"Oh my~ All that fire!" Marci mused in her ear, watching the sorceress's belly expand ever larger. *"Tell me, do dragons have a limit?"*

RRMMMBBBLLL!

Minerva winced. Skin pulled around her back. The expanding globe forced her spine into an arch to accommodate its boulder-like girth. It pushed her breasts upward with a shelf of taut, skin-stretching heat as if she'd placed them on a bed of coals. Beneath her mounds, her stomach hissed like an angry balloon rapidly filling from a volcanic vent. Milk boiled and frothed within her breasts.

"Nnnngh!!" Smoke poured from her nose. Minerva strained, eyes watering at the bomb-like pressure of her pent-up attack. Fire roared within her belly to push it impossibly large. Her skin drew rock-hard, thrumming like a drum, and consumed much of her view. Slowly her legs spread apart at the incredible sphere of heat. Her belly button trembled and tension creaked. Pressure ached for release. Minerva's tail tensed and writhed in desperation.

"You're turning a little red there..." Marci whispered. *"Aaaaall that fire built up... That explosion has to come out eventually~"*

Minerva knew she was at her limit. Straining with the last bit of stretch left in her immobilizing gut, she lashed her tail behind her. It found its target and coiled around Marci's

neck. Muscles flexed in one smooth motion to tear the pyromancer from the ground. It whipped overhead, throwing her high into the air. The moment her hand left Minerva's mouth was like a volcano blowing its top.

FWWOOOOSH!!!!

Fire exploded and drowned Minerva's scream. Rushing from her overfilled stomach, it erupted from her mouth into a violent plume of superheated purples and blues. The explosion shot upward to engulf not only Marci, but to pierce the tree canopy as well. Flames cut through to the top of Glomia into the sky in a geyser of destruction that lasted over ten deafening seconds and cut the night like a fiery blade visible for miles.

Her firebreath sputtered and died. Minerva coughed, falling to her knees to hug her aching stomach. The skin across it felt abused and looser than before. More than anything, it was a relief just to have the pressure expended. Ash coated her mouth as she rasped for breath.

Marci fell to the ground leaving a trail of smoke. Dirt crashed around her and for a moment was still. Minerva was hopeful, but not surprised when the woman slowly staggered to her feet. Her body glowed like a beacon from her small impact crater. Across her figure, firebrand markings pulsed in anger.

It was Minerva's turn to snicker. "Sorry, did I get your eyebrows that time?"

Fury left the madam trembling. "So you want to challenge a pyromancer to firebreathing..." Her markings pulsed faster and her belly glowed. "*Fine.*" She leaned back, inhaling to fill her stomach until it rounded forth and assumed a dull orange hue as if she'd eaten a pile of coals.

"*Minerva!*" Tria screamed.

The forest seemed to darken when Marci released her breath. Minerva only had time to bring her arms in front of her before light glinted from Marci's throat.

It beat against her body like a raging river of molten sandpaper. Minerva's vision was blinded by a blend of reds, oranges, and whites. Her feet skidded back in the dirt several meters despite her leaning into the attack to brace herself. Even with her scales, her arms sang in pain as they shielded her face.

She was going to lose. Even if she had a dragon's power on her side, Marci had more practice with fire. Hers was hotter and more refined. Minerva's feet slid back again. She dug her claws into the ground, but they would only help so much. Fire whipped through her hair like angry hands trying to tear her apart.

Flashes of the forest came through the flames: Tria watching weakly from Karnor's arms, the fairies cowering in the trees, the Sacred watching in sorrow as their forest burned, and Eris, still motionless. Minerva knew the fight couldn't go on. She couldn't last much longer, nor could the forest take more destruction.

She pushed forward into the flames. Pain sparked at her shoulder blades. Her body knew what it was doing even if she didn't. Draconic blood pulsed through her veins and made her heart

race. The aching on her back grew stronger. Grinding her teeth, she hunched forward and flexed her back.

FWOOOSH!

A gust of air billowed around her. She saw flashes of crimson webbing arc from her left and right. In a single powerful beat of wings, she dispelled Marci's breath. The madam stood in shock at the winged appearance of her opponent that had dispelled her fire.

It would be her last opportunity. Minerva sprang ahead, her feet leaving the ground after several wingbeats from her back. A wingspan of eight feet thrummed to propel her like a ballista.

She tackled Marci, wrapping her arms around the madam's torso and hugging her tight, before continuing her flight upward.

"*Let go! LET GO!*" Marci demanded, beating and tearing upon Minerva's back with fiery blows.

The sorceress endured the pain, only flapping her wings as hard as they allowed. Together they climbed higher. Tree branches soared by in blurs of charred green as she rocketed through the hole she'd burned only moments ago. The air became cooler. A breeze met them. The glow of the fireflies faded and gave way to a midnight moonlit sky. Far below, the world grew silent. Darkness and clouds enveloped them. The air grew frigid to the point of frost forming on Minerva's wing tips.

Still Marci raged. "*I WILL BURN YOU ALL ALIVE IF YOU--*"

Her wings paused. They hovered for a moment before Minerva turned her and Marci downward. Air rushed from the opposite direction now. Wingbeats worked with gravity this time. Speed climbed as they fell until even Marci's furious shrieks were eaten by the wind whistling in Minerva's ears. The madam left a trail of fire in their wake in any attempt to stop the attack. The night sky retreated. The world returned. Lush greens flew by. Golden firefly light rushed around them. By the time the ground was upon the fighters, the air had risen to a deafening pitch.

Minerva released at the last second. Her arms opened with her wings to drop her cargo and slow her own descent. Marci crashed with meteoric force as Minerva soared tangentially to the ground before the speed caught up to her and she crashed, tumbling over the forest floor and coming to rest in a heap at the outskirts of the clearing.

Fire's crackle was the only sound to fill the forest. Marci's crater was silent and motionless. Foliage ignited around where Minerva lay. Wings limp and body aching, she was the first to move, and crawled onto her hands and knees. Slowly she made her way to where Eris waited. As she did so, her dragon features faded away. Scales blended back into skin. Her wings shrank and retreated into her back. Claws dwindled to leave bare hands and feet clawing at the dirt until only her horns and tail remained.

She came upon Eris in choking gasps.

"Eris-- E-Eris--"

The scholar wouldn't respond. A black flame still flickered from the center of her chest where her skin was cracked and cursed. Paleness drained all color from her skin. Gently, Minerva took her by the shoulders and held a cheek.

"Eris, say something!"

Minerva hardly had the strength to sit upright, much less hold her lover in her arms. Tears pelted Eris's face when she was pulled close.

Tria tried to crawl over. Dread sagged her expression and Karnor held her back.

"Minerva? Is she...?"

"You...have to wake up!" Minerva's face contorted. She buried her head in Eris's chest and hugged her tighter. *"Please! You-- I-I love you-- You can't leave me now-- Not after we--"* Her back started to buck up and down. *"Not after we finally--"*

Sorrow overtook her. Minerva started to weep. Her hand grasped Eris's, searching for any sign of hope.

It twitched.

"Ngh..."

Minerva looked up. Blurry, tear-filled eyes looked on in prayer. *"Eris?!"*

The scholar's eyelids moved, weak as a newborn's. *"You're--"*

"ERIS!"

Minerva embraced her. Renewed sobbing took over.

"Ngh-- You're--" Eris pushed. *"You're...too hot..."*

She pulled away. Her body still burned like a furnace and Eris was covered in sweat. *"I'm just-- I thought you were-- I thought I'd lost you! Marci had--"*

Rock and dirt clattered from across the clearing. Minerva's heart dropped to her stomach when Marci's crater stirred. Looking back, she felt despair crash over her as a figure stumbled from the smoke.

She didn't have energy left to fight.

"Goddess, please, no..."

A glowing snarl pierced the dust. Holding a broken arm, Marci came forth with white-hot firebrands searing over her skin.

"You... You hellish, good-for-nothing, WRETCH OF AN ABOMINATION!" A hand extended and a black fireball ignited to evaporate any moisture in the air around it. *"I'm going to personally see to it that you burn to a pile of ash, before I finish what I started on your friend. DO YOU HEAR ME?!"* The fireball grew larger. *"I won't stop until you're both CINDERS! I'll never stop! You think your fire burns hotter than MINE?!"* The fireball bloomed into a crackling sphere of roiling evil. *"I'LL SHOW YOU FIRE SO HOT, THAT IT WILL BURN YOU TO YOUR--"*

Fssshhhhhh--

The fireball fizzled. A deluge of clear, viscous fluid poured over Marci in a thick glob. Mortified, she looked up to see one of the Sacred looming over her. A pair of cupped hands had released a load of gathered saliva. The trio smiled, happy with themselves.

“Finally, we gathered enough.”

“Your distraction was most welcome, Dragon Girl.”

“Now the forest can stop burning.”

Marci fumed. Anger turned into a maniacal laugh. “You think some *drool* can cool me off?! *I’m going to burn this forest to the ground, with you three bloated, overly pregnant freaks in the middle of it!*” She whipped her hand forth again. Minerva pulled Eris close in preparation. “I’LL--”

Hsssssss

No fire came forth. Marci looked at her hand in frustration and tried again.

Hssssssssss

“What--”

Her eyes drifted to her abdomen. Slowly, her figure was changing shape. Softness plumped across her belly and breasts to make them round and airy. One of her hands pressed into her waistline as she assumed a heavily bloated appearance. Her thighs rubbed together with hips flaring to the sides.

Hssssssssss!

It became more pronounced. Horror and anger mixed as she saw her body round forth. “Hey! *W-What--*” She turned on the Sacred and shoved a hand toward them in an attempted attack. No flames emerged.

HSSSSSSSS!!

The rush of hot air grew louder. Marci stumbled in confusion and hugged her chest as her breasts seemed to balloon in her grasp and take on minds of their own. They rose atop a protruding abdomen large enough to make a woman pregnant with twins blush. Girth forced her thighs apart and her feet skidded in the dirt. Minerva watched in stunned awe as the woman seemed to inflate with bout after bout of air.

HSSSSSSSS!!!

The sounds grew louder as Marci tried to retaliate with fire. Cleavage pushed into her face. Legs spread-eagled, her intimate folds were put on display as they puffed and pushed downward between her thighs. Roundness swelled around her sides and to her back. Tria gasped as the woman’s abdomen began taking on a rounded appearance.

“She’s...” Tria shivered. “*She’s blowing up... Just like I did...*”

HSSSSSSSS!!

“STOP! Make it--” Marci raged and sank her hands into her ballooning figure as if to push it back to normal. “MAKE IT STOP!! I’M--”

STRRRRTCH!!

“A-AAHH!!”

Tension pulled around her body. Slowly, her arms and legs were pulled into her spherical abdomen. Her breasts, while enormous, began flattening out as their bases stretched wider atop her belly. Limbs were swallowed up to her elbows and knees as they too began to puff. Every inch of Marci's skin softened before assuming an inflated appearance. Even her hands flared as her fingers thickened like sausages.

HSSSSSSSS!!!!

"Mmmphh!! MMMMPHHHH!!!"

Cleavage swallowed her face. Sunken divots appeared around her hands and feet as they were pulled into her rounding form. Eyes wide, she watched her belly rise around her head.

Finally, her feet left the ground.

Minerva watched in horror. "I-Is she--"

Tria and Karnor stared in wide-eyed amazement. "She's going to--"

HHSSSSSSSSSS!!!

"MMMPPHHHH!!!!!"

Rounding full and plump, Marci bounced on the ground several times before overcoming gravity and truly starting to rise. Flailing hands slapped against her sides to produce hollow echoes. Once private folds were now plumped and engorged to fantastical proportions between her sunken feet. Nipples stretched across her dome-shaped breasts like flattened dinner plates.

Inches became feet, then meters. Marci rose faster the larger she filled. Ever tighter, her form boasted a near-perfect sphere broken only by her breasts and faint outline of her inflated limbs. Pyromancer firebrands pulsed around her like decorations on a festival lantern.

Minerva swallowed, raising her head to watch Marci rise higher. "What... What did you do to her...?"

The Sacred grinned. "So much hate... So much heat."

"We've sealed her magic within body."

"Her fire will only fill her now."

Anger bellowed from above. Marci was entering the canopy and rising rapidly. Minerva winced in anticipation as she bounced against broken branches, but her skin held firm. Even at over ten feet wide, her ballooned body became difficult to pick out amongst the night sky as she drifted out of the forest through the hole Minerva's breath had left. Soon, her muffled cries vanished. The clearing waited for any sudden, final sound of escaping pressure and heard none.

Minerva's horrified eyes fell to the Sacred at the fate they'd just dealt. The enormous triplets only watched in serenity as the threat to their home was fully swallowed into the darkness.

To be continued