
Divinity Rescue Corps
a cozy litRPG harem
by Nolan Locke

DIVINITY RESCUE CORPS

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Chapter the first

by

NOLAN LOCKE

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Chapter 1- This Is Christopher

Now

The smile that came to my face came on easy. The sort of smile you'd have as a kid, and some of us as teenagers.

The weather: gorgeous. Cotton candy clouds, more literally than figuratively, drifting along through the sky in powder blue, soft yellow, pink, lavender. Sun cheerfully shining. Grass soaking up the rays and just seeming to sing.

The butterflies: everywhere. Some of them landed on my arms, shoulders and head. They didn't seem to mind the taste of me. All colors, all sizes, some zipping around fast and others lazily flapping their way to wherever they needed to go.

And the flowers…

Like I said, easy smile.

In the distance, a canopy of trees stretched out, but these were trees tall and… I don't know how to explain it. Free? The trees seemed to be dancing, the way they grew up.

I couldn't put my finger on it at first, until I realized that every other tree I'd seen was desperate. Locked in a struggle for sunlight. Pushing against their neighbors. In conflict with the vines who wanted to climb up and strangle them.

I'd gone canoeing a couple of times before my mom got sick, and a whole bunch of trees on the side of the river were leaning out over the river, trying to balance between grabbing up more sunlight and the chance that they'd pull free of the dirt and fall over. They all grew in a bow shape, a smooth arc upward. Trees were kind of uniform: they grew toward the sun.

Not these trees. These trees seemed to boogie. Hip thrust out. Boughs off to one side, or like they were dabbing. I'd never seen anything like this, and it was both strange and *amazing*.

Then there were the *mushrooms*.

"Christopher?"

"Hm? Oh, sorry." I turned back to Regina, who was grinning like she knew exactly was happening in my mind.

Regina stood next to me and took a great sniff of clear alien air. Her hands tightened around the big straps of her hiking backpack. She was carrying a load and a half, essentially, on account of my particular shortcoming. Still, it didn't seem to bother her, having an extra twenty pounds of gear in her bag. She twirled in the meadow, surrounded by the butterflies and the cotton candy clouds and the boogie forest, grinning.

“You don’t need to be sorry, Christopher,” she said. “Not one little bit. This place… it’s infectious. It’s really something, isn’t it?”

Her question seemed to give me permission to look around me yet again, let my gaze wander. The sky wasn’t blue. The leaves on the trees weren’t exactly green. Some of those trees had what looked like golden leaves. Others had teal-like leaves. And… did that tree not have leaves at all, but large spheres made of summer green sprouting directly from the boughs?

“It’s… amazing.”

Remember this moment, because things get a little dark. Not dark in the here and now. If nothing else, the slight shimmer to the sky, the leaves glittering as they fluttered in the breeze, the sweet tang of the air, and the butterflies seeming to appraise me as they drifted by made all the suffering worth it.

Super worth it.

This is Christopher remembering his sense of wonder.

Chapter 2- Getting Fired Up

Before

Blinking several times, I ran my hands up over my face. And sighed. My boss had the good grace to look abashed.

"I wish it didn't have to be this way, Chris," he said. It actually *didn't* have to be this way. This was a choice being made by a guy I previously thought was pretty cool. I'd gamed with the guy and streamed that several times. He'd been a good teammate at the time. "I just… the customers are uncomfortable with your conduct. We need someone who's going to greet folks with a smile and a laugh."

I stood, slowly, still blinking like I maybe expected the universe to be its actual self if I could just clear out the filmy stuff. Then, limping like I do and still attempting to blink the reality out, I shuffled out of the game store.

This asshole would not see me cry.

"I'll get another job," I muttered. "I'll go save the universe somewhere."

For a guy with pretty bad scoliosis caused by osteomyelitis and further messed up by growth plate injuries from a bad childhood breakage, this was a pretty tall order. Save the universe? Superheroes need to be able to run and jump for that kind of

activity. Christopher and running did not get along. Jumping was out of the question.

On the other hand, I was going to get another job, and that job was for saving the universe. For now though, it was a painful and slow walk of shame out the door, not looking for a couple of extra pity points from my ex-boss. I didn't need that, even though I did need a job.

This is Christopher getting fired.

Chapter 3- Tweedle Dee

Now

"I don't get it," I told Regina.

Her auburn hair was definitely full of more luster and bounce than on the other side of the portal. It seemed less brown and more reddish orange. Her eyes weren't that clear mountain pool blue either. I'm pretty sure they had little flecks of purple in there as well.

The sky looked like it had some patches of slickness to them, fuzzing to an iridescent rainbow in certain places. And as the trees grew closer and clearer, I could see that I was correct: some of them didn't have leaves at all, but perfectly spherical… what? Bulbs? Bulbs seems like a decent name for them.

And the trees all seemed to have faces.

"Oh?" Regina asked, then broke into a wide smile again when she turned back. She wasn't wearing her glasses any longer. Her freckles were more pronounced. And… they were changing color as well. "Oh, right, of course. You know, when I first set foot here, I had the same thought. I couldn't make sense of anything I was seeing, I wanted to spend hours and hours looking at every individual thing. I had a million questions." Another laugh bubbled up out of her. "At least a million!"

She hadn’t seemed this talkative on the other side. I didn’t mind, really. It was a lot better than what I was used to, in my old life.

“And don’t you worry, good buddy, we’ve got you covered. You’re going to have all million of those questions answered, even while you end up with five million more questions. We haven’t even done any of the system intro shit yet. Whoopsie doodle!”

“What?” I asked, laughing.

“We’re supposed to be good ambassadors here, rookie,” she said. “That starts with language, you know? Be the good you want to see in the world. Which is how I say fiddlesticks instead of, you know, fuckity fucky fuck, and I say fudgesicles and awww sheep dip and fluff like that. So now I go fluff that! And sheep on a shingle! And cheese ’n rice!”

“Jeez o’ pizza!” I blurted.

We shared a laugh.

“There you go. I guess that’s your first lesson here. Good ambassadors, be the good you want to see in the world.” She reached over and took my hand. I stared at it, surprised by the contact but at the same time not so surprised. I grew warm at her touch, and realized I could see just a hint of her bra under the pink tank top she had on.

I told myself not to blow it, not to get hard. Don’t do it, Christopher, I told myself, grinning like an idiot.

There wasn’t anybody else around. We were in a completely different world. We could… if she wanted to…

Okay I was growing hard already. Doesn’t take long when you’re under thirty and only not a virgin by a technicality.

Regina was a beautiful human, who was growing more beautiful by the second. She had the kind of personality I wanted to bathe in. I could watch her smile and listen to her giggle forever, at this moment. And if she wanted to give Christopher a little extra lesson before we got to the city, I wasn’t going to stop her. I wasn’t in any position to hit on her, though. The way I was right here and now, she was so far out of my league I was surprised I could even form a coherent sentence.

“Come on, we’re almost to the best part.”

“We are?”

“Oh yes,” she said. “I can’t believe I’ve been away from him for a whole month. This was the hardest.” She started pulling on my arm, and although my legs protested at moving this fast, we broke into a jog through the tall grass.

Oh. It made perfect sense that she had someone, and it was further proof that I shouldn’t have even considered what it would be like to be with her.

“Tweedle Dee!” she called out, sing-song. “Tweedle Dee, where *are* you?”

Did I say *perfect* sense? It suddenly made a lot less sense.

We rushed through the grass faster and faster, with her skipping and jumping up in the air to get a slightly better view, calling out.

And then someone answered. No, some*thing.*

“Tweedle DEEEEEE!” she squealed in delight.

A tawny fox-like creature leapt out of the grass and tackled Regina backwards. I was sent sprawling as well, and only caught flowers amongst its blurry form.

I got up onto my elbows, saving my misshapen legs a bit of ache, and just watched them. She was glowing, while the creature licking her face and yipping with glee was… the most adorable thing I’d ever seen in my life.

It was like a fox, but flowers sprouted out of its brown ears, and where its tail should’ve been was instead a garland made entirely of flowers. Or rather, where its *tails* should’ve been, plural. It had at least five I could see, flicking and wagging.

Eventually Regina got to her feet cradling Tweedle Dee and gushing to him in baby speak about how much she missed him, and how she felt terrible every moment they were apart, and she would apply

to have no R&R going forward. They nuzzled noses before Regina put Tweedle Dee down onto the grass and stretched out her hand.

"Come on, we've got to get you to the city, get you set up with your own companion."

"Wait…" I glanced past her to the creature, who was looking up at me with bright, intelligent eyes and padding along next to her. It seemed to know what I was thinking, and its tongue lolled out happily. It made a yipping bark, as if to tell me, "That's right, you're now the luckiest monkey flubber on the planet."

I ignored the protesting legs and headed forward, toward my own Tweedle Dee.

This is Christopher falling in love with life again.

Chapter 4- WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTINUE?

Before

I died.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTINUE? the game asked on screen.

Sometimes you play the oldies. You play for nostalgia. You play to enjoy something simpler.

For a guy like me, for whatever reason, this hasn't worked on his streaming channel. Not yet at least, but there's a chance. After all, there are these two guys playing all these SNES games on their channel and it's making enough for them to live comfortably. But these games were pretty damn hard. Honestly, the ones from the 90's are practically impossible without cheat codes.

Christopher does not do cheat codes.

Would I like to continue?

"Nah," I told the game, but let the timer run out on the screen. I didn't have the energy to deal with this today. I didn't have the energy to deal with a lot of things lately.

"You're terrible at this," someone commented on the stream.

"You know it," I told him, but the commenter was already gone, bringing my viewers down to zero.

Terrible at this game? Terrible at streaming? Terrible at life? Maybe some combination of two, or

maybe all three.

I switched the stream off, got my broken ass up off the couch slowly, and made my way over to the door.

This is Christopher’s hobby failing to generate any additional income.

Chapter 5- Ranger, Not A Teacher

Now

Regina looked at me, a gleam of delight in her eye. "You want to meet him?"

I glanced down at the creature. It wasn't quite a fox and definitely wasn't a bouquet of flowers. It was, however, adorable all the way through. "Absolutely."

She bent and got her face in his. "Dee, this is Christopher. He's our new recruit. We're going to take him over to the castle and get him registered, then we'll escort him to the academy."

A happy go lucky expression appeared on Dee's face, his tongue lolling.

"Just let him sniff you," she told me. I first had to sit, because my legs really don't like me hunkering down. After that was as awkward as could possibly be, and after I made noises like an octogenarian, I put my hand out.

Dee sniffed at my hand, then yipped twice. The sound was filled with pure joy, and I couldn't tell you how I knew that. I just knew. Dee leaned into my hand and allowed me to scratch at her head and ears, and the flowers sprouting inside and around her ears.

"Um… do they, are they real?"

She nodded. "They're real. Dee is partly mammalian and partly plant, so he photosynthesizes and also consumes food. The working theory right now is that the photosynthesis is for emergency purposes. He usually eats like a horse."

Dee liked the scratches, just like any doggo, so I went a little overboard, getting behind his forelimbs and over his back. He then went for the belly scratches too. The fur was incredibly soft there, long and white. He felt pure and magical. He was definitely the latter.

Regina snorted laughter. "Oh yeah, he'll just lay there the whole day if you keep doing his belly like that."

"How did you… are there more like him?"

She waved her hand up and down. “Yes and no. There will be a lot of fox-like creatures, but some of them will be part fish, some will be part lightning, some will be part steel or bronze, and then you’ll get the weird ones.”

“Weird like what?”

“Part fox and part whimsy. Part fox and part strategy expert. Fox with wings. Foxicorn. Void fox.”

I laughed, watching Dee’s leg twitch with each soft belly scratch. Imagining a unicorn fox and then trying to wrap my head around what a void fox might be was both hilarious and difficult. “I guess I’d better get to the academy and start learning everything from teachers and books, in classrooms.”

She grinned. “I confess to being pretty terrible at explaining things. It’s why I’m a Ranger and guide instead of a teacher.”

I nodded.

“Any idea what you’ll end up being?”

“Absolutely none.”

Although I’d tried to get some of the reading done before I made it through the portal, there was a lot to prepare for my family. A division of income. I’d be making more money than I’d ever imagined, and that money wasn’t coming to the new world with me. Instead I set up auto deposit, then auto divided it out between Sarah, who would get a monthly stipend with the message ‘For Brayden from Toph’ and my folks would get most of the rest. They’d get a similar message. A tiny bit was staying, and would be headed for managed stock buys through a company Johnson introduced me to.

So long as money went to my parents and my sister, great.

And as I’d watched, Dick Johnson put over two hundred thousand dollars into my account as a signing bonus. “As a show of good faith.”

I just goggled at him.

For the rest, there was also a scary bit about signing a living will, buying up some premium life insurance, and so much more that it

became a dizzying headache. By the time they brought me to the portal location and into the portal room, I'd been taking regular naps after hours in the office. Finally, after mountains of paperwork and non-disclosure agreements, they went into the final stretch: what I should pack (basically nothing), and what I could expect in the other world. The details were left vague. "Everyone's experience is different," the HR person said. "You will see magic."

Here, Dick Johnson returned. "We've left it vague for several reasons," he said. "One, most people don't believe it. Two, you've already signed all these non-disclosure agreements… the less you know, the less you might distribute around the internet… not that anyone would believe you, but we don't like to take those sorts of chances. Three, it kind of spoils the fun."

I just nodded. "Oh… kay. The fun?"

"The fun."

This is Christopher rediscovering fun.

Chapter 6- The Before Times

Before

I peered down at my mom in the hospital bed.

"How you feeling?"

"Heyyyy buddy," she said, and gave me a vague smile. Her motions were loose and barely controlled. Just pulling her head away from facing the window and over toward me looked like it took a lot of effort. She was blinking at me, too.

"We have her on some pretty intense opioids right now," the nurse said. "She was in a lot of pain earlier."

"I thought she was getting better," I said.

I spotted the vase I'd given her, which had held the flowers I periodically replaced. Or at least, I spotted a shard of that vase and a few specks of dirt in the corner of the room. They must have swept it up after. After she threw it? She could've bumped it… but all the way across the room?

"She is getting better, son. It's going to be a long trek, and sometimes there'll be some dips down before she gets back up."

"All right. But she is going to get back up, right? This is temporary, right?"

"Your mom's going to be fine."

This is Christopher's life spiraling out of control.

Chapter 7- A Hint of Divinity

As I scratched beneath the chin of a creature with soft flowers in its ears and multiple tails, I got it. Why spoil this kind of amazing surprise? Of course you would never.

Regina indulged me for a little while longer, allowing Tweedle Dee to roll around on his back and make the most adorable noises of appreciation."Shall we?"

Tweedle Dee hopped obediently up as though he fully understood. I wondered how much he did or didn't understand, and added it to the list of a million bajillion questions that I couldn't ask and Regina would be terrible at answering.

Who discovered the portal? Did the Chinese, the Russians, or the French have portals of their own? What was the purpose of us coming here? How often did creatures like Tweedle Dee manifest out of magic? Could I eventually get a companion creature like it?

I dearly hoped the answer was yes. My mother was allergic to dogs and so was I, and they'd always considered that the last nail in the coffin for pet ownership. It wasn't a discussion that I could have with them. The only times I ever brought it up, it was swiftly shot down. No dog.

But could I have a foxicorn? Or a fox Pegasus, like a fox with wings? Or a fox made of ice?

My mind spun off and away from the other questions that I'd considered, and settled on this one.

Maybe I could have something even bigger than a fox. Maybe there were giraffes and hippos and elephants with batches of crystals growing out of them, or psychic ostriches.

I'd gotten to my feet, slowly of course, and hobbled after her when she set out with her purposeful strides, carrying half the contents of my pack like they were nothing. For a time the minutes passed in companionable silence. I marveled at all the things; she

glanced back at me periodically and grinned at the expression on my face. I must have looked like a stoned dope.

I didn't care. Over there was a mushroom the size of a skyscraper with what looked like tiny dragons flying around the cap. As I watched, one of the caps of the distant mountain lifted off and, over the course of the next ten minutes, floated over to a different mountain before settling down again.

"Regina?"

"Hm?"

"Could I get one? One of the… like Tweedle Dee? Is he yours? It seems like he's yours."

She laughed. "Slow down there, cowboy. I know what you're getting at, and the short answer is yes."

I jumped up and then thrust my elbows back. "Yesssss!"

She laughed again. "It's a little more complicated than that, but yeah. You get one. Let's get you to the city…"

"Lead the way," I told her.

Colossal mushrooms are weird, but not as large as upside down floating cities, buildings made of trees, or places where gravity works both ways at once.

You have to imagine a staircase that both ascends and descends at the same time to get what I was seeing. People walking upstairs from below on one side and walking downstairs, *also from below* on the other side. Straight out of an M.C. Escher.

Castle towers that had crenellations on four different sides, like a cross, with people manning those towers on all four sides. And nobody was falling off. The whole guard tower cross situation slowly rotated clockwise, while the banners rippled in a wind that made no sense, and guards stood rigid at attention.

Regina had been in the middle of sketching out a bare skeleton of what the heck was going on here. The trouble was, she wasn't very good at it. Her good-natured manner, cheerful laughter at herself, and frequent petting of Tweedle Dee made it seem like it didn't matter.

“So, the gist of the world is that magic is everywhere. It’s suffused into all the objects and organisms all the time. It’s, sort of, possibility. Until you add intent, it just sort of sits around and collects. The teachers at the academy will be able to explain a lot better than I can, but the basics go like this: if enough magic collects in one place, it spontaneously generates objects, or lifeforms…” She laughed, half embarrassed. “Or elements or emotions or acts of nature. Sorry, I’m not explaining this very well.”

She gestured to a large column of purple red vines waving in the middle of the meadow, looking more like tentacles than vines. But the vines sported leaves, and thorns.

“That, over there, is a manifestation.”

“Is that a plant or a creature?”

“You have to understand that the lines get blurry. Tweedle Dee here is mostly an animal but some bit of plant. Like an eighty twenty split. And the lines get blurry in some weird ways, like… there’ll be creatures that are also elements. Creatures that are also feelings. Plants that are also elements. Elements that are also feelings.”

“What?”

She blew out an exasperated sigh. “There are mixes of all kinds of stuff. I can’t explain it all that well… save it for the academy. Just trust me, that vine thing right there is maybe half creature, maybe a little less, and around half plant, probably a little more. And there’s a mine where miners found a vein of crystallized excitement. And also a river that was fire. And a creature that was also your pleasant dreams.”

“That is… so…”

“Fudged in the A?”

She was also growing less normal as the walk went on. Her freckles had definitely multiplied, and they definitely had started going different shimmery colors. Because they were also shimmering.

“You’ve probably noticed, magic is collecting on me,” she said, gesturing to her shoulders, where the freckles gleamed iridescent

colors, “and it’s collecting on you.”

“What?”

She produced a mirror and showed it to me. Sure enough, my eyes had already changed to a violent Monarch butterfly orange and black patterning. My hair was wilder than it had been a half hour ago, the mousey brown frosted with orange tips. And I had an odd pattern of organic lines running over my face, faintly darker than my regular skin tone.

“Holy…”

“Shiznits. I know.”

Both of us stopped.

“Dee? What is it?”

Tweedle Dee was whining, and his tails were tucked down beneath his legs. He clearly didn’t like whatever he smelled or heard.

Veering off, I went in search of the sound I’d heard. “It sounds like… oh dagnabbit, what’s that smell?”

I came upon a figure in the tall grass, lying there and making a pitiful sound. Worse, though, was the stench. It became thicker and stronger the closer he got to the creature.

The thing he was looking at… was all different colors. All the soft pastels ran together in different ways, sometimes creating abstract flowery shapes, and other times running down its body like stems or leaves. It was humanoid, vaguely, with a number of spindly limbs all along a long trunk like body. I realized its head was a flower.

It was also bleeding black. Several wounds on its body ran with ichor directly down into the dirt, where it was pooling.

“Hey,” I said gently, reaching out a hand. “Hey, what happened? Who did this?”

“Who did… oh.”

It became clear that several of the petals had fallen off when it raised its head to look at me. It appeared to have four eyes, or perhaps six, but they weren’t organs, just suggestions in the middle of the sunflower-like center of the flower, where all the pollen would

sit. A large mouth shape turned down as it locked those five or three or four eyes on me and made another keening cry.

"You said oh," I told Regina, not taking my eyes off the pitiful sight. "That means you know what this is and what's happening."

"That," she said, "is a god."

"I'm sorry?"

It would still be another week before I got to choose Divinity's Vet Corps, but the face of this thing.

The flower god extended one pleading hand out toward me.

"It's a god. That's part of the reason this program exists."

"A god."

"Probably the god of flowers. Maybe the god of the scent of flowers. Usually when they get corrupted like this their purview goes first."

"Uh… huh…" I said, and reached out to take its outstretched hand. Her words didn't register much. The need on this creature's face made perfect sense.

"Christopher, don't—"

Too late. A cool hint of divinity touched me, and everything went both immediately bright tie-dyed colors, and also total white. The pastel colors soon fled and left me wondering where the world had gone.

***

While I was… away, I had a flash of memory. Sarah was just a tween at that point, maybe twelve years old or so, and she had gotten it into her head that she was going to start a garden.

"And these are the tomato flowers," she said. "Look. Little and yellow. Six pointed stars"

"I know," I told her, and rolled my eyes. There were little yellow stars all over the kitchen where the plants were growing.

“I’m learning all about flowers. There are pansies and peonies and poinsettias—”

“And purple people eaters.”

“Shut up. There’s Sweet William Catchfly and Adam’s Needle and Thread, and tons of lilies, of course roses, but did you know there are also primroses? There are hyacinths, hydrangeas, hollyhocks,…” She continued reciting flower names, up until she went and grabbed the book, some sort of flower encyclopedia she’d gotten from the library.

“I don’t. Care.” I told her, and tried to turn back to the computer. I was watching someone speed run a video game where you play as a guy with a coffee mug for a head. It made no sense, but video games don’t really have to. Internal logic is only a thing if companies make it a thing. The cool thing about this game was that the animation was far more fluid and bubbly than anything I’d ever seen. The description claimed that the game animation was not only hand drawn, which was incredible in the age of computers, but that the style was almost a hundred years old.

There were certain hit box tricks to the speed run that fascinated me. Flowers were decidedly not fascinating. They wouldn’t be until I was in my mid-twenties and wanted to cheer up my dying mother.

***

I came to with several people and several creatures standing over me. I hadn’t met any of them, save Regina, who radiated worry, and Tweedle Dee, who was presently head butting my face softly. The smell of rosals, gaura, Chinese trumpet flowers and a few other flowers had roused me from unconsciousness.

Wait.

I knew the names of all the flowers. And I could parse rosals from gaura by smell alone.

“What’s… happening?”

"Just lie back, son," a man with a case of too-much-mustache said. That same bushy salt and pepper stretched around above and behind his ears, but left him with a shining bald head.

"I'm okay," I told them, not sure if that was true. I couldn't sense anything wrong, though I was drained. "What happened?"

"You touched a corrupted god, you nitwit," Regina said.

"Oh." And apparently that was unwise.

"Not to worry," Mustache Head said. "Regina and her Nakamamon were able to reach the city swiftly and we were able to get help here in a jiffy. In the future, if you should happen upon a corrupted god, you should be extremely cautious. Only go to interact with it once you've learned the procedures and if you have the appropriate skills."

"Noted," I said. "Where is the… the god?"

Mustache Head beamed at me. "Why, she's all around you, son. Just get a snout full of that aroma, you'll see." By way of example, he sniffed loudly, seeming to suck half his mustache up into his face.

I closed my eyes and took a sniff as well, and instantly became aware of marigolds, daffodils, tulips, and cherry blossoms in the vicinity, among others that weren't so prevalent. Mostly, Tweedle Dee was in my face and I was smelling all the flowers in his ears: the rosals, which were probably my favorites for right now, guara, trumpet flowers, balloon flowers and the others.

A large rectangular screen I recognized instantly expanded into being and took up my whole field of vision. The border was a royal blue, the background a grayish blue, and the text was eight bit. Those big chunky letters appeared rapid fire, all of this exactly like some of the video games I'd played.

You have been touched by divinity!

The little downward triangle flashed, so I… pressed on it. With my mind. There wasn't a click audibly, but I could feel it in my brain.

[Goddess of the Meadow] has judged you worthy, and bestowed the gift of [floral knowledge] onto you. [Goddess of the Meadow] felt your compassion and willingness to help, though you knew not the way. [Goddess of the Meadow] has bestowed upon you +1 Likability. You gain 1 Likability token.

I sat up, feeling the warm sunshine, the cool breeze, and the attention upon me.

"I don't want to take any more of your time," I told Mustache Head and the rest of the assembled people. Mostly Mustache Head. He was the only one apparently willing to talk to me.

Mustache Head nodded curtly. "I'll be meeting you soon, lad. Stay safe." With that, he climbed aboard his own weird animal companion, a thing that looked like a raccoon that rose swiftly into the air on flaps of skin like a flying squirrel.

Several younger people rose up into the sky as well, one of them on a large crane with bright purple and red feathers. The other one stepped onto a smiling pink cloud and zoomed off after Mustache Head.

Afterwards, Regina convinced the armed guards I hadn't noticed to take their leave also. They climbed aboard their flying companion creatures and zoomed off.

She watched them go for some time, hands on hips, smile slowly vanishing. She whirled on me when they were out of sight.

"You could've been killed," she hissed down.

I blinked at her.

"Idiot! When someone says 'oh that's a corrupted god' you don't just reach out and touch it. That thing could've drained out your life force to reclaim some of its… whatever. Essence. Or magic powers or whatever they have."

I smiled easily at her. "Divinity?"

"You need to take this seriously, Christopher. Ohh, my assignment is a flipping ship for brains."

“Oh, I won’t touch another one of those things again… at least not without Mustache Head next to me.”

She froze. “Mustache Head?” The name dawned on her then, and she threw her head back and laughed uproariously at the sky. “Oh, you’re not wrong. All of his hair looks the same. Even the eyebrows!” The clutched at her sides and laughed and laughed.

Finally she stopped, and glared at me. “My job is to get you to the academy safe and sound, you hear? No more dumb swizz, okay?”

“For shizzle, my nizzle,” I told her seriously.

She threw her hands up in the air. “You’re going to get yourself killed before you even land your first paycheck.”

I blinked at her and slowly got to my feet. I was feeling more energized now, less like I was going to blow over in a stiff breeze. I did sway on my feet a bit, but I steadied without having to use Regina’s shoulder for balance.

“Hey, what’s a Nakamamon?”

This is Christopher beginning to feel like himself again

Chapter 8- Don’t Sell My Organs

Then

I'm getting ahead of myself.

The question of how a college dropout recently fired from a job at a game store got to a world of magic could be answered by a single gold coin.

So I had gotten fired from my job, failed to turn streaming into an asset that would propel my life forward in a way that made work fun, and on top of that, a lump of cells was in the process of very slowly eating my mother. That had been on my mind enough to land me in the manager's office at my job and end my career as a cashier at the game store. It had been enough of a distraction to mess up my attempt at turning streaming into a side gig.

It got worse, and that only matters because the *worse* got me out of my house, and got me the job. Two things happened that I don't really want to talk about, but they matter so here they are. My father wasn't handling my mom's condition well. He was presently drunk and trying to put a '62 T-bird together without the patience to do so. Every problem made him erupt into a swearing fit.

The second thing was my sister calling me and asking me to meet.

This meant she needed money.

I drove to my sister's house in my mom's car, and sighed when I parked on the street. The house was in a bad neighborhood, it was small, and the yard was completely out of control. Two cars were in the driveway, and between the two of them, they might've made a decent car, but neither of them worked well.

She was already out on the slab of concrete that served as her front porch. Pale, bags under her eyes, hair looking unkempt, bobbing my nephew up and down absently on one hip and holding her phone in the other.

"Toph, listen," she said, before I even said a word, "I don't like doing this, okay. I don't like asking for money. You know that, right?"

Tears were threatening.

I bent and gave the toddler a grin, and he grabbed onto my finger. I made some silly noises and got him to smile, then took him off her hands. He was still small enough that I could hold him for a while without my legs starting to give me trouble. “How you doing, Brayden?” I asked him.

“Ris,” he said, and giggled. “Unk Ris.”

“That’s right, buddy. Uncle Christopher.”

“I need help,” she said, not willing to wait for the pleasantries to be over.

I made sure not to sigh, and keep my face neutral for what was going to be a string of demands.

“What happened?”

She took me into the house, where I immediately saw that the place had been smashed up. There was a hole in the wall just opposite the entryway. Mirror glass had been swept up and sat in the dustpan not far off.

“I have to get the locks changed, Toph.”

My face twitched. She didn’t know about my job, she didn’t ask about mom, and she didn’t seem to care.

“Travis threw a fit,” she said. “He lost his mind. Broke fucking everything.”

“Ucking!” my nephew parroted.

It seemed like the failure to watch her language in front of her own son was enough to cause her to break down. The tears came on, hard. It was ugly crying time.

“Travis… I’m pregnant, Christopher.”

I literally staggered back a few steps, like the words had weight and she’d struck me with them. I couldn’t have asked all the questions on my mind if I’d wanted to.

“Travis found… found out… it’s not… his,” she sad in between the sobs.

“The baby… isn’t his?”

She was sobbing now, getting snot and tears all over me shoulder. And I left her like that for some time, to get it out of her system.

She had been like this for… ever since I could remember. At least ten years. Long enough that I had trouble bringing to mind a time when she wasn't in serious trouble or needing our parents to bail her out. And now that events had gone from bad to as-bad-as-they-could-possibly-get for my mother, the money would have to stop coming. My father was still making money, but if he couldn't stop drinking, that wouldn't last either. He'd get fired.

We made our way through the house towards the play room, which had been the dining room and now contained a small kid fence with a handful of toys on the cracked linoleum. A lot were from goodwill. I put Brayden down slowly, carefully. I couldn't have my legs buckling under me.

"Sarah," I told her gently, so damn gently. "We can't… I can't do this anymore."

She pulled away with her face disbelieving and rage already blossoming there.

"What the fuck, Toph?"

"Mom's… she's dying, Sare."

She stared at me. Wild calculations were going on at a furious pace and I couldn't believe how fast she blew up.

Her hands flew up in the air, waving back and forth. "Oh, yeah, I know. I'm the bad daughter, you're the good son. Sarah's the super fuck up who can't do anything right. Doesn't visit her mother in the hospital. What a piece of shit I am. So I deserve to have Travis come over and beat the shit out of me whenever he wants, is that it?"

"Stop it. Nobody said any of those things," I said, summoning up the willpower to stay cool. "What do you need?"

She took a deep breath, already knowing she'd won. "I just need enough to change the locks. Like now. Today. I don't know when he'll come back."

And then she would 'just need enough' to do whatever else would be next. I didn't bother to tell her that we'd had objections to her moving in with Travis in the first place. That ship had sailed.

Nor would she move back. That wasn't going to work either. She and my parents had had a spectacular blow up over Travis and the first baby. They weren't going to take her back, and she wasn't going to move back.

I ended up sending her money through my phone, frowning at the diminishing balance in my own account. It was close to nil right now, and wasn't going to suddenly balloon out unless I got a job.

I could maybe drive a taxi as a gig worker. Deliver food as a gig worker. Do people's grocery shopping as a gig worker. I could drive for a good few hours at a time without my legs giving me too much trouble.

Don't sigh, I told myself, no big sighs. Sarah's got enough on her plate. "There."

She had the locksmiths on the phone a second later.

***

It wasn't until the guy slid the gold coin in front of my face that I really believed he was telling the truth.

He'd answered my application only four hours after I sent it in, with my resume and a personal essay on why I needed the job. The job description had just promised good pay and travel opportunities with on-the-job training, and that was it.

So, I decided, hell with it. I could always scope the place out and tell them to fuck off. 'Good pay' didn't actually mean anything. I'd need a real figure before we went anywhere.

The man himself was about as nondescript as you can get: clean shaven, average height, boring hairstyle, plastic rims on his glasses. The only thing remarkable was that his suit fit. I couldn't tell you how many times I'd lamented having a suit that bunched or sagged

around the shoulders, or hung oddly. Then again I was buying all thrift shop stuff. My parents weren't made of money.

Style and color of the suit though? Designed to be unobtrusive.

The man held up his phone, looking at the headshot I'd sent in, and nodded toward me with a bland smile. He walked over.

"You're Christopher? Christopher Fletcher?"

"I am."

"Great! Do you want anything? My company's buying, so go nuts."

I stood, with some difficulty, and shook his hand. "What can I call you?"

"Mister Johnson," he said, in a tone that said it wasn't his real name and he was very pleased to be making fun of me in this situation. "Dick Johnson."

That clinched it. He wasn't a real person. That wasn't his real name.

"Dick… Johnson."

"Yeeeaaaah," he said, laughing. "It's like saying your name is boner boner. I promise you, though, the job is real, I'm a real person, and I represent people who have no trouble paying for your meal, Mr. Fletcher."

It still seemed too good to be true, pretty fly-by-night. Did they just abduct people and put them to work in a sweatshop? Steal their kidneys? Perform experiments on them with psychotropic drugs?

It was your average greasy spoon. The name of the place was Fat Louie's. I pointed to the circular glass case with all the desserts I'd never been able to afford.

I told him I'd take a slice of blueberry pie, a burger, fries and a milkshake. Strawberry. I could afford about three more meals like this, or one more favor for Sarah before things started to look desperate.

Soon I had pie and a milkshake in front of me, and the promise of my food coming up in just a moment. Dick Johnson had a coffee.

"Let me start out by giving you one of these," he said, and produced a thing like a poker chip on steroids. It was almost half an inch thick, and almost three inches across. It was a coin like you'd see in a movie, and nowhere else.

He plunked it down on the table before sliding it across.

I stared at it. The image of a winged person appeared on it, one leg outstretched and the other bent, looking like she was blowing me a kiss. Around the edge were inscriptions, but none that I could read. None that I'd ever seen on earth.

I looked at him.

He looked at me, with that smug and self-satisfied smile of someone who has told a joke you're either going to get, or you're not. If you do, good. If you don't, better.

I continued looking at him.

And he finally broke into a wide smile, then sipped his coffee. "You can touch it if you want."

I did, finding it to be actual metal, possibly gold, and heavy. I turned it over, and studied the image engraved on the back. This one showed a henge, but not Stonehenge, behind that a canopy of trees, and beyond that jagged mountain peaks. More inscriptions sat beneath the henge and ringed the coin, in the same language I didn't know and had never seen.

I glanced back up at him.

He continued staring with that impassive, maybe smug smile. And sipping his coffee.

One last look at the coin showed me it wasn't all gold. Tiny glittery specks of some other colors than gold showed when I turned the coin over, and when I tilted it.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do with this," I told him.

"This is how you're going to live once we get you a job," he said.

"I'll be paid… in these nice, heavy, made-in-China coins? What do I do, put them up on Ebay?"

My food came, and conversation died while the waitress topped off Dick Johnson's coffee, asked me if I wanted more milkshake, and

then left when Dick Johnson told her I could indeed use another milkshake. I took several fries and chewed them suspiciously, staring at the man, again. Finally I waggled the hefty coin at him.

"Yes, the coins. You actually use them in the workplace. We pay in American dollars, Christopher. Roughly fifteen times more than what you were making at the game store, to start, with advancement opportunities, immediate full healthcare coverage, furnished housing, travel, quarterly bonuses are possible, and even hazard pay."

"Hazard… hazard pay." He nodded, so I snorted. "Mr. Johnson. It sounds like you looked at my resume, but you clearly didn't read my personal letter."

"On the contrary, Mr. Fletcher, we read it. We liked it very much. It was… sincere. Open. Brutally so."

I gulped. I'd put in that my legs had been messed up since grade school, my mom was dying, dad wasn't taking it well, and Sarah was a fucking mess.

I figured all my resumes would just get tossed out.

"What is it you do at your company, then? And how is someone like me going to end up earning hazard pay?"

"We'll be letting you choose, but what I'd like to do is put you into a trainee program, where you'll start drawing paychecks immediately, and figure out which line of work you'd like to go into. We need employees out away from the main city area, helping out with smaller, isolated towns. Nothing dangerous initially, but just know that we can triple your pay if you choose to enter hostile territory as part of your duties."

I went to hand him the coin, but he held up a hand. "It's yours."

I studied it further, turning it on its edge and spinning it on the table. The weigh of it made the coin go *whud whud whud* as it spun. The glittery bits threw off sparkler of light.

It was a fake, and they'd embedded sequins or cubit zirconias in there.

"Five times your annual wage, to start. And we'll be giving you two weeks off every three months."

I stared at the fake coin. "It's cute."

His look turned puzzled for just a moment before his grin broadened out. "Ah, right. I can assure you that this coin is very real."

"In the sense that this fork is real, yes. It's a real thing that your company has produced."

He smiled indulgently again, smugly also.

"Is this… cuneiform? It doesn't look like it."

"It is indeed not. The cuneiform marks of the Babylonians are, I'm told, the closest we might get in this world."

The words hung in the air between us. *This world*.

"What is this about, Mr. Johnson? You want my internal organs? I'd sell them, but, you know… there's no way they're going to pay for my mom's cancer treatments." I barked out bitter laughter. "My sister's turned into a money suck, too. And there's definitely no way you're selling me into slavery."

"I wouldn't dream of it, Mr. Fletcher."

This world.

It's so strange how just a week later I'd be grinning from ear to ear, having my breath taken away by the scenery and the possibilities, and having my family's expenses handled by my salary *in another world*.

"Okay then… why me?"

He leaned in. "You need us as much as we need you, Mr. Fletcher. While you're on the job site, we can make sure your family here has access to those funds in order to cover the costs of all their needs."

This hurt my chest to hear. Like, hurt, but in a good way. I wouldn't have to strand Sarah in limbo and run the risk of forcing my only nephew to starve. My mother would have good care. My father would hopefully stop destroying himself.

This world.

I leaned in. "Listen… if you guys are going to make me a slave or sell my organs to a Chinese businessman, I need like a million. Two million!"

Johnson stared at me for a minute before giving me an affectionate smile.

"Enough that they won't have to worry, okay?" I whispered. "They'll be set for life."

"Oh, Mr. Fletcher… that won't be necessary. I love the name, by the way. A professional arrow maker. I hope you'll join us. Please drop in within the next week and we'll get everything sorted. After a week…" He shrugged. "I'll have to fill the position."

He slid his card across the table. It listed his name (Johnson), his profession (HR) and the address of an office building halfway across town. Then he dropped a stack of five twenty dollar bills on the table, gave me one last smile, and headed out.

Late that night, the gold coin began breaking apart into streamers of light and smoke. It would take another twenty-four hours for it to dissolve entirely. I stayed home and watched it disintegrate.

This world.

I drove over to the address on the card the day after the coin had vanished completely.

And this… this is Christopher getting a job.

Chapter 9- Nakamamon

It turned out Nakamamon was a shortened form of Nakama and Monster, the former meaning 'companion' in Japanese and the latter totally obvious. But apparently also Japanese?

Companion Monsters… Companiomals? No, that was stupid. Monsterpanions? Even worse. Okay, I gave them mental consent to stick with the name they gave it.

My mind continued to swirl. How cool would it be if I got a friggin land octopus made of gems and precious metals? Or a Pegasus plus unicorn but also a panda bear? The flying ones could make for some awesome rescue squad stuff.

A whole lot had just been launched at me in a very short time. Gods, Nakamamon, people trained to deal with the plight of corrupted gods, a big system screen that popped right up in front of my face.

There were corrupted gods. There were game stats. I had a token. I had a special ability.

I realized I had… something. An issue. In my peripheral vision, several small bursts of dancing light. I grabbed at one with my hand.

Achievement: *first near death experience*

Whoo, that was close! You nearly perished! Let's try to avoid that kind of thing going forward, shall we?

Reward: +5 Free Tokens

Achievement: *first Nakamamon encountered*

What mysterious and amazing creatures they are! You have encountered a Vulpetunia.

Reward: +1 Free Token

Achievement: *first small god encountered*

In a world of magic and monsters, we really should've been prepared for the existence of gods. You have encountered a god! Humbling experience, was it not?

Reward: +1 Free Stat level

Achievements. I exulted, and resolved to look around later for an Achievement list so I could go after all of them. Collecting things was definitely my jam.

And yes, encountering a god was definitely a humbling experience. Holy crikey, it was not something I was going to handle lightly going forward.

"You okay, boss?" Regina asked.

I realized I'd been staring vacantly out at the insane but wonderful and amazing landscape, and ignoring my guide. She'd called herself a Ranger. That, plus system, meant a lot of possibilities I hadn't considered before.

I mean, since going through the portal, I totally forgot I was here to do a job.

"What kind of jobs are there? You're a Ranger. Is that a special character class?"

She gasped. "I guess the academy isn't going to go over chargen... sorry, Christopher. We'll have to do it together."

"Uh…" The way she'd said the words 'do it' had been suggestive… or I was just imagining things, talking to a beautiful girl? She could be messing with me.

I took several looks over Regina as she hefted the hiking pack up onto her back again. She was wearing a pleated skirt that came down just below mid-thigh, and stockings. Both had been brown in color, the skirt a plaid pattern, but they were now splashed with magical color as well. Green vine designs and flowers now twined around her toned legs. The chest strap she clipped right below an excellent pair of breasts. The top two buttons of her top had come open at some point, showing me glimpses of collar bone and the

color shifting, glittery freckles all over her body. It led to a deep well of cleavage I definitely stared at for too long. By the time I glanced up, she was grinning down at me.

"Say 'character creation,'" she instructed, and I did.

My vision filled with a huge blue rectangular screen, just like before after I'd woken up from surviving the touch of the flower god. The chunky 8-bit letters now read 'please select a name', and Christopher Fletcher had already been entered there. Below that was a keyboard.

"You need help?" she asked, sounding closer than before.

"I… have done this before, in games."

"Don't pick a dumb name, like Shadowdude Superkiller, or LadiesMan69. The other academy students will bully the hecky Becky out of you."

I laughed. "I can just go with my regular name, I guess?"

"If you want me to advise, you just said 'reveal character sheet' and it will show anyone else nearby."

I wanted to, but I did want to prove that I wasn't an idiot. She already had reason to doubt my intelligence. Plus, she wouldn't know that I got a special bonus from touching the flower god. For some reason, I didn't want to show off that I knew everything about all the flowers in the world. It wasn't that her knowing it might emasculate me. I didn't give a shizz about machismo. After all, I'd gotten a free pass out of gym class all through middle and high school. I didn't know whether the power was typical or unusual, whether it was good or bad, and whether she had a similar thing or not. If she didn't have one, she might march off and put herself in danger to grab one, and I wasn't going to endanger her life like that.

"It's okay," I said, and accepted my plain old name. I could go by Fletcher. It was cooler than Christopher, and I could also go by Chris.

The screen then showed me five basic stats: Affinity, Durability, Ingenuity, Likability, and Physicality. Each had a numerical value.

Affinity 0
Durability 3
Ingenuity 4
Likability 2
Physicality 1

I was surprised at the Durability score. I hadn't thought of myself as someone who could suffer a lot of punishment, but when I moved my finger over the word, it explained Durability was for mental and physical fortitude.

Beneath the stats were the words 'Please place five additional stat points' followed by 'Unspent free points: 6' The +1 free stat level had come from the contact with the flower god.

"Affinity?"

"It's for magic, magic beings and gods," she said. "A higher score makes you more magical."

"Got it."

"You're going to get a Token for each of your stat points every time you level up," Regina said, though she couldn't see what I was looking at. "But here's the thing, your base attributes aren't really going to change. You'll get one point every four to six levels."

All of them seemed valuable, but I immediately put a point in Physicality. Nothing happened, though I'd been hoping it would heal up my legs and give me big muscles. And maybe those washboard abs, and the lines down the sides of my abs, the ones they called cum gutters. Sadly, nothing like that happened.

I then considered that the system had given me a Likability of 1 before I met the flower god. That was no good. I boosted it by two, on par with my Ingenuity. The last two points I put in Affinity, so I could have some inkling of what was happening with magic. Finally, the game told me I had started off smart, and I wanted to keep it that way. I put the free stat point into Ingenuity.

If I knew anything about games, it was that the early levels were going to be easy, and I'd earn dozens of levels before the inevitable

slow down.

When the game asked me if I was sure about these choices, I pressed the confirm button.

My new stats read like this:

Affinity 2
Durability 3
Ingenuity 5
Likability 4
Physicality 2

Congratulations! The window now told me. *You have gained 2 Affinity Tokens, 3 Durability Tokens, 5 Ingenuity Tokens, 4 Likability Tokens, and 2 Physicality Tokens.* Now each of my stats had a little readout beside it: 2/2 for Affinity, 3/3 for Durability, and so on. Beneath all that, it read 'Free Tokens 6/6'

You have not chosen a class! Would you like to choose a class?

"I don't want to choose a class though, do I?"

"Let's hold off on the class until you're into the academy and they know where to put you." Cocking her head, she regarded me with an easy smile. "You catch on real fast, huh?"

I shrugged, unsure whether or not I was slow in asking all these questions or not. How many people came through, and how often? How many of those… died? And how often? What was the academy like? When would I get to choose a Nakamamon? Would I get to engineer my own somehow? Would there just be like three choices and I'd have to settle for one? What was I expected to do over here? I sort of got that Dick Johnson hadn't wanted to spoil the magical fun of entering this place, but he could've prepared me with a job description, at least.

I wasn't about to get answers for any of these questions right away. It wasn't even vital that they get answered today, or this week. I was just swirling all around in my brain.

Gods. Magic. System. Monsters. It was a lot.

She grinned. "Let's go take a rest. There's no rule we have to get to the city in any sort of hurry, and I feel like we've hit our danger quota for the month, so I don't expect any other trouble."

"Really? What about predators?"

She laughed. "Most stuff here just eats magic. And since we're not magically rich, they don't bother with us."

"Oh, that's good."

"Yeah, you'll get your daily pill and you'll take it. That stops us from turning into monsters."

I froze, and once again she threw back her head and laughed. "Sheesh, I'm sorry, Christopher. I keep adding stuff on here. Look, the pill keeps us from overloading on magic and changing into magical beings. Every living thing attracts some magic, right? And if that process goes on too long, you'll, I guess, be part of the food chain. It's never happened to anyone I know, because we take our pills every day."

"Right."

"I've been here for going on six months, and no problems turning into a magical creature, then being eaten by a hungry boulder. Sorry for scaring you." She chuckled, and I joined in.

She gestured toward a boogie tree, one of the ones with enormous green spheres instead of leaves. A closer look at it revealed a big dopey grin with two knots for eyes. That grin broadened as we approached.

"Is this thing… a Nakamamon?"

"It's ninety percent plant, I'd guess, and the rest creature. I'm not a researcher so I couldn't say what they've got in terms of brains, but they all seem pretty chill and happy. In fact, they love to be climbed."

She took off, climbing the tree, while below I was going to ask Regina about all of this when I peered up into the tree's branches and stopped, mouth hanging open.

Regina had taken off the hiking pack when we reached the tree, and now hunkered on a strong branch. Her feet perched on the branch, but the rest of her hung over in plain view.

Either she had taken off her panties when I wasn't looking, or she hadn't been wearing any the whole time. I could see straight up her pleated skirt and past the stockings. They were only thigh highs. She was on full display right above me. It was mesmerizing.

She was grinning down at me, with a knowing smile. "You coming up?"

I'm sure she could see the confusion, embarrassment, the amazement and the lust all written on my face. I tore my eyes away from her nether region, the first I'd seen in the light of day since… a long time.

Was she teasing me? She had to be. The arousal warred with the shame of knowing she was just messing with me. I'd be shot down in a heartbeat.

"I can't… my legs are…" She knew my legs were garbage. She'd been carrying half my supplies for several hours.

"Give it a shot," she said, all encouragement and no hint of superiority. "You might be surprised."

There was one branch I could grab onto. It actually lowered a little so I could heft myself up. I silently thanked the tree creature. Growing up with messed up legs generally meant my upper body did a lot of compensating, so I did have a bit of muscles in the arms, chest and shoulders. Pulling myself up wasn't too difficult, but getting my legs under me was uncomfortable, then when I didn't move, painful.

Below us, Tweedle Dee frolicked around happily, yipping and waving his several tails. Eventually he made his way over to a sunny spot and sprawled out.

Regina had reached down, not far away, and was playing with herself. The contrast between the stockings and her skin was mesmerizing. The way her freckles sparkled in the shade of this weird tree was incredibly cute. Her eyes were glowing, literally, and

if I had to guess, her hair had grown out a good three inches in the last three hours. The thick reddish locks framed her face and made her look all the cuter.

Okay. The math went through my head instantly: if I didn't go up there, there was absolutely no chance of me getting laid. If I did go up there, the chance existed. She had already provided me with what I figured was a lot of fap material if I got shot down. And if everything worked out, she and I could have some sexcapades any time she returned to the city while I was in the academy.

"You coming up, new guy?" Her voice had changed. It was huskier, thick with need.

When I went to climb up onto the next branch, the tree again adjusted the next branch so I could get at it easier. Still, my legs didn't like this at all, and complained when I got up from my crouch.

***Physicality check**: You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is Moderate difficulty. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 2 Physicality and 6 Free Tokens.

I reached out and tapped at the big Y floating in the window in front of my face, but it wasn't necessary. My intent, or reaching toward it were enough. The window disappeared and **-2 Tokens** floated up from the bottom of my vision in huge, 8 bit blocky letters.

Right before power flooded into my body, two enormous coins sprang into being in front of me. Both were similar to the coin I'd been given by Dick Johnson: thick, a good three inches across, but where Dick's coin had had a fairy on one side, this one had the silhouette of a bodybuilder embossed on it, from the waist up at least. The faceless little guy held beefy arms up, mid flex. The other side—because the coins were slowly rotating in the air—showed this same henge behind the trees, and the mountains behind the henge.

They rotated for several moments before disappearing into a burst of rainbow energy. That energy coursed into me.

I felt indestructible. The condition was only temporary, it turned out, because a small circle sprang to life in the corner of my vision and immediately turned into a tiny green circle, with an expanding sliver of red like a pie chart. It was a timer, ticking quickly down towards zero.

So of course I did what I had to do: climb the tree towards Regina. I did so in a blur of movement, grinning the whole way. She had only been two more branches up, but the climb wasn't easy. She was on a thick branch and reclining against one of the tree's gigantic ball leaves spread eagle.

Still, it was terrifying.

"Get over here," she told me, and I obeyed. The timer for Physicality Tokens rapidly wound down, but she had moved onto the gigantic leaf sphere and I climbed on after her.

I marveled at the spongy feel of the big green ball, and the scent of Regina's arousal. I could smell it, something I hadn't thought possible. She smelled natural and wild, a mixture of some different herbs. I couldn't place the one, and it felt like it kept shifting: mint, dill, rosemary, basil, lavender, and others.

A lazy smile spread over her face. "I thought you might not make it."

"I had to," I said.

Her lazy smile spread. "You know anything about eating at the Y?"

This is Christopher freaking the F out.

Chapter 10- You're Not A Sludge

Loath as I was to confess to this gorgeous, glittering beauty that I didn't know anything about the female body, I was in the dark. I'd spent a lot of years being bitter about this fact, but then mostly I just accepted that girls didn't want a broken man, and moved on to different aspects of life.

I had won the middle school spelling bee. Take that, guys who had had sex.

"Hey," she said, when I was halfway into telling her my whole life's story. "Hey. Don't. Don't worry about it, okay? Just tell me I'm pretty."

"You are fluffing gorgeous," I breathed. "Like a thousand miles out of my league." She was hardly supermodel beautiful, but she was fit, smiling, and she was glowing with literal magic.

She grinned and kissed me on the nose. "Charm a girl's panties off, why dontcha?"

She wasn't wearing any. I didn't mention it. Instead I breathed, "I feel like I won the lottery."

The big leaf ball was soft, squishy, and full of water, and felt like memory foam. She had no problem reclining back into it and sinking in a couple of inches.

I reached out a hand toward Regina, who immediately grasped it and led me toward her thigh.

Gob, man, she was soft, smooth and cool to the touch. Just that initial contact, her hands on mine and then mine on this expanse of skin was enough to get me throbbing, painfully hard in my pants.

"Touch anywhere you want," she murmured. Her voice was already heavy with arousal and need, and she did the touching by herself, while I got acquainted with all the different places on her.

Although my instinct was to just sit there gaping at her, I knew this might be my first and last chance to be with a woman. So I ran both hands up and down her thighs, loving the contrast between her soft skin and the silky material of her stockings.

Then I started massaging her calf muscles and up over her thighs. Just running my hands over her taut muscles as hard as I thought I could get away with, then squeezing.

"Mmm," she groaned.

"Is that… that's good?"

"Mmm yeah. Do my feet."

She put her stocking-covered foot on my chest and I proceeded to run my fingers up and down over every bit. The whole time, I couldn't take my eyes off the junction of her thighs. She was running two fingers down her slit, sometimes working in small, fast circles, other times just massaging like I was doing. Up and down, up and down. Peekaboo.

I'd only seen foot massages in movies and porn, but I tried to make it as nice as I could. Regina's eyes slowly closed and she threw her head back, moaning appreciatively. Whether it was from my massage or her own hand I couldn't tell.

Eventually she put her other foot up on my chest, then stopped and rolled the stocking down her leg, removed it, and gave me the foot back. I got right to work, loving the warmth and softness of her body.

I then noticed her other foot was sliding up my thigh and tickling against my cock.

Her eyes were closed and she was hard at work on herself, so maybe she didn't notice. It was possible I was just being used as a toy for her pleasure, but this was the most experience I'd had in my twenty years of life on this earth. It was definitely my first public encounter. Very arousing by itself.

So while I watched her fingers sliding over her, and her foot sliding over me, I worked on her foot with both thumbs, learning

every bit of what was what, and which parts made her go ‘mmm’ with regularity. Turns out I didn’t need to worry about that.

“Right there,” she murmured. “Right there, yeah, yeeeeaaaahhhh.”

I kept doing that, both thumbs into the arch in slow, rotating circles. Her lips parted and she mumbled that she was about to cum.

“I want to lick it,” I blurted.

It was through clenched teeth that she said, “Get down here, stud.”

I got down, caressing one leg still in a stocking, the other bare, and scooted up to get my tongue on her open slit. She humped her butt up and down, so all I had to do was stick out my tongue. Feet rested onto my back now, and I inhaled the intoxicating scent. I could’ve cum right then and there, but I was too focused on the sight and smell and taste in front of me.

She was delicious. This, I would learn, was the magic. She was buttery and tasty, and I lapped at her. She *smelled* buttery, too, like a croissant. She still continued to fondle herself, work her clit, fingers bumping my nose. I didn’t care. I just licked and licked at everything I could.

“Oh, guh… fuh…”

She arched her back and shoved her midsection down into me. I got a flood of that buttery flavor, so I pushed my tongue into her as far as I could go. She rewarded me with a shrill squeal of pleasure, and her thighs convulsing against my ears. One hand was also clutching at my hair.

“Wait wait wait wait,” she panted, “St-stop.”

I didn’t want to, but it was necessary to follow instructions. After all, she was the guide and I was the newbie in this world. In reality I told myself that this was her show and she could run it how she wanted. I was just a sex toy if she wanted to use me like one.

Although I had no real idea what she was thinking in wanting to do this, with me, I wasn’t going to stop her and be like ‘aren’t you capable of finding a guy who can fuck you senseless?’ Whatever this

was, I wanted it again, though I had a feeling it was a one-time thing.

She tapped the space beside her, so I settled down and laid there. After a few more moments of shaky breath and composure, she sighed contentedly, slipped off the other stocking, and rolled over to put her head in the crook of my shoulder, draping one arm and leg over my body. My very stiff body.

Her leg slowly moved up, and then down. Sliding over my crotch.

She was the picture of contentment: eyes closed, tiny smile teasing her lips, total relaxation… all except her leg sliding back up and her calf muscle sliding back up over my dick.

"Mmm that was really nice," she purred in my ear.

"Yeah. It was."

"I liked it when you got assertive."

I mulled this over. I wanted… a lot of things. But they all boiled down to the same thing. The question was whether or not I could force myself to say the words. Indecision and terror gripped me. It was laughable; here was a girl who'd just showed me her everything, gave me her feet and legs to massage, and let me stick my tongue up in her. She would have sex with me.

But another part of me still screamed that it was a trap, that she was going to turn me down and laugh at how insulted they were at the prospect. Just like Jaime Riley had done, just like Jessica Kynowski had done, just like Stephanie Kildare had done. And none of those girls had been anywhere near as hot as Regina.

After some more indecision time, she just let out a soft and sleepy cooing noise. "It's all right."

"I want…"

"Mmm?"

"I want… you."

"What do you want exactly?" she teased. Her breath was on my neck.

Deep breath, Chris, I told myself. You can do this.

"I want… to have sex… with you."

She sat straight up, eyes full of mischief, grinning oddly. Was this the other shoe dropping? I held my breath in case the cruel laughter came out now. She swung one leg over and my boner actually came into contact with her bare pussy.

"What a coincidence! I also want to have sex… with you. Actually first I'm going to give you the best blowjob of your life, and then, pff, you're what, twenty-two?"

"Twenty."

She grinned. "Never correct a girl who gives you a couple extra years, until you're at least forty."

"Right."

"Anyway I'm sure you can get it up again. Then, then we'll have sex. Maybe twice."

I lasted, somehow, five whole minutes. Now, I don't know what your stamina was like when you were a virgin, or when you were twenty for that matter, but I only lasted five minutes because Regina was really good at her job.

She freed up my erection and followed this by grinning greedily up at me. I could just about see sparkles in her eyes.

"Ohhh Christopher, I can't believe we've been friends for almost a full day and I haven't had this inside me."

She quickly took me into her mouth, and expertly massaged me while removing my clothing, staring up at me the whole time. I would have just blasted off right there if she hadn't pulled off and grabbed on.

"Girthy," she muttered. "And pretty long. I am gonna get some mileage out of this bad boy."

She licked at it, causing me to groan. I resolved, right then and there, to keep hold of every moment of this encounter mentally, so I could replay it whenever I was feeling lonely. Regina popped the head into her mouth once again and pumped several more times, then smiled at the sounds she was forcing out of me. It was like she

had a direct line to my orgasm, and she was stopping just before the finish line.

This went on for some time, with her caressing my balls, slowly jacking my cock, and sucking on it. She kept up the soft stream of compliments the whole time, telling me she liked the head, this baby was going to rearrange her insides, and she couldn't wait to feel it all the way up to her diaphragm. After tickling my sack with her fingernails, she gave it a long suck, then whipped her shirt and bra off.

Now she only had on the pleated skirt, and she soon stood with her back to me, shimmied out of it, and tossed it out of the tree like no big deal.

"Do you want…" she asked, and lowered her midsection down onto mine with this seductive tone that nearly made me blast off in her hand. "…do you want to put it in me?"

"Y-yeah… I do," I managed.

"First you gotta cum for me," she said, and lowered her body down mine, pressing it against the bottom of my cock and sliding downward. Up her midsection, past her belly button and ribs. She stopped with it nestled between her breasts and pushed them together. "Maybe you can try this next…" With that, she pushed them together around my cock. She wasn't massively endowed, but they were enough to form a channel of pillowy softness.

"Go on," she whispered. "Funk my tits, Chris."

I did, moaning and groaning like she was killing me. It felt like she was.

Again, I gazed down and got every detail. I didn't know if this would be the only time with Regina, the beginning of a long dry spell, but I was going to use this encounter for years to come. I memorized the way my cock appeared and disappeared down into her cleavage, her pointed little tongue reaching down to get at the bead of precum she found, and the gleam of her perfect teeth when she glanced up at me and grinned.

Finally, on the downstroke, she let go of her tits. Taking my whole cock into her mouth, she sucked, hard. That was the end of resistance from me; I erupted with a shout. It was enough that I triggered her gag reflex, and she ended up coughing. My seed went dripping out of her mouth, but she swallowed before dipping back down and licking the rest up.

"Holy shift," I mumbled over and over again. "Holy shift."

"You came a lot," she said, wiping her mouth with a thumb and sucking the rest off her lips. Her tone grew hungry again. "…and you're still hard."

A moment later she'd straddled me again, and I could plainly see her glistening pussy ready to swallow me whole.

"Oh wow," I said.

"Pay… attentio-uh!" She went so slowly, I saw literally every detail. Every bit of her enveloping me, even as the overwhelming sensations and the incredible tightness swallowed me up, I catalogued every microscopic event.

Finally, she was sitting on my thighs, hands on my chest, unmoving.

"You… okay?"

"I have a… confession," she said through clenched teeth. More a hiss actually. "I uh… I've never done this either. And you're… big. I'm just gonna sit here and let my pussy… get used to the size. Okay?"

"Okay." When you've just been handed the best gift in the world, you don't ask for a gift receipt. Or, hell, you don't go talking back to the gift giver.

When she moved, there was a new wave of pleasure, and I looked down to see my dick reappearing, coated with a thin sheen of blood.

"Yeeeahhh," she said, and sank back down. Her eyes fluttered closed and both of us let out mirror groans of bliss. This was the best day of my life. I hadn't died, and now… I guess I could?

"Does it hurt?" I asked.

"A little."

Another few strokes and it was clear it didn't hurt any longer. She was shaking and shuddering, telling me how great it felt. It was so deep inside her, she said. It was really… fluffing… big.

She came just as I was about to tell her I was feeling that familiar rise.

"Uh…" I told her. "I'm gonna, I'm…"

She'd gotten one hand on her clit, massaged it all of three times, and collapsed down onto me, shaking like she had the first time with her thighs on my head.

With no idea what to do instead, I grabbed two big handfuls of Regina's plump ass, pulling her up so I could fuck upwards from below. All the while I kept telling her that I was gonna, I was gonna…

In one lightning movement she got up off me and sank down to her knees again, this time taking the whole load on her face. I was flat out astonished at the amount, for one, and the fact that she would do this kind of thing. I painted her face and she moved around, eyes closed, so she could get as much of her face covered as possible.

She didn't seem to know what to do with all of it. Her eyes darted to my face, then around at all the nothing we had available, then back at me. Finally, with nowhere else to put it, she scooped it onto her fingers and into her mouth.

Finally, after collapsing down onto the pillowy soft green bulb next to me, she snuggled up into my shoulder again. I put an arm around her and marveled at the softness of her skin and body. It just wasn't possible to stop stroking her or squeezing this or that part.

"You must think I'm such a slu..." She got caught up on the word 'slut' and, not wanting to swear, turned it into, "…sludge."

I laughed. "I don't think you're a sludge."

"I just… this is the first time I got to escort a single new hire. And you were so cute. And then you nearly… anyway I don't, this isn't… I'm not normally like this."

“That’s all right,” I told her, and continued hefting up both her breasts, one after another, then tracing the outlines of her nipples with my fingers.

She sighed contentedly and got a handful of my junk. “That was pretty fussing great.”

“I’m so glad you liked it,” I told her. “You were… amazing.”

Regina smiled indulgently at me, down at my already-stirring cock, and back up at me once more. She then proceeded to teach me all about a woman’s body. And use me for her own pleasure.

I spent more time touching and exploring in that single afternoon than in the entire rest of my earth life. We didn’t just do it once more after that.

This is Christopher making a core memory.

Chapter 11- Firsts

I received, and this is rich, a new Achievement.

Achievement: *first sexual experience*

Someone got lucky, didn't he? Well congratulations on your first. May it be the first of many.

Reward: +1 Free attribute rank and associated Token.

Rather than spend that, I just grinned at it like a fool. It seemed like I would need a job before I knew what sort of attributes I should be specializing in… though it seemed like I'd already blown that load.

The next few hours included mostly Regina telling me about her time here. It was difficult to map out this world, because things were constantly springing into being and shifting around. Luckily her Ranger skills and special abilities gave her an innate sense of direction, and an ability to survive out in the wilderness. She had only been an 'employee' of the company that also now employed me for a few months, and after her first month in the academy, she'd gotten her job, her skillset, and actual paid assignments: to ferry folks to and from the portal. She didn't know why the portal didn't open directly on the castle, but told me that the distance between portal and the stronghold had been growing. She shrugged as if it was normal for towns to just slide around the map.

I had a lot to learn about this world, and although I really liked being around Regina, she wasn't the person to teach me. She kept getting tangential, going off into the weeds about this or that Nakamamon she discovered out ranging during her academy times. A squid like creature that had the same kind of camouflage as cuttlefish and octopus but spread confusion instead of ink when it

was threatened. A humanoid chain of water droplets and bubbles roaming the countryside, some ten or twelve feet tall.

And the gods… she described a swarm of tiny lights, a thing like a mouse but with galaxies instead of eyes, and then a blanket that covered a good third of the sky some nights around twilight.

"Speaking of which…" She grabbed onto my hand and massaged it a little, then squinted at it. "I thought there might be… yes, look."

I looked at where she was pointing, and saw *something*. A faint shape in the middle of my palm. The spiral petal shape of a rose. It wasn't a tattoo, but rather a darkened series of lines *beneath* my skin.

Concentrating on it brought the blue window back up.

[Goddess of the Meadow] has judged you worthy, and bestowed the gift of [floral knowledge] onto you. [Goddess of the Meadow] felt your compassion and willingness to help, though you knew not the way. [Goddess of the Meadow] has bestowed upon you +1 Likability. You gain 1 Likability token.

[Floral Knowledge]: You are a living encyclopedia for all flowers and the plants they are attached to. You are able to identify them by sight, smell, touch, or taste. This knowledge includes poisons, medicines or herbs you might encounter.

I blinked the message away, amazed. The Goddess of the Meadow just… gave me all this knowledge. I knew false goat's beard. Poinsettia. Lilac. It was like everything Sarah had been excited about when I was a kid all came flooding back to me, but way more. I could tell that types of sage and how differently they tasted. Plus, I knew… other flowers. Windwhispers and true grellets, and common numphties.

It was so strange. Also, the word *numphty* sounded stupid and silly.

From what I gathered, there were basically four types of jobs I might take up: ranging and guiding, like Regina, researching the

Nakamamon and the gods and the magic and such, guarding and combat, or the job Mustache Face had: healing. There were probably more boring jobs out there, like bureaucracy and logistics, and I guess being a desk jockey would've been safe, but this place… who would want to be stuck behind a desk when you could go out and watch mountains float away?

"What are you going to do when you go back on R&R?" she asked.

"Huh?"

"You're going to have three months' worth of wages waiting for you… it's way more money than I could've ever hoped for. I mean it's not this place, but we can basically do whatever we want."

I gave her a considering 'hmm.' I hadn't thought about it at all, honestly. It was my first day here. And now I wasn't sure how much I wanted to tell her about my family situation. My mom's cancer, my sister's impulsive behavior or her terrible taste in men would only prompt pity. I didn't want that.

Instead I let silence do its work. She was going back to earth soon, and she was geeked to get in some travel experience.

"I'm going to see the water like they show you in the movies. Like the Seychelles or Fiji. I'm going to get my SCUBA certification and take underwater photos and basically forget that people exist. No internet, no social media, nothing at all except maybe a couple glasses of wine watching the sunset on the water."

I nodded. "That sounds lovely."

"I think this place might break me on earth, though."

"What do you mean?"

"I've seen a centipede flower nearly kill a guy, and I have a fox with flowers in its ears and tails. I don't think anything on earth can compare to this."

"Yeah."

She snorted and looked off at the mushrooms big enough to be apartment buildings, and the mountains beyond. She had more in mind but didn't want to share it with me. She'd already given me far

more than I could reasonably expect. Practically the only thing she hadn't given me was anal, and I wasn't about to go asking after that, not when I'd just arrived here, just met her, just nearly died, and just lost my virginity.

"I guess we'd better get back on track," she said. "Time to start earning what they're going to be paying you."

Oh! I smacked myself upside the head. I'd just been having sex and lazy snuggle conversations while on the clock. Whoops.

She tossed her bra and shirt out into the open air, and scrambled to make her way down the large branches in the nude. I watched her go before following after. Getting down, although terrifying, wasn't as hard as going up the tree. The window told me it was Easy Difficulty, and I could spend 1 Physicality Token for an automatic success, but I chanced doing the check without the requisite skill. It then told me I had scored a success, but barely. My legs still complained, but I was amazed to find they weren't as bad as I remembered from on earth.

I peered down at them; they didn't appear to be any different. The surgery scars were still there, along with the places where the bones had poked through. No gigantic swelling of muscle. Stick-thin legs, underdeveloped calf muscles, all the same.

"Oh well," I told them. "Maybe one day."

I paused to watch Regina slide the skirt up her legs and zip it up, then replace her bra and button her blouse back up. For some reason, it struck me as just as sexy as her being naked, possibly even more so. She noticed me watching and winked.

"You're just standing there in the buff, my guy," she said, grinning. "I don't think my poor puss can handle another round. I'm going to need some ice."

I quickly got into my boxers, then pulled on the rest of my clothes. By the time I was done, she had her stockings back on and adjusted. Tweedle Dee was also nuzzling her shoulder, and got some chin scritches just because. After all, he was a treat.

"You're a good boy, aren't you Dee?"

He yipped in response.

"You love the Dee," I told her, and she gave me a wicked grin.

"I have another one I'm rather fond of," she told me, and I chuckled.

***

The castle grew a lot larger as we approached. It didn't seem to make sense, being like a reflection in a pond. The bottom half was a perfect reflection of the top half, just upside down. It was the same way for the guard towers. Somehow it functioned, though it didn't really go into my brain how it should. I kept expecting some of them to fall out onto the grass below.

Eventually the castle approached, and I saw a smattering of smaller houses and buildings also floating, and also mirror upside down versions of themselves. Now it became clear that the castle was held down by a series of chains. The smaller buildings also. Some were mud and timber, others were stone, and still more were made of red and orange brick. The upside down parts and the chains were both difficult to handle.

"How do people get inside?" I asked.

"You'll see," she said, grinning. "Let the magic happen. Surprises aren't all bad."

I found at least one answer before we got there: a magic carpet lifted off the ground with people on it, too far away to see clearly. It approached the upside down part of the castle, where a balcony would allow access to one of the very highest towers on the castle—in this case closest to the ground—and in an instant the rug flipped upside down. It landed, and the folks sitting on it, now upside down to me, stood and headed inside the castle.

Another one involved a flying manta ray descending out of the sky. It swooped down in a large arc that suddenly took them into the opposite gravitational pull once they reached a certain point. It was

carrying some eight people, all seated comfortably, and there was room for more.

There were others: another cloud bearing a person, a tiny tornado, and several more flying Nakamamon.

"Holy heckabaloo," he muttered.

***

The guards from the nearest tower called down, and leapt down to meet them. Christopher thought they were going to land on a cool giant dragonfly or something, but instead he just landed in a perfect superhero crouch. Two more guards landed at his sides a moment later.

These three were huge, built like trucks, and it took me longer than I cared to admit to realize that one of them was a woman. They wore spartan style helmets and carried spears, round metal shields, and had short swords at their backs.

"Guns?" I asked.

"They don't work here," she said, and didn't elaborate.

To be fair, the spear was rife with magic, having a spark that ran down from the tip through a vein of what looked like marbling, to the base of where it was connected to the haft. The shield, too, was embedded with gems that seemed to sparkle in a variety of colors. These were red, purple and several shades of pink in between.

"Let's have your name and ID," the guard said.

"Ranger Regina Hampstead, sir," she said, and handed him a packet of papers sealed with wax. "I'm here on a guide and escort mission."

The guard looked up at me. "I s'pose you don't have any of the requisite paperwork."

I shrugged. "Just arrived a few hours ago, uh… what should I call you? Sir?" I wasn't military. I hoped not to be, also.

The guy raked my figure up and down, pausing at my legs. "Sure, kid. Sir is fine."

He won zero points with me. The good news is that I'd had tons of experience with these kinds of people ever since my legs got broken and I got out of the hospital. I shrugged it off, reserving the right to dislike Blake, and holding out judgement on the rest of the guards here.

Regina saw this, and her face twisted with anger. "Excuse you?"

The guard looked up from her papers, then back down at them.

"Do I go take this up with command then?" she asked.

He snorted. "Why would you do that?"

"Christopher here is twenty years old. He's not a kid, and we don't do disrespect around here. How old are you again, Blake?"

Blake's demeanor grew instantly dark. "Look, Hampstead, you do the ranging, I do the guarding. Get off my back." He swelled to even bigger than his already enormous form. This isn't like a guy puffing out his chest, either. His guard uniform tightened onto his obscenely bulging body. He literally got muscles that didn't formerly exist, his neck disappeared, and it was a good thing he was wearing an armored skirt, because he would've shredded through any pants he'd been wearing. The leather groaned as he grew. The hulking routine took time, long enough for me to realize Regina had no visible reaction to him doing… whatever he was doing.

"This ain't earth, Blake," she said. "You don't pull that shizz here. And the super muscle routine doesn't work on me. I'm not intimidated. Now, you going to apologize to our newbie here, or do I go talk to your boss?"

Blake bared his teeth at her but said nothing. One of the other guards put a hand on his shoulder, and that seemed to do it. He deflated a bit, and glanced over at me.

"Sorry *Christopher*."

"What—" I started, but didn't get that far.

Regina stepped forward and stared intently up at his eight foot, double wide frame. "Not good enough."

This time, Blake went super saiyan. Yellowish energy literally burst out around his feet and surrounded him in an aura. He was breathing heavily, teeth clenched, hands balling into fists and falling limp again and again. He looked like he needed a truck to bench press, stat.

"Last chance, Blake, apologize to the man."

Blake turned and literally screamed in my face. He got down, opened a jaw that he nearly had to unhinge, and spittle flew out with a mighty roar.

***Unknown check**: You have been targeted by a special ability! You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is very high difficulty. Would you like to spend 8 Tokens to automatically succeed this check?*

The urge to mentally click yes was almost overwhelming, but some tiny part of me decided against it. That would be all my Free Tokens and whatever other Tokens that were left from my attributes. I knew I would need them. That meant choosing failure.

***Morale check:** You have failed this check. Do you wish to spend 1 Token to try again? If you fail again, the Token will be lost.*

"No," I growled.

Instantly, paralyzing fear swept over me. My knees buckled and I fell to my ass, scrambling backwards, into… another one of the guards. I looked up and into the face of a weary female guard.

"We're sorry about this, newbie," she said, and picked me up as though I was just a bag of groceries that needed putting away. "Blake's got a bit of a temper." When I peered back at the source of my terror, Blake was gone. I saw a tiny speck of a person wreathed in a yellow flaming aura flying through the air.

"He's also got the skills to be a serious danger," Regina said, "in a place like this. He is precisely the wrong sort of person to be

working in a job like this."

The lady guard grimaced. "Go ahead and report him."

"You could go ahead and report him," the other male guard said, "or you could chalk his behavior up to extenuating circumstances, and trust that he's a good guy otherwise." He removed his helmet and shook out a head of curly brown hair, then stared at her with icy blue eyes that glowed with magic.

Regina stared at the other guard for some time, then snorted in derision. "Come on, Chris, let's get out of here before this whole place goes up in hypocritical flames." She stalked off.

"Oh, I thought it was Christopher!" the other male guard yelled. "You giving him pet names on his first day in the Shire, huh?"

I didn't know what was happening. I had to push myself pretty hard to keep up with her, which set my legs to aching something fierce.

When she finally realized she had outpaced me, she stopped and tapped her foot, eye twitching. Tweedle Dee seemed to grasp her agitation and rubbed up against her leg. By the time I got there, she'd knelt down and had her hands buried in his fur.

"What… was that… about?" I asked, out of breath.

Regina sighed heavily, and kept her eyes downcast. "I'm sorry about that. I wish one of the other guards had been on rotation, but you had to meet Blake."

"And Blake is…"

"He was, kind of, not really, my boyfriend for a hot second."

This is Christopher rethinking his choices.

Chapter 12- Rightside Up and Upside Down

As we made our way through the upside down and rightside up buildings, my mind raced. If that other guard put together—or even suspected—that I was Regina's lover and Blake was the ex, that big meathead might do something like put my face through the back of my head. I had no doubt that big dumb bastard could do it, too.

Regina took us directly to a travel platform, presented her papers, and we got astride a freakin' pterodactyl with coruscating stripes of energy running down its body and wings. Tiny pulses of light traveled down its stripes and fizzled out where the creature ended. I focused on that, rather than on my questions or Regina's fury.

Tweedle Dee clearly didn't like the creature, or didn't like the idea of flying. He had to be coaxed up onto her lap. He curled around Regina's waist and whined pitifully the whole time. She calmed him with soft strokes of the fur.

Once on the leather double saddle, the creature launched itself off the ground with powerful flaps of its wings, and brought us to the lower levels of the rightside up portion of the mirror castle. We ended up on a docking platform specifically for flying creatures, since this portion of the castle was hovering over a hundred feet in the air. I found the situation surreal, watching as upside down means of flight swooped down towards the platforms directly below ours.

Regina leaned back and slipped a hand onto my thigh. "Ugh, I'm really sorry about what happened. And I wish there was another chance for us to have a little alone time."

"It's not your fault," I said. I hadn't even really blamed Blake. He was just the latest in a long line of assholes. And she was really placing her hand on the middle of my thigh… and sliding it higher. My body did the thing all twenty year olds did: it reacted.

"You don't quite understand… violence isn't allowed here."

"Violence… isn't allowed?" I really didn't understand.

She shook her head and slid her hand up my thigh. "Not allowed. The natives don't do it. Aren't even capable of doing it."

This rendered me speechless. Here we had Blake, super strongman and glowing super saiyan douche canoe with his intimidation shriek and his acting like a fucking toddler, and the natives… couldn't even defend themselves? Or rather… why were there guards if violence wasn't allowed?

We landed the pterodactyl creature with a head shaped more like a tyrannosaur, and in my periphery I noted that the number of Nakamamon I'd encountered had risen to two. This one, the system notified me, was called ???. Which was unhelpful. I chuckled at it, and tried to get my body back under my control. I was going to meet with officials who would decide my fate here in this new world, and I needed to make a good impression on them.

Tweedle Dee was more than happy to take his leave of the creature, leaping free and bounding all around the landing platform with his tongue lolling. I watched him with fondness, hoping to see as much of Regina and Tweedle Dee as possible.

Regina had gone stiff, her expression thunderous. "I'm going to leave you off at intake," Regina said curtly. She was clearly still upset about how the situation with Blake had gone.

"Oh!" he said. "Is this goodbye then?"

She pulled up short in the middle of leaving, and turned back to me. She went to reach for me, but stopped herself, which caused me to glow warmly in the middle of his chest.

"I'm… not sure. I may be on the team to escort you to your assignment. We'll see." She glanced around before finally mustering up the courage to reach out and squeeze my hand, right where a

flowery shape had been indelibly etched. “Hopefully I’ll see you again, Christopher.”

“Call me Fletcher,” I told her, and she grinned. “I’ll see you later!”

With that, she was off.

The attendant responsible for the flying creature smiled down at me. He was a giant of a man, easily six and a half feet. “First day, huh?”

I nodded. “You got that right… this place… it’s amazing.”

The corner of his mouth quirked up, and he gazed around. From up here it was easy to see a lot further than before, and the vista was still just as glorious as it had been before: imposing mountains stabbing up at a sky full of coruscating colors, gigantic mushrooms looking like they could feed thousands, and trees that didn’t seem to give a shit where the sun was. Off in one direction, for the first time, I saw the shoreline stretching off in both directions for ages.

“Get used to it, son,” the older man said.

“Could I ask you a question?” I asked, and he just chuckled. “I guess I already have. What’s your Nakamamon called?”

“I named her Iris,” he said. “Goddess of rainbows. She’s a Glimmerdactyl.”

“So clearly we’ve been naming all these creatures, huh?”

He nodded. “Come on, I’ll show you the way. Welcome to intake, by the way. I’m Rus, and you’re Christopher Fletcher. Odd to have a cohort of one, but we’re used to odd here.”

I shook the hulking man’s hand and asked him to call me Chris, or Fletcher. He had an absolutely crushing grip, but the warmth coming off him told me it was accidental. He ate up the distance leading me down the well-lit hallways to the office, and only belatedly realized I wasn’t keeping up. He chuckled.

“I gotta tell you, Fletcher, I feel like a younger man in here. Would you believe when I got in here, I was sixty-seven years old and basically retired?”

“You don’t look a day over sixty-five,” I told him, grinning. He actually looked maybe forty, though I was twenty and everybody

over forty looked just plain *old*.

He threw back his head and guffawed loudly, instantly getting my fairly lame joke. "Sixty-five! Hell, I used to be almost completely bald. Had one of those horrible strips of hair that runs from ear to ear. Shudder to think, eh?" He ran a hand through his hair. Despite having a receding hairline, he had a (mostly) full head of salt and pepper hair. "Hell, it was all white, too. And I couldn't keep this godawful paunch off…" He went to grab onto a gut that wasn't there, and grinned at me. "And the energy I got back, just setting foot here. I tell you what… if they don't kick me out, I'm never going back."

"That's great," I said, and gave him the most sincere smile I could muster.

He shook his head and continued chuckling. "Sixty-five. Son, I get why Dick got you in here so fast. I like you."

"Thank you, sir."

"You can call me Rus," he said. "After all, I feel like you look. I may look like a 'sir' but I don't feel it."

I grinned. "Well, Rus, just tell me where to go and who to talk to, and I'll get out of your very thick hair."

"Nah," he said. "I'm intake."

"Intake Rus, that's what they call him. Good old Intake Rus, with his invisible flab and full head of hair on his bald head," I said, and he guffawed again.

There was some paperwork, or rather, there was some stonework. He had me sign a wet slab of clay, after reading through the fine print carefully. This was identical to the contract I'd already signed on earth, which included a spot for my parents' names as beneficiaries in case I ended up ended.

Like having my life sucked out by a corrupted god.

I signed with a stylus, and he brought the tablet out to his glimmerdactyl, who dutifully breathed fire on it until the tablet was totally baked through.

"What's next?" I asked, though by now I was hoping to get a bit of shuteye. The day had been long, hard, and I was spent.

"Let's get you to the academy, get some grub in you for dinner, and get you a place to sleep. Then academy begins in the morning." He rummaged in his desk and brought out a small vial of bright yellow liquid with a stopper. The liquid was opaque, so it definitely wasn't that I thought it might be. "In the meantime, take this if you please."

I cast a worried glance at it, but the system stuff, the burst of invigoration from the Physicality Tokens and the existence of magic all helped to clear my mind. This was just a magic potion of some kind. I popped the stopper off and drank quickly.

The flavor was so, so weird. Like seventeen different flavors, all shifting in and out of each other. It went from one to the next rapidly, almost faster than my tongue could process.

You have imbibed Stamina Potion! the huge blue window told me in that same blocky 8-bit font. *Your stamina has been restored to full. Your stamina has been restored beyond full. The excess will be kept in reserve until you wake.*

A new thing I hadn't noticed before appeared: a yellow green bar at the top of my periphery, near a very short red and an even shorter blue bar. The yellow bar was easily three times longer than the red one, and filled with glowing yellow light as I watched. It then hit the end of the bar, and an even stronger glow erupted as the bar extended past where it had before. I saw the demarcation line, where the bar typically ended. It kept going until it was maybe 50% of the original.

And here's the thing: I felt *amazing*. Not jittery and on edge like I'd just had a coffee, but fully awake and alert, like I'd just had the best sleep of my life and woke up on a thick mattress and a down pillow. I gaped at Rus, who was bent over, hands on knees and laughing until he couldn't make even tiny wheezes of laughter.

"Are you… okay?"

He held a hand out and shook his head, then fell back on his butt, laughing.

"You shoulda… seen your… face…" He sent himself off into another fit of laughter.

I had to laugh too, wondering what I looked like. Once he was done with his paroxysm, I helped him off the floor and listened to him periodically burst out laughing.

"Whoooo," he said. "I can't even… heeee. Every time we get a newbie."

"I'm glad, I think," I said, unsure. He didn't seem to be making fun of me. This was a very different experience than every interaction I'd had with people, ever since the accident.

No pity, no overprotective mothering, and certainly no sneering barbs of cruelty. Obviously I liked it here, but now I liked Rus. A lot.

"Oh, you are, and so am I. Just keep that childlike feeling of wonder and awe, son. Don't lose that. You'll be better for it."

"All right," I told him.

Now that I had a pep in my step, it was quick going to reach the academy. This was across the whole length of the castle, and then below… into the upside down.

At one point, we were headed down the stairs, and then Rus had us take a strange sideways step here, and then we were just upside down. People passed us, and it was mind-boggling to watch them flip around on the stairwell, then be subject to the other gravity after passing us.

"Just ignore it," I told myself. "It'll be fine."

"Can't handle a little Escher-esque backwards gravity, can we?" Rus cackled again, then shook his head, holding his sides. "I have… the best job."

The academy wasn't big. It was no Frogwarts School of Magic & Whatnot, that's for sure. We approached large double doors, and that felt pretty similar, but upon opening them, it was basically one

big hall with four rooms, arranged two on either side. Three were classrooms, and one was the office. The end.

"Expect to be sorted into a house?" Rus asked.

"Kind of?"

"Well you can be a Flufflehump," he said. "We all are. Though I guess some of us are Wiseowls."

I thought about Blake.

"I've got a question for you, Rus. Unrelated."

"Hm?"

"What's with the rule on violence?"

He stopped short. "Huh? What makes you bring that up?"

"There are guards all over the place, but no violence allowed? If there's no violence, then why have guards in the first place?"

He squinted off into the corner of the academy. "It's a chicken or egg situation, see? If we've got no protection and something dangerous happens, we're toast."

I nodded. "But if you have protectors you're more likely to end up with a warlord."

"You're not wrong. It's part of the reason why the guards here only serve for a maximum of three weeks before getting rest and relaxation back on earth, for weeks at a time. They're not allowed to have jobs back on earth, and especially not jobs like security or bouncer, or professional fighters. And anybody who ends up with a criminal record is uninvited."

I raised my eyebrows.

"There's no violence here," he said, "period. The creatures here didn't even know what it was until we showed up. They still don't, and that's the way we're aiming to keep it. Catch me?"

"I guess I do."

"Anyone with enough power could do some serious damage if they wanted to," Rus said.

That made a lot of sense.

Rus and I entered the academy section of the upside down part of the castle. He turned and entered the first of the rooms he came across, where a middle aged woman was writing with a quill onto paper. On her shoulder, a winged snake was perched, with scales that seemed blue at first. Those scales flipped over on themselves as we approached, and became a brilliant striped pattern in red, white and yellow, like the flames from Rus's Nakamamon. It regarded us with intelligent eyes.

The woman, frowning, scrunched the paper up into a ball and threw it into a metal wastebasket.

"I guess we really are using cuneiform, as it turns out," she said, not looking up. "Every single official communication is going to have to be baked into the bloody clay like it's three thousand bloody years ago.

"Russell? What brings you… oh, you have someone, don't you?"

She finally seemed to recognize that I was there.

"Headmistress," Rus said, with a little too much inflection, "this is Christopher Fletcher, who prefers to be called Fletcher. Fletcher, this is Head*mistress* Alexandra Jenkins, but she likes to be called Allie. You know, she'll find help you figure out the type of job that's up your alley."

The woman stood. She was very, very tall. Taller than Rus, and far taller than me. "You are aware that joke sounds very much like an innuendo, do you not? Several, in fact."

Rus shrugged. "And yet you don't stop me from making it. Let's get young Fletcher here a place to store his things for the night, a meal, and then we'll let him bathe in the sights for a day or two before we put him to work."

"Christopher Fletcher, that's right," she said, nodding. "I received the notification from Dick Johnson about you last week." At Rus's snort, she turned a sharp glare his way. "That is no way to treat our hiring department, Russell."

"Oh come on Allie, he's not here. We can slip in a little fun at him, can't we?" He leaned toward me and poked an elbow into my

ribs. “Ain’t that right, Fletcher? Dick Johnson can get the shaft just so long as we know we’re joking and we’re polite when he’s around. Just the tip, ya might say.”

I grinned. “Dick Johnson? I like the guy. I think he’s got quite a good head on his shoulders.”

Rus chuckled. “He’s a bit of a stiff though.”

“He did seem quite excited,” I replied. “Ejaculated his job offer before I could really understand what was happening.”

“That is quite enough of that,” Allie said.

“The man goes hard, he does,” Rus said, and chortled, then slapped a hand on my shoulder and nearly bowled me over. “All right, all right. I’ll hand ya off ta Allie. When she’s done with ya, I’ll be right outside and ready to take ya to the mess.”

And it was in the moment after Rus left that I realized I was now in Allie’s care, and I probably should’ve been kinder to Dick Johnson.

This is Christopher burning with embarrassment but grinning like a fool anyhow.

Chapter 13- ARE YOU SURE?

Before

The confusion and hurt on my father's face crushed my insides.

"They're *what*?"

I explained to him again that the specialists were going to be coming in the next day, to have another look at Mom's condition. They were going to make sure she had the best care available, and he wouldn't have to worry about the money anymore.

Secretly, I hoped he'd start going back into work. I'd already exhausted my boss's patience with my moping around and feeling sorry for myself, but Dad had a good job at GM, designing their new line of cars and trucks. They had given him plenty of time away from work to handle getting Mom comfortable, then even more time to be by her side every day, and get his head back in order. But by now, even he was stretching the goodwill of the company. I knew he loved the work, and they really enjoyed him. He had friends there. Work and friends would both help him get through this… just like the money from my new career as a whatever-the-hell-I'd-be-doing.

"We need you here, Chris," he said. "I don't understand. Where will you be going?"

I'd been instructed to tell him as little as possible.

“It’s a research facility… up in northern Alaska.” This wasn’t, strictly speaking, a lie. The government agency that did this other world situation had a facility up in Alaska. He and Mom could really find it and visit it, if they moved heaven and hell to get in contact with me. And, in the event of a serious emergency, the agency would transport me out there.

“And they won’t have internet there?”

I shook my head. “I’m not sure. They said there’s a chance I would be cut off from the world, so I’m letting you know. From what I understand, I’ll be setting up equipment way, way out. Like in polar bear country. So, sleeping in tents and growing a beard.” I’d grow a beard the day pigs started doing calculus and quantum physics. It wasn’t that I hated the idea of doing it, just that my genetics wouldn’t allow it.

The joke slid right off his haggard face and concerns. “And… and… why?”

I sighed and shrugged. “Obviously for the money.” I didn’t want to tread on his pride. He was supposed to be the provider, but Mom’s treatments had already crushed us financially. “Sarah needed money. You guys could use some. It’s the least I can do.”

Hell, I’d lived in their basement trying to make an extra buck off streaming.

“That’s…” My father’s gaze turned inward. “That’s kind of you, buddy, but it’s not necessary. You don’t have to do this just for us.”

I owed them more than I could say. Life, birthday parties, soccer practices, camping trips, and then all the consoles and video games I’d asked for over the years.

“I’m not,” I said, “believe me. I’m doing it for me. One, I get plenty of money even after throwing a bunch at you and Sarah. Two, I get to go on an adventure. I’ll see the aurora, I’ll get to see the sun rotating around in a circle in the sky, or the sun won’t even come up… I can’t remember which one happens now.” I laughed. “Also, I want Sarah to realize that she needs to talk to you guys. And I hope you get to see your grandkids.”

His expression grew very complicated there, but only for a moment. The implication of what I’d said sank in. “Grand…kids? Did you say grand*kids*?”

I nodded. “She’s pregnant. Again.”

“Oh…” he muttered. “That’s great. That’s amazing!” The words didn’t have all the punch and emotion they should’ve, but that was alright. As long as he was talking about Sarah in a positive way, that was good.

He clearly had a lot more to say, but he wouldn’t say it in front of me.

“Look,” I said. “Apparently this is the kind of environment people don’t handle well, so I have to put a lot of books onto my e-reader, a whole bunch of songs onto my computer, and a whole bunch of movies onto my computer, and get ready to just be alone for a couple months. Then I’ll be back on some R&R time, okay?” These were almost all lies. I had been specifically told that all electronics would die on contact with the other world. It wasn’t a lie in that I’d be putting all the media on my electronics, but all the electronics were going to be left before reaching the portal building.

He nodded.

“I’ve got to get ready.”

“Sure, buddy.” He blinked several times and rose. “Sure. Sure.”

“I already told Mom.” I let the words hang in the air, along with the other implication. She needed him. Me leaving them money, and me leaving them, were going to push Dad back away from the abyss he’d been staring into, and back into her arms.

I made for the stairs. I really did have a lot to pack.

“Hey,” he said. When I turned, he had broken into a wide smile, and this time it looked like the reality of the situation had finally penetrated. He looked joyful for the first time in ages. “You’re amazing.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“I’m proud of you. Now go get all your YouTubes downloaded and movies pirated and MP3s on your disks.”

I laughed, and headed through the kitchen, into the basement.

Now

Allie towered over me a moment. She had blonde hair with threads of gray, but also threads of blue, green, and purple. She was wearing a typical pantsuit in gray material with tiny white pinstripes. The whole thing was skewing towards purple, with the magic in the air.

"Mr. Fletcher," she said. "I'm pleased you could make it. However, you shouldn't immediately jump into Rus's inappropriate antics just because he fails to take anything seriously."

"Rus is pretty familiar with people here," I said. "Sorry about that. It was infectious…" I trailed off, feeling pretty lame. Also embarrassed. I had a sinking feeling this imperious woman could end my stay here after a single day if she wanted to and there'd be nothing I could do about it. Goodbye huge pay increase, goodbye helping out my sister and my parents.

"That won't be a problem," she said, and cracked a wide smile. Apparently my contrition was convincing. "Rus is enjoying the same benefits all us old people are." She gestured to her hair. "I have all the color back in my hair. And would you look at this?" She pulled up the curtain of hair on one side, revealing a pointy ear. "I'm an elf!"

“Whoa,” I breathed.

“And you,” she chuckled. “It looks like some of the projections were right. Let’s get you a mirror and your first pill.”

The mirror showed that my face was turning colors. It looked a bit like I was a stained glass window and each of the smaller window panes was a different color. Most were orange, but a few were yellow, red, or brown. In a few places dots had emerged, and I was once again reminded of a Monarch butterfly.

“Um… could I ask why this is happening?” Actually, I needed a lot more than that, but I was going to start there.

Allie let out another rueful laugh, and took a glass container full of pills out of her desk. She retrieved one, followed by a tumbler filled with water for me to wash it down. In the meantime, I had a look down into the collar of my shirt.

Yep, I had gone Monarch… or rather stained glass, all the way down inside. And that wasn’t all. The shirt I’d worn in here had been one of a few dress shirts I owned, a blue collar button down with short sleeves. The buttons had changed into those old school toggle things: thick rope, wide button in the shape of an egg if you managed to squish it down and pull out the long end. The shirt itself had

blossomed with color, too. In one place the color had leeched out and left it a gray white, while the extra color apparently migrated up my trunk and turned the soft blue into a purplish color.

Nothing was untouched. The boxer shorts I'd packed were a riot of colors now. The material of all my socks had shifted slightly. Some were scratchier than before, while one of the pairs turned to a silky substance, possibly silk but no way to know.

All the lettering on all the tags on every single piece of clothing I'd owned were now indecipherable. None of them were the same letters. It was like all the letters turned into tiny worms that wriggled around on the tags, and eventually froze back in place. It was so weird I couldn't help laugh over it.

"Yes, so, you will need to use this pill once a day. In an emergency you can ration them out to once per week, but if you are too far from your supply, you will need to return to base within a week of taking them."

I blinked at her. "What happens after a week?"

Allie smiled kindly at me. "I am here as part of your employment, and as such I am obliged to tell you this: you not taking your pills will not allow you to claim hazard pay. This is a minor annoyance that, left untreated, will advance internally. We studied it initially, and found there were alterations to brain

function. I don’t want to scare you. We developed the pills to counteract these sorts of effects, the pills work, end of story.”

Nodding numbly, I let the reality sink in.

“Since you are here as an employee, currently drawing a salary, it is incumbent upon me to get you to a place where you can perform the tasks and duties of an employee as soon as possible.”

“Class selection,” I said.

“Did your guide brief you?”

“Yes and no. I had an encounter with one of the corrupted gods, a goddess of the meadows.”

She nodded solemnly, but I caught the slight widening of her eyes and the way her hand automatically drifted up to her chest, over her heart. “I had read that report, and I will say I’m quite pleased you weren’t seriously or irreparably hurt. You are here, meaning neither your guide nor Rus saw a need to send you to the infirmary.”

I nodded.

“Of course if you feel that you are in need of medical care, I’ll take you there straight away.”

I considered telling her about the rose shape that now lived under the palm of my right hand, but decided against it. Instead I took my pill, washed it

down with water that tasted slightly of sugar, and nodded to her.

"She decided it would be best to go through character generation," I told her. "I picked my name, spent my attribute points, and got a bunch of tokens."

She continued nodding, and rolled her hand over, a sign for me to continue.

"It seems the Tokens are spent to accomplish tasks without trying to rely on skills and attributes." More nodding. "I have a few questions, naturally."

"Of course."

I then learned that she didn't know who set up the system, or if it was in place when she arrived. She did confirm that skills helped offset the need for Tokens, and that my class would supply the skills.

"Then let's get you a class," she said, and pulled up an honest-to-goodness Player's Handbook(TM). It looked enough like the Player's Handbook I'd seen growing up that I squealed in delight and laughed. The production quality, graphics on the cover, and font choices were high enough quality to bring out the old tabletop roleplayer in me.

"Dick chose well," she muttered, smiling. "You'll need chapter three, which is class selection."

I flipped the hardcover book open, skipping chapter one, which was *What Is A Roleplaying*

Game? and similar introductory material. Still, the illustrations on the book's interior showed me this wasn't just an employee handbook, but somebody's labor of love. Somebody's jokey labor of love.

"Did Rus make this?" I asked, and skipped over chapter two, which covered the chargen I'd already gone through with Regina. Chapter three had a full page illustration of an adventuring party: a bard, a cleric, a fighter, a Ranger, and a Wizard. All of them, however, had Nakamamon creatures with them. The Ranger had a bear-sized porcupine made of wood, bark and twigs, while the bard had a glowing pink bird with four wings and long, flowing tail feathers. It was absolutely enchanting and I couldn't help but gasp in shock.

"There are more guys like Rus here than I'd care to imagine," she said with a sigh. "And it looks like there's one more."

"I guess…" I said, flipping through the next few pages.

The base description of what classes were and what they did wasn't necessary. I had that stuff memorized from when I was a kid. After that, it went in alphabetical order: bard, followed by cleric. I didn't need to go further.

"I'll be one of these."

Allie stared down at the picture of the Healer holding a glowing hand against the torn leg of a fellow adventurer. She frowned a bit, then schooled her expression well.

"You haven't even read the description."

"Doesn't matter," I said. I wanted to do what Mustache Face had done. I wanted to save people, and wounded creatures, and maybe even uncorrupt the corrupted gods like the Goddess of the Meadows. No way was I going to be a huge musclebound Guardian like Blake. Why they would choose to be guards in a place without violence made no sense to me.

On the other hand, there was a very real problem here, with the gods of this world bleeding and dying, and I was going to be a part of that solution. I was already thinking beyond the job.

"You want to be a Healer then," she said, with the unasked 'is that your final answer' hanging in the air.

"Yep."

She nodded, resigned. "It's not like we don't need more Healers," she muttered. She wasn't going to try talking me out of it. "You'll have to say 'class selection' and then follow the prompts you find there. If you have a choice to make, consult with me first."

I said the words, and once more the large blue window appeared, full of blocky white text.

CHOOSE YOUR CLASS: was followed immediately by a triangle pointing at BARD. Below that was CLERIC, then FIGHTER, RANGER, ROGUE, SORCERER, and WIZARD.

I moved the triangle down so it was pointed at CLERIC and mentally pressed my assent. ARE YOU SURE? Y/N the prompt asked, and I once again confirmed my pick.

A white light shone down from above, somehow cutting through both the rightside up and the upside down sections of the castle. Pulses of pure white rained down around me, and the whole place filled with an antiseptic smell I associated with my mother's hospital room. The whole room grew brighter and brighter white, while energy swirled around me faster and faster, whipping my hair and clothes around, and throwing things off Allie's desk.

When it subsided, she was smiling ruefully. "I always forget to have them do that in the main hall. Would you kindly help me pick up some of this stuff?"

I chuckled and went to help her retrieve her books, papers, and paperweights.

This is Christopher finally getting his job.

Chapter 14- Orientation

Allie and I spent a good fifteen minutes tidying up her office. She alternated between grumbling and laughing about forgetting the whirlwind that surrounded people when they chose their classes. Every single time, apparently, she forgot.

She assured me there were no other things for her to counsel me on; now that I had my class, it would be about getting a look at my skills and then raising them. The only warning she gave was not to go too fast right out of the gate. Go slow and easy.

"You're talking to a guy who reached out and touched a god," I thought and definitely didn't say.

I'd find out what she meant soon enough. In the meantime, she also gave me the Player's Handbook to look at.

It wasn't long for this world. The illustrations were already being tampered with by the magical resonance suffusing the whole place. And it appeared that most of Chapter One was already altering itself into nonsense words, and turning the letters into more indecipherable gobbledegook.

She promised to have some of the clay tablets sent in. These would explain more, and were much more resilient against magical interference than basic paper and ink. Then she sent a runner to grab my gear and escort me to my quarters to deposit all my stuff there, then head to dinner. The runner had a kind of ferret creature, or maybe an otter, made of multi-colored inky stuff. The Nakamamon flowed through and around the runner's feet, never tripping him up. Sometimes it glanced at me with eyes of solid empty black that seemed to judge me.

I was filled with questions, and the runner answered them with great big smiles, while he hopped around from one foot to another. His ink creature kept weaving this way and that in figure eights around his ankles. It turned out he'd only been here a month, and

was still pretty new. He'd immediately started turning into a stuffed animal on his first day in, and luckily the pills took care of all that. His clothes were ruined though, haha, and all the electronics he'd brought were toast. Double haha.

Passing a t-intersection, I locked eyes with Regina, who was grinning at me. I had just enough time to see her clutch her pleated skirt and start to raise it before the runner led me out of sight. When I stopped and leaned back, poking my head back to see down the hall again, she giggled and pulled her skirt all the way up. Once again, she was going commando. The thatch of hair I saw had changed to the same glowing pinkish red as up top.

Then the runner was calling for me. I gave a lightning fast wave and hurried to catch up, trying to ignore the protesting from my already-aching legs.

"Holy shift," I muttered, and grinned at my own unconscious following of her rule.

Dinner was perhaps the most sumptuous meal I'd ever had in my life. I mean, my family was never very well off, but this was essentially government spending here. Somehow they'd enticed a Michelin chef out into a magic world, and given him an octopus-like Nakamamon with fire on all of its arms. The creature was bigger than I was, flicking woks full of fried rice while stirring several different pasta dishes at the same time. Other cooks and their own companion creatures helped prep, cook, and plate the food.

And the smells… ugh. I almost wished Regina hadn't distracted me away from the astonishing world around me, because it smelled like heaven. Sweet, savory, spicy and floral smells all mixed around.

The dining hall was just a buffet, and since I hadn't eaten basically all day with Regina, I loaded up my plate with one of everything. I had crab legs and slices of pizza, California rolls and a scoop of cream pasta.

The runner watched me with bemusement, telling me to slow down a bit. Then, when he asked what class I'd chosen and I told him, he got real sober.

“Oh. Then I guess you’re not going to be sticking around, are ya?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, there aren’t enough Healers. You’re going to be stationed somewhere, probably working under a journeyman Healer. Could be out in the boonies for all I know.”

“Oh.”

“You’ll be out among the natives.”

I didn’t know what that meant, and he didn’t want to expand on it. Instead he waved at friends, and took his inky ferret friend with him before I could even make a proper introduction.

So I ate, and then I ate more. It could’ve been from all the hiking, but I was pretty sure I had extra helpings because of an afternoon spent having athletic sex. And if they weren’t going to stop me from eating my fill, I wouldn’t stop until I was done.

The evening found me back in my dorm room, a place that felt positively enormous compared to my bedroom back home. It was more of an apartment than anything else: two cozy little bedrooms with bunkbeds, even though I was the only newbie, twin dressers and two vanities with large mirrors. All appeared to be trees grown directly out of the floor, without visible joints, nails or screws to keep them together. The mattress was thick and soft, definitely imported from earth, but the rest had been… I don’t know, commanded to grow like this. Even so, the dresser drawers slid smoothly out and then back in on wooden rails.

There wasn’t much of a chance I was going to spend more than a few nights here, but I luxuriated in the plush carpet, wine-colored, and the homey candelabras that held no candles. Instead, the tapered metal ends just lit up with a yellow white light.

The bathroom was the only place where I felt they could’ve done better. It was small and a bit cramped, with those same candelabras above the large mirror, which was too bright. Still, they had hot and cold water that went somewhere after I took a shower, in an anti-

gravity portion of a floating castle in a magical world. What was I even doing, critiquing this?

After a mental forehead slap and a chuckle, I toweled off and explored my living quarters more fully.

The living area was divided into two sections: one included a wraparound sofa facing two easy chairs, while the other included desks and comfy desk chairs, and straight-backed cushioned chairs that looked like smoking chairs. These had bookstands in front of them. Just as I was getting to the part where I wondered why the bookstand needed to be made of stone, or have a foot thick base beneath, the same runner appeared, with his buddies. They were each holding stacks of heavy clay tablets.

Which was how I spent the evening reading through an impressive stack of information on this world, all stamped into clay and baked. These had been stamped and looked like old newspapers. Some of them even had hand-carved illustrations, essentially stamps pressed into them. These showed Nakamamon and the different sorts of gods. The guidebook was a very simplistic guide to the world here, and what I could expect to see on any given day.

The Nakamamon had evolved, or transformed, due to the magic here, and some of those transformations were on account of things humans had brought with them. The creatures could be shaped like anything they'd ever seen. Tweedle Dee was a Vulpetunia, a flower fox essentially. The guidebook explained that these creatures were shown to the world through books, generally, and then the latent magic sort of popped them into existence. So the pteradactyl-looking creature was literally just an artist's rendering of a dinosaur that had sprung to life after someone brought a dinosaur book in here and started, what, showing the pages to the plant life of this world?

I wondered what this place had looked like initially. A barren landscape of absolutely nothing? No color anywhere? Had it only started imitating colors once humans came through?

The answers to those questions weren't in the guidebook, but I read on regardless, eager to soak up the weird lore of this place.

Eventually it came to the place where class selection happened, and what happened next. I read through the command again, 'reveal character sheet', so I said the words aloud. Before, it had been pretty simple, but now…

Christopher Fletcher
Healer - Trainee 1

attributes:
Affinity 2 (2/2)
Durability 3 (3/3)
Ingenuity 5 (5/5)
Likability 4 (4/4)
Physicality 2 (0/2)
Free Tokens: 6/6
Unspent attributes points: 1

Healer Skills:
Diagnosis (physical, spiritual, magical, mental)
Treatment (potions, salves, tinctures, elixirs, unguents)
Develop cure (swarm, small, large, huge)
Develop cure (elemental/nature: fire, earth, water, plant, electric)
Develop cure (spiritual, beast, insect, fairy, dragon, psychic, unique)
Administer Cure*
Unspent skill points: 42

The tablets explained that each of those skills in the parentheses was a unique skill. So Diagnosis (physical) was different than Diagnosis (spiritual), and both needed points put in them. Meaning I now had around 28 different skills, and not even enough points to give each of them a skill rating of 2.

Also, I still didn't have a skill that would allow me to shrug off Blake's douchey intimidation yell, which I didn't appreciate, and no skill to defend myself from the guy. I didn't love that either.

With luck, this assignment abroad would take me far, far from Blake and any other guardsmen who had battle skills they were forbidden from using. Then again, my luck had a pretty bad track record right this moment. I'd do a lot of finger crossing until I got to where I was supposed to be.

The clay tablets (and Allie) suggested I should start small. The Develop Cure skills by size indicated the type of gods and Nakamamon I would be healing, so I put 3 ranks in both Swarm and Small. It then indicated I could increase the skill levels of the Develop Cure when I was on assignment, so I should save at least 6 skill points for those. I set those aside, leaving me with 30 points.

Diagnosis seemed absolutely vital, for me to know what it was I would be doing, so I spent 3 points on all four of those.

Unlike with the Develop Cure (Swarm) and (small) skills, the moment I sank the twelve points into Diagnosis, I was flooded with a whole host of knowledge on how to check for various maladies. I knew how to take a blood pressure reading for the physical ailment, I knew how to apply my Affinity with the Magical skill to discern how magic might be at play. I knew about fonts of magic that bubbled up from beneath the earth, I suddenly knew about ley lines and the shifting tide of magic, in how it circulated throughout the world.

Honestly, it was headache inducing to have all of that flood my mind all at once. I shook my head and smiled, amazed that I could just put a point onto a screen and instantly flood my brain with understanding.

With 18 remaining, it was time to take a look at what Administer Cure looked like.

I now had a whole lot of screens stacked atop one another, and I was enjoying the serene atmosphere of my dorm room, and the game-like challenge of distributing my points in any sort of effective way.

The screen informed me that Administer Cure would take a different form with each of the affected beings. I might have to dose a creature with a big pill, and get them to swallow it, or inject them in the correct spot, or get them to inhale the cure.

"Hello with it," I muttered, and put three points into that. On a whim, I tried to put another point into it, and it allowed me. I pushed it up to rank 6, then even 7 before it stopped me and said 7 was the max for any one skill to begin.

It seemed obvious that no matter how long it took me to figure out what was wrong, what treatment to use in the meantime, and how to cure the thing, it was all four naught if I couldn't actually deliver the cure in the end. If I made up a prototype of a huge friggin pill, it would be useless if I dumped it when trying to get the creature to swallow it.

Plus, the clay tablet newspaper things informed me that Administer Cure was the number one thing you wanted in the end.

This left me with the 6 I was intending to save for all the different types of creatures, and 11 more besides. I decided to put 2 in each of the different types of treatments. All the balms, elixirs, potions, unguents, and tinctures were getting 2 ranks each.

More knowledge flooded my brain: tools to use in making them, the correct viscosity of each, the fact that some were solutions and required more of this or that. I knew a whole host of potential ingredients, beginning with oils and moving on through herbs and barks of trees. Some of these I'd never heard of.

The whole thing was disorienting, and I knew some aspirin would help. Acetylsalicylic acid. Made from willow bark and other natural ingredients.

"Huh," I marveled aloud. I knew these things automatically now. Wild.

I had a single skill point remaining out of the ones I was ready to spend, but pushed it over into the 'keep for later' pile. If the max I could do was rank 7, then I should have at least that many. This made sense in my mind at the time.

The runner was outside my door. He produced a pair of aspirin when I placed a hand at my head, before I could even speak.

"Common occurrence?" I asked tiredly.

He grinned in the affirmative. "Every time. I have to say though, it's odd having just one newbie at a time."

"Oh yeah?"

"The first couple of cohorts around my time were fifteen to twenty strong. My cohort was sixteen. We had a lot of fun those first couple of training days. I got all kinds of laid. Practically all the girls we entered with, and one of the runners who helped us out in those training days."

I had to wonder how much of this was true, and how much was bullshit. A lot of people liked to puff themselves up to look good for other people, but I'd never had it happen to me.

He smiled sadly at me. "Pity you don't have a bunch of fellow trainees to spend the next couple of days getting to know, like Biblically."

Was everybody here super horny? It sure seemed like it. Blake wanted Regina, this guy wanted to nail everything that moved. And Regina wanted me, for some unfathomable reason.

Back in my dorm room, I chanced a look in the enormous mirror behind the sink, and froze.

My body had been transformed. I'd been a twiggy, pale little guy before, and already my sloped shoulders had a hint of definition. My sunken chest now bulged with far more muscle than ever before, the little belly I had from too many sweets and sodas was conspicuously absent, and I had *biceps*. Like real honest-to-meadow-goddess arm muscles.

They weren't big. They weren't even remotely what you would call impressive. Nobody would be asking me how often I went to the gym. I definitely wasn't a match for the towering slab of beef Blake. At the same time I also wasn't a weakling. I leaned back and watched as a hint of ab muscles appeared.

“Whoa,” I said. It made me want to spend my free attribute point on Physicality.

After a shower, it was time to hit the clay tablets again. According to the guidebook, I had selected my skills pretty well, and the instantaneous knowledge from those skill points meant I could pretty much start doing my job, like, now. It was time to figure out how to get myself an assigned Nakamamon. I needed a cutesy creature in my life, starting yesterday.

I was interrupted by a scratching at the window. Looking over, I saw two vine-like tendrils curling in through the window, growing with incredible speed and grasping at the stones making up my room. Buds appeared in contrasting colors, then sprang to life on the vines.

Soon enough, I could hear panting, so I headed over and found Regina climbing up a hastily constructed ladder. She waved me away, and then laughing and breathing heavily, she pulled herself up through the window and into my room. She spied that my bed was just beneath the large window, and rolled down onto it.

“Uh… thanks Dee!” I called out, as the vines disengaged from their grappling hook configuration. Both vines waved cheerily at me.

This is Christopher… the sex object?

Chapter 15- It's Hamster

Regina looked, if possible, even more gorgeous than she had earlier that day. Her freckles were still glowing like gemstones embedded in her skin, and her hair was still glowing a brownish red. It now included some odd highlights, like a strand or three of glittery purple, some shining green, and a lock of actual ruby. The pink sleeveless shirt had been replaced by a sky blue tank top. The happy flower between her breasts had been discolored by the magic here, with the colors running together, and that made it even cooler. She'd swapped the pleated skirt with an even shorter one in a plaid pattern the magic was turning into a light show. And if she somehow understood everything that had ever turned me on before, she had on rainbow colored knee high socks.

I don't know what it is about the presence of a woman's knees and half her thighs, but men everywhere will understand. If those are visible, if a sliver of midsection is visible, if a hint of cleavage is visible, it's almost better than seeing her in a string bikini. Perhaps it's what you can see playing in your mind against what you know is there, but *can't* see.

I won't make the argument that men are complicated. We'll still drool over pictures of naked women. I will argue that there is a spectrum of allure, and sometimes less is more.

"Well," she said, "if it isn't Christopher Fletcher."

"Well!" I mimicked, grinning at her. "If it is Regina, whose last name I don't remember. Wait! I heard it once, don't tell me. It was… Regina… Hamster."

She laughed and shoved me back. "It's Hampstead, you goof."

"I'm pretty sure it's Hamster, and it always has been and will be."

"Oh is that how we're playing it then?"

I nodded sadly. "I'm afraid Fletcher is an awesome last name and you won't be able to butcher it and tease me. Apologies, Hamster."

"Flexer? No that's lame. Flint, no, flack, no… ugh, this is hard."

"What brings you here?" I asked, my tone pure innocence.

She stepped up, really close. I could smell the jasmine-based perfume she'd put on. And I could feel the arousal in the air between us… somehow. Regina was wet.

"I'm wet," she confirmed, making my cock jump in my pants, "and I need you to do that again, from earlier. With your tongue."

"Do wha… ohhh." Well, according to porn, there were several options. "So you mean sit on my face, lay back and enjoy, or sixty-nine?"

She reacted like she'd just won the lottery: her face lit up with bewilderment, amazement, and pure joy. "Sit on your face?"

"Is that your final answer?" I asked, with an impish grin. This world had really gotten to me, honestly. I was so overjoyed to be here, and I couldn't wait to find some monsters and gods to heal up. Right now my boner was straining against my pants and there was a girl here—not just any girl, but a smoking hot one—who wanted me. Everything was coming up Christopher.

She laughed nervously. "Why don't we uh… why don't we keep it simple first? I've never—"

I pulled her by one hand over to the bed, where I immediately sat down and scooted back until I had my back against the wall. She had to awkwardly climb up onto the bed, and when I pulled her even closer, she came right up to my face.

The moment was charged. She hadn't understood that I wanted her to stand up on the bed, and instead I found myself staring into her purple eyes. Glowing purple eyes. They were like twin amethysts in there, no doubt enhanced by the magic.

"Fletcher?" she asked, very seriously, her nose about an inch from mine.

I gave her my dopiest grin. "You're supposed to stand up and straddle my head," I told her softly, "but I'm happy to make out first."

We hadn’t kissed. It was all about the sex earlier today. Somehow, it felt like if we kissed, it would take the relationship to the next level and it felt like she didn’t want that. She just wanted to remain fuck buddies and not feel any attachment.

Anyway I couldn’t have been more wrong. Her eyes slid to half mast and she leaned forward to kiss me.

I had only been fortunate enough to have two girlfriends, and we’d done a lot of making out. I could say with pride that I was a good kisser, and Regina wasn’t too shabby either. Her lips were soft and moist, and she immediately got into it, licking against my upper lip and nibbling at the bottom one.

Her face felt so perfect at my fingertips. I ran them up and down her jaw, over her ear, into the roots of her hair. She responded by moaning into my mouth. I couldn’t help but moan a moment later when I felt her fingers grazing up and then down the length of my cock.

When we broke the kiss we were both panting. I smiled again, loving the smile I received in return.

“You were supposed to stand up and straddle my face,” I said.

“That wasn’t in your available three options, Fletcher,” she said.

But she did it anyway. One quick zip and her skirt puddled around her feet, leaving her wearing nothing but rainbow socks and a powder blue tank top. When she straightened, the junction of her thighs was at the perfect level.

I extended my tongue out and got the first taste of her. It was even better than I thought it would be. With Affinity as a statistic, I could taste the magic that had gotten into her body. I was also tasting with a sense that I hadn’t had before. Licking her was wild and earthy and fresh.

Regina let out a loud and astonished grunt, then started humping against my face. It was all I could do to hit the spot I thought I should be hitting, but her lust-filled moans told me I was doing just fine. My hands slid up her smooth calves, up her thighs, and around to her ass.

"Ohhh funky chicken," she moaned, and whipped her shirt off. In the meantime I pressed my tongue up into her as far as I could, and her groan of pleasure turned to one of surprise. She made a yelp, before pressing forward even harder. "Yes, Fletcher, yes…"

She went on until almost the moment my jaw started to ache. It was maybe two minutes or ten minutes. I couldn't tell. I knew every bit of her anatomy now, all the ins and outs. I could now pinpoint her clit.

"You said… you never did this… before," she panted.

I just gave her that impish grin again. "Lay down," I breathed, and she complied, while I licked my fingers and started again.

This time it was easier, with my fingers involved. Her pussy tightened around them, and the sharp intake of breath only lasted a moment before she shuddered and thrust herself up against my probing tongue.

She lasted less than a minute before exploding in orgasm. She thrashed on the bed, lifting her ass up and jamming it into my face. The flavor of her intensified. The thatch of hair above where I was doing my best glittered in the dim light.

She lay there for a few moments, and I stared at her nude form. She was perfect. She'd been perfect before the magic saturated into her.

"I want you inside me, right now," she said quietly.

While I jumped up to fling my clothes off, she sat up and watched. Then, when my cock came into view, she gave it a smile and a quick peck, before spinning and getting up on hands and knees.

"I want to try it like this," she said.

"So do I," I told her, and fell to my knees. Although this was going to hurt my legs, I didn't care. I'd suffer a bit for the pleasure of it. I grabbed hold of my cock and slid it down the length of her, then back up.

"Go slow," she managed, and grunted when the head slid into her. "I'm still a little… uh, sore… from earlier."

Nothing about this feeling seemed off. She felt incredible, hot and wet and squeezing down on me from every side. And from this angle I got to see her whole back tense and flex, and her butt jiggle when I gave her a light spank.

She chuckled softly. "What was that for?"

I spanked her again, and watched her ass ripple. "You thought you could just come up here unannounced and everything would work out for you, huh?"

She was having trouble speaking. "I thought… you wouldn't mind… a little study break."

She wasn't wrong about that. Still, I wanted to witness to her big round ass cheeks wiggling from the spanks. And for that I needed a reason.

She pushed back against me, taking more and more of my cock with exaggerated slowness. I liked the difference between our skin tones coming together. I liked the sound of her heavy breathing mixed with grunts of exertion. I especially liked the way the freckles across her back glittered. And the fact that she wanted more of my cock.

"Ohhhhh," she moaned, and I punctuated it with another spank. "Hey!"

"You have to ask first," I said through gritted teeth. She wasn't the only one straining here. "Take a guy out to dinner."

"Uh… okay." She pushed back again, and I was finally buried in her to the hilt. I stayed just like that, savoring the sensations of her squeezing down on me and the feel of my tummy pressed against that glorious butt of hers.

I smacked her butt again and loved the way it moved.

"Ugh," she grunted, and went still. "Uh, Fletcher?"

"Hm?"

"Can you… pull my hair?"

I nearly came right there. Instead I agreed, leaned forward, wrapped her thick auburn hair up in one hand, and slowly pulled back until she told me to stop. This arched her back and changed

the angle inside her. Suddenly a pressure against the underside of my shaft released a bit, and I could thrust in and out without constantly worrying about exploding inside. Which I did.

She was starting to speak again when I started really humping down into her, and she cut off.

"You're amazing," I told her. "You have such a great body."

She couldn't manage more than sharp moans each time my midsection crashed into her ass. Now I got to watch it ripple on every thrust. It was just like in porn, but a thousand times better.

Her moans rose in pitch until her elbows buckled and she went down onto her face. She shuddered and came. I couldn't hold onto her hair any longer, nor could I keep sexing her the same. That pressure to the underside had returned and with it my imminent orgasm. She went through the throes of orgasm for several long, delicious moments. I got a rush of pride I had only ever felt a few hours ago.

"Easy!" she groaned. "S-slow."

I wasn't doing anything! She continued to spasm and clamp down on me, and moan and groan in ecstasy. I continued to stare in amazement at the gorgeous woman before me.

Eventually I pressed down on her back and led her down onto her stomach, a position I'd seen a few times but had never tried. We were already past the limit of my previous sexual experience, and I was loving it.

"Oh my gosh," she muttered, as my weight came down on her ass. "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh."

Something about this position did it for me, a hundred percent. It was one part squishing down into her butt cheeks, so springy. It was another part kissing her freckled, glittering shoulder, her neck, her ear.

And then she turned her head and we were kissing again. While I was inside her.

As soon as I started moving it ramped up to a hundred. I knew I wasn't going to last long like this. She was too amazing.

"I can't…" I told her. "I'm gonna…"

"Not inside me," she breathed, but she wasn't moving to get away. Instead her ass shoved back up to take more of me in, to get the full length of me. Why would she do that if…

"I'm gonna…" I repeated. "Where do you…"

"My face. On my face."

The moment arrived whether I wanted it to or not. I jerked up and out of her, and she whirled to receive the first jet all the way up her stomach and breasts.

She scooted down in time to get the second jet on her breasts and neck, and got far enough down by then to get the rest on her face. I came, and came, and then came some more. It was honestly astonishing.

Cross off another first.

First doggystyle, first time eating out a woman while she was standing up, first time spanking her, first and now first time dousing her.

I knelt like that on the bed for some time, just staring in wonder at what I'd done. Obviously, I was overwhelmed with sensations and emotions. I wanted her to be in my life. If it could be like this, I wanted it to be like this every day. Never mind that I hardly knew her, she was perfect like this and the rest didn't matter to my lust-addled mind. Never mind that she had her own job to do and that job probably wouldn't allow us to remain together.

I fell to my side on the expansive bed, while she sat up and looked at herself. My legs weren't happy with what I'd just forced them to do, and I had to rub them.

Regina seemed to be entranced by the amount I'd spattered on her, and started running her fingers through it, holding it up to her face to inspect it. Then she got up and padded to the bathroom, staring at herself in the mirror for some time. I heard the water going, and started wondering how they had functional plumbing, or hot and cold water for that matter, in an enchanted castle the wiped books out of existence.

When she returned to bed she was clean, but still nude save for her socks. I watched the way her body moved, the slope of her breasts, the way her smooth thighs flexed, and the way her facial expression changed when she finally stopped looking inward and saw me focused on her.

"Did you get an achievement for earlier?" she asked.

I nodded, grinning.

She chuckled, her face a mixture of amusement and embarrassment. "I can't believe the system gives out that kind of thing."

"Me neither." I wondered what other kinds of achievements there were to be gotten. I could access my character sheet by saying those words, and by mentally searching for the things I wanted to see, but unclaimed achievements weren't listed, only the ones I'd done so far.

Regina crossed the room and sat on the bed.

"I noticed the scars," she said. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

I shrugged. "I broke both my legs as a kid and didn't get surgery in time. You get growth plate problems from that kind of thing."

"Shit," she said. "Sorry."

I was already more physically capable than any time in my life, and it was because of the system.

It was time. I brought up my character sheet and sank my free attribute point into Physicality.

"So… with me… it hurts?"

I nodded. "I can put up with the pain. I've been doing it most of my life."

She lay down and draped herself over me. One leg over mine, and her head nestled into the crook of my shoulder. She fit me. It only reinforced the certainty that we should be together, despite the obvious obstacles.

"Holy shizznits… like… all the time pain?"

I shrugged it off. “Most days, some pain. When I walk around a lot… or apparently when I engage in sexual intercourse.”

She traced a finger up my torso. Somehow I could feel her smiling, even though I could only see her auburn hair. “Thanks for pulling out. I was, uh… I was not in my right mind. I would’ve let you.”

“Do you want to stay the night?” I could have sex again in another couple of hours.

She got up on one elbow and smiled down at me, eyes already hooded with lust. “We wouldn’t get any sleep. I know I wouldn’t. I’d probably wake up sucking your cock.”

“I will not stop you,” I told her. “If that’s a thing you need to do in your sleep, I fully endorse the idea.”

She chuckled. “As much as I want to, I’ve got another guide gig to move on tomorrow morning. Got to find the portal and get the new hire back here.”

I nodded. “There’s caffeine for that, right?”

Her lazy smile turned into a wolfish grin. “You’re bad, you know that?”

This is Christopher being capital B Bad.

Chapter 16- Kid In A Candy Store

Morning dawned with us engaged in our fourth tryst of the night. I couldn't help myself, and I make no apologies: she was gorgeous, willing, and we had complete privacy. We had slept maybe three hours between the second and third sex sessions. It was enough sleep to wake refreshed, go take a shower with Regina, and then get both of us horny in the midst of soaping up her back.

We were eventually interrupted in the midst of standing on the sofa, pressing her against the wall of my dorm common room, by Tweedle Dee climbing up into the dorm room from below.

I reluctantly stopped slamming my hips up into her when her Nakamamon poked its head in through the window and whined.

"Ohh funky chicken," she moaned. Her hands were on the wall, and her forehead was on her hands, and she was just absorbing all I could dish out. "We have to stop."

I knew it… I just didn't want to. Reluctantly, I pulled free of her, and felt a weird bout of shame for her pet creature seeing the two of us fully naked, and me with a raging hard on no less.

Regina had slid down the wall and curled up into the couch, already drowsing. "Okay," she mumbled, when Tweedle Dee came up and nosed her in the back. "Okay! Ugh."

She made her way to the shower, didn't stop me when I also entered. This was how, two minutes later, her lips were wrapped around my cock.

"Last time," I muttered. "Last time."

I came in her mouth with a grunt and watched in amazement as she swallowed it all. She grinned up at me.

"You taste good," she said.

Goodness, a gorgeous woman, down on her knees, smattering of face and chest and shoulder freckles all glinting off the light coming

from the bathroom light fixtures, her nipples hard and her hair slicked back… I would make a mental snapshot of this and keep it for later.

It was almost like sneaking her out of my room some twenty minutes later, with me poking my head out and checking to see if the hallway was clear. I couldn't help but laugh about the absurdity of the whole thing. We were consenting adults.

Then again, first off, I didn't feel much like an adult. I felt like a kid in a candy store. That night had been better than any Christmas. Any Halloween haul. I didn't care that I had to brace myself against the wall of the corridor on the way to breakfast, and stopped several times to reapply icy hot to my thighs just above my knees. That didn't matter.

I hadn't just had sex, I'd practically fallen in love.

The thought shocked me out of my reverie. I couldn't get too attached. Regina was still most likely nothing more than a hookup, as much as I might want otherwise.

I had no idea how wrong I was.

At the time, I lamented the loss of her, and wondered if I could maybe change my job over to Ranger. It was a preposterous idea. She didn't have broken legs, and needed to be very mobile for her job. There was no way I would slow her down.

"Jeez o Pete's, Fletch, are you okay?" Regina sounded concerned, and a bit guilty. Like she had caused me to screw her in every position I'd ever seen or read about all night. Pff. I could have begged off, and hadn't.

I nodded and brought one knee up to my chest, then the other. I repeated it several times, amplifying the pain with a hiss before letting it get back to regular levels.

"Let's get you to breakfast," she said.

We were just ten minutes away from the end of the breakfast buffet service, and I was very glad of that fact. The exhaustion I'd cheerfully boasted wouldn't be a problem had just crashed into me. I probably looked like hell. I was practically teary-eyed to see coffee.

The attendant grinned at my brimming cup of black gold. “We bring fresh beans through the portal every other day,” he said. “Roast them on site.”

“You people are doing the gods’ work,” I told him blearily.

“Have a good day there, newbie,” the attendant said.

“You too, my lord and savior coffee person,” I mumbled back, and he laughed raucously.

Regina sat across from me, and periodically fed Tweedle Dee bits of everything. Sausage, salad, carrot sticks, the yogurt cup.

She was starting to look like I felt.

“Shiznickles,” I told her, “I’m sorry—“

“I’m not,” she said, “but now we have to face consequences. It’ll be a rough day, and I’ll be packing extra coffee for the road.”

“Good idea.”

The runner from yesterday meandered through the crowded cafeteria to meet us.

“Hey there, Fletcher,” he said, and turned to Regina. “You’re… Regina? And Tweedle Dee?”

His smoky, inky ferret creature was perched on one shoulder, standing tall and gazing down at us with fathomless black eyes.

Tweedle Dee gave a yip of acknowledgement and came over to butt his head against the runner’s leg.

“Would you believe I never got your name?” I asked sheepishly.

“Timmy!” he barked, in an impression of a cartoon character. “And this little bundle of creepy, adorable darkness is Wendell.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both,” I told him. “Can I… is it okay to pet Wendell?”

Regina was already reaching to do just that, and little arcs of lightning zapped her fingers. She jerked back.

“Sorry, he’s a storm ferret. You’d have to be immune to electric or have a high resistance to handle touching him.”

“Got it,” Regina said.

Timmy beamed at us, while tiny arcs of lightning zapped him here and there.. “Good news is that bonding with him makes me basically immune.”

I didn’t have the heart to tell him that the hair on one side of his head was standing directly up, like it was full of static electricity. Immune was a bit of a stretch.

“You’re slated to start training at the academy today,” he said. “I’m supposed to ask what job you’ve taken on so we can get a master in to begin your training.”

“Right. Healer.” At his disbelieving look, I repeated myself. “Healer. Right? Cleric?”

“Good for you, Fletcher,” Regina said, and put a hand on mine. Just that simple touch and my body got ready for another bout of sex. Somehow.

“Healer. All right. Okay. Uh. Okay,” Timmy stammered, then turned to go. “I guess that’s a field assignment. I’ll head out and see what Mr. Rainer says.” With that, he bolted out of the room.

Although I felt wrung out, and exhausted, I was happy. Regina again touched my hand.

“Are you sure that’s such a good idea?” I asked. “That guy Blake is somewhere nearby, isn’t he? And he’s got friends.”

Her hand jerked away, and she frowned. “I guess you’re right.”

“What’s up with Timmy? Am I not supposed to be a Healer?”

Heat crept into her cheeks. “Listen, Fletcher, I’m not really supposed to talk—”

“Oh fudgecicle,” I muttered. “Out with it, okay?”

Her face twitched. “There’s a lot of accidents with Healers, okay? It’s practically the most dangerous profession.”

“I would’ve thought Ranger would be more dangerous,” I said, “what with the running around all over an ever-shifting world.”

“You would think that, but you’d be wrong. Listen… you’ll probably be fine, okay? Just pay attention to Mr. Rainer, and follow directions.”

"Now you're scaring me," I told her. "What is it?"

"It's… not for me to say."

I didn't want to be frustrated with her, but that wasn't something I had any control over. "Okay." I picked up my tray and started to head out.

Regina looked ready to speak, and boy did I hope she did. I hoped she wanted to apologize for not telling me, and come give me a big hug to make up for it. Then explain what she wasn't telling me.

None of those things happened.

***

Mustache Head was Mr. Rainer. He looked a bit like Albert Einstein, but with less hair up top. Every patch of hair on his face was like its own bristle brush, and that went double for the biggest patch, running around his head from ear to ear.

"Well now, if it isn't our resident god-touched," he boomed, and laughed.

I couldn't help but smile. "Yeah, sorry about bringing you out of the castle and away from your duties here."

"Nonsense!" he yelled.

This man did not have an inside voice, and it made me smile.

I'd been summoned not to the academy, where training happened for everybody else, but the infirmary. This involved reversing gravity again, again a weird sensation.

The infirmary was a massive and spacious hall sectioned off by mobile white partitions. Plain old gurneys sat in neat rows, though the white sheets had been stained by magic in some form or another. One had a starfish of purple and pink seeping into it. Another was littered with yellow splotches that appeared to be stars. In four different places around the huge room, nurses' stations were set up, but three of the four were empty. There was a sort of inner circle of gurneys beyond that, and Mr. Rainer's office in the center of everything.

“Walk with me, Fletcher,” he said, and without preamble took me by the shoulder and led me outside.

The huge medical hall had equally enormous double doors leading out onto a walkway that ran the circumference of the castle. It afforded us a rightside up view of the surrounding countryside. The trees, which sometimes spasmed and adopted different poses, the mountains rearranging themselves, and the colossal mushrooms were all easily visible. Some flying creatures made their way through the skies. I couldn’t tell if they were plain old Nakamamon monsters or perhaps gods.

“What kind of person are you, Mr. Fletcher?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” I told him truthfully. “If you’re asking my ancestry, I’m from all over the place. If you’re asking what kind of personality I think I have, in a word I’d say stubborn.”

He chuckled. “Tenacity is a trait my friend and yours Dick Johnson would have been looking for, sure.”

He gestured out toward the wider world. “You could’ve chosen anything, my boy. You could have decided that you wanted to be stationed here at the castle, and thought that guard would be your best by for a magic companion animal, and powers that render you a superhuman, and that would’ve been that.”

“But I didn’t.”

“No. You did not.”

We walked on, with me watching some of the folks flying upside down toward lower parts of the castle, or the ones flipping midway around. The weirdest were people who took off from the upside down and soared out away from the castle a good way, continuing the gravity they’d started with, only to flip at some demarcation line I couldn’t see.

The huge manta ray I’d seen yesterday flew into view, and edged very close to where Rainer and I were walking. I noted that Rainer chose to walk on the outside, closer to a fall of over a hundred feet, but closer to where he could come into contact with his Nakamamon.

The stocky, chubby man reached out with one hand and the creature drifted over to nuzzle his hand.

"You could've gone with research, administration, or something even more banal. A runner like our friend Timmy, at the absolute lowest rungs of administration."

"I chose to be a Healer." He knew this, and I knew this, and I couldn't be sure what he was driving at, stating the obvious.

"Instead of knowledge, control, or ease, you went with the path of service to the world here."

"Mr. Rainer, if there's a point you'd like to make, I hope you could make it quickly."

Mustache Head regarded me carefully.

"You also reached out to try helping an ailing god before you knew what you were doing. And I have to tell you, Mr. Fletcher, if I hadn't spent the last several weeks tending to the Goddess of the Meadows, diagnosing her, treating her, working up a cure… if I hadn't slapped together that cure in a handful of minutes instead of over the course of hours and hours, well…" He shook his head. "If she had resisted the cure, tried to shake me off, tried to attack or run… you'd be dead right now, son."

I chewed at my lip thoughtfully.

"I'm from a different generation, kiddo. My pops served in World War II and I served in Vietnam. I never had a smartphone and I never grew up with video games, twenty-four hour television, or the internet everywhere I went. We call it going in half-cocked. But essentially it's being impulsive. If you're impulsive, if you go in half-cocked, you're going to be one in a long list of dead Healers."

Mr. Rainer didn't stop walking when I froze. He and his flying manta ray kept right on having a moment with one another.

Finally, I trotted up by his side again. We turned the corner again and continued onward.

"I know it's dangerous now," I told him. "I'm not going to make that mistake again."

He snorted. “Sure, you won’t make that mistake again, but what about the other mistakes you’re going to make? You’re in an ever-shifting, ever-changing world. Things aren’t the way they were the night before, when you wake up in the morning. You haven’t met the natives.”

“I assume,” I told him, “your job is to help prepare me for these sorts of issues, so I don’t end up dead.”

He nodded. “Yep.”

“And there will be other organization members there to help keep me safe and mitigate the damage.”

“There will be,” he said.

“Meaning when I make the mistakes I’m sure to make, it’ll be as someone who’s fully ready to accept the consequences, and you won’t have to blame yourself for my death.”

He regarded me for some time, while the third corner of the castle drew closer. Groups of people flew this way and that. I’m pretty sure I saw Rus on his glimmerdactyl. I liked the big, cheerful guy. A lot more than I liked the dour Rainer. More like Rainer-on-my-parade.

“Some of what you need to know you already know,” he said. “Assuming you purchased skills with your available starting points.”

I nodded. “I know a lot more than yesterday… except I don’t know how to pronounce the word unguents.”

It was Rainer’s turn to stop and throw back his head, and roar laughter. “Oh that’s rich.”

“Is it ung-ju-unts? Or un-gyu-ints?”

He regarded me. “Fair play, Fletcher.”

“You understand that my conduct as a Healer going forward is on my head and not yours.”

He still appeared troubled, like he was ready to add my dog tag to a very heavy chain.

“Let’s get to work,” I said.

And we did.

This is Christopher learning the ropes.

Chapter 17- Get To Work

Training lasted a whole week, and blessedly, included several more visits from Regina. I chafed at the lack of my own Nakamamon creature companion, but Rainer assured me that it was highly dependent on the job I was doing, and the needs associated. I'd landed myself in the most dangerous of professions, and that meant it was more important for me to have the appropriate Nakamamon. Rangers and guards could have whatever they wanted, since their jobs almost never required them to use their Nakamamon in the doing of their duties.

Rainer took me out and quickly became impressed with my ability to find and identify local plant life, then state what they were used for generally.

We went through a number of fruit and vegetables that were typically used in making oils for the drinkable cures. I was forced to get a dab of each on my fingertip and try to identify them by licking them, which was practically impossible… at first. By the third day I could tell olive oil from canola oil without difficulty, and both of those against sesame oil, no problem.

Rainer's training forced me to overcome several system checks. Some of these I spent Tokens to deal with, while others that seemed lower down the ladder of importance I tried to tackle with my skills and stats. These largely succeeded, though I failed a handful of times at Likability checks with Nakamamon in the field, and an Affinity check to synthesize a potion.

The cool thing was that I got experience points for successes *and* failures, and the even cooler thing was getting more experience points for the failed checks. I netted only a handful of xp for easy or moderate checks, and a lot more for hard and more difficult challenges. The harder ones were usually beyond me, but they still provided more xp than succeeding at easy and moderate.

I leveled to Trainee 2 and 3 in the first and second days. I was elated, but Rainer seemed unimpressed. This led me to look into Allie's info tablets, where I found that there were 25 levels of Trainee before getting to Apprentice rank.

Trainee level 2 granted me 2 skill points, while Trainee level 3 granted me the first special ability: Hard At Work

Hard At Work

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

When engaged in checks that pertain to your class, your Tokens are worth double.

The best part about leveling up was getting my Tokens refreshed. I had initially hoped that I might end up with more than my attributes, if they weren't spent, but it was not to be. My Physicality Tokens went from 1 to only 3, instead of adding my Physicality level of 3. The upside was that I had 6 Free Tokens… every level.

Thanking the Goddess of the Meadow for my unbelievable power, I stared at my new and improved character sheet, basic as it was.

Christopher Fletcher

Healer - Trainee 3

attributes:

Affinity 2 (2/2)
Durability 3 (3/3)
Ingenuity 5 (5/5)
Likability 4 (4/4)
Physicality 3 (3/3)
Free Tokens: 6/6
Unspent attributes points: 0

Healer Skills:

Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)

Treatment (potions 2, salves 2, tinctures 2, elixirs 2, unguents 2)

Develop cure (swarm 3, small 3, large, huge)

Develop cure (elemental/nature: fire, earth, water, plant, electric)

Develop cure (spiritual, beast, insect, fairy, dragon, psychic, unique)

Administer Cure 7

Unspent skill points: 9

Special Abilities:

Hard At Work (Common, Passive)

Divine Gifts:

Floral Knowledge (Rare, Passive)

I thanked Allie for letting me know I'd be a Trainee forever, and she chuckled. Most newbies got out of Trainee status before their first few months on the job were up.

"Apprentice," she informed me, "is not even where the system rapidly increases in difficulty. No, you will have to reach past level 250 and become a Master."

I was level 3. The concept of hitting level 250 was astonishing to me. Then again, the next day I hit level 4, and was given one Ingenuity point, and one attribute point to spend how I liked. I was tempted to go straight into Physicality, sorely tempted. I knew my body could use the boost, to stop my legs from being a problem. That said, I also understood that the magical sense in Affinity was bound to be useful to the job I hadn't even started, and Likability was apparently good for working with the natives. Although they were a pacifistic sort of people, that didn't mean we automatically got anything we wanted when we went out to play doctor in their lands.

I let it sit for now. Once I started my job I would know whether or not I could sink it into my dump stat Physicality, or if I'd need magic knowledge, the ability to work for longer, more charisma, or even a better thinkey brain.

So far, the system seemed forgiving, which felt a whole lot like most video game systems I was used to. The ones created after the first generation NES and Super NES, that was. The days before tutorials were a thing. After 1990, video games got increasingly easier and easier.

On the fourth day, there was a problem requiring Rainer's expertise.

When I woke up, with Regina in my arms and Tweedle Dee sleeping at the foot of the bed, something felt different. The moment I got out of bed and put my foot on the floor, it sounded like a thunderclap. A tiny thunderclap, but a thunderclap nonetheless. The next footstep gave off an audible squelch that made me giggle.

Outside in the hall came a cacophony of bizarre sounds, along with confused exclamations here and there. I heard some muffled laughter, and some cursing through the wall, and grinned.

The next step sounded like a cricket chirp. After that it was the sigh of a satisfied lover.

"Okaaaaay," I said, and made my quiet way to the shower. Every time my foot came into contact with the floor, a new and weird sound emerged. A bee's buzz, the crackle of static from televisions of decades past, a brief burst of police sirens, a roar of laughter from a sitcom laugh track.

I was spared most of that in the shower, but by the time I got out, Timmy was at my door.

"I hope you don't mind, you didn't answer—"

His eyes flew wide open when Regina appeared with the squawk of a bird that wasn't a chicken. She locked eyes with him, and both froze. Then she disappeared back into my bedroom, trailed by a series of snorts, grunts, crinkles and other odd sounds.

“What’s going on?”

“Dude,” he hissed. “I heard you pissed off Blake and he ended up getting demoted down to local village security out in the boonies. You can’t just be stealing his girl like that.”

“She’s not his girl,” I said, unimpressed with where this was going. “Now, you came here for a reason that definitely had nothing to do with Blake’s nonexistent significant other. What’s going on?”

“Rainer sent for you.”

We made the absolute weirdest noises heading across the castle to find him.

***

Rainer was frowning, which I loved. It made his mustache completely consume his mouth. Without his mouth, he just looked like a video game doctor, like from the MegaBot series of video games. Sure he wasn’t wearing a lab tech’s white coat. Sure, he was standing on a gigantic floating manta ray style creature. Sure, instead of a clipboard or a tablet he had a backpack suitcase with all sorts of ingredients inside.

“Fletcher, there you are.”

“We have a situation with a god?” I asked.

“Just so. You’re going to get your first chance to approach one without foolishly touching one before you have any idea of its condition, and let me remind you that touching it is strictly forbidden.”

“Got it,” I said.

“Climb aboard, son.”

I clambered up onto the Nakamamon’s back, while Timmy and Wendell looked on.

“Mr. Rainer—”

Mustache Head just held up one fat hand and the manta ray slid noiselessly out into the air. I spared one last look at Timmy and saw

a concerned grimace on his face.

Ugh. I couldn't control what people talked about. I hoped like hell Regina could sort him out, or he was cool about what he'd seen. We were all technically adults here, but people like Blake, the other guards, and possibly Timmy tripped my 'not yet grown up' sensor. Like they were on their way toward being adults, had adult bodies and all, but weren't yet out of the ridiculous drama phase of their lives yet.

"Using Affinity, we will be scouting out the location of the god in question."

It was the God of Footsteps. "What's the size of something like that?" I asked. "Small? Swarm?"

"One hopes. On the other hand, the smaller ones are harder to find. And if they are yet to be in serious distress, they may be quite mobile."

I opened my mouth to say we should just follow the sound of the squeaks and grunts and ambulance sirens and record scratching noises, only to realize those were everywhere. Everywhere people walked the sounds of their footsteps went berserk.

"If possible, we try to isolate the phenomenon. If this is a god of blue eyes, we round up the blue eyed people and see if we can use them to work toward a location. This won't be so easy."

***Affinity (unknown) check**: As part of you efforts to diagnose the situation, your ability **Hard at Work** comes into effect. This check is extreme difficulty. Would you like to spend 12 Tokens to automatically succeed this check?*

"Twelve Tokens to automatically succeed it," I told him.

"If you have that many—"

I pressed Yes just to see what would happen. All my Affinity Tokens (two) and four of my Free Tokens went into the pot, doubled because this was now my job, and a sound like a pulse resounded from deep in the well of my… I don't know. My guts? Wherever your

third eye is at any given time. The chakras as a concept were sort of correct here, meaning that sometimes your Affinity resonates from your heart, sometimes from your butt, sometimes from the top of your head. Just now, it came from my gut.

The pulse flew out in all directions and echoed off the god in question. Then, whatever fueled the power narrowed into a single beam, and I pointed in the direction of the faint blue line heading toward the rightside up portion of the castle.

Rainer gave me a significant look but swung his flying manta ray up and around in the direction I'd indicated. Soon enough we were heading there, and I noted the beam of light intensified. Came into focus. Sharpened.

"We're getting closer," I told him.

He nodded. The plethora of noises that came with the territory grew in volume as we got closer. We skimmed along the edge of the castle until it became clear that the huge shaft in the center of the castle was a better bet.

"Up and inside," I told him. "Then down."

The ray swooped sharply upwards, and I grabbed on to the harness handles provided. Soon enough we swooped up over the castle walls, over the courtyard in the rightside up part, and the line came even more sharply into view.

"Very close now… but it's… it's distracting." The sounds of so many messed up steps was impossible to ignore. Some were elephant trumpets, others howler monkeys shrieking out, shouts and calls of birds, hints of violin solos, car horns, and one that I was sure was a repeated burst of armpit farts. I don't care who you are, that's sure to get in your brain and shove everything else out.

Rainer opened up his mouth, and thundered out. "Everybody freeze!"

It was like a magical ability in and of itself. The UI informed me that he had used **Hard at Work** for a critical success at a Likability check, and I opted not to spend any of my Tokens on what was an action designed to help us do our jobs. It sure did work on me. I

suddenly respected the man so much I was willing to obey this very reasonable request. The other reasons flooded in: the sooner he was done, the sooner people could get back to their own jobs, he was trying to fix this thing, and also that injured gods were terribly dangerous, and best to let him get about his business.

The noises mostly stopped as people froze in their tracks.

We followed the blue beam of light… into the dorm rooms. And after we hopped off Rainer's Nakamamon, the beam continued to lead us right to my dorm.

"Not awesome," I muttered, over the sound of my footsteps. They were frogs croaking, that horrible sound your fingers make when you rob them down a balloon, and the sound of a whiteboard marker screeching on the board. I chuckled, despite the fact that the god of footsteps was just outside my window.

It was nearly invisible, and it was indeed small. It appeared to be nothing more than a pair of shadowy shoes.

"I knew it," I breathed.

"You're getting ahead of yourself, trainee," Rainer said, leaning heavily on the word *trainee*. "Keep away from the entity."

"Sure," I said. Why was it close to my dorm?

I heard several confused yips from above, right where my window was, followed by the glimpse of several flower-covered tails.

"What do we do next?" Rainer asked.

"Call for guards, secure the area."

"Correct," he said, so I cupped my hands and called out for the guards. It wasn't long before several came running up, their footfalls sounding like pots and pans banging together, like a jet engine screaming high overhead, or like a crack in the thick ice in the center of a lake, among others. Heads peeked out of windows, and several guards zipped in on modes of flying transportation. When they hopped off, the ridiculous fanfare continued: a marching band playing a half second of something upbeat, a vocalist singing out in falsetto, and the explosion of artillery fire. It was wild.

“We have a sick god here!” I called out. “Let’s cordon off the area.”

Thankfully they knew their jobs better than I did. Several of them hovered around overhead at a good distance, to keep an eye on things, while others quietly called out orders: set up a perimeter, keep people from coming out to this courtyard, get someone in these dorm rooms and get them cleared out, and… and Rainer was frowning at me.

“What’s next?” I suggested.

He nodded, eyes almost vanishing under his twin mustache eyebrows.

“We’re supposed to run a series of diagnostics,” I said, not sure how that was supposed to go exactly. Sure I’d read the manual, but ‘run a series of diagnostic tests’ was pretty flipping vague.

“Also correct.”

I stopped myself from sighing in relief or beaming at getting two in a row right.

He reached into a pouch and produced a small vial of dried green leaves. As soon as he pulled off the stopper, the scent of purple whimsy wafted out. Rainer got a good pinch of the whimsy and spread it out in a circle over the twin shadowy shoes. I’d been given advice on how to streamline the UI process, turning dialogue panels into just plain scrolling text at the bottom of my field of vision, or to have the words appear directly in my head. Allie had spent a long time going over the Settings and specific options I had at my disposal. Healers needed every available advantage, because theirs was the only real dangerous job here in this new world.

“We’re doing a test for magical ailments first,” he said. “Do you see what I’m using?”

“Dried leaves of purple whimsy,” I said, and this time those eyebrow mustaches shot up.

“Somebody’s been hitting the books,” he said.

Someone had actually been hitting that ace, I thought, but definitely didn’t say.

He didn't have to conduct the other three diagnostic tests, because the purple whimsy erupted into flames that first appeared blue, but quickly ran through several other colors.

"It's magical, all right."

"Is it always?" I asked ahead of my brain.

"Of course not," he said, his mustache brows knitting back down and making his eyes vanish again.

I'd known that, of course.

"We'll try treat the little guy with an elixir or a potion. These are best for magical ail—"

The little feet suddenly moved, and Rainer jumped back. Not fast enough. The feet brushed against his wrist and he yelled out.

They went running off, but I held my hands out.

"Hey," I told it kindly. "It's all right. We're trying to help."

"Back away from that thing, Fletcher."

"I know, you're probably scared," I said to the little god. I made sure to remain calm, quiet, and nonthreatening. I took two very slow steps toward it. "We're all scared too, but we're going to fix you."

"Back off!" Rainer barked.

That did it. The feet jumped a foot in the air and took off. They got about eight feet before they bounced off a magical shield held by one of the guards. In the meantime, Mustache Head threw a potion together on the fly, muttering the ingredients. A pinch of this, a scoop of that, and soon enough he had it dissolving in the liquid. I watched him work, trying to make sure I could replicate it if something happened to him.

And like that, the potion flashed to life. It had stats from the UI, but Rainer thrust the potion down at the inky shoes and splashed the mixture over it.

They shuddered and relaxed.

This is Christopher fearing he may have made an unwise choice.

Chapter 18- Baby Steps

I followed Rainer through the process of healing up the God of Footfalls. This first meant keeping it under guard all the time. While it was sedated by the potion, people's footsteps were still all over the place, but the sensation was a lot quieter. Rainer wanted to move the god, but the guards on hand weren't comfortable putting their hands anywhere near it. Understandably, since some of them had watched me nearly die from the meadow goddess, and the ones who hadn't had definitely heard about it from the ones who had.

I'd picked that up from the snickers I was hearing while walking around the castle.

As the days wound on, he allowed me to mix up the potion to calm it. I memorized the plants used: stem of hellfeather thistle, dried and crushed, globe amaranth petals, and root of phoenix creeper. These were mixed into a solution of jaln oil, and magic was added to allow the god to ingest it. Once infused with magic, it needed to be administered within an hour of creation.

Luckily for us, the god didn't have a mouth, so it could simply absorb the potion through its magical body. Pouring the potion onto it worked perfectly.

As the week wore on, we researched the magical ailments he had on hand. It wasn't something called **mana drought** because the supply of ambient magic wasn't critically low. It wasn't **mana sickness** because the ambient magic wasn't insanely high.

"What about the little rainbows it left when it started to run away?" I asked.

Rainer frowned. "Good catch. It's the rainbow plague then."

I returned my attention to the 'book' of cures, the huge stack of clay tablets done up like newspapers. "And that is…"

"We don't know yet. Not sure where it comes from or why it's affecting certain gods at random, and not others."

It was the same as the Goddess of Meadows. That meant I was about to do something stupid.

"When you healed me, for touching the flower god…" I asked. "What, uh… I only saw white. What did you do to save my life?"

"It simply requires you to administer the cure to the source," he said wearily, flexing his one hand over and over again. "You'll develop a resistance to it, over time, if you're not killed outright."

Relief flooded me. Now I could do something stupid in relative safety. The operative word being relative.

He held up his wrist and removed the bandage, revealing the telltale slash, seething with rainbow oil slick energy. Several drops fell and plopped onto the workstation, where they sizzled with rainbow magic and began to dissolve into steam. He waved me back away; apparently it was contagious even airborne. "It's vital you bandage this and… and…" He swayed on his feet. "And we still need to hurry, resistance or no resistance."

He wasn't looking good by the second day, and handed over working up the cure to me. We needed ingredients from the mountains. According to the cure write up, there were summer mist lilies up there.

This meant heading out into the lands beyond the castle on his manta ray Nakamamon, who was called Rafael. I was given a new runner, Tara.

"Hi!" she chirped. "You're the new Healer, huh? I'm Tara. I'm technically a Ranger, but they mostly have me running errands all over the castle because they need someone who has a lot of energy. Turns out I have a lot of energy!"

She certainly did.

Tara kept talking as she seized my hand and shook it, telling me she was amazed I wanted to be a Healer here. She also told me her older sister's friend Bethany wanted to be a nurse but she wasn't any good at it, and Bethany had come here but kind of flunked out of being a Healer here. Then Tara told me about her sister, her parents, the deal with her parents (they hardly spoke but had been

married forever), about her brother (a drywall installer) and the time she'd gone out to Disneyland in California.

Tara stood a hair taller than me, long and lean without a hint of fat. She was the type of sorority girl who worked out relentlessly and went out to yoga and pilates all the time. Subsequently she was in the sort of shape that allowed her to wear yoga pants right this second.

I blinked at her several times as she continued on, telling me about her recruitment situation back a few months ago. She had been in the cohort after Timmy, and blah blah blah…

I couldn't help but glance at her body. The yoga pants were flesh colored, making it look like she wasn't actually wearing anything below the waist. The long red t-shirt that flared out like a skirt halfway down her butt didn't help. It was sleeveless, with little ruffles at her shoulders. Then I stopped myself from staring with a mental slap, because I didn't want her to notice. Also, I had a steady stream of mind-bending sex in the form of Regina.

"You don't need armor or weapons or anything as a Ranger?" I asked.

She laughed the question off. "Nonsense. Only Nakamamon out there, and some defective gods here and there, but I've been informed they're quite rare. We should be okay."

She did have a fully stocked hiking pack, and I hefted my pack as well.

"We should only be gone for a few hours," I said, and explained about mountain mist lilies, as well as henge grass. We needed that as well. I was under instructions to gather up any of the other ingredients for the treatment potion while I was out, but not to dally.

"If we're lucky we'll find both of those things on top of the mountain, or in a valley… on top of the potion ingredients."

"A cozy, misty mountain valley! I can't wait." Tara chirped, and grinned. "Okay Rafael, are you ready to have us aboard?"

Rafael was fully sapient, because his head dipped in a quick nod. I clambered aboard after Tara, first getting a completely

inappropriate view of her ass in those yoga pants, and a hint of what lay between her legs. She grinned at me when I got seated and strapped in next to her.

It didn't seem like she'd caught me out, and I gave an internal sigh of relief.

The flight over to the mountains only took perhaps a half hour, but Tara was so, so excited for me to know everything about her experience here, her life before, and the way this job was changing her life for the better.

"You know, I can afford any food I want now," she said. "Pff. I used have just mac n' cheese, ramen, and a lot of egg sandwiches. Now I can go to restaurants any time I feel like it. I put down a payment on an actual house, not that I need to, but apparently rental property is the way to make money. My student loan debt is gone—"

"What did you major in?" I asked.

"Anthropology!" she said, grinning. "Ugh, this place is absolutely amazing for anthro, Fletcher. You haven't met the natives yet, but you will. They'll have you in one of the larger towns, and then you'll probably be making house calls out to the villages…"

She kept going, telling me about how great it was, and then her hand covered mine. "Look."

Out amongst the sun-kissed fields were a group of something like dinosaurs, duck-billed creatures with mottled red and yellow skin. They also had feathery frills running the whole length of their bodies, from forehead on back to the tips of their tails, which appeared to be made of undulating fingers. They were bounding across the fields and toward a river. Beyond, the grasses themselves were purple, red, yellow and gold. I couldn't focus on much other than the warm feel of her hand on mine.

"This place," she said reverently, and removed her hand. "You can smell it in the air, you can taste it… it's so good. It's so *perfect*."

"It's great," I said, meaning it. It had been two days without anything in the way of leg pain. The encounter with the God of

Footfalls had gotten me almost all the way to level 5. Aside from Blake, and the fear that the company people were going to forbid Regina and I from being together, I had only positive experiences here. Money was piling up on the other side of the portal, going to my parents and my sister.

"Hey, where's your Nakamamon?" I asked.

"I have a confession," she said, grinning like she was about to open her first ever Christmas present. "We're actually here for another reason. If I can find a companion, I'm supposed to form a bond with it."

"That is so great!" I said, instantly wondering how that should go and whether or not that meant I had a Nakamamon in my near future. "What level do you need to be before you get one?"

The answer was after level 12. Meaning I had just a few more weeks of leveling and work before I could get my own.

"So what level are you?" I asked. There was no viewing other people's character sheets without extremely high wizard skills and special abilities. Discussing skill levels, attribute ranks and special abilities seemed frowned upon, except with your superiors.

"Eighteen," she said, then rushed to explain that since she'd been doing all this running around the castle, she hadn't really gotten much in the way of leveling up. She'd begged to get this assignment, for leveling as much as for trying to find a companion creature. She didn't have any expectations of finding the perfect one today, but she was going to keep her eyes open. "You never know what you're going to see, or if life will throw a miracle at you, you know?"

"Two weeks ago I wouldn't have agreed with you," I told her. "Now though, I think you're absolutely right."

"Oh yeah? Why not?"

I was hesitant to give her details. I didn't want a pity party. And I didn't generally share what was going on in my family life, for reasons of discomfort and fishing for sympathy.

That said, she had just poured out her entire life's story to someone she had never met before.

"My mom's sick, my sister's life is kind of a mess, and she and my parents don't talk a lot."

"Oh!" Her voice filled with concern, but I smiled and waved it away.

"But the money from this job is going to help. I think me leaving is probably going to force them to talk. My parents need to see their grandchildren, especially if my mom's cancer gets really bad really fast. And my dad… he wasn't doing well. I was worried he might lose his job."

"You're so kind," she said.

I waved her off. "Thanks. You'd do the same—"

"A lot of the people here wouldn't. That Blake guy that got in your face? He wouldn't. There are a lot of Rangers who are talking about investing, traveling a lot, retiring at age thirty-five." She gave me a winning smile, and I noted that her eyes were two different colors. One of them was gold, like glowing molten gold, and the other was a soft ocean blue. "You're certainly a Healer."

Rafael had brought us to the top of the mountain. It was covered in vegetation, with tons of flowers, bushes, young trees, and a few older ones all clogging the absolutely breathtaking view we'd just had on Rafael's back.

"Hey," she said, and when I turned she was very close to me. She wrapped me in a tight hug, and I pointedly ignored all the curves, the softness, and the warmth of her body against mine. "Some of the others, they have situations at home… I don't hear them talking about paying for their nieces and nephews. You're a good person, Fletcher."

"Thanks," I said, both flustered and embarrassed. I had had a simple and straightforward relationship with girls like this all through school: none at all. Oh, I could secretly lust after them, because that's what teenage boys did, they lusted. So while there was Stephanie Ambrose and Danielle Donazewski and the rest, I'd never

actually talked to them. And talking to Tara was… not as hard as I'd imagined. The wondrous beauty of this other world definitely helped us bond over literally everything around us, sort of how Regina and I had done.

The weather was unpredictable, and wind had begun to gust in, bringing cooler air with it and turning a pleasant summer day into a chilly fall. Tara whipped out a knit sweater and zipped it up, which only accentuated her lovely butt and legs in those skin-colored yoga pants. Ugh. It wasn't even fair… whenever she got more than 20 feet away it looked exactly like she was naked from the waist down. Her hair was up in a blonde ponytail.

She was well out of my league, and not only that, but Regina and I… were…

Actually what were we? I had no real concept of what she felt like our relationship was. She had slept at my place two out of the last five nights, and I had enjoyed carnal delights with her even when she didn't stay the nights. She'd ranged out to grab up other incoming newbies, but she kept returning and slobbering all over my knob, or shoving her crotch in my face, or riding me cowgirl, or begging me to pull her hair and spank her ass.

Meaning we were, uh, sex friends. I had no idea what that meant in terms of exclusivity. We hadn't formalized anything.

Tara broke me out of my reverie. "What do these things look like?"

By now, after only a half hour, I liked Tara. I felt like she was already my friend. I described the plants we were looking for, and showed her the painted panels I'd brought, copies of several pages. She nodded and stalked off.

While I searched for the plants I needed, and quickly found a bunch of them, I ruminated. Tara was far, far above me.

The old me.

The new Christopher Fletcher could eventually have a Physicality of a fracking Olympian if I wanted. I could artificially boost my Likability, and… whatever happened once I did that.

I resolved, while picking the summer mist lilies off a shady part of the mountain ridge, to have a talk with Regina.

"Is this Hellfeather thistle?"

"I've already got some," I called back.

We moved lower, got on Rafael and swooped into a cleft in the mountain, where rain would collect, or where a spring would carve a natural stream and then turn that stream into a shallow valley. It was shady, gorgeous, and very quiet. "There, we'll look there."

Rafael made a strange hooting sound and set us down nearby. I immediately started swiping said the phoenix creeper with a walking stick. It soon had burn marks up and down the end, and when I found the root I hacked at it with my multi-tool. Once it was dead the roots came up easily.

"Is this the henge grass?" she called. "You said it grows out of cracks in rocks, right?"

"Yup!"

She came trotting up, swatting plants aside and panting. "Oh, good…"

She trailed off, and I locked eyes with her.

"Uh… Fletcher?" she asked. "Are you, is there, um, what's happening?"

There was, and I also was. Something was happening, because I had a hard on and it had come from nowhere. It was straining against my pants. I was hard enough to feel it in my balls.

When I looked, my eyes were drawn magnetically to the crotch of her yoga pants.

A wet spot had formed there, through her panties and through the yoga pants themselves. I was no expert in female anatomy, but in my experience so far, it wasn't possible to get so turned on you flooded through both panties and pants.

Tara looked drunk: eyelids drooping, lips parted, cheeks flushed, and breathing heavily. Right in front of me, she shoved one hand down her pants and groaned.

"Fletcher I'm burning up."

This is beyond Christopher’s wildest fantasies.

Chapter 19- Entwined Ecstasy

"This must be some kind of god situation," I said, through a mouth feeling like it was filled with cotton. "A god of sex or something." We needed to leave. My feet refused to move. The only thing I could do was watch her move her hand in her pants.

A ludicrous question came out of her mouth: "Are *you* the god of sex?"

It wasn't funny. Her voice was thick with need and heat. I could practically see the want drifting up off her body. No, I could *literally* see it, in honey-gold tendrils floating up off her against gravity, and fading out of existence when they got more than a foot away from her.

There was magic to arousal, apparently.

We needed to climb onto Rafael and get out of there, immediately. It was time to get away from this place.

The only motion came from my mouth. I was salivating with the need to see her, touch her, smell her, have her. My pants were practically bursting with the need to be inside her.

"Take them off," my mouth said, sounding husky and full of promise.

She slipped the yoga pants down her legs without a word, and straightened with them at her knees. She had a thin landing strip of blonde hair streaked with brown, but my eyes were drawn lower. Her lower lips made her fingers shine with wetness. They moved in small circular motions, pausing to slip a finger into herself, and sometimes pausing to pull her pussy lips apart so I could see better.

"Fletcher, I need to see it," she breathed. "Your cock."

My hands moved to obey her, and quickly got my pants and underwear out of the way so she could see what I was packing. Tara sucked in a gasp of breath and fell to her knees in the greenery, leaning back to show me her orgasm.

"I'm cuh…" she managed. "Oh fuhhhhh."

She groaned and shuddered with her eyes firmly fixed on my tool.

Movement in my periphery showed a lithe figure leaning against a nearby tree. Figures, engaged in the act. They were green and melded together, so that they were just a tangle of arms and legs. Neither had facial features that I could see, but the one who was being ravished had two big yellowish eyes, wide and staring at us. The other one was facing away… but where the two connected, they

were just one. Their fuzzy moss-like bodies had no seam separating them.

The one facing away might be thrusting into the other, but for all intents and purposes they were one entity.

Tara had fallen to her knees and in one quick motion ripped off her hoodie and shirt. Her hand immediately went back to her dripping wet sex and continued rubbing.

"Now you. You get naked too," she begged. I did, and she hissed out every breath through her teeth, like just seeing me was completely undoing her understanding of reality. Belatedly she seemed to realize she still had on yoga pants, but I was already crawling toward her, on my hands and knees, and I ripped them away from her feet. Her shoes and socks went flying.

"Ohhhh…" she groaned.

When I bent to taste her, she hit my tongue like a party: bright and lovely and exciting. She arched her back and thrust herself up into me, immediately beginning to orgasm again. Whatever the god was doing to her, she was producing a lot of juices, and they got all over my face. Like they were filled with a potent aphrodisiac, I lapped them up and felt myself swelling below with need. I needed to blast into her. *Needed* it.

“On my face,” she told me breathlessly. “I want it in my mouth.”

Dutifully crawling up her body, I positioned myself at her mouth, and spared a look at the two creatures that were one. The one was busy bobbing its head into the other one’s crotch.

So I put my cock directly into Tara’s mouth. She knew what to do, and began blowing me immediately.

Whatever was driving us to do this, it heightened the sensations I was feeling to the max. Just the suction of her mouth sent me right up to the edge, and looking down at the intense look of arousal in her eyes sent me over.

I came more than I ever had in my life. Much more. The power of this god really gave me reserves that otherwise just didn’t exist. Tara’s mouth overflowed with my seed, even while she was gulping it down. Pulling free, I aimed the rest at her face, just as she had asked.

For a while, neither of us moved. She stared at the shaft in front of her like she’d never seen one before, while I just felt the bliss that had overcome me slowly receding.

By now, there was no resistance. I couldn’t even imagine doing anything other than servicing Tara. That was my only goal. That was what I would do.

“I’m going to funk you,” I told her.

Her only response, dripping with my seed, was to nod dumbly and spread her legs further. Taking one ankle in hand, I positioned them at my shoulders. Those legs were so long, and toned, and an overly bronze color that seemed unnatural.

Plunging into her was like arriving home after a long day of work. I hadn’t gone soft, and I didn’t feel anything other than the ecstasy of the flesh surrounding me. Her body enveloped me in its heated, velvety embrace, and I watched her face go through the contortions.

“You’re… big,” she ground out through gritted teeth. “Really… really big.”

“I’ll go slow,” I told her.

“No!” Her eyes flew opened and she stared slack-jawed into my face. “Funk me, Fletcher. Hard.”

I did exactly that. First I slammed down into her, deep, leaning forward and beginning to fold her in half. She grunted like I’d punched her in the gut, and winced, but she didn’t tell me to stop. Instead I pulled all the way back out, and slammed down again.

Soon the only sound in this green river valley, burbling with water coursing down the mountain, was the slapping of flesh on flesh. She grimaced in what looked like pain as I kept on.

“Keep… going…” she managed.

I couldn’t have done anything else. My cock was in control now, and it desperately wanted the tight confines of Tara’s body. It wanted the deepest places.

“Do me, Fletcher. Don’t stop. Don’t stop, do me, oh fudge… don’t… stop…”

I wasn’t going to be able to last much longer, but speech was beyond me. Instead I gritted my teeth as well, and sank my fingers into the moss to try to focus on any sensation other than the bronze beauty under me.

Another minute of hard pounding and her eyes flew open. Her head shot back into the soft moss and she bucked, hard. Her third orgasm arrived with her legs slipping off my shoulders and around my waist. Ankles locked behind me, just above my ass, while she came and came.

That did it. “I’m—” I started, but couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Inside,” she hissed.

She didn’t know what she was saying. I didn’t either. There was no resisting her. She had perfect, muscular yoga legs, she was clasping tightly onto every bit of my cock, and she was demanding to have me cum inside her.

I couldn’t break free, and more importantly, I didn’t want to. The gods had maneuvered so they could watch us, with one of them on hands and knees, and the other fucking it from behind. All four luminous, empty eyes were on us as I called out my orgasm.

I flooded Tara with seed. There was enough left over that it gushed out when I finally pulled out of her. She flopped to the ground bonelessly, before rolling over onto one side

“Ohhh wow,” she moaned.

Her eyes flew open once again when she realized I wasn’t done.

“On your knees,” I told her. I scarcely recognized my own voice. Who was this guy, commanding an absolute stunner to get up on her hands and knees so he could fuck her?

Whoever he was, she responded obediently, getting up on all fours with her ass swaying side to side. She made another strangled groan as the full length of me speared forward and her pussy accommodated my size. Then all she could do was hang on while I pounded her relentlessly. Again, she demanded to have me pour all of what I had inside her.

Again, I roared out my release, and it felt like buckets.

We had sex two more times after that. Tara rode me while I lay down, then changed position and took me reverse cowgirl. Finally she laid down with her back on my chest, and I got two good handfuls of her breasts while thrusting up into her. She demanded, in the most lust-filled voice possible, that I dump it all inside. There was no way in hell I was going to stop being inside her unbelievable body, orgasm or no orgasm.

I gave her every drop.

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We then lay on the grass and moss afterwards, panting and dazed. Tara had her arms wrapped around my upper arm, the most flattering of places to be held.

The god must have departed at some point, because the ravenous need to mate had abated, and they weren't—

Two enormous, luminous eyes loomed directly overhead, set into a head made of green plant life I couldn't identify. Bits of soil showed through in a handful of places.

"Don't. Move," I muttered.

"What… oh!" Tara started, but didn't leap up and go running. Her hands tightened around my biceps

and triceps, as the thing stared down at us.

Things. The other one was hovering above Tara's head as well.

"We come in pea—"

I didn't get to finish, before the creature brushed my forehead with its grassy face. The lightest, most feathery touch ensued, but I felt the immensity of the creature's power in just that flash of contact.

The words immediately appeared in my mind, as opposed to the blocky 8-bit font I was used to seeing in the large blue windows.

[The Lovers] have judged you worthy, and bestowed the gift of [Pleasure's Bounty] onto you. [The Lovers] have seen you to be a capable Healer with a radiant heart, and have awarded you with [Entwined Ecstasy]. [The Lovers] have bestowed upon you +1 Durability. You gain 1 Durability token.

The rush of pleasure that shot through me was nothing short of monumental. I had never felt anything like that. It was like having an orgasm from scalp to toes, buzzing everywhere beneath the skin. It felt like it lasted ages, though it was probably over in a few seconds.

When I was able to think enough to make my eyes see again, Tara and I were definitely alone and the

creature was gone.

Pleasure's Bounty

(Secondary class)

Your secondary class is Pleasure Seeker.

You receive experience when engaged in intimate acts. You receive experience depending on the breadth and pleasure each participant receives during the act.

You receive experience for deepening relationships with sexual partners.

Holy crap. I checked, and found that not only was I a level 5 Healer now, I was a level 3 Pleasure Seeker.

"Um. Wow."

Entwined Ecstasy

(Special Ability, Legendary, active)

You may spend a Token of your choice to enhance pleasure during intimate acts. Pleasure is boosted more for higher relationship levels.

You may spend 2 Likability Tokens when meeting someone to bring them into the fold. This expenditure is voluntary and may be canceled by the other person at any time. This grants them a

relationship status with you, and can even grant them a secondary class like yours.

The higher your relationship status with an individual, the more pleasure you both attain from intimate acts with one another.

I could not contain myself, looking over the two special abilities I had. The text of the second one specifically read 'a secondary class like yours' meaning not everyone I converted into my pervert circle would be a Pleasure Seeker. Some of them might be Freak In The Sheets maybe. Or in the case of Regina, Secret Sex Friend.

These abilities caused me to consider having a serious talk with the Ranger who'd been sharing my bed. We needed to come to some kind of understanding, seeing as how I'd just had unprotected relations with a completely different person.

A flash of panic shot through me, followed by a shot of exultation. I could now gain experience points directly from doing the deed, and I could increase pleasure from intimate acts with anyone who agreed to be in this with me.

Flipping. Wild.

"What in the ever loving fudge was that?" she asked. "You felt that, right? You got a message about

the thing that just happened?”

I thought that perhaps Tara didn’t know about the way gods could grant these kinds of miracle powers. It wasn’t something I wanted her to get into, since I wasn’t entirely sure I could keep myself safe in the event I touched another one of these things.

“I got a message… special powers and a free rank in Durability.”

She laughed. “They want you to be capable of even harder fracking than what I just got? Hoo boy, I may have to stay away from you.”

I could tell she was joking by the dopey grin on her face and the way she arched one of her blonde eyebrows.

“I can’t really blame you,” I said, and then faltered. “We have to have a serious talk, don’t we?”

Again the beaming smile. “Oh, because you just filled me to the brim with god-enhanced magic jizz? I wouldn’t worry about it. Those two were The Lovers, not the God and Goddess of Fertility. Also, I just finished my period yesterday, so we’re almost certainly safe.”

What if we weren’t? I stammered an apology, which she waved away.

“It’s not like you could’ve helped yourself. I know I couldn’t. I needed you in me, right then, and there was absolutely nothing I could’ve done to stop it.”

"Oh."

"If I end up, you know, expecting, we'll jump off that bridge when we get to it."

"Oh… kay." I had been around Sarah enough to know I should keep my opinions to myself in this regard. If Tara wanted a kid, then we'd be talking about next steps. How much she wanted me involved. Whether or not we would try for a real relationship to provide a unified front for the baby. For now it was too early to go jumping down that very deep rabbit hole. She took the conversation onwards anyway.

"And, sure, that was lightning fast, as far as seductions go." She laughed. "I had expected maybe a dinner date after this, hahah. You're a good guy though. You're helping out your parents and your sister, and your sister's kids, you took this job thinking you were going to lose your kidneys… you stood up to Blake, who is a total doofus. Yeah, I think you were definitely boyfriend material, if not bed sharing buddy material."

Again she had just started talking, and never seemed to need to stop.

"And that dick of yours, whew!" Now it was my turn to throw my head back and bellow laughter. She smirked, then nodded down at my still-nude body. "I

don’t know if it was the influence of the gods, or if you’re just really, fracking, big.”

She glanced back down at it. “I really hope you can use it like that when we’re not emotionally controlled by a magic plant sex god.”

I managed a weak laugh. “Yeah, me too.” Did she want to do it again? My body really wasn’t up to the task right now, but it seemed like she was talking farther future.

“But anyway!” she declared, before getting up and hunting for her clothes. I got up and got dressed as well, definitely ogling her naked body.

This is Christopher loving his luck and counting his blessings.

Chapter 20- What Happens In Vegas

To recap: I had mind-blowing sex with an unbelievably attractive young lady who was well out of my league, the god of lovers was responsible for this, the god of lovers not only made that happen but also imbued me with sex powers, and now… I was off scot free with the super hot girl Tara, had a new secondary class to handle (Pleasure Seeker), and to top all that off, got new skill points and abilities for jumping to level 3 as a Pleasure Seeker.

I stared down at my hands, wondering if I were dreaming and if seeing my hands would prove to me that I was in a lucid dream.

"Hey big guy," Tara said, and clapped a hand on my shoulder, "why don't we get these ingredients back to home base and get your mentor healed up, save the day, and celebrate? What do you say?"

That wide smile and those mismatched eyes. She looked so pretty. One gold eye, one sky blue, and all the crinkles around her eyes showing me how happy and excited she was.

"I have to confess," I told her.

She gave me a conspiratorial grin and a wink. "Confess away, big guy."

"There's a girl."

"Oh yeah?" This didn't seem to dampen her mood even a little. "You don't have to tell me who she is or anything. Are you two… an item?"

"Yeah… I haven't, we haven't… I'm not sure what we are. She's not my girlfriend, and we haven't talked about how to go forward, or if our relationship is really a relationship at all. I'm interested in her. She's beautiful. I hope that's okay."

"Of course, silly!" She said, and climbed onto Rafael. I noted that she took a little longer than before getting on. Meaning I was left

staring at her flesh-colored yoga pants that still had a wet spot in the middle. That wet spot was partially made up of the loads I'd shot up into her.

Gods she was beautiful.

She looked over her shoulder from where she was on her hands and knees. "Come on aboard."

I scrabbled onto Rafael's broad back and clipped my hiking pack into the carabiner on the harness, then strapped in around the waist like before, and grabbed onto the harness.

Tara turned to me. "If there's no relationship, you don't have to worry. And since this whole thing was because of a god's influence, you super don't have to worry."

"Thanks," I said.

"I don't want to know who she is, and I'm not going to get in the way of whatever you choose to do." Her voice dropped back to that conspiratorial whisper again. "But I tell you what… I want to find out if you're that good without having a god get in the middle of our business. I think maybe I got hypersensitized from its influence. I mean, I came like ten times. That's never happened before." She laughed. "I mean I've only met like two gods, total, but yeah… now three I guess."

"You want to… find out," I said stupidly, then recovered. "Yeah, that's, that's great. I'd love to. You're gorgeous."

She continued beaming. "Thank you, Fletcher. I happen to think you're quite the handsome young man yourself." She leaned toward me. "And I want to get my insides completely rearranged again soon, okay? I mean I'm kinda sore down there, but in a good way… and I'm gonna get ready for round two."

"That sounds amazing." It sounded way better than amazing. I was honestly flummoxed at going from basically zero sexual attention throughout high school and beyond, to this.

"Yeah, so please have a talk with this girl, ask her out if you want, break up with her if you want, or, haha, I don't know, tell her you have a long-legged twenty-two year old who wants you all up in

her guts, and she can figure out whatever your relationship really is and if she's going to put a chastity belt on you."

I started getting hard again just hearing her talk like this. The way Rafael's flying harness worked, it was easiest and most comfortable to lay on your stomach, or put your feet in the stirrups and get up on all fours. You could technically sit, but the way the manta ray rose up into the sky, it meant being jounced around. So when I looked over at her, and saw that butt of hers jutting up in the air, I couldn't help but salivate.

"And listen," she went on, "Once that confirmation session is done with, if you pass the test, if…" Here she laughed nervously. "…if the second time is anything like the first, there's no reason a girl couldn't share, okay? This new world is practically Vegas, okay? What happens here stays here."

"Do you… have a boyfriend then?" I asked. "Back in America?"

She laughed. "No, but it wouldn't matter if I did, would it? What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

Again my brain went into overdrive. Why not, was the first question. Why wouldn't she have a million men lined up to try to be with her? I guess it didn't matter… she didn't, and she wanted me, and that was that.

I didn't want to freak out. Tara might be okay sharing, a concept that I just didn't understand at first. Did that mean if Regina put her foot down, that Tara would fight her for the chance to get that 'confirmation session?' Would Tara just back me into a corner and try to have her way with me no matter what happened? And if, on the off chance I had this talk with Regina and she said sharing was a thing she could abide, what would that even look like?

I thanked my lucky stars that Tara was a) okay with what happened, and b) wanted to do it again, but now I had to add c) she was okay with me having multiple fuck buddies to the list of lucky stars in my sky here.

I just hoped Regina wasn't going to freak out.

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Rafael set us down, making a high pitched keening noise I didn't understand. I took it to mean he was worried about his companion human, so the discussion with Regina would have to wait. Tara waved goodbye with a knowing gleam in her eye.

I didn't know yet whether the investigation into the God of Footfalls had led to her being found in my dorm room, and I was low-key dreading the questions that would follow.

So I did what I normally did when things were getting uncomfortable: I went to work.

The Healers occupied a wing of the rightside up portion of the castle, even though Rainer and I were the only two Healers in the place. It held pride of place not far from the courtyard, which doubled as an herb garden.

The Healer wing consisted of something like half a dozen different alchemy style lab rooms, and Rainer kept two of them in use. The first was for human and Nakamamon health, he explained, which mostly boiled down to minor injuries and food poisoning. The other was for handling the ailments of the gods.

This room had everything: large workbenches stocked with every type of vial and flask known to man, cupboards and cabinets for holding ingredients, and also racks set into the ceiling that held dozens of dried plants. The flowering plants hanging up there were all known to me, the phlox, the goat's beard, the bleeding hearts, the sage, witch hazel and some that acted like poisons, along with the non-flowering plants I hadn't yet memorized. All were labeled according to a strict system Rainer set up. I would've gone alphabetical, but he had set them up differently.

The henge grass needed drying, so I hung it up in its own place. The mist lilies had their petals plucked and their essence distilled, so I set up the lab equipment for that. Got the heat crystal burning, and put the distillation agent into the flask with the petals.

“Heat, evaporation, condensation, cooling,” I muttered, and adjusted the distance between the heating element using telescoping tripod legs.

Preparing the ingredients and then mixing them up took some time. Some of the ingredients (the purple morpheus root, the jaln oil) were already on hand, so I set those out.

“Magical remedies don’t last,” was the inscription on the wall, literally set into stone. It was carved into a block of almost pure white stone. Rainer explained that anything of a magical nature was bound to change into something else before too long. The addition of preservatives changed them into something else. Meaning the whole process had to be done from scratch at any given time.

“Fresh ingredients, freshly prepared,” the next inscription said. It was like something out of a sub restaurant chain advertisement.

“You got it,” I muttered, and followed the instructions to the letter.

We had ingredients enough to make the potion ten times. This required the proper amount of heating, using a thermometer my dad would stick in his mouth as a child. The oil had to be heated to one eighty and kept there, stirring often, but not constantly. The first to be added in were the freshly chopped morpheus roots.

The nice thing about having earth handy was you could get a chopper, and slam your hand down on the thing about twelve times with rotating blades. The bad thing about having a magic-filled world was that these sorts of choppers were made of plastic and were prone to melting after a couple of days. And let me tell you, the stink of a melting plastic device from earth is unbearable.

This one had come through with Regina and her new cohort of one, at my request. I hadn’t known they didn’t last, but now that I knew, I was going to take advantage of the thing to the fullest. I had another day, possibly two, before whatever was in the plastic started to contaminate my ingredients.

Thank the many, many gods for quality steel.

The morpheus roots needed to be soaked and stirred and kept at one eighty degrees while the other ingredients got going. When I shouted out the door that I needed an extra set of hands for this, I was given a runner.

Tara sauntered into the lab some fifteen minutes later, smirking at me.

"Hey there, Fletcher," she said. "I tell you what, today has been a pretty good day so far. I have had zero complaints—"

"Stir this every five or ten seconds. And every five minutes, check to see that the temperature is one eighty."

She frowned and blinked in surprise at being cut off, but got right to work, while I grabbed the henge grass from where they'd been drying. We had wind and heat creating Nakamamon, and I'd been given the use of one to rapidly dry the henge grass.

If all went well, all the moisture would be out, and I could just get whatever medicinal ingredient resided inside into the pot as soon as possible.

A tiny gray blue bird that was mostly mouth blew a steady stream of wind over the grass, while a creature that appeared to be a fat, droopy salamander napped nearby, radiating heat. It looked like a glob of lava, except the sides expanded and contracted slowly, and its tail twitched every so often.

"You guys are miracle workers," I told them. "I think we're done."

The magma creature's eyes opened—there were four of them, oily black chips of obsidian—and it gave a mighty yawn in response.

"No marveling at the many many rows of teensy little teeth," I told myself.

I wanted to give it a little scratch at the base of the head, but we didn't have any thick blacksmithing gloves in this room. It slid off the large metal tray on the workstation, which was glowing red, and plopped to the floor, then began shambling out, in alligator-like movements.

As for the miniature bird, it had an enormous head for its size, and opened up its beak, exposing a cavernous maw. It then blasted

me with wind for just a moment, its version of a tweet maybe, before puffing out of existence looking like a cloud. I caught a near-invisible rush of movement toward and then out the window.

"This place is awesome," I muttered, and gathered up the henge grass.

Tara peered at me. "Are you sure it has to stay at one eighty?"

"Uh, yes?"

"Oh… and if it was one sixty-five before I added more fuel to it?"

"I haven't done this before, so I wouldn't know," I told her. "I can only hope that… nope, pretty sure that's ruined. Yep, the recipe noted that purple scum at this stage means failure."

The potion had developed a purple oil slick on the top that hadn't been there before.

Tara swore colorfully, though she didn't use the actual curse words. Then came the effusive apologies and the promise she wouldn't mess up next time. We had enough materials for a next time, right?

I assured her that we did, and we really only lost two hours worth of work. Rainer wasn't doing well, but his rate of degradation hadn't sped up in the last two days. He would probably be okay another handful of days.

The recipe noted that a purple scum was bad, meaning we needed to throw out the mixture, scour the cauldron, and begin again.

Rus had been lying when he said I wasn't going to be in a House. I felt a lot like I was in Brewing Potions class, but without a professor. I was secretly thankful for no Darke Artes Abjuration classes at all. I didn't feel like having the Darke Artes teacher to be the villain of every story, thanks much.

We began again with a fresh cauldron while the other one dried off, and I showed Tara how to keep the temperature steady. When that didn't work and she flubbed up a second batch, I sent her after that magamamander Nakamamon responsible for drying out the henge grass.

Tara returned a few minutes later.

"Awesome, put the creature… where's the Nakamamon?"

She gestured over her shoulder at the woman entering the room, and smirked.

In walked the largest woman I had ever seen. And the first native I'd ever seen. She was easily seven feet tall, possibly taller. Her skin shone a brilliant orange, and she had a baffling amount of black hair. Like, Princess Leia amounts of hair. It was braided up into big cinnamon buns. It was braided up into hanging ropes from around her ears back to the center of her head. It fell down her back and past her butt in a curtain of shining silky black, with highlights of deep purple.

The feeling of bigness only increased when she squeezed through the doorway. In addition to being fracking tall, she was fracking wide.

Although in large part she looked humanish, several factors wiped that away. One, her hugeness. Her proportions weren't exactly right. Her arms were too long, her waist was too small. Two, she didn't have a nose. Three, she might've had ears, or not, but the hair definitely seemed not human. It was too much. No human could've grown that much hair.

Also, her clothing was alien. She wore a cross between a martial arts gi crossed with a monk's robe. The material was gauzy and partially transparent in the light, and thankfully she moved out of the direct sunlight and into the room where I couldn't see that she was definitely female. The uniform was white, trimmed with royal blue down the center and around her neck, and at the cuffs. It gave me the impression that she hadn't worn clothes before, but made them when humans showed up.

She was cradling the magmamander in her arms, and it radiated heat.

"Fletcher, I'd like you to meet Larelle," she said. "Larelle, this is Christopher Fletcher. You can call him Chris, Christopher, or Fletcher."

"Uh… hi," I said.

The native spoke directly into my brain. The words didn't come out of her mouth. Instead they went directly into the speech center of my mind, with a husky and deep voice that made sense for this woman. *You are the one who attempts to heal the God of Footfalls.*

I stopped gaping at her and nodded.

I'd nearly forgotten. For whatever reason, having random squeaks, squishes, crinkles, smashes and such were getting to be something I could work around. Luckily with the god happily sedated by the treatment potion Rainer made, and subsequently the elixir he made for a longer term effect, it lowered the volume.

"I am," I said.

Then you are to be given every assistance you require. I am at your service, friend Chris, Christopher, or Fletcher.

She then handed me a Nakamamon that was approximately eight thousand degrees.

This is Christopher's next near-death experience.

Chapter 21- How To Fail Like A Pro

Making up a Healing Potion didn't take long and wasn't very difficult. They had a couple of clerical assistants taking turns making them pretty much every day, so almost everywhere was stocked with them.

This was good, because I had to resist the urge to drop the chunk of living magma that had just been placed in my hands. Instead of throwing the thing directly on the floor, I yelped and placed it on the thick metal plate we had ready to accommodate it.

Tara had only laughed a single bark of joy before the realization hit and she saw the reddening, blistered flesh of my hands and wrists. She shrieked out and dashed to grab a Healing Potion, followed immediately by apologizing about a hundred times.

"Don't touch anything! Oh my gods, you poor thing, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to laugh. I just do that when things go wrong. I just, it's—"

"It's okay," I told her, hissing the words through my teeth. "Just give me the potion please."

She held the back of my head and poured the potion directly into my mouth, then scooped the rest up with one finger and sticking that finger into my mouth.

The red bar at the top of my vision had steadily dropped below half and toward zero, but the Healing Potion brought me back. The rush of good feeling was totally different from the Stamina Potion. The Stamina Potion had replaced all my tiredness and weariness with the sort of energy you get when summer vacation starts in high school. The Healing Potion erased my pain, and helped me feel more alive. I watched as the blisters sank back down into my hands, and the pain was swallowed up, along with the raw redness of the burns.

"I keep making everything worse!" Tara declared, beginning to tear up. "Gosh I'm sorry."

"It's all right," I told her. "No harm… only a little harm done. And all harm erased."

Both of us turned to the new girl, Larelle. The huge orange-skinned woman with the acres and acres of gleaming black hair stood there impassively, watching everything.

"We make sure not to hurt people," Tara said.

I was unaware of whether he might have a fire resistance, Larelle said into my mind. *Please accept my apologies for my ignorance, Chris, Christopher, or Fletcher.*

"Apologies accepted," I told her. "I guess just assume nobody has fire resistances. And you don't have to call me all three names. You can choose Chris, or Christopher, or Fletcher." I told her I didn't have a preference after she asked which I preferred, but it didn't matter. "Now let's get to work."

I was already fretting about this cure situation. I needed to save Rainer. That needed to happen before I was responsible for someone dying. Just as importantly, that needed to happen before the teacher responsible for keeping me alive on my job was no longer able to teach me.

So this time, I went over the whole cure creation situation with Tara and Larelle. Read out the whole recipe with them, including all the side notes from Rainer and who knew who else.

"This whole thing is going to take us almost twelve hours with the recipe as written," I said. "Messing it up at any point means we start again. There's no control Z situation here."

Tara had the good grace to look ashamed, but I held up a hand. "Don't worry about it. We have to focus, get down to work and make sure we rock this thing."

We got to work. I put Larelle on the chopping. All the dried henge grass needed to be powdered, so she commenced to crushing it up with a mortar and pestle. It wouldn't have been possible to do

this in time while tending the cauldron, which meant I'd been sloppy in my prep.

I watched her enormous muscles bulge under the monk outfit she had on, and watched her hair bounce against her very well-muscled butt.

Tara noticed and whacked me on the shoulder. "Horn dog."

"I simply have a lot of questions about the natives," I said.

She used the thermometer again to check the jaln oil in the cauldron. "The natives are all Nakamamon."

"All Nakamamon. They're all… she could be a companion creature to one of us?"

She shrugged, stirring the oil while I chopped. "I'm not entirely clear on how companionship works. She has her own magmamander, so she has a companion too. I've been learning about the bond in my Ranger classes, and it's not a simple or straightforward process, I guess. My teacher just said we'd need to reach out with our senses and make a pact with the creature that we found."

Blake hadn't had a companion creature, a fact that satisfied me greatly. I decided I'd be asking Regina, until I recalled that she was pretty terrible at explaining things. Well, there was more reading on Nakamamon in my near future.

We hung the cauldron on a tripod and had to adjust the height to get the hundred and eighty degrees we needed from Larelle's snoozing magmamander. The creature had patterning on its back and tail that at first seemed natural, but the veins ran a certain way that repeated.

From there, it was the same as before: adding in the purple Morpheus root, frequent but not constant stirring, adding the powdered henge grass after several hours and increasing the heat up to two hundred, and finally adding the essence of mist lilies. The whole thing went on for a good four hours, and allowed only a little in the way of rest. More runners arrived, including Timmy and Wendell the storm ferret, to deliver packaged meals and give us a

moment to head to the bathroom. The latter wasn't really necessary, until hour nine. After that, exhaustion began to set in, bathroom breaks were necessary, and I got pretty cranky until I realized that I was just hungry. I scarfed down the fried chicken, coleslaw, biscuit with butter and jam, and green beans in about five minutes, and got back to adding, stirring, skimming off excess 'scuzz' as it was written, and altering temperatures as instructed.

We failed at one point when we lost track of time and were unable to recall how many hours had been spent stirring 'often', which led to the whole thing curdling and emitting an absolutely wretched odor. The next time we failed was because too much of the powdered henge grass was added too quickly, and the mixture began foaming out of control. Like we needed to take baths and get new runners to sweep up the bubbles that were literally filling the room.

Each time we failed, the easiest thing to do was simply to pick up all the ingredients we could salvage and start again in a fresh lab. There were advantages to having only a single Healer and multiple labs.

Finally on the fourth try we got to the, uh, interesting part.

"Okay here's the last part," I said. "It says we need to add a trickle of mana to the mixture while stirring over the course of the next eight hours."

It was already past midnight and I was dead tired.

"How do we do that?" Tara asked.

I didn't know, but I had Affinity and I had a skill for crafting cures. The Develop Cure (Small) skill would be used, but I didn't have any skills for the different types of Nakamamon or gods. This one was a Unique type, a sort of natural phenomenon made into a god. Using my unspent skill points, I put all 7 ranks into Develop Cure (Unique). I did not want to mess this up.

***Develop Cure (Small/Unique) Check**: This check is Extreme difficulty. You do not currently have 14 Tokens with Affinity and Free*

Tokens for an automatic success. Would you like to spend your 7 Tokens to lower the difficulty to Develop Cure?*

Total Tokens: 2 Affinity and 6 Free Tokens.

*****Hard At Work:*** *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

I actually didn't want to spend 7 of my available 8 Tokens, given that I had to Administer the cure with another skill check. Instead, I spent the 2 Affinity Tokens, which only lowered the difficulty of the check by 1. Allie had gone over this with me once upon a time, and I hadn't used it that way. There was a lot of new information to go, but the Tokens had three uses I knew about: auto success, retrying a failed check, and reducing the difficulty at two Tokens to 1 point of lowered difficulty.

"Okay," I said, blowing out a huge sigh. "Okay, okay. It's a difficulty 10 check."

"Oh!" Tara said. "I've got 3 Affinity Tokens. I'm being told it's an Affinity check, and for some reason not Ingenuity, but pfff, fine, whatever. You want me to lower your difficulty by one more? I mean I owe you a lot more than that, but I'm really only a low level Ranger," and here she started talking out of the side of her mouth, "who the higher ups really don't want to let go out of the castle to actually *range* anywhere, but who's complaining about that, haha! Like it's totally fine, and I shouldn't be one to complain because this is the chance of a lifetime and all…" she trailed off and then apologized for going off on a very Tara tangent.

I was astonished to find out people not doing the check could lower the difficulty at a cost of 3 to 1, but only if the player actively participated in assisting the check.

"I won't say no to that," I said.

"I can assist you as well, Christopher Fletcher, also known as Chris," Larelle said.

"Any assistance you can provide would be most appreciated," I told the giant hair lady.

She proceeded to spend 15 Affinity Tokens and lower the difficulty from 9 to 4. After picking my jaw up off the floor, I turned my attention back to the user interface, to find the check was now merely Difficult. I felt like my 2 Affinity and my 10 skill ranks, cross fingers, should be able to handle a difficulty of 4.

I pressed the button that set everything in motion.

The user interface was effusive in its praise.

Overwhelming Success! *Your 12 skill ranks produced 7 successes, a mighty feat. Your success is 3 levels above the difficulty needed for this check. You have gained 3 Free Tokens for use on your Administer Cure check.*

"Okay!"

And then the fun part really began. With my successful check, I knew how, theoretically, to allow a trickle of mana to exit out of men and drop down into the cure we were developing. All that remained was to spend the next eight hours, from midnight until morning, doing it.

"Okay," I said. "It has to be me." Then I explained what would be happening, how long it would take, and why we were not going to have a fun night.

"You two can take off," I said. "I'll handle this."

A Stamina Potion later and I felt like I really could handle it. Although I knew that wasn't truly how it worked, and I would be running low on Stamina within the next few hours, at the moment I felt indestructible. Like I could run a marathon… or at least the first few miles.

"We will remain with you," Larelle said, and Tara nodded enthusiastically.

"That's not necessary," I said. "This will be just like meditation." Already I was beginning to feed a little mana into the concoction and the thing was responding.

"You need us," Tara said, while the cure bubbled and began to swirl with the mana put into it. Following the instructions meant feeding mana into the cauldron at a 'slow, steady rate, focusing on the intended cure.'

"You need us and you need to admit it to yourself," she said. "There's no internet, no streaming, no distractions, and no fun to be had as a result."

She was a hundred percent correct about there being no internet. No NewbTube full of videos explaining how to do anything's, or CubeTube full of videos on every science phenomenon known to man. Nor were there any other streaming services from any of the big companies. There would be no princesses, no superheroes, no streaming series(es) of any kind. To add insult to boredom, there was no music to be had, no audiobooks available, nothing digital at all. Books melted into parodies of themselves due to the saturation of magic. I could only ask for big clay tablets to be brought in from the library or the academy.

Oh, and did I mention it was after midnight?

A small crowd had begun to gather as the hours ticked on. The runners, mostly fledgling Rangers and Guardians, were tasked with making sure I got anything I wanted, the moment I wanted it. They had a steady stream of water coming in, along with food and supplies they thought I might wanted. This included Healing, Mana, and Stamina Potions. I would need those.

Other hangers on appeared too, drawn by the fact that there wasn't much to do in the castle, and this was the only after hours entertainment they hadn't met yet. A betting pool had started, and money was changing hands. I tried not to let it get to me.

"Hey Tara," I said, "Could you put twenty on me to succeed please?"

She flashed a smile. "You got it, big guy."

Big guy. Yikes.

I continued with the trickle of mana. The cure had begun as a golden oily color, which quickly turned purple and then a muddy

brown. That shifted to a metallic green somehow with the addition of the henge grass, and once we'd skimmed off the scum we were left with something clear. After the essence of mist lily was stirred in there, it got marbled swirls of yellow and green. The clear part eventually became opaque, an eggshell white.

Once the mana entered into the picture, everything went more and more blue. It started out powder blue, or robin's egg, but eventually cerulean, deepening toward cobalt, and then royal blue…

"Hey!" Tara barked, and snapped her fingers several times. When I looked, she had her shirt pulled tight against her body and was showing off the fact that she definitely wasn't wearing a bra.

I blinked several times and she went, "Mana!"

I fed more mana in, glancing up at her clearly outlined nipples and back down at the dark blue, deepening to indigo.

"That's right, big guy, only two more hours to go." She was facing away from the door where faces were peering in and watching me work. I watched as she wrenched her shirt tighter and tighter. This shirt was a button up number, and the spaces between the buttons were opening up from the strain.

I wasn't able to down another Stamina Potion, because it would have interrupted the flow of mana out of me and into the cure. Instead I watched Tara get increasingly more and more risqué with me. First, she closed the door on the folks watching, promising that she would let them know if I required any assistance. Then she turned back and unbuttoned several of her buttons until I got to see both plunging cleavage and her large, erect nipples.

Larelle, I was certain, didn't understand earth customs well. She followed after Tara, cinching her monk's robe shirt at the back. Since hers was belted, it just created an enormous amount of cleavage.

"Oh, Larelle, you don't have to—" Tara started both laughing in sheer mortification and hilarity. "I'm doing this because…" She whispered something into the giant's ear.

Larelle's eyes went wide and she nodded.

"I must pair with Christopher Fletcher in the flesh first, then," she said. Her nod was firm and resolute: this was the future she saw before her. Once she and I had 'paired in the flesh' then she could also 'assist me' by showing off her body.

In the meantime, Tara crossed in front of Larelle, made sure she couldn't see, and hiked up her yoga pants in the front. She turned a perfectly normal but sexy pair of yoga pants into an obscene camel toe. It was glorious.

As the hours went on, Tara showed me more. She wriggled out of her yoga pants until they sat just below her butt cheeks, and arched her back so I could see a hint of what lay between. She also raised her shirt up until she had an underboob situation going, something I'd never witnessed in real life.

All the while her eyelids started halfway closing and the smile she gave me was pure sex.

"I'm only doing this to help you," she purred, and reminded me again about the mana. "You keep your eyes trained right where they're supposed to be, okay?"

Did she mean eyes on the cure, or eyes on the prize?

By the time I was finished with my eight hours, the light coming in the window of the lab was softening, and Tara was two feet away from me, spreading her lower lips apart and playing with her clit.

"You're unbelievable," I muttered.

The moment came. Eight hours was up. The final smidgen of mana sank into the cure and a pulse came from within.

Success! *You have crafted a magical cure for a unique creature.*

This is an exhausted Christopher wearily going, "Yay."

Chapter 22- Let Me Do My Job

I didn't bother with sleep, but instead immediately took a Stamina Potion. I received an alarming notification from the UI explaining that one more potion on no sleep or an empty stomach would trigger a Durability check of Extreme difficulty or higher.

"Noted," I told the psychic notification, then turned to the ladies and smiled. "You two have been phenomenally helpful, and I thank you. Now it's time for me to go administer this cure."

The Guardians were in charge of wrangling the God of Footfalls, but as it was a god, you couldn't just box it up and wait for the cavalry to arrive. It wasn't good manners to something that essentially governed every aspect of footsteps.

They had kept it boxed in out in the courtyard of the right side up portion of the castle, for days now. Every single Guardian I'd see on hand the first day we'd tracked the thing down was different than the guards now on duty. Which was a testament to the weird imbalance we had on our hands. Why only one Healer and at least two dozen guards? That didn't make any sense to me.

Then again, they had a job that was far less lethal than mine, so of course there were more. Healers had this bad habit of dying, apparently.

The courtyard itself was littered with fading rainbow footsteps. This thing had run all over the place: up walls, into windows, up and around trees, back into the courtyard. The tracks criss-crossed the courtyard more than a few times. I imagined the Guardians having a hell of a time and felt a little bad we'd spent so many hours messing up the cure before finally getting it right.

When I asked for who was in charge, I was pointed in the direction of a man by the name of Binks. He was, thought not quite the same size as Blake, still enormous. Instead of Blake's tiny head and immaculately done up blonde hair, he had a three day growth of

patchy black beard and looked as though he hadn't slept or showered. He probably didn't look too different from me at this point.

"Binks," I said. "Thanks for holding down the fort. Looks like you guys haven't had it easy."

He stared at me, until I felt uncomfortable.

"Is there a problem?" I asked, after a fashion.

"You're not going to ask?"

"What, if your name is Jared Jarson? Or if you have a pair of Mason jars hanging around anywhere? Or if you left your car door open, or if you—"

"Yeah, that."

"Why would I?" I asked innocently. "Those movies are a quarter century old. People don't hate that character like they used to. They've moved on to hating plenty of different Star Wars properties and characters."

He nodded curtly but narrowed his eyes at me as though he wasn't completely satisfied with me not making fun of him.

He didn't look as though he or his people had been receiving an unlimited supply of Stamina Potions, which I sympathized with. Then again, he wasn't trying to guard this thing with one person.

"We have a shield power that reflects motion and power back on the opponent," he said. "It's not super effective against godlike creatures and we're not comfortable using it, but the potion Rainer was using kept it pretty docile. Kept is the operative word here. It jumps."

"Sorry, boss."

"Yeah." He frowned. "We've been chasing it around and trying to bring it back to this general area. It can walk on walls." His people couldn't. They had to employ Rangers for that kind of work. Luckily it did respond to provocation like any prey animal might, so they were able to corral it back to this area just a while ago.

"Let's get this cure administered then," I said.

I stepped up beside the phalanx of Guardians with their shields up and glowing blue. They had formed a circle around the twin dark footsteps in the middle of the courtyard, and the footsteps were pacing restlessly back and forth.

"I got this," I told them. "Just close the circle in behind me, okay?"

"That is a terrible idea, sir," Binks said.

Of course I knew it was a bad idea, and so did he and all of his Guardians on duty, but that's just because none of us knew better. I was under the impression, based on the Goddess of the Meadows, that these things were suffering and needed reassurance and a good bedside manner as much as they needed to be force fed a pill or injected with a dose.

"You don't happen to have the Administer Cure skill, do you?" I asked. "If you do, I'll gladly hand this over to you and let you handle the situation with your defense powers." I knew he didn't, because I didn't have the fracking intimidation skill, or any way to resist intimidation.

He shook his head, his frown threatening to slip off the sides of his face. "I do not."

"And you don't have several Free Tokens based on the success level of your Develop Cure check, correct?"

"No, no I don't," he confirmed.

We stared at each other as the reality of the situation sank in.

"One of us is a Healer, and the other one isn't," I told him. "Let me do my job, okay?"

"My job is to Guardian," he protested.

"Okay," I said. "Then come in with me."

It turned out he didn't want to do that. "I can go in with you," he said. "I have bonuses for protecting someone with me. My powers will be extra effective if I'm directly guarding an individual."

"I promise," I told him, "that's not necessary."

Let me do a Likability check, I told the UI.

Likability check: *This check can be reasonably covered by the Administer Cure skill. This check is Difficult. Would you like to spend 2* Tokens for an Automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 3 Likability, 6 Free and 3 Special Circumstance Tokens.

*****Hard At Work:*** *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

I mentally clicked yes, and I watched the slight widening of Banks's eyes as he saw what had happened. He could spend 4 Tokens overcome my success and initiate whatever contest came next, but he understood my intention, and decided to keep his own Tokens for another day.

"Fine," he growled, "but you were warned. If you die doing this, I'm chasing this thing out of the castle."

"You do you, Binks," I told him.

So it was with great reluctance that he got another half dozen Guardians onto the field to create a bubble behind me, so that when they opened ranks, the thing couldn't slide through me, run up my body and kill me, and make a break for it. Then and only then did they open the line and let me in.

I got the distinct impression that I was a gladiator and not just facing down a shadowy pair of animated shoes, but a gigantic killer beast frothing at the mouth for some people meat.

"Heyyyyy," I said with as much sympathy and care as I could muster. "It's all right. I know you're scared."

The footsteps backed away from me, then shuffled around to the side, leaving rainbow tracks everywhere it stepped.

"I'm not gonna hurt you," I said, crouching down on the balls of my feet. "These guys been zapping you with shields? Well that's not me. I don't have a shield, see?"

The shoes shuffled around but slower than before. They were still clearly agitated, but not as skittish as before.

I reached a hand out toward it. "You're going to be all better," I promised. "I spent all day yesterday and all night working this bad boy up. While these guys out here were trying to herd you back here so we could finish this off."

One of the guards started talking, but somebody shushed him.

The god jumped in alarm and raced around in a circle, directly behind me, before skidding to a stop and running back around.

"Hey," I soothed, "it's all right. I got you. I'm here for you, okay? I've got this yummy cure all ready for you."

This Likability check I spent Tokens on as well, and because it was covered by Administer Cure, it had the full 10 ranks. Lowering the difficulty did it; I only needed three success points on my Likability of 3 and skill of 7.

The shivering, terrified and sick god gradually calmed, and approached like a starving dog. I held my hand out in that 'sniff me' gesture, keeping my voice nice and soft and reassuring.

"It's okay," I repeated for the fiftieth time. "It's okay, I've got you."

The god made the first sound I was aware of it making, a pleading and inquisitive coo.

"That's right," I said. "I'm here. I've got a cure. You're going to be all better."

Nobody moved. Nobody spoke. The unending stream of reassurance kept spilling out of my face, while my knees ached and my hips complained.

"Now," I told it. "I have medicine in this vial."

The shadowy shoes made a questioning sound.

"That's right. It's going to make you all better. No more worrying about these shield guys. No more weird noises. All better."

***Administer Cure check**: This check has fallen under the Likability attribute due to your approach. This check is Nigh Impossible. Would you like to spend 9* Tokens for an Automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 1 Likability, 6 Free and 3 Special Circumstance Tokens.

*****Hard At Work:*** *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

I mentally clicked **yes**, and watched as the creature approached the vial, before sipping at the concoction. The other shadowy shoe hopped over and put its toes to the vial as well. The liquid within, nearly dark enough to seem black, quickly drained out.

While they did, I reached out and stroked at it. For just a moment, I felt a shock of divinity course up into my arm, and the god gave a start. This thing was pure power. It had nothing but energy, and I could sense that it was sick. The energy entering me wasn't right. It wasn't the pure bliss of mana filling up the reservoir that was my soul.

It made a terrified sound, then a confused sound, followed by a comforted purr.

Then it was done.

A flash of magic announced that the cure had been administered and the god was back to its normal self. The UI had words to say about the situation, but I wasn't listening. I had also fallen back on my ass and onto my back, which was spasming with the pure power coursing through me.

I distantly heard shouts of alarm and fear from the circling Guardians, but I managed to feebly wave my arm.

"I'm… okay…" I managed. "I'm okay."

I was better than okay. I had the simple satisfaction of knowing, for the first time, that I had been the key to purifying the divinity of an actual god, the manifestation of something that was simple, sure, but something innocent and real and all-encompassing. I lay there on the ground heaving great big breaths, and grinning up at the sky. Squinting against the bright sunlight, but grinning all the same.

Sure I'd gotten plenty of help, and some of that had been x-rated help from Tara, but I'd done it.

"Back off, boys," I heard Banks call. "It's done."

A lot of relieved sighs went out, a few cheers, and then a whole lot of future beers. The Guardians promised each other they'd link up for beers after some much-needed rest. A handful of them bent and clapped me on the shoulder, muttering about what a crazy plucker I was.

A huge figure loomed over me suddenly, blocking the sun from my view but appearing like nothing more than a large humanoid blob.

Eventually I noted the noseless face of Larelle bending toward me, until she was inches from bumping into me.

"You saved a god," she said.

"I mean you helped a lot with crafting the cure. And so did Tara. We can celebrate together…" My head was suddenly full of mental images of the weirdest threesome imaginable, and I banished the thoughts. I could not presume to know Lanelle's mind. She was not human. She was like a Nakamamon. Or rather, she *was* a Nakamamon.

Still, I kept picturing her on hands and knees with me behind her, a serious amount of hair wrapped around my fist, pulling her and forcing her to arch her back. Meanwhile Tara was beneath her, sucking on what could only be enormous nipples.

What was I thinking?

You did a good thing, Christopher Fletcher or Chris, she said into my mind. *You have saved us all. I have not seen the gods succumb to this illness. I do not wish to see it so long as I draw breath. I cannot imagine what will become of this world when divinity falls.*

I blinked up at the very female creature, who lifted me into her arms and carried me back into the castle.

Now you are in need of sleep, and a reward.

I nestled my head against her expansive bosom and smiled dreamily. Yes, I was absolutely and totally drained. A day and a half we'd spent in the lab, getting things wrong and then spending tokens.

I had probably leveled up. I mean, I had definitely leveled up. I could see the little exclamation point over my level, which was now Trainee 10. It had been an incredible amount of experience gained, apparently.

Just as importantly, the UI wanted to let me know that my actions with the God of Footfalls were worthy of reward as well.

[God of Footfalls] appreciates your efforts in saving it. You have been gifted [Golightly]. [God of Footfalls] understood compassion and salvation could be found through a gentler way. Although terrified of the angry ones, [God of Footfalls] sees that not all humans are bad ones. [God of Footfalls] has seen your effort and the difficulties you went through in crafting the cure, and has bestowed upon you +1 Durability. You gain 1 Durability token.

Yes. I couldn't have been happier with this. These attributes seemed like they didn't come easily, so each increase was a really huge boon.

I took a look at Golightly, curious to know what kind of ability it would be. Instead, I found it to be the first ever item.

Golightly

Item, Wondrous, Legendary

The wearer of these shoes feels no weariness when walking, leaves no tracks, and gains 5 ranks in any skills that require the use of feet.

This item has the following properties: unbreakable, soulbound, returning.

Unbreakable: This item never takes damage and can never be destroyed except by divine power.

Soulbound: this item belongs solely to you. You may gift this item to another, but the item may never be taken from you.

Returning: this item returns to your possession at a thought.

I sent a silent thanks to the God of Footfalls for these gifts.

Larelle apparently knew the way to my dorm room. She carried me effortlessly down the halls, ascended the staircases, and then opened the door as though I weighed no more than the clothes on her back.

Up this close to her, I could see she had smooth skin, and her irises were a dark purple, similar to her hair. The pupils nearly melded with the irises.

Suddenly, I was being lowered into my bed.

Rest, she told me telepathically. *Your work is done. Rest.*

This is Christopher falling asleep almost immediately.

Chapter 23- There's Something About Tara

The discussion about Tara didn't go even remotely how I thought it might. I mean, first, Regina ended up having to wade through a whole host of interrogation questions by a number of different security staff. She then had to go do another escort mission from the portal to the castle, bringing back another young recruit. The three days in between the God of Footfalls showing up and me seeing her again were wild for the both of us.

"You'll never believe what I had to go through to get our new friend here," she told me, when I let her into my assigned quarters.

I was calling them that in order to make them seem less like a skeezy college room I was only going to inhabit for ten months, and more like a cozy place usable by many different military people.

She once again looked gorgeous. Freckles all glittering like little gemstones in her skin, all over her face and neck and shoulders. She was wearing a… type of shirt I didn't have a name for. Like a tube top with these adorable little sleeves. So her chest, neck and shoulders were totally exposed, along with a freckled belly button. She'd gotten a haircut too, maybe while she was on earth, because the sides of her head were shaved and the long part was draped down one side.

I chuckled and tried to seem comfortable. I wasn't, not even a little, and I didn't know how long it would take before she figured it out. "I've got some pretty crazy stories to tell, myself." I didn't know when I was going to get to the discussion about Tara, but I was not up to the task at this moment. She could freak out, she could call me names, she could storm the hell out, and she could probably perpetrate violence on my poor little self.

Because keep in mind, I still only had a Physicality and Durability of 3 by this point. Sure I didn't know about Regina's stats, but also did I need to? She could climb a tree effortlessly, run over meadow and vale tirelessly, and she'd carried half my supplies in from the portal while doing so.

"Okay you go first," she said.

In the silence that spun out, I realized this was the best time. This was perhaps the only time, honestly. We were going to get into the weeds.

"Okay first, is there a… is there an official designation we have? Are we exclusive? Boyfriend and girlfriend?"

She froze and cocked her head. Whatever kind of earrings she had on, I liked them immensely, because they had a rainbow iridescent sheen to them. They were hoops, but a little wider than regular thin gold ones, and the band running up the center had that cool color-shifting sheen to it.

"Who was it?" she asked quietly.

"Look, I'm just asking because I don't know, you and I didn't talk about it, and let's say for instance that a god got involved and I was sort of divinely forced to have sex, then—"

"Wait what?"

"There's a god out there called The Lovers, and I got sex powers, and it's really kind of freaking me out, and I'm worried you're going to be really upset."

She took me by the shoulders and backed me up until the backs of my knees hit one of the easy chairs. Then, she pressed until I was obliged to sit down. She took the one across from me and scooted it close enough that we were practically touching knees.

"There is a fudge of a lot to unpack there. Do you want to go over the god thing first or the sex powers thing first?"

"Uh… the god thing I guess?"

She nodded, and I went over the scene between Tara and I, without saying her name. There were a lot of runners and Guardians

who could've fit her description around, so I thought it was probably safe so long as I didn't describe her facial features or name her.

Regina, however, wasn't interested in that at all. She wanted to know what Tara's pussy looked like, how wet she got, how she sounded during orgasm, how her breasts felt, what color her nipples were, which positions we did, how her body felt in different positions, that kind of thing. By the time I got through the story, I had a painful erection, and I could tell Regina was getting—or was already very—turned on. She kept glancing at my cock and rubbing her legs together.

"Okay, well, there's no harm no foul," she said. "You couldn't have helped yourself against the power of a god, right?"

"Well, this person also said she really wants to have a rematch. To, sort of, see whether the pleasure was all god-inspired or not."

"Ohhhhhhh," Regina said, eyes a-twinkle.

"And I told her about you, and she said okay, just talk to you about this, and if we're just fudge buddies, then she won't have any problem doing… me… again… yeesh this all sounds so weird."

"You mean you don't discuss sex with all your partners?" she asked.

My face twitched; I didn't have partners with which to discuss this kind of thing. I had never been wanted by another woman while not entirely sure of my relationship status with my current sex friend.

"I mean I've never been in a situation like this," I said. "I'm not what you'd call a sex symbol or a wanted man."

She threw back her head and laughed. "Ohhh okay. Okay okay. Well here, first, I'm gonna need to get that in me right now." She strode up and just brazenly rubbed on my cock. "And then we can talk about you having sex with this other girl, and whether or not I'll be there."

"Uhh…" I had this weird problem of having difficulty speaking when someone other than me was handling my equipment. And also with the words she had just said.

Regina whipped off her clothing and mine before I could say an actual coherent word. She'd gotten me standing to wrench all my clothes off. With a single finger jabbing at my chest, she pushed me backwards and back into my comfy chair, and I sat down heavily while staring into her eyes.

She then got up and knelt on the heavily padded arms of the chairs, which put her midsection almost exactly in front of my face. I was salivating with need. Tara had gotten my engine revved up last night by rubbing herself suggestively and pulling her clothes off. I was more than ready.

So when she rose up on her knees and put herself in my face, I grabbed onto both cheeks and buried my tongue as far up inside her as I could.

Entwined Ecstasy *(Special Ability) may be activated during this intimate act. Would you like to spend 1 Token of your choice?*

I mentally answered **Yes** and spent one of my Ingenuity Tokens. I had 5 and they weren't going to be missed.

She responded with a gasp and then a laugh. "Is Fletcher horny? Did he have to watch a girl play with her little pussy when he couldn't do anything about it?" Her voice dropped an octave. "Did he stay away from her just so he could ask my permission?"

I nodded. This was technically true. Regina responded with a growl in her throat.

She was already wet, and the sweet floral fragrance of her was intoxicating. I wanted to get all of it out of her, and she was content to rub her clit against my nose with my tongue buried up inside her.

"I bet somebody wants a little threesome," she muttered, her voice husky. "Some little perv wants two girls sucking his big fat cock at the same time, doesn't he?"

I groaned.

"Somebody wants to watch me eat out his mystery friend," she panted. "Somebody wants to watch me make out with her while

fracking me doggystyle, doesn't he?"

My erection was throbbing. I had no idea she was even capable of talking like this. Holy crap.

"Ugh, yeah, there," she said, and started grinding herself in little circles around my mouth. "Yeah, I bet you want one of us to ride you and the other one to sit on your face, pervert. Ugh, you're such a filthy man, Fletcher."

Eventually she couldn't handle it anymore, and sprang off the chair. She immediately went to the next chair and climbed on, pointing her ass at me and looking over my shoulder.

"Frack me," she begged, the freckles on her nose and shoulders and all down her back sparkled in the dim light. "Fletcher, please."

I obliged her, lining myself up and slowly sinking in to the hilt.

"Ohhhhh," she moaned. "I needed this. I've been waiting for it."

"I didn't get to explain… about the sex powers," I told her.

"I don't care. Just give it to me, hard."

For a time, I just watched her back arch, her freckles glitter and twinkle in the light, and the ripple of her ass cheeks when I slammed into her from behind. She was incredible. Shorter and stockier than Tara, curvy in a great way. And she felt like I imagined heaven would feel.

Regina eventually put her hands on the back of the smoking chair and put her forehead on top, doing nothing but taking me over and over again. Eventually one hand drifted down between her legs and she came almost immediately.

"I'm cumming… I'm cumming," she said, her voice tortured, before she set off shuddering and shivering. "Fuh… frack me. Don't stop."

I didn't, though I had the powerful urge to explode inside her. Instead I focused on the increasing pain in my legs. The growth plate injuries, the osteomyelitis and the scoliosis worked to keep me from orgasm, because so far as I knew there weren't any condoms here.

"Let's change," she panted afterwards, and I disengaged to follow her to the bed. She pushed me back onto the bed and mounted me, then rubbed herself up the full length of me and back down, smiling.

"Do you want sex powers?" I asked.

Now her expression changed. "What? What are you talking about?"

"I can give them to you too," I said. I was almost completely sure, anyway. This was a trial run situation.

She didn't stop rubbing herself over me, but wanted to know what I was talking about. This was how I ended up explaining the second sex ability, **Entwined Ecstasy**, while teasing and tweaking Regina's nipples. Which was also how, in between listening to me read the explanation of the power, she instructed me on the right pressure and how much they could be twisted.

"The girls like to be licked," she said, and leaned forward to get them licked when I got up on my elbows.

"Do you want to be 'brought into the fold?'"

"Mmm yes," she said.

I mentally clicked **Yes** to spend the 2 Likability tokens necessary. Neither of us was sure what '*the more pleasure you both attain from intimate acts with one another'* meant. The pleasure would be boosted… but by how much?

Regina immediately came. I wasn't even inside her, and she was only using my cock as a dildo to rub on herself, but there it was. She froze and started crying out in ecstasy. The shudders and shivers came over her, causing her to lay her head down on my shoulder and mumble questioningly about what the fuck had just happened.

I made her orgasm three more times, and I had two of my own. The first one happened after a good two minutes of her riding me. The buildup before had been difficult to handle, but now it just wasn't possible. There was no resisting. I told her I was going to, and she pulled off just in time to have me spray her belly and tits.

That was another amazing thing: I gained super spurting abilities. My capacity for distance was longer than ever before. The load itself

was larger than it had been also

"Holy shirt," she muttered, and stared down at the mess I'd made. "That is so hot."

"Yeah," I panted.

"It's like a porno but in real life."

Looking at it, I couldn't disagree with that. Regina got that unfocused look in her eye and scooped it up, then licked it off her fingers. She locked eyes with me and made a satisfied moan.

We spent the next hour together, going through a series of different positions and speeds and intensities. She lay on the bed and pulled her legs up around her ears, tucking her feet behind her head. In that position, I could slam my entire bodyweight down into her over and over again. The newfound sensitivity of the special ability meant that I would have just orgasmed into her over and over again, except that my legs grumbled and complained after only a minute of hardcore bashing.

Regina came, and then she came again, and begged me to stop, so we shifted positions.

"I can't… anymore," she panted, and just lay on her side. Then, when I scooted up behind her, she guided me back into her, so we were spooning and banging at the same time.

It was exquisite.

I had definitely never had anywhere near this much sex in my entire life. After that one half-real time, I had been in a dry spell.

Now, I'd spent the last two weeks, literally every moment since getting here, either learning about this world or having mind-blowing sex. For a guy that was only two years out of high school and flush with teenage hormones from having no luck with the ladies, this was a crazy fever dream I didn't want to end.

She came yet again with me behind her, reaching around and tweaking one nipple while kissing and licking at her ear. Finally, the pleasure was too much, and I grunted out that I was close.

"On my face," she begged.

Once again, Regina amazed me with her speed. She exploded into action, off the bed, and down onto her knees. The sight before me was mesmerizing: a red-haired beauty, naked as the day she was born, shining with magic, down on her knees with mouth open and eyes mostly closed. The sight alone might have made me climax once upon a time. Now I scooted sat up and aimed for her face.

I'm not going to lie, I came more than I ever have in my life. Regina accepted my gift with relish, and even amazement. Eventually she made a surprised sound and asked if I was trying to drown her. Then she cupped her hands under her chin, collected it up, and tried to slurp it all down.

I stared in amazement.

"What? It's… it has to be influenced by the magic. It's really good." With that, she sighed and sank sideways against the bed.

It was also the special ability from The Lovers. I made sure to reorient the UI messages so I could read it clearly, and read it again if I needed to.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have entwined with Regina Hampstead. Your relationship status is* ***close confidants****. This bond isn't easy to forge so quickly. These lovers have shared a bed a number of times, both for intimate acts and plain sleep. These two are comfortable with one another's bodies and presence.*

Pleasure from intimate acts between ***close confidants*** *is boosted strongly.*

The next UI message that arrived pertained to bringing her into the fold.

Entwined Ecstasy*: You have brought Regina Hampstead into the fold. She has gained the ability* ***Healer's Resistance****. You have gained the ability* ***Wild Lore*** *from entwining with Regina Hampstead. Entwine more deeply with Regina Hampstead to unlock further abilities.*

Next, came a write up for my new ability.

Wild Lore

(Special Ability, Common, active)

Concentrate on a plant, animal or native of this world to understand it better. Information you gain is based on your Ingenuity or Affinity attributes.

"Did you—"

"What the flunk?" she blurted from the bathroom. Seconds later, she burst back into the bedroom, staring wildly at me. "I think we need to have a lot more time rubbing our naughty bits together!"

I blinked at her, and she burst out laughing. "Seriously where did you… this is your sex abilities isn't it?"

When I nodded, she leaped onto the bed and kissed me, grinning. "I'm glad we're close confidants, Fletcher."

"Me too," I told her. And I was. I really enjoyed being with her. "Could I ask you a favor though?"

She squinted at me. "You want to keep these powers a secret, don't you?"

I felt myself go instantly red. "How did you know?"

She shrugged. "Just a hunch."

"Well you're correct. I didn't want anybody else to go after The Lovers and possibly get themselves killed." From what the literature said, gods were forces of nature that did not give a single solitary fuck about people, and could kill them with the slightest touch. That didn't gel with what I'd experienced.

But also, there were people like Blake, and Binks. In Blake's case, I didn't want a person selfishly trying to corner the god of sex just so he could get some kind of powers. Blake wasn't the type of guy who needed more power anyway. In the case of Binks, I didn't know

what he would do. Build an enormous wall around all the human settlements and make a no god zone? I wouldn't put it past him.

"Hey when you… were talking all dirty…" I started.

"Oh yeah?"

"You didn't mean any of that, did you?"

She smiled and gave me some playful side eye. "I don't mind telling you… I had a bit of a bi phase my last year of college. I hooked up with a couple of girls. It was better and safer than getting with guys. The girls… they were soft. And anyway I kept my virginity like that, just hooking up a couple of times. I kind of wished I'd had a hot roommate, though… no. I wouldn't have studied at all. I would've just forked her over and over. Scissored her over and over. And licked her, of course."

"Whoa."

She nodded. "I figured you would react like that. Yeah, girls taste really good." She wasn't wrong.

"Because it's hot."

She grinned. "So the short answer is… I didn't *not* mean any of it."

This is Christopher's brain exploding.

Chapter 24- Come Clean

We lay there for some time. I was reading through the abilities again, and staring in wonder at the changes coming over me. In under two weeks, too. My level in Pleasure Seeker had risen from 3 to 5. I was a level 10 Healer. I had crafted a cure and saved a god's life.

Level 2: +2 skill points
Level 3: Gained Ability: Hard At Work
Level 4: +1 Ingenuity, +1 attribute point
Level 5: +2 skill points
Level 6: Gained Ability: Healer's Endurance
Level 7: Gained Ability: Healer's Resistance, +1 skill point
Level 8: +2 skill points
Level 9: +1 Affinity, +1 attribute point
Level 10: +1 Ability upgrade

This was a lot. This confirmed, first, that attribute points weren't going to come easy, and second, that skill points weren't going to come much faster. However, I had several abilities to read through and understand.

Healer's Endurance

(Special Ability, Common, active)

You may spend a Durability Token to resist the need for sleep for 10 hours. Penalties for sleeplessness are suppressed during this time, but are doubled and take effect afterwards.

Healer's Resistance

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

You may spend a Durability Token to resist damage from a Nakamamon or godly being. Long term effects are reduced by 75%. Onsets of all diseases, venoms, poisons, or other afflictions are tripled, as are intervals. Lasts one day.

You may spend an Ingenuity Token to gift this ability to a willing target for one day.

Onset was the time these things took to start damaging you, and the interval was how often the damage recycled. This would be extremely useful the next time I went ahead and tried to pet a god, or was sideswiped. Triple the onset sounded good, until you considered that a box jellyfish could kill you almost instantly.

Cross fingers that nothing here was box jellyfish or blue-ringed octopus deadly.

Oh, who was I kidding? I gave up on the silly wishful thinking and read on.

Ability upgrade was exactly what it seemed like: I could boost one of my special abilities into whatever it would become next. In scrolling over the three abilities at my disposal, I tried to assess which of them would be the most beneficial to upgrade. Usually you went with the highest rarity, since it would upgrade the best. Meaning **Healer's Resistance** should prove to be the best shot for upgrading.

I looked over the upgraded versions of **Hard At Work** and **Healer's Endurance** just in case.

Hard At Work presently doubled my Token successes while doing my class job, which was huge. The upgraded version made it so assisting someone at their job only cost me 2 Tokens instead of 3, effectively reducing the difficulty of a task they were doing. Not nearly as good as I'd hoped, but also not bad. Larelle and Tara had both helped at a rate of 3:1.

The upgraded version of **Healer's Endurance** added a 25% boost to hit points if I spent a Durability token.

In both cases I had the option of 2 new ways of spending Tokens, and one of them made me a bit tankier.

Healer's Resistance, the uncommon power, gave me the same deal: spend a Durability Token, and this time it would grant me a 30% resistance to whatever element that was dealing me damage, along with a 30% damage reduction against that same element.

All three of these seemed pretty great, and I couldn't be sure which would come in handy. I wanted advice about these from Rainer. I also wanted to see his mustache face again, and ask him about whether I'd be transferred out of here and start doing house calls like Regina thought. So for now, just left that.

As for my 2 attribute points, I was sorely tempted to go with Physicality again and turn myself slowly but surely into an Adonis. Still, it seemed like Affinity was extremely important, because of magic being absolutely everywhere.

I'd gotten one Affinity from Level 9. I could afford a point in Physicality.

Christopher Fletcher
Healer - Trainee 10
Pleasure Seeker - Novice 5

attributes:
Affinity 4 (4/4)
Durability 5 (5/5)
Ingenuity 6 (6/6)
Likability 5 (5/5)
Physicality 4 (4/4)
Free Tokens: 6/6
Unspent attributes points: 1

Healer Skills:
Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)

Treatment (potions 2, salves 2, tinctures 2, elixirs 2, unguents 2)
Develop cure (swarm 3)
Develop cure (small 3)
Develop cure (unique 7)
Administer Cure 7
All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 11

Special Abilities:
Hard At Work II (Uncommon, Passive)
Wild Lore (Common, Active)

Healer Special Abilities:
Healer's Endurance (Common, Active)
Healer's Resistance (Uncommon, Active)

Divine Gifts:
Floral Knowledge (Rare, Passive)
Pleasure's Bounty (secondary class)
Entwined Ecstasy (Legendary, active)

When I looked over the level up rewards for Pleasure Seeker, everything was different.

Level 2: +1 Likability
Level 3: Gained Ability: Hard At Work
Level 4: +2 skill points
Level 5: +1 Durability, +1 free attribute point

The progression seemed far better than the basic Healer class, with attribute points coming twice in four levels. Healer attribute points came at levels 4 and 9, though it was 4 total points.

Also, **Hard At Work** upgraded itself to level 2 from getting it twice. I had to grin at the idea of what **Hard At Work** meant for a Healer versus what it meant for a Pleasure Seeker. Anyway, it meant I would be getting the 2:1 assistance ratio for helping out others with their checks, and I didn't need to spend my level 10 Healer upgrade on it.

I left my last attribute point for now. My stats were far higher than they had been just a few days ago, and I didn't know where this one needed to go… yet. I'd figure it out soon. Same with the skill points. I wanted to have some handy in case I found myself trying to treat a Nakamamon made of rocks or nightmares, or something even crazier.

I was brought out of all the system stuff when Regina's finger began to circle my nipple. She had seemed pretty dazed after our encounter. "You're going to fork that other girl, aren't you?" she asked.

I just looked down the length of my body, with her leg draped over my torso and her thatch of pubic hair slowly grinding onto my hip again and again. I looked back up into her eyes.

"You want me to, don't you?" She wanted me to do Tara. The idea turned her on.

"You really won't think I'm a sludge, will you?"

"I promise, unless you're fracking half the people in the castle on a regular basis, I won't think you're a sludge."

She chuckled and continued slowly gyrating against me. "Half, huh? I think I can up my game and start fracking, um… about a hundred people in the castle on a regular basis. That'll be well under half."

"Please don't," I told her, also laughing. "Just so long as you don't think I'm a sludge either."

"You? Pff, you're like the farthest thing from a playboy there is. Which is why I have to tell you, I'm a bit surprised and delighted by this whole thing."

"Delighted?"

“I kind of want to corrupt you. You’re so pure. You don’t have any vices.” She got up and straddled me, holding my arms up over my head and hanging her hair around me like a curtain. “The question isn’t whether you’re going to have sex with this mysterious other girl.” Out of the side of her mouth, she said, “although I totally have enough details to figure out who she is if I wanted to.”

“What is the question?”

“The question is whether or not I’m going to be there. And then the second question is whether or not I’ll be joining.”

***

I struggled to use the brush on the stones in the laboratory. It had been hours, and for whatever reason, the bubbles here didn’t seem to want to stop multiplying. It was like one of those horribly funny videos about a bathtub overflowing with bubbles, or adding bubble bath to a hot tub.

And it was already a full day after we’d failed with this version of the cure.

I had been inclined to laugh about it when it was suggested that I help clean up, and I laughed even louder when the scrubbing started. I had a long-handled brush, like a dust mop but with Rainer’s thick, bristly mustache stuck on the end. My mood turned when the hours began to pass without any change, matching the sour faces of the other attendants they’d put on this job.

“Sorry, everybody,” I told them, but I only got sullen and dark looks in response.

Tara didn’t seem to mind the work, but Timmy and his two buddies hated it. They also responded badly to Tara’s familiarity with me, scowling while they pushed frothing bubbles into a fire Nakamamon who popped them and did nothing else. Eventually, I saw some whispering happening between Timmy and one of the other runners, and I had to tell her to scale back the flirting a little.

“We can talk later,” I whispered.

"You got it, big guy," she said, then went and was her super bubbly self with Timmy and the other runners.

Rainer joined us in the cleanup effort, initially jolly about being saved. Soon though, he begged off, saying he was exhausted from too much strain on his body over the last two solid days of being on death's door.

"You take a rest," Tara said, and led him out. "You don't have to worry about this little nonsense at all. We're all going to be just fine, all right?"

"Fine?" Timmy grumped. "Fine? Why is it we get all the garbage menial jobs, and that guy gets to go…" He trailed off, seeing the expression I was giving him.

"Is there a way to change your class from Ranger to Healer?" I asked.

"Hey, you, if you'd have done your job right, we wouldn't be here at all," one of Timmy's buddies said.

"And if you two had been Healers in the first place, I'm sure you would've done a much better job," Tara said, chin jutting at them. "Now shut your yaps and get back to scrubbing, before I remind you, again, that Fletcher doesn't have to be here at all, and he's doing us a favor helping out. What a nice guy who could probably stand to get a reward for all his hard work and kindness, and his bravery for choosing the only dangerous job in this whole place."

The other three fell darkly silent, and the next several hours were spent in growing pain from every part of my body, but especially my legs and back. The scrub brush wasn't quite long enough, so I had to bend over a little, and that was enough to turn several hours of scrubbing from painful into unbearable. Still, I couldn't just let Timmy and the boys do the work. There could be no giving up.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, we had isolated the source of the bubble production, and threw it in front of the fire Nakamamon for it to roast.

A fresh gout of frothy bubbles spurted out and covered half the room, but they didn't spread any further than that.

“I’m calling it!” I said. “You guys can come back after a meal, or come back tomorrow. We did the majority of the work, and we’re okay for now.”

“Tara, you coming?” Timmy’s friend called.

“I’ll get Larelle's magmamander back to her first,” she said. “You guys go on ahead.”

The disappointment turned all three of them frosty once more, and they didn’t waste any time in getting the funk out of there. I boosted myself up onto the workbench to get the bubbles off myself, since they’d coated me almost up to my knees.

Tara came sauntering over, smiling. She had swapped the flesh-toned yoga pants for stark white yoga pants, which I found both funny and cute. Staring at her long legs now, it wasn’t cute. It was very sexy, especially when she did a pirouette and threw her blonde hair up. Up top, the shirt no longer hung over her hips and part of her butt. Instead it was a form-fitting zip up hoodie. Although it was thick and comfy, it somehow made her look sexy regardless.

“Well, big guy, it’s just you and me.”

I burst out laughing. “I think you’re incredibly attractive, but there’s no way we can do anything here and now. The door is open, the place is full of bubbles, Larelle’s magmamander is still in here somewhere under all that, and she’ll come looking for him sooner rather than later.”

The realization that a sorority goddess was hitting on me should have frozen my insides and stopped my heart from beating, but instead I just got butterflies in my stomach.

Just.

I had been inside her. Hell, I had blasted off inside her multiple times. Replaying the scenes in my head did not make her actions now any more understandable. Her explanations made sense intellectually, but made zero sense instinctively. She was just going to test me out in bed.

Just for the sake of scientific curiosity.

"So," she asked conversationally. "Did you have a talk with your not-exactly girlfriend? I think you did." She grinned and squinted. "I'm reading… yes. Wow that must have taken some serious balls. Dagnabbit, Fletcher, you sly dog. You know, I'm surprised I haven't heard your name all over the castle, I mean I guess I have. People are talking about the new Healer. I'm more surprised that nobody's come up to me going 'oh my gods I can't believe you and Fletcher!' Which means you haven't told anyone. And I can say that with confidence because I get some pretty insane jobs all over the castle, top and bottom. So, big guy, you have to tell me. What did she say? Did you tell her who I am?"

I would've laughed at just how much she could go on, but instead I checked the hallways for listeners.

"I didn't tell her your name, but she could probably find out if she did any kind of digging. I wasn't very careful."

She waved that way. "Okay I keep going too fast. What did she say? I have to know, you've got me on pins and needles here, Fletcher."

"She's… interested in talking about, maybe, um… being there. With us."

Tara's eyes shot wide open. "Holy spaceballs, Fletcher. Are you sure this isn't a set up to find out who I am? No, I don't think so. If she was into revenge and wanted to figure me out, she'd just find out who was on duty to go grab up plants and herbs with you. Meaning… she really does want to be there?"

Her face went slack as she thought through all this.

"Is she bi then? Holy mackerel, Fletcher, did you land yourself a freak?"

I faked a cough as someone rounded the corner of the hallway, and I changed the topic to types of Nakamamon she wanted for her companion.

"Oh, I'd really prefer one that makes me hard to see. If there's a psychic one that can mask us from people's minds that would be so cool. I don't really want to be out in the wider world without any

kind of escape plan. I mean obviously everyone wants a flier, but then you have to go on certain missions all the time. They keep relegating the fliers to the Guardians and you Healers. I'm okay not getting— okay are we good to talk the other thing?"

She looked around, and sighed. We'd entered a more populated section of the castle.

"I want something fluffy, like Regina," she said. "Ugh, she's so lucky doing the guide missions back to the portal. I'm thinking about whether or not I want something small that I could carry and cuddle, or something a lot bigger." She gave my arm a quick squeeze. "I really like big, if you know what I mean. Bigger being better."

"You are incorrigible."

She grinned at me, and let go of my arm several seconds later than she should've. "Big and cuddly, if I have my choice. Real big, real cuddly."

I just shook my head.

This is Christopher not believing his luck.

Chapter 25- Qualifications

Engineering the time and place to have a chat with both Tara and Regina was no simple matter. We spent all week not in a position to meet one another. Regina was in and out, and when she was in, she was being more careful about getting into my dorm room. Tara had duties that kept her elsewhere, though she would periodically show up at my side during my training with Rainer and nudge me.

A lack of cell phones was ultimately a wonderful thing: no endless distractions, no zillions of ways to keep yourself occupied, and you weren't beholden to answer the phone or reply to any text that came your way. There weren't any of those.

On the other hand, without cell phones, I couldn't make a group chat with Regina and Tara. I couldn't just let them figure out between themselves whether they could both sex me at the same time by messaging each other a million thousand times and becoming best friends. That wasn't an option at my disposal.

The runners were kept around as messengers, but there was no way in hell I was going to trust one of them to deliver one of those fourth grade notes 'do you like me? Circle one: yes no'. Because in this case, the note in question was going to be 'do you have prior history with Regina. Also when are you available for a threesome?'

Not happening.

So Tara kept popping in. I told her that 'this other girl' wanted to be there. It was exciting, of course, but also terrifying. Imagine you could have the ten million dollars you wanted, but if the slightest thing went wrong you'd have to watch every single bill go up in flames right in front of your face. I couldn't just take Tara back to my place and have sex with her, as Regina might pop in at any time.

Also my training was rapidly coming to a close. Rainer had showed me methods for sussing out what sort of malady a Nakamamon had. Physical was both easy and incredibly

complicated: it could be a sliver in a paw… or any kind of infection. Mental or emotional problems were much more difficult to figure out, but once you ruled out physical and magical, you pretty much had to find out whether your Nakamamon was haunted. Spiritual maladies were the least common, at least as far as Rainer was concerned.

"You're going to see more of these rainbow maladies," he said, while I watched for his mouth to appear. "That will make it easier and more difficult. The rainbow sickness, we don't really understand it. We got lucky with the cure. It requires a different cure each time, depending on how far gone your patient is."

I nodded, and took down notes on the thin wooden board we were using. As long as you scratched the letters in there instead of inking them on, the words were less likely to be altered by the magic.

"I know it seems like I'm rushing things," Rainer said, and sighed. His shoulders slumped a bit. "I don't know as you're ready, even despite what happened with the Footfalls god."

I wasn't about to tell my direct superior he was wrong. I didn't have enough information, experience or supervision to go it alone, that was for sure.

"The problem is, there are more reports of this illness, and other stranger things going on out there. Nakamamon and the gods. We don't have enough boots on the ground. I'm going to have to cut you loose."

"Could I make a suggestion?" I asked.

He pursed his lips (I thought anyway… his face scrunched further into the main mustache) and nodded. "Go on then."

"I'd like to take a small group of recruits to help out. Having one of the runners to help in procurement was a big help. Having runners and one of the Nakamamon Guardians come to help develop the cure was also enormous."

"Non-healers." He clearly didn't like the idea.

"Rangers mostly," I said. "If I have to gather ingredients over and over again, it will be better to have people conversant with the wildlife, and the terrain. They'll speed up the process. And also, it was a huge help to have that fire Nakamamon… it was much easier to keep the temperature steady that way than by constantly feeding a lit fire."

He continued to chew this over, with his mustache twitching on one side.

"I could use a Guardian or three as well," I said. "Probably a Wizard, too, though I have no real idea what it is they do."

Rainer burst out laughing. "That makes two of us, boy." He held his big gut and guffawed for a while. "Ahhhh… those fools, they seem like their only goal in all this is to turn a profit for the corporation. They're almost all of them holed up in labs in the castle, doing frack knows what, probably trying to enchant items that won't turn to pixie dust on the other side of the portal."

"Oh…" I didn't know what to say to that. There was a lot of money being poured into this project, and I wasn't entirely sure where that money was coming from. Really, once I'd gotten here, earth fell out of my mind almost completely. I did want to check in on Sarah and see my mom again, but not right now.

"Could I make a second request?" I asked.

"Heck, why not? What've you got for me?"

My heart was racing here, and I hoped he couldn't see straight into my brain. I didn't think his Nakamamon gave him telepathy, but these creatures had some strange abilities. "Could I hand pick my group members? I'd like people I trust with me… I've had a couple of bad encounters and I want to make sure the people with me are, let's say, on my wavelength about the work I'm asking them to do."

Crossing my fingers behind my back, I silently sent out prayers to all the gods that might hear. I tried mentally explaining that I wasn't just trying to create a sex… squad. That was a secondary objective.

"Let me run your two requests up the chain and see what I can do."

***

Rainer paved the way for me to be able to pick my own team members. This is also how I was able to sit Regina and Tara down in the same room with a reasonable amount of relative privacy.

Dumbass me, I didn't see it until I was two days into interviews and applications. I had had Regina in as soon as she got done escorting a new hire in, and she recommended the new hire as well, a squirrelly little guy called Alan.

They gave me a small office on the inner portions of the castle, with a small window overlooking the courtyard, so while I was waiting for Tara to deliver my summons and for Regina to show up, I could peer out at the mobs of people lazing around with their Nakamamon. One guy had a land octopus type thing. It wasn't made of soil or anything, but was brown and green, and didn't seem to have any trouble moving over the ground to play fetch.

It was actually kind of sad, because he couldn't throw very well, and the octopus creature sometimes just caught the stick by vaulting up and wrapping a tentacle around it before it went anywhere. I was chuckling about this when Tara returned with Regina… and this other dude.

"Fletcher," she said, "I want you to meet Alan."

It would certainly have crossed my mind to have Regina and Tara have their little conversation right here and now, except that Alan stood here. Five and a half feet of intense awkwardness. He looked so intimidated it wasn't even funny.

"Hello, Alan." I gave Regina a significant look even while reaching out and shaking Alan's hand. Why was she including another guy in this situation? I hadn't intended to pack my little Divinity Rescue Team with only women, but I had wanted some time to speak with her alone.

"F-fletcher, sir," he stammered. "I-I'm glad t-to meet you."

“Alan has a stammer, but is a genuinely great person,” Regina said.

“Has Regina told you what I’m proposing? Because while I’d be thrilled to interview you and have you along, if you haven’t gone through the training, it won’t really matter. You’ll need to stay at the castle and get a few levels in before venturing out.”

“Oh! Of c-course,” he said. “I-it won’t be a-a-a p-problem.”

“Alan said he’s interested in being a Wizard, which I know you need,” Regina said, “and also that he’s not interested in just cataloguing artifacts and magic resonance measurements. So I suggested he join the team and get out of the castle and the bureaucracy here.”

Major curveball.

I stared at her, mind whirling.

“Okay, you have mentioned to Alan that I’ve already had two near-death experiences, correct?” I asked. “We’re not doing something safe.”

Alan suddenly straightened. “That’s o-o-okay! I-I-I won’t back down, s-sir.”

I thought about telling him to stop calling me ‘sir’ but couldn’t deflate this exuberance. He was feeling what I’d felt two weeks ago, and really, what I still felt about this world.

“The most dangerous job,” I told him, “is Healer. Which is what I’ll be doing. And everybody around me is going to face that kind of danger too.”

He puffed out a scrawny chest in adorable defiance. “I-I’m ready.”

“I tell you what,” I said. “You put in officially with the Wizards who train you, and I’ll see that you’re on the team. I don’t know what their training entails, but you’ll need to be done and given leave to join us in about a week.” Then I turned to Regina. “Are you interested in joining up?”

“Oh? Hm, I hadn’t really given it much thought,” she said, and I had to stop myself from snorting. Tara certainly didn’t. She knew

exactly what was going on, because I'd told her who Regina was. She definitely snorted, then coughed several times to cover it up.

"It does seem like a lot of work a Ranger would do," she said.

"My team will have several Rangers on it, I think," I told her, then pointed my chin over her shoulder. "Tara will be joining us."

Regina turned, eyed the tall and bronze-skinned Tara for a few seconds too long, then turned a pointed, questioning look my way. I gave her a tiny nod, and watched in amusement as her eyes widened even further. And most amazing of all, her tongue darted out, licked her lips, and she bit her lower lip after that.

"I think I'd be very interested in joining your team," she said. "Grabbing newbies is a great job, but it's getting tedious. In the castle, out of the castle. In the portal, out of the portal. In and out, in and out."

"You want something with more of an adventuresome thrust," Tara suggested, and Regina vacantly nodded after darting a glance at my midsection. "That's exactly what I was joining up for. I'm burning with need… to get out of this castle."

"I l-love this team idea!" Alan burst in, breaking up the increasingly steamy vibe that was starting to circulate.

I shook Regina's hand too, and she rubbed her finger on the inside of my wrist. Yep, I was definitely going to get a hard on if this kept up.

"I'd be thrilled to have you." And Tara. Out under the stars. All sharing one sleeping bag… zipped in together with another sleeping bag so it's big enough.

I had to stop that kind of thinking right away so I didn't get myself horny.

The remainder of the interviews went off well, with only a few exceptions. Timmy brought Wendell to his interview, with the little storm ferret sitting on his shoulders and staring at me with eyes like the void.

"What makes you think you'll be a valuable member of my team?" I asked, the same question I'd asked all the rest.

"We know each other!" he blurted out. "I showed you around the castle… hell, I cleaned up your messes, bro. You owe it to me. And you know you want Wendell along for the expedition. Little guy is an amazing hunter and perfect for scouting."

"I have several Rangers in mind already," I told him, to mitigate the sting that was to come. "It's going to be a difficult choice, honestly."

He looked panicked. "Who've you got? Is it Regina? She is hot," he admitted, as if choosing her was based on her looks rather than her experience and her own companion creature. And while it was a little of column A and a little of column B, he made it sound cheap, like I would only have her on my team to ogle her. "I would definitely pick her if I were you."

He chewed his lip and nodded. "Maybe I can get on guide detail after she goes."

"I can't say anything is certain," I told him. "I just want you to know that choices are being made based on a number of different factors. Can I ask what level you are?"

He grew angry, his blue eyes bulging and the cord standing out on his neck. "They won't let me out of the castle! I barely get any actual Ranger-ing done. It's not my fault the administration won't let me do my actual fucking job!"

After being in this place for several weeks, the use of an actual swear word hit me like a hammer blow. Playing with the language and pretend swearing had given this place a kind of cute sheen of innocence and purity that I quite enjoyed. This one word, more than anything else, disqualified him from being on the team. It told me he couldn't control himself. He had a temper, and I wasn't going to have somebody on my team with a temper… and an electric ferret that might obey him implicitly.

No violence.

"What level?" I asked him quietly.

"Sixteen, okay? Is that what you wanted to know?"

I held out my hands to ward off attack. “I only reached level ten the other day. It’s all right.” It wasn’t all right. He’d been here for months. I definitely wished the administration would take this kind of frustration into account with these newb runners, but I wasn’t in charge. I didn’t hire people.

Except for right now.

“Hey,” I told him, standing and offering a hand. “Thank you for helping me out when I got here. And I appreciate you helping out with the cure failure messes. I’ll be in touch regarding the expedition squad choices.”

He shot his hand forward and ground the bones in my hand together in a painful handshake. It was clear bro had put his points into Physicality. I actually took several hit points worth of damage, and saw the little red bar in the corner of my vision dip. Timmy pumped my hand up once, down once, and stalked out of the room.

This is Christopher not liking the leadership role one bit.

Chapter 26- Divinity Rescue Corps

The first day of interviews had been exhausting and mind-bending. He'd gone through some thirty people, and he had given them a good fifteen minutes of time on average. The ones who impressed him got longer to further impress him. Starting at eight, he finished just after eight, not loving life.

On the second morning of the interviews, he had the amazing idea to have Tara summon Regina back in, but to make sure she came alone.

"You've got it, big guy," she said, winked and gave him a knowing smile before heading out.

They were back in only fifteen minutes. He was just about to interview another Guardian when the two of them showed up: Tara almost a head taller than Regina, and Regina blinking innocently at him.

"We didn't have an opportunity to conduct your interview yesterday," he said in the midst of closing the door.

"So," Regina said, "are you sure that there was a god involved? Because I wouldn't blame you if you came onto this hottie and she wanted to be your second girlfriend."

"Could you keep your voice down a little?" He asked, glancing toward the door.

"Oh, I like her," Tara said, while Regina shrugged nonchalantly.

"I guess this is maybe the most important interview," I said, and motioned toward the chairs.

For nearly a half hour, I tried to get the situation as clear as I could in my head. The girls surprised me by falling into an easy rapport. Tara and Regina knew each other, obviously. They were part of the Rangers, and part of the Rangers who were stuck in the castle

doing make work. Though they hadn't talked a lot, they had spoken some.

Which left me with what became a very weird interview, because it was about sex. Regina answered easily and calmly, but only perfunctory responses. Yes she was in. No she didn't have a problem with me having sex with Tara. Yes she was attracted to girls, and Tara specifically. She shrugged as she said this, while both Tara and I stared at her in wonder.

Yes she could keep secrets.

As the discussion went on, Regina spread her legs and gave me a view up her skirt. Not long after she put one foot up on the chair so I couldn't just get a hint of what was going on down there, I got the whole view.

For Tara's part, she appeared somewhat mystified by Regina's responses but more into the interview itself. She wanted to know if there was anything Regina considered gross (no) or off limits (ehh… no toilet stuff), and whether Regina had ever done this kind of thing before.

"Nope," she said, smiling an easy smile, "but I'm getting turned on just thinking about it."

"Why is that?" Tara asked.

"Dude, need I remind you that there's no porn in this whole world?"

Tara burst out laughing. "Fair point," she said. She stood up. "So if I were to tell you that I'm going to get Fletcher hard…" She began to slowly advance toward my desk, while unbuttoning her shirt. "… and let him do whatever he wants with me…" Here she dropped the shirt to the floor and caressed her bra-covered tits. "…what would you say to that?"

Regina sat up in her chair, grinning and eyes locked on the long-legged beauty. "I'd say you're most of the way there. Fletcher's already rock hard, so step one is out of the way." I could feel her arousal through my Affinity attribute. She was generating a field of magic. That's what happened when people got horny in this world.

She might as well have her tongue hanging out and drool dripping onto the floor.

"What if I asked you not to get involved this time?" Tara asked quietly.

Regina finally blinked and shook her head. "That's fair, and fine. What about next time?"

"I'll need some time getting used to the idea," she said. "I thought we'd just be sharing him as sex friends, like you Monday and me Tuesday through Sunday."

Regina snorted laughter. "More like I get him Monday through Friday and you can have whatever's left over on weekends."

"Um, hello?" I asked.

I have to say it was the weirdest, most flattering conversation I've ever witnessed in my life, being bandied about like a piece of meat. It made me stiffen just to hear them talk about all the sex I would be getting.

"We can give him a rest day," Regina said, grinning. "I'll even offer up one of mine."

Ah, they were kidding. They were definitely kidding. I was pretty sure they were kidding.

"You're not the only one who's conducting tryouts," Tara said, in the middle of slipping her yoga pants off, and kicking them expertly up to one hand so she could pull them off the second ankle in a move so smooth I wondered if she practiced it at home.

She wasn't wearing anything underneath. It was just gleaming bronze flesh, a landing strip of dark brown hair, and then obvious wetness.

"I've been looking forward to this all week," she said in a low tone. She'd gone into full arousal mode, staring down at me in the chair. Finally, she parked her cute butt on the desk and put one foot up on the arm of my chair.

Regina looked at me. "What did you do to this girl?"

I held up my hands. "It was a god, okay?"

"Okay, big guy," Tara said. When I darted a glance over toward Regina, she reached down and pointed my face up at her. "Right now, she's not here. It's just you and me. If you were going to invite me to be part of your little fellowship, it's time for you to impress me. Regina will have to impress me next time. I haven't thrown the idea out."

"I knew I liked her," Regina said from behind her. When Tara turned her head, she raised her hands defensively. "I'm not here."

But then her head appeared in my peripheral vision, and I could sense her intense glare. A lot was at stake here; clearly Regina wanted some Tara, and maybe some threesome fantasies fulfilled. That glare told me in no uncertain terms not to fuck this up.

It was time not to fuck this up, though fucking would definitely be on the menu.

First though, I started with a massage. Her one calf muscle, nice and slow, varying pressure, followed by her thigh and hamstring. I wasn't used to touching other people so much, let alone gorgeous women, so I really got into it, running my fingers over the underside of her feet and rubbing in tight little circles. I wasn't a foot guy, like I had no inclination to suck on toes, but I wouldn't mind rubbing her feet on my cock.

Tara's eyes flew open, but they quickly drifted close again as she blissed out. She was on her feet all day, running here and there, so this massage was badly needed. She groaned when I took hold of her other leg and lifted it up onto the chair's arm as well.

After that, I asked her to lay down, and she rolled onto her stomach on my desk. Legs initially together, but they parted before I even got back to touching her.

I kneaded her silky flesh for long minutes, loving the appreciative sounds coming out of her. I got in real close to the junction of her thighs before backing up and massaging both hips. This required me to straddle her. All three of us were on board with this.

One look at Regina told me I was doing well. She was slouching back in her chair with her skirt hiked to her waist and her hand

working between her legs. Her face was slack.

I went to work on Tara's ass cheeks. Pressing down where the bones came together, around her tailbone, and loving the tortured groan she emitted. She actually pushed her butt up into my hands.

I didn't know how she ended up with statue metallic skin, but it certainly felt natural. And I saw her nether region appear and disappear as I squeezed and appreciated the globes of her butt cheeks.

This went on, up her back and over her shoulders, then down her lower back to her ass again.

Now her legs had parted, and we could begin. Sliding my hand down between them, I slowly got a feel for exactly what Tara felt like, and how turned on she was.

The answer was a *lot*.

Entwined Ecstasy *(Special Ability) may be activated during this intimate act. Would you like to spend 1 Token of your choice?*

The answer was of course **yes**. I loved having Tokens to spare. This one I felt should come from Physicality.

As soon as my finger penetrated her even a little, she arched her back off the desk and cried out.

"Fuh… Fletcher!" she groaned.

"I'm here," I told her.

"In…inside me. I need you inside me."

"How about we play a little more?" I slipped my fingers lower, to where Regina showed me her clit was, and I began playing with it in tiny circles. At the same time, I slipped a finger fully into her with my other hand.

"Nnnn… no fingers. Just dick. Ugghhh…"

"Soon," I told her quietly.

"Ohhhh gods." She went back down, head on forearms, and began to shake violently.

Unconsciously, she'd drawn herself up onto her knees and pushed her ass out at me. It was easy to bend over the desk and get a mouthful of her juicy slit.

Regina tasted of wildflowers and fresh breezes, but Tara had a fresh taste to her. Like juicy berries. Like watermelon. I got in there and parted her lower lips, and licked around, loving the taste. Maybe this was what Regina had meant when she said she liked my seed. I even paid a lot of attention to the clit, and sent her into overdrive.

Soon she was arching her back, shoving herself back against my face and riding the air, moaning and groaning, head thrown back and eyes closed.

Finally she sprang up to her feet and advanced on me. She grabbed a hold of my cock and looked at me with such an expression of fury and arousal that she looked like a wild animal.

"You're going to put this," she said, and squeezed, "in me, and you're going to do it right now. Foreplay time is over."

This was how, perching her ass on the desk with her legs spread wide, she led me by the cock directly inside her. She enveloped me, far tighter than Regina, scorching hot and already so wet.

"Yesssss," she hissed, and grabbed onto my hips so I would start pumping away at the rhythm she needed.

Soon, aside from the slap of our bodies coming together over and over again, the only other sound was a quiet squeaking coming from Regina's side of the room. I kept right on plowing Tara hard, and she soon slumped down onto the desk again.

She was soon mewling and crying about how she was going to orgasm, again. I watched her mouth open in a soundless scream, and locked eyes with Regina, who was biting her lower lip and also shaking.

I'd gone from practically a virgin to having someone watch me have sex in under a month. The very idea was enough to push me close to the edge. Watching Regina orgasm did it for me.

"I'm going to—"

Tara's feet locked around my waist again. "Keep going, don't stop. Don't stop!"

I couldn't just wrench her feet apart. Her legs were stronger than my arms. I was too close anyway. And as she threw her head back, muttering about how I was not to stop, and went still before her orgasm, I had no choice but to release. With Tara convulsing with her third orgasm, I couldn't help but erupt all the way up inside her.

"T-Tara!" I groaned, and came. And came and came and came, it seemed.

I wanted to ask her what she was thinking. It wasn't a safe day. She told me last time it was safe, and that was a week ago. Hell, I could feel the vitality through my magic sense. Affinity let me know she was swirling with magic down there. Her legs released me too late.

My thoughts were interrupted by Regina, who tugged at my hip, and immediately slurped my cock into her mouth. She eyed Tara's dripping sex for a moment before my long-legged beauty sat up to watch.

"What are you doing?" Tara asked, but she sounded amused.

"Cleaning up, obviously," Regina replied in between licks, sucks and slurps. "I'm not touching you."

Tara smirked. "Enjoy it."

"Oh, I am. It's fluffing delicious."

***

In the aftermath of the situation with Tara, I realized I'd neglected to 'bring her into the fold' with **Entwined Ecstasy**. Still, just like with Regina, I received notifications that I'd gained abilities from the sex… somehow, regardless.

The reason was, of course, that the Lovers had given her the exact same powers as me and she was already 'brought into the fold' without me having to spend the Tokens.

Tumbling with Tara gave me an ability called **Eagle Eyed**.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have entwined with Tara Harkenen. Your relationship status is* ***acquainted****. This is common for new lovers. These lovers have shared a bed only a handful of times.*

Pleasure from intimate acts between ***acquainted*** *is boosted moderately.*

The next UI message that arrived pertained to bringing her into the fold.

Entwined Ecstasy*: Tara Harkanen was already brought into the fold by The Lovers. She has gained the ability* ***Diagnostic****. You have gained the ability* ***Eagle Eyed*** *from entwining with Tara Harkanen. Entwine more deeply with Tara Harkanen to unlock further abilities.*

Next, came a write up for my new ability.

Eagle Eyed

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

Your eyesight becomes better than human. You are able to discern details at a distance, and analyze close objects much better than base humans.

The **Wild Lore** ability proved to be pretty amazing. I didn't have a skill called Identify, so I was only able to make easy checks against my Ingenuity or my Affinity, but a small write up about the plant or animal would pop up, giving me its name and its rarity. The castle didn't have anything amazing, except for a massive old tree in the courtyard, but I couldn't score enough successes to get more than its name (Methuselah Scarple) and its rarity (Rare). With **Eagle Eyed** it was even easier to zero in on a plant outside the city, or spot Nakamamon roaming around beyond the guardhouses.

On the third day of practicing **Wild Lore**, I actually gained a rank of the Identify skill, which shocked the heck out of me. The organic gaining of skills was mentioned briefly in the manuals given to me by Allie, but there hadn't been any specifics.

The team assembled three days later and left at dawn. The castle might have been some things, but it was not a haven for privacy. Not was it too busy to make their departure just another thing going on.

No, everyone saw the team together on the landing platform. People ringed the platform, hung out of windows, watched with those retractable telescopes you'd see in pirate movies, and rode their Nakamamon companions if they could fly or hang on castle walls.

I had chosen ten members for the team, wanting to have every class represented. This included two natives to this world. Larelle was the first.

Larelle had come to my office and squeezed in the doorway, asking telepathically whether she would be considered as an addition for the team. She had a magmamander, after all, and had already assisted in crafting a cure for a god. She claimed that she would be honored to join the expedition. She seemed almost frantic with need to get away from this castle and back out into her native land.

I assured her that she was welcome to join my team, and I doubted I would be choosing any other Guardians over her.

The other native was a Guardian as well, but didn't appear to be one. She was also nothing, absolutely nothing like Larelle. First off, she was whip thin and floated just off the ground on a tattered skirt of white. Her whole body glittered with tiny facets, like she was made of ice or snow.

Second, she had any number of arms she needed. That was… odd. When I'd asked her to demonstrate why she was a Guardian and how she could be expected to assist us, she lashed out with about ten of these arms, producing eight daggers of different sizes, along with a tower shield and a spear some ten feet long, made of

the same substance as her body. She then launched those daggers into a wooden chair, and they formed a neat line when the last one finished thunking into it.

"What are you?" I asked, amazed.

It turned out there was no real word for her species before humans showed up, but they were now called frostlings. He name was Chrysta. Not Crystal.

"Have you done much guarding in your time here?" I asked.

Surprisingly, the answer was yes. She mostly guarded people from making stupid choices and doing violence with one another. Humans were kind of violent, when it came down to it. They kept getting this poison into their systems, this *alcohol*, and doing strange things while under the effects.

Two natives and me meant that after Regina, Tara, that brand new Wizard named Alan, I had five more human being on the team.

Timmy was not among them. I actually caught sight of him as we were boarding a huge flying carpet created by a team of wizards. Glaring at me. With his storm ferret standing on his head, also staring at me.

Honestly it would've been adorable if not for the fury written on Timmy's face.

This is Christopher getting out of the world of human influence, and not soon enough.

Chapter 27- Meet the Team

As much as I didn't want to have a whole bunch of Guardians on my team, I had to admit they were strong, fast, agile, and had defensive powers that could shield other teammates. If nobody else was going to be a healer, we needed to prevent damage. Larelle wasn't enough.

I also had to figure out, in a hurry, who was going to step up and do the right thing when the time game. Binks had the wrong attitude when it came to the gods. The questions I asked deliberately targeted who had been indoctrinated by the administration and who hadn't bet made up their minds about divine entities.

This meant almost all of them were complete newbs. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

I had quickly discovered that the administration wasn't entirely sure what to do with most of the character classes. Most new recruits wanted to be Rangers and Wizards for obvious reasons: to range, or to wiz. With mapping efforts underway by lots of more veteran Rangers and Wizards, and the research being undertaken by even more of the veteran Wizards, more Rangers and Wizards ended up as interns. Rangers as runners and guides, Wizards as clerical staff, number crunchers, desk jobs.

And they hadn't signed up for that… they'd signed up to explore a rad fantasy world full of magic and weird creatures.

However, there were still Bards, Rogues, and Sorcerers.

The only Bard who applied for the position had been kept in the castle purely for entertainment purposes and was getting tired of it. She had changed her name to Cinzia but wanted to be called Cinzy.

"And what is it you can bring to my god healing team?" I asked.

She arched an eyebrow at me and grinned. It was like an explosion of charisma. I had never had someone immediately captivate me just with a smile before.

"Well," she said, "first off, you're going to be talking to and integrating the team amongst natives. They have towns, villages, and smaller communities. I do my best work making first impressions. Check this out."

She gave an even brighter smile, and I almost had to squint and look away. It was amazing how she could just about glow with likability.

"And I assume you play music?" I asked.

"Pff. Of course I play music. But I won't be playing any music on this expedition unless I want to. If anyone tries to force me, I'll beat them over the head with my oboe."

"What about the no violence policy?" I asked.

"No requests, no violence. Easy," she replied, and beamed another smile at me that felt like I should have put on sunscreen to guard against.

I liked Cinzy. I was almost entirely sure that was a series of abilities she had, but wasn't going to press the matter.

I also wasn't certain what a Rogue could bring to the party, but a fellow named Drat convinced me.

Drat was really short for Kondrat, his last name. He'd used Drat when he took the job and went through the character creation process. First name unknown, at least by my two sex friends.

He was basically the rat: sharp features, twitchy, didn't care what other people were doing, and greedy as hell. He was famous in the cafeteria for clearing everyone's plates when they were finished with meals. To avoid waste, you see.

Drat didn't say much of anything. He didn't do much of anything, either, so far as everyone knew. Whenever a runner was sent to find him, he wasn't there. Whenever his name was called by the Nakamamon the Wizards had, he'd suddenly turn up at the administration office. A lot of times it was just easier to get someone else to do it.

"And why is it you want to be a part of my team?" I asked.

He shrugged. "This place is boring."

As far as his Nakamamon, he shrugged once more and said the little bugger was around somewhere, but he wasn't sure. "He'll show up when he's ready to help out."

And when asked about the god situation, and how he felt, again he shrugged. "I'm not worried about it. You'll have me doing recon and scouting."

"I have two Rangers."

Another shrug. "Maybe some light burglary. That's what you need me for. I'm the Baggins of the group."

The other Rogue I'd interviewed had been one of Timmy's biggest supporters, ready to get out and explore the world with Timmy and their other friend. So… no thanks on that score. Although I wasn't certain we'd be using a Rogue all that often, I figured it couldn't hurt.

I'd been initially ready to add one more Guardian to the group. Her name was Ivy, and she seemed great: no attachment to either Timmy or Blake, no horror stories from Tara, Regina, or Larelle. She largely kept to herself, and was itching to leave the castle to do real Guardian work. There were too many cooks in the kitchen, she claimed. She was hoping to plant her shield when it was necessary, scare off real threats if there were any to be found, and then paint literally everything she saw.

"You're an artist then," I said, impressed.

Ivy was one of those types who shaved her head down to stubble, had a bunch of piercings, and a handful of tattoos… that I could see.

"Oh yeah, you could say that. I don't know as I would say artist artist, but I'm aspiring."

"But not a Wizard." I was coming to understand that Wizards could do magical painting if they went into that.

"Too stuffy. No thanks."

She ticked all the right boxes in terms of attitude, attachments here, relationships (or lack thereof, ideally) with any of the other Guardians… there was just this one thing.

"If you choose to have me on board, you have to bring Isabelle onto the team."

"Isabelle."

"Isabelle Lee Martinez," she said, nodding.

It turned out Isabelle Lee Martinez was Ivy's closest friend. I would have disqualified the both of them for Ivy making the condition, but Isabelle really impressed me. First of all, she had a Nakamamon, a rochidna the size of a hippopotamus. The armor plates were astonishing. Not only was the thing docile and an excellent pack mule, it was virtually indestructible. It was called Muppin, and she loved giving it scritches: chin scritches, ear scritches, between the spiky plate scritches.

More than that, Isabelle had a laid back attitude (kind of a female version of Drat) when it came to basically all the things I was asking her to do. I really hoped she wasn't being dismissive about the danger, the being away from the castle, and the isolation. She really didn't seem bothered.

The last I wasn't sure about, but the Sorcerer I found intrigued me.

See, the guy's name was Trent, and I had expectations about the guy. Oily, douchebag, cocky. Sorcerers had a pretty well-earned reputation.

Trent wasn't any of those things. He stood a few inches shorter than me, messy blonde hair, half his face drooping with scar tissue, and deadly fucking serious.

"I'm ready to go," he said.

When I asked what he brought to the team, he made the entire castle shake. Soon enough the blocks that made up the floor started to vibrate and rattle. Several of them lifted up out of the floor like blocks out of a game and rearranged themselves into various different configurations.

"So long as I have mana, I can do that," he said, visibly sweating. With more concentration, he sent them back to where they were, causing cries of alarm to drift up from the floor below.

So he was like a Wizard who didn't need a bunch of glowing crystals, a staff with runes carved into it, or any of the other zillion bits and bobs Alan was forced to carry around.

Wizards were Jacks of all trades, masters of none. Sorcerers, it seemed, were masters of one, and to hell with all the rest. While Wizards were restricted to the number of spells they could memorize using Ingenuity and Affinity Tokens, Sorcerers had mana pools dependent on Affinity and Likability. I could get on board with having a little of Column A and a little of Column B. Allie and Rainer made it clear that administration wanted Alan along simply as a scribe, who could use long range communication spells to relay messages back to the castle for mission updates, requisition orders, and probably to spy on the natives.

When I finally selected my tenth, a new window popped up in front of my vision.

Leadership the top of the screen read.

You have been given control of an expedition consisting of ten individuals! You have selected:

Cinzia Graham (Bard) + Fairy Poppins
Chrysta (Guardian)
Isabelle Lee Martinez (Guardian) + Muppin
Ivy Gutierrez (Guardian)
Larelle (Guardian) + Calida
Regina Hampstead (Ranger) + Tweedle Dee
Tara Harkonen (Ranger)
Drat (Rogue) + McCauley Skulkins
Trent Thomas (Sorcerer) + Garnet
Alan Abbot (Wizard)

Would you like to name your expedition? Y/N

I hit Y, having given this a lot of thought already. I was already thinking of having commemorative t-shirts made up, and coffee mugs printed online and sent to everybody (or brought back here for Chrysta and Larelle).

A typical keyboard appeared with the 8-bit letters and numbers on it, and I typed **DIVINITY RESCUE CORPS.**

Although I didn't love how close CORPS was to corpse, I didn't want to change the spelling to CORE. That simply wasn't correct.

Then, when prompted whether this was my final answer, I mentally gave my assent. Yes, we were the Divinity Rescue Corps. The DRC. It was better anything else I had come up with.

You may issue commands and give out quests through this menu! DRC members will suffer experience penalties for disobeying, and be given experience point bonuses for complying.

Please note that the parameters of your mission will be considered when giving orders. Orders that fail to meet mission parameters or go against mission parameters will not grant bonuses or incur penalties. Your DRC members are all aware of this, so take this into account. Repeated orders that fail to take mission parameters into account or which go against mission parameters will result in command being passed to another.

One cannot lead from the rear of the battle, commander!

Do you wish to issue orders at this time? Y/N

"No, no I do not," I muttered.

You may issue orders at any time by typing them here, or saying the phrase, 'That is an order.'

Some of the ten party members were giving me odd looks. One of those was Regina, who was giving me a raised eyebrow and a half smirk I didn't particularly care for. No, I was not going to order anyone to have sex with me. Yeesh.

While I was grappling with the weirdness of having ‘command’ of ten people and the even weirder weirdness of being forced to say ‘That is an order’ the group were mingling and beginning to talk amongst themselves.

We didn’t remain on the flying carpet for very long. I wanted to take the long way, find out as much as I could about the world at large, and get to know these strangers for as long as I could before we got into the weeds with populations of natives. The fewer variables the better, at least for now.

“Team meeting!” I called out.

“Team meeting!” Cinzy echoed in a sing-song tone. “Everyone gather ro-ound!” Her voice carried much farther than mine, which I would discover was a basic Bard trick.

The natives were the first to head over, though Tara wasn’t far away to begin with. Regina gave Tweedle Dee an order and the Nakamamon bounded away into the meadow, towards the colossal mushrooms.

“Apparently I can order you guys to do things,” I said, when everyone was in attendance. “These orders have to be mission specific, so that’s good. I can’t order anybody to bark like a dog or imitate a chicken or anything like that, sadly.”

Cinzy cocked her arms up and started bobbing her head anyway, then commenced with the strutting around. With occasional clucks.

“Excellent.” I looked to Regina and Tara, who just shrugged. “I hope to not have to do any of that. The core mission, as you all should already know, is just to locate any suffering, diagnose the problem, treat it while researching and working up a cure, then cure it. The last stage was something we did with the God of Footfalls, but that was highly accelerated because the sickness was already well established in the record books. We may not get so lucky with future cures. Any questions so far?”

Isabelle’s hand shot up.

“First of all, you don’t need to raise your hand,” I said.

“We all have job classes, but what are the roles we have as part of this expedition?” she asked. Ivy was nodding along.

I had already considered this. In the first encounter, it was largely the job of the Guardians to keep the sick god from creating collateral damage. So in this case warding the patients away from where they can cause harm to others, or getting others away from our sick gods. And if there are outside threats, ward them off too.

“And how rigorously are we enforcing the no violence rule?” Isabelle went on.

“I assume there won’t be any need for it?” I turned it up into a question. “I’m told the natives are peaceful and never knew what violence was until we showed up.”

“Well I’ve heard some of these creatures and gods are pretty nasty and attack settlements and research groups,” Ivy shot back. The tattooed member of the party with the shaved head and the piercings was already closing in on hostile.

Being twenty, I’d never been in a position to hire people like this before, or command them. I’d never had to try being a good judge of character. I apparently was shit at it.

“I would like violence to be used as a last resort,” I said. “After all, I’m the one with the healing powers.”

Ivy’s eyes narrowed. “Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“The less people f around, the less people find out.”

She started to jab a finger in my direction when Isabelle put a hand on her shoulder and turned her away.

“All right, I’m making Larelle the Guardian leader. We will approach any situation where Guardian expertise is needed and take her advice.” Isabelle and Ivy both turned incredulous looks my way, so I took a page from Drat’s book and shrugged. Whether they had a problem trusting sapient Nakamamon, or taking orders from anyone, or if they knew and disliked Larelle, I didn’t much give a shirt.

The rest of the meeting went much better. Drat wouldn’t be needed to scout ahead in wild territories like this, but he offered up

the services of McCauley Skulkins, his Nakamamon. Either his companion was invisible, made of air, or just not here at the moment, because nobody got a hint of where Skulkins was. Scouting, for now, was best handled by the Rangers. Afterwards, we discussed food procurement. Again, the Rangers were good, but Trent the Sorcerer also had a spell for helping plants to grow at a faster rate, and this included fruiting plants. All of us would defer to the Rangers and assist them as needed when it came to traversing the wilds, getting food moving, and camp duties.

Alan would be providing support as he could, since he was only a fledgling Wizard. I was secretly thrilled to be able to have a Wizard who wasn't deeply into whatever corporate or government structure our employers had the rest of the Wizards under. Alan and Trent were supposed to use their magic powers for creative problem solving type situations: if we had to climb a cliff, if a magic something came at us, or if we needed an igloo made of stone in a hurry.

As for Cinzy, I made it very clear to the team that she wasn't here for performance or entertainment purposes. Sure she was a Bard, but her actual job was going to be in Public Relations. If we encountered unfriendlies she was going to run point on negotiations. When we rolled into a settlement, no matter how small, it was up to her to meet with the leaders and convince them we were the good guys.

"Are you comfortable with that role?" I asked.

She beamed a beaming smile at me, and just for a moment I considered telling her I loved her. Goodness gracious but she was beautiful, and even more so with the power of emotional manipulation or whatever was going on there.

"I'm comfortable with that role," she said.

"And," I announced to the people, "Cinzy has made it known that if you request songs, she will use her oboe to do violence on you. This is the only type of violence that is explicitly allowed, because you've been forewarned. Don't mess with Cinzy."

I felt a touch on my face and realized she bent forward and given me a peck on the cheek.

This is Christopher getting wide-eyed looks from the two women who’ve agreed to bed him on the regular.

Chapter 28- This Guy Gets It

The perfect world here continued to shine and sparkle. The sky coruscated with colors, and the clouds continued to swirl and twirl. The trees did their weird boogie woogie instead of pointing toward the sun. A fresh series of smells was carried in a refreshing breeze. It had rained a handful of times in the castle, short showers that drifted in, pelted everything for a good few hours, and moved on. For now though, though the temperature was dropping, it felt just amazing. As someone who was from the swampiest part of the United States, suffering through the humidity that seemed to squeeze the whole world, this was a delight.

Larelle and Chrysta informed me that this world was called Dorfilialtos by the natives. It was an odd word that seemed to stick in your mouth when you tried to say it. Dorfilialtos. My mind could conjure the word up, but every time I tried to actually speak it, something went wrong.

"Endorphin teal dos. Wait, what? Doritos filial Fritos. Is there a reason my mouth simply cannot say Dorfinnishrialtos? That is… very strange."

Larelle laughed, and after several more false starts, Chrysta joined in. The ghostly woman just shuddered and made odd sounds as she shook and bounced in the air.

"Oh, you laugh, but can you say supercalifragilisticexpialadocious?"

After several seconds of visible confusion, the huge Larelle laughed even harder. Chrysta joined her after several more moments of silent staring.

"You laugh, but it's powerful magic." An eyebrow waggle undercut my point a bit, and again Larelle laughed. She then clapped a hand on my shoulder, which dealt actual damage. I nearly went flying.

I like you, earth person, she said into my mind. *Your nonsense is most agreeable.*

We saw coneflowers, cosmos, tiny lily turf and dandelions, along with flowers that didn't exist on earth: striped coinpurses, sundrinkers (like sunflowers but with absolutely huge leaves), and meadow foffles. I ended up stopping the team several times to grab up some of these and begin drying them out. I initially told everybody all the names of the flowers, but most of them soon tired of it. Only Isabelle seemed interested, though Ivy was being a bit of a jerk. So the expedition traveled in silence for a time, just enjoying the sun on our faces, the magical energies suffusing our bodies, and the breeze tousling our hair.

We had lunch on a lonely boulder sitting in the middle of the tall grassland. I wondered what the natives might eat, but they had seaweed-wrapped rice with some vegetables inside like the rest of us. Larelle might not have a nose, but she had a mouth, and a huge one at that. She scarfed down three times as much as anyone else. Even Chrysta, weird white ice ghost she was, consumed food, though she was much daintier about it.

All was going well until Trent decided he was going to impress us all by lifting the boulder out of the ground and floating it not far off the ground.

"Don't do it," Ivy warned, immediately jumping to her feet. Both Regina and Tara were on their feet as well. I noted Larelle in a superhero crouch, and Chrysta floating up off the boulder. Everybody else was on their ass, on their backs, or hands and knees.

Now that my Affinity score was higher, I could make out the aura of magic being expended by the Sorcerer. It came off in gritty waves, sliding directly down into the rock, where it acted a bit like a magnetic field.

None of that mattered next to the shivering of the stone, the way our pots, pans and dishes went rattling around on the stone, and the way the cups immediately tipped over and spilled.

"Not cool, Trent!" Ivy yelled. "Cut that schnitzel out right now!"

Trent just laughed. “You’re not afraid of flying are you?” He made his face into one of comical fear. “Oh nooo you guys, flight I can’t controoooool!”

“Enough,” Drat said. “Come on, this is stupid. You’re gonna—”

It was then he yelped in pain and lost control over his spell. One second he was holding his hands parallel to the ground, concentrating hard, the next he was shaking his right hand, and droplets of blood were flying.

And the rock was tumbling.

It hung in the air for just a second before slowly turning over and dumping Alan, Isabelle and me off the one side. Drat stood and executed a perfect backflip off the rock, landing like a gymnast. Others were far less graceful about it, including Trent himself. He started sliding off, just as Larelle was scooping me out of the air and vaulting off the rock to land like a super badass.

I would love to report that nobody was seriously hurt. Instead we had Isabelle with her ankle broken after landing badly. Alan also landed badly, knocking the wind out of him.

The rest of the girls were good. Regina, Tara, Ivy, and Cinzy got to safety or landed awkwardly, but without injury.

The boulder plowed into the ground just inches behind where Isabelle and Alan had slid off, shaking the ground and producing a thunderclap of rumbling. It kicked up a large cloud of dust, and followed this up by slamming down the rest of the way.

Stunned silence reigned for a time. I detached myself from Larelle’s beefy arm and went off to look in on Alan, Isabelle and Trent. The latter had landed on Alan’s legs and was scrambling up off him with a shocked expression. He backed off, bloody hand up.

“S-sorry,” he said. “I didn’t… something bit me.”

“You get to go put the boulder back where it came from and clean up your mess” I told him. “I’ll make it an order if you force me too.”

“Yea, no, of course, I’ll just…” He wandered away clutching his hand, and pretty soon the boulder lifted a bare inch off the ground,

then slid back away from us.

Ivy was at Isabelle's side a second later, muttering her concern and worry over her friend. The tattooed, pierced girl with her shaved head turned a dark look Trent's way.

"Nope," I told her. "I'll get Isabelle bandaged up, and we absolutely won't be retaliating. Understood?"

Ivy turned that wild look my way. "You're just going to let him get away with this?"

"I am not," I said. "He'll have KP duty and be restricted from using his abilities off mission. You, however—"

"I'm a Guardian," she snarled, "and I failed to guard my girlf— my best friend!"

"Ivy," Isabelle hissed. "Let it go, okay? I'll be okay."

I had a look at Isabelle's ankle, thankful I had the Healer skills for the job.

***Diagnosis (Ingenuity) check**: You have the skill associated with this check. This check is Easy difficulty. Would you like to spend 1 Token for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 6 Ingenuity and 6 Free Tokens.

I signaled that I would not be spending Tokens on it, and received the notification that of the 3 Diagnosis (physical) and 6 Ingenuity, I scored 3 successes, giving me 1 Token for a Treatment roll. Also, the UI explained that it wasn't necessary to develop a cure, since this was not a malady that would eventually kill her. However, a success on Develop Cure would make the Administer Cure a simpler matter. I could treat the wound temporarily, or Administer Cure.

Develop Cure would use Large as a category, since Isabelle counted as a large creature instead of Swarm or Small. I didn't have that one, nor had I invested in Beast, which was how she was categorized. None of this was good news.

Instead, I could spend my skill points. I didn't want to do that. We were going to come up against wind creatures and fire gods and electric creatures and psychic gods and stuff. Whatever we came into contact with, I wanted to have the points for.

Instead, this.

I looked at the Treatment options. The UI informed me that a Salve would be the way to go: applied topically and immobilized, the salve would slowly seep into the wound.

"Why don't we use Healing Potions?" She asked.

I shook my head. "They're resource intensive to make, the resources are back at the city, and they don't last long in liquid form. Second, it's way more than you need. And third, I'm told that it infuses you with magic, which can attract Nakamamon, or gods, or both."

"Ah."

"If someone gets impaled or has a limb torn off, I'll make up a quick Healing Potion for them and make sure they don't die, but we only have ingredients for about three… if we use those ingredients for salves, unguents, elixirs and such, specific to needs, we'll have ingredients for about three dozen."

"That makes sense. Listen, Fletcher, thank you."

I paused at my work and flashed her a smile. "It's my job. Happy to help, happy to get the experience, happy you'll be well soon."

She was beautiful. Isabelle and Ivy were Guardians, so they had formidable combat abilities and physiques, but they weren't overbearing mountains of muscle like Blake. Instead Ivy was thick around the legs and butt, and well built in the shoulders as well. She didn't have an ounce of fat on her, like an Olympic wrestler. The tattoos, metal, and shaved head served to make her appear more dangerous.

Isabelle, by contrast, was formed like a runner. She had a dexterous build, and I bet she could throw those javelins or shoot those arrows of her far and fast. She was also an exquisite specimen, similar in shape to Tara, but her skin had started to go

swirly and pink purple, like cotton candy ice cream. Pin stripes of white threaded along her skin, and her hair was raven black, tinting toward purple. Mostly though, it was the open gratitude despite the pain on her face that made me think of her as beautiful.

She was also Ivy's girlfriend, if I understood correctly. Whether she was Ivy's girlfriend like friend who just happened to be a girl, or whether they were dating, I didn't know. Ivy's behavior made it seem like the latter.

"You've ridden on Muppin before, right?" I asked her.

"Oh… yeah."

"Wait… Muppin sounds a lot like muffin."

"That's his name," she said. "It's the Korean word for muffin."

I squinted, and saw that she did appear to have Asian blood. "Are you half Korean then?" She gave me a smile. "Well I love that. Muppin doesn't look super comfy to ride, but not everything is what it seems. We'll work something out. Right now I'm going to work you up a salve, splint your leg, and we'll get you laid down comfortably on your big old rock monster. How's that sound?"

The huge rock beast didn't look comfortable, but we had blankets and could fashion something to help her ride.

"Thank you, doctor," she said, and flashed me a big smile.

I spent my Token as part of the 3 needed to automatically succeed at the salve creation check. Right now I felt like I had plenty, and I hoped that feeling didn't dissipate.

Soon enough we had the double boiler going, heating the oil and melting the beeswax in there. I'd mashed up some Sundrinker leaf and mixed it with other herbs that had been mashed up: icebalm and root of mender's fern from the herbs I'd brought. They went in and were only stirred for a good thirty minutes before I asked Alan for a cooling or ice spell. I wouldn't burn her with the salve.

Alan was… not ready for such a thing, but fumbled through a series of note cards carved into bark, and eventually came out with a spell that he said should work. After muttering an incantation about three hundred times under his breath and practicing the hand

motions another good fifty times or so, he cracked his neck and announced he was ready.

"Make it happen, buddy," I told him.

"I just need…" he got out some water and flicked it at the jar of salve. After saying the words, and doing the hand motions, a tiny ray of blue white energy shot out and splashed into the mason jar. Frost grew around it, and he leapt to his feet, pumping his fists in the air and howling in triumph like he'd just landed a rover on the surface of Mars.

"Good job!" Cinzy gushed, and put one hand on his forearm.

Alan about had a frackin' heart attack. His eyes bugged out of his head and his mouth opened and closed again and again, fishlike.

Once Isabelle's dainty, lovely little ankle had a good dabbing of salve on it, and then it had been splinted to keep it immobile, we got her situated on top of Muppin and set off again. Ivy rode up there with her for a while, and Trent sulked in the back. His Nakamamon, Garnet, was nothing more than a literal gemstone that made its way through the topsoil like a mole. It would pop up periodically, gleaming facets around its… head? Then as soon as it appeared, it would vanish beneath the dirt again.

We had miles to go before we slept, and that meant a companionable silence fell over us. Largely. There was still a fraught silence hanging between Ivy and Trent, over Isabelle's injury and his foolish showing off.

I kept circulating between different members of the team, who had broken up into small cliques. The two guard girls attracted Cinzy the Bard, and at times Regina and Tara. Larelle and Chrysta largely kept together, and kept to themselves. Regina sometimes ventured over, had a short conversation with one or the other, and broke off again. Alan was by himself most of the time, though Drat joined him walking in silence.

First I stopped by to thank Alan for his spellcasting, and he went all shy on me. Drat informed me, laughing, that Cinzy and Tara had already been over to do the same thing. Alan was collapsing into his

own self-esteem issues. He was worse than me when it came to girls.

Next, I had a word with Larelle and Chrysta. They told me that the gorgeous landscape held little in the way of danger, unless we spooked a large or huge Nakamamon. We might not be able to sense it because a huge creature would naturally spread its magic aura out over a huge area, and you wouldn't notice it right away unless you knew what to look for. As for how we would spook it, Larelle just made an amused sound into my mind, and Chrysta said there were many ways we could trigger a reaction out of a slumbering creature.

In that case, I asked them to stay vigilant and make sure we didn't run afoul of anything that could kill us with a wave of its flipper.

Afterwards, Ivy found me.

"Fletcher," she said curtly.

"Ivy."

"Thank you for handling Isabelle's injury. She has already recovered most of the damage caused. She has suffered a temporary… her max HP has been lowered for the time being. It should come back within a few hours."

I nodded. "Great. That's excellent."

"I can't imagine recovering from a broken ankle within a few hours." She reached out and took my shoulder, forcing me to stop and look her in the face. "I'm glad you chose us, Fletcher. You won't have to worry about Izzy and I, okay? We're with you a hundred and ten percent."

I could only smile at that.

Afterwards, I sought out Tara and Regina, under the guise of conferring with the team's Rangers about Ranger-related business. In fact, I was not! Instead I got sly, knowing looks from the two women I was coming to believe were the horniest two women on the planet.

"Ohhh you sex monster you," Tara said, giggling.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” I sort of lied. “Are you saying that Isabelle and I are about to do the deed, because I healed her ankle?”

“This guy gets it,” Regina said, laughing.

“Dude!” I said, amazed.

“My advice would be to just tell her you’re amazing at sex and she’ll believe you,” Regina said, but couldn’t keep a straight face. Tara couldn’t either, and snorted her juice out of her nose, before choking and sputtering juice all over the place.

“Can you do that when I’m not drinking?” she asked. “Honestly though, Fletcher, you should probably get all these girls to do you at least once. I don’t see any downside to seducing all of them, and getting a power from having them join the fold.”

“You’re just fluffing with me…” I told her. Astonishment came on its heels. Maybe she was being serious.

“Of course I’m not being serious!” Tara said, practically reading my mind. “You definitely don’t want a bunch of jealous women being catty with one another. You’ve already seen Ivy lose her cool over Trent.”

“Overreaction much?” Regina confirmed.

“Have you two become best friends overnight?” I asked.

Much laughing followed this. They were definitely party to an inside joke I had yet to get in on.

This is Christopher repeatedly rolling his eyes… while grinning like a fool.

Chapter 29- Ranging

Larelle suggested a few activities to give us a better sense of one another's abilities, along with getting to know one another. We would still cover ground and move toward our eventual destination, the improbably named Glumpdumpkin. We would also range out with the Rangers, pull guard duty with the Guardians, collect materials with our Healer, me, and maybe do some wizzing, with our Wizard and Sorcerer.

Drat had gruffly refused Larelle's suggestion that he take some of us out for some stealthy scouting. He then rolled his eyes, walked off in that direction, and disappeared into the underbrush.

"What a mushroom," Regina said, giving me an elbow.

"What are you talking about?"

"What a fungi."

I threw back my head and laughed aloud. "That… was actively terrible. I love it."

The first group I was assigned to was Regina and Isabelle. Both had requested to go out on assignment with me. I leveled a flat stare at Regina and told her with my dead expression that we were not about to attempt to put the moves on Isabelle.

This meant ranging out away from the main caravan while another pair went with Tara out in the other direction. We would swing wide around in an arc and meet up around evening.

"We're not worried about Nakamamon attacking us?" I asked.

"Why would we?" Isabelle asked. "Regina here knows where the dangerous ones are, and I have a shield." She held up her shield as proof, and wiggled it, I guess to make me believe in its existence.

The terrain started rolling here, and the main bulk of the party appeared and disappeared several times in the distance: Muppin with the vast majority of supplies on his back, Larelle and Ivy on

guard duty, Trent still lagging behind and sulking. Chrysta and Alan had gone out with Tara today.

For a long time we traveled in silence, each absorbing the world outside the HQ. It was a vast expanse of magic, so how could we not? I also turned my face to the sky. No planes overhead, no car horns or freeway rush in the distance, no police sirens. Real, actual silence. Nothing but the whooshing wind making the grass sway, and the occasional Nakamamon poking its cute head out of the grass before chirping and bounding away.

Tweedle Dee bounded ahead, hid badly in the grass, and leapt out at Regina when we reached his position. Regina allowed the adorable fox to knock her down and lick her on the face, then leaned into the pets and scratches administered by Isabelle and myself.

"It sure isn't SoCal," Isabelle said, peering into the distance. "It isn't Mexico, and it definitely isn't Korea."

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"You've been to Korea?" Regina asked. Dee made a questioning noise that got her giggling.

"One parent from California, one from Korea."

"That's amazing," I said.

Isabelle didn't respond, but smiled without much mirth. Her parents… perhaps they were no longer married. Perhaps one of them wasn't in the picture anymore.

"What's so different here?" I asked, already knowing the answer for myself. No suburbs here. The world was natural, not cut apart by roads and constantly blaring at you to try to get your attention. No, it was bright and relaxing, a vacation for every moment I wasn't taking hours to mix up cures. It was like those videos of African sunrises, where the sun is monumentally huge, but the whole plain below, and the trees, are silent and still.

"The quiet," she said, shrugging. "And the distance. Korea's close. Busy. Crowded. There's always people around you, at all times. Here I can get away from people, you know?"

I knew. Here I didn't have to play arbiter between my parents and my sister, or fix all of Sarah's problems.

"Mexico isn't much better," she said.

"Hang on, what?"

"My father is Mexican American. I'm pretty much a mutt, you know?" She laughed again, but I still couldn't sense any genuine feeling.

Her body was going bright sky blue and cotton candy pink, with thin threads of shining silver curling up in there, little spirals and curlicues.

"Don't sell yourself short," I said. "Being a whole lot of things is better than being plain old white bread. And you've seen things I've never seen."

I glanced over at Regina, who was waggling her eyebrows like I'd never seen before. Either it was the effect of the magic, or she was really good at it. I had to force myself not to laugh, and not to roll my eyes.

Isabelle shrugged, smiling. "I can speak Korean, and some Spanish."

"Then you're a language and a half better than me."

We spooked something with a lashing tail at one point. A slicing blade of a tail came whipping up out of nowhere and up in a wide arc. Just like a downed power line, it was sudden and unpredictable, and I would've gotten it bad if Isabelle hadn't suddenly surged forward with a glowing shield held before her. The cable slashed against her shield and threw out hissing sparks. Isabelle hissed and gritted her teeth, bracing against what looked like a ton of force. The strike sent her skidding back several inches.

But only for an instant. A moment later, and a huge bird had taken flight, taking its thin metal wire of a tail with it. The tail streamed out something ridiculous, like fifteen or twenty feet behind the silvery wings glinting in the midday sun.

All of us just stared after it. The glints continued until eventually the bird landed somewhere else in the grass a good distance away.

Silence continued to hold us, until finally Isabelle looked at me. “You’re not hit, are you?”

“N…no,” I said, though I had to look at myself. The wiry tail on that Nakamamon bird looked like it could’ve sliced my leg off and I wouldn’t have noticed it until now. “You… you saved me.”

“We’ll call it even,” she said, and extended a hand down to help get me to my feet. Then she pulled me into a hug.

There hadn’t even been a check at all. No chance for me to dodge the thing. Maybe I would’ve gotten a Durability check before being torn apart, but maybe not. I was so glad I never needed to know.

“Thank fork,” she muttered into my shoulder. “You’re okay.”

Regina had moved around behind us, and was now mouthing words. I actually did roll my eyes this time, which caused her to shrug. No, I wasn’t going to try seducing Isabelle, not here and not now. No chance of that. I was pretty happy with my current level of extremely hot ladies, thanks much.

Isabelle released me and looked my body up and down. In my periphery, Regina was flapping her arms madly and gesturing like crazy. She was probably miming butt squeezes and kissy faces, so I focused on Isabelle instead.

“That didn’t get though your shield power?” I asked.

“Knocked most of my mana out absorbing all that damage,” she said, “but no. Jeez, I don’t know what I’d have done if you got hurt on my watch. Ugh, you’re the leader and you hired me even when you weren’t supposed to.” She groaned. “I wasn’t supposed to bring it up. Ivy told me not to. I’m such a babo.”

I gave her what I hoped was an easy smile. Truth be told, I was amped up on adrenaline and freaked out a lot of other creatures might attack us. “I don’t know what that is, but it doesn’t sound like you’re being kind to yourself. Anyway, don’t worry about the team. You’ve already earned your place here.”

Isabelle smiled gratefully. Still holding me by the arms, she looked me up and down again, confirming that I was still unharmed.

Only then did she let me go. Regina's pouty disappointment disappeared as soon as Isabelle turned, and she grinned.

We spent the next number of hours ranging and talking, with a sidetrack over to grab some reeds from a river we found gurgling nearby. Regina showed us the sign we'd been missing of the silvery-tailed bird Nakamamon.

I learned that Isabelle's Physicality was already at 8, with a Durability at 6, though she barely had any Ingenuity to speak of. Meanwhile Regina boasted that she had straight 5's in everything. Isabelle didn't look like a physical powerhouse until the split second moment you needed her to save you from a cutting blade. That moment was when she transformed into a muscle mommy like Larelle.

Grassy meadows turned into copses of trees interspersed with clumps of bushes and foliage, where tiny mice-like things ducked out of sight. Regina halted us in the middle of our journey, and we waited as a snake as big around as my thigh slithered away into the tall grass.

"That thing was pitch black," Isabelle said with a shudder.

"There are so many different kinds," Regina said. "I hadn't encountered the metal birds before. I would bet the snakes prey on the birds and we spooked it."

She took every opportunity possible to brush her hand against every part of me she could touch. A hand squeeze here, a shoulder or butt squeeze there, brushing off dirt from my shirt here, patting me on the lower back there. Every time Isabelle turned her back, Regina would flash me a wild grin and get her hands on me somehow.

I definitely liked it, despite the possibility we could get caught. I think that drove Regina to go even harder. Though she wasn't pleased we weren't getting freaky and adding Isabelle to the mix, she sure did enjoy this as a substitute.

Only once did we have another issue: when a mushroom the size of a large house suddenly sneezed out spores. Regina had been

ranging ahead at this point, making sure there weren't any other hidden creatures ready to slash me in half with their metal tails, or any other defense mechanisms they might have.

Once we were done with the ranging, a disappointed Regina marched off to rejoin the main bulk of the team, and Isabelle waved a thankful goodbye my way.

The next ranging that happened involved myself, Tara, and this time Chrysta.

Tara spent almost the whole time talking about herself. It was a welcome relief after having Regina trying to shove me between Isabelle's legs.

As for Chrysta, the ice ghost hovered nearby. She slowly rotated around in a large half circle around us. Tara was supposed to scout the way toward Glumpdumpkin and the other towns with silly names, but she only wanted to tell me literally every detail about her life.

"My brother got into drywalling because it was the only way to keep my dad from declaring bankruptcy," she started.

"Is that so?"

"And he had a girlfriend for a while, they got along really well… or so we thought! As soon as my brother went into drywall she turned into an awful hag. She broke up with him less than a month after that. She was trying to pressure him to go into something else. She wanted an engineer, a dentist, a doctor, a lawyer. She really wanted that cash and that prestige." She made a raspberry. "Pfffffbbbb, gold diggers. Gross."

I barked out a laugh. "Yeah."

"Even worse than that, gold diggers who have pretensions that they're something they're not."

I couldn't disagree with that.

"I was kind of annoyed when he started dating one of my best friends from school, but, you know, she always had a crush on him. I couldn't really do much about it. He's the breadwinner, you know,

and so that gives you a certain amount of say with what you do with your life."

Blinking several times, I took some time to process. I really liked Tara's energy, even if it was a bit much, but some of the stuff that came out of her mouth. Wow.

"So enlighten me as to what your other siblings are doing right now?"

"Oh! Right. Well, I've got an older sister, Bethany, who works with old folks in a care home…" She continued to talk for nearly two hours. I learned all about Bethany (she was married, had just had her second child, wow, and wanted to be a nurse but couldn't hack it), followed by Tara's younger sister Danielle. Dani, being youngest, had tried to act spoiled for a while, and hadn't gotten very far with that since their parents weren't doing well financially.

"She's been pretty bummed out that she doesn't get the kinds of phones and computer and car that her friends at high school do. But we kept telling her to study, study, study, you know? If you're smart, you can do anything."

She stopped and turned to me slowly. "Know what she wanted to be?"

"What, like an Insta influencer?"

Her face transformed into one of sheer astonishment. "How did you… did somebody tell you already?"

"Nope. Good guess."

"Ugh! She can't make money off that garbage. And you know, I'm worried that all the money I'm funneling back into my parents so they can make payments on the house and not get evicted… maybe I shouldn't. People need to get themselves together, you know? They should do the work themselves."

I considered my mother, frail under the thin hospital sheet and the tube running into her nose, supplying her with oxygen. How just that little mound of cells in my mom's body had overwhelmed her, my dad, and then me. Only Sarah hadn't been affected, and that was because my sister was colossally self-centered.

"Anyway Danielle is probably gonna end up being a friggin gold digger, or film for XXXfans. Ugh, I'm really glad I'm stationed up in the Arctic Circle where I don't have to watch any of that happen in real time."

I laughed at the cover story they'd given us. The portal… the portal had been all the way out in the middle of nowhere. In a little cave, on a nondescript mountain, in the vast expanse of wilderness in the middle of Alaska. We really were up there, doing our part.

She stretched her hands over her head and yawned. I was treated to a show of her belly button as the short cropped shirt rode up. The way her skin was going metallic bronze was awesome, like she was one of those living statues in the big cities.

The yoga pants were blue gray today, a color that shouldn't really have done anything for her, but it somehow really worked. I got to see every muscle movement in her legs and in her butt. It was frankly incredible. Tara was like a pro tennis player here.

I was pretty sure the system, and Physicality in particular, was making all of us into more perfect physical specimens over time, but I got the feeling Tara had started out pretty darn beautiful.

"Ugh, all this walking gets me tired. I wish we could slip out and you could rock my world." She grinned and leaned in. "Too bad we have this deadbeat chaperone."

"You're bad," I said.

Chrysta joined us a little while later. Tara greeted her warmly before claiming the need to scout ahead and get the lay of the land out that way.

"What is a deadbeat?" Chrysta asked when she was gone.

This is Christopher's mouth working open and closed in extra embarrassment and shock.

Chapter 30- Fairy Poppins

The landscape passed with wonderful slowness. Tara and Regina, along with Drat, scouted the areas beyond while the sun began to descend toward an amazing sunset.

Being away from the city, and specifically the castle, had a freeing effect on both me and the rest of the team. Only Drat and Trent seemed unaffected by the smiling sunshine, the endless grasslands, the purple mountains majesty in the distance, and the trees that seemed to be in the midst of posing for a photo every time you looked at them.

The grasslands gave way to rolling hills, and the trees seemed to be gathered to greet us as we crested the largest hill, some three hours into the journey.

"I never get tired of this," Cinzy said.

I cast a glance at her, then stared. She had tied an already revealing pale yellow shirt up at the waist. This pushed her boobs up, creating a deep cleavage, and also her nipples poked clearly through the thin fabric. Her belly button was now also showing. She'd had a short but flowing skirt, and whenever she walked it bounced dangerously up and down. And the kicker: she had knee high black steel-toed boots on.

The magic everywhere in this world had begun to change her, and she was more than a full day into not taking the daily suppressant pill. Her skin was… all the colors. Of earth anyway. She had patches of creamy white, darker sepia, and nearly midnight black. These slowly shifted into different colors and shapes as well. Right now she had a darker patch right at her collarbone and the hollow of her throat. I wanted to kiss it.

"Me neither," I said, tearing my eyes away from the delicious woman standing next to me. I had Regina and Tara. "I mean, I've only been here for a couple weeks, but I can't see myself getting tired of it."

“Out of curiosity, why’d you choose me for your team?” she asked idly.

“Oh, because I wanted one of everything, and there were only two Bards that applied. You were a much better fit for the team.”

“What do you mean by better fit?”

“I got a lot of applicants who were pushy and entitled. People who lost their temper in the interviews. There were some who wanted out of the stuffy confines of the city—”

“I’m definitely one of those,” she said, interrupting me from listing all the things she wasn’t.

“Not for the same reasons. Those guys wanted out so they didn’t have to follow any rules or be accountable to anyone. Least of all me.” When she made a considering sound in her throat, I continued. “I get it… there’s complete freedom here. You can do anything you want, essentially. You get magic powers. The Guardians can leap tall buildings in a single bound. The one guy intimidated me with some kind of shout power. So they want to go out and treat this place like a video game. They want to grind out monster kills.”

“The hiring process should weed those ones out,” she responded.

“That’s a nice wish. It’s easy to say you’re virtuous and wouldn’t turn a new place into might makes right world, where everyone pays tribute to you and you take women as sex slaves, and the only work you ever have to do is scare and hurt people. But it’s seductive to just sit on a pyramid made of slave labor if you have the sharpest spear.”

Cinzy stopped and gave me a long look. That patch at her throat that looked so kissable melted away into Mediterranean sienna, while the left half of her face darkened to a reddish brown. Her eyes were fathomless dark brown, though. She seemed to stare into my soul.

I squashed my instinct to ask her what she was thinking. She would vocalize it, or she wouldn’t.

Also, if we’re being honest with ourselves, I was pretty intimidated by her. Both Regina and Tara were probably the best

looking girls at a party, but Cinzy was the best looking girl in your whole school. The type of girl who could have become an actress, model, influencer, that kind of thing. Before this new job and this new world (and the new body Physicality was giving me) I would've put myself at a 4/10, a generous 4/10. Imagining that the most beautiful woman in the world is a 10, I'd put Cinzy at an 8, possibly a 9. She was way out of my league, like way way way way (infinity ways) beyond my reach.

"Did you want to meet Fairy Poppins?" she asked.

"Absolutely!"

A teensy fairy popped out of her traveling bag, looking like a dragonfly that glowed from within.

I gasped and made a sound of astonishment. "You are just the cutest!"

I held out my finger and the little person landed directly on it, standing up and waving.

"Well hello to you too." I goggled a bit, before turning back to Cinzy. "I have a lot of questions."

She just laughed.

"Never mind. I'll just stand here gobsmacked."

She nearly doubled over laughing. Meanwhile Fairy Poppins took to the air, went around my outstretched hand several times, and doused me with fairy dust.

***Durability check**: You have been **fairy dusted**. You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is Very Difficult. Would you like to spend 6 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 5 Durability and 6 Free Tokens.

"What happens if I don't succeed at this Durability check?"

Cinzy squinted at Fairy Poppins. "Bad Fairy Poppins! You're going back in the bag and not coming out tonight if you can't be good." Turning to me, she said, "I'll lower the difficulty on the check."

"Just curious," I told her, though I was beginning to feel the effects. A timer was running out on my ability to pass the check by my lonesome. I didn't have a snowball's chance in hell of passing this without Tokens.

Suddenly the cost of passing the test with Tokens was down to 2, so I paid out the Tokens and the buzzing feeling in my mind and in my teeth lessened. A general euphoria had started to steal over me.

"You end up feeling high," she said, "and it has a truth telling effect. So it's like a truth serum. As a bonus, you also get a couple of highly boosted Resistances."

"That sounds good."

She nodded. "It definitely has its place. I can't believe she's trying to interview you right back."

"What?"

"She's being protective."

The little Nakamamon was trying to protect her bonded human by feeling me out under the influence of a truth serum. It was kind of adorable and a little worrisome at the same time. I tried to laugh it off, and noticed a flashing bit in my periphery.

Achievement: *Nakamamon Explorer*

10 Nakamamon encountered

What mysterious and amazing creatures they are! You have only begun to see the wider world.

Reward: +1 skill point

Was it ten already? I hadn't been counting. If there was a catalogue of Nakamamon I hadn't found one.

"I like you," she said suddenly.

"I like you too, which is why I chose you for this expedition. If you, by chance, use whatever mental or emotional powers to take over the expedition and set yourself up as liege lord over the whole

countryside, and make people build you enormous pyramids through slave labor, I tell you what, I'll be severely disappointed."

Here she laughed.

"You don't happen to have a girlfriend, do you?" she asked.

"Lots of girls who are my friends," I told her truthfully. "No one I'm specifically dating, no."

I knew this was threading the needle of truth. I also knew that, for reasons Regina alone had, she was keen on me having other sexual partners. One of those reasons was lust. She was very keenly interested in having a hand in getting me laid by other people. With Tara, I couldn't rightly say. She might've been interested in being my girlfriend, but she hadn't made any of her wishes clear. I needed to approach her like I'd done with Regina and figure things out, especially if the unthinkable kept coming up, and women kept hitting on me.

"You're not insinuating that you're in the market for a boyfriend, are you?" I asked, and she grinned that magically glowing grin of hers.

Cinzy's eyes grew huge. "Why no! I would never insinuate such a thing. I would outright state certain things I was interested in doing."

"Such as?"

"Going out on a date, for one."

I peered around, smiling so broadly my face began to hurt. I had to keep it on my face or else I'd give away my utter astonishment. "I'm afraid there aren't many romantic bars or restaurants nearby. Shall I take you out to dinner once we find something appropriate?"

I had to squash the notion that she was only doing this in order to get my ear. She was interested in me. Yeah, definitely only that and nothing else. She wasn't interested at all in having the ear of the expedition leader.

She quickly squeezed my hand, chuckling. "Something appropriate would be lovely."

“It’s a date…” I said, “sometime in the future… at a location to be determined.”

***

We made camp in the shade of a boogie tree. Alan had a spell for this, and pitched his tent in a cloud of glowing purple magic. Or rather, it pitched itself after he said the correct words and waved his fingers the right way. Isabelle lay there while Ivy and Larelle threw their tent together.

“I do not understand the housing situation,” Chrysta said. “Why is it we have forsaken the stone constructions with the hearths that contain the warm fires?”

I was in the middle of setting out my tent materials. I’d only done this once in training. I wasn’t much of a hiking person, so I also wasn’t much of an outdoorsy person. Or I hadn’t been, anyway.

I sat there, massaging the pain out of my legs, watching as Regina and Tara set up another tent. Trent sulked nearby on a rock, stroking Garnet, who had pushed its head out of the dirt nearby. When I sauntered over, I let him know he had the ability to create his own earth igloo or whatever he wanted to do, provided it was far enough away from the other tents. We had a lot of people who didn’t trust his powers after today.

“I don’t get it,” he said, rubbing his bandaged hand. “I’ve never lost control like that. I swear something bit me.”

I nodded. “Sorry, man. It’s going to take some doing before we get you using your abilities freestyle like that again. It was a bad move playing with people like that.”

He nodded, forlorn. Soon though, his hands started glowing vaguely green and a bit brown. Soon a number of earthen bricks had torn themselves out of a central circle, and were stacking up outside of that circle. He had an igloo made of earth about eight feet high and ten feet across, with the floor a good three feet under ground level, in just under two minutes.

"You want me to look at your injury?" I asked.

"Nah. I'll just take it easy and wait for you guys to ask me for help on stuff."

"I want your ideas, too. When it comes time, your knowledge of your abilities is going to help us in ways I can't even imagine."

He nodded, but didn't say anything further. Instead he headed into the igloo's small opening and disappeared. Garnet vanished into the dirt and a tiny rumble could be heard as it tunneled to be with him.

It took me something like fifteen minutes to set up my own tent. I eventually had to agree to Chrysta's assistance. The ghost Nakamamon had a seemingly limitless number of hands, so she could tie things up, hold the stakes, wield the mallet, and keep everything taut at the same time. I was depressingly little help in the matter.

Still, just after finishing, I received word that I'd gotten a skill point in Outdoorsman skills.

Opening this up, I found a skill for Hiking, Trekking, Trapping, Wilderness Survival, Fishing, and a whole litany of others. It was like my own Healer skill list all over again. I had no doubt a lot of these were on the Rangers' skill lists.

It was interesting that I couldn't just get these skills at character creation, but they became available through practice and messing up. Again, failure seemed to be an excellent teacher.

The UI informed me that I could have an extra rank if I put the skill into Hiking or Wilderness Survival (Temperate).

We were probably going to be doing an absolute shit ton of hiking, so I put the first point there, and grinned at the silliness of it. I didn't *feel* any different. No shower of sparks or halo of magical lights, no magical girl transformation gave me better hiking boots, a camp stove and a bunch of clips and pockets.

Still, there was now a place on my character sheet that read Hiking 2. Nice.

We ate and had a long conversation about what we suspected was going on over on earth right now. I told them that I hoped my sister reached out to my parents, because my nephew was really cute and they hadn't seen her much. This got a lot of oohs and aahs, and annoyed curses at the magic saturation of this world that it would completely wreck photographs. So I promised to have one etched in stone so they could see my cute nephew.

"You better not boast about that kind of thing," Tara said sternly. "I like adorable kids."

"He's a toddler," I said.

I didn't matter that I didn't describe him, they all cooed over him being just a wee little guy.

Cinzy talked about how she was so glad to get this job, and everybody else nodded along.

"The first few weeks were tough," she said. "But I'm grateful. There's no drugs here. I just can't get it, so I'm clean. And it's been three months now."

"Hell yeah, girl," Tara said, and fist bumped her.

Alan had his stuttering. Isabelle confessed she had crushing depression, and hadn't actually submitted an application; Ivy had. Ivy applied after Izzy got the job, which was good because she'd gotten doxxed by a classmate-slash-enemy, and had deep fake porn of herself doing a dozen guys posted online.

"It got pretty fracking ugly," she said. "We had to move. I had stuff posted all over my locker. I got assaulted." A group of guys boxed her into a ring in the hallway and they groped her before a teacher broke things up. Then her dark expression cleared and she beamed a huge smile at Isabelle.

"Fresh start," Isabelle said.

"Fresh start," Ivy echoed.

Tara said things weren't easy back home but, amazingly, didn't elaborate. Maybe with one person she could open up easy… and talk ceaselessly regardless of your familiarity with her and her life. Now she quieted after a single sentence. Nobody pushed.

"Regina?" Cinzy asked.

Regina smiled sadly, staring into the cook fire. "Yeah."

"Oh? Bad?"

Regina just nodded, and nuzzled Tweedle Dee. The fox with the multiple tails pressed his forehead to Regina's face and absorbed her tears.

"Sounds worse than mine."

Regina shrugged. "It's not a contest, but it was bad. Like human trafficking bad."

"Oh," Cinzy said sadly. The girls all came over and hugged Regina, forming a human blanket. Fairy Poppins poked her tiny head out of Cinzy's bag and chirped a tiny squeaking noise, but Cinzy waved her down. Yes, euphoria probably would've been good, but not with the truth serum effect.

"Drat?" I asked, then looked around. I could've sworn Drat was there, but I couldn't find him anywhere. Alan nodded over toward where a figure was disappearing into the darkness beyond the light of the campfire.

Trent's name was not brought up.

"Larelle?" I asked.

"Hm?"

"Could I ask how you came to be employed in the city?"

The enormous woman with the no nose and the acres and acres of hair sat in thought for a few moments. *They came and asked.*

And that was all we got out of her. She volunteered to take first watch a moment later, stood, and began circling the perimeter.

"Did you all meet Dick Johnson?" I asked. A chorus of snorts erupted. "Is that his real name?"

"Amazing, I know," Isabelle said. "I wouldn't have gone to the interview at all except he didn't give his name until we were there."

"Same," Tara said.

The talk turned to other matters, eventually died down, and watch shifts were discussed before everyone drifted off to their

tents.

That night, I ended up having not one, but two visitors.

This is Christopher waking up to his first ever threesome.

Chapter 31- Pop Off Is Fine

I was just drifting off to sleep when the zipper on my tent went sliding noisily upward and someone entered, trying to be quiet and failing. The whole situation, me in a large four person dome tent and everybody else around in their own tents, made me grin in the darkness. Surely neither Tara nor Regina were going to try anything right now. I'd already overheard several conversations between Ivy and Isabelle in their own tent, which was being watched over by the tent-sized rock echidna Muppin.

A figure crawled in, still not being quiet, swiveled and took off her shoes. I couldn't tell, due to the darkness, who it was, but I knew it soon enough. The moment she slid her body over mine and I smelled the freshness of her magical scent, I knew it was Regina.

She kissed me all up my face and neck, and slid her tongue into my mouth. As soon as my hands were on her waist and sliding over her ass, she gave off a moan that couldn't be allowed.

"You have to keep quiet," I breathed in her ear, while squeezing and jiggling her bouncy butt cheeks. "These tent walls are so thin."

"You did something to me, Fletcher," she murmured, even as she sat up, straddling me. She had my sleeping bag open and fully unzipped, my shirt up over my head, and my pajama bottoms down in a flurry of motion.

Soon enough she had the other sleeping bag unrolled and on top of us. She had pressed her body against mine, skin to skin.

"You know I can't stop thinking about you, and this…" She grabbed onto my rapidly hardening cock and hefted it, testing out its weight. "This thing is addictive."

I wanted to tell her we shouldn't be doing this, but I held my tongue because I had a gorgeous naked woman slithering her body back and forth on top of me. The freckles even glowed minutely in the darkness, all manner of colors twinkling like the stars outside. The purple flecks in her blue eyes likewise glowed, enough that I

could see her eyelids half closed and her lips parted. Her tongue kept darting out and licking them.

I could feel her butt cheeks cradling my hard cock, and her pussy pressed up against my abdomen. Like I was going to turn down free sex from a woman like Regina… even if part of my mind told me that Cinzy also wanted to see where we could end up, for whatever reason she had. And if Cinzia found out I was screwing Regina right here and now—

"I'm gonna suck your cock," she breathed in my ear.

"Okay."

"Or maybe I should lick your balls. *Then* suck your cock."

Maybe I'd been hit on the head by something on earth and I was experiencing the coolest and most wonderful fantasy life while doctors tried to figure out a way to get me out of my coma. Who was I to stop this from playing out?

Her lips closed over the head and her mouth slid a good ways down the shaft before I registered the zipper was moving again. It was zipping downwards, closing the tent back up. Regina hadn't zipped it closed again. My eyes, which had started getting used to the darkness, made out the second figure crouched on the inside of the tent and slowly closing the zipper.

Again I squinted, but I couldn't make out who it was. The fact that Regina didn't miss a beat and stop sucking and licking told me what I needed to know.

Fingers encircled my balls and started slowly, gently playing with them, another sensation I'd never felt before in my life. I arched my back and resisted the urge to thrust up into her mouth. When the prompt came from the UI to spend a Token, I didn't want to press **Yes** right away. No, I wasn't going to increase the pleasure of Regina's blowjob and waste an entire load before I even got inside her. No way.

She licked around my balls for a while, while I watched the second figure sit by the tent flap, unmoving.

The pleasurable sensations grew. I couldn't see anything, so I was only left with the sense of touch. Regina's tongue was everywhere, and in between exploratory licks, she took me into her mouth just as far as she could go.

I definitely couldn't focus on the newcomer because of what Regina was doing. Still, I tried to get a bead on whether it was Tara or not. It had to be Tara, but… she wasn't moving. Please, let it be Tara, I thought.

The pleasure went on, and on. She thoroughly lubed me up, and that was good because when she finally mounted me, she was tight. So damn tight. I pumped upward from below, clamping a hand over her mouth a moment later when she started to moan.

Only then did I spend the Token to boost our pleasure. This one went from Ingenuity. I resisted the urge to spend it earlier and just paint her throat with my load, like a fracking genius.

Sitting up, I breathed in her ear again. "If you can't be quiet, we can't do this."

No way Larelle, Chrysta, Ivy, Isabelle, and Cinzia needed to hear this. The guys could probably handle the sounds of sex… maybe. But I couldn't handle the girls hearing it. As dumb as that sounded, these were the panicked thoughts that went streaming across my mind at the time.

"You'll have to… shut me up," she breathed in reply, and got up off me. This time, she stayed on her hands and knees, grinning down and inviting me to get up behind her. I did, quickly slotting my cock home and stifling a moan of my own. I sank deeply inside, and once again perfection surrounded me.

Gods, I needed this all the time. I had no idea how I was going to keep my hands off her. It was hard enough watching her walk around without constantly touching her.

She straightened, putting her back against my chest. "Frack me," she murmured. "I need it so bad."

I had to stop her from crying out with a hand over her mouth. She responded by bucking backwards and downwards, shoving her

ass into me repeatedly. The sensations were unbelievable. We had been having sex maybe two weeks and I still couldn't get over how just incredible it was.

Regina's moan was out of time, and I peered over her shoulder to find Tara feeling her up. The **Eagle Eyes** ability was getting my night vision going. Her thin hands glided up and down over Regina's softly glowing freckled breasts, and Regina gasped.

Tara wasn't nude, not yet, but that didn't stop Regina's hands from drifting up to her breasts too, hefting and kneading them in the darkness.

"You can… s-suck them…" Regina moaned, only to have me clamp my hand over her mouth to shut her up. Down below, a muscle I had only read about squeezed tight against my whole length, and I hissed out a breath to keep fro making too much noise myself.

"I want to watch," Tara breathed. "Just like she watched us."

She meant she wanted to watch me sliding in and out of Regina. Just the idea of this was an incredible turn on. I wanted to know how it looked also, but Regina and I had done it in front of a mirror, we'd done it with the lights on… I liked her inquisitiveness.

There wasn't a ton of room in the tent. I couldn't figure out how to make this happen at first, but then got it. Bending Regina over at the waist, she went back down on all fours, but I kept pushing until she slowly lay down on her stomach.

Something about this position lit me up from within, making it really hard to resist dumping a huge load deep inside her. So I grabbed her by the hip and guided her up onto one side. Luckily this lessened the pressure, but not by much. Lifting one of Regina's legs, I slid slowly into her, and then started back into our usual rhythm. I hoped Tara got down there and was satisfied with the show, because I wasn't going to last long.

Regina clamped both hands over her mouth, breathing rapidly and emitting teensy little screams each time. It was so cute the way

she tried so hard not to expose us to the rest of the team. She came like that, suddenly stiffening and shuddering.

Tara appeared overtop us. "You two are really hot," she murmured.

"You could help," I told her, still pumping in and out of Regina's incredible channel. When she looked a question at me, I said, "She needs to be quiet."

This was how, just a few seconds later, I was greeted by the most erotic thing I'd ever seen in real life: Tara making out with Regina. Soon she had her hands all over Regina's curves yet again, twisting and pinching and kneading those breasts. Tara's long thighs were slipping around down there too, with Regina's hands sliding up and down her butt, then up into her yoga pants, and then back down inside.

It's practically impossible to describe just what this did to me. The ecstasy I was experiencing was enhanced by **Entwined Ecstasy**, and I suddenly couldn't hold it any longer.

"Ugh… I'm gonna cum," I muttered, and the girls exploded into action. Tara pulled Regina off me, and both of them got down there, mouths open. The sight of two gorgeous women ready to swallow my seed meant I didn't last long. I came all over their faces.

***

The night was far from over. Tara had apparently gotten over her hesitancy and locked lips with Regina, and Regina went absolutely wild. She shoved Tara down and virtually tore her clothes off, then commenced with licking and sucking every inch of her, from neck to genitals. She spent a long time on Tara's smaller boobs but larger, darker nipples, and I joined her. Once she had her fill of this, and had her fingers liberally coated in Tara's juices, she dove between her legs, while I watched in amazement. I eventually slid into Regina again from behind, marveling at the sight of a girl giving another girl

oral. When the prompt came, I didn't hesitate to spend another Token to boost Tara's pleasure as well.

Regina insisted that Tara ride me reverse cowgirl, then had her lay down on my chest.

"Now you hold, yes, hold her butt," Regina whispered. "Gods that's so hot…"

Soon I was pumping away and driving Tara wild, with the two of them kissing and Regina swirling her tongue over Tara's nipples yet again. One hand below to feel me pumping in and out of Tara, mouth locked on her bronze nipple. I was able to hold Tara's hips, giving me the ideal angle for maximum friction. It was a struggle to keep myself from climaxing, but I clamped down on my body and made sure this went well for the girls. If it did, they might want to do it again. This thought alone kept me from going off inside Tara, with Regina's fingers wrapped around my shaft.

The moment Regina locked her lips on Tara's clit she came hard. I had to abandon one support hand and clamp it over her mouth so she didn't wake the whole camp.

Afterwards Regina coaxed Tara into trying a little meal at the Y. She wasn't into the idea until I had her doggystyle. Once that happened, Tara was up for anything. We got her down on her stomach and she started licking away, driving Regina wild.

Although I wished to have unlimited stamina, the long day of trekking had already taken its toll, and I wasn't about to spend Physicality or Durability tokens to keep going. Tara had switched position to be on her back, with Regina basically sitting on her face, and I was leaning forward to suck on Regina's glimmering boobs when I felt my third load becoming inevitable. Just like the first two times, Tara had her long legs wrapped around my body, ankles locked. There was a magical little switch down there, somewhere inside her, that I could only tickle on the downstroke when we were in this position. I'd felt her tense up and shudder with several orgasms over the last… how many hours? There was no way of knowing. Maybe less than one. It felt like three.

"Tara," I whispered. "I'm gonna… Tara, I can't…"

And was it my imagination or did the bronze-skinned amazon goddess tighten her grip on me so I couldn't escape? Her midsection looked incredible in the darkness, flexing and relaxing so she could hump up and get more of me inside her. A six pack kept appearing and disappearing with each hunch of her unbelievable body.

"Tara…"

There was no more talking, and no more resisting. I couldn't stop myself from exploding, deep into her.

"Oh my God," Regina whispered. "You just came in her again."

All three of us collapsed onto the sleeping bags, and the girls moved so they formed the cookies to my creamy center. Smooth, delicate hands traced over my body just as soon as we were covered.

I wasn't sure how this was going to work. I couldn't just emerge from my tent and have two gorgeous sex goddesses follow me right out. My mind swirled with the implications and the possibilities. Maybe I could leave the tent, get people in motion, away from the camp, and the girls could slip out.

"Are you using protection?" Regina asked.

Tara took her time answering. "No." Nor did she have some kind of magic pill. No, she wasn't sure what she was thinking. "I just… can't stop. I need it."

"How many times did he pop off inside?"

"Pop off?" I asked.

"You prefer ejaculate?" Regina asked. "Release the millions of baby makers?"

"Pop off is fine I guess," I mumbled.

"Six now," Tara answered at last. "Four when we saw The Lovers. Once last time in the castle. And now."

"Whoa."

"Yeah, I don't know what's wrong with me. I probably should go. I think my body wants more of it, and I'm pretty sure I could make you get hard again. And then get you to…" She shuddered. "Get you to… blast off inside me. I definitely have to go."

I seconded that assessment. She was smoking hot. I was going to retract my earlier rating about Cinzy and these two. But perhaps that was the pheromones talking.

Tara silently dressed and left the tent, while Regina moved not at all.

"She's trouble," she told me. "You need to stop doing that inside her."

It might've already been too late, for all I knew, but I didn't disagree with her.

"What are you going to do if you get her…?" She couldn't even say the word, apparently. The word was pregnant.

I didn't know the answer to that question. I wondered, now dozing off, if Regina was going to leave, but she felt so good snuggled up to me, one leg on mine and her sex pressed against my thigh. I couldn't just demand she go. I didn't want her to go.

Instead of dealing with that, I looked over my character sheet and mulled over a use for my free skill point. It made sense to put it into Hiking or Wilderness Survival, to see if it would double up, but instead I decided to put an extra point into all the different types of treatment. The situation with Isabelle's foot showed me that I needed to have my Healer skills in order. The Rangers would help us range, but so far nobody could help us heal.

I had a remaining attribute point to spend, so that went into Affinity. I needed to be much more magically active and ready to tackle the magic in this world.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have entwined with Regina Hampstead. Your relationship status remains unchanged presently. You remain* ***close confidants****.*

Pleasure from intimate acts between ***close confidants*** *is boosted strongly using* ***Entwined Ecstasy****.*

Your ability ***Wild Lore*** *has advanced to* ***Wild Lore II****.*

Entwine more deeply with Regina Hampstead to unlock further abilities.

Next, came a write up for my new ability.

Wild Lore II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

I- Concentrate on a plant, animal or native of this world to understand it better. Information you gain is based on your Ingenuity or Affinity attributes.

II- Choose a plant, animal or native of this world and spend a Token to gain the ability to speak to it for up to a minute. The subject's level of trust and information given is based on a Likability check, including the Persuasion skill.

At first the level 2 power for **Wild Lore** seemed incredible, but after a fashion it seemed less so. Spend a Token but with no guarantee of any decent information? And I had to imagine plants weren't very intelligent or interested in anything other than sunlight and keeping pests off their branches. I hoped I'd be wrong about how it worked, and resolved to try it out at the first available opportunity.

I also gained a write up for sex with Tara.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have entwined with Tara Harkenen. Your relationship status has changed to* ***trusted acquaintances****.*

Pleasure from intimate acts between ***trusted acquaintances*** *is boosted moderately.*

The next UI message that arrived pertained to bringing her into the fold.

Entwined Ecstasy: *Tara Harkanen was already brought into the fold by The Lovers. She previously gained the ability Diagnostic. You have gained the ability Eagle Eyed from entwining with Tara*

Harkanen. Both your abilities have leveled up. Entwine more deeply with Tara Harkanen to unlock further abilities.

Next, came a write up for my new ability.

Eagle Eyed II

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

I- Your eyesight becomes better than human. You are able to discern details at a distance, and analyze close objects much better than base humans.

II- Your peripheral vision and reactions are increased beyond human maximums. You may not be caught off guard except while asleep.

When I tried to flex this particular new muscle, I realized nothing really had changed. Also I was laying in bed, in the dark, cuddling a beautiful woman. Of course nothing had changed. The prospect of things wanting to sneak up on me did not fill me with joy, but I was thankful that wouldn't be possible.

Lastly, looking over my sheet it appeared that I'd advanced three more levels as a Pleasure Seeker. My salve action to handle Isabelle's broken ankle wasn't enough to take me to Healer level 11, sadly. However, the following bonuses were here:

Level 6: Gained Ability: Blissense

Level 7: +2 skill points

Blissense? Okay this I had to see.

Blissense

(Special Ability, Rare, Active)

By touching a target and spending an Ingenuity Token, you gain insight into their deepest desires, kinks and passions. Your target

also gains bits of insight into you.

This is Christopher working his mouth like a fish out of water. Then sleeping.

Chapter 32- Blissence

The next morning, I didn't have to do anything in order to activate **Blissense** other than spend the Token, since I was already touching Regina, so I did, taking the Token from Phyiscality. I wasn't restricted to spending them in a way that sort of made sense, but I kept wanting to. If it ever became important, I would spend them more strategically… but for now I was getting a Token refill every 5 levels, and that made spending them easy. In the future I'd have to be more judicious.

For now though, Regina.

Now, as a human I didn't have a third eye. I didn't have a physique either, unless you wanted to label it laughable. Now though I had both.

The center of my forehead 'opened' and allowed in whatever was happening. A flow of images, sensations, and magic rushed in, making me gasp.

Regina's tastes ran to the passionate: she wanted to be wanted by someone. She wanted to be shown she was beautiful in someone else's eyes. There was no place she didn't want to be pleasured and give pleasure. She found the female body gorgeous and desirable. She clearly had a lot of fantasies involving men. Clearly, she was experimental at least, and most likely bisexual, with an appetite for variety. She wanted to see someone beaming at her, utterly transfixed by Regina.

The next couple of images were from Regina's point of view. She wanted, apparently, everything. Regina riding some gorgeous woman's face. Regina arching her back and taking a man from behind, while another person lay beneath her and sucked on her nipples. Regina being fucked while standing up. Her being flexible enough to get her feet up around her ears, and slowly easing a big thick cock into her back door.

I felt myself stiffen in my sleeping bag. How could I not?

There was Regina having sex in the calm waters of the ocean with a sunset behind her, with her pants down and hands planted firmly against a tree while a faceless man railed her from behind. Regina on the sheer cliffside of a mountain, overlooking the endless forests below, with all the climbing equipment hammered into the rock and a sort of hammock spread out so she could sleep there. She had the supports of the hammock in each hand while taking it from behind. There was even Regina on her knees in a dark alley, dutifully sucking off a man in a trench coat, while he used the coat to block most of the view.

Regina was on all fours, spit roasted by a pair of men, sucking off the one while the other slammed into her hips again and again. She was on a bed, rubbing herself against another woman's pussy, groaning in exertion. She was on a chair, bouncing up and down on a cock while facing the rest of the hotel room, while another couple made passionate love. She was laying on the chest of one man, who was buried up her asshole, while another man arrived to make it a double penetration. While having a cock in each hand.

I got all these sights and more.

I couldn't help but snuggle up against her and explore her body with my free hand. Every curve of her felt smooth and delicious, down to the patch of hair.

"Mmm," she groaned in her sleep, and opened her legs for me.

I dipped my fingers down, finding her wet and rubbing over her folds.

"You're going to get us caught," she murmured.

I actually couldn't be sure what was going on outside the tent. I heard some sounds of motion: tents unzipping, murmurs of speech, some pots and pans banging in the distance.

"Should I stop?" I asked, rubbing at her clit in between poking my finger into her.

"Noooo…"

Her fingers wrapped around my girth in the darkness and I heard a sharp intake of breath. Soon she'd slid over on top of me, kissing

me and wriggling her whole body against mine. In seconds she had my cock in hand and was shoving herself backwards to get me inside.

Entwined Ecstasy *(Special Ability) may be activated during this intimate act. Would you like to spend 1 Token of your choice?*

Yes, yes I would. I spent 1 from Affinity and clenched my hips and abs, stifling a moan that wanted out.

The Token came into being near by, flying up in the air out of nowhere, spinning once, and then disappearing. I caught brief sight of the familiar fairy embossed on the one side of the coin, but it puffed out of existence in a shower of rainbow sparks and smoke.

"You're so wet already," I muttered. And hot. And tight.

"I had all these, unh, dreams… about fluffing… ugh… it was really romantic," she breathed, pushing herself back into my cock again.

Sliding her belly and boobs up and down me like this, she got into a rhythm, breathing out heavily each time she impaled herself on me. It was like I somehow reached all the way up in her guts and smashed into her diaphragm the way she was exhaling. She kept the pace slow and easy, but deep and ending in a hard push against my abs that sent shockwaves of pleasure throughout my body.

I couldn't help but take her by the hips and force her back and forth while I humped upwards.

"That's right," she whispered. "Ohhhh that's right, fluff me good."

In your butt? I wanted to ask, humping away. Footsteps happened by just outside, and there was no way I could stop myself from ramming myself into her as long as I could. This hadn't been my reality until just a few weeks ago, and it had utterly transformed my world.

We shifted in the sleeping bag, getting me on top, as quietly as possible. I couldn't stop from wanting to feel these sensations for longer, and longer, and longer. I pumped in and out of her, with long

and hard strokes, watching her eyes flutter and her bite her lower lip to keep quiet.

"Ohhh," she breathed, "I'm gonna cum I'm gonna cum, Fletcher ohhhh…"

I was hitting the magic spot inside her. Kissing silenced her as much as I could manage, but some sound still came from her throat as the pressure of orgasm built and condensed inside her. I felt the magic gather up in her core as it happened, a tight ball of natural energy threatening to explode like a bomb. Once she reached that precipice, all the magic and all that tension shot out. She jerked away from my kiss, and I got a hand over her mouth in time to muffle her orgasmic moans that followed. This was a long one, even for her, lasting a good twenty or thirty seconds.

"Are you there?" she breathed.

"Not yet."

She got me off her and urged me up the length of her body, until my cock disappeared between her lips. She began sucking, expertly bobbing her head and urging me back and forth to establish a rhythm. In the meantime, she worked at my balls and encircled the part of the shaft she couldn't fit into her mouth with her thumb and forefinger.

The sight of this alone would've caused me to blow before, but I had much more staying power than the Christopher who agreed to come to this insane world. But it wasn't just the sights right now. She was lashing the underside with her tongue, and swirling it around the whole girth on the downstroke. And I don't know what it was about her looking into my eyes, using her tongue and lips like that, or slowly raking her nails against my balls, but the amplified sensations from **Entwined Ecstasy** put me over the edge. The orgasm surprised even me, and I barely had any time to react.

"I'm…" I managed, before my own ball of tense energy burst and I poured all I had directly into Regina's waiting mouth.

***

There was still the problem of a waking camp and Regina in the wrong tent: mine.

"Just stay here," I murmured.

"We have to take down tents soon," she replied.

"I know… I'll think of something."

I unzipped the tent, made my way out, and greeted the brisk morning. Several of the team members were already up and about: Trent had cleared away the coals by sucking them into the ground, and gotten another cook fire going. He saw me coming and left. Soon he'd broken the igloo down into clumps and left the ground mostly like it had been, though it looked like someone had shoveled the whole area up.

Ivy and Isabelle were still in their tent, but Alan and Tara were up and about. Larelle slept with her back to one tree, her acres of hair all tangled and frizzy. Chrysta drifted out and toward me.

"The Rogue has departed without a word. Possibly in search of food or to look at the dragon lake."

I nodded. Drat was going to be a bit of a problem and I wasn't looking forward to the confrontation. For now, I just shrugged it off.

Speaking of dragon lake though… last night before bed, Larelle informed us that in this direction, toward the village of Glumpdumpkin, a vast lake sometimes stood in the way. You know, how lakes *sometimes*… aren't there.

"That's fine. Can you take Tara, Alan, Trent, Ivy and Isabelle to the lakeside to scout the area for a moment? I'll get some things moving for breakfast."

"To what end?"

"I guess make sure the area is safe, and see if you can't figure out how long the lake is going to be here before it moves on…" I focused on the lake with **Eagle Eyed** and my vision sharpened.

"I will see if perhaps Regina is down there. Her companion was curled up at the campfire all night."

Suddenly, down the slope and past scattered copses of trees, I could make out the shoreline, the broken tree trunks and the wilted plants around the edge of the lake. I could also see where the shoreline had been before. Meaning the lake had lifted off the ground, gone to do whatever lake business it had as a river or a flying water dragon thing, and then settled in a slightly different spot.

The result were a number of places that used to be lake bed, but now were like mini cliffs supporting dried water plants.

***Affinity check**: You have the Identify skill. This check is at Extreme Difficulty. You currently have 10 tokens, not enough for an automatic success. Would you like to spend Tokens to reduce the difficulty of this check?*

Total Tokens: 4 Affinity and 6 Free Tokens.

I laughed off the fact that sex with Regina just now had cost me the automatic success.

"Turns out I don't know what a lake is," I told myself while chuckling.

This check wasn't covered under my **Hard at Work** ability, which wasn't ideal. I could do it if the lake was a god and was sick… for now I didn't even know what I was dealing with. Gigantic water elemental? Nakamamon of a truly insane size? A god? My skills indicated that gods could come in huge and larger sizes, so it could've been any of those.

Based on the information I'd read and checks I'd gone through, I could expect one out of every three of my attribute and skill levels to produce a success, meaning I had an average of 2 successes on this check, but my range was from 0 to 6 total. I could probably succeed most Moderate checks. Lowering the difficulty using all my Tokens would take it from 11 down to 6, and there was just no way I could succeed either way, unless I was super lucky.

Hell with it. I let the check go without using any Tokens. Predictably, I failed. Still, I knew that failure granted more experience than success, generally.

I laughed again, turned back, and hurried to my tent.

"Coast is clear," I told Regina.

She emerged a moment later, hastily clothed once more, and made her way to her own tent, casting me several amused glances on the way.

I made good on my promise of breakfast materials. We had packed a whole bunch of goodies on the back of Muppin, and in the backpacks that came with us. Larelle, for one, had been hefting over a hundred and fifty pounds of supplies for us.

And speaking of Larelle… I looked her way, found her still sleeping and had a moment of intense curiosity. After wondering briefly if I should do it or if I definitely shouldn't, I gave in and approached her where she was sleeping against the tree.

The enormous woman in her white and blue-trimmed martial arts garb had her eyes closed, and lots of very long hair stuck up and out in a cute way. She still had the cinnamon buns hiding her ears, but individual strands shot out in every direction.

All I had to do was touch her, and I could spend the point to figure out whether natives had sexual urges. Then I'd know what hers were. Purely for scientific purposes. Seeker of pleasure, seeking out pleasure. It made sense, even if I felt guilty and frightened sneaking up on her.

The voice entered my brain directly. *I am at your service, Fletcher.*

"Oh, uh, I'm getting breakfast together," I said. "The others are down at the lake getting the lay of the land, and hopefully Chrysta will know how long the lake will be there."

I will assist you with the cooking of the sustenance, she told me, *momentarily*.

"Was anything out there while you were on watch?"

A few Nakamamon visitors had come in the night, along with the presence of a smaller god. None had remained, though they'd sniffed around the outskirts of the camp and weren't interested in eating any of us. Her vigilance was reassuring, though the report didn't fill me with confidence.

I went back to making breakfast.

While working, I checked out the enormity that was my character sheet. It was looking pretty hefty by now.

Christopher Fletcher
Healer - Trainee 10
Pleasure Seeker - Novice 8

attributes:
Affinity 5 (4/5)
Durability 5 (3/5)
Ingenuity 6 (5/6)
Likability 5 (4/5)
Physicality 4 (3/4)
Free Tokens: 6/6
Unspent attributes points: 0

Healer Skills:
Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)
Treatment (potions 3, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)
Develop cure (swarm 3)
Develop cure (small 3)
Develop cure (unique 7)
Administer Cure 7
Other Skills:
Identify 1
Hiking 2

All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 9

Special Abilities:
Hard At Work II (Uncommon, Passive)
Wild Lore II (Uncommon, Active)
Eagle Eyed II *(Common, Passive)*

Healer Special Abilities:
Healer's Endurance (Common, Active)
Healer's Resistance (Uncommon, Active)

Pleasure Seeker Special Abilities:
Blissense (Rare, Active)

Divine Gifts:
Floral Knowledge (Rare, Passive)
Pleasure's Bounty (secondary class)
Entwined Ecstasy (Legendary, active)

This was getting to be a bit much.

Getting into the settings, I saw it was possible to bring up just the parts I wanted to see. I could now just summon up the attributes, or the skills, or the special abilities. For instance, **Golightly** was an item I'd received from the God of Footfalls, but because worn items weren't part of my character sheet, it wasn't showing up.

"That's better," I said, while mixing up eggs and veggies into a sort of omelette.

The others returned not long after without much news to share. I fed them food, and they fed me information. They didn't know how

long the lake would remain there. Alan did know the name of the lake: Guanelzia.

Guanelzia had been in the list of gods I'd read over in Allie's 'welcome to a magical world' packet of introductory clay tablets, but little information was available. Since it was a god, there was no way we could safely touch it, I knew that much for sure. A boat maybe, but falling into the god would be deadly.

I was secretly hopeful that just applied to sick gods. There was literally nothing else to do but try to go over it.

After breakfast was packing up camp, then getting on the road. We had a ways to go before Tara would find her Nakamamon to bond.

This is Christopher not being envious at all, not being impatient to get to the good part.

Chapter 33- Bonding Time

Glumpdumpkin, the town, was our first civilized destination, but the disappearing reappearing lake was presently in the way. Now, as anyone can imagine, hearing these words caused a lot of questions. Since I was expedition lead, it fell to me to ask the one on everyone's mind.

"Why is the town called Glumpdumpkin?" I asked, ignoring the probably more pressing disappearing reappearing lake question.

"Out settlements were very different than what you think of as settlements in your earth world," Chrysta said. "Many of the folk had never previously lived in a building. The vast majority find your earth ways interesting, and are excited to participate in becoming more earthesque."

"Earthesque. Good word," Cinzy said. "Perfect word."

"There are other nearby settlements that have emulated earth sounds, but inexpertly. Flunt-on-the-Rustle is one such settlement. Saxwhacket is another."

"Saxwhacket is my favorite of the three," Drat said with a perfectly straight face, and all the girls lost their shit. They started laughing uncontrollably. Tara and Cinzy were actually close together when they doubled over, bonked their heads together, and fell back onto the grass guffawing until they weren't even producing sounds any longer.

"You will be the first earthlings to arrive in Glumpdumpkin to stay for any period of time," Chrysta said, to even more raucous laughter. "It would behoove you to muster up some decorum."

"Don't worry," Drat said in that same dry tone, "the residents of Glumpdumpkin, Flunt-on-the-Rustle and Saxwhacket can expect to see us act with the utmost professionalism."

Several of the girls were wiping tears from their faces. Regina and Cinzy were kicking their feet onto the dirt and holding their sides.

What is so funny to everyone? Larelle asked me mentally. I too was having trouble stopping myself from laughing.

"It's… those names are rather humorous," I told her.

But these are earth words, arranged in a way that conveys the title of a township. And they came highly recommended from Rus.

"Ah," I said. "Rus is a little different than the rest of us. He must have recommended them."

So Swollen Woods is also a silly name? she asked.

I burst out laughing. "Oh, Rus."

The problem with the on-again-off-again lake was that it sometimes migrated. I was informed that sometimes it decided to become a ribbon of water a good quarter mile wide and zip off into the sky, or make its way around the area masquerading as a river, but then take a rest later and become a lake again.

"Does this make the lake… a god?"

Chrysta stopped and considered. "I believe that assumption is correct."

The lake, a huge source of water variety Nakamamon, would take ages to go around. Going over in a boat or raft could reduce the travel time from over a week down to less than a day. The trouble was the risk of being launched into the air on the back of the dragon version, or being dragged well off course if it changed into a river.

"If it changes into a river we can probably jump ship and not suffer too badly," Tara said, "but if it changes into a fracking dragon I don't really… we don't have any fliers who can carry the whole team. We don't have anyone with a sky manta or a way to float down. There's no way Chrysta can pull us up and out, right?"

"I cannot," she said. "You would more likely freeze to death on my… what was that?"

All of us looked around.

Affinity check! *You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is Easy difficulty. Would you like to spend 1 Token for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 4 Affinity and 6 Free Tokens.

I indicated that I would spend the single Token from among my Affinity Tokens, and immediately a large shape lit up. This was like a sheet of air, near invisible at first but then coalescing into a cloud-like thing with darker, gray cloud eyes a moment later. It was maybe ten or fifteen feet long, and it behaved oddly. It would swirl around a group of several of us, mussing hair and lifting backpack flaps and skirts, or slither along the ground.

You have spotted a slitherwind, an elemental of air! The UI explained. *This is an uncommon type of Nakamamon.*

"Look at youuuuuuu!" Tara said in a sing-song tone. "How lovely you are. Oh you're so beauuuuuuutiful."

She immediately did a cartwheel and spun around with arms outstretched and head back. The sheet of air paused before swirling around her. With a joyous laugh, she took off down the hill, waving her arms and turning around. It should've sent anyone into a fit of dizziness and would've made me fall down, but Tara did several cartwheels, front flips, and twirls I didn't have names for on her way down the gentle slope.

The creature followed her, leaving the rest of us and inspecting Tara as she went. Those two gray rain cloud eyes followed her every movement, and it zipped this way and that to get her from different angles. It was clearly

"Is that safe?" I asked.

These elementals are mercurial, as most air aspects are. It will either bond with her, leave, or suffocate her, Larelle told me.

"Oh you are so wonderful!" Tara gushed, and did another flip. The snake bolted beneath her as she left the ground and was gone by the time her feet landed again.

"Suffocate her… to death?"

Naturally.

“Um,” I said. “What is she supposed to do?” Clearly I hadn’t seen anything like this in the castle. Everyone either had their companion creature, or they didn’t and they complained about not having one. Tara had been out with me to try to find one, but the only thing we’d found was The Lovers, and the dripping sex session to follow.

She should already be familiar with the process. Bonding takes many forms, but includes the sharing of mana. Tara has already begun releasing mana to draw in the creature. Now we wait.

To see if Tara ended up drowned.

I focused intently on the action at hand. The creature become a tiny whirlwind that went around her several times, lifting her bodily and completely messing up her hair. Tara laughed, then stopped laughing. She turned over slowly, hanging a good six feet in the air, like she was under water. She was too far away to clearly see the look on her face, but I took off running anyway.

Chrysta was there as well, along with Ivy and Regina.

We were just about to reach the situation when Tara’s feet touched the ground again. She spun around in a circle, grinning, head thrown back and look of pure ecstasy on her face.

Slitherwind *has bonded with expedition mate* ***Tara***, the UI informed me.

I stopped, and clutched at the places on my hips and thighs that would need to be massaged out whenever I went all out in a way I shouldn’t have. The ache spread out more quickly than I was used to. I hadn’t been in a sprinting mood in years.

“Guys, guys!” Tara said, rushing back over toward us. “Guys I finally got mine!”

The elemental rushed up between her legs and she hugged to the shimmer of cloud, then locked her knees around it and began flying, like she was riding the world’s largest snake.

“Whoooooo!” she called out as she passed by. “This is so flipping cool!”

The snake slithered up into the sky with Tara riding it like a horse, and she pumped her fist as she soared by a second later.

Maybe this would help us deal with the lake situation. I certainly hoped so.

***

We all took turns trying to come up with names. Except Trent. He was still bent out of shape about what he'd done yesterday and refused to travel with us, or talk to anyone but me. And even then, he limited all interactions to a grunt if possible, or a single word if not.

"Airy Styles?"

"Airy Poppins is out," Cinzy said. "You can't copy me. But you could go with something like Breezy fo' Sheezy."

"Stormfront? No. That sounds like a militia holed up in a compound in the back woods of Missouri or something," Regina said.

"Cumy?" Isabelle suggested. "Like cumulonimbus?"

"I don't know how to spell that in a way that doesn't look like cummy," Tara replied, to lots of laughter and grossed out calls. "Isabelle what's the Korean word for cloud?"

"Goo-rum," she said. "Sounds strange, right? Wind is cuter, it's Baram."

"Doesn't look like a goat that goes 'baa' so I'll say no," Tara said.

"The word for snake is BAM!" Isabelle shouted.

"Meh," Tara said, laughing. "Maybe for a fire aspect, if it had an explosion power."

"Alto? Like altostratus," Regina tried. "Gosh, this is hard. I just went with Tweedle Dee."

"Gosharoo," Drat said with that same blank face. He earned a dark look from Regina.

"Y-you could go w-w-with a s-s-snake thing and w-work toward a-a-air or w-wind or breeze or gust," Alan said.

“Python or Cobra or Boa Constrictor or Anaconda, like that?” Tara asked.

“Air…aconda? Airaconda?” Ivy suggested.

“Ohh I like that,” Tara said. “Do you like that, you beautiful boy? Do you like Airaconda?”

The snake made of air curled around her whole body and then her outstretched arm, resting its chin on her fingers.

And just like that, the snake’s name was Airaconda.

I was, of course, jealous that she had not only found a companion creature right off the bat, but hadn’t had any trouble bonding with it. Also relieved that I didn’t have a dead team member on my hands. I was a Healer, but that didn’t mean I could bring people back from the dead. Even genies couldn’t do that, and I wasn’t even able to grant wishes or make miracles happen.

I put aside my own envy and congratulated Tara and Airaconda. The rest of the girls and their Nakamamon did also, Ivy included. She was the only girl without a Nakamamon now. She was surrounded by a huge rock echidna looking thing, a yipping fox with flowers blossoming out of it, a teeny little fairy, and Larelle’s magmamander. Even Trent’s crystalline creature Garnet appeared out of the ground and extended its multifaceted protrusion of a body toward Tara and her new wind snake. Alan and I didn’t have one either, but the stuttering Wizard was beaming with joy.

Cresting the next hill put us in view of the lake, stretched out below us, jewel blue and sparkling. It was enormous, stretching out far beyond view and into the horizon. Unless you grew up on the ocean, or maybe on one of the Great Lakes, I doubt you’d have a different reaction. All of us just stopped and stared.

Surprising me were the boats at the far side, just specks right now, but definitely specks with triangular sails topping them.

“Those are boats,” Trent said. It was the first time he’d spoken to anyone other than me all day.

“Yeah. Huh,” Regina said.

“We’re still about a half day’s travel out,” Tara said, and started bounding down the hill. She seemed even lighter on her feet than before.

Knowing now about the lightning resistance Timmy got from Wendell, and knowing about the fire resistance Larelle no doubt had from her magmamander, there was no doubt a power swap was happening with the Nakamamon bonding to Tara. I’d read about it in the clay tablets from Allie. The question was always what kind of abilities or bonuses the bond would produce. They varied, but there were trends.

If the creature emitted damage, you always got the resistance to it so your bonded creature wouldn’t hurt you. But there were a ton of other resistances, buffs and abilities. I couldn’t read through most of them, but a lot of stat increases were common. Earth aspects like Isabelle’s gave Durability, armor, and resistances to cold or air attacks. Some of the abilities granted were along the lines of being more surefooted, seismic attacks, regeneration so long as you were touching the earth, or amazing climbing abilities.

I doubted Tara would get the ability to fly. It didn’t seem like any of the humans in the castle had that ability just from bonding. But she could get a gliding power, slow fall, or gravity having less of an effect on her. Wind blasts were a cool one, which could fling you in one direction or fling something away from you. Common stat increases were to Affinity or Ingenuity: sensing magic, or thinking on the fly.

“What’s our play here?” Regina asked.

I realized everyone was looking at me. This having responsibility for other people’s wellbeing thing was unnerving. How was I supposed to know what the best course of action was? Should I try to ask the UI for an Ingenuity check?

“I see what you mean about no getting around it, Chrysta,” I said. It went on forever out into the horizon to the east. “How often did you say it shifts?”

“The m-m-m… the m-mana on it is s-s-strange,” Alan added.

“Every week or so, if I recall the report correctly,” Chrysta replied.

“Then I’m happy to remain at the edge of the lake for the time being. See if we can’t get some leveling done, earn some more skill experience for outdoor survival.”

“And we can see if Alan’s being skittish about a mobile lake or if he’s onto something,” Drat said.

The descent down to the lake took a good two hours. We had to crest yet another hill, and we were all happy to reach the top, because it was all downhill from there.

“Bad analogy,” I told myself. “It’s all good news from here. All easy peasy.”

The lake looked even more enormous, imposing, and vast from up close. Also inviting. The girls dropped their packs and started rummaging around in there. Cinzy, Isabelle and Tara soon came out with swimsuits and bikinis, making Regina shriek with recognition and excitement. She went rifling through her pack too.

“Folks!” I called. “We are, unfortunately, not going to be swimming inside the body of a possibly volatile elemental god.”

Faces fell.

“I’m not saying don’t put on swimwear. It’s a gorgeous day, and you should feel comfortable or try to soak up some sun and get a tan.” You could practically hear Alan’s blood pressure rising. “I am saying we should avoid touching the gods. And I am saying I can’t believe I just said that sentence out loud.”

Chuckles mixed in with groans of disappointment.

“Alan and I will try to run a test to see if it’s dangerous.”

The young Wizard peered at me through thick spectacles. “A-are you s-s-sure you m-made the right choice having m-m-me… on this t-team? There w-w-were dozens of b-better w-w-w-wizards.”

“Oh, I made the right choice,” I said. So many of the Wizards were stuck up, arrogant, insufferable know-it-alls that it was refreshing to have one that was an actual human that recognized he could make a mistake. “Now, Wizards should have divination spells for figuring out this sort of issue, right?”

He shrugged. “S-s-skill, actually.”

The lake itself was just like every other lake you’ve ever seen: big, blue, water rippling this way and that. It was slightly different based on the large dinosaur-looking creature poking its head and flippers out of the water. This was a possible sign that we might end up in the water at some point, but not conclusive. The other big and unsettling thing about the lake that made it very different from earth was the lack of a tide. No little waves coming up the beach. No white caps crashing against one another creating foam. The edge of the lake just sat there.

Alan removed a small device from his pack and muttered a couple of magic words into it. I’d noticed that when he was doing his casting, the stutter was missing.

The device lit up and beeped.

“I-i-it’s definitely a g-god,” he said.

“Safe for us to touch, or not?” Based purely on my Identify check difficulty, it seemed clear that any attempt to diagnose, treat, or work up a cure was going to be practically impossible. Even with the assistance Tokens from the remainder of the team, I doubted it would work. We’d spend ourselves dry, and then… Tokens replenished every 5 levels and with special conditions, so we’d just have to wait and wait and wait… so if there was any danger here, I wanted to be able to avoid it.

“Hmm,” Alan said, and muttered some more magic words. He stared at it, frowned, tried again, and again it beeped. “D-device… readings… in… inc… inconclusive.”

So he did something utterly insane, and dipped his hand directly into the water.

This is Christopher wondering how long it will be before there’s a team member fatality.

Chapter 34- Taunting Lady Luck

Alan looked at his hand, up at me, back down at his hand, then back up at me.

"Do not go sticking your hand in a god again. That is an order." I threw my hands up in the air. "I can't even begin to understand my life. I just said that sentence and not only did it make sense, but I didn't feel silly saying it."

Alan chuckled, then stiffened and fell back onto the variable-colored grass. His eyes rolled back in his head and his face went slack. A thrill of terror went through me watching him convulse and shake uncontrollably.

"Fuck," I muttered, "Fuck fuck fuck."

I dropped to my knees and tried to get a Diagnosis check to come up, but nothing happened. This was well beyond—

"Y-you're not s-s-supposed to s-swear," he muttered.

"Huh?"

He hadn't stopped shaking, but it was all from laughter now. His hands had gripped his sides and he was rolling back and forth on the dirt.

"You're not dying instantaneously from the touch of a corrupted god are you?" I asked flatly.

He laughed harder.

"You think freaking me out is funny?"

Wiping the tears away, he nodded.

"Well it is. But it's still a dick move."

***

About a half hour later I was staring at a pile of logs cut down to build a large raft. Larelle, Chrysta, Ivy and Isabelle were engaged in a contest to see who could get the most, and it looked like Ivy was close to meeting Chrysta, even though the ice ghost Nakamamon had all kinds of arms and all kinds of axes.

"Boss man," Cinzy said, sidling up to me. Fairy Poppins was out now and fluttering around the logs, tapping on them like a dragonfly laying eggs on the surface of the water.

"How'd you sleep?" I asked.

"Fitfully," she said.

"Oh?"

"I'm hella excited about meeting these people. Flumpdumpkin, can you believe it?" She giggled, the sound almost equal in adorableness to the look on her face.

I confessed, grinning and chuckling, that I could not.

The logs touched by the fairy Nakamamon began to shudder, and Tara had no trouble picking them up under one arm. These should've weighed hundreds of pounds, but instead seemed to weigh little more than a sleeping bag or a rolled up tent.

"I wonder what the Flumpdumpkinites will be like. Or the Saxwhacketers. I'm imagining blobs of gelatinous ooze with big googly eyes and dopey smiles in Flumpdumpkin, and a bunch of anthropomorphic birds in Saxwhacket… each one has a saxophone that they use to play a game like croquet. What, why are you laughing?"

When I finally stopped myself, I shook my head and blew out a loud sigh. "We will have to be ready to keep a straight face when the day comes where we encounter these people." Honestly, what they were doing employing people in their early twenties with this kind of work, I could not begin to imagine.

Near the water's edge, Tara used some kind of Ranger ability to coax the boogie wood to straighten out. The wood creaked and groaned like the ice over a lake beginning to come apart. However, slowly but surely, the wood went ramrod straight.

Cinzy waved a dismissive hand. “Nah. I’ll have them eating out of my hand in no time. That’s a promise.” When I gave her a thumbs up, she shrugged. “I need to start earning my keep around here. Everybody’s been working really hard so far… except Drat. I wonder about that guy.”

“You’ll have plenty of work to do,” I told her. “Just so long as you don’t pull the kind of stunt Alan just did.”

“Oh, Regina put him up to it. She’s got it out for you, you know?” She grinned. “I don’t know what you did to annoy her but you should apologize.”

I probably hadn’t fulfilled my quota of deep dicking she seemed to require, the horny little minx. As if on cue, I locked eyes with her, where she was in the middle of stripping the bark off the trees and turning it into a crude rope. She was giving me a pouty look and I loved it.

“What?” I called out.

“Just waiting for the squishy little Healer and the even squishier little Bard to start pulling their weight in this expedition,” she called back.

“Don’t make me order you to work quietly!” I shouted.

“Someone has just made the shirt list!”

“Well,” I told Cinzy, “I guess that settles that.”

“Yeah.” She giggled. “Now it’s even worse than before.”

“She’ll get over it.” Now it was my turn to wave a dismissive hand. She better have gotten over it. I hoped she’d get over it. A pit of fear opened up in my guts and made my body run cold. If Regina really was upset with me I didn’t know if I could handle it.

“So I wanted to talk with you about the town when we make it.”

“Great.”

“Well, you and me will be in this together, okay? We’re going to have to work closely when we arrive.”

“Oh?”

She beamed another magical smile at me. Bards, I was coming to believe, were dangerous. If they could just influence your mood, they could really wreck some havoc on society. Civilizations could easily be laid low by somebody like this. A Bard with the power to convince you could be an apocalyptic threat.

I stifled a laugh.

"I'll need to know your intentions, plans and needs anytime we speak to the leadership of the natives. Chrysta tells me they have a small ruling council called a Shagnasty."

I lost it.

After another good ten minutes the Guardians gave up their game and Ivy collapsed on the ground, heaving, while Isabelle called her an idiot for trying something so stupid. Chrysta seemed to be winded also, floating down to the ground and lying beside the tree she'd been about to fell.

Tara and Regina recruited Isabelle and Drat to help lash the logs together. The request had come in to use Trent to arrange the logs, and hold them in place using earth. He had, of course, jumped at the suggestion. It seemed like he was trying hard to get back in the team's good graces after the lunch boulder incident.

Cinzy discussed how often we would meet, and how best to arrange time for going over reports, drafting requests, and how often to meet the town leadership. She seemed ready to drain the vast majority of my time.

Just after lunch the raft was declared ready. It was a glorious thing, some thirty feet square, made of trees with their bark stripped and then shaved down almost square. They fit together exceptionally well, and I was amazed the whole project came together in a morning.

"Okay!" Regina yelled. "Everybody aboard!"

Muppin was loaded aboard first, and all the supplies that weren't already lashed to her back. Tara and Regina tied those on as well, in a ring around the enormous lumbering rock creature, in a way that gave anyone else a bit of a wall so they didn't fall off. Afterwards

they had the Guardians on, and then the squishies in a ring in the middle.

"There's a web of rope all around Muffin," Regina explained, guiding Alan's hand directly up to the mesh of rope they'd created. "You're tied to it by this bowline here, but you hang on to it anyway."

Then she moved to Cinzy and helped her, unnecessarily in my estimation. Cinzy told her she'd keep her hands and arms inside the ride at all times until it had come to a complete stop, and that she would enjoy her ride on America's Roller Coast.

Regina then gingerly took my hand in hers. With our super sexy Bard watching. The sensation of her smooth, warm hand gliding up my wrist electrified me. "Okay team captain who's on my shirt list, you are going to want to hold on here, and then here." Once I was holding on, she swiftly tied knots around my wrists and looped them around the mesh net.

"Um, excuse me," I said, watching Cinzy smirk. "I don't want to be tied to this thing."

"I'm afraid that's too bad. And if it somehow capsizes, you're going to have to learn how to breathe water fast."

"This is what I get for being mostly useless?"

"There is one thing you're good for, and you can't do that on the raft anyway," she said. Another thrill of terror shot through me. Surely Cinzy could figure out what she was talking about and get that this banter was all an act. She wasn't stupid.

When I turned a terrified look her way, she lit me up with another glorious smile. "Tough luck, I guess."

Isabelle strode over on her totally healed leg, scowling. "As the person whose job is to keep people from being injured in the first place, I have to use my Guardian veto power and save poor Christopher."

"Poor Christopher is in your debt," I said, and stuck my tongue out at Regina.

"You just wait," Regina said darkly, and headed off to strap Alan and Trent in.

Christopher Fletcher who prefers to be known as Fletcher, Larelle said, using the very long and totally unnecessary form of address, probably on purpose. *You should know that the Rogue known as Drat but whose real name is Michael Kondrat is not in the area.*

"Regina, Tara, have we lost somebody?"

A quick head count had them both frowning. "Where is that fifth squishy punk?" They went off to check the trees, but somehow Drat had reappeared by the time they were just about to head in. One moment he wasn't there, and the next, he was just seated on the other side of Cinzy.

He leveled a stare at me, expecting me to give him shirt for causing a slight delay, but the look was also bored. It was like he was daring me to micromanage him. And although it was annoying, he hadn't technically done anything wrong. He was filling out his role on the team, and he was back where he needed to be when it was time to move.

Cinzy let out a loud whoop that had to be magically enhanced, because both Tara and Regina were some two hundred feet away at the trees. Still, both of them jumped and whirled.

"He's right here after all," Cinzy said in a much quieter voice, but the received thumbs up, and they returned.

"What's the range on that?" I asked.

About 500 feet was the answer, though she was looking forward to the second level version of the special ability, because she was hoping to get better range out of the deal.

With everyone on board, Trent got us moving by having the dirt lift the raft and push it out onto the lake.

We now had six oarsmen, or oarswomen anyway, since they were all Guardians and Rangers. Regina was put in charge of the rudder, while the four Guardians each had a huge oar.

For the time being, however, they unfurled a makeshift sail and attempted to use the wind to get us across.

Guanelzi was indeed vast. As the shoreline receded further and further out, and gradually disappeared, the lake seemed for the

moment like the only thing in the whole world aside from the sky. Big puffy clouds lazily inched by behind the thin sheen of ambient magic, so they turned a variety of colors over the course of the next hour or so.

The Nakamamon were everywhere. There were fish ones, jumping out of the water or putting a fin up out of the water. Several dinosaur adjacent creatures poked long necks above the surface to watch us pass. Enormous pancake-like creatures similar to Rafael the sky manta kept pace with us, and flew out of the water a few times to get looks at us. At the end of the first hour, a bulb of pure water and nothing else formed in front of the raft, and two large basketball-sized spheres sat where eyes should be in the biggest octopus head I'd ever seen. It seemed like we'd crash into it, and a cry went up to Regina to alter course, but we never got closer to it.

I ended up getting another achievement soon afterwards.

Achievement: *25 Nakamamon encountered*

How many different varieties will you find? Will you ever encounter them all? Only time will tell.

Reward: +3 skill points

Those spheres fixated on us, slowly traveling the length of the raft and its occupants, keeping a good twenty feet away from the raft the whole time. Whatever it thought of the raft, we had no idea, but it finally vanished beneath the waves some ten minutes after it appeared.

"I love it so much," Cinzy said.

"Me too," I replied.

"I don't know why… I feel like I should maybe be terrified of a gigantic head and the eyes, but instead it's just awesome. Look at this: blue skies, a little chilly, sweater weather is awesome, honestly, and blue seas. There are weird jellyfish creatures here and there, flying fish Nakamamon, some strange cluster of seaweed that looks like it might have eyes… What else could you ask for?"

“Peace and quiet?” Drat said rather than asked.

“Oh stop being a grumpy Gus and enjoy something for once,” Cinzy shot back.

“If I do will you promise to stop talking?”

She just rolled her eyes and leaned over into me. I could smell her now, and somehow she had a whole bouquet of good scents. I smelled buttered popcorn, for one, caramel, for two, chocolate swirling in with coffee, and the scent of oncoming rain showers. Together they should’ve smelled overpowering at least, but they were perfect for some reason.

I just chalked it up to Bard stuff and lamented not reading the entire Player’s Handbook in clay or wood form.

“I’m glad you’re not a grumpy Gus,” she whispered, with a hand on my knee.

“Me too. Seems like a lot of effort to be that dour. I’m looking forward to our date,” I told her quietly, earning another big, warm smile.

“I sure am glad we’ve got smooth sailing so far,” she went on.

“Ugh, why’d you have to do that?” Drat asked.

“What?”

As if on cue, just waiting for us to spit at fate and Lady Luck, the whole lake shuddered and lifted up off the ground.

“You had to go spit in her face,” Drat said in his usual flat tone.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about!” Cinzy shouted now.

The transition from surface to air wasn’t quiet. It came with a roar of running water, even though the raft only teetered slightly back and forth. I thought we might go sliding off as the lake changed into a dragon and rose into the sky.

“Imagine you’re driving down the road,” Drat yelled. “Smooth sailing. The moment you say ‘oh, we haven’t run into any traffic yet, bam! That’s the moment you piss in Luck’s coffee and she gets on your case.”

Cinzy turned to me. “Is he an insane person?”

“Oh wow, normally the grocery store is really busy this time of day. We must be lucky!” Drat went on in a high pitched female voice imitation, before dropping it. “And just like that, the grocery store fills up, and when you get to the registers or the self checkouts they’re completely rammed. Babies crying, Karens complaining about how their coupons should work, businessmen loudly on their phones and everything.”

“Well I. Am. Sorry!” Cinzy shouted over the roar of water. “I had no idea I had insulted Lady Luck, because obviously I didn’t believe in such bullshirt!”

We did start to slide downward, the whole raft tilting to the left while to our right a massive column of water as big as a high rise formed into a worm shape. Larelle jammed her oar into the water and tried to use it as a lever, which worked for a good ten seconds before the oar snapped.

Finally Garnet flashed. The huge reddish crystal dipped into the water and the whole raft froze where it was. Trent was also holding his hands out, eyes closed with a look of utter concentration. Sweat began beading on his forehead immediately and went dripping off.

This is Christopher taking flight on a lake.

Chapter 35- The Nine Qualities

The air cooled, and we were faced with the misty spray of water coming from the raft bumping onto the dragon lake's surface.

Tense minutes ticked by. Cinzy had one hand clamped on my thigh, and was staring at me in fright.

Achievement: *first huge god encountered*

There is nothing that puts you in your place quite like a deific being that doubles as a geographic feature. Really puts the holy in holy moly.

Reward: +1 Free Stat level

We stabilized.

Trent eventually fell to his side, and I did a quick Diagnosis using Ingenuity. I passed the easy check without spending any Tokens, no problem there. He was technically fine, though he was exhausted and out of mana. This was a classic case of **mana burn**, which led to **exhaustion**. Left alone, he would be back on his feet in a good ten to fifteen minutes. In that time, though, he was out of commission: unable to lift a finger. He could just as easily slide off the raft and… I don't know, drown in the flying lake monster, or fall to his death by plummeting through the water. Losing a team member in the first week was not one we wanted. Come to think of it, we had hoped not to lose a single team member, period.

A rummage through my pack later gave me some oils and some dried herbs, flowers and roots, enough for a quick and dirty Restoration Potion.

"I got you," I told him while I worked. "This will be okay."

"It… sucks," he muttered, shivering, teeth clacking.

Cinzy was holding me by the waistband with one hand while I went through the ingredients at hand. I unfolded and placed down a specially built flat surface, then got a collapsible container stuck to the base. These were like custom-built camping supplies for potion crafting.

"Do you need help?" Cinzy asked me.

I passed back a mortar and pestle, along with yarrow root. "Have Drat grind this up. You hold onto me. I don't want to fall off this raft and find out whether I fall hundreds of feet to my death."

"Why do I have to grind it up?" Drat asked.

"Would you prefer to cup Fletcher's supple ass?" Cinzy shot back. "No? Okay, grind it like you were in the club."

Drat snorted, which was about as close as we would get to laughter, I thought. I rather enjoyed his deadpan delivery and wry humor. Regina was passionate and adorable, Tara was bubbly and a bit air headed, and Cinzy… I wasn't entirely sure. Pragmatic? Subtle? I hadn't spent enough time with her to figure out what her deal was.

Cinzy went back to holding onto my belt from behind, and softly coaching me while I crushed up these leaves and sprinkled those flower petals into the potion. The real key to a Restoration Potion, which immediately gave some stamina and mana, and also boosted recovery for both, was the infusion of some mana while I worked. The materials mattered some, but not as much as the correct infusion of mana.

So while I worked, I threaded what mana I had into the potion. Rainer had insisted that potioncraft was about consistency and speed. I'd worked at potions for days, slowly putting more and more mana into each one. My first ten or twenty of the things had been disastrous mistakes, some exploding with mana and causing **mana poisoning**.

And let me just tell you, you don't want **mana poisoning**. I've never had it, but apparently it's like being on LSD, where you hallucinate in the most insane ways imaginable and a bunch that

aren't. Apparently it's not like being on LSD because it can literally reshape your entire body and the surrounding reality just at random.

Anyway we had to get Wizards and Sorcerers into one of the labs because it had become a complete disaster. All the materials had turned into other materials. All the surfaces had bubbled or become spiky, and some of them had just changed into lifeforms. The beakers had all gone flying off, with wings, trying to drain people of fluids to fill themselves up.

It was pretty embarrassing.

So now I had a slightly better understanding and ability of how to steadily drip my mana down into the potion. Even while Cinzy tapped on my butt and then passed me the mortar filled with the powdered root, I kept the mana infusion steady. And then, finally, root added, the mana continued to flow at a slow and constant trickle.

And it was done.

Potions are, of course, best when consumed. Their efficacy increases, because they go directly into your tissues and get absorbed into your bloodstream. But they also work when poured onto a subject's skin… just less.

Trent couldn't move, and I wasn't in a position to move him. I considered asking Regina to take a moment out of her vital role of manning the tiller, but being hundreds of feet in the air told me we needed her to continue steering the raft. Plus, I hate interrupting people.

So with one hand full of potion and the other clutching the webbing of rope and nets tied around Muppin, I gently poured just a smidgen of the potion directly onto Trent's face.

A few drops was all it took. His eyes shot open and he pulled in a deep gasp of air. He scrambled up onto his butt, bumped into Regina, course corrected, and backed himself up against Muppin's echidna tail.

"Drink," I told him, and he reached a shaky hand up to grab at the aluminum camping cup.

We continued to rise. Minutes fell away. The path of the dragon creature was impossible to chart, so we were just along for the ride. The fright of falling off the back of the lake god had worn off, and now I found myself astonished at the sights.

The sun glinting off the water showed us the profusion of fish and creatures below us. We were now seeing flying creatures, and not just birds. Some had the look of bats, some like flying squirrels, others snakes like Tara's new companion, along with manta rays like Raphael, bats, and then even weirder things.

Cinzy was, of course, over the moon to see a pegasus, and I soon noticed a couple of flying deer, a flying fox, and a unicorn… dog… that was also a Pegasus.

"Unidog with wings," Drat said, not having lost his blasé attitude about everything. "There's a dog with wings, and a horn. I finished my bingo card."

As the hours passed, we stopped counting and settled in to try to enjoy the ride. Larelle and the Guardians announced that we weren't in danger of sliding off so long as someone manned the tiller. When Regina tired of this, Chrysta took over, followed by Ivy, and then Larelle.

We ate a lovely lunch of picked berries, beef jerky, and some of the rolls that weren't quite brick hard yet. As a last resort there was a potion I could whip up called a Nourishment Potion, and it did exactly what it sounded like, but with none of the enjoyment of real food. Basically, I could take ingredients that were on the verge of going bad, and process them into ten times the amount of food, if you didn't mind it tasting like runny oatmeal and coating your tongue in its aftertaste for ages. It beat starvation, but not by much.

I noted Cinzy was a pretty touchy-feely kind of person, and it was distracting for a while, before it became difficult. She usually put a hand on my shoulder, but from time to time would pat my knee and just leave her hand there. Other times her hand would fall on my thigh, and if I didn't look at her, she left it there.

When I did look at her, she apologized. "Sorry, I uh… I need to hold onto somebody. I hope you don't mind."

She knew. She knew I didn't mind and she was taking advantage of that fact. I also didn't mind that she was taking advantage like this. She could've put the moves on Drat, and he would have reacted the same way. I'm certain of it.

Regina collapsed on the raft's deck after her shift at the tiller.

"You okay?" I asked. At least half the space was taken up by Muppin, so my legs stretched out and left only about a foot of space to the edge. She fell between my outstretched legs, and Cinzy.

"I'm good," she said in a shaky voice, pointing a finger at the sky. Tweedle Dee had joined her and was snuggling up to her chest, licking her face and making her laugh. "Fine, fine! I'm fine."

"Your Nakamamon is so cuuuuuuute," Cinzy cooed.

Regina rolled over and sat up while Tweedle Dee got Cinzy's hand off my leg and onto the flower fox. In the meantime, Regina stared at me, flicked her gaze over towards Cinzy, then back over to me, before waggling an eyebrow.

Good lord.

I'd gone from essentially a virgin to being in a thruple to having my sex friend suggesting I get a harem going.

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It was clearly the fact that Regina was very bisexual. That had to be it. I couldn't imagine any other reason she would try to get me in bed with Cinzy after she'd already gotten the both of us in bed with Tara like that.

These thoughts were drowned out by the lake leveling out and then beginning its descent. I'd gotten another achievement.

Achievement: *Flying High*

Your first time hitching a ride on a god, eh? The meal service isn't what it could be.

Reward: +1 class level in your class(es)

The whole expedition started buzzing about the achievement. A free level in both classes was huge. I had advanced to Healer 11, and Pleasure Seeker 8, which I still was amazed was a real thing. The first gave me 2 more skill points, while the second granted me +1 Likability and +1 skill point.

Three additional skill points sounded awesome, and I wanted to do something I hadn't considered strongly until now. So far what I'd wanted to do was be the best Healer I could be, and I had completely neglected to even consider what my skills in Pleasure Seeker might be like. When I'd gotten Healer to begin with, I'd gotten a whole plethora of skill points for an even more ridiculous amount of skills. That hadn't happened for Pleasure Seeker.

Pleasure Seeker Qualities List

Um, what?
Oh, geez. My face started to heat up as I read through the list.

Load
Refractory Period
Length
Girth
Stave Off
Flexibility
Tongue
Pheromones
Adaptability

"What the f—"
"What are you looking at? System stuff?" Cinzy asked.
I stiffened and tried not to look guilty. "Yup. System stuff."

"Yeah there's a lot in there. Every time I go searching for something it seems like I find several more things. What's it? Potion specifics? No, wait, you almost swore… I'll bet it's the leadership menu for this expedition."

Silently very thankful Cinzy couldn't see my menus or character sheet without me sharing, I flicked the leadership menu open and marveled. This would take my lie down to the white lie category, and hopefully make it harder for me to figure me out.

She was absolutely correct in assuming that there was always more to the system. There were morale stats (very high except for Trent and Drat), compatibility between members, current role in the group, and approximate readouts of their attributes, skills and special abilities. This one had a little question mark, and when I focused on it, the following message explained.

Team member statistics may be shared with you. So far none have shared those statistics directly. Approximate stats are derived from direct observations of your team members, knowledge of their activities based on secondhand accounts, and knowledge of special abilities. Special abilities listed are either directly observed or commonly known.

"You are not wrong," I said.

I thanked Cinzy for her help with the Trent situation, and received another of those bewitching smiles from her. I really wanted to stay near her, but a deeper part of me knew instinctively that it was just a ruse. Either I had a resistance to her charm abilities or she wasn't using them at full power.

I begged off, telling her I needed to head around the raft and check on everybody's status health-wise. What I really wanted to do was look over these Pleasure Seeker Qualities and weigh the need to spend skill points on them or not.

Some of them were quite obvious. Length, Girth, and Load were all size-dependent, meaning more skill points sunk into Qualities

would basically increase me physically. Tongue was length-dependent. I could turn myself into a chameleon, or a frog, or that guy from the rock band Kiss. Refractory period went down over time, meaning I could get hard after a shorter period of time. The UI went into great detail about how various factors like age, health or sexual experience impacted Refractory period.

Flexibility was obvious and direct. Stave Off gave me a skill check when it came to Durability when sex was involved, so I could keep my orgasms at bay. Amazing stuff.

Then there were Pheromones and Adaptability.

The Pheromones did just what it sounded like: exuded a barely perceptible sex stank into the air around me. The effect of the pheromones was twofold: one, to encourage women to have sex with me in the first place, and two, to enhance the pleasure of partners when they did. I could activate it or turn it off at will, and I could push it to double its rating by spending a Likability Token. To me this sounded pretty rapey, and I wasn't comfortable pushing women in the direction just because they smelled me. On the other hand, I could keep it off until I wanted to use it, then drive Regina or Tara wild.

For now, I felt like there were far better ways to spend my skill points than something ethically super gray. Healer skills were all very much on the up and up, and none of these made me consider whether or not I was a gross criminal.

Adaptability was something else entirely. With this Quality, apparently my entire body could (and would) change to fit with my partner's anatomy. And I'm going to be honest, for entirely too long, I looked at this and went: what? Why would I need to— what could possibly— when would I ever—

I was crouching next to a prone Chrysta when it clicked. I also looked over at the hulking, enormous, eight foot form of Larelle, with her enormous amounts of hair, no nose, and otherwise perfect physique.

I could have sex with the Nakamamon.

That very concept really messed with me for the rest of the flight. People talked about the different types of Nakamamon they had never seen before, that they could add to the catalogues. They also discussed Guanelzia and the experience of riding on a flying lake. None of their friends, family, or other fellow coworkers had ever done this, obviously. They definitely had bragging rights whenever we made it back to the city and the castle. Some of the discussions were logistical: we had x amount of food with us, and could handle x number of days without rationing, and 2x days with strict rationing. They were hesitant to broach the topic of whether or not we could scoop part of the god up and drink it, though Alan was of the opinion that would could, and probably should. Wizards were supposed to have an understanding of gods and how they fit into the world physiologically, magically, and logistically. Alan didn't have much of that, so he was working with the info he recalled from his short on-the-job training.

I was busy wondering just what in the hell I was doing, considering taking Adaptability and then hitting on the natives.

"Fletcher?" Trent said quietly, when I was back around the raft and close to him.

"Hey, Trent, hey, you did great, okay? Exactly how we planned it. Consider the temporary ban very close to lifted, okay?"

"It's not that," he went on, the severity in his voice and the shifty look on his face filling me with more worry than probably warranted. "I mean thank you. I appreciate it. But there's another thing."

"Ohhhhh kay, hit me."

"Who was in charge of keeping the magic resistance pills?" he asked.

"That would be Alan," I said, "though I asked Cinzy to keep an eye on him. She didn't have much else to do."

The magic resistance pills needed to be taken once a week to ensure you didn't transform into a Nakamamon yourself. Cinzy had those color shifting patches on her skin. Tara's skin was metallic bronze. Regina's freckles twinkled. Isabelle and Ivy had their own

things, but I just didn't think about them. Ivy had a red orange aura around her feet that sometimes sent glowing speckles fluttering up, like campfire embers. Sometimes there were streamers of the aura reaching up as far as her knees before drifting away. Isabelle had cotton candy skin, and like Cinzy it slowly shifted. I'd noticed her chin was mostly pink until this morning, when it was blue with pin stripes of pink and white.

As for me, I was a bit of a strange case. At first, I'd started to turn into a stained glass window, or a monarch butterfly, but after the first pill, I'd gotten green facial hair and eyes. They went mint green at first, the color slowly deepening. Truthfully, I didn't know enough about the magic suppressant pills to know if this happened to everybody. It had been on the bottom of a long list of things to learn in an awful hurry.

Trent didn't seem to have any issue, so far as I could see, until I looked closely. His skin had a fine grain on it, like wood, but it was light and he wasn't showing much skin.

Trent lowered his voice even further, darting glances at the others. "After the boulder incident, a bunch of the pills were crushed. Alan just stared at them. I thought for sure he would tell you… Cinzia didn't tell you either?"

"Um. What?"

This is Christopher days' travel from home with a body absorbing magic like a sponge.

Chapter 36- Flirting With Consequences

A light breeze blew, and we alternately spent time cataloguing types of Nakamamon or dipping fingers into the god and swishing them around. By now our flight had lasted most of a day. Isabelle's ankle had been fully healed by the magic in the salve, Trent was back to normal only minutes after taking my potion, and now it was just the ten of us and our companion animals enjoying the ride.

Though chilly, the direct sunlight kept us from breaking out the warm weather clothes. We were up level with the scattered clouds, but after our full day aloft, the great god of the lake descended. Larelle and the rest were ready to paddle like hell to keep the raft from falling, but after several tense minutes it didn't look like we were sliding up towards the wyrm's head.

Tara had spent a lot of the ride getting to know Airaconda, her new friend. The serpent could manifest as an actual flying snake, with wings hovering around it and wads of puffy clouds, or it could shimmer and vanish. In both forms, Airaconda was large and powerful enough to take a passenger for a little joyride, and for now that passenger was Tara.

She and Airaconda looped around the raft, sailed from the lake's head to her tail, and then when Tara was more confident she wasn't going to fall to her death, around the entirety of the mammoth snake of water. She could be heard talking to the creature, telling it her whole life's story in typical Tara fashion. I wondered if the slitherwind could speak, and it just didn't ever get a chance.

As the minutes passed and the air around us warmed further, we gradually approached the ground. A small valley in between two sharp mountains soon proved to be our destination. Dipping down,

the lake god curled around into a circular snake shape, and finally touched down.

I'd only flown in an airplane a handful of times, but this landing was much gentler than the one I remembered. The plane landing had been a bump, sure, but not a problem.

This was like a leaf on the wind, gently gracing the land with its presence after a whole summer hanging out above it all.

"Well that was nice," Cinzy said, and again patted my leg. I caught sight of Regina smirking. "I was worried there'd be a tsunami or the landing would capsize us. Whew! That was wonderful. I'd like to do it again!"

We had no real way of knowing how far off course we were, and supplies weren't ideal. I hadn't yet brought up the anti-magic pills situation with Alan or Cinzy, but it bothered me just the same. The Bard, for her own reasons, didn't seem to care about it. Alan, I could understand, looked mortified at nearly every moment of our journey… unless he was pranking me.

"We likely could end up doing it again," Chrysta said, already manning several oars at the same time and getting us moving towards the shore. "We've suspected that Guanelzia might have several stops along a migratory route, but no one has tested out this theory… the next trip could be soon and could take us even further afield."

That was no ideal.

"Okay!" I called. "We're making camp on the shore! Everybody knows their places and duties already, correct?"

A chorus of assent followed.

"Good, because it's been a long and boring day that was completely unexpected. Let's make it a calm, orderly night, no surprises, no messes."

Larelle, Ivy and Isabelle grabbed their oars from Chrysta and got to work. Trent got to work, too, piling up dirt beneath the shore and creating a ramp closer to the raft. Once there, he used his power to reel the raft up onto the shore. This time he followed my advice and

didn’t overtax himself by burning through his entire mana pool. Alan, Cinzy and I got him up to the campsite.

Once again it was tents and food and firewood. Cinzy and I were much faster at the tents this time, testing the wind and making sure the doors didn’t face the wrong way. Firewood was quick again, and soon enough Regina and Tara were back with some herbs, berries, and Tweedle Dee had caught a rabbit. A thing that was rabbit adjacent anyhow. As soon as Regina grabbed it and began skinning it, the flower fox darted back into the valley forest, followed by a shimmer of wind in the shape of a serpent.

“Trent,” I called.

“Boss?”

“Permission granted to use whatever power you like to help set up camp, especially a campfire, latrine, and if Larelle thinks we need them, any defenses.”

He saluted and quickly hollowed out a large fire pit.

“Alan?”

“Hm?”

I started walking, and he fell in beside me. I laid out the situation with the anti-magic pills, and he paled.

“I-I-I-I—”

“It’s all right,” I told him. “We’re not in any real danger, so far as I know. And I’m not mad.”

“It’s, w-w-well, it’s… there’s, uh… w-well, we have ab-b-bout three w-w-w-weeks.”

“What happens then?”

What happened then was we became beings infused with magic. The administration and bureaucracy of the company weren’t comfortable letting that happen. People changed forms. They developed abilities. It wasn’t like the class abilities from the system. It sounded like the became Nakamamon.

“None of this sounds bad, though.”

It wasn't that the situation was good or bad, it was too early in the program to study the effects. Things made entirely of magic, like the big honking coin Johnson had slid across the table to me approximately one lifetime ago, those things dissolved into nothing. Nakamamon weren't able to travel through the portal without being in constant pain, slipping into comas, and then dying. So the top brass was worried about us not being able to go back through the portal.

"So you're saying we might be stuck on this side of the portal forever," I said. Without a cure, obviously. Which, if I was high enough level, I could probably create.

"I-i-it's not c-clear," he said.

I wasn't in a position to offer up my nine human team members as guinea pigs for that little experiment, meaning one of two things had to happen. One, we needed to abort this little mission and make our way back with all due speed to the castle. This could take the three weeks we had left, depending.

Or we could use the resources at our disposal to get one of our own back to the city, pick up more of the medication, and bring it back.

"Tara!" I called out.

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Moss and a carpet of leaves muffled every footstep. The silence here really was like almost nowhere else on earth. From the corners of my vision I could see odd animal creatures poking their heads out of burrows or shuffling off deeper into the forest to get away from the two legged oddities.

Obviously, I wasn't pleased that my long-legged, bronze-skinned gorgeous funk buddy was going on a weeks and days-or-week-long mission to recover the medication we needed in order to see our home world again.

She reminded me just by what she was wearing that this wasn't going to be fun or easy. Tara had on a pair of black yoga pants with pink stripes up the middle, and they showed off her toned legs and gorgeous bubble butt superbly. Above that I could see an inch of belly, including her belly button, before a matching athletic zip up hoodie took over. She had her blonde hair in a ponytail, but it too had been going bronze, making her look like one of those living statues in the middle of big cities. It bounced as she walked, shining in the evening sun.

I joined her on a short walk through the forest surrounding the valley, checking out the weirdness that was to be found. I spied several flowers I'd never seen before in my entire life, but knew the names of anyway. Jallanapes weren't native to earth, but here they were, twining around several dead trees and spreading their bell-shaped purple and magenta flowers for huge bees and butterflies.

"This is not an order. You are allowed to say no," I told her, "but I wanted to ensure that we had this conversation in private. I don't need a panic."

She peered at me, then took my hand in hers and rubbed her thumb over it. Her skin was cool, soft and smooth. Perfect in other words. "It's a difficult choice to make," she said. "I should be fine. Airaconda and I have been flying for hours now, and she's getting used to my weight. I can bring food and water with me, and if you give me a potion for Stamina, we'll be gold. I think probably we'll spend the night somewhere under the stars, or if the weather's not cooperating, I can construct a shelter. Ranger, after all."

"This sucks," I said. "I was hoping—"

"Eh, shush. If I get this done right, I'll be back in less than a week, and then you and can get down and dirty as much as you like whenever you want."

I grinned at her.

"And we can have a little farewell messing around," she said, and offered me a grin that was equal parts adorable and naughty. "Now, expedition leader, are you going to order me to strip down for health reasons so you can clear me for this emergency excursion back to

base?" She didn't wait, but instead unzipped her hoodie and freed up her perky breasts. Apparently there hadn't been anything beneath, and I was here for it. She then turned and inched those yoga pants of hers down her ass.

"I guess I don't need to issue any orders," I muttered, staring down at her incredible ass, contrasting as it was against the black of her pants. She grinned and winked at me.

"We'll need to do an oral exam first, I'm sure," she said, and dropped to her knees. A second later my cock was out in the open and she had her mouth all over it. This blowjob was going to be a sloppy one, it seemed, lots of tongue and lips slurping up and down, over my balls and up and down the shaft without sucking on me. Twice she popped the head into her mouth and sucked me down halfway, before it popped free and she gave a satisfied 'ahhh'. Like she'd just had a refreshing sip of beer on a hot summer night.

"Next I'll need you to see if my chest is all right," she said. I stepped forward and put my cock between her breasts, and enjoyed the odd feel of them cradling around my well-lubricated shade. They weren't big enough to really call this a full tit fuck, but it had the added effect of making me feel like a very well-endowed man. Every time I slid upwards she lapped at the head and slurped at it before letting me free to slide back down.

Lust had largely replaced her playful manner. Her face went serious, eyelids falling and her breathing deepening.

"I'll need to do a cavity check," I said, in between strokes.

"Oh my, doctor… which cavities?"

"All of them, I think," I said.

Entwined Ecstasy had signaled that I could spend a Token in order to enhance the pleasure of our lovemaking, but I held off until now.

She stood, back to a nearby tree, and thrust her midsection out at me. There was nothing sexier to me than seeing a beautiful woman both leaning back and also pushing her pussy out toward

me. I was still very much in the disbelief phase of this situation. I couldn't believe my luck, and wasn't about to question it.

Wrenching her pants down, I checked by hand and found her very wet. It was now, working a finger back and forth over her slit and tonguing at her pleasure button, that I spent my Token.

I spent some serious time making sure her clit was as healthy as it could be for her trip back to the city, and also massaging her inner walls with first one, and then two fingers. There was a patch of skin on the inside of Tara that produced the desired effect of making her go absolutely wild. She humped down into my face over and over again, talking breathlessly the whole time. Yes, she said, that was the spot. Right forking there. Yes, she went on, I shouldn't stop, it felt so damn good, she wanted me to fluff her right here, right now. Please would I just give it to her? Why couldn't I just stick it inside her, please?

I got the sense, via Affinity, that she was rapidly climbing the ladder to a huge climax. The mana within her collected, and collected, balled up just beyond where my tongue flicked back and forth over her clit.

And after several minutes, that ball of mana inside her condensed so much, it exploded outward, and she came. The flavor of her changed immediately, sweetening and becoming even fresher than before.

"Holy…" she panted. "I've never… cum… that fast."

I couldn't help it. I had to buy up a point of one of those Pleasure Seeker Qualities. I put one point into Stave Off and the next into Girth. I'd been having a little trouble keeping everything in when I wanted to keep going, so Stave Off claimed it would help with that. And who doesn't want more girth?

When I stood she was just finishing turning around and presenting her incredible ass. She'd kicked off her yoga pants and was looking over her shoulder expectantly.

"Don't keep me waiting, Fletcher," she moaned, so I didn't. She kept right on talking, in her own Tara way. "I need it right now. I

need ugh… yes, I want that big, fat… oh fudgesicle you're big. Oh it's going to be lonely without this… ugh, this big, fat monst—uhhhhh…"

She stopped talking as I pushed the widest part in. She was wet, very wet, but Girth did not lie. I was noticeably bigger around. She seemed a lot tighter all of a sudden, and I didn't think she had shrunk.

"Oh gods, Fletcher," she continued, getting breath back in her lungs. "Are you even bigger than before? Ugh, yeah, push it… even… further. Don't stop."

I did, gritting my teeth against the additional pleasure created by all the additional pressure. I tried to distract myself by squeezing her ass, running my hands up and down her sides, and then cupping both her boobs as they hung down. By now both her forearms were against the tree and her head was down, like she was just trying to survive the onslaught.

Her breathing came in shallow, but loud gasps.

"Wait," she managed weakly. "D-don't move. I need to… get used…"

Instead I reached down and brushed two fingers over her clit, and set her off again. She lost her balance and would've gone down, except I held her with one arm. With the other, I kept lightly strumming her clit, making her shudder and flop. She even bucked back into me, squishing her ass cheeks back into my midsection and forcing another loud groan out of her.

When she recovered, we shifted positions with her on her back in the huge patch of moss, peering up at me in wonder. Her mouth started going again.

"I've never… I've never cum like that before," she panted. "Not even when I was just playing with myself in my room when I first discovered I could make myself cum. Holy smokes, Fletcher."

I slowly sank my full length back into her, and she groaned out, low and long. It was perfection again, surrounding me, which

ratcheted up notches in the perfection level the moment I started sawing in and out of her.

"Oh, oh jeez," she said, "you're not done."

She brought her legs up around my waist again and locked her feet together at the ankles.

"Fluff me, Fletcher," she begged. "I want it."

I couldn't very well refuse such a request, now could I? This was how, ten minutes later, I was slowly pounding my cock in and out of her, and she had gone through three more crushing orgasms and being loud about it.

I'd been sucking on her nipples and sliding my hands all over her toned legs, loving how long they were and how smooth she felt in my hands. If she was going to be gone for at least a few days, possibly days and days, I wanted her to know what she was coming back to.

"You going to have sex with anybody else?" I whispered.

"Nooooo," she moaned.

"Why not?"

"Because… ugh… because I want Fletcher's dick," she managed. "Nobody can, unh, match this."

"And you want my cum now?"

"Yesssss," she hissed.

"Where?" I asked, grinding in deep and rolling my hips. "You want it in your mouth? On your face?"

"Inside," she gasped. "Cum inside me."

I didn't question it. My mind was too fogged from all the sex. My need to have her trumped my higher order brain function. Plus, she had her ankles locked and I'm not sure I could've gotten them apart at all, much less in time to stop her. I pressed forward, as deep as I could, and dumped every drop into her.

"Mmm," she said, a sound of pure satisfaction.

Time passed, with us just resting like this.

“You better get used to doing that, because I need it more than just these three times, cowboy. After that first time with The Lovers… I just can’t have it any other way.”

Eventually I softened up enough to pop out of her. Her hand drifted down to the junction of her legs and she scooped some of my seed out, staring at it like she wasn’t quite sure what it was.

“Uh… yeah.”

“I can’t decide whether this stuff is addictive, or having you dump it in me, or the friction.” I had no idea what to say to this. “But I can’t stop. Can you go again?”

“If you can get me hard again,” I said.

It turned out I could. We had sex for another thirty minutes, and at the end of it she was riding me, shivering and shaking and demanding I pump everything I had into her. And like a genius person, I did it.

This is Christopher flirting with consequences.

Chapter 37- Cinzia Vs Fairy Poppins, Round One

The night got chilly again, and forced us all to scoot closer to the campfire. I'd only gone camping the one time with my father the one time, either broken and recovering in the hospital, or incapable of walking long distances without triggering serious pain. Now I truly understood what I'd been missing.

First, the camaraderie. Cinzy was wrapped in a blanket and holding a mug of steaming hot chocolate, made up by Alan and later Isabelle, once she was done with her portion of the firewood collecting. Just her face and blonde hair peered out of the blanket, along with her hands gripping the mug, leaving her looking just adorable.

She caught me looking once, and a dimple appeared as she smiled just a fraction at me, then winked. I couldn't help but feel conflicted. Regina had noticed whatever Cinzy was trying to do, and wonder of wonders approved, but the reciprocal was not necessarily true. Cinzy didn't know I was, ahem, intimately involved with both Tara and Regina. I wasn't sure how she would feel about me once she learned those facts.

She wouldn't have to know that I was routinely attempting to fill Tara to the brim. I couldn't be entirely sure that Regina could handle that information either. Hell, I wasn't sure it sat well with me either.

The flames were hypnotic. First, I dealt with the Pleasure Seeker situation. Tara and I also gained the **close confidants** relationship status. While I was being milked, the system granted me an upgrade to **Eagle Eyed,** bringing it from Common to Uncommon but keeping it at level II.

Eagle Eyed II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, passive)

I- Your eyesight becomes better than human, including limited night sight. You are able to discern details at a distance, and analyze close objects much better than base humans.

II- Your peripheral vision and reactions are increased beyond human maximums. You may not be caught off guard while your eyes are open. You may spend 1 Durability Token to sleep with your eyes open.

Well that was some tomfoolery I hopefully wouldn't ever need. It sounded amazing, but a bit scary. With luck, I wouldn't ever have to use it. That said, if we ever had a night watch situation, I could take the whole night and give the whole team a rest.

Both powers I'd gained from the girls, **Eagle Eyed** and **Wild Lore**, were definitely tied to their class, Ranger. I made a mental note to ask Regina what sort of ability she'd received from me, and snorted laughter. How would that conversation go? 'Oh, hey, by the way, you know the special ability I got from boning you? It's called Wild Lore. What did you get from having me terrorize that pussy?'

"What's so funny?" Cinzy asked.

"Oh! Uh… I was thinking…"

Ingenuity check: *You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is Moderate difficulty. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 4 Ingenuity and 6 Free Tokens.

I quickly spent the Tokens, not wanting to be caught in this particular lie. Several options quickly popped up in front of my face when I spent the Tokens. The first one was great.

**I was thinking about when I got the job, and I thought Dick Johnson was planning to sell my organs.*

I repeated the words and watched as Cinzy's face went from shock to amazement to disbelief and very quickly onto hilarity. She

thought the whole idea of me meeting this real HR recruiter but thinking he was a fly-by-night organ salesman charlatan was perfect.

This time she clapped her hand on my knee and didn't let up, eventually pressing her forehead to my knee and crying. Not far off, I spied Regina giving me an unreadable look.

"I need to speak with you," I told her, and stood. It was a good thing I did, since my legs were stiff and full of ache from sitting down too long. She joined me on a slow circuit of the area we'd picked for the camp.

"I know it's not ideal," she said, "and we won't have a chance to go on our dinner date any time soon."

"I'm told you knew about the pills getting destroyed?" I asked.

"Oh, that."

"I'm concerned that Alan came to you, and neither of you consulted with me."

"Are you mad?" she asked, sounding for the moment like a child about to be punished. Like she'd been caught with her hand in the cookie jar.

"Mad? No. I mean a little disappointed." Using the word from my parents.

"Ah," she said, frowning. "I hadn't thought it was that important. Alan told me the Wizards don't have any data on what happens if we get magic saturated. And I figured you could probably heal it, like develop your own medicine for us."

"Well, I had to send one of our Rangers all the way back to the city on her Nakamamon. That will cut into our ability to deal with trouble if trouble arises, but I think the ten of us and our abilities and companions can handle it. And we lucked out with her getting that slitherwind."

She nodded. "I hope you're not too upset."

"If you'd told me about your theory, and me making a version of the medicine, I probably could have tried before sending Tara back…"

"It was a bad lapse in judgement," she said. "I take full responsibility." She turned and puffed her chest out, defiant. "I probably influenced Alan on accident, when I told him we didn't need to go advertising the pills had gotten crushed. I know that he's pretty young and inexperienced with, you know, and I'm sorry. It's definitely not his fault."

"He's young and inexperienced with *what*?"

"You know," she said, and smiled a coy smile.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," I lied. I wanted to make her squirm a little bit.

"Well I may have made him, ah, a little uncomfortable, with my, ah, feminine wiles."

I leveled a flat glare on her. "You seduced him."

"You make it sound like I had sex with the poor boy!" she blurted, a little too loudly. I chuckled as her eyes bulged with the realization of what she'd done. If Alan was a little young and inexperienced, well, weren't we all? The higher ups had hired a bunch of people in their twenties, after all. "That's not what happened. I didn't. I mean I didn't have sex with him."

"You guys all right out there?" Ivy and Isabelle called.

"All good!" I yelled. Then, back at Cinzy, I said, "But you did seduce him."

"I didn't just spread my legs for him," she hissed, then appeared embarrassed yet again. "I didn't have to. I just smiled at him."

"Just smiled." My parents did this a lot, just repeating the same words somebody said back to you, but sounding like half a question and half an accusation.

"I may have unbuttoned one of my shirt buttons, and showed a little cleavage."

"A little cleavage."

"Okay, okay… I hiked up my skirt a little."

"Hiked up… your skirt."

"Hey!" she said. "I was just… it's like… it looks like this, okay." She flipped the waistband of her skirt over, which gave me an extra two inches of visible thigh. Then she unbuttoned the top button of her shirt and clasped her hands together, which pressed her big boobs together. The line of her cleavage deepened. Then she batted her eyelashes at me and flashed a coy smile. She was gorgeous, especially since she'd put on knee high socks. I didn't know why that did it for me, but it really really did.

Likability check: *You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is High difficulty. Would you like to spend 4 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 4 Likability and 6 Free Tokens.

"Are you going to make me pass this check?" I asked in my best disappointed voice.

She darted a glance toward the fire and kept the same mischievous smirk plastered on her very attractive face. A small timer rapidly wound down, and I stubbornly crossed my hands over my chest. I then refused to spend the Tokens. "You could just tell me if you've got a girlfr—"

It looked a lot like Cinzy was going to become Cinzia and our relationship might take a turn towards the very cool when Fairy Poppins appeared and interrupted her companion human. Glowing fiercely in the dead of night, the dragonfly-sized fairy buzzed up into Cinzy's face. A stream of words came out of the minute Nakamamon, and she bashed Cinzy directly in the tip of the nose. As much as a bug could bash something a billion times its size anyway.

Cinzy suddenly pouted, and stopped assuming the sexy pose she was using on me. The timer vanished, and with it the Likability check. She chuckled suddenly.

"None of that happened," she told me. "I was just putting on a bit of a show for you."

I blinked several times. “I’m sorry? None of that happened? What happened?”

“I just told him it probably wasn’t important, and, you know, he didn’t push the matter. Because when I smile at people they kind of, I don’t know, want to go along with me. Want to help me. Want to be my friend.” She smiled again. “I’m not doing anything active. I didn’t do the shirt thing or the skirt thing. Just for you.”

“Cut it out.”

The smile vanished. “Sorry—”

Suddenly, a tiny and glowing Nakamamon was flying up between my eyes, hovering a few inches from me.

“Why thank you, young lady,” I told the fairy. She seemed delighted at the praise, and zipped around my head several times before having a few more angry words with Cinzy, and disappearing back into her traveling bag.

“Way to ruin a perfectly good joke,” Cinzy grumbled.

All three of us knew it hadn’t been a joke. Cinzy was going after information. I didn’t push it.

“You could have simply asked,” I told her. “And the answer is no. I don’t have a girlfriend.” It was so odd to say these words, for a multitude of reasons. One, I was talking to an absolute stunner, with a gorgeous face, a bright personality. Two, she was someone who didn’t see the way I limped around as freakish. Three, she wanted not just to talk to me, but maybe date me. And right now, that told me she wanted to go on dates, have fun, talk and laugh together, and figure out whether or not we might end up having sex.

I was about to tell her exactly what the situation really was when Regina and Isabelle appeared out of the darkness.

“There you are!” Regina said. I got the impression she knew exactly where I was the whole time. Isabelle blinked at the two of us several times.

“I’ve been discussing how we plan to approach the natives when we run into them,” I lied. That discussion had been had previously.

"Makes sense," Isabelle said. "You probably don't want Chrysta or Larelle negotiating or trying to impress the natives without Cinzia being there. Neither of them have any skill in social."

"We had discussed this very thing," Cinzy said smoothly.

"I wouldn't doubt both their Likability is down at one or two." Isabelle chuckled, before going wide-eyed. "Oh em gee. I can't believe I just said that. Don't tell them, okay?"

I nodded, giving her a chuckle. "Sure, no problem."

Regina didn't say anything, but instead simply looked at me. I wondered what internal discussion was going on there. Was she sizing up Cinzy as her next sexual meal? The idea of the supermodel gorgeous Cinzy naked in my bed was enough to make my cock come to life. The idea of Cinzy naked in my bed and fooling around with Regina caused me to adjust my pants.

"Let's get back to camp," I said.

Cinzy didn't seem to love this idea, but there was nothing she could do or say to oppose it. Her skirt was still hiked up a little, and I know this because when she skipped ahead with her ponytail bobbing behind her, I caught a lot of thigh when her skirt bounced up and down.

This new world was definitely the weirdest and most wonderful thing to ever happen to my life.

I had a slight twinge of regret, thinking about my parents and my sister, along with my nephew. They were probably better off without me there, and with the money this job supplied. This knowledge didn't make me feel a lot better though. I still wanted to be with them, near them, or at least in contact. My nephew was a toddler, and the cutest he would likely ever be.

Once settled back around the fire, we traded fun stories about our first encounter with a Nakamamon or a god that wasn't Tweedle Dee.

Isabelle, as it turned out, had a similar run in with a god, but hadn't been dumb enough to stick her finger in it.

“It was just a little flower god,” she said. “Doctor Rainer was just about to heal it, so I got to watch him use an eye dropper to drip something on it.”

“I n-never s-s-s-saw any gods,” Alan stuttered.

Isabelle launched into a description of the tiny flower god: which looked like just a flower, but larger, and with two large eyes.

“Bleeding,” she said. “They were bleeding rainbow goop… looked like this tiny little guy with smudged mascara. I wanted to hold it and give it a big tight hug. I’m really lucky Ivy told me not to touch it. I probably would have.”

Regina then told my story, which had everyone staring. Drat, alone amongst the group, laughed at me. He threw back his head and guffawed at the sky.

Honestly, I didn’t mind it. If you couldn’t laugh at yourself, who could you laugh at?

Amazingly, it was Isabelle who came to my defense. “Drat, that’s not funny.” I caught Cinzy leaning forward with a look of righteous fury on her beautiful face, but it was the half-Mexican half-Korean who stepped up first.

“Oh yeah, that’s rich,” he said. “I should definitely feel sympathy for the guy who touched a corrupted guy. This is the same guy I have to take orders from.”

“You should take this order,” Cinzy said, her tone icy. “Head to your tent and don’t make a peep, got it?”

Drat flashed her a nasty look before standing and turning his back on the fire. “Hundreds of miles out of the way, no clue where we are, and I’m with a bunch of girls swooning over this yutz. G’night, yutz. Enjoy your… harem.”

He vanished into the darkness, and we all stared into the crackling flames. The only sound was a zipper catching badly, followed by a quiet curse from Drat, and then a longer, slower zipper.

“The Rogue’s words might be harsh,” Chrysta said, “but that does not make them untrue. Touching the corrupted gods was an action

with deadly consequences."

"I know," I said. "How do you think I got this near death experience achievement?"

That did it. Everybody wanted to know about the achievement, and then the other ones I'd gotten. That set off several different conversations at once, about who'd gotten what achievements and why. Regina, Ivy and Isabelle all knew veterans who had passed out of the first batch of easy levels and into the next tier. That gave a pretty nice achievement.

I received one for assisting in the creation of a cure, Larelle put in. That was news to all of us. Tara hadn't shared her achievement if she'd gotten one for helping me craft the cure for the God of Footfalls.

"Fletcher got one for healing up a god, didn't you?" Cinzy asked, flashing that signature magical smile at me. She soon had Fairy Poppins buzzing around her head again. "What is the matter with you? Ugh, quit it!"

We'd all gotten the Nakamamon achievements, but Regina could boast that she'd just gotten the one for encountering 50 different individual types.

"It's got to be really easy to get, right? They're everywhere, and there are millions of different ones it seems," Isabelle said.

The discussion went on, round and round, until people started drifting away into the darkness to get some shuteye. Cinzy got chased over to her tent and cursed several times before going, "Fine! I'll go to sleep! Happy?" Eventually it was myself, Regina, Isabelle, and Chrysta. Ivy was on first watch.

"I'm headed to bed," I told them. It had been a long day.

"Night," Isabelle and Regina said simultaneously. They shared a look, burst out laughing, and both rose to head to their respective tents.

This is Christopher about to have a very rude awakening.

Chapter 38- Keeping It Hush Hush

Darkness was quick to swallow me up, but though it was brisk here, I had a thick fleecy hoodie keeping me warm. Soon enough I had my business done, teeth brushed, and I was getting snug in my tent. It would take a minute for my body heat to reflect off the tent's walls and turn the interior from chilly to comfy, so for now I stretched my back and legs. My butt, and especially my legs, were sore from all the sitting… all day's flight, then around the campfire.

Not two minutes later I heard the zipper rise up, and a shadowy form entered my tent. I knew my tent was pretty close to Ivy and Isabelle's, so I couldn't say anything. What I wanted to ask was 'seriously? Are you that horny that you have to have it every day? Yeesh.'

To be fair, exhausted as I was, I was still only twenty and a handful of months, so my hormones gave me a shot of adrenaline.

Well, if I was going to have a sexy encounter, I wasn't going to tell her no. So I did the only natural thing, and unzipped my sleeping bag. The blob of darkness that zipped my tent closed dove directly down there, rubbing her face over my legs and my crotch, running her hands everywhere. They soon found the waistband of my pajamas and my underwear, and had them off in a flash.

This felt a bit different.

"I don't want to play guess who," I muttered quietly.

In response, a finger pressed onto my lips, before she ducked down to begin kissing and licking, and sucking.

"Hey," I said, but she ignored me again, and got to work on getting me off.

Kisses rained down on my midsection, and my thighs, followed by my balls and then my rapidly hardening cock. Still her hands slid up

and down, frantically trying to touch every bit of me. Her hands massaged my thighs, down to my calves, then slid up my hips and into my pajama shirt, over my torso. Smooth and cool and insistent.

More kisses and licks came, all over. She hadn't bothered to get undressed, she hadn't come up and given me a kiss. The quickness of it left me mystified. Just a quickie?

Soon her lips closed over the head and started to bob up and down.

Entwined Ecstasy *(Special Ability) may be activated during this intimate act. Would you like to spend 1 Token of your choice?*

I definitely didn't want to spend a Token if the only thing happening here was some sloppy head. Although I would love some bonus pleasure, I wanted to use that Token to give my partner pleasure. Wow her. Keep her coming back for more.

Entwined Ecstasy then asked if I wanted to spend 2 Tokens to bring this partner into the fold. In the heat of passion I clicked **Yes**.

Well, that pushed Regina out of the running. I was having sex with my third girl inside of a month.

Amazed, I felt Cinzy's hot breath wash over my full length and girth.

"It's so big," the whisper was almost inaudible. "I can't fit it in my mouth."

Maybe Adaptable would work here and allow my newfound Girth to slim down a little bit to accommodate smaller mouths and blowjobs. I kind of hoped so.

"You should get that pussy over here," I murmured.

She ignored me yet again. I could only just make out the outline of a butt raised up and swaying back and forth while she continued to blow me.

I guessed my newfound girth messed up her ability to do the job properly. Still, the frenetic energy and the cock worship definitely felt amazing.

It crossed my mind that maybe, just maybe, Cinzy had decided to check out what was under the hood and take me for a test drive before even getting any alone time with me. Could it be her? It certainly felt different, but I'd enhanced myself. I was different. Her tent was further away.

The feel of lips and tongue sliding up and down my shaft erased most rational thought, all need to verify, and any lingering protests I might have had. Regina certainly didn't mind me doing other girls. Even if Larelle somehow squeezed her huge form in here in order to engulf my cock, who was I to stop her? So I decided to just enjoy it.

"Are you close?" she asked.

"Not… really."

"Um… hmm."

She sat back and spread her legs, hand moving furiously between them. It was too dark to see, but not to hear. Soon enough the sounds of wetness and arousal were audible, from my mystery partner gasping.

I needed this. She had gotten me all riled up and on the verge, then sat back. I was nothing more than a slave right now to the needs driving me.

She surprised me by turning and presenting her ass when I started moving. I grabbed it and pulled her toward me, horny and ready. I couldn't imagine anything more naughty and wrong than a girl with ass up and face down, begging to be used. In the dark like this, she was nothing more than a hole for my pleasure.

I fumbled around in the darkness for only a few seconds before my cock found what it wanted and began pushing inside. My partner's breath caught, and I decided now was the time to spend that Token to enhance the sensations. Since it was Cinzy, we were only going to get boosted a little, but that was fine.

I forced my enhanced cock further in, staring in wonder at the incredible tightness. It took a number of retreats and then slow, forceful strokes in order to get all of me in there. I didn't think she breathed the entire time I was opening her up. Finally though, I

heard a muffled groan that went on, and on, and on. She'd buried her face in the sleeping bag and bit down.

I was pretty sure she'd just climaxed. That was confirmed a moment later when the full body shuddering came over her.

I tapped into Stave Off to keep from exploding too early. This was delicious.

Why Cinzy had chosen now… Perhaps she felt bad about our interaction and wanted to make it up to me, or thought I wouldn't go out with her and wanted to take things into her own hands.

Slowly, I worked into a steady rhythm. I wished I could just slam down in deep, and fill the campsite with the sound of flesh smacking on flesh, but we needed to keep quiet and she knew that.

"Are you… close?" she whispered.

In response I snaked my hands up under her shirt and found she wasn't wearing a bra—excellent—and got my hands on her boobs while I humped away. Soon enough I had her stiff nipples between thumb and forefinger, twisting and pulling as Regina had instructed.

She went wild, immediately going into orgasm mode again. Against my sleeping bag she screamed a muffled scream, while she shook and shuddered.

Since this was my first time with this new partner of mine, I was going to do my best to rock her fracking world and drive her so crazy she couldn't help but come back.

Her incredible tightness and the mere thought of making her cum twice in less than ten minutes pushed me dangerously close, but I staved it off by shifting position. Pushing her legs forwards, she got down directly on her stomach. A muffled, questioning sound came out of her and went directly into the sleeping bag, but soon enough that disappeared with another coo of delight. I drilled down into the bed, squashing my midsection against her springy butt, and loving the feel of her tight channel beginning to get used to my size.

She had my sleeping bag clamped in her mouth, because I saw a flash of teeth in the darkness using my **Eagle Eyed** ability.

I ran one hand over her hair, getting it out of the way of her ear, which I nibbled on while fucking her for all I was worth. The hair was… curly. Cinzy's was long, straight, silky and bouncy.

"I'm close," I breathed, unable to stop my hips from giving me the pleasure my body wanted so desperately. "Where do you—"

I really wanted to just blast off directly inside. Tara had been giving me that forbidden fruit and Regina hadn't. Well guess what? Exploding while gripped tightly on all sides within your partner's pussy is the best feeling in the world, bar none. Grabbing your juice covered cock getting to finality by hand… less awesome.

All I wanted to do was cum, but I wanted to punish her for being weird about this. Cinzy didn't need to come in here in the dark. I would've had sex with her anywhere, any time. Same with Regina. So I did what any pleasure seeker would naturally do, and put a point into the Load Quality.

When I pulled up and out of her, flipped her over, and shoved my cock in her mouth, I came buckets. Far more than I ever have in my life, by far.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have entwined with Isabelle Lee Martinez. Your relationship status is* ***base acquaintances****. You have just joined in the flesh for the first time. Hopefully it won't be the last.*

Pleasure from intimate acts between ***base acquaintances*** *is boosted minimally.*

Wait, what?

***

Isabelle disappeared from my tent in a rush while I was busy puzzling over the first sentence from the game UI. She'd yanked the zipper up and collected her clothes without even putting them on, then got her naked butt out of there without a word. I couldn't tell if

she'd swallowed or was even now in the process of spitting. Aside from where she'd bitten on my sleeping bag to muffle her moans and groans, I couldn't find any trace of my load in the tent.

"What the f…" I trailed off, looking at the tent wall in the darkness.

I was interrupted by the next UI message that arrived, pertaining to bringing her into the fold.

***Entwined Ecstasy**: You have brought Isabelle Lee Martinez into the fold. She has gained the ability **Herb Lore**. You have gained the ability **Stalwart** from entwining with Isabelle Lee Martinez. Entwine more deeply with Isabelle to unlock further abilities.*

Next, came a write up for my new ability.

Stalwart

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

You come from sturdier stuff. Whenever you are forced to make a contested social check, you are considered to have the skill for such a check at rank 7. If you are in physical danger, you are considered to have the skill at rank 3 instead.

I spent the next few minutes pondering why Isabelle had come to my tent. She had just cheated on her girlfriend, if they were indeed a couple. I had assumed based on what Ivy said that she and Isabelle were together. They certainly went everywhere together. Neither of them had expressed any interest in Drat, Alan, Trent or I, so far as I could tell. Not that they were obligated to do that. They could be here to do a job and not want to get stuffed. They could have boyfriends back on earth, though I doubted that was the case. I didn't think Dick Johnson hired people who were in committed long term relationships, only to be off planet for months at a time.

Then again, girls used the word 'girlfriend' to mean just a friend who's a girl. So perhaps they were just really good friends? No… I

had specifically heard Ivy say ‘she’s my girlf…’ stop herself, and then say ‘she’s my friend.’ People didn’t do that kind of thing when they were just friends.

Unless I’d heard them wrong?

I couldn’t be sure what was going on here. Fact: Isabelle had come in here, blown me, and then when she couldn’t get me to orgasm, offered up her pussy.

Supposition: she just wanted… to test out a guy? See what dick was like?

Fact: Ivy was on watch.

Supposition: this gave Isabelle a short window of opportunity to test me out without Ivy knowing about it?

Fact: I’d gotten a special ability from Isabelle, so I wasn’t imagining things.

Supposition: nah, enough guesswork. I’d talk with her about it and find out what the hell was going on. My only ‘girlfriend’ and I back in high school hadn’t had good communication, which had led to me thinking she was cheating. We hadn’t been clear on whether we were a couple, so… she’d gone and gotten herself a boyfriend who asked her to be his girlfriend. Which obviously hurt, partly because it was my fault. I wasn’t about to let that kind of shit happen again. I had to know.

***

I’d reached Pleasure Seeker level 9 after my curious encounter with my third sexual partner in the Divinity Rescue Corps.

Level 9: +1 Ability upgrade

I had a look over my character sheet to test a theory. Last time I had an Ability upgrade I hadn’t considered upgrading my god-gifted

abilities, or the abilities I'd gained from Regina, Tara, and now Isabelle.

"Seriously, Isabelle! What the frack?" I muttered.

Christopher Fletcher
Healer - Trainee 11
Pleasure Seeker - Novice 9

attributes:
Affinity 5 (5/5)
Durability 5 (5/5)
Ingenuity 6 (6/6)
Likability 5 (5/5)
Physicality 5 (5/5)
Free Tokens: 6/6
Unspent attributes points: 0

Healer Skills:
Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)
Treatment (potions 3, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)
Develop cure (swarm 3)
Develop cure (small 3)
Develop cure (unique 7)
Administer Cure 7
Pleasure Seeker Qualities:
Girth 1
Stave Off 1
Load 1
Other Skills:
Identify 1
Hiking 2

All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 4

Special Abilities:
Hard At Work II (Uncommon, Passive)
Wild Lore II (Uncommon, Active)
Eagle Eyed II *(Common, Passive)*
Stalwart (Common, Passive)

Healer Special Abilities:
Healer's Endurance (Common, Active)
Healer's Resistance (Uncommon, Active)

Pleasure Seeker Special Abilities:
Blissense (Rare, Active)

Divine Gifts:
Floral Knowledge (Rare, Passive)
Pleasure's Bounty (secondary class)
Entwined Ecstasy (Legendary, active)

It turned out I could indeed boost my Special abilities from sex. I could not, however, boost my Divine Gifts. So **Entwined Ecstasy II** was out, along with **Floral Knowledge II**. Not a deal breaker. I still had a lot to work with.

I checked on **Blissense** first, and wasn't disappointed with what I found. The second level of **Blissense** would boost all of my attributes by 1 when I was interacting with a partner who I'd already scoped out for their deepest desires and kinks and such. This would not grant me temporary Tokens to use on them, though. It seemed like a really great boost, giving me 6 attribute boosts for spending a

Token. Still, I had to touch the subject first to spend the Token, and I wasn't yet used to just touching people willy nilly.

Come to think of it, Cinzy had touched me a bunch of times and I hadn't thought to spend the Token. The readout made it a little unclear if I had to touch the subject, or whether I could just use it even if I hadn't initiated the touch. It was another avenue of research I needed to do.

"Okay, let's see here… Hard at Work III," I muttered to myself.

Level 3 lowered the difficulty of all skill checks for my class by 1. Pretty good, but not astonishing. And also, I had a feeling the specific language meant that Pleasure Seeker Qualities wouldn't be affected… they weren't skill checks.

"Wild Lore III," I said, then was frustrated to see a message saying that this ability would naturally level up through prolonged contact and increasing my relationship with Regina Hampstead. If I just had more fun with her, I would level it up naturally. The same went for **Eagle-Eyed** and **Stalwart**. I considered it with the last, though, because I had this feeling I wouldn't be seeing much of Isabelle in the future. She had Ivy and the more I thought about it, the more it seemed like she was just satisfying a passing fancy.

Healer's Endurance and **Healer's Resistance** were the last two. The former provided a new way to spend Durability Tokens: to gain +40% additional Hit Points for the remainder of the day. That was a lot. However, if I went below zero HP when I ran out, I would lapse into a coma and require healing within one day. After that one day without medical attention I would die.

"Awesome," I muttered. It was not awesome.

The latter now allowed me to resist damage and long term damage sources from Nakamamon or Gods. The upgraded version gave that same resistance from all sources, which was great. That would include people… or my own cure making failure sources. The second tier ability would allow me to spend a Token after taking damage from a source in order to permanently gain some of that resistance.

I went with that.

Healer's Resistance II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

I- You may spend a Durability Token to resist damage from any source. Long term effects are reduced by 75%. Onsets of all diseases, venoms, poisons, or other afflictions are tripled, as are intervals. Lasts one day.

You may spend an Ingenuity Token to gift this ability to a willing target for one day.

II- You may spend a Durability Token after taking damage from any source. You gain a percentage of Resistance to that source permanently.

This is Christopher progressing, slowly but surely.

Chapter 39- Going Down That Rabbit Hole

Tara left us in the breeze, but what a breeze it was.

I exited my tent to find a glorious sunrise, delighted with the morning chill and the dew of many colors. Sun-kissed, I stared up at huge clouds speeding overhead and promising rain, and relaxed. For the moment I watched the leaves on the trees glitter back to front, back to front again. Flashing intermittently in the cool wind. The air smelled fresh, clear, with a hint of sweetness. I drank it in. The game store, the hospital where my mother sat, my untidy house and Sarah's place couldn't compare to this. Nothing could compare to this.

I would address the Isabelle in the room today, discover just where the hell we were and how far we would need to travel to get back to Glumpdumpkin, how long that would take, and whether Tara would even be able to find us on her return.

We broke camp and traveled in the direction Regina had scouted and discussed with Tara. It wasn't an easy climb, and more than once I had to stop and massage the pain out of my legs, but the

forest opened out into a broad grassy slope that gave way to sheer cliffs.

I caught Isabelle's eye, but she couldn't maintain eye contact, and quickly looked away. Cinzy's behavior was largely unchanged, however: she approached after we'd struck camp and gotten everything tied back onto Muppin or on our backs, made small talk, and kept touching me. It wasn't long before Fairy Poppins appeared to play chaperone, sitting on her shoulder nearest me and reminding Cinzy of what she was doing again and again.

Isabelle and Ivy remained close throughout the morning, up until it became clear that we weren't going to be heading to Glumpdumpkin after all.

When we crested the ridge and it leveled out, a huge vista appeared before us. The world was mostly green, but not the vast majority. Trees apparently decided what color they wanted to be, and then just were that. The grasses, too, slowly rippled out with different colors as the wind swept over them. And, not far off, sat a clump of buildings on stilts above a river delta. Copses of trees gave way to scattered singular trees, then to plain old grasslands, then a marsh, which stretched on for ages. This is where the buildings stood, on a series of large platforms connected by those V-shaped rope

bridges I'd seen at outdoor obstacle courses, or sturdier rope and log bridges. The central buildings connected to outer buildings by the thickest and nicest types of bridge yet.

As for the buildings, they were largely wood and bamboo-like constructions, with walls that could fold upward into overhanging roofs, or be folded aside like accordions.

"Would you look at that," Cinzy breathed.

"It's gorgeous," Trent said. Ivy and Isabelle both nodded, and even Drat was there with an awed look. For once, I noted a creature like a centipede and a weasel wrapped over his whole body, from hip to shoulder. It was furry, a good four feet long, and gripped onto Drat by over a dozen clawed little legs.

Regina explained. "I found it before breakfast. I haven't been down there, but I'll go on ahead and scout below—"

"That's not necessary," I said. I'd noticed Larelle, Ivy and Isabelle listening with deepening looks of dismay. They didn't want Regina so far away, where they couldn't get to her to protect her if need be. "We have our first destination. We'll meet the natives, give Cinzy a chance to earn her way here, take a break for a couple of days, and if we can get the location and distance to Glumpdumpkin…" I stopped as Cinzy and several others all snickered. "…

we'll consider waiting for Tara to rejoin us, or leave word for her and press on."

Everyone, predictably, turned to Trent.

"No," I said. "Nope. We are not repeatedly exhausting our Sorcerer again just because we don't want to go the long way."

"B-but… that's his job," Cinzy complained.

"Are you, Cinzia the Bard, complaining that someone's not doing what he was brought on board to do?" Ivy asked, heavy on the sarcasm.

"Well, I, I haven't," she spluttered. "I simply haven't been given the chance to shine in my designated role!"

Ivy rolled her eyes.

"It's not as though we've been under constant attack and—" The words died in Cinzy's throat at the fierce look on Ivy's face. The realization must have struck that Ivy had helped out a goodly amount. "Fair enough. You've worked hard with many camp duties."

"That's correct," Ivy said imperiously. "Now hang onto your lute. We'll figure out the best way down the cliffs and to that village. We'll let you know if it involves any singing."

"Anyway," I said, forestalling the spat before it could turn into anything worse. Was Ivy being salty

because she was upset with her girlfriend? Did she know about us? I decided probably not. Ivy was the type of person who would address the problem head on, and challenge me to a fight, before cutting my manhood off when she inevitably won.

On the other hand, I was the leader of this expedition, charged by our employers, and she knew that kind of conduct would get her fired faster than you could say Saxwhacket. So the possibility of Isabelle confessing her indiscretion was still theoretically on the table. Ugh.

"If only Tara hadn't been forced to head back to the castle to report and resupply," Isabelle said. She, like most of the others, didn't know about the medicine getting crushed by Trent's little lunch levitation stunt.

"And we'll definitely end up needing Trent to do his job again," I said, trying my best to kill the brewing fight and the vague possibility that Ivy was going to snap me like a twig. "At which point he will. But I doubt we'd make it down more than twenty or thirty feet at a time in between waiting for him to get his mana back."

"Actually," Trent said. "I think there's a tunnel system below us."

Trent knew this, of course, because he had himself a tunneling Nakamamon who traveled through dirt

and sand as easily as we walked on land, and who traveled through rock like we could swim. Garnet was only a sentient reddish crystal the size of a volleyball or so, but he was somehow quite useful. I squashed my pang of jealousy and nodded to him.

"Are we close? Can you get us in easily enough?"

He grinned and radiated power for a moment, before slowly sliding down into the ground. He disappeared from view in a matter of seconds, leaving behind the rich scent of minerals and wet earth.

Everyone looked to me. It was still very odd, having people listen to me and look to me to make the decisions. I wasn't going to get used to it quickly, but I guess my job as peacemaker between my parents and my sister had paid off. I had the patience, the observational skills, and the will to stop the bullshit before it got out of hand.

The others went to peer into the hole Trent had just created. I followed suit, and saw Trent waving at us from down below, smiling. Then a series of handholds like a climbing wall pushed out of the circular shaft he had just created. Quite girthy, that shaft.

I glanced to Isabelle, but she was studiously not looking at me.

"I guess we follow him?" I said.

“What do we do about Muppin?” Trent asked, climbing back up. “There’s no way he’ll be able to fit down here.”

“I’ll take him,” Regina said. “Tweedle Dee doesn’t like being underground either. It’s bad for his flowers.”

I went to ask if she was sure, but she assured me yes, there was no problem for her to get down the mountain. She could do it much, much faster than anyone else (save Tara), and she could guide the big rock beast down with her. They would meet us there.

This wasn’t ideal. I wanted to keep my sexy Ranger close at hand, but I realized I was thinking like a needy little pansy. She had repeatedly proven that she would come back to me, and she was a capable Ranger who had two different Nakamamon by her side, so nothing bad was going to happen to her.

“I shall accompany them,” Chrysta said, and floated after Regina, who had already taken off to the right and down the slope.

“Perfect,” I said.

***

Luckily for everyone except Larelle, the tunnels down here didn’t squeeze down to force us to crawl

on our bellies. Anywhere the ceiling dipped too low, Trent would smooth it out with a bit of concentration and the wave of his hand. Larelle didn't appear to be safe from this kindness, and I figured she had to bend low the whole time.

Not so. Larelle simply shrank down by a good foot, until she was slightly shorter than Drat and I. All of us stopped and stared at her in the dim light, but she acted as though nothing was weird or different. She generally enjoyed just being 8 feet tall, I guess.

The tunnels weren't absolutely, hauntingly dark either. Many of the the walls were littered with glowing slime molds, and some of that glow glinted off veins of crystals. Soon though, Alan had us covered with a spell that created light at the end of his staff.

I was getting used to feeling Trent expend mana out into the air, where it would attach itself to the stone and alter its shape. It was much like the alterations that were slowly happening to all of us, except Larelle and Chrysta since they were natives. When Trent did it, it was done with intent. The mana helped convince the stone to be a different shape, essentially. Just as my mana helped convince the herbs and plants and oils to become a vehicle for healing.

Throughout the next couple of hours, Isabelle remained plastered to Ivy's side. It was clear to me she was either regretting her decision last night, and was probably afraid I would out her. Little did she know I was way more about group cohesion than that, and had zero inclination to ruin what she had going on with Ivy.

Now that I was paying attention (and didn't have to duck out of the way of stalactites) I noted Ivy and Isabelle periodically holding hands. It was never for long, usually just a hand squeeze. Ivy, though, was much more touchy feely. The tattooed girl with the brush cut always seemed to be touching Isabelle: brushing her shoulder, grabbing her elbow, and several times that I saw, punching her butt.

***

The cavern was too much for us to handle in one quick push. Trent repeatedly tried to find a quick way out closer to the surface of the marsh, but wasn't having any luck. Eventually we stopped for lunch, and I enacted my plan.

I first took Cinzy aside, and reiterated that we would be working closely in whatever village to figure everything out. She nodded along, confused

but cheerful. Fairy Poppins eventually zipped out of Cinzy's bag and started buzzing around between us.

"That's weird, right?" I asked.

"So weird," she said. "I'm going to have to try and talk with her."

Afterwards, I had a brief and slightly off-putting conversation with Larelle about her role as Guardian leader. She assured me that all was well. She enjoyed the work, and although she was slightly uncomfortable giving humans orders, she was getting used to it. After all, we seemed more like Nakamamon every day. In appearance at least. We were still very different culturally. I thanked her and sent her back to the lunch spot.

Next, I had a quick chat with Trent about the awesome job he was doing, and how I was glad he took the job of Sorcerer seriously. He was relieved to have started gaining back the trust of the others, though Ivy was still on his ass all the time for hurting Isabelle. I told him I'd take it easy on the work I asked him to do.

"Those two are definitely a couple," he said in a conspiratorial tone.

"Those two might have enhanced hearing abilities," I reminded him, and he blanched.

Afterwards, it was time to get the final portion of my plan underway. I returned to the main area

where everyone was relaxing, eating, and chatting, and called Isabelle over. She looked mortified for a second, before schooling her expression and following me to the secluded cavern room I'd selected.

"I'm really sorry!" she blurted.

"Why? I had a great time, and I thought you did too. But I have a raft of questions to get through, and not a lot of time."

Several moments of mystified staring commenced, during which I totally undermined her expectations. Her eyes flicked back and forth at different possibilities that hadn't happened, questions she was preparing to answer, and questions she had for me she might or might not be able to ask.

"I'm guessing you thought I wouldn't know it was you," I said.

She pursed her lips pensively and nodded, still not looking at me.

"And you didn't know that I have sex powers."

She gave a rueful laugh, a single bark: Ha! "Definitely not."

"So as soon as you got my Herb Lore power, you knew that something was up. You probably figured that I also got something out of the exchange of bodily fluids. You were right. The UI told me it was you."

She nodded absently, studying the floor.

"I'm not going to betray your secret," I said.

But the silence wasn't done being incredibly awkward. Isabelle finally looked up, after a good few moments. "But?" she asked.

"But what?"

"This is the part where you blackmail me, right?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You say 'I'm not going to betray your secret, but I want something in return' and I gasp…" Here she gasped, eyes wide. "…and I ask you what you want, and you say 'You know what I want' and take my hand, and put it on your, your thing."

I squinted at her in confusion. "I'm… not going to do that." It seemed, from her weird fantasy, that she maybe *wanted* to be blackmailed? That was pretty odd. "We don't have to call it a thing, either. It's… actually let's not talk about my penis at all."

She laughed, more comfortably this time. This was a good sign and I was pleased at the softening up. She'd started off so tense.

"I just need to know what happened last night… more the why than the what. I was there for the what."

"It was some pretty intense what," she said, rolling her eyes.

“Sorry,” I told her. “I thought you were someone else.”

Her eyes widened. “You’ve been doing… one of the others? Is it Cinzy? Never mind, don’t tell me, I don’t want to know.”

The smile came easier now. “Good. Because not only am I not going to tell you if I’ve been fooling around with anyone else, I’m also not going to tell you who it was or wasn’t. We’re focused on you. So, the why. Why’d you… last night?”

“There’s a lot,” she said. “You don’t… Ivy and I, she keeps saying she’s not gay. She had a boyfriend, and she likes, um, penis.”

“Okayyyyy,” I said, grinning.

“And anyway, there’s… it drives me nuts that she keeps talking about it. I never had a guy. I mean I did and he was an absolute piece of… deep cleansing breath Isabelle. I swore off guys. Until last night.”

I nodded, and gave her time to keep moving on. In the meantime I studied the cotton candy coloration of her skin: the soft powder blue with tiny swirling lines of silvery white next to patches of pink shot through with the same lines. She already looked a lot like a Nakamamon. She would be a fairy aspect. Her hair had gone hot pink as well in the last twenty-four hours.

“So over the past, you know, month or two, we’ve been, uh… when we get intimate she’s been complaining about, uh… penis.”

I probably shouldn’t have chuckled, but couldn’t help myself. “All right.”

“So I went to your tent because you’re… because there are only four guys and you seemed the best.”

“I appreciate the ringing endorsement. I’m happy to be the least worst option.”

She smiled an embarrassed smile and scratched the back of her neck sheepishly. “I guess, there’s… she and I have to do some talking.”

“Let me guess: you like each other, but she keeps complaining about what you don’t have. Anatomically speaking.”

Another nod.

“Well, I would offer myself up to play with in times when you two are feeling like you need a very realistic toy and scissoring just isn’t cutting it, but—”

“Seriously?” she blurted, loudly.

“Look,” I told her. “There are toys. You guys have used toys, right?”

Her smile turned dark. “Vibes don’t work here.”

“Oh right.” Magic killed electronics.

“And I wasn’t thinking I was going to need a strap on when I got here,” she said. “I didn’t pack

anything. Also plastic doesn't survive well"

"Ah."

She went bright red at the mention of the strap on, but plowed on. "You can't just get sex toys in through the portal easily, Fletcher. And there is absolutely no way I'm going to go around asking people if they know where to get one, or approach someone to craft one. No way. I kept thinking we should ask Regina to get some when she goes through, but we never did, and then she joined your team, and…" She shrugged. No more Regina being guide, no more possibility of smuggling in whatever sex toys they wanted to use.

"I really like her, and she really likes me," Isabelle said. "She's really romantic. She paints and draws and stuff. She painted me naked. Oh my God I shouldn't have told you that. Why am I always doing that?"

I chuckled. "A little oversharing is fine. I'll keep your secret."

"But she, I think she needs something more in the bedroom, and I can't give it to her. Meanwhile she's been really good to me, she does this thing with her tongue… oh my God I have to stop talking."

Again the easy laughter came again. I wasn't making fun of her and she knew that, thankfully. "Well, we can figure something out," I said.

Isabelle sat bolt upright and almost clocked head on the low cavern ceiling. “It’s not important. We have our jobs to do. I’m a Guardian, you’re a Healer.”

“Relationship health and mental health are absolutely important,” I said. “Maybe a little less important than bodily safety, but that’s neither here nor there. Either we figure out a crafting situation in town, or…” I trailed off, not sure if I wanted to offer up my services again. It wasn’t like I would just be used as a dildo by two girls. I’d be me, naked, in the room with one professed lesbian and her bisexual girlfriend. And while that was every man’s dream (one I’d amazingly lived out already) I didn’t know how Ivy would handle the situation.

“Either we figure out a crafting situation,” she repeated, “or… what?”

“Or, um, I can offer up my, um, services. If that’s something you two want.”

She stared at me, and after a time a big smile spread across her face.

This is Christopher possibly getting a two for one deal?

Chapter 40- A Revealing Problem

After some hours bumbling through in the dark and huddling around Alan so nobody tripped or banged their heads, it felt like we'd descended quite a long ways. We emerged from the tunnels beneath the cliff with a slight problem. I knew this because Trent announced it.

"We have a slight problem," he said.

"What's that?" Isabelle asked.

"We are very close to the outside of the cliff face, which is good, because we can get out of here."

"That doesn't sound like a problem," Isabelle said.

"Close to the outside is good," Ivy said, quite unnecessarily.

"I'd like to be outside again," Cinzy said. "Feel like I'm breathing recycled air."

"I-I-I'm running out of m-m-mana for l-l-l-light s-s-s… s-s… s-spells," Alan said, and got a reassuring pat on the shoulder from almost everybody.

"Has anyone seen Drat?" Ivy asked.

No one had. However, we were all focused on Trent.

"The elevation is the problem. We're too low. If I open up the tunnel we might all get a bit soggy. Or… maybe, uh… drown."

"Drowning is bad," Isabelle added, then ducked when Ivy clipped her on the back of the head. "Hey!"

"Yes, Isabelle, drowning is bad," Ivy said with a roll of the eyes.

He opened up a tiny hole at waist level, and water started spraying into the tunnel, so he quickly sealed it back up.

"I didn't think I'd have to reiterate this, but drowning is bad," Ivy said. Isabelle cuffed her upside the back of her head, and both of

them had a laugh.

"I have to agree," Drat said from beside me, making me jump. "Is there any way we can go up another level and break out of here?"

Trent looked at me desperately. "It would take another couple of hours for me to tunnel that far. Here we're just a couple of inches of rock away, and it's structurally sound."

"Let's try squeezing through a smaller hole up a few feet," I suggested.

"The marsh is right outside, and we don't have a raft. I guess if we all crawl out a smaller opening… I can engineer a platform."

"We are taking this easy," I said, "and not taxing your powers to the limits, right?"

He nodded, frowning. I could see he wanted to do the impossible, but the word existed for a reason. He couldn't please everyone.

"I c-can g-g-give us w-w-w-w…" Alan started, but faltered when everyone looked at him. The shyness overcame his ability to speak.

"Go on, buddy," Cinzy told him in a soothing tone, and gave him a pat on the back. I felt a hint of mana flowing out of her, and Alan sucked in a deep breath before continuing.

"I have a w-w-water… breathing. A s-s-spell."

"You can give it to all of us?" I asked.

He nodded.

"And it works. You've cast it before."

"Y-y-y—"

"Well then," I announced. "Prepare to get wet, and probably dirty."

"Wait a second," Ivy and Cinzy said as one, then glared at one another.

I didn't. Alan was in the middle of casting, and I called out, "Trent, the floor is yours. Or I guess the wall is yours."

There was no second. A hole opened up in the wall and a torrent of water began rushing in. Larelle dashed in and was gone a second

later. The rest of us followed.

As it turned out, we didn't really need the water breathing spell from Alan. It wasn't a close thing, though it was a bit uncomfortable having our gear with us. The majority of the marsh was shallow enough that we could walk, though the muddy bottom really wanted to suck our boots off.

Larelle helped us out, since the water tried for a little while to suck us back in through the hole. She had braced against the cliff's edge and pulled us up and out, then against the wall, making sure our heads were above water.

Soon enough though the water level evened out, as the short hall filled with water and the force of water entering stopped being a problem. One by one we popped out of the hole. Cinzy came bobbing up coughing and spluttering, hair plastered to her forehead and looking miserable. Ivy looked just as uncomfortable with this situation, but Larelle shoved her toward us and against the cliff wall.

The sun felt incredible once we exited. After having been in the cave for nearly six hours, both the air and sunlight were welcome changes. Although the marsh wasn't cold, it was spongy and sticky, and soon I had grainy mud oozing into my boots. I had to fight to keep them on.

We all took turns congratulating first Alan, and then Trent. Both of them really needed the confidence boost. Alan peered around, all smiles, perhaps looking for the prank or the KICK ME sign on his back, and only grinned brighter when there wasn't one. Trent was just as pleased his skills had a positive impact yet again.

"Aw, you're doing great too," I told Ivy and Isabelle. The former had a dark look, and the latter almost screamed when I came up behind them. "We need pack mules and day laborers even more than we need a water breathing spell."

Ivy chuckled. "Thanks."

"Yeah," Isabelle said, rolling her eyes. "Appreciate being a pack mule and day laborer."

"I mean Chrysta is the real queen of wood chopping, but you two are amazing as well. In different ways. Not firewood."

Ivy flicked me on the forehead. "You almost had a brownie point there, Fletcher."

"Guardians!" I called. "Guardians I've been attacked."

The way Cinzy and Ivy complained, you'd think they had just survived being shipwrecked in a category five hurricane. Trent, Isabelle, Alan and I were laughing at the horrible misery of their lives, and at one point I locked eyes with Isabelle, getting a furious blush in return.

Neither could I keep my eyes off her or Cinzy. With their clothes clinging to their bodies like that, it was easy to see their incredible figures. Isabelle wasn't wearing a bra, and her white t-shirt showed exactly how big and dark her nipples were, which in both cases was very. Cinzy wasn't much better off. Although she wasn't as busty as Isabelle, she had worn an even tighter pink tank top, and it was plastered to her body like it was painted on.

We trudged forward, and were soon met by shallow boats. The boats were full of ivory white humanoid natives, complete with mint green accents. Each was unique: some had fully green arms while others had stripes running up the backs of their arms. Some had the same coloration on their faces. All of them had thin, translucent webbing between their fingers and toes, and small fish fins protruding from their upper arms, calves, their backs and some of them had fin-like sails running up the center of their heads, and we would learn that they had tails ending in a tail fin. Their heads weren't exactly humanoid, missing noses and ears and hair, and instead having finny things.

They were all super naked.

"Uhh…" Alan said in confusion from behind me.

The natives were here to receive us.

"Huh," I said. "Cinzy, I hope you're—"

I broke off when I noted that not only was Regina seated with them in one of the boats, but she'd also gone sans clothing. Her

freckles were on full display, glittering and even more pronounced than before. In fact, I would come to find out that each glitter freckle was now surrounded by what looked like flower petals, tiny colorful areas in different floral patterns: jagged ends of lanceleaf flowers, the round multitude of peony petals, the pointed multitudes of sunflowers, or the star-shaped autumn lily were just a few of the ones I counted. Tweedle Dee sat beside her, and yipped in welcome when I saw her.

Beside Regina hovered Chrysta. She, also, appeared to be a nude woman now. Where before she'd only seem to have a half body, now she had the hints of transparent legs ending around the knee. Where before she'd had a sort of formless white cloak, now she had a slim, snow white body with a few spots of ice blue. She was staring a challenge directly at me.

I decided it was probably wise to look away.

***

The clothing situation got decidedly weirder when Cinzy stopped complaining, strode forward, opened her mouth to begin speaking her prepared greeting. She got exactly three steps closer before all her clothes vanished as well.

The vanishing was accompanied by a loud whoosh of sound and rushing air, blowing Cinzy's ponytail up for several long seconds. Almost immediately, a flash of blue white energy announced that her clothes had just dissipated into vapor. The tiny motes of mana flew up into the sky to join the rest of the shimmering light show that was all around us.

Then she was stark naked. She had unslung her large backpack, but the smaller hip bag containing Fairy Poppins vanished and the fairy peered around in confusion.

She noticed immediately, because she gave a loud, "Eek!" and peered down into the hip-deep water. "My boots! Oh my gods, you guys, it feels so yucky!"

Never mind that her butt crack was right in front of me just at the surface, or that her tramp stamp tribal tattoo on her lower back was on display. Never mind that her boobs were out, you guys, her feet felt gross.

Apparently we were also supposed to not mind that Regina and Chrysta had made first contact, without any social skills between them, before our 'diplomacy expert' currently freaking out about icky bugs and gooshy mud.

I felt like laughing and screaming at the same time. This was a blunder. It was a catastrophe. It was boner-inducing also, and thankfully I had my own clothes on.

Thankfully Cinzy still had her large hiking pack on, and the smaller bag she usually kept at one hip. This contained Fairy Poppins, and would've been dragging in the water, except she had it held to her chest.

"Cinzy," I said, and tried to lace the word with as much warning as I possibly could.

She cast a glance back at me, and I nodded toward the nude natives. Maybe they just had a thing about clothes and they could enforce it magically. She needed to get her shit together.

"I hope you'll forgive me for my outburst," she said, a complete one eighty in tone, although she was still bobbing up and down a tiny amount, probably from discomfort. "I was greatly surprised that… all my clothes suddenly vanished. I'm Cinzia, and this is Fletcher, leader of our expedition, and I hope it will be possible for us to talk about assisting your village in any way you neeEEEEEEE something crawled on me!" She literally jumped, splashing me and her stuff.

"Could we talk in your village?" I asked.

The nearest being in the boat with Regina smiled just slightly, face crinkling in delight as Cinzy tried to keep both feet off the marsh's mucky bottom. Several others were snickering.

In short order several boats were poled up toward us, and the natives helped us aboard. I'd only done a couple of canoe trips with

my folks, and the sudden swaying of the little boat was extremely unsettling. I lay flat on the wide-bottomed craft for some time, even as Alan came aboard and nudged me out of the way. Phooey on that. The most I could do was scootch over a bit and let him get seated.

"Thank you so much," I breathed.

A number of other light shows followed whooshes and the loud noises. It hadn't been a cold day, but there's an undeniable difference when the daytime temperature is hitting you all over. I shivered and looked down to find myself just as naked as Cinzy.

We were all naked.

"I'm going to go ahead and say this has godly influence written all over it," I said.

"No shirt, Sherlock," Regina said, grinning. Then she tore her eyes away from between my legs and blushed fiercely.

"This is, by the way, not cool at all," Drat grumbled. He was on his hands and knees, naked butt thrust out, picking things up from the bottom of the boat. Some of them were those coins I'd seen when I spent Tokens. I immediately wondered where he'd gotten those, and how he could just have them out in the open.

There wasn't time to question it. I didn't want to have anything now except for a unified front. We had discussed this beforehand. Cinzia would do the talking, she would confer with me, and then all anybody else needed to do was nod along. If they were asked questions or challenged on anything, it was Cinzy's job to help smooth things out. They were only really encouraged to answer questions about themselves, their life stories, or the class they had, since neither Cinzy nor I were experts in what they were experts in.

"What is the name of your village?" I asked.

The nearest native turned, and I noted she was very female. She had immaculate proportions, and the minty green stripe ran up her legs, flanked her tummy, and accentuated her breasts before running out over her arms like full sleeves. The interior was fully

white, save for her nipples, which were a slightly darker version of that minty color.

"You humans rather enjoy your names. This was just called the Cliff's Marsh Village before you came. We have chosen from the list of names, and decided on Slinktickle."

I chewed on my tongue and the inside of my cheek, and tried like hell to force the laughter down. This required me to massage my cheeks and nod sagely, which probably looked as silly as it felt. Yes, yes, of course, Slinktickle. Perfectly normal name. Yes of course.

"May I know what sort of Nakamamon you are?" I asked.

"We are Marshins," she said.

"Of course you are," Drat said from the next boat over, his deadpan making it even harder to force the laughter away. Somehow I was able to manage it. Ivy and Isabelle snorted, then masked their laughter with coughing. Alan was busy repeating something to himself under his breath as a way to stop himself from laughing.

"Do you have leaders?" Cinzy was asking. "We ought to talk to them if at all possible.

It turned out the Marshins had a few village elders who presented what they thought were best options for the people, and the people voted. I wasn't sure how this went, but it sounded like a great way to get things done.

Everyone, big and small, male and female, was in the nude here. Every single one of the Marshins appeared to be 'mature,' meaning probably capable of reproducing sexually. I say 'appeared to be,' because for one they were hairless, and for two they were all basically the same size. Some difference in body and shape, and most importantly patterning made each of them unique, but none of them were the size of children.

There were hundreds of them, all nude, and all mostly androgynous. If you were a Marshin, you either had large bare breasts, or you didn't. None of them had genitalia that I could make out, but I was mainly focused on literally anything else. I was

completely nude, after all. If there was one thing I did not want to do here, it was get an erection.

The buildings we'd seen from the clifftop were much larger than I thought, and the platforms surrounding them were positively enormous. They had a market square on one of them, with dozens of the creatures peddling handicrafts, ceramics, children's toys, and all manner of foods I'd never seen before. The Marshins were paying with thick jade beads on wires.

"Those probably doubled as bracelets and necklaces and earrings," I told the girls.

"Huh?" Isabelle asked. She was preoccupied with covering herself with her hands. "Why don't they put them on then? It would be easier—"

"They would be clothing then, and probably disappear just like all the rest of the clothes," Ivy said. "Fletcher, what do you think hap… don't look at me!" She brought up her hands to cover her nipples and the turquoise tuft of hair between her legs. "Just answer my question."

"Sorry."

"It's fine. What do you think happened to all the clothes? Gone for good? And what caused it?"

"Oh, this is exactly like the footsteps thing," I said. "It's bound to be a god situation."

This is Christopher's stomach going butterfly mode.

Chapter 41- Anything You Need

Fortunately, all the cargo strapped to Muppin didn't suffer the same fate as Cinzy's hip bag. Since the huge rock echidna was loaded up with most of our supplies, it would've been a disaster to lose all the dried herbs, chopped roots, flowers, oils, and other solvents for all my Healer needs. The rest of it, including a lot of the tents and cookware, food and such, we could rely on the Marshins from Slinktickle.

"What do you think of Slinktickle?" the Marshin with me asked. This one was definitely a female, lithe and sinuous and not at all human. I had to keep my eyes on the village. No erections, I told myself.

Luckily, or unluckily perhaps, the name of the village snapped me out of whatever horny thoughts I might otherwise have.

"It is a delight," I told her. "You have mountains, marshland, fields and forest. I don't know what else I could ask for."

She seemed very pleased by this, and smiled. "I am Vellenia."

"What a lovely name. Vellenia. I have several names, but my friends call me Fletcher," I said.

"Does that make us friends?" the beautiful creature asked.

I sure hoped so. "I hope we will grow to be friends, yes," I said.

"For now, while we are not yet friends, what shall I call you instead?" she asked.

"Uhh…" I had hoped she would simply call me Fletcher, and I blushed. Now I had boxed myself into a stupid corner here, all because I was walking around nude in public, and flustered to be talking to one gorgeous nude figure while dozens of other gorgeous nude figures strolled nearby as though nothing was wrong. "Chris, or Christopher will be perfect."

“Chrisor Christopher, we are well met,” Vellenia said. “I will be your guide here.”

More introductions were made, and I quickly lost track of all the names. We passed several more large buildings made of wood, while we walked along the large decking they’d constructed around them, and then on the bridges as well. This was more complicated with our bags unable to go on our backs.

“We have had to make do with some modifications to our lives since clothing is no longer an option,” Vellenia told us. “Those baskets used to go on backs, but we must carry them in the boats now. We didn’t use the boats, before, either, but we need a series of mobile platforms on which to store food and materials. Since we cannot wear containers…” She shrugged.

Cinzy moved quickly from her place in the procession and grabbed my hand. “This situation with the disappearing clothes,” she said. “I don’t mean to be intrusive, but our expedition leader here is a Healer, so we are at your disposal if you need help in such a matter.”

The native’s eyes widened at me. “A Healer? Not many of the humans who have come through here have been Healers. That is splendid news. Splendid!”

Vellenia grabbed my hand in both of hers and pulled me out of the group. Cinzy made a disheartened sound and stayed with me.

“What’s going on?”

“We will need your expertise this moment!” Vellenia said. “I’m certain the elders will be most pleased to learn you are helping to heal our afflicted.

I wondered just what I’d gotten myself into, but quickly turned to Cinzy. “Please meet with the elders and use your abilities to secure us a place here, along with trying to figure out what issues the people here are having.”

“B-but—”

“I’ll be fine. I’ll take Regina and Isabelle with me,” I said, nodding towards the two of them. “Isabelle for protection I’m sure I don’t

need, Regina for getting supplies off Muppin, wherever she's being kept." I didn't know how well Cinzy could detect falsehoods with the social skills she had, so I went with legitimate reasons, even if they weren't the full ones. I didn't want to let on that they had abilities gifted to them by my sex powers, and could actually help a lot more than any of the others.

"Take Fairy Poppins with you," Cinzy said.

"Happily," I said, not certain how the tiny fairy could be of service, but I wasn't going to say no to more help. Right now I'd have to regard her as a potential spy in my midst, as much as I didn't like that idea.

Regina fell out of line without trouble, but Isabelle had a lingering glance to share with Ivy for a moment before joining me. Sometime during our weird naked procession, Regina had had the genius idea to pull her hair forward on both sides and use it to cover her nipples. Isabelle couldn't do that, and had to carry her pack in hand rather than sling it over her shoulders. She was fully exposed, all pink and sky blue cotton candy skin shot through with swirling pinstripes of white and metallic silver. Regina looked just as yummy, with her freckles slowly morphing into flowers on her skin. I noted that her irises weren't right now, or weren't normal anyway. I couldn't get a closer look without making it awkward for everyone.

"Ladies, thank you for joining me," I said, with a heavy sigh. "I'm hoping we can work out this forced nudity situation in a hurry. Until that happens, I'm sorry in advance for my eyes roaming where they shouldn't."

Regina snorted laughter. "Oh you are, are you? Well I'm not sorry in advance for looking at your hanging dong."

Isabelle gasped and followed that up with a laugh.

So, she was going to continue playing the adversarial role in public. I doubted she was trying to make me upset for real… no. There was only the tiniest of chances that Isabelle knew about Regina and Tara, and an even slimmer chance Isabelle had gone to her with that knowledge, then confessed to having sex with me.

No way. I was being paranoid… probably.

"I'm saying that occasionally I may make a mistake and not look you in the eyes, and I'm sorry about that."

"And I'm saying your wang is just flopping around down there, and your bush is all green," Regina said with a laugh. Isabelle joined in the laughter. Thankfully we were away from the main group and out of earshot.

"I… am… glad we have an understanding?" I tried.

She folded her arms. "That's correct."

"Oh my gods," Isabelle snorted.

"He's a big softie," Regina told her. "Don't worry about him."

"Are you saying I'm not hard?" I challenged.

"Super unprofessional!" Isabelle said, voice strained and eyes bulging.

"I would think so!" Regina agreed. "Go put some clothes on, you wanger hanger."

"You put some clothes on, sparkle freckle."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand," Vellenia said, leading us across one of the widest and nicest of the plank bridges. This one had handrails and everything. You could almost forget the marsh was a good eight feet below us. "Could you kindly inform me of what 'wanger hanger' and 'sparkle freckle' mean? It sounds as though the group is experiencing some travel tension. And since I know that you were brought off course by the Great Guanelzia, your discomfort must be the cause of friction between members."

"Our expedition leader has a bit of a hormone imbalance," Regina said.

"Hormone?"

My mouth dropped open and I stared at her. Isabelle was following suit.

"He's constantly thinking about mating," she went on. "It's sad really. Interferes with his work and everything."

"I do n—"

Vellenia regarded me, staring directly down at my crotch. “Is that so?”

“Vile rumors, and unfounded,” I declared.

Regina shrugged, eyebrows raised, with Isabelle staring in wide-eyed amazement the whole time. I’d nearly forgotten about Fairy Poppins, who was bobbing up and down, clutching her tiny sides and kicking her tiny legs while she laughed. “Says the person who just apologized in advance for perving on us.”

“Worry not,” Vellenia said to me seriously. “If the need arises, I or another Marshin will help take care of these urges in order for you to complete your task as a Healer in our village.”

Now it was Regina’s turn to gape in amazement. When she said ‘take care of those urges’ did she really mean what I thought she meant?

“I don’t know what to say to that,” I said quite truthfully. “Thank… you?”

The beautiful creature placed a mint green hand on my shoulder. “I will attempt not to rouse your hormone, Christopher, but do let me know if the imbalance becomes too much.” She seemed to realize that physical touch might ‘rouse my hormone’ and snatched it away as though she’d touched a hot frying pan.

We lapsed into perhaps the most uncomfortable silence I’d ever been a part of. The only thing that came close was when I brought a girl over for a group project in high school, and my mother had to ask me if she and I were having sex. And if so, did I need her to buy any condoms?

I was so happy to have forgotten that little horror-stravaganza from when I was seventeen.

“I’m so sorry,” Regina whispered when we got moving again.

I just looked at her, amazed. She had apparently gotten me all the ‘relief’ I could ask for, quite by accident. Looking into her eyes now, I could more clearly see they weren’t perfectly circular any longer. Her irises were flower shaped.

“It’s fine,” I told her quietly. “We’re here, naked, in a village full of naked Nakamamon, and I don’t have the first clue of what’s going on. So let’s take it easy with the practical jokes for just a moment here.”

“Okay,” she said quietly, like I’d just kicked Tweedle Dee. Her companion nuzzled into her open hand and she turned to the flower fox for comfort. She seemed distinctly embarrassed, as well she should.

The building they brought me into was enormous, a long house in shape and size. It had windows cut and fitted with glass panes that curved slightly to match the semi-circular shape of the building. Inside, past a large entryway, the building was divided up into a single central hallway, and rooms down each side.

Vellenia opened the very last door on the right and gestured inside.

Now, for just one moment I was certain she was going to give me a free conjugal visit to help me get my hormone under control. Then, after blowing me or offering up a hole I hadn’t seen yet, she would take me to the actual thing she wanted me to see. And that wasn’t just pure fantasy either; the room she indicated seemed far too small to hold any patients. Initially.

It stood full of wooden boxes stuffed with straw, and each one of those boxes held a large egg in splotches of mint green and white.

“Ah,” I said.

They weren’t all mint green and white, though, I noted this almost immediately, something was wrong. The eggs all had brown spots on their shells. Some of these were hardly noticeable, just little rotten dots. Others were half covered by the brown stuff.

“These are our eggs,” she said. “They will eventually hatch into Marshells.”

Secretly, I sent a mental thank you to Rus for helping to name all these things. Even though it was a shame these eggs were sick, the names Marshin and Marshell were so goofy and delightful, to say nothing of the genius Slinktickle.

“Please see to the Healer’s supplies,” Vellenia told my two compatriots. “Regina knows the way to the rockidna called Muppin. I will confer with the Healer in the meantime.”

Regina and Isabelle shared a look before heading off.

Leaving me alone with this gorgeous creature.

“What can you tell me about this situation with the eggs?” I asked, happy to keep the topic off nudity, my hormone, or how she’d offered to mate with me.

“The problem began some weeks ago,” she said. “None of the eggs were hatching on time. It was discovered that several of them had these discolorations. We attempted to isolate these from the others, but all of them eventually developed the similar discolorations.”

“This is an even bigger shame, because the nest wardens abandoned the eggs to avoid possibly catching the affliction. These eggs need to be stimulated constantly in order to help them hatch healthy and strong.”

“How long ago did the… other event begin?”

“Only two days past,” she responded, surveying her nude body. “Honestly, the only real inconvenience has been the inability to carry objects we use in every day life. Our trade beads cannot be carried on bracelets. A great deal of jade beads simply vanished.”

“I doubt the two are related, but I’d like to inspect the eggs first. It seems like a much more pressing concern.”

Her face brightened at the prospect of having the eggs hatch. She clapped her hands together in front of her face in a way I associated with little children. She grinned and blushed, showing two perfect rows of teeth.

“I am so pleased to finally have a Healer with our village,” Vellenia said. “You will be given whatever the village has available to assist in your duties.”

“Thank you so much.”

Her eyes opened wide, raking the length of my body. “Including assistance with your hormone.”

"It's not…" I started, but she held up a hand to forestall me.

"I have been given to understand that mating between humans is an experience to be prized. It grants a great deal of pleasure to the humans in question."

"That's true, but—"

"Say no more, friend Fletcher. I am honored to relieve you of your hormone. My people have only ever seen a handful of humans, and it will be my pleasure to serve you in whatever capacity I can. If that means mating, I am only too happy to mate with you. And in doing so, I will know how pleasurable the experience is." As she was talking, she ran her fingers down the length of her torso towards the junction of her thighs. This was where white belly met green hips and thighs, like bikini underwear or a one piece swimsuit." After all, your mating tool hasn't retracted, and appears quite large… possibly painful."

As she rubbed the insides of her thighs and over her crotch, the smooth area slowly separated out into lips that looked almost exactly like a pussy, though it was stark white.

"It's not… It actually never retracts." I couldn't keep my eyes off what she was doing.

"Never retracts?" She seemed mortified, but didn't stop rubbing up and down to either side of her magically appearing orifice. "How do you conduct every day tasks with your tool constantly swinging down there? Wait… what is happening?"

Blood was rushing to my cock at what she was doing and her words.

"It's getting erect…" I said lamely.

"It grows even larger? Humans are a wonder to behold, friend Fletcher. How big… by the gods, it's even larger."

As she spoke, she radiated with soft white light.

Affinity check: *You have the Identify skill at level 1. This check is easy difficulty. Would you like to spend 1 Token for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 5 Affinity and 6 Free Tokens.

What the… I indicated that, no, I did not wish to spend Tokens on this check. My Affinity of 5 and Identify of 1 succeeded, but with only 1 success. I could generally expect 2 successes on 6 levels, so I'd done badly on my check.

Identify worked, and informed me that Vellenia was using a quasi-empathic and psychic ability, **Enhance Sensations**. This would make sensory input for the chosen senses increase by a moderate amount.

It then went on to mention that Healer's Resistance would not be activated here, because it only provided a bonus to resisting sources of damage. This wasn't a source of damage.

***Durability check**: You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is Moderate difficulty. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 4 Durability and 6 Free Tokens.

My mind raced. She was trying to influence my mind. I could feel a pulse of energy race into my mind and spread throughout my body. I could counter it, but it didn't seem like she meant me any harm.

"This will make you release your mating fluids even faster," she said, her voice husky.

This is Christopher utterly confused and utterly aroused at the same time.

Chapter 42- Post Nut Clarity

Vellenia approached me. I backed up a step, only to come into contact with cool, slightly scratchy wall made of wooden planks.

"I have also been informed that the mating process should be done in privacy," she said, her words dripping with lust. "We should hurry, before your friends return."

The enhanced sensation was definitely touch. I could feel the grain of the wood on my butt and upper back.

Soon her thighs came into contact with mine and I felt that as well… way more than normal.

"How much time do we have?" I asked quietly.

I definitely felt the resin or lacquer they'd used on planks underfoot. And I felt her breath wash over my collarbone as she closed the distance toward me.

"I chose this place because it will be impossible to navigate with the rockidna quickly," she responded in a breathy, lust-soaked tone. "They will be forced to take the long way."

"Uhhhh," was all that came out of my mouth. I wanted to tell her this wasn't necessary, that she didn't have to, but she seemed very into it. For scientific purposes, for one. She wanted to know what it felt like. To help her people, for another. Even if the reason was made up by Regina and believed by our native guide here, it was still presently a reason in Vellenia's mind.

She took my hands in hers and guided them up towards her breasts. They were spectacular in feel alone, but they were bone white, giving the impression she was a superheroine wearing a skintight suit. It felt unbelievable in my hands, and Vellenia sighed as I fondled and pressed.

"That's right," she mumbled. One cool hand encircled my shaft, and both of us made almost identical sounds of disbelief, awe, and arousal.

When the prompt came to enhance our pleasure based on our relationship, I spent the Token. I distantly hoped that she was feeling the enhanced sensory effects that I was, from her ability.

She responded with sharp gasps to me pinching and twisting at her nipples, gripping my shaft tighter and then stroking it forward and back.

"So… massive," she muttered.

Slightly above average, for a human. If the male Marshins could fully retract, it seemed like they didn't have what I did, a solid seven inches.

"Will I hurt you?" I asked, "When it goes inside?"

"I do not know," she whispered, dragging herself the length of me, forward and back, forward and back, "but I will suffer if it means helping you."

"I'll go slowly," I breathed, in between kisses along her neck and up her ear.

"We must be careful."

Like all the rest of the Marshins, she had a tail, and it lazily swished back and forth. I know this because I gripped her springy butt in two hands and pulled her closer, and continued kissing down her collarbone and up her neck. She was delicious, tasting like fresh rain and a bit like sweet… grass? I didn't care.

"Th-this is p-part of the mating ritual…" she half-asked. I couldn't speak at that point, and instead just nodded while kissing and nibbling. My cock was now nestled into the space between her thighs, and was bumping against the underside of her tail.

The ability she'd used on me was getting me toward an inevitable and hard climax. With half my concentration, I threw another point into Stave Off and brought the level to 2.

Vellenia was just a few inches shorter than me, and felt cool and soft in every way that mattered. Around her genitals, I was warming her up. She had moistened up and was coating my length with her liquid as she and I humped in unison. Her mound kept grinding against me, and she began to groan.

“Take me,” she begged. “Please, human.”

Then she plastered herself against the wall and pushed her ass out, raising her tail and showing me a set of perfectly white, wet genitals. Her legs were spread a bit, and I watched as a bead of moisture began to cascade down the inside of one thigh.

The opening seemed small when I placed my head against it and began to push, and after a good thirty seconds of pushing, it finally popped inside. Her tail twitched and eventually rested against the side of my chest, where it continued twitching and slithering as time went on.

Vellenia grunted in pain.

It was time to spend more of my precious skill points. I put one into Adaptability.

Almost immediately I cooled down and slid another inch inside.

“Oh!” She exclaimed.

“Easy,” I told her quietly. “Easy. That’s the first third.”

“Oh, oh gods of all things great and small,” she muttered, and shuddered. “There is more. Yes, there is so much more.”

For the time being I just pumped the final few inches in and out of her, watching her stare at nothing with wide eyes and a slack face. She drooled and her breathing came in tiny gasps. Each time I speared forward and tried to wedge more of myself inside her, she gasped.

“Is your… curiosity… satisfied?” I grunted.

“Not… yet…” she managed.

A high pitched squeal came out of her, and I clamped a hand over her mouth to try to quiet her, only to have her suck my fingers into her mouth and lick them with what felt like half a dozen tongues.

She started to orgasm with about half of my length inside her. The licking around my fingers sped up, the gasping got wilder, and she began to tremble. Her tail also twitched and spasmed suddenly.

“Now?” I asked.

"Ugh," she groaned. "Almost…"

The process was painstaking and slow, but eventually I got to the point where my hips impacted her buttocks. She was in a state of full-time orgasm by then, just slumped against the wall and letting me do whatever I liked with her.

Vellenia's insides clenched at me like a fist, and the combination of this and the licking at my fingers had me on the verge after only about ten minutes.

When I pulled out to get my breath, she slid down on jelly legs, face plastered to the door. I was worried she might be hurt, until a blissed out smile spread across her face.

"Lay back," I told her.

She complied, and soon I was staring down at her gorgeous self, spread wide for me.

"Easy," she whispered, as I lined up to take her yet again. She was right to do so; the entry was again very snug, and nearly caused me to explode. She arched her back up off the floor, staring across at the opposite wall and hands clawing at nothing. Beneath me, that tail of hers curled up and around, now stroking against my back. The rest of her flopped and trembled and came.

Vellenia wasn't capable of speech with me all up in her guts like this. It was like I reached all the way to her vocal cords and shut her off. The only sound that emerged was a constant 'Uh, huh, uh,' over and over again.

Now that I was above her, I could see what I was doing, getting intimate with a Nakamamon for the first time. I could see her lithe body struggling to accommodate me, making my cock look absolutely enormous by comparison. Her juices coated me on every stroke.

I wanted this to last forever. Obviously it couldn't be. One, her body was practically massaging my cock and tightening every time I slowly eased down inside. Two, the scene itself was incredibly erotic. The novelty of it was something else. And three, Regina and Isabelle

were both going to return, and neither of them could know I'd been getting down and dirty with the townsfolk.

Gritting my teeth, I managed, "I'm going to… cum," Containing myself was a struggle.

"Your seed," she moaned.

"Yes." I couldn't manage to say more. All my power was focused down into keeping myself from blasting off deeper inside her than anyone had ever been.

She opened her mouth wide, and her tongue was more like fingers than a tongue. It was like six tiny tentacles, all waving around.

No way I was going to pass up that offer. Pulling free of her, I scooted forward and with a hand at the back of her head, shoved my hips forward.

I had never felt anything like this. No human could've done this to me, wrapping a half dozen licking and sucking tendrils around my shaft and flexing independently. It was like nothing else.

I threw back my head and yelled as I came. Vellenia's throat contracted as she gulped down my seed: once, twice, three times. She'd gotten a hold of my balls and was gently massaging them. I kept right on spurting.

Finally I backed off, and she allowed me to get a view of her open mouth, full of what I'd gifted her. Swallowing it all, a lazy smile spread over her face.

"I am in your debt, friend Fletcher," she mumbled, half lidded eyes giving her the look of someone half asleep. "You have given me something none of my kind have experienced, and many have asked after."

"You're… in *my* debt…" I said wonderingly.

***

Regina and Isabelle appeared only about five minutes later, and it was clear they had run in the hopes of maybe catching us engaged

in the act. It hadn't been a quick cleanup job, and I still couldn't put on clothes for them to come back to a presentable me, but by that point Vellenia didn't look freshly fucked and didn't have that dreamy look about her that said she'd just had a zillion orgasms one after another.

I'd decided not to 'bring her into the fold' for several reasons. It wasn't because I didn't want a free ability, I definitely did. Instead, I didn't want her to feel used. If Regina confessed that she'd been just making shit up to mess with me, the native might misunderstand and think we'd been working together to grab at whatever psychic or empathic power she possessed.

That didn't stop me from getting a level in Pleasure Seeker. I wasn't sure how that worked, because I'd had sex several times, and once with Isabelle, without leveling. But I wasn't going to complain about reaching level 10.

Level 10: Gained Ability: Post-Sharing Clarity

"Oh," I said, and Vellenia regarded me from where she still lay twitching on the floor. I gained post nut clarity. What in the absolute hell?

Post-Sharing Clarity

(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)

After having intimate relations with a partner, both partners gain +2 temporary bonus to all attributes for the next 10 minutes. This bonus does not grant additional Tokens.

The duration increases by 10 minutes for each relationship level above base acquaintances.

Peering at my character sheet, I noted that all my attributes were boosted by two.

attributes:

Affinity 7 (5/5)*

Durability 7 (5/5)*

Ingenuity 8 (5/6)*

Likability 7 (5/5)*

Physicality 7 (4/4)*

*Your stats are boosted for the next eight minutes due to the ability **Post-Sharing Clarity**.

Maybe it was the boosted Ingenuity. Upon reflection I realized it would've been a much better idea to discuss the situation with Isabelle before spending the Tokens to bring her in. **Stalwart** was a nice power, and I'm sure we could find uses for her ability she'd gained from me, but I hadn't really asked. I made a mental note to apologize when we had a moment alone.

"We're here," Regina said, eyes everywhere. I laughed.

"Great! We're going to get to it. Vellenia, if you could kindly have a table of any size brought, I'd like to set up a healing station and begin inspecting these eggs so we can deal with the more pressing issue first."

"Terrible news," Ivy said, face inches from the large eggs. "The brown stuff on these makes them useless for omelettes."

Everybody stared at her.

"It was a joke! A joke!" she protested.

"We must deal with this situation first," Chrysta repeated what I'd said.

"Leaving us all naked," Isabelle said, clearly not pleased with my choice and Chrysta's confirmation. She cocked one hip out and rested a hand on it in annoyance, though the tiny smirk on her face subverted that.

"Correct," I said.

The new ability made me feel noticeably different. A clear feeling came over me that I didn't understand at first, until I focused on it. I

felt I could stand taller, that the scoliosis didn't bother me at all.

The colors were sharper, the textures too. It seemed like I could track the movement and position of every air molecule in here. That was nonsense, of course, but what wasn't nonsense was the growth of my Affinity score. The temporary buff allowed me to actually see mana in the air, clearer than before, and sense how it was moving in the air and through the things around me.

The mana wasn't moving around the eggs well.

Isabelle may have missed what was going on between Vellenia and I, but Regina didn't. When I requested the table, the native I'd just mated with stood there in a daze, blinking. It took her a good few seconds to register my words, mumble that she would get right on it, and disappear out the door.

"Let's see what you've brought," I said. Several other natives were with them, all carrying some of the many components I had at my disposal. Regina went looking for some of the materials I needed: firstly a magnifying glass, along with a series of stones for sensing various magical maladies.

Regina took this opportunity to hunker down and grin at me.

"Vellenia looked pretty out of it," she said. "And the smell in here is distinctly not what it was when I left. How close were we to finding you two engaged in the act?"

I frowned at her, forgetting that the others had aspects of herself verging on or exceeding human maximums, and well exceeding them in some cases, given special abilities. Of course Regina had an enhanced sense of smell, as a Ranger. "Too close. Now, I'm afraid I need to do my job."

She gave me a playful elbow jab to the shoulder and made a sound like 'ooh you sly dog.' It was still unthinkable to me that this stunner of a girl not only wanted to frequently have sex with me, but was totally okay with adding extra women to that mix.

With a magnifying glass, I was able to get an even closer look at the egg shells. It wasn't anything magically enhanced, but it did give me a better look. As the time wound down on my buff from the new

Pleasure Seeker ability, I engaged the Diagnosis skill and tried to run it through each of the different aspects: Magical first, then Physical, followed by Spiritual and Mental. In either order.

With only three minutes left on the buff, I was chomping at the bit to deal with the Diagnosis and get straight to treatment.

Unfortunately the system didn't like me running through checks like this.

Diagnosis check: *This check works with Affinity. This check is made at Very Difficult difficulty.*

**It seems you would like to push the Diagnosis to be completed faster. This will increase the difficulty by 3 points.*

Would you like to spend 4 Tokens for an automatic success?

Total Tokens: 4 Affinity and 6 Free Tokens.

Although I was tempted, I declined this and slowed down in order to lower the difficulty back to normal. I took deep, cleansing breaths and got down to the Diagnosis at the regular speed. There were small glowing stones in a lacquered wooden box that would glow in the presence of a magical malady, and I asked the girls to fish it out for me, pretty please.

It was actually a lacquered wooden box filled with several smaller boxes. Each stone needed to be opened and waved near the afflicted individually. I opened the first box, hovered the AA battery-sized green crystal near the egg, and closed it back into its box before getting the second out for the same treatment.

This pushed the difficulty back down to 5 instead. I wouldn't have the +2 Affinity for long enough to complete the check, and I wasn't certain I could make it happen with 4 Affinity and 3 skill levels. That should produce 2-3 successes, maybe 4 if I got lucky. I wasn't feeling so lucky, so I spent 3 Affinity Tokens to lower the difficulty of the check by 3, succeeded, and frowned.

The nature of the affliction is not magical, the UI reported.

This is Christopher being quite confused.

Chapter 43- Diagnosis

I stood and went to get some fresh air outside. The air was noticeably cooler on my fully exposed skin, but the sun was shining and its warmth helped me get over the slight disappointment of having ruled out Magical afflictions for these people's eggs.

Luckily, my efforts over the last ten minutes hadn't been completely in vain. The UI gave me a bit of a bolstering in that respect.

However, since you have ruled out magical afflictions, the difficulty for all further checks would be lowered by one.

"Damn," I muttered.

It would be physical.

The Physical Diagnosis went much better. This one involved a literal physical check up: using a stethoscope to listen, running my fingers over the shells as normal, and poking them gently in the affected areas. Finally, there was a reactant strip I had for the job, and placing it against the sickly brown section of egg did result in some sticky mucus-like substance sticking to the strip, but no color appearing. I spent 2 more Tokens to lower the difficulty and scored the two successes needed easily.

And it wasn't physical either. The UI told me as such in exactly the same language.

The nature of the affliction is not physical, the UI reported. It went on to lower the difficulty of the remaining two categories: Mental and Spiritual.

"That's not good," I said.

"What's not?" Isabelle asked. Both were now standing beside me on either side, watching me work.

"I can't imagine eggs having either a mental problem, or a spiritual crisis." There was a lot of unexplored territory when it came to Spiritual afflictions, Rainer had said. Thinking of old Mustache Head made me smile. "There are a lot of spiritual maladies we don't

understand yet. I guess a god that doesn't believe in himself would be a pretty big deal."

Regina and Isabelle both snorted laughter. "God has low self esteem, huh?" Regina asked.

"Rainer said there was an area far, far from the castle and the main admin city that all natives just don't go, because the god or gods have a spiritual malady. Spiritual sickness is something we don't understand and can't easily treat, let alone cure. I wouldn't know how to begin dealing with it," I told them.

"But it is still kind of funny to think about," Regina said. "Once you get past the existential crisis."

Isabelle snorted. "You like your humor dark, huh?"

The Mental diagnostic test also seemed incredibly silly. After all, the embryos within the eggs couldn't listen in on what was going on, or react to it… could they? I couldn't very well understand them even if they were suffering from some kind of mental illness.

Or maybe I could and just didn't know it.

I once again reminded myself I was in a magical land where mountains rearranged themselves and lakes went on vacation. Anything could happen, and would, and did.

I peered at the eggs that were afflicted, and squinted. Was I imagining things or were the two nearest to where I'd just had sex less brown than before?

"You're seeing things," I told myself.

"What are you seeing?" Regina asked, then peered at the eggs when I explained: I'd had, um, an enlightening conversation with Vellenia, and it had been rather warm of tone. Regina nodded along sagely to my lie, pursing her lips and crossing her arms in front of her perky boobs. I could see she was holding back laughter.

"You're wondering if good vibes coming from the two of you during that conversation influenced these nearby eggs," Isabelle said, and regarded the eggs. "You want to do some measurements and see?"

"Do either of you have the Hard At Work ability, which lets you spend fewer Tokens while you're doing class-related tasks, and lets you spend fewer Tokens to assist others doing their work?"

Both shook their heads.

"It's fine. I'll just do this. I'm the Healer, and I'll do the job I was hired to do."

Isabelle clutched her hands between her breasts in the cutest naked display I had ever seen. "You've got this!" With her hands like that, it really put her pink and sky blue swirly nipples on display, and I peered down at the floor after accidentally checking them out.

Now that we had been out here going on a week, the color of her skin and the advancement of the cotton candy coloration was starker than I recalled it.

"Perv," Regina said.

"It's ha… it's difficult to just ignore things when they're right in front of your face!" I protested, pointedly not saying the word *hard*. "You try ignoring my dong when I gesture right at it."

Both girls laughed. Fairy Poppins bobbed up and down with them, clutching her little sides. Clearly laughter made her wing fluttering more erratic.

"I bet you're regretting hiring on seven girls to this expedition," Isabelle said.

"On the contrary," Regina said. "I bet he's never been happier."

She wasn't wrong. Between Tara, Regina, Cinzy and now Isabelle's advances on me, I was kind of in girl heaven. I couldn't believe my good luck, so I was keeping my fingers crossed they didn't erupt into a backstabbing, catty, gossip-fueled team fracturing situation. I especially didn't want to break up Ivy and Isabelle, given that either of them could snap me in two without getting winded.

"I am not really pleased that I'm totally nude right now, no," I said. "I'm also not happy that the weather's getting colder and we can't wear clothing. I don't know what the sleeping situation looks like, but I'd prefer to have the option of pajamas."

Isabelle stared at me, showing me with her widened eyes she hadn't considered nights. But she could also invent reasons to sleep cuddled up to her girlfriend. I would be hard-pressed to find justifications for sleeping with any of the ladies.

We discussed this while taking measurements of the affected portions of the eggs. I wanted to employ Fairy Poppins and her ability to make objects lighter by tapping them with her fairy dust, but I didn't know if that would affect the eggs in a negative way, so we gingerly brought the worst of the afflicted eggs to the table Vellenia had just supplied.

"Thank you so much," I told her.

"No no, thank you so much more," she replied. "It was an honor to mate with you and help you handle your hormone."

Both girls stared at me. Regina wasn't even subtle about it, staring directly at the package hanging between my legs.

The heat immediately rose to my cheeks. "That… wasn't supposed to be common knowledge," I said, burning with embarrassment.

Vellenia hadn't told any of the other Marshins, which was good, but she had just assumed my team was open about matters of mating, which was less ideal.

Finally Isabelle and Regina cracked up laughing. Once Regina got going, Isabelle wasn't far behind. Isabelle's laughter was interrupted by a snort, which set Regina off even more. She ended up laughing until she wasn't making any sound whatsoever. Clutching at her sides, her head shook back and forth and I saw tears in the corner of her eyes.

"Your companions do not seem bothered by knowing we mated," Vellenia said.

Fresh peals of laughter erupted behind me.

"Great. Great," I said, grinning through the embarrassment.

I tried to go ahead with the Mental Diagnosis, and one Token later scored the two successes needed to pass the check. I actually hadn't needed to spend the Token, getting 4 out of the 2 successes

necessary between Ingenuity and Mental Diagnosis. Stepping it down to difficulty 2 wasn't needed, but there was no guarantee.

I reminded myself that the re-check was still an option.

When the laughter died down, my guess proved out. The infected sections of the eggs were indeed smaller than they had been when I'd initially measured them. The UI informed me that while it was likely contagious, it was unlikely to be contagious to humans. Moreover, it wasn't likely to be fatal to grown Marshins.

"The malady is a mental one," I told them. "Something affected the mood of the eggs. An empathic or psychic effect, perhaps."

"That is welcome news, I suppose," Vellenia said. "It is better to have the knowledge than sit in darkness wondering."

"Very welcome," I told her. "It won't be fatal to Marshins, but it could be to the eggs. And since it's mental, I'm going to recommend a treatment of easy conversation, positivity, laughter, dance, music, and the like. I don't think it will be a complete cure, but it will keep the situation from spreading and make sure these eggs can still hatch at all."

What the hell? I… sounded like a Healer.

***

Regina followed me outside the building, agog. Just flabbergasted. Gobsmacked even.

"We have to figure out—"

"You have to tell me *everything*," she commanded. "You had sex with a Nakamamon. That is… honestly that's hot. She is hot, for a magical otherworldly creature."

"I need to do my job," I told her, with eyes rolling. I knew she would perv on me the first chance she

got, but sheesh, at least let me do my job first. “I can’t afford to get a boner right now, not like this.”

“Okay mister, but you’d better give me every single detail,” she said, wagging a finger at me in mock seriousness. Then she grinned. “Dude you perv. That is wild.”

I couldn’t exactly disagree with that statement. It was wild, and I was kind of a perv.

“Wait,” she said. “Wait wait wait a second. You said the egg problem receded because of your conversation with Vellenia?”

“Uh… yeah.”

“Your… conversation?”

“Regina, no. Look, we can’t. I’m not setting up the hatchery as some kind of sex dungeon, okay?”

She waved my concern away. “All I’m saying is, we don’t have to stop caring for the eggs just because it’s night time. You and I could maybe have a little playtime, and do our part to help cure—”

“What are you guys talking about?” Ivy asked. She’d just rounded the corner.

“Oh hey Ivy,” Regina said. “We were talking about the situation with the sick eggs, and how there aren’t any Marshells around the area. Fletcher here is working on treatment options while he gets started on a cure.”

She looked to me, and I nodded.

“Okay, great. Have you guys seen Is—“

“Ivy!”

Isabelle rushed up and gave Ivy a big naked hug. I got to see boobs squishing together and Ivy's stricken expression melt a little with her girlfriend there. Then it began to wax again, as worry about us and our view of the couple sprang to the forefront.

"What've you guys been—"

"Fletcher had sex with a Marshin," she blurted.

Time seemed to stop.

Everyone, all four of us, began to process all this at the same time. Tweedle Dee was also there, and froze. He seemed just as startled as Ivy, Regina, me, and especially Isabelle.

Eventually, everyone got a handle on the words that had been spoken. Dee started off the return to normal, by rubbing up against Regina's legs and pushing a needy head into her hand.

"Um," Isabelle said, just as horrified as I felt. "I shouldn't have said that. I, uh…"

She scratched him absently, before smiling down at him. She was probably silently thankful that Isabelle didn't know that Regina and I had been doing it for weeks.

"You had sex with a Nakamamon?" Ivy asked, equal parts amazement, amusement, and accusation coloring her face and words.

"I would like it very much if nobody else knew about this," I said, before a thought struck me. I turned back to Isabelle. "Are you under the influence of fairy dust?"

"Oh, yeah, I was chatting with Fairy Poppins a little," she said. "She dusted me and I didn't really think about it. I mean really I was talking and she was listening, because whatever language she speaks, I can't hear it and don't understand what I do hear. Wasn't it weird that she was buzzing between you and Cinzy last night, right before I—"

"By all the gods great and small," I blurted, influenced by Vellenia. "Let's all go back to the hatchery and sort this out."

I realized now that bringing Isabelle into the fold was a huge mistake. She naturally had a big mouth and it wasn't one of the

things I'd been interviewing for in the first place. I hadn't thought we'd need to keep secrets.

Fairy Poppins wasn't there, but several of the Marshins were holding animated conversations and gesturing toward my brand new workstation and the eggs sitting all around the room. They moved to leave as soon as we all entered, but I held up a hand.

"I'm happy to have everyone stay here, so long as they don't touch any of my materials. Good vibes are needed. Any bad feelings or disagreements have to go on elsewhere."

"Aren't we about to have a disagreement?" Isabelle asked shakily.

"We are looking for Fairy Poppins," I said.

The little mischief maker was gone.

"Listen," I said, and quickly explained the situation. Regina did her part too, explaining that she'd been teasing me about a hormone imbalance that didn't exist, and Vellenia took it seriously. I finished off by trying to explain to Ivy, "It wasn't on my list of things to do, obviously. She hit me with a psychic ability I couldn't resist easily—"

"Didn't want to, more likely," Isabelle said, then clapped her hands over her mouth. "I'm so sorry!"

"And it amplified all the physical sensations."

"Whoa," Ivy said, and glanced down at the offending penis. "This no clothes situation is, uh, difficult."

"Yeah," I said, and went on to explain that we were going to have to ask the Marshins about sleeping situations. We could probably set up our tents and sleeping bags in the large open areas on the platforms, if they allowed it.

"The question is whether or not sleeping bags will count as clothing when we sleep," I said. The girls cast dismayed glances around. "It's getting a lot cooler at nights. It seems like the beginning of fall here. I doubt our sleeping bags will vanish but we'll test it. We're going to have to double up in the tents for warmth if that's the case, which is going to get really uncomfortable."

"The natives may have sleeping quarters for us," Ivy suggested.

“You won’t have to worry about your hormonal imbalance,” Regina muttered, and the three of them burst out laughing.

“Can we not reference my sexual experiences?” I asked. “I may not have a hormonal imbalance, but I have a ton of hormones anyway. I’m only twenty years old, for fork’s sake.”

“Oh, is somebody going to get a boner?” Regina asked.

“If we keep talking about this, yes!” I shot back.

“Are we going to leave the natives to satiate your overwhelming lust then?” Ivy joked.

“We are not talking about this!” I declared.

“I shall reluctantly volunteer to assist Fletcher,” Regina said.

All three of us stared at her.

“What? I’m joking!”

“Girl, I know a joke when I hear it,” Ivy shot back. “That was not a joke.”

“Ooohhh somebody’s got the hots for Fletcher,” Isabelle said, then clapped her hands over her mouth again, eyes wide and darting to look at all of us.

“You!” Regina whirled on her. “You’re under the influence of fairy dust, meaning you can’t really lie, right? How about we get you to say something incredibly embarrassing. Maybe a deep dark secret?”

I knew it was only a matter of time before she confessed to having had sex with me. I had to get out of there.

“I have to do actual work,” I said, and strode away before anything else could be said, or seen. My cock was beginning to stir at the thought of. All three of them watched me go, but they must have realized they were staring at my naked ass, and giggled before resuming their conversation.

This is Christopher both loving and hating life.

Chapter 44- Elder Ring

The next order of business was to find out how the rest of the team was finding things, and whether Cinzy had spoken to the trio of elders, whoever they were.

Vellenia escorted us through the village. Over bridges both plank and rope, we wound through a market just cleaning up for the day and then over another bridge. We sighted Muppin outside the largest of the buildings in the village, the only one with multiple stories. Eventually we made our way to where the rest of the team was currently just standing around with their dicks in their hands.

Unfortunately, that was sort of what we came upon. Alan, Drat and Trent still had their hands clapped over their junk and were studiously looking everywhere but their teammates. Trent, I noted, held Garnet in two hands. Like a basketball. The Nakamamon was like the largest gem I'd ever seen, and mostly did the job of obscuring his twig and berries. I couldn't help but snort at the overly modest show going on.

Maybe it was the fact that I'd already had sex here, and these three already knew about it, but my nudity didn't bother me so much.

Only Cinzy, Larelle and Chrysta remained when I came back with the other three ladies on the team. Neither Larelle nor Chrysta appeared very different from their previous forms. Larelle stood there in all her big, red-skinned glory, holding and slowly stroking her magmamander with huge boobs exposed and uncaring that all of us could see the juncture of her thighs. Chrysta hung in the air about two feet above the planks holding up the building, also boobs out and the tops of her thighs visible for the first time. I didn't understand how her ghostly clothes could've been removed, but that was god stuff. Most of her many arms rested at her sides, but two of them were on her hips.

The two natives were on alert for danger, though it wasn't really necessary.

Tara was… hopefully most of the way back to the city by this time.

As we caught sight of Cinzy, her tiny glowing fairy companion zipped off and got in Cinzy's face. I couldn't tell whether they were having an argument or a hushed conversation, but it occurred to me that I really wanted to know what Cinzy's intentions were for having Fairy Poppins join us.

A voice suddenly spoke in my ear. "Fletcher, don't look too surprised. It's Drat."

"Ohhhhhkay."

"Hm?" Regina said.

"Nothing to worry about," I told her. "Just talking to myself, as usual."

She gave me an unreadable look, shrugged, and headed in to speak with the others.

Drat spoke up as soon as I had some space separating me from the ladies. "This is my element. You're here to do a job, I'm here to do a job, and the time is now. If you need information found out, or if you need someone spied on, just say the word. I got you."

I thought it over. Something must have happened to trigger the problem with the eggs. If we didn't have to ask, all the better.

"Several weeks ago, something happened to make all the villagers' eggs sick," I said. "Can you figure out what?"

I could almost hear the gleeful grin in his voice. I mean, I could see him across the platform, but he had a perfectly bland, schooled expression. "Naked Ninja is on the job, boss man."

"I feel like I need a code name too."

"Boss in the Buff," he said.

I laughed. "Better than Fletcher the Lecher."

"Oh, that's good," he said, his tone sinister. "But we're sticking with Boss in the Buff."

***

Cinzy bounced over, still looking like an absolute stunner. The patches of different color on her skin weren't confined to her face. They expanded, shifted colors, and retracted at a glacial pace, and somehow it didn't diminish her beauty.

It was happening to her hair, also. It was far, far longer than I recalled it, down past her butt, and part of it was a powder blue color while most of the rest was platinum blonde. I loved the crinkle in her eyes and her smile as she approached and grabbed my hand in both of hers.

"Fletcher!"

"Hey," I said, trying not to look at her. "Sorry. Trying not to look at you. This is… difficult."

"It's not hard?" She asked with an impish grin.

"Don't," I warned. "I've already had issues."

Her amusement was replaced with… something else. "What? Really? What happened?"

I tried to wave this away. "We need to speak with the elders. I assume everything is going to be pretty smooth, because we took a look at the egg situation and worked up a pretty good treatment while I work on the cure."

Her eyes went wide with shock, and an absolutely breathtaking grin spread over her face. "That's amazing, Fletcher! Well done!"

"You're going to love it, too. We need to sing, dance, party, and have pleasant conversations with the eggs."

She started hopping around in a circle with my hands in hers, laughing in delight. "Yes! An early win is going to be really good for us when we talk to the elders. Oh, Fletcher, you weren't supposed to do my job for me or make it super easy. I don't mind a challenge, you know."

It was a challenge to keep my eyes off her body. Gods, everything about her was taut, perky, and on the verge of muscular.

Perfectly toned, in other words. She was just a shade shorter than me, and I knew this because I was staring into her mismatched eyes the whole time. One was brilliant blue, while the other was a light brown tinged with flecks of gold. By the time she'd finished this meeting, the light brown one had a hazel ring to it, and the bright blue one was more like an aquamarine, sparkling light blue. It was like soul gazing with the hottest girl in your entire high school… while naked.

Once again, Fairy Poppins was suddenly in front of my face, flitting back and forth and catching Cinzy on the tip of the nose, then getting back in my face. I could barely make out the expression on her face, but it seemed upset.

"Hey!" Cinzy barked. "You cut it out, okay? Fletcher and I are discussing the political situation. Butt out."

The tiny glowing fairy whirled on her and poked her in the nose several more times, making her step back. Then, with one last few moments hovering inches from my face, she zipped away and vanished into Cinzy's large backpack.

"Screw up the mood much?" she muttered, grumpily.

The Marshins at the door to the huge building approached now, and asked if we were ready to meet with the elders. Cinzy indicated we were, and took my hand before dragging me in after the two Marshins.

The tone of the situation shifted immediately upon entering. It wouldn't have been an issue whatsoever, except the doors to this large building were shut behind us, and four Marshins we hadn't seen before dragged a heavy, solid beam in from one side to bar the door.

From the inside.

"That's not a good sign," I told her quietly, indicating with a flick of my head.

"It's okay. We'll be okay. I have plenty of Tokens. We can handle this."

There was an enormous hole in the middle of the floor. It looked down directly on the marsh itself, which had the effect of making me think we were about to be thrown down there, and swallowed up by marsh-dwelling crocodiles. That hole was ringed by what looked like clam shells. Big clam shells. We're talking like two and three feet across in some cases.

They were opening and closing, and each time one of them opened, I got the distinct impression we were being observed by whatever was within.

"You've got this, huh?" I asked drily. "Am I calling for our Guardians?"

"N-no way," she said, but her hand wasn't holding mine to pull me along anymore. It was instead clutching my hand in a death grip.

One of the clams opened up, and a little face appeared at the edge. The pale face of a child. Inside a clam.

"Okay that's it!" Cinzy yelled. "Did you bring us here to scare the daylights out of us or what? Because I don't mind telling you, it's working!"

A wave of mana shot out away from Cinzy and splashed into everyone in the room. Our Bard had just used a special ability, and I was glad of it. The clams all snapped closed. The half a dozen or so Marshins in the room took hesitant steps away from her, eyes wide and fearful.

But whatever special ability she had, it didn't seem to have any effect on the things that rose up out of the hole in the floor.

They were enormous, easily as wide as I was tall, and then some. Maybe as wide across as Larelle was tall. In only the vaguest sense, they were similar to the Marshins: mostly white bodies, with that identical mint green in places. These ones had some brown threaded in there too, making the minty green portions of them look like trim. And they were humanoid, sort of, with four thick arms each and large heads on thick necks. Below the waist, though, they were… mermaids? Whatever was down there, it seemed to have fishy scales and definitely had a fringe of fin-like thing.

So, more like eel bodies.

Three of them appeared above the floor of the building, balancing on their tails. Some several dozen more crowded around down below to get a better look at Cinzy and I.

"Hooooooleeeeee shiitake mushrooms," Cinzy muttered in wonder and a little fear.

The first of the 'elders' spoke, drawing out every single word like it took a lot of effort to speak.

"Theeeeeese… aaaaare the hyoooomannnnnsss," it said, crossing two sets of arms across its broad, broad chest. *These are the humans*, said in the most intimidating and spooky way possible.

The two nearest Marshins bowed low at the waist, again and again. "Yes, venerable elders. This male is the Healer who has seen to the Marshell eggs, and the female is her spokesperson."

This thing could kill the both of us with one bear hug if it wanted. When the Marshins waved us forward, Cinzy's already painful grip on my hand intensified and she hummed a low jingle to herself.

Another small burst of mana later and an aura flowed over me. The UI informed me that a special ability used by Cinzia temporarily gave me +3 Durability, +3 skill levels when facing fear or intimidation, and 3 bonus Tokens specific to social rolls in this scene. Then she stepped closer, pulling me along.

We got within a good two feet of the huge hole, and within a foot of the nearest gigantic clams. I swallowed my fear, hoping that she had the same kind of intimidation shout that Blake the asshole did.

"We are from the human world," Cinzy said. "Sent to help heal any ailments, illnesses injuries that you might be suffering."

"Thisssss isssss knoowwwwnnnn," the elder said with exaggerated slowness.

She took another deep, cleansing breath. "Your townsfolk have given us permission to use whatever resources required to help with the egg situation, and the uh… clothing situation."

"Weeeee aaaaaare awaaaaaaaaare," another elder said, this one a female.

“Are any of these developments problematic or unacceptable to you?” Cinzy asked.

The three elders who were above the line of the floor peered at one another and hissed things in a language of their own. The dozens and dozens of other ones all hissed too, pushing against one another in order to see us and be heard over the others. Eventually, the deliberation concluded and the largest of them turned back to us.

“Allll issssss wellllllll,” it said.

Relief flooded through me.

“I regret that our task may take multiple days. Obviously, we don’t wish to intrude upon your village,” Cinzy went on, “but we will need to secure sleeping arrangements in a way that will please your people and avoid possible friction.”

“Yesssssss,” the elder said.

“Do you foresee any issues with sleeping arrangements? My people have brought mobile sleeping quarters. We call them tents.”

This situation right here felt pretty intense. Ha.

“Quaaaaaaarrrterrrrrs willllll be arrrrrranged.”

While Cinzy continued asking questions and eventually answering them, I focused on the creatures before me. They appeared similar to the Marshins, but perhaps they were a different species, or mutated versions of the more humanoid ones.

With this in mind, the UI gave me the +3 bonus to my Identify skill, along with the 3 Tokens to use on the check.

***Identify check**: This check will pair with Ingenuity: your ability to piece together information on hand. This check is Difficult. Would you like to spend 3 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 6 Ingenuity, 6 Free, and 3 Bonus special ability Tokens.

I didn’t get the notification about the ability Hard at Work, meaning my Tokens wouldn’t count for double in this case. It wasn’t a direct outgrowth of my job, apparently. This was disappointing, but not crushingly so.

I figured spending the Tokens was just fine. Although with the buff I currently had 10 levels to use, and 3 successes was to be expected, I wanted this information.

Marshmellow

Second Stage Transformation

These mermaid-like Nakamamon closely resemble humans from the waist up and eels below the waist. They spend most of their time at the mouths of rivers, deltas, or resting at the bottoms of flowing fresh water, relaxing and pondering the meaning of life, the universe, and everything.

Typical length: 16-20 feet (large)
Typical weight: 600-1000 pounds
Gender: male
Aspect: water/fairy
Transformations: Marshell -> Marshin -> Marshmellow

***Marshmellow** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

Everything suddenly snapped into perfect clarity. The huge clams with the faces inside weren’t trapped children or anything, they were large Marshells. At some point they would transform into the Nakamamon of the village, either fully grown or nearly. No wonder there weren’t any children or old folks here.

We had nothing to fear from these elders just because they spoke weirdly.

I breathed a sigh of relief and gave Cinzy’s hand a squeeze.

“Excuse me a moment,” she said, and turned her attention to me.

“They’re called Marshmellows. The Marshins change into them at some point.”

She stared at me, then looked at the townsfolk around us, then at the elders, and back to me. For several seconds she looked, and looked, and looked, then broke into a wide grin. Finally she threw her head back and laughed.

“Oh! Oh that’s good. Marshmellow! Ohhh boy. Okay. Whew!”

I turned to the Marshin nearest, and indicated the nearest clam. “May I?”

It gestured permission down toward the gigantic shell, so I hunkered down and, thinking again, put one hand over my leg so my dangling hand would cover my dangling Dick Johnson. Then I slowly and lovingly stroked the shell.

After several moments, the shell opened up and a child’s face peered out. It was almost all that same mint green, with a stripe of white down the very center.

“Hi there,” I said. “I’m Fletcher.”

“H-hello,” it said. It must’ve been laying down in the shell, because the face was sideways.

“You’re a Marshell?”

It nodded in the shell, going, “Mm-hmm!”

“When did you, uh… hatch?”

“I’m this many!” The little guy said, and a hand appeared with two fingers.

“That’s amazing,” I told him. “Do you ever come out of the shell?”

“Nuh-uh!” He said.

“The young ones are quite soft on the inside and require their shells for protection,” the Marshin said.

“Fletcher?” Cinzy asked.

“Huh?”

“They’re wondering how long it will take to get the situation with the eggs under control—”

"That's already done," I said, and explained directly to the Marshmellows what I'd found out. Once my spiel was over, they peered between one another and the ones crowding each other below, nodding and impressed. "The cure I'm not sure about. I will need to consult the list of cures, gather ingredients, and concoct the cure over the course of possibly days. Hopefully not longer than a week, but I can't guarantee that."

This was received less well, but Cinzy held up hands. "Unfortunately healing isn't an instantaneous process, but all of his team members will be helping him at all times. We will try to speed it along."

Except Drat. He would be looking for funny business.

Eventually the meeting concluded, with me tickling the Marshell's gigantic clam shell and making him giggle in there. The little guy had a particular ridge that was especially ticklish, and his tiny feet thrashed in and out of view several times. I was glad that the creepy child-trapped-in-a-box impression I'd gotten was dead wrong. These were actually super adorable.

Cinzy laid a hand on my shoulder. "Let's get moving, big guy. We're done here."

Big guy was what Tara had called me. I missed her, all of a sudden, and hoped she was doing well. Cinzy didn't let go of my hand until we were heading out of the town's meeting hall.

"You did great in there!" she said, at almost the same time I said almost those identical words. We both laughed.

"Seriously, thank you. That buff ability you used was far more useful than I thought it might be."

"A little courage goes a long way," she replied, grinning, before a more somber look fell over her face. "Um," she said, "do you want to postpone our, uh, dinner together, until we can wear clothes? I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but it's, uh, it's pretty distracting having you be totally naked around me. Getting any amount of work done is going to be hard." She laughed. "Oh my gods, hard."

I sighed. “Yeah. Trust me, I’m way more intimidated and distracted by your body than you are of mine.” I noticed she hadn’t said the word ‘date’ and couldn’t recall if she’d used the same word when talking about it before.

This is Christopher speaking to a fully nude supermodel-beautiful girl and not completely losing his mind.

Chapter 45- Cinzia Graham

The sun was just swinging around toward sunset direction, what I thought of as west, as Cinzy and I left the meeting with the elders. She seemed reluctant to let go of my hand, and I suddenly remembered that I had a power specific to this circumstance.

She really was a touchy-feely person, and I had zero complaints.

"I couldn't believe you figured out they were all related like that," she said.

I should have known by the coloration and the similarities in the images, and started to get on myself about it, but Cinzy hadn't figured it out either, and had just stood there, naked and afraid, and clutching my hand.

"I couldn't either."

"You're like a genius, Fletcher!"

I had really just applied the abilities I had, and thankfully the knowledge had helped me overcome the creepy scene we'd found ourselves in.

Now we stood on a platform in the full light of day, fully nude, with the team several platforms away. The Marshins were ready to escort us back to the team, but I asked for a moment, and led her over to the far side of the building.

Over here, first off, we were out of sight of the rest of the team. Second, the vista we found ourselves overlooking was breathtaking. The marsh stretched out for miles this way, eventually turning into a ribbon of a stream. A thicker forest with taller vegetation grew up on either bank, but the sky… it was absolutely fucking enormous. People in cities don't seem to realize, or even suburban dwellers, they don't seem to get that buildings drain the awe of nature out by confining the sky, putting walls on it, so you can really only see it overhead. Like this, the sky was so vast and sweeping as to make me feel childlike wonder again.

She got real quiet and still, and bit her lip. The moment became charged, full of a vibrant energy. I started to get hard again, and squashed it by thinking about brick walls and huge, thick coins that dissolved into streamers of rainbow-colored glitter.

"I really want to kiss you," I told her. "I hope that doesn't make you uncomfortable."

It did, but not for the reason I thought.

"I really want to kiss you too," she said, and continued staring at my lips. "Fairy Poppins isn't around to badger us for being interested in one another."

'Interested in one another' was a wild way of saying this top tier beauty who was way out of my league had a dearth of choices, but for some reason set her eyes on me. We were very close together now, and I was definitely getting a hard on. But with her this close to me, she couldn't just look down at my junk without telegraphing exactly what she was doing.

She was close enough for me to smell her perfume, or her shampoo. It was lovely. She was so beautiful.

"Fletcher we can't just… we can't like this." She gestured down at her body and laughed. "We can't do a relationship naked. That would just be sex. I don't know anything about you."

I opened up **Blissense** and took another quick look over the ability's text.

Blissense

(Special Ability, Rare, Active)

By touching a target and spending an Ingenuity Token, you gain insight into their deepest desires, kinks and passions. Your target also gains bits of insight into you.

"What if you could? Know about me, I mean," I said.

"What are you talking about?"

"I have a special ability that lets us get to know each other." Very intimately.

She furrowed her brow. "That's… shouldn't that be my thing?"

"It's kind of a gift… from a god."

"Whoa."

I had to be sure I really wanted to do this. Hell, I had to be sure she really wanted to do this.

"But it might be kind of… revealing," I said.

She snorted a laugh. "Like how revealing?"

I could tell she was covering up her discomfort over the idea, and gathering up her courage to do something she maybe didn't know if she was capable of doing. Her bravery was impressive.

"I don't know," I said. "I haven't gotten a chance to use it yet."

"Let's do it!" she said.

Yeah, I really did want to use it. I wanted to know what was going though that sexy mind behind that sexy face and under that sexy head of color-shifting hair.

I was only slightly worried that she was going to see something that freaked her out. I say slightly because in continuing to think it over, if she found something she didn't like, and we didn't get together, no problem. Regina and I were sex buddies by now. Tara wasn't gone forever. Isabelle… whatever the hell had happened there was going to resolve itself somehow, eventually. I didn't think it was going to fizzle out and die.

In fact, I was being a little greedy here, but if Cinzy saw with my power into my sex life and she didn't like it, she could take a hike. She could shack up with Drat if she wanted. If she didn't mind it, great.

"What are you waiting for?" she asked.

"Curious about what you're going to see from my end, and whether or not it'll scare you away," I said truthfully. Fletcher the sex freak. Four partners in as many weeks.

"Trust me," she said quietly, squeezing my hands, "whatever you've got going on that I'll see, it can't be that bad. It can't be as, um… it can't be worse than mine."

"That doesn't sound like you're having second thoughts," I said.

She shook her head. "I trust you. You chose to be a Healer, you sacrificed your safety to help others, and I've heard about your people back home. Now, go on."

Considering what she'd said, and considering her high spirits after our weird yet productive meeting, I spent the Ingenuity Token and used the special ability.

The very first thing that happened was that I saw her passions.

She was passionate about pushing her boundaries and experiencing new things. Crazy passionate about it. She'd gone on road trips and used public transportation around New York City despite her parents' insistence that it was dangerous and that she shouldn't. She booked trains when she should've been at school, going up and down the East Coast.

She was passionate about being the best version of herself she could be. Cinzia, whose name hadn't been that back on earth, absolutely loved the way her body felt whenever she went to work out. She loved the stares she got while out and the men turning to watch her butt jiggle on the walk by. Mostly, she loved how it got her out of the house and away from the parents.

The fracking parents.

Cinzy do this. Cinzy why aren't you doing that? Cinzy, you're not wearing that to school, surely. No respectable daughter of mine is going to wear that. Cinzy have you finished your university application to Brown? Cinzy if you're going to be a lawyer or a doctor one day, why can't you just…? Cinzy you have to buckle down and…

No conversations. No consideration for who she was. She was nothing more than a game piece on a board for her parents on their quest toward a perfect life. Otherwise they could give a shift about her, her personality, her ambitions, her hopes and dreams.

She wanted attention, and she got it. She got it in the gym, out of the gym, but none of it was attention she really respected. Her circle of best friends was dissolving, with university coming on and all of them heading to the best universities in the country, or out to study abroad. And while the friendship fulfilled her, it didn't fill a need she had. She was passionate for connection, real connection.

She had a desire for freedom, for recognition, and for someone to come along who was worthy of her.

See, her parents hadn't stopped with planning out her professional life. She had been courted by numerous young men: tech bros at start ups, hedge fund bros at the ickiest kinds of firms, law bros who seemed more at home in a sewer than the swanky galas.

Cinzia's desire for connection and boundary pushing ran deep, and it had been twisted. It had twisted itself into a kink of sorts.

I wasn't sure how I knew it was a kink, except that the stream of information, the rapid-fire images and sound bites took on a different tenor. Like I was getting deeper into the core of her.

I shift you not, that inner core was into anal. I saw Cinzia through a Cinzia-tinted lens, as she saw herself. I saw her stripping off her clothes in the mirror and playing with herself on her bed, watching porn, and in fleeting glimpses I saw that porn become more and more brutal: women being pushed around, and the stories getting darker. I saw those fantasies on the screen, with the girl being brought to ecstasy before being used harshly.

Then I saw those fantasies as she experienced them.

This included her bent all the way down, ass up, and a huge penis slowly shoving aside whatever defenses she might have, stretching out her ass to a frightening degree.

This included her pushing larger and larger objects into it while rubbing furiously at her clit.

This included walking around the house with anal beads inserted, and drawing them back out of herself with agonizing slowness before reinserting them even slower. This included inserting a plug

up there, one with a cute glittery jewel-like flower made of plastic at the base. So if she decided to show anyone, they would know exactly what it was.

Also it was cute.

These mental images of Cinzy included her chained up with handcuffs to a set of bedposts, and forced to be penetrated in both holes: one man beneath her buried in her ass, the other slowly working himself in and out of her pussy while she absolutely lost her mind.

She had a mental image of herself walking around town on earth, hand in hand with a man who had put a vibrator inside her and was controlling it with an app, slowly lowering the sensation as she grew closer and closer to orgasm. She wanted that person to suddenly and inexplicably make her cum while she was ordering coffee. She'd be hunched over, elbows on the counter, apologizing because she wasn't feeling well. Then she would take that man's cock, fit it into her ass, and slowly lower herself down on it in the coffee shop bathroom as a thank you.

All of these mental images were accompanied by mental sound clips: the panting, the grunting and groaning, the quiet encouragement for her to relax, and the praise when she finally received the full tool all the way up inside, and her butt finally rested against the man violating her as she so desperately needed.

She wanted someone to strum her clit repeatedly while clapping a hand over her mouth so the people in other dressing rooms couldn't hear her building toward a crushing climax.

She wanted to be face down on the couch with her ass in the air, and a man drilling down into her very core, driving her within inches of unconsciousness from the overwhelming pleasure.

She wanted someone to tell her she wasn't allowed to cum until he said so.

She wanted someone, at her deepest core, to dominate her.

All of these mental images and their fantasy noises she'd created came with phantom sensations, and real sensations. Cinzia had

started toying with herself, and knew what some of these things felt like. She had a small army of toys that she'd had to put in storage when she left earth. She had only been able to bring a tiny array of her toys, and all of them were in her gear. So she knew, when she imagined a man inserting the anal beads, what it would feel like to have them go up into her, and for her asshole to slowly accept larger and larger toys.

Mere nanoseconds passed as all this information flooded into my brain. I had no time to wonder what it was Cinzia was seeing at the same time. It was just one thing after another, after another, after another. Pure sensation flooding me.

On their heels were some even deeper passions. She wanted someone to come on to her, strongly. She wanted someone to tell her what to do. She was in a position of having every man acting totally subservient to her. She was hot, and she knew that, but that was because she worked hard on her body. It meant no man had ever dared to approach her with any confidence. They wanted to spend money on her, and give her complete control over the relationship. She wasn't some queen to be doted on, she was an explorer who didn't know the way.

She wanted that man to appear, and she was getting desperate to find him. That man would tell her what they were doing that day, tell her where they were going, take charge of situations, and then he would drive her wild before using her body for his own satisfaction.

In a way, the anal was just an extension of that. She could, and would, get off the hardest of her life knowing that she was going beyond what she'd ever tried, while having her partner confidently please her, while pleasing himself.

This tidal wave of knowledge and moans and gasps and begging and pressure and demanding fingers and cocks hit me simultaneously. This was the very first thing that happened.

The second thing that happened was I got an instant erection. How could I not? I'd just been in the deepest recesses of kink in the mind of the most mind-bogglingly gorgeous woman I'd ever met,

standing before her, both of us nude, and she'd basically confessed to being an anal freak.

I came back to myself with Cinzy's hands in mine, her mouth slack and a blissed out expression on her face. Like she didn't have a single care in the world. Her eyelids fluttered, and she emitted a soft sigh.

Her nipples were hard, pointed things, nearly brushing my chest, and my rampant erection was perhaps two inches away from touching the cleft between her legs.

And Fairy Poppins was coming.

"Oh forking fork," I muttered.

I'd spotted her over Cinzy's shoulder. The tiny glowing fairy had just zipped up in the air, clearly trying to find her companion, and locked on us. The trail of fairy dust told me she was flying directly toward us.

I scrambled for some way to save myself.

Would you like to spend an Ingenuity Token for instant assistance? The UI asked.

I spent the Token without even realizing it, so thick was my need. Once more the huge coin appeared in the air, spinning to reveal the embossed Ingenuity symbol: a figure with a finger raised up in the air, and a lightbulb hovering over their head.

The mental image supplied by the UI was exactly what I needed, and I immediately collapsed to my knees and curled up into a ball. I let out a tortured groan that I very much felt.

"Fletcher?"

"Ow ow ow," I moaned.

"What happened? Oh jiminy crickets, you're not supposed to get injured. You're the fracking Healer, you dolt!"

I laid there, clutching my foot and other ankle, studiously keeping my erection totally covered.

The girl who wanted to be anally intruded upon peered down at my face, putting a hand over mine. “What’s happening, what’s happening, what’s happening?” she repeated in a panic.

“I’ll be fine,” I told her shakily.

Fairy Poppins arrived, and went flitting about trying to figure out if I was dying or not. Concern flooded through me that the little Nakamamon was going to figure out my game.

Slowly, I purged the mental images from my mind and felt myself begin to get back to normal. It wasn’t a quick process, not with the very attractive and equally as naked Cinzy practically showing her lady parts to me, including the one she wanted to have some lucky man take control of. Bending down like this was the upskirt shot of my dreams, and I squeezed my eyes closed against the knowledge that she had neatly trimmed down there, shaving the lips.

“What is it? Is it the growth plate injuries?” She asked in a panic. “The scoliosis?

I latched onto the lifeline she’d thrown. The **Blissense** must have shown her my injuries. “I think the character sheet and Physicality attribute is changing my body.” None of this was a lie. It was affecting my body somehow. I didn’t know if it would ever completely fix my body, but I had better muscles now than ever in my life. I had almost gotten myself back to pre-injury levels of stamina and fitness. The only lie was the inference that the changes were painful. So far they weren’t.

“You scared the shirt out of me, Fletcher… are you okay?”

“Right now? No.” Again, not a lie. I was not okay.

“You poor thing. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“I’ll be okay. I just need time.” I repeated. “It’s just… sometimes it’s like this.”

She rubbed her hand up and down my back, and I tried to fix my mind on clams with kids in them, the brackish water of the marsh, and mountains reassembling themselves for shifts and giggles. Anything to make it so I didn’t have a boner.

Miracle of miracles, it eventually worked.

“We can talk about your special ability later,” she said.
This is possibly the weirdest day of Christopher’s life.

Chapter 46- The Ups and Downs of Healing

After thanking Cinzy for her concern and her help, we reunited with the group and debriefed them. Cinzy immediately set off to help with the egg situation, guided by one of our Marshin friends.

For the rest of us, work immediately got underway to anchor ourselves in Slinktrickle as quickly as possible. In order to get down to the real job after that, the job the good people of Slinktrickle wanted and needed us settled here.

Or rather, they wanted me in particular to get down to business.

I spent the rest of the day in talks with Larelle as Guardian captain, Regina as the only Ranger, Cinzy as liaison to the Slinktrickle-ians, and the rest of the boys. Alan in particular had a serious amount of difficulty handling the no-clothes situation. At least Trent could hold Garnet in front of himself to shield anyone from looking at his genitalia, but Alan was new, he already had a stutter, and he was something of a social outcast. None of these helped him to cope with the situation we found ourselves in. Eventually though Trent got tired and muscle achy from holding Garnet like that, and went with covering himself with his hands like Alan.

There was herb harvesting, which Regina volunteered to get up to. She also wanted to get the lay of the land, and took several Marshins in one of their reed boats over the marsh to one of the grassy areas where the land firmed up. Once I told her what to look for, she nodded sharply and tapped the side of her head. To me this meant 'I got an ability from boning you, you goofball, you don't have to explain everything' so I let her go about the business she was best suited for. I tried not to let on that I was watching her butt jiggle as she left, but at the last moment she peered over her

shoulder and winked at me. Tweedle Dee yipped in delight, fluffy tails wagging in delight, and very nearly got me caught by everyone.

Lucky for us, the sleeping bag test proved out: it was only considered clothes if you tried standing up and hopping around like you were in a sack race. We lost one sleeping bag like that, with one very embarrassed Alan furiously blushing from red down to maroon.

The Marshins, true to their word, cleared out a building on the edge of town for our use, and Cinzy set Alan and Trent together in one of the building's three sleeping chambers. Drat and I should've had another, but Isabelle and Ivy began to kick up a fuss. Why did the menfolk get priority? There were seven of them, including Tara, and that was nearly double the number of boys. Cinzy calmed them down, but I relented. They could use the more spacious rooms, and Drat wasn't here to complain about being relegated to a tent beside the building.

For now this meant putting three girls in each room, and pitching tents for Drat and I. The Guardians once again kicked into action, no longer having a job to do. I chuckled; none of the men would be pitching tents in our pants until we found whatever god of clothing there was and getting them back to normal.

Since no one had any idea where Drat had gone at the moment, I decided for us, and got two of the smaller tents put up side by side, rather than a single larger tent.

As part of the quest we were on, Alan summoned me to his shared quarters.

"Th-th-th-these b-binders," he said, indicating several thick ring binders, "a-a-a-a-are full of t-tablets. Clay t-t-tablets."

"Wait what?" I waved the question away, so he wouldn't think I was insulting his speech. Opening one, I found the tablets the size of trading cards, the illustrations minuscule and the text illegible. "Hang on, you've had these the whole time?"

He nodded sheepishly. "I-I-I don't t-talk mmm…mmm…" Finally he threw his hands up and blurted, "MM-MUCH!"

“I know, buddy,” I told him, patting him on the arm. “No worries. Take your time.”

He showed me by grabbing out a large magnifying glass and holding it over the tiny tablets. It wasn’t great, but it did the trick and only gave me a tiny bit of headache.

He also motioned for me to wait, while he took out one of the tablets, put it on the provided desk space, and performed a spell.

Wizard spells were always so fun to watch in action. You had the slow trickle of mana through the concentration on their faces, the magic words that came out, and the way their fingers twitched in complicated hand gestures. In addition, this one used a bit of green later identified as one of the gigantic tree spheres, the huge singular green leaves.

For whatever reason, Alan didn’t have any trouble with the chanting situation. He could chant the magic words, or sing them, without inducing a single iota of stuttering. That focus, I guess, was stronger than whatever inside him made him stutter. Also, a tiny thread of mana flowed out of both his hands and his lips at the same time. The green thing was also laced with some mana, and by the end, the mana coalesced around the clay tablet.

It immediately swelled to the size of a full newspaper sheet.

“Shit,” he muttered, as the spell finished. The clay tablet bumped several things aside in its growth and sent one of the binders careening off, but we were quick enough to catch it.

“We’ll have to remember that for the future,” I said, chuckling.

“Yeah.”

The tablet he’d enlarged with his engorgio spell was a list of potential cures for mental afflictions.

“Good thinking,” I said. “I’ll need to take a closer look at this before I start flinging ingredients around. I read through all three that appeared here, frowning at how strangely similar the cures were to the one I’d crafted for the God of Footfalls. Sure the procedures were different, and the ingredients were different, but at its core, all of them involved heating up liquids and stirring them

over the course of hours, adding in different herbs, roots, flowers, grasses, generally all dried.

There was the difference. At the end, the one cure needed to be misted into the air around the afflicted. Another needed to be condensed into a solid and wafted around the air by a censor. The third needed to be painted into a specific ritual circle so the offending mental energy couldn't breach it. For the god, it had needed to ingest or absorb the cure in liquid form.

At least that part was different.

I sought out a specific tablet for Alan to enlarge, using the magnifying glass and eventually giving myself a bit of a headache after searching so hard. I shouldn't have; Alan was holding it.

I eyed him. "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

He burst out laughing. "You should've seen y-y-your f-face." Then he did an impression of me, bent over and peering with full concentration, one eye squinted shut and the other one bulging out looking everywhere.

"Ha ha." I rolled my eyes, and couldn't get mad at him. It was nice to see the timid little guy having some fun.

Once he got the second tablet enlarged—without knocking things off the workbench this time—it became clearer that the mental ailment had been caused by an oversaturation of rage and frustration. The page in question was an overview of typical mental illnesses and how they manifested in Nakamamon. There were sicknesses of sadness, a more bipolar sadness and maniacal swing, depression, fear, dissociation, hallucination, and plenty of others. What we were seeing was a fear and depression reaction to the rage and frustration episode, whatever that had been.

Somehow that emotion had been thick enough in the space around the eggs that they'd gotten infected with it. From there, the Marshins hadn't wanted to touch their little Marshell eggs. The lack of a comforting mental atmosphere had been more damaging than the initial infection.

I thanked Alan for his work, told him I'd get him back for messing with me, and then headed out to find the others.

It was time to convince the Marshins they needed to get back to their egg-keeping duties.

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"Marshins of Slinktrickle!" Cinzy called with the aid of another Bard skill. Several snorts and snickers drifted up from below us.

She gave the party below an unamused look, though the corner of her mouth quirked up.

The special ability was the same one she'd used to get Drat's attention when we were getting moving on the raft. Her voice boomed out in all directions, aided by a pulse of mana that looked nothing like the stuff Alan, Trent or I used. Although nearly invisible and hair thin, it came out in a massive shockwave. I wanted to understand it better, but the villagers began drifting toward us. They were still hairless, still noseless, all of them white and minty green in mostly identical patterning. White bellies, green limbs. It was still strange.

"Please gather round!" She bellowed.

Cinzia and I were now standing atop Muppin, on a small wooden platform set up by the Guardians and Regina.

She held my hand, another slightly problematic behavior, given what I knew about her. I wanted to do some pretty nasty things to her, things I knew she wanted, but for now I had to concentrate on the marsh water, Drat's unsettling looking Nakamamon, and the sickness gripping the eggs. Anything to keep from getting another hard on.

"As you should know by now, Fletcher is the name of our party's Healer," she said to everyone present in that same authoritative voice. "He will lay out the situation with your eggs, what will be done, and the cure he hopes to craft. Then he will take questions from you."

Well this was nerve-wracking as hell. Literally hundreds of eyes were on me, and hundreds of ears trained on what I had to say. I was very uncomfortable with this, but I decided to hell with it. Cinzia's courage flowed through me.

Also, I didn't have to picture the crowd naked… they were already stark.

"The eggs have suffered a sort of mental illness," I said, "the result of extreme frustration and rage expressed in their presence."

The Marshins shifted and looked to one another. A bit of muttering rose up around the assembled people.

"I'm sorry for that," I said. "Luckily, I believe treatment should stop the spread, and reverse course for all your eggs."

"What do we do?" One of them yelled.

I explained that the eggs needed good cheer. My people were thrilled to supply that, and if any of the townsfolk had time and was in high spirits, they should join in the merriment.

"It may seem strange to party and sing and dance around a scene of sickness," I called, "but the eggs have already reacted positively to these sorts of vibes."

They once again started muttering between one another at this news.

"I will attempt to concoct a cure, but this will take some days. Administering the cure will also be tricky. I ask for your patience at this time."

Likability check! *You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is Extreme difficulty. You do not currently possess the Tokens necessary to perform this check. Would you like to spend 11 Tokens to lower the difficulty by 11?*

Total Tokens: 5 Likability and 6 Free Tokens.

Note: This check qualifies for the* ***Hard At Work* *bonus of double Token value.*

A target higher than 11 was high. Too high. I wanted to say yes, but I couldn't… I needed all those Free Tokens to first concoct the cure, and then administer it to the eggs. There was no guarantee I would have all my Tokens replenish in time. And I couldn't be sure what passing this check even meant. The people stayed calm?

This wasn't an easy decision, but in the end I thought the cure was worth more than the peace of mind of the townsfolk.

I pressed **No**, and watched as my 5 Likability and the buff from Cinzy's special ability generated only 3 successes, far short of the twelve plus that I needed.

"Our babies need to hatch!" One of them called. "They're past due!" A chorus of concern and assent washed over the scene, and Cinzy squeezed my hand.

"I will try my best!" I said, but my words were being drowned out by the horror and despair that the eggs would never hatch.

The wail that went up was stricken, horrified. "My babies!"

"The babies!" Another cried out, like they were already dead and she was grieving lives that had never been.

The others took up this chorus. "The babies! The poor babies!"

Cinzy once again drew up her mana and a deep breath at the same time. "Folks!"

A ray of hopeful sunshine seemed to break through the assorted masses, but just for a moment. Cinzy rushed on: "If need be, we will work day and night. Please give us time, and please understand."

It wasn't working. Several of the females who had apparently laid the eggs swooned and had to be supported by their neighbors, while others clutched their hands to their chests and howled to the sky.

"Let's get to the hatchery," I said. Cinzy immediately locked eyes with Larelle, who had her Guardians fan out and keep people away from the bridges linking this huge platform to the section of the town with the eggs.

Isabelle clicked her tongue and Muppin lumbered into motion. Regina and Isabelle helped the two of us down.

"Okay, well, that was a disaster," Regina muttered.

“I thought it could’ve gone worse,” Cinzy said. “I don’t know how, but maybe, possibly. Okay, it was a disaster.” She immediately began to collapse out of overdoing her special abilities. Trent and Drat were there to catch her, and I experienced a moment of bitter jealousy that made no sense. I wanted to be the one to catch her, cradle her, save her, and I was upset that other men had touched her gorgeous body. Sure she wasn’t mine, and sure I had more sex partners than I knew what to do with, but there it was anyway.

Fairy Poppins was, of course, in a fit, and hovered over Cinzy’s half-conscious face. She snuggled up against her companion’s cheek and bopped her with fairy dust, so she would be easier for the boys to carry

Larelle moved to the nearest bridge, and started fending off already grieving townsfolk, Chrysta took another, and let Ivy and Isabelle by so they could guard other nearby bridges.

“We need to get to the hatchery and give them some love,” I said.

Alan nodded. “On it, b-b-b-boss,” he said, then immediately cast a spell that gave me the ability to jump. Beside me, Regina was rushing across the bridge covered by Larelle, with Tweedle Dee bounding after her on silent toe beans.

As the mana entered my body, I felt the oddest sensation. For the first time I could remember, I felt like my legs could take me to the Olympics. I could outperform every athlete in the hundred meter dash. I could jump higher and longer than any gazelle, to say nothing of any human. My muscles bulged, and grew muscles of their own.

“G-go!” Alan urged.

I didn’t wait; crouching, I launched myself off the platform’s edge and damn near landed on the building on the next platform over. Meaning I’d just jumped the fifteen foot gap, the fifteen foot platform surrounding the building, and the whole thirty foot width of the building in the platform’s center. I landed essentially on the curved, sloping longhouse roof, and used that to launch myself at the next platform.

I caught sight of Regina staring wide-eyed at me. She broke into a smile, and put on an extra burst of speed.

UI messages about Physicality checks came and went. It seemed that the jumping spell gave me free Tokens on each of these, so it wasn't even a thing to pass them. I nearly ended up in the gap between two of the stilt house platforms, but managed to catch one foot on the planks and send myself with a half-successful kick of my leg. This one sent me only about twenty feet, whereupon I rolled to a stop and stared up at the sky, laughing breathlessly.

Then I got to my feet, saw Regina race past, and leapt clear over the smaller building in front of me. Seconds later, Regina joined me at the hatchery building.

She was heaving for breath. "I can't… believe… your dick was… just flopping… like that… in the wind."

"Me neither," I gasped.

"Come on," she said. "Dee… can you… watch the door?"

The fox gave an affirmative yip and immediately turned to guard the door.

"Good," she said, pulling me inside. "Someone needs to give these eggs some good vibes, and all our team members are tied up at the moment."

This is Christopher feeling good about his chances at getting laid in the next thirty seconds.

Chapter 47- Want to Rip Off Your Clothes

A stiffening breeze was accompanied by my own reaction to what Regina was proposing. The sun warming my exposed skin felt incongruously nice against the backdrop of all the stuff going wrong.

The announcement with the Marshins in their village had gone sideways when I was presented with a social roll I couldn't hope to pass and then still accomplish my mission. For the next several days, the team would need to keep the natives out of their own hatchery, so thick were the negative emotions flying around.

I could tell right away that Regina was serious. She cooed to Tweedle Dee and gave him several chin scritches before ordering him to guard the door.

As the wind rushing over the marsh receded from the door being closed, I turned to face my remaining Ranger.

She didn't even speak, but instead pushed me against the door and kissed me, hard. This lingered for some time, before she broke off, wild-eyed and gasping.

"I'm kind of peeved that you're already naked," she muttered, kissing over my neck, my ears, my collar bone. "I want to rip off your clothes right now."

My hands were already on her body. Such a nice one, with curves and softness where they were best situated. My fingers traveled down the length of her torso, hugging her waist, flaring hips, and finally dug into her ass cheeks. She gasped.

"We have to make this quick," she said, and dropped to her knees unnecessarily. I was already most of the way hard, yet she still popped my cock into her mouth. For some time, the only sounds were the slurping and sucking, and my groans of encouragement.

She pulled away with another sharp intake of breath. “It’s bigger than before. It wasn’t this big when I sucked it last time.”

I gave her a smile. “You’re going to feel really tight, then, huh?”

“Oh my gods,” she muttered. “You’re going to break me with this thing.”

“Does that mean you want to stop?”

She stood and looped her arms around my neck, kissing me again and rubbing her pussy up and down the length of me.

“Absolutely not,” she said, directly into my mouth. “If I can’t handle it, then it just means I walk funny for a day or so. It’s a sacrifice I’m willing to make.” She looked halfway blissed out already, eyes half lidded and grin spreading.

Pulling her leg up, I looped it around my hip and fisted my cock so it ran up and down her slit. Squeaks of pleasure followed immediately. I watched for her reaction, and was pleased to have her throw her head back, groaning.

“Put it in,” she begged. “Come on.”

“No oral first?” I asked innocently.

“Funk me, Fletcher. I need it. Staring at your naked body the whole time is killing me.”

She hunched forward, placing the head at her opening, and soon enough the incredible heat and tightness enveloped me, bit by tiny bit. Ever so slowly, she sank down onto my shaft.

“Big?” I asked.

Her response was strained. “Big. Bigger.”

Standing up sex was not as good as I’d hoped it would be, until I spun her and pressed her back against the interior wall of the hatchery. Only then did I have the leverage necessary to begin drawing out and pressing in, out and in, over and over.

“I’m going to spend the Token now,” I told her.

“Yesssss,” she hissed.

Engaging **Entwined Ecstasy** made the feelings intensify an absolute ton. Both of us groaned, and her breathing quickened. It

was one of the signs that she was approaching orgasm already. Now every bit of her insides seemed to both clamp down and increase in wetness. I stared at her glittering freckles, her heaving breasts, while I pistoned in and out of her.

I'd needed this too, after the Cinzy situation. I hadn't been cognizant of just how much of a relief this could be. Driving her back into the wall over and over, hearing her moans and gasps, having her arms loosen around my neck as she neared the climax, these all served to sharpen my focus and get her to the precipice as fast as I could.

"Ohhhh," she groaned. "I love this, Fletcher. I love… doing this… with you."

"I love it too," I told her.

Her 'ohhhh' went on, and rose in pitch and volume. One last sharp intake of breath later, this groan came out the loudest, and her whole body bucked. It was the first of many. As for me, I kept up the pace, loving the power I had within me to give a woman such bliss.

She begged me breathlessly to stop, so I slowed down and she sagged against me. So I did what any normal, sex-crazed, god-touched Pleasure Seeker would do, and helped drape her over the workstation table.

Then I lined up and sank back into her depths, and made her fake curse again.

"Ugh, you've got a fracking cannon now," she moaned. "It's so, unh… so big, Fletcher. It's too… too good. Fuuuhhhh…"

Her hand drifted down to play with her clit while I worked into a nice rhythm. Just loving the sounds of her breathing, her moaning, her complaints that it was too good. Just loving the feeling of her straining to accept me, the amazing friction, and the feel of her ass squishing against my abs. Loving the sight of her on her tip toes, the sight of her parting to accept my shaft again and again. The sight of her round cheeks rippling every time I slammed home again.

"Don't stop," she begged. "Funk me, funk… ugh, Fletcher…"

The pleasure had built and built, and over the next several minutes we lost ourselves to the act, just enjoying the animalistic perfection of this coupling. She wanted to switch again, so I laid down on the floor and let her ride me. With access to her boobs, I got to heft and knead them, run my palms and fingers over her nipples, and watch her hips rise and fall again and again.

With one hand on her clit and the other on my knee behind her, she brought herself right to the brink yet again, and I watched in amazement as we repeated the crushing orgasm: the shaky uneven breaths, the inability to speak, the broken words falling into moans of ecstasy, and the full body buck. The groan transformed into a yell, and she cried out my name over the course of several shudders. Eyes closed, focused only on the sensations.

"Regina, I'm…"

She kept rising and falling.

"I'm gonna cum," I told her, thrusting my own hips up and then up again.

She didn't seem to register the words, but instead kept rising after I'd slammed up into her.

"Regina," I got out through gritted teeth. "I'm…"

She kept hammering her hips down onto mine, squeezing on my shaft with her muscles, mouth slack and a tiny bit of drool leaking out of the corner. As for me, I felt every muscle in my body tense as I tried to stop a tidal wave from crashing. I might as well have been trying to stop the sun from coming up.

"Reg— fuhhhhh!"

I came.

At the very last moment, she seemed to get it, and those eyes of hers with the flower-shaped irises fixed on me. I saw a brief battle go on in her brain: did she want to feel the contractions as I blasted seed up into her, or did she want to be safe from the possibility of a life growing inside her?

That battle went on a second too late, because the first blast went directly up into her. I groaned and screwed my eyes closed,

trying not to, but it just wasn't possible. She rocketed up off me, and a moment later caught a stream directly across her face. Then another got her in the eye before her lips closed over the head and she took the rest in her mouth.

I'd enhanced my Load using the Pleasure Seeker Qualities available to me, so her eyes opened in surprise when I kept blasting forth. She drew up off me with a mouth completely full, pointing my cock downwards. Now when I arched up and came, it was all over the glittering freckles on her chest and breasts. And then there was even more.

She was silent for a time, staring down at herself.

"What the hecky Becky, Fletcher?"

"Sorry," I told her.

"Sorry? What for? You're like a fracking fire hose now. That's amazing! It was practically a milkshake I just swallowed. Holy cow, we need to clean this up. I can't just cover it up with my shirt." She laughed. "I don't think that would even work. It would just soak through and everyone would know I got doused in jizz."

I smiled lazily, while she went to the workstation to get a rag and wipe off the copious amount of my seed streaming down her body.

"Is this your second job class doing this?" she asked.

"Yep. And the girth enhancement." I realized I had a magical penis pump, and chuckled to myself. Life was so weird.

She froze. "Wait… did you dump this much into Tara?"

"No. I found the skills for the second job class later."

"I'm still amazed that you kept doing it inside her. We don't have any condoms and I'm sure she's not on birth control. I'm not on birth control either." Her hand drifted down to her pussy and pressed on it. "Ugh I want to go again. Can you get it back up?"

I blinked at her several times.

"Okay, fine, I know we can't… but tonight, again. I want it, slow and easy and, holy shirt I'm getting myself horny all over again. I can't stay here and look at you." She pointed an accusing finger at me. "If your jizz is laced with some kind of addictive substance I am

gonna… I dunno, get fully addicted and be in withdrawal all the time I guess."

She strode to the door and pulled it open, getting a yipping Tweedle Dee jumping on her and wagging tails, begging for scritches with tongue lolling. "Hey buddy! Yeah! Let's get out and go gather up some herbs and flowers and roots and such, because I'm going to go out of my mind otherwise. Or maybe do something in front of the whole team that I really regret later."

She paused, then scratched Dee again down the head and back.

"No, I'm not doing Fletcher in front of everybody else. Not doing it."

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"Status report?" I asked from my workstation a good thirty minutes later, upon hearing the door open.

Surprisingly, it was Drat who spoke up from beyond the partition walls the natives had put in this afternoon. "Larelle and the guards slowly pulled back to the bridges just outside this platform. The villagers are gathered, but they're not pushing the issue."

"Crimanitely." Big sigh. Lots of big sighs.

"Alan's here with me. Trent is working on an escape platform out in the marsh where we can take the eggs if there's an emergency, and he can blow the bridge with one swift burst of mana."

"Cinzy?"

"She's not doing well," he said.

Another big sigh. This was supposed to be a nice, calm, easy job, where the native townsfolk love us and welcome us, and not a high stakes adventure story where the natives slowly come to loath us and overwhelm us with sheer numbers. Then there'd be a race against time while my people got pushed back and swallowed up like in a fracking zombie movie.

Drat dratted on. "Blames herself for not making the big announcement for you. She has a way higher Likability, so she's

right. It was a stupid move to let you speak. She's been crying her eyes out for the last thirty minutes and Alan's been trying to console her."

"That's messed up," I said.

"All of this could've been avoided if she'd done her job," he said.

It was time to concoct a cure. I had made myself as presentable as I could, so it was time to work up a cure in the buff. We had sectioned off the hatchery with some curtains and partition walls so that people wouldn't have to stare at each other's naked bodies. Right now I could only hear Drat, I couldn't see him.

"Still, really harsh," I responded.

Alan came around the partition holding one of the binders of clay tablets. I needed these recipes, since I didn't have them all memorized. Without a word, he cleared off space on the workstation and performed the spell again. He looked shaken, which was not something we could afford right now.

"Hey," I told him. "You clear out of here unless you can regulate your emotions better, all right? These eggs need positive vibes."

He took a deep, cleansing breath, nodded sharply, and marched right out the door.

"That was unexpected," I said.

"You know what else is super unexpected?" Drat said. "We aren't the first humans these people have encountered."

"Um… you're not going to pause for dramatic effect and make me guess what the heck you're talking about, are you?"

He paused. "Well I was, but you ruined it. So apparently what happened was, a group of us came in here a couple of weeks ago, and there was a serious altercation. That person used some sort of ability fueled by anger. I'm going to call it a Sorcerer or a Guardian ability. Probably not Wizard but I wouldn't rule it out."

I let out a long breath. No wonder the majority of them weren't happy we were here and didn't want to accept that we couldn't just solve all their problems instantly. After all, they saw us as the creators of their problems.

“We’re going to fix this,” I said. “Did you find out who it was?” It didn’t matter, but there were only so many away teams that got allowed outside the castle.

“I’ll have Alan send a message back to central HQ,” he said, “Ask about the away teams matching this kind of description. Trouble is, a lot of them are Rangers and Wizards, but they all have Guardian escorts in case of danger.”

“Yeaaaaahhhhh,” I said.

Some young idiot with newfound magical powers had been denied something he wanted, kicked up a fuss, and possibly killed any chance these eggs had of ever hatching. It was like wiping out a whole generation of these Nakamamon in their little village society.

I needed to make this cure as fast as possible.

“I’m gonna need Alan and Cinzy back in here, preferably with their shirts in order, and Larelle’s magmamander.”

Drat had either already gone, or he disappeared without a word. This whole ‘I’m darkness, I’m the night,’ thing was getting old. But, in the spirit of keeping things light and cheerful in here, I plastered a smile on my face, started whistling while I worked, and started putting together ingredients, and getting the equipment in order.

This is Christopher facing the realities of being a Healer in this world, and both loving it and hating it.

Chapter 48- Apothecary's Assistant

In the aftermath of having sex with Regina yet again, the system didn't award me Pleasure Seeker level 11. This wasn't too big of a bummer, nor was it unexpected. The higher level you were, the more you had to fulfill experience triggers. The first bunch of levels had come all at once, and now they'd come slower and slower.

What did happen was an increase of our shared abilities. It turned out that Regina reached Herb Lore at level 3, and I got Wild Lore level 3 as well.

I'd secretly hoped to get a brand new ability for each level of every special ability, but it wasn't to be. And, after looking it over, I was glad. I already had a lot of abilities. It was good to see Wild Lore shift into something more useful, rather than add something that wasn't useful in the slightest.

Wild Lore III

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

I- Concentrate on a plant, animal or native of this world to understand it better. While doing so, your Identify is considered +3 levels. Information you gain is based on your Ingenuity attribute.

II- Choose a plant, animal or native of this world and spend a Token to gain the ability to speak to it for up to a minute. During this time, your Likability and Persuasion are considered +2 levels. The subject's level of trust and information given is based on a Likability check, including the Persuasion skill.

This was really good. I had only used it a bit, but I was pleased with the progression. Free levels when I performed certain actions,

excellent. This had already engaged to give me information about the Marshells, Marshins and Marshmellows. It would help going forward for sure.

In the immediate aftermath, I also gained a new Achievement.

Achievement: *Third Level's The Charm*

One of your special abilities has reached level 3! How exciting. You've begun to tread what is sure to be a very long and winding path, Healer.

Reward: +1 Ability Upgrade

I could definitely get on board with that. My first instinct was to grab Hard at Work at level 3. The level 3 lowered all skill check difficulties for my class by 1. I wanted to reach for higher, but having things be just a little bit easier wasn't so bad. It was essentially like having a free Token spent on the difficulty at all times. When I looked at it this way, it was a very valuable ability and upgrade.

"I love it!" I tried to convince myself, and it didn't really work all that well.

The other options I'd already explored: **Healer's Resistance** and **Healer's Endurance** weren't what I needed right this moment. The Pleasure Seeker abilities weren't going to help with regard to the egg situation either, though **Post-Sharing Clarity** might help if I could take a break and have sex with Regina whenever the 10 minutes ran out. A quick look showed me that the bonuses would increase to +3 to all attributes for 10 minutes as opposed to +2. Which was great, but wouldn't be as great as an increased duration. And it required me to have sex first, which was a sporadic occurrence, mostly in my tent right now. **Blissense** just wasn't going to be helpful in the slightest here.

The only thing it had done so far is told me Cinzy was kind of messed up, and had probably been coming on to me since this expedition started. I had no clear idea of what horrors it had shown her when we both engaged in the use of the ability, but for the

moment, it was best to play it cool and accomplish this task before trying to figure out if she wanted me to slowly draw anal beads out of her before slowly putting something much bigger in there.

After gazing down at my hardening cock and willing it back to normal, I sighed, stopped thinking about Cinzy and her kink, and sank the Ability Upgrade into **Hard at Work**.

Hard At Work III

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

I- When engaged in checks that pertain to your class, your Tokens are worth double.

II- When you assist someone in their job, and seek to reduce the difficulty of a check, 2 Tokens will reduce the difficulty by 1, instead of 3 Tokens for 1 reduced difficulty.

III- All class-related checks using your class skills have their difficulties are reduced by 1.

"Let's get to work," I told the system, and banished all the screens.

I had ingredients laid out, a series of instructions inscribed onto a clay tablet, and I had everything prepped long before Cinzy arrived.

Fairy Poppins came first, flying in through the window and bobbing up and down in front of me. I gave her a friendly smile, told her I was glad to see her—this was the truth—and kept right on grinding up roots, soaking flowers in oils, and drying leaves with the help of a magmamander.

None of these were quick processes, so I just narrated while I worked for the four or five inch tall fairy.

"I'm just marinating these cloves in sesame oil," I told her. "The cloves need to soak up the oil for a good few hours so they dissolve in the heated potion later."

Fairy Poppins rested on the window sill and watched me work. I set to chopping stalks and dividing them up into attempt piles, in case I flubbed the cure up.

"I really hope Cinzy can get herself together pretty soon. She's not really handling this failure situation well, is she?"

Fairy Poppins shook her head sadly.

"I understand she's sailed through a lot of life really easily, being so smart and so pretty. Failing for your first time when you're twenty-something can be hard."

I shrugged and swirled the cloves around in the oil. Fairy Poppins watched me work, knees drawn up and chin on her knees.

"I learned it pretty easily. There are always going to be things you can and can't do, that's just a fact. You have to focus on what you can do, and get good at it."

Eventually I got the cauldron set up, took a deep breath, and started heating the oil. Just like the last time, this mixture was a series of steps that had to be done in a specific order. It was precisely like being in potions class. This one, though, differed in one important aspect: it would be misted over the whole hatchery. I wasn't entirely sure how that was going to happen, as we didn't have any spray bottles handy. The magic would've warped the plastic they were made of anyhow.

"Focus on one thing at a time," I told Cinzy's Nakamamon. She had flown over and was standing on the ingredients.

"Could I ask a favor of you?"

She nodded vigorously.

"Unfortunately, I need an assistant or two. Could you make sure Cinzy is feeling better, and grab her? And Alan while you're at it, if he's okay to come in here."

She flitted up to me, saluted, and followed this up by bopping me on the nose. I ended up sneezing from the fairy dust I got in my face, but I laughed nonetheless.

By the time Alan and Cinzy entered the hatchery, I had the temperature of the cauldron at a nice two-twenty, and had dissolved the already-softened cloves in there, followed by the stirring, the ground roots, and then the mana-soaked stems.

"Cinzy, I'm so glad you're here," I told her.

“What?” She sounded very much like she was in a daze, like nothing

“I’m. Glad. You’re. Here.”

“Oh. Why?”

“Because you’ve got an incredibly high Likability, you’re perfectly suited to keeping eggs happy, and you’re walking around, meaning you’ve gotten over the nonsense that happened earlier.”

I heard a sob.

Well I hadn’t meant ‘the nonsense that happened earlier’ to mean she was at fault, but apparently that was how she saw it. I got halfway through yelling that very thing when I heard the door slam.

“You have got to be kidding me,” I muttered.

“B-boss?” Alan asked.

“It would be really nice if everybody put aside their drive to be perfect, and just tried their fracking best!” I called, more angrily than I wanted. “The mission needs us all to be doing our jobs, Alan!”

“Y-y-y-y-yeah,” he mumbled, clearly upset, and looking the same way Cinzy had before she stormed out.

“Not you too.”

Healer’s Resistance II*: You have been dealt damage. Would you like to spend a Durability Token*

to resist the damage and step down the duration of debuffs by 75%?

"Yes, I very much would," I said. "And, for that matter, I'll spend one on Alan here."

The two Tokens, like before, appeared before me as massive gold coins. Both were a good half inch thick, and the video game sound of the coins —cla-cling!—sounded twice. While Physicality Tokens had the image of a muscle flexing torso, Durability Tokens instead had a small raised image of a faceless person hauling a backpack that was easily twice their size.

The UI then went on to explain that I'd just resisted all damage from a **Debilitating Lash**, a psychic damage effect. The **Debilitating Depression** had already run its course, because my Stamina had already replenished. It informed me about a minute later that Alan's Stamina had fully replenished also, from where it had been draining away, and he was now done dealing with the psychic damage.

"Get Cinzy back in here right now!" I really was allowing this to get me angrier than I should've been. Once more, I plastered a smile on my face and tried whistling as I worked.

The fight was on, then, to actually craft the thing I had been requested to craft. It required only one temperature alteration, which I liked, although there were more ingredients overall. The sundrinker petals and seeds were in there, along with a flower I'd seen on my first day here, the common numphty. I smiled as I ground up the numphty stems. Yes of course, I thought, the flower with the silly name gets to be on the list of the mood-improving cure.

Cinzy appeared not long after I began trickling mana into the cauldron as instructed. She moped into the hatchery, bawling, leaning first against the doorframe and then slowly sinking into a crying ball of pure misery after two steps. Not looking away from the cure I was crafting, I pointed at her with one hand and quickly spent the Durability token to help her overcome the **Debilitating Lash**.

"You all right?" I asked.

She blinked away the tears and looked at me like she hadn't seen me in weeks.

"Fletcher? What happened?"

I didn't stop stirring, and actually had to make a Durability check at Easy in order to continue going without losing my concentration.

"Something called a Debilitating Lash," I told her.

"Duh, I can read," she said, and wiped her eyes with the insides of her wrists. "Where'd it come

from?”

“I think it was a psychic attack from the eggs… possibly from the Marshins. Could you kindly go check our Guardians and how they’re doing? If they’ve been affected…”

I didn’t need to tell her again. She shot out the door, her half-white, half-brown tushy bouncing amazingly before it vanished.

Some thirty minutes later she arrived, panting, and telling me that they had weathered the **Debilitating Lash** poorly. Although only Isabelle had been seriously affected, all four of the Guardians gave ground and slowly dealt with psychic damage before turning and securing bridges far closer to the hatchery. Isabelle had gone fully fetal position. When the Marshins tried to press through Isabelle’s bridge, Drat appeared out of nowhere with a terrifying Nakamamon wrapped around his torso. He, Alan, and Cinzy had scared them back, and dragged Isabelle directly to this platform.

“How about Trent?” I asked, still stirring and still infusing the whole thing with mana.

Her eyes widened and she ran out the door again.

While she was gone I continued to monitor the situation with the cure. The mana went in along with another batch of sundrinker petals, and I eased the cauldron back down to two twenty by putting the

telescoping legs of the tripod up to where I'd marked them.

Cinzy reappeared a short time later, telling me that she'd nearly exhausted her mana on her mood stabilizing special abilities, because they'd hit Trent so badly.

"I think," I said, stirring and pushing an increased amount of mana down into the concoction, "that we're going to need that escape platform. Tell him to double time it, and he can have up to two mana potions if he needs them."

She let out a low whistle. We didn't have many of the really good mana potions that would last, so using two of those meant I was really serious.

"You got it," she said.

She had just returned and said something when the UI interrupted and gave me the check dialogue. I held up a hand, staring down at the cauldron to see if it matched the instructions on the tablet I was using.

"All right," I muttered to myself, "it's been a dull yellow orange the whole time, deepening to yellow, and now it's supposed to shine like the sun. And… sing? I don't know how a potion's supposed to sing."

A tiny, distant heavenly chorus could be heard, and I frowned in amazement. It nearly made me lose my concentration.

***Develop Cure (Small/Fairy) Check**: This check is Very Difficult (7). You currently have 5 Likability, 3 levels in Small Nakamamon, and 0 levels in Fairy aspect Nakamamon. Would you like to spend your 4 Tokens to automatically succeed at this check?*

Total Tokens: 5 Likability and 6 Free Tokens.

*****Hard At Work:** Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

I let out yet another huge sigh, this one of relief. The difficulty was lower than that of a god, which was nice, and also realistic instead of going with the slowly escalating difficulty rating most often seen in video games.

A total of 8 ranks would give me two to three successes, not eight. I had the option of sinking my available skill points into Fairy aspects, or just spend the Tokens, hoping they replenished quickly. Even if I spent the 7 remaining skill points, that would give me maybe 4 more successes, if I was lucky. No, it was better to keep the skill points in reserve and spend the Tokens for now. I still had plenty left for

I spent the 4 Tokens. All four of them rose out of nowhere—*cla-cling cla-cling cla-cling cla-cling!*—and spun in mid-air before they faded out of existence. They puffed into various different colors of smoke and glittery stuff.

Success! *You have crafted a cure for a unique creature.*

I let out a whoop of triumph and immediately pulled the cauldron away from the magmamander.

"Now we're talking," I said, about three seconds before Larelle entered the hatchery.

"We have to go."

This is Christopher's relaxing sex adventure getting decidedly far more fraught than it should've been.

Chapter 49- So Many Raspberries

The weather was just beginning to turn foul when Larelle burst into the hatchery.

There's no time, she said without speaking. *The people are pushing past. Some of them are getting to the boats and trying to climb up the stilts inside the perimeter. We have to evacuate.*

She scooped up several backpacks, and I noted she already had mine in hand.

"Are they getting violent?" I asked.

No, but they are convinced we are going to hurt all their children. Come, we must flee this place and—

"I have the cure finished," I blurted. She froze.

Fletcher… she tried a resigned tone that told me she was ready to abandon the eggs. The revelation that the cure had been finished didn't change that; she was still ready to cut and run. And, being the Guardian captain of this expedition, she had a veto power when it came to keeping us all safe. If our safety was compromised, she was within her rights to take command of the whole thing until we were all out of harm's way. *We can attempt this another time,* she told me.

"Look," I told her, and pointed down to the where the cauldron was singing cheerfully, with warm spring sunshine blazing up out of it. "It's pure positivity. It succeeded, and all we have to do is apply it —"

There was a shout from outside, and a thump, followed by a chorus of dismay.

"If we leave these here, the people are going to kill them. They won't mean to, but they're going to bring their negativity in here. All

the fear, the horror, the anger, it's going to rapidly accelerate their condition. Meaning this is our only shot at this."

We will move the eggs to Trent's redoubt, she said.

"No. The sick parts are spongy and sticky. The shells are weakened there, so just picking them up could break most of them."

We will save those that can be moved.

"Larelle," I told her. "I'm not moving from this hatchery. You can take the others and retreat if you want, but I'm staying here."

The captain goes down with his ship… or in this case, the doctor goes down with his sinking clinic.

For a brief instant I saw her consider just taking me. She could scoop me up in her big muscle mommy arms and stomp past all the dismayed natives, maybe stiff arming a few of them if they pushed in too close.

That internal discussion went my way in the end. She stomped back out, clearly not best pleased with how things were going.

A loud cry came from outside, where the Marshins now had the building more or less surrounded. With only a single entrance to the hatchery, the natives only had to gather near the door. The Guardians had kept them focused that way, so us non-guards could get away towards Trent's evacuation platform. Thankfully, none of them had considered going in through the windows… yet.

"The babies!" came the horrified cry from outside. "Our babies!" Dozens of voices picked up this call, which visibly dimmed the light and the chorus coming out of the cauldron.

"Fletcher!" Cinzy said from the doorway. She was wild-eyed, terrified now.

"Cinzy, get in here and help me. The cure is cooling down. Once that's done—"

"We have to go, Fletcher!" She said, and a pulse of mana came bursting out of her. It was a Bard special ability and I didn't care for it one bit.

Likability check! *You do not have the associated skill for this check. This check is Very Difficult. You do not currently have enough Tokens to pass this check. Would you like to reduce the difficulty by 3?*

Total Tokens: 0 Likability and 6 Free Tokens.

I desperately wanted to know why this check didn't fall under the auspices of **Hard at Work**, and turn my 6 Free Tokens into 12 tokens. Just as I was gritting my teeth to spend the Tokens and push my luck, another UI pop up appeared.

You have been forced forced to make a contested social check. ***Stalwart*** *gives you the Persuasion skill for this check at rank 7. Would you like to reduce the difficulty by 3?*

Total Tokens: 0 Likability and 6 Free Tokens.

"Yes," I hissed. The first thing that happened was all six of my Free Tokens *cla-clinged!* up into the air in rapid fire order, rotating as they went. These now all had the Likability embossing of a cheerful grinning face, flanked by two thumbs up.

Cinzy saw them too, and stared in wonder that I had so many.

I then watched as the difficulty rating fell from 6 to 3, and I crushed it with my 5 Likability and 7 Persuasion, scoring 5 successes. Cinzy's expression went to pure dumbfounded amazement as the readout came up for her, and her lip trembled.

"I just spent all my Free Tokens on that check," I hissed at her. "If that costs me the chance to administer this cure, I'm going to have you off this team before the sun goes down. You'll be hiking back to HQ in the buff."

"I… Fletcher, I—"

"Don't. Get in here and help me. This needs to cool faster."

I poured the sunshiny concoction into a cool mixing bowl, and started scooping out cupfuls into mugs.

"I have to tell Larelle—"

"Shut it and help. Or go."

She scurried to obey, and I wasn't sure if I'd just initiated a contested social check or not, since I was willing notifications out of the way. I needed to concentrate on what I was doing.

"This has to be misted over the eggs," I told her, scooping up and pouring out another ladle into another mug. "The droplets have to be very fine. We have to figure out a mechanism to mist it out."

Tears were slipping down her cheeks, but she nodded and followed along.

"Check the cups. Once they're cool we can start administering."

"Okay." Her voice was shaky, and I caught her wiping the tears away several times.

In the meantime, I was suddenly low on Tokens, and I had a feeling this was going to be Likability again. Administer Cure was at rank 7, and I saw as I pulled up the information on my character sheet that I was only a sliver of experience away from leveling it to 8 naturally. Putting a skill point in there now was almost counterproductive, but I really wanted all the natural successes I could get.

"Do you have any Tokens left?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I used them up in the big talk earlier, and then getting Trent and Isabelle back on their feet."

"Free Tokens?"

"I only have one."

Huh. I wondered… scrolling back up through my logs, it appeared that I'd gotten the first 5 Free Tokens from my Near Death Experience Achievement, from touching the Goddess of the Meadows. I guess people didn't run around poking things that could kill them on the regular.

"It's fine," I said. "You're going to be using Likability and a skill you don't have for this check, but your Likability is really high, right?"

She nodded, looking shell-shocked. "Twelve."

“It’s about what I’ll be doing with my maxed out skill.”

It had to work. These eggs were due to hatch any day. They weren’t going to survive the zombie Marshin apocalypse. This was literally our only chance to do this.

“Um… how do we mist them?” She asked. “There’s no spritzer bottle.”

Inspiration! Would you like to spend 1 Token for inspiration?

I considered it for a second, but then replayed Cinzy’s words. She hadn’t said spray bottle, but spritzer bottle. Spritzer bottle sounded an awful lot like spitzer. A game my folks played at family reunions, but that didn’t matter. I waved that way. Spitzer sounded an awful lot like spit.

“We get a mouthful and just spit it out all over the eggs,” I said, and blew a raspberry.

The UI notification disappeared, and I mentally pumped my fist. I could inspiration without Tokens, thank you very much.

“Are you… you’re serious?”

“Uh, yeah.”

***

The spitting was, and I’m being perfectly serious here, glorious.

Honestly, I thought it would be stupid and stop the cure from working. Neither of us had leftover Tokens to use to make this easier, but I was hoping good old fashioned ingenuity (not the game derived kind) would trump system shenanigans. And so, getting a mouthful of the cure, I puffed out my cheeks, pursed my lips, and sprayed it out as misty as I could.

Now here’s the thing about magically infused cures: they have magic in them. I know that sounds stupid and obvious, but you forget once you’ve created your first or second magically infused

cure. It's just liquid, after all, with the chorus of singing being drowned out by the freaking out of the natives not ten feet away, and with the glow being normalized by your five minutes of seeing it.

Humans can make even the most astonishing of miracles seem tame and banal by the end of the day, honestly. You know that story about the wifi on the airplane that had never existed before, and went out after a few minutes? Nobody shot up out of their chairs and went 'holy shiftballs, this is life-changing technology!' They did, however, grumble and grump about losing it after just a few minutes of being able to talk to people from 35,000 feet. Was it absolutely amazing? Yes. Is modern technology like magic? Sure. Do we take it for granted once we've got it? Yes, and after about ten goldarn seconds.

Example: You can drive your car faster than any animal on the planet can run. Amazing? No. You hate driving. It's because the other people are in your way, or don't use their flashers. Example: You carry around a device in your pocket (perhaps the device on which you're reading or listening to this written account of mine) and that device shoots information up into friggin *space*, then receives information back.

We've taken photos of black holes. We've left footprints on the moon. We recreated the likenesses of people who've been dead for millions of years using their skulls. We've printed materials out of plastic, and concrete, and living cells. We made identical clones of animals.

And once we'd done it, or once it had been around for five minutes, we waved a dismissive hand at it and called it boring.

So the liquid I was about to spit out seemed like a liquid that I could just drink. I have no idea what would've happened if I had, but I think it probably would've been as spectacular as what actually happened.

What happened was I had my mood lifted.

As soon as the liquid got in my mouth I felt better. I mean, the heavenly chorus of angels was directly in my ears, as loud as a

dentist's drill when he's going to town on your molar. The light was in my mouth, making my cheeks look orange and highlighting the blood vessels. I know this happened because Cinzia did it and that's what happened to her.

(She also told me later on this had happened.)

And I felt the best I ever had. Better than I had all day, even better than I had when having sex with Regina just a few hours ago. Yes, I immediately got an erection. It was immediately, and strong: the hardest I've ever been.

I spit this substance, glowing and warm and bright and wonderful and calling down from the heavens, onto the nearest eggs, laughing the whole time. Tiny droplets of good-feeling juice went everywhere. It definitely reminded me of the thousands of videos from the dark depths of the COVID era, where the androgynous, computer-generated, hairless, nude person would sneeze and release a cloud of droplets too small to see into the air. Infectious and potentially deadly. Then they'd put masks on those people and, depending on whether this video was pro or anti-mask, the droplets would be sneezed directly out the mask holes, or be contained inside.

I could not have been more thankful at that moment for a number of reasons. One, to be in a situation where news was based on direct observation or the direct observation of friends. Two, to be in a situation where my mood was send to the heights of giddy excitement by a cure I'd just created, which banished all the bad vibes that might have arisen from the thoughts I'd just connected with what I was doing.

Seriously, I thought about just having some of this stuff around in order to make me feel better whenever I thought about how my mom probably wasn't doing too well, or my sister and father were having a tense conversation while my nephew watched from nearby. I could just have a swig of feel-better juice and boom, none of it mattered so much. Hell, based on how it was going so far, I wouldn't even have to drink it; all I'd need to do was open up the bottle and get a whiff of the scent, a listen to the chorus, and a look at the glowing goodness.

It wouldn’t work like that, but a man could wish.

Nearby, Cinzy had her cheeks bulging with the cure and was also spraying it up and out away from her with absolutely wild eyes. High as I was off my own supply, I could really appreciate her right now. She might very well be a patchwork of different colored flesh like a monster made by Doc Frankenstein, and her hair might be a bunch of different colors, but she was so beautiful. With her mouth full like that and her cheeks glowing from within, she was simultaneously hilarious and gorgeous. I wanted to swat that muscular, jiggling butt right this moment. I wanted to tweak both her nipples, and plant a big fat kiss on her perfect lips.

But instead, mouthful after mouthful, I sprayed out the glowing and singing cure until the UI message popped up.

Ingenuity check: *This check can be reasonably covered by the Administer Cure skill. This check is Difficult. Would you like to spend 2* Tokens for an Automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 5 Ingenuity Tokens

Hard At Work: *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

Grinning, in the mood I was in, I knew I could handle this check without needing to spend Tokens. Of course I could! I could do anything in this state! Figure out quantum entanglement or string theory or rocket surgery? Sure. Calculate the favorability rating of a brand of chips after a string of Super Bowl ads, or do brain science? No problem!

In retrospect, I honestly wish I’d been able to call up the check before, ahem, partaking of the good stuff.

I skipped around the room, blowing out little clouds of the cure everywhere and anywhere. I felt so good I just tossed my head from side to side and got as much of it on me as I got on the eggs.

Cinzia and I pranced around the room, roaring laughter at one another, spitting and spitting, our bodies now glistening and

beginning to glow.

Somewhere distant, possibly as far away from the cure as ten or fifteen feet, pounding could be heard. A few distressed voices that didn't matter at all were raised in alarm. They were familiar, but a lot of them weren't. Crashing followed. The natives were breaking through the windows and climbing inside. It seriously didn't matter.

When the Marshins got close enough, I simply sprayed them with the cure, spitting it all over them. The way they fell back, I could tell they understood right away what I was up to. They got it. Of course they did; how could they not?

Cinzy and I joined hands in the center of the room and were skipping, literally skipping in a circle, getting mouthful after mouthful and going *pfffffffbbbtbttbtt!* over and over. Just raspberry after raspberry.

In retrospect, it was sheer insanity. I don't know how we continued to do it as long as we did. Or rather, I do know how did it. I don't know why none of the parties involved didn't stop us with ranged attacks to put us out of their misery.

This is Christopher, glad they didn't.

Chapter 50- Evolution Complete

I was later informed by the UI, once we had run out of the cure, that the check had succeeded. Barely. I'd gotten lucky that the check switched from Likability to Ingenuity, though it made sense. There hadn't been a good delivery system, so we did our best with the tools at hand. Namely, our mouths.

The eggs were suitably misted by the two of us, and would begin hatching the following day. The Marshins understood this, and immediately ceased hostilities once they realized that although we looked like disrespectful naked buffoons prancing around their sick and injured babies, we meant well and the works we were doing were good.

I did end up spraying half the Guardian unit of the Divinity Rescue Corps, which was its own set of weird issues.

So while Larelle and Chrysta had specified they weren't willing to sacrifice themselves for me and my stubborn insistence that we could do the mission, Isabelle and Ivy had stayed behind to try to keep the Marshins at bay as long as possible. They had set themselves on in a suicide mission.

Regina, Alan, Drat and their Nakamamon had all gone with Larelle and Chrysta to where Trent and Garnet had been exhausting themselves to make a stone platform away from the village of Slinktrickle, just in case this very thing happened. It wasn't a large thing, but it was a stone block large enough to hold both Muppin and the team if absolutely need be, raised right out of the water with considerable difficulty, with a thin stone walkway connecting them. The moment the team—the survivors who hadn't offered themselves up to die for the cause—got across, Trent waved his hand and the bridge collapsed, stranding them all about thirty feet away from the Marshins. No, it wasn't a foolproof solution for safety; the natives could attack with weapons if they wanted to, get on boats and climb the stone column if they wanted to, but it was the best Trent could do in the space of just a few hours. They could—and did—hide behind the enormous rochidna in case projectiles or water aspect attacks came from the unhappy townsfolk. He'd burned through a lot of mana potions, and though it hadn't ultimately been necessary, it sure seemed like it would be. They sure had used it, pursued by a contingent of grieving and wailing natives to the edge of the village, onto the stone bridge, and Chrysta kept the Marshins off it

until it could be collapsed. She then simply floated across to safety.

This left Cinzy, Isabelle, Ivy and I surrounded by well over two hundred angry townsfolk.

***

I came to some time later in a small, private room with Ivy sitting against the door.

“You all right?” she asked.

Now, I had studiously avoided contact with Ivy for various different reasons since this whole thing started. One, she was fierce. Like a fucking juggernaut. She was close to matching Larelle and Chrysta in firewood cutting ability, with only two arms and not being seven feet tall. She didn’t take shirt from anybody. Two, lesbian. I didn’t want her to misinterpret my interest for something it wasn’t, either in her or her girlfriend. Three through nine hundred ninety-nine, her girlfriend had had sex with me. If that’s not a reason to avoid somebody, I don’t know what is. I didn’t know what Isabelle had or hadn’t told her. I didn’t know how she would react to any of that information.

She was also—as I viewed through half-lidded eyes—built like a wrestler. She was all lean, wiry muscle, with none of that soft roundness most

women get. She usually went with tight shirts that flattened her chest a bit, and baggy pants most of the time to fill out the punk look. Now, I could see she had breasts that were on the smaller side, and the tattoos went far deeper than just the arms and neck. Then again, it might've been the residual ambient magic of this world changing her body like it was doing with Isabelle. Instead of making Ivy into a cotton candy swirl version of herself like Isabelle, I initially thought it could be that Ivy's thing was new tattoos.

I hadn't yet caught sight of the tail, or the wings.

Between the tattoos, the piercings, and the shaved head, she had natural intimidation without needing the skill. But it was definitely an attractive intimidating.

"What happened?" I asked, feigning more grogginess than I felt. Actually, I felt forking amazing. I could've jumped out of bed and run on the walls in defiance of lame gravity. But the shock of being under Ivy's gaze held me back.

"You and Cinzia spit all over everybody. And yourselves. You were glistening with glowing mental cure juice, giggling and running around like lunatics."

"Oh, is that all?" I asked drily.

She snorted. "Well, you spit all over Izzy and I. And several dozen natives. You're lucky we have

special abilities that give us resistance to mental impairments.”

Stalwart. I knew exactly what she was talking about, because Isabelle had come into my tent unannounced, sexed me under the cover of darkness, and I’d only known it was her because the UI told me so.

“That let us keep the Marshins from tearing you guys apart, and you kept spraying them all. Real mood changer you brewed up there. Seems like something we could bottle and sell.”

I grinned ruefully. “It would go off in under a day, but yeah, I see what you mean.”

“You feeling okay?” she asked, and used the opportunity to look me up and down. We had handled the egg situation, but hadn’t gone after whatever god had stolen all our clothes, and the ability to wear them. I was still in Christopher Fletcher’s Patented Birthday Suit™, dick just flopping around out there for all to see.

“Feel good,” I admitted. “You? Sorry I doused you guys. It was too much to deal with. I wasn’t in control.”

She shrugged. “Honestly, this world is weird. So fraggin’ weird. And this might’ve been the weirdest thing to happen, but I figure it definitely wasn’t the first weird thing. It won’t be the last.”

“Thanks.”

She shrugged this off. “You’re the team leader. If you spitting on us is part of the job, I guess that’s

what's gonna happen."

It was a decidedly odd sentence to come out of her mouth.

She leaned forward in her chair, and stared at me. "Izzy and I had a long talk. About you."

Oh fork.

"You know she and I are a thing. I messed up and you heard it. We generally keep that quiet. She likes me, for whatever reasons she has. I obviously think the world of her."

This was going to go really badly for me.

"We ended up here some months ago. Everything's been pretty fracking amazing, to be honest. Until recently."

Internally, I winced. This was where things got nasty. She was going to slap me around a bit, threaten me with castration, and then—

"Don't worry," she said, reading my obvious concern with ease. "I ain't pissed. I was pissed with her. Not at you. But I get it."

"What? Why?"

"She came onto you."

"Ah." Isabelle had cheated, then come clean.

"But here we are, just the ten of us, and I guess you're also involved… with Regina."

My brain went into overdrive.

She waved this away too. “She talked with Izzy. Izzy talked with me. All three of us talked together. Needless to say, I was upset, and now I’m not. Luckily Regina said she couldn’t lay claim to you, and was surprisingly cool with Izzy boning her, uh, fudge buddy.

“I get what she did and why, though I really wish she’d told me what she was going to do.”

“Why didn’t she?” I asked.

She scratched the back of her neck. “I say some things when we’re… well I made a suggestion in the heat of… anyway I wasn’t really serious, and she took it seriously.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked flatly.

“We were having sex,” she said, “and I said some stuff I only halfway meant.”

My body certainly reacted to that bit of news. When you’re in your twenties, just a word or an image can get you horny.

Ivy had been talking dirty in the heat of the moment, and one of the things she’d been talking about was adding a guy to the mix, so she could have her guts rearranged while Isabelle sat on her face, or while they made out. Maybe she’d talked about sucking some cock with Isabelle, kissing around the shaft, and maybe she’d talked about having someone rail her from below while Isabelle

licked her from above. Whatever they talked about, Isabelle took it seriously enough to come into my tent and test drive a stick shift.

"Ah," I said, lacking any brainpower to do anything but fight against an erection. A fight I lost.

***

Cinzy didn't want to be left out of what was happening here, but when I used the word 'order' she left, pouting and stomping off. Fairy Poppins trailed after her, though she paused several times and looked back towards Ivy, Izzy and I.

That left Isabelle, who'd been watching over Cinzy, to join me in the bedroom that had been reserved for Alan and Trent. The cotton candy colored cutie who I thought was Cinzy the other night entered the room timidly, shutting the door as quietly as possible. She surveyed the scene and frowned at all the attention focused on her.

"I uh… told Cinzy she has to go speak with the elders." I snorted. It would be some time before she got done with that little errand.

"Did you speak to him?" she asked Ivy.

"Yup," Ivy said.

"What did he say?"

"He's in the room," Ivy said, with full eye roll.

Isabelle turned my way. “Are you okay? You’re not upset? Ugh, I always make everybody upset. I’m amazed Regina didn’t tear me apart when she cornered me and made me tell the whole story.”

“She what?” I asked.

“I said too much, again!” Her hands fluttered in the air and came to rest on her thighs. “Ugh, I always just talk without thinking.”

“Come here, babe,” Ivy said, and stood up to give her girlfriend a good hug. The two embraced for some time, with me watching, and murmured encouragement to one another. They began with light kisses, with Ivy taking Isabelle by the hips and pressing their bodies together, slowly grinding and humping.

“I don’t know if I want him here,” Isabelle complained.

I knew it was best to just shut up and let Ivy do the talking. I wasn’t sure if I wanted me here either. I didn’t want to screw things up for these two and their relationship.

“The least we can do it get a special ability for me,” Ivy said. “I feel like you owe me that much.”

Isabelle made a high, keening whine that I thought was both cute and horrible. She complained, “I apologized already.”

“You also got a free special power out of the little ambush situation,” Ivy said, thumbing both Isabelle’s blue and pink and silver swirled nipples, while kissing down the length of her neck. Then, Ivy’s hand snaked up into Izzy’s hair and clenched tight, pulling her head back. Ivy licked over her throat.

“And you got the D.”

“Fine,” Isabelle muttered, panting. She’d been grinding her mound against Ivy’s. Both started moaning: Isabelle with her face pointed at the ceiling, and Ivy with her tongue all over Izzy’s neck.

Fine. I was about to have sex with one bisexual and one professed lesbian who had already had sex with me once. A bi-curious lesbian? I shook the thoughts away, willing myself not to overthink it.

“What if I don’t want to do it with him again?” Isabelle asked.

“That’s fine,” Ivy muttered.

“You promise?”

“I promise. And you promise not to go sexing anybody else until you get permission first.”

“I promise,” Isabelle said breathlessly.

Ivy turned to me. “We don’t have forever. Lay down.”

I lay on the bed, and watched, fascinated, as Ivy led Isabelle across the room while furiously making

out. Eventually Isabelle's confusion turned into question, until Ivy told her to mount my head, sixty-nine position. Her head appeared from around Isabelle's thigh, and she stared hard into my eyes.

It was a 'don't fork this up,' look.

I hadn't been lucky enough to see Isabelle up close like this in the light of day. Izzy's blue and pink butt came together at a very pink juncture, though tiny threads of silver converged here too. I pulled her butt down and extended my tongue, and the moment that happened, I spent the Token to enhance what was to come, with **Entwined Ecstasy**.

I barely heard the *cla-cling!* of the Token flying into being and dissipating again, since Isabelle cried out.

Now, for only the second time, I felt two sets of lips on my rampant erection. Gods but I was horny. After listening to Ivy tell the story of how she needed some good deep dicking, and about how Regina had pumped Isabelle for information, I was more than ready to go. Two beautiful girls were okay with this, then I was okay with this.

Isabelle and Ivy worshipped my cock while I made damn sure to put every one of Regina's lessons into action. Isabelle was wet and getting wetter by the moment, shivering and moaning around my shaft

when I concentrated on the tiny bump of flesh at the top of her pussy. Her clit wasn't the same size or shape as Regina's, not exactly, but the differences didn't matter as much as the reactions. Isabelle loved having her clit licked. A tiny ridge was the place she loved it most. And what set her off was fingering her while using tiny little flicks of the tongue.

She lost the ability to work on me, which bothered me not at all. Ivy took over, sliding her lips up and down the head and half the length of me while I drove Isabelle crazy. It she just lay on my stomach clenching tighter and tighter within herself.

The bubble of magic inside her grew more intense, and grew both larger and smaller at the same time. It got more dense and shrank, even as layers of the magic pulse outward with every breathless moan.

I held her soft form to me to make sure she couldn't go anywhere, and worked on her until she finally made several gasps and grunts that were different than before. The ball of mana within her exploded, shooting off little streamers of magic pin balling throughout her entire body. They shot down to her feet and into her toes, which spread out before curling up. They shot out to her fingers and up to her scalp, where they sat and tingled.

"He's good, isn't he?" Ivy asked, grinning.

“Uh… huh,” she muttered.

“As good as me?”

“Nuh… uh.”

“Aww, that’s sweet,” Ivy said. “I’m gonna stuff this monster inside me now, pet. Watch or participate?”

“Uh… w-watch,” Izzy slurred, and slumped off me and onto the bed. Her sky blue and pink thigh lifted off my face to reveal Ivy, lithe and muscular tattooed body already poised to take me into herself. She enveloped me, unbelievably tight. Her slick center didn’t want to allow me in at first, and I watched as she did the work of slowly loosening herself up to accommodate my girth.

“Ohhhh fudge,” Ivy murmured, “I’m sorry, pet, but your tongue doesn’t reach this far. All right, Fletcher, give me all you’ve got.”

The first thing I did was spend the Token to increase our pleasure. A ripple of additional pleasure went through me and I noted Ivy’s shiver. The second thing I did was bring her into the fold for 2 Tokens. Now I was running dangerously low, but didn’t care. Who got to be in a threesome with a committed pair of beautiful ladies because they’d forgotten their strap on back at home?

“Ohhhh,” she hissed out a breath. “You are big, Fletcher. Unh, definitely the biggest, ugh… cock I’ve ever had in me.”

The dirty talk definitely did it for me. I started going at her in earnest.

"I think you're… you're poking my… diaphragm."

Ivy had to hold my knees as I thrust upward and into her tight confines. Still, her perfect and perky boobs bounced with each slam. I relished the pained look on her face each time I bottomed out. Time disappeared; there was only the slap of skin against skin.

"Ugh, Fletcher," she said, her voice shaking. "Ugh, you're big. F-fuck me. Fuck me r-real good."

Isabelle had roused, and started swirling her tongue around one of Ivy's big, dark nipples. I sat up and got my lips around the other one, then told her what I wanted.

"Ugh… oh, okay."

Once I laid back down, she slowly spun until she was facing away. All her strange back tattoos came into view: Dr. Seuss characters, a dragon, spiderwebs at her elbows, the strange eyes at her calf muscles, comic book characters mid-fight with their villain counterparts. All coated in a sheen of sweat.

Now, Ivy's ass wasn't nearly as nice as Regina's, with her extra back padding, and her legs weren't as long and strong as Tara's. Ivy had muscles, and I watched them flex and bunch holding herself above me so I could drill her from below. And Isabelle now

had access to her girlfriend. She immediately got her lips on Ivy's tits, and her finger down between her legs.

It only took Ivy a few minutes of this to clench, clench tighter, and then finally convulse with a powerful orgasm. She kept disregarding the no-swearing rule, going 'fuck fuck fuck fuck fuuuuuuuuck,' through a shattering climax.

I had to stop in the face of risking blasting off inside her. I'd already done that to Tara too many times. I had to slow down while Ivy threw her head back and groaned loudly, shaking and shuddering.

Afterwards she lay down, directly onto my chest, ass pressed against me and breathing heavily directly in my ear.

I got an idea. I waited until she had just sunk down and rested her ass on my thighs to go into the Pleasure Seeker Qualities and upgrade Length by 1.

Ivy started to have a sort of aftershock orgasm as my cock expanded into before untouched depths. Letting out a loud squeal, she shuddered and bounced yet again.

"Fletch— ugh! What the—"

All talk ceased when I moved inside her.

The sex continued for some time. Isabelle latched her lips onto Ivy's clit and flicked at it while I slowly fucked in and out with long, slow strokes. It seemed

like Ivy's orgasm just went on, and on, and on. Beneath her like that, I had two choices: support her hips from below and rock my hips to stroke in and out, or knead and pinch at her tattoo-covered breasts and nipples. Both were appealing, but Isabelle took care of the latter. She reached up and had two handfuls of Ivy's breasts while lashing her clit repeatedly, then sucking on it.

Ivy was incapable of doing anything except twitching feebly and constantly groaning. I couldn't tell if she came two, three, or several dozen times. They all seemed to blend into one continuous shuddering experience.

My pleasure grew, especially when they shifted into a sixty-nine position, with Ivy's tattooed ass pointed directly at me. She gave me a lazy smile over her shoulder before going down on Isabelle. From behind, Ivy's body seemed even more taut, more muscular, and more athletic than before. Each time I penetrated her, she growled and moaned into her girlfriend's pussy. Together, we all managed to cum together. Isabelle stopped licking at Ivy and cried out just as Ivy likewise collapsed onto her, and my release could be contained no longer.

I pulled and sprayed Ivy's ass with more than I'd ever produced, shooting farther than I ever had. I reached her shoulder blades, and it pooled in the

central groove of her back. I covered her ass. It was enough that the dripping fell onto Isabelle. She dutifully opened her mouth and lapped it up.

"Don't swallow, pet."

Izzy's vocalization was less a question than a moan. "Ung?"

"Fletcher will love this," Ivy said exhaustedly, and got up. I watched in amazement as first she sucked the remainder off my cock, then licked over Isabelle's face for any left over. She then kissed Isabelle, hot and hard and long, swirling my seed between them.

This sweaty, inked angel looked up at me, half drenched in my seed, a look of wonder on her face. "Damn, Fletcher, that tastes good," she said afterwards. "You're really big, good stamina, and your jizz tastes like joy. No wonder Regina can't get enough of you."

She turned to Isabelle even as she scooped more of it off her ass to put into her mouth. "Don't worry, pet, I'm not leaving you."

Isabelle's numb shock disappeared into a wary smile.

This is Christopher somehow evolving into a guy who has sex friends.

Chapter 51- Celebrate Good Times

More happened, much more, but this is the first leg of my journey completed. Hell, I hadn't even touched my system progression following the healing situation or the threesome with Isabelle and Ivy.

Cinzy returned from a lengthy session of negotiating to find us cleaned up and acting like we hadn't just screwed each others' brains out. I could tell she was disappointed we wouldn't be able to spend time together, but there was a lot to learn and a lot to do.

First of all, I'd inducted Ivy into the sex-having squad, giving her the special ability I was about to get from level 12 in Healer. She was giddy with the ability, and I was too. **Healer's Breath** actively healed people, and obviated the need for healing potions so long as Ivy or I was around. We'd have to discuss what to tell the others when the Guardian on my team suddenly kissed someone and healed a physical injury, but we'd have to jump off that bridge when we reached it.

In return, I gained an ability called **Fierce**.

Fierce

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

You know you're kind of scary when you want to be. Whenever you force a contested social check against an opponent, you are considered to have the skill for such a check at rank 7. When you enter a dangerous situation, you gain a temporary Token in Physicality and Durability. These Tokens disappear after an hour if unused.

My **Stalwart** ability didn't go up a level after only my second encounter with Isabelle, but I was confident that one or two more times would do it. Whether or not she'd allow that was another thing entirely.

I'd also reached level 12 in Healer and level 11 in Pleasure Seeker. In my main class, I got an ability called **Healer's Breath**. As for Pleasure Seeker, Level 11 meant a free attribute point and a skill point. I also unlocked the ability to bond a Nakamamon. Since right now my Token situation was looking very bleak, I'd need to try to level up in Pleasure Seeker in order to replenish them. I certainly couldn't take on the god of not wearing clothes like this.

Oh no, that meant I would have to have a whole bunch of sex. How terrible.

I chuckled at the thought, earning me a dubious look from Cinzy. She was still pouting about something, so I squeezed her hand for reassurance. That earned me an even more dubious look.

Fairy Poppins had been sent ahead to relay communications to the rest of the team. Larelle, Chrysta, Alan, Trent and Drat were stuck on a stone pillar out away from the village of Slinktrickle—I won't ever tire of writing down Slinktrickle, and will write Slinktrickle as often as I can because it makes me laugh to do that—but the natives were effusive with their praise and thanks.

They held a party, which would have been a far different affair had we been wearing clothes the whole time. Since we weren't, it was… awkward. All the Marshells were now out and peering through the edges of their clamshells at the Divinity Rescue Corps. Nearby, the Marshins danced alone or in pairs, and in some cases lifted the Marshells up and swayed with them.

The Marshin music was mostly done with a few drums, and a lot of stomping, but plenty of singing. They had beautiful, etherial singing voices, though I couldn't tell if there was much in the way of lyrics. The Marshells slowly opened out of their shells and the tiny humanoids stood on top of them, swaying and clapping and stomping. The girls were in love,

and I even caught Trent and Drat going ‘aww so cute’ at the two foot humanoids wiggling and singing on their open shells.

Eventually all the Marshells were put to bed, taken away by some nannies so the higher stage transformation ‘adults’ could get down with their bad selves. Torches were lit and put on poles around the platform’s edge to ward off the deepening gloom.

The Marshins had alcohol, but thankfully it was both potent and awful. After one cup of the vile stuff, I was drunk and able to keep myself from getting aroused throughout the after dinner dessert buffet and the singing and stomping they did by firelight.

I thought keeping my dick from getting hard would matter. It did not.

After several hours of partying, a brazier was brought onto the main platform outside the huge meeting hall. It had grown chilly by now, and some of the nude Nakamamon were holding one another for warmth… or more? Marshmellows joined in the festivities on their enormous tails, some of them sitting on the edge of the platforms and chatting… and then the chatting turned into rubbing and grinding.

Rubbing and grinding showed me exactly how these creatures mated. I thought I was witnessing something private, but the natives didn’t seem

bothered in the slightest. The males appeared smooth and androgynous, but with enough rubbing they grew miniature penises. It was like those infographics I'd seen on social media about gorillas having tiny genitalia. The female Marshins didn't seem to mind. They also didn't seem to mind bending over against the building walls or getting down on hands and knees right on the platforms.

Larger females often paired off with Marshmellows, the thickly-built creatures getting larger erections out of nowhere. In most cases this meant the eel-mermaid creatures just lay on the platforms and let the females ride them.

"We're in the middle of an orgy," Regina whispered.

"This is… wild," I replied, not sure what else to say.

Alan had been approached by several female Marshins, and after initially warding them off, he eventually looked to Trent, who shrugged, then to me. Across the platform, I made the 'go ahead' waving gesture, and the stunned Wizard was pulled out of sight by his native partner. Trent and Drat were more brazen, both taking the first Marshin females that came onto them.

Vellenia approached, swaying and stomping and crooning. A dozen of the natives followed after, two

dozen.

“Fletcher!” she sang my name. “You are our savior! You and your Cinzia Graham!”

“Savioooooor!” she rest sang. “Saaaaavior!”

Savior of Slinktrickle definitely undercuts the gravitas of the situation.

“Um,” Cinzy said, as some eight or ten of the natives bent and laid hands on her, “Um, Fletcher?”

They then lifted her into the air, still singing. “Saviors! Saved the babies!”

“Go on,” Regina whispered to me, patting my hand before a mob of them lifted my naked ass into the air too. “Make a whole bunch of hybrid Nakamamon little babies.”

“What did you just say?” I said, before going, “Whoooa!” As I was lifted above their heads like Cinzy had been.

Let me tell you, as a grown adult, the only thing like it would be perhaps flying commercial, where that weightless feeling comes into play, or being thrown around on a roller coaster. Grown people just aren’t used to having someone else do gravity on their behalf.

“Have fun!” she called cheerfully, waving.

I thought Cinzy and I would be carried to the same room, where we would end up screwing one

another's brains out. Honestly, I was ready for it. We'd been in close contact, I'd seen her naked body so much, and she'd shown so much interest that I was prepared to get my first taste of Cinzy. Hopefully Fairy Poppins wouldn't try to interfere like she had before. Whether the little Nakamamon was trying to save Cinzy from me, or the other way around, it was tiresome.

At the same time, the moment the two groups separated and took us over different bridges, I had a moment of relief mixed with regret. Sure we wouldn't be able to have sex, but did I need more partners? Did I need more possible entanglements? I couldn't be sure how Tara would view the situation with me engaging with not just Isabelle, but also Ivy. I didn't know how she would view me having sex with Vellenia either. So adding Cinzy to the mix was another big question mark. The Bard didn't know about my relationship with the two Rangers, nor about the Guardians. How Cinzy would react to the news that she was sharing me with any of them was a huge unknown and not something I truly wanted to deal with, in all honesty.

However, I couldn't lie and say I didn't want to spend a whole lot of time in bed with Cinzy. Every straight man who sees a woman that mind-bogglingly gorgeous in real life would love a chance

in bed with her, whether he's eighteen or eighty. Just because she's out of our league doesn't mean we don't play the 'what if' game.

But it wasn't going to happen tonight.

The Marshin females didn't even ask, they just worshipped my body. They got me hard, they marveled over my equipment, and then took turns going down on me. I'd seen a handful of Japanese porn videos like this, and it was with a pleasant buzz of bad alcohol that I watched it play out in real life. To me.

Soon enough I was being ridden and smothered by minty-green and white breasts. I had their tongues in my mouth, on my neck, on my nipples. I slowly eased into native after native: laying down, kneeling to accept me from behind, or even standing up against the wall. Facing me, yes. Facing away, yes.

Regina was there. She'd followed me in somehow, even after the native girls closed and barred the door. I saw her in the shadows, touching herself as she watched all of them run a train on me. Either they didn't notice the sparkling freckles with their flowery little outlines in the shadowed corner of the room, or they simply didn't care.

It was far more than I should've been able to handle, but my experiences earlier that day: with

Regina, with Ivy and Isabelle, helped keep me from blasting off. I had not one single thought to the game system at this point. No considering whether to inflate my Qualities as a Pleasure Seeker.

The night went on, and then on, and on more. Eventually the room's bed was covered in slumbering Marshin females, one after another being unable to handle what I could dish out. While the rest of the natives paired off and enjoyed one another's company, I sated and then exhausted partner after partner. They muttered to one another about me and what I was doing to them, about how no male Marshin was capable of anything like this.

I could only fit about three inches into some of them. They cried out and told me it was too deep. Some of them could accommodate more, eventually, but others could only handle the head and that was about it. Repeatedly popping the head inside them still drove them wild, making them flop and thrash and cry out like I was remaking their entire understanding of their place int he universe. It was, quite frankly, a massive ego boost.

It was Vellenia who came to me last, and demanded what I had in me.

"I want your seed," she breathed, as she bounced up and down my pole. Marshins lay on the floor now, one of them with her legs up on the bed and her

face down on the stomach of another semi-conscious native, unable to move after the pounding I'd given her. Her hand drifted down to tenderly explore what had become of her slit. Others were watching in silence, having drifted back to consciousness.

Vellenia was flexible. She had started by folding herself in half, grabbing her ankles, and letting me just pull her ass back and forth like a toy for my own pleasure. This had continued when she jumped into my arms and wrapped her legs around my waist, then demanded I lift her up and down while standing. Enhanced as my body was, I could only handle a minute or two of this kind of thing, since she was well over a hundred pounds. Phsyicality or no, my growth plate injuries and scoliosis began to protest what I was forcing on my body. Once I had her against the wall this was easier, and I could really make my partner cry out in ecstasy from the brutal pounding. After that, she wanted to spin around and be pressed flat against the wall by the force of my thrusting. Again, I obliged her. Who wouldn't love the full-throated moans and growns, the shuddering and shivering of pleasure, the squeaking and crying out that I was too big, that she would never be able to walk again.

Finally, I was sitting on the expansive bed and she was using my knees to help her with leverage. "Fill

me up, Healer.”

I couldn’t believe what she was saying, but my body was more than ready to obey. I thrust upward, making her clutch onto my neck and mewl in a mixture of pleasure and pain. At the end of that, the dam of my self control burst and I gave her what she wanted.

I awoke sometime in the middle of the night to Regina sucking me back to full hardness. My first partner grinned into the first kiss, climbing up my body.

“You got one more in you?” she breathed, barely audible, “because I want it in me.”

I did. I threw Regina onto her back, mounted her, and the hot confines of her pussy welcomed me in.

***

This is how it ends: with Alan getting laid by a native, possibly having his first ever experience by a native, because such things matter a lot. With Trent and Drat getting laid by natives as well. With Cinzy getting carried off to an unknown fate. With Larelle and Chrysta who knew where, and all the companion creatures somewhere, hopefully asleep. Regina disappeared after swallowing my last load of the

night, sleeping in her own quarters. I ended up in a sweaty, cum-glazed tangle of bodies.

Of course the tale continues. This is only the first leg in a journey. Heck, I haven't even gone back to earth for my first few weeks of rest and relaxation as mandated by the company. As amazing as it sounds, I was under contract to work for the government. Apparently my duties included inseminating the natives of this new land.

The next few weeks would see us working towards a solution with the god that had erased all clothing here. It would mean exotic new locations, meeting new and interesting individuals, and coming to grips with the odd magic of this beautiful and unspoiled world.

Right now though, that will all have to wait for another day. Like all things, there's a time for doing and a time for resting.

This is Christopher signing off. For now.

—The end

Of

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About the Author: Nolan Locke

Nolan Locke is a real human being and not a figment of anyone's imagination. Nolan started roleplaying at the tender age of twelve, in Ninjas and Superspies, and has since gamed almost everything: D&D, Rifts, 7th Sea, Shadowrun, Star Wars in three different game systems, and plenty of others. Recently he's been gaming A Familiar Problem, Kids on Bikes, Blades in the Dark, and Teens in Space. He has also played Magic: the Gathering in various forms, with huge gaps in between, since middle school.

Nolan presently resides outside Seoul, South Korea, where he teaches students, rides his bike around looking for shady picnic tables where he can write, exercising to keep the kidney stones away, and laughing at jokes very few people think are funny.

Past titles from Nolan include EEE (Evan's Eldritch Emporium) books one through five, ARSE (Augmented Reality System Apocalypse), Douchemage, Dungeons & Dillholes, and Ultimate Grimdork, which make up the Glitchworld series, Aethermarked books I and II are Dark LitRPG without a lick of smut. Nolan has also appeared in several LitRPG anthologies, including GitGud and Mystery Box.

This is his SECOND (!!!) foray into NSFW writing, and once he takes a quick shower, he'll get back at it.

Always shower afterwards.

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