

Devotion

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No one had the right to look so entrancing while drinking grape juice.

It was a crime, in Liven's eyes. Dark lips lay parted around the glass, throat exposed to the yellow light of the cellar, eyelashes fluttering above hazel irises. The drinker finished before straightening up with a grimace, black curls of hair falling aside. "They make it so *strong* here."

"It's our diner's specialty." Liven huffed, taking the chance to stifle the heat in her freckled cheeks. "You didn't have to pour out so much."

"Can't refuse a gift from you." A grin split across the drinker's face, dropping the drained glass onto the table with a thump. There was only a chuckle in response to Liven's flinch at the noise, brown hands raised in reassurance. "Calm down, there's no way anyone heard that."

"You could at least pretend to be careful." She grumbled, sliding off her perch on a barrel. "I'll put the rest away. Where's your bag?"

"Got it right here." The drinker scooped up a leather satchel from the ground. "Going up *there* to return the stuff?"

"What else Senith, put a half-used bottle back into storage?" Liven retorted, holding up the stamped bottle. "That'll get the others in trouble. And I can create an alibi."

"Then I'll wait behind the presses." Senith glanced down at the satchel, smile widening. "Don't take longer than ten. Think the little guy's starting to get antsy."

"I'll be back in *five* minutes, thank you very much." She tucked the bottle underneath an arm, scooping up the glass too. "Don't drink any more."

"No promises~"

The call floated after Liven as she ducked around the barrels, approaching the steps leading to the kitchen. A pause to straighten out her apron, before she made her way up, voices filtering through the door.

“-half-filled glasses. Gotta deal with ‘em all on my own.”

“Ah, unfortunate. I could join you, once the storage is finished?”

“It’d be damn nice...”

“Willow, Hal.” Liven pushed through the doorway, both of the speakers turning to face her, wearing similar aprons. One was soaping dishes in the sink, the other holding a logoed crate. “Sorry to interrupt, but... I found a bottle down there on top of the barrels. And a glass.” She set down both next to the sink. “I know it wasn’t you two- or any of us. It just appeared today.”

“Of all the-” The dishwasher cursed, snatching the glass and dropping it into the frothy water. “I swear, if it’s another thief...”

“Did you search the trap doors?” Willow piped up, shouldering her box. “They may have escaped through there.”

“Those were my thoughts. I’m heading out to track them down.” The practiced lies escaped her easily. “Let the manager know?”

“We’ll try.” Willow smiled faintly. “It’s a busy night and I can’t say he’ll be happy, but doing nothing would be worse. Hope you find them.”

“Yeah, have fun getting fresh air for a change.”

Liven gave the dishwasher a deadpan look. “Have fun *not* choking on soap, Hal.”

“It was *one time*.” Hal rolled their eyes. “...But good luck.”

She gave a parting wave before turning back towards the cellar. The moment the door shut behind Liven, she dashed down the stairs, undoing her apron. The dull cloth was tossed over a rafter as she hurried towards the back, tugging off her hair tie as she rounded the corner, sweaty strands coming undone from her auburn ponytail-

And nearly crashed into Senith's chest, reeling back with a yelp. A hand grasped around her arm, warm touch steadying Liven before she could fall.

"Someone's eager." Her vision darted up towards a pair of hazel irises, corners creasing in amusement. "I said to get back soon, not to die trying."

"Told you I'd get back in five minutes." Liven grumbled, face reddening. "Now are we going or not?"

Senith smirked, satchel hanging off her arm. "Thought you'd never ask."

The mesh-covered trapdoor was just a few steps away, which Liven unhooked easily. Gripping the steps, she lifted herself up, cool breeze whistling past her face as she emerged. It wasn't the latest she'd snuck out from her job at the diner, but the slivered crescent moon was already high in the sky, dark wisps of clouds flitting across.

Senith gave a low whistle. "Perfect night for a summoning."

"Who are we seeing this time?" Liven questioned, getting up from the patchy grass. "A dark one?"

"Had a few options, but I prepared for someone... important." Senith slid a jar from her bag, presenting the glass with a flourish. Something glimmered inside, and Liven suppressed a groan. "Surprise?"

"*Char?*" She glared at the jar, the firefly inside only winking green back. "We're summoning a destiny god *again?*"

"Hey, Char does its best." Senith snorted, petting the container. "Besides, it's been a while since we contacted those gods. Is it really too much to say hi to my dad?"

"He's so *aimless.*"

“That’s destiny-seeking for you.” She fastened the satchel again, tipping her head towards the woods. “Come on, let’s get going already.”

“Seeking for a break, more like.” Liven muttered, but dashed after the demigod, both of them disappearing into the undergrowth. The only thing illuminating the dark was the jar in Senith’s hand, now glowing indefinitely as the firefly showed its true form. It still wavered, more of a candle than a steady light- but the hum resonating from the creature made its excitement clear at being unleashed once more.

They reached a circular clearing, grass dotting the perimeter, a stream cutting through pebbles and mud in the middle. Char returned to the firefly form, settling on the jar wall with a flutter of wings. Liven was panting by the time they halted, leaning against a tree to catch her breath.

“Don’t actually take a break yet, he said he had something important this time.” Senith set down the jar, pulling a small mirror from her satchel, followed by a bottle and paintbrush. “Get the water.”

“Not all of us have the stamina of a god.” Liven grumbled, but scooped up the glass and carried it towards the stream. She let the cold liquid flow inside, stopping just beneath the firefly’s perch. Liven carried it back to where Senith was painting translucent circles onto the mirror. Her friend didn’t seem to notice as she kneeled onto the ground, eyes fixed on the task at hand.

The effort Senith displayed during these semi-monthly rituals was so genuine, compared to her usual cocky persona. Not that Liven truly minded the latter. Still, the devotion to show her all these deities, information once washed clean of all mortal belief and history... She couldn’t

help the warmth in her chest, knowing the demigod had so arbitrarily settled on her own mortal self.

“Got the water.” Liven murmured, watching her gaze dart over. “Is it ready?”

“Yup.” Senith set the brush down, the mirror now with four concurrent circles of the translucent paint. She placed a hand on the jar, the firefly dropping into the water with a miniscule splash. It began to ripple with green light, swirling around through the rest of the liquid.

With a sharp breath, Senith flipped the jar over, thudding onto the open-faced mirror. The circles turned silver as the water spread, glow bright enough to light up the whole clearing. Liven averted her eyes until the glare died down, a clear presence in its place before them.

A snort came from beside her. “About time you arrived.”

“Of course.” Liven’s hand fell back down as she saw the new speaker. Black straggles of hair fell across a dark brown face, a solid green collared shirt sitting on broad shoulders. Grey irises held amusement behind rectangular frames, atop a scarred nose. “So did both of you.”

“Save it, old man.” Senith gave her father a look as she stood up, one Liven didn’t quite understand. “Not yet.”

The god put up his hands with a chuckle. “*Yet.*” Char floated out from behind, settling on his shoulder. “You’ve chosen quite the home, though.”

“What can I say?” Senith gave a melodramatic sigh, leaning towards Liven. “I sure love places that don’t want me to exist.”

She shoved her friend back upright with a scoff, bowing to the god. “Eriston.”

“Don’t be a stranger, Liven. Stand up.” He waved off her formality, expression warm. “You’re following your path just fine.”

“You always say that.”

“As it remains true.” Eriston shrugged. “Your physical destiny isn’t going to change so soon, from what the others have said.”

“And my...” She hesitated. “Emotional destiny?”

His smile widened, Char floating off his shoulder. “Why don’t you see for yourself?”

“Dad, are you seriously-”

“Stop worrying.” He raised an eyebrow at his daughter. “I’m not intruding for you. Though if she *does* find out...”

“Okay, look-”

Liven was barely aware of their bickering as the firefly halted in front of her. Before she could reach out, it trembled and shook, reverting back to its true form with a flash. She shut her eyes at the searing light, peering through tentatively once it died down again. A gasp escaped her at the sight.

Beside Char was another firefly, completely identical- yet flickered cerulean instead. It hovered inches from her face, hazy blue amongst the trees, glowing in tandem with her heartbeat.

Senith seemed to pause from the earlier argument, staring at the new critter. “Huh.” She stepped closer. “Will admit, when you said you had a gift, this is not what I expected.”

“Wait, this-” Liven swallowed, cupping her hands around the firefly. “You’re... gifting this to me?”

“You deserve it. I haven’t seen mortal dedication to destiny gods in years.” Eriston beamed. “Though it is my own creation, there’s gratitude from us all. And for accompanying my daughter.”

Liven exhaled slowly. With a firefly of her own... she'd be able to tap into destiny seeking any time. No waiting for Senith to have the supplies to visit Eriston specifically. All she'd need was a mirror, just to seek out her own emotions.

"...Thank you." She managed, the mite settling on her palm. "It's an honor."

"Stop sucking up, you're not at the diner anymore." Senith nudged her elbow. "He's still an airhead."

He shook his head fondly. "You're so much like Charlotte."

"...Pass on the comparison to mom."

"As you wish." Eriston tilted his head. "Farewell, you two. Use my gift wisely."

With his last words, his form rippled away, fading into silvery mist. Senith kneeled down to stow away the ritual items, glancing back. "Got a name in mind?"

"Uh..." Liven stared at the firefly tickling her skin. "Raindrop?"

"Lazy, but sure." Senith got up with a smirk, holding out the jar. "Probably should keep it in here. Don't let it out in the diner."

"Duh." She sniffed, scooping the insect inside. "But what about Char?"

"I'll grab another jar from my hideout, should be fine." The demigod tossed the satchel over her shoulder, Char settling on the strap. "That was a successful night."

"Yeah." Liven was still staring at her divine critter, before remembering something. "Hey, what were you arguing about earlier?"

Senith froze slightly. "...Nothing?" Liven raised an eyebrow. "Okay, nothing *important*. Promise. I'll tell you later. Now's the time to get back to your job."

"Wow, sudden responsibility." She snorted. "...Are you sure it's not important?"

“Just something he’s been nagging me about.” Senith leaned back against a tree, brushing curly hair from her face. A fond, wistful smile. “Some day. For now, I’ll see you next time.”

The moment she finished, Raindrop lit up blue inside the jar, illuminating the surrounding forest. Liven hesitated, before giving a shrug. “Alright... two weeks. Don’t be late.”

“No-”

“-promises. I get it.”

Senith grinned deviously, Liven’s heart quickening as she disappeared into the shadows.

“Until then.”

The alluring image remained in her head the whole trip back, Raindrop’s glow just as bright.