Fictober 2019 - Snippets

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Summary

The collection of snippets written during Fictober 2019. Each one is individually tagged if necessary. Overall tags might be added as well, if other characters/settings will make an appearance.

Notes

This Fictober I'm writing about Neve, both her regular self from "Of Mosters and Men" series and the one I played during the larp ;)

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning: No Archive Warnings Apply
Category: F/M, Gen
Fandom: Wiedźmin | The Witcher (Video Game), Wiedźmin | The Witcher - All Media Types
Relationship: OFC/OMC, Lambert (The Witcher)/Original Female Character(s)
Character: Original Female Character(s), Original Male Character(s), Lambert (The Witcher), Geralt z Rivii | Geralt of Rivia
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Series: Part 4 of Of Monsters and Men
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1. “It will be fun, trust me.”

(Regular Neve, no warnings apply)

Neve gave herself another once over in the dusty mirror, admiring the neckline of the dark green dress she had been given for the occasion. It felt like ages since the last time she wore something this pretty and she sincerely hoped that the garment would survive till the end of their evening outing.

Her eyes slid towards the other end of the room where Lambert sat on the bed, looking decidedly less impressed with his outfit.

‘Please save that expression for the nobles we’ll be meeting today’ she said, turning to face him. ‘If you look at them like this they might be less inclined to express how displeased they are with our presence. And you do look fine in that doublet’ the elleth added with a smirk, brushing her hair over her shoulder, revealing one pointed ear with and emerald earring dangling from it.

‘It’s fucking stiff. And it pinches…’ the witcher deadpanned, rolling his shoulders uncomfortably.

‘I can pinch your ass if that will make you feel better’ Neve snapped, walking over to the table were her daggers were laid out. ‘At least you are not wearing a corset’ she picked one of the knives up and bent to hide it under the layers of silk hanging around her hips.

She could feel his eyes following her movements.

‘This shirt will tear, if I move to fast…’

‘It most certainly will not’ she hid another knife. ‘These clothes are way sturdier than you might think.’

‘Speaking from experience?’ this time he wasn’t even being subtle about it, staring right at her exposed cleavage.

‘It is not my first time attending such an event for business, if this is what you are asking for.’

Out of the corner of her eye she could see him rolling his eyes.

‘Do tell.’

‘We don’t have enough time’ Neve grinned as she hid the last dagger. ‘Or beer for that matter. We need to leave soon, if we don’t want to offend the count.’

‘If he wants to have the job done he’d better not be fucking offended…’

‘Lambert, I am sure that you’ve already heard this, but it’s how the world fucking is. Nobles get offended by the slightest shit. And we are trying not to piss them off to much…’

‘Your dirty mouth don’t exactly fit with that pretty dress. And this guy could do with regular mercenaries...’

The elleth snorted, resting her hands against her hips.

‘We are still not sure about that, remember? Besides, you don’t mean to tell me that you would rather
go roll in the mud while hunting drowners or some shit.... The count also pays considerably more than a regular drowner contract…’

‘You don’t have to remind me’ Lambert pushed himself off the bed with ease that belied his complaining about the outfit. ‘Shall we? I’d rather be done with this shit already.’

‘It will be fun, trust me.’

Lambert scoffed and was opening his mouth for another scathing remark, but Neve chose this moment to push the door open and hook her arm through his elbow, effectively derailing his thoughts.

‘Really?’

‘Really. We’ll be introduced together. We might as well look the part.’

‘Do I get the chance to round you into some alcove if we are to look the part?’

The elleth rolled her eyes.

‘You may try; just remember that I do have plenty of sharp objects hidden on my person…’

‘Yeah, that… Where do you keep them anyway?’

2. “Just follow me, I know the area.”

(Witcher School (larp) Neve, mention of infertility)

The tutors at Kaer Tiele talked with them extensively about how their bodies will adapt and change as they prepare for and during the Trials themselves. Often without sparing them all the gory details of a failed transformation.

The girl sleeping next to her wept when her moonblood slowed down to a trickle and then did not come at all. Neve felt maybe a little disappointment. She would not dare to bring a child into the world that had shown her its ugliest face. To be quite honest, she was not even sure if she could – she tried plenty of times since the day she left the burning remains of her village behind and nothing ever came of it.

Considering that the possibility was now forever outside of her reach, it was better not to think about it too much.

There were other things too. She could work out longer without getting tired. The bruises faded quicker, though the fresh ones made that hard to notice at first. But the biggest changes came after the Trial of Grasses. She could see further and sharper than she ever thought possible. The sun no longer blinded her, and she could move in the dark forest with only the moon and the stars for guidance where she previously clung to a torch or her campfire. The first time she heard a fox sneaking through the undergrowth, it was so loud she mistook it for an approaching danger. And when she once given into the morbid curiosity and nicked her palm, within three days she couldn’t see where the cut was.

Discovering how much sharper her senses were now took up the better part of her first month on the path. Maybe she should have spent that time at Kaer Tiele and get used to it, but after what had transpired at the school she couldn’t get out of there fast enough. Most of her fellow adepts now
wished to kill elves as much as monsters and she would not stand for that.

She would never do that – she owed them too much. The king’s anger meant shit to her. And Hatzel deserved every stab that reached his wretched, little heart.

She’d only hoped that she would not have to stand against any of her fellow witchers to defend that belief of hers.

This time, when she heard someone approach, she at least did not flinch, and her hand remained planted against her belt. To be honest, she expected the confrontation since the moment when she realized that she was being observed.

‘I’m alone’ she cringed at her own voice. It’s been a while since she last used elder speech and she was never particularly skilled with it. ‘I do not wish to fight you.’

She could swear, she could hear a bowstring creaking somewhere above her head.

‘Well maybe we do’ came the reply and when she glanced in the direction of the voice, she could now see a silhouette hidden behind the bushes not even five feet away from her.

‘Humans are not welcome in these forests.’

‘Not all humans, my friend’ Neve allowed herself a smile, before the sudden realization wiped it off. ‘And I am no longer one.’

‘Lower your weapons; I know her.’

Now that was a surprise. It felt like ages have passed since the last time she heard that voice. She thought it was one of those things she had left in the past. And she was glad that it wasn’t true.

‘I didn’t think I would see you again, Gallar’ she said, turning towards the light rustle of approaching footsteps. ‘I’m glad to see you alive.’

He looked surprisingly well. Nothing like wounded, feverish ellon that told her about the torment Chiarro had endured at the hands of the Blue Stripes.

‘You look different’ she said with a smile as they slowly approached each other.

‘Says the woman looking at me with a pair of yellow eyes and wearing a sword across her back now’ he replied but clapped her on the shoulder with a smile.

Then his fingers slid towards the wolf’s head hanging against her breast.

‘We thought you were dead like the others…’

‘Not quite’ she squeezed his hand briefly. ‘Not yet. And I do plan on enjoying this new life of mine for a long while.’

‘And the first thing you do is coming back to the places from your old one?’

‘I had good reasons…’ Neve replied, turning serious. ‘Not sure how fast the rumors travel around here, but I witnessed some things that I think you should know about… And who’s better to tell you than someone you used to trust?’

‘You don’t give yourself enough credit’ Gallar replied. ‘I won’t be the only one happy to hear from you. Just follow me… I know the area.’
‘You forget that it’s not my first time travelling these forests.’

‘I remember everything’ the ellon scoffed in mock offence. ‘But the new recruits don’t know you, and I would hate for your witcher career to be cut short by a stray arrow.

Neve glanced towards the branches hanging above their heads.

‘Itchy fingers?’ she smirked. ‘Fine, lead the way then. Just let me grab my horse first.’

3. “Now? Now you listen to me?”

(Regular Neve, no warnings apply)

Neve watched as the body slid down the wall and slumped into the mud, leaving a wet smudge over the rough stones. It was supposed to be a simple, in and out, reconnaissance, but then of course everything just had to turn to shit. At least this guard died quickly and quietly, giving them a moment to think about their next step.

She wiped her dagger against her opponent’s trousers, before she glanced at Alven, standing maybe five paces away from her.

Yes, she was still tempted to shove the knife into his gut. Maybe if he’d allowed her to talk instead of trying to kick their way out then maybe they wouldn’t be in such a deep mess right now.

Alven was completely unbothered by the glare she was levelling him with. He even had the audacity to grin at her as he slid his knife into his boot.

‘That was quick. What’s next?’

It took Neve a moment to wrestle her slack jaw back into obedience.

‘Now?’ she hissed, taking a step towards him. ‘Now you are going to listen to me?’

She wanted to throttle him. Then again, she knew him for nearly twenty years now. One would think it was enough time to get used to his antics.

Sometimes she wondered, which deity she had offended to have her patience so endlessly tested.

Alven made his way over to her, leaning in close enough that she felt his breath against her cheek.

‘Of course. It’s always worth it’ he closed the distance completely and pressed a quick kiss against her cheek, before she could pull herself away. ‘I lost count of all the times when listening to you had saved my hide.’

‘It is a wonder how did you manage to survive on your own before you’ve met me’ Neve rolled her eyes at him, but she could barely keep the smile off her face.

‘I have no idea’ he muttered into her ear. ‘And I have no plans of ever trying that out again.’

4. “I know you didn’t ask for this.”

(Witcher School Larp Neve, fairly graphic description of injury)
The fire outside of the caves has died down to barely a few, glowing embers, but Neve didn’t bother with throwing more wood into it, simply staring at the sparkles rising into the air. It must have grown pretty late at this point, because, except for the single guard that sometimes crossed her line of sight, everybody else already headed back inside, seeking to get some sleep.

She didn’t think, she would risk lying down in some crowded corner. She didn’t think she was going to be sick, but her stomach was still roiling after knocking back a swallow earlier this evening. Her left forearm was expertly bandaged from her wrist up to her elbow and did not even hurt anymore, but she could agree that the deep gash that left her skin hanging loosely from her arm had been quite a gruesome sight.

She would have quite a scar to brag about had it not been so carefully stitched. She could feel the pull of the string at the slightest move of her wrist. Not that she particularly cared for boasting such an extensive scars.

But she would have to look for a new pair of vambraces when she’d get the chance, since her left one was torn to pieces by that damn fleder.

Fleder. Her first, serious kill. And a complete surprise. She was fully planning on spending the first few months on the path doing simple jobs, before searching for something more challenging. As much as she hated hunting ghouls and drowners they were less likely to rip her to shreds.

But she was glad that she went for the patrol with Gallar and few other elves. If she didn’t, they might have never made it back. And when the creature jumped at them from one of the trees, she didn’t really think about it before grabbing her sword and placing herself in its path.

It was an ugly creature, a bit similar to an overgrown bat, but almost entirely bald, with a pasty body and small beady eyes. But it did have a huge maw filled with rows of knife-like teeth and long, sharp claws on all four of its legs.

She didn’t remember much of the fight. It was fast, trying to jump on her and pin her to the tree or to the ground so she dodged a lot, jumping out of the way and attacking it from behind. Igni also seemed to do the thing of keeping it away. At some point she saw Gallar nocking an arrow, obviously intending to help her and yelled at him to stay away. She didn’t want the fleder to take interest in the elves; she wasn’t sure if she would be able to keep them safe if it did.

Then the vampire claws were tearing through her vambrace and clothing beneath it, ripping her forearm open.

Next thing she knew was herself standing over the twitching body of the fleder, foul blood sprayed across her face, the searing pain slowly spreading up her arm. She cut its head off to make sure that it was truly dead, before she allowed Gallar to wrap a strip of cloth around the wound.

The soft rustle of the steps pulled her back to the present, just before a heavy, warm blanket was dropped onto her shoulders. Gallar sat on the log next to her moments later.

‘Thank you’ she said wrapping the blanket around her shoulders properly. ‘But the weather is not all that bad…’

‘You are sitting out here wearing only a shirt’ he offered her a half-hearted smile. ‘I’m not quite sure if witchers can fall ill from a little cold, but I certainly feel the chills just by looking at you.’

Gallar rarely appeared tense or nervous, so his fidgeting was all the more obvious now. When she looked at his hands to see what he was playing with, Neve was more than a little surprised when she
saw a leather pouch he held.

And then came the irritation.

‘I know you didn’t ask for this’ the ellon started, clearly reading her expression. ‘But it’s the least we could offer you for your help today…’

‘You are allowing me to stay with you’ she interrupted him. The healer made sure that I won’t end up with a potentially debilitating scar at the very beginning of practising my trade. I am not going to take any money from you, when I know how much you need it…’

‘You will always be welcome here. And you mean to tell me that you won’t? You still need food and shelter for yourself and your horse. So stop insulting both of us and take the payment like a proper witcher would. Whatever is in that purse is not going to make any difference to us anyway.’

Neve muttered something under her breath, but extended her hand towards him. Gallar was glancing at her the entire time, looking smug.

‘Thank you’ she said at length, causing his smirk to split into a grin.

‘It’s good to see that the mutations improved your manners as well as reflexes…’

He laughed when she shoved him off the log.

5. **“I might just kiss you.”**

*(Regular Neve, no warnings apply)*

The inn was loud and much more crowded than usual. Except for the regular patrons and her company it was full of merchants and sailors that docked to the Novigrad’s shores today. Not everyone could fit into the “Golden Sturgeon” and some people simply preferred smaller and less know establishments. Mohar chose the “Three Quails” just for this reason – it was popular enough among the locals to supply them with fresh gossip, but still nondescript enough to avoid running into the authorities.

Neve leaned against the counter, glancing at the innkeeper pouring them another round, while most of her attention was on the room. So many different people in one place always sparked her curiosity… and was often a recipe for trouble.

The innkeeper cleared his throat and put the first tankards in front of her. She grabbed a handful of coins from her pouch and tossed them into his hand.

When she turned around, she came face to face with a man. He was dressed in fine clothes, though they were obviously worn for a while. He was wobbling and leering at her. She had to lean away to avoid spilling the beer all over his doublet.

‘Maybe I could help you with that?’ he asked. She could smell the wine on his breath and barely stopped herself from cringing.

‘No thank you’ she replied, taking a step to the side. ‘I am not alone you see…’

The merchant smiled, undeterred.
‘You could always ditch your current company…’ he reached out and ran his hand along her forearm. ‘And find a better one…’

Neve wondered briefly which part of her demeanor suggested that she was interested at all. Maybe he simply had a thing for elves.

Then again, he reeked of so much alcohol she was getting drunk by simply standing next to him.

She slowly placed the tankards o the counter; there was no point in wasting perfectly fine beer.

‘I must decline’ she turned back towards him and smiled politely. ‘Please leave. I don’t want any trouble…’

For him mostly.

The merchant grinned.

‘I can show you plenty of trouble…’

He trailed off when someone clapped him on the shoulder.

‘I believe that this lady said she’s is not interested’ Alven said calmly. ‘So, do us both a favor and leave, before they will have to carry you out.’

The merchant spun around to face him and for a split second, Neve thought that he will put up a fight, but he deflated just as quickly. She wasn’t surprised.

Alven rested his other hand over the dagger hanging at his hip and smiled. The merchant blanched and left quickly, almost tripping over his own feet.

‘I had him’ Neve muttered as Alven took the vacated spot in front of her.

‘I know’ his expression softened. ‘But you would have thrown this poor sod over the counter and then our gracious host would have to throw us out.’

‘And we wouldn’t want that’ the elleth smirked. ‘I think I should thank you for saving me’ she leaned towards him slightly.

‘At your service’ Alven reached and wrapped a strand of her hair around his finger. ‘Are you going to pay for my drinks?’

‘I was thinking about something else’ Neve leaned even closer until their noses almost touched. ‘But I might just kiss you now.’

And she did, before he could respond. She felt him smiling against her lips, his hand snaking towards the back of her head to press her closer.

‘Get the room you two!’ Borgh bellowed from their table in the far corner. ‘Where is the beer?!’

‘Or no!’ Oddo yelled from beside him. ‘I want to watch!’

‘Yeah, because finding a willing woman is beyond you…’ Neve glared at him before smiling slyly. ‘Unless you pay them.’

Oddo glared at her, ignored among the raucous laughter of the others.
Days 6-10

6. “Yes, I’m aware. Your point?”

(Witcher School (larp) Neve, no warnings apply)

Neve could feel the heat coming off of her in waves. She tried to not pay too much attention to that, or to the small clouds of steam that escaped her with every breath she took. She fixed her stance again, moving her feet further apart, before she launched into another series of cuts and blocks.

It was difficult to practice when there was no one at the receiving end of her blows. She had no idea how the older witchers could do it and make it look absolutely effortless.

She felt like she was constantly one step away from tripping over her own feet.

The morning was surprisingly cold for this time of the year, though she guessed it was to be expected this high up in the Mahakam Mountains. When she made her way to the clearing earlier, the grass was crunching beneath her feet, held by the thin layer of frost. Now that the sun was a little higher on the sky the cold was getting a bit more bearable, unlike the slippery ground beneath her feet.

At least it was a good way to practice her balance. She would need this, considering she had just damned herself to the life of hunting in places that will be much worse than this.

Her stitches tingled when she changed her grip on her sword.

Then she heard a rustle behind her and spun towards the sound.

‘You are leaving your left too open.’

Neve lowered her weapon and huffed.

‘Yes, I’m aware. Your point?’

Gallar grinned and approached her, hand resting against the hilt of his sword.

‘This is why you got wounded in the first place. Your new reflexes were the only thing that saved you from being gutted. Now if you don’t stop this, you will rip your stitches again and Aileth will not be pleased.’

‘The wound is almost healed. One ripped stitch is not going to change that…’

‘Are you going to look her in the eye and say the same thing?’

He apparently got his kicks out of ribbing her like that. Neve sighed and shook her head. It didn’t even bother her that much. If anything, it was a nice reminder of a simpler time.

‘How long were you watching me?’

‘Long enough to notice that you are more familiar with a sword now. But you could still use some practice…’

‘You don’t have to tell me that…’

‘Are you sure they did not let you out of the school too soon?’
Neve grimaced, not quite looking him in the eye.

‘Maybe… But I couldn’t stay there and I will have to deal with it somehow.’

‘Or you could find a sparring partner.’

‘Meaning you?’

The ellon shrugged.

‘Soon enough the snows will come and we will be confined to this valley anyway. You might as well stay. Use this time to train and hunt for local monsters… It will be much easier to pick out humans when we won’t be afraid of some creature attacking us from behind… And you are not as clumsy as you used to be…’

Neve stared.

‘Are you asking me to stay?’

‘It wouldn’t be much different than when you were living here before… But maybe you will be more useful now.’

Neve cursed under her breath.

‘Do you want to spar or no?’

‘I thought you would never ask… And your accent is still awful.’

Instead of responding she pointed her sword at his face.

7. “No, and that’s final.”

(Witcher School (larp) Neve, no warnings apply)

Neve did her best to keep her eyes away from the door, but she couldn’t wait to be out of the house and as far away from the village as possible.

She knew it was supposed to be part of her job – approaching villages and going into cities, searching for measly paid contracts that will hopefully allow her to keep herself and her horse fed. She was warned that the people she would meet on the path would often resent her or fear her and that it might lead to many tense situations she would have to work herself out of.

So far though, she supposed she could consider herself lucky. She purposefully travelled to places where she could find easy work like nekkers or drowners even if such contracts left her purse empty much faster than she would have liked. But this way, she had avoided coming across something that could easily kill her and never had to decline a job which was a habit she acquired back when she was posing as a merchant.

If the people will get the word that you are trustworthy, working with them will get easier. Not that she expected them to trust her faster that they were willing to trust a woman, travelling alone through the wilderness. She couldn’t remember his many times she was dubbed a witch. Or worse.

She had no doubt that being a witcher will only make the matters worse.

But so far, she was pretty pleased with her conduct and whatever came out of it.
Until today.

When she approached the village there was nothing unusual about it. A few houses tucked between some fields, a pond and a dark wall of the forest a little further, where the gentle hills turned steeper. Dogs, cats, chickens and even some goats wandered around, unbothered by the running kids or approaching horse. She wasn’t even sure if there would be any work for her here, but she went between the buildings regardless.

Then she came into what could only be described as a village’s main square and the first thing she spotted were Temerian Lillies. And several horses tied to fences and low branches.

She had a split second to think about turning about and leaving the place, when the door to one of the houses opened and the soldier poke his head out.

And this is how she ended in the company of captain Hugo Bolla and his men. Who, much to her dismay, had a job for her.

One that made her want to smash his face against the table, but she had somehow managed to listen to his blabbering with a fairly neutral expression.

‘I don’t get it. I’m offering you a decent amount of money and I’m certain that witchers can’t complain about the excess of it.’

‘We can’t’ Neve agreed. ‘But it’s not about the money. You mistake me for something I am not, captain.’

‘Oh? And why is that?”

‘Because witchers are made to kill monsters. Mindless creatures that crawl out from the dark and kill innocent people…’

‘See? There is little difference between what you described and those damn elves!’

‘But there is captain… Because no matter how you look at it, they can hardly be described as mindless.’

She could see a brief flash of irritation in his eyes.

‘It is still a no, then?’

‘There are rules I have to follow. And those rules forbid me from killing creatures that could be otherwise reasoned with… So yes, it is a no. And that’s final. Unless the village elderman has a problem with drowners or other creatures that I can help him solve.’

For a moment she thought that captain Bolla will continue to argue with her, so when his expression changed from annoyance to disgust, all she felt was relieved.

She apparently travelled faster than rumours did. Or someone chose to keep the events from Kaer Tiele securely under wraps for now.

She stood up at the same time he did.

‘That won’t be necessary’ he said courtly. ‘We had this area under control, and we can handle anything.’

‘Of course,’ she did her best not to sneer. ‘I will go some place else. And I will make sure not to
interfere with the business of temerian army.’

‘That would be much appreciated’ he dismissed her with a nod.

> ‘I wouldn’t think about it.’

Neve managed a shallow bow, before she turned back and returned to her horse.

The captain didn’t have to know that she was planning to do just that.

8. **“Can you stay?”**

(Regular Neve, no warnings apply)

The rain was hammering against the roof of the inn. If she would bother to take a look outside of the window, Neve would see the streets of Oxenfurt, turning into the rivers of mud in the downpour.

Instead the elleth moved their shoes closer to the fire and then checked on her jacket hanging from the back of the chair. They were both completely soaked through by the time they made it to the inn and it was only because the innkeeper knew them well that he had managed to find them a room.

She was fairly certain that it was one of his own and she was all that much more grateful for it. Elves rarely could expect similar kindness from people these days. Someone else would have probably kicked them out back onto the street.

She put some more wood into the fire and ran her hands through her hair, trying to detangle the wet mess, when the creak of the bed frame pulled her attention back to her companion.

‘If you move another inch I will bind you to the bed.’

A breathy laugh was her first response, before it descended into a fit of coughing. Neve pushed herself to her feet and walked over to Alven, who was watching her with a smirk, despite the glassy look in his eyes and the thin sheen of sweat covering his forehead.

‘Normally I would think about it as an invitation’ he made a move to sit up, but Neve’s hand was on his shoulder in the next instant, pressing him down.

‘I said no moving’ she said gently. ‘I don’t want you to start bleeding all over Albart’s sheets… again.’

‘Getting stabbed in the gut will have that effect on you…’

‘That’s why not getting stabbed is preferable. Then we would’ve only had the fever to deal with.’

Alven grimaced.

‘Why are you fine anyway? You were as soaked as me all the time…’

Neve placed her hand against his unnaturally warm cheek and smiled.

‘You are wounded, so it’s obvious you would be more prone to fall ill in such a shitty weather. Besides, I survived a smallpox outbreak when I was still an apprentice in the Melitele temple. I would say that a simple cold is not going to harm me.’

‘Lucky you…’
'Remind me of that later and I will tell you about how I was burying the other less fortunate girls... but you should try to rest now. You are not going anywhere anytime soon.'

'And what about you?'

'I will go downstairs and try to whisk away something to eat... Maybe I will go check on the horses. The stables were as crowded as the inn and I want to make sure...'

'Can you stay?'

Neve’s smile softened at that, before she leaned down and placed a quick kiss against Alven’s sweaty temple.

'Unfortunately we both need food, but I think I can pass on the horses tonight... Albart’s boy seemed like a lad who knows what he is doing...'

'Good' Alven breathed letting his eyes fall shut. 'Just don’t take too long...'

'Just go to sleep and you won’t even notice me gone’ with the last pat onto his shoulder, Neve turned on her heel and quietly left the room.

9. **“There is a certain taste to it.”**

*(Regular Neve, no warnings apply)*

Neve pressed her lips against the rim of her tankard and tried to keep her expression straight as she watched Geralt chew at the piece of meat they had been served for a supper. She spat her own back out almost instantly, before feeding it to the dog, lurking beneath the table.

Meanwhile, the witcher still chewed, seemingly unbothered. Neve had no idea whether she should be impressed by the feat or grossed out.

It certainly begged the question, what else he was capable of eating. And she wasn’t sure if she wanted to know the answer.

Geralt finally managed to swallow and immediately reached for his beer to wash the meat down.

‘There is a certain taste to it...’

She failed to keep her composure then and snorted into her beer.

A few patrons turned to glare at them, but Geralt’s gaze was enough to keep the villagers from speaking up.

‘Well if you mean, that it tastes like a huge mistake, then I am willing to agree. We shouldn’t have come here.’

‘And pass on the chance of a proper meal?’

‘Define proper’ the elleth grimaced. ‘Because the next time we will have a choice between some shady inn and hunting, I will go get us dinner myself...’

‘Haven’t you said the opposite... yesterday?’

Neve faked a laugh. Geralt simply watched her, unbothered.
Yesterday, I didn’t know that an inn can stoop so low… I can understand that the current… situation in Velen can be bad for business, but it doesn’t mean that they have to serve us food that tastes like an overcooked cat.’

Geralt blinked.

‘I had no idea you know how a cat tastes.’

Neve almost choked on her beer, but the surprise was short lived.

‘You mean to tell me that you don’t?’

‘I am of the opinion, that anything can be eaten if you are desperate enough’ the witcher took a sip of his beer. ‘But I can’t say that I was ever desperate enough to try out cats…’

Well, that at least answered a part of her question.

‘I like jesting as much as anyone, but we were supposed to talk about awful food… and I do like cats.’

‘If we keep doing it, the innkeeper will throw us out’ Geralt remarked, glancing into the pitcher standing between them. With a sigh, he pulled himself to his feet. ‘And he won’t give us anymore beer. I’m sure you wouldn’t want any of that.’

‘No, I wouldn’t’ Neve replied with a grin. ‘While I don’t really mind eating a questionably roasted rabbit, I’d rather avoid sleeping in that mud as often as I can. Especially, since I know now, what exactly can crawl out of that mud…’

‘We can discuss merits of sleeping outside if you want…’

‘With pleasure, but I’d rather wait with that for more beer…’

She could have sworn that Geralt has smirked, before he turned around and made his way to the counter.

10. “Listen, I can’t explain it, you’ll have to trust me.”

(Witcher School (larp) Neve, no warnings apply)

Neve laid flat on the ground, face pressed against the layer of wet leaves. She squeezed herself beneath some bushes, looking for cover and hoped that her dash for safety went unnoticed.

About twenty yards away, several men crowded the narrow path winding between the trees.

The first men she came across since the village went up in flames.

And they were soldiers too. Armed to the teeth, just like those she saw then.

The man at the head of the column, studied a map, snapping at two others behind him, when they tried to explain him something. She didn’t have to think too hard to understand what they were looking for.

For several moments she observed them, listening to her heart pounding in her chest.

It could be her chance. She could have approached them, lie about being lost and maybe they would have brought her back to the nearest city.
Or they could be just like the soldier that caught her in the hut.

And there was a camp of completely unaware, mostly wounded elves nearby. They didn’t stand the chance if the soldiers would find them, even if she knew that they would fight to their last.

She didn’t want to see another slaughter.

She owed at least this much for saving her hide and keeping her from starving all those weeks.

Very slowly, trying her hardest to remain undetected, Neve crawled backwards, until she was sure that she was hidden by the dense undergrowth.

And then she ran.

She tripped over a hidden root, and braced herself against the tree, scraping her palms. It was better then making noise. She didn’t want to lead the soldiers into the camp with her floundering.

She was glad that the first person she saw in the camp was Chiarro, though after she almost barrelled into him, the others were quickly drawn to the commotion.

‘What happened beanna?’ the ellon asked gripping her shoulder to steady her.

‘We need to move camps. Quickly…’ she breathed out, but it seemed to only deepen his confusion.

‘You would have to be a little more specific than that’ Gallar drawled, coming to stand beside Chiarro.

Neve grimaced. She knew the ellon didn’t like her, but it was not the time to make things difficult.

‘Listen, I can’t explain it right now, so you will have to trust me…’

She didn’t really expect to have a dagger pressed against her neck for her efforts.

‘Trust is earned, not given’ Gallar spat, ignoring Chiarro who tried to pull him away. ‘Not to the likes of you…’

Neve didn’t flinch, not even when she felt the blade biting into her skin. She lost everything she could over the last few weeks.

Her life would be just another thing on the list.

‘Fine’ she sneered, glaring at him. ‘Then you are welcome to sit here and wait until the soldiers I saw in the forest will figure out how to use a map… I’m sure you will survive through another massacre…’

She could see a brief flash of surprise in Gallar’s eyes before he withdrew the knife.

‘What soldiers?’ Chiarro asked. ‘Where?’

‘Maybe a mile away from here on the path’ she shrugged. ‘At least forty men, fully armed. They can be there soon and I don’t think that you stand a chance against them as you are’ she finished, glancing at the several elves sitting around the fire.

Anything to avoid Chiarro’s piercing gaze.

‘And you are telling us this why?’
She lifted her eyes to meet his.

‘They didn’t pull me out of a burning village. You did. It’s the least I could do…’

The ellon tilted his head to the side, apprising her.

‘They could lead you back to your people.’

‘My people were burned and slaughtered’ she could feel the heat rising into her cheeks, but she couldn’t avert her gaze. ‘I’d rather take my chances with you!’

Chiarro smiled though his gaze remained inquisitive.

‘So be it’ he finally said, before turning to the other elves. ‘Pack up the camp. We are leaving…’

‘Are you serious?!’ Gallar interrupted him. ‘You are going to just listen to her?!!’

‘She could have led them here. And she didn’t have to come back, but she did. That’s enough for me’ the ellon grabbed her by the arm ad pulled her towards the fire. ‘Come, beanna. Let’s see if you’ve made the right choice.’

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