

Just a flicker

A modded Stardew Fanfiction

Von Calyses

Kapitel 5: Of to the mines... or not?

"Lunch pack, check. Torch, check. Notepad and pen, check." Sam was satisfied. She shouldered her knapsack and marched out the door. She greeted Joel, who was sitting by the reception desk.

The best way to the mines would take her almost up to the station and then east. She had walked the track with Lewis already so she knew where to go. The weather of the early spring day was perfect. The sun just melted the morning chill away and it promised to be moderately warm.

From the boardinghouse she headed to the bus station a bit south of the premise. The old, broken down bus was a remnant of better times. The recession had hit the valley hard, Sam thought. Once again she was musing how to coax Lewis to let her in the community center and if it was only once.

Her steps took her down the road to Calico Desert. Just before she reached the tunnel she turned right and began to climb a flight of wide, steep steps someone had carved into the slope. The path took her underneath the massive support beams of the cable car and along the mountainside. Large evergreen trees narrowed the path. She walked past the carpenter's house. The vegetation grew denser as she neared the mountain lake.

Sam began to stray from the path. The scattered standing trees gradually became a light forest. Fallen leaves from last autumn rustled beneath her feet. Occasionally twigs snapped under her weight. She was in high spirits. It definitely had been the right decision to move here. As she made her way through the undergrowth she started to hum. Little did she know, there were pairs of eyes watching her.

Eventually Sam noticed that someone or something was tuning into her little melody. She stopped and searched the trees with her eyes. Clear, little chirps sounded around her. There must be a bird somewhere, but she couldn't find any, so she continued her way. With half an ear she listened to the chirping around her, as she varied her melody. The chirping adapted and created harmonies. She tried to close in on a particular loud one slowly. Various of the small voices went silent, but the loud one seemed to be oblivious.

Sam was almost sneaking by that point. She noticed something on a branch in front of her. She never had seen anything like that in her life. It looked like an apple ...with tiny legs and arms? And it was... singing? It had closed its small eyes and seemed to be lost in the melody. She hold her breath and tried to listen. This small creature had a beautiful voice. As she shifted her weight unconsciously a twig beneath her feet snapped.

Everything went silent. The creature had stopped its singing and looked at Sam in surprise showing its little black beady eyes.

"Hey little one."

Without a warning it jumped down the tree and ran away.

"Wait, I won't harm you. I just want to listen. Your singing is wonderful." without thinking Sam started chasing after it. The creature broke the wood and ran. Over a downtrodden path into the next patch of trees and greenery. Sam was right behind. She didn't want to lose sight and followed between the shrubs without looking where she was going.

"Please wait!", running and shouting wasn't any good for convincing it, she was harmless to be honest, but her thinking failed her in that particular moment. Her feet carried her forward and with a bit of momentum she reached an embankment. Behind it water...

She tried to stop, but the ground beneath her feet was soaked, soft and slippery. It gave way under her as she lost her footing. In panic she reached out to grab something. She got hold of a dead branch. It snapped under her wait, as she pivoted in an attempted to stop.

Lady Belinda waited in the middle of the circle. Eyes closed she concentrated on the faint voices in the wind. Her disciples arranged the items for the ritual around her. Sometimes she would wander to one and shift it a little, her eyes still closed.

Rasmodius was intrigued. To witness a ritual done by a high priestess was a rare treat. She revered to herself as seer and so did her disciples, though. He had wondered about her being inside the summoning circle, but he was told she had decided to act as a conduit. This way they needn't use nearly as much arcane energy than otherwise and the spirit would be able to stay a bit longer.

He watched her finish the preparation. It was almost time. He had suggested to use the brief period between day and night, when the light was not quite gone, as it was the most magical time of the day and the best moment to make contact, but Belinda

had advised against that, as they had not enough fighters at hand, to protect the ritual. The Ridge was a dangerous place after nightfall.

Her disciples, an earnest young man, with the hint of a secret, who kept most of his face hidden behind scarf and hood, an outgoing and flirty lady and a young girl with red-golden hair took positions in the north, east and west of the circle. Rasmodius himself was the south. The unseen lines between them formed a cross dividing the circle in perfect quarters. Belinda settled right in the middle. She sank onto her knees, her hands in her lap and started to recite an incantation, reminding Rasmodius of an old poem. Mist started to squirm inside the circle. The wind outside picked up, but left the inside of the circle untouched.

An eerie light crept into the mist illuminating Belinda's face. She murmured, repeated the poem over and over.

The wind howled louder and louder. The mist swallowed her features as it rose and swept above her. The old wizard looked around to see the other three fell in with the chanting. He waited till it was his time to take part to recite the words. Every step was meticulously planned and had to be perfectly timed to work. Belinda was lifted and rose to her full size. Warped in light and mist it looked like she was hovering a few centimeters of the ground. In an unsuspected motion her head jerked back, Her eyelids began to flutter, the eyes rolled back, so that only the white showed, her mouth formed unheard words.

Suddenly the world fell silent.

Wailing emerged from Belinda's throat. In a broken, deep voice she began to speak:

"...magic... Time's... Help...magic... Close... cracks... Help...farmer...intervene..." the voice cracked and faded.

Belinda suddenly shuck. She was thrown back to the edge of the circle, slammed into an invisible barrier holding her inside.

The sky turned gray. Thunder rolled over their heads. The entity possessing her left with a scream and Belinda slumped to the ground unconscious. Rain started to pour...

In affect Rasmodius tried to get to her, but was stopped by the girl with the red-golden hair Belinda had introduced to him as Bliss raised her voice:

"DON'T! The Lady's still in the spirit world. If you sever the connection now she'll be lost. We have to protect her body. The anchorpoints of the circle have to stay intact at all costs. Be aware. They are coming..."

„Fuck, fuck, fuck, Fuck!“ With a loud splash Sam landed in the water, which wasn't that steep on that side of the mountain lake, but it was enough to soak her head to toe.

The creature had made it over the water and seemed to laugh at her, before it vanished into thin air. Sam hit the water in frustration. “Damn!”

She hadn't gotten up again, as someone started to laugh right above her:

“This fae has a very colorful language, but to witness this beautiful pirouette almost made up for that.”, she heard a familiar voice. Without even thinking she grabbed a handful of mud and threw it at Elliott who had appeared on the brink of the slope.

“I have certainly earned this.” he said, still laughing, after he dodged the dirt-missile.

“My lady.” He extended his hand to help Sam up. Thankfully she accepted to get out of the cold, muddy water.

“Thank you, you just appeared at the right time, it seems.” she said.

“I was here all the time. Admiring the beauty and tranquility of early spring. The question is, what are you doing here?” he asked.

“Swimming practice.” she answered.

“Oh, really? Fully clothed?”

“It's just early spring. The water's still cold.”

They couldn't help it, but both started to laugh about their stupid banter.

“Okay, now, what were you really doing?” Elliott inquired after that. “I was about to enjoy the peace and quite of the lakeside to spark my creative juices and suddenly you break out of the thicket shouting” he added and showed her a somewhat hidden place between some trees and lesser foliage where he had placed a picnic blanket.

“Haven't you seen the apple thingy?”

“The what?”

“A small green, apple-like creature. It was just here.”

Elliott looked at her puzzled. “No, I can not say, I have. And that's why you are here?”

“Actually, I was on my way to the mines. It's my day off and I want to take a look around the valley. That's when I saw the creature.”

“The story about the walking apple seems a bit peculiar, but the rest sounds neat. Getting to know your way around here is a smart idea. To go to the mines on the other hand, is rather not.”

"Well, not to be rude, but I need to get somewhere warm. Preferably home, to get out of my wet clothes." Sam could feel the cold creeping up her spine. She tried to rub away some goosebumps that had formed on her forearms, ignoring the remark about the mines.

Without saying another word Elliott passed over his jacket.

"I can't, I'll ruin it." Sam responded.

"I insist, you are freezing."

Sam thought about it. Suddenly the wind picked up and send a new shiver through her body.

"Okay, but... just give me one sec." She pulled her wet sweater and t-shirt over her head and dropped it to the ground, before putting on the jacket. As she was done, she could see, that Elliott had turned away and looked in a different direction. Sam wasn't sure, but she thought she could see a little blush around his nose. She couldn't help herself:

"Ah, the beautiful architecture..." she commented.

"What?", Elliott looked puzzled.

"Nothing, it's just a silly insider... Anyway", she thought about something, "Would you like to accompany me home for a cup of tea?" she asked. "I've something I'd like to give back to you."

Elliott's heart took a leap: "Do not say you have what is most precious to me? Have you found my notebook?"

"Yeah, you lost it on the train. It was sitting on the floor right after you left for the phone call. I pocketed it so nobody would step on it. I would have given it back to you right after, but you didn't came back."

"You are brilliant. You saved me. I was sure I had lost it for good." without losing a thought he stepped in and hugged her.

"Hey, stop! What are you doing?"

He released her that instant:

"Oh,... I am sorry", he was blushing again. Now his face was almost matching his hair color. "I was not thinking. I am... I am just so happy. You can not know what this book means to me."

"No harm done. Normally I wouldn't even mind, but I don't know you yet and on top of that, I'm still wet and all I'm wearing is cold and clingy." she shuck water out of one leg of her trousers. "Hm, officially I don't even know your name", she said. "So how about

an introduction? I'm Samantha, Sam for short and I moved to the valley just last Saturday."

"I am Elliott and I have been here for the last two years. Nice to met you, Sam. But indulge me. What did you mean by officially you do not know my name?"

"I ran into the Mayor and Pierre on Sunday and since I was looking to give you the notebook back, I asked and they told me."

"Makes sense." He wondered what the men could have told her.

Rumbling from above let both look up. The sky was darkening quickly.

"That's strange. They didn't forecast any rain for today..." she pondered. "Let us quickly pick up your things and move. I'm living at the boarding house. It's not far from here, if we walk along the mountain path beneath the cable car.

Elliott nodded. They quickly collected his things and wrapped the picnic blanket around the soaked Sam, too and then made their way down to the boarding house. The sky was getting even darker and soon the first raindrops would fall. By the time they reached their destination Elliott was drenched, too, so he gladly decided to stay for a warm shower and the beforehand offered hot tea.