What Matters In The End

by Golden506

Summary

She knows she should be angry. She isn't. It's okay. She has them.

A thick sea of trolls mills slowly across dusty, flattened dirt trails and spills out onto patches of grass between buildings and stands, talking and laughing with their friends and quadrants. Wrappers, sticks, and scraps of other products line the edges of each path or near the corner of a wall, kicked haphazardly out of the way by the crowd. Vendors sell candied grubs, frazzled saccharine fluff candy, and enough elongated meat products to kill a seadweller.

New tactic, you think. Assassination via excessive loaf housed protein tubes.

Your moirail and Tegeri walk beside you, the former suspiciously regarding a packet of oinkbeast rinds while the latter waxes eloquent about the poor form of a pair of dueling ceruleans they had just passed by. You let his ranting fade into the background and observe your surroundings, a habit formed from years of silent observation and caution in preparation for the kill. The trolls around you walk casually, chatting loudly in their own groups, all with weapons sheathed and all cerulean or lower. No purplebloods, for which you are thankful - the convention is rowdy enough without dozens of subjugglators wandering around in a stupor of rage, faygo, or most likely both. Occasionally a scream erupts in the distance, but considering the nature of the convention you aren’t all that worried.

“Are you sure I can eat this?” asks the alien hesitantly, holding up the oinkbeast rinds. You laugh slightly. “It’s just oil-heated salinated oinkbeast. Same as the elongated meat products. If you can eat them, you can eat that.” you answer reassuringly. They’d yet to find an Alternian dish they couldn’t eat - plenty they wouldn’t, but nothing they’d tried had hurt them - but they still ask nervously every time. Considering your words for a second, they revert back to eyeing the package warily and reading the labels again.
And then the world explodes around you.

Trolls scream and scatter as a fully grown cholerbear, covered in a garish smattering of multicolored blood, charges through the crowd. The beast roars, tossing trolls and detritus broken off from the buildings it had smashed through high in the air, to come spinning to the ground with a crunch. You start running, and scream at your companions to do the same. You risk a glance behind you, and you see your alien moirail.

Not running.

Instead, you see them yell and throw the oinkbeast rinds at the cholerbear currently bearing down on a small, terrified jadeblood girl.

You try, you really do, to comprehend the pure, visceral stupidity of it but it simply does not compute. Your think pan tries to reject the information. No, they did not just intentionally draw the intention of a cholerbear. That is not a thing that just happened. Not even they would do something like that for some young, errant jade they don’t even know. You would assume it was one of their numerous friends, but they usually mention the spoils of their incessant obsession to you, at least in passing.

What you cannot deny, much as you would wish to, is that the cholerbear has turned around, staring down your moirail, seemingly just as shocked as you at their actions. And after a fraction of a second that seems to take years, it starts running. And just as fast, you are running at them. A thick, heavy blade in your hands - you wonder when you drew it - as you shove the alien behind you and brace for impact.

The last thing you feel is the crunch of your blade being driven deep into the cholerbear and a shock of pain as your body is lifted off the floor.

“Tegeri!” you scream, running over to Polypa’s figure lying prone in the dirt - *not her body, her figure, she’s fine, she’s fine* - and kneeling next to her. You’re vaguely aware of shouting and a weak, sputtering growl as the last inches of life drain out of the cholerbear, of Tegeri standing beside you and speaking to you in a terse hiss, of strangers in the scattered crowd looking on at the mere oliveblood who just killed a cholerbear and her strange alien moirail, but it’s all distant and faded. Your attention is on Polypa now.

You turn her over and inspect her. You sigh in relief as you detect the faint rise and fall of her chest as she breathes, the weak but steady thrum of her pulse when you feel her wrist. Alive she may be, but you can tell she’s badly hurt. Scuffs and scrapes cover her body, a deep angry olive. Blood is dripping from a long cut on her shoulder - it must have scored her with an errant tooth or claw - and one of her legs is bent at an angle even you can tell it shouldn’t be.

“-is even wrong with you, I’ve half a mind to strike you down here and now, but we’ve got to get her out of here and soon.” says Tegeri as you snap back into reality. He’s right, she can’t stay here now. You can do this, you refuse to be a *complete* failure of a moirail. Nodding shakily at him, you circle around Polypa, before grabbing her under her arms and trying to lift her.

You promptly fail and let her drop back to the ground. A flash of guilt surges through you as Tegeri sighs and hauls her up to throw her over his shoulder; you are the worst moirail, it is you. You walk attentively behind him as he trudges briskly off, dedicating yourself to keeping an eye on the crowd behind you and sort of just. Supporting her legs. Pointlessly.

You don’t even really know why you did it. You saw that one jadeblooded girl - some adventurous
young auxiliatrix who snuck out of the caves - and you knew instantly that something about her was different. You don’t know what, but something. And before you knew what you were doing, the cholerbear was turning.

The cholerbear was running.
Polypa was running.

The cholerbear was dying.

Polypa was dying. Polypa was careening broken and bloodied through the air. Because of you.

And you can’t even find the strength to bring her to safety on your own. Bitter guilt rises up within you. You failed her every step of the way. You hurt the one person in the world that you care about more than anyone else, because you aren’t good enough. She did what she did for you. And all you can do to pay her back is follow Tegeri like a lost puppy and worry.

Worthless.

Your eyes feel sluggish and sticky as you open them, a blurred, painfully bright cacophony of colors greeting you as you awaken. Something is wrong, you don’t know what because you can’t think, can’t remember, but there was danger and fear and resolve and It was charging right towards them.

It was charging right towards them, and there was no way they could dodge it. It was massive and fast and terrifying and where the fuck is your moirail.

You shoot upright - at least, you try to, your weakened muscles only lifting yourself some few inches off of what feels like a pile beneath you before falling back with a quiet gasp. Your body feels like one gigantic bruise, a dull ache throbbing throughout you. You can barely move right now, let alone fight off an attacker. Fear begins to set in, you haven’t felt this helpless in sweeps. You can’t defend yourself and you can’t defend them.

“Polypa?” a quiet, hesitant voice calls out. You hear shuffling footsteps as you force your eyes to focus on the thing kneeling in front of you, until you recognize the figure of your moirail.

They’re alive.
They’re unhurt.
They’re okay.

Overpowering relief courses through you(they’re okay you were so scared and so worried but they’re okay), but you quickly notice something. While you’ve bore witness to a wide variety of emotions on your moirails expressive, stark face the current combination of despondence and guilt is new to you - your bloodpusher twists just looking at it. A heavy second passes before the dam breaks.

“I’m sorry, I - fuck - I shouldn't have thrown that, I shouldn’t have just stood there, I should’ve run or fought or I don’t even know, but I didn’t and you - you… I’m the worst moirail, I’m so sorry.” Tears appear in the corner of their eyes and threaten to spill as they continue to talk. “I wasn’t good enough, I’m not good enough, I’m supposed to help you and protect you and I want to so much but all I did was hurt you because I can’t-”
Whatever they were going to say is lost as you pull them into a hug, squeezing them tightly against you despite the protest of your abused muscles. They tense in surprise at first, but relax cautiously as you shoosh them and rest your head on their shoulder.

You know that you should be angry at them. Angry at yourself, even. They drew the attention of a cholerbear, intentionally, and couldn’t even bring themselves to run when it turned on them(Not that it would have helped.) And you know full well that what you did was the stupidest, riskiest thing you’ve ever done.

It was absolutely idiotic and you are, quite frankly, utterly unable to give a fuck. You were so scared, but it’s okay. They’re alive, they’re unharmed, they’re warm and soft against you, and they’re yours.

“It’s okay.” you whisper gently. “It doesn’t matter.”


They look even more shameful at that, and as you think of them bringing you back here, guilt consuming them as they replay every decision they made and worrying that you would die, that if you lived you wouldn’t forgive them, and in that moment you are painfully pale for them. You pap them gently, your hand lingering briefly on their face before you draw it back towards you as you lean back on the pile.

“I was worried.” you admit. “Scared even. Didn’t know if it got you.” Their hand trails down your cheek, and you relax further at the touch. “But honestly. As long as you’re okay, I don’t care. I know I should be angry. But I’m just glad you’re here.” They smile slightly at that, and you pull them weakly onto the pile with you. “Pale for you.” you murmur, to which they snuggle closer and say the same to you.

The Polypa of only a perigee ago wouldn’t even know what to make of this. She’d wonder what could possibly justify the actions you took today. Why you would even think to risk everyone for someone else. She wouldn’t think of it for long, though. She’d process the information, wonder briefly as to how, and move on. To another job, another mark.

It wasn’t a bad life. You weren’t sad, not so much as you were simply distant. Nonchalant. You had Tegeri, which helped, but he wasn’t your moirail. For the most part, you were an ungrounded drifter. You wonder if you could ever go back to your old life. The habits would come easy enough, you suppose, but things would never be the same. With them, you’re warm and safe and happy and you know that they are too. Whatever else may come of it it is worth it for that.

You have them, and they're what matters.

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