Still Tumbl'd, Still TAZ

by InterNutter

Summary

A collection of fictions inspired by the prompts that all of you send in to me. #2: Electric Boogaloo.

Tags and ships subject to change without notice, added as necessary. Please check the tags regularly, but I am keeping all this PG.

Based on prompts from my Tumblr (internutter) where my Ask Box is always open. Even to Anons.
Anonymous said:
I love the baby birds AU!! mostly cause I'm a sucker for adorable and funny twin shenanigans. Could we see more of this AU?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The twins flourished in any environment that was away from the orphanage. The further they got from those chilly, urine-soaked and mould-infested walls, the healthier they got.

Which was part of the reason why Carey and Killian bid on the old, Elven farm in the first place. It
was a run-down old place but the Mountain Ygdrassi that was the main building was still alive and the estate grounds held some promise of being returned to beauty.

What they hadn’t expected was the wards that prevented most people from inspecting the interior, or doing anything related to renovations. But that was another story for another time.

The twins breezed through the wards as if they were nothing but early morning mist, and an investigation revealed that they were the legal inheritors of the house, mountain fastness, estate grounds and all. Which was another story for another time[1].

The good news was that Elven wards recognised that family wasn’t always genetically related, and that love bonds overwhelmed legal ones. Therefore, once the twins trusted their new, adopting parents, they too could pass through the wards without trouble.

Of course, the paperwork was so much slower than that. Demanding visits and inspections and reams upon reams of forms to fill, bureaucratic hurdles to leap, and red tape hoops to leap through.

The twins were almost seven, and spending less and less time in the orphanage. This would be their first complete year in the care of Carey and Killian Fangbattle.

The good news was: the twins were getting used to having people who cared for them and wished to keep them.

The bad news was exactly the same as the good news, because both Lulu and Koko could be up to anything whenever they were quiet.

Carey and Killian both got accustomed to the noises of children. Which screams meant “I’m legitimately hurt/in danger,” and which ones were screaming for the sake of screaming. Which levels of crashing cacophony were worth investigating and which ones were simple horsing around.

They were still learning about what a hazard Being Quiet was.

Killian had taken a few Stealth lessons from her lovely Dragonborn wife, and used them as she looked for their kids. They had been entirely too quiet for entirely too long, so it was way past time to check on them.

She found them in the Big Kitchen, one perched on the other’s shoulders, and the higher twin at just the right height to raid the cookie jar. Which was exactly what they had been doing before she found them.

She folded her arms, anticipating a rain of horseshit from her boys[2] in just a few seconds. “You two do know that those are for treats and not meals, right?”

They froze, Lulu with one cookie in hand, Koko halfway ready to bolt.

“We can explain,” said Koko, hurriedly.

Killian nodded and said, “I can wait.”

Lulu, a step ahead of his brother, started putting cookies back into the jar. “We didn’t want to bother you,” he said.

“We’re used to foraging for ourselves, y’know?” said Koko. “We’ve only been in the orphanage for like a year, so…”
“Also we don’t know your plans for the stuff in the pantry,” said Lulu. “Or the ice box[3].”

Wow. That was almost plausible horseshit. Killian was impressed. “You areallowed to ask if you have any ideas for cooking a nice meal. Your mom and I could even help.”

The last of the cookies returned, Lulu put the lid back on the jar. “We… we’re -uh- we just…”

Koko sighed. Slumped a little in defeat. “We wanted cookies, okay?”

They flinched in unison, anticipating any number of things that the asshole side of the family had done to them before they became runaways. Killian didn’t let her anger towards those unseen Elves show on her face or in the way she moved.

“I know,” she said. “Everyone wants cookies. The thing is, you two need more than just cookies to eat.” She hugged Lulu off of his brothers shoulders. “It’s okay to ask for stuff, okay? We’re here to make sure you grow up healthy and happy. In that order.” She scooped up Koko into her other arm. “Okay?”

Koko was the more likely to be depressed about things. He was a natural pessimist, an attitude only enforced by the sheer volumes of suck that had landed on the both of them since they were practically babies. “…we’re never getting cookies,” he mumbled.

“We didn’t say that,” said Carey, entering the big kitchen. She wrapped her lithe, blue-ish arms around all three of them. “Cookies are for after a healthy dinner, okay? That’s the rule. Your mama and I can follow it, and so should you.”

Killian carried their boys over to the Aga that nestled in the ancient hearth. “Since you’re hungry, how about we cook up a Mess together? Everyone picks an ingredient and we try to make it work.”

Smiles won out on their dappled faces. Koko went for the honeycomb and Lulu went for the chillies. It looked like tonight was going to be another Sweet’n’Spicyness Mess for dinner.

Chapter End Notes

[1] See Over the Meadow and Through the Woods… for the basic shape of it.

[2] My headcannon is that Lup/Lulu wasn’t aware of her true identity before age 10. In this universe it might even be age 8. Either way, she has neither realised nor told anyone yet.

FoxNinja asked:

This AU sounds so precious. Now I'm trying to figure out how the Terrific Trio meets Magnus. Were they investigating a dog show? Missing dogs? A seemingly unrelated art theft that somehow has Magnus investigating the same place at the same time because he is trying to find his lost/missing dog? I do need to know more on that.

And Merle and Davenport have the best roles in this AU. It fits them so much, I love it!
It wasn't the most glamorous of cases, but Ango would literally take any case that crossed his path and their moms tended to frown on them getting involved with gruesome murders, serial killers, and the kind of thieves who left bodies in their wakes. Compared to those, finding some rich lady's pampered pooch should have been small beans. Easy peasy. Simpler than Simon.

'Should', unfortunately, is not 'is'.

On one hand, the seven-year-old Ango was great at finding and following clues. There were days when he made both twins - ten years his senior - feel like rank amateurs despite their additional years of experience with stumbling into adventures and messing up someone else's nefarious plots. What Angus did was give them direction, purpose, and an increased chance of winding up grounded for finding someone else's dastardly plot and potentially wrecking a Bureau of Benevolence op to end it once and for all.

On the other hand, they wound up grounded a lot more often since they started going out on cases with their babyest brother Ango.

Which was why they were hesitant, cautious, and careful when entering the warehouse to search it for further clues. This was the fifth one they'd checked out this day and might be as big a wash as all the others, but that was never an excuse to get sloppy. Besides, Mom Carey would be vexed, upset, and very disappointed if they were ever caught picking locks. Specifically, she would be upset that they were caught.

They crept in quietly. Since they were Elves and half-Elven in the case of Ango, they had a natural boost to any stealth checks and they used it to full advantage. Scurrying from stack to stack of wooden crates or lurking in the shadows of free-standing shelving as they scoped the place out. There's a certain feel to abandoned places and this one didn't have it. There may be dust on the floor, but the tracks in it were relatively new, and no cobwebs were in any of the paths from the door to the so-far unseen centre.

There was also a safe with a suspicious lack of dust or cobwebs on it. Someone came in here to stash something. Not a rich lady's dog, but definitely something interesting. They hunkered behind some crates so that Ango could take notes on what he'd found so they could report to their moms. If
anything suspect was going on here, their moms could tell the Bureau, and the Bureau would stamp it out tout suite.

They didn't get that far, though. Because, as they were hunkering, a small terrier pup found them and started treating them like long-lost friends. Including a vigorous amount of wiggling because their stumpy little tail couldn't quite express their overwhelming joy at finding people, a small amount of pee because they were a puppy, and an excessive amount of yapping.

There was an urgent amount of shushing and whispered commands, none of which made a jot of difference to the pup.

"MAGNUS RUSHES IN!"

A clatter of feet and a young humanman bounded over the crates to crash into the twins, roll into Ango, and wind up upside-down, tangled in some shelving that wobbled ominously for more than a few minutes. The pup bounded over to lick the young humanman teen in the face and wee on the floor a little.

The twins froze, ears moving every which way to detect if there was anyone else in the vicinity.

"Holy shit. Elves."

"SSSHH!"

More ear twitching. The twins decided that things were quiet enough to go back to whispering.

"What the fuck, broceph?" Koko demanded.

The boy, still upside-down and tangled in the shelving, pointed a finger at them and said, "Halt, evil doers! I am here to hinder your heinous plot."

Lulu looked to Koko, who shrugged. "Okay, sweetheart. Few things. One - we're not evil doers. We're here investigating a crime. Two - there's no evil plot. Three - how the fuck do you think you're going to stop anyone by yelling as you rush them?"

"Four," added Ango, who had finished taking notes, "you appear to be stuck there, sir."

The humanman wriggled, making the shelves wobble ominously again.

"Don't. Do that again, m'kay?" Koko whispered. "We'll help you, just... no yelling and no sudden moves."

"Yeah, we have a vested interest in remaining unsquished, m'fella," added Lulu.

He quieted the pup and seemed to be the only one who could. "Magnus Burnsides," he whispered. "Who are you three?"

"I'm Lulu, this is Koko, and that's Ango."

"We fight crime," supplied Ango.

They carefully extracted Magnus from the shelving. Once standing up he was nearly as tall as the twins despite being some three years their junior. "I'm tracking down a bunch of baddies who are abducting pups and small dogs from the street. This is Bait. I've been following him around. And training him a little."
"Bait?" said Koko. "Really?"

"I only found him today and Stalking-horse is a little bit wordy for such a tiny doggo." He stared at the twins. "Say, are you two related? You kind'a look a lot alike."

Ango rolled his eyes. He knew what a question like that would cue.


"And then he asked if we're related because he thinks we have to be," tutted Lulu.

"What a speciesist."

"I bet he thinks we all ride deer and do archery."

"Or make cookies in a house grown out of a tree."

"Or have a pot of gold somewhere."

"Miss, that's leprechauns," Ango tried to interrupt.

"Or steal babies."

"Or turn people into hideous beasts because they didn't want to kiss us."

Magnus was close to tears. "...i don't think any of those things, i was just try'n'a be friendly," he whimpered.

Lulu patted him in the arm. "There, there, dear. We're just goofin' on ya."

"We're twins. We started off identical but Lulu had to improve on perfection." Koko then gestured at Ango. "He's our babyest brother, by the way."

Magnus stared at Ango, then the twins, then back at Ango.

"I'm adopted," said Ango.

The twins gasped, feigning shock and dismay. "Who told you?"

Magnus was grinning. "You're funny. I like you."

Lulu's ears twitched. "E'rybody shaddup. Someone's coming." They scurried into a more concealed area. Twins, baby brother, Magnus, and dog together. Huddled up in a space almost too small to take them. Soon, the pup became a squirming force of nature determined to lick every face present and widdle on everything in reach.

Footsteps and voices. "We should move to a different city. Scuttlebutt has it that there's detectives looking into us and the bloody Bureau is everywhere and in everything."

"The boss said thirty more mutts so we're getting thirty more mutts."

"...holy shit," breathed Magnus.

Ango was busy taking notes.

"This trap's no good. Nothing can get to it," said one.
Lulu peeked and started using Elven Sign Language. *Three of them. Two roughs, one suit. They've lain traps in this warehouse like we found in the others. Roughs wearing common clothes. Suit looks like Neverwinter make. Dark sunset blue. Nice shoes.* She ducked back down.

"We should book. I got the feeling we're being watched."

"Take it easy," said one of the goons. "Bureau ain't found out about this part yet."

The Bureau would, and they'd do it by tomorrow. This was looking like way more than a missing pet case.
dualityandsuch asked:

I would literally kill a man for circus family protecting their cinnamon roll.
As the circus wended its way away from Ranratton, several things became clearly evident.

First: Mak’arune was a born city slicker and didn’t know the first thing about circus life, camping, foraging, or literally anything outside of city life.

“There’s no firewood store anywhere near here?”

Koko snorted as he and his sister gathered sticks and twigs. “This is what you might call the free range stuff.”

“Make your own firewood,” added Lulu.

“It doesn’t come with the bark removed? Ugh. I’m gonna get my dress dirty.”

“So don’t wear your best all the time,” advised Lulu. She was using a portion of her skirt as a basket for her sticks. “You’re out on the road. Getting your clothes dirty is normal.”

Second: Mak’arune was more than a little naïve about almost everything.

“So there are bears that hunt by dropping out of the trees?”

“Yah-huh,” said Lulu, ignoring the faces that Koko made. This was too easy. “They look like a big old beehive, and they’re always on a sturdy branch. That’s how you can tell.”

“While we’re at it,” said Koko. “We’d better warn you about the Snipe…”

Someone eventually told on them for hazing Mak’arune, but by then she had swallowed all possible tall tales. Hook, line, and sinker. It would take months to remove her from the certainty that all that was true.
In the meantime, they could track her during foraging missions by the whistling, clapping, and chanting of, “Owah tafoo lyam.”

Three: Mak’arune was a true innocent and that had to be preserved if only for the novelty value.

“So there I was, in the middle of a vat of syrup and totally naked,” said La’ming, once again temporarily forgetting that the twins were underage and should not be hearing this story. “And these three super-buff guys—”

“HOLY SHIT, MAK’ARUNE’S LISTENING TO SHRIIVO!” Koko took off towards the impending scene.

Shriivo, one of the circus contortionists, was a Changeling Druid and told far more lurid stories than La’ming could hope to accomplish. With descriptive gestures that could make Asmodeus blush.

Lulu missed out on punching her brother, but only because he was out of her range. Then the penny dropped about the inherent peril and she, too, took off towards Mak’arune at double-dash speeds.

La’ming, only a fraction of a flinch behind her, muttered, “Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit… as she ran pell-mell for the same destination. They all knew what Shriivo’s stories could do to a person, even if two out of three hadn’t actually heard one because Monty had an over-the-horizon Fantasy radar for Shriivo telling tall tales to the twins.

“…in the middle of Grasping Vines, I had this totally naughty idea,” Shriivo said.

They arrived just in the nick of time. La’ming clamped her hands tight over Mak’arune’s eyes.

Lulu and Koko took an ear each, cushioning one palm per twin over Mak’arune’s half-Elven ears.

All three of them desperately interrupted with, “NONONONONONO, you don’t tell her that kind of story!”

At which point Montgomery turned up to scowl at all four of them and the Scene as it stood.

“Hi, Monty,” said three Elves and one Changeling, all four of them rather badly forged pictures of innocence. Especially in comparison to Mak’arune, the genuine article.

Montgomery wished, not for the first time, that he possessed eyebrows so he could raise one. As it was, the Glare of Doom had to suffice. “I certainly hope nothing untoward was happening,” he said. “And if it was, it better not continue.”

“No, Monty.”

“Of course not, Monty.”

“Who do you think we are?”

“Actually, scratch that question.”

Three Elves released Mak’arune, who glanced from player to player in preserved innocence. “What’s going on?” she said.

“That was a very bad story,” said Montgomery.

Three Elves and one Changeling agreed most enthusiastically.
dualityandsuch asked:

Can I get some of that Luume’d Ming fam?
It should have been a peaceful trip between towns. The circus train of wagons was pretty much halfway between one fairly large city and another. It was a nice morning. The sky promised to be clear, the twins were already cooking an astonishing amount of food for everyone.
They were eighty percent through their usual morning argument, something nobody else could understand because they conducted it in their own personal language. From what Mak’arune could tell, they were still at a draw.

She was making her own kind of progress, in that she took anything the twins had to say with a healthy dose of salt. Once she realised they were pulling her leg about having a triplet, she stopped believing just everything they had to tell her.

She had even found out that Ms Ton was not the keeper of the Mermaid, but also the Mermaid herself. That had been her own erroneous assumption. More fool her. The fact that nobody had corrected her was a grey zone, though.

Everyone was out and about. Having their meals, enjoying the twins’ show, or waiting in a patient line for the next dish to come out of the chuck wagon. Some were washing dishes in an effort to be helpful. Some were washing clothes before they packed up to move on that day.

Mak’arune knew most of them by name and all of them by face. Every possible race in Faerune, every possible colour and creed. Well. All colours but one. Mak’arune missed spotting La’ming. Her familiar blue skin and lack of decent clothing were conspicuous by their absence.

Therefore, after she had her own, light breakfast, she secured a plate for La’ming and travelled the short distance between the chuck wagon and La’ming’s little caravan. She must have had a little more than usual to drink and was feeling poorly.

The door was unlatched, and when she crept in, the inside was more of a mess than usual. La’ming, still in her nightwear of a see-through half-shift and a pair of underpants, had been turning the place upside down. She looked… oh dear. She looked haggard, flushed, distracted, and distant.

“Are you all right?”

“Want…” said La’ming. Her pupils were so dilated that her eyes looked black. “…want…”

Oh dear. It was Luume’irma. The curse of Elven kind. In a few more hours, La’ming might well make a plague of herself on everyone else in the circus. She had to spare them, and her… co-worker… from such wanton display.

Mak’arune offered up the bowl. “Eat,” she said. “I’ll look after you.” Well. She hoped she could. Her own Luume episodes were light and she could willingly shut herself off from the rest of the world for the twenty-four hours in which she was -ahem- in an unseemly condition. Thank goodness it was only one day out of eight years. The rest of the time, she was perfectly capable of behaving herself.

As La’ming ate, Mak’arune scrawled a hasty message on a piece of card. Not her neatest handwriting. Quarantine! DO NOT ENTER, and then pinned it to the outside of the door before latching it as firmly shut as she could get.

La’ming - what was left of La’ming - was a bit rowdier than Mak’arune ever was. She had finished her food and was sniffing Mak’arune with evident fascination. Getting right up in there.

“Nice,” said La’ming. “Want.”

“Yes, dear,” cooed Mak’arune, reaching for the soft patches behind La’ming’s ears. “I’ve got you.” She’d only read about how to do this, and only half-remembered the method, but it seemed to be working. The full-blood Sea Elf in her arms was looking drowsy and contented.
Maybe that would suffice.

Lulu was on Lollygagger duty, making sure no performer, performer’s wagon, nor any camp shit was left behind. The most conspicuous offender was La’ming. She must have tied one on, last night. Lulu whacked the side of the caravan with a big stick. “Wakey-wakey, ocean princess! We gotta roll if we wanna be in the next campground by sunset!”

Silence there, and nothing more.

A hastily-scrawled note on the caravan door provided something of an answer. But also more questions.

*Quarantine! DO NOT ENTER*

Lulu clambered up to an unshuttered window. She intended to say, “Hey, you want someone to tow you?” but she didn’t get much further than, “Hey, you wanna—”

La’ming pounced, cooing, “Baby….” and dragged Lulu inside in one swoop.

Koko was officially worried. He knew Lulu could handle herself, but… She never took this long to get people going. It was unnervingly unlike her. He chased around the camp as various carts and wagons got on the road, asking after his sister.

Eventually, the trail lead to La’ming’s wagon, in which an argument seemed to be going on.

“Let me out!” That was Lulu! Koko picked up the pace.

“My baby…” La’ming? Had she done mushrooms or something?

“No, no, dear, the baby wants some air. Let her loose.” Oh great. Mak’arune was tied up in all of this. Which meant that it was all two steps away from absolute disaster.

Koko clambered up to the open window and said, “Can you three stop dicking arou–ooop!”

La’ming pulled him in with a gleeful cry of, “Baby…”

Koko struggled like a cat trapped in a running shower stall. “Whoa, what the shit? I’m not a baby, we’re seventy-two.”

“Baby. Babies. My babies.” La’ming wasn’t listening. Gripping them both close to her body and snuggling like their lives depended on it.

Mak’arune was frantically alternating between ear massage and attempting to pry the twins out of La’ming’s arms.

Koko would never admit how ashamed he was that he felt worlds better for all the pseudo-parental attention. Lulu, held fast in the opposite arm, glared at him with her Ultimate Don’t Tell Death Glare. She must have been feeling the same hunger-for-affection that he had. “It’s Luume’irma,” she announced.
“Aw dunk,” muttered Koko. He just relaxed and let La’ming snuggle, coo, and kiss.

At which point Monty turned up at the window and it was Lulu’s turn to impersonate a wet cat in a shower stall.

“Monty! Monty get us– mmrff mmf mfftrrl!” her words were muffled because her struggles made La’ming readjust her grip, and therefore La’ming’s elbow was close over Lulu’s mouth.

Mak’arune was busy trying to slacken or break La’ming’s iron grip, actually crying about the disaster as it was unfolding. “Please just let them loose,” she begged.

“Good baby,” La’ming laid yet another kiss on Koko’s cheek.

“…whatever…” mumbled Koko.

That damned snake was smirking.

“Aha. That time of the decade,” he said, and shuttered the windows. After a few more minutes, the wagon started moving. Either piloted by someone or towed by someone else.

There was nothing else to do but sit there and get attention lavished on them and watch Mak’arune be pants at preventative ear massage.

“You’re doing it wrong, by the way,” he said. “Don’t be scared about a little bit of pressure, and your circles are just a squinch too small…”
dualityandsuch asked:

Don't know how far you'll get with the last one, but can we see some Ming and twin bonding?
It was a very strange thing to wake up and discover that you’re a parent to twins. Especially twins who were practically adults and well capable of looking after themselves.

Not that any of that mattered. Luume-influenced family bonding was a permanent biological
compulsion to care for and after anything her Luume-addled mind had classed as a ‘baby’.

Which meant any creature under the age classification of ‘of age’.

Which, in this case, meant that portions of her instincts now classed the twins Lulu and Koko as ‘her babies’. She felt compelled to check that they were eating well, enough, and regularly. She gathered books for them to read that might expand their education. She stocked up on herbal ingredients that could be used for medicinal simples and even brewed up a few.

The circus’ medical cart had never been so well-stocked, even if it was well-stocked with Elven remedies. And more than a few bundles of herbs.

She stopped in at their caravan every evening to be sure they were tucked in and felt safe. They’d been through too much with Saint Vingo’s and the mess afterwards. They needed a gentle and caring hand.

La’ming had, on more than one occasion, sat watch on their doorstep. Protecting her babies from unknown evils in the dark. She worried about them. They slept instead of meditating because they didn’t feel safe. She couldn’t help them. She couldn’t make them feel safe.

She hadn’t, before. Now that she couldn’t… it worried her.

There were even nights that she played soothing music for them on her wooden flute. To let them know that she was standing watch and guarding them from any possible danger.

She couldn’t guard them from everything. That really worried her.

Hence, why she was following them around on their foraging trip that day.

“We’ve done this like a billion times, La’ming,” complained Lulu.

“Ye-es. I know that. It’s just… Aunt Irma’s driving me nuts.”

“You’ll understand when you’re older,” mocked Koko from somewhere in the shrubbery. He emerged with an apron full of weird berries.

La’ming knew one thing about strange berries - high danger of them being poisonous. “You’re not planning to eat those, are you?”

Koko’s face was an open book with large print that said, Bitch, please. “These are Lapiswort. I’m dying my hair.”

Lulu laughed out, “What?”

“I’m sick of being asked if I’m the girl one, so after this, they should be able to fuckin’ tell.”

“I have experience with dyes and dying hair,” said La’ming, rather desperate for something she could actually do to help her seventy-six-year-old babies. “I could help make sure it’s even and everything.”

Which lead to a long afternoon of washing, treating, and binding Koko’s hair in a plastering of a preparation of Lapiswort and alum, then coating it with leather until it set.

The next day, Koko’s hair was a vibrant and resplendent blue. Which - unfortunately for his romantic hopes - failed completely to win Kustaad’s attention at all.
Koko was right. The dye job did deflect the questions. For the week that they were entertaining Crossconnect Vale. After that, it started to fade to green as Koko’s natural golden colour began to literally shine through.

By then, they both sort of tolerated La’ming’s attempts to mother them. Most of the time.

“You are not going out in camp dressed like that, young lady.”

“Why? You’re running around in your undies and sleep slip.”

“We can totally see your boobs through that thing,” added Koko.

“And put away that pipe for today, thanks.”

Koko didn’t. “You do worse on the daily. Why should we even try to listen to you?”

Borstok, watching the show with Montgomery, leaned over to his boss and murmured, “It’s like watching a vodka or a wine aunt trying to parent angry teenagers.”

Montgomery had to agree. They were all hopeless at it. Exandria was probably going to chew him out for letting it happen, but… the entire circus had never had such ready entertainment on the daily.

“Shouldn’t you step in?” prompted Borstok in a rare display of competence.

“I’ll be the dad when they need me and not before. My job is keeping Miss Mak’arune from making it all explode again.” To damn Mak’arune with faint praise, she meant well and had the very best of intentions. She was also an enormous wet hen and prone to tears at the least provocation.

Borstok shrugged and said, “Fair ‘nuff.”

La’ming was taking ten deep breaths, attempting to come up with something rational. Not her forte. “Listen,” she said. “My life… is already a train wreck. I’m trying my hardest to stop yours from ending up that way too. Okay? You want I should dress better on my days off - help me out. You want me to cut down on the interesting herbology… help me out. Meanwhile i’m trying to help you out by preventing some of the huge mistakes I’ve made. Is that a deal?”

Lulu looked to Koko, who used Prestidigitation to put out his tiny clay pipe. He packed it away in his vest. “We’re stuck with you anyways. Might as well get you to wear a decent fucking nightie.”

Lulu added. “When you get down to it, ‘lion’s not as bad as some of the shit out there. It’s free and not that addictive.”

“Sure,” said La’ming, “you could quit it any time…”

They all glared at each other like cats. “I stay off the pipe for a week, you wean yourself off of those interesting shrooms you’re on half the time.”

“Deal,” said La’ming. “And I’m putting on a khaftan, too.”

It was a rocky start, but at least it was a start.
anonymous asked:

*slides over seventy cents in nickels and some pocket lint* if you continue the purring half-elf ango thing you did a while back i’d owe you my life?? i love and die for that good good hurt and comfort. also vaguely related what were lucretia and taako talking about in sign language? anyway uhh thank you for holding up the entire taz fandom like atlas held up the sky ily

[AN: Aaawww, bless. May the clerical errors in your favour remain perpetually unnoticed]

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
It began in the dark, with Lucretia noticing Taako paying more attention to Angus McDonald than she expected. Taako was so much colder and more aloof from any social contact than she was used to. Of course he was. He was now in a state where he believed he had never had anyone or anything he could rely on.

Yet there he was, feeling the brow of Angus McDonald and looking concerned in the darkness of the theatre.

She leaned back and employed ESL[1] to ask without disturbing anyone else, *Everything okay?*

Taako also leaned back so he could sign, *Thought sickness. Boy(mine) taught not purr.*
Oh shit. Oh shit, that was bad. Xenophobists of all kinds used all kinds of cruelties to teach halfbreeds to avoid any behaviour of their ‘bad’ half. Taako’s very abbreviated grammar meant that he didn’t want to make a big deal out of it, but… She had to get involved.

This is bad, she signed to him. Bad for head, bad for health, bad for him all through.

No duh, signed Taako. Me easy hate humans about this. He still wanted to keep this low-key. Lucretia could understand.

We should talk to him. We should teach him.

Taako signed, You can, in a dismissive way. He noticed the way she stared at him and added, Don’t look at me in that tone of voice.

Lucretia signed, You know the most about being Elven. You’re already teaching him magic. Why not teach him about himself?

Not my kid, his fingers said. The rest of his body telegraphed that that was a blatant lie. But only to those who’d known him for a century or more.

Lucretia couldn’t call him out on his bullshit based on that aspect of her past, though. She could sign, Not what you said a minute ago.

Now it was his turn to glare at her. He knew he’d claimed ownership with the brevity signs he initially used. Such were the subtleties of ESL. He fumed for a while and signed, Not son. Apprentice.

Lucretia signed her acquiescence. An economical gesture that meant, As you will. She kept her suspicion to herself. Even now, with the damage she’d done, Taako was wont to form bonds with others. Especially others who were abandoned, forlorn, or simply without everything they may clearly deserve.

In other words, waifs, strays, bastards, and broken people. Angus qualified on two counts and now counted for a third.

She signed, We must discuss this with him.

Taako added, After scroll. Child(mine) needs small fun.

Not his kid, her aunt Fanny. All of Taako’s denials were pure, unadulterated, horseshit. He might as well have adopted the kid outright, but wouldn’t because it would harm ‘his brand’. Maybe when all the fuss was over, there might be the hope of Taako actually giving Angus a good home.

* 

She checked up on them for their first Elf Practice. IN Angus’ favourite reading nook, in a pile of pillows, Taako was dozing and purring in a sunbeam with Angus propped up against Taako’s middle.

She could hear Angus clear across the library. That was some ‘engine’ he had going. Lucretia readied a speech about being impressed with Taako’s teaching capacity as she crept closer.

As she approached, maintaining a quiet tread, she noticed several clues. The aroma of hot chocolate, the way Angus preferred to have it. A few remaining sweet curd cakes, laying neglected on a nearby plate. The place where they lay, right in a sunbeam, had all the pillows arranged for maximum
comfort.

Under the thunder of Angus’ purr, Taakos’ ran almost a counterpoint. Soft and soothing and continuous with his breathing.

His purr said more than any of his most of his lies ever could. He was, indeed, feeling parental towards Angus. How that would play out given his voidfish scars could be… problematic. She would be keeping a watchful eye out on them, simply because of that.

Taako’s uppermost ear flicked and a hand moved to lazily sign, *Bug off.*

Lucretia involuntarily signed, *Peace,* despite the fact that Taako wouldn’t see it. She whispered, “Lessons going well?”

Angus’ eyes were open. Watching her intently, as he watched everything intently. His hands moved. In forms and shapes coherent with ESL. *We’re doing fine, ma’am. I’m looking forward to more lessons, later.*

Lucretia had to roll a will save not to freak out.

Chapter End Notes

[1] Elven Sign Language
dualityandsuch said:
But he's such a nice guy!
Every circus obtained temporary hangers-on. People who thought that life in a travelling show was romantic or would be fun for all of their time there. They were usually disillusioned after a handful of days and their turn to gather the horse dung from the campsite.

Most of them didn’t last the distance between two towns, often turning back to the life they lead before they fell in and out of love with the circus. There were others who were more trouble, not because they fell in love with the circus and were bad for it, but because they attached themselves to some circus performers. Montgomery had had to chase more than one off of the twins, they were the truly heinous sort who didn’t care that the fabulous chefs and amazing trapeze artists were underage.

Koko, who kept fatally falling for older men, kind of hated Monty for doing that but Lulu’s gratitude balanced things out in the end.

Then there was the complications with Mak’arune.

She was with the circus, initially because she had to be. Then because she was intensely useful to the overall production. Now, because she was one of the family. This entire enormous psychotic mess had adopted her as -more or less- their new baby.

The latest wrinkle in the entire mess of organised chaos was the fact that Mak’arune had picked up an ‘admirer’. Koko was the first to complain about him, and not about the latest interruption to his nonexistent love life. In fact, he was on Montgomery’s doorstep and looking pissed.

“Hey, Monty…”

“Your last potential paramour was almost old enough to be your grandfather.”

“Not about him,” said Koko. “I got it. Even though he was a total silver fox. Anyway. Y’know Rellian Danto?”

“I’m aware of his existence…”

“Total scumfuck. He’s already tryin’ to get Mak’arune to buy him his own caravan.” Koko had a tray of a more sumptuous breakfast

“Convincing her of this is the problem,” said Montgomery. “It always is. I’ll have a quiet chat with the man.”

“Good,” said Koko.

Montgomery took his breakfast with him, to observe the scumfuck in action. The dude looked like a
perfectly respectable Humanman, but he had had to get his sumptuous clothes from somewhere and he’d had a sob story just ready to roll. In fact, he’d had several.

Danto had his hands around Mak’arune’s. As Montgomery moved closer, he could hear some of the wheeling.

“All I’m saying is that we deserve a nicer space. You’ve seen the brochures I handed you, aren’t they beautiful homes? Don’t you want us to have a home together?”

“I have. I do,” Mak’arune was looking more than a little pressed. “They’re just so enormous. We couldn’t keep up with the circus.”

“Who says we have to? We can stick to wider roads and catch them up in the bigger towns. That way you can work on your best material away from all the distractions.” A gesture he made took in the entire rest of the circus as ‘distractions’. “It’ll be just you and me and the safer roads in a home just right for the both of us.”

Translation: He was isolating her and readying her to absorb more poison as it dripped from his lips to her pointed ears.

Fortunately, Mak had a good memory. “You need your sleep. There wouldn’t be much time for me to use my sewing machine on everything. And I know you love using my buttons on your look. I don’t think—”

Danto went from lovingly fawning to furious rage in instants. “You don’t think,” he interrupted. “You never think! You stupid bitch, I’m doing this for you, you ungrateful cow! You’re lucky I don’t smash your idiot head in and see if anyone can tell the difference.”

Montgomery was up behind him so silently, just in the right moment. “And you’re lucky I don’t test my poison on you for threatening my staff.” He loomed half a foot taller than Danto, hood flared and fangs visible.

He acted like all Human weasels caught in the act of being completely vile, using three of the four D’s: Deny, Delay, Distract, and the final, unused Decamp. “Hahaha,” he laughed. “That’s a little affectionate joke between us. Is that a breakfast by the twins? How about you get us some, honey?”

Mak’arune said, “Just yesterday you told me they only cooked slop and you wanted me to make all your dinners…”

“I’d like to understand the meaning of this joke,” said Montgomery. “Miss Mak’arune, do you have one?”

Mak’arune shook her head.

The twins appeared out of nowhere, freshly made up and ready for a show on the trapeze. “Explain it to us,” they said.

“And then explain why you hit on a minor,” added Lulu. She was distinguishable from Koko because of the peplum on her leotard and the absence of full-length gloves. They both had their goggles off and showing their witch eyes. Lulu briefly told Mak’arune, “He totally groped me and said I’d look better in a red dress.”

“That was one of the things you told me,” said Mak’arune.

“Listen,” said Danto, “I’m a nice guy… but you people are a whole bunch of untrustworthy bastards.
 Especially you two pieces of gutter trash shit.” He pointed out the twins. “If this universe was just, you’d have died in the cradle.”

Mak’arune gasped. It was not her upset gasp that proceeded so many fountains of tears, but a gasp of anger. They had seen Mak’arune upset. They had seen her weep and howl in despair. They had never seen her fury.

“Rellian Virtue Danto, how dare you! These poor babies have been through seven kinds of hell in their lives and they need patience, care, and understanding! You do not speak of children like that if you want to have any hint of my favour in the future at all!”

This was the last thing he expected. He thought he had Mak’arune completely gulled. Nevertheless, he attempted to distract from the causal event. “They look like adults, especially dressed like that. How’s a man supposed to know they’re kids? You look like a kid. The blue bitch looks like a kid. Even your grown-ass magic act looks like a kid and he has a kid.”

“That ‘blue bitch’,,” iced Mak’arune, “is my best friend.”

La’ming would be interestingly shocked to learn that. Montgomery covered his shock at learning the exact same thing by remaining on topic. “I heard you tell a joke. I would like to know what’s so funny about dashing someone’s brains in.”

Danto ran through the only gap between the people surrounding him. He did not stop anywhere in camp. He didn’t stop anywhere outside of camp, either.

“Just as a hint,” said Lulu. “The more often someone tells you they’re nice, the less likely they are to actually be nice.”

“Think about it,” said Koko. “How often do you tell people you’re nice?”

“I… don’t… have to…” she said, light dawning.

Montgomery let his hood fall and his fangs retreat. “Good. Lulu… Koko. You’re on in ten. Let’s make it a great show. Miss Mak’arune… I think some calming work for you before lunch? We don’t want your excellent stitching to suffer from the actions of one asshole.”
dualityandsuch said:
I'd like to order an angst sandwich of new mom Ming going missing and the twins panic on some tearful reunion bread with some purr pit on the side.
Several carts had broken, thus causing the circus to come to a halt a mere day outside of their next destination. Options were not good. Carry the circus to their field by relay, overload the existing wagons and carts and hope no more breakages happened, or send someone ahead to fetch a cartwright and take a hit to the Bail Fund.

While they camped and argued, hardly anyone noticed La’ming ‘borrowing’ a horse to head into the plentiful town of Highmarrow.

Not until lunchtime, when Lulu and Koko had made lunch and entertainment together in the chuck wagon, when they noticed that their adopted mother was conspicuous by her absence.

“Listen, see. We got some horses that ain’t got carts to pull. We can load them up and load up the people as much as can,” said Borstok. “Our strong man can lift two hundred pounds.”

“Lift, yes,” countered Montgomery. “Carry… not so much. You can lift one hundred and fifty pounds. Can you carry it far?”

“Monty…” said Koko.

It was the note of worry, rather than the nickname, that caught Montgomery’s attention. Koko was generally cold to others and paranoid about everything. Anything he could laugh off, the circus could work around. Therefore, anything that made him show concern was a sure indicator of something gone or was about to go seriously bad. “A moment,” said Montgomery. “What’s happening, Koko?”

“Our mo– La’ming’s gone missing,” he said, twiddling with the ties of his tunic. His luume-influenced adoption by the Sea Elf performer hadn’t been the smoothest. He and his sister were “only a few decades” away from being officially adults. That little verbal stumble was actually a good sign for Koko.
“Missing,” Montgomery repeated.

“She took our horse and left a note,” Koko handed it over.

It read, *Gone for cartwright, you kids stay good. Should be back by lunch.* And a scribbled heart and her signature.

“It’s way past lunch,” Koko added. “I know we’re still fighting over the next step, but… Maybe some humanmen could go lookin’ or something?” He stopped twiddling and straightened himself. “Not that I care or anything. It’s just that The Mermaid’s one of our biggest draws an’ we just got a Major Restoration on her ears ‘n’ shit…”

A gift that resulted from the twins running hustles over the last five towns. La’ming had been overjoyed while the twins downplayed it at every opportunity. The kids were of the opinion that no Elf deserved to have their ears docked. La’ming was of the opinion that she had the best kids in the universe -nay, in the planar system, and twitched her ears about just because she could.

…ears that she sometimes forgot to hide or disguise when going into new towns.

“Oh shit,” Montgomery muttered. He rushed over to the largest cluster of Humans in their impromptu camp and interrupted their bickering with, “One of our own has gone missing in or around Highmarrow. It’s Ms Ton, so go asking after the horse without making it sound like she’s stolen it, thankyou. I need word of what’s happened to her.”

* 

The downside of places like Saint Vingo’s was that some of its dirty secrets got passed around. La’ming couldn’t blame her babies for passing on the curses of its spells on to the future incarcerators of Administrator Citron. Not even when such spells had been passed around enough to use on her.

Currently, her captors had her trapped in Citron’s Malevolent Sensory Deprivation. She was blind, deaf, and incapable of feeling anything. It could drive a being insane to be without any kind of sensory input at all. She couldn’t even hear the rhythm of her own body.

Koko, on the rare occasions that he spoke about what he endured under Citron’s heel, had said that when he gave up on screaming and struggling, the spell would lift and his senses would return. Sometimes, he was on the verge of collapsing from exhaustion when that happened.

Now she could understand why. That spell was *terrifying.*

Light, sound, and feeling returned, and she was in a cage. Facing down the impassive and incredibly ugly face of Lybirti Sor. Her former owner/handler. Her former master.

“You got old and fat,” she said, and winced at the sting in her newly-restored ears.

“You don’t talk unless you call me master,” he said. “You behave yourself and life’ll be good for you again.” By which he meant, do as he said, fawn, simper, and let him have his way, and he might give her enough to eat every day and not hit her so much.

“Fuck you,” she said. She had enough time to hiss at the blistering pain in her ears from Citron’s Blazing Correction before Sor sent her back into the cloying darkness of sensory deprivation. She relaxed and let the spell dissipate so she could say, “Fuck you with the rough end of a pinecone.”

She had to stay sane, keep Sor off of her, and survive long enough to figure out a way to get back to her babies. She didn’t care if her new ears burned to cinders, she would fucking kill this guy.
No matter how often she returned to the world of feeling in tears. No matter how hoarse her throat. No matter how often the fine webs of her ears seared with her every show of resistance. She. Was. Going. To kill him.

*

When the circus descended on Lybirti Sor, it was not the Humans alone who came with weapons drawn and threats ready on their lips. A good two thirds of the circus came for him. Orcs, Elves, Dragonborn, Changelings… all the heaviest hitters. And three glass cannons in the form of Lulu, Koko, and Mak’arune.

The Orcs punched the shit out of him, the Dragonborn scorched him with their breaths, the Changelings confounded him as they stabbed him with their blades. Montgomery got a bite in before the twins freed La’ming and Mak’arune healed her blisters.

The two Elven children gave La’ming a choice. Wand or Blade. One offering per twin.

She picked up the wand from Lulu, accepted an ingredients pouch from Koko, and drew a bead on her former captor. Three deep breaths as the rest of the team stepped back from the bloody and bruised form of Lybirti Sor. La’ming chose her spell. She said, “Abra-ka-fuck you!” and cast Cloud of Daggers directly in the area where Sor was kneeling and begging for mercy.

La’ming watched him die with an impassive face, then ran off to be sick behind the nearest tree.

Lulu, Koko, and Mak’arune ran after her, not caring to go through Sor’s pockets for anything valuable. Fortunately, Borstok was there to make up for that lack.

It was quite the scene. La’ming retching bile as she clutched at the tree while three Elves swarmed, trying to soothe her. Lulu and Koko knew the effects of those spells well. Too well. They knew what those spells had done to them. Intimately. They knew what the aftermath of facing a captor was like.


Lulu, a step ahead in the logic processes, had realised that it was their actions who had hurt their adopted mother. She was weeping as she attempted to comfort La’ming. All she could say was variants of, “I’m sorry,” over and over again.

Mak’arune fussed with draping La’ming with her shawl and some petticoats and rubbing whatever handy portion of La’ming’s body was close by whilst rattling through all the herbal remedies and simples she could make with whatever herbs she could spot at the moment.

Koko was the one who slipped La’ming his pipe and some dried dandelion. Nobody had a single word of objection.

The circus arrived at Highmarrow a day late, with freshly-repaired wagons and two acts currently out of commission. Technically three, if one counted the Conjoined Twin Act, which was a combination cooking show, fake freak exhibit, and catering. Those placards were stowed in one of the moving carts as a small family of Elves cuddled together in the Big Hammock.

It lay strung between La’Ming’s caravan - the one she shared with the twins - and Mak’arune’s, which she inherited from La’ming. It was big enough to hold ten adults, which meant that La’ming, the twins, and Mak’arune were all cuddled together in it with as many pillows, blankets, and throws as they could cram into its voluminous folds.
Montgomery checked up on them occasionally and brought them meals.

There was an assortment of purrs within the cluster. Loud, soft, and stressed, though it would take an expert to tell who was making which kind of purr. As long as they were purring, Montgomery rationalised, they were on their way to being okay.

He really hoped he wouldn’t have to drag his wife and youngest all the way to their next destination for some emergency counselling. Exandria never travelled well, the poor sweetheart.

In the late afternoon, an almost unnatural hush from the Elven huddle prompted Montgomery to carefully excavate his way through the encompassing blankets to investigate. Encountering a mildly hostile Koko prompted him to stop.

“Boss or not,” Koko whispered, “You wake our moms and I’ll magic missile your fucking tail off.” Just visible nearby were the cuddling, slumbering forms of La’ming and Mak’arune.

Montgomery wisely decided not to call any attention to Koko’s Fantasy Freudian Slip.
SHORT ANSWER: Depends on the universe.
LONG ANSWER: This -

Canon Compliant

Angus McDonald baulked the instant the light spilled into the old tunnels. Agatha, her hand in his, felt his pulse jump. She crept forward and whispered, “Bad guys?”

“Worse,” Angus whispered. “Cobwebs.”

She peeked, looking in at what their dark lantern revealed. She leveled a glare at him. “Cobwebs scare you?”

“No the cobwebs. The spiders that made them.” Angus felt compelled to add, “I don’t make fun of you for hating big heights.”

Young Angus Verse

Agatha noticed that Angus’ breathing quickened as they stepped into the confines of the tunnel. She whispered, “Claustrophobia?”

“Kind of,” he whispered back. “I told you about the orphanage I started in, right?”

“Yeah?”

“I have a lingering thing with small, dark spaces...”

Agatha understood. This was just like her lingering thing with small and fast insects. “It’s all right. There’s a way out the other end and we have a dark lantern. It’s going to be okay.”

He focussed on trying to breathe. “Sorry if I squeeze your hand too tight,” he whispered.

Circus verse

“...werk,” mumbled Agatha, pulling away from the edge.

Angus, used to the trapeze and the tightrope since practically infancy, looked over the edge. “Yeah, that’s a long way down. There’s a ladder. I could carry you...”

“...werk,” she repeated. “This is worse for me than thunderstorms are for you.”

“You be in one wind-tossed caravan once, and then argue with me,” he countered. “It’s okay. The ladder’s in good repair. I’ve never slipped in all my years. You’ll be fine.”

Anonymous said:
Do you head canon Angus or Agatha to have any phobias?
Agatha kept her eyes closed and clung tight all the way down.

Baby Birds AU

Angus shrank away from the table and the bowl of black-to-brown things that was one of the feast options.

Agatha, who’d taken him as her plus one on this mission, leaned closed to his ear and whispered, “You okay?”

“...looks like mould,” he whispered, breathing fast. “I hate mould. I’ve always hated mould.”

“These are butter-fried mushrooms,” she whispered. “They’re tasty. I promise they’re good.” To prove her words true, she speared some and set them on her plate, taking a cut and eating it. “See? It’s good.” Agatha offered him a tiny sliver. “Want to try?”

It took him ten deep breaths to brave a taste. Just like it had for her to try jellied eels.
Good news, bad news, good news... good news, he had an act that was a guaranteed draw. Practically everything the Elf twins Lulu and Koko did was an instant draw for paying customers. This included the Wild Things of Bor’ne’o, their cooking in the Chuck Wagon, and their futzing around with the high-wire folk. They could draw a curious crowd by washing dishes. It was amazing.

Bad news, that selfsame act was the biggest drain on the circus’ Bail Fund. No matter how well they dressed, acted, or behaved, they were bound to get arrested for doing something whilst Elven. That was also amazing, but in the opposite direction.

The twins spent most of their time pretending they didn’t speak common. Playing the fool at virtuoso levels while the circus got acclimated to them. Montgomery, being ringmaster, owner, manager, and ersatz parent to the entire fucking circus, kept them with him in his caravan for mutual safety.

Five arrests in as many towns had left the kids gun-shy about going anywhere or doing anything without some kind of guardian nearby. Which meant Montgomery had them permanently in his shadow whenever they weren’t working. He was, after all, the only figure in authority who seemed to hold a vested interest in their welfare at all.

Gods alone knew how they were going to handle the Winter Campgrounds.

Gods alone knew how his wife was going to handle the additions to the informal family.

Thus it was that he took the last turn towards Varmvale with some trepidation in his heart. Further south than Neverwinter, the snows never reached it. The lands were wide and the seaside proved a draw for the wealthy when the circus was out touring. There, the friends and family of the tour waited for winter for the circus to come home.

His dear darling Exandria didn’t travel well, and managed the town as mayor during all seasons, all whilst raising their hatchlings in the comfort of their home.

Lulu and Koko roused from their torpor in the caravan and emerged to peer over the vertiginous curves of the main road to Varmvale. They chattered to each other in their own tongue, sounding trepidatious as they spoke.

“Looks like a pretty small town, Monty,” said Lulu eventually, ignoring Koko trying to pull her back into the safety of the caravan. “How are we gonna earn enough to get out of it?”

“We don’t have to,” he said. “This is where the circus winters.” He did not call it ‘home’ as Koko was allergic to that word. “You two can stay with my family or reside in one of the cabins for the cold season, though we do expect you to keep it clean and orderly if you do.”

“No way,” said Koko. “There’s a Mama Monty?”
“A Mrs Monty,” Montgomery allowed, using their own terms. “And a few Montlings.”

Koko muttered something in the twins’ language and got an elbow from Lulu. Whatever he said must have been rude. Montgomery ignored the exchange.

Lulu said, “Just checkin’, you’re -uh- you’re not... fattening us up for Candlenights or that, right?”

“Nonsense. Roast Elf is for Midsummer.” Montgomery could bite himself for that joke. These were flighty kids, prone to just run off if things looked too dangerous. “You’re way too profitable alive and whole to become any portion of any given meal.”

“Promise?” said Koko, to receive another elbow from his sister.

“No harm will come to you,” he said. The words seemed to be wearing a groove in his forked tongue. These kids must have come afoul of a lot of liars in their brief years. “You two make more in ticket sales than you cost in bail, I want you to stay with us.”

They didn’t fight on the road down into the vale. They clung to rails or permanent parts of the caravan until the inherent fall into the bottom of the valley was no longer a threat. After they were on more level ground, they adjourned to the interior of the caravan for a good old brawl.

Montgomery let them battle the ginger out of their veins. It would be a while yet before the long and winding roads took them towards the gigantic parking zone for the circus’ storage and stables. The twins eventually tired of their battle and surfaced to watch from the relative safety of the caravan roof. An ideal spot to turn and bolt from if things looked dangerous.

Montgomery could pick out the cosy little house where his family resided. He could spot Exandria by her hat. That silly straw hat she always wore when she was working in the garden. He could see his oldest daughter, too. Gathering her share of the harvest into a basket on top of her head.

Almost. Almost there. Other houses escaped his notice. He couldn’t care less about them right now. His eyes were on the next fork in the road, the next turn, this landmark or that. Every mark that meant he was closer and closer to his family’s loving arms.

They were waiting for him in the parking grounds. Exandria, Lilly, Rosemary, and a new little one in Exandria’s arms. This new figure had a hood. A boy. He had no heed for whether or not the twins followed, he simply sprang off the caravan and rushed to greet his first son.

The baby boy was concerning himself with gumming at his own wrists. He must be working on his infant fangs. Thank goodness Yuan’ti poison glands didn’t come in until the child was in their teens.

“More waifs and strays?” Exandria was peering past Montgomery’s left arm.

Only now was he aware of the presences so close to his tail. The twins clustered close to each other and, using his body as a shield, hunkered out of immediate grasping range whilst simultaneously peering around at the collected ‘Montlings’.

“They don’t have anyone else,” said Montgomery. “They’re very talented performers and... they need security.”

Exandria sized the two of them up in a cold second. “You two are welcome to my home. Any time.”

Lulu and Koko exchanged glances, exchanged chatter in their private tongue. Eventually, Koko said, “No... thank you?”
Lulu, bolder of the two, said, “Is it safe to hold your baby?”

“His name is Daniil.” Exandria had a dark joke, too. “If you don’t steal him, he won’t bite.”

Montgomery helped Lulu hold baby Daniil. He wondered anew that such a small creature could exist. Lulu and Koko seemed to be wondering, too. They clustered around Daniil.

Daniil cooed for the new faces, and wriggled into the twins’ body heat with small, happy noises.

For the first time in Montgomery’s hearing, the twins started to purr.

“Oh gods, he’s adorable,” Koko crooned, thus gaining eternal favour in Exandria’s eyes.

“He’s so cute,” singsonged Lulu. “I wanna steal him already.”

Good gods, that was an actual joke. They were getting confident. Montgomery was impressed. Nevertheless, he wanted to hold his baby boy.

“My turn, thank you,” he said, easing his son out of teenaged Elven arms. The twins still hovered close, watching Daniil squirm in his infant way. “Welcome to the family,” he said. To his son and to the twins at the same time.
MayaKnightStar on Chapter 3:

I love the twins and laming, they are so cute! Can we hear a full story from Laming?
Thank you!!!!!
Candlenights in Varmvale was something else. The entire circus, their families, and incidental people who just happened to live there year round gathered in the city hall for festive food, too much alcohol, and general socialisation. This also meant too many adults getting drunk and too many rebellious younglings sneaking one too many Winter Ciders. It was Candlenights. The kids were either high on sugar or approaching food comas, the grownups were in circles and sharing stories.

Montgomery and Exandria, usually in charge of curtailing the bawdier stories, had been plied with a little too many ciders and were coiled around each other and snuggling by the hearth while they waited for the room to stop careening around so much. Which meant that La’ming, the Circus’ chief flirt and source of terribly bawdy tales, was free to hold court with all the kids who shouldn't be so entranced by her bad examples.

However, it was Koko's turn to have the floor. "...easy cum, easy go-gurt," he slurred. He had definitely had a few too many Winter Ciders.
La'ming, listening intently, roared laughing. She, too, was well on her way to being gently pickled by cider. "Reminds me of the time I nearly burned down a cat-house in Featherstroke..." she began.

The twins reflexively looked over to Montgomery, who was distracted from the tilting room owing to an opportunity to snoodle with his wife, and took a chance.

"Sounds like a fun time," said Lulu.

It worked. La'ming launched straight into her story.

Few words about Featherstroke. They forged their town first with their mining, but literally everything tailed out and, as a way-point between places more interesting, the population went with the only way to make money they had left. It's a fun town. If it ain't a bawdy house, it's a casino, and if it ain't either, it's probably both.

They also make a really interesting drink out of the mosses and vines that grow on the rocks out that way. Watch out for the green jelly, that's all I can say about that.

Now, I wasn't rich enough at the time to afford the house of best repute, if you know what I mean. However, they have some very nice therapy that earned the town its name. These guys can use the entire chicken if you get my drift. Feels very nice by the way. Now, I don't remember a lot of what happened? I'd had a lot of those green jellies, and thanks to some mishaps in my formative years, my cycles a little... youknow. Wierd.

When Aunty Irma strikes plus alcohol, it's never pretty. I wanted to grab hold of the world with both hands and I couldn't even focus on one part of it.

So there I am in the middle of the steam parlour, in these teeny tiny underoos that leave nothing to the imagination, putting out more heat than they're putting in of you get my drift. There's like thirty guys, girls, and whatever else around. Some are customers, some are staff, and my masseuse fuckin' notices. Instant panic. They're trained for lots of shit, but the Elves having a Happening usually make better arrangements. At better places.

Then some genius decides to blow powdered Dreamroot in my face. You know what they say about Dreamroot, right?

Restful sleep, peaceful dreams, but give to Elves to make them scream.

Big. Fuckin'. Mistake.

Something real whacked out was going on in my noggin, that night. I was tripping major league balls. Now you have to understand that I had no understanding of what was real, and I only have what others told me after the fact. As best as I can remember, the place was suddenly full of Skitterclaw Roaches. I somehow managed to get up, roaches everywhere. Horny as hell. I grab the nearest thing, which was a flask of their best massage oil. Also made out of the vines and mosses.

They can do a real lot with vines and mosses. Hur hur hur.

I throw the oil. Really badly. It catches on the way over the candles, it catches in the candles, some of it catches on its way over to the splash zone.

There's screaming. There's pandemonium. There's me in my undies screaming, "want," at the top of my lungs, I think the whole place is full of the most disgusting, toxic bug there are... Three people are on fire. It's getting hot in more ways than one.

Thank the Gods that one of the clients there was a half-Elf who not only knew their shit but also dealt in a little of some primo 'lion. Dude cast Pyrotechnics on all of his dandelion seeds right under my nose. So now I'm in Luume, under the influence of Dreamroot, overdosed on green jelly, and now I've got a solid snootfull of the dankest fluff ever created by the hands of intelligent creatures. In. My. Undies. Only.

About the only creature I recognise at this point is my masseuse, who's still on fire.

So I jumped him. In more ways than one. Let's just say we got the fire smothered. He. Was. Not. Prepared. Neither was I.

I don't really know what happened after that bit, but the next morning I woke up on the landslide side of town, covered in therapeutic mud, clinging to someone's ass. Staring at the face of the local Watch, who were not pleased to see me.

They said, "You had a nice night, miss?"

And I said, "I dunno. This isn't even my donkey!"

La'ming waited for hoots of laughter. For applause. For some expressions of disgust or -in fact- any kind of normal reaction to a story like that.

Unfortunately, the twins had fallen asleep, propped against her.

Too much cider.
Everyone knew about the horrors of St Vingo’s by the time the twins fount Montgomery’s circus again. Montgomery had made the mistake of assuming that they would be safe in the arms of their extant family. He had assumed erroneously.

Their remaining living relatives - pure assholes. Once the grandfathers died, all promises of a safe home and a good future were forfeit. Which was why the circus found them again - destitute, desperate prostitutes who ran for the shelter of scum and villainy that was Montgomery’s Amazing Circus.
He let them be as idle as they wanted to be until they hit the Winter Campgrounds in Varnvale. It seemed fair. They needed time. Time to recover. Time to establish normalcy. Time to heal both mentally and physically from their misadventures. Time… that nobody had enough of.

Montgomery woke in the wee small hours to the sound of shouting and camp gear getting knocked over. That was Koko’s voice. He slithered out of his warmed bed to see what the ruckus was, not even bothering to sling on a coat, and remaining in only his sleeping cap.

Koko was out in the campgrounds, shouting at phantoms. He had a wooden spoon in one hand, aiming it like a wand. Judging by the burned end, it was not a wood that was friendly to magic. Judging by the scorch marks around camp, this was not an activity friendly to anyone.

He had to get this situation calmed down before anyone happened to anyone else.

“Keep away from them, you bitch,” Koko panted. “I got my wand. You can’t get them. You can’t have them!”

“That’s right,” said Montgomery, facing the invisible foe of Koko’s imagination with him. “You want them, you’ll have to get through me.”

Koko seemed startled a little. “Monty?”

“That’s right. It’s me.” Because of the situation, he used his least-favourite nickname on himself. “Monty. I want you to take three deep breaths, and name five things you can see. Take your time, now.” Time was the important factor. Koko’s body was awake, but his brain was still having a nightmare.


“I’ve been told,” he said dryly. “You’re doing great. Name four things you can hear, now.”

Koko’s ears twitched. “I hear… leaves rustling. The campfire coals cracking. There’s an owl… I hear La’ming snoring.”

Montgomery snorted. “Halverdale could hear La’ming snoring… That’s great. Concentrate on three things you can feel. Let’s hear them.”

Koko closed his eyes. “I… have… too tight a grip on this spoon… I feel… dirt… under my feet…”

He was starting to panic a little. Montgomery could tell by the way Koko’s ears drooped back and started swivelling closer to his head. He reached out and stroked Koko’s cheek while holding his hand. “Take your time, Koko.”

Tears gathered at the edge of his eyes. “I feel you.”

“That’s good. Good. Deep breath. Tell me about two things you can smell.”

“Horse farts and Naga’s bed funk.” Koko opened his mismatched eyes. The little asshole was fully awake and skating on thin ice as he always did.

“Last step, kid,” Montgomery started guiding him back to the caravan from whence he had come. “One thing you can taste.”

Koko smacked his lips and grimaced. “I need to brush my teeth. My mouth is gross.”
“After dawn,” Montgomery suggested. Inside the twins’ caravan, Lulu was still in bed, arms outstretched for a sibling that wasn’t there. She had only just begun whimpering in her sleep.

Sleep. Not meditation. They didn’t trust their safety. Not yet. The Starlights and their dreams of riches had ruined what little trust had remained in the twins’ souls. Now they slept every time, and meditated rarely, if at all.

Koko clambered into Lulu’s reach, whispering, “It’s all right. We’re safe. They’re gone.” The fact that he could summon only half a breath’s worth of a safe-comfortable-secure kind of purr was telling, and telling harshly, that he wasn’t sure, either.

Montgomery closed their door for them, fetched his coat, and kept watch over their caravan until the dawn coloured in the landscape. They would both likely need sleeping sacks to prevent another random outbreak of somnambulistic battles of old ghosts from their past.

They would definitely need heavy counselling from Exandria when they were safely within the boundaries of Varmvale.

Which left Montgomery the problem of finding light, summer-rated sleeping sacks as the Autumnal chill kept strengthening, and puzzling out who the twins could talk to until Exandria was within reach.

All he could do in the meantime was keep them supplied with dandelions and mead, in the hopes that it would at least calm their fears until something better came along.
dualityandsuch said:
And Baby Birds angst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Koko clung to Lulu like his life depended on it. His twin did the same. There was a big Orc lady and
a slightly smaller Dragonborn and both of them were the type that some other kids said would fatten up and eat little teeny Elves like them. Personally, Koko wouldn’t mind the ‘fattening up’ part, but he didn’t want to end up as anyone else’s stew.

This was a home visit, according to the officials. One week away in someplace called Star River, then back to the bland, grey chill of the orphanage for assessment. Koko knew what ‘assessment’ meant. It meant a standing naked in a cold, clinical room while entire bunches of people poked and prodded at him and took blood and asked questions and tutted at his answers and made him pee into small containers and he never knew if anything was right.

Assessment was where they pulled him away from Lulu so hard that they both had bruises for a week and scrubbed him raw and shaved his head. Koko hated assessment.

The Dragonborn - Mrs Fangbattle - was chattering nonstop while her Orc wife drove the carriage. Koko hardly paid attention to it. Most of it was about some legal tangle involving the place they were going to. Old wards and farmland and some estate auction or other horseshit. He was just focussed on holding Lulu for all the time they had left.

Lulu whispered into his ear, in Us, just to be sure, “We’re not dead yet.”

Koko knew Lulu meant it as reassurance, but he couldn’t help thinking of it as an impending threat. Like they only had hours left to them. Like they were destined to be dead later.

He flinched when a huge, Orcish hand petted his shaved head, then hated himself for purring at the contact. He shrank away from the touch and watched out the corner of his eye as an Orc hand that could easily crush his whole head went back to gently grasping the reins.

“IT’s always like this,” said the Orc. The other Mrs Fangbattle. “Too scared of the unknown to give anything or anyone a chance. I’ve been there. I’d hoped things had changed, but… they haven’t.”

He had no idea what they’d meant about that. He and Lulu had had scant time with these two at all. Now the orphanage trusted them to take him and Lulu away to who-knew-where to do gods-knew-what and…

Wait.

Koko looked again, startled. He picked out the next one a mile further along the road and pointed it out to Lulu. The symbols may dance for him, but Lulu could make them stand still by holding his[1] fingers just so. Koko could never make them behave like that. Yet another way in which Lulu was the better twin. Not that he’d ever say that out loud.

“Lulu! Lookit.” He switched to Us after that little stumble and said, “Do the finger trick. That’s gotta be a marker for Grampa’s place!”

Lulu looked. Waited until the stone was close enough and did the finger trick. Neither of them could read Elven, but they remembered the symbols on those markers. “It is! It is! We’re headed for Grampa’s village! We can jump off and hide in the safety holes and steal food off’a the guests and they’d never get to us because of the family wards. Koko, you’re a genius!”

“Ohello…” said Mrs Fangbattle. The blue one. “You see something familiar? Have you been here before?”

They went back to their huddle, and guarded silence. They couldn’t let the plan out where these two Elf-eaters could foil it. They had to bide their time and wait.
Carey jumped a little when the twins bolted off the carriage and ran for the campsite, hand in hand. “Wait,” she shouted. “There’s dangerous wards all over–”

The twins just breezed past them like they belonged there.

“Well. That’s unusual,” said Killian in an epic level of irony. “They’re the first ones besides the Starlights who could just cruise through those wards.”

Carey sighed. “Well. They belong there. It might make them feel better about us?”

“No, love. This is bad. They belong there. Which means they’re related to the Starlights. Which means either they or the orphanage are guilty of fraud. And if it’s them, they’re also guilty of criminal neglect.”

“Ooohhh…” Carey let that all sink in. “Well, shit. Okay. It’s my turn to call the Bureau lawyers. You get a good old camp stew going. The kids are likely to hide in that tree until boredom sets in, right?”

“Maybe,” Killian allowed. “I’ll give them a couple of hours, anyway.”

The time almost flew by. Killian spent most of it halting what she was doing and staring at the Mountain Ygdrassi castle in the hopes of seeing two small, Elven forms turning up anywhere. She couldn’t help worrying that they’d found some ancient Elven trap or fallen prey to some wild creature living in the labyrinthine expanse of tree and burrow. They were skinny enough to slide right down the kludgie-holes and get trapped in the noisome oubliette at the tree’s roots…

Finally, when the arbitrary time limit was up, she picked up one of her smaller weapons and adventuring gear and announced, “Fuck it. I don’t care what those wards do to me, I need to make sure our kids are safe.”

A little known fact about Elven wards. When designed to secure the safety and protection of the family, they have a rather loose and inclusive definition of ‘family’. In brief, Killian had just said the magic words.

Not that she cared about any of that. Her first priority was the pair of tiny children presumably lost in the confounding tangle of warrens and hollows that was inside the tree. She charged in, more worried about them than herself. Prepared to take on any threat within those ever-growing walls.

She found them curled up in a cote off the ground floor family area. A space just big enough to hold the both of them and keep them out of Killian’s reach. Safe and sound.

“Oh thank the gods,” she breathed. “Lulu, Koko… this place has been abandoned for years. There could be snakes and other things in the small spaces. Please come on out? I’m worried about you.”

They boggled at her like she’d grown two heads. There was a hushed but animated argument.

Lulu said, “How’d you get past the wards?”

“I had to make sure you two were safe,” she said. “I don’t care what they do to me. Come on. We can camp in the safe zone and figure out what’s happening later. I need you safe now.”

Lulu looked to Koko, who sized Killian up like a butcher sizing up a hog. Finally, he said, “Okay,” and started crawling out of the tiny cote.
He and Lulu actually suffered her careful grasp, carrying them out of there. Still clinging to each other as they clung to her for stability. Something momentous had happened, she knew it. What exactly it was could wait until these two had all they could eat and a proper rest back at camp.

Chapter End Notes

Reader Request #33

Chapter Notes

flyingfishflops on Chapter 6:

Sjsjdhsjdj this is so cute.
If you don’t mind, I’d love to see some more of the Jason story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jason was up to his elbows in hot, soapy water. Getting the dishes, pots, pans and assorted tools of the kitchen perfectly clean. Because he didn't want to get his clothes too wet, he had an apron on and his sleeves rolled up to the elbow. Because it was getting later in the evening, he had taken his shoes and socks off.

Because it was his third week of giving Mom a night off, his father was hovering in the kitchen doorway and glaring at him. Jason could feel the impending sexist comment looming like a fat storm cloud.

"If you don't have anything better to do, you could pick up a tea towel and do some drying."

Dad rumbled, "'M not a woman," like distant thunder.

"Neither am I. Was there a point you were trying to make?" Jason sprained something not grinning at that one. Taako had gone over all the arguments with Jason during his survival lessons. Jason knew every foil.

Dad didn't rise to the bait, but he didn't pick up a tea towel either. He said, "Housework's for the women. You need a real man's job."

"Housework's harder than you think it is," said Jason. "Have you ever made anything other than your famous roasted sausages or that Fantasy French silk chocolate pie you make for Mom on her birthday? You also make a huge mess for her to clean up, which is kind'a rude if you think about it."

This time, his thunder rumbled, "Don't know nothing about cleaning up a kitchen."

"Great news. You can learn any time." Jason smiled. "It'd help Mom out a great deal."

"What does she even need help with? She does nothing all day."

Jason could have argued her case, but... Mom was a fairly smart woman. "Well then. You'll have no trouble swapping with her for a week."

Dad laughed. "Yeah. My work would squash her flat in two days."

"Bet on it?" goaded Jason.

Susan had little idea how it happened, but the men in her life insisted that this would be good for
everyone and "settle things once and for all." Her boys were up to something and she would play along until whatever little silliness they had going on played out. Then it would become an amusing Candlenights story or parlour tale at the next coffee and cake club.

Jason had told her to wear comfortable shoes and hard-wearing clothes, and now Kyle's boss, Mr Chandler, was guiding her around the storehouse where Kyle worked all day. She was already formulating several questions about the organisation in this place. Or rather... lack thereof. There was no way anyone could find anything quickly and efficiently in this mess. Typical men. They needed a good woman to come in and sort everything out for them. And their bookkeeping was a total mess.

Her first question told how her week would be going. "Do you want some suggestions to improve efficiency around here? I can think of a dozen easy things everyone can do to help speed things along for everyone."

Mr Chandler listened instead of rolling his eyes like Kyle did.

Meanwhile...

Kyle was scrubbing ineffectually at his favourite suede vest. "What idiot left greasy cheese on this?"

"I think that was you, Pop," said Jason. He was being Obnoxiously Good by not getting in Dad's way and only doing what he was told. "I can only help you do that," had become his catch-cry. And, like Taako, was not-so-gently encouraging his father to realise that inaction came with consequences, too.

"The suede brush isn't working. What works on grease stains?"

"Lots of things work to get rid of grease stains, do you want the most effective one?"

"Yes. Now."

And just because he was being Obnoxiously Good, Jason said sweetly, "You forgot the magic word, Dad."

Glare. "Please show me the best way to get this grease stain off."

Dad learned way faster than Jason had. Good sign. He zipped into the kitchen for the corn starch and showed his father how it worked on grease. "And if this doesn't work, we can try hitting it with some pure vinegar. That works on the older stains."

"Vinegar keeps turning up," said Dad. "Is it useful for lots of things?"

Good grief, an intelligent question. Jason decided to reward him with five requests free of Obnoxious Goodness. "That's a real smart question there. In fact, there's only one stain that vinegar won't shift, and that's blood. Your best bet there is using salt and lemon juice. There's a lot of soaking and waiting on that one."

Dad, already sick of soaking and scrubbing and rubbing whimpered a little. "Mom does this every Monday?[1]"

"Mondays and Thursdays, before I cleaned up my act."

"...gods..."

"And we still have to cook a healthy dinner for Mom when she comes home."
Dad boggled at the pile of laundry, most of which was his garments. "How long does that take?"

"Depends. What did you have in mind? And sausages are off the menu."

"Uuuuhhhhhh...."

Dinner was wonderful. A glistening roast with expert glaze and surprising herbs with steamed vegetables and rich gravy. Susan hadn't known her boys were capable of such things. Kyle had rushed to rinse the warehouse stains off her clothes and run her a fragrant bath, and now she was relaxing with her aching feet in a warm tub and a hot meal and wine ready for her. Her nighty was crisp and her bathrobe so fluffy. They had gone all out.

"Aw, this is so sweet of you. Thank you, darling."

Kyle said, "Jason showed me how. I've been learning a lot from our boy."

Jason said, "Yup. I've been giving Pop some Taako lessons."

Susan remained as oblivious as ever. "Our boy. A teacher at fourteen. I feel like such a loaf. All I've been doing all day is sorting things out."

Kyle looked a little flummoxed. "My boss took mercy on you and had you doing the paperwork?"

She laughed. "No, silly. I had the paperwork sorted out before morning tea. No, I was re-organising the entire warehouse. Did you know that not one of your coworkers had any idea about common pathing?"

Kyle looked like he hadn't heard of it either. "I have to be honest. I think you might have said that once or twice? But I wasn't focussing on it."

Susan started to explain. People, like rivers, took the path of least resistance. They didn't like travelling far with heavy things, but tended to have the same philosophy with light things if they were in a hurry. This led to everything being in a chaotic pile in the front. An organised shelving system with the most common items in unit storage near the doors solved a _lot_ of problems. Storing things according to mass helped, too. As did categorised shelving and a boy or three to sweep through them and make certain there weren't any misfiles lying around. I freed up sixty cubic feet in one day. That's just half of one warehouse. I couldn't get all of it done, unfortunately."

Kyle had frozen, fork in midair. "You... found... sixty cubic feet of space? In one day?"

Jason was smirking into his vegetables.

"Everything rushed along once I got past ten. Those boys were so eager to help after I demonstrated the principal. Do you want to know what they called me after that? A much-needed competent woman. Me! I never thought I was any such thing."

Kyle finally ate his fragment of roast. Thinking as he chewed. He finally said, "Honey, I think I might have helped you with that bad idea. You always were competent. I just... I never saw it before today."

Jason pumped his fist in victory.
[1] History time! Laundry was once such a labour-intensive occupation [involving such steps as hauling water from the well and boiling the water over a fire in a vessel called a 'copper'] that it was done once a week. There's even a painting called _Monday Morning_ that shows how laundry was done in the bad old days. Look it up. [insert 'the more you know' gif]
dualityandsuch said:
If I planned this right, it should be about time to see the twins trying to hook up Mak and Ming (I want to draw this and hopefully when I can crank out some art before you post it) :P
Love, they say, is strange. It certainly isn’t logical, and the road to the best and longest-lasting loves is long, winding, and full of potholes. Lulu and Koko were pondering this as they shared a pipe, well out of anyone’s view.

“We know they’re in love,” said Koko, circling the distant figures of La’ming, their mother figure by Luume-adoption, and Mak’arune, famously repressed costume nerd. They were currently in the centre of the circus campground, standing five feet apart so that no-one would ‘accidentally’ bump them into each other. “Everyone in the circus knows they’re in love. Hell, even Borstok clued into it.” Puff. “So why don’t they?”

Lulu took the pipe out of his fingers and inhaled deeply. She blew the dandelion smoke out of her nostrils. “It’s been like a decade or something. I wanna be a flower girl at their wedding, not an Honour Guard.”

Koko was smiling. “Lulu? I have had a genius idea.”

“More genius than locking them in a trailer together for the night? Or sending one of them to fetch the other while they were skinny-dipping? Or pretending the seasonal sniffles was a curse that could only be cured by true loves’ kiss?”

“It was better than getting them drunk and hoping for the best,” sniped Koko. “Or sliding rings on their fingers when they passed out and lying our asses off about them being married already. Or trying to get Mak’arune to keep La’ming warm after ‘someone’ misfired a frost curse on Mom’s mermaid tank.”

Koko took the pipe back and inhaled a measured half of the dried weeds left in the tiny pipe bowl. He let his smoke out through the gap in his teeth. “Sure. Fine. We’ve both had our fuckups. But listen. We’re close to Thanerdon.”

“That moralistic ass pit that made everyone rent rooms so that there’d be no shenanigans? They never had enough rooms for all of us and everyone had to pair– Oooohhh…”

Koko let her have the last of their pipe. “Everyone had to pair up. They made us do a blood test to prove we were sibs and everything. And they’re relentlessly heteronormative. Which means they put the boys with the boys…”

Lulu drew a heart around their prospective parentals with the stem of their pipe. “And the girls with
the girls. Now all we gotta do is scam Monty Junior into going to Thanderdon.”

The plan was on. The entire circus was in on it. Well. The entire circus except for Mak’arune and La’ming, both oblivious as hell. Everyone who was a part of the circus suddenly became exemplary citizens of high moral standing, and all paraphernalia of naughtiness was well concealed.

So well concealed that some of them wouldn’t find it until next spring, but they all agreed that it would be worth it if those two finally admitted something about each other and their feelings.

Montgomery Jr, as well as five other crew members, kept the proposed roommates occupied for a majority of the day. Montgomery had Mak’arune securing paperwork, and other circus crew had La’ming run off her feet with errands, often to the other side of Thanderdon.

The twins secured their own room early. A modest twin (ha!) with single bunks that they would have to muss up half of because their own nighttime peace of mind included being able to reach out in their slumber and find their sibling. On the rare occasion that they felt safe enough to meditate, they did so back-to back and wands in hand.

Thus, the two lovers-in-waiting found themselves with just one bedroom with one bed to share, and the individual of their affections being dragged into the room by one of the twins.

“Its this or jail, Mom,” Lulu said, shoving her adoptive parent by her shoulders. “And we already spent the bail fund on the rooms, so… It’s not really a choice.”

Koko, meanwhile, grunted as he shoved Mak’arune closer to his adoptive parent. “They say… nothing naughty can happen. It’s just for the week. We… meditate… anyway… (Oof) So… what’s… the big… deal?”

It was clear that inertia and abject mortification had produced a pretty darn effective repulsion shield that kept La’ming and Mak’arune three feet apart and burning bright with embarrassment. The twins checked each other across the seemingly impassable gulf.

Koko made the universal gesture for, What now?

Lulu made the universal gesture for, I don’t fuckin’ know…

Koko attempted being glib. “Well you two already know each other, so I guess it’s arm wrasslin’ to see who gets the side nearest the privy or something.”

Lulu, too, tried to lighten the mood. “Mom snores when she lies on her back so you might have to jab her in the ribs real hard if that happens.”

They both apparently rolled ones. Silence stretched as the ruddy tides of mortification rose to conquer two Elf faces. Koko side-stepped towards the door. Lulu followed suit.

“We’ll… uh… we’ll leave you two to it.”

“Don’t do anything we haven’t done,” chirped Lulu.

Five seconds out in the hall, after they shut the door, they switched to Us.

“What the fuck was that? ‘Don’t do anything we haven’t done’? What the fuck, Lulu?”
“I couldn’t help it. I panicked. It was meant to be a joke.”

“Nobody’s laughing, sis…”

“I fucking noticed.”

Koko’s ear twitched. They were talking. Well. Saying stuff in the vicinity of each other. “Shuddup, they might be working something out.”

Both twins put an ear to the door.

Mak’arune had gone past vermillion and was heading towards maroon because she also hardly dared breathe. Silence stretched like a prisoner on the rack. She coughed delicately to remind herself that air existed and she was free to partake.

“So,” said La’ming.

“Yeah,” allowed Mak’arune.

“I’m sorry about those kids,” she allowed. “I think they think we’d be cute together or something.”

“Yeah.” Her brain caught up with her mouth, and then raced off with it. “I mean no. I mean… we could, I suppose, but there’s complications. I mean. You’re a perfectly nice person and everything. Of course you are. I think you’re doing a wonderful job with those two scamps. It’s just… I always thought…”

La’ming rescued her with, “We can take turns meditating on the bed. It’s only four hours each.”

Outside the door, Koko shouted, “DAMNIT!”
Lily on Chapter 8:

I love these so much, particularly the circus chapters. Would you ever consider writing one where Lup and Taako return to visit the circus post hunger?

[AN: I originally figured they’d stay on Tosun and whatnot, so this is an AU Universe Alteration. An AU UA if you will]
Out of fame, they made a fortune. Taako's cookbooks were suddenly in high demand again. Lup and Taako together found a scribe who could take down their rapid-fire bickering narrative in real time and put out their own version of a tell-all book about their time on the Starblaster. Taako was currently allergic to Lucretia, so Lup deferred. He had lived with the scars longer than she'd even been aware of them.

Now they were doing publicity tours, helped by the fact that Lup was literally in the flesh by then. Taako spent more time using Disguise Self, using his sister as his only mirror and Krav's delight as his only measure of worth. He had people who are never there telling him how he could have stopped the Hunger before he even knew it existed. People telling him everything he did wrong. People starting statements with, "I wouldn't have done it that way..."

Fuckin' good for them. They didn't know what the Hunger even was before Fisher and Junior showed them everything. Now everyone had an opinion. Taako had to bite his tongue to not correct them. Bite it harder when he was so very tempted to whip them with barbed retorts like, "You can defeat the next one, then," or, "Well we didn't have your amazing expertise from the point of view as a dung carter," or, "What level are you again?"

Lup, Barry, and Krav caught the edges of it. In every inn, at every campsite. For every rant about the unadulterated ignorance. He had degrees at the most prestigious educational establishment on their entire damn homeworld, damnit. What did they fuckin' know? They had nothing. Nothing! They had their opinions and everyone knows about them, right? Opinions are like assholes. Everyone's got one and nobody reckons theirs stinks. He would then dissolve into iterations of, "Fuck them," until sleep finally claimed him.

Lup would cuss them out between signatures, keeping to Us so that nobody else could understand what she was saying. Keeping a smile on his face in the bookshops and cafes where they annotated and signed every copy for every asshole who had an opinion. She was the smarter twin, and that
proved it by letting the emotional steam out in small, safe doses rather than Taako's angry, explosive
rants in the night. He'd rant about some of that, too. Calmed and eased by the love of his family.

Well. The family he had left.

After a month, he stopped keeping track of the towns they stopped in. Stopped asking folks' names.
Stopped caring a mote for any of the multitude of faces who came and stopped listening to whatever
they had to say. Started signing every book with, You're welcome, and his mark.

That was why it was such a shock when he was signing in Varmvale.

"You inspired us," said the latest mark in the queue.

"Uh-huh," mumbled Taako. Wringing another You're welcome, out of his fingers. Then Lup
elbowed him in the ribs. Hard. He flipped to Us. "Lulu, what the fucking hell?"

"Be nicer to our mother."

Wait. What?

Taako looked up from his half-angered slouch. Holy shit, he knew those boobs. From when they
were in their late seventies and she was the only one besides Monty and Kustaad and Mrs Kustaad -
Tri'fel - who could tell how old they were. When he was one of the few who was completely
immune to her tits.

"No fuckin' way. Mo-- I mean, La'ming?" And peeking shyly behind her... their other mom.
"Mak'arune?" And further behind... so many familiar faces. Or close enough to familiar. "Monty
Junior?"

"Monty the third," the Naga with the familiar top hat smiled. "Ms. Monty the third. You Elves never
keep track of generations, do you?" Oh yeah. She had a distinctive lack of a hood.

Taako was illogically homesick. "You look just like your grandad when we were nineteen..." He
was illogically happy. He turned to Lup and said, "Lulu, we've come home..."

"It's only the twentieth time I tried to tell you," she snarked. Always keeping score. "Wake up,
Koko."

La'ming Ton and Mak'arune Ton - they had matching rings - were not his adopted mothers, but...
This looked so very familiar. There were illogical tears in his eyes. "Tell me you two stole some
babies who needed a chance?"

"We found a pair of abandoned babies one fine Luume," said Mak'arune. Not his Mak'arune, but so
achingly like her. "They're artificers in Neverwinter."

"Well shit, I always wanted some sibs," Taako laughed. "I know you're not my mom, I left her back
on my home planet, but..."

"Of course we'll adopt you too," said La'ming. "Come here and give your family a hug."

He knocked over the table on the way. Of all the people on his homeworld that he missed, these
were the echoes that healed his heart the most. No more talking dust. Not now, not ever. Family all
over again. That's the way he had to do things. They might not be the family he left behind, but they
were willing to be his family all over again. That was how he beat so many others out for the coveted
position on the Starblaster in the first place. The ability to form such bonds with people who were
completely unrelated. The ability to bond with his shipmates. The ability to pull up stakes, move on, and adapt. The ability to make wherever he was and whoever he was with his home.

Taako threw away the book he'd started on, replacing it with a fresh copy. "I signed that one wrong," he said. "Lemme fix it."

He signed it, *Thank you for everything the other you did*, and then his mark.
FifiMae on Chapter 9:

Can you write a story about Kraviz having a nightmare for the first time in centuries and Taako teaching him the grounding exercise?

The more time he spent in mortal form, the more mortality showed on him. Love warmed his body for Taako, that was true, but wearing a mortal body also gave him hunger, thirst, and weariness.

Tonight, it gave him nightmares.

Tar-like stuff he could not name, forming into hands, dragging him under the dimly-lit surface, coloured in rainbows like an oil slick. Imbued with rainbows that bit him as they shone. They whispered lies in his ear. Give up. Nothing’s worth it. It's all pointless...

Taako, visible through the portal caused by a death, snatches Magnus back into the living, and sees him. Sees him struggling. Sees him fighting. Shoves away Magnus and enters the Astral plane.

That... That didn't happen that way...

The portal was closing, and the thin thread that held Taako's soul to his body was in peril of being cut off.

Taako... Taako, no! Look out!

Fighting to get free of the chilling, grasping hands. Fighting to rise up and stop the disaster from happening.

No... no, no, no. NO! Taako!

"Babe... Babe, wake up."

The portal closes. The thread snaps. Taako's soul, no longer weightless, plunges into the oil-slick ocean of hands and Kravitz gets to see the expression of shock like so many empty shells in the world of the living...

TAAKO! OH MY GODS TAAKO, NO!

"Krav? Honey... Babe... Love... Kravitz, come on back to me."

He sees the light fade out, the form fade out, the life fade out of him. Just another soul in the endless sea. Turning into the opal lights in the oil slick. Turning into another hand dragging him down.

NO! NO NO NO NO NO!

"Babe. Babe, I'm right here. I'm right here with you. Take a deep breath, baby. In and out. Breathe with me."
Air on his face. Air in his lungs. Some hands on him are warm. The restraining force is still there. He fights anyway. Taako needs him to be free...

"That's good. That's good. Tell me five things you can see. One at a time. Five things you can see. For me, baby."

Two lights were Taako's eyes in the darkness. Shining steadily out of the oil slick. Strong and bright. "I see your eyes."

"Good. Good start. Four more to go."

"I see your lips. Your ears." Gods, he wanted to kiss them. "I see our bed."

"One more, babe. You got this. One more thing you can see."

Moonbeam. "I see a moonbeam. It's making everything glow."

Taako was with him. Taako was smiling. His hair was up in two braids and he had his footie pyjamas on and he never looked more adorable. "That's fucking great. Okay. Next up. Four things you can hear. Tell me all about 'em."

"I hear your beautiful voice. I hear... the tree creaking in the wind. I hear the Fantasy Fridge running in the kitchen. I... hear the Aga burning."

"That's great. Fan-fuckin'-tastic, sweetie. You're almost there. Now name three things you can feel."

The hands holding him were Taako's. "I feel your hands. And... I got tangled in the comforter. And..." He untangled himself, reached out and caressed one of Taako's ears. "Your skin is always so amazing."

"Flirt," Taako was starting to relax a little. Kravitz could tell by the way his hair was letting down from an attempt at an anxious frizz. "Tell me about two things you can smell. We're nearly there."

Kravitz took a deep breath. "I can smell that casserole you put in to slow cook last night. It almost makes me hungry. And..." he took a deep breath from behind Taako's ear. "I smell you. You're even more delicious."

"Yeah, you're back f'r sure," Taako leaned in and kissed him. "But you still gotta tell me one thing you can taste."

"I taste your monster mouth," said Kravitz.

"Worth it?"

"Totally." They kissed again. "That's... I remember having nightmares, before, but it was always... vague. That was too close to real. It hurt."

"I know, baby." Taako laid back down beside him in the dark. Snuggling up to him. "You woke me up."

"Sorry."

"Don't be. 'Drather be there for you than sleep through your time of need. 'Sides. It's kind'a reassuring that your nightmares would be about me in danger."

"I was talking in my sleep?"
"Babe, you were fighting in your sleep. Fighting the covers, but still... I got a pretty good clue to where your noggin was."

Kravitz wrapped his arms around his husband. Alive. Safe. Sharing a bed. Sharing a life. Sharing his love. "I don't want to hurt you with my bad dreams."

Taako was already half asleep. "We'll get you a sleepy sack tomorrow. Just in case."

That was why Kravitz loved him. Always ready with an interesting solution to any given problem.
Chapter Notes

LadyVin on Chapter 9:

Can we see some Kravitz & Agatha bonding time?

All mortals looked young to Kravitz. It was existing for thousands of years that did it. In the service of his Queen, he had seen nations rise and fall. He had seen generations repeat the mistakes of the past over and over to the point where he could sing along with the chorus. He had met hundreds of souls with thousands of regrets. He thought nothing new could ever happen.

Then he met Taako.

Life changed. Existence changed. He met Taako's literal firecracker of a sister and could understand how he had come through his rough life just... being like that. He caught the Story and Song, and knew that Taako was someone incredible. Not that he'd had a single doubt before then. His 'idiot wizard' act was a work of pure genius.

Life with Taako was a whirlwind with no clue of how it was going to end, or where, or when. It had to. Eventually. Kravitz knew this and prayed daily that 'eventually' was an appreciably long time away.

In the meantime, for the years when Taako was vibrantly alive, loving life, and sharing all the treats... he had situations like this. Awkwardly babysitting the wife of their adopted son whilst her side of the family attempted another vengeful vendetta as a response to her latest tell-all article.

It was a good one. Guaranteed to rile up the public about how bad a set of villains the Tremaines were. Which should have prevented any of them from striking back against Agatha, but both Angus and Taako preferred to play it safe.

Guarded by the Grim Reaper? Check.

Inside a metric fuck-ton of wards naturally supplied by the farmhouse in Star Valley? Check.

Whilst the rest of the Reaper Squad, Tres Horny Boys, Team Sweet Flips and the world's greatest detective hunted down and eliminated the threat? Check, and check.

With the world's smartest two-month old? Now that bit, Kravitz could enjoy.

Agnes was investigating her own fist as she sat in her mother's arms, and had had enough of Kravitz attempting to make her laugh and was patently ignoring her silly Popop. So now Kravitz had to find something he and Agatha had in common besides their family.

Kravitz figured crime fighting might be a decent basis. "I never had crime in my family. I mean, before I married Taako."

"Taako's enough crime to make up for any lack," she smiled. "He's something of a pro, there. At least he never hurt anyone on purpose with his crimes."
Kravitz had to laugh. "You should have seen him hustling for this house. I'm shocked he didn't walk away with their shoes."

Agatha laughed as she dandled Agnes on her knee. "The only shoes my family were concerned about were the concrete ones."

Oof. That was a mood killer. "That's the reason you decided to go against them?"

"One of them," Agatha checked that her daughter was still awake. "I was six before I realised the family wasn't... nice. Someone disappeared and I heard about them being sent on holiday from my aunt. I didn't know it was a euphemism. I just heard about a money reward for information about where they went and... accidentally became an informant."

"That's not as bad as being an accidental sacrifice," Kravitz noted. "That's how I started my career."

Agatha said, "You've inherited some one-upsmanship from Taako."

Which lead to another round of loving trash-talk about their favourite Elf. Agnes fell asleep, still mouthing her fist. Eventually, Taako and Angus returned, the former smoking slightly and the latter mildly bruised.

"Got the bad guys?" he and Agatha asked together.

"You bet'cher ass we got 'em," smoothed Taako. "You and the Aglet are safe."

"Again," said Angus. "One day, we'll get 'em all."
dualityandsuch asked:

Can we get Garfield interacting with the circus peeps?

[AN: We got into a discussion about La’ming and Garfield and then this happened]
It was the largest building in the world. The shocking part was that it was a business-place for one business. Inside was a huge warehouse that held wonders from all around the world. It promised discounts, bargains, and dreams come true if one read the marquee.

The inside seemed to be dimensionally transcendent. People from all walks of life could just come in
and buy entire crate-loads of whatever they wanted.

The circus fucking loved it.

Koko couldn’t believe it. They had all kinds of magical shit just lying around in baskets, tubs, and bins, as well as sitting around on the shelves.

“T’ma gonna steal one of every-fucking-thing in here,” he whispered.

“I WOULDN’T TRY THAT, SWEETHEART. THE ANTI-THEFT CURSES ARE TERRIBLE!”

The twins jumped and shrieked. Floating just behind them was the terrifying figure of a large-ish ginger Tabaxi in a moon-and-star-patterned robe. He had a nametag that introduced him to the literate as Garfield.

La’ming, still biologically compelled to care for their welfare, wrapped one up in each arm and issued a warning growl at him.

“JUST A FRIENDLY WARNING, MADAM. THE AISLES OF THE FANTASY COSTCO ARE RIDDLED WITH THEIR OWN KIND OF PERIL. WE HAVE STRICT ANTI-SHOPLIFTING WARDS AND ANY UNATTENDED CHILDREN WILL BE EMPLOYED.”

After a moment’s thought, the Tabaxi added. “FOR ANY FURTHER ENQUIRIES, I SHALL BE AT YOUR BECK AND CALL. HAVE A GOOD DAY.”

They hustled away from the Tabaxi, feeling like they had just escaped an eldritch horror. La’ming quickly distracted the twins with the variety of choice available to anyone with the money or the vouchers. This place had _everything_. Bags of Holding in assorted colours. Pocket tents, pocket workshops, pocket laboratories. Portable holes, portable doors, portable underground connections…

Koko fell in love with the pocket spa. Based on the same principal as the pocket tent, this one promised all one’s relaxation needs including refreshments and a golem for massages. It boasted the ability to hold and sustain two medium-sized creatures when compact and up to six when unfurled.

His for only… way more than he could afford. Ever. In his life. Even if he went straight and kept the bail fund overflowing… he’d never have one.

Koko contemplated ways he could scratch it or dirty it up so he’d get a discount without breaking it completely.

“FIND SOMETHING YOU LIKE, SWEETIE?”

“Could you not do that?”

“I ONLY KNOW ONE WAY TO APPEAR, HANDSOME. PERHAPS YOU’D LIKE TO MAKE A DEEEEEEEEAAAAALLLLL…”

It was the way he was salivating on the word ‘deal’ that almost scared Koko’s pants brown. “You win the intimidation check hombre. Truth is, I ain’t got the money for this and probs never will. So unless there’s someone I could fuck for this…”

“FRATERNISING WITH THE CUSTOMERS VIOLATES COMPANY RULES, GORGEOUS.”

Oh thank the gods. “Maybe we could play a game,” he looked around. “What’s that green table
“THAT’S A POOL TABLE, SON. HAVEN’T YOU EVER PLAYED POOL BEFORE?”

“No,” Koko lied. “Maybe you could show me how to play and then best out of five wins?”

He was drooling again. “AND WHAT DO I WIN WHEN YOU LOOSE, HMMMM?”

“You can gimme a haircut and keep the hair.” Roughly equivalent worth, really, and harmless enough to not cause much trouble down the line.”

Two hours later, Koko caught up with his family. He had the pocket spa, Garfield’s Shoes of Floatation, and the nifty dollar-sign pendant he’d been wearing.

“Where were you?” said La’ming, who had found the costumes section. “I was starting to worry.” Translation: She was worried and working on her last nerve trying not to outright panic.

“Playin’ some pool with the big cat,” said Koko. “Got some neat stuff.”

La’ming, wearing a really cheap imitation of Garfield’s robe over her clothes, squealed in delight and borrowed the pendant. She put on some tiger-print platforms, a pair of kitty mittens and a humorous cat mask as well. “HoW dO i LoOk, DaRlInG?” she said, mocking Garfield’s voice. “Is It WoRtH a DeEeEeEaAaAlLlL?”

She was hilarious.

Garfield was not impressed. Especially when Lulu attempted to hustle him at pool for the outfit.
dualityandsuch asked:

Luume’d Mak hitting on Ming. Roll your will save.

[AN: Big thanks to @dualityandsuch for getting me into the Hamilton Soundtrack which has heavily inspired parts of this effort. Also, my mind has been everywhere today, so apologies if this turns up tomorrow. I got a weird day]
The first La’ming knew about Mak’arune having a Luume episode was what she initially thought of as her babies horsing around. They were apparently playing a variant of tag with someone else in the circus camp.
They swung around her caravan to where she was busy with the laundry and cheered, “YES!” One ducked back to wave and chirp, “Yoo-hoo! Here we are! This way!” Then the other dragged the first away and up to their favourite hiding spot on the roof of the caravan.

La’ming had enough time to say, “What are you two–” before she got a far more distracting interruption.

“Babies… come ba-a-ack…” Mak’arune rounded the caravan and met eyes with La’ming. “Preeeeetzttyyyyyyyyy…”

La’ming knew the symptoms instantly. Flushed face. Dilated pupils. An easy, slightly drunken smile and a marginally unsteady gait. That, and Mak’arune smelled very, very nice.

Slightly worrying was the fact that she was wearing a very flattering red dress that normal-Mak’arune didn’t feel bold enough to wear. It showed off all her best aspects and put more colour into her Moon Elf pallor.

*Gods, show me how to say no to this…*

The on-again, off-again Thing between her and Mak’arune was so well known that it inspired multiple attempts to get the two to admit it, several thousand camp jokes, and at least one raunchy song with the refrain, “Waiting for the day…” Mak’arune deep in Luume might prove too much for her tentative willpower.

*I don’t know how to say no to this…*

Her eyes were deep and dark and La’ming could get lost in them if she wanted to and she smelled of crisp linens and a cool, fresh stream and that rosin she always used when she threaded her needles and…

*Oh gods, I feel so helpless…*


So very tempting. La’ming forgot about the laundry. Forgot about the twins whispering with each other on the rooftop. Forgot that she was soaking wet and wearing the ugliest dress in the world. Forgot, entirely, that she wanted their eventual meeting to be something magical.

*How can I say no to this?*

Her lips were sweet, soft, and warm. Bliss and balm and comfortable - so comfortable. The soft swell of her purr kicked up as La’ming purred back and for a moment - just a moment - she nearly dove into temptation.

Then she reached up and found the pressure points that told Mak’arune’s drives to go away, that now was not the time, and an inconvenience at best.

She spasmed like she’d been hit with a bucket of cold water, then fell limp into La’ming’s arms.

“Okay, you two little shits. You’re setting up the big hammock and then we’re all minding her.”

The twins, previously anticipating some fucking closure, grumbled about it.

“Or I tell Mak’arune how you set this up so she can lecture you about it.”
Now they hurried to comply.
dualityandsuch asked:

I'm gonna draw some Phan as a prompt for you but if I don't send you this I will put it off so I'm gonna do this and mark a due date so I have to do it. Consider this a prompt I am tired
Phaan had put it together with the Story and Song, and all the other things the voidfish had made public, and things he’d found, heard, and otherwise dug up through diligent and noisome work in several middens.

It all came out in a headline that dominated the page:

KRAAGNUS?

There was a Fantasy Picture of the three of them together, sharing bottles of some unspecified drink. Taako remembered the day well. They had been renovating the old Sellsnow farmhouse and were taking a break for refreshments.

The article within was the usual thrilling tabloid trash about sordid affairs or perhaps a trio tryst. The copy editor always ‘punched up’ Phaan’s work to make it sell better. Phaan was learning, of course he was, and every time he wrote some copy, he got a little bit better at phrasing it the way the editors liked it.

This one was the closest he had got to getting it right.

A low growl at the Fantasy Newsstand got his attention. Oh holy shit. That was none other than Taako from Tre Llew-Ddion. Up close and personal and pissed off.

Phaan couldn’t believe his good luck. He did his best to appear innocent despite being a rose-coloured Tiefling with bright pink hair. “Something the matter?”

“These stupid tabloids get everything wrong,” he said, waving a one that had repeated headline of BABY BUMP? and several red circles in the lower abdomens of every woman in the BOB, including Lup, who was still in her lichy form, waiting for her body.

“Wow. Whoever wrote that lot failed basic biology.”

Taako showed one off of Krav with the same rude red circle. “Tell me about it. I mean, I can tolerate some of this crap but this is just bad manners. Digging around in middens, spreading lies. If I had my druthers with any one of these cockroaches…”

“People have to eat,” argued Phaan. “I think you said that sometimes you gotta make what you love pay the rent.”

Those mismatched eyes bored into him. “You’re somehow involved in the business…”

Phaan shivered. He knew without a doubt that Taako had a pretty high perception score and could likely see right through him. He showed the KRAAGNUS story. “Stories like this are the only way I get to pay the rent and eat.”

“There’s more than one way to do that, homie,” said Taako, true guardian of the lost and hopeless.

The arrays of tabloid trash were unstoppable. The only difference Taako’s change made was that the quality was much lower and far less truthful. They were flocking to a new, far more honest paper. Most of it was written by Phaan, and he called it The Bird’s Coop. It promised all the best and most honest news about the Seven Birds and those who worked around them. It was far more polite about everyone’s tummies, too. The sales told the whole story, and Phaan told the rest.

He might have been editor in chief, but he always told the world that he was Taako’s publicity agent.
Anonymous said:
Life kinda sucks currently and the panics are on the return! May I request some feel
good family feeling things with Ango and Taako to chase them away? Thanks so much
for taking the time to read this

[AN: Wishing you well in your battle with the panics. May your happies at least quiet
the little beasties down]

Angus McDonald, age six and a half, woke before the alarm was about to go off and, just in time,
reached out to silence its musical chime. Papa hadn’t even entertained getting him a mechanical
alarm with its harsh and frightening bell. That sort of thing brought back too many bad memories and
Papa understood.

That was one of the reasons why he was doing this. One amongst very many.

Glasses on (he had the freedom of vision whenever he wanted it) slippers on his feet and bathrobe
over his pyjamas (no more cold floors leaching heat and sensation from his toes) and gathered his
clothes for the day (he had a choice, no more grey, thinning clothing that did nothing against either
the chill or the heat) and padded off to the bathroom to wash. No more rough treatment from Nurse
Stronginthearm. No more tepid water that smelled of carbolic and pee. No more harsh scrubbing
sponges. He could take his pick of soaps and washing instruments, he could linger and luxuriate in
bathing if he wanted to. But he chose to be quick and efficient, this morning.

This morning was parents’ day.

Washed, dressed, and the bathroom tidied up, he crept down to the kitchen and started gathering
 tools an ingredients. Two cookbooks, one scroll copied from Fantasy Youtube, and some of his own
notes.

He was going to make his parents some lava cakes for parents day.

Angus had to melt the chocolate in a double boiler since Papa wouldn’t touch a Fantasy Microwave
with a Barge Pole of Reaching. That was okay. He knew how to do that. Even for two batches of
ganache. One hazelnut praline for Papa, and the other dark chocolate blood orange for Dad

Once they were ready, he poured them into the ice cube containers and popped them into the freezer.
While they were cooling, he washed up and got the cake moulds and batter ready.

That was from one of Papa’s best cake recipes. The Choc-o-licious cake. Working on that batter
took all the time he needed to have for the ganache to freeze.

Problem. The Fantasy Youtube video hadn’t told him about greasing the ice cubes tray. It took some
serious twisting and at least one count of taking a cube out of the tray in small fragments.

Papa always said to use the happy accidents. Therefore, he stirred the little frozen chips into the
batter and hoped for the best. One Choc-o-licious with the hazelnut ganache. The other with the dark
chocolate blood orange. All set carefully into the right place in the Aga for cakes.

So far, so good. Sort of.

Angus cleaned up and peeked into his parents’ cote. They were still snuggled under the covers. The dawn light had yet to creep into Papa’s eyes and force him into consciousness.

It was so tempting to just crawl in there for a small nap, but he had cakes in the oven. Therefore, he went back to the kitchen with one of his favourite Caleb Cleveland books, and nearly burned them.

Which was why he wasn’t thinking when he smelled burning. He ran to the oven and pulled the tray out without first putting on an oven mit. It burned! It fell. Hot cake mess spattered all over the place and then Papa blinked into the area.

He stepped on the hot tray and in boiling-hot lava cake to scoop him up and then hurried him to the nearest bathroom. Cool water soothed Angus’ hurts and a minor potion of healing solved all the injuries.

Angus was still crying. “Your feet. I hurt your feet.”

“I’m the one who stepped in the hot stuff, bubeleh.” He finally ran his own feet under the cool water and downed a potion of his own. “See? All better.” Papa scooped him into his arms and purred. Soft and gentle and reassuring.

Angus still felt bad about the cakes. “I wan’ed to surprise you with a cake each an’ I was makin’ you some special lava cakes and I almost burned them and I didn’t mean to hurt myself an’ I’m so sorry...”


“It’s parent’s day,” Angus sniffled. “Wan’ed t’ do somethin’ special.”

“Hey,” said Dad, who came in to see what the fuss was about. “You know what’s more special than cakes in bed?”

Sniff. “What?”

“Cakes made together.”

Once all hurts were healed and the damage undone via Prestidigitation practice, Taako surveyed Angus’ plan. “Not some bad invention, there, little dude. Good job putting it all together like that.”

Angus started smiling again. “Really?”

“Yeah, you did some good detective work there.” Papa gave him a hug and a kiss. “Want to learn the best way to do a ganache?”

Cooking together with Papa and Dad was the best. Papa knew every trick about cooking good food and showed them to anyone willing to learn. Dad and Ango grouped together as apprentices.

They learned a lot that morning. Including that ganache lava was best with ice cream.

“Thanks for being my parents,” he said.

“Thanks for being our kid,” said Dad.
“Without you, we’d have no special occasion to have cake for,” added Papa.

After that, the best part of the day - snuggling with his parents for a lazy day in. All cuddles and kisses and comfort.
She told herself it was butterflies. It was natural for a bride to be nervous. She felt like her heart was about to leap out of her chest as she approached the mirror.

Mak’arune didn’t like this dress, but her intended did. She thought it made her pale skin look sallow, and it showed far too much flesh. It was bedecked with too much lace and embroidery, and she was certain that the sigils on her corset meant something... icky...

But he was a good businessman, and he said she was a lady of inherent quality. It was only natural that a gentleman of good fortune and standing would be in want of a wife... and yet...

She’d left something behind...

There was something she was forgetting. Something she was sure she’d left undone. It was why he’d hired seven maidens to see to everything. To reassure her.

She’d heard rumours about his former brides...

Shoes. Stockings. Underpinnings. Overpinnings. The dress, of course, the dress.

It made her feel nauseated to look at it...

The maidens adjusted the flowers and one of them coached her in her breathing and two stood ready by her elbows in case her knees turned to jelly or she felt faint.

It’s natural. It’s only nerves. It’s perfectly--

It isn’t perfect! It isn’t natural! Something’s wrong! RUN!

Tears pricked her eyes and her breath wouldn’t slow down and her whole body shook as they opened up the door and she wanted to get away from here so badly but she promised. She promised, and she always kept her promises.

Mak couldn’t remember the event, but he said she promised, and the maidens agreed, and she’d been so scatterbrained of late, she’d forget her own hea--

None of her friends were here! They were invited, she’d made sure!

He looked resplendent in his suit. Brocade vest the colour of dried blood. Suitcoat and pants darker than a tomb. His shirt was as pale as a shroud and he--

--looked worse than a corpse come for dinner...

--he was smiling at the sight of her. Matching her pace as tradition decreed, surrounded by seven groomsmen who leaked dark ichor matched his measured pace as his Honour Guard.
Something... was very wrong!...happened...

The violinist in the atrium changed pace to something lively and definitely not chamber music.

*Dah dum datumtum daddledumdum daddle-diddle-daddle-daddle dah-dum...*

The stained glass of the temple burst inwards but it sounded like splintering wood and figures burst in from all directions and someone yelled, “Dispell magic!”

The groom before her was dressed in the same clothes, but he was barely humanoid. A beast’s skull barely wrapped in dripping flesh opened a maw full of too many teeth and roared.

The twins pulled her away from the animated corpses, Lulu still holding the violin she had used to give the signal, Koko firing Magic Missiles behind him.

“Is that La’ming swinging on a rope?” Mak’arune wondered.

“Yeah, the whole gang’s here,” said Lulu. She’d stowed her violin and had a small knife that she was using on the strings of the corset. “Gotta get this dress off you before it drains your life, babe.”

Koko had something large and voluminous. “I got mom’s muumuu for a replacement. Guaranteed unspelled.”

The corset had horrible runes on it. Vile, dark magic. So did the stitching on her dress. So did her exposed skin. She wasn’t a bride. She was a sacrifice.

Fortunately, the rest of the circus was making short work of that fiend. Good for them. Now that the spell was broken and her mind was clear, now that she was scrubbing her body clean with her own spit and tears, there was one thing she had to do.

She stepped back into the sepulchre that she had once thought was a church, raised her hand at the fiend and said, “Abra-ca-fuck you!” and cast Sacred Flame at him.

*Now* she was free to collapse in a gibbering heap.
Even the twins, fantastic at digging up dirt, couldn’t find anything wrong with Beige Blandish. No skeletons in the closet, no dark secrets. No hideous family lurking in the wings. No racism, no biases, no assumptions, no profiling, no hurtful vices.

Also, nothing interesting about him. His hobby was making miniature flowers out of pencil shavings. He coloured them with watercolours. He was a chartered accountant.[1] He was perfectly nice. Which was pretty much all that could be said about him.

Put together, a man like Beige Blandish was a nil-all win. Everyone agreed that the twins needed someone to temper their reckless spirits - except the twins. Having a decent male role model might even help them out a bit.

Which was why Mak’arune was crying. She told herself that it was natural to cry at weddings. People did it all the time. She could do all this, arranging the venue, the flowers, the dress... because she was very fond of Ms La’ming Ton and would do literally anything to see her happy.

Koko was ring-bearer, walking in pace beside Blandish and looking like he’d rather be spitting rats at a target than there in his powder-blue suit.

Mak’arune covered her tearful gibbering with both hands as La’ming entered. Every inch a Sea Elf. Her dress was in ocean tones with highlights of sea-foam and it looked like the tide was swelling and ebbing with her every step. Pearls and mother-of pearl bedecked her blood-red hair, her ears, her neck, her waist and her wrists. Her bouquet looked like it could have been plucked from an octopus’ garden despite coming from land-based plants.

Beside her, Lulu was in powder pink, scattering petals in a picture of grace only spoiled by the expression on her face. She, too, would much rather be spitting rats than right there and then in this circumstance.

You can’t always get what you want...

She kept telling herself that. She kept telling the twins that. She kept telling anyone who would listen those exact words.

But if you try sometimes, you get what you need.

La’ming needed this. She needed stability. She needed someone staid and sensible who could balance a chequebook without thinking and be reliable and sensible and reasonable and sensible and...

Mak’arune held her breath through the reason for impediment, with the twins glaring at her and making subtle do something! expressions at her. Just for a tiny moment...
...La’ming looked over her shoulder towards her best friend.

But no words were said.

The marriage lasted four years. Four dull, boring, dependable, sensible and reliable years in which Beige Blandish was perfectly nice. Very little else but nice. Even their break up was amicable and without tears. Beige Blandish remained a friend of that odd little family for the rest of his days.

La’Ming’s second marriage, on the other hand...

Mak’arune watched the woman in the mirror as Taako slotted a few final flowers and feathers into her hair. There were no tears this time. No terror, no trepidation, no uneasy creeping cold-vomit sensation crawling up her spine...

“Perfect,” Taako announced. “I couldn’t ask for a better mom.”

Mak’arune turned away from her reflection. “I look like a fashion model ready for the runway.”

“You look amazing,” he reassured. Very carefully, he smeared her lips with a single red berry. For the sweetness to come, according to Elven tradition.

The doors opened. Taako buckled on his shield and drew his sword, leaving an elbow free for her hand.

There she was. Ocean and sea-spray and pearls. Lup at her side with shield and sword as a very ferocious Honour Guard. They were only a hundred and one, the poor dears. Young enough to take their newfound adulthood tremendously seriously. The dress had sparkles of tiny diamantes on it, this time, because it was bad luck to walk down the aisle twice in exactly the same dress.

Mak’arune didn’t keep the staid and steady pace for long. Neither did La’ming. Her ocean dress became a tidal wave of hugs that met her lunar forest in a laughing crash.

The twins only slightly spoiled things with their victory dance and chants of, here we go, here we go, here we go... But everyone who loved the four of them laughed and applauded.

This is the best thing that has ever happened to me...

This was it. This was right. Mak’arune said the words without thinking a whit about them, and it looked like La’ming did exactly the same.

I love you, I need you, I need it, I love... you...

That kiss was the best one worth waiting for, and Lup showered them both with rose petals despite being too old to be the flower girl any more.

Half the circus erupted in cheers and hoots. More than half of them supplied displays of magical fireworks in celebration.

This one? This one was going to stick.
[1] This is not to say that accountantcy is a position naturally lending a worker in it dull and uninteresting. It is to say that it takes a special kind of person to be very interested in tax law throughout history. Or at all.
There was something odd about Felman Hollo. Mak’arune couldn’t quite put her finger on it for some time. Then she noticed the man making sweet with Lulu just a minute after he’d smooched Koko farewell.

She dithered about it, wondering if it was better that he made the twins happy, or if he didn’t know he was talking to twins, or... or if he was playing with them both. That was the thing that got her confronting him about his life choices.

“I certainly hope you’re not taking any advantages, Master Hollo,” she began.

“Mister,” he corrected, signalling himself as a man of age making sweet with underage kids. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“The twins have been through enough in their lives,” she said, giving him the benefit of the doubt for now. “They don’t need a heartbreak before they come of age.” There. That should be enough information for the intelligent sort.

His forged picture of innocence was completely missed by Mak’arune’s Insight Check. “Twins? I had no idea there were twins... How do you tell them apart?”

Not a word about the maturity gap... Odd. Perhaps he was tackling one problem at the time, though something was amiss about his priorities. “You’ve spent enough time looking into their eyes, I would think.”

He laughed, “More like staring at their assets,” he laughed. “Don’t pretend you haven’t. They’re both gorgeous.”

Euw. Gross. “Do us all a favour and let them down gently. You’ve plainly made a mistake in assuming they’re adults and--”

“There’s no mistake in aiming to be their first,” he said. “It’s an experience they’ll remember for the rest of their lives...”

Double gross! At this point, Mr Pithon, La’ming, and several other circus people stepped out from their places amongst the scenery. Mr Pithon loomed to slightly over eight feet tall while the others cracked their knuckles and made ready with improvised weapons.

Mr Kustaad Paafae made a show of his Orb of Recall. “...no mistake in aiming to be their first,” said the tiny image of Felman Hollo within it. “It’s an experience they’ll remember...” he shut it off.

La’ming had her wand out. “Now before you claim this was all a joke... I cast Zone of Truth!” She actually cast Prestidigitation, since she didn’t have that cantrip, but Hollo would experience a tingle as the sparks flew over him.
He didn’t run an Insight Check. “You want the truth? They look like some pretty sweet ass. I’m gonna be the first one they have and take ‘em for everything they can give, and you can’t stop me!” He pulled out a medallion. “Faerun Intelligence Bureau. I tell the Watch what to do.”

There was a moment of intense silence.

“Not when there’s clear evidence of misconduct,” said La’ming, gesturing to the Orb. “Attacking you might be illegal, but filming you on duty isn’t. Neither is showing local authorities the footage.”

“I can have it transcribed to a scroll in a jiffy,” said Mr Paafae. “My wife has Duplicate. I’m sure you know what that means.”

“I can pay you...”


Mak’arune remembered that she had Shocking Touch, and let sparks of lightning play between her fingertips as a warning.

Hollo ran. He did not return.

Mr Pithon relaxed down to a more comfortable six feet in height. “Miss Mak’arune? Ms Ton? I trust you know this means you’re on mop-up duty.”

“We were going to do it anyway,” said La’ming. “They’re my babies.”

“And I’m rather fond of them,” added Mak’arune. The twins would realise in maybe three more days. Plenty enough time to seed their love-addled minds with hints of the bad news.

Maybe even get them to realise they’d nearly been had.
dualityandsuch asked:

Garfield pic

[AN: This pic rises from the grave again. For this one, I’m using an AU that @dualityandsuch and I have been calling Little Domestic. Modern With Magic, and something of an age swap since the twins are 5-6 when La’ming informally adopts them. Duality is working on a comic about how La’ming finds the twins. Pester Encourage her to work on it :D Loads of people we know are in the same rough area.]
Kids should enjoy Midsummer. The dressing up, the games, the carnivals all over the place. There was even a circus downtown that she was going to take the twins to, whether or not they managed to crack a smile. This was their first Midsummer Festival with anything approaching a decent family since they were three and a half. La’ming couldn’t figure out why they were grumpy, pouty, and otherwise out of sorts.

It could be being forced to ride in the trolley like babies. Not that La’ming could trust them to stay close and not get lost in the labyrinth of tall shelves and bargains. Her official reason was that small children had to ride in the trolley so they wouldn’t get stepped on by the larger customers. They didn’t protest, knowing that they were tiny, and were otherwise quiet.

And yet…

The more she tried to interest them in the holiday, the more pouty they got. Red-faced and ears down, their answers more clipped and brusque as their trip went on.

She even went as far as imitating that Tabaxi who was always in others’ business all the time. Not a smirk. Not a chuckle. In fact, she even glimpsed the start of some tears.

La’ming dumped her improvised costume into the trolley and took five deep breaths. “Okay,” she said. “If I tell you I have no idea what’s wrong, will one of you tell me what’s biting you?”

Koko opened his mouth, and Lulu elbowed him, commencing an agitated argument in their Twinspeak. La’ming, used to this, piloted the entire mess to a quiet spot in the hardware section and waited it out.

“Any time you’re ready. What do you want?”

Lulu spoke first, this time. “I want it to just be my birthday for a change!”

Koko nodded solemnly. “We’re sick o’ being told we can’t have cake ‘cause of all the candy we get that night.”

“We’re sick of bein’ told we can’t have two birthdays ‘cause of how Koko was born day after.”

“We’re sick of being told we’re attention hogs.”

“We’re sick of being told we’re lying for more treats.”

La’ming almost hugged them out of their trolley seats. “Oh, babies…” she sighed. “You can have your birthdays this time, but I like dressing up too much to just give up Midsummer like that. Next year? We have Lulu’s birthday and then go have some Midsummer fun. Sound like a de–” she stopped herself in time. “Sound like a good thing?”

Murmuring, this time, then two identical nods from nearly-identical siblings.

“Good. Let’s get you some birthday cakes.” She started cruising in that direction. “Lulu picks the cake for Midsummer, and Koko picks a cake for the day after. Okay?”

“These cakes are huge!”

“We’ll never eat them all…”

“They’re bigger than we–”

“–are put together!”
La’ming decided not to call them out on speaking in tandem. It could disturb a lot of people, but this time? This time they needed time to be themselves. “It’s not a good birthday unless you make yourself sick,” she said. “Candy. Included.”

While Lulu was looking over the options, Koko lifted a hand. “C’n I…?”

“Yes?”

“C’n I still wear a costume? I like the pretty rainbow dress.”

“It’s your birthdays, you can do whatever you like,” she said.

Koko leaned forwards to whisper in La’ming’s ear. “Lulu likes dresses, too, but people beat her up for it, so she doesn’t say. She doesn’t wanna say she’s a girl.”

Well. That was an interesting little revelation. Having bathed them, she thought they were both boys… evidently not. She whispered back, “Should I call you both girls or just Lulu?”

“I’m fine with being a boy,” said Koko. “Just… don’t be mean about it?”

Lulu heard and punched him. “Shut up, Koko. I can be whatever whenever.”

“Please don’t hit,” La’ming unfurled Lulu’s fist. “Talk it out, okay?”

“I’m a boy. Everyone says,” said Lulu.

“It’s who you say you are that matters,” La’ming petted Lulu’s hair. “Who do you say you are?”

Lulu returned to a sullen sulk. “Won’t.”

Fair enough. “Did you decide on a cake, at least?”

“Want the chocolate one.”

“Please,” coached La’ming.

“…please…”

She picked one out and added it carefully to the cart. “It is your birthday… you can wear anything you like, go see anything you like, or stay in if that’s your fancy. You can even be anyone you like.” She let that settle in while Koko took his time deciding between the gigantic cherry tart or the extravagant strawberry gateau.

Once he was happy with his choice, it was a slow cruise to pick out silly, flashy outfits. Koko lifted his desired rainbow dress right off the rack and pressed it against his skinny little chest. “See? I’m gonna be fabulous for my birthday and yours. So ner.”

Lulu, apparently wanting to be contrary, pointed to a fire lich costume and said, “I want that one!” And, as an afterthought, added, “Please.”

Koko had somehow snagged a ridiculously gaudy wizard hat and half his face was lost under the brim. If it wasn’t for his ears, his whole head might have gone in.

La’ming lifted it up. “I think this one is for grown-up heads, sweetie.”

“I love it anyway,” argued Koko. “Can I please have it for my birthday?” Baby doe eyes. Her only
weakness.

Once again, La’ming had to wonder how these two had wound up in a cardboard box by her apartment block’s dumpster. They were just too adorable to deny too much.
Anonymous said:
Circus twins get separated and angst ensues. Moms try to comfort them.

They’d only been passing through. The town was large enough for an overnight stay, but not big enough to fund a week’s performance. Those who had more portable acts were free to gather what coin they had as the wagons trundled through. Which was why the twins were away from each other when the fire happened.

Lulu didn’t do it, for the record. The old tinker Mad Darmigan made a fatal and effective mistake with his collection of black powder. After that, all the other fireworks in his workshop made everything more complicated for everyone else.

La’ming left the caravan, taking one of the horses, riding pell-mell for where she knew Koko was cooking up a storm from whatever the crowds had to offer. Dry thatch and crumbling wattle-and-daub caught like tinder, and it was an inferno by the time she leaned in the saddle to scoop up Koko in one arm.

She tried to find Lulu. She really did.

The fires were too hot. Upper stories were falling into the streets. The only choice was to flee. Save what she could. La’ming kept a guarding arm around Koko’s eyes and let the horse run until it could run no more.
“Lulu? Where’s Lulu?”

She stood in the saddle, trying to find any sign of life in the inferno that had once been a sleepy little mountain town. Trying to see any activity at all in any of the multiple paths out of that town.

She could only see fire, but shielded her heart-son’s eyes anyway.

Despite his ninety-some years, he was starting to cry. “Where’s Lulu? You haven’t said. Where’s Lulu? Is she okay?”

She sat back down and held him close. “I can’t see her. We know where the circus was headed, though. We can make our way there. We’ll know then.”

He tried to put on a brave face. “Well shit. We better get there before Lulu burns it down as we–” his voice cracked. Stopped working.

La’ming let him be weak. She could be strong for him tonight. She could keep the horse walking tonight. They could sleep and rest tomorrow. Pick up all their shattered pieces then.

* 

Someone scooped her out of the market square on one of the circus draught horses. Indeed, the poor creature was still dragging their caravan behind it. Mak’arune was at the reins, urging the massive beast on.

Lulu, now sprawled across her lap, didn’t even have time to complain before whistling bursts of colour ignited the surrounding buildings and turned the whole street into the Plane of Fire. She untangled herself quick. “KOKO! Mak’arune, we gotta find my bro!”

Mak’arune held her down with Bigby’s Hand. “I’m looking for him, love, but we’re getting out of here on the way. I’m sorry. There’s no time.”

A burning piece of debris spurred on the horse where the reins would not, pitching them both back in the seat.

There was no sign of Koko anywhere. Just lots of people in a panic.

They were headed to the ford, likely to splash up water and put out any cinders. “No, wait, the ford’s flood–”

Mak’arune wasn’t listening and neither was the horse. They nearly got washed downstream from the rushing water and then, because the horse was still in a panic, nearly tipped off the side of several cliffside curves.

Finally, a combination of exhaustion and decent brakes got them slowed to a walk.

Lulu was up on top of the caravan, shouting for her brother in instants. Smoke had made her voice rough, and she couldn’t call for him more than a few times. The caravan came to a halt in a green field, and Mak’arune clambered up to hold her.

She hadn’t even been aware she was crying until Mak’arune had her in a soothing grasp. Her knees went out and she felt weaker than ever.

“We’ll find him. If we don’t, we’ll find out what happened.”

“I didn’t do it,” she found herself sobbing. “I was just playing music…”
“I know, I know,” Mak’arune cooed. “Ssh… I know, I know.”

“I’m supposed t’ look after ‘im… Thought ‘e’d be okay…”

“I know. We all did. You two are almost adults…” she didn’t say, you keep telling us. Tonight was not a night for the blame game. “We’ll find him when we find the rest of the circus. It’s going to be okay.”

Lulu didn’t want to run an Insight Check that, even though she could hear how badly Mak’arune was at lying. Just for tonight. Let lies be truth. Let the strong be weak.

Tomorrow… Tomorrow, they could start over. Tomorrow, they could pick up the pieces. Tomorrow… she could look for the other half of her heart.
dualityandsuch said:
“Are you hurt?” “No.” “Then why are there bruises all over your face?” - Monty's Circus AU

La’ming knew something was up when she spotted Koko returning to camp via one of the goat-trails less travelled. Even at a distance, her Elf eyes could see he wasn’t in the greatest shape. Half his braids had come loose and into frizz-balls, making him look like an asymmetrical poodle. The semi-fancy clothes he’d worn out for an evening’s carouse was askew at best and used for improvised medical aid at worst.

He was using his best shirt as a sling.

La’ming gathered some of her better healing herbs and simples as she kept an eye on Koko’s progress. He was a proud kid. He’d only accept help dragging his ass home if he couldn’t do it himself. Thank the gods that Lulu was off on a different mission in a different place with Mak’arune to keep her from setting the entire city on fire.

Next was pretending not to be ready for all of this shit and surprised by his attempted stealthy approach. Late eighties-age Elves were all the same. Ego, ego, ego.

She dropped her pretense at mending when he came into the circle of light cast by her lantern. “Koko! I thought you were out having a night off. Are you hurt?”

He rolled a one on his deception check, not quite straightening up and pretending this was a new look. “No,” he said. “I’m fine...” He attempted to stride and came up short, stifling a grunt of pain.

She couldn’t let this pass. One of her babies was hurting. She got up and cupped his face in her hands Gently, of course. “So why are there bruises all over your face?”

Now his trembling ears drooped. Now he let himself shake a little more. Now he let on that he wasn’t as fighting fine as he was pretending. Yet he still had to fake at being a big man. “Little disagreement. Nothing to be fussed over.”

She scooped him up and let him sit on the step, getting some simples and salves that she ‘just happened’ to have ready on the little shelves by the door. Bandages. Lint. Splints. Enough to hold him until the camp Cleric came back from doing their thing.

“So what was the disagreement, then?”

“I told a dude he was pretty cute and I was available if he wanted and he told me he wasn’t into dudes. With his fists. And five of his friends.”

“Oooch. Yeah, that’d do it.”

“Mmmh.”
She palpated the arm. Yeah. That was a fracture. Not a bad break that had to be reset, thank the gods. Salve. Splint. Winding bandages around his arm. Tight enough to secure but not too tight. “I’m guessing there was some pretty strenuous debate.”

“I would’a had ‘em if that sixth guy hadn’t stepped in with a fucking chair.”

Ow. The desire for vengeance was rising. She’d have to settle for bilking them for everything they had. Later. The fight now was to not cry. Proper sling. See to the cuts and bruises and clean him up in the process. “Then they showed you where they thought you’d have a better time.”

“Pigsty. Yeah. Good thing I bounce, huh?”

She couldn’t take it any more. She dragged him into his arms and wept into his shoulder. “Don’t scare your mom like that, okay? Get out first thing, then see about settling your opinions at a safe distance.”

Slightly whining, “Aw, mo-o-om... it wasn’t that bad...”

“You got hurt,” she sniffled. “Yes it was.”
dualityandsuch said:
“Have you seen my hoodie?” “Nooo.” “You’re wearing it, aren’t you?” - Baby Birds AU
Killian never thought she’d miss the time when the twins were too scared and doubtful to express themselves. She even remembered the day that they felt comfortable enough about their new home to actually fight in front of her.

Now, however…

“Koko, have you seen my hoodie?”

“Noooo…”

Lulu leaned over the back of the couch to glare at her brother. Who was nice and snug in a slightly-oversized red hoodie and relaxing with a book. “You’re wearing it, aren’t you?”

“Prove it.”

That she did, leaning over and yanking the hoodie off over her brother’s head. “Ha! It has an L on the tag! Mine!”

“That’s the brand, goofus, not your initial! Give it!”

“It’s my brand!”

“Is not!”
“Is too!”

Killian found the other, identical red hoodie hanging innocently in a closet. She brought it over to the burgeoning fight. “You have exactly the same clothes,” she told them. “Look at this. Does it matter whose is whose?”

Two pairs of mismatched eyes glared at her. On one hand, they weren’t afraid of her any more. On the other hand… they weren’t afraid of her any more. “Yes,” they chorused.

“It’s got all my personal warmth on it,” argued Koko. “It’s got rarity value now.”

“Got your stink on it,” countered Lulu. “That makes it devalued.”

“We’re twins. We got the same body stink.”

“Not since I got my parts changed.”

“Do not!”

“All right,” Killian headed that one off. “Chill. Both of you.”

“Easy now I’m freezing my niblets off,” complained Koko.

“Learn to retain your own body heat,” sniped Lulu.

“Okay. Give me that.” Killian gestured for the garment of contention. She’d shuffled garments before and each got them to pick one, but that solution was not working in the long term. Therefore, when she had both hoodies, she took them out of the room.

She didn’t give the twins time to get scared, returning with her own red hoodie. She ballooned it over their surprised heads and snugged both shocked little noggins through the neck.

“Now you get to share one hoodie until you can agree on whose is whose,” she said. “No hopping out of there until you get along.”

The hardest part was not laughing at them as realisation dawned that they had to work together to do anything at all.

Killian expected them to settle for the first coat they could grab, each, and thereby escape their situation. But these were the twins. They never did anything halfway. Inside of an hour, the argument about coats was forgotten in favour of becoming some kind of two-headed beastie and making up a reign of terror over their toys.

Well. One way or another, they were getting along…
anonymous asked:

“All I do is drink coffee and say bad words.” - canon....?
Angus rose to greet the dawn. Some days, he rose to greet the pre-dawn, but most of those were during winter. He loved mornings. The birdsong, the colourful sunrises, the promise of a fresh new day… and of course, greeting all his coworkers in the Bureau of Balance.

The reclaimers shuffled by, headed for breakfast after what looked like an early morning meeting. Madam Director slotted herself into the queue behind Angus, who allowed THB to have early access to anything they needed. First off, because Reclaiming was a really demanding and dangerous job. Secondly, because it was a bad idea to get between Morning Taako and his coffee.

Merle had Taako’s hand on his shoulder, pulling the somnambulistic Elf onwards while Magnus steered him from behind. Together, they piloted Taako towards his first coffee.
It was quite the spectacle. Taako refused to be awake before noon if he could help it, and valiantly attempted to remain asleep during any hour marked with an AM. Thus, he pointedly remained in his footie pyjamas, with his hair in pigtails, and any concession towards wizarding work was in whether or not he wore his gaudy wizarding hat and carried his Umbrastaff. Neither were present today as Magnus guided Taako’s hand towards a big mug, then held the big mug under a stream of night-black coffee until it was two-thirds full.

Next came the part that always amused Angus. Magnus removed a single spoon of sugar from the bowl whilst Merle tipped most of the contents into Taako’s mug. They would then stir for him and throw away the stirrer before Taako’s reflexes made him accidentally stab his own face with the thing.

Sip. Swig. Gulp, gulp, gulp… Taako’s hair frizzed up, causing the braids to lift up as they tightened. Half a cup downed, Taako surfaced into consciousness. “FU-HUCK…”

Too late, Madam Director put her hands over Angus’ ears. “Taako!” she chided. “There’s a child present.”

Taako now had the motive power to top up his cup. “You fuckin’ called th’ gods-damned meeting at fuckin’ five.”

“It’s okay, ma’am,” Angus begun.

The hands remained. “Like it or not, Taako, you’re a role model for this boy…”


“I’ve heard all the words before, ma’am,” said Angus.

“You shouldn’t have had to.”

“Five. AY EM. This fuckin’ time of day? All I do is drink coffee and say bad words.” This time, he downed the cup. “Azmodeus’ tits, I need more fuckin’ sleep than this…” He refilled his mug over the caffeinated sugar slurry trapped in the bottom and let Magnus stir for him lest he add even more sugar.

“We’ll feed him the good muffins until he’s got a better attitude,” Magnus promised.

Merle, already on that one, was loading up Taako’s plate with some of the more gourmet selections from the breakfast muffins. “I think he’ll be fine after the fetta, salmon, and olives one. He likes those.”

Angus finally disengaged Madam Director’s hands and said, “You should probably let him sleep later, ma’am. He’s plagued by bad dreams and night terrors.”

This earned him an elegantly sculpted and raised eyebrow. “How do you know?”

“I’m his protege, ma’am. He takes me out on survival lessons. I -uh- hear a lot on those nights.”

She nodded. “I’ll endeavour to keep that in mind.”

Angus had the feeling she’d committed it to memory before he’d even mentioned it.
Anonymous said:
May I request some Angus and Agatha smooches? Thank you!

Until Agnes was born, Angus only had one weakness: Agatha’s lips. His mighty brain tended to fuzz out in loopy inebriation brought on by sappy infatuation. In brief, the lady had him twitterpated.

Not that he was complaining too hard.

In fact, from all evidence available, he actively sought out the sensation. Which mystefied Taako a little bit because those reporter’s lips managed to fritz that genius noggin right the fuck out.

“Good work today,” said Agatha, standing on her tip toes to smooch Angus’ cheek. “You were brilliant.”

“Hee hee heh hur hur hur,” Angus managed, his dark skin turning ruddier. “Aw tha-a-anks...” He was lost in the giggles until Agatha was well out of the situation room. By the time he recovered his usual verbal capabilities, she could no longer hear his, “I thought you were wonderful.”

“Excellent timing, boychick,” said Taako, oozing sarcasm. “Wowed her right out of her little argyle socks, there.”

“They’re lavender polka-dot mid-calfs, sir.”

“Whatever. You, my little man, need to learn how to talk to her when she’s in the same room or you’ll still be flirting towards each other in your old age.”

“Weren’t you too young to be a grandfather just twenty minutes ago?”

*

There they were. Just inches from his face as they danced together at the Neverwinter Charity Ball. They were playing at being a couple, and he’d been told - repeatedly, pointedly, and often rather forcefully - that they made a really good couple.

It would be so easy to lean those last few inches between them and...

No. He needed his noggin intact for this one. So when he kissed her, he kissed gently by her ear, and imparted some vital information about the scuzzbucket they were tracking.

From there, it was just business. He could deal with business.

Unfortunately for his deepest desires...

*

It had been one hell of a fight. A sewer chase, battle with random underground factions, and finally a last-ditch chase across half of New Halverdale... but they got the asshole.
Agatha leaped into Angus’ arms, fully intending to fuse his brain out like always but... this time... he won the grapple roll.

Dipped her.

And planted one.

Squarely.

Passionately.

Desperately.


It was like being hit with Feeblemind after a dozen fine wines whilst riding on the Hurlsalot rollercoaster. It was like diving into a box of the worlds’ best chocolates that had no bottom. It was like filling up with stars from toe to tip until she wanted to explode.

She was left even more out of breath than the chase had pulled out of her. Weaker than the run had drained her. More confounded and confused than a butterfly in a windstorm.

She wanted to say, “Been saving that up?” but no intelligible words came out. She could feel the blush filling her face as sound did finally pour out of her.

“Hee hee hee hur hur hur...”

“I’ve wanted to do that for years,” said Angus, also red-faced and giggly. Also filthy, singed around the corners, and effectively wearing rags. “More?”

Agatha said, “Hee hee hee hur hur hur,” and nodded enthusiastically.

Taako, also filthy, singed around the corners, and wearing battle-damaged clothing, sighed and muttered. “Great. Now they’ve both caught it.”
GARfield the DEEEEdals warlock on Chapter 21:
IIIIIIII have a request! The lovely La'Ming spinning a sign outside of Fantasy Costco!
She can even bring her kids if she wants. What a
DEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAL
Motherhood creates a lot of changes. La'ming already knew this, of course. Becoming a non-official guardian to abandoned twins was only going over old territory in a new chain of circumstances. At least time she was better at it than when— Less said about that the better.

Lulu and Koko were doing a lot better. They had safety, security, regular meals... The only problem was enough regular income to keep two small Elves in shoes, school books, uniforms... Her previous occupation was not something that child services or Officer Snocoun exactly smiled upon, so she was trying some honest incomes for a change. Well. More socially acceptable incomes. There was everything honest about her -ah- network job except the part about it being something she'd want the twins to ever see.

Finding babysitters for her highest-paying time windows was yet another reason why she was doing this.

Fantasy Costco loved the profits that her joking imitation of Garfield, the Deals Warlock, had wrought. Being a mascot for a shopping chain didn't exactly pay a lot, but it was a more respectable job than flashing her cleavage for paying customers on the internet. Her uniform was an orange tiger kigurumi and a star-spangled cloak meant for ages eight and under. Her work consisted of holding a gigantic cardboard arrow to help the navigationally challenged find their way on the last corner.

The twins came by in the afternoons for conversation, dancing along in their adorable little sailor suit uniforms, and runs to get her drinks because standing around in a polyester kigurumi wasn't the breeziest of occupations. Still, literally anything was better than stocking shelves.

The twins came running out of the store with a haul that had to be awkward for two such tiny kids to cart at that speed. A folding chair, a big umbrella, a gigantic frozen drink, and a fan that looked like it had a slightly magical aura.

The kids set up the chair and added the umbrella.
"Angus said it's illegal for you to work in the sun all the time," said Koko.

"You gotta have shade and half-hour breaks for every two hours," added Lulu.

"And drinks," said Koko, handing her the frozen flavoured slurry. The fan he had summoned a minor gust of wind that was like a blessing from the gods.

"It's official," she breathed. "I got me the best kids in the universe."

Twin giggles were the best giggles. They were rightfully proud of themselves for all their efforts, too. No shock, since half the stuff they brought over was bigger than they were.

She accepted the fan off of Koko and wafted some of that blessed breeze down the kigurumi, which briefly puffed out from the cooling breeze. "How am I going to do the sign stuff on my break?" she said.

Lulu appropriated the cloak, which was far too big. "We gotcha. You chill."

Koko had his sib up on his shoulders in a trice, and the two of them got to juggling the sign for her with all four arms.

La'ming would have to make sure Angus McDonald didn't let the twins get up to too many shenanigans. They were getting more sure of themselves, more confident, and fast transforming into miniature forces of nature. Almost too much to handle.

There had to be a better way. She couldn't keep imposing on the nice neighbours forever. Not Angus, not the Pithons, not miss Mak'arune downstairs... even though it was nice to have an excuse to talk to her...

There had to be a better way than what she had.
They grow up so fast. Allegedly. They say that Elves mature at the same rate as humans, but that is not quite so. Elves don’t have growth spurts, but rather slowly progress at a steady pace from infancy to something close to their adult forms.

According to their parents, they shoot up overnight. According to outside observers, they keep pace with their Human counterparts until roughly their mid-teens. That’s when the final progress of Elven growth slows down over the remaining eighty-some years until their official entrance into the adult world.

Humans used to say that it took special training to tell an underaged Elf from a grown one. That was before a lot of vitally necessary education regarding some of the more subtle indicators of an Elf’s age. All of this meant that Sazed had no business approaching Koko during his afternoon work in the local bodega.

“Excuse me,” he said. “I was documenting daily life in the urban landscape and I accidentally got you in the shot.”

“Walkway needs sweeping m’dude,” said Koko, never stopping.

“No, no. That’s not a complaint. Look.” He showed the image on his camera, which looked almost like something by a renaissance painter. With the clouds of dust and the light streaming through them and Koko, in the middle of it, looking like some diving being with the light shining in his golden hair. “You look so beautiful, here. You could be a model.”

Koko smiled in spite of himself. So far, only his moms had called him beautiful. Even his sister said he was the ugly one and they were identical. “Aw, that’s sweet of you. And a good pic. Pity I’m not paid enough to buy a print.”

“Oh, I’m not selling,” he said. “I’m Sazed Baker, and I was hoping to hire you.”

Koko brayed laughing. “For reals? Me?”

“Sure. You can start by signing this release form so I can put this picture in my art book.” Sazed offered a reasonably thick sheaf of paperwork. “This is boilerplate stuff. Permission to use and reproduce this image as an unpaid civilian, bla bla bla. Everyone has to sign it. It’s horseshit. You don’t need to worry about it.”

“Uuuhh... I have to run this by my moms...”

Sazed appeared shocked. “Come on... we’re both men of the world. You don’t really need your mommy’s approval for everything do you?”

“Legally yeah. I’m like sixteen.”
“Sixteen? You? I’d never have guessed. I had guessed you were way older.”

Koko blushed. “Yeah? How old?”

Lulu appeared like a demon or an avenging angel. “Boss says stop standing around and looking pretty. Your turn in the stockroom.”

“Aww, Lulu...”

Lulu didn’t like the guy that Koko was already stupid in love with. Much though she’d never admit to loving her brother, he had a tendency to fall into love like the KT meteor into the Yucatan. She didn’t want to hurt his feelings about Sazed but...

There was something hinky about him.

Which was why she pulled Aunt Sno into the kitchen for some hushed and urgent girl talk while Koko continued to wax lyrical about his favourite topic - Sazed.

“You know how you’re always telling me to watch out for guys?” said Lulu. “You should have been warning Koko. This dude? Sazed? He might be like a semi-famous photographer and shit but...some of the stuff he says? Some of the stuff he does? I get hackles like anything.”

“I did try to warn Koko,” said Aunt Sno, sipping at her semi-eternal cup of coffee. “Some people just can’t be told.”

“I caught them in the stairwell last night, kissing. And it wasn’t what you’d call an innocent kiss. It’s like...” she groped for the correct reference frame. Her moms kissed like they were giving their hearts to each other. Angus and Agatha kissed like they were each others’ water in the desert. “You know those old movies where the guy kisses the girl to shut her up and you always yell about it? That. And Koko always melts like warm butter.”

“Okay, that’s a borderline thing, I can’t really--”

“His hands went inside Koko’s clothes, I swear.”

Aunt Sno nodded. “That, I can investigate. I know the right questions to ask a victim. Don’t stress, okay? I’ve been looking out for you two since your mother...” She didn’t say, Fell victim to a plague and left you as orphans. That was unspoken history by now. Including the part that made Aunt Sno technically the twins’ sister.

Lulu fixed up some snackabobs that would distract Koko. They were all used to Sno’s lines of questioning and knew all her tells by now. Keeping Koko from picking up those lines was part of her job at this point. All part of protecting Koko from what felt really, really hinky and gross.

Koko felt like he could fly. Sazed loved him and wanted to share him with the world. Show everyone how beautiful Koko was.

It was like a game. Wear this, pose like that. He got to wear makeup and had people styling his hair and he felt like a superstar and, after a particularly good shot, Sazed would kiss him and it felt like
Which was why it was such a shock when Aunt Sno burst into the studio with a whole dang task force. Some of them landed on Sazed. Some of them landed on the hair and makeup people. One of them wrapped Koko up in a big cloak and took him out of the building and into a counselling room.

That was when he felt like an idiot because they showed him what Sazed had been doing. For every artistic shot that Sazed showed Koko, there were like twenty that were...

*Gross*...

Pornographic.

They even read out and interpreted the contracts that Sazed said were ‘boilerplate’. They were gross consent forms to acquiesce to ownership. They were illegal, of course, but Sazed could have used them at a later time to make Koko think that he was property.

All of which would be evidence in court.

Koko didn’t know when his family turned up, but gods, he was glad they were there. Moms and twin sister clustered around and held him safe as he sobbed. He spent what felt like forever repeating, “I loved him...” over and over.

He’d never questioned why the artists working on him were all older men. He’d never wondered about any of the poses or the wardrobe or... anything.

“You were right,” he finally murmured to Lulu. “I’m an idiot.”

“I’m sorry I said that Koko,” she said. “You’re not an idiot just ’cause some nasty old man had you fooled. He said things you wanted to hear. He was running a con.”

When Sazed came down, he was in handcuffs, and bruises were on his face and arms. He’d been stupid enough to try and fight his way out.

Koko had a good run-up, and kneed him square in the crotch. “YOU ASSHOLE! YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE!”

“That’s assault,” said someone in the periphery.

“I didn’t see anything,” Aunt Sno glared at the speaker. “And neither did you.”

The gigantic ass had poisoned him against any kind of love in his future. He had to be careful and wary about anyone he liked from that day on. He couldn’t trust. Not outside his family. Not for years.

Aunt Sno provided regular updates. He was in solitary for his own protection. His court date was incrementally delayed because they had to find a lawyer who even wanted to defend him. Someone shanked him in prison. He was no longer allowed to have cameras.

Koko could feel a little better knowing that that man would spend the rest of his life in a box without touching anyone, eating nothing but pre-packaged food because so many people wanted to kill him and poison looked like the best way to do it.

Sazed would never reach fame. His published photo journals were burned. Only a handful were kept as relics in sealed archives. So that others would learn how to spot anyone like him in the future.

Koko spent a decade dying his hair so that he wouldn’t look like the famous “Angel Sweeping”
photo, which was everywhere with, or without context. Waiting for the world to forget him as he
grew a shell around his heart and a cynical sting to his world view.

He would never trust anyone who started a conversation about how beautiful he was. Never again.
Now Where's My Art?

Consider this:

Baby Taako and Lup, or Lup and Taako since we all fucking KNOW she’s the alpha twin. Runaways and exiles, etc.

BUT

With matching

Shirley firkin Temple
god
damned
RINGLETS

Bitch I might!

dualityandsuch

Bitch I might!

#but I'm at work  #And its the job I like
#maybe later this weekend since I gotta write a paper
#write it for me and I'll make you art

The morning after the nightmare before…

Tre Llew-Ddion was dead. That was too big a thought to wrap their minds around. The caravan of wagons and horses they’d escaped in was dead. That, too, was too big. Their mother and Auntie and Uncles had died. That… was enormous.

It didn’t seem real. It was too large a jolt in their world. Koko couldn’t deny his mother’s death, he’d seen the arrow come through her chest. He’d watched as she fell…

There had been no time to scream…

But the others? Aunty Ques was a fact of life as real as the grass that grew or the cobblestones in the streets. Uncles Ench and Tortie were as solid as stones and as fundamental as trees. Koko kept expecting one of them to pop out from behind a bush or something and smile.

“There you are,” they’d coo, as if it had been an interesting game of Hide and Seek. “Come on out of the mud, you two. Let’s get going, then.” And the world would right itself and they’d have a place to stay and someone to tuck them in and chase away the nightmares and they would be okay again…

But those smiling faces were a long time in coming.
Koko hadn’t been able to meditate. It just wasn’t safe enough to do so. Besides, Uncle Ench always said that Elves could go days without resting properly. He’d watched the night while his sister floated in serene peace, even though she’d had a rough time getting there.

Now she was awake. They were both awake. Filthy and hungry and lost and cold and alone with nothing but an old book, the clothes on their backs, and no idea of what was supposed to happen next.

Lulu took his hand and helped him up. She said, “Let’s deal with things one at a time.” Which was why she was the clever twin.

Filthy could be dealt with by washing themselves in the nearby stream. They used Prestidigitation to clean their clothes and let their hair air dry to defeat some of the summer heat.

Hungry could be dealt with by a fish they snagged from the water and the forage they found, and a fire easily set by Lulu. Rough food was fortifying after a night of terror, blood, running, and death.

“Ho there, friends?”

The stranger was leading his horse, and reasonably dressed in travelling leathers. They froze around their little camp.

“I saw your fire and—aw, you’re adorable… did your mom make those ringlets for you?”

Koko exchanged looks with Lulu. It was true. Their hair had dried into cute ringlets, but they hadn’t cared about making that happen at all. She had no answers for him so he said, “Our mom died last night.”

The smile dropped off his face. “…oh no. I’m sorry. How long was she sick?”

“Raiders came,” said Lulu.

Now he was down on his knee, rummaging through his pack. “Tre Llew-Ddion?”

“…yeah,” said Koko.

The man said a word that would quickly become an over-exercised part of their lexicon. “I was looking for there.” He sighed. Out of the bag came some cloaks, some boots, rations, and a few simple weapons. “This isn’t much, but… it should get you to the next town. Follow the road to the East. You should be safe enough there.” He stood, looking so sad. “I’m sorry. This is all I can do for you.”

He mounted his horse and was off.

They’d never see him again, nor know his name, but that may well have saved their lives, that day.
Taako had taken the flier off of the dweeb because it was more or less a professional exchange. He, too, had been handing out fliers for Monty Pithon’s Amazing Circus and they both promised to see what the other’s flier was about. You know, the usual horseshit.

Except this dude actually turned up. In the actual midway while he was doing the lunch rush and turning it into an instructional show at the same time. Lup was down with the local crud, so he had to go solo this time.

“And that’s the chicken bouillabaisse,” he smoothed, ladling out small portions of it to the audience thanks to one of the circus brats. Anyone who actually worked in the pandemonium of the circus would stop by for whatever they wanted, but the people watching him had to add an offering to the box before they got theirs.

Bluejeans dude added a silver to the pot and, after taking a few bites, called the kid with the box back to add a couple of gold. Nice guy. This meant, of course, that Taako had to go to whatever his shindig was. Scouting forum for something called Ip Re.

He was only a hundred and sixteen. Barely an adult by Elven standards, so he showed it to his moms and sickened sister. A little of his legendary ginger garlic chicken soup saw her over the crud enough to come and attend with him.

My gods… it’s full of nerds…

Lup was still a little under the weather despite his soup, and he needed to boost her spirits. So he kept up the acerbic comments in her ear about the nerds, geeks, and dweebs that took turns up on the podium. Interesting stuff. This super-nerd called Hallwinter insisted that there was more than one planar system, and was busy devising a method of departing one planar system to investigate another.

Lup was coming up with some interesting questions about it and jotting them down. Taako kept his questions in his head. The ones that Lup didn’t think of, anyway.

There was a queue of people who wanted to ask nerdy questions. Some of them also bought books thick enough to be fucking weapons.

As they approached the desk where Professor Hallwinter was signing and answering queries, it was none other than Bluejeans man himself! He leaned over to his sister and said, “Nerd alert,” a little too loudly.

It was classic. He looked over their way, did a double-take, took off his glasses and cleaned them, and looked again.
“He– Yo– Wha– I– There’s two of you? I mean, we were looking for a cook for the eventual mission, but… twins would solve a lot of the bond engine issues. Hi. Sildar Hallwinter. Professor.”

Lup had recovered her edge. Taako could tell by the way she launched right into their Bit without turning a hair. “Wow. So… you think all Elves look alike, then?”

“That’s a bit speciesist,” said Taako. “And listen to him presuming we’re twins.”

“We are totally different people,” said Lup. “Next thing you know, he won’t be able to tell us apart despite the obvious differences.”

He was stammering so fast that it almost made a word. “Ah-er-ab-u-da-er-ih-tha-oh-de-ur…” He was turning so red it was a miracle he didn’t bust a vessel somewhere.

Lup burst out laughing, and Taako followed. “We’re pulling your leg, professor. Of fucking course we’re twins. Hi. Call me Lup. And this is my dumb baby brother…”

“Taako,” said Taako. “From Tre Llew-Ddion.”

It was a half-hour of interesting questions, followed by being loaded up with offers to further their education at the Institute of Planar Research and Exploration. The very young Professor Hallwinter thought they could gain some diplomas - after a few catch-up courses that they’d obviously sail through.

In spite of all evidence to the contrary, he thought they were both very brilliant and would be shining stars at the Institute. “Now I know he’s trying to sell something,” Taako joked on their way back to camp. “You and I both know I’m as dumb as a bag of rocks.”

“Let’s humour him,” said Lup. “If nothing else, we can be cooks and get a proper education.” She had her wicked smirk back, too. “Besides, he looks like he’d be fun to play with.”

“Play gentle,” Taako advised. “Humanmen are kind’a fragile.”

If he only knew then what he’d know in less than a century…
InFluxxx on Chapter 28:
A friend recommended your work to me and I'm starting backwards but I love this! Was Ming in a live show? Either way can we see Ming go after the people who hurt Koko? Lulu can join in too.

Clerics had healed Koko up in a trice, once they returned to the circus, but the young Elf remained under a metaphorical cloud of doom. When he wasn't on the stage or in the chuck wagon doing his cooking show, then he was skulking and sulking around in the family caravan, allegedly studying, but actually moping.

La'ming pulled herself out of the mermaid tank to see Lulu waiting on the platform she usually used to don and doff her artificial mermaid tail. Sea Elves like herself had a natural Water Breathing ability that proved useful in acts like hers. Most fake mermaids had to use a spell slot on that sort of thing, when the circus or freak show could afford to do it at all. Lulu did not look like the happiest person in the planar system.

"Koko's never like this," she said by way of a how-de-do, helping her adopted mother out of the water, and then out of her tail. "I think they did more to him than beat him up."

La'ming wring her hair out and put it up in a towel before scrubbing water off herself with the other one. "You know what the boss says about extracting revenge," she said.

"Don't get caught," said Lulu.

"He also said it isn't a good look." Dry enough, she slipped into her robe and made her way down the little ladder. "So... what did you have planned?"

Lulu grinned. "Oh, I was thinking a little bit of Revenge of the Dead mixed up with Wrath of the Gods..."

La'ming boggled at her. "You are downright evil, sometimes."

"That's what you love about me."

The six tough boys laughed as they exited the bar, all rolling dex saves to help keep each other on their feet. They were having a good night.

That was about to change.

A floating figure in what had once been nice clothing stood in the middle of the street. There were empty hollows where there once had been eyes, and dark ichor stained where they'd injured the Elven lad just a few nights ago. An eldritch wind whipped up his cloak and hair. A wind that didn't touch the boys. Just like the light only touched the ghostly figure.
A bony hand pointed a finger at them.

"Murdrrrr..." said an empty voice. The figure's lips did not move.

"Wait no, we didn't kill you!"

"We just bashed you up."

"Murrddderrrrr..."

"The pigs. We didn't make sure he got out from the pigs!"

"Oh shit."

They turned to flee, only to encounter the very embodiment of the Goddess of Justice with her two-edged sword. "Beware, thou who woulds't do evil unto the innocent. My wrath is swift, and my blade is sharp!"

Of course they freaked and ran straight for the local watch as a very disguised Lulu and La'ming pursued them halfway there. La'ming was the one to cast Invisibility on them both so they could listen in to the panicked confession of grievous bodily harm and attempted murder.

Lulu made quite the spectre of death, thanks to a little stage magic. Just like La'ming made an excellent fake goddess. Once some degree of justice was secured, they returned to the circus to tell the entire story to Koko.

There were six of them in the stocks, in the town square. There until the Watch sorted out what their sentence should be. Koko cruised past, looking resplendent in his high-wire costume. In the company of a local Watchman.

"Yup. Those were the dudes who were real rude about turning me down," he said. "They broke my arm. They could'a ruined my livelihood if they didn't succeed in killing me via pig."

One of the less intelligent ones burst out, "You're dead! You're supposed to be dead! We killed you!"

Koko said, "Little misguided on the aim there, m'fella. I got outta the damn pigsty. Nice attempted murder though, I nearly fell for the entire thing." He leaned down close to the one he'd made a kind offer to. "Next time, just say 'no thanks' m'kay? I'm not like you. I know a 'no' is a 'no', hombre." He turned to the Watchmen. "Thanks muchly, and -ah- make sure you check their packs and bedrooms for a little of the old sleepy dust if you know what I mean. First thing he and his chucklefuck friends did was accuse me of doping his ale."

The horrified look on their faces was worth more than any gold Koko could have earned in his entire life.

"Ta-ta-a-a..." Koko waved them goodbye and almost floated all the way back to camp. He had the best family in the entire fucking planar system, that they'd do this for him. He owed them the best dinners he could cobble together for, like, a month.
revolvingidentitty on Chapter 28:
I love seeing the twins call La Ming "mom, " they've come so far under her care! Can we see the first time they called her that to her face (one twin or both)?

It may be a hell of a thing to wake up as a sudden mother to grown-ass twins, but it was also a hell of a thing to face a new day with a previously unnecessary mother. Koko knew better than to try and wriggle free of an Elf deep in Luume. La'ming Ton, circus performer primarily in the Mermaid Act, would henceforth be biologically compelled to look after him and his sister Lulu.

He hadn't had a mother since he was twelve. They hadn't had a mother since they were twelve. They'd spent sixty years relying primarily on themselves with the occasional intervention from the kindness of strangers. Not that they could trust in the latter. He didn't know what he was supposed to do with an adopted parental figure. Especially not one who was compelled to mother him.

What kind of mother would she even be anyway?

They'd stayed in separate caravans for half a year, but this was the first time he knew about her sneaking over in the middle of the night. It was the music that clued him in. Waking up, sodden in fear sweat, from a nightmare that was already fading out of his memory. There was a waning flicker of the grey concrete walls of St Vingo's before reality restored itself thanks to Lulu's snoring and the melody from the flute.

Koko slid into a robe and stumbled over to the door. He pulled the top half open to find... "La'ming? The fuck?"

She stopped playing, but she chose to whisper. "Did I wake you? I didn't mean to wake you. I'm so sorry."

"You're good, I woke me," he yawned and sighed. "Have you been playing for us ever since--?"

"Ever since I went through Luume. Yeah. I know you two have issues with resting properly. You don't meditate. Sometimes, I think you can't meditate. I'm... worried."

Koko had to admit she had a point. "Yeah, meditation leaves us vulnerable and we... we don't like bein' vulnerable. You're... really out here every night?"

"I have an easier time meditating for four hours than you do," she said. "I'm a little late getting going in the morning, but with me, it's background noise."

Koko said, "I think I might have an easier time meditating from now on," he said. He dared pat her shoulder. "Thanks, mom."

He was too tired to bother listening for her tiny little squeal of joy.
Lulu was better at going along with things than Koko was. She sort of accepted La’ming as a distant wine aunt turned mother and didn't much bristle against her attentions. For instance, she let La’ming dress her hair. She did not, however, let La’ming dress her body.

"Hold it right there, young lady!"

Aw shit... "Yeah, what?"

"Are you going out to the town dressed like that?"

"No, I was headed for their red light district," she said, oozing sarcasm. "I'm gonna turn some tricks for the golds."

La’ming was not amused. "Well, if that's your goal, target achieved," she said. "There's scumbags out there who think they're allowed to grab whatever they see, and you got loads on display."

"You can talk, I can see the birthmark on your left tit through that top!"

"I'm not planning on going out!"

"Everyone and their kid brother's dog can see your business when they pass by the camp."

"Not where I keep my caravan. You're putting some proper clothes on before you leave this camp, miss."

Lulu threw up her hands. "Gods, mom, get off my fuckin' case!"

They both gasped at once. One with the realisation of what she'd just said and the other with barely-concealed joy.

"...you called me 'mom'..."

Lulu sighed and started trudging back to her caravan. "Sure. Yeah I did."

"Where are you going now?"

"I'm putting on a fuckin' muumuu!"
Her babies were off researching very clever stuff over at IPRE, competing with other people in the IPRE for some posting on a two-month mission into the greater beyond. La’ming wished them luck. They needed a good adventure on their own. Her concern was with one of their past misadventures.

One of Lup’s past misadventures named Greg Grimaldis. He was one of the rare few scum-sucking user assholes who had successfully passed all their paranoid inspections to later betray the whole family.

On the surface, it was a simple matter of fifteen dollars. Not only was it the principal of the thing, but it was also one of Lup’s special fifteen dollar bills. The one success she’d needed to fund the thinnest of their college years. It should have gone back to La’ming and Mak’arune, but Greg Grimaldis had left her with a very clever fake.

He was now using the original to fund his entrepreneurial ventures, having dropped out of the IPRE the second he got what he was really after. And here she’d been thinking he was simply out to procure sex. Now she was thinking of ways to get past Grimaldis’ increasingly convoluted security measures.

Fifteen dollars a day, every day, added up to quite the tidy fortune.

She did not intend for it to add up for him for very much longer.

A combination of clever spellwork and superior stealth got her into his offices, and ransacking them for the bill proved fruitless.

“You really think I’d leave it somewhere like a doofus?” he said.

La’ming stood from her former, covert huddle. “Grimaldis.”

“Ton,” he smirked in that oily way she had hated from day one. “Small surprise I’d find you in here. Looking for something... special.”

“You have something that isn’t yours. I’m simply retrieving it for the person you stole it from.”

“Prove its hers and I report her for forgery. She’ll get kicked out of that fancy-schmancy gig they got going. Think she’d love you after that?”

He had to have it on his person. Somewhere. Good thing Taako had taught her how to rob someone blind without them knowing it. La’ming turned on the charm. Smiling seductively. Edging closer.

“Now, now, Mr Grimaldis... can I call you Greg?” she didn’t wait for permission. “Greg... we’re both beings of the world. I’m certain we can come to... some form of understanding.”
He grinned and moved beyond her reach. “Nice try, but you told me to fuck off in no uncertain terms at every given opportunity. I don’t think you’d betray your little wife like that. She is prone to cry.”

_Damnit._ La’ming sighed. “You should also know that this isn’t over. You’ve angered a very talented family. We’ll get that fifteen dollars away from you one way or another.”

“Yes, any more threats, Mrs Ton, and I might have to call in my boys,” he cooed.

She left while things were still civil.

Of all the things she regretted, La’ming regretted not being able to tell the twins about their new brother. He’d been adopted at age seven in another fit of Luume and didn’t seem to mind having two Elven moms doting on his general welfare.

They taught him everything he needed to know.

Low cunning, high strategies, and being able to play the fool at a virtuoso level. Terry was almost as good as the twins and their mothers put together. He’d even counted on his older sister to figure out a way to try and procure it herself.

_Sorry, Lulu. The circus needs that fifteen dollars more than you need to destroy it._

La’ming waited, watching what she could from hacks she had made in the Grimaldis Casino security systems. Her twins were very good at this, avoiding many pitfalls along the way. They were so close to taking it with them...

Then everything cut off. A pre-recorded image of Old Blue-Eyes was glaring in her general direction.

“Of course you’re up to something, La’ming Ton,” he said. “Try it again and I’ll destroy everything you ever loved. Starting with Turkey Boy.”

He knew!

“Yeah, I know he’s yours. The interesting thing is going to be whether I fire him or kill him. Guess we’ll see how much a rich man can get away with murder.”

Terry kept the bill safe and himself financed all the way to Varmvale, where a neat little cottage rested by a barn made to shelter a moderately-sized traveller’s caravan. The original note was safely hidden and he had an easy way to tell the original from the duplicates that sprang forth once a day.

His step was lighter on the way to that little cottage. His smile wider as he walked up the path towards the pretty little gate and the neat little fence. "Mo-oms... I'm ho-o-ome!"

Two Elven figures, one blue, and one pale, rushed towards him from their former places in maintaining and keeping their winter home. One was half-Elven, but that didn't matter when family was on the table. They scooped Terry up in their arms and covered him in kisses and there was more than one pair of eyes that got a little moist.

"Any trouble?" said the blue one, known to the world as La'Ming Ton, Fushi Mermaid.
"You were right about the twins turning up," said Terry, letting Mak'arune Ton add a bobble hat to his ensemble. "Mom, it isn't that cold. Give over..."

"You need to stay warm, baby. Did they make more trouble for you?"

"No, your scrying was right on the button. I gave them the wand and they bought it hook, line and sinker. I could tell Lup was gonna be pissed, though."

"She'll get over it. How'd they get back into this dimension? I never saw that part."

"Special belts. Which means we might be in for trouble when they recharge."

La'ming grinned. "I think they'll forgive us. Meanwhile, it can help fill out the Bail Fund."

Terry let himself inside to warm by the fire and started to relax after he handed over the fateful bill. "Grimaldis was a piece of work, though. I almost didn't make it in."

"Yeah. We tried to warn your sister, but..." Mak'arune shrugged. "You just can't warn people sometimes."
Enter Jon Arbuckle - a regular loser in a regular town who sees absolutely nothing wrong with talking to his cat. The man in question has been the sole individual to hear his cat talking back for some significant amount of years, but that’s not the problem, today. Today, there’s something a little bit more unusual about his favourite feline. For starters, there’s been a substitution...

“You know, Garfield; after all these years trying to convince you not to eat my lasagna, I figured it’d be easier just to make two.”

Instead of the expected - his cat taking both and eating them in seconds - the figure on the counter was not the domestic orange tabby he expected. He was larger, for a start. He was wearing clothing, also. Most concerning, though, was the very, very wide smile.

“That’s a very nice offer, sweetheart, but I’m temporarily out of items to trade.”

“You’re... not... Garfield?”

“I could tell you I most assuredly am, but I get the sensation that you were expecting someone else. Tell me all about it, perhaps we can make a deal...”

Meanwhile, in a totally different planar system...

Three adventurers looked down at the large ginger tabby curled up with a teddy bear behind the counter.

“Do... you think maybe he went on a diet?”

“I’m pretty sure that’s just a regular cat,” said Merle.

“Gee willikers, Fantasy Tintin, what was your first fucking clue?” said Taako. True Seeing and Detect Magic both told him that (a) this was not quite a regular cat and (b) there were some extraplanar shenanigans going on. “Anyone got Speak to Animals?”

“I could--” volunteered Merle.

“Absolutely not. You’re gross enough with the plant kingdom, Dad. Silencio on that fucking noise.” He dug out his telepathic band and thought gently at the cat. Hey there, amigo. Don’t wanna alarm you, but you’re not where you belong.

The cat blinked. Yawned and stretched. Sat up and scratched himself in a very Human way. Either it’s a Monday or I’m dreaming super realistically...
“Wrong on both counts,” said Taako, strictly for the benefit of his teammates. “I think it’s a weekend, and definitely not a dream.”

“Well, there’s a line in a song that says you’re wrong,” said Magnus.

Things tended to escalate from that point onwards.
Lulu never liked it when Koko cried. He[1] always wanted to make people cry if they made his brother cry, they deserved to be crying too. Except this time, Lulu couldn’t work out why Koko was crying.

“Roshi was playin’ Sticks an’ Stones,” said Lulu. “Everyone plays it.”

Koko sniffled and wiped his face. “Roshi said... don’ play with ‘er no more,” sob, gulp. “She said we’re bad. She wasn’ playing... she said go ‘way forever...”

Lulu helped his brother to his feet, helping him limp home. “It’s just Sticks an’ Stones. Like from everyone. We dodge and laugh. ‘S how it goes.”

“...not funny any more,” pouted Koko. “I wanted to catch bugs and lizards with her.”

Mama found them on their way home. She could see if one or both of them were crying from forty yards away. She probably already had, and that was why she was running for them.

Koko wasn’t bruised or bleeding. Neither was Lulu. Mama had them both in her arms anyway, and the whole world could start to feel okay again.

Then he said it. “Mama, why do people always say we’re evil?”

“What?”

Koko took over. “Roshi said her brother said their mom said we’re demons an’ we’re gonna wreck the whole world.” He wiped his face again. “Sticks an’ Stones was never a game...”

Oh. Oh that was why... Poor Koko. He’d worked it out. Lulu had been pretending for months and Koko had worked it out anyway.

Mama had very sad eyes. Sadder than every day. “No. It was never a game. Oh, my loves...” She held them just a little tighter. Picked them up and took them inside and gave them honey cakes. “My dear boys... I love you so much. I wish I didn’t have to tell you but... some people believe that eyes like yours can make curses happen.”

Mama’s eyes were amberish-brown. Both of them. Lulu and Koko could easily see that they had one green eye each. It was just how they’d always been. Mama and Aunty Ques and their Uncles Ench and Tortie had never feared them. None of their family had had curses happen.

“That’s silly,” said Lulu. “We don’t make anything bad happen to you or Aunt Ques or Uncle Ench or Uncle Tortie.”
“It is silly. It’s very silly, indeed,” said Mama. “People who believe in witch eyes like yours are... far too silly.” she sighed. “Yet they still believe. Your father left us... because he believed.”

Koko’s fingers tightened on Lulu’s tunic. They remembered that night of shouting and slamming doors, but they’d carried on without him and hardly noticed. As far as the twins were concerned, there were not more nights of shouting and slamming doors. And they got to spend seasons with their aunt and uncles.

“We can’t fix it, can we?” said Koko. “They’re gonna be silly all the time and we can’t run away like father did.”

“No,” said Mama. “We’re stuck here.”

Lulu was very quiet as Koko fed him a honey cake and he fed his brother the other one. There was a lot to think about.

“They want us to give ‘em curses,” Lulu said in Us. He let Mama wash their hands and faces. “I think we should show ‘em what real curses look like.”

Would that he could do so, Lulu would become a one-Elf plague on the little village of Tre Llew-Ddion. If they so much as threw one more thing at them, they’d learn that some curses could land quick.

Koko shrivelled up and hid when hostility came at them. He preferred to run away. Lulu, on the other hand, could be four times as bad as anyone wanted to think they were. He stormed through their little world, daring it to challenge them. Aiming magic missiles or other cantrips at anyone who tried to give them trouble.

Unfortunately for Lulu’s aspirations to punish the entire world for being silly, the twins were only six. The grownups around them had far better magics, far stronger abilities, and far quicker reflexes than a pair of little kids.

Chapter End Notes

[1] They’re six. Lulu hasn’t worked out who she is yet.
Anonymous said:
Garfield has a secret adult section in fantasy Cosco. Who do you think would be in there the most/ the least?

You had to know where to look for it. You had to know it was there in the first place to even know where to look for it. So naturally the band of Reclaimers known to all as Tres Horny Bois found it in under a minute. It only took them that long because Merle had to be pried out of the gardening section.

Some places have a discrete curtain between Adult interests and the rest of the store. Some places have a door that’s guarded by a big burly bloke named ‘Bubba’, who has four-letter words tattooed across his knuckles. In classier establishments, Bubba’s tattoos are even spelled correctly.

Here, however, the inner sanctum of naughty things is guarded by: an illusory display of Fantasy Furbies (cursed), a hallway of cunning traps, pitfalls, poison spikes and approximately five magical golems, seven interesting puzzles depending on illogic, irrational behaviour, and a certain amount of really stupid decision-making skills.

Naturally, Garfield - or one of his Prime Material Plane Physical Manifestations - is always waiting for them when they enter.

The less said about Merle’s Arbor Ardour, the better. Let’s just say that there’s a surprisingly healthy collection of books about vines, greenery, and the use of fertilizer. Fantasy Chuck Tingle has written most of them.

As for the other two...

“TUSK LOVE TWO: THE LOVE OF THE WARRIOR WOMAN,” said Garfield. “THAT SEEMS TO BE A FAVOURITE OF YOURS. PERHAPS YOU’D LIKE TO BUY INSTEAD OF RENTING?”

Someone behind the shelves, perhaps wearing a two-foot pointy hat, snorted.

“Shaddup...” Magnus said out the side of his mouth. “There’s other people here.”

“YOU ROOM WITH THEM, THEY SHOULD KNOW EVERYTHING BY NOW.”

“Yahbut... you don’t gotta shout from the rooftops or anything...”

“MY SILENCE COSTS EXTRA, MY GOOD MAN.”

Magnus grumbled an paid for the rental of Tusk Love 2. Then slunk back out the entrance like someone who had committed a crime.

Merle didn’t even bother. Nobody wanted to hear about his personal proclivities and Garfield didn’t want to announce them, either.
Taako was smart enough to wait until everyone else was gone before ponying up to the counter with his selection. Nevertheless, it startled the deals warlock.

“THIS?” said Garfield. “THIS IS A VERY PECULIAR SELECTION, SIR...”

“I know it,” said Taako. “How much to rent it?”

“I’M SURPRISED WE HAD IT AT ALL. I DON’T THINK IT’S MOVED OFF THE SHELVES IN YEARS.”

“Then it should be cheap,” said Taako. “And since it won’t be missed, how about I borrow it for a month?”

Garfield looked at the cover of the boxed set. Then back up to the smiling, seemingly unintelligent face of his customer. Nobody could be as stupid as he seemed... He checked the case, all present and correct. No illusions, no sneaky bullshit. Nothing.

Finally, he shrugged and rang it up. Far be it for him to dictate what got people through the night.

He still had to wonder what the hell Taako found so raunchy about Homesteader Hubbies.
star-binary said:
If you're still taking prompts here, I'm such a fan of your TAZ elves and their history/culture. Would you want to do something more about ancient elves back when they would build cotes and hide from predators? Thanks for providing so much quality content!

Work fascinated and enthralled Taako, he could watch other people do it all day. Take this ditch, for instance. It wasn’t actually a ditch. It had no real purpose other than to see what was under the soil beyond (a) dirt, (b) more dirt, and (c) rocks and roots and shit.

Humanmen called it ‘archeology’. Taako called it, ‘digging up stuff and making up stories about it.’ Frankly, he couldn’t see what the fuss was about. So what if there were ancient Dragons whose bones had turned to stone? Everyone who knew the Old Lore knew that Dragons were the first animate beings in the world, intelligent or no.

It was the same way that everyone should know that, though the Dragons made the world, it was the ancient Elves who shaped it. Though the jury was out on which particular sub-variant of Elves were the original, they all agreed that it was the Elves who made other creatures in their own image. With varying degrees of success.

He’d never tell his Humanman friends this, but... the old legends pretty much universally declared Humanmen as something of a failure, creation-wise.

Ango gasped as a section of packed earth crumbled away to reveal something of a cavern inn the side of the stone. He got out some visual helper apparatus and peered through it. “Oh my gosh...” his boy hadn’t got any better at swearing over the years, “This is quite the find. Sir, do you know what this is?”

Of course he fucking did. This was Elf stuff that Ango was digging up. “Looks like a First Era Cote, li’l man. Elves were the first ones to use magic to shape the world around them.”

Ango was already in there with a light source. “Whoah... this is almost unchanged from the cotes in the farmhouse, sir.”

“No sense throwing away a good design,” breezed Taako. It’s comfortable, easily defensible, and you can keep the whole family close so there’s always someone on watch. Hells, bubbeleh, we invented our meditation techniques so that nobody in the tribe would be in danger at any given time. Lots’a history in the Elven race, we go wa-a-ay back.”

Ango emerged, holding a small object with reverential awe. “They had pottery in the First Era, sir. Or perhaps even earlier. Some of this clay was mixed with charcoal to colour it.”

“Yes,” said Taako, effectively disguising his astonishment that something possibly older than Krav could still exist to the point where a genius boy could detect how it was made. Pretty impressive for a broken piece of pottery. “Elves invented the basics of civilisation, hombre.”
“But... this is First Era. Who or what did they have to defend themselves against?”

“The stone-boned Dragons, of course.”
dualityandsuch said:
Can we see Sno’s awkward reunion with Ming in LD? And the twins remember her. :O

The entire Precinct called her Officer Sno. Some within it called her “The Cold Front” when they thought she couldn’t hear them and that was just fine, actually. She didn’t need those assholes getting into her life and discovering things. The only one who knew all of the truth was Avi, and he kept things to himself.

It was Avi who had found the twins again. She’d been concerned about them. Poor little tykes. They’d been dealt a bad hand. Absentee father who was so superstitious that the shrink he was visiting insisted he wasn’t ready to be an adult, let alone a decent parent. Their mother had died of a horrible infection and her sister had perished of allegedly unrelated heart problems not long after.

Following that, it was a series of terrible fostering attempts on the Starlight side of the family, and then... then they’d run away.

Considering that their last accommodations had been a plastic playhouse in the backyard, Sno didn’t blame them. Anything could have happened to them in the year between their last known residence and this latest sighting... in the same apartment building as her partner. Two floors up and across the hallway.

With another familiar name.

La’ming Ton.

Sno’s genetic mother. At least this time, she was an official adult and allegedly putting her life together. Though her finances were stable, they came to her bank account through a convoluted system of anonymised transfers that meant her income was one not entirely smiled upon by society at large. Sno had to calculate La’ming’s age.

_If I’m a hundred and forty, she’s two hundred and eleven._ Seventy-one years between mother and child. Gamgam and Peepums had always blamed La’ming’s youthful parenthood on her. They’d called it a scandal. Sno had spent eighty years believing that before she asked, _What about the two hundred-year-old guy who fathered me?_

He had sailed through his life without any kind of consequence or expectations towards assisting in the daughter he’d made.

Enough about him.

This was about two other babies left without a family. Now in the alleged care of someone who should -according to Gamgam and Peepums- never have one. Sno had to be certain that La’ming wasn’t letting them play with rat poison or keeping them in the bathtub or something.

That was why she was here. Knocking on her mother’s door. Crisp and Severe in the Neverwinter PD uniform.
Thundering footsteps. The door swung wide open.

Two nearly-identical faces, each with mismatched eyes, stared up at her. Clean faces, good. New clothes, better. Screaming blue murder and slamming the door... nope.

The Taaco twins were the ones screaming, “IT’S A RAID! IT’S A RAID! GO! GO! GO! GO!”

What. The. Shit? Sno knocked a little more forcefully.

When La’ming opened the door, she said, “What the hell did you do to those babies?” Then she realised who she was talking to. “Nono?”

“Snocoun,” she said.

_Somewhere in the distance, one of the twins yelled, “It's the Blue Wave! Gittouttahere!”_

“You look... You look amazing.”

“This is not a familial visit,” said Sno. “I’m here on CPS business.” The flat had fallen ominously silent. “Those twins are missing minors and it’s my duty to see to it that they’re safely housed in appropriate accommodations.” She didn’t need permission to enter while children were at risk and La’ming didn’t stop her.

The flat was tidy. Clean. Middle-of-the-road thrift furniture, some shabby chic going on. Books and toys appropriate for minors scattered around. Tolerable. The CPS would give this a grudging pass.

Sno knew for a fact that her grandparents had stopped sending private eyes after her mother when La’ming had a decent enough income to afford rent at this flat and a modicum of furniture.

All the fun of it had gone out when they could no longer let Sno find photographs of the dives in which La’ming was staying. Realising that they thrived off of La’ming’s screw ups was Sno’s first piece of detective work.

Working out that La’ming had illegally adopted these kids wasn’t even enough to work up a sweat.

“So,” Sno picked up a copy of _The Tubby Little Puppy_ and paged through it. “Why them?”

“And not you?” said La’ming. “We both remember that phone call a month before your Seventy-first birthday. You know why not you.”

Because an Elf’s Seventies were the most chaotic, disorganised, misunderstood years of their lives. Perhaps worse than the Terrible Twenties, when the lifespan differentials really started to stick out. Seventy was when a young Elf was handled all of the expectation and none of the respect. Treated like children, expected to react like adults, given choices that could reflect on their entire lives...

_And her mother had gone into a terribly early Luume and got pregnant by a man who should have known, acted, and done better..._

“Just ‘why them’... mother.”

La’ming fussed around in the kitchen, making tea. She had fresh fruit, and honey in a jar instead of a sugar pot. Fresh vegetables in the fridge, too. “They were living in a cardboard box next to the dumpster. That asshole kid in five B had just chucked some garbage bag down and konked out Koko. Lulu was crying, she... she was acting like her world was ending. I remember that feeling. Too well.”
The night she’s left baby Nono at her parents’ place, she’d said, was the worst night of her life. The entire two years of being underage, pregnant, and then a parent had been two years of the worst days of her life... but that day. That day topped them all. The worst of the worst.

“He,” corrected Sno. “They’re both boys.”

“Lulu says different.”

Oh shit... Sno re-evaluated everything, including why certain foster homes had felt it necessary to ‘drive the devil’ out of the twins. It wasn’t just lingering superstition about heterochromia or ‘witch eyes’. It was lingering transphobia whenever Lulu tried to tell anyone who she really was.

No wonder living on the streets was preferable to being in the system.

“The good news is that that counts as extenuating circumstances,” said Sno. “I can force some paperwork through and get you registered as a sympathetic foster house inside of a month.”

“Great. Now all we have to do is talk two scared babies out of Mak’arune’s place. They’ve probably battened down all the hatches by now. What did you even do to them?”

They’d been three when their mother died, and didn’t understand that the dead body she carried them away from would never wake up. They weren’t much older when their aunt had perished, too. Time and time again, she was on duty to take them away from places where they insisted they were doing okay in. Time and time again, she took them away from family.

“It’s my bad luck to have been on duty every single time they’ve had to be taken away from a situation.”

La’ming handed over the tea. Had some herself. “Right. So they think you’re going to arrest me.”

“I wish...”

La’ming glared at her.

“...sometimes.”

“Fair enough. We’ve all been through shit. Anyway, talking them down from whatever disaster scenario they’ve leaped to. Koko’s really good at those. Scarily accurate for six.”

Six. Shit. They were twice the age they’d been when their birth mother died. Once again, perspective swirled for her. More than the dizzying realisation that she was twice the age her mother had been when... and there was still that sense of anticipating a disaster from Gamgam and Peepums.

Drinking tea gave the twins time to realise that the usual chaos of Sno’s visits wasn’t happening. Therefore Sno drank tea. In silence, because smalltalk with her mother inevitably ended up in an argument.

Then, after the tea was done and the cups were rinsed, it was downstairs to 2D, where Mak’arune made hats for Etsy and babysat the twins when La’ming was working online.

La’ming had to show the twins that she was okay, she was not being arrested, and that Officer Sno - the ‘Blue Wave’ who washed away their lives- was not going to sweep through and turn the world upside down.

The news that Officer Sno was their sister... that just about worked as enough topsy-turvy for these
kids. But that was life. Awkward, complicated, and too weird to believe if it were set into fiction. Messy, too.

La’ming’s higher-paying customers were no longer paying for La’ming’s correspondence courses. That money was going to Lulu’s transition fund. The spell to change her body to match her mind and soul was not cheap, nor were the experts who would be working it.

Like it or not, La’ming Ton was working on being a better mother than she had been a literal lifetime ago. That was why Sno chose to help her out.
Reader Request #56

Chapter Notes

dualityandsuch said:
Can we see Merle and Ming in LD?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Every neighbourhood has a bodega, the corner shops, the convenience store. They have many names, including some brands. Seven-eleven, the IGA, quick-e-mart, shop’n’go... The names change, but the concept remains the same. A little place where anyone living there can walk and gather emergency supplies. Be it a loaf of bread, some ingredients, or the little things that one is always running short of at the last instant. They can be pokey little places with only a handful of shelves, or labyrinthine expanses with claustrophobic confines and items no-one who goes there could ever fathom needing[1].

This evening, just after ten PM, Merle was cat-napping at the counter when one of the regulars came in. One of the Elves who lived around the corner and down the street a bit. She made a beeline for the tourist spot, where clothes claiming the bearer loved Neverwinter despite any evidence to the contrary.

Long experience with this neighbourhood had ensured that this particular bodega stocked pants and skirts as well. They were one-size-fits-most atrocities that owed most of their construction to pull cords. There had been many instances in Neverwinter of the hardy perennial street loonie who managed to misplace all of their clothing before having some kind of loud and public wobbler long about three in the morning.

Merle got most of his business from the average naked creature who happened to be tripping balls. You didn’t have to be crazy to choose a pair of those pants, but it certainly helped. Therefore it was slightly odd to see the relatively sane Sea Elf grab two (size med-to-small) and two I (heart) NW shirts (small), stuffing them into her basket before scouring through areas she had never gone into before.

Merle watched through a mixture of the camera feeds and the special mirrors around the shop as she seized two stuffed toys, a misshapen unicorn and some kind of bizarre purple cow-hippo hybrid. A couple of Little Golden books, some terrible off-brand action figures. Then she stopped at some of the pre-packaged foods.

“Hey Merle... you have kids, right?”

“Technically. They’re off with their mom. I don’t get ‘em until the weekend.”

“Six-year-olds don’t need baby food, right?”

“Yeah, they all have all their teeth by then. They can chew.”

“Uuh. So... what should I get like... two of them?”

Merle was dimly aware that she had family in distant areas. “You got some little niblings?”
“No. I found a coupl’a babies in the trash.”

Okay. Maybe it was time to hit the silent alarm. Merle decided to humour her and see if it went into
dangerous turf. “Who’d throw away perfectly good babies?”

“Exactly my thoughts,” she said. “Dino-chicken nuggets should be fine, right? Are tater tots a
vegetable or should I try these bubble-and-squeak thingies?”

“Never had a kid turn down the nugs,” said Merle. “As for vegetables... it’s hit or miss... most
usually go for the mint peas, though. Sweet corn. If they only eat potato, go for the sweet potato.
That has more vitamins.”

“I don’t think these ones are too picky.” she got a frozen vegetable medly. Handed over a hundred-
dollar bill, and scooted off with her bag of supplies into the night.

Say what you like about the loonies, most of them were generous tippers.

Two weeks later, he got to meet them. One was clutching the binicorn plushie from that night. Both
wore enormous sunglasses, and had their golden hair up in identical braids.

“Okay,” said La’ming. “You don’t like what I got? Go look for yourselves. I got a budget, so stick to
the limits, okay?”

The one without the binicorn had the I (heart) NW shirt. On them, it was almost a dress. Six-year-old
Elves were nauseatingly cute.

“Ah,” said Merle. “They’re real. Colour me surprised.” He watched as the twins made a bee-line for
the fresh produce, each with a basket and a state of terrifying glee.


“Eh. I might’a supplied the weeds dispensary down a coupl’a block some dodgy dandelions.
Accidentally planted ‘em in the Psilocybin mycelium. I got a few complaints.”

“I don’t need ‘lion.”

“Yeah every Elf says that. I don’t need Dreamroot, until my sciatica acts up or I can’t sleep or...
y’know. I actually need it.”

“Long as you keep your fumes to yourself, we’re fine,” said La’ming.

“Shit yeah! Real garlic!”

“If you’re gettin’ garlic, I’m gettin’ peppers!”

La’ming journeyed into the back shelves, “Whoop. Better stop it before they have a big fight.”

These two preferred fresh ingredients. Fresher than the stuff-in-a-box she used to eat. Judging by the
way the kids were plotting, they knew a lot about cookery and were teaching their adult minder.

Well. Good for them.

It wasn’t every day that people found the families that were best for them.
[1] It can’t be helped, some of these tiny little shops seem to stock gimcrack from other dimensions, like left-handed kerning sponges, or hand-cranked doormouse stuffers. They are the most common source of terribly off-model and off-brand toy merchandise. In some other reality, that’s the way it actually was.
dualityandsuch said:
Avi and Sno in LD.
According to the assessment test, Avi managed to wind up on the ‘dumbass’ end of entrants and wound up with the other slow learners in the Academy - the Elves. As far as society was concerned, they were there to fill in some quotas. A few might have been. One was definitely there to prove the entire world wrong.

Her first words to him were, “That’s a violation of uniform code.”
“I never got writ up for it,” he said, taking the last seat, right by her.

“Of course not,” she said. “You’re Human.”

“What?”

Class began, and Avi soon noticed what was happening against literally everyone else in the class. Elves could get write ups for the most minor of infractions, including uniform code, whilst Avi was allowed to skate by without notice. He was always called on first, regardless of whether or not he had his hand raised… and the Elves were always wrong.

It was his first taste of injustice. It would not be his last.

It took a week of written reports, several interviews with the people in charge and, finally, an ‘anonymous’ hidden camera recording released to the media for that teacher to find himself reassigned and a more fair setting to enter the classroom.

By that time, he’d learned his future partner’s name. Snocoun Ton. She was one of the few cadets who worked herself ragged to make it to the top, earning extra points by helping him study, amongst other things.

Rumours whispered that she slept her way to the top of the class, but Avi knew that she’d never had the time. All of her extracurriculars ate every second she had to spare. Though she was valedictorian of her academy class, the higher brass had it that she was ‘on par’ with the average Human in the academy.

“It’s okay,” she said after Avi had finished ranting about the injustice of it all. “I have the time to play the long game.”

She was a hundred and twenty. A fresh-faced young adult by Elven standards. She could afford to spend his entire life working up to the higher echelons of the rank and file.

“Be proud to see you do that,” he said. “I’m in for the ride.”

“That’s career suicide, Burnsides.”

“I never wanted a career,” he said. “I just wanted to help the law be lawful without being an excuse to become a bunch of bullies.”

“That’s a lofty goal for a Humanman,” she noted.

“Aim high or shoot yourself in the foot, Ton.”

She winced. “Don’t… don’t call me that. Please.” She took a deep breath. “I’m not happy with my family name.”

“Shitty family?”

“Nailed it.”

“Okay if I call you ‘Sno’?”

A rare smile took over her usually sour face. “Sno will do. We’re going to get all of the shit. You know that, right?”

Avi grinned. “You know nothing… Ton, Sno.”
“You get away with that *once*, Burnside.”

He laughed. “Worth it.”
dualityandsuch asked:

I’m sorry I’m on an LD kick, space these out if you want fam. Also can we get Sno and Luce in LD?
Avi slowed as he passed the fire escape. It was getting dark, and it was getting chilly, and that little
girl that had been up there this morning, was still up there now. Sure, she had a light to read by, but
she was looking mighty cold. All huddled up with her knees inside her dress.

Sno, who had marched ahead, stopped and turned back. “What?” she said.

Avi nodded his head in the kids’ general direction. “I think something smells wrong with a situation,
here.”

Their chief had them on the shittiest jobs. Enforcing CPS visits, rules, and decrees. Separating kids
from the only families they knew. Sweeping kids up off the streets when they’d been thrown out of
their homes… sometimes recovering sad, small bodies from culverts, dumpsters, and gutters. They
got to have a second sense about things being hinky.

Sno saw it in a second, of course. “Aw shit. D-U-N?” Quasi-forensics code for Dead Upstairs
Neighbour.

City life lead to some fucked up shit, sometimes. Like neighbours not knowing that a fellow
neighbour had died until the foul-smelling ichor leaked into their own areas. Or children living with
the deceased bodies of their parents until something forced the information out into the open.

This tiny little figure on the fire escape was small enough to not know what death looked like. Just
like a certain pair of twins in her case file who had cooked for themselves for two months before…
Well. That had been a nasty one.

Avi, usually the smiling, welcome face of the NWPD, walked in his patented Friendly Goof manner
towards the fire escape. “Hi there, cutie…” he cooed.

She hid behind her book with barely a whimper.

“So much for the Burnsides’ famous rustic hospitality,” Sno teased. She edged around to the kids’
peripheral vision and did her best impersonation of harmlessness. It came off as somewhere between
burning fuse, loaded gun, and growling dog with orange eyebrows. “Hey. My name’s Sno. What’s
yours?”

She didn’t hide, but rather peeked past her book with one eye.

*

“Hey, up there,” the blue-ish police woman waved again. “Can I come up?”

Lucretia looked down at the officers. There was the nice young man and the scary blue lady and they
weren’t going away like everyone else did. She’d seen the scary blue lady around the
neighbourhood, and had once seen her taking down a bad guy at the bodega. She was the good kind
of scary. Lucretia nodded.

She winced when the fire escape shook, all the same.

"No, Burnsides. You stay down here. If we both come up, we could spook her. She gave me
permission."

The nice young man said, "Okay, but when she screams at you, I’m coming up there for mop-up."

"Just gimme one of those lollipops you always have and I’ll try it your way.”
Lucretia watched as the scary lady came up. Watched as she slowed down the closer she came to Lucretia’s sunny spot. Watched in silence and read the name, “Ton” on her badges. There were other words, too. Serve and Protect.

“Pretty cold up here, isn’t it?”

Lucretia had to agree. She nodded.

“I see you have an umbrella for rain. That’s smart. Do you have something for the cold? Or would you like my jacket?”

Lucretia glanced inside the window into her home. She didn’t like going in there if she could help it. The smell was getting real bad. She took a risk and pointed to the jacket. It was nice and warm when scary Ton wrapped it around her.

"Is it bad inside?” said scary Ton.

Lucretia had to nod. It was very bad inside.

“Nobody hurts you,” it was more a statement than a question. Police were clever and saw lots of things. Scary Ton would notice things like bruises. Or little stains that weren’t washed out of Lucretia’s cleanest clothes.

Lucretia nodded again.

“Who’s looking after you, sweetie?”

You had to be honest with police. Lucretia pointed at herself.

"Are your people sick?”

Lucretia thought about that one. They were sick. Mom and Dad had been very, very sick. And then they stopped coughing and throwing up and stopped breathing and started smelling bad. She shrugged.

“Can I go see?” said Scary Ton.

She couldn’t work out why she wanted to, but Lucretia nodded.

Scary Ton went inside, and coughed some, too. Then she came back outside. “You’re right. It’s very bad in there. I can take you somewhere that’s better. Would you like that?”

Lucretia nodded, and when Scary Ton came all the way out onto the fire escape, she latched onto the Police Officer’s leg and wouldn’t let go.

The nice young man down on the street thought this was so funny, but Lucretia just wanted to feel safe. Scary Ton was scarier than anything else in the whole world and would protect Lucretia from everything, she just knew it.

Lucretia wanted ‘safe’ more than anything in the whole wide world.

“Okay, okay…” Scary Ton cooed. “I can’t take you anywhere like that. Come on… up a bit… up to my hip, huh? I need that foot for later.”

It took some wrestling, but Lucretia wound up on Scary Ton’s hip and the coat got put back on with Lucretia still inside. Scary Ton held her close and patted her hair and she was warm and smelled nice
and Lucretia didn’t want to feel scared when she was like that.

*

Sno lowered down the kid’s supplies in a bag with the help of some string. Her coming down the fire escape with the kid on one hip was a complicated matter, but she was agile enough to get them both down without trouble.


She flinched away from Avi’s offer of touch.

“Hey, it’s okay, Lucretia…” she’d learned the name inside the apartment. A name plate on her door plus confirmation via found ID’s gave her name as Lucretia Clarke. Her own attempts at writing practically screamed that she preferred her full name, rather than Luce, Lucy, or any other derivative diminutive. “This is Avi. He’s my friend. And you know what? He’s always got lollipops.” The last sentence had been added in a conspiratorial whisper.

Avi, on cue, used some sleight of hand to produce one as if by magic. This one was yellow, like Lucretia’s pale blonde hair. “Ah? You can take it, it’s okay.”

Lucretia burrowed into the confines of Sno’s coat. “Guess she’s not a fan of candy. Or she’s not a fan of you.”

“Fine, I’ll call it in. You keep her cozy.”

Sno juggled the kid on her hip a little. Amazed at every turn how someone that small could get so heavy. There’d be no getting this kid to let go, that was a white-knuckle grip she had on Sno’s clothes. “You know… if you feel like talking, you can tell me why you like me. I’m not exactly popular with kids like you.”

Lucretia didn’t say a word, just closed her eyes so she could listen intensely to Sno’s chest.

Judging by the condition of the bodies, she hadn’t heard an adult’s heartbeat or breathing for five months.

“It’s gonna be okay,” she whispered. “I got’cha. I got’cha.” One breath to steady herself. Two. Three. And, oh fuck… she was purring for this kid.

*Now what?
anonymous asked:

Is it possible to see Lup being a total dumbass for once?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Life was rarely fair for the twins. Take birthdays. Lup always managed to have hers celebrated, but - thanks to a small matter of forty-five minutes edging into the first four minutes of the next day- Taako inevitably missed out. Lup, as the first-born, was legally entitled to whatever their missing family could provide her. If an inheritance had ever really been in the offing, Taako would have got the scraps.

He was ninety percent of her impulse control, and the harbinger of doom who had always managed to pull her out of some situation her usual recklessness had got her into. He was her back-up, her confidante, her loyal second… her entire heart. She might have been the smart and outgoing one, but Taako always managed to form the bonds with the most meaning. He had the keenest eye and the shrewdest mind for finding new directions to take. That brother of hers could salvage a con gone sour with very little in the way of warning.

Which was why she was leafing through Taako’s cookbooks while he was out looking for interesting ingredients. Looking for a recipe to help add a balm to his battered soul.

They were one hundred and forty-seven. They had been one hundred and forty-seven for thirty years so far, and it showed no sign of coming to an end. He had put up with so much shit in that time, not the least of which was watching her die so often. The first time that happened, he’d just… collapsed[1]. He hadn’t dealt any better with it the other six times.

Not like she’d done any better, watching him die twice during those years. The first time, she’d gone on a rampage of vengeance. Literally blazing a path of destruction across that suck-ass reality that, only in retrospect, she had not been proud of. The other time… The other time she’d followed him into the metaphorical grinder, not seeing a worth to her life if he wasn’t in it.

Which was just one reason upon thousands why she was searching through his recipes. She wanted to surprise him with one of his favourites. Cooked by her own hand. Because food was one thing they had in common, because it was his birthday, because she wanted to apologise for the last time she’d died, because food was one of the thousands of ways of saying ‘I love you’. Good food, especially, between the two of them.

She owed him much more than that, of course; but this was a good start.

The best way to find the best-loved recipes in any cookbook was to look for the one with the most stains. She knew Taako had a whole mouth full of sweet tooths -sweet teeth? - so picked out some of the stickiest pages in there. Sure, many of the ingredients of the original recipes weren’t around any more, but Taako was thorough. In every dimension, he insisted on finding the best substitutes he could and jotting them down. Thus, the books became a near-indecipherable mess that Lucretia attempted to sort out once every decade.

Heer dear, darling, paranoid obsessive brother had one clear favourite that didn’t involve trucking around half of this reality to get the ingredients. He called it a Fruity Tuity and it was somewhere between a figgy duff and a plum pudding. Typical Taako, it involved four kinds of sweetening and - yikes- Fifty-seven steps. Sixty, if you included the time spent soaking it in rum or honey mead, and putting unfinished steps into the cold box to chill.

Two days prep? Fuck that noise.

Surely, there’s a few steps I can skip to speed this thing along a smidge…
It had been a long, tiring, and somewhat fun day. Taako returned with his prizes - ninety percent ingredients, ten percent fashion, and some weird shit that was probably unique to this particular reality that might be useful at some later date. He ignored Maggie complaining behind him.

“…why I have to be your beast of burden,” he was whining. “I mean, it’s not like any of it is really heavy, so much, as it’s… awkward…”

Taako sniffed the air. There was sugar, and rum… and… “Dragonfruit?”

Lup appeared with the multiverse’s fakest grin on her face. Which was smeared with flour, syrup, and something looking remarkably like soot. She was wearing an apron that was similarly besmirched. “Taako… You’re early…”

“It’s getting late, actually.” He sniffed the air again. Charcoal? “Lulu, have you been fucking up my kitchen?”

“Me? Fuck up your kitchen? Hahaha! I know better than to make a mess in our kitchen, brother-dear.” Oh shit. Something had gone mega terri-bad. That ‘brother-dear’ was a dead giveaway. “I was just tryin’ a-youknow- arrange a little surprise for your birthday…”

“Oh… why’d you borrow my apron, there, sis?”

“So I thought I’d just whip up one of your faves…”

“That ain’t aromatic smoke in the air, goofus.”

“…and I might have had a few technical issues…”

“What the fuck did you do, Lulu?” Taako dumped his share of the shopping bags on the handiest patch of floor, sailing down the spiral stairs that lead into the mess.

In this case - the literal mess. This was three times worse than the last time they’d done a fuck-it-let’s-cook-literally-everything gourmet extravaganza because Merle owed them a month of washing up. It was worse than the time Barold attempted to cook the whole crew dinner, which was -by no co-incidence at all- the last time anyone insisted on sharing duties on the Starblaster.

It was worse than the time Maggie burned the Spaghetti and attempted to make up for it with pancakes. Which he also burned. And got stuck to the ceiling.

“Oh my sweet merciful gods…”

“It isn’t as bad as it looks?” said Lup.

“YES IT FUCKING IS!” Taako gestured at the wreckage. “What the fuck were you trying to make?”

“I thought you might like a Fruity Tuity?” She edged past him to release the valve on the pressure cooker.

“…in the presh-pot…”

“I figured it didn’t need to be as complicated as you set it out if I approached it with logic and science on my side–”
“...oh gods, no...” Taako moaned. “The nerdlord’s infected you.”

“Nonsense, Koko. It’s going to be fine. So I was a little bit more creative than usual. So what? No progress without experimentation and this–” she opened the lid at last and took a peek. “–is... not... what I expected.”

Her face said it all. All her best-laid plans, attempts at improv, and possibly five pounds of wasted ingredients had come to naught. Taako peeked anyway.

“Yeesh. Looks like the results of the last time Merle tried to cook.” And by that, he meant the diarrhea. “Is that one of my good pudding cloths?”

Lup was aghast. She knew the ships’ rule. You fuck it up, you’re eating it. “I’m so sorry, Koko...”

“Maybe next time follow all the instructions, hm?”

Maggie, meanwhile, had taken a spoonful to sample. “Mmm. Crunchy.”

“It’s not s’posed’a be crunchy!” Lup wailed.

They were gonna have to send out for pizza and ice cream before they even thought of cleaning up after this one.

Chapter End Notes

[1] See The Worst Year, as chronicled by yours truly.
Anonymous said:
What does Lup get from keeping Taako around? It seems like she's always rescuing him or cleaning up after his mistakes. Have they argued about that?

“I mean... yeah. Sure. We always argue about stupid stuff. It’s a thing.” Lup shrugged. Trying to act casual about just... not having her brother there. These interviews had to be conducted one on one. Captain evaluating potential crew. She hadn’t thought talking to a rather young Gnome would be intimidating, but there she was. Nervous about talking to a man who needed a booster seat to see over his desk.

“So. Why do you need Taako to be part of this crew? What does he bring that can’t be supplied by any other crew member?”

*His right hand in my left,* she thought, but couldn’t say out loud. That was too brief. Too glib. Too easily missed by such a stern and dour man who looked like he’d never had a friend nor a happy thought in his life. He hadn’t had anyone like Taako, that was for sure.

He’d never had...

The someone who was always there. The rock of reliability in seas of uncertainty. The one person she could always turn to. Even in the living hell of Saint Vingo’s, he had been there for her. Always.

He’d never had...

A brother at age five, usually timid of anyone else, shielding her from Mr Bingbong as he drunkenly capered about in the Tre Llew-Ddion streets. Picking up a chunk of hard, mouldy cheese that had been thrown at them mere moments before, and flung it towards the drunk clown with the sad umbrella. She'd followed suit after three such throws, laughing as Mr Bingbong turned and squeaked miserably away.

He’d never had...

Instant acceptance at age ten, when she told him in secret, and then told the world when she defended her identity against some bigger, older kids. When the news had reached their mother, he was an eager font of ideas on how to scratch together one thousand gold pieces worth of gemstones when they could barely keep a copper piece between them. He’d never had someone who worked so hard for so long to help when there was pain like that for every day of existence.

He’d never had...

Someone else purring in her ear to ground her when the nightmares came. Someone to gather herbs and medicines when it was just them on the road. Someone’s shoulder to cry on. Someone’s warmth to share. Someone to warn her of a bad idea. Someone who could sell pig dung to farmers like it was precious gems...

Lup thought long and hard about everything she loved about her brother. How he could sell ice to
frost giants. Thought hard about what he’d say to sell her to this stern and stoic man. Then she thought about what he’d want her to say about him.

She took a deep breath. Began with his favourite word. “Listen...” she said. “I may say the words ‘dumb baby brother’ about Taako, but that’s like, a joke on the universe. You’ve seen our test scores, you know he’s not an idiot. Hell, I’m not even sure if he made mistakes on purpose ‘cause he knew I wanted to get in. He’s--” my entire heart. If you take him away from me, I will be a soulless shell. No. Don’t say that. “There’s been entire decades when Taako’s the only reason I got up in the morning, you know? He-- We’re twins. You know what that means for Elves?”

“I’m familiar with the superstitions. It’s bad luck to separate twins. They’re two bodies with one soul... all that nonsense.”

Gods it was a fight not to get angry. “For us... it’s almost true. We’re...” Deep breaths, and don’t incinerate the nice man with his finger on the button of your future, Lulu... “You’ve got all our records. You know we didn’t always wash up in nice places.”

“Saint Vingo’s stands out,” he said. “It always does.”

He knew. He’d read all about it. Yet here he was, giving them a chance. “Places like that... have a lasting effect. Without Taako by my side, I’d...” wither away to nothing... “He’s like... all of my impulse control, now. Saint Vingo’s is where I lost the last of my patience for anything. I’m... I’m his sense of restraint. Like, sometimes, he’ll go off on a really terrible idea, and I have to stop him because - he won’t. He stops me. We’re each other’s brakes.” Well. That was this job down the tubes. “He’s my up when I’m down. I’m his warmth when he’s cold. We have a joke, together. As a pair? We make one functional Elf. We’re a team. We’ve been a team since forever.”

He was taking notes. “Mm-hm...”

“We were born holding hands. We’re a team. We’re unit. We’re a package deal. Double or nothing, Captain. And if you need me to tell you how good he is or why you need him and me?” All or nothing. Do or die. There were no grey areas any more. She’d had enough of grey in Saint Vingo’s. “You can just fuck right off to hell.”

She marched right out of there without giving him any form of comeback opportunity. Only imagining her entire future burning to ashes. All the way back to the little place she shared with her brother. Head high, as if she hadn’t just destroyed every single hope she’d had of every having her best dream come true.

She kept her appearances up all the way in to their pokey little living room, where Taako had baked a cake. It was shaped like the ship still under construction, sailing off towards the sky. A tiny fondant likeness stood on the prow, one arm raised and pointing the way. There was a banner across the wall that red, Congrats Captain Lup!

That was when she broke. He hadn’t even put a fondant Taako on that ship. He knew. He fucking knew... He knew they were angling to leave him out of the expedition. Already. That was when she broke.

Taako was wrapped around her in instants. Listening to her incoherent howling about how she’d fucked it up for both of them. “Hey, hey, hey,” he cooed, “I’m the debbie downer in this duo. Stop stealin’ my act. We always knew you were goin’ and -hey- it’s just two months. I’m sure I can survive that long. Taako’s good out here.”

She sighed. “Nah. I fucked it for both of us.”
Taako leaned over the cake, turning the fondant figure around and then changing her hand to giving the entire ship the finger. “Eh, so you get to be captain of the next one. I get to be two eye see. Who needs those losers, right? Remember whats-her-face? Didn’t know we were twins for like two months?”

Lup snorted, pushing him away. “You butt-waffle.”

“If I’m a butt-waffle, you’re an ass-erole.”

He was her ability to laugh when she was feeling her worst. They had cake anyway. And the biggest surprise of their lives when the captain put the both of them on his short list the next morning.
Reader Request #59

Chapter Notes

dualityandsuch asked:

Show everyone the cute AvixJohann with Sno being Sno

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Promotions didn’t happen often amongst the Elven portion of the NWPD, so Snocoun’s ascent upwards in the ranks was reason to throw a huge party. Sno hadn’t wanted any kind of public attention, so Avi had arranged literally everything. The venue, the caterers, and the entertainment.
Everything had been arranged by text. Email, messaging systems. He hadn’t known…

He hadn’t known the Bard would be so lovely.

Avi was staring. He knew he was staring. He could feel the blush starting in his cheeks. He could imagine quite a number of interesting futures with that man on the dias.

All dependant on his being able to talk to him first.

“You’re drooling, Burnsides,” Sno murmured in his ear. “See something you like?”

Avi swallowed and quickly looked away from the violinist. “Who? Me? What makes you say that?”

Sno quickly picked up on where Avi was pointedly not looking and smiled like a shark. “Oooh… Lust at first sight… The Bard?”

“Shut up,” he mumbled.

“I think you li-ike him. You want to ki-iss him. So go and hu-ug him…”

“Shut up…” The blush crept outwards from his cheeks.

Sno took a deep breath and fortified herself. “Welp. It’s about time I took a bullet for you. We’re buddies. It’s about time I did you a good turn.”

Avi, who knew exactly how awful Sno was at interpersonal relationships, cringed and blushed harder. “Sno, no…”

“Sno, yes.”

Avi could only whimper and attempt to hide in the crowd. He rolled a nat 1 on his stealth check.

Johann had been quietly eyeing the guy who’d hired him half the night. He knew that Elves - even half-Elves like himself - had a certain effect on Humans. He was living proof. As the night progressed, the dude was turning increasingly interesting shades of red.

Uh-oh. Here came the partner. Johann had heard the others here calling her ‘the cold front’ half the night and ‘the big chill’ the other half. Judging by the look on her face, she was about to be up to shenanigans. Probably something like requesting Freebird or Louie Louie. Junk like that.

“Hey. Bard…”

“Name’s Johann.”

“Yeah. Uh. Do you, like… have somebody?”

What? This was not what he anticipated. Not at all. He and Redguy had been chatting for a while. Maybe Red was that colour because he knew she was this awful. “Whut?” he said.

“You know like…” her hands juggled invisible balls between them. "A life partner. Significant other. Snuggle buddy. Whatever. Do you come home to a flesh person on the regular?”

Flesh person. Holy shit, that was awful. No wonder Red, over there, was turning vermillion. “…
no?"

"Are you looking for someone?"

Gods. She was making it worse. "Uh. Lady. I’m not… You’re not my -uh- cuppa tea…“ How to back outta this gig without being arrested or whatever? Over in the corner, Red was trying to hide inside his own hands.

“What?” she said.

“What?” he said.

“No! I mean. I’m not into you. Not like that. Um. A friend’a mine… he’s been… Look. Do you like guys?” This whole situation could not get more awkward even if they were having an awkward contest.

“This conversation is getting harder and harder to follow,” Johann confessed.

“So… my partner. Not partner-partner, but like, on the job partner? He thinks you’re cute.” Her face twisted weirdly and after a moment, Johann realised she was trying to smile. “He’s my buddy and I’m trying to do him a solid, here.”

Across the room, now valiantly attempting to hide in a corner despite the lack of cover, Red yelled, “DAMNIT, SNO!”

Buzz around the room increased significantly. Johann knew that buzz. Bets were being laid. More than that would be being laid, if he played his cards right.

“That’s him,” said Sno.

“Oh. Yeah.” Johann was certain he was failing to pretend he hadn’t noticed Red. “Kind’a cute…” especially when he was red-faced and cringing in anticipation of imminent disaster.

Sno turned and yelled, “HE SAYS YOU’RE CUTE!”

Gods, it was amazing the poor fellow didn’t spontaneously combust. If the path to true love was paved with soul-crushing mortification, this lady was the gods-damned entire road works. “Lay off the poor fellow, huh. I don’t want him to die before we get a chance to talk.”

“His name’s Avi Burnside and I will figure out a way for you two to talk to each other tonight if it kills me.” She had a slip of paper ready and tucked it into his shirt pocket. “But just in case, that’s his number.”

Ah shit. “M’kay. Real quick. Favourite song?”

"Istanbul Not Constantinople by They Might Be Giants.”

“Cool.” He pitched his voice to carry. “This next number is at the request of the celebrant…” and then proceeded to play the living fuck out of Istanbul.

Meanwhile, over in the corner of Avi’s eternal shame…

“I hate you and I want you to shrivel up and die,” said Avi.
“No you don’t,” Sno handed him another Redcheek Cider. The strong stuff, since they’d either be walking or catching a cab home. Besides, her buddy obviously needed some Dutch Courage. “He said you’d have to pay him in person? Someone’s been stealing his mail.”

Avi didn’t believe it for a second. “We already have each others’ emails, and I can pay him by e-transfer.”

“Nope. You can’t do it. There’s been a SNAFU with his bank. They’re taking too long to give him money people send him. Dude’s running a bit short. He needs to pay rent y’know?”

“Ahuh,” said Avi in his this-is-a-cartload-of-horseshit voice. “What kind of SNAFU?”

_Ah, crap…_ “Uh. Like. You know on Paypal when you get too many payments, too fast? They - uh- freeze your account? It’s like that, only they’re auditing every e-payment. It’s a pain in the ass.”

“Huh. Never heard of that,” he said. “Shouldn’t be a big deal to hand him a cheque.”

“And thank him for a marvellous job at playing tonight?”

“Especially that one. I didn’t know you were into They Might Be Giants.”

“Who isn’t?”

“Sno…”

“I panicked. It was the only violin piece I could think of.”

He patted her arm. “Honesty’s very important between friends, Ton, Sno.”

“I’m letting you get away with that tonight, Burnsides. Thin ice,” she growled. “Drink your cider.”

She sipped lightly - not that alcohol had a lot of effect on Elves - and tipped up his elbow a little to encourage him to drink more.

“You’re an ass, Sno,” Avi coughed, having had some of the cider go the wrong way.

“Yeah, and you’re the only one who can handle it. Drink up. You’re gonna talk to the man.”

“Okay.”

“Tonight.”

“Okay.”

“And say more than two words in succession.”

Now he looked stricken. “Aw, come on…” He was back into turning a fine shade of crimson. “I can’t do that.”

“Not yet, you can’t,” she had a bottle of his finest, richest home brew. “Follow that with some of this, and you might be able to say a few words to him before the end of the evening."

Avi whimpered.

“Or…” she said. “I act as your go-between all night.”

Avi sank the rest of his Cider in a sudden and desperate thirst.
Johann took a break for food and something non-alcoholic. Two more sets, tops, and ninety percent of these cops would be so pie-eyed, they’d be pouring them into their cabs and ubers.

Uh oh. Here came the lady of the evening. Shoving her partner towards Johann with a great amount of reluctance on his part.

“No, no, no… I still can’t do it… Sno-o-o-o-o-o…”

“Say ‘hello’,” coached Sno.

Avi, halfway sloshed and very red in the face. “Uhm. Hi? You play real good.”

“Thanks,” said Johann. “I practice daily.”

“Say, ‘I think you’re cute’,” coached Sno.

Avi went even redder. “That… um… youroutfitlooksrealnice…”

“Close enough.”

Johan was starting to feel a little pink around the cheeks, himself. “Yeah, the entertainment company makes me wear it.”

“Say, ‘maybe I should see you out of uniform’,” said Sno.

“NOT LIKE THAT!”

Johann snorted. “Yeah, I wouldn’t mind seeing you off the clock, either. You free weekends?”

“Alternate ones,” said Sno. “This coming weekend is completely free.”

“…eeeeeexx…” said Avi, cringing in mortification.

“Saturday or Sunday?” said Johann. “You a morning person, cutie?”

“…kyeeee…” Avi gasped. “…yousaidI’mcute?”

“He’s a very annoying morning person,” said Sno. “Pick a day.”

“Saturday’s cool,” said Johann. “I know a great breakfast place on Swine Row. One thirty-four. Know it?”

Sno had picked his pocket and was plugging details into his phone. “He’ll find it. I’ll make certain he doesn’t freak out and dash.”

“I got a quicker way,” Johann said. “Want some motivation, sweetie?”

Avi just kind of squeaked.

Johann leaned over and kissed him. A friendly smooch on the cheek, but he put a lot into it. “See you Saturday? About nine in the morning?”

“…uh huh…?” Avi squeaked.
“Fantastic.” He was a lot red in the face, now. “Got any favourite songs? And please don’t say ‘Istanbul’.”

“Um. *Day in the Life* by the Beatles?”

“Aw shit yeah,” Johann grinned.

Sno dinged her champagne glass with a fork. “Everyone? Everyone raise your glasses for Officer Burnsides… because *he* has a date this weekend!”

The entire room cheered as one half paid some money to the other half.

Chapter End Notes

DualityAndSuch pointed out that I left out a very important part of this story, so here it is:

Sno helped Avi clamber drunkenly on top of a chair, hooting, “SPEEECH!” as he went.

Avi raised his glass. “You’re all assholes and I love you. Especially Officer Ton, you rat fink.”

Cheers and raised glasses all around.

Johann saw it coming and got into position before Avi tipped the wrong way and fell off the chair. He caught him before he could get hurt. “Hey,” he said.

“I gotta stop fallin’ for ya like this,” said Avi, apparently just the right amount of drunk.

Johann couldn’t not bone him, now.
Chapter Notes

anonymous asked:

Kravitz knows he has to keep Daddy happy.

[AN: You were expecting kink, weren’t you?]

Two thousand and something years before what we know as the present day…

Kravitz woke before the alarm went off, silencing the bell and, in the dark, tidied his bed so that it didn’t have so much as one wrinkle. He washed his face with the ewer and basin and put on the clothes he had left out the night before.

Daddy said, “Early to bed and early to rise…”

Shoes in his hands, he tip-toed downstairs and to the back door. He sat on a little stool to put on his shoes and went out to the privy. Always sure to bring back three logs from the log pile. Almost more than he could carry. After that, it was splitting them into firewood to stock the kitchen and feed the oven.

Of course he was careful to dust off his clothes and wash his hands. That, and remove his shoes because shoes were for the outside only.

His next destination was the one mirror in the Dressing Room. Move the sheet over it just so and make certain he was well-presented.

Daddy said, “Children should be seen and not heard,” and, “A well-presented man is a well-respected man,” and, “Vanity is the root of all sin.”

Therefore, the one mirror was always covered, and Kravitz only checked his appearance in it once, to be sure of his hair. He covered it again and went back into the kitchen.

Ham. Eggs. Sausage. Butter. Into the frying pan and onto the hob, waiting to get a good sizzle. No bread for Daddy, he said bread was for children and dogs, to make them hush. Kravitz filled the kettle from the pump and set it on the hob, too.

The one other clock in the house rang seven. Time for all goodly souls to be awake, Daddy said. Time for practice. Kravitz turned the breakfast and re-entered the Dressing Room, taking the cover off of the piano and turning over the hourglass.

Fifteen minutes of scales. In the keys of C major, D minor, E, F, and G minor.

Five minutes in, the kettle started boiling and whistling, providing an insistent monotone to Kravitz’s scales. Any minute now, Daddy would come downstairs and make his pot of tea, and serve his breakfast.

It was the way it had always been. It was the way it always would be.
E… up and down. F… up and down. G minor… up and down.

Breakfast was starting to burn. Kravitz started to breathe faster. Daddy would be angry if he let breakfast burn. He would be angry if he stopped playing. He would be angry if he didn’t have his tea…

C major… up and down. The kettle still sang. The breakfast still burned. Daddy’s footsteps still didn’t come down the stairs.

Kravitz snatched the hourglass off the piano and lay it carefully down on the floor. He would play the greater amount of time to make up. He dashed into the kitchen despite Daddy insisting that running around was for gadabout neer-do-wells and never, ever indoors.

Pan off the hob, kettle off the hob. Laying safe and out of potential harm.

No yelling from upstairs. No threatening stomp of feet. Silence there, and nothing more.

Perhaps Daddy was sick. That could be it. Sick in bed and therefore unable to get up and be angry. Listening for every sound, he crept upstairs. Tip-toed all the way to Daddy’s room, and very timidly knocked.

No man was going to hear that knock. Daddy said that a man would announce himself with confidence.

Except… he was a boy of eight.


In the following silence, the tick of the clock sounded like thunder.

Kravitz knocked again. Nothing. He tried the doorknob. Locked. There was a key, but it was on the other side.

He knew what to do about that one, even though he would get a drubbing for acting like a thief. Sheet of paper under the door. Poke the key out from the other side, then drag the sheet back to the side he was on, key and all. Then, he used the key to unlock the door and enter.

“My sincere apologies, Father, but I grew overly concerned,” he said. “You’re late for breakfast and you’re never late for breakfast.”

There was such a scene. His bedclothes were in disarray and Daddy had stripped out of his nightshirt and bedcap. There were pools of vomit on the floor.

“Father?” Careful of the noxious pools, Kravitz tip-toed about to reach Daddy. He was panting like a dog in the sun, and burning hot to the touch. He was also unable to be roused.

Further thievery was necessary now. He opened Father’s bureau and stole a sheet of paper and a modicum of ink to write, Dearest Father. I found you ill after you were late for breakfast, and therefore found it necessary to borrow the horse. I have gone to fetch the town Cleric and should return in good time. I’m well aware that I am overdue a good drubbing for my sins, and will await your earliest convenience.

Signed, Your loving son, Kravitz. He blotted, sanded, and blew the ink dry, sealing the inkwell and cleaning the pen before setting everything else in the bureau to rights. He left the paper where Daddy would see it and hurried out towards the stable.
He almost forgot to put on his shoes.

Kravitz could hear the clock ticking like thunder as he brushed down the horse, added blanket, saddle, and tack. Made certain the girth strap was tight before he mounted. Then he was off at a steady, but rapid, pace.

Daddy always said, “A steady pace is oft faster than racing. You whip a horse, you might as well shoot the thing.”

He was light and Double-Dash was eager enough to run. Kravitz wasted an illogical handful of seconds wondering what it might be like to let Double-Dash run and run wherever he wanted… but that was not the purpose of a horse.

Cleric found, Kravitz had to explain things three times. Once to him, once to his wife, who translated, and once more to him. He had to come. Daddy was very sick. Yes, he has a fever. Yes, he’s thrown up. No, Kravitz couldn’t wake him. Yes, he was still breathing. Yes of course we need to hurry, that’s what Kravitz was telling him! Please!

Kravitz rode with the Cleric. The wife rode behind. Nothing made a horse run faster than another horse running, Daddy said. The Cleric’s wife ran her horse hot and hard, so Double-Dash did his best to catch up. All the way home.

Where Kravitz caught his breath, took a drink of water, and sat back at the piano, setting up the hourglass where it belonged, with the most sand on the topmost side.

C major, up and down. D minor, up and down. E, up and down. F, up and down. G minor, up and down. Check the sand, start again. C major…

Around and around until his elbows ached. Kravitz paid no heed to what the Cleric and his wife were doing. Daddy said, “Let the professionals be professional and don’t pester them with questions,” so that was what Kravitz did, until the sand ran out.

Daddy always had work for him at this point in the routine. Daddy wasn’t here to give Kravitz something to do.

So he sat. Waiting. Stomach rumbling. At the piano.

He had to keep Daddy happy.

That meant doing everything Daddy wanted him to do. Which meant doing what he was told. When that something was absent, he sat. Waiting. Perfect posture. Perfectly still.

For a father’s smile that would never come.

The Cleric’s wife eventually fed him the cold ham, sausage, and eggs, and gave him a slice of fresh bread and a big glass of milk. She said words that didn’t make sense to Kravitz. Inheritance. Estate law. Regency. In loco parentis.

He said, “Father will sort it out. Father will sort out everything. Once he is done, I will receive the drubbing I am overdue. I have acted like a criminal, even though it was for a good cause.”

The Cleric’s wife snatched him off the chair and hugged him tight and said, “You don’t worry about that. You don’t worry about that ever again.”

It would be months before he realised that his father was dying at that very moment, upstairs.
DeathsKitten on Chapter 42:

Hey, if you're taking prompts here, I'd love to see how luume treats a taako on the moon, where he trusts basically no one except maybe Magnus and Merle. And while he shares a suite with a human and dwarf who probably don't have much first hand experience with Elven cycles, that they remember, anyway.
Early morning, very soon after the group soon to be known as Tres Horny Boys settled into their shared dorm space. All is quiet, and all is still. Reclaimers have a rough job and their health is important. Thus, they are expected to get adequate rest. For the newest Reclaimers, that often means sleeping off the bender from the evening before. Therefore, the air in this tiny room is rent only by the occasional snore of all those sleeping there.

Or rather, it should have been.

Someone is stirring.
The upper bunk above Magnus is centre to a disturbing amount of activity. Tossing, turning, mumbled groans of discomfort. Panting. Struggling against the restraint that his sleepy sack provides. Magic flared, and Taako burst free of the sack. Awake. Uncomfortable. Seeking something. Something has gone awry. Were he able to, he would warn the others that he's gone into Luume'irma. Unfortunately, he's not much able to string two thoughts together. His world is reduced into three categories: Enemies to fight, babies to feed and nurture... and potential mates to... fornicate with.

Taako sniffed the air, looking across the gap at his sleeping roommate. Some mental math could have appeared, but... the Taako currently gazing across the gap between beds is incapable of math.

"Want..." Taako murmured, swinging himself about to cross the narrow aisle between bunks. He sniffed. Robbie, aka 'Pringles', was not normally a nice-smelling Halfling. Not much could be expected of a potion-maker who imbibed their own product. Taako reached towards a phial...

Robbie was awake in instants. "Hey, man. Paws offa the--" a rusty self-preservation instinct made him stop. "Oh shit. Oh shit, no..."

"Want," said Taako.

"You can want elsewhere, dude. Fuck off."

Taako slid down the ladder, finding another slumbering form underneath. He didn't need to sniff long. This one was dead for sure. He pulled down his blankets, some curtains, and random clothing items and used them to bury the dead thing. Attempting to blow the bad smell out of his nose as he went.

"Awright, awright," said a voice under the pile. "I'll take a fucking shower..."

Another was awake. Big. Strong. Smelled like a friend. Familiar, but not too familiar; but not too not familiar.

"Taako?" said Magnus. "Are you okay?"

"Want," said Taako, and lunged.

Magnus fended him off. "Taako, what the shit?"

"It's Luume," said Robbie from the safety of his bunk.

"No, a loom's that thing you make cloth on," said Merle, half his ass hanging free of his long-johns. Robbie tutted. "Not that kind'a-- Your bud's turned into a sex goblin, okay?"

"No," said Magnus, keeping Taako at arm's length. "I do not want to be sex-goblin'd up."

Sniff sniff snuffle snort. "WANT!" Taako turned away from the three of them and, growling, went looking for his better options elsewhere.

"Aw shit," said Merle, master of the obvious and belated realisation. "This is gonna end real bad ain't it?"

* 

Killian was halfway through her Kata when she opened her eyes to see an Elf in her face. Not just any Elf, but a rather strung-out-looking Taako. Pupils wide, face flushed, feverish mien... Oh fuck,
"Want," said Taako. He smelled really nice, too. Really, really nice.

Then she remembered that he was an idiot pain in the ass who had nearly ruined her last assignment. She didn't have time to hurl him into the nearest tree because Carey had crept up behind him and let loose her lightning breath.

It was almost exactly like one of those cartoons where the shocked character takes several amusing poses before collapsing in a smouldering heap and twitching sporadically.

"Thanks for the rescue," said Killian.

"That's what teammates are for. What the hell is his deal? I thought he was gayer than a treefull of monkeys on nitrous oxide..."

"I dunno. He only said 'want' and... he looked kind'a sick..."

Carey had time to look worried. "Feverish? Flushed and sort of out of it? Really wide pupils?"

"Yeah. All of the above. Why?"

"This is an Elf thing, but all I remember is it's hella dangerous. We better find another Elf before he wakes up and fucking kills us."

Then Killian said the words that might have just saved the Bureau of Balance from a demented sex goblin of an Elf. "Hey. There's Johann. Half-Elves count, right?"

*  

Johann had to admit that he was mildly surprised at two of the toughest Regulators hiding from a slightly sizzling Taako behind his weakling Bard ass. "It's not April, so you better just tell me what the goof is," he said.


"You mean like Luume'irma?" Johann asked. "If you zapped him, you gotta run, now. I'll distract him."

"Yeah, throw yourself at that unexploded dick," Killian cheered. She lifted Carey under one arm and made them both scarce.

Just in time. Taako blinked back awake. Sniffing the air. "...fff... friend?"

"Man, I dunno." Johann took a careful step towards him. "But it's okay. Much though I'd love to get lucky with you - and maybe catch syphilis again - there's other ways to do this."

Sniff, sniff, sniff. "Nice. Want."

"Great. You're really far off the deep end, huh? C'mere. I got'cha. Fraternity of knife-ears and shit..."

Taako started a raucous purr the instant Johann touched him. Dude must've had a long-ass time between metaphorical drinks, there. He started caressing back and for a moment, just a moment, the temptation was strong to violate several public indecency rules on the moon.

Johann steeled himself and found Taako's 'off switch' points. Which, unfortunately, left Taako free to
perform an incredibly successful grapple roll.

* 

"...gotta put that PSA out more regularly, is all I'm sayin'," someone was telling someone else off. "Nobody else up here on the moon knew what the fuck was up."

Whoever was talking was close. Taako could hear their voice in the chest he was snuggled up against. Warm. Comfy-soft body. Not so warm or comfy-soft ground underneath his bare legs.

Wait. What?

Oh shit. He was wearing his posing pouch and that skimpy little transparent top that exposed way too much midriff. And literally nothing else. On the plus side, it felt like someone had covered him over with a cloak, so he hadn't caught a chill. On the other hand, everyone could have seen his ass. And other personal attributes that he wasn't the best fan of. Maybe he could just pretend to be asleep until everyone but Johann went away.

"Quit pretending to be asleep, Taako," said Magnus. "You need this complete breakfast."

On the really plus side, he still had his clothes on, he wasn't covered in anyone's blood, and he hadn't stolen a baby. It was a nil-all win for Taako. He cracked open an eye only to see Merle. Not the most welcome of visions, apart from the plate of deep-fried Speck he was offering. "Off switch?" he risked.

"Off switch," said Madam Director. "I'll be circulating more regular PSA's on the topic of Luume'irma as soon as this... spectacle... has cleared away."

Great. Everyone had seen his ass. Including the person he now let go. "Thanks for the assist, Johann."

"Don't mention it. Ever."

"Fair. Fair," said Taako. He wrapped himself up in the cloak and almost inhaled the Speck. Maybe if he hid out for a week or so, the rest of these people might forget about all of this.
Merle used to be a night manager for a convenience store near the Neverwinter Community College. He got fired from there because… well… because of this.

It was getting so late that it was nearly early. Mak’arune, working on her degree, prowled the aisles for any and all over-the-counter pick-me-ups. Coffee, Monster, some pep pills, anything with guarana in it, and anything with taurine in it.

“Late night hitting the books, huh?”

“Worse than that, said Mak’arune. “My laptop imploded and now I have to do my entire thesis from scratch.”

Merle whistled backwards. “Tell you what. I know a little something-something that can help you out. It’s pretty strong stuff, so you gotta go easy on it. But it’ll definitely give you energy to do all that thesis stuff.”

“Anything,” said Mak’arune, tears in her eyes. “I need this degree. I need it so bad.”

“Cool your jets,” Merle grumbled. “Just wait there.” He clambered down from his tall chair and waddled on all the way into the back room. Moxes rattled, curses uttered, and after a few minutes of this, he waddled back with a small bottle with no label and an eyedropper lid. “Here it is. One of my little extracts. It’d knock a Dwarf or a Humanman out so hard they could sleep through the apocalypse, but you Elven types? Wired to shit and back.”

The bottle, contents and all, couldn’t weigh more than two ounces. That such a small thing could be so important.

“Will it really?”

“Yup. Big-ass energy boost,” he said. “Now you gotta be careful with this shit. It’s distilled, so it’s extra potent. No more than one drop per drink per hour, even if you’re not mixing it with the rest of that noise. If your sternum starts to feel like it’s gonna shake apart, you fuckin’ quit, got it?”

Mak’arune nodded. “M’kay. And I can stay awake all night with this stuff?”

“Miss, you could probably stay awake through a sleep dust storm. One drop an hour. You’ll be fine.”

Mak’arune handed over her money and took the entire bag of legal uppers back to the residence where she was attempting to salvage the unsalvageable.

Two hours in, Mak’arune yawned and, in a complete panic about one yawn, sank the entire little
brown bottle in one go.

On the plus side, she got her thesis reconstructed.

On the minus side, the campus security had to fish her out of the main Quad fountain, where she was (a) dressed only in her underwear, (b) yelling about things coming out of otherwise solid objects, (c) sending misfiring magic all around the area, and (d) doing all of the above during a tour of potential donors of wealth and privilege.

It took some major league tranquilisers to get her to even chill. Even then, she was in something of a torpor for the majority of the next day.

Mak’arune would never touch anything stronger than a cola ever again.
"Sir, this is beyond unnecessary," Angus complained. He had good reason to be complaining, though, what with Ruff Boi and technically alien Magnus Burnsides having flung the boy detective over his shoulder and subsequently whisked him away from his offices on the moon[1] for an expedition to the surface of Faerun. That expedition was still happening with Angus over Magnus' shoulder, even more reason for Angus to complain.

"Nope," said Magnus. "You've been indoors so long, you're gathering dust up in there. You need some green time. And some sun time. Maybe some green sun time..." Now that he arrived at his destination, he lifted Angus off his shoulder and placed him down on a greensward. "Besides, if you hadn't come down, you'd never have met Barclay."

A large Labrador, sitting in place and panting in a typical doofy Labrador way, barked briefly.

"Barclay?" Angus guessed.

Barclay woofed again, tail wagging.

"Goo'boy, c'mere, Barclay," Magnus enthused. He automatically started petting Barclay the instant he came close. "He's my first student. Needs some practice playing 'fetch'. Thought you could oblige."

Angus glared at him, arms folded. "Madam Director complained in your direction, didn't she?"

"That boy sits still all day long, just reading. I'm shocked we haven't found a new species of lichen growing on him," Magnus quoted. "Yeah. Pretty much."

"You're not letting me go back to my studies until I do this thing, are you?"

"That's a huge-ass nope-aroo right there." He reached into his pack and produced a frisbee. "Could be fun..."

Angus vented his first aggrieved teenager noise. They grow up so fast. "Fine," he said. "But I'm not going to enjoy myself."

"If you insist. You should see what Barclay can do before you get started on 'fetch', though. Just to see what he can do for you."

Angus snarled under his breath and said, monotone, "Barclay, come."

Barclay did that.
"Sit." He sat. "Lay down." Success. "Roll over." Not a hitch. "Up." Again. "Beg." A puppy paragon. "Shake." He offered his paw. He was a good dog. There was no real reason for Angus to be angry at Barclay. He was still free to be mad at Magnus, though.

"He's got one more," said Magnus. "Barclay, who's your buddy?"

Barclay nuzzled at Angus and wrapped a foreleg around one of Angus'.

"Good boy," Angus whispered, rolling a will save to not have his heart melt on the spot.

Magnus handed him the frisbee. "Go and show him what to do."

Angus already deduced that Barclay knew exactly what to do. This was all just a gigantic ruse. Nevertheless... dogs needed exercise and Magnus... well... he probably needed time with company that wasn't those other two chucklefucks. He sighed and, acting like he was doing the world a favour, threw the frisbee and yelled, "Fetch!"

Barclay bounded away after the disk, a picture of canine enthusiasm. He came galloping back and obeyed, 'drop it', tail wagging the entire time. He was enjoying the day more than Angus was. Well. At least for the first three rounds of 'fetch'. After that, it wasn't too long before Angus was throwing the frisbee around and running after it, starting to laugh at the feeling of being able to run in the sunshine.

That was when the trouble started.

There was another couple attempting to force their young teenager to get some sunshine and Angus nearly beaned the kid with the frisbee.

"I warned you," said a nearby Sea Elf in the company of a half-Elf of Moon Elf origins.

"Do please stop trying to disassemble the street lamps, dear..." said the other one.

Angus felt compelled to stop. "Sorry, ma'ams, miss. I'm... still getting my throwing arm in.

Barclay trotted up to his heel and sprawled on the grass, panting.

The girl slid down the street lamp's pole. Interestingly, she was as human as Angus was[2]. "I caught it anyway," she said, brandishing the toy. "No harm. Hi."

Angus tipped his hat. "Hello, miss."

She handed the frisbee to him. "Agatha Tremaine-Ton. Pleased to make your acquaintance." She added a belated curtsy.

"Angus McDonald," he bowed. "Likewise."

Magnus finally caught up with them, a little out of breath. "Hey," he said. "Sorry about that."

"Oh don't worry," said the half-Elf. "Your son has excellent manners."

"Uh. He's not my kid."

Angus faked a shocked gasp. "You mean I'm adopted?" he yawped. "How could you let that out to total strangers?"

Agatha hid a giggle behind one hand, while the nice Elven ladies didn't know how to react.
"This is revenge for all the pranks I've played on you, isn't it?" said Magnus.

"Got it in one, sir."

Magnus shrugged. "Fair enough." He introduced himself and Angus, and the ladies introduced themselves as La'ming Ton, the Sea Elf, and her wife Mak'arune.

Mak'arune said, "That was a mean trick to play, young sir. What if we'd called child services? What if you broke your poor daddy's heart."

"But I'm not his--"

"Father," chided Angus, "how could you?"

Agatha said, "They're going to be forever at it. Momma Mak is always that little bit behind the news."

Angus sighed. "I really mislike it when people don't listen, miss."

"Can your dog play tag?"

Angus shrugged, and tagged Barclay, saying, "You're it," and running a short distance away. Sure enough Barclay came loping after him and booped Angus with his nose. "I guess that's a 'yes'." He tagged Agatha and said, "You're it," and laughed as Barclay trotted out of her reach, tail wagging.

It was fun to play tag with a dog.

Magnus was having less fun getting lectured on parenting by the adults of the Ton family. Intermittently attempting to explain that Angus was a coworker and not a ward.

Chapter End Notes

[1] Angus has a detective agency office on the moon. Deal with it.
dualityandsuch said:
What are the guilty pleasures of THB?

Magnus:

Magnus put the mask on before he was out of sight of the travel orb but definitely after he had ditched the other two. Hood up, inconspicuous clothes on. Nobody need know it was him out here, headed for that place, doing these things.

In the unlikely event that anyone from the Bureau was here, they had enough plausible deniability to say they couldn’t be sure it was him.

Besides, he’d more or less earned this. Tough job, hard work. He really should have a day off like today. No questions asked. And if anyone did ask questions, he could probably flatten them.

He slunk into the side-entrance, taking all the covert byways into the heart of the business. Every city had a place like this, but this one was one of the better establishments.

“Welcome to Goldcliff Day Spa, anonymous sir,” chirped one of the clerks at the desk. “How may we ease your worries?”

Magnus hunkered up to the desk, hunching over and whispering. “I want the full body beauty treatment and that thing where ya soak in a tub of mud with cucumber on your eyes.”

“Certainly, sir. Would you like a mani-pedi with that?”

Merle:

Every now and then, a man has certain needs. It’s even more true for a Dwarf. He’d done everything he could to ditch his teammates in the thick of the crowds and then followed his nose to a discrete establishment down in the darker corners of Hunchback Lane.

Sure, these days, a Dwarf could fish or farm cattle and nobody would think less of them for it, but back in the ancient times? There were only two kinds of meat that a Dwarf could readily lay their hands on. Rat, and... call it ‘tunnel pork’.

There was something instinctual about it. Some kind of ancestral craving. Or harkening back to the remembrance festivals of his origin tribe when it was one of the tastes of his overlong childhood. Sometimes, you just had to go and get it.

They joked about it now. There was some smartass fella who had a whole book series with it as a running joke when mentioning Dwarven cuisine. Nevertheless, it wasn’t a popular joke and drove places like this -ha- even further underground.

He found it at last by the distinctive smell. Following his nose into the deeper-down of Little Khaz-Modan. On the other end of a twisty little alley that you had to know how to look for.
He poneyed up to the counter, put down his gold, and said, “One ratburger with all the mushrooms. And a large pot of mustard.”

**Taako:**

Nobody should ever know. Nobody could ever know. He’d evaded his teammates with superlative skill. Cast Disguise Self in order to purchase the cursed thing, and now made his way into a discrete Fantasy No-tell Motel where the rooms were rented by the hour and smelled like it too.

Fine. Fair enough. He wasn’t even planning to touch the beds.

He put the ‘do not disturb’ sign out, locked the door. Jammed a chair under the handle. Drew the curtains. Crept into the tiny bathroom and locked that door behind him, too.

Nobody would ever know...

Nevertheless, he ran a full Perception and Insight check before using his body to jam the door shut.

There, sitting on the cold and filthy tiles, he withdrew his illicit prize from his bag of holding. He was a five-star fucking chef. He could make these - and much better than these - in his fucking sleep. Nevertheless, there was something about the ones you could buy.

Maybe it was the mass manufactory. Maybe it was the way they tried to fancy it up with a fucking zigzag of cheap icing. Maybe it was the fucktons of sugar that also acted as a preservative. Maybe it was all the other preservatives.

Whatever it was, he had to have it.

The Fantasy Plastic cover cracked like thunder as he struggled with the ingenious seal. He flinched as it popped open, barely sparing it from the hideous floor.

He didn’t even peel the gigantic patty paper off the outside, just started digging into it with his manicured fingers. Shovelling it into his mouth handful by atrocious handful.

Cheap, yet rich chocolate assailed his senses. Taako moaned in pleasure, still trying to keep it down in spite of it all. The guilt of it. The need for it.

Nobody would ever know that the famous Taako from TV, five-star chef and once star of *Sizzle it Up! With Taako* had to occasionally indulge in cheap, crappy, store-bought, mass-produced chocolate cake.

He would eat the whole thing, and love it.
dualityandsuch asked:

Guilty pleasures of Krav and Barry?
Kravitz sighed with concealed relief when he couldn’t find Taako in any of his standard places to hang around in. He had found the hidden room some time ago and, whenever Taako wasn’t around, had worked on it to turn it into his secret lair.

Taako thought Kravitz was a gentleman of quality and, for the most part, he was correct. Kravitz did enjoy the finer things in life. Wine, good music, better food, Taako, of course… but there was one
little thing that he illogically loved and couldn’t get enough of. It was something not entirely great, not really. He loved it all the same but… He had to keep it his guilty little secret.

Kravitz put on his Fantasy Headphones and slid an album on the player. In mere moments, he was taken away into the rhythm and what passed for a melody. In a few more moments, he was singing along.

“…A twist of fate makes life worthwhile/ You are gold and silver/ I said I wasn’t gonna lose my head/ But then pop! Goes my heart…”

_Completely unaware that Taako had found him and was listening in. The adoring smile might have showed Kravitz that Taako was loving this in a very goopy way, but… he wasn’t looking._

The smell of popcorn roused Lup from her usual night time coma. The other side of their bed was empty and she felt a vertiginous moment of terror that she was back inside her Umbrastaff. But no. The night light was glowing and there were other sense aids like the fluffy hanging on the wall and the tinkling of the wind chimes outside their window.

Enough to help ground her, he had said, in case he was on the shitter or something.

The light wasn’t on in the nearest privy. Lup got up and wrestled her nightshirt back down before stepping out into the otherwise quiet halls of their house.

No glow in the lab. Okay. Wait. The living room was alight? Lup padded silently towards it, her sharp Elven ears picking up on a low murmur of voices.

_I swear to fuck, if he’s brought Death Criminals back over so he can grill them on their techniques again…_

He wasn’t entertaining captured bounties. He was entertaining himself. With a big bowl of popcorn, some Fantasy Mountain Dew, and the Fantasy TV. Where some guy with hair like a half-sucked mango seed was explaining how the Starblaster and its crew was responsible for ninety percent of Faerun’s historical mysteries. With increasingly ludicrous proof.

Barry was enraptured.

_Oh my gods, I can’t not love him more for this…_

She smiled, watching him as he enjoyed bad food and worse Fantasy Television. Because she was who she was, though, she was also attempting to think of ways to use this to her advantage.
The curtains were drawn. The shutters were closed. The door was locked. Nobody else was going to see what was going on behind these closed doors. Mak’arune had retreated into privacy to get into her costume. La’ming retreated into her privacy, about to get dressed up in something fancy for her wife.

They’d agreed to this for their first anniversary. A quiet night in while each of them dressed up in what they felt sexiest in. It was an involved process for the both of them, taking some significant amount of time. It also required one or both of them to answer the door in concealing robes as the deliveries arrived.

Finally, all was ready. The last delivery arrived, the door was locked, and no more interruptions could happen. They set up the table, lit the candles, and braced themselves for the final reveal.

“All ready?” squeaked Mak’arune.

La’ming’s hand was so tight on the opening of her robe that it hurt. “All ready,” she quavered. “On three.”

They counted to three together. Four times. Laughing each time. The fourth one, though, was the charm. The robes came off.

“Wow,” Mak’arune said. “You look like a princess.”

“What are you wearing?”

Demure, constantly-covered Mak’arune who blushed at the word ‘underpants’ was dressed... pretty much in Fantasy Gaffa Tape[1]. There was more of Mak’arune showing right now than had ever been seen by any mortal eyes. Perhaps even on the day of her birth. “It’s a swimming costume.”

Meanwhile, normally brash, exhibitionist La’ming Ton is in the floofiest, frilliest, most ornate and concealing Lolita dress. Frilly socks, frilly pantaloons, frilly... everything. There was not an inch anywhere that wasn’t edged in lace. “It’s... Lolita. I like to feel like a princess.”

“You look adorable,” said Mak’arune.

“You look like you’re in for a lot of pain, tonight. Is that... actually tape?”

“Yes.”

“How do you take that off without removing half your lovely skin?”

“Warm oil sponge bath,” said Mak’arune. “I scent it with flower petals.”
“So on all those days when you smelled extra special...”

Mak’arune blushed as she nodded. “The day after. I had something like this on underneath my clothes.” She bit her lip. “And... on the days you were... extra bouncy?”

“I’d had a Princess Day, the day before. Yeah.”

Mak’arune wearing next to nothing, grasped the lace-gloved hands of La’ning. “We don’t need to hide this from each other, any more, do we?”

Chapter End Notes

[1] This is a thing. Google ‘Gaffa Tape Swimsuit’ and be amazed.
dualityandsuch asked:

Guilty pleasures of Ango, Agatha, and Sno?
Agatha:

Certain things could only be learned by cohabiting. Such as the presence of a very familiar box. A cube of purple with grey features, tucked away and slightly out of normal notice. She knew that box. She used to have one just like it.

That was a Fantasy Gamecube.

She quickly investigated. There was just one game in there. Fantasy Animal Crossing. A game for up to four players.

She couldn’t help herself. She extracted her Fantasy Gamecube and her own savegame and managed to wrangle her transfer over to Angus’ village.

There. Now they could play together if they wanted.

He’d figure it out soon enough. Meanwhile, she could plant some peach trees in his orchards.

Angus:

Someone had been messing with his village. When he logged on, someone had already pulled all the weeds. There was a new house and some saplings in his orchard… and a letter in his mailbox.

_Dear Angus,_ it read, _I found your little secret and had to join mine with yours. Perhaps we can enter the fishing competition together, one day._

It was from Agatha.

Angus couldn’t help but smile. It was wonderful to know that the woman he loved also had a penchant for the drama-free meditative peace and quiet of Fantasy Animal Crossing.

Sno:

Her package had arrived! She daren’t open it at work, so she hid it behind her coat in her locker until it was time to knock off and head for home. Even then, she hid it inside her coat as she walked at a faster pace.

All the way to the tiny flat in an overcrowded apartment building with cardboard walls and neighbours who were living noise violations.

Only once she was locked inside her sanctuary did she dare take it out of hiding and open it up.

Her heart thundered, all the same, as she took the garment out of its protective packaging. Layer upon layer of frills and lace. Autumn-toned, but beautiful all the same. It was everything she’d craved.

Sno had had a lifetime of conforming to other people’s expectations. Being a refined and graceful Elf for her grandparents. Being one of the boys for the City Watch. Only when she was alone did she dare…

She stripped out of her uniform, all the way down to her underwear, and slid it on. Beautiful. Frilly. Lacy. Feminine. Steampunk skirt. The blouse was still under construction so she paired it with her Fantasy Steam Powered Giraffe shirt.

She twirled just to watch the layers flair out. Struck poses just to watch herself in the mirror and
feel…

Just for a moment…

Like herself.
Reader Request #66

Chapter Notes

dualityandsuch said:
What kind of parties does Merle go to???

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Submitted for your approval - Merle Highchurch, sole holder of 1999 Party Points. None can hold a candle to him at partying. Even the party gods hold him in awe. He has not held a party so huge and rowdy that he passed out and woke as the new deity of parties and partying... yet.

Nevertheless, the Dwarf knows how to tie one on.

Chesney’s is in full swing. The liquor is flowing, the music is blasting, and the nibbles are on fucking point because Merle got Taako to make them. He was insulted that Merle would dare to put on store bought pretzels and cocktail franks and therefore made his own.

Elves tend to exceed at everything they do. The Taaco twins are merely more so since they feel they have more to prove. It doesn’t matter that they’ve been surviving and proving it for the better part of two hundred years, they still have to go overboard every single time.

So, too, does Merle.

He’s had fifteen tankards of his Special Nectar Mead[1] and is dancing with anyone who can still stand after five. That list includes the Reaper crew, half of Team Sweet Flips, and (just barely) Taako, who won’t be outdone by his sister this time, damnit.

The decorative plants around Chesney’s started to dance along with the beat. Lianas and creepers spread out, wriggling like they, too, were dancing.

“Stoppit...” warned Lucretia.

“The party’s gonna come out somewhere,” he said, still jiggling. “If it ain’t the greens then...” he shrugged. 1999 party points, under certain circumstances, could alter reality itself.

“There are children present, Merle,” snarled Lucretia.

“Aight, your funeral,” Merle gestured and the plants returned to what passed for normal. It took a few more moments for different realities to assert themselves.

“AWRIGHT BOUNCE HOUUUUUSSE!” Magnus yawped, shedding his sharp corners and rushing in.

“HEY DAD, WHERE’D YOU GET THE BALL PIT?”

“HOLY FUCK IT’S AMUSE BOUCHE!”

“WHEE! FUCK YEAH! FIREWORKS!”
In ten minutes, the party would be off the hook.

Chapter End Notes

[1] At this point in the game, it’s not wise to ask what the nectar is, or the exact process involved when Merle brews it. Suffice to stay that Barry invented a special, non-exploding still to brew it in within five cycles.
The Bureau of Balance prides itself in the ability to hire the best of the best. The best of Bards, the best of Fighters, the best of Wizards, the best Arcanists, the best Tinkerers... And, of course, the best of thinkers.

The three of them worked in the Dirty Tricks Department. Disguises, interesting devices, and nefarious maneuvers.

Rogues, after all, didn’t know everything.

Madam Director didn’t usually allow families on the moon. Too many opportunities for stress, angst, and other dramas. Yet there were, as for all things, special occasions. Just as Tres Horny Bois were allowed straight into becoming Reclaimers, this particular little family were allowed to be the entire brain trust and the department.

A Sea Elf named La’ming Ton was nefarious maneuvers. She spent most of her time adapting her memoirs into pamphlets concerning assorted behaviours for agents out on the field. How to confound a trail. How to mislead a tail. How to use a foe’s psychology against them. How to weigh someone in the balance and judge their character. How to de-escalate conflict. It was amazing what La’ming Ton had picked up in two-hundred and some years of her checkered past.

Her wife, Mak’arune, was chief of disguises. She was mistress of the budget, chief of alternate sources, and could tell where any given thread came from and what it was most likely to be used for with two minutes, a magnifying glass, and - if dye is involved - the ability to taste it.

The chief tinkerer of Team Brain Trust is none other than their adopted daughter, taken up by the couple in a fit of synchronized Luume’irma. Her name is Agatha Tremaine and she’s in the vicinity of ten years old. She’s also a tinkerer, an alchemist, and almost as nosey as...

Taako kept thinking of a small annoying boy on a train. They’d make a terrifying match, come to think of it.

She was ten years old, and explaining the functioning of a specific device as if she were talking to a toddler. That was more or less fine. He was still playing the idiot wizard, but... he wasn’t even trying to overdo it for this kid.

“Do you have an even nerdier brother?” said Magnus.

“Do you cross-dress?” said Merle.

Taako snorted and rolled his eyes. It was obvious that this little nerd wasn’t related to the other little nerd. An idiot wizard couldn’t say as much out loud. However, an idiot wizard could fuck things up in amusing ways...
Oooh, that looked interesting. “What does this button do?”

The orb it was attached to released a blinding flash of light. So blinding that he was concerned for his vision for a good twenty minutes.

His first vision was a condescending baby administering special eyedrops. “Have we learned something, today?”

It was the sneering that did it. He just had to play, now. “Oh, that was a fun toy. Got any more?”

She said, “Nobody can be as stupid as you’re pretending to be.”

Boo. No fun.

“Yes he can,” said Magnus.

“He really can,” said Merle.

At which point, her parents turned up. “Which one of you assholes is messing with our baby’s inventions?” demanded La’ming.

Closely following her was Mak’arune, carrying a large bag. “Is anyone hurt? Baby, are you okay?”

She, unlike her wife, was half-Elven. However, like her wife, any Luume-adoption inclined the adopter to repeatedly acknowledge their adoptee as their baby.

“It’s fine, mama. Just a dingus playing with buttons. I saw it coming so I had my lenses down.” She demonstrated, flipping down what had appeared to be an interesting head decoration but was actually heavily smoked glass on a frame that collided neatly with her existing spectacles. “Even then, I can find the eye drops by feel.”

“You sneaky little shit,” cooed Taako approvingly. “I like this nerd!”

“This is our baby you’re talking about,” menaced Mak’arune, normally the shyest and most unassuming member of the Bureau.

“It’s cool, it’s cool,” said Magnus as he received the eye drops. “That’s the Taako seal of approval. (Ow, those sting...) It means he likes your daughter.”

La’ming was glaring at him. “You’re seven colours of messed up in the head, aren’t you?”

“Six, last count,” said Taako. “The new one must be my own special variety.” He dared peruse some other inventions with his hands behind his back. “All part of the brand, now.”

Agatha whispered, “He has learned,” in Elven, as if it were a minor miracle.

Taako had to pretend deafness lest he had to act offended around two very dangerous and very protective mothers.
They were curled up in the most comfortable spots in their current cavern. Which, considering the assorted detritus of a decade-old, tailed-out mine, wasn't that comfortable to begin with. Alongside nudies and shrooms, uncomfortable sleeping had to be the worst of this entire fucked-up mission. On this night, however, Magnus has to wonder about their Elven Wizard.

"Don't Elves meditate?" he asked as Taako did his best to tuck himself into the sleeping bag.

"Sure, if I don't mind getting stabbed to death," said Taako. "Listen. Elven meditation is efficient, but it kind'a leaves you vulnerable, you dig? To meditate, you go deep inside. Super-deep. On the outside, everything and their kid brother's dog can get you. I only meditate where I feel safe, hombre." He burrowed himself into his sleeping bag and plopped his hat over his head. "Now shut up, I need some Z's."

Magnus shrugged and settled down, trying not to snore or fart too loudly.

Four hours later, Taako started screaming. Well. Not entirely screaming. If anyone had been anywhere near a Workhouse at a certain hour of the day, they would know the Workhouse Howl. When all the guards locked up for the night, the captives in the workhouses would unanimously vent their terror, fear, and frustration in one long, incomprehensible wail. They would get two, maybe three breaths before the guards came to pummel them into submission; so they usually stopped at two.

Taako was sitting bolt upright, as he had on the way to Phandalin. Tears streaming down his dusky, dappled cheeks. He paused, panting, after the first howl ran out of air - gods, this Elf had some pipes-ears swivelling for any sound other than his own echo. His next breath made words. "No! No, don't put me in the dark! I wasn't bad! I wasn't bad! Lu... Lu... No, no, no no no..."

"Taako. Taako, shh-shh-shh... you're okay. It's not dark. Open your eyes."

Taako did, and vented another shriek. "Grey! Grey! It's all grey... no, we burned it. We burned it. The grey walls ate the sky... Lu... Lu... I can't find Lu..."

"You're okay," Magnus cooed, despite ample evidence to the contrary. "You're okay. I'm just gonna hold you, now..." Touch was not the magic to startle him out of it, this time. Magnus held him tight enough to be reassuring, but not tight enough to hurt. "You're okay, now. I got'cha. I got'cha."
"...'s all grey... everywhere... Gotta find Lu... Can't find..."

"Deep breaths. I got'cha. Tell me about the bad place. Where's Lu usually at?"

"...'s grey," said Taako, sounding more like a child than a grown-ass Elf. "When I'm bad, they hurt... gotta find... They took..." Taako stiffened, staring at nothing but darkness. "She's here!"

"Lu?"

Urgent and whispered. "Citron! Citron's here. She took... she took..."

Oh shit. Now there was a name from the history books. "You were in Saint Vingo's?"

That woke him up. Taako snorted and immediately made a dex check to get out of Magnus' arms. "Get off me, you sweat factory."

Magnus didn't let it go. "You made it out of Saint Vingo's?"

His mismatched eyes glowed in the subtle light of the mine. Glaring at him. "Yeah, and I surprisingly don't go murdering people. Shocking."

The horror of Saint Vingo's was over almost a hundred years ago, but... "What about your friend?"

"What friend?"

"The one you were calling out for. Lu." Magnus was worried. "Did they make it?"

"I didn't-- I don't..." he frowned, shaking his head. His ears flicked like he had a bug tickling them. "Stop trying to make friends, lugnuts. Taako doesn't 'do' shares." With that, he burrowed back into the seclusion of his bedroll.

Magnus couldn't get back to sleep, though he could hear Taako snoring. He'd seen how bad workhouses messed people up. In fact, the first thing Ravensroost did when the revolution came was to fucking destroy all of Kalens double-cursed workhouses. According to the histories he'd read, Saint Vingo's more or less operated on the same model. Punishment after punishment for acting like homeless, resourceless kids. Rewards for getting more and more broken as they became 'processed' into polite, affable, near-mindless puppets with no real will of their own.

Taako had made it out, obviously. Just as obviously, it had turned him into a prickly, defensive, aloof loner who couldn't trust anyone.

You're going to be okay, Magnus vowed inside his own dome piece. You can trust me. I'll keep proving it way beyond the point that you know you can. He could do nothing to protect the scared little Elf who had suffered in Saint Vingo's... but he could work to help heal the Elven man who still operated in its shadow.
CHOIR CONCERT!!!!!
Schools with a choir program always went after the Elves like starving, rabid dogs after a hunk of steak. It shouldn’t have surprised La’ming Ton, new mother of two tiny, adorable, six-year-old twins that the choir program swarmed during their first day of school. Frankly, she was shocked that someone got little mister no-words Koko to string together a complete sentence.

That kid was jittery as hell around strangers at the best of times. Hell, the first time they met, he only got into her apartment because he was out cold and Lulu trusted her. The fact that she had food when he woke up gained her a minimum of trust, likewise the fact that she didn’t force them into anything. How he had agreed to choir had to be a tale involving major intervention from the gods. Probably all of them.

Now, though, La’ming was glad.

For such little devils, they both had voices like angels. Sweet, pure voices that never missed a note. It was almost enough to sweep one away into paradise…

Blip-blip k’chow boom “HEY DO YOU WANT TO MEET HOT SINGLES IN YOUR AREA? MY NAME’S TAMMY AND–”

Several people were glaring at the kid in the next row forward, and slightly to the left of La’ming. Some were shushing him. La’ming politely tapped him on the shoulder. “Could you silence your phone, please?” she whispered. “Some people want to listen to this.”

“Some people can bite me,” he said.

Well. She had asked nicely. Now it was her turn to play nasty.

She focussed the spell intensely onto one person. Specifically, a much smaller bubble than the usual twenty feet. Then, blessing the fact that she took a couple of levels at Bard-dom, made a gesture behind his seat and whispered, “Pianissimo, pianissimo, pianissimo, pianissimo.”

Ha. That should shut him up for the duration. Which should be extended because of the smaller volume.

His mother had to be somewhere… but La’ming wasn’t budging until her babies had their solos. Koko’s soul-cleansing extended arpeggio… closely followed by Lulu’s irrepressible tempo change into something that made the entire audience tap their feet and burst out in applause.

Damn straight. Those were her babies. Shining like they deserved to. La’ming blew them both kisses
and sidled out of her seat to have a little Word with Susan Hakniid, who was busy haranguing the
talent night’s director for a slot for her idiot lump of a son, Jason.

Everyone knew Jason. If it were possible, he would be put away for wasting carbon, air, and
everyone’s time… but you couldn’t convince Susan of that. She was utterly convinced that her
darling little Jason was a gift to the world and only needed one real chance to show it.

*If he’s such a gift, how can I return it?* La’ming wondered, not for the first time. It took her three
goes to get Susan’s attention.

“–and furthermore, your own school charter says that *every* talented student will get an opportunity
to shine, *I was talking*…”

“We noticed,” said La’ming. “All the way through *other* childrens’ opportunities to shine. Or is your
son the only child who matters?”

Only now did Susan notice the front three rows of parents, friends, and family all glaring in her
direction.

“We have sent numerous notes about your son, Jason, and his… lack of co-operative skills,” said the
director, who finally had a word in edgewise. “His only talent on display tonight is that of being a
disturbance. Something he’s obviously inherited.”

“You might want to have a word with him during intermission,” said La’ming. “If he thinks he can
make noise during others’ performances, other kids might think they’re allowed to make noise
during *his* performance.”

“Assuming he can spend a semester without any behaviour demerits,” said the director in a hurried
addition. “Furthermore, as per the school rulebook, any further disturbance by you or your son will
force us to remove you both from the premises.”

“This is a conspiracy to hold him back,” Susan hissed. “*My lawyers* are going to be involved.”

Thank the gods that the courts found security footage to be more admissible than Susan Hakniid ever
did. Meanwhile, La’ming got to field her babies as they came off stage.

“You. Were. Amazing,” she said scooping them up into her arms and delivering a kiss each onto
their darling little cheeks. She carried them towards her vacated seat and whispered, “Wanna blow
the rest of the evening off for pizza and ice cream?”

Two matching grins and four matching thumbs’ up gestures. The perfect finish to a not-so-perfect
night.
Sno was going to be Avi’s Second in his wedding to Johann. It was a choice that was beyond automatic. It was almost instinctual. They’d been best friends since the Academy. Of fucking course she was going to be the next best thing to the Best Man. It also, kind’a-sort’a, solved the problem of what they were going to wear to the ceremony.

It also presented a heavy problem.

As Avi’s Second, it was Sno’s duty to run the Stag Night. The Bachelor Party. The last hurrah before a life of domestic bliss. Him, her, and the boys on a pretty standard evening of drunken revelry, pranks, and possibly a stripper. Sno knew about the theory, but...

That was pretty much all she knew.

She was his partner. He loved her like a sister. But gods damn it, Sno had all the social capability of a house brick.

“Hey, pard’. I can get my mother to jump out of a cake.”

Case in point. “What?”

“Family discount. Mom jumps out of a cake, does a few dirty dances, everyone has fun and we have like, a hundred spare for more booze.” She looked up from the clipboard. “It’s win-win.”

She was genuine. Sweet Fantasy Jesus, she was genuine. “It’s. Your. Mother.”

“Yes?”

“That’s fifteen levels of inappropriate.”

“ Weird. ‘Cause twenty of the guys have her pinups in their lockers, and--”

Avi put his fingers in his ears and started humming. He only stopped when she stopped talking.

“It’s cool,” said Sno. “I’ve known she’s been doing this for years and she has like three ready-to-steal-’em babysitters for the twins and--”

“Your mother had twins?” Avi panicked. “You have baby sibs?”

“She found ‘em by a dumpster and is in the middle of upcycling them. Chill.”

“Wait. Stop. Someone abandoned twins by a dumpster...”

“No, they were kind’a living there themselves. You remember the Taaco case out by Tre Llew-Ddion?”
“Those twins?” Oh, this was not good. Orphaned at three, shuffled between assorted asshole family members and shitty foster homes for a year. Runaways who dropped off the map at five. A chain of suspicious fires, horrible accommodations, peculiar deaths, and murders most foul. And now they resurfaced in the illegal care of an internet stripper who was also his partner’s mother. “This couldn’t get any worse if the kids were boosting cars, Sno.”

“Believe it or not, mom’s cleaned up her act since she had me in her seventies. She’s... she’s actually better care and providing more of a stable environment than anywhere official. I’ve checked.”

“You mother. Who played Busty Juggs in Tug Rats.”

“Yeah?”

“A better care provider.”

“She doesn’t do any hinky stuff when the kids are home. Gods. She’s a train wreck, not a monster.” Sno started ticking off the checklist on her fingers. “The apartment’s clean. Her studio’s always locked, the kids have proper food, good clothes, and they’re going to school. She makes sure they have good babysitters when she’s livestreaming. They’re even seeing some doctors about the malnutrition and parasites they picked up both on the street and via official channels. She’s... she’s actually being a halfway decent foster parent.”

Avi forced the conversation back on track. “And you want her to jump out of a cake for my Stag party.”

“The kids need books. They’re voracious readers.”

Of course a couple of the guys dressed up in SWAT gear to haul him away from his apartment. That was pretty much SOP for a City Watch Stag Nite. Instead of the come-along wagon, there was a party bus and Sno had stocked it with Redcheek cider. Avi’s favourite booze, besides the microbrews he made himself.

The party music was fairly typical. Nothing overtly offensive even though little of it was his particular jam. He could dance to it - more and more as he imbibed - and have a modicum of fun.

Then they arrived at the bar that was the actual party venue. A bar that had a stage with poles on it and a suspiciously huge cake.

*She didn’t, Avi begged the universe. Please, gods, tell me she did not...*

“Oh no,” said Sno with blatantly fake sincerity. “They delivered the wedding cake early and to the wrong address...”

Just then, half a dozen nuns entered the bar.

“Whoah, whoah, hey. This is a private party, ladies. Sisters.”

“Oh we won’t be here long,” singsonged the lead nun. “We’re gathering funds for orphaned and abandoned children. Just a five minute song and dance and we’ll be on our way.”

*Waitasecond... since when do nuns wear heels? Avi had just enough time to ponder that before some heavy Eighties synth started pounding out of some small but powerful speakers.*
Bananarama’s Venus started pounding and a well-endowed figure burst forth from the cake.

Sno’s mom did not jump out of the cake. The stripper in the cake was none other than Hornee D’Lite, a Tiefling co-star in Tug Rats and regular feature in the local brand of direct-to-disk porno.

No. Sno’s mom was the lead nun. She had managed to gather together the entire fucking cast of Tug Rats for a one-night-only live performance.

This could not have got more mortifying if Sno had been trying. That was the regrettable part. Sno had honestly been trying to make this a night to remember.

Well... she wasn’t wrong...
dualityandsuch said:
And his wedding

_The pace of the bride, the pace of the groom, tell all watching the measure, how much love bein’ true_- -- Ancient Faerun saying.

Some arrangements had to be made. Johann didn’t have much in the way of family who claimed him, though he had made a plethora of friends who were far, far better. The entire ranks of the Precinct and some members of the Neverwinter City watch from outside of the Precinct were there. Sno’s family could not be stopped.

Well. The rowdy side of her family could not be stopped. Which meant that Lulu was there as a flower girl and Koko as a flower boy in a dress because why should his sister have all the fun of pretty dresses with fairy wings and flower crowns? La’ming Ton, Sno’s mother, was in amongst the ranks of Watch officers with her girlfriend. Another half-Elf by the name of Makarune.

She had been the seamstress who had seen to Johann’s outfit for today.

Avi, Sno, and all the other officers of the Watch in attendance had a much easier choice of wardrobe. Or rather, a lack of choice. Formal ceremony meant formal attire. End of discussion.

Dress blues, knee boots, dress sword, capelet, white gloves, and the plumed hat. On Sno, it looked crisp and vaguely menacing. Avi, on the other hand, couldn’t help feeling like a bit of a knob in the whole get-up.

His heart was in his mouth. This was it. This was the big day. This was where his life changed for the better for sharing it with Johann.

Soon to become Mr Johann Burnsides.

“Teeth,” said Sno.

He bared them, and she checked for anything embarrassing stuck in there. There shouldn’t be. He hadn’t been able to eat anything since he woke up and fought off the hangover thanks to the McDonald Family recipe for Gator-aid.

“Your teeth aren’t green either. Excellent,” she noted.

“Yeah, despite Andy’s best fuckin’ efforts.” They shared a laugh. “Ready as I can be.”

Sno stepped outside the door, made certain her sword was clear and clean and saluted the Chief of the Watch with it before returning it to her scabbard. Across the way, one of La’ming’s co-stars - unrecognisable in a crisp black suit- exited the opposite chamber and gave the signal.

Buglers played a fanfare. The door opened. Avi barely remembered the formalities because -oh sweet gods- Johann was resplendent in full Bard’s Motley. Deep lapis. Stark vermillion. Vibrant
saffron.

The hose. The long, scalloped sleeves. The slashed pantaloons. The fucking codpiece. And the brocade. My gods, he looks magnificent.

Johann’s magnificent curls were trained into ringlets behind his lovely pointed ears, and sailing on top like a ship in the storm was a feathered cap with a peacock’s eye in amongst all the other finery.

Avi didn’t remember what pace he set but witness statements after the fact stated unanimously that both he and Johann took off running to collide in a hug and kiss combo where they both took turns dipping each other. Much to the enthusiastic applause, cheers, and hoots of the audience.

The celebrant officiating had to remind them both to “save some of that for later.”

He took off his gloved and tucked them beside the sword. Staring at Johann and holding his hands as the celebrant went through all of the usual palaver.

He remembered sounding soppily goopy when he said, “I do,” and loving hearing it in Johann’s voice when he said the same.

Tears might have been shed. Sno would never admit to it in her lifetime.

While they were sharing the official kiss, the twins had a competition to see how many flower petals they could get in the new couples’ hair. They were extremely lucky that they were small and cute and could get away with those kinds of shenanigans.

They both had indelible smiles on their faces for the rest of the day.
Lucretia decides she wants to look more regal and glamorous after her year alone on the judges planet and goes to the twins for help -- missdreamgirl32

The white light re-wove itself into all the crew. As it always had. All in the position they were in when they breached the barrier between realities.

Magnus let go of the railing. Lup and Taako let go of each other. Barry let go of the railing. Merle let go of Davenport and Davenport let go of the wheel. Every single one of them was wondering how they made it out of that reality alive.

Then Lucretia let go of her books. Just... fucking dropped them onto the deck where she had been cringing when their world ended. She wasn’t cringing any more.

There were still more than a few hints of her usual timidity there, of course. Changes so profound weren’t always so obvious in mere seconds.

Lucretia set down her pen and ink, more careful about those than the books that had slammed onto the deck. All around them, they noticed that the Starblaster was in worse shape than they remembered.

“I did it,” she whispered. “It worked...”

Three months into their next reality, she came to the kitchens where Lup and Taako were where they belonged. Together, and cooking, and arguing in their friendly manner.

“If you’re looking to document my macaroon recipe, you can fuck off,” said Taako.

“No. It’s not that,” said Lucretia. “Um. I’d... like your advice in your other area of expertise.”

“You’re not getting my hachi-machi hot Hades Heartburn recipe either, babe,” said Lup.

“No, no. I mean.” She forced herself to stop her usual submissive huddle. “You. Both of you... Always find ways to command respect. You always look so... magnificent.”

“Natch,” said Taako.

“It’s in the genes,” said Lup.

They were currently both in ratty old clothes that were almost worn to a whisper. A garish combination of three different worlds’ full of disparate fashions. They still looked fucking amazing.

Taako’s hair hadn’t been brushed since he put it up in braids the evening before, and he still looked like he was runway ready.

“I... want to look better. I want... I’m tired of standing in the shadows and fading into the background. I’m tired of my own crew running perception checks so they don’t bump into me.” She
took a deep breath. “I want to stand out.”

The twins got that speculative look they always got before pulling one of their epic pranks.

“Without looking like a fool,” Lucretia amended.

Taako blew a raspberry.

Lup sighed and rolled her eyes. “Fine. Take all the fun out of it.”

“Nah. She’d tell everyone we told her to dress like that. It’d ruin our rep.”

Lup vented a long, anguish-filled groan. “Fiiinnnne. You, us, and all the trade goods we can wrangle. We’re going to the markets and giving you some kick-ass style advice, dear.”

“You’ve already failed step one,” said Taako, “which is, ‘be an Elf’, but we’re willing to work with that handicap. We’re magnanimous like that.”

The twins, of course, paid more attention to their usual look than they would have a month into a mission. Full uniform for both of them with all the stops pulled. Taako had even bothered to shine his boots.

They were representing the Starblaster, Elven kind, and whatever transformation they wrought upon her during the day.

There was a lot of walking. There was a great deal of either twin holding up things against her form and humming a lot. There was a lot of checking jewellery against her.

“Blue,” they decided before their mid-morning break. “Blue is definitely your colour.”

“Shades of blue,” said Lup. “Trim of white. Maybe small amounts of orange if you want it to pop.”

“Very small amounts of orange,” said Taako. “Little details. Fine trim level or less.”

“I see silver, I see sapphires, I see little bits of gold, maybe some amber... Heels f’r sure.”

“Lulu, she’s taller than both of us.”

“Yeah? So? She would fucking slay in heels.”

Lucretia took notes. They eventually found a plethora of clothes that gave her some regal aplomb. Some that would take her some years and a lot more courage to wear. Many that she would never wear for various reasons.

Some... she would rename later into calling them her “full business regalia” and use to command respect in her role as Madam Director in the Bureau of balance.
Anonymous said:
Merle and Ango get mistaken for father and son.

Angus was allegedly helping Merle with Earl business in Bottlenose Cove. What he was actually doing was essentially imitating Radar from Fantasy MASH. Working out what the Cove needed for its assorted rebuilding projects, making a note of them, and telling Merle a fraction of a second ahead of Merle telling him to do the exact same thing.

Mavis, also trailing in his orbit, was detailing the guilds who could help with everything that needed organising. Meanwhile, Mookie was... just being Mookie.

“Sir you should really warn Mookie about--”

“GET DOWN OFF’A THERE BEFORE YOU FALL DOWN OFF’A THERE I ONLY HAVE SO MANY SPELL SLOTS FOR HEALS, PANDAMNIT!”

“Didja thee how far up I climbed, pop? That wath like two thtorieth or sump’n, wazinit?”

“Yeah you’re a regular Fantasy Sir Hillary. Knock it off before you kill your old man from fright, okay?” He paused for the seemingly mandatory wrestling match with his rambunctious son. “Keep it to heights you know you won’t bust your skull open from, okay?”

Construction sites were a semi-natural playground for Mookie. It seemed like a busted skull would only mildly slow him down.

Mookie took off again at Fantasy Warp Nine, up on the scaffolding with an innate hubris only ever reached by small children who had no idea of how badly the world could hurt, sometimes.

“Maybe you should quit--”


Anyone and their kid brothers’ dog could tell he’d never go that far. Hekubah would fucking kill him if he did.

A newcomer tapped Angus on the shoulder. An Elven merchant, apparently, leading a camel that was seemingly chewing three bars of soap. “Young sir, can you remind your father that he has an appointment?”

Angus, inlined to his own brand of mischief, smirked and said, “Oh father, dear...”

“What? I ain’t your fuckin’ daddy.”

Right in front of strangers. Angus cried on cue. “How could you be so mean to me, daddy? Is it ‘cause I can’t grow a beard like you?”
Merle caught up with things. The Elf judging him hard, the way Mavis was hiding giggles behind her hand. The distant snorts of Taako, who had an over-the-horizon radar and instant approval for this kind of horseshit. “Aaaah, shit,” he muttered. “He’s not a Dwarf.”

“You mean I’m adopted, too?”

Somewhere, he was sure, the twins were laughing their asses off. In fact, he could hear them. That high-pitched cackle of theirs carried.

Merle took him by the shoulder and glared up into his eyes. “Kid,” he said. “No matter what happens, I still got Li’l Smoosher.”

Angus cut the act cold. “In-joke amongst the crew, sir. I’m actually a humanman boy and no relation to Earl Merle, here.”

“Kids these days, anh?” said Merle. “Ango, you go practice casting Featherfall on Mookie before he hurts himself.”
It should have been yet another day in the markets. Taako got distracted by some of the latest gizmos from Miller Labs and buttonholed the salesperson about how *exactly* their pastry roller could save time and effort when it required three times the messing about than the original pastry.

It had been going on for some time before Market Security turned up.

“Sir,” said one of them. “Your son has been in an altercation with a local gang.”

He never expected his heart to drop like it did. “Where is he? Is he all right?” after half a second to actually think, he added, “Did he win?”

One of the guards handed the other two gold.

“Come with me, sir,” said the winner of the wager.

Taako was wont to walk a little faster than these particular members of the Watch, anxiously looking for any sign of a big trouble.

Burned bunting. Frozen bunting. Some upturned planters. Something had gone down here. Five guys bigger than Ango each were being seen to by Clerics whilst under the hairy eyeball of bigger, burlier Watchmen.

There, in a seat purloined from a nearby furniture store, was Ango. Bruised, battered, a little frost-rimed, but whole.

“Hello, sir.”

Taako felt like he could breathe again. “There’s my beautiful magic boy,” he said, and lunged.

“Oof! Sir... I haven’t had my turn with the local Clerics, yet.”

“Ah, what’s one point in grapple damage?” Taako breezed, pretending to not care but easing up all the same. “What happened, genius?”

Ango cast Mending on his glasses, which were a little warped. “I bumped into their leader as they were lifting some jewellery off the displays, thus revealing their ruse, sir. They took umbrage to that.”

“I’ll take my Umbrastaff to their asses if they try that shit again,” mumbled Taako.

“I don’t think that’s at all necessary, sir.”

“Horseshit,” said Taako, automatically.
“I mean... I did trounce them sir.”

“Sir?” said a Watchman. “The Clerics are ready for your son.”

Ango looked to Taako, who merely deferred a place of access for the priestly sort. He said, “Uh. He’s not my dad...”

“For shame,” Taako mock-sobbed. “Disowned by my own flesh and blood! Why are you ashamed of your old man? Is it because I remarried after your poor dear mother...”

“Sir...” Ango chided.

Taako faked more tears.

He cleared his throat. “Da-a-ad...”

Taako instantly recovered. “I forgive you,” he allowed. He leaned close to that cute little Humanman ear and whispered, “Nice job on the other two chucklefucks, but do not for one instant think I’m that easily gulled.”

They looked each other in the eye. One apprentice villain to an old master. Both were smiling, but in a calculating way.

Ango won, though, with upraised arms and, “Carry me home, daddy?”

Oooh. He was getting good.

At some point down the line, he’d have to explain that the Elven words for ‘apprentice’ and ‘child/descendent’ were one and the same.

Ango was damn heavy and awkward to carry. Despite that, or maybe because of it, Taako caught himself purring for the damn brat. Then he caught Ango’s sly smirk.

Damn kid already knew.
Every parenting book written by parents insist that quiet children were automatically getting into trouble. Every parenting book - according to Snocoun Ton, officer of the Neverwinter City Watch - was wrong. There were two states of Lucretia being quiet, and they were: asleep, or reading.

Needless to say, the school had trouble with this.

“She doesn’t talk,” complained her teacher, with the principal as backup. “Her class participation scores are terribly low.”
“She talks to people she feels safe with,” countered Sno. “She’s been through a lot for someone so young, and… if she feels more confident being quiet, perhaps you could find ways to participate that don’t include making her talk when she doesn’t want to.”

The principal, leaning against the wall, said, “I’m not entirely sure she’s reading… exactly. It looks like she’s just… flipping through the books.”

“You haven’t watched her eyes. She’s really reading them.”

Mz Tutta sighed and steepled her fingers. “For her age group, we have to hear her reading out loud for her to advance into later classes. Talking is not only necessary, but also vital for her further education.”

“That’s not fair for mute people,” noted Sno. “Nor any deaf ones.”

“She’s capable of talking,” said the principal. “Therefore, she has to talk.”

Sno did all her grumbling about ableist horseshit before she was within hearing range of the little shelter where Lucretia preferred to sit and read. She had a two-inch-thick tome from some epic sprawling fantasy, and paging through it with her normal rapidity.

She approached with just the right amount of noise. A heavy enough tread to be detected, but not heavy enough to threaten. She stopped just out of arms’ reach and dropped to a squat, waiting patiently for Lucretia to finish the section.

Little brown fingers politely added a bookmark to the places. Beautiful deep, brown eyes paid Sno cautious attention.

“Bad news, Lucretia… They’re insisting you talk. They say they have to keep you in that class until you do.”

Lucretia huffed in exasperation and sighed disappointment.

“The good news is that if you can read out loud for them, they might bump you up to an older class.”

Lucretia’s skeptical glare said that she didn’t think that was good news.

“I know. It’s all horse apples. Unfortunately, it’s all horse apples that we have to put up with. Sorry. How about… I read to you and then you can read to me, tonight. We can cuddle up in the cote and stop whenever we’re ready.”

Nod. This was a good deal.

*  

Sno liked thinner books than Lucretia. She read a good section of *Wee Free Men* for Lucretia. She opened her tome to her bookmark and read, “Teach the ignorant as much as you can; society is culpable in not providing a free education for all and it must answer for the night which it produces. If the soul is left in darkness sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness…”

She read very softly, but she was clearly reading. Competently. Capably. Ably.

If anyone wanted to claim that a four-year-old child had somehow memorised the entirety of *Les Miserables*, then Sno would have immense fun watching them trying to use this as a reason why
Lucretia should stay down with her age-mates.

Sno cuddled up with Lucretia as she read, checking over the little Humanman girl’s shoulder as she read. Her purr started, of course, as she helped steady the tome in Lucretia’s tiny hands. After that began, Lucretia started smiling as she read.

When she finished with the chapter, she leaned into Sno and said, “You tickle.”

“Good tickles?” Sno worried.

Nod. She squirmed further into their embrace.

Sno automatically petted her. “Don’t ever think you’re stupid just because they say so. You’re a clever little girl, and the whole world should believe in you.”

Lucretia took a deep breath and did her best imitation of an Elven purr.

It would be a long time before she would speak freely, but when she did… she would be strong.
Reader Request #75

Chapter Notes

QueenKara671 on Chapter 58:
Hi, I was wondering if you could write a chapter where Taako and Lup go to check up on their moms (in the Montgomery Within verse) and find out about them having Terry steal the fifteen dollar bill? I want to see their reactions.
Thanks!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"These ones should be good for a whole day," said Barry. The belts didn't look much different from the hour-long 'alpha version', but Taako was inclined to trust his nerdy brother-in-law.

"Nifty," said Taako. "What's the heist?"

"No heist, sweetie," said Lup. "We should really introduce our snuggle-buddies to the family."

Realisation hit like a truck. "Oh snap. We're introducing Barold and Krav to our moms? Are they even ready?"

"They better fuckin' be," said Lup.

Taako scurried for the room, looking for his particular sweetheart. "Krav! Bone daddy! HEY, SALT!"

"Okay. So these ones work on deep bonds," Barry instructed. "We all hold hands. Kravitz? You and I focus on our love for the twins. Lup and Taako will be focussing on their parentals. It should take us to the safest open space near wherever they are in their reality.

There was...
...a feeling like falling...
...wind without air...
...the unpleasant sensation of being turned sideways-out...

Then ground under his feet and a residual dizziness that made him cling tighter to Taako.

"Easy, now," Taako soothed. "Deep breaths, bone daddy. You got this."

"I'm... alive? That usually takes hours..."

"This dimension's Raven Queen's a little more benevolent than ours," said Lup. "Just lean if you need to lean, bossman."

"Aw dunk. There's our moms' house."
It was a cottage that they wintered in when Montgomery's Amazing Circus was not on the road. The closest thing the twins had ever had to a home since they were twelve. It was a picturebook house. With floral arches and a thatched roof and pretty painted shutters guarding the windowpanes. Abundant herbs and vegetables grew in neat little rows. One would easily expect Baba Yaga to live there, or a fairy godmother in disguise. Or an enchanted princess or a wizard with a destiny to deliver. Certainly not the gangly, unassuming character who emerged from the slightly sunken door.

The twins recognised him instantly. "Terry?"

Terry said, "Oh shit," and dashed back inside.

'WHAT DID YOU DO TO OUR MOMS, TERRY!"

They had just enough time to yell that before two Elven figures rushed out into the open. One full-blood Sea Elf and a half-Human Moon Elf. Both with aprons on, both with hands upraised and yelling, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

The smaller half-Elf put herself in front of everyone else in the doorway of the cottage, only to have herself body lifted out of harms' way by the Sea Elf, who shrieked, "MY BABIES!"

The twins, now eager to greet these women, said, "Mom!" and rushed into her arms. They soon absorbed the half-Elf when she joined the family cluster. There was definitely some competition purring.

Kravitz hung back with Barry and politely waited for introductions to happen. These women had to have adopted Lup and Taako at some point, and Luume may have been involved[1], but they were definitely family and it didn't matter that none of them were related.

The Sea Elf was 'mom', and her half-Elf spouse was 'momma' according to the twins, and after a handful of minutes' worth of embracing, they were introduced as La'ming Ton and Makarune, respectively.

"I'm so glad you're okay," sighed Taako. "We thought that asshole Terry had done something to you."

Makarune said, "That's your baby brother you're insulting, Koko."

"WHAT?"

Of course it turned into a family dinner. Mothers and twins attempting to cook together in a kitchen made for a maximum of two people. Taako would, and did, call it a 'two ass kitchen'. They were spending most of the cooking session dodging out of everyone else's way and Terry, apparently used to something similar, was passing in fresh herbs and ingredients through a convenient window.

"So..." said Lup. "When the fuck did this happen?"

Makarune laughed. "When Jeffandrew put the universes back together, he gave them all the ten years' difference from your reset. At least, that's how I understand things."

"We didn't exactly live them," said La'ming. "We experienced them, but... it's like a dream. Sort of. Some silly fantasy, for sure."

"But real," said Terry in the window. "Very real. I was twelve when the Hunger hit. Running away from home and then... I dreamed about finding the circus and... your moms. Our moms."
"Luume," Makarune shrugged. "What are you gonna do?"

"So he got the fifteen dollar bill from Greg for you?" Taako guessed. "Or for Monty?"

"For us, originally," said La'ming.

"It wasn't his to start with," added Makarune. "We know you made it for college and a little financial security in Neverwinter."

"It was never meant to be exploited like he did," said La'ming. "And anyway, we gave it to Monty."

"The bail fund always needs money," the entire family chorused.

Kravitz had to laugh at that. So did Barry. They'd both heard a lot of Circus stories.

"Hey, are we on Monty Three still? Or is it Monty Four?"

"Monty Four. I swear we make them age faster, the poor dears."

Dinner, by comparison, was stilted and awkward. Seven people sitting around a tiny table more suited to six, awkwardly eating dinner and attempting to find something nice to talk about.

"Interesting heist technique you got there, baby bro," said Lup. "Let the geniuses do all the hard work and let them send the macguffin straight to you."

"Looking like an incompetent employee was an especially nice touch," said Taako. "You had us completely fooled."

It was the fact that they sounded approving that threw Terry, Barry, and Kravitz for a loop.

"You did trust every word outta my mouth," said Terry, vaguely defensively. "An arcana check here, an insight check there. You could'a avoided a whole bunch of embarrassment."

There was an extended silence as the siblings glared at each other over the bowls of vegetables.

Then uproarious laughter from all three of them.

"Yup! He's our brother," said Taako. "Always shift the blame to the rube!"

"You sure got us," cheered Lup. She mock-punched La'ming. "You taught the shit outta this boy."

"Anyway, meet the brothers-in-law. Barold J. Bluejeans is the nerd marrying our sister."

"Hey," said Barry, waving.

"Kravitz, over there, is the nerd marrying our brother."

"Greetings."

The twins leaned forward, over their plates, casting a set of evaluating gazes over their new sibling.

"So," they chorused. "Anyone special in your life, Terry?"
[1] It was definitely involved.
Anonymous said:
I really like team Brain! Can we see how worlds greatest detective at 10 years meshes with Agatha? It sounds like it'd be super cute. First crush? Or fast friends first? Thank you so much for reading!

“Miller labs is fine and all, but this Obscura image recording device is kind of... it needs fixing.” Agatha pointed out the blurry pictures that it took normally. “You have to keep it in place for way too long with normal light levels.”

This was when she added what was obviously an adjusted flash bulb. “But with this baby, I can capture all the light in seconds.”

“That... isn’t a Nova Flash,” noted Angus.

Agatha handed him a pair of darkly smoked safety glasses. “You’re going to really need these for my Big Bangs.”

Angus put them on, and experienced total darkness.

*Whoomph.*

Angus could see the world in a single flash of light. “Holy shit,” he murmured. “Miss Agatha, that’s practically a weapon in and of itself.” He raised his goggles, looking at the shadows lingering on the wall.

“Nova Flashes cause temporary blindness for ten turns. This... lasts an entire hour.” Agatha grinned. “I’m still working on the antidote. Overclocking a flash is easy. Overclocking a potion... not so much.”

“Have you tried a pinch of ground red stone? I saw that in some notes somewhere...” Angus trailed off. Turning towards the doors of Agatha’s lab.

In one, Agatha’s moms were peeking around the doorframe. In the other... Taako and Magnus were having math circulate their heads.

Oh no. Please no.

“Something wrong?” said Agatha.

“Your parents have noticed us,” he whispered. “So have... my crew.”

Agatha looked. “What’s bad about that?”

“You’ll find out,” sighed Angus.
All Hearts Day.

A day that celebrated love in all its forms. Familial love, friendly love, lustful and companionable. Couples were wont to pair off and spend the day together.

Angus hadn’t been expecting Taako to make a housecall. He had a rather pretty box and a cultured air of disinterest. “You’re such a nerd you probably don’t care what day it is,” he said, thrusting the box into Angus’ arms. “Here. Share this with your little friend and thank me later.” He was wearing some of his flashiest clothes.

“Good luck with your date, sir.”

Taako didn’t say anything as he sashayed off.

Angus found out that the Ton family had been equally as insistent towards Agatha. Perhaps more so.

She, too, had a pretty box, but her usual wear of tough canvas pants, hefty boots and protective leathers had been replaced with a frilly pink confection that was overloaded with lace.

“Now I get it,” she said.

Angus sighed and parked himself on the grass of the quad. “Yeah. They’re embarrassing.” He opened the box and looked aghast at the contents. Of fucking course Taako had made Sweetheart cookies. He felt his face heat up. At least the icing didn’t go into realms beyond PG.

“Mine made a cake,” said Agatha. It had icing heart swirls and fresh strawberries and curlicues of chocolate on it. “Gross.”

“They’re the worst,” agreed Angus.

Makarune, watching the two on the quad, squee’d. “They’re bonding,” she cooed in a whisper.

Taako, leaning over her, added, “You realise they’re bonding over how gross we are about them, right?”

“I don’t care, they’re bonding.”

“They’re ten. How bonded could they get?”

“It’s still so sweeeet...”

Taako tutted and groaned. “Whatever. I got a hot date. Don’t wait up and don’t get in their business.” Which was as close as Taako was likely to get to openly caring about the proceedings.
The Xenophobia wars ended less than two hundred years ago. If you asked any random Human, they would claim the time to be closer or longer than four hundred years. They liked to pretend that the only Elves who remembered the atrocity of yesteryear were the ones who were behind the times and therefore easier to ignore.

Two hundred years after the wars came to a close, there were other evils. Segregation, separation of children from families. Sno was lucky that she’d only read about some horror-shows. Saint Vingo’s, for example, always came to the surface of that particular kettle of bad fish.

That one had given her nightmares for weeks.

The last generation of Elves had grown up more or less incapable of forging families. They had reproduced, and government ‘help’ had produced yet another generation of runaways and half-breeds flocking the ghettos and eking out existence out of whatever they could grab.

La’ming had nearly been down that deep dive. Right into the darkest gutter. She’d had a close call. A very narrow escape. Yet she still gained a majority of her income from... less than socially acceptable avenues.

The rise of dragon dens, Elven gangs, and trade in weeds had caused a lot of (Human) wowsers to generate fuss over how this sorry state of affairs could possibly have happened. They often did this whilst trumpeting about recreating horror-show reform schools that were exactly like Saint Vingo’s... which had caused the extant problem in the first place.

In an effort to pay lip service to action, the Chief of Police came up with a phenomenal stroke of pseudo-brilliance that was destined to bite people in the ass long after he’d retired. He outlawed being underage and unmarried on the streets if one was also Elven.

In an effort to reduce incidences of prostitution, and in an epic display of ignorance, one law stated that it was now illegal for Elven maidens to walk the streets of Neverwinter without the escort of a parent. Elven women had to be married in order to have the freedom to go where they whist and act under their own mental power.

It was bullshit.

As the only unmarried Elf maiden on the force, Sno felt obligated to do something. Not just for the children roaming the streets, but for any other Elf maidens everywhere who may have to deal with these asshole laws in the future.

Since the genetic donor responsible for fathering her couldn’t be assed with her existence, the only parent she had to escort her on her job in the streets of Neverwinter was none other than La’ming Ton. Her mother.
Her mother, who had had Sno at age seventy-one. Her mother, who had abandoned her to her grandparents at age seventy-two. Her mother, who had a criminal record longer than a Goliath’s arm. Her mother, who had earned her most stable income through being a cam girl. Her mother who had recently become emergency foster mother to the Taaco twins. Twins who were also gathering a long record... or at least a very thick case file.

As far as civil disobedience was concerned, this was fucking perfect.

Snocoun Ton, on patrol with her partner Avi—who had been briefed—with her mother in tow and, because minors couldn’t be left at home unaccompanied, the twins. All three of her immediate relatives had been told that, as a proper Elf maiden, Sno could not upbraid her mother or assist in the parenting of her adopted siblings.

Which meant that all three of them had automatic license to commit any and all minor crimes whenever Avi’s back was creatively turned.

It was only a matter of time before the Chief turned up to see what the hell was going on with them. They had been patrolling some of the better neighbourhoods, filled with the aforementioned wowsers, with La’ming wearing some of her flashier outfits and the twins... just being their adorable hyperactive little selves.

Half the golden street numbers in Elysian Heights had gone ‘mysteriously missing’ inside of the first week. The twins were most upset when they learned that they weren’t real gold. Nevertheless, polished brass still had some interesting-for-children resale value. Which was why the very same walled estate frontages were now gaining a layer of small, sticky, Elven handprints.

The chief arrived in his rolls (the hubcaps would be gone in less than a minute, the figurehead on the bonnet would vanish in another minute) and left its secure confines to talk with his most promising Elven officer.

“Ton! Sno! What the hell is all this?”

Sno had a carefully cultivated air of innocence. Nobody could ever guess it was the cleverest of forgeries. “Chief! What a pleasant surprise,” she saluted. “You’re always saying how officers of the law should follow the law, sir. As an example to all others, I’m following your most recent law, sir.”

“What sort of law makes you drag along creatures like that—” he pointed to the twins, who were using the back of his rolls as a trampoline. “--while you’re on duty?”

“No unmarried Elf maiden may go unescorted through the streets of Neverwinter,” she quoted. “Escorts must be characters of good repute and blood relatives, for example, the maiden’s parents.”

La’ming handed the Chief his wallet back. “You need to be more careful where you put this, sir. There’s light-fingered people everywhere.”

The wallet was, no doubt, lighter by a decent percentage of whatever he had in there.

“Chief, allow me to introduce my mother, La’ming Ton,” said Sno. “And these are her wards, Lulu and Koko. You remember that child abandonment case? Tre Llew-Ddion?”

The Chief’s face was an open book with large print and the current page said, Oh, shit... “The children don’t need to be here.”

“Oh, but they do, sir. My mother is their only recognised legal guardian, and therefore the only figure
of custody. Leaving them in the care of unauthorised babysitters would be irresponsible, sir.”

“Daycare places. Exist.”

“Sir! Surely you remember the case file you yourself inspected before passing to me... The twins have had numerous bad experiences with official institution. Leaving them there could scar them for life, sir. They’re best in the care of someone they know who cares.”

The twins, bored of attempting to take things from the Chief’s rolls, started climbing the Chief. Sticky handprints and half-chewed sweets appeared all over his crisp uniform.

“You do have a father somewhere,” he growled.

“My father has never been involved in my life to date, sir. Asking him to get involved now would be pointless.” She faked a bright and vacant smile. “Fun fact, he’s one of the people in the council who helped you write this law.”

“But he’s...” the Chief trailed off. The math came out in his head and the full story was not something he wanted to air. Evidently, an older man could make a baby on an underaged girl and still be a gentleman of standing while the girl herself was criminalised.

“Yes,” singsonged Sno. “And not a penny paid for child support.”

The Chief got back on track. “They’re your family. Remind them of the law!”

“Why, sir... for shame. A daughter has no business correcting her own mother, sir. I’m a mere maiden. I have no authority over my younger siblings. Further, I have no legal hold over what they do.”

Lulu had reached the Chief’s shoulders and took his hat for herself. Koko, soon after, confirmed that the Chief did indeed wear a toupee.

Sno may have won a prize for keeping a straight face under those circumstances.

The Chief wheeled on La’ming. “Madam! Control your brats.”

La’ming took offense. “You mean horrible man, how dare you try to suppress my sweet little baby angels.”

Nobody could cause a scene like La’ming Ton. The twins, of course, fell to the street level, sat down, and started bawling their eyes out. Now any wowsers watching from behind their lace curtains would see the Chief as the bad guy.

That law was going to be stricken from the books in less than another week.
Anonymous said:
Can I see Sno and Avi bonding?

They promised to stay in touch, and they didn’t. Avi did remember to keep an eye out on the papers for her mention, but… there wasn’t any. There were a small amount of Elven police officers in the NWPD, and it seemed like all twelve of them were taking turns being a figure on the front page.

The closer they were to looking Human, Avi noted, the more prominent they were likely to be. Sno, with her blueish skin tone and seemingly unnaturally red hair, wasn’t going to be in the papers unless she did something spectacular.

Which was kind of horrible, when you got down to it. Sno had to be one of the most driven officers in the NWPD, and they were likely wasting it all with her being a meter maid. Something like that.

Fellow officers called him an Elf Lover, and taunted him about it. Started more than a few fights that Avi refused to finish. They also tended to abuse the fact that he knew Elvish whenever an Elf was wont to panic in their native tongue.

Then Tre Llew-Ddion happened.

A small ghetto of Elven treehouses struck with a dismal disease that wiped out most of its population. The entire place had been conceived as an ideal community for Elves so that they could be separate yet equal. There were schools and meadows and a minimum model of what the Humans thought an Elven civilisation should look like.

It was too crowded and a fungal infestation from improper irrigation was just the nail on the coffin. Hundreds of Elves died. The survivors were almost universally the criminally young. Babes in arms, toddlers, and very small children. Everyone over the age of seventy had perished.

The Neverwinter City Watch were reassigned to the case files of all those young Elves. Which was where Avi met Sno once more.

She was in full uniform. She’d all been in full uniform before, but this was full uniform with a point to prove. Every crease was knife-sharp. Everything obeyed every single letter of regulations, including the way she sat and the way she wrote. She even had her uniform hat on, something that most officers doffed within seconds of being in the office.

She also had a mountain of paperwork that she was methodically working through like anyone would work through any odious task.

She looked like she’d never smiled in her life.

He tried to lighten her up. “Hey, maybe you could adopt one or two.”

She looked up and shook her head. “Not allowed. We’re here to see to their safe rehabilitation with family or foster homes.”
Avi tried again. “Okay. Then how about a few brews after you knock off to lighten that mood?”

This time, it was a pained yet patient glare. “I’ve been racking it on this shit since day one, Burnsides. There’s no time. These kids need help.”

Wow. That was her first empathic moment since their illicit rooftop beers back at the academy. Avi took half of her inbox and took a station in a neighbouring desk. “Okay, then. So I’ll help, then.”

Patrons to the Starlight Hotel had complained about their things going missing. Small items that wouldn’t easily be missed. Small items that turned up at an all-night pawn shop within three blocks of the hotel. Obviously, it was an inside job.

The manager, one Fritaada Starlight, captured Sno’s attention. She asked about his family and got introduced to Leverpalt, his wife, and their four kids, Mem and Coco, the older twins, and the infant ones, Trip and Tort.

Realisation dawned when Sno said, “What about Lulu and Koko Taaco? The twins added to your care?”

“They... ran away,” Leverpalt lied. Blatantly.

Sno kept her nat twenty insight check to herself. As did Avi. They continued with their alleged investigation into the small thefts, but the instant they were alone... she buttonholed Avi. “Listen. They’re going to be watching me like dire hawks, but they’ll think you don’t give a shit. Don’t let them think otherwise and find those twins. Make sure they’re okay.”

Sno never forgot a case file. She did her utmost to check, annually, on any of the hundreds of kids she’d seen into other homes. She was especially paranoid about those who remained in the system. The Taaco twins had effectively dropped off her radar despite being in family care. She was upset and obsessed at the same time.

He found evidence that the Starlights were cashing the cheques meant to go towards the Taaco twins’ care, but there was no evidence of those twins in the Starlights’ penthouse suite. One room for the older Starlight twins. One infants’ room for the others. No hint of little Taacitios.

He found them in a basement maintenance closet that had been refitted to be their bedroom. Two cots almost too small to let them sleep comfortably. A bucket for a bathroom and only an exterior lock. No windows, little circulation and, by the looks of things, little in the way of food.

Avi called it in as a clear case of neglect and Sno carried them out of there and into the flashes of some avid press.

She finally made the papers, half-obscured by two adorable, nearly-identical faces and the NWPD blanket wrapped around them both.

Avi knew he was allowed to be reckless with the bike the Watch gave him, sidecar and all. So long as he drove, he could pull whatever idiot stunts he liked. And he frequently did.

Sno preferred it that way. She could - off the record - egg him on to some stunts that inevitably
needed a little magical assist to survive. Featherfall came in very handy when it came to hot pursuit of a criminal.

Then came the Clarke family case. Two parents expired of the Neverwinter Summer Flu - it had been bad that year - in combination with an outbreak of the same mould that had seen to the end of Tre Llew-Ddion. They had remained where they died while their three-year-old daughter continued to eke out an existence using available cash, and then her parents’ credit card. Her name was Lucretia and she was almost terrifyingly clever.

She was also electively mute and had selected Sno as the one person in the world she felt safe with.

Avi kept his distance as they sat in the lounge and waited for someone higher up the chain to come and attempt communication. Lucretia stayed bundled up in Sno’s big, winter coat and wouldn’t come out. She communicated exclusively through a series of nods, head-shakes, and pointing.

“I don’t know what to do,” Sno whispered as Lucretia apparently slumbered on her lap. “Why the hell did she pick me?”

Avi shrugged. “Guess she likes you. Somebody has to, right?”

That earned half a smile and a snort. She’d had to grow a tough, tough shell to make it to where she was in Precinct 42. Especially since their commander kept giving her the shittiest beats he could. “Thanks.”

“So... I can fill out all the forms you’d need for emergency foster care status,” he offered.

“They’re gonna wanna know the last time I had luume’irma and who was involved,” she sighed. That was two years ago, and Avi had known about the Off Switch. “There’s all kinds of invasive questions on the Elven forms.”

He got them anyway. Yikes. Those were nasty. When was the last Luume, how regular was the cycle, precise dates of the last ten, if applicable. Who was involved in every instance. Was there sexual intercourse and did any family result...

Things that nobody needed to know.

Sno, like her mother, had gone through early Luume in the company of her grandparents at age seventy and had since gone through... eight of them. Regular as clockwork to the day. Rough as guts, too, since they put her through the wringer for forty-eight hours of metabolic hell.

After the last one, there was a memo in her file about being allowed time off and chemical sedation for the duration. Avi only knew this much because she’d bitched about some asshole laws people were looking at that may well have criminalised luume’irma.

He spared her as many details of the form as he could. CPS could try something in eight years or less when her next Luume was due to flare up, but... perhaps things might have changed by then. He could only hope.

“What do Humanman babies like her usually eat?” Sno worried. “Are they on solids, yet? Do I still give her milk?”

Avi snorted. “She’s got teeth, she can chew.” He remembered some words he’d heard a neighbour saying as she trooped the Taaco twins towards the bodega. “Never had a kid turn down the nugs,” though when she’d said it, she was complaining. “Some kids are lactose intolerant, though. Ask her what she likes to drink when she wakes up. I think they have juice boxes down in the kiddie room. I
could get a sampler. And there’s always water.”

Sno took a deep breath. “My mom wasn’t ready for me when I was born. She left me with her parents and it took me years to learn that they’re some—” she stopped herself just in time. “You’ve met them.”

“Unfortunately,” agreed Avi.

“So I’ve got that as a starter kit. I know what CPS fffff--fudging hates, what their standards are for foster care. I know the schedule they’ll expect for improvement... but I got no idea how to start on that steep slope. I need help, Burnsides...”

“Well,” he said, ticking some checkboxes. “You know what not to do thanks to your grandparents. You know the lowest bar thanks to CPS. You know redemption is possible, thanks to your mom. Considering some of the places we had to let off with a warning? I think you’ll be fine.”

Lucretia Clarke stirred and stretched in Sno’s arms, causing her purr to kick up a notch. Sno carefully arranged some flashcards on the table. People, mostly, but there were other things. One card had a toilet on it and the word ‘bathroom’. Nothing was left to chance.

The larger portion of the flashcards were in a stack, should Lucretia ever decide to interact with them.

“Hi again,” Sno cooed. “Get enough sleep?”

Nod.

“I need to know if there’s anyone we can look up,” she said. “Anyone you’d like to stay with.” The cards had ‘grandmother’, ‘grandfather’, ‘aunt’, ‘uncle’, ‘cousin’, and ‘friend’ on them.

Lucretia very delicately picked up the ‘friend’ card and tapped it meaningfully on Sno’s badge. She wedged it partially under there, just to make the meaning clear.

The look she gave Avi was clear to anyone. It said, Help! and conveyed more than a modicum of, I’m out of my depth, here.

Avi had been the one studying early childcare in the hopes of being a dad, one day. He and Johaan had been talking optimistically about children. “Okay,” he said. “She wants to stay with you, she gets to stay with you. I can help with the fine details, but for now... do you have any relatives with a criminal record who could harm a small child?”

“Gramgram and Peepums don’t count,” said Sno. She was smiling. That was a joke. “Mom’s been cleared of that kind of wrongdoing, and the twins are too young. So... no.”

She was going to be fine. Avi could tell. Solid determination to do better than everything she knew had to be a clear indicator that she was going to be fine.
“I’ll be back late, so you two go stay at Aunty Mak’s, okay?” La’ming kissed each of the twins on their foreheads. “It’s not a school night, so you can stay up late and watch shitty television and eat shittier food if you want.”

Koko rolled his eyes and blew a raspberry.

Lulu elbowed him and said, “Gourmet pizza exists, dingus.”

“If it can have pineapple on it, it’s not gourmet,” grumbled Koko[1].

“Don’t worry about me, okay. I’m fine. It’s just a really long session at the studio.” She spared a word for Makarune. “Don’t let them cook anything extravagant, okay? They should be kids. It’s burgers and popcorn kids crave, not pate du foi gras or whatever.”

“You try to cook a decent Pappardelle one time…” grumbled Koko.

“Don’t let ‘em run through your budget,” La’ming whispered. “Common, everyday ingredients, only.”

Makarune saluted. “I honestly don’t mind having a couple of little gourmet chefs in my kitchen. Go. Do your thing. It’ll be fine.”

It wasn’t.

Most of the day went well, but all it took to ruin a good day was a slick patch on a polished floor and a bad fall.

The twins didn’t know about any of this until the next morning, when they checked their emails.

It was a simple, brief message from a ran.som@gmail.com and it said, Got your mom. Email back 4 deets.

The screaming happened exactly five seconds after the message sank in. The twins ran for Makarune. They ran for Angus, on the top floor. They raised fifteen colours of stink and nobody could get a word in edgewise between the two of them. Not that either of them were making much in the way of sense.

The words ‘ransom letter’ and ‘mom’ surfaced a lot, but since the twins were talking over each other the entire time, it took a few moments to unriddle.

By then, Makarune had dosed them with the special sedative apple pancakes and hot chocolate. The emergency meeting of friends of the family had to happen on the rooftop garden, since it was most of
the apartment block by then.

Avi was there with Johaan, hand in hand. The Pithons were there, as were the McDonalds. Then there was Makarune desperately trying to keep the twins at least on something resembling an even keel. So far, the Pithons were assisting by wrapping the twins up in their tails, Avi was attempting to coach them through some breathing and memory exercises, Johaan was playing Calm Emotion, and the McDonalds were analysing the shit out of the email.

“What kind of kidnapper sends a CC?” wondered Agatha.

“Or uses Gmail?” pondered Angus.

“Whaddathey want from us?” Koko snivelled. He had his hands wrapped around a big mug that almost dripped marshmallows and cream. “We’re kids. We don’t got shit…”

Lulu wiped her face. “I been savin’ up my pocket money, an’… I got… almos’ twenny dollars?”

Agatha elbowed Angus, pointing to something on the screen. Angus peered at it, lifting his glasses up. He said, “Oh, shit.”

Koko started out-and-out bawling again. “It’s the curse! It’s the cur-hur-hurse… I hurt our mo-o-o-om…”

Lulu wrapped herself around him. “We’re not bad luck, doofus. Our stupid father didn’t know anything about anything. We’re not cursed.”

“Indeed you’re not,” said Angus. “This isn’t a ransom email. It’s an email from someone who’s name concatenates into ‘ransom’. Specifically, ran dot som.”

“I think it might be from one of your mom’s… co-workers. Ransei Somner.” Also known as Hornee D’Lite to a select crowd. “I’ve emailed her back. Your mom took a tumble and broke her arm. She’s in recovery and I have the ward details.

Koko gulped down the hot chocolate. Lulu did the same. Together, they said, “Is she okay?”

La’ming surfaced from a cloud of dandelion extract. Her left arm really hurt. “Ma’am… There’s a large crowd of people here to see you. They say they’re your family.”

She looked over to Ransei. The large, thickset tiefling said, “I only emailed your kids,” and shrugged.

“Wanna see m’ babies,” La’ming slurred, deep in the valley of the dandelions. “They’ll be worried about me…”

The nurse pulled aside the curtain enough so that La’ming could see the entire fucking crowd of worried residents from her apartment block.

“Heeeeyyyy,” she crooned. “Th’ gang’s all here… Where’s my babies?”

Twin golden streaks shrieked, “Mom!” and then she was covered in family. Not so skinny, any more, but still so small and so light and very, very wet.

“Din’ wanna make y’ cry, m’ poor babies…” It was very important to kiss them. She couldn’t kiss
them enough. “It’s okay… they got me onna good stuff.”

“Ease up,” said Ransei. “Careful of her left arm.”

“Is this your family, ma’am?”

La’ming squinted at the mob. “Yeah, they is m’ fam’ly. We all ‘dopted eachother…”

Ransei introduced herself to the family as a ‘co-worker’. She had had the foresight to get into some street-passable clothes before climbing into the ambulance with La’ming.

Those who recognised her as Homee D’Lite kept that knowledge to themselves.

She was a thickset, russet-coloured tiefling with an enormous set of horns. Everything about her was thick.

“You didn’t tell me your babies were this cute,” she cooed. “Hey, there li’l darlin’s. I work with your momma. Can I cuddle you?”

Lulu looked to La’ming, who slurred, “Rans issa ver’ gen’l frien’…”

She was also, the twins discovered, soft and warm and the kind of comfort they needed at that exact moment.

The assembled crowd of well-wishers decided to wait until La’ming was sober before telling her about the upset, that morning.

Chapter End Notes

[1] Opinions expressed by characters are not necessarily that of the author.
dualityandsuch asked:

Nermal the Bargains Warrior
“Since you’re such loyal customers,” said Garfield, “I can name the favour you have to perform in order to win this bad boy practically for free!”

“Cool…” said Taako.

“I want you to go to Neverwinter and eliminate my mortal enemy - Nermal the Bargains Warrior.”
Tres Horny Bois snorted simultaneously.

“Seriously?” giggled Magnus.

“Either you want the thing enough to do this, or… it goes to someone who will…”

So now they were in Neverwinter, facing the lair of the so-called enemy.

Fantasy K-Mart.

The shelves were narrower, the lighting dimmer, the carts wobblier and the prices… the prices were rock bottom. Everything was on sale. The bargain bins had bargain bins.

“Holy shit,” Magnus breathed.

Taako doffed to the Seven Birds merchandise in the toy aisle. It was off-brand and insultingly off-model. “Who’s responsible for this shit? That’s a violation of copyright, right there.”

“On da contwawy,” said a voice belonging to a debatably Tabaxi shape inside a conglomeration of pick-and-mix armour. “It’s factowy seconds and thenewfow a bawgain.”

The consensus of opinion was, “Eurrrgh…”

Nermal was cute. Undeniably so. He was also a level infinity warrior and capable of taking down grown-ass Dragons all by himself.

“Don’ be awawmed,” said Nermal. “I’m Newmaw, de bawgains wawwiow. I fight de fight fow better bawgains.”

“This has to be the shittiest store I ever set foot in,” muttered Merle.

“Of couwse it is,” said Nermal. “We keep de ovewheads low so we can pass de savings on to you.”

It was already too late. Taako had steepled his fingers. He was taking a deep breath. Doom for Fantasy K-Mart was incoming. “Listen…” he began.

For a change, they returned to Fantasy Costco without much in the way of injury or a maligned state. They did, however, have a huge cart full of random shit.

“Hail the victorious heroes!” Garfield cheered. “What the fuck is all that?”

“Taako talked him down to one copper for the entire inventory,” said Magnus.

“We already went through it for anything we could find useful,” said Merle.

“You can have anything you like outta the rest of it,” said Taako. “For store credit.”

“We’ll take that macguffin now,” said Magnus.
Anonymous said:
Out of curiosity, did either of Agatha's or Angus's luumes ever actually result in kids? Considering the intensity, for lack of a better term, and what I understand luume to be I just wondered. Thank you for taking the time to read this

[Short answer: Where do you think the twins Ambrose and Aloicious came from?]

Waking up half-clothed from an episode of Luume is nothing new to Elves or half-Elves. Waking up in a guardian position was something new to Angus. Agatha was fast asleep and purring and he knew Agnes was staying with Gram’pa Taako.

He still scanned the area for potential threats. He had to keep his mate safe. Even though his senses were currently addled from Luume, the wording of his back-brain caught his interest.

Angus threw on a robe and shuffled into the kitchen. They’d had quite the feast for their sync’d Luume, but their instincts always make them over-buy supplies in the week before. Which was great because he wanted to cook his lovely wife something nutritious and delicious as a post-Luume pick-me-up.

Something good for the baby...

Wait. What?

Angus snorted and got on with cooking. He was probably thinking about Agnes. Luume hadn’t been necessary to make their firstborn. It didn’t always result in young when it did happen. Though... fertility increase was one of the things that occurred.

Five months later...

“IT’s going to be twins,” crowed Gram’pa Taako. “They run in the family, you know.”

Papa groaned and rolled his eyes. “We’re not genetically related, Papa. Twins run in your bloodline. Both Agatha and I come from a long line of single births.”

“Never argue with an Elf’s schnoz,” countered Gram’pa.

Agnes giggled. Papa had just told her that she was going to have a baby sibling soon, and it was growing inside Mama. Gram’pa was being silly and insisting that there were two sibs coming up. Agnes loved it when Gram’pa was silly. He was so very good at it.

He was absolutely over the moon when there were twins. Two baby brothers looked so tiny in the big crib Agnes had outgrown. They slept a lot and cried real loud and were stinky sometimes, but they were fascinating.
She didn’t believe that she used to be that small.

She also couldn’t believe how Gram’pa never stopped talking about how right his instincts were.
dualityandsuch asked:

Sno + beau? (+Avi?)
Avi didn’t worry about waking up in Sno’s apartment. She usually dragged him to her spare bedroom when he’d overdone it the night before. She would even have a decent breakfast and some Gator-aid waiting for him by the time he was done having a shower.

World’s best partner.

He didn’t think anything was out of the ordinary with the extra body products in the shower stall. What got his attention was the extra toothbrush.

There was her toothbrush, the guest toothbrush (sterilised for guest protection), and now there was a third toothbrush. Labeled with ‘his’. Hers had a piece of paper tape with the sharpie’d word ‘hers’, now.

Avi was halfway through brushing his teeth when he noticed it.

Sno was busy doing the post-hangover fry-up to restore Avi’s health points, so he was able to sneak into her bedroom to search for clues. Lucretia was likely to wake up any time soon, so he made sure he put on his pants and at least threw on a shirt before wandering out of the bathroom.

Sno’s place was, as always, display room worthy. There were a few scattered toys on the vestiges of Lucretia’s room, and the fallout from making room for her surrounding a closet or two, but it was otherwise pristine.

Sno used hospital corners when she made her bed, and she made her bed every day. Sno kept everything neat. If there was any traces of anyone else there, he’d have to go looking in her closets and drawers.

That would be a definite breach of trust.

Lucretia was sitting neatly at the table when he joined it. She had laid out some picture cards as a breakfast request. A green apple, a pile of pancakes, a syrup bottle, and some whipped cream and berries.

Avi snagged his serving of fry-up and sat a safe distance away from the kid.

“Good morning,” he said.

Lucretia held up a smiling sun card.

“Looks like you picked a good breakfast,” he said. The eggs and sausage were really hitting the spot. The bacon, especially, was just what he needed. The Gator-aid definitely helped his stinging head. So did the painkillers.

Lucretia nodded.

“Still not liking the mouth-words, huh?”

She shook her head.

“Don’t give her grief about it,” warned Sno, still working on pancakes. Her cooking had improved since Lucretia had come to stay. The twins certainly helped with that, too.

“I wasn’t,” said Avi. “And I’m not going to. Words help, that’s all.”
Lucretia had a homemade card. It had Arya Stark on it and the words, *Not today.*

“Yeah, I get it,” he said. “Sure nothing new’s scaring you.”

She shook her head.

*

There had to be someone in Sno’s life. She smiled a little more, when she thought nobody was looking. She tended to hum. She was more than a little more amenable when people gave her crap.

It was a stakeout that gave him an opportunity to ask. “So. Any other changes in your life?”

“What brought this on, Burnsides?”

“I saw the extra toothbrush in your bathroom. You’ve been having sleepovers, Sno?”

“We have movie nights and he falls asleep on the couch. It’s still PG.”

“Okay. You got a plan when it gets deeper?”

“Nunya, Burnsides.”


“How do you know they’re a him?”

“His and hers labels on the toothbrushes.”

A moment of thought. “…fuck…”

Avi smirked.

*

Lucretia was talking, at last. She wasn’t exactly the world’s biggest chatterbox, but she hadn’t needed her flash cards in an entire year. That was an epic accomplishment, and therefore occasion for a party.

She was a little nerd, so the games were a little more cerebral than they should be for a six-year-old. The older kids attending didn’t mind, even though they were slightly more cerebral than the stuff they were used to.

Some aspects of it were slightly more cerebral than the *adults* could handle. Nevertheless, the kids adapted.

Avi was having a good enough time, and so was Magnus, who had no truck at all with the rules. “So I get three attacks, right?” the boy asks.

“No after you double dash,” said Lucretia.

“Aw beans…”

There was one guy at the party that Avi couldn’t place. Tall dude. Looked vaguely familiar. Avi knew he’d seen him before. The only problem was that he couldn’t place the guy.

He was racking his noggin as Johaan attempted to schmooze. Bards made their money with
“Having trouble, sir?” said Angus, who had once refused to find out who Sno’s mystery dude was.

“I know him. I know I know him… But where?”

“Purple tights, pirate shirt, and an 80's glam wig,” said Angus. “Picture him wearing those.”

It clicked. The Convention Caper. Of fucking course. That Dark Elf had been cosplaying Jareth from *Labyrinth*. Sno had been wearing a TARDIS dress because she was undercover as a nerd. The fact that she owned a TARDIS dress had flown past Avi’s notice at the time. She and ‘Jareth’ had spent a lot of time talking…

The click as it all came together was almost audible. He immediately went to Sno. “You’re dating a nerd?”

“I have depths, Burnsides. Deal with it.”
dualityandsuch asked:

Can you start the "Everyone is suffering and Sno is in the canon AU?"

[AN: This is an AU of an AU that Duality and I are calling “Glass Canon”, mainly because Sno would fucking shatter the established canon with the least little twitch of causality.]

Lucas Miller warned, “Don’t touch tha–”

A flash of light. The sensation of falling. A dizzying sensation like being inside-out without being inside out. Then something resembling reality restored itself with dizziness, disorientation, and debilitating nausea.

Snocoun Ton passed out without any realisation of what had gone wrong.

She would realise it as soon as she woke.

“I’ve called the four of you here today because of an unexpected event. Our arcane energy detectors found a spike in energy similar to a relic… here on the moon.” Lucretia watched their faces with a stab in her heart. Taako didn’t seem to care. Magnus was instantly alarmed. Merle was wearing his, This shit again, face. Angus was intensely shocked.

“But… every relic that comes to the moon is destroyed. Right?” said Magnus. “I mean, we’ve seen three go down.”

“Yes,” she said. “Yes you have.” Better a plausible truth than a definite lie in front of the world’s greatest detective. “That’s why this arcane energy spike is so alarming. I’m afraid it only gets worse. The epicentre of the spike was in the Miller’s moon-base laboratory, which has been left vacant since the incident with the Philosopher’s Stone.”

“Fuck,” summarised Taako, not even looking anywhere but his nails. “That’s some bad beans.”

“Indeed. I need the four of you to get your asses down there and find out what the shit is happening. If you can contain it, do so. I doubt it’s a relic, but… if it seems like it could be one, Mr McDonald, I want you to retreat the hell out of there at all possible speed.”

“Yes’m.”

“I want you to find out who’s responsible for this and, if you can, bring them back to me alive. If you can’t - at least find out what they were doing, why they were doing it, and how they got that idiot idea in the first place.”
Sno moaned as she sat up. The world was still spinning as she tried to make sense of what had happened. The globe she had picked up from Miller’s desk was on the floor beside her. Cracked. Dull. Dead.

The lab around her was covered in a fine layer of dust. Everything here had lain undisturbed for quite some time. Not quite as she last recalled. Someone had thrown a sheet over some things, but not all of them. Her body print and the print of the globe were the only signs of recent life.

_What did this idiot thing fucking do, Miller?_ She was still recovering her wits when the door blasted open.

“MAGNUS RUSHES IN!”

She was used to hearing that from a six-year-old boy adopted by her partner, Avi. He used it whenever he raced into anywhere. _This_ speaker, though, was a grown-ass Humanman of thirty-something. Behind him was a smaller, stouter figure of an older Dwarf, and a slighter figure of a Humanman boy.

He looked a hell of a lot like Angus McDonald… but he’d had a daughter, not a son.

Behind all of _them_ was a puzzling figure. Elven… a Sun Elf. Golden hair, dappled skin. It was the prominent front teeth and the gap between them that made everything click for her.

“Koko?”

“How the fuck do you know my childhood eke name?” he demanded.

But… Elves picked their adult names at one hundred. If he was an adult, then Magnus couldn’t be alive and— “Who’s the kid?”

“Hello, ma’am, I’m Angus McDonald,” he said, and offered his hand.

That was the exact moment that she knew everything was fucked up. It only got worse when they dragged her and the globe back to their Director.

The last time she’d seen Lucretia Clark, she had been bade farewell on her latest day at school. Because she was six years old and still combatting her elective muteness. Sno had kissed her adopted daughter on the forehead and gone to work.

This Lucretia was fifty if she was a day. Regal and authoritative, dripping gravitas from every pore.

Sno couldn’t help but start weeping. “Something’s gone very wrong,” she said.

Old Lucretia cocked an eyebrow that stabbed Sno through the heart and said, “Indeed.”
Reader Request #82

Chapter Notes

DeathsKitten on Chapter 67:

AAAAHHH I love this one. Tiny cuties. How about for a request, the tiny twins first day at school? ;3

[AN: I have no idea why the pic turned out sideways. If I knew how to fix it, I would]
"First day of school!" The twins landed on her bed, bouncing around in their excitement. "We get to go to school! We get to go to school!"

Having the twins around definitely taught her to change into sleepwear for bed fast. La'ming attempted to boot up her brain before she'd had her coffee, and peeked at the curtains. "...'s still dark outside."

"Yeah," said Lulu.

"We got stuff to do," said Koko.

"We gotta have a shower an' dry our hair and comb our hair..."

"...and get dressed and have a good breakfast and brush our teeth..."

"...and pack our bags and shine our shoes..."

"...and then we gotta find the school."

They chorused, "That's a lot of stuff, so we gotta start early."

They would not be this enthusiastic in a week. A month, tops. La'ming growled as she pried herself out of the comfortable warm and checked her bedside clock. "M'kay. You waited until five thirty, you get a grudging pass for waking me up." Yawn. Stretch. Crack a couple of joints. "I'm still not doing shit 'till I've had my coffee."

"We put it on all ready," they said in unison.

Indeed, she could hear her percolator perking, and smell the sharp tang of caffeine in the air. La'ming glared at them. "Have you two had any?"

"No..."

"Gross."

Great. All this was just natural enthusiasm, then. They still needed her to reach the high taps in the shower stall and reach the baskets where their uniforms were stored. "Okay. No putting on uniforms until after breakfast. Eat, brush your teeth, wash, then dry, okay?"

Coffee helped, as did a supervised morning feast of eggs, bacon, and crunchy waffles with honey. Then it was into their room to figure out who was wearing what. Neverwinter Primary had options for clothing, and La'ming had purchased entire sets of each. "Okay. What do you want to wear on your first day? Skirts, shorts, or skorts?" They all looked like variations on the sailor suit. Adorable.
"I want the dress," said Lulu.

"I'll have what she's having," said Koko.

La'ming didn't argue. There was bound to be a soccer mom who would, but for now? Choice was more important than what some alleged know-it-all had to say about gender presentation and clothing. Besides, they were six. Every complication about physicality could wait.

After the shower, and drying off, and hair-drying, and the twins dressing themselves neatly, came the hairdressing. Lulu wanted braids, Koko wanted his loose, but La'ming insisted on a clip to keep his hair out of his face at the back.

It was hard not to tear up. She'd missed out on all of this with Nono... Snocoun, now. All grown up and possibly the most menacing cop in Precinct 42. She was a proud mom, but she wouldn't get in her daughter's way. Not now.

Packing the bags was easy. Packed lunchbox (no nuts or nut byproducts, they were allergic to peanuts), four each of the requisite books (the rest were already waiting in their eventual classroom), the pencilcase, and then the beribboned hats on each of their adorable little heads.

Amazingly, it was only half-past six. Even after shoes and socks. La'ming had her second cup of coffee and said, "Well, they don't expect us there before eight, so... you two get to watch cartoons."

"YAAAAY!"

"But first? Who do you trust to take you home?"

"People we know from this building," they chorused.

"Except stinky Susan," said Koko.

"And the rest of her family," added Lulu.

La'ming snorted. Considering it was Jason who knocked Koko out with a bag of garbage, Susan who ratted them out to CPS, and Kyle who had uncomplimentary things to say about street kids... it was no wonder they were the least-liked neighbours in their apartment block. "Don't call her that to her face, okay? It's Mrs Hackniid."

A gloomier chorus. "Okay..."

It wasn't far to walk, not really. A couple of blocks, showing them how to use the crosswalk and telling them never to cross without grownups. Koko had to be convinced to hold La'ming's hand when crossing the road. He much preferred to stay glued to his sister. Some older teens -either out early or out really late- snorted and called the twins 'baby sailors' on their way past. La'ming ignored them.

Their schoolroom was typical starter education fare. Alphabets along the walls, bright posters about good manners and good hygiene. There were two teachers, both suitably soft around the edges. One of whom squealed in delight when she saw the twins. "Hector, we have Elves..."

"This is Lulu and Koko Taaco," said La'ming, patting each twin on the head to indicate who was whom. "They can write their names in Common and know more about cooking than they really should at their age. Not that I'm complaining. They've taught me more about making good food than I've known all my life."
Their teacher, Mrs Pembly, smiled and leaned down. "Aw, you are the cutest little ones I've seen today. Do you like to sing?"

And that was how La'ming learned about Neverwinter Primary's almost predatory choir program. Elves almost uniformly had beautiful singing voices, and any choir was always on the lookout for them.

Mr Rorke listened to them sing *On Top of Spaghetti* for all of five seconds before rushing out of the room in a sprint.

"Now. Mrs Taaco..."

"Oh no. I'm Ms Ton."

"She found us in a dumpster," sat Koko.

"She's our foster mom," added Lulu.

Well. That was the awkward explanation out of the way. They were shown where to put their bags, and where to store their lunchboxes, and given stickers with their names on. A blue one for Koko and a pink one for Lulu. After that, it was a tour of the important areas of the campus. The bathrooms, the playground, the cafeteria, and OH LOOK, THERE'S WHERE THE CHOIR PRACTICES WHY DON'T YOU GO IN AND SHOW THEM YOU CAN SING?

This time, they were encouraged to sing one of the more popular songs on the radio.

"Are we gettin' paid for this?" asked Lulu.

"We should get paid for this," insisted Koko.

La'ming had to explain, "This is extracurricular. That means you get paid in school grade credits."

"Booo," said Lulu.

"We want money," insisted Koko.

Their career as problematic, *promising-but* children had only just begun.
dualityandsuch asked:

Can I get some Luume’d Sno in Glass Canon kidnapping her canon family counterparts? Feel free to cram in all the fluff and angst you want.

Sno could usually set her calendar by her Luume. Every decade on the dot since she, like her mother, had been Seventy years old. Fortunately for her, she had pretty much locked herself indoors with close relatives for the entirety of that year, until her Luume passed in the company of decent adults.

This… was not the same circumstance. She *should* have had four more years to go. Unfortunately, the forces of fate had different ideas.

It hit in the middle of the day, as she was training with Team Sweet Flips. She went down fast and hard. Tumbling from a throw and planning to tackle as she rolled, to recovering on all fours and glaring in hurt confusion at two people who smelled like friends.

Need. A great and building need. A desperate want not easily slaked.

Dragonborn-friend halted, as did Orc-friend. They looked worried. Sno - what was left of Sno - scented the air. They were bonded with each other. Not wanting Sno.

“You okay?” said Dragonborn-friend.

She only had one word. “Want.”

“Aw shit,” said Orc-friend. “It’s Luume! Grab her!”
The part of Sno remaining understood ‘grab her’ and the fact that this would stop her getting what she wanted.

She succeeded her Dex saving throw.


Big edge! Long fall! Baby not safe! Runrunrunrun find!

“Baby!”


“What the shit? Sno! I am *not* a baby…”

All of that entirely missed the bit of Sno’s brain that was busy actually thinking.

Sno had built an Elf Nest out of the cushion and pillow storehouse in the moon. In it, she stowed: Lucretia, Magnus, Taako, and Angus.

She’d also dragged in a good amount of packaged food, so her current captives were okay. For limited definitions of ‘okay’.

Unfortunately, thanks to efforts of the Bureau staff, Sno was in aggressive guardian mode. Not letting anyone else in, and certainly not letting her ‘babies’ out. She also didn’t let anyone close enough to activate her “Off Switch”.

Not that Taako hadn’t been trying.

Sno wasn’t exactly rough with repelling her captives, but she was definitely firm. She’d bite ears enough to sting or, if ears weren’t available, the most convenient limb.

For Taako, two bites were plenty. He made himself comfortable and doled out packages, finding one that hadn’t been anywhere near peanuts.

“Aaannd this is mine. Might as well settle down for the long fuckin’ haul.” He started munching. ‘Bathroom’s down that tunnel and no, there’s no avenue for escape.”

“Well, shit,” summarised Magnus.

Angus found one of his preferred treats. “Might as well make the most of it.”

Taako and Magnus tutted and rolled their eyes.

Lucretia voiced a very subtle groan.

Magnus raised a hand. “I’d like to talk about how we’re her babies all of a sudden. I mean. Three of
us are grown-ass adults.”

“Didn’t she know us in her home dimension, sirs?” said Angus.

“Yeah. Baby versions of us,” Taako’s finger isolated himself, Magnus and Lucretia. “She must’ve picked on you ‘cause you’re a real baby.”

Civil conversation only devolved from there.
Honk!

Chapter Notes

anonymous asked:

Can we see BOB members looking thru picture’s on Sno’s phone in GC and speculating about their other lives? :3
There were many differences between Snocoun Ton’s home dimension, and the one she found herself currently trapped in. The ages of her friends and family varied wildly, which had made for a very unusual Luume.

This dimension also seemed to lack cell phones for some reason, which is why Sno was surrounded by a crowd of BOB employees who had seen her tapping at the small rectangle in her hands. THB followed Sno around trying to glance at the screen anytime she took it out of her pocket.

It didn’t take long for her to snap at them, “If I give you fifteen minutes to look through my phone, will you stop this?”

The boys nodded.

Sno sighed, “I’m watching you the entire time, no deleting my shit!”

The boys nodded and stuck their hands out, awaiting the small rectangle of mystery. Sno considered taking back the offer. What if they saw Lulu? She begrudgingly deleted all photos of both twins just in case, but like fuck would she delete all of Lulu.

On the other hand, they were bound to see all the happy photos. They might trust her more if they saw their baby-selves with her.

She handed them the phone.

Taako grabbed the phone first, going through the photos at a rapid pace with Magnus over his shoulder and Merle yanking his wrist down so he could see. Sno stepped behind them to watch. There was nothing risque or secret on her phone. Family photos, grocery lists, the occasional
gourmet dinner to post on Instagram.

It was a shock when Taako stopped scrolling at a picture of Merle and Ming. Ming was lifting Merle onto her shoulders, probably from the last family fun run.

“Fuck Merle, how did you end up with her?” Taako asked, disgusted, but intrigued.

Merle smiled, “I have a certain effect on women.”

Taako continued to scroll, finding a picture of Merle in a pair of juicy sweatpants, with Ming gesturing to his ass.

Oh right, Sno had saved that eyesore to show Avi that her mom literally bought the local bodega owner sweatpants to match hers.

“…Are we… married?” Merle asked.

“I didn’t know anyone could tolerate being that close to his ass,” Magnus added.

“Just… how? Did, did you blackmail her?” Taako asked.

Sno tuned out their conversation while they continued to ogle pictures of Ming and Merle before stumbling onto a photo of Ming, Merle, and a baby Taako.

Taako went wide eyed and dropped the phone.

“Whatch it! I don’t know if your Lucas can fix this!” Sno grabbed her phone. “No more phone time!”

Merle and Magnus groaned, but Taako stayed frozen. Sno waved her hand in front of his face, “Koko! Come on, wake up!”

Magnus began shaking his shoulder, Merle jabbed his knee, but his entire body remain rigid. Taako could only think one thing, was Merle his… dad?
Anonymous asked:

Can we see BOB members looking thru picture’s on Sno’s phone in GC and speculating about their other lives?

[AN: As part of April Fools’ (which was yesterday here in Aus), @dualityandsuch and I swapped roles. She was the writer and I was the artist. None of y’all noticed so I guess that was a flop]

They called the Snocoun Ton from another reality Alter-Sno. It saved everyone the fuss and bother of saying “Sno from another reality” all the time. Alter-Sno had come from a vastly different Faerun, with vastly different technology, which she had in her possession.

The operative word, here, being ‘had’.

Because Taako had managed to filch her peculiar Stone of Farspeech and was now twiddling around with it and figuring out how it worked.

“Uuuh, Taako? Maybe you shouldn’t be messing around with that,” Magnus worried.

“Eh, if she wanted it kept away from us, she wouldn’t have kept it in her pocket like that,” murmured Taako. “Ha! What a loser passcode. Who the fuck uses 1-2-3-4?”

“I gotta change my luggage lock,” said Magnus.

“Don’t bother, I only take what I n–” The rest of his thought went unspoken. He had found something… interesting. Or, by the expression on his face, horrifying.

Magnus peeked. “Holy shit…”

On the screen was a six-year-old Taquito showing off a gap in his teeth, next to someone who looked remarkably like La’ming Ton, over in the Dirty Tricks Department.
“Aaaw, you’re an adorable kid,” said Magnus.

Taako moved his finger across the Stone, showing an image of Merle being carried Fantasy Yoda-style across some finish line by a sweaty and triumphant La’ming. There was another swipe, and Avi with what looked like a six-year-old Magnus. Another, and there was a miniature Lucretia in a sailor-suit school uniform.

Another, and Merle was on a platform, clad in skin-tight exercise shorts, his hairy back to the camera and flirting over his shoulder at the person taking the shot. Kneeling beside him was La’ming, looking suitably proud of herself whilst presenting Merle to the viewer.

La’ming was in track pants and a loose shirt. Merle was wearing the aforementioned shorts and a criminally short sleeveless top.

“That is more hair than should be allowed on a humanoid,” noted Magnus, who had seen far too much of it on various occasions.

There was another. Little Taaquito photobombing Merle as Santa and La’ming as a Candlenights Elf. He was wearing a shirt with the legend, *Where the Elf are my presents?*

“Holy shit,” they said together, stopped in the middle of the quad and looking from the Stone to Merle, and back to the Stone again.

“Something horrible had to have happened to Mak’arune…” murmured Magnus.

“Fuck her, something horrible must’a happened to La’ming…” said Taako. “How the fuck else could she stand to be near such a horrible misshapen joke on the rest of the Universe?”

“Worse than that,” said Magnus. “He’s your dad, dude.”

Taako’s hair frizzed right up from stress shortly before the Elf himself fainted dead away.
Anonymous said:
What if Taako and Lup are having a sibling day when they hear about an orphanage that was mistreating elves. They check it out and it turns out elves in Luume are being kept in solitary confinement? Idk

Elven reformation projects are a great deal more effective when there are actual, decent Elves involved. At minimum, survivors of worse reformation projects are vital.

Which was just one of the reasons why Lup and Taako were running a Teaching Kitchen just off from the Le’Vine Reformatory. The Elf in charge, named Schadoq, had said that it was an excellent training opportunity. He said a lot of things. Things like “protecting virtue” and “moral backbone”.

It put Taako’s hackles up, but, after an inspection of the facility, he hadn’t found anything untoward.

The inmates were quiet and reserved. Lup expected that. They had been quiet and reserved after they’d got out of Saint Vingo’s... for all of six months. The key was to be quiet and kind and gentle until the kids got bold enough for some lip. That was how you could tell they trusted you.

They each had a bracelet that -on an arcana check- was a health and welfare tracker that took note of all their biosigns and reported to some office somewhere.

It seemed above board. It seemed nice enough.

Until the day that one of the kids, Roshi, started panicking as his bracelet started beeping. “No, no, nonononono... It’s too soon! Don’t put me in the dark!”

“What the shit?” said the Twins together.

Taako put his work down, wiped his hands, and gathered the kid up. He was only seventy-five. “Hey, hey, homes. Take it easy. What’s the fuss?”

“That’s the Luume-alert,” said an older kid. Closer to Ninety. “They take us away to somewhere we can’t hurt ourselves. So we can stay pure. It’s hell.”

Taako fought to purr for this stranger-child. Reaching for the kid’s ‘Off Switch’. “It’s okay, it’s okay,” he crooned. “We’re outside of the spells, here. You’re okay. I got’cha...”

Lup subtly got out her Orb of Recall and said, “So Kaar... this place they send you to when you’re in Luume. What’s it like?” she tried to stay casual, but memories of Citron and the horrors of Saint Vingo’s kept bubbling into the back of her mind. It was really hard not to let her anger out.

She wasn’t angry at these kids. She was angry at the situation they were in.

“It’s nothing,” said Kaar as Taako showed Syr how to use the massage points to soothe another Elf into a happy torpor during their Luume.
“It’s okay. We won’t narc,” said Taako.

“No. It’s literally nothing,” said Kaar. “There’s no light, no heat, no cold, no feeling. No sound, nothing. It’s pure nothing. And we stay in there until the Lull hits.”

They knew it immediately. Citron’s Malevolent Sensory Deprivation. She had used it in Saint Vingo’s to punish. Now it looked like Schadoq was using it to ‘save’ these kids from their own biological necessities.

Taako was on his Stone. “Hey, Luce, did you know that scumfuck Schadoq was using a Vingo’s spell on kids in Luume? No? Let’s send some teams down like the vengeance of the gods...”

“Koko?” said Lup. “How about we teach these kids some creative use of level-appropriate spells...?”

It had been quite some time since someone last trashed a place like Saint Vingo’s. It would be quite some more time before anyone else would get the opportunity.

Vengeance was a dish best served cold, that was true. It also went well with generous sides of flames and tentacles.
Nonny Request #92

Chapter Notes

Anonymous said:
Can we get a large helping of Dad!Merle helping Ming in LD?

They were having a parents’ day in the park. Merle had custody of his kids for the weekend and La’ming... La’ming was learning to be a decent parent by studying others.

Most of the others here at the play park were nannies who didn’t speak the best of Common and used playtime as an excuse to gossip.

Merle... Merle wasn’t much better, but at least he knew something about parenting. Something - even a bad something - was better than nothing. For example - Merle sunbathed while Mookie threw himself around the climbing gym like a dervish and Mavis took turns on the swings or the monkeybars. His parenting involved occasional interjections involving the word "don’t”.

“Don’t wrassle kids below your weight class, Mookie...”

La’ming, using his example, kept an eye on the twins and was ready to bolt straight for them if there was the slightest hint of trouble. She also had all the approved snack foods so they’d have plenty to eat.

Food security was still a big thing for them.

Right now, though, the twins were building a sandcastle with one of the smaller, younger children. One would invariably defend the pile of sand from Mookie and other kids who liked to stomp on sandcastles.

That was when she’d need to step in and mediate. Get all involved parties to talk it out instead of fighting it out. Assuming they didn’t talk it out without prompting.

“First kids always make for an anxious parent,” said Merle, apparently from his coma. “You’re always worried about being a failure. Trust me. Kids aren’t that delicate.”

Yes they are, she thought. “I abandoned my first kid with my parents when I was Seventy-two. These are the first kids I’ve actively tried looking after. That I haven’t given up on.”

“Seventy-two? Isn’t that like... way too young to have a kid?”

“Yeah. Like a Humanman sixteen or something.”

“No blame on that one, then,” said Merle.

“Tell that to my daughter. My parents are assholes.”

There was an extended silence between the two of them. Not absolute silence, since they were seated by a playground, but they were quiet. The kids continued shrieking and yelling at each other as they expended all their energies in assorted games.
“Sorry about that,” said Merle. “I assumed...”

“Many do. I don’t talk about it a lot.”

“She doing okay, now?”

“Yeah. We’re almost on speaking terms.” She twitched as Lulu fell off a swing, but relaxed as she rolled and recovered her feet. She’d intended to do that, the little daredevil. “I know how bad it can get. What I need is... how to not get there. You know?”

He chuckled. “Yeah. I know that one. Their mom and I never got along, and... The last straw was Mookie crying because we were whispering at each other. Can’t wake the baby, y’know? So we fought in whispers so the kids...” he sighed. “Didn’t work. So after we got him settled again, I asked, Would you be happier if I left? And she said ‘yes’ and we tried to handle the divorce like grown-ass people. I send her what I can spare and I live in this little room in the loft to save money and... The kids are the most important part. You do what’s best for them.”

At Seventy-two, that had been leaving her baby with the only people she could rely upon to care for her. Now that she was two hundred and thirty... it meant doing everything in her power to make sure something like that never happened again.

“I can make sure they have what they need,” she said. “I got that covered.”

“See? You’re already doing better than like half of the other assholes out there.”

“I already love them to bits.”

“Now you’re up to seventy percent,” said Merle. “Most parents I get in the Bodega? They treat kids like a chore. Something they gotta do and something they gotta put up with like they’re obligated. Not a lot of love.”

Mookie took a tumble off the high bars, landing sort-of okay, but scraping his leg on something under the sand. He stood up and blood started snaking down his leg.

“Duty calls.” Merle got up and cheered Mookie for not breaking his fool neck, and ran a minor healing spell over the injury. “No battle scars for you, champ. But let’s find that sharp thing so nobody else gets hurt.”

Mookie started digging like a dog and making vroom noises while Merle was a little more sedate and cautious. It was a sharp rock, not a piece of glass or a needle, thank the gods.

La’ming toured over to where Koko was helping another kid with their sandcastle. She said, “There’s sometimes sharp things in the sand, so you make sure the littles use their tools so they can play safe.”

Koko said, “You can stop fussing, mom. We’re fine.”

She almost floated all the way back to the bench. Mom. He’d called her Mom.
Anonymous said:
may I request a really sick Ango( adult or child, half elf) being cared for by Taako under luume? it'd be interesting to see, considering the “feed” part is so strong, but when you're sick, eating doesn't always go well. Thank you!


Baby sick!


*The thing people forget about the simplified form of the three classes of Luume - fight, fuck, or feed - is that ‘feed’ includes every form of nurture...*

Taako lifted Angus - his baby - off the Humanman bed and, stripping most of the boy’s clothes off as he went, carried his baby (a young man, now, but that didn’t matter to Elven instincts) to a cote with a nice through-breeze in the summer.

Careful lips to his boy’s forehead. Still too hot. Need cold magic. Need good food baby will eat.

Ray of frost chilled off the ceiling and sent coolness drifting down on his baby, and Taako purred to hear the sigh of relief from his boy.


Poor baby.

Baby needed him.

Taako took a healthy portion into the cote, to a nook charmed to stay warm where at least one cat usually nested. Taako hissed at the one there to drive it off and make room for the soup. From there, smaller bowls of it would be used to tempt baby into eating.

“...sir, please, I’m not hungry.”


“Sir?” Angus blearily peered into Taako’s eyes, then slumped back and sighed, “Oh no. Not this again...”
“Baby eat?” It was a very small bowl. No trouble for baby. Mostly liquid. Nothing too hard to chew.

Sigh. He accepted the cup and sipped. Carefully. He winced when he swallowed.

Taako pressed his lips to his baby’s brow. “Too hot,” he complained. He found water, found a cloth, and washed down his child. “Poor baby... Sick baby...”

“I just want to sleep, sir.”

Taako uged the contents of the bowl on his baby. Stayed close, but not close enough to crowd or overheat him. He purred a soothing rhythm as he watched and waited for his baby to stir on his own. From there, he would offer another bowl of soup.

In between times, he would wash his baby and purr and maintain the chilled ceiling. Once or twice on the half hour, Taako would press his lips to Angus’ brow to check on his fever.

A fever that broke sometime before Kravitz returned from his work.

Taako purred a little louder the instant he saw his chosen mate.

“Hello, Dove,” his mate murmured. “What’s happened?”

“Sick baby,” Taako cooed. “Won’t eat.”

“I’ll help. You rest, love.” Kravitz ran his chilly hands over Taako’s face, then rested one on Angus’ still-warm brow.

“Th’nk you sirs,” Angus mumbled.
Okay. So. Now she had a small child. A small child whose parents had died of the Neverwinter Summer Sniffles, a seasonal plague that occasionally killed despite medicine's best efforts. They had then lain where they'd died, unnoticed, until almost the middle of winter.

In all that time, little Lucretia Clark, three and a half years old, had taken money from her parents' wallet and purse, journeyed down to the Bodega, and bought herself meals. Later, when the cash ran out, she switched to the credit cards. If Avi hadn't noticed her, she may have continued until the next summer, when lower apartments would have noticed... let's call it 'the fallout'.

Sno logically deduced that Lucretia had had enough of pre-packaged, ready-made meals, and would be grateful for something homemade. She knew enough about cooking some things with a level of competence only reserved for eating the results herself. As part of the process of luring Lucretia out of her shell, she took the kid to the local bodega for some shopping.

"I know you've had enough of food that comes straight out of boxes, bags, and bottles," she said. "So you pick out any ingredients you like and I'll cook you up some dinner out of everything you pick out. Sound good?"

So far, this kid had only ever communicated by pointing, nodding, or shaking her head. She sat in the trolley comfortably enough, but kept one tiny hand on Sno's at all times.

"Just get 'er the dinosaurs," rasped the Dwarf who staffed the counter. "Never had a kid turn down the nugs."

Sno, who knew two such kids, said, "Thanks, but I'm letting her choose."

It was hard to tell, at this point, whether the three-and-a-half-year-old Lucretia Clarke was just a shy, quiet kid or somehow traumatised into muteness or had just never caught on to talking. So far, she'd communicated largely by body language and Snocoun had to wonder if she had a hearing disorder.

Was she reading, or was she playing at reading? Sno had watched the kid's eyes jinking over words on the page and had to admit that yes, she was reading. She was reading pretty fast for a little kid barely out of pampers, too. Not reading out loud, though. Not using her voice. Was she incapable of talking? Selectively mute? Painfully shy? There were no obvious answers for Sno.

Nevertheless, the district shrink told her to keep up the chatter, keep it friendly, and keep it gentle. That meant that when Sno was watching Talking Heads television, she had to keep it to the friendlier talking heads. Nobody yelling about things, just to be sure that nothing would cause little Lucretia to go back into her shell. Well. Further back. Sno couldn't figure how much further this kid could go without being in a fucking coma... but there they were.

"I have to tell you, this shopping trip has been interesting," she cooed, unloading the grocery bags.
"Letting a three-year-old pick out the food shouldn't end well, but you got me more veggies than I'm
used to." All the colourful stuff, too. Purple cabbage and yellow bell peppers and some weird things
she wasn't even sure were edible. "I'm not even sure I can make a meal out of this lot. Thank the
gods there's an app for that." She had several, in fact. All of which claimed to be able to make meals
out of whatever she could photograph

Lucretia browsed what there was of Sno's bookshelf. The stuff that wasn't books the twins had left
behind was a bunch of lurid science fiction and fantasy. Sno had never been one for bodice-rippers,
so those books were more or less safe. No gore, for certain. Sno got enough of that in her day job.
The most a kid like Lucretia could expect from Sno's books was the occasional complicated word.

"Well," she singsonged. "I could make an interesting stir-fry out of this, even with the dragonfruit. I
think you're a little too young for anything spicy, so nothing stronger than ginger..." She had one
egg, not enough for the recipe. She didn't have ginger, or the right kind of salt.

Worse, some of the instructions were a little bit more complicated than the kind Sno was used to -
stab the plastic with a fork and microwave on high for five minutes. Therefore, the next thing she did
was call her mother.

She scooped up Lucretia, reading material and all. Balanced the little baby Humanman on her hip as
the phone rang. Lucretia was content to keep reading and used Sno's shoulder as a rest for her book.
"Hello, mother." She had never been comfortable with calling La'ming 'mom'. "The twins there? I
need some recipe words decoded."

La'ming put it on speakerphone and got into conference with the twins. After that, it was unriddling a
sum total of four words before the kids finally tutted at her and said, "Don't move a muscle."

Koko said, "We're on our way before you start messing up the prep."

Lulu said, "What ingredients do you not have?"

Sno started listing them off.

"Oh yeah, we're bringing the essentials."

Sno purchased a dozen eggs and some dry ginger powder while they were on their way, and allowed
Lucretia to have a marshmallow pop shaped like a cartoon duck.

She tried reading along with Lucretia and earned a baleful glare from the kid.

"Yeah. I know. You can do it yourself."

Then the family arrived.

"Tidy up," said Lucretia, proving that she could speak. "Company's here."

Okay. So she did talk. That was something. Now she had to run interference. Lucretia was happy
with her book, and not inclined to bolt. All the same... "I'm stepping out into the hall to talk to some
people, okay? I'm not going anywhere far. It's just a few minutes."

She ducked outside, just as her mother and her adopted sibs started up the stairs.

She halted them before they could reach her door. "Okay. I need some ground rules with all of you."
The twins, age nearly-seven, huddled closer to La'ming.
"Listen," said Aunty Sno. "She's been through some shit and she's only four. So none of your usual horseshit, okay? I just barely got her talking and if you all barge in here like the forces of nature you are, you might just mess up like months of therapy. Got it?"

Koko grinned. "It's cool, Aunty. We just wanna see the only kid in the universe who isn't terrified of you."

"She has to have gone through some shit to not be scared of you," said Lulu.

"Come on," cooed Momma La'ming. "I wanna see my new grandbaby."

"She's not--" Aunty Sno sighed. "I'm fostering her, the poor mite. I'm the only person she even trusts so far, so... Please. Be gentle with the kid, okay?"

They all swore to be gentle. Koko remembered being on the streets and terrified of everything including Aunty Sno, so when he came into the brand new playroom, he did so in stocking feet.

Oh my sweet Gods, she is fucking tiny...

She was almost four, like Aunty Sno said, and quite dark in her skin tone despite her blonde curls.

"Were we ever that small?" said Lulu, articulating Koko's thoughts.

"Smaller, probably," Koko admitted. "Hey there, li'l cuz. We're your mom's adopted sibs."

The kid looked up from her book, thicker than most stuff you'd give a tiny child, and marked her place with a cord. She waved.

"Silent type, huh. I can dig it. I'm Lulu," said Lulu, offering her hand. "This is my dumb baby brother Koko."

"She thinks forty-five minutes counts," said Koko. "I thought babies couldn't read thick books. Are the pages cardboard or what?" He reached out to just see...

The kid flinched it away, getting up to double-dash for the safety of Aunty Sno's legs.

Wow. Aunty Sno wasn't kidding about this kids' skittishness stat.

He backed away from the book and sat down, and interlinked his hands behind his neck. "I'm sorry," he said. "Didn't wanna scare ya. Me 'n' Lulu an' our mom just came over to see you and help cook up some dinner. Y'know? Our mom is Sno's mom, so I'm like... your uncle or something?"

She looked up to Sno, who nodded. "Elven families are kind'a nebulous. The twins are technically my siblings, so you... if you want me as your mother... you get them as an aunty and an uncle."

"We're family," said Koko. "I ain't gonna hurt ya."

Slowly, by small degrees, Lucretia edged out of hiding and picked up the book she had dropped. Just as cautiously, Koko offered the bookmark on his open palm. "See?" he said. "You're okay."

In the kitchen, Lulu and Mom were working out things from available ingredients. They had this. It was up to him to put this poor nervous kid at ease.
loyalshipper said:
A cute one shot would be Taako and Kravitz going on a date night type thing and leave little Angus with a babysitter (Lup and Barry, Magnus, even the Raven Queen) but he has an anxiety attack and they have to cut their night short right before they get into the meat and bones of the night but they don’t mind because they have the rest of their lives for date night so right now is making sure Angus knows he is lived and that he matters and it ends with a family cuddle.

Papa was all dressed up fancy. So was Dad. Angus couldn’t explain why this worried him, but the worry lay trembling under his heart nevertheless.

“It’s just tonight,” Papa was saying as he braided his hair. “There was quite the brawl to babysit you while your Dad and I are out.”

“Can’t I come?”

Papa sighed. “Baby... You know we love you. It’s just... We need to re-enforce our bonds with each other. A night where neither of us can pay all of our attention to each other.”

Angus knew about this. Sometimes, parents needed one night where they didn’t have to be parents. “And I’m not going back to the orphanage.”

“Hell, no, Ango. Naw. You got your Uncle and Aunty Bluejeans coming down, then there’s the Fangbattle Aunts and Uncle Magnus.”

Uncle Magnus almost always bought Mitzy with him. That sounded like it could be fun.

“All of them at once?”

“It was better than holding a raffle for the privilege of your company.” Papa pinned up his hair. “Dad and I have our Stones, and if you need us, we’re only a call away. You’re going to be okay. I promise.”

It was easy to believe when they were home. Less so when they weren’t around. He had three Aunts and two Uncles watching over him and Mitzy to play with and that was enough to keep him distracted for a good two hours.

The third hour, when he and his Aunts and Uncles were cooking together, was when it hit him like a bully twice his weight class. Aunty Lup had her eyes the wrong way around. Everything was wrong. Everything was going wrong.

The call came before the mains, and they picked up instantly.
"Ango needs us?" came out of their mouths in stereo.

Taako dropped some gemstones on the table and Krav tore them a portal all the way back to their home.

Dinner didn’t matter. The night out was less important than their kid. Taako rolled badly on passing through the Astral plane on the way, but that didn’t matter either. He rolled and recovered before Krav could even offer a hand.

“Daddy! Papa!”

They landed on him in a hug, Taako already purring.

“It’s okay,” soothed Krav. “You’re okay.”

“I didn’t wanna wreck your night. I’m sorry.”

“Hey, you needed us, kiddo. We can have a night out anytime.”

Lup, hovering nearby, said, “He called me ‘Papa’ like twice and then freaked out. I’m not upset about the confusion, sweetie, I promise. You’re okay.”

“I thought... I thought... I thought you were never coming back an’ I kept seeing you outta the corner of my eye an’ it was only Aunty Lup an’...”

He and Krav covered him in kisses. “It’s okay. We’re here, now,” they said, wrapping their little boy up in their arms.

They never saw their show, and their dinner was what the family had cooked up that night. They watched one amongst many of their collection of their moving scrolls.

The important part was that Ango had his family. That he knew they would be coming back. That he could be braver next time.
Reader Request #86

Chapter Notes

dualityandsuch said:
Can we see C!Luce talking to Sno about her daughter Luce in GC? :3
Alter-Sno was staring off the edge of the Moon again. It was her posture, more than her permanently-down ears or the look on her face that made Madam Director Lucretia journey over to
her and say, “Please don’t jump?”

Alter-Sno took three measured steps away from the edge. “No. I wasn’t thinking about it. I was just… the me who belongs in this world is down there somewhere. Isn’t she?”

“It’s not advisable that you try to find her,” said Lucretia. “We don’t know what energies would be released with the encounter between the two of you.”

“Of course we don’t,” sighed Alter-Sno. “That’s the perfect topper to my fucked-up week. Of course there’s no progress in getting me back or reversing whatever fucked-up thing that globe did. Of fucking course you have no idea if time is passing back where I came from… I promised y— her that I’d never abandon her.”

Lucretia could hear the words that Alter-Sno had not said. The pieces slotted together. “You… promised your universe’s version… of me?”

“She’s almost four years old and… the summer fever got her parents. It was months before we found her.”

Oh. Yes. City life and staying out of everyone’s business, and being too busy to care about their neighbours… There were other factors that could lead to children living with the corpses of their parents, but that was the one most common. “I understand you’re worried about her. We’re doing our best, I promise.”

“She’d only just started talking,” said Alter-Sno. “I let her down. I broke my promise…”

“We don’t know that, yet,” said Lucretia. “Come away from the edge… there’s a tea-house here that does some acceptable shortbreads…”

Alter-Sno didn’t come for the shortbreads. “They do dandelion tea?”

For an Elf, that was pretty much equivalent to asking for a sedative. Something to knock her the fuck out so that she wouldn’t have to suffer being awake. “Only under medical supervision. You do want to keep your promise, don’t you?”

Sigh. “Yeah. It’s just… I worry about her.”

Lucretia may have made a mistake when she said, “Tell me about her.” On the other hand, Alter-Sno came back into the realm of the living when she was talking about her adopted daughter.

Unlike most Elf-Human adoptions, this one didn’t involve Luume’s interference. It involved a scared and selectively mute child only trusting Alter-Sno as the toughest person she knew, and therefore the safest one.

Like Lucretia, her tiny counterpart enjoyed reading and other quiet activities. Like Lucretia, her alternate had a reluctance to speak born of being almost criminally shy. Unlike Lucretia, there was family willing to work to help her overcome that shyness. A version of Taako who had his sister - this knowledge was classified and kept away from the rest of the base in general and Taako in particular - and was therefore much warmer towards the rest of the world. A version of Lup who could gently wheedle any close-mouthed child out of their shell.

In another world, Lucretia had careful and gentle relatives who were already shaping her confidence and capability. In another world, Lucretia had a caring family who worked around her quirks and found ways to help her communicate when she wasn’t in the mood to speak. Instead of a mother who wept and a father who yelled when she chose to be quiet and retreat, Lucretia had a family who
was willing to whisper and would fetch flashcards so she could still tell them what was wrong.

Lucretia was almost jealous of a four-year-old child in another reality. It was a very strange thing to hear that one had a better life in a different dimension. Not that she wished her own parents dead, but... hearing about this could almost make her do so.

Then Alter-Sno started showing her the baby photos.

Her alternate transformed, from swipe to swipe, from the shy and retreating baby self Lucretia was familiar with, to an increasingly happy and confident little girl. Including being able to do public speaking at her school, if the photo of her at a podium (standing on a step-stool) was any indicator.

It had taken her years, one year in particular, the efforts of her crew, and this wild-ass plan of hers to acquire the gravitas and inherent power that she had today. This junior version of herself was going to have it all much sooner and without all the suffering.

Lucretia wished her well.
dualityandsuch asked:

Show them all the return of Magic Brian in GC
Her name was Jakaranda and she was a necromancer and a Tiefling. What she had been trying to call a spirit back into the mortal realm for was a moot point. She had forgotten a key element of the ritual - the vessel in which the soul was meant to reside. It could be anything. A golem of clay, bone, wood or flesh. A corpse fresh in the grave. A doll for the spirit to haunt. Anything at all, as long as
parts of it could move and it was vaguely human-shaped.

Her name was Jakaranda, and she gave Magic Brian a door from the Astral Plane. An opportunity that he didn’t hesitate to grasp at with both currently ephemeral hands. Without a vessel, there was only one thing to possess.

Her name was Jakaranda. It’s Brian, now.

He looked at the lavender skin and the pink hair and the very tall horns care of the bathroom mirror. “Not exactly my first choize, darlink, but I guess ve can’t be ze choosers vhen ve are ze beggars, ja?”

The fading remnants of Jakaranda, trapped in the back of her brain, said, *No, no, no, I didn’t want this…*

“If too late,” said Brian. “Ve can’t always get vhat ve vant. But I… am gettink revenge…”

He could remember. Even in a living body. Interesting. The remnants of Jakaranda heard static when he said things like ‘Bureau of Balance’, but he could hear a subtle little hiss under the words that came through just fine.

Excellent. He went through Jakaranda’s wardrobe and threw together something nice and devastating. Next up, cruising some popular cities for some members of the Bureau who were so new that they wouldn’t remember him. Or, failing that, some of the consults. Yes. Being allowed around the base without a tracer bracer would be most beneficial.

It was almost a joke. An Elf, a Dragonborn, and an Orc walk into a bookshop/cafe…

Two of the three were wearing Bureau bracers, but the Beach Elf wasn’t. She looked like she was suffering an immense loss, and perhaps an equally high stress. She looked ready to snap, an impression not helped by her whip-thin physique.

Target acquired.

Brian had a few variations on the standard Bureau tailing technique, so that even a Bureau member wouldn’t catch on that he was following after the Beach Elf. She spent random moments crying. She’d lost someone. Recently.

Brian arranged to be in the aisle next to where she was sniffling and picked any old book so he could peek through. “Oh,” he said, “Are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” she lied.

“You look very upset, zough. Are you in trouble? Are zose ozzer two menacing you? I can help.”

“No, they’re fine. They’re helping me, I… I’m not from around here and I’m just trying to get home. My little girl needs me.” Tears sprang forth again.

Brian had an ‘in’. He reached through the gap in the bookshelf and said, “It’s goink to be okay. I vant to help.” A touch to her cheek, and the magic words. “I just vant to be Friends.” He cast Friends on her, and she, unsuspecting, went under the spells influence.

“Of course we’re friends,” she said. “My name’s Sno. What’s yours?”
“Call me Jakaranda,” Brian cooed. “Tell me about gettink home…”

She really wasn’t from around here. She’d come from an entirely different reality where some adults here were still children, and Madame Director was a tiny three-and-a-half-year-old child named Lucretia.

Just imagining Madame Director as a tiny child almost blew his borrowed brain.

Nevertheless… “The other Lucretia, she has somesink interesting, ja? Somesing… special…”

“Of course. She has a really magic staff. It’s magic as hell.”

“If you could borrow it,” wheedled Brian, “and bring it to me… I could help you. I could send you home.”

“I want to go home.”

“Zhen you vant to help me. Find a vay to bring me ze staff…”
She had thought that she had stronger willpower. That she was immune to spells like Friends. Apparently, mourning can bring those defenses crashing down.

She didn’t know about that until Brian had the staff within reach.

“Zhat’s it, my dear. Chust a liddle closer... and I vill have all ze power in ze relics!”

“And then I go home?” It was the one desire more powerful than the whisperings of the staff itself. The need to get back to her little girl.

“Vhat? No. Zhen you die. Zhis is Brian’s time to shine, darling.”

The sure-fire end of Friends is when the caster causes damage to the victim. That particular statement was at least five psychic damage. Sno shook out of the spell, backing up away from this... this fiend.

She had the staff. She could...

_She could protect everyone..._

No. This thing had different wants to hers. Right now, she wanted to see this fiend _suffer_. As a cop, she had numerous spells that could delay, capture, or otherwise render harmless a purp. There was one that was desperate circumstances only, and this fucking _counted_.

She cast Circle of Death.

Frankly, Brian was lucky that she didn’t cast Tsunami.

The ravens of the Reapers swarmed the area and Sno heard other people talking for the first time.

“Hey, babe. Can’t even get one day off, can we?”

“Now is not the time, Taako...”

Sno blinked her tunnel vision of rage away. Tres Horny Bois and Team Sweet Flips were there. So was Director Lucretia.

“I’ll take that, now, thank you.”

“Sure,” Sno handed it over without a second thought. “They were lying, weren’t they? About that thing being able to send me back home?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” said Lucretia. “This staff... can’t do that. We’re still working on a solution to your needs, I promise.”
Back where she started, then. In a strange world without a friend and without a hope. Sno broke
down on the spot. “I just wanna go home...”
Anonymous said:
May I request a Taako getting luume on the moon base, and gathering up his family, ie the former IPRE members that he could find. He is slightly panicked when he can’t find all of them. Idk if that’s how luume works tho.

[AN: It normally isn’t, but I can make an exception with pressures on Taako’s brainspace]

He’d killed a town. Again. At least the survivors of Glamour Springs had been able to bury the dead and pick up the pieces. This was way, way worse. A whole down. Wiped off the map. That which wasn’t black glass or a ring of slag was ash.

He could wheedle his way out of it. He knew he could. He was a pro. If they’d killed that Kurtz kid (*a literal child, he couldn’t know what he was doing*). Or if they’d just ignored the scavenging raiders (*and left a literal child to deal with slavery or worse. He’d been there...*) and gone on with hunting down and stopping Cyrus...

He’d killed a town. Again.

All those families. All those lives. All those people.

They couldn’t even be buried.

Then, for an encore, the people who could have helped dragged his sorry ass up to the moon with two other chucklefucks. They could have helped, if only they could literally communicate what the fuck was going on. If he’d known...

If he could tell the difference between Elderberries and Deadly Nightshade on sight...

If he hadn’t cried out and gained the attention of that one archer...

If he wasn’t born with witch eyes...

It was so far down to the ground. He didn’t have the spell slots to run away. But there was still worse news in this shit sandwich.

He’d forgotten entire fucking war. An ages-long, seemingly endless war. Friends. Family. Dying in it, and he’d forgotten.

If there was any worse time to get a visit from Uncle Irma, it was now.

But Taako didn’t know that. All he knew, as the fever rose and his mental capacity shot down, was that he had to protect his family.
Taako was looking super-squirelly, searching through the four, tiny bunks as if he were searching for some lost ancestral trinket that was worth more than his soul.

Merle, finding him in the middle of his rummaging, said, “You okay, there, son?” and thereby learned that there was a very rare fourth aspect of luume’irma. Instead of the usual fight, fuck, or feed, Taako had gone to fortify. Which meant he was driven to protect and guard his family.

“Danger,” Taako said, and scooped up Merle faster than the Dwarven Cleric could blink.

The next thing he could make sense of, he was in some soft, cavernous space made out of mattresses. Someone had laid in supplies and there was one exit to a privy and the other--

“No! Danger!” Taako physically shoved Merle back inside. He had a dazed and confused Davenport under one arm and was frantically out of breath.

“Davenport?” said Davenport.


“Davenport,” sulked Davenport.

“Yeah, that kid’s deep in luume. Better to just sit down, shut up, and put up until he wears himself out.”

“Davenport,” he mumbled, still sulking.

Magnus had to be dragged in, half an hour later. He had made the mistake of attempting to fight an Elf deep in luume, and had been knocked the fuck out and tied the fuck up. Taako physically picked up Merle and mashed him into Magnus. “Safe,” Taako insisted. “Live.”

Merle cast Cure Wounds and Taako seemed happy. He left in the blink of an eye.

Magnus moaned as he came to. “What. The. Fuck.”

“Never mess with a manic Elf, kid,” growled Merle. “Now sit tight, play nice, and exhibit some patience. I’m not made outta spell slots, you know.”

Next into Taako’s collection was Madam Director herself. Stunned, but not unconscious. Meerle spent another spell slot on recovering enough of her hit points for passing normalcy to resume itself.

“Well,” she announced on her return to the waking world, “this is a clusterfuck of epic proportions.”

“I don’t know what got into him,” said Magnus. “He managed to overpower me and drag me into... this place.”

“The bedding depot,” said Madam Director. “It seems to be a magnet for Elves in Luume. They like building their own dens.”

“This has happened before?” said Magnus.

“Amongst our Elven population. Some PSA’s go around periodically about procedure... You missed the last one. I must update our administration protocols.” She crawled to a space by the entrance and waited.

Half an hour later, Taako entered again. Frantic. Out of breath. Hyper-aware and freaking out. He
counted them all. “One. Two. Three. Four. One. Two. One... two... three... four...” he pawed at they air twice. “Need...”

“I know what you need,” said Madam Director. “Come here, I can help...”

“Not safe. Danger... Danger...”

“Just come here. I’ll help you.”

He did, but stopped to pause at every other handful of seconds. “One... two... three... four...” paw, paw. He moved a little closer to Madam Director. “One... two... three...”

Madam Director pounced. Seizing Taako’s head with both hands. Her fingers found his ‘off switch’.

“Danger...”

“Ssh... Hush, now,” Madam Director whispered. “It’s all right, now. I’ve got you. Ssh-shsh-shsh-shsh...”

“Danger...” mumbled Taako, slowly slipping under. “One... two... three... four...” Paw, paw at the air. “One...”

“I’ve got you. I’ve got you...”

Mismatched eyes rolled back. Luxurious eyelids closed. He trembled from head to toe. His breath shuddered. Then he slumped, purring softly, with his head still in Madam Director’s hands.

“There, now,” she cooed. “None of you try to get back out of here, he’s still aware of us. The slightest disturbance in his environment and there’s no predicting what he’ll do.”

“So...” said Magnus. “We just sit here until he’s done?”

“Davenport,” nodded Davenport. He offered a packet of chips.
purple-sea-dragon said:
angus, every time taako goes into luume, without fail: im aby??

One year After Story and Song (ASS)...

Taako was looking... demented. His pupils had almost obliterated his irises. His face was flushed and, mere moments before, he had been turning the place upside-down as if searching for something desperately needed.

“Sir?”

Taako took one look at him and smiled as if he had found the solution to every problem in the world, all wrapped up in one weedy pre-teen boy package. “Baby,” he cooed.

“I’m baby?”

Taako pounced.

———

Five years ASS...

He’d come down to see what the fuss was. Taako had cooked more than a spread. This wasn’t an anxiety bake-off. This was Taako going through every ingredient at his disposal and every recipe in his noggin.

“Are you... okay? Sir?”

Taako turned. “Baby!”

Sigh. “I’m baby,” he grumped. This sort of thing was only supposed to happen once a decade, damnit...

———

Nine years ASS...

He woke with Taako sprawled across him and purring voluminously. How long he had been under the influence of Luume was anyone’s guess.

“Baby...” Taako singsonged.

Yawn. “I’m baby,” he sighed.
Nineteen years ASS...

“Sir, I’d like you to meet Miss Agatha Tre--”

Whump.

“Baby!”

Angus, ass knocked flat on the floor, sighed and looked pleadingly around to where Agatha was lurking and hiding. “I’m baby,” he growled.

Twenty years ASS...

This time, he grabbed Agatha with a cheerful, “Baby baby!” and whisked her off to the cote.

“Agatha! Go limp!” It was a mere handful of moments after that that he had to wonder, “What the actual shit?”

But in a minute, Taako was back. “Baby!”

Ah. Now things were back to what passed for normal. “I’m baby...”

Twenty-four years ASS...

This was the first time he hadn’t called Angus ‘baby’ since... since forever. He was more interested in baby time. On one hand, it did give Angus the freedom to call the doctor and help resolve a mere few of the issues.

On the other hand... he kind of missed being the baby.
Anonymous said:
Can I ask for a pre-Angus McDonald, but slightly tweaked where Taako is pregnant with Angus (because of elf biology shenanigans) and Taako and Kravitz are just fawning over Taako’s belly and talking about how they are going to give Angus the best life.

[AN: Oh, I could kill y’all with so much angst on this, but nah. We can pretend that Elven biology actually accommodates the horseshit I put into the preamble of Warp and Weft. Let’s go with that.]

Five Months After Story and Song (ASS)...

Taako was wiped the fuck out. This business of his was exhausting. Worse than exhausting. All he ever wanted to do was sleep.

Unfortunately, one of the chucklefucks he’d spent an entire century with and then some, was attempting to batter down the door.

“Taako,” bellowed Magnuts. “Come on, we got a mish!”

“Open up, glamour boy.” Oh shit, it was the alleged cleric.

Taako fought the gravity well of the couch. It would be so much easier if he could use magic, right now. “Fuck off,” he hollered, barely hauling himself up into a sitting position. “Your glass cannon’s out of fucking order.”

Now both of them were using all available fists to thunder on the door. “Taako, stop dicking around!”

Taako growled and levered himself up from the couch. These assholes wouldn’t take ‘fuck off’ for an answer. He shuffled up to the door and opened it between peals of fist-driven thunder. “Your glass cannon,” he repeated, “is out of fucking order.”

“WOAH!”

“Holy shit, you’re pregnant?” Magnuts reached for the bump, but stopped when Taako took a step back.

“Yeeah keep your grubby paws off the alleged precious cargo, there, bullmoose. I’m off adventuring for seven more months and prob’ly more than that. You know pregnant Elves shouldn’t do magic.”

“But... you’re a dude, dude!”

“Yeah, not all dude. It happens with Elves. Not so much with Humanmen.” He didn’t exactly let them in, just shuffled away from the door towards the most convenient privy because getting up meant he needed to pee.
The little nugget within decided to help add pressure on his bladder by dancing on it. On one hand, painful. On the other, sort’a helpful in a way.

When he got back to his nest, Magnuts had some reheated nutritious treats and Merle had some pungent tea.

“I know. It smells like ass,” Merle began.

“Your ass. After an arbour ardour sesh,” said Taako.

“Think of it like medicine,” said Magnus. “You need your natal vitamins.”

Taako growled audibly this time, ears flicking right back. “You’re almost as bad as my actual family.” By which he included Lup, Barold, and Krav. “All three of them are on my nuts twenty-four sev.”

“Looks to me like someone was on more than your nuts,” said Magnus.

Merle waited until Taako was trapped in a chair before he urged a cup of the tea on him. “Drink the ass tea or I’ll tell you all about my sordid affair with a philodendron.”

*That* fuckin’ worked. Taako shuddered at the aftertaste. Already reaching for the tasty treats to clear his palette. The next thing he knew, he had four grubby chucklefuck hands on his spreading middle.

Magnuts had tears in his eyes. “It’s kicking...”

“Yeah, the little nugget does that a lot,” grumbled Taako. “Please tell me you washed your fuckin’ hands before laying them on me?”

“Yeah, yeah. Antibacterial and all that shit,” said Merle. “You’re fine.”

“Apart from the bit where I got you two idiots groping me...”

“Did Krav help make this?” said Mango.

“No, I held a fuckpile and you weren’t invited. Of fucking course Krav and I...” He had to giggle. The baby was tickling him. “My other name for the nugget is ‘Serendipity’...”

A happy accident.

They hadn’t meant to make this life, but they wanted it.

“So... actual names?”

“I get to name any girls, but Krav gets to name any boys. So... Angus or Lulu. I already got checked out by a competent Cleric and... uh... it’s the first single birth in like a hundred generations of my family, so... It’s the ultimate coin toss.”

“You’d really name your baby after your sister?”

“Shyeah! She’d fuckin’ kill me if I didn’t.”

Mango insisted on talking to Taako’s baby bump. “Whoever you are, I will protect you.”

Merle, a little more grumpy about it, said. “Yeah, I’ll even learn to be a competent Cleric so I can heal it.”
Taako muttered, “You two get any more cute about this and I’ll throw up on you.”
Anonymous said:
Are you still doing Little Angus prompts? Cause I’m kinda curious if Angus had any friends in the orphanage (adults or kids or otherwise) that he’d miss or want to visit.

It had taken Angus an entire year to talk freely to his dads. When he did, he expressed his worries about his one friend in the entire, dingy, dismal, depressing grey coldhouse that was the orphanage.

Her name was Agatha Tremaine and she was maybe a year older than him. She smuggled the outdoors inside for Angus, much to the horror of the nurses and the consternation of Mr Thud. They never could prove that she was the source of dandelion flowers, stick insects, or grasshoppers that managed to turn up in Angus McDonald’s presence and he never ratted her out, no matter how much time they made him sit in the Quiet Room.

This caused Papa some immediate concern, and the rest of the family some Stone calls. There were a lot of Stone calls.

There were more than a few moments when Angus feared he had done something wrong. A feeling that was quickly dispelled by one or more of his new family scooping him up into a reassuring hug.

Then came the Trip.

Papa and Dad and Aunty Lup and Uncle Barry all piled into the cart with him and Garyl took them on a whirlwind trip. But they weren’t taking a trip to Neverwinter.

Angus fought past his elective muteness. “Sirs. This isn’t the way to the orphanage...” He pointed the way they should have been going. “We’re headed the wrong way.”

“Right and wrong, baby,” said Papa. He wrapped an arm and part of his ruiana around Angus. “Yes, this is not the way to the orphanage. But no, we are not headed the wrong way.”

“This is the way to the Aunties Fangbattles’ place...” said Angus.

“Correct again, little buddy,” said Dad.

“You said we were going to see Agatha.” Just like that, the pieces slotted into a bigger picture. “Did Agatha get adopted by my Aunties?”

Uncle Barry handed Aunty Lup five gold. She laughed and said, “I knew you were a smart little cookie, kiddo. You got it in one.”

The Aunties Fangbattle - also known as Team Sweet Flips - had a little country cottage with a neat little garden that always seemed to be full of flowers. Angus liked the times he got to stay with them because he could help out with the chickens and play with the butterflies and birds that were too bold to fly away from his careful touch. They always had warm bread or a gooey sweet pie fresh out of the oven.
This time, the cottage looked quiet and still. Even the birds refused to coo or call from the branches of the fruit trees. No butterflies spread their wings in the sunshine. Therefore he feared knocking on the door.

Dad did it instead.

Aunt Killian opened the door. “Oh great. You’re here.” She turned and called, “Agatha...”

There she was. Hiding under the table and clinging to furniture legs like a prisoner at the bars.

Angus was over there before he could blink. “Hey, remember me?”

Her dark eyes were fearful. “Angus? They said you died.”

He knew who ‘they’ were. The bigger kids. The mean ones. “You know they lie.”

She crawled out to hold him, and this was the first time Angus remembered being bigger than her. “I’m glad you’re alive.”

“I’m glad you got a family,” said Angus.

“Are you kidding?” she whispered, “That’s an Orc and a Dragonborn. They’d eat me if I fatten up...”

Angus detected the not-so-subtle influence of Them again. He joined her under the table and had a hushed conversation while the grownups talked grownup things literally over their heads.

“They’re careful with you, aren’t they?” he asked. “They’re not rough or mean.”

She had to agree.

“They’re kind, right? They try to make things right by you.”

Another nod.

“They keep making better food so you can have enough to eat?”

“They wanna fatten me up...”

Angus had to think his way around that one. “You know... if you’re strong, you can run off if they start measuring you for a basting pan.”

She snorted at that one. “I gotta admit their pies smell delicious.”

“So have some, pumpkin,” Papa had a small plate with a slice of rich, glistening pie and a fork. “This one’s one of my recipes, so you know it’s great.”

“Yeah, and it’s my herb and spice mix that makes it even better,” said Aunt Carey.

“Excuse your scaley ass, it’s the gravy recipe I got from my mother,” objected Aunt Killian.

Angus giggled. “Anyway. If they’re going to eat any kids, they’d be after my marbled flesh, not yours.”

Agatha relented, and started to eat without fear.
Neondragon54 on Chapter 86:
Can Sno go home at some point, Baby lucretia must miss her and I can only handle so much angst ya'know. I

Sno fought the Hunger on the moon. They called her Alter-Sno because she didn't belong in this world. It was telling that, some significant time after her mistaken arrival in this reality, she was starting to think of herself as ‘Alter-Sno’ instead of her proper name.

It was specifically infuriating that that was so.

The world was ending, and she was having an identity crisis. The world was ending, and all she wanted to do was see her baby girl. The world was ending, and she had to stop herself from thinking of all these people as her family. They weren't. They were echoes of people she knew.

Here, Koko didn't have Lulu by his side. Here, he was Taako. Here, he was a kleptomaniac asshole.

Here, Lucretia was fifty-some years old. Not the tiny little girl who needed someone reliable.

She'd been gone for so long...

Her baby would be missing her. She might never talk again, after this.

Mom would be beside herself...

The mother she'd only recently achieved a truce with. The mother who had had a rough start to things and was only just now patching her life back together. A mother who was only just now learning to be a proper mother. A proper mother to twins who needed Sno to ensure that they were all going to be okay after literal years of hell.

She had to live...

Live for the hope of going home. Live for the chance to explain things to Lucretia: that she couldn't help it, that it was an accident that took time to undo, that she wanted to go back to her baby every single day...

Live for some kind of breakthrough that would get her out of this warped and strange reality. Live to defend the next person here, fighting the phantoms only she could see. Well. She and NO3LL3, for whatever reason. Either way, she had a blade, Great Cleave, and a seemingly infinite host of enemies.

Then a wave of blue and a wave of green dipped her entire consciousness in one hundred years of memories. More than that.

She remembered two suns, and a purple sky, and an entirely different reality. The mission, the ship, the hundred worlds, the fight... the fight for far too long against it. The desperate move to at least stop it eating this world, so much like the very one they started on. The betrayal that stole memories, that
That stole Lulu away from Koko.

Sno could have hated Lucretia for that. No doubt Taako would gather his pound of flesh. Later. After the battle. He would still prioritise saving as many people as he could over petty vengeance.

The silver ship took off. Up into the writhing, rainbow-lit blackness. For a moment, there was the vertiginous fear that she, and everyone in this world, had been abandoned to be eaten by that thing. Then there was another light, and the entire plane of Hunger was wrapped up in a pearlescent shield.

Or at least, that's what it looked like just before the light whisked her away to... somewhere. Nowhere. Anywhere. Everywhere.

She heard a voice say, *Let's get you back to where you belong.*

Then she was sitting in the middle of her apartment, in front of a very surprised Lucretia. She'd just come home from school.

She was wearing the very same outfit she'd been wearing the day Sno had made that awful, awful mistake. The calendar on the wall was the same day she'd made that mistake. As far as Lucretia was concerned, Sno shouldn't even be home, yet.

"Mom?" said Lucretia.

Sno leaped up and landed on her daughter in a huge hug. "Oh my baby... You won't believe the trouble I had to go through just to be here."

Lucretia hugged her back. "I guess it's my turn to make the hot chocolate..."
dualityandsuch said:
Can we get THB trying to make Sno happy in GC?

The longer Alter-Sno remained on the moon, the worse she seemed to be. Her mood just kept on dropping to the point where there was a guard set up around the edges of the moon. Not that it was needed, she seemed determined to remain alive no matter how much hell she had to go through to do it.

Taako couldn’t fathom how she could be so bummed out. He had never needed anyone or anything, and failed to see how anyone else could need more. However, he could feel the sadness oozing off of her like a chill, cloying fog. Such as right now.

He didn’t even know she was passing behind him until the gooseflesh overtook his entire body despite the footie pyjamas, the shawl, and the hooded cloak he was wearing against the morning.

“Brrr... I dunno about you guys, but she is bumming me out.”

“Yeah, that’s a definite cloud of doom she’s got, there.”

“We should do something,” said Magnus.

“Naaaah,” said Merle, “Put three drops of Dreamroot extract into her ‘lion and she’ll be fine. Right as rain.”

Taako glared at him. “Just one question,” he said. “What the FUCK?”

“I have the same question,” said Madam Director, apparently manifesting spontaneously behind Merle. “You don’t mix Dreamroot and smoking weeds, Merle.”

“Well, maybe you don’t,” Merle began.

Taako tuned out of the incipient argument. Things were headed down the tube, for sure. The only question was how deep and how fast.

Merle sat down beside Alter-Sno as she stared up at the stars. “Thoughts of home?”

Tears remained unshed in her eyes. “Yeah. My baby’s waiting for me. I dunno how much time is passing back home. She’s gotta be so worried... I promised her... I promised...”

“Here,” he offered a rolled-up cigarette paper that was lumpish in odd places and smelled familiar. “Smokee this, you’ll feel better.”

She knew that stink, and tried not to inhale very much. “You shove that in my face again, I’ll shove
“Your entire arm up your own asshole.”

“Oh... kay...” Merle quickly made the joint vanish. “I’ll keep it handy in case you need it.”

Magnus had thought hard about this. Obviously getting her a puppy was a bad idea. Dogs wouldn’t remain on the moon. Giving her a puppy that would only run right off the dang thing would not help her overall mood.

He had spent quite a lot of time working on this. The creature inside the travel cage just had to make her smile.

“Hey,” he said. “I know this isn’t your kid, but... it’s company.”

She lifted the cloth. “It’s a pigeon.”

“It’s a homing pigeon,” said Magnus. “It won’t take fall damage if it wanders off the moon and it’ll always come back to you.”

Sno stared at him. It was a look Magnus was used to. It was a Look that said, he can’t possibly be as dumb as he seems right now. She said, “Thanks... I think.”

The pigeon just cooed and rolled ones at comprehending the world.

Taako launched straight into his thoughts the instant Alter-Sno opened the door. “So I can’t give you the baby of the base, right. He’s like annoyingly smart and shit. He’d come up with fifteen different reasons why it’s illegal. So I didn’t bother.” He swanned into her apartment. “Then I thought - food basket? But I have no fuckin’ idea about your favourites, so that’d be a wash. Then - a stroke of genius.” He started making tea.

“Genius,” echoed Alter-Sno.

“Yeah. See. You know a younger version of me, and you’re... so very worried about how my other self turned out. So I’m gonna tell you my backstory. Any step forward from where I wound up is bound to raise your spirits about my other self.”

Alter-Sno fussed with giving some seeds to a pigeon. “You figured that out, huh?”

Taako poured some tea. “So let’s start at age three. The genetic donor responsible for fathering me was a superstitious shit and took my heterochromia as a sure sign that I was both bad luck and demon-made. He and Mom fought a hell of a lot before her an off...”

Considering what she knew of her Koko’s past, there were a few key points in common. Absentee father who suffered under the burdens of superstition and immaturity, a mother who died too young, some portion of life with relatives, some of whom were assholes. And, as she listened, a lot more of life on the streets.

Taako had nobody and nothing, and he still managed to become something of a hero. The Koko she knew had a much better foothold on a better future.

The Koko she knew had a sister. He had a family who cared. He had an education. He was... he was
doing okay. Further, he would be there to help Lucretia when Sno couldn’t return home.

For the first time, she was starting to feel like things could be okay.
Swailey on Chapter 89:
Are we allowed to request things here? Or ask questions. I don't remember...
If so-

Do the twins always hit Luume together? If so- do they get eachother into a never ending loop of taking care of eachother? Or do they combine their forces and wreak double the havoc on everybody else?

[AN: Short answer - they almost always hit Luume together, and mutual 'off switching' is not the easiest thing in the world when you're sinking fast. Long answer - this:]

One more world, one more roll of the dice. The twins had an erratic cycle and, barring a "double event" where Luume could happen twice inside of two years, they could suffer it again anywhere between five years, and as many as fifteen. At the time of the Starblaster's launch, they had been seven years without an Incident. Every time they re-set, the chance that they could have an Incident re-set with them.

In brief: all bets were off. Including the bet concerning how long it would take the twins to enter Luume.

This one was going to be a rough one.

The twins didn't let go of each other, this re-set. Then they turned away from the railing with speculative looks in their eyes. Looking over their crewmates as if they were a feast ready for the picking. A low rumble, somewhere between a growl and a purr, sounded in stereo.

Five people at once said, "Aw shit..."

Barry leaped for the twins, hands already reaching for their Off Switches with a reflex born entirely of desperation. He had studied many things to get his multiple doctorates, and the most useful one to date was Elven Biology. For example - how to turn off twin Elves in Luume when one only had two hands to spare for the task.

They went down quickly, thank goodness. With Magnus' help, he got the three of them to the rec room couch. There, the twins nuzzled up close, weighed Barry down, and refused to move.

"This is the worst time to remember I really needed to pee during the launch," said Barry.

...forty-eight hours of babysitting the twins later...

Merle had thought it was funny to use Barry as a shelf for random books. Lucretia had bought him refreshments, but Magnus had rearranged them out of his reach. Further, he had added several other plates, cups, and glassware to the nest. Often in precarious areas. Their captain had at least made certain he had food, and certain... technicalities in regards to hygiene. However, Fisher had decided to add all its ducks to the resultant pile and snuggle in. Tentacles everywhere.
It wouldn't be so bad, Barry reflected, if it wasn't the fifth damn time that it happened. Taako ate five of the refreshments that Magnus had balanced on Barry's head while Lup yawned, stretched, and sighed, "Thanks, bar-bear..."

"This is fuckin' stale," mumbled Taako.

"That was the last fucking straw," growled Barry. He extracted himself and announced, "You chucklefucks think it's funny to do this every single time? Fine! Next time this happens, I'm leaving all four of you to corral Taako--"

"Hey," objected Taako.

"--and I'll be keeping Lup company."

There was a laugh about it, and most of the crew forgot. But Barry remembered.

The kitchen was full of cooked food. The twins had been on a spree. Barry took Lup's hand in his and said, "It's going to be okay, babe." Then he took her and some shares of food away to secure privacy. Leaving Taako behind in the kitchen. A burning fuse leading up to a Luume explosion. He had maybe an hour, tops, before he went on a full-on rampage.

Strictly out of courtesy, he set off an alarm that the entire ship could hear.

Then, he focussed all his energies on Lup.

"Want!"

"Gods damn it, how did he do this?" Magnus was barely keeping Taako in his arms. The Elf in question was alternately wriggling to get free, trying to bite, and trying to make out.

Somewhere behind Taako's thrashing head, Lucretia hesitated to lay her hands on him at all. She flinched close to his ears, but never made contact. She couldn't make it all the way through, "Magnus, hold him still..." and all that came out was, "Mag-- Ma-- Ma-- Mag--"

Davenport was vigorously shaking Merle. "Cast Sleep! Cast Calm Emotion! Cast something!"

"Mag--?"

Taako managed to get his teeth sunk into Magnus' arm. He drew blood.

"Argh! Fuck!" Magnus screamed and let go of Taako.

"No!" Lucretia flinched again, but never made contact.

Davenport desperately cast an illusion of fit, nubile men to delay Taako, but he never banked on sharper, Elven senses rejecting that illusion as approaching reality. He was off the Starblaster in less than seconds, vanishing into the night.

"Aw fuck," sighed Magnus.
"This is not going to help negotiations," said Davenport.

Merle actually managed to heal Magnus' injury. "Whelp. We're in the shit no matter what. Better sweep up the wreckage, come the dawn." A smirk appeared through his facial hair. "He'll be nice and worn out by then."

Now Lucretia could talk, an anguished cry of disgust. "Mer-er-erle..."
Reader Request #92

Chapter Notes

dualityandsuch said:
Can we get Circus! Mak and twins bonding?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Another village, another attempt at keeping the Bail Fund intact for another fortnight. This time, at least, La’ming Ton was there to help keep the twins in rein.

Allegedly.

“I’ll have your strongest ale,” said Koko.

“He’s having a mild cider shandy[1],” said La’ming. She wheeled to face Lulu, “And so are you, young miss.”

Lulu switched to Street Elven, “These are Humanmen, they can’t possibly know.”

“Elves already have a reputation for being duplicitous, deceptive lawbreakers. The last thing we need to enforce that reputation. So you two under-age Elves are drinking shandies. End of.”

The twins grumbled, but suffered to drink shandies.

Raucous laughter erupted from a card table across the inn.

“That’s what I like to see,” roared the most obnoxious one. “Tame Elves.”

One of his lieutenants laughed even louder and said, “Rather see ‘em hangin’ in a ‘pothecary to dry!”

“Hey, hey. Careful. They can hear us,” said another lieutenant. “With ears like that, they can hear your hand!”

The twins were growling under their breaths. La’ming, with her ears docked and her disguise on, rested a hand on one each of theirs. “Okay,” she said in Street Elven, “Now is the time we run the kind of scam where we let them walk home in their breechclouts.”

The twins turned to assess the quartet of boozy card players. “We have three... We could run the Winterheim Two-step.”

“I was thinking of the Passholdt Handshake.”

“How about somewhere in-between? The Goldcliff Warm Welcome.”

The twins grinned like sharks. “Goldcliff. I like it.”

La’ming sighed. “I don’t know whether it’s more disturbing that I know what all those are... or that you do.”

The game, known to hustlers as the Goldcliff Warm Welcome, was also known as skin the guys who...
are going to learn better. It began with La’ming airing a little more cleavage and hiking up more than a mere corner of her skirt.

The twins insisted on speaking only in Gutter Elven, a language that La’ming insisted was their twin talk. She also gave them the story that the twins were found wild and didn’t understand Common. A ‘fact’ that emboldened the Humanman quartet to be louder and more boisterous than they had been before.

It took only a few hours to rid them of every coin they had on them, all their jewelry, every single weapon in their possession, and most of their clothing. They were also getting the message but, as Koko and Lulu gathered up the spoils, Koko had to twist the knife.

“Just so you know,” he said to their astonished and gaping faces. “It’s really bad luck to insult an Elf.”

La’ming hurried them out of there and back to the safety of the Circus campgrounds. Haul and all. There, she made the twins vow that they wouldn’t leave the grounds until the Circus left with them.

Three weeks later, when they left for another town, La’ming noticed that her savings jar was a lot more full than she knew it had been a mere week ago. Of course she confronted her adopted kids the instant she found it.

“Did you two have anything to do with the extra coin in my restoration fund?”

“Depends,” said Koko. “Are you mad about it?”

Lulu elbowed him. Hissed a stop-talking noise with some urgency.

La’ming took a breath. Parenting these two was a constant negotiation. “I’d only be mad if you took any risks. Like going into the town when I told you it was dangerous. Especially going into the town without an escort to make sure you’re,” not arrested, “safe.”

“We never left the circus grounds,” said Lulu truthfully.

“We gave all that stuff we skinned off’a those dudes to Monty so he could hock ‘em for us,” added Koko. “And we put all of it into your jar.”

“No Elf should have their ears docked,” said Lulu. “It’s painful and limits expression and...” her voice fell to a mumble, “…’n’ I read of how it can cause problems in y’r dome piece...”

They could have blown all that coin on fashion, luxuries, ingredients, or even treats for themselves. They could have wasted it on potions and pipeweed. “You... really put all that profit into my restoration fund?”

The twins looked at each other, and joined hands. “Every last copper,” they said together.

She swept them up in her arms and smooched the heck out of their adorable little faces. “Thank you, thank you. I’ve got the best babies in the world.”

“Stop it...” whined Koko without much conviction.

“You’re embarrassing," added Lulu without any honesty.
[1] Shandy: mixing small amounts of alcohol with large amounts of lemonade or sweetened soda water.
Sometimes... it’s good to get away from the kids. Kustaad, La’ming Ton, Mak’arune, and Montgomery Pithon were glad enough to leave the twins with Kri with Tri’fel and Exandria as the grownups took a break from their combined shenanigans in the Varmvale Inn.

Montgomery was enjoying things slightly less, since he was used to parenting two of the remaining three whilst they were on the road. It took him a good percentage of the evening to get drunk enough to relax.

Kustaad, on the other hand, was well into his cups. It took a lot to get an Elf drunk, and the Varmvale ale was thick and strong and potent as hell. “Tha’ li’l Koko,” he rambled. “He’s goin’ be trouble.”

“I know he’s a rough diamond,” said Mak’arune, who could not hold her ale. “But he’s... he’s real sweet. Th’ poor boy’s been through lots... Lots ‘n’ lots ‘n’ lots ‘n’ lots....”

La’ming took the tankard out of Mak’arune’s fingers. “I’m pretty sure you’ve had enough, there, dear.”

“I think,” said Kustaad. “I think... I think... I think I’m starting to think... That poor li’l boy might... just be sweet on me a li’l.”

Montgomery was glad he couldn’t roll his eyes. Everyone in the circus knew that Koko was fully occupied with pining for Kustaad. Happily married Kustaad. Old enough to literally be his father Kustaad. Also ripped, more than a little bit of a nerd, and thoroughly beautiful even for an Elf.

“I think you might be right,” he announced. “You’re kind of his type.”

“I’m also... approaching... Threehunnerd an’ fi’tty...” Kustaad belched. “I gotta... I gotta... uh... I gotta baby... tha’ss closer to his age’n I am.”

La’ming chuckled. “Babies always gotta get crushes onna grownups,” she said. “I remember this one time? In Freeport? I was only a hundred and thirty, but that didn’t matter... This li’l fifty-year-old squirt tries to sneak into my tent after th’ show...”

Mak’arune latched on to Montgomery’s arm. “Y’r th’ bess’ boss inna wholewide worl’... di’joo-di’joo-di’joo-di’joo... know that?”

“You’re very drunk,” said Montgomery.

“...didn’t notice until I was halfway outta my costume, y’aw’msayin...”

Mak’arune’s eyes began to mist over. “Are you mad at me?”
“I’ll be less mad if I have my arm back, thankyou,” he allowed. *I’ll be really mad at you tomorrow, when you can appreciate it.* To add to the freedom, he gently tipped Mak’arune towards La’ming.

“...so there I am in tights and skimpy little panties, my bra half off... More’n half off if you get my drift... And he pops outta the clothes basket like, ‘tah-dah! You gotta love me’... so o’ course I-- Hey!”

“You’re ver’ preddy,” said Mak’arune.

“You’re kind’a adorbs yourself,” slurred La’ming.

The worst thing about tonight, Montgomery reflected, was that none of these Elves would remember any kind of progress they might make tonight.

Damn it.
Anonymous said:
Hey, how about Sno being involved in a hostage situation (not taken hostage, but helping negotiate) and Ming and all the kids and trying not to panic as it plays out. Luce is v concerned

Lucretia had just turned five when the Event happened. She had a few words that she would use when there were no alternatives, but this was not one of them.

“Mom!”

The twins came running, so did Gramma La’ming, who Lucretia secretly called ‘Gramming’ in her occasional playful moments. Not that she said that out loud. She rarely said anything out loud.

Her extended, adopted family were careful to circle around so she could see who was coming even when all her attention was transfixed on the TV, and the news it contained.

Her adopted mother was on the TV. Slowly approaching some house in suburbia and she had her vest on and her hands empty. Lucretia could read the crawler. She could read all of it.

*Hostage situation in lower east end,* was the main one. There were also words that zipped by like *gunman,* and *drug bust gone wrong,* and *possible fatalities.* The twins knew what was up.

“You need a hug?” offered Koko.

“You need a Sammich?” said Lulu. It was family shorthand for both twins holding her like comforting brackets.

“Sammich,” she nodded. She didn’t close her eyes as the twins squeezed in, keeping her eyes on the screen for any hint of what her mom was doing. Gramming patted her lightly on the head as if to say, *I will be right back with what you need.*

In a moment, she heard the dryer going and smelled the special hot chocolate. Therefore, in just a few minutes, there would be warm beverages in all hands and a warm blanket tucked around all three of them.

“Aunt Sno knows her suff,” said Lulu. “She’s gonna be okay.”

The words zipping across the screen said, *Armed gunman allegedly high on Bad Dreams, a dangerous new drug on the streets of Neverwinter.* Lucretia couldn’t listen to any of the words that the people were saying, no matter how clear their speech nor piercing their voices. Her attention was fixed firmly on the scrolling words and the tiny blue figure in uniform, whenever she turned up in the shaking camera’s view.

She was glas of the hot chocolate and the warmth of the blanket when her mom stepped inside the building.
“She’s got this,” repeated Koko between slurping at marshmallows. “She’s got this sewn up...”

“It’s gonna be okay. It’s gonna all be--”

The popping noise sounded clearly above the on-scene commentator. The camera view shattered into a flurry of blurs and incomprehensible movement. The twins had hands over her eyes and over her ears, but it was too late.

Shots had been fired.

Every cop’s kid knew what shots fired could mean.

Lucretia clawed at the twins’ hands, screaming, “No, no, no,” over and over. She was screaming. The twins were screaming. Gramming was screaming. Even Aunt Mak’arune was screaming. They were all so loud that the Pithons came down from upstairs, one of the Montlings in their arms, to see what the ruckus was.

They let Lucretia hold the baby instead of the hot chocolate. Something about a small and helpless being in her arms provided an oasis in a sea of emotions. The TV was showing the house, at an even worse distance than previously. The words, *Shots fired!* crawled across the screen. Endlessly.

Some more people in uniform rushed in. There was no sign of anyone for too long. Koko’s hair had frizzed right up out of stress and Lulu’s wasn’t far behind. Lucretia knew, without a doubt, that if it wasn’t for the little Montling in her arms, she would be a total wreck.

Then, like a miracle, a blue figure in uniform walked out. There was a human-sized bag on a stretcher, and some other people with blankets around them.

Lucretia paid all her attention to the blue figure with blue hair. “Mommy... mom...”

“She’s okay,” Lulu cheered. “She’s okay, she’s all right!”

Someone - probably Uncle Avi - leaped on her from amongst the wall of uniforms keeping the public at bay, landing in a hug.

Mom gave him a noogie and shoved him away in the way that she always did for Uncle Avi. Then they cut away to a Porky Pig cartoon.

It was over. Mom was okay.

When Mom came home, she was mobbed by family. Lucretia wrapped herself around her legs, and the twins only added to that burden. Gramming and Aunty Mak’arune all but tackled her in the doorway. There were a lot of tears.

The news, much cut down to a five-minute segment about drug violence in Neverwinter, had everything boiled down to the essentials. It held no horrors for Lucretia. Not any more.

Mom held her on her lap, that night, feeding Lucretia because she wouldn’t let go. Just like it had been for the first couple of days in Mom’s care.

Mom kept holding her, kept kissing her forehead, kept purring, and kept saying, “It’s going to be okay. The Chief has seen to it that I shouldn’t be in that much trouble any more. We’re going to be okay.”

Tomorrow, she might believe it.
Two days after that, she learned that there had been a kid at the scene. A tiny scrap of a boy who had also run afoul of the Foster system and had been found in a literal doghouse after all the news cameras lost interest.

His name was Magnus, and Mom was pulling some strings to have him fostered with Uncles Avi and Johaan.
Anonymous said:
When Agatha had the twins Taako was careful not to bite the doctor, who tried moving her or whatever. I'm curious as to what would have made him snap? Something little? Obviously big? Or since it was slow, would he have a better control? Thank you so much for these wonderful fics.

...in another reality, a fragment of the one we know...

*Growl...* Taako rather *insisted* that Mrs McDonald remained upright.

“None of that nonsense,” said Mawlit briskly, levering Mrs McDonald’s feet out from under her. Or at least, that’s what he tried to do. There was a blur and a snap, and a sharp sensation of pain in his left shoulder. And a blood-soaked Elven face in his.

“Need. Safe,” Taako growled.

“Sir... sir... deep breaths, sir. Dr Mawlit is here to help.”

The growling continued like a burning fuse. The sort of growl that starts in the back of one throat and ends in someone else’s.

Mrs McDonald shrieked. “It’s... coming!”

*Grrrrrrroooowwwwllllllll...*

“Sir, it’s okay. I won’t let the doctor hurt her.”

The baby was out before he could think of dressing his own wounds. Something Mr McDonald was there to help for. The important part was hale, hearty and crying.

“Baby eat,” was even more disturbing with the slow fuse of growl underneath it.

Mawlitt let that distract the Elf in the room and got out the forceps and special scissors. “Now to cut the cord...”

There were sharp, Elven teeth in his wrist this time, holding forceps and his hand away from the trailing cord. The growl intensified with flecks of foam. Mawlit was close enough to see murder in those suddenly-thin slits.

“Sir, no!” Mr McDonald put himself between Taako and Mawlitt.

“Ba-- baby? Threat! Threat! Babies. Threatening babies!”

Mawlitt figured it out. No bladed instruments. Right. He moved his more imposing obstetrical arsenal well out of sight and hopefully out of mind.

“No threat,” he assured. “Help babies.” He bandaged his right wrist. “I’m using the clean hand, to
help with the afterbirth. Okay. No hurt. No threat.”

Taako yielded grudgingly, growling the entire time and poised ready to strike if the slightest hint of trouble glimpsed his way.

*Whoops. That’s a second baby...* He got the kid oriented the right way with a gentle shove. “Ms McDonald,” he said, “You’re going to have a twin.”

Taako was suddenly happier about life in general. “*Babies,*” he preened. Then returned to growling slightly softer at Mawlitt.

“He is going to be *intolerable,*” she complained between pushes.

“He is *never* going to shut up about this,” agreed Mr McDonald

Twin number two entered Mrs McDonald’s arms and Mawlitt found himself pushed forcefully towards the exit by a pissed-off Luume-addled elf. Just as those sharp, sharp teeth drew closer to his neck, rescue came in the form of Kravitz Reeper. “Hello, Dove. Don’t bite the doctor.”

Agatha squirmed past squeaking, “*Babies! Babies! Grampa was right! There’s twins!*”

Mr McDonald stage-whispered, “We don’t need to encourage Grampa...”

Mawlitt would be grateful when civilisation reasserted itself. Fortunately, he was plenty distracted by the husband cleaning blood off of his face.
Anonymous said:
May I request Tiny Ango and Agatha being taken to the Cote by Taako for protection...but said Cote has been found by the invaders?( could be the orphanage people who run it ? Or others) I just really like the protective nature of it. Almost like reading it makes me feel safe too? Anyhow thank you for reading this

If there was any day that would be the worst one for a surprise inspection visit by the Fantasy CPS, it would have to be the day that Taako was sliding inexorably towards a full-on Luume rampage.

He was currently cooking everything in the kitchen whilst Angus, Agatha, and Carey flipped rapidly through reference material, desperately searching for something that would prevent Taako bonding with all the babies in the house. Carey and Killian liked Taako just fine, but not as a co-parent to their own daughter.

Both Orc and Dragonborn had rougher hides, and couldn’t finesse an Elf’s ‘off switch’ like an Elf or a Humanman could. The only other option was one of the children, and by the time he got near one, he would want to grab the other.

“Here it is,” Carey found the passage. “Co-parenting of a child by a more authoritative figure can prevent a parental bond forming in an Elf suffering luume’irma. This is it. One of us goes with and does most of the parenting stuff instead of letting Taako do it all.”

“Or I could just hide,” suggested Agatha.

“No, hon. He’d scent you out,” said Killian. “We’ve seen this sort of thing before. Unless Kravitz turns up to really distract Taako--”

“Gross,” said the kids.

“Yeah, we figured that wouldn’t be an option,” said Killian. “And I don’t wanna disinfect my kitchen again.”

“Babies eat,” singsonged Taako, bearing an overloaded platter of nutritious and delicious treats.

Someone knocked as they barged in. “Fantasy CPS inspection.”

Sniff? Snort. SNARL!

“Sniff? Snort. SNARL!”

“Oh shit,” said Angus.

Taako quickly put the tray down and leaped over the couch to scoop up the kids, growling at the representative from the Fantasy CPS, and one of the staffers from the very orphanage both kids had come from.

If there was anything that was a worse threat to those children, it would be the slightest hint that they
were going back to that horrible orphanage.

Taako lifted one kid in each arm, hissed defiance at the representatives for their alleged welfare, and bounded off towards the backyard, where he had built a cote some years prior.

“Agatha, go limp,” Angus advised.

“Luume?” said the Fantasy CPS representative.

“Luume,” said Carey, lifting up the tray. “I gotta go make sure he doesn’t adopt our kid. Okay?”

They let her go off with a wave of their hand.

Killian, attempting to remain calm, made tea. “So,” she said. “How does your organisation feel about moments of bad timing?

Meanwhile, up in the cote...


“Bad people near,” he said.

“Ye-e-es,” cooed Carey-friend. “Bad people are near. This is the safe place. This is a good place.”

She handed Taako a cake, and gave one to Agatha. “You feed your baby, I feed mine. Okay?” She urgently whispered, “Don’t let him feed you. Always look to me for that ‘kay?”

Agatha nodded, taking the cake from her Dragonborn mother’s hands.

Taako knew he could groom both babies, that was good. He could sniff and worry and guard. That was... allowed. He could feed his baby and keep him arm and comfortable and that was very good. He could purr up a storm for the three of them. And if he saw even the slightest hint of the dangerous outsiders, he would occupy the entrance and threaten them until they went away.

*That was excellent.*

Agatha stayed glued to Mom’s lap or wrapped around her arm if a lap wasn’t available. The passages she read had said she had to make the belonging clear to a being whose mental capacity was diminished at best. Mom was cool with it, always keeping at least one limb wrapped around her.

The cote was comfortable, Agatha knew. She used it as a treehouse once or twice. The food was great - of course it was, Taako had made it. Much though she loved Mama Killian’s cooking, Taako was the best chef in one hundred worlds. He did actually make the best stuff. Even when Int and Wis were his current dump stats.

She got to chatter - quietly - with Angus about how their home lives were so much different now that they had a home. How worried they were about Fantasy CPS and the orphanage taking them back.

At that point, Taako wrapped himself around Angus and groomed him towards calm, purring as soothingly as he could. Mom Carey had her own Dragonborn purr, too, and rocked Agatha in her arms as she singsonged, “We burned the receipts, you can’t be returned, it’s going to be okay... Mom’s gotcha. Mo-om’s gotcha...”
Agatha held hands with Angus as the conversation turned to whispers. Finally, as the moon shone between the woven branches, Mama Killian strolled into their yard. “They’re gone. You’re all safe now.”

Taako sniffed the air, snorted, and murmured, “Danger...”

In the end, it was a sleepover and campout. Mama brought up pillows and blankets and some fairy lights, and snuggled with Mom while they both held Agatha safe between them.

Angus curled up safe in his Papa’s arm, with Taako purring in his ear.

It was a good night.

Chapter End Notes

This is not the end! There will be an all-new, all different collection of Tumblr stories in yet another anthology tomorrow! I have loads of prompts over on my Tumblr (@internutter) and there is no sign of them ever ending.

I’ll see you in the next one (I hope) or in my in-box. Whichever happens first.

All suggestions towards the next collections' name are welcome.

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