

Chapter 6





Grant tilted his head back, lifted the bottle to his lips and let the sweet wine pour down his throat. It tasted fruity, with a peppery kick, and to his surprise and delight the wine turned out to be sparkling, the bubbles tingling his tongue. Wiping his mouth with the back of his arm, he started to say wow, this is great stuff, but he stopped himself. Grant was a sexist ass with a stunted sense of manhood mostly gleaned from his abusive stepfathers and a handful of Scorsese films portraying small-time hoods.

Wine, in his conception of things, belonged firmly to the world of females. The alcohol content was too low and the taste not nearly horrible enough for a real man. Of course, certain cheese eating wimps with sparkly and very stealable watches drank the swill, but they were more girl than man anyway. Consequently, Grant found himself once more struggling with his sense of self.

First, a real man like him could never admit to liking wine. That much was obvious. More problematic than admitting he liked wine was the fact that he now liked wine. The shocking and embarrassing realization made him once more hyperconscious of the feeling of his short skirt, the cool air swirling around his bare legs, the heft and weight of his breasts. I didn't choose this body, he thought, but I am still in control of my mind. I will not let them make me think like some stupid chick. He raised the bottle over his head, thinking to hurl it to the ground and smash it,

but he paused. The sweet, magical taste of that wine lingered on his tongue, and the fumes tingled his nose. It was so good.

He looked at Hal and Paul, both of whom were swilling their wine. "This shit rocks," Hal said.

"Fuck, yeah." Paul looked at the label on his bottle. "Werewolf Wine!" He laughed. "It says those wolf assholes made this from some kind of lunar grape."

Hal looked at his bottle. "Mine, too." He chuckled and chugged. "I bet orc wine sucks."

Grant looked at his bottle. It read Milady Merlot and indicated it was elvish and made from a grape known as the delicata. Fuck, he thought. This was the most pussy ass wine in all the world. It was, however, too good to waste. Liking wolf wine was cool, thought, so he grunted— it sounded more like a mouse squeaking. "I always thought wine was for pussies, but this wolf shit rules."

"To dumbass wolf freaks!" Paul shouted. The others cheered and they all took a drink.

"Guys, guys," Eric said, waving his hands. "Keep it down. We don't want to draw any attention from wandering monsters."

"Nag... nag... nag..." Paul said. "You remind me of my 2nd ex-wife."

"You're the worst," Grant called out, glad for a chance to side with the men— the other men.

Eric gave up and turned, taking up a position where he could stand watch with a view toward the spider and wolf sides of the dungeon. He glanced at the timer, then checked the map. Maybe there was a way they could make it, assuming the hallways between where they were and where they were going weren't too crowded with monsters. "I'll just keep watch while you all get drunk," he announced.

"Thanks, Mom," Grant said and the guys laughed.

It annoyed Eric that Divinity of all people was making fun of him. She was a dude trapped as a girl with huge knockers. How could she think she was above him?

Why do I always have to be the serious one? He asked himself.

Both Paul and Hal, while enjoying their own growing buzzes, were also keeping on eye on the little female chugging away. These were not nice men, and the sight of a woman getting drunk filled both of them with dark and sticky thoughts.

Merlena, meanwhile, was hopping up and down at Grant's side. "Me, too. Me, too," she said. "I want some."

"How old are you?" Grant asked.

"I'm..." Marlana paused, her brow crinkling. "I can't remember."

Back in the Lab

Madison checked. "We never established her age," she said. "Let's make a note to give any major NPC's back stories and basic details beyond quest facts."

"I could have the AI whip something up right now?"

"Nah. Let's see how it plays out for now."

Dungeon

Grant shrugged and handed her the bottle. "Just a sip."

Madison groaned.

"And he gives a little girl alcohol," Kim said with disgust.

"Surprised?" Madison asked.

"No."

Back in the dungeon

Marlena's eyes sparkled as she brought the bottle to her maw. She sniffed and giggled. "It tickles."

Paul and Hal snickered. They both remembered their first sips as children. "I thought my throat was on fire," Eric said. Paul nodded. "I spit it out."

"That's what Grant said."

Marlena brought the bottle to her lips and sipped. Her eyes went wide. She looked at the ceiling and howled, "arooooooo..." then brought the bottle back to her mouth and guzzled.

"Hey. hey," Grant said, trying to grab the bottle back.

"Get your own," Marleana growled, pulling the bottle away and running a few steps down the hall. Hal, Paul and Grant laughed.

Eric shook his head in disgust. She'll probably end up being an alcoholic, he thought, but he kept his mouth shut. He didn't want to be called a nag again.

Hal pulled another bottle of wine from his inventory and handed it to Grant. "I stole a bunch of these, fair maiden."

Grant took the bottle and drank greedily. Some of the wine dribbled from the corners of his mouth and drooled down onto his breasts. He dabbed at the ruby liquid with a finger and then slipped the finger between his plump lips, sucking.

When he looked up, he saw the lust in Hal's eyes. Grant had his finger in his mouth still, and he felt the usual sense of revulsion at these pervy guys, but then the wine kicked in and he started laughing. "Bro," he said. "I'm giving you a boner."

Now it was Hal's turn to be embarrassed. "What? No."

"Oh, wow. Look at your face." Grant wiped his fingers across his breast again, smearing the wine across his pale flesh. Seeing how uncomfortable he was able to make Hal look amused him in ways he never expected. "You want to lick it off?"

Hal recovered. "I'm not-- You're so full of it."

Paul stepped forward, put a hand on Hal's shoulder and pulled him back. "Is that an open offer?" He said, his own head swimming with booze. He was not even remotely thinking about Grant as a man anymore. He was just imagining how good it would feel to run his tongue across those sweet, elf girl breasts.

Grant burst out laughing. He took another guzzle. The world had begun to tilt. He poured a little more wine over his breasts, acting on impulse. "You have to give me 50 gold pieces."

"Done." Paul leaned down.

"I had first dibs," Hal said, ducking under Paul's arm and getting in front of the other man.

"I have bigger muscles." Paul lifted Hal off his feet and physically moved him out of the way.

Grant giggled and drank. The guys are fighting over him. He couldn't believe it, but he liked it. He'd been feeling so helpless, it was good to have this sudden sense of... power.

Hal had gotten right up in Paul's face. Well, it was actually to his chest because Paul was so much taller, but they were fronting like any teen boys trying to impress a girl. "Step back, little guy," Paul said.

"You can't even kill a mouse without puking," Hal said. They each took a swig from their bottles.

Paul shoved Hal, who stumbled back. Hal's short swords flashed into his hands. "Don't push me, Pukey Brewster."

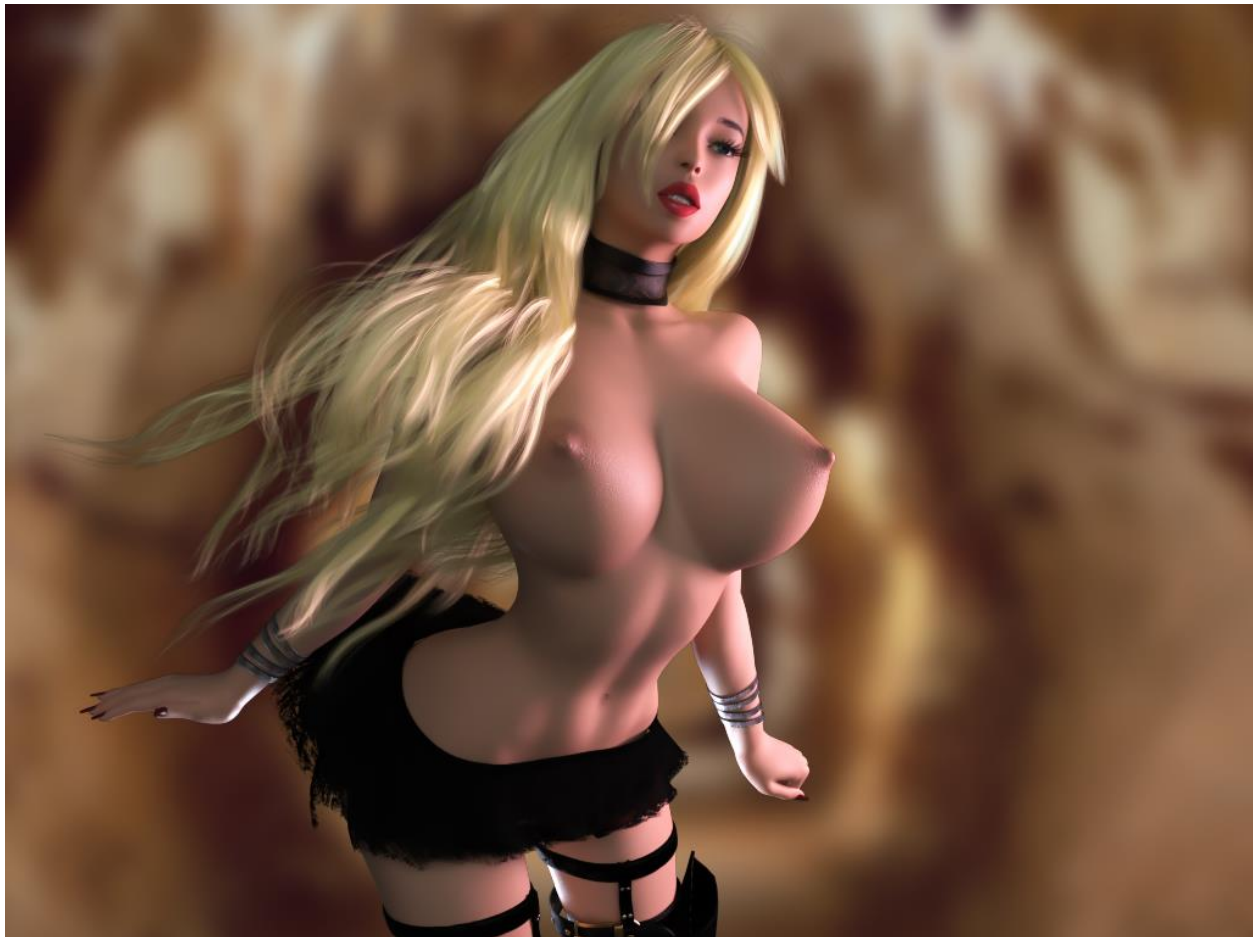
"You wanna dance, bro?" Paul shouted, his hammer appearing in his hands. The men began to circle each other.

"Hey... hey.. Guys..." Eric called.

Grant fanned himself. "I'm so hot all of a sudden."

"I helps with that," a boozy Marlena said. "I think I wines too much dranks." She started to undo the laces of Grant's corset.

Grant took another swig of wine. The corset was so uncomfortable. He liked the idea of getting out of it. The thought of the looks he would get from stupid Hal and Paul was also quite amusing to him, and even as he thought of all that the memory of his kiss with the werewolf flickered through his mind and he felt his skin tingle.



“Guys, don’t...” Eric’s voice had trailed off as he noticed Marlena undoing the laces on Grant’s corset. Already the corset was separating, revealing more of the little elf girl’s glowing skin. Eric also found himself replaying that steamy kiss between Grant and the wolf.

Marlena peeled the corset off Grant and tossed it aside. Grant felt his ribs expand and took his first full breath since the day he’d woken up as a woman, wearing that cursed thing. Grant put his hands on the small of his back and sighed. It was the first time his breasts had been completely free, and the swell and weight of them swaying from his chest fascinated him. Bored with the guys’ macho posturing and wanting to be the center of attention, he called out, “it feels so good to go topless.”

Hal and Paul turned their heads and they looked upon the topless girl. Their mouths dropped open. They froze.

Grant, remembering moves Cherise used to make, shook his little round shoulders side to side and closed his eyes, sighing softly. His golden hair had fallen across his face. He left it there. He knew how sexy it looked. “I’m so drunk,” he said, letting his voice get breathy and sexy. Where once finding himself in Cherise’ place had humiliated him, for now, boggled with wine, he found it funny to cosplay his favorite stripper.

“Hoochie Mama,” Hal said.

Paul didn’t know if he’d ever seen a hotter woman. “Drink up,” he said, his voice hoarse. “Drunk is a good look for you.”

Marlena was dancing and barking. Drinking. She and Grant started dancing together.

Grant burst out laughing, thinking I can’t even believe what I’m doing right now and yet at the same time loving it, loving the looks on the stupid guys’ faces. He wondered if he could get them to do stuff for him now, dumb stuff like girls would try to get him to do when he was a teenager.

In the Lab

“I told you,” Kim said, loving the scene. “Inside every guy is a little slutty girl wanting to go clubbing.” She loved seeing Grant like this, and was juking him, filling him with total pleasure as he danced and shook his boobs for the boys. “How much more wine, I wonder, before he slips out of his panties?” Just the fact a big macho guy like Grant was wearing panties made Kim feel so many feels. He looked good in them, too.

“You’re probably going to be disappointed, Kinky Kim.” Madison pointed to the second screen that showed the approach to the party’s location from the spider side. “We have a party crasher.”

Back to the Dungeon

Eric couldn't take his eyes off the dancing girl. He wanted her more than he'd ever wanted any woman in his life. I need to learn that Charm Person spell, he told himself, without any sense of how wrong it would be. He wanted what he wanted.

Ollie the Dungeon Ooze also wanted what he wanted. Just a short time ago, before the Rehabbers had come running into the caves, he'd been down a little deeper, nibbling on some lichens, feeling depressed lonely. "Is there really all there is?" He'd thought. "All I do is eat, rest, look for food and eat some more." Sure, once and a while he would split into two which was kind of cool, but that new self never wanted to hang out and would just slime off to go about its own pointless existence.

Ollie wasn't satisfied with surviving. He wanted to be famous and often imagined himself performing stand up comedy in a mystical realm called "Vegas."

"What's twice as dumb as a gelatinous cube?" Pause for a few beats. "Gelatinous twins."

The audience would roar. He would know what it felt like to be loved.

He didn't have any idea where these ideas came from. Trying to make a friend, he'd once asked another ooze what dreams it had and the slime had called him a dork and slimed off.

Maybe just being a glorified dungeon janitor wouldn't have been so bad, but the food sucked.

The wolf people never came in here, and he'd made a truce with the spiders that he would never eat them, so it had just been lichens and mold and the occasional rat or just the turds of different creatures who knew to avoid slimes.

He had these foodie fantasies, though. Fantasies of tasty creatures from someplace called "the surface" with a blue ceiling that seemed like it was so high you could never reach it. These creatures were called weird names like humans and elves and dwarves, and in his dreams, they always tasted like the best thing you could ever eat, and they made little noises and wiggled. He couldn't understand where these wonderful dreams came from, but when he heard the noises of the party entering the caves and the talking and laughing, he began to slime his way upward, moving toward what thanks to his dreams he recognized as tasty.

He snuck up on Eric, oozing across the floor behind him. Ollie the Slime's senses pinged. The creature smelled so good—like salt and butter. There were four more of the creatures. Surely, they wouldn't miss one. Less creatures meant more of whatever they ate for food would be left over for the rest. Ollie would grab the closest one and drag him down into the dungeon, where he could eat him in peace, maybe spread it out for a couple days.

Grant had gone all in on his Cherise cosplay, imitating dances he'd seen her do. The guys were clapping now, drinking, cheering. Hal tossed a coin at Grant's feet, and then Hal and Eric followed, the coins glinting in the light, pinging as they hit the stone floor. Once more Grant laughed at the absurdity of his situation and he laughed. "I' really am a bimbo now." He lifted his skirt and hooked his thumbs under the strings of his panties and smiled. "Should I?" He asked the guys.



"Yes!" They roared.

"Show me the money."

Eric was grabbing some more coins from his inventory when he felt something wet and slimy slap across his throat and another slink across his waist. He struggled and shouted "fuck" as he felt himself being dragged backwards.

Drunk, the group reacted slowly, looking toward Eric, struggling to process the sight of what looked like a blob of Jell-O dragging him backwards. Eric's hands flickered as he summoned his spells.

Grant suddenly felt self-conscious and crossed his arms over his soft breasts. “What the hell is that?”



Hal had the awareness to click on the creature:

Ollie the Ooze

LVL 5 Ooze (and aspiring comedian)

An Ooze attacks living creatures by smothering them. He can also form “fists” and pummel enemies. Once his prey is incapacitated, he secretes acid and eats their bodies as well as all clothes and armor.

Non-Magical Weapons do only ½ damage.

Melee attacks have a 10% chance of causing the ooze to split.



“I thought you were keeping watch,” Paul said as he summoned his hammer. “Good job.”

“This is not the time,” Eric yelled back. He whispered the magic word and a magic missile slammed into the slime. Smoke rose from the wound.

“Dick!” Ollie shouted as the missile ripped into his body. He used his slime pod to cover Eric’s mouth and nose.

Eric, for the first time, became aware he needed to be able to speak to cast spells. He was also reminded of something he’d long known: he needed to be able to breathe to live.

Paul charged forward and brought his hammer crashing down on the slime. It bounced off the green flesh but left a dent in the creature.

Hal slashed at it with one of his blades and cut a chunk out, but the sliced off portion immediately slithered and reconnected.

Ollie called out to Paul. "What did the slime fist say to the face?"

"Hunh?"

"SLAP!" Ollie sent one of his blob fists slamming into Paul's face and sent the big man falling backward landing on his ass. It had been a very hard blow. Woozy, Paul pulled the slimes that had clung to his face off and blinked, seeing stars.

"Oh, hell." Seeing Paul knocked down like that, Hal had no doubt a single punch from the slime would send him to sleepy time or worse, so he began to dodge the blows, finding himself on defense, unable to strike back.

Eric, for his part, had gone into survival mode as he grew ever more desperate for air. He kept trying to cast magic missile, but his fingers only sparked. He couldn't cast a spell without speaking, but he had no other ideas and kept trying anyway, just hoping that somehow it would work..

Grant watched it all, his arms wrapped across his chest, his heart racing. He had no offensive skills, but seeing Eric's health bar fading, he decided he had to try and do something to at least keep the wizard alive. He rushed up and lay hands on Eric, whose health bar was now down to half and had turned red. He cast his spell. The bar rose, but not all the way and then went right back to draining.

Hal dodged and dodged. Paul got to his feet, wobbling. His own health had been knocked down to half by the blow of the ooze, and it felt like his jaw was broken. He stumbled forward.

Eric was looking at Grant, eyes desperate as his hit points plunged. "I'm waiting for the spell to recharge," Grant said.

They both watched the health bar dropping, dropping. Eric's eyes began to close. His health bar was near zero when Grant could once again cast his spell, but Eric's health rose to less than half and stayed red. "Shit," Grant whispered. "I'm out of mana."

He met Eric's eyes. They both knew Eric would die before Grant regenerated enough mana to cast the spell again. "I'm sorry..." Grant said, his eyes filling with tears.

Eric closed his eyes. What would it feel like to die in VR? He wondered. Even though on some level he knew it wasn't a "real" death, everything felt real here and his mind felt the impending death like it was a permanent, real world termination.

Memories. He didn't see his whole life, but just the worst day of it. He saw his disappointed parents' faces when the judge had sentenced him to prison and he'd been led from the court

room in handcuffs. They'd been so ashamed they'd sold their house and moved to a new state. Regret consumed him. They'd deserved better.

Paul slammed his hammer into the slime. It swung its pod and smashed him once again. The blow sent him crashing to the floor, unconscious. Hal, gasping for breath, had paused to rest and now felt the slime grab him and lift him in the air. Grant turned to run but Ollie grabbed him as well.

Lab

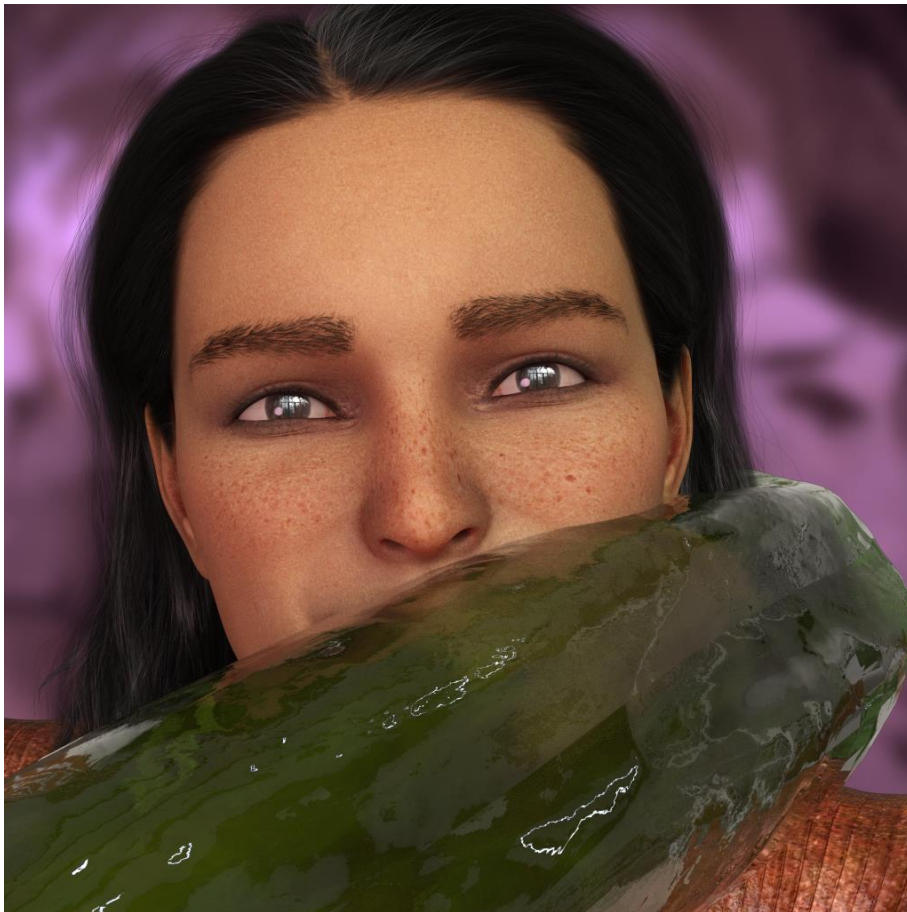
"Looks like they're all going to die," Madison said.

"Let's hope they learn their lesson," Kim said.

Dungeon

I wish I had some way to make it up to my parents, Eric thought, I wish I had something...

He opened his eyes and grinned. If he could have, he would have laughed.



Bonus

