

Zinnia Demitasse Patreon by Thomas Bell

(14/April/2022 - 28/December/2023)

[Dev Blog: 4/10/2022](#)

[Apr 14, 2022](#)

Tomorrow is the release of the demo, and damn am I nervous on levels that I never believed. However, I stand by my concept, and I am excited to share this story with you all and see where it goes from here.

What you can expect:

The demo itself is a little over 91,000 words. This is the combination of an Introduction and Chapter One. That being said, there are several paths you can go down, so your individual paths might feel a bit short. I felt it was more important to explore during this phase though for you, as the reader, to get to know my writing style, and to explore the world your MC has been dropped in.

All four romance options will be present within the demo, though possibly not in the path that you take. Heads up now, Belladonna is a cameo, but she will become a big focus in Chapter Two.

Design your MC's hair color, eye color, skin type and height in this run through. Along of course with your sexuality. Just because you choose your sexual preference, does not mean you will start a romance with any one of the characters within the demo.

What I hope to see from here

I have BIG plans for this story. Very big plans. I would love to in the upcoming weeks add a status bar for your personality. I also want ways for you to earn money within the Night Market.

Along with that, I would love to code a health bar and potentially give you an inventory for small items you will pick up from your love interests along the way.

The demo:

I am very hopeful that this will be something big. I cannot wait to hear what everyone thinks and I am looking forward to developing this along with all of you. Thank you for your continued support. I eagerly await hearing from you.

[Apr 14, 2022](#)

A/N Paper Lanterns is a community based IF game we do on Tumblr, taking place within the Night Market. At the end of part 8, there was a choice to sleep with the character Malcolm. So of course we did. :) Here is the paid content to that short.

While you get to choose your MC within the game, the cannon MC is male and Malcolm is trans (female - male). Please be aware, if you want to have a story written about your MC instead, you will need to contact me.

You thought about leaving him in this state. Would have served him right. Even stronger, was the desire to ask him to come with you. To forget the Night Market and the illusions it had to offer.

To run.

But that wasn't an option for people like you. You could never return home. Didn't matter how hard you tried, it never worked. So you took comfort and joy when it came, and you tried your absolute best not to hate yourself for it.

Smashing your lips against his own, you bite at his lower lip, your tongue darting out, pushing past clenched teeth to find that perfect heat as you grab roughly at his hair. You kiss him hungrily, feeling him respond in turn. Hands beneath your shirt, he pulls upwards, calloused palms running up your spine until he can tug your tunic off in one tearing pull. The air was cool despite the shafts of sun filtering in. You could see the iridescent wings of small moths and dragonflies, flitting around in the golden light.

Beneath you, Malcolm gasps. Your hand scrape up and under his shirt, tracing those familiar scars. When he makes to turn his head away to hide, you grab him by the chin, squeezing tight. Slowly, you shake your head.

"You don't turn away, remember?" It was an old argument and one that had ended with your eyes locked together that first time, as you two slowly fucked each other, letting the sweat drench your skin. You wanted to remind him that now was no different, despite a year and some change sitting between you and that moment.

Your clothes are divested in a flurry of grabbing hands and blunt nails. Sharp edges of teeth bite into skin, sucking bruises and marks that would last for days. You want to see it on him. Want to see a sign that this wasn't just another dream. Pants down around your ankles, you take one tanned thigh, holding his legs open. You stare down at him, feeling his gaze questioningly on your own. He didn't know how

much you thought about this. How you woke at night, hard and aching, wanting to bury yourself in that wet heat.

When he reaches out, grabbing your cock, your head falls forward. Something low curls within you as you feel your cheeks flush and your heart stutter in your chest. You hang in one suspended moment, where all you know is the smell of him and the feel of his rough hands on you once more. There was no going back now.

“Fuck,” you mutter.

“I believe that is what we’re doing, yes,” he laughs against you. His laughter soon turns into a low moan as you reach between your bodies, brushing between his thighs. You watch as he pauses for a moment, savoring the feel of you once more. You push your fingers inside him, passing your thumb against his center while you crook your fingers upwards. His eyes flutter in pleasure. A flush appears high on his cheeks as he grits his teeth, eyes squeezing shut. You couldn’t resist as you leaned forward, biting at his neck, knowing it would be a mess come morning. Not that your own is going to be much better.

“Now,” he grunts, hand tight around you, pumping up and down with only sweat to guide his way. It edged on painful, but you didn’t tell him to stop. Climbing up on the desk, you position yourself above him, pulling your fingers free and tracing his lips. The gasp he makes is filthy. The look in his eyes, sinful. And you want to make him scream.

Hooking his legs above your hips, you position yourself, pushing inside him with one smooth thrust. His hand comes up, curling around your neck in a tight grip as he writhes against you, fucking himself harshly on your cock. His mouth hangs open in one kiss bitten moan, and you feel yourself tighten already. It had been too long.

You wanted it to last. More than anything, you wanted this moment to go on forever. The two of you spread across his desk, the sunlight that was nothing more than an expensive enchantment streaming across your sweaty skin, both of you fucking each other harshly, a mess of limbs and scratchy beards and desperate hands that had never been ready to let each other go.

“Fuck,” he mutters, a litany of curses falling from his lips. You are both consumed with a rush of yes yes yes and more. A soft whimper echoes around you, and you aren’t sure if it is his or your own, but it doesn’t matter. It’s all too much too quick, and as you feel him tense, your own release floods through you at the slack jawed bliss that crosses his face.

You collapse, sweaty and exhausted against his chest, trembling. Closing your eyes, you let out a shaky breath, curling your fingers within his dark hair. Around you, the world stills. The soft glow from the garden window drapes over you both like a welcoming blanket.

For the moment, you two are silent.

[Romance Options](#)

[Apr 15, 2022](#)

Alright, I'm just very curious at this point. Who is everyone romancing so far?

Milo Next

Hazel Albright

Gabriel Caine

Belladonna Malady

73 votes total

[Milo Snippet from when he first see's the MC](#)

[Apr 15, 2022](#)

The wind whipped through the canyon, howling through the cracks of broken down establishments that had once stood proud and tall. They were the remnants of some world or other. Something that had fallen into the Night Market, becoming absorbed by its mystery, never to return home. It's how the market expanded. Milo theorized years ago that the market itself was sentient. The following years had done nothing to prove him wrong.

Sitting at a broken table, a warm drink in hand, Milo stared out at the beach and the gathering crowd. The docks would be busy tonight. Elias had thrown another tantrum and the crossfire had been dire. Velvet Guards had been combing the streets for "bails" the last few days, trying to make up for it. Because never mind actually punishing the man responsible for the situation.

"Tara got off okay." The clinking of herbal tonics and overfilled vials sounded like bells as Hazel sat down next to Milo. She scooted herself next to him on the bench, knocking at his spread legs and slouched form. He grinned at her, a warmth to his face he often didn't give others.

"Good. She was sweet. Deserves to have a nice life from here."

Hazel grabbed at his drink, sipping it and wrinkling her nose. She didn't give it back immediately, though, continuing to sample the contents of the tankard, despite her dislike. "I have a free room this means," she started. "Anyone stick out tonight?"

Milo tilted his head towards the sloping path ahead. It slid down from the open cave above. The one that housed all the cells and the over eager eyes of the Velvet Guard. "That one."

"Which one."

"That one." He pointed towards a figure walking downwards, trailing behind the Guard Captain. They were looking out at the beach before them, clearly not akin to what they were seeing.

"Oh," Hazel breathed. "They look scared."

"Scared?" Milo snorted. "No. They look angry. Mischievous. Absolutely delectable."

"I don't think we're talking about the same person."

Turning to her, Milo snatched back his drink. "That's the one we'll go after. Get them from the clutches of Caine."

"He's not that bad."

Sure, Milo thought, if you enjoyed a man with a proverbial stick up his ass.

Despite Hazel not hearing him, she still gave him that look. Disapproval was heavy in her eyes when it came to Milo Next. Though she had been giving it to him for years, Milo mainly remained unaffected by it.

Swinging an arm over her shoulder, he hugged her close. She moved into his embrace willingly. Sometimes, Milo was all she had.

"You want to get them or should I?"

"We can't just walk up and steel them," she commented.

"Why not? Caine knows we do it. Let's just cut out the middle process."

Hazel tapped his knee. Again with the disapproval. It allowed a low chuckle to escape from him as he finished off his drink. A drink that had been remarkably more full when she first sat down.

"Gabriel is not the one I am worried about in this situation. While you operate in between the lines here, I do wish to keep my business up and running."

"I'd never jeopardize your shop," he said, almost offended she would suggest such a thing.

"Then please do this right," she urged.

Sighing, Milo upturned his mug. The warden was leading the prisoner downwards now, locking them in one of the bottom cages. He looked on edge tonight. More so than he usually was. Probably due to the influx of prisoners. Milo couldn't help the small amount of joy at the thought of the other man's discomfort.

"Alright, tell you what. I'll go get another drink. Mingle a bit. You do the same. We'll see who gets to them first."

"Milo, they are obviously not from around here. They must be terrified. Can't we just go and comfort them a bit? Promise them they won't be sold off to the likes of Dragul or something?"

Leaning forward, he pressed a kiss to Hazel's hair, lips brushing the frayed edges of the colorful scarf she had wrapped around her locks tonight. "There's a process, Hazel," he chided, turning the tables on her. "Respect it."

Hazel rolled her eyes, practically shoving him away.

Standing, Milo grabbed his tankard, bidding Hazel goodbye for the moment. There was a skip in his step as he made his way to the Saloons, watching the prisoner for the time being. They would be an interesting one. He could already tell.

Tilting his head back, he grinned. Excitement was on the wind tonight. And by the Knowing, it felt damn good.

[Chapter Two Snippet - Optional route if Milo helps you escape](#)

[Apr 15, 2022](#)

The apothecary district was just as small as Milo had described. The alleyway in which we walked darkened as the lamplight above turned a deep cerulean blue and the walls crept with waxy vines of forest green. There was an absence of noise here. The background whir of conversation and plodding feet faded away as we wound down an alley barely a shoulder's width wide before emerging into a circular den filled with the most resplendent colors I think I had ever seen. Large flowers of the deepest mauve crawled up the far wall, stretching out to wrap around the arching branches of a white birch tree. Beneath the tree was a grove of herbs, leaving the air aromatic and smelling like a meadow would after the first rain. There were clay pots filled with the brightest flowering shrubs of yellow and orange and a

large caged area where ripe and supple fruits hung from strong vines. My eyes went wide at the sudden change.

A path of broken gems and glass wound between all of this, the small shards glittering and sending up little motes of iridescent dust. The ground looked as if it glowed, as a thin shimmering fog settled about our ankles.

"Come on," Milo said. "She should be home."

A house sat in the very back, nearly obscured by the jeweled tones of life that sprouted up all around it. By no means was it anything special. A large stone archway with a broken gate stood before it, the moss covered slate half walls that wrapped outwards looked crumbling in certain places. The house itself was made of wood, stained-glass windows and circular portcullises inlay haphazardly against the walls. The chimney puffed sweet smelling smoke from a bent and whistling pipe and the roof was shingled with various shades of what looked like damp cedar. The house was two strong winds from falling apart. But I didn't dare speak such a thought out loud.

Milo didn't knock as he pushed open the front door. A wave of heat barreled into us the moment he did, sweltering and smelling of cloves.

"Oh," the worried tone sounded from somewhere within.

"Hazel?" Milo called out. He looked over his shoulder at me, his smile assuring, but I couldn't help but notice how cautious his steps had become. "Haze?"

A large crash spilled throughout the room followed by a muffled shriek. The room itself was fairly dark, lit only by the filtered light coming in through the windows, and even that was murky at best. Splotches of smeared dirt and oil coated the glass in layers of grime, giving the room a dank appearance.

"What the hell has she...?" Milo didn't get to finish his sentence as he side skirted a large crate with a fist size hole near one of the bottom corners. What looked like nuts were spilling out of it and scattering across the floor. The floor in which small brooms were sweeping like mad, sending the round pods scattering everywhere, knocking into piles of fallen hearth wood and upturned cauldrons. When one of the brooms raced over Milo's feet, trying to sweep his shoes, he kicked it across the room. The bundle of twigs and rough straw let out an unearthly scratch.

"Hazel!" he shouted.

From up above, there were more scratches before Hazel tipped her head over the upper landing, her brown hair falling from her poufy bun and her dark skin spotted with sweat and what looked like flour. "Milo," she said in relief. Her fingers were curled around the knotted oak banister, the only thing keeping her from tipping completely over the side. "Oh, you brought a customer." Her face tried to morph into a warm smile but as a broom knocked her from the side and she stumbled, panic was clearly written across her face.

"What did you do?" Milo asked, kicking at another of the brooms. They were no more than a foot tall, made of spindly looking twigs and fluffy stalks of wheat or thrush. As far as I could tell they were trying to clean but instead were sending up motes of dust and other mixtures until the air was nearly cloudy with it.

"I needed help," she protested.

"This doesn't look like help."

"I was desperate." She yelped as one of the brooms crawled up her side, attempting to sweep the flour from her face. She batted the rough bristles away, holding the thing out to the side. It squirmed as it tried to sweep the motes of dust within the air.

"Well look no further," Milo said with a grin that even I could see was tight. "I brought you a new shop hand."

[Chapter Two](#)

[Apr 15, 2022](#)

What would you like to focus on in Chapter Two?

Exploring the Night Market

Trying to find a way to get home

Learning more about your romance options

Finding Belladonna

13 votes total

[Character Q & A](#)

[Apr 17, 2022](#)

We are going to be gearing up for a character Q & A soon. Send in those questions by April 23rd! Please specify who you are asking the question to. No limit on questions this month since we have such

a small group. :)

[Dev Blog 4/18/22](#)

[Apr 18, 2022](#)

With the demo released, I have had a lot of great feedback. I can honestly say I was nervous as hell to release what I did. One, because I have never been good at putting my own work out there for the masses. Two, because this has honestly been a big debate within my household of whether or not we can afford for me to do this (I'm on the side of fearing we cannot. My husband is a cheerleader). And finally three, because I was worried my concept was going to be looked over. But, here we are! Chapter One down, and Chapter Two in development. I cannot be more excited.

This week is going to be a slower week of work. I need a rest after that last push. However, I am setting up a discord for some beta readers, so hopefully we have my mistakes under control.

The goal for the continuation of this week is as follows:

Decide how many paths I will have within Chapter Two

Figure out which MC customization options I want to add within the chapter itself. I want the character locked after this chapter.

Continue working on Paper Lanterns and fleshing all that out as the backstory to the Night Market.

Start looking into commissioning more art of our RO's.

Outline a new short for patreon access only. I want to make your investments worth it. :)

Otherwise, a little bit of a slower week news wise here. Just happy to have the demo out and playable and all broken links fixed.

Love,

Zinnia

[Gabriel Caine POV](#)

[Apr 21, 2022](#)

A sigh was heavy in the air. As was often the case when the so-called morning awoke and Gabriel stepped into his office. It was a dimly lit alcove that had once been a cell before the boss thought it to be far too big for the likes of a prisoner and his right-hand man, got shoved here instead. Not that Gabriel minded. It was at least quiet in this area. Far away from the comings and goings of anyone being bought in for processing. If there was one thing that Gabriel needed, after all, it was the quiet.

With his morning tea in hand, and a wrapped steamed bun, he sat down at his desk. No sooner did he unwrap his food was there a crisp rap on his door, a nameless guard bursting in. They looked fresh-faced and young, and Gabriel was almost certain they had not worked here yesterday. Or perhaps he truly did need to sleep. It had been three days.

"I have a report, sir," the young man said, holding himself straight and staring somewhere over Gabriel's shoulder. Setting down his food with a sigh, Gabriel leaned back in his chair.

"Go on."

"There was another breach," the man, a child really, said. "One near the gem district. A younger person. Human we think."

Gabriel stared at them, unblinking. The office cell was consumed with silence that normally, Gabriel would have reveled in. If it were not for the at attention kid in his door. He couldn't eat while others expected conversation from him. "And?"

"And what sir?"

He took a deep breath to keep his calm. "Why is this one important?"

Breaches were a dime a dozen now. Gabriel had long stopped caring about the ones that came through. Not that he ever really cared. He wouldn't be here without a breach, after all.

"Oh, uh- I'm not - well, I don't really..."

"Where's Maddox? Or Celia?" They were at least competent at their job. Gabriel couldn't really see how any of this information was supposed to be deemed important when they sent a mere underling to deliver it. He wondered if the guards were getting uppity again and trying to screw with command.

"I don't know, sir."

"Who are you?" Not that it mattered. He would forget his name within ten minutes.

"Carver Adlun, sir. Reporting for duty. This is my third day as a member of the Velvet Guard, our most esteemed..."

"Right." Gabriel stood, looking at his steamed bun longingly. It was now much less... steamy.
"Adalaine..."

The boy shifted on his feet, his demeanor breaking into something far more nervous. "Adlun, sir."

"Adlun. Do you know how often a breach through the Night Market walls happens?"

"No, sir."

"Once every two point five days. Do you know how many of them we apprehend?"

"No, sir." Adlun's voice was far quieter now. *Good*, Gabriel thought. Maybe he'd think twice before stepping through his door again.

"All of them. Every last breach that is reported, we take care of. So you see, when a breach is being reported to me, I find it of very little note. Mainly because I know the individual has been taken into custody and if everyone is doing their job correctly, will be in due processing as we speak." Stepping forward, hands behind his back, he bumped the polished toes of his boot against Adlun's own. When the boy flinched, Gabriel nearly didn't waste his next breath. It was only because of his position, his duty to explain, that he even bothered.

"It is the ones that go unreported, the ones I know are happening and slipping into our society with illegal papers and intentions to tear down the structure we have created, that I care about. Those are the ones that I take interest in. But you're not reporting one of those to me," he told the boy softly, his voice edging on condescending without the barest hint of regret. "So, my breakfast has been interrupted. I hate when my breakfast is interrupted. The reason for interrupting it better be much better than 'I was told to come tell you' or else you will not make it to your fourth day within the Velvet Guard."

The boy swallowed. Sweat dripped down his temple to disappear somewhere beneath the unruly hairline near his ear. Gabriel sneered at that. Couldn't even look presentable.

"I don't. I'm afraid sir that I don't really..."

Gabriel walked by him. The boy could see himself out. He hoped he enjoyed his last day on the job.

Walking through the cavern halls, Gabriel made his way downwards, towards the section of tunnels that branched. One led straight, a row of thick iron doors housing the prisoners of the Night Market. He could see a few guards coming and going, starting the processing for the bail block that evening. Other doors remained tightly shut, red sigils marked on their outside. Looked like they had quite a few they would be dealing with at a later date.

Turning down one of the tunnels, he walked through the dirt caked halls until the ground beneath him became stone. The walls began to smooth into something more palatable and the lights that flickered ahead were bright. He supposed it was a sad imitation of sunlight. If born within the market, it probably sufficed as something dazzling. To him, it looked to be nothing more than a smear of gleaming white with an edge border of gold.

“Warden.”

Gabriel sighed. “Cecil. Thank the Knowing. Why did I have a child come into my office to tell me about a breach?”

She smiled at him a little, something more akin to playful. Her steel grey hair was pulled back into one long braid down her tanned back. “Why do you assume that anyone new to the Guard is a child?”

“They are all children compared to me.”

“Fair enough,” she said with a shrug. “At for him coming to you? Ambition. That and the gang wanted to see if you’d fire him.”

“Of course I’m not going to fire him.” As of right now, that is, the man still had a job. He could dismiss him tomorrow. “Why was he there, Cecil? Standard breaches are not my protocol.”

Her face quietened at that. With a shift, she motioned for him to come closer. “Something different about this one. Was all the standard signs. Guards were there before they even cracked through. But this one. This one came through a new door.”

Gabriel frowned. “Concerning but not entirely unheard of.”

“The door then disappeared. Moved completely.” The rigidity within the wardens form was unsettling for anyone that knew him. Cecil had the benefit of working with him for the last few years and becoming one of the few members of the guard who wasn’t offended by his blunt nature. It was the only reason she didn’t turn away at the line of his jaw. “I already sent a small group out to look for it. The signature they received though doesn’t track. By all intents and purposes, it was never there.”

“That’s impossible.” When a door opened, even if it was shut again, a tear within the fabric of their dimension was made. It may not be accessible any longer, but a blemish would still remain. For it to smooth over as if nothing had happened was concerning at best. “What cell were they put in?”

“47B.”

“Well,” Gabriel said, “looks as if I will be heading out to do a bit of processing this morning.”

Cecil had suspected as much, and only nodded. “Would you like to go eat your breakfast first?”

"No. No a matter like this better be addressed sooner rather than later. I can buy another bun this evening."

She nodded. "Of course, sir. Sorry for the inconvenience."

Making his way back down the hall, Gabriel stared ahead. Beneath his feet the ground became dirt once more and the sconces of runic firelight lit his way. Up ahead, he could see a cell door opening. A blond man was being escorted out, his wispy blonde hair in disarray, his shirt and jacket missing. Reese escorted him with a hand to the back of the man's neck. It wasn't an unusual sight to see, but he certainly did not like seeing it so close to the cell he was heading towards. Towards 47B.

"Evenin' warden," the dark skinned man said, his hold still on the shirtless form of the prisoner he just released.

"Anything I need to know about, Reese?" Gabriel asked. Reese and Caliban. They were not a good combination.

"Oh, I'm sure there is. But don't you go worrying your pretty head about it," Reese drawled.

"Hey," the blonde haired, blue-eyed man looked up at Gabriel, rocking back and forth on his toes. "You going in there?" When Gabriel didn't say anything, he took it as confirmation. "Go easy on them. They've been through a lot."

Reese rolled his eyes, shoving Caliban along down the cell, not giving Gabriel a chance to answer. Not that he would have. Instead, Gabriel looked at the twin cells. The open door and the one shut, housing 47B. Of all the cells they could put them in, it had to be the one next to the eyes and ears of the market itself.

Gabriel watched as Reese and Caliban left, heads ducked together in conversation. He would wait. 47B had probably gotten an earful already. He wanted to go take a look at the breach before he entered into that cell, after all.

Because whatever was in there, didn't belong.

[Character Q & A](#)

[Apr 25, 2022](#)

Belladonna

- You strike me as a very ambitious individual. What is the biggest obstacle for you to reach your goal?

"I long ago have reached my goal, dear heart. I am quite comfortable with my position in the Night Market. It is best not to strive too high in life. The higher you climb, the more painful the fall. However, I must say that I do enjoy watching people climb that ladder. I enjoy even more giving them a little shove along the way."

- Can you tell us a little something about the place you came from?

"That's the funny thing about the Night Market. Whether you mean for it to happen or not, you often times forget your life before. If you plan to come and visit and peruse our wares, I would suggest getting out quickly. For the longer you stay, the more you forget why you ever wanted to leave to begin with."

-Have you ever been in love?

"Of course not. Love is foolish. It accomplishes nothing in life. However, for the right price, I can certainly fall for you."

Gabriel

- You seem conflicted about the work you do. Why do it at all?

"A job is a job. Whether you like it or not makes no difference. In order for society to function properly, everyone must know their place."

- If you were to choose a different career path, what would you want to work with?

"You do not choose careers. You simply are born into what you are meant to be. Choosing a career is for the whimsical and the unambitious."

- What was home like, where you came from?

He declines to answer.

-You carry a shard of something on you. Can you tell us a little more about it?

***"It's nothing. A trinket that I like to fidget with from time to time. I don't even remember where I got it."

Milo:

- Keys are an interesting collectable for someone who seems perfectly capable at lockpicking. Why keys, specifically?

"What can I say? I like how they look. Something so shapely about them. I see one on the ground, pick it up, give it a home. Such a shame for something so pretty to be forgotten in the dirty streets."

-You seem to hold Hazel in high regards. Did you two ever have a thing.

*wild laughter fills the room

“Hazel? Haze? No. No no no no no. She’s practically a sister. I could never... no. That girl and I have been through far too much for me to think of her as anything other than my dearest friend and family. Why do you ask? You’re not considering trying anything with her are you?” He leans forward, a small glint of something unreadable in his eyes. “You think you’re good enough?”

Hazel

- What is one thing you and Malcolm can't see eye to eye on?

“Milo.”

- You seem like a caring and selfless person. Is there a personal reason why you feel like you need to help others?

“My mother was not a kind person. I don’t know if she ever was. She was the original bog witch of the Night Market and ran this apothecary at the edge of the herbal district before it burned. I grew up watching how she was. How she treated others. How others treated her. I didn’t want to be there. So when I took over her shop, I just chose not to be. I want to change the perception everyone has of the Albright family. I’m not sure if I’m doing a good job of it, though.”

- If you could set aside others need and ask for one thing for yourself, what would that be?

“Time to garden. I know it sounds silly, but I would really love some uninterrupted time to dig into my plants. They get so neglected sometimes and seeing them flourish under my care is one of my favorite things.”

Blue-eyed cellmate

- Do you know of Milo Next, Gabriel Caine, Hazel Albright and Belladonna Maladie? What would you have to say about them?

“Does one ever really know a person? Let us think about that for a moment. What makes up a person? Is it their occupation? Is it how they take their morning tea? Do we define others by how they look and conduct themselves within society? Or do we make snap judgments and decide who they are to us, never quite knowing the bountiful nature of their soul.

When asked, just now, whether I know the four individuals in question, it gave me pause. A pause so pregnant and bright that I am blinded by the possibilities of what it can pertain. What do I know about them? Nothing.

And everything all at once.

For to know a soul, you must experience them to their fullest. You must allow yourself to revel in their aura and find yourself consumed in their thoughts and fears until you sweat nothing but their very existence. Aw, yes, to know a soul. Such a messy process full of love and wonder. I find most afraid of it. Too scared to allow themselves the quintessential action of opening their minds and hearts to another. Too timid to let their flaws be known. It is a humbling process. One that we avoid as a society. The nitty-gritty of belonging is not a path many are strong enough to take. But if you are brave enough. If you can tread that narrow road of broken dreams, you may just find one, beautiful, sparkling gem at the end of it all."

[Dev Blog 4/28/22](#)

[Apr 28, 2022](#)

So I am a bit late with this blog because I started writing Chapter Two and have not been able to stop. Everything lined up in my schedule to where I got some good chunks of time and am already cranking away at the first branch I had planned.

I'm not going to lie, writing Chapter One was a mess. I wrote it in sections, tried to connect the sections, tried to keep each storyline straight at the same time. It was a nightmare to try and go through and connect so I wanted to start Chapter Two differently.

So, I began writing it like I would any standard story. No breaks. Let's just get it all out on the page. I'm beginning with Milo's arc because he is one of the easiest for me, and I'm just writing it without options. I can then go back, add in the options when they make sense, and branch off from there. I feel like this will streamline the process and allow me a lot more time dedicated to actually writing the story as opposed to trying to figure out which branch goes where.

On the list for the rest of the week:

I would love love love to finish this arc this week. Will it happen? Probably not, but it is a lofty goal. :)

I got all my edits back for Chapter One and want to go in and do a massive update.

I am still trying to find a code to put an enter button in where your name is to make it easier for people on mobile to play.

There were a few concerns about pronoun placements that I want to address, but I don't think I'll get to it this week.

[Next Short](#)

[May 4, 2022](#)

What POV would you like to see the next short from?

Gabriel

Belladonna

Milo

Hazel

14 votes total

[Snippet/Insight into Chapter Two](#)

[May 4, 2022](#)

A/N: This would be when you first meet Belladonna properly.

“Hello.”

I jumped. The voice came from nowhere and everywhere at once and sent a chill up my spine. A woman stood near the fireplace, where she had most certainly not stood before. A gown of black silk draped across her pale skin, dipping down to show ample cleavage and slitting high enough up to expose one creamy thigh. Her hair shifted between fiery red and soft ginger depending on the way the light hit her. I couldn't help but notice how deathly still she stood.

[[Hello]]

[[You must be Belladonna]]

[[Well, you are terrifying]]

[[Holy crap, you're pretty]]

[Dev Blog 3](#)

[May 8, 2022](#)

The biggest chunk is done in Chapter Two! I don't know what got into me this last week, but some sort of fire was lit, and I wrote 56,000 and got it sent off to the editors. I am so extremely happy with how it turned out and am honestly so excited for you guys to be able to spend a little time with Belladonna since that is the one RO you haven't really gotten the option to talk to you.

On the list for this upcoming week.

Next, is going to be the route that continues if Hazel is the one who bought you from the bail block. This route is going to be a fairly easy write, I feel, because it will end up bleeding into a lot that I've already head written.

I will also be putting in the corrections that I have gotten back about what has been written for Chapter Two.

AND I am happy to hint that there may be some more art work coming our way soon. :)

Thank you so much for supporting me. I have another supporter this month, and I cannot express how much those little notifications make my day. You all are absolutely essential to what I am doing, and I appreciate your time that you spend in my little world.

Sincerely,

Zinnia

[Chapter Two Preview](#)

[May 12, 2022](#)

The sage of Milo and Billows the Cat

As Milo shifted his hand, Mr. Billow's let out a low growl which caused Milo to flinch back. While Milo no doubt looked like a man who had been punched several times in his life, I never would have pegged him as a person concerned about the odd actions of a shop cat.

"What is with you and the cat?" I asked, nodding towards the way Billow began to edge towards Milo. He only stopped when Hazel petted him, leaning down to place a kiss within his fluffy grey fur.

"It's a demon," Milo said.

Hazel's eyes snapped upwards. "He is not, Milo Next. You take that back."

"I won't. That cat straight up is a monster."

"You stepped on his tail," Hazel protested.

"Nearly ten years ago!" Billows swiped out as if to hit Milo for the tone of his voice. "See? Look at it. What cat does that? That is not a normal cat. That is a demon straight from the icy pits of the underworld, sent here to make my life a living hell and nearly make me bleed out."

"You were fine," Hazel said firmly. I didn't think it was possible for her face to become irritated, but apparently when it came to Milo and Mr. Billows, it did rather quickly.

"He shredded my damn leg," Milo continued his rant. "I didn't even see him, and he shredded my damn leg. I apologized and everything."

I blinked at the argument, not having known what my simple question could have even done. "I'm suddenly sorry I asked," I muttered.

[Dev Blog May 17th, 2022](#)

[May 17, 2022](#)

This week is certainly not shaping up to how I had hoped. I had grand plans for the Chapter to be done by the end of the week, but now it is looking more like early to mid next week. Which is fine, I would rather it be more polished for all of you, but it was a disappointment. Coding is an awful monster that looms in nearly each passage, and I naively made everything about ten times harder for myself by having so much variation in Chapter One that needed to be coded into Chapter Two. I know I'm not going to catch all of it, but I'm hoping to catch a vast majority.

On the schedule for this week:

ALL OF THE CODING - Seriously, I am in coding hell. I am going back through the story now and trying to code in who you escaped the bail block with and little bits of flavor text to try and personalize your experience.

From there, I am hoping to add a bit more to Milo's route because it feels oddly short.

Then do a quick run through of the game myself to make sure there are no blinding errors.

I really am hopeful that this will be out early next week, guys. Then I can focus on the shorts for the Patreon. I'm also planning a small giveaway for all my Patreon followers. Hopefully it will drive some more foot traffic here for more participation. Stay tuned for those details, but I thought it would be cute for the winner to receive something from Hazel's shop. :)

I hope everyone is doing well! I cannot wait to share the next chapter with you all and see what you think.

Sincerely,

Zinnia

[New Short Coming Soon](#)

[May 20, 2022](#)

Hey everyone!

Chapter Two is done and out and oh boy was that one giving me trouble towards the end. I learned a lot of things on what not to do when coding and IF game. LOL!

But, I wanted to give everyone a heads-up, that I will be working on a new short for this account this weekend. You all voted for a Hazel short story and I have a really good one in mind. Now that I can take a breather from the main story, I have a few little things I want to put out for you guys so stay tuned!

Sincerely,

Zinnia

[Monthly Q & A](#)

[May 21, 2022](#)

Send in your questions for your favorite characters, please! I've only gotten about two so far. So if there is anything you want to ask your RO's, now is the time. :) You can send them to me on here or on Tumblr.

[Hazel Albright - New Short](#)

[May 22, 2022](#)

Hazel sighed as she set down her basket. Broken glass lay at the bottom of the thick woven wicker, while blue-black sludge burned a hole through the bottom. She would have to weave another one before market day tomorrow. Along with creating a stronger vial to contain her brews. She wondered if she could make unbreakable glass.

"How'd it go?"

Malcolm was sitting at the small table near the back of the shop. They had only just managed to get the hexes cleared from the area. Her, Milo and Malcolm had to rip up floorboards and replace some of the side wall. A lot could be said about her mother, but there was one thing that held true even after death. The woman was thorough.

"It was okay." She pushed the basket aside, trying to hide it behind a large cluster of jars filled with the latest honeysuckle harvest. It tipped off the counter, however, sending a clattering array of multicolored glass across the mahogany floors. A sizzling pop sounded as the sludge began working on the recently mopped boards, eating away to the foundation of the shop, where blood still stained the concrete.

Malcolm frowned, standing and walking over to his sister as she frantically grabbed a few poultices from behind the counter and dumped them over the scorch marks. An ashen smear would mar the floor until she could afford a board replacement, but at least the rot was no longer spreading.

"Why are there so many broken bottles?" Malcolm was looking down at them; the jagged bits of blue and green that he knew had been whole when his sister had set out this morning. She had gone to sell at the local co-op. Trying to show the rest of the market that her goods were different from their mothers. That she wanted to heal. To help. Not to kill.

"Hazel," he started hesitantly. She didn't look him in the eye. Hazel had seen the blind rage within Malcolm's gaze far too often over the years. She didn't want to see it again. "I knew I shouldn't have let you gone alone," he muttered, berating himself more than he was her.

Sweeping up the rest of the glass, Hazel pushed her curls from her face. "It's fine, Malcolm. Change takes time. They look at me, and they only see mom." They had taken the tonics from her basket. Thrown them on the floor and stomped them to bits. Her stall, the little wood one she had woven wildflowers among, had been burned in her absence. Smeared within the soot were the words "Begone Witch". It was good that Malcolm had not come with her this morning. He would have lost his mind and started a scene. And a scene was the last thing that Hazel needed.

"You're not mom," he said firmly. "Anyone that takes two seconds to talk to you can see you're not mom."

"Mom wasn't always like mom either," she whispered to him. Dumping the glass in the bin by the counter, she sighed. She couldn't be certain, of course, but she had always imagined her mother in her youth. Vibrant. Resilient. In love with love and life. Why else would she have had children? "It's okay. It really is. I understand why they are the way they are."

"There is absolutely no excuse for them being the way they are. It's ridiculous, Hazel. You should just get rid of this place and be done..."

"No."

Her words snapped through the air like a whip. Around her, several flames guttered to a stop and the room grew dark, the willow wisps outside the window flitting away. Hazel eyed the change, wrapping her arms around her waist. She was not her mother. She was not her mother.

Warm arms wrapped around her. Ones that had gained so much muscle the last few years. Changed into something strong and capable. They had both grown up when the other wasn't looking.

"I know this place means something to you," Malcolm whispered, resting his head on top of her own. "And if this is where you want to be, I'll help you get it all changed up. But Hazel, if someone hurts you, if this gets too dangerous, you can't just keep doing this to prove a point."

"What else do I have, Malcolm?"

"What do you mean, what else do you have? You have me. You have Milo. You..."

She pulled back when he trailed off, giving him a soft but sad smile. "All I have ever known was this shop. I worked here from the time I could walk. I love this place, and I hated seeing what mom did to it. You have your art and that new job you think I don't know about. Milo eventually is going to leave once he can get enough money. I want this. I want his place. The Night Market deserves to see the truth about these walls."

"It's hard to see the truth when the path here is guarded by vengeful spirits and the cackling echo of our mother's final words."

There was nothing to say to that. It had taken both of them days to even traverse that alley again and when they did, they could only hear their mother's shouts following them until they ran from the alley, tears coating their cheeks.

"Let me come to the market with you tomorrow."

"No."

"Let Milo come with you to the market tomorrow."

"An even bigger no." Puling away, Hazel straightened her apron and took a determined breath. "I'm going to do this. People in this world just need a little kindness. If I caved so quickly, then I am no better than them."

"You are a hundred times better than them."

"Which is why I will rise to the occasion and heal them all with a good heart. It's what the world needs, Malcolm. We don't fight hatred with more hatred. We fight it with love and understanding."

Kissing her forehead, Malcolm sighed. "You're better than all of us, Hazel. By miles."

"Thank you. And yes, I am." Digging in her leather satchel, she grinned at him. "I got you some new paint, by the way. With the few tonics I did sell. I was hoping you could capture how the garden looks at night. When the pink wisps are playing."

Malcolm stared down at the powders in her hand. There had been a time they had to steal just for him to create. Steal and hide. That was their childhood. Or Hazel knew it to be Malcolm's, at least. Steal and hide and hope that their mother didn't tear up the floorboards to burn his pictures in the hearth. It was the first thing Hazel had done to erase the nightmare. Every picture Malcolm had ever drawn was pinned to the wall now in some odd conglomeration of wallpaper that was an eyesore to her brother, but a reminder to herself of how far they had already come.

Taking the paints from her hand, Malcolm nodded at her. "I'll paint," he said. "While you harvest."

Hazel grinned. "Good. I was thinking I could bring some chilling tonics to the market tomorrow. The heat is starting to get bad, and I'm sure everyone would appreciate a bit of cold."

Above them, filtered light shined through on the two Albright siblings as the wisps watched over them through painted windows. The day had been long, and the years ahead would be longer. But as Hazel looked towards her brother, she felt relief. As long as she had Malcolm, she knew she could keep fighting.

[May 27, 2022](#)

A/N: This obviously is written with the headcannon versions. So, just so you are not surprised, MC is male. Malcolm is transgender.

Swallowing, you look up at him, your breath short. His hair fell in his face, dark and soft, cutting across his nearly black eyes. The calm of the room shone across him, down the slope of his cheekbone. Across the curve of his jaw. You reach up, tracing your fingers over each line of his face.

"I'm sorry," you mutter.

"I'm sorry too."

Neither of you knew what exactly you were both apologizing for. It no longer mattered. At that moment, forgiveness was more important than past deeds, coming to a resolve. There was a point in which you had to simply move on and as he hovered over you, the soft warmth of his sweater pressed against your bare skin, you couldn't remember anymore why you had wanted to leave this world. Or him. For so long, you had fought for it. To escape the Night Market and start a life somewhere.

Start a life.

That was always what you had said.

You held onto that notion so tight that somewhere along the way, you hadn't realized that your life had started long ago.

"Ahem." Both of you jumped, tearing your eyes from each other. Hazel stood in the doorway, a small smile tugging at her lips. You practically push Malcolm to the floor in an effort to get to her, wincing as your side pulls. Hazel rolls her eyes and came to you instead, wrapping her arms around you tightly. "My hero," she whispers.

You wrap your arms firmly around her, hauling her close. "Are you alright? Did they hurt you? I'll kill Tandri. There was no reason to arrest you and... fuck I left Rat and Neve at your apothecary."

Malcolm, from his position on the floor, shook his head. "Just thought of that, huh?"

Pulling back, Hazel cups your cheek. "Everything is fine. Neve took Rat back to her place. The apothecary is shut up tight. And prison wasn't so bad," her smile was wane. "I mean, it's dark, but they didn't hurt me. They just tossed me in a cell with no communication. I was only in there for a few hours."

"Few hours too long," you mutter.

Leaning forward, she places a soft kiss on my cheek. “So,” she said, turning to her brother. “I thought we would all be pretty hungry tonight. And since we are lying low I can’t really go back to the apothecary yet and deal with everything.”

“Wait, why are we lying low if she made bail?” There was something Malcolm wasn’t telling you. Or maybe the situation was worse than you thought. Most likely, though, the two of them were once against standing in solidarity against your own fuck ups.

“Hazel made bail,” Malcolm stated calmly. “You didn’t.”

“So,” Hazel said, her voice pitching a bit higher. “I thought I would go out through the tunnels. Get a few basics. Bring it back here and cook for us all. No decisions or plans on how we’re going to do deal with the Baron of the Mists is going to be made on an empty stomach.” The look she gave both of us was significant. “I’ll be gone for say, three hours?”

“Four,” Malcolm smirked.

“Are you sure it’s safe for her to…”

“My bail was bought. My name is clear. Besides, I provide most of those guards with herbal supplements. No one wanted me there except Tandri. She’s always had it out for me.”

“Probably because you didn’t want to date her,” you say.

Malcolm’s eyes went wide. “Excuse me?”

Hazel waved him off, checking your wound and tutting under her breath before rising from the bed. “I’ll be back soon. Malcolm, they are still hurt. Please keep that in mind.”

Malcolm stared after her as she grabbed her shawl and secured it around her shoulder. There was a small drop near the back of the apartment. A trap door that led to the underground tunnels that ran along the underbelly of the city.

“Tandri wanted to date her? When?” Malcolm didn’t even wait for his sister to be out of earshot before grilling you.

“When did she not.” From what you remember, Tandri had always had it bad for Hazel. But Hazel didn’t like cruelty in any amount, and Tandri’s was past intolerable. “Are we really going to talk about Tandri, though?”

Malcolm crawled up on the bed, sweeping the covers aside. It was the first time you realized you were stripped bare, clothes tossed aside somewhere from when he had patched up your wounds. He hovers over you for a moment, still fully clothed, drinking in the sight of you splayed before him. You feel your skin flush, your fingers curling in the moss green sheets beneath you. It had only been a week since you had fallen against his desk. Since you were inside him for the first time in a year. Malcolm had always

been home. From the time you were young. Never again would you allow that home to be shattered like it had been for so long now.

Reaching up, you grab the back of his head, taking a fist full of his hair and pulling him flush against you. You seek out his lips with a desperate need, wanting to get closer. Desperate to feel every inch of him against you. Bracing himself on either side of your body, he stares down at you, and you feel your motions slow. Suddenly, your touch turns softer as you begin exploring him. Your heart pounds against your chest as you lock eyes with his own, suddenly feeling as if this was the first all over again. Back when the two of you were young and scared of the world, clinging to each other in the dark, aching for understanding that you only could find in each other's arms.

Cupping your cheek, he runs a thumb under your eye, pressing his finger to the corner. Then, leaning down, he captures your lips with his, kissing you in a slow and soft breath that has your chest rising and falling with emotion. Ever so slowly, his hands began to trace your side, lingering around your hips, ghosting across you in a shuddering moan. Tilting your head back, you gasp.

"Look at me," he whispers. "I don't want you to turn away tonight."

You nod, falling so easily into his command. You feel yourself arch against, rubbing against the scratchy material of his trousers, seeking the friction you loved. Malcolm was going to take his time tonight. You could see it in the hungry way he stared at you. As if he wanted to watch you come apart against him over and over again and push you that much further. Until you were a mess, panting against the sheets, begging for more.

Threading his fingers through your hair, he rests fully on top of you, his hips grinding slowly against you in a slow and aching dip that has your thighs bracketing his own slender ones, squeezing him in an attempt to urge him forward.

Pulling his shirt up over his head, you toss it aside. You manage to flip him to his side, both of you avoiding your own angry wound. Your tongue traces the scars of his chest, your hand snaking down to undue his belt. Malcolm's breath hitches as your hand sneaks inside, seeking out that warmth that you crave, dipping your fingers in the gathering wetness. He kicks off his pants then, discarding them somewhere at the bottom of the bed with the sheets. His own hand comes forward, wrapping around you, pumping up and down in a familiar motion. Leaning forward, you suck a mark into his skin. Something angry and mottled that come morning, you would look at and admire. You can feel the way his heart hammers beneath his chest and the way his own breath hitches with the action.

You swallow each other's moans as a frantic pace begins to swell, the two of you grinding against each other, hands slick with sweat and arousal. When he shudders against you, you watch him. The way his eyes roll in the back of his head and the way his own wrist stills against you while he shakes.

When they open again, his eyes are nearly black. He says nothing as he helps you sit up, wary of your side. His hair is mused and his lips bitten and swollen, and you think that you might die if you never get to see this again. You had forgotten. Forgotten how consuming he could be. As he straddles you, hovering above your hard length, he keeps his eyes on you, staring. Unblinking.

Slowly, he lowers himself and you feel your world tilt into something right once more. A broken whine escapes your lips as he settles against you, the two of you kneeling together on the bed, sweaty and full of gasping moans. Something wrecked slips from your own throat, and you see him smile.

“There it is,” he whispers. Golden rays of light beam in through the enchanted window, cutting across the two of you in thick beams.

“There what is?” you pant. You look at him desperately, laid bare to everything and everything he wants to know.

“What I was missing,” he leans forward, kissing the curve of your lips. “That sound. Dream about that sound still.”

You mutter some sort of curse as he raises and lowers himself on top of you, his fingers twisting in the hair at the base of your neck, while all you can do is cling to him and steady him as he rocks against you. You feel that wet heat all around, taking you in and squeezing tightly as if to claim you. Gritting your teeth, you feel the way your muscles clench as you help him raise and lower himself on top of you. Leaning forward, he kisses you once more, his tongue licking the seam of your lips before pushing inside and battling your own. You groan, knowing that the sound he gives you in return is one of self-satisfaction. When you pump your hips upwards and feel him gasp in surprise, you can't help but grin.

Malcolm starts moving faster, angling his hips in just such a way that you knew the end was beginning to near. You can feel your own arousal beginning to take over, racing up your spine and wrapping around you in a clawing need. Leaning forward, you pant against his neck, suddenly overwhelmed by the emotion coursing through you. It was too much and not enough all at once, and you never wanted it to end but knew it was an inevitability that was rapidly approaching.

“Mal,” you choke out. “Please. Please please please.”

He doesn't answer as he grips you tight, swirling his hips over and over again. You reach between your bodies, seeking him out, determined to give him release before your own. He slaps your hand away, and you cry out, clinging to him tightly. Sweat drips from your brow as that aching swell reaches to full crescendo.

“Look at me,” he demands. And you are helpless. You would do anything for him. You know this.

Snapping your eyes upwards, you lock eyes with him, bound and determined never to look away. When he tips over the edge, his mouth parting in a broken plea, you follow him. The two of you rock together, falling apart in each other's arms, faces red and slick with tears.

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After, you lean heavily against him, your sweaty cheek pressed to his, his hand running absently up and down your back. Golden shafts of sun drift through in dizzying motes and for a brief moment, tucked far away, it was just the two of you once more.

"Your turn," he rasps, his voice rough with pleasure.

"My turn what?" you look down at your spent bodies, the bruises forming around his collarbone, the red scratches you felt against your own jaw. "I think I was very good at taking turns," you murmur.

He pinches your hip. "How did you fall in love with me?" he asks. "When did you know?"

You look up at him. That was the thing about Malcolm. He had always been there. From the time you were a grubby little kid, wandering the streets, trying desperately not to be terrified. Then, as you grew, as you learned, he had always been around, him and Hazel, the two of them your rock in a world that had never quite been kind to you. You don't remember when you fell in love with him. Why it had been him over Hazel. You just knew without a doubt one day that you were. You accepted it as easy as the air you breathed.

"I don't think I ever fell in love with you," you say quietly. "I think I entered the Night Market lost. I was alone and I was scared. Then I met you, and that part of me that had felt hollow since the day I was born was no longer there. So, I never fell in love with you, Malcolm. Because you were always just a part of me. I just had to find you."

There is nothing to say at the whispered confession. Malcolm only curls you closer, pulling the blanket up over your rapidly cooling bodies and entwining his legs with yours. With your arms around his waist, and his draped across your shoulder, the two of you lie in bed together, eyes cast towards the enchanted window, watching as the sunlight begins setting on the garden just outside.

The day was done. Tomorrow, dawn would light the sky with a deepening night. The lamplight that cast its spell across the Night Market, would continue to sway. And you, would have to walk the streets, fate rolling out beneath your feet. You only wondered if the lights above you would guide you to a safe end.

1. Wake in the morning and discuss with Hazel and Malcolm what to do.
2. Sneak away in the middle of the night to confront the Baron. Leave Hazel and Malcolm out of this.
3. Try to leave the Night Market to keep them safe.

[Q&A For the Month of May](#)

[May 30, 2022](#)

Author: "Welcome everyone to our end of the month Q&A. I have decided to sit Hazel, Milo, Belladonna and Gabriel down in the same room together. Our other guests will be brought in a bit later."

Gabriel: "Who else are you interviewing?"

Author: "No one, Gabriel. No one at all. Let's get to the questions. First one is for you in fact, Gabriel. What do you do when you aren't working? Besides stealing the heart of many of the readers."

Gabriel: "It is impossible to steal a heart. Unless you are implying that I am murdering someone, which is not my intent with being a member of the Velvet Guard."

Milo: "You like to bring that up a ton. Afraid we'll forget, Gabby?"

Gabriel (ignoring Milo): "In my free time, I like to listen to music. Concerto's predominantly. I also enjoy quiet dinners. There is a small bistro by the river front that I enjoy inhabiting."

Author: "That sounds lovely, Gabriel. Milo, since you seem eager to speak, the audience would like to know if you get cold with an open shirt like that?"

Milo: "I do. Which is why I am looking for someone, kind, caring, and warm-blooded, to be my blanket."

Belladonna (rolls her eyes): "Please. That can't possibly work on someone."

Milo: "Oho! Are we answering questions today without the mask of propriety on?"

Belladonna: "I am shocked you even know the word, Milo."

Author (clears throat): "Moving along. Hazel. We have heard you mention your mother a few times. What is a good memory that you have of her?"

Hazel: "Of my mom? Uh. Well... she taught me how to grow my garden. I remember her taking me out into the beds there and teaching me how best to harvest basil and rosemary. You have to get them at a certain time during the day. A feat that is much harder given we don't really have a day. I'll always appreciate that about her. She made sure that I knew how to fend for myself. That I didn't have to rely on anyone for survival."

Milo (reaches out and taking Hazel's hand): "You have the best damn herb garden around, too."

Author: "This next question is for all of you. What can be found in your pockets?"

Belladonna: "Well, I don't have pockets, per se, but I do keep my lipstick somewhere close at hand."

Milo: "She means between her boobs."

Belladonna: "Or around my neck."

Hazel: "I mainly have seeds in my pockets. And some treats for Mr. Billows. And a few receipts for clients. Oh, and sometimes I carry some snacks for myself if I get hungry. A few tonics in case I run into an emergency when I'm not at home. My papers of course..."

Gabriel: "You should all be carrying your papers."

Hazel: "Oh, and a small athame. For protection."

Milo: "Mainly got junk in my pockets. Some bits and coin."

Author: "And you, Gabriel?"

Gabriel: "I'd rather not talk about it."

Author: "Well, okay, instead, how about tattoo's. Anyone have any tattoos? Gabriel, we will start with you."

Gabriel: "No."

Author: "Alright, moving on. Belladonna?"

Belladonna: "None. I find that I quite dislike needles."

Gabriel, for reasons unknown, clenches his jaw.

Hazel: "I have a small one. Of a bundle of wildflowers. It's on my ankle."

Milo: "Got a tramp stamp. Of a butterfly. Love those winged freaks."

Hazel (giggles): "Does it have glitter?"

Milo: "Of course!"

Author: "Hazel, everyone is dying to know how you found Mr. Billows."

Milo (muttering): "Demon Bill."

Hazel: "He found me, actually. I was wandering home one night, and he followed me. At first, I thought he was just hungry. He was so tiny, after all, but then when I tried to give him food he just batted it away. I think he instead wanted a few snuggles. I- It had been kind of a rough week. I think he had noticed that. Anyway, he disappeared for a bit after that, but always seemed to be around when I needed him."

Author: "Well, I think all of us, but Milo can say we are happy he is around. Next question is for Belladonna. What is the strangest client you've ever had?"

Belladonna: "Now, I can't actually divulge that. Client privilege and all. But I can tell you it involved several gallons of toenail polish and an ornately woven rug."

Hazel: "Is there a difference between toenail and fingernail polish?"

Belladonna: "Oh. Oh, dear heart. Drop by the office after this is all done. I may have a few things I need to be teaching you."

Hazel blushes

Author: "And our last question for you four is this. If you could only eat one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?"

Gabriel: "It would have to be something nutritious. That would cover most of the food groups and be high in protein. Perhaps an energy bar designed specifically to meet all your dietary needs."

Milo: "Noodles. All of the noodles."

Hazel: "Oh. I do like noodles. And sweet bread. And dumplings. Maybe a bit of kafe with it?"

Milo: "Kafe! Yes! I change my answer to that."

Author: "And you, Belladonna? What is the one food you would have for the rest of your life?"

Belladonna (smiling): "You."

Author (blushing and suddenly realizing how hot it is in here): "Well, that is all the time we have with these four. Stick around for our bonus guest, and I'll talk to you all later."

Everyone leaves the room.

Author, after a moment: "You can come out now."

Malcolm Albright enters the room. He sits on the chair Milo has vacated, looking at the one his sister had been sitting on.

Author: "Now, Malcolm, I know we cannot ask you where you are or what has happened to you, but there are a few questions that the readers do have."

Malcolm: "I suspect they have more than a few."

Author: "Probably, but let's start with this. What is your favorite memory of your mother?"

Malcolm: "I don't have any. She was a bitter, mean, old woman. And Hazel is going to be great at trying to dismiss that or seeing the good in her, but I made peace with that a long time ago."

Author: "Alright, that's fair. You have been known to have enchanted windows in your apartment. How did you get them, and why doesn't everyone have them? It would seem beneficial for more people to see the sun."

Malcolm: "I got them after a job, actually. A rich type. He couldn't pay his bill, but he had these windows custom done by an enchanter that I don't think lives in the Market anymore. It was quite a big job, so when I requested those, he had really no choice but to give them to me. I haven't really seen where anyone else in the Market has been able to replicate them. Though, I'm sure they've tried.

Author: "Sounds like the artificers need to get on that. And just one more, before we let you go for the evening. If there was one thing you could say to Hazel, what would it be?"

Malcolm stops, taking a moment to think about this. He looks at the chair his sister had been sitting on, almost as if he is looking at her. "I'm proud of you." Getting up, he exits the room, not giving a single glance back.

Author: "Well, I hope you all enjoyed this month's Q&A. As always, if you have anything you would like to ask the characters, please send me your monthly asks to my Patreon box. Hope everyone is doing well! I'll see you all soon!"

[Dev Blog May 30th 2022](#)

[May 30, 2022](#)

Well, it has been a couple of weeks here. Sorry for missing the last Dev blog. Everyone in my family has been sick almost consistently, it seems. We also are having a lot of car difficulties that has taken up our time.

On the schedule this week is Chapter Three!

I have already begun writing it, which is a lot of fun. It is all character based this chapter. You will get to go shopping with an RO and go on a mini outing with them, catered more to what they like to do in their downtime. This means you can spend the entire chapter with one character, or can split it and go shopping with one and on an outing with another. Currently, I am writing both Milo and Belladonna's routes, and that is the hope for this week. Hopefully I'll finish those two.

As for codeing:

A few problems have arisen in the main codes that I will need to be fixing, and I am hoping that doesn't mess up anyone's base save game. I'm talking to some other twine authors to see what their experience is and hopefully we can get some sexuality codes tightened up because there seems to be a lot of bleed over. Especially if you chose to like women for some reason. I'm not sure what that is about.

Also, I will be adding an asexual option. It won't be coded in the first two chapters but can be coded from that point forward.

And hopefully we will be getting rid of all the random back slashes we have floating in there from character codes.

That is the ambitious list for this week. Hope everyone is enjoying their Memorial Day if you celebrate. Otherwise, hope you are having a good Monday!

## [Gabriel Caine Post Chapter Two](#)

[Jun 1, 2022](#)

A/N If you took the route with Gabriel before the Pleasure District, this is the post scene after he leaves you to Belladonna.

The night air did little to cool his skin. Gabriel had never been one to outwardly show any sort of discomfort. He was not even the kind of man who allowed his irritation to be in full view. However, this was twice now. Twice that this person, this prisoner, had gotten the better of him. It made his skin itch in a way that wasn't entirely unpleasant, which then made it unpleasant all together. Though he didn't show it. He would never show it. Because Gabriel Caine was nothing if not fastidious, and emotions were paltry efforts of sentimental anxiety that accomplished nothing but irrevocable mistakes.

"Warden?"

Turning on his heel, his sword out, he stared at the man before him. The blade leveled as the broad slope of their nose. The man was clad in crimson velvet. Gabriel sighed, letting his sword hand drop. "Lieutenant." Meyers. From what he remembered. Lieutenant Meyers.

Lieutenant Meyers was looking at him with a wide set of eyes, his hands still raised in the air, as if he were afraid Gabriel would run him through. A fear that was not all together unfounded, given the slightly unhinged look within the Warden's grey eyes. "Are you alright, Warden?"

"I am fine." Gabriel's voice was flat and monotone as he spoke to the subordinate. "How can I help you?"

"I was just stopping to say hi," the man said nervously. He ticked his gaze back towards the pink lanterns. "I didn't know you enjoyed the Pleasure District."

Gabriel's eyes narrowed into silver slits as he looked down the alley, following the man's gaze. The sweet smell of vanilla and brown sugar wafted on the breeze towards them. "I don't," he said.

Lieutenant Meyers looked over his shoulder. Where Gabriel clearly came from. Confusion was clear on his face, especially since Gabriel stood in the mouth of the only alley leading towards the place he apparently had not been. "Oh. Right. Of course, sir." he said knowingly. There was a smile on his lips that said that Gabriel's secret was safe. But that was the thing. Gabriel didn't want his secret to be safe. There was no secret to be had. He had simply allowed the day to get the better of him. The mention of Belladonna. Escorting the prisoner towards her place of work. The ambrosia.

When he heard Lieutenant Meyers chuckle, he snapped. His hand flat on the man's chest, he slammed him against the brick wall. The guard's eyes went wide, the laugh he held falling away. "I am going to make one thing abundantly clear here," Gabriel said. "I do not inhabit the Pleasure District. I do not go there. Nor have I ever. I was simply escorting someone there for safety purposes. So if I hear tomorrow that your Warden was seen within those walls, I will know who to come for, will I not?"

Meyer's nodded his head resolutely, swallowing thickly. Gabriel could feel the tremble run through him. *Good*, he thought.

Taking a step back, Gabriel released the man, smoothing a hand down the front of his uniform. "Get your jacket cleaned," he said, straightening the lapel. "The Velvet Guard has an image to maintain, and you are certainly a disappointment to that."

"Yes sir."

It took no time for the lieutenant to run away. At the sound of his retreating boots, Gabriel stood there, stoic and calm. Above him, the lights swayed, a chilled wind bustling through. A few wanderers edged by him, their heads down as they disappeared through another alley, leaving the Warden standing there. Alone. Always alone.

There was a pop in his chest as he breathed in the night air. Hazel's tonic still sat heavy in his cloak pocket, whispering to him. He needed to get home and take it. He could feel the control beginning to wane. But behind him, the faint glittering pink of the lights mocked him, whispering words of comfort to his tired soul. He wondered what the prisoner would think of her. Wondered what she would think of them. He snorted to himself. Knowing Belladonna, she would pump the prisoner of every ounce of information they had before manipulating them into a moment of softness.

All lies.

Blatant lies.

Holstering his sword, Gabriel stared ahead. The green lights that lead towards the docks swung heavy in the distance. Technically, it was still his day off. But there was work to be done. And in the end, men like him didn't deserve days off. Penance didn't quiet just because a body needed rest.



Alone, Gabriel walked back towards the beach, and towards the solitude of his office.

[Milo Next - Post Chapter Two](#)

[Jun 5, 2022](#)

A/N: This is what takes place if you were one of the ones who went down the alley towards the Pleasure District with Milo, and found yourself locking lips with him. Enjoy!

Hands in his pockets and an unlit cigarette hanging from his lips, Milo walked down the street, kicking at his own heels as he placed one foot in front of the other. He had left the Pleasure District only in the sense that he was no longer under the sway of those velvety pink lanterns. But there was a little side street, one in a makeshift alley just to the right, that he liked to visit from time to time. It was less ostentatious. Less about sex and pleasure. More about a particular other itch that needed to get scratched.

Yivi sold the best seared mushrooms in all the Market. She was a retired courtesan that had never quite moved away from the quarter, but had instead continued to offer pleasure for a price with sautéed mushrooms and dipping sauces that Milo swore were other worldly. Given that he was almost positive she was not from here, he assumed that was pretty close to the truth.

When he approached the stand, she eyed him carefully. She was still a looker. Old age not claiming her like it had some others. Milo had been tempted from time to time to ask for her services when she had still worked in the district proper. But, he was also terrified of being bossed around. And boy would he succumb to a woman like her. Strong and firm with a no nonsense attitude? Yes please!

Leaning forward, he placed a kiss on her smooth cheek, placing a stack of bits down on the counter.

“Don’t you dare think of lighting that cigarette, Milo,” Yivi scolded.

“You know I quit, Yivi. Just a nervous tick by now.”

She nodded her head towards the Pleasure District. “And that? You fornicating in there as another nervous tick?”

Milo laughed. “Nah. Just dropped off a friend. Waiting for them to be done with the illustrious Belladonna, then I’ll pick them back up.”

Yivi raised a brow towards them. “Why are your lips puffy, boy?”

Milo paused. Because the searing reminder of another person lips pressed tightly to his own was still evident against him. The way his heart had skipped over something so unbelievably simple, the heat rushing through him in a way that demanded that he ask for more more more.

Milo shrugged. "Allergies."

"Bullshit, allergies," Yivi muttered. She put a mushroom kebab in front of him with a sauce of basil aioli and sriracha for him to dip it all in. "You seeing someone new finally?"

Milo looked down, a bitter twist to his smile. Wouldn't that be a concept. A surprise for Hazel, that was for sure. Seeing someone new. It was laughable, really. "Nah. It was just the Ambrosia, Yivi. They didn't know what they were doing."

She scooted another kebab in front of him. "You and I both know Ambrosia doesn't work that way."

"Then it was a kiss that was a mistaken form of passion. I am quite charming and kissable, you know."

"You are," Yivi agreed. "So when are you going to start believing you deserve a bit more than a one-night stand and a throng of people who you keep at arms length?"

Popping a mushroom in his mouth, Milo chewed thoughtfully, trying not to let the hurt show on his face. "When are you going to give up your life of decadence and marry me, Yivi?"

She hit the kebab from his hand, sending it flying. Milo pouted at her, but slumped in his seat a bit. Yivi did not back down with her piercing stare, her blue grey eyes pinning him to the spot. She had made those fresh and her look was clear. She was disappointed she had to make a point by tossing it all in the garbage to highlight how much she was not joking around.

"You can fool everyone else, boy. But don't sit here and use your broken heart as a character charm. I'm too old and have seen what it does to people too often."

Milo ducked his head. "Yes, ma'am."

Taking out another few bits, he put it on the table, silently asking Yivi for more. With a glare, she turned, beginning another batch.

It wasn't that it was a bad kiss. Far from it, in fact. It was the perfect amount of pressure, and the feel of another body against his own was one he sorely missed. But Milo had made a point over the years. Don't get too close. Keep them all at a distance. The hurt that came with losing someone was too much. The only person he ever opened his heart to anymore was Hazel, and only because he was certain she was the only one who understood the depth of it all.

But still...

Milo had had a lot of pleasure through the years. Had been with many people. Had gotten on his knees for some, had guiding them across his lap for others. He had been with both men and women and had twisted himself up in every position possible, riding the crest of passion high and fast. And at the end of it all, he had always felt hollow. Empty somehow.

Then that kiss.

One stupid single kiss.

He found himself touching his lips and looking towards the soft pink lights of the district beyond.

"I'm not cooking you another plate, so stop saying stupid shit," Yivi rasped at him, slamming a fresh platter down in front of him. She was glaring at him when he finally pulled his attention to her. And just like that, the warm and patented smile of Milo Next was back in place.

It was just a kiss.

Forgettable even.

But as he popped another mushroom in his mouth and began gossiping with Yivi and the few patrons that sat at her booth, his eyes kept ticking towards the district beyond. It wouldn't hurt to stick around and wait for them. Be there when they left their meeting with Belladonna.

It was, after all, the gentlemanly thing to do.

[What Would you like to see next?](#)

[Jun 5, 2022](#)

I am still getting to know you guys and what it is you like reading. I wanted to take a poll and get a feel for what you want to see for your paid content

RO Backstory

Post Chapter POV shorts

Side stories with Characters you haven't met yet

Snippets from the new chapter

32 votes total

[Dev Blog 6/9/22](#)

[Jun 9, 2022](#)

When it rains it pours. I have gotten nothing done that I set out to do so I'm afraid not much has changed from my last development blog. But between a transmission blowing out on our commuter car, medical bills rearing their ugly head, my entire family being sick, and now a teething baby who is beside herself because it is starting to get hot here? Our house has been a place of absolute turmoil and not conducive to any sort of creative process.

Thankfully, I have a husband who is taking tomorrow off work. Meaning, I'm pulling an all nighter tonight. I know. I know. I'm on my own timetable and my own schedule and there is no need. But, the creative process, doing this kind of thing, is helpful to me. And I am driven. I am driven for this to be my eventual career. I am driven for this to be my future. To show my kids that this life is possible. You may have to work your ass off and do odd things you never thought you would be doing to make the time for your work, but it is possible.

So, while not much to update on the progress of the story, I am here to tell you all that I am not stopping. The absolute cluster fuck that has befallen on this family is not enough to stop me. :) Which means that when life settles, I am going to be an unstoppable force. And I look forward to showing all of you that.

Thank you to all my supporters. I cannot tell you how many times you all have made me smile.

Love,

Zinnia



[Malcolm Albright](#)

[Jun 10, 2022](#)

If you are unaware, our darling Hazel Albright has a sibling named Malcolm. Depending on where you are at in the Night Market IF, and if you have read Paper Lanterns, you may or may not have heard of him. :)

Credit to the darling Mooreaux

## [Tier Change](#)

[Jun 12, 2022](#)

Hey Everyone,

I am going to be changing around the tiers a bit. You will not be losing anything from your current tier but the language in them is bulky and I want to kind of clean it up a bit for new patrons. On top of that, I think I'm going to take away one of the Chapter snippets and instead make sure it is an RO POV piece instead. We also are going to occasionally offer art and I want to put that in the tier.

Please feel free to message me if you have any questions.

## [Dev Blog 6/16](#)

[Jun 16, 2022](#)

This week was much more productive than the last. I was able to get all of Milo's route done last Thursday. I stayed up all night to do it but it got done. Hazel's was finished up early yesterday afternoon and already, Belladonna's route is about a third of the way done.

I also reformatted the Patreon tiers to include the post Chapter stories you guys love as opposed to just "snippets". We also have the addition of art when available.

On the list for this next week:

Finish Belladonna's route

Get a good chunk of Gabriel's done if not completely done

Start my edits.

What this means is if everything does go according to plan, we are looking at releasing this for Patreon somewhere between the 25th to the 27th. The only thing I could see delaying me is a coding issue.

Fingers crossed!

Sincerely,

Zinnia

[Hazel Albright - Post Chapter Two](#)

[Jun 16, 2022](#)

A/N Post Chapter Two, while the MC is meeting with Belladonna

“What do we do, Mr. Billows?”

Hazel sat, legs curled beneath her, staring into the small fire in the upper area of her home. The little area was hidden by stacks of books and grain barrels piled high but nearly empty. It used to be her mothers. The place she sat and composed her spells. The sigils she had burned into the floor were all but faded now.

It was darker back here than the rest of the shop, the walls lined with dusty old jars, swimming with things Hazel would rather not think about. The hearth back here was made of bleach white bone and the alter that was placed in front of it looked to be marble. Hazel knew better of course. Her mother never was one to make something of such importance out of such a common material.

In her lap, the grey cat was curled, purring and offering comfort. Hazel ran her fingers softly through his mane, knowing he must have sensed her discontent. It wasn't often he decided to stay.

“I mean, I know I should tell them. About Malcolm. About the Gatekeeper. But...” she sighed. “I don't want them to be mad at me.”

Before her, a bowl of glass sat on a dais. It was colored a dripping black and stood in jagged protrusions from a chipped golden bowl. A soft glow of sickly deep green glowed from the depths of it.

“Do you think they'll be mad?” she whispered. Mr. Billows nudged at her palm, licking at her fingers and nipping at the pad of her thumb. “They seem sweet,” she said. “Lost and confused but very sweet. I want to help them, Billows. I really do. But...” she trailed off, staring into the bowl. She had begun the spell four days ago. Tonight was supposed to be the fruition of her labor.

“Oh, Billows,” she sighed. “I just want everyone to be happy.”



The light from within began to flicker, rising with crackling smoke into the surrounding air. The floorboards creaked and shuddered and the screams from the alley beyond became louder and louder. Hazel sat up a little straighter, holding Billows close to her chest and staring hopefully at the dais. Black sludge began to drip down the side, pooling on the ground and creating a small vortex. The nebulous reach began to flow outwards in vain like tremors, filling in the dips in the floor.

“Come on,” Hazel whispered. “Just a little more. Just a....”

She yelped as the jars around her began to shatter, viscous liquid dripping to the floor with the remnants of old bones and suspicious looking organ like shapes. Smoke rose in a great big plume above the bowl and the sizzling of acidic burns across peeling wallpaper singed the air with rot. Immediately, Hazel rushed to the cat who had jumped from her arms at the first sign of danger.

“Oh, Mr. Billows, are you okay?” she asked, her eyes shining bright with worry as she scooped the cat up and held him tightly to her chest. Billows only leaned forward, licking the blood from her cheek and bumping his head against her, as if to ask her the same question.

Hazel slumped back down into her chair. “Why won’t it work?” she asked, her voice cracking. “Why won’t any of this work? I don’t get it. I’ve followed the directions. I’ve made all the proper sacrifices. How much more do I need to give?”

Tears began to slip down her cheeks, ones she wiped at angrily. A painting hung across the way. One old and burned around the edges. Malcolm had painted it for their mother when he was little. Chubby little fingers making crude figures of trees and butterflies. Their mother had thrown it away. Tossed it in the pile of things that needed burned.

That night, Hazel had saved the small painting. Sneaking out from their room amongst Malcolm’s soft weeping. From the embers of the fire, she had plucked it, keeping it under their shared bed. Now, she hung it above the altar. A promise that she would save him as well.

“You were supposed to be home already,” she told the picture. “But I suppose you just can’t get here. Maybe your injuries are worse than you thought or the Night Market is just taking longer. But I’ll find you,” she promised. “I’ll bring you home if you can’t get to us.”

Every day she waited. Every day she stared at that door, wondering if the next person to walk through would be him. He would sweep her up in his strong arms. Twirl her around like he had so many times before. He would hold her close and laugh as she wept, telling her he was finally home. That he had kept his promise. Hazel could feel it in her bones. Her brother would return one day. He would.

Against her, Mr. Billows meowed, knocking Hazel out of her reverie. She blinked at the large grey cat. “You’re right. We do need to clean up. We have a house guest and this is entirely improper for them to live in.” Again, Mr. Billows meowed. “No,” she blushed. “Of course not! I mean, well, yes. They are nice to look at but that’s not why I’ve been cooking so much. I just want them to feel comfortable. Things have been scary for them.”



When Mr. Billow's meowed, knowingly, Hazel felt a blush spread across her cheek.

"I think Milo is coming for dinner and cards tonight," she said happily, scratching the cat behind his ears, paying him back for any insinuation he meowed at her about their new house guest.. "Won't that be nice?" Mr. Billows hissed. "Really now, Mr. Billows. You need to try and like him. Just a bit."

As she left the upper landing, the bowl on the dais tipped over. Old and congealed blood spread across the floor and beneath the floorboards, their mothers old sigils burned bright.

[June's Q&A](#)

[Jun 17, 2022](#)

Hey everyone! Make sure to send in your questions for June's Q&A!

[Chapter Three is Here!!!!](#)

[Jun 22, 2022](#)

Hello!

I don't know how I did it, but Chapter Three is here for early access. Thank you to everyone that has provided so much support. I cannot wait to share this chapter with you all.

Enter "fallen", no capitalization, into the text box to gain access.

Enjoy!

[Glitch Fix](#)

[Jun 23, 2022](#)

Hey everyone!

There was a weird upload problem but the new chapter should be fixed now! Sorry for the inconvenience. Please let me know if it is still not working!

[Dev Blog 6/27/22](#)

[Jun 27, 2022](#)

Well by now, most of you have probably read Chapter Three. I know that one was a shorter chapter, but I feel the amount of personal information you guys got about the characters and the plot information (depending on the route you chose) was some of the best in the story so far. I really loved the chance to be able to spend time with the characters one on one, and I want to occasionally put in these kinds of chapters moving forward.

This entire thing is obviously a learning situation for me. I'm learning how to code. I'm learning what works within the stories and what does not. I did originally have it where halfway through the chapter you could switch to a different RO. When I did this though, the story felt split and stunted, so instead I think I would rather give you time to spend with the RO's one on one, hopefully per chapter. Plus the different routes will give this replayability.

Going forward, I have a few things planned.

1. I need to get that character Q & A out in the next few days. I've had some fun questions so far. If you have anymore, please send them my way.
2. I want to write post Chapter 3 scenes for each of the RO's because all of them had something significant happen within those chapters.
3. I am itching to start Chapter Four. Do I know what Chapter Four is going to be about? No. LOL! Because I am that kind of writer. I got a small bit in the beginning for my jumping off point that I will probably be starting this week, but that's it. So we'll see how that goes.

I got so many new patrons this last week and I want to tell you all that I value your support. We are a big family here on this side of the computer and your money is going to helping keep the house cool this summer for the kids, and our grocery bill. I am so happy to say that with what I am now making, I have been able to make headway on two bills that I was never able to before which has helped take so much stress off of all of us. So thank you from the bottom of my heart for your continued support in this endeavor. I'll work hard to keep the Night Market going as long as you all want to read. :)

Sincerely,

Zinnia

## [June Q & A](#)

[Jun 29, 2022](#)

Author: Welcome, everyone, to June's Q&A with our lovely bunch from the Night Market. June flew by fast here, and I know there are a lot of people still reading Chapter Three. Thankfully, none of this should be too spoilery. Now, please give a round of applause for our guests; Milo, Hazel, Gabriel and Belladonna.

We have a lot of questions to get into so let's jump right into it. This first one is for all of you. What are your pet peeves?

Gabriel: People who aren't hard workers. There is no excuse for laziness. How a person conducts themselves in their work is very indicative of the kind of individual they are.

Milo: Except there are a dozen excuse I can think of off the top of my head in favor of being lazy. One of which, being, that it's more fun.

Gabriel: Must you always counter everything I say?

Milo: Must you always speak first?

Belladonna: Boys. Is this really necessary right now? You two should know how to hold it together for at least an interview.

Hazel: Belladonna has a point.

Belladonna: Hazel, dear, you look lovely today. Absolutely edible.

Hazel: (clears throat uncomfortably) Thank you, Ms. Malady.

Belladonna: Oh please. Most of us are friends here. Call be Bells.

Milo: Anything to say to that, Gabriel?

Gabriel: (silence)

Belladonna: My pet peeve, is liars, by the way.

Milo: Interesting. Given what you do.

Belladonna: I'm not a liar, Milo dear. Which is more than I can say about you.

Milo: My pet peeve is self-importance.

Hazel: Milo....

Author: Okay, so it looks like there may be some high emotions gathering right now. Due to the events taking place at the end of Chapter Three, I assume. I know you are all tired, but maybe we could put that aside? Besides, aren't you all supposed to be working together? At the very least you should have the same goals.

Hazel: Of course. Please, author. Continue. I am sure we can all adjust our attitudes. Would it help if I made some tea?

Belladonna: Oh, I would love a cup of hibiscus.

Author: How about we just move through these as quickly as we can. Gabriel has told me there is a lot of work to be done within the Spice District.

Gabriel: I shouldn't even be here right now.

Milo: And yet, you are.

Author: Well, this next one is a bit more fun. What do each of you hate most about dating? How about we start with Belladonna?

Belladonna: Not that I often date, but when I did, during my much younger years, I did not like the expectations that came at the end of the evening.

Hazel: (frowning) Expect... oh! Oh. Yeah. Those. No. I don't like those much either. Or when someone ignores you at the dinner table in favor of something else. Like the person they actually want to be on a date with.

Milo: Who the hell is ignoring you at the dinner table? You make the food half the time. They should be singing your praises. Bowing at your damn feet.

Hazel: Thank you, Milo.

Gabriel: I for one, do not like the time that goes into the dating process. I would much rather skip the planning phase and jump to the understanding that time is precious, and we have to take it when we can. That also means that dates will be canceled at moment's notice. Or taken while I am on route.

Milo: (snickers) Romantic. As for me, there is nothing about dating I don't love. The thrill. The unknown. The absolute chaos. Give me someone who is ready for adventure and I guarantee we will be compatible.

Author: All of that sounds very much like you all. How about another one for the group as a whole. Are you all dog people, cat people, or animals of a different sort?

Hazel: Cat, of course.

Gabriel: I do not like pets, I'm afraid.

Belladonna: Human. Or if they have to be fuzzy, those cute little winged rabbits. They just come in the most vibrant of colors. I especially like the ones with little nubs for horns.

Milo: Migilicutties. All the way.

Author: I don't think those exist...

Milo: They do.

Author: Alright, how about some personal questions. Milo, since you seem chatty tonight, there are quite a few out there that have their eyes set on you.

Milo: Got my eyes set on them too.

Author: And they wish to know, as a self-proclaimed cad, do you ever plan to settle down?

Milo: Oof. You go for the tough ones, huh? Honestly, I don't know. I've kind of made a point never to say never in my life. I think holding yourself to one idea or one type of future is dangerous because in a blink of an eye, everything can change. Who I was ten years ago is completely different from who I am now. And I suspect that who I am ten years from now will be unrecognizable. So do I want to settle down? No. Will I one day? If the right person can convince me that it won't end in heartache? Yeah.

Author: All valid points and I'm sure there is more to that story. But, alas, let's move on to Hazel. The audience would like to know, how old is Mr. Billows really.

Hazel: (laughing) I think he's about eleven? Maybe twelve. No. Wait. Fifteen. He was full grown when he first started coming around, so I don't know how long he lived before becoming my shop cat. But he is fat and happy, and I think has a lot of years left in him. There's a woman, down in the Warehouses, that says she had a cat live until they were fifty. I'm hoping Billows is the same.

Author: And Belladonna, we just learned you are a business owner. Any plans on eventually just being that?

Belladonna: As opposed to a courtesan? The nice thing about me is I do not age so my so called 'shelf life' for entertaining will be eternal. Though, if the market gets anymore out of control, I am inclined to perhaps take a step back and conduct a more, slower, and safer lifestyle.

Gabriel: What do you mean the market is getting bad?

Belladonna: Do you truly not know?

Gabriel: Are your clients getting bad or the market, Ms. Malady.

Belladonna: I have a superb body guard, Warden. The best I've ever had. Everything is under control. I assure you.

Author: That brings us to you, Gabriel. You are quite the rule follower and during this last chapter, some of us learned why. But is there ever a rule that you did break or would be willing to break in the future?

Gabriel: Of course not.

Milo: What's that you said, Belladonna? About liars...?

Gabriel: Rules are there for a reason. I will not be breaking them.

Milo: The question was, have you broken any in the past, Gabby. They're looking for a dirty little secret. Which I know for a fact you have plenty.

Gabriel: This interview is done. I have more important things to attend to with the recent door activity.

(Gabriel gets up and leaves. Awkward silence fills the room)

Hazel: Did you have to push him? You know that he is under a lot of stress.

Milo: He's not the only one.

Hazel: It wasn't kind, Milo. You don't need to bring up his past like that. You know how he hates talking about it.

Belladonna: Hates talking about it, does he? Well. Good to know.

Hazel: No, I didn't mean it like that. I... (looks to the interviewer with panicked eyes)

Author: Uh, well, that concludes this month's Q&A.

Hazel: Thank you for having us!

Belladonna: It has been enlightening.

Milo: I think I pissed him off.

Hazel: You know you did, and we will be going to apologize. I'll bring a basket of bread.

Belladonna: He doesn't like bread. Try a bottle of wine.

Author: Thank you everyone for your wonderful questions. Chapter four is on the way and I encourage you to send me in your questions for July at any point in time. As always, your support means everything! See you next month!

### [Next Short](#)

[Jul 1, 2022](#)

Will be writing up a post chapter three short soon. Which RO would you like to see first?

Hazel

Belladonna

Milo

Gabriel

41 votes total

### [Milo - Post Chapter Three](#)

[Jul 2, 2022](#)

A/N Milo and Gabriel tied and this was just the story that came to me easier tonight. But Gabriel will soon follow. :) This is post Chapter Three, assuming Milo has romanced the MC.

“Miloooooooo.”

He ignored it. The voice outside his door. Hair plastered to his face, curls gone dark and sticking to the side of his head, he stared at himself in the broken mirror. His shirt was discarded somewhere in the corner, along with his pants. He had managed to find a clean pair of trousers to pull on before he caught sight of the scars. The one on his side, jagged and moon shaped. The burn mark across his shoulder that was still discolored. The starburst near his hip that he couldn't even remember getting. Roadmaps, he had always called them. To different moments in his life. Important events and times worth remembering only because it changed everything.

“Milooooo.”

He sighed. Lashes brushing the tops of his cheeks as he closed his eyes in discontent. Grabbing a clean shirt, he shrugged it over his shoulders and shoved his feet into his boots. The chains around his neck were tucked neatly inside the folds of his shirt, cool but dry now. Only the leather cords wrapped around his wrists were still damp from the rainfall from earlier. That and his hair.

Stepping outside, he turned and locked the door, sticking the jagged key into his trousers pocket. Ever was there, sitting up on an old grain barrel placed in the shadowed part of the alley.

“Took you long enough,” she said with a giggle, kicking her feet back and forth on the barrels tarnished binds.

He didn’t look at her. “Not tonight, Ever.”

“Why?” she pouted. “Is it because of that door opening?” She clicked her tongue in disapproval. “You gonna get upset now every time some refugees run on through? I was a refugee once. Remember? Just a poor little lost girl who flung herself into the market just like Mama said.” Milo’s head hung between his shoulders, his fingers twitching against the lock of his door. Maybe he should just go back in. Get some sleep. Hazel could take care of things tonight. “Do you remember that, Milo? Remember what Mama said?”

Sighing, he turned on his heel and looked at her. She was a waif of a thing. Forever little with big, wide set green eyes and lank honey curled hair. She had the fat of youth on her cheeks though. The only thing about her that wasn’t skin and bones.

“No, I don’t remember that, Ever. I don’t know your mother.”

She frowned at him, tilting her head to the side and pausing her kicking for a moment. “Oh,” she said sadly. It was the same each time. She always hoped for a different answer.

Running his fingers through his hair, he approached her. He should have had more patience for her. She was stuck, after all. Died in the alley right outside his front door. Too young to understand what had happened to her but not young enough that the Night Market let her go.

“So why are you sad tonight if not the door opening?” she asked.

Hopping up on the grain barrel next to her, he leaned back, crooking a leg up and draping an arm across it. “Who says I’m sad?”

“Your eyes are red and puffy.”

“Dust does that to you.”



"Uh huh." Tilting her head to the side, he watched as her hair fell across her shoulder, revealing the scar near her temple. "Is it because of that person I've seen you going around with?"

Milo frowned. "How are you seeing anything? I've not brought them back here."

At this, Ever looked excited. "I'm stretching. I can sometimes get away for a full twenty minutes at a time."

Milo refrained from commenting that ghosts shouldn't be able to do that. Restless spirits were to remain restless in their spots. He maybe needed to come home a bit more often.

"They don't make me sad," he said.

"They remind you of Mal?" she asked.

Snatching the cigarette from behind his ear, he perched it between his lips. By the Knowing, he wanted a smoke. "Mal is the only one that reminds me of Mal."

"Then what?"

"Dunno. They're just different, I guess."

"Ah," she said with that knowing smile that only little kids with buckets of confidence could have. "You're falling for them then."

Milo snorted. "Such a kiddie term. Falling for someone. Makes no sense when you think about it." She shifted by his side, frowning a bit. "Besides, I've taken plenty of lovers over the years."

"None that you kept going back to," Ever pointed out. "What makes them so special?"

Taking the cigarette, he twirled it between his fingers, wondering when the enchantment on it would wear out. How the damn cigarette was still intact after all this time was beyond him. Holding it out, he stretched out his arm, the lamp light from above dripping down on them in the occasional fat raindrop.

"Ever," he said, "if you could choose one thing in the entire world to have, what would it be?"

"You're changing the subject."

"I'm not, actually. Just go with me on this."

She paused, seeming to think long and hard about that one. Ever's life had been confined to a short little stretch of space right outside an old whiskey distillery. She was such a fixture in the alley that Milo sometimes didn't even notice she was there. He wanted to feel more guilty about that.

"I would want a cow. Not a real one. A stuffed one."

He peered at her out of the side of his eye, his heart aching. "Why would you want that?"

"My brother gave it to me. When I was a baby. Still in the pram. I tried to grab it when Mama told me to run. I think I dropped it somewhere in the mud."

Swallowing thickly, Milo didn't look at her. The lanterns above were swirling. Their amber light soft and warm and reminiscent of a life that was stretching on and on and on...

"What does this have to do with what we were talking about?" she asked.

Hopping off the whiskey barrel, he turned and looked at her. "Gotta go to Hazel's tonight. I don't know when I'll be back. Anything I can bring you?"

She shook her head, her small fingers curling around the edge of the barrel. He wondered if they had been worked to the bone before death. Or if she had been spared from field work and chosen to bake bread with Mama instead.

"I don't think so," she said.

"I'll see you later then, my Never Ever. Try to get some rest."

He turned, not able to look at her much longer. He hoped she did sleep. He knew it helped her pass the time. Tucking the cigarette back behind his ears, he shoved his hands in his pocket. Behind him, he could hear her shuffling as she began humming to herself, drawing on the walls and making the most out of the life she was now trapped within. He needed to get to Hazel's. They needed to discuss the doors that were opening. Too many were forming and too quickly and no one knew why.

First though, he'd stop off at the market. He had a stuffed cow he needed to find.

[Gabriel - Post Chapter Three](#)

[Jul 8, 2022](#)

A/N Post Chapter Three thoughts from Gabriel. This is assuming he is romancing the MC. MC is referred to as they within this short to keep pronouns inclusive.

Gabriel was not a man who often cursed. He found it uncouth and unbecoming of a person of his station. Though when the gate opened, practically at his feet, he felt every litany of displeasure course through him. More people poured through that they had to find support for. Another crack snapped like a chasm through the ever thinning veil. And once more, he was left with more questions and very little

answers as to why any of this was happening. If the day ever did come that he found the Gatekeeper, he suspected he would toss them in confinement simply for the trouble they had already caused.

All he had wanted, was a nice dinner, and polite conversation.

The remnants of their snack feast were still on his desk when he arrived back, hanging his cloak upon the curved metal hook by the converted cell door and unhooking his sword from his hip. Why he even carried it was beyond him. It was standard issue for the Velvet Guard but he never drew it. Hated the things, really. They were nothing like how a sword should be and in the end were only a sad imitation of a real blade, clanging against his thigh in irritation.

Sighing, Gabriel pinched the bridge of his nose. There was a possibility he should eat some of their leftover snacks. Too much wine was fermenting in his belly and not enough food. Typical night, really.

“Warden?”

“What?” Gabriel snapped. Turning, he found a familiar form. The tall and lanky figure of a sometimes bird, the wisps of his blonde hair sticking up in several directions. Gabriel sighed at the nervous sight, walking around to sit behind his desk. He had plenty of paperwork he had been too distracted to get done. He may as well spend a few moments going through it all while Caliban spun whatever story he had come to tell. “What is it, Caliban? I do have work this evening.”

The man, Caliban, shifted from foot to foot, weighing out his words at the obviously disgruntled figure of a guard before him. “Reese is a bit pissy about the current gate opening.”

Gabriel paused, a stack of parchment fluttering beneath the huff of breath he let out. “You can report back to him that it is not as if I am enjoying its arrival.”

“No. I know. I get it. I really do. But uh— so here’s the thing? He’s pissy in that way where he’s gonna start causing some problems. Like the bloody kind.”

Gabriel was rather proud of the fact that he didn’t slam his head down into the desk. “Tell him,” he said through gritted teeth, “that I am taking care of it as best as I can.”

“I can tell him that,” Caliban agreed. Again, he rocked back and forth on his heels, debating his current situation. Making a decision, he slipped further into the room, shut the door behind him, and plopped down into the vacant chair. Gabriel’s eyes ticked upwards. It was the chair they had sat in not long ago. “Or,” Caliban started, drawing out his syllables, “I could go back to him with clear proof of what it is you are actually going to do so he isn’t in the pissy mood he is in.”

Pen hovering over his forms, Gabriel watched as the ink dripped in one long line over the parchment. “You cannot just appease his anger some other way?”

“What other way would that be?” Caliban asked, confused. “Oh! Wait. You mean blow him? I mean, yeah, I could, but that’s like a daily thing for Reese so I don’t think it’s really a lack of sex that’s…”

Gabriel held up his hand. "Please stop."

"Right. Probably don't want to be hearing that stuff about your adoptive dad and all that, huh? I get it. I see you." Propping his feet up on the desk, Caliban eyed the wrappers. Crinkled cellophane and bits of cheese cloth were crumpled in the corner. "You a binge eater?"

"I had company earlier." Ticking the correct boxes he let his eyes scan over the sheet beneath him. It was mechanical at this point. Gabriel wondered if he would be able to fill out gate missives with his eyes closed.

Across the desk, Caliban grinned at him, his lips stretching into something curious. "Oh really? And who might this company be?"

The most captivating person Gabriel had met in a long time. It had bothered Gabriel to no end after seeing them at Hazel's. Broom in hand, eyes guarded and still unsure. Gabriel had attempted to soften his tone, trying to convey to them that he was not the enemy. Though he didn't know if that was really something that could be achieved given that they had met in a cell not far from here.

But he wanted to. Oh did he want to. The sheer amount of bravery that came with walking back to these caves today was a force that he did not often get to witness. Normally, in the face of fear, most ran. Fear ruled many within the Night Market. But, they faced a prison that was designed to be an unbearable weight upon their shoulders. They had walked across the bridge and had followed him into this office and Gabriel felt himself feel a notch of surprise over these actions. Surprise and unabashed pride. It was not many who had a sense of character pure enough to do what they had done.

"Hello?" Caliban waved a hand in front of him, snapping Gabriel's gaze out of the brief reverie he had fallen within.

Lifting his chin, Gabriel narrowed his eyes. "Why are you really here?"

"I told you. Reese. Pissy. Sex is not working. Please fix it."

Fighting the urge to roll his eyes, Gabriel set aside his parchment. "I will be going to miss Albright's within the hour. Her and Mr. Next are getting the refugee's settled. From there, there is a possibility that we might be able to cooperate with one another for information so the Velvet Guard can do their job."

"You think they're hiding things from you?"

"I work under the assumption that most people are hiding things from me," Gabriel said. Folding his hands together, he observed Caliban over the tops of his steeped fingers. Whatever Reese saw in him, Gabriel did know. Nor did he wish to question it. Gabriel's only hope was that the man was happy after everything that had transpired. If the conniving little bird man somehow did that for Reese, who was Gabriel to judge. There wasn't a lot of happiness to be had within the Night Market. When one found it, they needed to covet it.

Though Caliban was the sort that made that incredibly hard.

"You are dismissed," Gabriel said when no further words were exchanged.

"Oh, come on, Gabe? Isn't there anything you can give me here? Something that will make him calm down before he goes on a murder spree throughout the docks?" Wildly gesticulating around him, Caliban was making no move to actually leave. From experience, Gabriel knew these conversations could go on for hours.

"You can tell him that I have made the gates my own personal project. And, given that he is not one to want his identity known, perhaps he should let me do my work."

Caliban thought about that for a minute before shaking his head. "Yeah. No. That's not going to work. That sounds kind of like a threat and you know how he is with threats."

"Just go, Caliban. I have seen you locked in these cells far too often as of late."

Caliban grinned. "Been some interesting people popping into these cells. Can you blame me?"

Gabriel bristled. "You are wasting valuable time and resources of the Guard."

"You can afford it."

Hoping to his feet, his oversized coat comically slouching across his shoulders, Caliban gestured to the mess of wrappers. "You should eat, Warden. You're looking thin."

Gabriel watched him leave without a word, feeling the tightness in his chest. He waited a long moment, until he was certain Caliban's footsteps had danced him down the halls. The man was no doubt searching for something specific but Gabriel had long ago turned a blind eye to his ministrations. For Reese, he had always told himself. For Reese.

Standing, Gabriel stacked the papers to the side, knowing it would be a long night that the candles would burn here while he poured over forms that he had been neglecting during his busy schedule. If he went without sleep this evening, he could maybe get caught up to a more manageable rate.

Grabbing the cloak he had so recently discarded, he clipped it under his chin, sheathing his sword. To Ms. Albright's then. Perhaps, he could find some time to continue dinner if matters were not so pressing.



[Belladonna Malady.](#)

[Jul 10, 2022](#)

[Dev Blog 6/16/2022](#)

[Jul 16, 2022](#)

I feel bad that these development blogs are not more frequent but I am struggling to find things to say other than “I’m working on this chapter”. LOL

Essentially, Chapter Four was a slow start. A very slow start. My kids are home for the summer, my baby is popping all the teeth, and I am still trying to figure out how my work balance and home balance can co-exist. I know that the advice is to take it easy and be kind to myself but I have always been a much more ambitious person. I need that mental stimulation. When I don’t get it, oh boy am I not a fun person to be around. Ask my husband and best friend. They oftentimes kick me into going and writing just so I’m not a stress case.

However, I can now safely say I am about 70% done with Chapter Four. And surprisingly, Belladonna was my absolute favorite to write. I have been struggling to connect with her in a way that the words flowed from my fingers and this time around, she jumped off the page. Apparently, we just need to get her away from her job and allow her to be the take charge woman she is and BAM, I got it.

Ironically, though Gabriel is a fan favorite, he is my toughest to write. I decided to do his route first this time, instead of saving it for last, and I think that actually helped everything along much more.

So, this weekend, here is my hope. I have the cold write done for the Milo and Hazel route. I am going to go back and add all my choices. There are quite a few little bugs that have been reported that I want to get up to. I got another beta tester so I am keeping my fingers crossed that the editing is going to go smoothly, and, with any luck, Chapter Four will be out before the end of next week.

I hope everyone is enjoying their July. If there is anything you would like to see in these blogs, please drop a comment below. Half the time I feel like I’m doing a weekly journal update with you guys and I swear my life is not that interesting.

Love,

Zinnia

[Chapter Four is Live](#)

[Jul 21, 2022](#)

Chapter four is now up for early access! The password to get in is "apple snakes" no capitalization. Hope everyone enjoys!

[Send in your questions!](#)

[Jul 22, 2022](#)

Q & A is almost upon us. Send in those questions for this month! Should have the Q&A up on the last of the month.

[Belladonna Malady Post Chapter Three](#)

[Jul 23, 2022](#)

A/N This is post Chapter Three, assuming the MC is romancing Belladonna.

A flurry of wings blew across the market, winding through the back alleys and across the mirrors, until they landed on the raised platform above the fashion district. Belladonna sat in a velvet lined chair as if she hadn't just burst through in a rage, her legs crossed, one pale leg exposed to the lantern filled air. Feebus took one look at her and poured her a healthy glass of wine before coming to sit by her side.

"The wonderful Ms. Malady. Twice in one day," he said, tipping his own glass towards her. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Belladonna's face was carefully composed. A mask of beauty and elegance that was not rivaled within the market. "Your company is irreplaceable, Feebus. I felt as if we didn't get a chance to share it at all today." Beneath them, the sounds of the district rang out. A cacophony of late night shoppers. The darker the lanterns got, the rowdier the runways became. Belladonna was almost certain there was a show tonight.

"I had a lovely evening drinking with dear Milo," Feebus said. "The boy has certainly come a long way from being the button boy down in my shop."



Belladonna hummed in agreement but wasn't listening. As Feebus regaled her of his time within the bar with his young lad, her thoughts turned elsewhere. To a new little dear heart that she needed to shake. She was supposed to be charging. The paltry amount of money she took from them today was mere pocket change. It was enough to create an excuse, however. One in which Belladonna knew was weak. Yet still. Their blood smelled sweet. Sweeter than any other blood she had sampled. And for the first time in a long while, Belladonna wanted to feed.

"You're not listening, beautiful," Feebus interrupted. He knew how these evenings normally went..

Belladonna's eyes dragged to him. "Apologies, darling. It has been a trial of a day. I have a terrible nephew running my business into the ground and I must recoup the profits. I was thinking a gala of some sort. Perhaps something that would benefit us both?"

Feebus looked at her for a long moment before setting his wine glass aside. "Is that what you truly came here for?"

"I came for your company," she said. Leaning forward she squeezed his hand. "You in fact, look lonely, Feebus. I was hoping I could offer you my services this evening."

"How much?" he asked, considering.

"We will simply put it on your charge tab."

They both heard the giggles from the onlookers all around. Belladonna and Feebus had always made a handsome pair. The rumors about the beauties were flung far and wide within the market itself. There was always someone lurker, wondering just what the two fiery red heads got up to with each other. Especially when their cheeks were flushed with such desire, as they were now.

"I think we could arrange that," Feebus purred.

Feebus held out his hand and Belladonna took it coyly, sipping at her wine. The two of them slipped behind a heavy beaded curtain near the back of the platform and into a large room filled with brightly woven fabrics and candles on every surface.

When the curtain fell shut, Feebus looked at Belladonna sternly. "Speak."

Belladonna slumped into the nearest chair. "Are you silencers up?"

"Of course they are. Now speak," he demanded.

She slouched back in her chair, her face pensive. "I am afraid I am becoming enamored," she whispered.

"Belladonna, you have always been enamored with a certain individual." This was not news and was now a yearly situation they had to address. Especially after larger events where she was forced to be in

the room with the object of her obsession.

She shook her head. "It's the one I brought here today, Feebus. Not— not him. I cannot explain it. I have no feelings towards this new little one, other than a slight twinge of protection. But I know what happens when I hear the call of blood. They are a curiosity that I cannot seem to shake and that concerns me."

Feebus thought back to the muse he had dressed. The way that Belladonna's eyes had followed them. "It does not need to be concerning."

She laughed at that. "Yes it does. It should be the most concerning, in fact."

"Why?"

Her eyes narrowed, fangs bared. "You know why."

"Do not bring your anger into my home, Belladonna Malady. It is not wanted or accepted here." His voice was a boom that made the curtains waft in fear. Belladonna only looked mildly chastised.

As the wind and heat settled around them, Feebus looked at her sternly. "Are you in love?"

Belladonna snorted in laughter. "Vampires do not love."

"You did once."

She turned away at that, arms crossed over her chest. When a blanket settled across her lap, she startled though. Feebus took one of the thick woven ones she liked and placed it across her.

"Your style is impeccable but every time I look at you, I get cold."

She smiled. "Says the man with no shirt."

Pulling up an ottoman in front of her, Feebus lowered himself down onto it. "I am sorry for being short with you."

"It is alright. You know how I need it at times." Belladonna needed that power to settle across her at times. Remind her that she did not need to fly apart.

"Explain your concerns, darling." Leaning forward, he tucked a stray piece of hair back behind her ear. His wayward girl. Feebus had always had a soft spot for her. Even before she had the fangs.

"We both know how it ended the last time the blood sang so loud," she whispered. "I do not wish to make the same mistakes again. And with this new one, this precious little sweetling, all I wish is to take them close to me and spill the blood of anyone else that taints their scent."

"But you do not have feelings for them?"

She frowned. "No. Though, if this is anything like before, feelings have a pesky way of sneaking up on me when I least expect it." Looking up towards Feebus, her eyes glittering, she swallowed thickly. "I do not want to love again."

It was a point in which they would never agree. Feebus loved freely in this world. He had the hearts of two women, and they had his own. Love was something that made him strive for more. Do better in the world. Wish to see the next day. Love was worth every breath that he took. For her to shy away from it was a disservice to her and to the ones that she could call her own.

Sighing, he shook his head. "Then I am afraid, your only option, is to stay away. But Belladonna, you must know that it is not a disparagement on your character, to fall in love."

"No," she said softly. "It is only a disparagement on them."

He heard her voice crack despite her face remaining a beautiful porcelain.. "Oh sweet girl. Come here."

Wrapping her up in his embrace, he felt her sigh against his chest. There was nothing that he could say to her that he hadn't told her a thousand times. In the end, Belladonna was a stubborn woman, and had her mind made up before anyone else even knew what the issue was. He did not envy the facade she had to keep. Not at all.

"How would you like me to help?" he asked her gently.

She did not look up at him, not wishing to display the emotion that she knew was raw across her face.

"Tea would be lovely," she said softly. "And perhaps a book."

Feebus laughed. "Would you like to read here or are you headed to the book district."

"I'll head to the district. You have had a long night as well and your wives will be arriving home soon. Spend the eve with them."

"You are always invited, Belladonna."

She smiled at him softly. "And your heart is too tender for strong-willed women showing their weakness."

Tipping her chin up, Feebus shook his head. "Tears are never a weakness."

She swallowed thickly but nodded all the same.

With a thermos of tea in hand, she bid Feebus goodnight and began wandering towards the book district. The Baron was a mean little cusp who was cruel to anyone that even tried to touch his wares. He had taken a liking to her though, long long ago, and Belladonna may have been the only one allowed within his library walls. Sitting in her favorite spot in solitude for a while sounded like the perfect cure to get her head on straight.

But then, the air shifted. It was subtle at first. Just a minor twinge. But it was on the wind like a fine lace. Another door had opened.

When a flurry of wings beat through the night air again, Belladonna disappeared. In her place, was only a steaming thermos, sitting alone within the now abandoned streets. The call of blood could wait. The matter of love could be forgotten entirely. The only thing Belladonna cared for at this moment in time, was the pain the Night Market felt, as it was torn open once more.

### [Tier Change Come August 1st](#)

[Jul 23, 2022](#)

Hey guys, I want to give everyone a heads-up that I am going to probably be changing the tiers around come August 1st. The interaction in the Q & A's is really low but you guys seem to really love the shorts stories. So, I am considering dividing the stories. You get two at the ten dollar tier and two more (total of four) at the fifteen dollar tier. Then, you will have a customizable short every month at the twenty dollar tier. This will leave early access, polls and dev. blogs to the five dollar tier. I have been having a lot of confusion as to where each short story will be each month and I need to simplify it.

Thank you so much for your patience and understanding while I continue to figure all of this out.

### [Dev Blog 8/2/22](#)

[Aug 2, 2022](#)

Chapter Five is underway! I'm so sorry for the lack of updates here. Everyone in my house except my oldest and my husband, got this terrible chest cold.

Chapter Four's writing experience was a different one for me. Having two distinct routes and having to figure out how to balance the information in each was a little hard to do, but I think there is something interesting within each route. I want the routes to feel different from each other, give new information and in general, feel like a different experience. I think this helps with replayability, even if you are not romancing anyone.

We are coming up on the decisions of whether or not we are going to enter into a romantic arc with people. This does not mean that if you enter a romantic arc, you will immediately jump their bones. LOL!

I'll be making a tumblr post about that later.

For this week, I've got an ambitious list going. Already, I have finished the beginning portion of Chapter Five in what I call the cold write. If you are new here, cold writes are when I just put the route out on paper without choices. I then go back during my reread and place choices in where it seems logical. It streamlines my writing and keeps my brain from feeling like it's going to explode.

I also did a cold write of Gabriel's route, and it turned out much different towards the end than I expected, and I am living for it. He has always been my struggle character, so to have his voice come through so clear finally was a breath of fresh air.

I am going to try and knock out all my Patreon shorts this week after my kids go to bed. I want to start writing four a month. Two for the ten tier and two for the fifteen. On top of that, I want to go back in and put in my choices for my cold writes, so I can get them to the beta testers.

So, essentially, it is going to be a long ass week of writing but after being sick for nearly two weeks I'm excited to get back to it.

### [Post Chapter Stories](#)

[Aug 3, 2022](#)

So, as we have reformatted the story system, each month you will now have available four post chapter stories. Two for the ten dollar tier and all four for the fifteen and twenty tier. Would you like me to release these stories once a week and spread them out? Or, would you like all your content all at once?

Post one story a week

Post the content all at once

Doesn't matter to me. Just here for the ride

29 votes total

### [Milo - Post Chapter Four](#)

[Aug 3, 2022](#)

A/N: Post Chapter Four short with Milo, assuming the two of you have started a relationship.

The door to the apothecary had closed behind him and Milo had made his way down the burnt street with the intention of heading home. Intent was a funny thing though. It was a decision he consciously made. Continue forward, despite the odds. Yet, intent always carried his feet to the exact places he wished to avoid.

There was a footbridge that stretched across a very shallow creek. It sat in the midst of a boggy field and reached down towards a road that wound far off into the distance. Milo stood beneath said footbridge, listening to the wet drip of the stones above, staring at an old, rusted door, blankly.

He had kissed *them*.

Not for the first time either.

It was laughable for Milo to even consider himself as someone playing the field or caught up in the moment, when he had kissed the same individual now what, two, three times? The sunset soaked horizon along with the death of an old city stretching beneath their feet wasn't romantic in the sense that Milo could claim he had gotten lost in the idealist fantasy of it all. No, Milo knew what he was doing. Had from the very beginning.

So what the fuck was he attempting to accomplish here?

The door was stretched over with wet moss and algae. It had been made up of wood but with a stone exterior to keep the water from rotting the hinges and surface of the door. Milo hadn't even helped Hazel clear it out. During those initial days neither of them had wanted to, really. There was still the hope that they would wake from some horror ridden nightmare. But when the time came and Hazel had gone in to at least get the things that were the most valuable, Milo had disappeared. He had gone on a binge somewhere for two weeks, barely knowing where he was and worrying Hazel nearly to death. Because he was an asshole like that. He still remembered seeing the gutted look on her face when he had returned. Then the relief that quickly followed when he walked back through the door.

He stared at the door now. For years, he had forced himself not to think of him. Malcolm was gone. The name was not even one that passed his lips. But, the dead were often pulled back to the living, whether they wanted to be or not. Today was the perfect example of that.

"Fuck," Milo whispered. He wiped at his cheeks furiously, the dew from the creek having hit his face. "Fuck you," he said, kicking half-heartedly at the door.

The thing was, he liked them. He liked this new person in his life. They had taken his hand and reminded him once more what it was like to feel again. To not pretend to be filled with passion and life but to actually *feel* it. They had this desire to help, to 'save' the Night Market, and despite Milo's

assertion that it was a lost cause, they still gave a shit. Why? Because they were good. It was a commodity that was hard to come by in this world.

And Milo Next was a fucking fool for falling for it.

He kicked out, his foot connecting hard with the door as his fist pounded against the slate exterior. Then, his head fell forward, and he breathed silently.

"Why'd you have to fuck me up so much?" he whispered to the empty space around him.

Malcolm was to blame. Everything could be traced back to that fucker. He had up and left them all, leaving these damn gates to be dealt with. This was supposed to be his job, his task to deal with. The fucking Gatekeeper was supposed to keep this shit under control. It wasn't supposed to fall to the likes of the people just trying to live their lives the best they could. The ones left behind in the grief.

And now, now he had kissed them. He had kissed them, and they had kissed back, and Milo had walked back to Hazel's with their hand in his. He should have been happy. He should have been over the moon. Love was not easy to come by. Not for him at least.

Yet, Milo only felt as if he were betraying his dead boyfriend. Continuing a life without them. One that they had planned to live together.

But they weren't living.

Hazel was spiraling into an obsession to bring Malcolm home, whether she admitted it or not. And Milo? Well, no one gave a shit about what Milo was doing. As long as he kept smiling.

Just keep smiling. Dance in the rain. Wander the streets and breathe in life anew.

Feeling the wetness on his cheeks, he swallowed thickly. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Malcolm had no grave. Hazel had made sure of it. For a time, Milo had tried to argue the point to her, that they should have some place to mourn. To lay him to rest. But she had refused. To her, Malcolm was not dead. Yet, if Hazel was right, that seemed like a fate far worse than the death he had chosen to have.

The door was all Milo really had to go to. He could have gone in. The key to it still hung from his hip. It was rusted and faded from his thumb worrying across it when the world became too much. When he felt like he couldn't handle things, he had grabbed onto that key. It was a paltry substitution to when he could run to the man and have him make the world a little less dark.

Sliding down the wall, Milo leaned his head back against the grubby surface. Footsteps echoed above as people crossed the bridge to and fro. An entire world up top that was unaware of the one below.

"I feel guilty," Milo confessed. "I know you'll tell me not to. That I don't owe you anything but this isn't fucking about you. I just... I feel like what I'm doing isn't okay." He laughed, mirthlessly. "I know it's not okay. I mean, what the fuck am I thinking here? That I can just start a relationship? With them? It's not right. I know it. You know it. No one else knows it but..." Running his fingers through his hair he grabbed at the soft strands there. "It's fucked up. I'm fucked up. And everything that they are willing to do... You're supposed to tell me what to do here. I always came to you when I couldn't figure out my own head. I haven't been able to come to anyone for ten years because you're a prick that decided to up and die because of what? Some lame sacrifice to protect me? Fuck you, Mal. Fuck you. That wasn't supposed to be your choice. It never should have been your choice. It..."

He stopped.

Malcolm had taken the choice from him. Had cleaned up his mess once again. And had paid for it.

"I want to live my life again," Milo said slowly. Though the words felt stunted at best, coated with a certain amount of failure that he couldn't fathom. "But I'm so afraid that by doing that, you'll be forgotten."

The wind blew through the tunnel, whistling softly and tumbling the few fallen leaves that had gathered there. Milo stared at them. Hazel would see it as a sign. Milo saw it for what it was. The lanterns were going to go out soon. The festival to relight them was tomorrow.

Scrubbing at his face, he shook his head. "I'm gonna end it. I should have ended it a long time ago. I'm gonna tell them that they just got here to the market. They don't even know what they want yet. And with everything else going on, everything they think they have to do..."

He trailed off, realizing he was talking to the air and nothing more.

Straightening his shoulders, Milo shook his head and grabbed the cigarette from behind his ear. Perching it between his lips, he placed his hands deep inside his pockets, refusing to look back at the door.

He needed to end whatever little love affair he had going before he couldn't stop it. Before it spiraled into something far bigger than the two of them.

The thing about Milo, though?

He was a very weak man.

[Night Market Discord](#)



[Aug 6, 2022](#)

Do you guys want a Night Market discord for Patreon access only? It would be at the five dollar tier and up.

Yes

No

Indifferent

30 votes total

[Post Chapter Four - Hazel](#)

[Aug 6, 2022](#)

AIN This is assuming you took the romance route with Hazel in Chapter Four.

"I think you'll like them," Hazel was saying. She was inside the small thatched dome that she had made as a child. The one place that she had gotten to hide when the world became too much. Trowel in hand, she dug at the earth, the hole in question almost half her height, the solid earth becoming wet as it contained run off from the nearby creek.

"They're so kind. And they are good with a broom," she giggled. "And the kiss?" Hazel trailed off at that. Perhaps her brother didn't need to hear about the kiss. Though, he had tortured her enough with descriptions of him and Milo.

"When you get back, I think that you'll get along with them. They're honestly easy to talk to. And they're not judgy. Not too much at least. Though, I suppose it's okay to be a little judgey. I find myself being more and more of that these last few years. Did you know that Mr. Hartin came in the other day and I nearly turned him away?" She shook her head. "I know you'd be proud of that, but it's just not in my nature."

Wiping her hands on her skirt, she took a deep breath. "Now, if this works, I don't want you getting mad, alright? Just remember, I'm doing all this for you."

The little flickers of light up above doused to a dark green as Hazel knelt in front of the hole she had dug. Raising her hands in the air, she plunged them deep back into the earth, her fingers reaching for the roots and old stone that she knew lay beneath. There was an entire city down below. One lost to

time and to the crumbling roads of the Night Market. Hazel's mother claimed she was from there. That she used to live beneath the earth and when they had risen to the top they had pulled the stars from the sky to light the world they now called home. Hazel used to hang on every word of those stories when she was a small girl. Malcolm had stopped caring when he turned about seven and claimed that their mother was lying. He didn't stick around the house too much after that.

Beneath her, the earth began to crack, folding in on itself. She could hear the boughs from the trees outside snapping and bending towards the reinforced hovel that her child form had created. With a deep breath, she pushed her hands further into the detritus, seeking out the old ways and the magic that still swelled deep beneath the caverns. Small tendrils of root and forgotten memory wrapped around her wrists and fingers, pulling at them and trying to drag her below. Hazel's head snapped back, eyes a deep miasma of green and black, her lips darkening to the color of tar.

"I call forth Malcolm Albright. Son of the Night Market. Gatekeeper of your walls. Give him back. Return your rightful son."

The walls of the pit before her began to crumble. They eroded, falling forward, down down down into a nothingness.

"Give back the one we call our own. Call back the soul that is yours."

A hand burst from the pit. Covered in mud and something sticky and golden. Sap stretching between each finger. Then, another. Two arms emerged, grasping onto the shelf of rock that was beginning to form.

"Come back to us, Malcolm," Hazel intoned, her voice deep and filled with the ancestor's call. "The Night Market shall call you home." Reaching from her side, she grabbed a curved blade, its edges jagged with bits of bone. Slicing it across her hand, she let the blood sink down, splashing against the mud and dirt below. "Blood calls to blood. Follow my call."

As the arms pushed upwards, shoulders emerging from the womb of the earth, a head began to form, gasping with an open maw. The lights above flickered and the bottles hung with dried flowers cracked and shattered in a rain of glass.

"Hear my call!"

The body that was emerging arched back, tilting in a silent scream as the surrounding woods took flight. Long ago the animals had fled, but the trees had been given no option. They trembled now, the wisps dissipating from above and the trunks of the old growth cracking in two.

"Hear me!"

The body lunged forward, as if to pull itself entirely out. But it crumbled. As it clawed upwards, the dirt gave away to silt until the right arm eroded into a forgotten pile of muddy ash.

"No!" Hazel yelled, falling forward. Her hand was bloody, smacking against the ground. She squeezed the wound, trying to keep the blood flowing and give new life to the eroding form beneath. But it was no use. The head turned towards her and for one heart stopping moment, she thought she saw the depths of her brother's eyes. Then, the body fell, patching up the hole into the city below. The lights above evened out. The bottles stopped their sway. And all was quiet once more.

"No," she sobbed, bending forward. She curled her bloody hand to her chest. "What am I doing wrong?" She looked around her, as if expecting an answer. But the bits of willow and vine that she had woven together were silent and once more, Hazel, was alone.

Later, as she crawled out from the small fort that her and Malcolm had made, she wiped her eyes on her apron. She had bandaged her hand as best she could but would need to get to her supplies in back to be able to really make sure this did not scar.

"I'll just have to try again," she told the night air. It was a coping mechanism of sorts. One that she used when she wanted Malcolm to hear her. "I'll keep trying," she whispered. "I promise."

Walking up the riverbank, she spotted the apothecary. The chimney was puffing out sweet smelling smoke. Sage and basil had been added to the fire.

Wiping at her eyes, she held her wounded hand to her chest. She doubted anyone was awake in there. Everyone had departed for slumber hours ago. Her shopkeep turned new-found love had been dead on their feet. She supposed though that the wisps might have started the fire. They sometimes did on mornings that Hazel was up far too early.

Coming through her garden gate, she sighed. The small window up top was dark. It had been for a lot of years. The one next to it though, had the faint glow of a candle. Often, they forgot to blow out their lantern at night.

They were something good. She needed to remember that. Despite the failure, there was still good. Still a reason to keep fighting.

"I want you to meet them," she whispered to Malcolm.

The breeze on the wind she imagined was him telling her 'soon'.

[Dev Blog 8/10/22](#)

[Aug 10, 2022](#)

The first portion of Chapter Five is done, along with Gabriel's route towards the end. This chapter is split, much like the other ones. The beginning portion is a little more on rails because I need you to go visit the Baron of the Books, but the second half is a Lantern Festival in which you can choose which RO you hang out with. Hopefully, tonight, I can get the cold write to another route done and then add the choices in when I work Friday evening. I want next week to start with me halfway done with this chapter. It's become almost a fun game to see if I can keep up with this once a month release. :)

In other news, coding is a bitch with WIP's. It's like I needed to know all my coding tags from Chapter One in order for them to consistently work. I'm still struggling with that portion. I'm someone that doesn't do good concentrating with a lot of sound though so it could just be my life is not conducive to sitting and typing in and creating code. I'm getting there though.

Other than that, not a lot to update. I have two more shorts written for Patreon this month that will be in the Velvet Guard tier. I need to get caught up on my Tumblr asks because they are getting intense.

On the more personal level here, the kids are finally all over whatever dreaded cold we had. Holy cow that was a lot of me sleeping on the couch with a baby on me. My husband works graveyard, so it was a brutal few weeks. Back to school for the older kids is going to be starting soon. I'm both excited and not excited for that. I like the quiet that comes with two less kids in the house, but I hate the constant coming and going that happens. Plus, I have been really enjoying my Stranger Things night with my teens. We've been fixing Eggo's for desert and staying up late. I hope they turn into the kind of adults who still come over and occasionally do that crap with me. LOL!

That is it for this week! I hope everyone is doing good out there. The struggle bus of this world is all too real, and I'm kind of over it. So, to anyone going through it right now, I'm sending you my love and support.

Love,

Zinnia

[Post Chapter Four - Gabriel](#)

[Aug 10, 2022](#)

A/N: Post Chapter Four, assuming you went with Gabriel and Belladonna to the gates.

The old wooden door slammed shut.

A tear. A fissure within the Night Market. Not a gate. Not an entrance to another world. But a damn fissure. Gabriel could deal with many things but this one felt overwhelming in a way that he didn't quite understand yet. It was new and something the Velvet Guard had not tracked, though that shouldn't have been a point of vexation for Gabriel.

Yet, Gabriel was vibrating with the intensity of his emotions. He had stormed through the rest of the market, barked out several orders to faceless guards that had gotten in his way upon returning to his office, and then sat at his desk for three agonizing minutes before he shot back up.

"I'm taking the afternoon." He didn't even know who worked at the front desk today. Just that he needed to get out of there. The cave walls were far too small, and the air was cloying.

The house he stood in was familiar in a way that he rarely admitted. An old waterwheel was attached to the broken down boat house, churning the river in a frothing mixture of algae and fresh mountain stream. The boathouse itself was dark and Gabriel was unsure whether the occupants would be home. Not that it mattered. He was always welcome at this particular doorstep.

"Whiskey?" A dark skinned man stood near a stained kitchen table, a bottle in hand. He was in a state of undress, shirt long since discarded in the heat of the night and pants torn and dirty from working on the docks all day. Scars were etched into his skin in the familiar shape of wild lightening, crackling faintly against him now that he was home and settling for the night.

"Yes." Gabriel said without hesitation.

The man gave a low whistle as he handed Gabriel the bottle. When Gabriel didn't even reach for the glass the man was getting, but instead swigged it from the green neck, the room fell into a tension filled silence.

"Well, I'd say it's nice of you to visit your dear old dad, but I'm wondering if that joke is going to fall flat with the way you look."

"I'm fine," Gabriel intoned.

"You look it."

Gabriel looked wrung out. Hair out of place. Top button of his shirt undone.

"Want to tell Papa Reese what's going on?"

Gabriel shot him a look over the bottle. "Must you speak like that?"

Reese snorted in laughter, kicking out a chair. "When it breaks you out of whatever little pattern you got yourself in you bet your fucking ass I will. Now, sit. What the fuck happened?"

"Nothing."

Reese nodded, reaching across and taking the whiskey from him and pouring his own glass. "Alright. We could do it this way. But you know for a fact I'm not a patient man, so I wouldn't advise it."

Sinking into the chair, Gabriel stared out the dirty window above the refrigerator. It was coated in grime and last night's rain. "I'm not supposed to tell you what is on my mind."

"So it has to do with the gates," Reese said.

Gabriel's lack of response was probably enough of an answer.

"What's new that's got you all in a twist."

"Nothing," he said quickly. "Nothing that should change anything we already know."

"Then what's the issue?" Reese was staring at him, his patience already thin from a long day within the market itself. His adoptive kid was not what he had expected when he reached home that night.

"I told you. Nothing."

"You don't come here unless you're upset, Gabriel," Reese said with a irritated sigh. "So just fucking spit it out, so we can both get drunk and forget about it all."

Gabriel's jaw twitched, eyes averted. What was he supposed to say? The individual he had been keeping an eye on came through a tear in reality and not a gate. Somehow, that was significant, but it was only significant in the respect that he didn't know how to protect them?

Apparently, that was exactly what he said, because Reese was staring at him with that look on his face. That one he gave Gabriel often when he came to visit with a problem at hand.

"You like this person or something?"

"I don't have to like someone to be concerned for them," he snapped.

"It helps."

Gabriel sighed. It was a deep one he felt rattle through his chest. Though the whiskey was helping put him at ease.

"What is it you're looking for here, Gabriel? I don't know much about the gates themselves and this tear or rift or whatever you're calling it--"

"Fissure."

"Don't fucking care. What is it that you're wanting me to do for you here?"

Gabriel didn't know. He didn't know why it upset him in the first place. Why the entire night had put him on edge. There was just something about it that had set him off. That made him wind up here, the very place he avoided most days, seeing the disappointment of a man that had fallen so fucking far from who he had once been.

Slumping in his chair, Gabriel shoved the whiskey aside. "I don't know what I'm expecting from you. The day was long and rough. I did not expect to have to deal with a gate opening and then traversing through the market with one of my old prisoners and Belladonna."

Reese laughed deeply. "How is old Bells?"

"Don't call her that."

"Why?" Reese said with a raised brow. "Still territorial?"

"Reese, please."

He held his hands up in surrender. "Look, if that's what this is, you having a shit day at work and walking around with Belladonna and who I'm assuming is your new squeeze, I get it."

"You get nothing."

"Come off your high horse, Gabriel. Sometimes, we just have a bad day. You are not immune to it, despite your angelic past and your position as Warden. Fucking accept that, welcome the pain and then decide if you want to do anything about it."

Gabriel's lips curled downwards in an angry frown. He should have known Reese would give him nothing but sarcasm. The man had never been good at comfort. Not since Elias and it was questionable if he had been before.

"Gabe," Reese said softly. "I mean it. You are allowed to have a bad day."

Standing, he straightened his coat. He shouldn't have come here. He had paperwork. And given what they now knew about the fissure, he needed to get back to his office and go over the reports they had on the gates. Perhaps there was more than one. Maybe they had mistaken some earlier gates. They would all need rechecked, of course.

"Gabe, come on, stay." Reese said. "It's been a while."

"Not tonight." Turning on his booted heel, Gabriel stopped, feeling his shoulders tense. Closing his eyes, he shook his head. "We're going to be contacting all the Baron's," he told him. "They want to name the one who came through the rift namekeeper."

Behind him, there was a marked silence. Then; "Interesting."

"Please don't pretend like you know me."

Whiskey poured into the dirty glass echoed through the room. Reese said nothing to that. When Gabriel left the house, the door shut behind him much quieter than when he had come in. Only momentarily did his face twist in grief for the man inside. For who he had used to be. Then, the Warden was back in his place once more, ready to greet whatever was to come.

#### [Post Chapter Four Belladonna](#)

[Aug 17, 2022](#)

There was a corner in the back of an antique store that not many knew about. To get there, a person had to wind through old relics from various different worlds, twisting and turning through tilted shelves brimming with dust covered forgotten memories. Take a wrong turn, and they would never find the small black silk table. Nor the opalescent stone that hovered in the middle of it.

Of course, someone could get here by mistake. A few had over the years. Belladonna was almost certain the shop owner didn't even know the table was hidden here and had been bewitched to quietly dispose of anyone that stumbled across the call center. Only those who were supposed to see the shard were to know the map. And if the location was not memorized during the first visit here, then the likelihood of getting back out was second to none.

Belladonna made her way to the silk cloth draped across the small table. The shard hovered a hand's width from the table's surface, a low hum echoing from it. Reaching into her purse, she pulled three freshwater pearls from the depths, placing them artfully beneath the stone. They shook, vibrating beneath a high-pitched ping before the pearls crumbled into a fine powder and coated the table in a shimmering light.

"I have a request," she said, seating herself before the gem. Pleasantries were not often needed here. "I need to bring someone to meet with you. I think you will find them interesting." She knew the Baron would find them interesting. Belladonna certainly did. There was something not quite right about them though. Almost like they existed in a reality that only loomed out of the corners of their eyes.

"The market is failing far quicker than we have given it credit for. What were once whispers now resonate so deep within the lantern light that I fear there is not much of a future on this horizon. But there may be a way to thwart this, if the Baron's are willing to listen. I wish to send to you someone that may be up for the task at hand."

The shimmering dust of the pearls began to evaporate, siphoning upwards into the opalescent gem itself. Belladonna knew he was listening. He just rarely responded.



"I know you stay out of the politics of the Night Market," she said. "But this one might be worth taking heed. Despite knowing that your wife dearly loves the wares here, if this world goes, the domino effect it could have on the others worlds far supersedes the desire not to get involved."

A sharp lash of electricity cut through the air. A shard of opalescent glass pinning itself near where Belladonna rested her hand. It was a warning. Don't tell him what he should and should not care about.

"Noted," she said, unconcerned. The role of the Baron of the Books was either a laughable one with a title such as his, or one that was feared due to his penchant of sending out warnings that were far over the top of what they should be. Belladonna suspected it was all for show and had yet to feel threatened. She knew, however, that that could change in the blink of an eye.

"I am willing to trade, of course," she said, watching as the shard evaporated into smoke. "The hunt that has been put upon Casimir Alskar. I know where the knife they have prophesized to kill him with lies. If you allow this meeting, I will place the location of it within the book at the fifth quarter."

There was silence for a long moment, but Belladonna was a patient woman. One that could sit as still as the night, if the occasion called for it. When the opal turned bright, she knew she had been given consent. A meeting was now in place.

The stack of parchment off to the side began scratching as an invisible quill began to write across the page. Tomorrow. Early eve. Before the lanterns turn dark. Belladonna took the paper and folded it in two, sticking it within her purse.

"Thank you."

When she turned, a man stood before her. Lavender hair falling across his eyes, a white coat with pearl studded cuff links donning each sleeve. She bowed respectfully to him.

"Baron," she said.

His eyes were the opaque slits of a snake, a mere reflection of the slow crawl of the monster weaving within the overflowing shelves.

"This person," he said, "how far do you trust them?"

"Does it matter if I trust them or not when our world is in such peril?"

"No," he agreed. "Though, I find myself curious. Why trade such useful information for a simple meeting? You know with what you hold, you could have asked for anything."

"True." The slow knife, the one fated to kill the only other love of the Baron's life. Its location had been sought after for years for lesser purposes. "I am taking a gamble, I find."

He tipped his head to the side, hands clasped behind his back as he observed her carefully. "That is not like you."

"It is not. Though, the time for caution may have passed. Tell me, Baron. Do the others even care that the world is being torn?"

"I doubt the Baron's care for much past their own self-serving goals."

"I am growing concerned. And this individual appeared in our world just as the issue was coming to head. Most would see it as convenient. I see it as fortuitous. What I do not see it as, however, is an opportunity to be wasted. So, yes, I am trading information with a value far higher than what I seek. Though, I do think it will pay off in the end."

"You have care for this one," the man said, narrowing his gaze. Belladonna was not deterred.

"I care for all my investments."

His smile was cruel. Cutting. But he did not call her out on the stench of a lie.

"Good day, Ms. Malady." With a small bow, he stepped aside, motioning his consent to let her pass.

"Baron." Walking past him, her heels echoed across the shop. She did not remember to breathe again until she was outside the antique shop, beneath the iron streetlamps and surrounded by the damp cobblestone streets.

Tomorrow.

Hopefully tomorrow they could begin the slow journey towards their end.



[Hazel Albright and Mr. Billows](#)

[Aug 18, 2022](#)

[Dev. Blog 8/20/22](#)

[Aug 20, 2022](#)

Chapter Five is written! This was the first chapter that gave me trouble where I ended up deleting a lot of content. It started first with Milo's route, where he was acting semi out of character and information was coming out that I would much rather deal with later in the game. It ended in me deleting over eleven pages of writing and reworking the entire middle of the route. But, honestly, it turned out so much better than what I had.

Belladonna was my next problem child. The way that this chapter is set up, is you go to see the Baron (which I am so excited to see what you guys think of them) and then you get to go to a festival that evening. When it got to the choice to go with Belladonna, however, I realized, this woman would not be making herself available to go enjoy fun festival antics with you. She is a businesswoman. She was probably already booked for a job. So then, I basically stared at the screen and went "wtf do I do". Because I didn't want to deny access to an RO for the chapter, but having her do what everyone else did was entirely out of character.

However, I LOVE how it turned out. The ending scene with her is so layered that it made my writer brain dance. :)

From here, I needed to put in my edits once my beta readers look at everything, and then I need to polish up and code the sex scene for Milo's route. I am looking at a tentative Patreon release on Tuesday.

Hope everyone is doing well!

Zinnia

[Milo NSFW Scene](#)

[Aug 22, 2022](#)

Hello all,

Warning: This is a graphic sex scene. This is meant for 18 years or older. It does contain a lot of adult content and should be read with discretion. Please do not share the code.

The code for Milo's scene is water sports. No, it does not mean there is actual water sports. I want to make that clear. LOL

## [Malcolm Albright](#)

[Aug 24, 2022](#)

Leading up to Book 2, would you guys want to see some Malcolm content on here? This would be when I have the time to write it but I'm sitting here and I have an entire week with nothing to write. Which is normally the case towards the end of the month. Would old stories from when Malcolm, Hazel and possibly Milo, were all little, be of interest?

Yes please!

No interest

I don't even know who Malcolm is

Indifferent

68 votes total

## [The Younger Years](#)

[Aug 27, 2022](#)

A/N: This is a story about Milo, Malcolm and Hazel. All very early on in their adult life.

"Be nice." A steaming pot of stew was clutched between Hazel's small hands as she walked down the alley, turning left three times until she found the right area. It was an old distillery, just outside of town. Out of the Velvet Guard's eyesight.

"I'm always nice."

She looked at her brother out of the corner of her eye. "You're not. Not to him at least. Can you at least try this time? He's really been through it lately."

Malcolm snorted. "It's not my fault Milo's an idiot and lost his balance on the rafters."

"That. See? It's that kind of attitude that I worry about. He's trying, Malcolm. He doesn't want to have to work for Feebus forever."

"If he knew what was good for him, he would. Milo is a decent thief, but he is terrible at responsibility."

Hazel's frown deepened. "I think he can learn."

"I think he can fool you into believing he can."

The whiskey distillery loomed before them. A large, rusted building that was hidden predominantly in shadows. It was as if the building itself was hiding, holding secrets never meant for the world. They hadn't seen Milo in weeks. Not since he had moved out of Feebus's and tried to make it on his own. When Hazel got word that he was sick, she had immediately set about brewing him a soup that would, as she claimed, cure all ills. Malcolm noticed the tonics she poured into it. He had tasted it but didn't have the heart to tell her it was foul. Luckily though, he wasn't the one eating it.

"Kindness, Malcolm," Hazel reminded. "I know he isn't your favorite but just try."

When she stepped forward, she didn't see the smug look that crossed Malcolm's face. "I'll try," he told her, hands in pockets and a retort ready on his lips in case Milo was going to be extra Milo today.

But it seemed as if sickness was the one thing that could get Milo down. When he opened the large metal door, it creaked loudly, echoing through the alleyway. His eyes were sunken and his cheeks bright with fever. Hazel gasped.

"Milo, why didn't you tell us to come sooner?" she admonished.

He looked between both her and Malcolm. "Technically, I didn't tell you two to come at all. How'd you know I was here?" He was looking specifically at Malcolm.

Hazel was barreling past him though. "You shouldn't have kept this from us, Milo. If you're sick we're supposed to help you."

Milo had been on a job. One of his first. Spying on an upper class marketer that was apparently importing raw chunks of fossilized amber. He had been up in the rafters of an abandoned building during the meeting and had fallen from them when trying to sneak away. He had landed in a pile of old watery sludge and had to stay hidden in there for the rest of the night, lest he be found out.

The result was technically a success, but he had caught a cold.

"I brought you soup," Hazel was continuing, marching into his home. Milo still stood at the door, opening it wider for Malcolm, who smirked at him as he walked in. "Oh," Hazel breathed. "This is... nice."

Malcolm looked around. "It's a shithole."

Milo pushed the door shut with a loud clang as it latched.

"It's not that bad," Hazel was saying. "It just needs a little bit of cleaning. And some pillows."



Milo ran a hand through his sweaty hair and shuffled close to her. “Thanks, Hazel.”

Malcolm, on the other hand, was looking around with a discerning look, giving a low whistle. “Really, button. How do you expect to ever bring anyone home? All your partners will be too afraid of catching a disease to even think about getting naked.”

The glare Milo shot him was one that amused Malcolm greatly. Milo had this full on pout that happened when he glared. It never ceased to bring Malcolm a small bit of joy. That is, until Hazel’s own glare was upon him. ‘Be nice’ she mouthed.

Malcolm rolled his eyes. “How’d you even settle on this place anyway?” he asked.

Milo coughed a bit. “No one lived here. And it’s big. Lots of room for expansion.” As if on cue, something clanged in the distance, falling to the ground with a bang. “And renovations will be fun,” he added. The cough turned into something deeper though, rattling his chest.

“Oh,” Hazel fussed. “Let’s get you to sit down. I want you to eat. It’s homemade, and it will make you feel a lot better. I promise.” She gave him no choice and looped an arm through his, practically dragging him down a series of rickety metal stairs. He looked once over his shoulder at Malcolm who only raised a brow at him, as if in challenge.

The bottom floor consisted of rusted out vats that used to house the grain. They were old copper, far past their shine, with broken tubes leading up to catwalks that looked questionable to stand on. An old beat up couch was pushed up against one of these, a few blankets tossed upon it. In front of that, was a series of pallets that looked as if they were being used as some sort of table. Along with a couple scattered shirts, a pair of shoes, and an old worn book.

“Sit,” Hazel demanded. Milo did, too tired and far too sick to protest. When she handed him the soup, he even took, humoring her with a small bite. Malcolm turned as Milo’s face twisted into disgust, hiding his own laughter.

“Oh, is it too hot?” she asked.

“No,” he coughed. “No. It’s just uh— wasn’t expecting the flavor profile.”

She beamed at him brightly. “I was trying something new. It’s chicory root. Do you like it?”

“Love it,” he grimaced.

Hazel sat by his side, patiently waiting for him to finish the bowl. And Milo, being the man he was, did so without a single complaint.

“So,” Malcolm started. “Got yourself a job—”

"Which we are so proud of you for," Hazel interrupted. Malcolm was not one to be deterred, however. Leaning against the vat, he raised a brow towards him.

"Heard you fucked it up pretty royally."

"Malcolm."

Milo narrowed his gaze. "Did it better than you," he said. "Heard that you were turned down for this bid. Face it, Mal. They wanted someone they could trust. Not a con man."

Malcolm snorted. "Or, they wanted cheap labor. They knew hiring me meant they'd have to dip into reserves. But, you know what they say, you get what you pay for."

"Fuck you," Milo shot out.

"Sorry, button," he leaned forward, a false pout on his lips. "I like my men a bit less nasally sounding."

Milo sneezed then, prompting Hazel to fuss over him while Malcolm continued wandering the distillery a bit. When he came to Milo's 'room', he grinned.

"Hey, button," he called. "You already have someone come over?"

"What?"

Malcolm picked up a shirt. Black and thin cut. And tossed it to the man. "Thought you were into women?" he asked him.

Milo blushed, hiding the shirt behind him. "Taste can change," he mumbled.

At this, Hazel looked around. "Oh. Oh, did you— did we interrupt something?"

"What? Hazel, no."

"We can leave, Milo. If you had someone here taking care of you we can completely go. Oh, I knew we shouldn't have come unannounced."

"Hazel, it's fine. Really. No one is here." Milo was flapping his arms at her, trying to get her to sit back down. She looked ready to run out of the place to give Milo and his companion the space they needed.

"You sure?" she asked.

"Yeah. Yeah, it's— it's okay. The company is kind of nice, actually." The way he said it hit the two of them hard. He had been lonely. Starting out all on his own, he had been sitting, sick, in this drafty old place, by himself for days.



"Hey, Hazel," Malcolm said. "Why don't you go to the market and get Milo a few things to make this place a bit more homey? Blankets. Pillows. A candle, so it doesn't smell like a bar."

She gave her brother a suspicious look. One that clearly said she didn't know if she should leave Malcolm here alone with Milo given how much the two hated each other. But, in the end, they did all agree that whatever Malcolm picked out for Milo would be thoughtless and rough in texture. And Hazel did want to make sure he had a nice quilt. Malcolm handed her some coin before she left, assuring her that she could spend whatever she wanted.

When the door closed behind her, Malcolm looked down at Milo.

"You look like shit."

Milo threw the t-shirt at him. "And you are tempting fate. The fuck is wrong with you? She could have recognized your damn shirt, you bastard."

Chuckling, Malcolm came walking over, sitting down on the couch next to him. He raked a hand through Milo's unruly hair, pulling it from his face. His eyes were glassy, and his cheeks were still pink from fever.

"You look better than you did this morning." Malcolm had found him, vomiting and groaning with stomach cramps. He had promptly gone home after he got him settled, to rat him out to Hazel. Telling her he heard a rumor that Milo was sick.

"Don't feel better," Milo muttered.

Smiling fondly at the younger man, Malcolm wrapped his arm around him. "Come here." He laid back, pulling Milo with him, until he settled across Malcolm's chest.

"She's going to come back and see us," he protested.

"You kidding? I just gave Hazel money and told her to outfit your place. She's going to be gone for at least three hours." He ran his fingers down Milo's spine. "Get some sleep, alright? Hazel's soup I know was foul, but it will help."

Milo shivered a little, sticking close to Malcolm's warmth. "You really think I fucked up my mission?" he asked, pathetically.

"Yeah," he said. "I really do. But, you know what else I think?"

"What?"

"I think given the lengths you go through to get your job done, you're going to give me a run for my money here, real soon. Gonna have to up my game because of you, button. It'll be nice to have some actual competition."

Milo grew heavy above him, a small smile on his lips as he began to drift off to sleep. Malcolm curled an arm around him protectively, making sure he didn't fall.

"Wake me when you hear her comin'," he slurred.

"Don't worry. Our secret relationship shall remain in the shadows a bit longer."

"Not in a relationship," Milo protested, snuggling close.

Malcolm laughed, snaking his free hand beneath Milo's shirt to span against his back. Above him, Milo began to snore.

Eventually, they would have to tell Hazel, but at this point, they were both a bit curious how long it would take her to catch on.

Not that it mattered. She'd be happy for them no matter what. But watching Milo squirm was one of his favorite things, and Malcolm didn't want to give that up. Not yet, anyway. For a little while longer, he'd let Milo do his non-committal, hot and cold, bullshit act. Malcolm Albright was a stubbornly patient man. He could wait.

[Milo Bug Update Please Read](#)

[Aug 29, 2022](#)

Holy crap guys. I am so sorry. I was getting things ready for a public release and I realized an important Milo code never actually coded. There is an entire post scene for him after you two have sex. And if you are in a relationship, it is actually a really soft and sweet scene. AND IT NEVER CODED!!!!

I am so so sorry. I should have it up here really soon. You will probably need to go back to the beginning of the chapter and click that you started a relationship with him in order for it to code correctly but I think this is important because it will affect the end chapter scene and the rest of the game. Again, I am so so sorry. I can't believe the wrong tag got put in.

[Dev Blog 8/30/2021](#)

[Aug 30, 2022](#)

I am for sure writing this while my daughter head butts my arm. She wants to show me her pretty headband. Her pretty headband, by the way, is one she stole from me. It apparently starts before they are even two.

That being said, I started Chapter Six last night! Not much to report there other than I do have a better grasp of what you will be doing and where you will be going. Yesterday was a big brainstorming session for how I want to see the rest of the Night Market shake out. I got a good friend, Poppy, that helps me out with all of that, and I think we spent all day tossing ideas back and forth.

On a more technical note, I am looking into giving better font and dark mode options to the game itself. Coding is new to me. I only started learning it about four months ago. Thankfully, I have some awesome people who have been messaging me and helping guide me in this process, so hopefully I can offer you all a bit more in case this is hurting your eyes.

I want to tell all of you that I am overcome with love for your support. My birthday is about a week away and I am going into my next year a bit more optimistic than I did the last one. And that's predominately because of all of you. I truly think that the Night Market can become something. And it can become something because all of you were willing to give me a chance. So, forever, I am grateful.

Hopefully I'll have more to report next week! Kids are getting back to school next week and our day to day schedules will be changing so it might take a bit to get this chapter going, but I am excited to share more of it with you.

All my love,

Zinnia

[Post Chapter Five - Milo](#)

[Sep 5, 2022](#)

A/N: This is assuming you took the Milo romance route within Chapter Five and you and him had some fun in the water. :) This is later that night, after the MC went home.

The heat of the lanterns were almost unbearable after the festival. Made a person feel hot and sticky under the collar. Of course, the dip in the pond had been refreshing. Active. A good way to end the evening.

Milo scrubbed a hand over his face. He was well and truly fucked, and it was in more ways than one.

Ducking around the last of the festival goers he made his way towards a familiar wall. Milo had been scaling it since he was a kid and despite it somehow growing over the years, it was still easy to get over. Hoisting himself up on the burnt edging behind the backs of the dilapidated buildings, Milo held out his arms. Putting one foot in front of the other, he balanced on the old market line that separated the Albright land from the rest of the world. It was of course all overgrown thicket and blackberries and Milo was pretty sure if he were to drop right there, he would fall forever. But there was a turn, about halfway down. It was a familiar one that he had used when he used to sneak to them at night. When he didn't want Lucinda Albright to know he was coming. Milo could navigate that area with his eyes closed. And he kind of had to. At least here. The lanterns may have renewed, but they would never light again in this alleyway. The grass here was plush and damp, speckled with purple flowers. He dropped down onto the green expanse, making his way towards a familiar creek and the large tree that hung protectively over it.

"You fall yet?" he called out. He didn't look up as he kicked off his shoes and stepped into the water.

He heard the giggle. She had probably been watching him from four or five blocks away. "Not yet," Hazel called down to him.

There was an old swing that hung from a thick branch. It was tied together with rope and had a wooden base. They had built it one year when they were younger. Milo hopped up on it now, his feet still grazing the water's surface. Curling his fingers around the old lines of rope, he began pumping his legs back and forth, listening to the water splash beneath him.

"How was the rest of festival?" Hazel asked. She was sitting in the tree, dangling her hands downwards and drawing intricate shapes into the night air. She lounged like a cat across the thickest part of the branch, her skirts hanging over the sides like ivy.

"It was good. You?"

"Lovely," she sighed. "The lanterns looked especially pretty this year."

"Why are you out here?" Milo asked.

"Why are you?" she retorted with a raised brow.

They both grinned.

They had been coming here post lantern festival for years. The two of them always ended their night in this river. Meeting back up no matter where the evening had taken them. It was tradition of sorts. One started when they were younger, back when they thought it was rebellious to stay up all night. Now it was an old comfort the two of them refused to shake. The older they got, the less of those types of opportunities they had. This was one of those childhood memories they clung desperately to.

"You know, Milo," Hazel said, pillowing her head on her arms. "If you want to keep a secret from me, you need to do a bit of a better job."

"Oh? And what secret am I keeping from you?"

"Your hair is wet. So was a certain shopkeep of mine."

Milo didn't look up at her. Just continued swinging. The edge of his pants were getting damp as he sliced through the water. When he didn't say anything and let the silence follow, he heard Hazel shift above him.

"Oh, Milo."

"Don't."

"I absolutely am not going to be listening to you. Are you okay? I know that you two have been very flirtatious, and I thought that was going to be good for you. You deserve to have someone in your life. But you don't look happy about it."

"I had a wonderful evening on my knees in a waterfall, Hazel darling. Why wouldn't I be happy?"

"Gross," Hazel said. "And stop deflecting."

"Is it deflecting if it is the truth?"

"Milo."

Sighing, he tilted his head back so he could look up at her again. She was still lying on the branch, somehow balancing on it perfectly. But her lips were turned in a downward frown.

"It was a good time. What more do you want me to say, Hazel?"

When a spare branch hit him squarely in the side of the head he nearly fell backwards into the water.

"Don't be an ass," she told him firmly. "You have a rule of not falling for anyone. I know you don't say it, but I know it's practically the gospel of Milo at this point. And from where I'm sitting, it looks like you broke your creed without meaning to. So you now have a choice, Milo. You either accept that it is okay to be loved, or you become an unrepentant asshole over this entire situation and make me and everyone else sad."

Milo snorted. "I like how you threw yourself in there."

"When it comes to the people I care about? Of course, I'm including myself. And I know you well, Milo. You don't mean to be an asshole, and you'll feel guilty if you are. So why not just skip that entire part and understand that what you did tonight was okay."

It was more than okay. It felt incredible. Milo had every intent to break it off tonight. Or, break off the idea of them becoming something more. Were they ever really on? It didn't matter. It needed to end before it went too far. But then there were the lights and the festival. Everything had felt right. It slotted in his

chest in such a way that made him feel swept away with it all. He never should have led them down to that pool.

Looking down at the ring, Malcolm's old Baron signet, he shook his head. He had been so stupid.

But gods did they look good wet. Water dripping down their shoulders, pooling at the dip of their neck. The way the wisps had cast an ethereal glow all around them. The way their thighs felt gripped in Milo's hands. He had wanted to shove them up against the wall and lick every bead of water that coated their skin. Worship their very body until they knew nothing but his name. And when it was all done, he wanted to lay them out, pliant and damp against the shore, and do it all over again.

Letting his head hang down he laughed bitterly to himself.

"Fucking hell this is messed up," he muttered.

"It's not," Hazel tried to soothe. "It's just the first time you've let your heart open again. It's okay to feel this way, Milo."

"And what about them, huh? Is it okay to keep doing this when I know it's all going to end in some sort of bloody mess?"

He hadn't meant to say those words.

"Why would you even think that? They're not Malcolm." Slipping from the bough, Hazel climbed down the small footholds until she landed in the water. Coming to stand in front of him, she stopped the swing. She was still shorter than him. Even with him sitting. His head was bent, his feet reaching towards the smooth pebbles of the creek bed, while Hazel stood in front of him, her skirts billowing out around her.

Ducking her head, she caught his eye. "That night was terrible," she whispered. "It changed both of us. But we can't keep living in its shadow."

His gaze ticked sharply to hers. "Then why do you? You're obsessed with getting him back. You're..."

"That's not the same," she said quickly.

"Isn't it? Why are there no animals around here, Hazel? What are you doing when you sneak out here late at night?" Leaning forward, his eyes dark, he shook his head. "I'm not the only one with secrets, it seems."

Tipping her gaze upwards, she met him head on. There was fear in her eyes but a stubborn determination swelled there as well. "No. You're not. But I'm not the one still punishing myself because I couldn't save him."

Milo wanted to protest. To scream and rage at her. Because how dare she. How dare she insinuate that that was what he was doing. She didn't know the half of what he had gone through or what he would

continue to do. She didn't know a damn thing. But when he looked at her, he felt himself deflate. Hazel had been there that night. Had held him. The two of them had held each other. He sometimes forgot he didn't have to be alone.

Cupping his cheeks in the warmth of her hands, Hazel smiled softly at him. "I think you two are cute together. And while I never ever ever want to hear any of the details of tonight, I am happy for you."

Milo couldn't help but feel guilty over her words. But at the same time, it was so hard to refuse the affection she so readily gave.

"You going to be able to handle it all again?" he asked. He didn't know why. He knew it wouldn't be this way. But...

"Handle what? Seeing you sneak around behind my back, thinking that I don't know exactly what you're doing?"

He laughed at her. "Yeah."

"I think I can handle it," she said. "Now, hold on tight. I'm going to push you. And I want to see if we can beat our record."

This, Milo knew how to do. Old games. Old habits. Safety. He jumped at the opportunity. Standing on the swing, he gripped the ropes tight. Hazel shuffled through the water behind him before starting to push at his back. He could feel the second she threaded her magic into the push.

"I can make it," he told her.

"Two more pushes. On the third, jump."

Milo held his breath, curling his back as he readied himself. One push. Breathe in. Breathe out. Two pushes. Steady. Don't rush it.

Then, the third.

Milo leapt from the swing, air born for just one minute. For one minute nothing mattered. Not the things to come. Not the decisions he had to make or the actions he had to follow through. Just him and Hazel in the creek like when they were kids. Stupidly trying to jump to the tree branch.

When he did, when his arms wrapped around the thick bough, and he scrambled upwards, it was with a shout of surprise. Down below, Hazel was kicking the water, hollering in victory as beads of dew flew into the air. Never before had they been able to do it. It had always ended with Milo, face first in the creek bed.

Standing on the branch, Milo bowed with a flourish.

When he fell into the water seconds later, it was to the sound of Hazel's cackling laughter. He was much bigger now and his footing was not as sure as when he was a child. But, despite hitting his shoulder against a rock and chocking a bit as he sucked in what he thought was a tadpole, Milo couldn't help but laugh as well. Because this was normal. This was why he was doing what he had set out to do. Because Milo Next was not willing to sacrifice nights like this.

[Dev Blog 9/10/22](#)

[Sep 10, 2022](#)

Chapter Six is so close to being done! I still am inserting some choices, but I think I will have it off to the beta testers by Monday night and then possibly posted by the weekend. This one went way easier because it is a plot heavy chapter. And despite what you may think, plot heavy chapters are quick ones to write.

You will be traveling down into a place called the Deep, with Hazel. There you will be able to meet a new character, and, go on one of Hazel's personal quests of the game. You do not need to romance her in order to do this.

As for the angst cravers out there, this one has it. There is a bit with Milo in the beginning that is hard, and Hazel's entire storyline here is sad. For the ones romancing Gabriel or Belladonna, don't you worry. Your time is very close at hand. :)

The goal is to get this chapter done as soon as I can and then spend the next two weeks getting some short stories written for on here, along with going back and doing a mass bug overall. I keep all the reports coming in. It's just sometimes harder to get them implemented right away. I need a much quieter place than what my household provides.

I hope everyone is doing well and I cannot wait to hear from you all!

Love,

Zinnia

[General Update](#)



[Sep 13, 2022](#)

I am really hoping that Chapter Six will be up this weekend. However, my husband's company went on strike today, and it looks like it is going to be a long one. This means that my husband and I are trying to figure out how to pay our bills without his paycheck for possibly the remainder of the month. We are a family of six so it's a tad bit disheartening to see that it has come to this. Especially with a company who has bragged about making over a billion last year.

What this means for you guys. Because everything is up in the air for me and my schedule and time commitments have had to change, my Patreon shorts might be a bit delayed. I am hoping that is not the case and that I can work through this, but I feel transparency is much more important. That also means my Baron tiered stories are going to be a bit more delayed this month. They 100% will still happen before the start of next month, but maybe more towards the very end of the month as opposed to spread out through the weeks. I am incredibly hopeful that I can keep my same working schedule on my end, but I want to give everyone a heads-up if that cannot happen.

Thank you for all your understanding, and thank you for the asks you've been sending in today. They have been a wonderful distraction to an otherwise stressful day. I hope that this is all resolved soon, and the workers can get the wages they deserve.

With love,

Zinnia

[Post Chapter Five - Belladonna](#)

[Sep 15, 2022](#)

A/N This is assuming you took the Belladonna route in Chapter Five. Post her getting you to sleep upstairs, but right before the events of Chapter Six begin.

The shuffling upstairs was becoming more pronounced. Soft little padding of feet back and forth as a morning routine was conducted. Clothes were donned, hair was pulled back, teeth was brushed and face was washed. It was all incredibly tedious and required far too much effort for early morning wakings. Belladonna didn't understand why anyone even bothered to be up this early. Rather, this was the perfect time to go to bed.

When the door upstairs opened, it squeaked in such a way that sent the small shadows lurking in each corner, scattering to their respective homes. The smiles sprites that were messing with the bundles of cracked wheat skittered beneath the floorboards and the kitsune that had taken up residence in the corner of the shop, climbed out the window. The stairs were taken at a quick downward pace; a stumble really, as the person in question struggled to wake up. All the while, Belladonna waited. She had of course been sitting there for far longer than anyone in the house suspected. So when Hazel flipped on the apothecary lights and saw her, silent and still in the small tea area, the young woman practically screamed.

And by practically, she did. Loudly. While clutching her chest.

Belladonna raised a brow as Hazel stood there, panting. "Tea?" she asked. She had brewed it hours ago but found several refresher charms to keep the kettle hot.

"Belladonna," Hazel said, eyes wide. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought it would be nice if you and I had a little girl time. It's been so incredibly goal oriented around here lately that we are forgetting that the foundation to any good life is pointless socialization."

Hazel's look grew more and more concerned. "I don't know if that is true. Or at least I don't think many would put it that way."

Belladonna waved her off. "No matter. Now come. Sit. I brewed a pot of earl tapioca."

Clearly, there were several thoughts warring in Hazel's head at the moment. Belladonna sighed as she watched the young woman try to decide if this was a trap. "Really, Hazel. While I am a vampire, I do not wait in apothecaries to eat my prey. I would have just come to your room and drank you in your sleep. You would have been none the wiser."

Immediately, Hazel's hand smacked the side of her neck, looking for a wound. At the smirk playing across the other woman's blood-red lips, she realized it had been a joke. Or at least she hoped it was.

Against her better judgement, Hazel sat across from Belladonna. While the vampire's presence was unsettling, there was a certain cause for curiosity. Belladonna Malady was not one to ever seek the aid of others. Not without a price. "I've never had that one before," Hazel said. "The tea, I mean."

"I suspect not. It was a blend native to my world. Took me years to find something equivalent to it. Had to kill a man for his secrets on tapioca production. Apparently they grow better under green lanterns as opposed to azure."

Hazel hesitated, her eyes flicking around the room, still certain that this ruse was going to be the death of her. "I am never sure if you are joking or not when you speak like that."

"That, dear heart, is by design." Pouring a steaming cup of tea, Belladonna handed her the cup. It was made of black opaque glass with blooming purple and gold flecked roses painted upon the rim. Sipping

at the brew, Hazel jerked back in surprise.

“Oh,” she breathed. “That is beautiful.”

Belladonna smiled, pleased. “A specialty of my home village. My father was a farmer of sorts. I grew up gathering from the fields and selling down at the local markets. You would be amazed how bored I could get.”

“You never talk about where you came from,” Hazel ventured slowly.

Sipping her tea, Belladonna placed it down on a matching saucer. “I don’t.”

When it was left at that, Hazel didn’t dare press.

The two women sat in silence, enjoying their tea. When Hazel finished hers, Belladonna poured her another cup without a word. Her chest was still this morning. She wasn’t even trying to feign the art of breathing.

“Uh, Belladonna,” Hazel said. She nearly jumped at the sound of her own voice. Which, in turn, had Belladonna’s fangs glinting in a smile. “I– I’m a little confused. Why are you here? In the dark. Before my shop even opens.”

“Oh,” she said with a smile, as if the question was somehow surprising. “Was I not clear earlier? Girl time.”

“Yes. No. You mentioned that but– we don’t exactly have anything to talk about.”

“We do, actually.” Setting her cup aside, Belladonna crossed one leg over the other. Her dress was made of shifting blue-black sheer lace with a bodysuit beneath. “Your shop hand–”

“They have a name...”

“I believe you may not be keeping them busy enough. I have noticed a few concerning things about them and I believe it would be in our best benefit to keep them a tad bit more occupied.”

Hazel blinked. “Oh. I– are they getting into trouble?”

“No,” Belladonna enunciated the word with a long-drawn-out frown while the flutter of wings began to whisper in the dark. “Nothing like that. I think they are just so new to this world that they are attaching to things that will ultimately be harmful to them.”

At this, Hazel looked genuinely concerned. “Oh, I had no idea. What are they doing?”

Smoothing her hands down across one pale thigh, Belladonna sighed. “Last night they came to the fire show past the eternal stairs. It is quite an elite place filled with some of the most dangerous creatures within the Night Market. They should not have been there.”

"That was... that was maybe my fault. I told them where you would be and—" she shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "I think they just have a bit of an infatuation with you and when you turned them down for the festival last night it really affected them, so I thought— wait." Hazel's words stuttered out. "The fire show is sanctioned. It is no more dangerous than any other portion of the market. You just have to have an invite to have a seat."

"I assure you it is far more dangerous than you perceive," Belladonna said primly. "Keep them out of there, Hazel darling. For me." It was a request, but the obvious threat was there. While Belladonna would never do anything to harm the sweet little Albright, she hoped the woman knew how serious this situation was and would absolutely use fear to her advantage if need be. Hazel, though, just wasn't getting it.

"Well," Hazel started slowly, "that shouldn't be a big deal since the lantern festival is once a year."

"Keep them out of situations like that," Belladonna repeated. "If I am on a job, assume they need to be nowhere near me."

Hazel paused. "I'm confused. Are you upset they showed up to this dangerous fire festival? Or are you upset because they have soft feelings towards you?"

It was Belladonna's turn to shift in her seat. "I am a woman of the night. People having 'soft feelings' for me is the hazards of the job."

"But they're not a job," Hazel reminded her.

Belladonna's eyes flicked away. Just briefly. The grip she dug into her own skin left half moon marks upon her leg and a tear in her lace. Standing, she gestured down at the table. "I have taken the liberty of ordering you this tea. I have also left the contact information for the tapioca supplier. I would like it if you would carry this brew from now on. I would much rather give you the business than the fungal excuse of a man."

"Belladonna," Hazel's eyes were soft, compassionate. "If you need to talk I— I know that Gabriel was rough but—"

"Why are we speaking of the Warden? He has nothing to do with my concern for your little shop hand running rampant around the market." Heading towards the door, Belladonna looked over her shoulder. "It goes without saying that this conversation will not be mentioned, yes?"

Hazel nodded, swallowing thickly.

"Smart little Albright. You are just delectable."

Outside, Belladonna looked up at the wisps, her eyes deepening to a fiery burgundy. She needed to feed. The entirety of that last night was an itch that continued to crawl against her spine and she wished for anything to get the taste of elation out of her mouth. Feeling her nails curl, and her bones crack

along her hips, she closed her eyes and allowed herself to rip apart, shed the skin that had carried them and had defended their honor. With wings of blood and bone extending from her back, she launched herself into the air, leaving behind scraps of lace and chiffon.

Down below, the window to the second story room, remained open.

### [Post Chapter Five Short - Gabriel](#)

[Sep 19, 2022](#)

A/N Post Chapter Five short. Takes place right after Gabriel leaves the MC at the apothecary. Get a small glance into his head and meet a new friend along the way.

The night air was cool and crisp, the lanterns up above swaying in a gentle lull. The festival was slowly beginning to calm, the last of the party goers stumbling drunkenly through the streets. A few of them straightened their spine upon seeing the Warden, sure that public intoxication was going to be a one way ticket to the pits. Not tonight, however. Drunken revelry was allowed on nights of festival. As long as no one got hurt.

Wandering through the nearly empty streets, Gabriel sighed contentedly. Ghost wine was still thrumming through him in a pleasant tingle. By the Knowing, how he wished he had been able to be a tad bit more sober when dropping *them* off at the apothecary. Perhaps if he had been, he wouldn't have stopped himself. Then again, he wanted them to be clear-headed as well. Equal choice. Both of them knowing what was to come and feeling themselves tumble over the precipice together. Was that even possible? He hoped so. For far too many years he didn't believe he would ever be given that chance. Tonight, however, that might have changed.

The lights turned a faint blush above, the street smelling sticky sweet as ambrosia filtered through the air. Not that it had much of an effect on him now. Wine had always been a bit more potent to him than the burnt sugary spells of the Pleasure District. Or, at least that's what he told himself. Winding his way through those alleys though, intending to just make the last of his rounds before heading home, he heard a bawdy laugh. It made his spine straighten out of its lax curve and the soft smile on his face melt away into the stoic mask of the Warden.

Stepping around the corner, he nearly sighed. Perhaps it hadn't been such a good idea that he had drank after all.

The man leaving the Pleasure District was shirtless, in loose fitting jeweled toned pants. His skin was dotted with broken shards of diamond or glass, Gabriel had never been sure. They jutted from his skin,

coated in the pale glitter of the district, as much a part of him as any appendage. Fiery hair hung loose around his face and a pipe was clutched between his teeth. Ducking beneath the main arches of the district, he did a double take as he saw Gabriel standing there, as if he had been waiting for him.

“Casimir Alskar,” Gabriel said. “You know you shouldn’t be here.”

The man in question turned, smiling at the Warden as he pushed his hair from his face. He stood just under seven feet tall and was a wall of muscle. He turned his heterochromia eyes towards Gabriel, focusing on him with one green and one blue. “Ah, Warden Caine. It is a pleasure to see ya, boy.”

Gabriel fought the second sigh of the night. “Mr. Alskar, I thought we had an understanding that your presence within the Market is prohibited.”

“We did. We did have an understanding,” he said between puffs of his pipe. It was clear that while the understanding was there, there was no real remorse for breaking it. “Lovely festival tonight. One of the best in years.”

“May I escort you to a gate, Mr. Alskar?” Gabriel offered. He was hoping the man would take it. After such a relaxing evening, a fight with the likes of him was not what Gabriel desired.

“Now, I think we both know tha’ ain’t gonna be happenin’.” Casimir laughed. It wasn’t a mocking one but more of just a knowing tone that said he was very comfortable where he was at, thank you very much. The thing was, Gabriel couldn’t even fault him. It wasn’t like the giant of a man did anything wrong. It was just that bad things tended to follow him wherever he went.

“Alskar, the Wild Hunt is still after you, from what I know, and I do not wish for them to crash through my market again.”

“Oh, I don’t think they’ll be doin’ that. It’s festival.” His smile was tight though at the mention of the Hunt. Rarely did anyone react kindly to them.

“The Iron District is not far from here. Odin still wishes to see your head on a pike at the front gates,” Gabriel continued to try and reason.

“I would very much like to see him try. Might be entertainin’.”

“Just because you are— *friends*, with a Baron—”

“Which one?”

Gabriel pinched his nose. Again, the laugh sounded, echoing throughout the district. Casimir slung an arm around Gabriel’s shoulder. “I’m just messin’ with ya, Warden. I’ll be goin’ soon enough. Want to stop off and see my— what do you call them? Friends?” he shook his head at the title. “Don’t think either of them would appreciate bein’ called that.”

"Do I have your word you will be leaving after that?" Gabriel asked.

"Aye. But why don't you come and escort me there. Just to make sure everything is all on the up and up."

Gabriel nodded solemnly. This, he could do.

As they began meandering down the alleyways, Casimir in the lead, the two men lapsed into silence. Gabriel had his hand on his sword hilt, almost certain something was going to come crashing through the walls at any moment. When one of the most wanted men across the cosmos entered the Market, he didn't feel like anyone could breathe safely.

"What are ya doin' still working' on a night like this?" Casimir finally asked, puffs of glittering smoke curling from his pipe.

"I was off duty until I ran into you, actually."

"Is that right? What does a man like you do on your off duty time? I always figured you for someone married to your job. Never hear of you in the different districts unless you're patrolling or apprehending someone. You got a personal life, Warden?"

Gabriel kept his eyes forward. Far too often lately, people have accused him of not having a life outside his job at all. It was starting to get a tad bit offensive. "If you must know, I had a lovely evening drinking wine with a friend of mine."

Casimir grinned. "This friend the same kind of friends I got?"

No. Not yet. Though Gabriel had hope. It was small and blooming and for the first time in a long while, he was allowing it to see the light.

"Ah," Casimir said. "It is, isn't it? Good for you, Warden. Life is not worth livin' without a bit of companionship."

"Some would say you have too much companionship," Gabriel bit back. Though Casimir didn't take offense to it.

"Most would say that, yes. But we're not talkin' about me, are we? Talkin' about you."

Gabriel frowned. "Why would you wish to talk to me about my personal life? I have arrested you at least three times."

"Now I could be given' ya a flippant remark, but I don't suppose you would appreciate that much. So instead, I'll tell ya this." Letting a curl of lavender smoke fill the air, Casimir breathed it out from his nose in two long curls. "I like ya, Caine. I think you do the best you can in a Market of genuine deceit. Now you don't 'ave to tell me anything of your evenin'. I'm just trying to make conversation while I get back to my

own. But, I have been told I am a good conversationalist if you want to say a word or two. If not, we can just walk these roads in silence.”

Gabriel thought about it. When was the last time he had had a conversation with someone just because? Perhaps tonight, on the beach, but other than that? When? It had been so long and those moments were shrouded in such blatant deception that even if the memories were true, he felt them to be tainted now.

Perhaps it was the lights of the festival, perhaps it was the wine, or perhaps, Gabriel was finally starting to turn the corner of tight-lipped soloist to something more. He couldn't quite say why he spoke the words he did next. Only that they were out in the night air, and he didn't actually feel that guilty for uttering them.

“I have someone that I would like to see more of,” he said softly. “I was spending the evening with them.”

Casimir grinned, pipe clattering between his teeth. “Do ya now?”

“Yes. They are— enchanting. I have not found myself as of late as someone that can open myself up to others. Share a meal with. Or a drink. Yet, they keep bringing me food and seem to genuinely care about what I feel. It is— strange.”

The clap to his back nearly knocked Gabriel off his feet. Casimir's hand was meaty and had a force behind it that the man often forgot. “Good for you, lad. Good for you. Like to see ya loosen those shoulders a bit when you're not on duty.”

“It's all very new,” he said, straightening his jacket. “I am uncertain if they feel the same.”

“If they're brinin' ya food, they feel the same. Food is a love language that is most accessible. Bet ya anything they have it for you too. And why wouldn't they? You're a striking young man. Got a good job. Know yourself well. You're a catch. Just got to believe that ya are.”

Gabriel frowned.

“Take it you were hurt in love once or twice.” When Gabriel turned sharp eyes to him, Casimir nodded knowingly. “Been there. It's a knife straight to ones heart. They tell ya time will heal it but for beings that have all the time in the world, don't think that really counts. But I can tell ya this. Your heart can expand. It can move on. It can provide room for others. And sometimes, just sometimes, that one that broke it originally, can come back.”

“Do you make amends with that person?”

“You try. And that's all that can really be asked for. And it's a damn sight more than you had before. And healin' from old wounds never negates new experiences.” Stopping, Casimir turned to look at him, stooping a bit to meet Gabriel's eyes. “Don't let your past shut you off from your future.”



Gabriel blinked at him, feeling something slot in his chest. An old wound. One that had never been allowed to heal. It tore, and it bled, but it didn't run with the thick poisonous tone of deceit and bile. Not tonight.

"Now," Casimir said, dousing his pipe and pulling his hair back. Brushing off some of the glitter from the Pleasure District, it was clear he was trying to look presentable. "Gonna go see my friends," he grinned. Gabriel looked up. He hadn't even realized they had arrived at the arches of the Book Baron's enclosure. "They were off at some show tonight, and I promised them I'd meet up with them before takin' off again. Chryssi's probably going to demand I stay."

"Is it going to work?" Gabriel asked, both fearful that he would become a fixture in the district and out of genuine curiosity.

Casimir looked genuinely sad at the question, however, turning his eyes towards the walls of books. "Not yet," he said softly. "Too many after me. Too much pain following me around to do that yet." Regret pooled in his words as he ticked his gaze away from what was before him.

"I thought your past shouldn't define your future?" Gabriel asked softly.

The bark of laughter that erupted from Casimir's throat was genuine, but he didn't answer Gabriel. Just nodded his head knowingly. "I'll be goin' now. Your market is safe once more. It was good speakin' with ya, Warden. Hope this new love of yours works out."

As he disappeared through the gates, Gabriel watched as books stacked up behind him, blocking Casimir from sight and anyone else from entering the district. Giving all three of the 'friends' privacy.

"I hope so too," Gabriel said to the night air. "I truly do."

[Dev Blog 9/25/22](#)

[Sep 25, 2022](#)

Hello to everyone new here because wow do I have a lot of new faces and names! Thank you so much for joining me on this crazy journey.

Despite Chapter Six having just launched publically, I am well on the way to working on Chapter Seven. I almost have the cold write done. I can tell you that this one will be a bit of a breather. At least the second half will. And there will be two NSFW scenes within Chapter Seven and the ability to start a

relationship. In fact, I am pretty certain all romance paths will be locked by the end of this next chapter. Don't worry, I will make it clear that they are locked.

On top of that, I want to give a shout-out to a few new beta testers that I have. They have been going back through the old chapters and helping fix spelling mistakes and code errors. They have been a wonderful addition to the Night Market and are helping make any re-reads you guys do less cringy. :)

Upcoming this week, will be a post Hazel short, and then I am going to cycle back to the start of the RO's for the October shorts.

My husband is still on strike so I am going to continue working my butt off to keep content churned out but heads up, I might take a week or two once he goes back to work to rest these fingers of mine. LOL!

Other than that, not a ton left to update you guys on. Things are going smoothly on the writing portion of it. If you guys ever have any questions about the writing process or the game itself, please feel free to drop some comments below. I would absolutely answer them.

With love,

Zinnia

[Post Chapter Five - Hazel](#)

[Sep 27, 2022](#)

A/N: Well this story went far different than I expected. This is post Chapter Five, after everyone has gone to be after the festival.

Hazel sat outside the garden gates, late that evening, long after Milo had gone home. The lanterns were now lit, and the festival was coming to an end. But there was one more thing that she had to do.

It was the same each year. Hazel always told herself that this would be the last time and that she would conduct her goodbyes but duty and nostalgia took precedence far more than she would like to admit. Malcolm had tried to rid her of the feeling of obligation, but Hazel didn't know if that would ever be possible. Especially with Malcolm gone. Who else did she have left?

Walking to the edge of the burnt out alley, Hazel peered into the shadows. They were especially restless tonight. They always were when the lanterns renewed. "Mom?" she called out to the dark.

At first there was nothing but a pregnant pause. Then, the shadows moved, scattering out of the way as the echo of footsteps sounded down the alley. Hazel knew that sound, having heard it most of her life come up the back stairs. Her right foot always came down heavier than the others.

Lucinda Albright appeared, materializing out of a black shimmer of magic that shouldn't belong. Her skin was a bit darker than Hazel's, but her hair was the same chocolate, piled high upon her head and tied back with a scarf. But unlike Hazel's heart shaped face, Lucinda's was sharp and angular, her cheek bones cut just beneath her eyes in a stark bruising slash.

"Must be a holiday," Lucinda mused.

Hazel ducked her head. It was the only time she called her mother forward anymore. Perhaps she should have been better about visiting, especially since her mother was stuck in this alley. But Hazel led a busy life. The apothecary kept her days booked. Or at least that's what she told herself.

"Hello, mother," Hazel side, curtsying a bit with a bow of her head. "Are you well?"

Lucinda's eyes were gold and sharp. "I'm dead, dear. What do you think?"

"I just meant..." Hazel trailed off. Some spirits lived perfectly fulfilling lives. There was a little old man down near the peach stall at the rain market that passed his time collecting stories from the market goers and writing them down into monthly newsletters.

"I know what you meant, and it was a ridiculous question. Why am I here, Hazel? Are you planning on setting me free?"

"Mother, you know I can't do that. The Night Market doesn't work that way." In order to set her mother free the hex the woman had woven into the fabric of reality would have to be undone. Then, Lucinda would have to be reborn once more from the Night Market's will.

"If you were half as good of a witch as I was, you would have been able to do it by now," Lucinda snapped. "And where is your sister? I notice she isn't showing herself as of late."

"He, mother. You know this. And Malcolm is... unavailable." Malcolm wouldn't have come here even if he could. Never mind if he was wandering the ether out there, he was probably staying far far away from Lucinda. The two of them hadn't seen eye to eye even at birth.

"Hazel," Lucinda sighed. "We are getting off on the wrong foot again. You know mummy never intends to. It's just so hard here, darling. Being dead is a trial."

"Then maybe you shouldn't have lit the alley on fire," Hazel muttered.

"What was that?"

"Nothing," Hazel said quickly. She tried to twist her face into an encouraging smile. It wasn't as if she was enjoying this conversation either. "Mother, I came here because it is the Lantern Festival. I thought you and I could sit and watch the wisps tonight. Like we used to." Every year they would picnic in the garden and watch the wisps flit from tree to tree, gathering energy from the lanterns and bringing their light down to weave among the herbs.

Lucinda sighed, sitting down at the edge of the alley. She could not cross over to where the patch of grass grew green and plush. She had to stay in the world she created. "I only ever did that to get you to stop yammering on about them," she said. "Really, Hazel. You were a difficult child."

"I know, mother." Hazel sat down all the same, looking out at the wisps. They were already coating the basil in bits of light.

"How is that urchin friend of yours?"

"Milo is just fine," she said with a sigh. "He really has been helpful to the shop as of late. He takes orders for me and rebuilt the entire back shed this year."

"Yes. Well. You can do better than him."

"I'm not dating him mother." Lucinda was certain Milo had stuck around for her. To this day, Hazel doubted she even suspected he and Malcolm had been a thing. Either that, or she ignored it completely.

"Good. I've raised you right then. He has no prospects, Hazel, and he certainly has only been sniffing around here to make you a notch in his bedpost."

"Mother, Milo is my oldest friend..."

"If you got out more that wouldn't be the case."

Closing her eyes, Hazel stopped, counting to ten. Why did it always have to be this way? Each time she called her forward, Lucinda got worse and worse and Hazel had to wonder when the day would come that she would lose herself entirely to the anger that surrounded her. Hazel knew it wasn't her mother's fault. She knew that the dead sometimes just went this way. Though, according to both Malcolm and Milo Lucinda had always been cruel. Hazel was just too wrapped up in her mother's approval to see it.

"Couldn't we have a nice night, mother?" she asked softly.

Lucinda sighed. As if answering that very question was a trial. "Oh, alright. You're obviously in one of your needier moments. Come here child and hold your mother's hand." Hazel scooted towards her, reaching her hand across the burnt barrier to wrap within her mothers. It felt like ash and crackling smoke. "What has gotten you into such a tizzy, child?"

"Nothing," Hazel said honestly. She frowned almost immediately after that. "Or, well, I guess a small something. Mother, they say the Night Market is splitting in two."

"It's split in two before, and we survived."

"I know that. I know that when we lived underground the world was supposedly ending but this one I think is a bit different. The sky is tearing."

"Then do something bout it."

"But what am I supposed to do?"

Lucinda rolled her eyes, tugging on her child's hand until she raised her chin and focused on the wavering form of her mother. "Hazel Albright. You come from a long line of powerful women. What do you mean what should you do? You have all the ancient magics right there at your fingertips."

"They require sacrifice."

"If you wish to save the world then blood will have to be spilled. Really, Hazel," Lucinda admonished. "Do you think you can do something as drastic as saving the entirety of the Night Market by being kind? Death with need to coat the streets. Blood will have to be the new foundation. And this nonsense of keeping magic from our world will have to be cast aside. It is time for you and the other witches to stop living in the shadows and take the world back by force. Unless, of course, you wish for everyone you know and love to die."

"No. Mother, of course not..."

"Then you need to grow up and do something about all this because if you don't, then the lives of the people around you will be lost." Her face softened as she patted her daughter's hand. "But you will never die, Hazel. Mama has made sure of that. So you will spend your days knowing you could have done something, but you didn't because you didn't wish to take another life." She clucked her tongue in disapproval. "Really. I don't know where I went wrong. You are far too soft."

Hazel's head was ducked downwards, eyes blurred and focused on her lap. It was the same each time. What her mother had left behind could be helpful, of this Hazel had no doubt, but at what cost?

"Oh, sweetheart. Don't cry." Lucinda's voice sounded nothing but put out but it was not without sympathy. When tears dripped down Hazel's cheeks, the woman only sighed. "Let's watch the wisps," she said quietly. "It has been far too long since you called me forward, and I would like to spend some time with you. Could you be stronger for mama?"

Wiping at her eyes, Hazel nodded. "Yes, mother. Of course."

"That's a good girl. Now tell me that you love me."

Looking at her mother, Hazel gave her a watery smile. "I love you."

Lucinda only smiled thinly back, keeping her daughter's hand in her lap. Hazel, watched the wisps flit from the trees, her heart heavy in her chest. On nights like this, she longed to have Malcolm home more than ever.

## [Chapter Seven NSFW Codes](#)

[Oct 4, 2022](#)

If you are romancing either Hazel or Milo, there are locked scenes at the end of this chapter. Please type in the following code to access them. They are 18 +. Please also note that these are adult scenes with adult concepts. If any of this is triggering to you, please do not read.

Other than that, please enjoy the chapter!

Milo's code: m7n7

Hazel's code: h7a7

Old code for Milo's chapter five scene: water sports

[Discord Now Open](#)

[Oct 6, 2022](#)

You may have just gotten thrown into a discord with no warning. For that, I am so sorry. I am very new to creating discord/patreon channels and I had no idea that would happen. But, it is keeping with the Night Market experience, I believe. Most channels are open to all Patreon members with there, for now, only being separate channels for the high tiers if they wish to discuss the monthly stories. Please let me know if you need help with anything regarding the discord.

Zinnia



[Blue-eyed man](#)

[Oct 6, 2022](#)

Art work done by the talented Poppy Mooreaux

[Caliban ch 7 big file.png](#)

[Gabriel - Post Chapter Seven](#)

[Oct 9, 2022](#)

A/N: Post Chapter Seven Gabriel short. Assuming you have started a romance with him and have gone down to the flesh pits in Chapter One.

The room was sleek, devoid of personal touches and mostly grey. Soft light came from a single lamp tucked away in the corner, illuminating a writing desk scattered with missives and papers. I sat on the bed, propped up by pillows and blankets, blinking as I tried to puzzle out how I had gotten here. At



some point, fresh from the shower, I think I had blacked out. Exhaustion or pain had finally consumed me and now that I was awake, I felt wrapped in cotton.

The door to the right opened, and Gabriel slipped inside. A small tea cart was pushed in front of him, the metal of the wheels rattling ominously. The cart looked rusted and more like a medical tray than a vessel for a fancy carafe of tea.

“You’re awake.” He blinked at me, pausing for a moment in the door frame. His normally slicked back hair hung in his face and the top waistcoat of his uniform was discarded elsewhere, leaving him in a black tight woven turtle-neck that showed off every line of muscle on his well-defined chest.

I scooted over a little, allowing him room as he pushed the tea cart to my side. Steam filled the small expanse between us, the tea he poured smelling spicy and making my nose wrinkle.

“Drink this please. Ms. Albright says that it will help with any sort of wounds we might not be able to see.”

Knowing it was from Hazel, I took it immediately. “You got a hold of her then?”

“I did. She was most concerned, but I told her that you were in good hands here. I did not want to move you back to your bed after you had become unsteady on your feet, post shower. And, I admit, I may be being a tad bit selfish with my desire to keep you here for a bit longer.”

The tea itself was bitter and gave a healthy burn as it settled in my stomach. I could feel something else beneath the spice, however. As if flesh and bone were coated with a strength that I hadn’t realized I had lost. While I didn’t particularly like the tea, it was medicine. There was probably no point in fighting it.

Looking around the room, I tried to discern where exactly we were. I remembered Gabriel leading me out of his office and I had followed him willingly, but didn’t know where it was we were supposed to be going. The slow tingle of his lips upon mine were still at the forefront of my thoughts when he had requested I please take a shower. The warm water had felt delicious after the chill of the Deep and I had stayed beneath the spray far longer than necessary. The soft robe I had wrapped myself in afterwards had tipped me over the edge, I suppose. I didn’t remember winding up in bed on my own volition.

“Is this your home?” I asked.

Gabriel gave a soft chuckle. “Occasionally. I have a different place on the other side of the market, but I am afraid I spend more time here than there. This place is a common area or sorts. For when the men and women under the Velvet Guard are too tired to make the trek home. Or their shift starts in a few hours. This place provides them small comforts.”

I looked around. “Gabriel, this place isn’t very comfortable.” Homey was not how I would describe this by any means. It was lifeless. Even if it was a place shared by many, I would have thought there would be some effort into making it friendly. It resembled barracks more than it did a soft place to rest. Though, I did have to admit, the bed was nice. So was the robe.



"I thought you may deem it such," he said. "That is why I had someone rush to the market and get you that robe and a throw blanket. The tea set is mine. I do keep some finery here for matters of importance."

The tea set was polished silver and far too nice for the Guard. "Manners of importance like the person you once tried to arrest nearly dying when trying to save the world?"

When his hand touched my cheek I was startled. Still unused to a touch from him. A kind one that is. The black bands still stained my wrists from where he had cuffed me before. They were fainter now, fading with time, but still evidence to how this had all started.

When his hand slipped away, he refilled my tea once more, perching stiffly at the edge of the bed. "I have only been to the Deep twice," he volunteered. "Neither time I found it pleasant. It may take a few days for the chill to leave you. I found that hot showers were somewhat helpful during the preceding hours."

"Why were you in the Deep?" I was desperate for someone to understand what I had been through, though the idea that he had been down there, swimming in the light of the angler fish, and had still let Hazel and I venture forth was unsettling.

"I had to escort Belladonna. Twice," he said, shifting uncomfortably. "Once, the journey ended in an overnight trip to the palace. The other time, we were only there for a matter of hours. While I am sure my experience is not indicative to the entirety of that district, I merely found it cold and alien. Too many dangers set out in the open. Irresponsible, really. Though, I will admit that the coral knights are an ingenious bit of technology that I do wish I could implement within the market here."

"Technology?"

He hummed in response. "It is what I consider them. I do not believe they have sentience as people claim." Grabbing a small satchel from the second tier of the cart, he turned towards me. "I wish to bandage your wounds. Ms. Albright said to let them breathe while you slept and then to put several concoctions over them. The tea should have a numbing effect, so this should not sting."

I stared at him. The wounds he spoke of were swiped across my belly. A few across my arms. I was wearing nothing but a robe, however.

Seeming to understand, Gabriel averted his eyes. "Just place the sheet across anything you are uncomfortable with me seeing," he said, voice suddenly gruff and edged in restraint.

The slip of fabric over skin echoed unnaturally loud in the dim room. I swallowed thickly as I pulled my arms from the robe and arranged myself in such a way. When Gabriel's eyes still remained down something warm fluttered in my belly.

"You can look now," I told him. His head lifted beautifully then, and I realized he was waiting for my instruction.

Silently, he began examining the various contusions across my bare skin. There was one particular split of skin against my side that caused his lips to purse with agitation. A lock of hair fell over his brow, blocking the soft grey of his eyes as he fixated on the mottled skin.

“Gabriel,” I tested. I was curious, really. He had seemed so sure of himself back in the office. But fell in line with what I wished for him to do. “Keep talking, please,” I told him. “I want to hear the sound of your voice.”

The response was almost immediate. While his fingers still worked a green cream into the wound, placing small butterfly bandages across my skin in lieu of stitches, his words filled the room without hesitation.

“I was merely in the palace area and a hut that was not far from the royal gates,” he continued his story from earlier. “It was quite a few years ago, but it seemed mostly uninhabited. Though I have heard word that there has been quite the revival around the entrance to the district. Ms. Feri, for example, has a shop that would have been laughable a few years before. I do appreciate their attempts at civilization.”

“Where I was, wasn’t all together civilized,” I told him. The entrance, perhaps. Just past the selkies. But the tunnel down into the frigid waters below the palace was devoid of anything but the horrendous images that lurked in the ark.

“What do you mean?”

“I ended up going beneath the Baron’s palace, through an access she had in one of her throne rooms. Where I ended up was dark. Angler fish were the only sort of light. Everything there was monstrous and confusing.”

Gabriel’s hands paused, warm fingers pressed against my side. “She should not have access to a place sch as that.”

“I get the impression that there are a lot of things the Baron’s have that they should not have access to,” I said softly.

The frown that twisted his lips was one of deep concern. Before I realized what I was doing, I lifted my hand to cup his jaw, much like he had done to me early. I kept my touch firm, however, dragging his gaze to mine.

“Stop,” I said softly.

His hands fell limp in my lap.

“Are you beating yourself over all this?” I asked.

“Yes.”

"Gabriel, you shouldn't. What happened down there was not your fault."

"Was it not?" His eyes flashed silver before falling down to the soft dovetail grey. "Was I not the one who escorted you to the edge of the ocean and bid you farewell?"

I sighed. It was doubtful that I had enough energy to deal with this at the moment and in truth, I needed to process the events just as much as he. But at the same time...

"I am tired," I told him. "I may need some time before I can have this conversation with you."

His shoulders slumped. Turning his face in my palm, he kissed the soft flesh there. That was twice now, in one night, and I was finding I quite liked the sensation. "Apologies," he murmured against me. "I am afraid I will have to insist that we get the rest of your wounds bandaged, however. Then I am yours for the evening."

He pulled away from me, his lips lingering against my hand for a moment longer, before he began ministrations once more.

"Did you take the day off?" I asked, registering his words.

"I have."

"However will the Guard manage without you?" I teased. Whatever had been in Hazel's tea was making me feel light and airy and despite him prodding at an open wound, I felt nothing.

"It will be a difficult task, but I believe the men and women I employ are up for the challenge."

I huffed out a breath of laughter, feeling a slight exhilaration that he was beginning to become comfortable enough to joke with me more often.

When he was done, Gabriel packed everything away, took my empty cup, and pushed the tea car to the side. He still sat at the edge of the bed, his head bowed for a moment as he breathed deeply. When he looked back up at me, it was with a sense of openness that I knew he didn't gift to people often.

"I would like to stay with you," he whispered. "If you will permit it."

I didn't hesitate. Moving over, I pulled back the soft throw. The one he had had someone buy for me specifically. I watched as Gabriel slid his own boots off before pulling himself up onto the bed. Slowly, he placed a warm arm around me and I felt myself melt against him, my eyes growing heavy.

"Please sleep," he requested. "There is much more we can talk about in the morning."

"Because you are off work," I reaffirmed.

Brushing a soft kiss to my forehead, he smiled against the crown of my head. "Because I am off work."

And with that, I snuggled against him. "Good." I was asleep before the word even left my lips.

## [Community IF](#)

[Oct 10, 2022](#)

Hey guys,

This is to kind of see where the Baron tier is leaning for a community IF. I have come up with a few options and we can for sure nail it down more when I kind of figure what you guys want to see.

Story about Gabriel right after he has fallen (Hurt/Comfort Family)

Story about Baron of the Books (how Chryssi and Noctine got together)(Courtly Romance)

Neither. Back to the drawing board.

71 votes total

## [Announcing Paper Moon](#)

[Oct 11, 2022](#)



Announcing the new community IF, Paper Moon. Play as an MC in the Night Market, tasked to help the fallen celestial, Gabriel Caine. Discover how he fell from the Knowing, why he is here, and help him navigate his way towards living a life before succumbing to the pits of madness.

Paper Moon will be posted each week as a Patreon exclusive. You will then have one week to vote on the choice at the end of the snippet and help guide the MC in the direction you wish for them to go. This will be a community based IF, so your votes will count and will change the direction of the story.

For the month of October, the parts will be up for all tiers due to it being mid-month. Come November, it will be locked at the Baron tier, however. Posting will start this weekend.

## [Paper Moon Part 1](#)

[Oct 12, 2022](#)



The streets were dark. Wet with a black rain that scattered across it in obsidian gems. The sound of the ocean roared at my back along with the rattle of cages. Soft moans of the dying were a cacophony against the night sky as the forgotten breathed their final goodbyes. My leather boots were wet with dirt and grime, stained with a dark sludge I would have to spend the evening scrubbing out. Glancing down at the parchment in my hand, I frowned.

The letter had been pinned to my door this morning. An old nail, like the ones they used to repair the docks, held it in place. It had been vague and the handwriting barely legible, but there was a promise attached to the end. A promise of money. The promise of a better place to hole up instead of the small hovel that I was huddled within. My roof was thatched and leaking, and the rain had been nearly incessant these last few days. As if the heavens were crying.

Stepping over the small foot bridge, I glanced at the stone house ahead. A waterwheel slowly churned the meandering river that bordered the house, while smoke puffed from a broken chimney. Tugging my hood up and over my head, I chewed at my lip, feeling it split open once more. It was a habit I desperately needed to break.

The door was four rough-hewn planks, fitted together with flat bands of steel. I knocked, my fists coming down on it with three thick thuds. It barely made a sound. But I could hear the shuffling inside and when

the door swung open, I was faced with a tall, dark skinned man. His hair was pulled sharply away from his face, his sleeveless shirt tight over a well muscled chest.

"Are you the Graceling?" His voice was rough and shot through with whiskey.

"I am, sir." I dipped my head in respect, knowing full well I should not be entering into this unknown house, but my stomach was empty and had been for days.

"Come in." The man stepped aside, and my eyes skittered towards the confines of the stone cottage. It was dark within, a single kerosene candle the only illumination upon a driftwood table. Stepping inside, I clutched the parchment close to my chest, feeling my heart flutter in fear. When the door shut behind me, I jumped, turning rapidly to stare at the man with wide eyes. "You scared or something?" he asked.

"No, sir. Just... cautious."

He nodded, not arguing. Walking past me, he disappeared around a half wall into a living quarters. I looked around, not sure if I should follow. When he didn't appear again, I stepped lightly after him. The man stood in a living room. A place that was soft and cozy, strewn with pillows and throw blankets and a few scattered weapons. The man was hovering around a half closed door, soft blue light coming from the cracks in the wood.

"Name's Reese," he said. "Probably should have told you that from the get go. Been a little stressed."

Again, I nodded, my hands wringing together. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Reese."

"Yeah. Doubt that. You look skinny as a waif and I know you're only here because you're about two days from dying of starvation. Seen that look on others. You got that hunger in your eyes. You able to do what you do without food in your belly?"

"With due respect, sir, I'm not sure what it is you want me to do?"

A soft moan came from the bedroom, the sound wet and broken with pain. Someone else was speaking softly, hushing whoever was hurt. My eyes couldn't help but lock onto the door.

"It's my boy," Reese said. "He's hurt. You know anything about celestials?"

I snapped my eyes back to him. "I do. They are a species that belong in the cosmos. Guiding forces that help in mysterious ways, answering only to the Knowing."

"And what about fallen."

I bowed my head. "They are the ones cast from the Knowing for their sins. It is rare to find a fallen, however. Without the grace of the Knowing flowing through them, they struggle to manage in a world that is not their own. Most succumb to madness."

"Yeah," Reese said, voice tight. "So you're gonna stop that."

I nodded. "I will try my best. I- It's really going to depend on how far gone they truly are. Grace is important to celestials. Their own grace. Grace from another doesn't always take. Especially if the individual is not willing."

"He's willing."

I felt sadness rock my heart. A parent watching their child die. It was never easy to see. I hoped that I would be able to help whoever was on the other side, but the likelihood was, that sickness had already riddled their mind.

"I will do whatever I can," I told him. It was the only promise I could make.

When Reese opened the door, a dull light pulsed from within. A man sat on the bed, his white blond hair falling into his eyes, face coated in tears. He looked up at me as I stepped into the room, his lavender eyes glinting. He looked startled, his eyes flicking over towards Reese.

"You found one?"

Reese stepped forward, placing a hand on the man's shoulder. "They are a graceling. You don't have to do anything more, Elias. She is here to help."

Elias looked back towards the bed, reaching out with a shaking hand. A soft glow emanated from him, falling across the prone body upon the bed.

A man with dark skin laid upon silver sheets. His skin was beaded with sweat, his body lashed across with cracks across a stretch of paper fine skin. Face contorted with pain, he laid on the bed, whimpering, eyes screwed shut.

Quietly, I stepped in. Without a word, Elias and Reese moved from the bed and slowly, I lowered myself next to the man. Black hair stuck to his forehead in sweaty tendrils and the feathered wings I knew had once been attached to his back lay in a bloody mess in the corner.

"How long has he been like this?" I asked. I reached out, running my fingers across his face, gathering the stench of his skin across my gloved palms.

"A few weeks," Elias said. "He was okay after the fall. We thought he would survive. Then... his feathers started falling out, and he went downhill from there. I- I tried to help him. I did but..." Turning, he buried himself into Reese's chest. I could hear the guilt within his cries.

Turning back to the man, I sighed. He was far gone, the madness etched across his features in hollow veins. It was doubtful I would be able to do anything, but I had to at least try.

Pulling my gloves off, I let the light of the grace fill the room. It sang, a high-pitched bell echoing across the walls. With the tips of my fingers, I rested them across his brow, slowly drawing lines across his skin. He whimpered, head thrashing back and forth.



“Shh...” I tried to soothe. “Let me help.”

He twisted upon the bed, his face contorting into agony and his body shaking in barely contained pain. Pressing my palm to his cheek, I pushed against him, feeling the grace embedded in my skin leech forward. The cracks and lines of his body began to fill, a slow roll of mercury running down the fissures of his skin. His eyes snapped open, coal-black and filled with the void. Arching off the bed, he reached for me, trying to strike out. Reese was there instantly, holding him down.

“What’s his name?” I asked, trying to keep my hand steady.

“Gabriel.”

I tried to smile. “Gabriel. It’s okay. I’m here to help you. Just listen to the sound of my voice. Listen to my words. You are loved, Gabriel. You are well. Everything is going to be okay. We will take care of you.” I felt a tear slip from my eye, tracking silver down my cheek. The chime of bells became louder and louder, echoing through the room in a blast of piercing song. But the light, oh the light was filling him, mending each crack and crevice across his parched skin. He only needed to accept it. He only needed to believe that he deserved to be saved.

As his body began to settle, the light sinking into his skin, his lips parted in sweet relief. Slowly, I took my own hand away.

“He should sleep,” I whispered.

Reese, who was still holding him, stared at me with wide and terrified eyes. “Did it work?”

“It’s too soon to tell. Filling a celestial with grace is a long process. It does not just happen within the course of an evening.”

“Then do it again,” Reese said.

“Reese,” Elias said from the corner. “She is telling the truth. It’s not like that.” Reese looked upset but didn’t protest. From behind me, I felt the other man approach. “Please, you have done so much for us already. Come into the kitchen. Let me get you something to eat.”

My stomach growled in response. “Yes. Yes, I would appreciate that.”

Settling in the kitchen, I kept my eyes on the door. Gabriel. He was asleep now. The house itself felt more at peace. Reese sat at the kitchen table with me, while Elias began rummaging through the cabinets.

“So what is our next move?” Reese asked. “We’re willing to pay you whatever you need.”

**[[I will do this for free. The Knowing wills it]]**

**[[I will help you in trade for protection. Gracelings are not well liked in the Night Market]]**



**[[I will help you in trade for room and board]]**

**Go to the above poll to vote for your choice.**

[Dev Blog: 10/14/22](#)

[Oct 14, 2022](#)

By now I am sure you have all read Chapter Seven but if you haven't, it is up and ready to go. :) With this chapter came A LOT of corrections to previous chapters were bugs were not only fixed but spelling and grammar errors were as well. I have a list of insanely wonderful beta readers that I will beg never to leave me.

Also, a discord was launched. Everyone please feel free to have fun in there. Talk about the game. Get to know each other. Whatever you wish. I want to create a community.

Going forward:

Chapter eight is already underway. The cold write to it is done, and I am now implementing choices. My hope is to have it out the first week of November. With that, is also a character sheet and a Baron sheet that I am starting to implement. I am sure you've maybe noticed a bit of that in the sidebar. It's still in the works however. Hopefully though, this will give you a bit of insight into your personal MC.

On top of that, I will be starting a community IF called Paper Moons. It is unlocked to all tiers right now since it is being launched mid-month. However, come November 1st, it will be locked for Baron tier only.

I am also working on revamping and importing our OG Paper Lanterns tale into twine. This will offer new routes and new choices. I will be releasing this one as a full game for an undecided price. It's looking to be 150k words.

On a personal note, we are still on strike here. So to everyone that has been supporting me on Patreon, I cannot express my gratitude enough. We are keeping a roof over our heads with your pledges and also putting food on the table for the kids. I don't know how I can ever thank you all enough for your kindness and I hope to one day, share this amount of love in return. We have a lot of things in talks for the future of the Night Market and a lot of things in motion. I cannot ask for a better set of fans to share this experience with.

Love,

Zinnia

## [Hazel - Post Chapter Seven](#)

[Oct 16, 2022](#)

A/N: Post chapter seven, assuming you are in a Hazel romance, and you did not choose fade to black.

The water lapped around me, Hazel secure at my back. Rose petals and small sachets of herbal tea, floated in the claw foot tub, tinting the water a soft pink. Wash cloth in hand, Hazel brought it up, squeezing it out over my chest and watching as the water ran down in soft pink rivulets. The lighting in the bathroom was dim, and I was almost convinced we were in a tree of some sort. There was no ceiling to be seen. Only the leafy green of a dozen pathos plants, all trained to climb the wall and wind upwards to create a soft canopy of flora.

"It scares me to see your body this bruised," she whispered. Her chin rested on my shoulder and her legs were tight around my waist. "I should have gone with you."

I shook my head firmly. "The last place I want you to be is down in the Deep. I'm lucky I even made it out of there."

"Don't say that," she said fiercely. "I was ready to contact Gabriel and call in every favor I had to be able to come down and get you."

I tilted my head back to her. "You have a lot of favors with the Velvet Guard?"

"Well, no," she said with an angry huff. "But I— I wasn't going to let you just sit down there. I would have done something."

"Like hexing people?" She froze behind me. So Caliban was right. That was something she was capable of doing. "Your secret is safe," I told her quietly. "I mean, it does make sense. You've told me a bit about your mother. I think it would be a little more odd if you didn't know how to do things like that."

"I don't curse people," she said quickly. "The magic I've obtained really is something that I use for good. It's why the apothecary has become what it is. I don't sell curses to just anyone. If someone comes in to buy a hex, they have to tell me what they are using it for." I didn't point out to her that these people could have very easily lied. In fact, people using hexes were probably the exact sort of people who would lie about their intentions.

There was real fear in her voice. Magic was obviously something she had kept well hidden through the years. Either for fear of backlash or for fear of becoming her mother. That and it seemed like unless you

were a Baron, you were not supposed to have magic obtained through anything other than the amulets controlled by the Velvet Guard.

Frowning, I twisted in her hold. Her head was tilted down, and her brow was furrowed in worry. Cheeks still high in color from our earlier activities, she looked raw and vulnerable.

"Hey," I whispered. "I'm really not upset," I tried to assure her. She was running her fingers along my bruises from the Deep, paying special attention to the one I had at my side. I could feel warmth seep into my skin but assumed it was from the water. She had said this would be a healing bath.

"I've just been keeping so much from you," she told me. "You have to understand I never thought that you would be— that we would—" Tilting her head back she blinked up towards the ivy covered ceiling. Their vines tightened around each other, making sure to block out anyone who may be listening. Not that I had ever really seen anyone enter past her main gates. Other than a few familiar customers from time to time.

"Has this really upset you?" I asked.

She nodded her head and then shrugged, avoiding my eyes.

"Hazel," I told her gently. "Why would I be upset that you have the ability to curse people? Especially when all I've ever seen from you, is kindness. You go out of your way to make people happy. You took me in when you didn't even know me. You put up with Milo daily." That got a small smile out of her. "So you have the ability to do something not so savory. Most people do. And, to top it off, you show a strength that others do not." I ducked my head, locking eyes with her. "Restraint."

She sighed a little, sinking down into the tub and pulling me close. There had been red and angry scratches all along my right arm. Gravel and sand had been embedded in my skin when I had first walked into Renaissance Alley. Now, the wounds didn't even exist.

"Wow," I told her. "Hell of a bath."

"You know it's not the bath," she whispered.

Taking her hand in mine, I brought it to my lips. "I know."

The water never cooled. The tub was deep and held us both, soaking us up to our shoulders as we lounged within. I watched her hands as they sliced through the water gently. A soft green light emanated from her fingertips, filling the copper tub with magic that left my body tingling. I didn't say a word though. I didn't want to.

With Hazel, everything was a test of mental fortitude. It was an odd thing to think but so very true. So easily this life could have led to unhappiness. From what I had experienced alone, I knew I could tip over into the edge of despair. Run, be afraid, rage at the world if I got up enough courage. But when I was with Hazel, it didn't feel right. I wanted to be better around her. For her. I wanted to be someone

that could see the kindness in strangers like she could. Who wanted to help. I wanted to be someone that she was proud to hold hands with.

"Promise me something," I told her softly, both of us lazy with the heat of the water and the events of the day.

"I can certainly try."

"Promise me that if things ever get too much, you'll come to me."

She giggled a little against my shoulder, pressing soft kisses to the skin. "I will gladly promise that."

"I'm not sure what I can do that someone like you couldn't, but I would like to try."

Nuzzling against me, I felt as she coaxed my body to lean further back into her. I felt as if I were melting into the surrounding comfort. "I think that you are capable of a lot more than you realize yet."

"Why do you say that?"

"A hunch, really. I look at you and see such potential locked away. As if you have magic swirling just beneath your skin, itching to get out. But magic is finicky, and I don't think the right time has presented itself yet. But, I think when you truly need it, you will be capable of so much more."

"It'll be a surprise for everyone," I joked.

I could feel her smile and the soft breathy way she whispered in my ear. "Surprise is what makes life worth living. When you open yourself up for surprise, you open yourself up to an entirely new world of possibilities."

"Will you teach me?"

Holding me close, she rested her hand flat on my belly. The wound at my side finally closing. "I will teach you anything you want. Give you anything you want," she said softly. "You only have to ask."

[Paper Moon Part 2](#)

[Oct 19, 2022](#)



A/N Please note, this will be locked to Baron tier starting November 1st. Please be aware you will need to upgrade next month to continue participating in voting and the story.

I felt my stomach rumble as Elias began lighting the burners and cooking something that smelled out right heavenly. Placing a hand over my abdomen, I tried not to look too eager. I could feel the sharp jut of my ribs, however, and couldn't remember when the last time I ate was.

"I will help you," I told them, dragging my eyes back to Reese. "In trade for protection."

"Trade?" The darker skinned man leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms in front of his chest. "Why wouldn't you just ask for coin?"

I needed that too. But coin I could earn elsewhere. Protection, I could not. "I am not a fighter, my lord," I told him softly. "Even if I were to buy a weapon, it is doubtful I would be able to use it. And I have learned, since becoming a Graceling, that we are viewed as a commodity much more than we are viewed as an individual."

Two days after I had received my shard of grace, I had been pinned in an alley as traders tried to knock me unconscious and drag me to the butchers. They left my lip bloody and two of my fingers broken. But I had managed to get away by sheer luck alone. Since then, all I had was luck. A vantage that had worked so far but I didn't want to keep risking myself.

"You wear gloves," Reese said, nodding to the brown wool fingerless gloves on the table next to me. "How do they even see it?"

I glanced down at my hand. The grace shone in a dull pulse against my palm. It was a jagged shard, pressed into my flesh. The skin was slightly raised there, an opaque luminosity beneath my pale skin. I curled my fingers around it. "I am afraid I didn't know the rules of the Night Market well. Numerous people saw me before I could afford to buy gloves and even now, if I have to take them off for anything and someone sees, they are quick to report me for a bounty."

From the stove, Elias sighed. "Grace is a beautiful shard of peace and tranquility. But in the wrong hands, it can turn ugly so very quick." Turning, he set a plate of what looked like blue eggs and soft bread in front of me. "I apologize for how you have been treated, Graceling," he said sadly. "Especially if my kind is at fault."

"You're a fallen?" I asked in surprise.

He nodded. When Reese scooted his chair out, Elias plopped himself in his lap. I felt my heart soften as he wrapped an arm around the celestial. The two of them looked the antithesis of each other. One light, one dark. One soft and one hard. But there was a softness between them that was easily seen. A bond that spoke deeply of love and comfort.

"For quite some time now," Elias said. "I was using my own grace to help Gabriel but—"

"But that will not be happening anymore," Reese interrupted.

I looked between the two of them. Reese's jaw was set in a hard line and Elias looked... sad. "I just want our boy to be okay," he whispered. There was no response to it though. It was apparent that this was not the first time this had been discussed between them.

"Eat," Reese nodded to my plate. "It's not much but we'll spare what we can."

Elias perked up at that. "Yes. We should have more coin soon. Reese just got a new job down at the docks. We'll have an abundance of food to share."

"And I'll figure out a way to give you that protection," Reese said firmly. "Can't shadow you everywhere but maybe I can get you an amulet of some sort. You know any magic before coming to the Night Market?"

I shook my head. "No, my lord."

"Stop with this, my lord shit," he said. "It's Reese. This is Elias. We are on first names here."

I swallowed, pushing my food around with my fork. "I'm afraid I cannot give you my name," I told them.

While Reese clearly didn't understand, Elias nodded. "That is okay. You must know though that you are revered Graceling. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your devotion must have been so strong to receive such a gift from the Knowing."

I flexed my fingers but said nothing. With devotion often came sacrifice.

"Eat, kiddo," Reese said softly. "I don't know what all you did in there but it was a lot."

I didn't wait any further. I began shoveling in the food as quick as I could, feeling my stomach cramp in pain at the foreign concept of actually having sustenance again. Food that was not moldy or dug from the bins outside the Spice District. When I was done, Elias placed another plate in front of me, smiling encouragingly. He looked like he wished to reach out and hug me but seemed to think better of it and went back to Reese's side, snuggling in close.

When I was finished, I felt my eyes growing heavy. "I should return home," I told them. "But I can come back in the morning if that is alright. Begin another treatment."

"Why don't you stay here tonight," Elias said. "It is late and you have traveled far. And it will give Reese time to figure out how to offer you protection."

Reese grunted in approval as he stood. "I'll get the couch made up." It was clear neither of them were going to take no for an answer.

They ushered me into a cluttered living room where books and weapons and odd bits of paraphernalia were stacked and scattered. The sofa was clean though with such warm quilts draped across it. I think I was asleep before I even laid down. When I awoke in the middle of the night, the house was quiet, several thick blankets tucked under my chin. Something disturbed me though.

Blinking at my surroundings I tried to peer into the dark, remembering that I had just trusted two strangers with a fallen in their house. Perhaps that was a mistake on my end seeing as how their story could very well be a lie. The fallen could be here on false pretenses. He could be here to attract unsuspecting Graceling's like me. He could—

A crash sounded from the other room.

Gabriel.

Slowly, I rose, tip toeing to look through the crack in the door. The bed was empty, sheets tossed aside. With the flat of my hand, I pushed the door open a little further. The man was over by the vanity in the corner of the room, the muscles of his back bunched and tensed. He was bent, arms braced on the surface of the vanity, hair hanging in soft curls in front of his face. Low slung pants clung to his hips but his back and chest were bare. From where I stood, I could see the slit where his wings had been and the bloody and ragged scars that were now in their place.

I was just about to back out of the room when his head snapped up. Black, voidless eyes stared at me through the mirror.

I jumped, stumbling backwards. He turned around quickly, storming across the room and smashing open the door. He had me before I could even cry out, pinning me to the wall, his grip surprisingly strong as he pressed his body to my front. I blinked up at him, the hold he had on my wrists nearly burning.

"Who are you?" his voice was deep and raked over with gravel. I could feel the feverish heat of his skin as his chest was pressed to mine, my entire body pinned to the wall with the weight of his.

"I'm a Graceling," I said quickly. "Your fathers called upon me for help."

He tipped his head to the side, a feral wild call ringing in his eyes.

Swallowing thickly, I tried to wriggle out of his grip but felt him shift closer, his hips pressed tightly against my own.

"I'm here to help you," I whispered to him. "You're Gabriel. Your fathers are Reese and Elias. They have summoned me to help with the madness."

He looked conflicted, the skin around his eyes twitching as I knew he struggled to grasp onto my words. "You're the angel," he said.

"No. I know that can be confusing but no. I'm just a mortal."

"No," he said, grip loosening as he dipped his head to drop onto my shoulder. I could feel his lips move over the collar of my dress. "You made the pain go away. You made the sound of screaming stop." He released me then, his hands falling to his side, his head still pressed into the crook of my neck.

I swallowed thickly as I brought a trembling hand up to card through the back of his sweaty locks. "I tried to help," I told him. "And I'm going to continue to try and help." I shivered as I felt his lips curiously mouth across my bare skin. "Let's get you back to bed," I told him softly. "You are unwell. You need to rest."

"Rest," he whispered.

"Yes. Rest. Can you- can you walk?"

When he pulled away, he blinked at me muzzily, as if he wasn't aware why he was even here to begin with. "Yes?"

I tried to smile at him encouragingly, applying firm pressure to push him off of me. He went willingly then and with very little effort, I got him tucked back into bed, but his eyes were still wide and shocky. He was tracking my every move.

"Are you in pain?" I asked. It was far too soon for another treatment but I didn't feel as if I could just leave him laying here, staring into the dark. When he shook his head, I bit the swell of my lip, unsure what I was supposed to do. The man was now a motionless calm as his senses seemed to be somewhat returning. At least for the moment. But he was probably in need of rest, a bath, and a good meal.

**[[Get him something to eat]]**

**[[Help him bathe]]**

**[[Just sit and talk with him]]**

[Paper Moon Part 2 Choices](#)



[Oct 19, 2022](#)

Voting will close next Wednesday.

Get him something to eat

Help him bathe

Sit and talk with him until he falls asleep

64 votes total

[Milo - Post Chapter Seven](#)

[Oct 21, 2022](#)

A/N: Assuming you slept with Milo at the end of chapter seven.

I hissed in pain, arching up off the mattress as something cold and wet swiped across my belly. Eyes flashing open, I stared up at the piped ceiling of a rusted distillery.

"Sorry. Sorry." Milo's voice was soft and warm in the chilled night. A rag was clenched in his hands as he sat next to me, naked. I blinked the grit from my eyes, trying to gain my bearings, but feeling every muscle in me scream in protest. "We need to clean your wounds," he said, holding the rag between us as if to further his explanation.

I was a mess. This much I knew. The Deep had taken its toll and while I had managed for a time, the wounds that I had were more than I was used to and the aches that were settling across my body were screaming now that I had had time to rest.

Laying back down on the sheets, I nodded at him. Much more carefully this time, he began cleaning me up, trying to find which spots were dried blood and what was something he needed to grow concerned over.

"I want to say I'm impressed with you, given how beat up you are.. But I also think that might be a dickish thing to say given what you've gone through," he tried to joke.

"What do you mean?" My voice was raspy as I stared at him, shifting my head on the pillow. There was a dull ache at the base of my spine and I vaguely remembered slamming against a rock.

"You sure as hell know how to treat a man right," he said with a small chuckle. "And now I'm really hoping you didn't open any wounds in the process."

I looked down at myself. I was still naked, a flannel sheet covering most of me. Milo's bed had no sense of order to it. It was all mismatched blankets and quilts and bits of fabric that looked as if they had been mended through the years.

Hissing as he passed over a particularly sore portion of my ribs, I blinked up at the ceiling, trying to keep the wetness from my eyes. I wasn't sure if it was a reaction to the Deep itself, or just the pain.

"I'm sorry," his voice was shredded.

"It's okay. If anything, maybe I should be apologizing."

"You didn't hurt me," he confirmed.

I smiled at him, remembering the way he felt beneath my hands. "I meant for not listening to you about the Deep."

"Oh." He laughed a bit at that, scrubbing a hand across his face. I could tell he was tired and with only dirty windows set high against dusty walls, I had no idea what time it even was.

"Have you slept?" I asked gently.

He shook his head. "Can't."

"Why not?"

His eyes ticked to me, looking at me hesitantly. Grabbing a few bandages he began wrapping my waist. Broken or cracked ribs for sure then. "We need to get you to Hazel's," he said. "She's way better at this than I am. Plus she'll have tonics that will fix up whatever you have going on."

"Milo," I said softly. "Why can't you sleep?"

He was silent as he continued to tend to me, his fingers soft against my skin, running across me with this little sense of wonder I wasn't sure I understood. "I just get that way sometimes. Always have."

"Surprised you haven't asked Hazel for something."

"I used to," he said, taping up the edge of the bandage. "But it gave me weird dreams and I struggled the next day with being super groggy. Ended up just not being worth it. I know she probably could make something different or tweak the formula but..." he tipped his head upwards, blinking towards the rafters. "I don't know. I hate asking her for things, to be honest."

"Why?" Hazel was one of the most giving people I think I knew. It almost felt like an insult not to allow her to help.

"Because that's all anyone's ever done. From the time I can remember, everyone has always asked Hazel for things. Hazel make this. Hazel do that. Hazel do you have any food? Can you watch my pet? Could you fetch something from the market? Whip up a tonic?" He dropped the rest of the bandage off to the side, curling his legs under him and grabbing a pillow to hug to his chest. "I don't want to be one of those people. So I usually try to figure it out on my own."

"But she would probably like helping you. And you're not taking advantage of her," I pointed out.

"I know. Just not something I'm comfortable with. Besides, the insomnia passes. It always does."

Shifting experimentally, I tried to figure out what hurt and what was okay to do. I sat up a little but knew that I didn't want to risk much more. I was going to need to send Milo to the apothecary in the morning to get some healing herbs. Everything ached far too much to walk back tonight, however. Especially now that the adrenaline had worn off.

"How often do you have it?"

He shifted uncomfortably. "We really don't need to be having these kinds of discussions. It's not important. And you should be resting." Something had shifted with him. In the last twenty-four hours there was something more to Milo that I was not entirely used to. A sort of discomfort within his own skin. The kind that made him not want to talk. The usually open and brazen man was being tampered down and I couldn't decide if I was finally seeing the real Milo Next, or if there was something more at play.

"Milo," I reached out, tugging at his hands. He startled a bit at the contact. "Don't you think that after the last two times we've been left alone together, we could have a conversation about sleep?" I laughed. I tried to make light of it, knowing that he was not all together on board for vulnerability. Never mind that what we had just done had left him pretty vulnerable.

He huffed in laughter, his eyes looking tired in the dim candlelight coming from his bedside table. "Yeah. I guess seeing my ass does lay everything bare, huh." He tried to smile. Though I didn't believe it for a second. "I used to get nightmares. Terrible ones, actually. And I mean this is a long time ago. Like when I was a kid. But they got so bad that I just would avoid sleep. We're talking for days on end. The amount of times I woke up, passed out somewhere, is ridiculous, let me tell you. Woke up face down in a stream once, coughing and choking, had no idea where I even was."

He played with my fingers, keeping his eyes set on them. The rings adorning his own glinted softly back at me.

"Eventually, I was able to work through most of the stuff that triggered the dreams. Was able to realize that not sleeping was making the sleeping hours way worse. Got help. Bla bla bla. All very uninteresting and casts me in the light of a not so dashing hero," he smiled a little at me for that. "But, when I get under stress, it sometimes just comes back, you know?"

"You're stressed then?"

He shrugged. "I guess. I hadn't really examined it much but yeah, the signs are starting to get there. Something's bothering me, and what do I do when something's bothering me? Avoid sleep."

I stared at him. It made sense. The last few days he had been far more on edge. It all seemed like it was catching up to him now. I wondered if it had come to a head when Hazel and I had gone down to the Deep. Seeing me banged up probably didn't help.

Sighing, I tugged on his hand, wincing a little as it pulled on my wound. He scrambled forward at that, looking me over as if I were about to fall apart.

"I'm okay," I winced. "Just moved wrong."

"Stop moving then," he demanded incredulously.

"I'll get right on that," I mumbled. Keeping a hold of his hand, I maneuvered the two of us to lay down, side by side. His eyes were wide and frantic and I knew even if I asked him to, he wouldn't be able to fall asleep. Reaching out, I ran my fingers across the freckles upon his cheeks. The ones that led down his neck and across his shoulders. He shuddered under the touch. "Talk to me. Not about nightmares. Not about things that stress you. Just talk to me."

He blinked owlishly at me, the words not quite coming like I thought they easily would. But I could see it. The effort he was trying to make.

Settling, Milo caught my hand in his own, tapping at each knuckle, playing with the nail beds and running his fingers across the lines of my palm.

"Have I ever told you how buttons are made?" He asked. I shook my head. "It's a terribly interesting story. You wouldn't think it but it is. You see, you must travel down to the button mines and fight a series of fluffy creatures for their eyes..."

"Their eyes?"

"That's what buttons are. The eyes of the adorable."

"That's disturbing."

"Gonna make you think twice the next time you put those pretty clothes of yours on, huh?"

I let out a shaky laugh. It hurt and rattled my chest but thankfully, Milo didn't stop talking. I listened to his ridiculous lies about the button mines and the fluffy creatures that lived there. I listened to his tale of daring defeat as he, at age ten, took down an entire army and sewed buttons on the clothes of emperors. I listened to it all until I slipped away again. And just before I did, I felt his breath ghost across my cheek.

"Dream good dreams for the both of us, yeah?"

I smiled, nodding a bit, and curling close to him.

[Dev Blog 10/23/22](#)

[Oct 23, 2022](#)

Hey everyone!

I think I have a release date for the next chapter. It should be going up on November 2nd! So not that far away at all. There are a few more things my beta's are looking at, and I have to flesh out a few little scenes here and there, but it is pretty much done for now.

With the update comes a lot more spelling and grammar fixes through the entirety of the Night Market IF. I'm still tweaking your Character Sheet on the sidebar and your Baron sheet so it looks pretty pathetic for now but I am really hoping that it will eventually have a bit more substance to it. LOL!

Also, just a reminder. If you are reading Paper Moons (which I am loving by the way) it does lock at the Baron tier starting November 1st. The only reason I started it at all tiers to begin with was because I started writing it mid-month and I didn't want anyone hit with a double charge, and because I wanted to give you guys a few parts to see if it was something you liked.

And while we are on the subject of Paper Moons, I am currently revamping Paper Lanterns into twine to put out on itch.io as a full release game. Hopefully sometime around Christmas? We'll see how ambitious I get. LOL!

Hope everyone is doing well.

Zinnia

[Paper Moons Part 3](#)

[Oct 26, 2022](#)



A/N: Please remember this is the last Paper Moons of the month, posted at all tiers. Starting November, it will only be available at the Baron tier.

The room was dimly lit, the only window off to the far right covered in gauzy moonlit curtains. The sound of the small brook outside filtered in with a trickle, providing a soft background noise to the otherwise still night. Gabriel's eyes followed my every move, tracking each of my breaths as I continued to sit on the side of his bed, wringing my hands together.

"I- I could wake your fathers?" I wasn't sure if that's how he referred to them. There was still a small fear embedded like coal in my belly. One that said I was being played a fool this entire time and that this man before me was a prisoner. Just as I would surly become as well. "Reese and Elias?" I continued. "They- they introduced themselves as your fathers."

"Don't wake them," the man demanded. There was a sharpness to his tone that scared me. It must have shown on my face as I shifted away from him. "I'm sorry. I only meant they should get their rest." Settling back down onto the blankets, he blinked up at me, forcefully trying to relax his body. "They have not gotten sleep since I have fallen ill."

I nodded in understanding. A knot of trepidation cleared from my chest. At least the situation at hand was not one of dubious origin.

"Can I get you anything?" I asked. Rest was what he needed the most but I knew how active a mind could be when woken in the middle of the night. "Something to eat perhaps?" He looked far too skinny. While my experience with a man, or with anyone really, was limited to a darkened tussle in the hay bales back home, I knew that his body could not last in such a state. His ribs poked out from the dark shadows playing across his skin and his face looked sunken.

"Water would be good."

I nodded, now set with a task. "I'll be right back."

Entering the kitchen, the house was quiet. Though, it was not eerily so. This was obviously a home. One that was full of compassion and kindness. I could see the light of the moon shining through the window over the sink, its silvery glow much brighter tonight. Grabbing a glass, I poured a cup of water from the stone pitcher off to the side. It was still cool, bathing in the moonlight to absorb whatever good

properties the market wished to send our way. A loaf of thick, crusted bread, still lay on the butcher block. I had eaten it earlier with some cheese and had practically devoured half of it.

Cutting a few slices, I made a plate of easy foods, hoping that Reese and Elias would be okay with me rummaging through their kitchen. Though, they had said, anything for their son. The sentiment left me rather warm. The ache of family was still present and I had to push it away on nights like tonight.

Gabriel had managed to prop himself up on the pillows when I returned. I set the plate beside him on the bed and helped him with his water, tipping it towards his chapped and greying lips. He stared at me over the rim, fingers coming up to curl over my wrist. Beneath my skin, my pulse fluttered.

"Who are you?" he asked, as I pulled the cup away.

"You may call me Graceling," I told him gently. "I have no name other than that."

"Are you a child of the Knowing?" he asked curiously.

"I am."

"Then why would you wish to help the likes of me?" Such bitterness laced his words. Ones that tinged each syllable with the disappointment of his actions.

"It is not my job to pass judgement," I told him gently, setting the cup aside. Picking up the plate, I positioned it beside his hand, a soft encouragement for him to eat. "It is only my job to see you well again."

Head lolling to the side, his eyes cast towards the gauze covered window. They were flat and dull and looked sunken within the lines of his face. "Just let me die."

I startled at the proclamation. "You cannot truly wish for that." His fathers had asked for his salvation. Not for his demise. I was not here to ferry him to death's door.

"You do not know what I truly wish for," he snapped.

I scooted away, my head cast downwards. I had always heard of the Fallen. How they were cast from the Knowing without a second chance. Their crimes so heinous that the cosmos could not contain their sins any longer. But I had to believe that Gracelings, people such as I, were made to help. For only our kind could help a Fallen. The Knowing would not create us if they did not care for their lost brethren any further.

"Gabriel," I said softly. His eyes ticked back to me, following the sound of my voice. "Whatever you have done to get you in this position, whatever actions have led you here, you must understand that those same actions have led me to this door on this night. I am here for you."

He stared at me then. A dark look had befallen his face, shimmering across his eyes. There was no telling if he actually believed me. Perhaps the madness had already taken him and I was only prolonging the inevitable pain. But I had to try. And I needed him to know that I was going to try. That the love that was surrounding him in this household was what would save him.

"You do not even know me," he said.

I smiled softly. "I do not. But I have spent time with your fathers and they care for you deeply. I do not need to know you to know that you have a good heart." Gently, I reached out, placing it across his chest. His skin was cracked and frigid, the grace having been sucked from his skin for some time now. But I did not flinch at the feel. Only kept contact with his black eyes. "You must trust me. As a Graceling I can feel these things. And you, Gabriel," I said, dipping my head low. "Are bound to do so much good. I will not let you fall any further."

Slowly, his hand came up to press lightly against mine, testing. Afraid that I was only going to pull it away at the first sign of trust. I opened myself to him though, letting a small bit of light warm his skin and fill the cracks across his heart. The sound of bells chimed gently around us as the grace trickled into the room. The relief on his face was almost instant and I suddenly knew why Gracelings continued to devote themselves so thoroughly. The peace that came with healing others was nearly addicting.

Behind us, the window shattered, sending me jumping from the bed with a gasp. Something sickly and calloused slithered through the window, falling to the floor in a puddle before rising up in a mass of cobbled together flesh with jagged glass teeth. My heart pounded in my chest. I had seen the creatures before. Had heard them dragging the helpless from their beds. I had hidden beneath bags of discarded waste many a night, until they had passed.

It looked right at me, a cackle falling like spit from its bloodless lips. "Lord Taliesin would like to see you now," it croaked.

I felt the tears prick my eyes. The goblin was not here for Gabriel. For the fallen that was at death's door. It was here to collect a Graceling. I had stupidly used my power twice tonight and had created a beacon for anyone who was searching. And now, the thing was through our window with a jagged looking knife and broken bottle. I knew if I did not go with him, we would both be gutted.

As I stepped forward, ready to give myself to the goblin, an arm pressed in front of me. With wide eyes, I turned, seeing Gabriel shakily standing from the bed. The grace I had given him glowed faintly in his eyes, rimming his black orbs with silver thread. He pressed his hand flat to my belly, pushing me back behind him as he stared the creature down.

"You will not touch her," he said.

The goblin sneered at him, eyes dancing with delight. "You think you can stop me?"

"I think that I have nothing to lose so I should at least try." From his hand, a blade of light appeared. Gabriel pointed it towards the creature, a silver glow filling the room. "Would you like to choose how you



die?"

**[[Give him more grace so he can fight the creature]]**

**[[Don't let him do this and go with the creature]]**

**[[Yell out for Reese and Elias]]**

### [Paper Moons choices Part 3](#)

[Oct 26, 2022](#)

Here are your choices for Part 3! Please remember that these are the last for the month of October and starting November, this story will go up to the Baron tier only. I just did not want members to get double charged in the month of October.

Give him more grace so he can fight the creature

Go with the creature to save Gabriel

Call out for Reese and Elias

45 votes total

### [Belladonna - Post Chapter Seven](#)

[Oct 28, 2022](#)

A/N: After the garden scene in Belladonna's route. Though, this one is nor romance related and I would say has far more plot detail in it than any of the others.

It was far colder than what should have been appropriate for the time of year. Not that the Night Market had seasons, per se, but it did have subtle shifts based on which district you were in. The gemstone district, for example, loved the crisp and cold weather. It created a shine to the crystals that was unlike anywhere else in the market. This was of course a secret but if you were observant enough, you noticed

they purposefully kept their district the biting, empty cold of a cave. With the weather having changed so suddenly, the goblins were positively giddy with the monetary prospects it would bring.

Belladonna stepped out onto the frost laden streets, her shoes clicking against the frozen expanse before her. Heels cracked the thin layer of ice beneath her feet as she walked down the glittering paths towards one of her more preferred jewelers. Goblins peeked out from behind shoddy market stalls while others spun down from the rickety rafters they had built into the sides of the alley.

"Gems today, m'lady?" One of them called. They pulled a sapphire from their gums, wiping the blood upon their tunic. Pity, really. Belladonna thought the blood made it quite a bit more fetching. She ignored them as she continued to walk, only glancing down at their grey and sullen faces. Enough to show them that she had seen them, but also a clear indication that she just didn't care.

Stepping around a corner, Belladonna made her way under the arches of liquid gold, the likes of which disappeared beneath the streets and certainly down into the mines. Through the small grove of ruby trees and emerald weaves of grass, and up onto the only stone set of steps around. When Pim had started their store, they couldn't afford the pretty glass or the cuts of precious stone like the rest of the shop owners. Instead, they had to make due with what was considered dirty and uncouth. But Pim kept the slate nice and despite now having more money than they knew what to do with, still kept the stone steps as a reminder of where they had come from.

Upon hearing this story Belladonna may have smashed quite a few of the 'prettier' steps around the district, just on principal. Beauty and functionality did not go hand in hand. It was perhaps a life lesson deserving of a bit more attention within the gem district.

The door chimed as she stepped inside the shop. Behind the counter, a hunched form tipped their head upwards, one bronze colored eye magnified by the spy glass they held to their face.

"Belladonna Malady," the goblin grinned. Their teeth were a fine set of fire opals today. It gave their skin a less sickly appearance. "It isn't often you come down to the slums anymore."

Belladonna smiled. "Not the slums, Pimello. I have been to the goblin realm and they are far less appealing than here. The gem district just is a bit hard on the nose." Rotted peaches. It was a scent that went hand in hand with the goblins. To the unrefined nose, it probably smelled like a peach grove. To Belladonna, it smelled like death. The kind she most certainly did not enjoy.

Pim laughed loudly. "Most would disagree with you."

"Most do not know what class is." Leaning across the counter, Belladonna ran one crimson nail across the glass display case. "I am looking for something special today. I didn't wish to send one of my guard to do my bidding."

"Ah, and what would that special something be today, Miss?"

"I was thinking a necklace of sorts. A choker, really."

Pim's hairy brows rose beneath a crinkled forehead. "How tight would you like this choker to be? Fairly so I'd say given that you are here on your own." It was questions like this that made Belladonna truly love Pim. They always knew just what Belladonna needed.

Nails tapping upon the glass, Belladonna looked at the gems beneath. Such pretty displays, each one unique from the other. Of course Belladonna wanted to get something special, but she didn't want to steal from the world a gem far finer than what the receiver deserved. Eyes skittering across each option, she finally settled on a ruby. Blood-red and gleaming.

"That one," she told Pim.

"A classic today then." Opening the case, Pim reached in with hands far cleaner than most goblins and pulled it out. They held it up so it glinted in the light. "Would you like proof?" Belladonna nodded her consent as Pim opened their mouth as wide as possible and bit down on the gem. Their glass teeth shattered into tiny nubs.

"Lovely," Belladonna breathed. "If you could set it in a lace choker, that would be darling."

"Of course. Of course. Shall only take a moment." Pim was one of the fastest jewelers in the market, their hands were said to be enchanted. Rumor had it, they had once worked for Lord Taliesin himself before the Baron had an unfortunate run in with the Wild Hunt. Pim had managed to sneak away from the raging storm that had descended upon the Baron's estate. Many others had not.

"Do you finally have someone special in your life, m'lady? I am not used to seeing you take such personal interest in anyone outside a job."

"How do you know this isn't a job?"

"You got an air about you. Something a bit darker today. If you are on a job, I pity the client."

Belladonna smiled appropriately, browsing Pim's other wares while she waited. "You are observant, dear Pim. But not entirely right. I, in fact, am on a job. Though it is a bit different from my normal. The necklace in question is for an old friend. In hopes of mending some bridges to broker a new business venture."

"You getting out of being a Lady of the Night Market?" Pim looked surprised.

"I will always be the Lady of the Night Market," Belladonna admonished. "But after a very unpleasant Lantern Festival where yet another one of my clients thought they could throw their weight around, I do think it may be time to move on to bigger and better things. Though, I may still keep some of my more favored clients. I do not wish to get bored."

"Well," Pim said, setting the freshly woven choker inside a black velvet box. "I do wish you the best with that. This one is a beauty." The ruby sat in an inlay of woven onyx while the band itself was silk lace. It

clasped in the back with a smaller ruby while teardrop crystals dangled from the chain in a singular line. It was a stunning piece.

“Pimello, as always, you out do yourself each and every time.”

“I’m hoping one day you come down here for a special someone,” they said. “I really am sick of making these death chokers for you.”

Belladonna took the box, shutting it gently. “That day may be soon. I simply have to take care of a few loose ends first. Bill me as usual, please. Don’t undercut your prices this time. Charge what you know you are deserving of. And a little extra so you can keep those steps in good condition.”

“Will do, Ms. Malady.”

As Belladonna stepped out on the frozen streets, she looked at the box in question. Soon. She just needed to wait a bit longer and this would finally all be over.

[Dev Blog 10/31/22](#)

[Oct 31, 2022](#)

Happy Halloween if you celebrate!

Not much new going on over on this end. My husband starts back to work this week after a seven week hiatus so we are in a mini adjustment in the household. However, I am going to be starting chapter nine today.

Chapter eight will be out for early release this Wednesday! With it, does come a warning of body modification and body horror, so please just keep that in mind. Also, if you are on the Hazel route, please go back to chapter seven upon release and replay the end where you lock her route. There was a coding bug and your scenes will not trigger otherwise.

I am rewriting Paper Lanterns for a hopeful early 2023 sale. It will be split into five days and I have just gotten day one done. There is also another project in the very early early stages that I can't talk about yet but am very excited about.

I hope everyone has a great day and I will be getting some more content to you soon.

Love,

Zinnia

## [Paper Moons Delay](#)

[Nov 2, 2022](#)

Due to my husband's new work schedule, my work schedule has had to change around. I'm going to set Paper Moons to every Friday now instead of Wednesday. Sorry about the inconvenience. It will just be much easier to write more towards the weekend when I have extra hands for the kiddos.

Zinnia

## [Paper Moons Part 4](#)

[Nov 4, 2022](#)

"Wait!" My heart thudded in my chest as I stepped around Gabriel. There was a wildness to the goblins eyes. A sense of amusement at our predicament that I knew was only a mask for sinister intentions. "Just wait," I said, placing my hand on Gabriel's arm. It shook with the effort to keep the blade leveled at the intruder. "I will go with you."

Gabriel's arm faltered as he turned to look at me. While the blade still hovering in the air, he blinked at me, confusion clearly filtering through the muzziness of his mind. He really shouldn't have been out of bed. Not so soon and not with how sick he had been.

"Interesting," the goblin said. "You would freely sacrifice yourself when this man so clearly wishes to sacrifice himself for you?"

Turning back to the goblin, I raised my chin. "It is my job as a Graceling to protect the children of the Knowing."

"He is fallen," the goblin pointed out.

"Yet he is no less deserving of care." Stepping forward, I placed myself between the goblin and the blade. "You may take me. If this is to be my last act as a Graceling, then so be it."

The goblin cackled loudly, not waiting for another opportunity before it lunged forward. I closed my eyes, bracing myself for the rough embrace and when its glass nails scraped across my skin in razor edged lines, I felt myself cry out. Because even though I expected it, it still hurt and I was still terrified. But this was what was required of a Graceling. The Knowing had deemed me worthy and I did not want to disappoint.

My body was lurched forward, and I could smell the rotting scent of peaches upon the goblin's breath as it laughed in my ear. "If I had known it would be this easy to catch a Graceling I would have volunteered to get one of you years ago."

Opening my eyes, I looked towards Gabriel, trying to tell him how very sorry I was. This was the last thing he needed to see and I could only hope that the grace I had given him was enough to ease his pain. At least for a while. He had collapsed backwards against the night stand, holding his blade limply at his side while his other hand pressed against his chest. I could see his dark skin turning grey and cracked once more. Even this was exerting far too much energy.

"It's okay," I tried to assure him. I wanted to say something more, something to ease the guilt that I was sure would come with a child of the Knowing, but the goblin was already dragging me through the open window. And really, what was I supposed to say to this man I had just met?

Out in the dew misted fields, I stumbled to keep up, the goblin dragging me with a bruising grip around my wrist. The cottage was shrinking on the horizon as I was taken from the small house, trying to keep our movements as quiet as possible. I wanted no trouble. With any luck, this little family would be able to find another Graceling within the Market. But when I fell, my feet stumbling on an odd rock, I cried out. The goblin sunk its claws into the locks of my hair, twisting gnarled hands into the unwashed strands and pulling me across the wet field. I clawed at their skin in hopes of making them release me or at the very least loosen their hold. Sticky wetness was gathering at my temple and I knew that chunks of hair were being torn from my scalp.

"Lord Taliesin will be most pleased," the goblin said. "He doesn't have a Graceling in his collection." They yanked hard and black dots began swarming my vision. "I'm sure he'll put you up all pretty on his pedestals first. He does like looking at his wares. You'll do so nicely. That pretty silver glow of your hand will amuse him for years to come."

My foot slipped in the mud beneath me as I tried to gain purchase, giving some relief to the grip they had on me as they continued to drag me across the field. I could feel my breath stuttering in my chest and tears streaking my cheeks as small whimpers escaped me. I wasn't even going to die. I didn't know if that was something I should be relieved of or fear more than anything.

When the pressure released from my scalp I fell flat on my back. Above me, the goblin screamed. Blinking, I tipped my gaze upwards, seeing the creature holding his now bloody stump of a hand. Frantically I searched my surroundings, wondering if the Knowing had seen fit to save me once more.

A bright light appeared though, bolting across the field and slashing across the goblins face. Looking up, I watched as Gabriel tore from the cottage, his skin shifting in the moonlight as he held out his hand, a

pulse of silver light emitting from him. His eyes were lit pewter, his steps even and sure, and I knew with a sinking feeling in my gut that this was going to be far too much for him.

When another bolt shot out, it tore the goblin in two, bisecting it in slow motion as it fell to the grass, its eyes wide and staring up at the sky above.

Scrambling away, I stared at the now dead creature. Blood clouded my vision and the pain that bloomed against my scalp left me dizzy. But as I turned to where Gabriel was, I watched him standing there, the light of the Knowing vibrating across him as he stared, unseeing, at where the goblin had been.

Then, as if a candle had been snuffed out, the light disappeared, and slowly, he fell to his knees.

Scrambling forward I maneuvered him, so his head laid in my lap. The cracks in his skin were worse than before, ripping across him in a web of fissures. The color drained from his lips and his eyes turned pale and milky as he began to crumble in my hands. Dying breathes rattled in his chest.

“Why did you do that?” I asked him frantically. He was going into shock. I could feel it in the rigidity of his body. In the way he felt brittle in my hands.

“Because it was the right thing to do,” he croaked back.

“I can’t heal you, though. I can’t...” The door to the cottage banged open and immediately I began to yell. “We’re here! We’re over here!”

Elias was the first to our side, dropping to his knees and staring at the man in my lap. Skin began to peel away like beautiful fractals of light, dissipating on the wind. I looked at Elias, the raw pain crashing against his eyes as he tried to gather the pieces to him and press them back to Gabriel’s dying form. When Reese appeared behind him, he was nothing more than a shadow looming over the three of us.

“Heal him,” he told me.

“I don’t have enough grace for that,” I told him quickly. Tears tracked down my cheeks. How could I have failed so quickly? “I used it already. I—”

Elias leaned forward, his eyes glowing in a flickering silver.

“Elias!” Reese snapped. “No!”

“It’s not her responsibility,” Elias whispered, brushing twisted locks of hair from Gabriel’s face. “He’s our boy. I’ll save him.”

**[[Stop Elias and try to give Gabriel as much grace as you can]]**

**[[Combine your grace with Elias to hopefully heal Gabriel]]**

**[[Let Elias heal him with his own grace]]**





[Gabriel Caine Full Body Art](#)



[Nov 4, 2022](#)

Done by mooreaux. The wonderful Gabriel Caine in his Night Market uniform.

[Dev Blog 11/8/22](#)

[Nov 8, 2022](#)

Last night I pretty much finished all of Chapter nine. I still have to go in and put in variations for different RO's, but this chapter was one I had been excited to write from the beginning and may be one of the only chapters I have ever had planned out. Due to this, it was completed in two marathon work days. I no longer know if I've just hit the jackpot stride of creativity with these chapters, or I have learned to compartmentalize so well that I'm able to write despite everything else going on in life.

That being said, this chapter is going to have a significant impact on the world and how you will be treated in Book 2. Choose your decision wisely. :) Also, if you are romancing either Milo or Gabriel, I think both their end scenes here are very, very significant to their character arc and who they become. The girls are going to have a moment like that come the end of chapter ten.

This one is a pretty short update. I'm mentally and emotionally tapped today but I did want you guys to know that the chapter went smoothly. It will probably not be up until December just because I like to get the monthly thing going but that will give me time to tweak if I want and get more work done on Paper Lanterns.

[Milo - Post Chapter Eight](#)

[Nov 9, 2022](#)

**A/N Post chapter eight and right before we head into chapter nine. This can be a story for a romantic route with Milo or a platonic one.**

The lights flickered on above sending the spectral crabs scattering. The chandelier was made of crustacean bone and tapered flickering candles, the likes of which had glass bulbs instead of wicks. Milo looked up, nodding as the crabs ran away and the little seahorse he had seen bobbing off to the

side, hid beneath an old barnacle encrusted hutch. He had rather liked the little sea friends. The Deep was a terrible place, but the salon didn't seem that bad.

Sitting in one of the old velvet lined chairs, Milo spun a bit. The gold framed mirror to his side caught his reflection, cutting it through with bits of scattered wax. He could see a few broken candles shoved off to one corner and wondered if it was standard practice to cut beast's hair by an open flame. In hindsight, his calm was misplaced. Or, at least, it was misplaced in what he was trying to present. So when the shriek echoed through the air and he in turn let out a startled wince, he really had no one to blame for himself.

Placing his hands in front of him, palms turned upwards, Milo looked at the woman standing not too far away. She had sea foam green hair that looked as thick as yarn and wore a puffy white sleeve top with embroidered flowers that Milo knew Hazel would love. Her hand was clutched to her chest as she stared at Milo with shocked eyes and the clear indication that she was ready to run.

"I'm not here to hurt you," Milo said quickly. "I probably should have waited for you to open and came in through the front door like everyone else but I'm not great at thinking my actions through."

She stared at him, slowly letting her hand fall to her side. He could see she clutched a pair of sheering scissors in her other hand.

"Also, the seahorse was hungry," Milo said. "I fed it."

She tilted her head to the side. "What did you feed it?"

"Jerky. I had some in my pocket for the selkies."

She looked towards the hutch where she knew the little creature hid. "Thank you. I haven't been able to figure out the poor things preferences yet." Setting the scissors aside, clearly understanding that she wasn't in immediate danger, she stared at him. "You're Milo, aren't you."

"It's not my birth name but it's what I go by," he smiled. "Hazel tell you I'd probably skulk on down here?" The woman nodded. "Yeah. I figured. She knows me pretty well. It is nice to meet you, Anemone. I've heard good things about you. And not just from Hazel. But I am going to have to chide you a bit for taking advantage of my friends."

"Taking advantage?" she asked.

"Yeah. With the entire ghost thing. You weren't really possessed and I'm gonna need you to admit to that so this charade can just up and stop."

"Well," she said slowly, putting down the rest of her things. "I wasn't possessed. You're right." Milo smiled, self-satisfied. "But that doesn't mean that your friend didn't show up."

"That doesn't—"

"Do you know anything about possession?" Anemone's voice was soft but it held a command that made Milo's spine straighten. Damn strong-willed women and their way to his very heart. "Possession, at least down here, is when something takes hold of your body. Normally, without consent. Your friend did not. He used the image of me through the mirror with my invitation. I was a tool along with that receptacle," she nodded towards the wax mirror, "but I was not possessed."

"Fine," Milo said tightly. "You weren't possessed. But it was still a lie."

Anemone looked confused at the anger and certainty crossing the other man's face. Normally, people rejoiced at hearing news about their loved ones. But Milo looked as if he was going to be sick. "Do you not believe in an afterlife?"

"Not if I can help it."

"But surely you know of the spirits in the Night Market."

"I do. They're not the same thing. Spirits wander because they are connected to this world. But when you aren't connected or you've made your peace, you move on to oblivion."

"Oh," Anemone breathed. "What a sad thought." Milo didn't know what he was expecting her to say but it wasn't that. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "You don't think his sister and his friends were worth him clinging to this life?"

"He was one of the most zen fuckers I've ever known. It was annoying. So I think he was able to let go of this mortal coil and move on before death even belched in his direction."

"So you would rather this Malcolm cease to exist?"

"Than share a realm with his dead mother? Yes. Yes I would." Then, as an afterthought and almost under his breath, "Mal would have fucking hated that."

When Anemone appeared before him, he startled. Gently, she pushed him back down into his chair and Milo really didn't know when he had even begun standing. When she handed him a mug of tea he was almost certain that this woman had the same type of homey witchcraft powers that Hazel had. Which meant she could probably kill him with a scone and an understanding smile.

"May I ask you something?" she said gently, after settling him down with a warm mug and a snack. Milo was almost certain she was going to bring out a blanket next. "Is the denial of him being alive for a specific reason or is it really because you don't believe in a realm beyond ours?"

"I don't believe in a realm beyond ares," Milo said quickly. "Bullshit Knowing rhetoric or what have you, is all comfort and nothing more. Maybe, just maybe, there are some beings that can make it through. That do go elsewhere because it's their culture or some weird shit like that. But Malcolm Albright was born here. He was born to a horrid woman and a nameless man and for all his life, was considered a fluke. Wrong somehow. He was ridiculed his entire childhood. He was disowned in his teen years. The shit

was beaten out of him time and time again before he learned how to fight back. And no afterlife or god within it, ever helped him. So, no, I don't believe there is a place for you when you die. And if there is? I don't really want a part of this magical utopia that didn't lift a fucking finger during life."

A tear slipped down Anemone's cheek. She looked at Milo with such sorrow, her heart aching. When she reached out to take his hand, holding out a tissue, Milo realized that his own lips tasted salty.

"I didn't lie to your friends," Anemone said softly. "If I could, I would call your Malcolm forward and prove it to you. But whatever happened the other day dislodged something. I think what was keeping him back finally broke loose. He is on the other side. Connected with what I suspect was a forgotten spirit that had been wandering. He is up there now, Milo. He did not walk into oblivion."

"And if I don't believe you?" Milo asked.

"Then don't believe me," she said gently. "But don't alienate the people who do." Standing, Anemone patted his hand. "I'm going to make dinner. I would very much like you to stay. I think you could use a good friend right now that knows nothing of your life." She didn't give him a chance to say no as she walked away. Only a moment to gather himself.

Leaning forward, head in hands, Milo let out a deep breath. The little seahorse from earlier came out, nudging his side. Without thinking, Milo reached into his pocket for more jerky, flicking it towards the dead animal. The Night Market was an oddity. It was a being onto itself that never should have existed and Milo felt like the second he stepped into their world, his life had spiraled out of control.

But he supposed it wouldn't be long now. Everything was slowly going to fall into place like a twisted little puzzle. Perhaps, instead of fighting, it was better to acknowledge that and spend the last free moments beneath a stitched sky with the people he cared for. Which equated to three individuals only. Hazel. Ever. And the one shining soul he owed so much more to in this lie and the next.

Sighing, Milo pushed himself out of his chair. Maybe he would take Anemone up on her offer of dinner. Then? Then he was going to drink himself into oblivion.

[Paper Moons Part 5](#)

[Nov 11, 2022](#)

Reaching out, I placed my hand gently on Elias's wrist. I could see the tears in his eyes but most of all, I could see the determination. "We could try combining our grace? I- I am unsure if that's even something

we're capable of but if we can do that then maybe it'll be enough to heal him. Just until I get my full power back."

"Do it," Reese said, interrupting Elias. When Elias looked up at him, he shook his head. "I'm not negotiating this."

I could see the pinched look upon Elias's face but I didn't think he was ever really one to argue. Instead, he gave a nod of his head, turning his body towards mine and reaching out to take the hand that held the shard of grace. I could feel something tingle against me as Elias's own hand lit up, a soft glow pulsing through his wrist and down to our joined fingers. I hissed as it pierced through my palm, pulling at the celestial power that sat just below the surface. I had used the grace a few times at this point, performing minor healing and little miracles. Gabriel was my first Fallen that I was able to help. Faced with Elias, it was clear now that I had no idea what I was even capable of doing.

The field around us lit silver. The grace tinged with soft waves of comfort bloomed from our joined hands, wafting out over the empty meadow and towards the waterwheel of the cottage. It rose up the paddles before falling again into each proceeding bucket. Above us, the sky burst forth with a vast and endless array of stars.

My breath caught in my throat as I looked down at the prone man in my lap. I had almost forgotten that he was there. His skin began to heat, the cracks in his skin filling in with the combined light as his chest rose in one aching crack and his body arched off of me to suspend itself in midair. Elias's grip tightened on me, not letting me go as he focused on his son, eyes burning a bright blue silver, sweat dripping down his face and forming their own cracked lines as he took Gabriel's away.

When Gabriel floated back down to the ground, nothing more than a feather, the light dissipated. Elias slumped forward, finally releasing my hand while Reese grabbed him and cradled his close. And in my lap, Gabriel was whole. His eyes softly shut in peace.

~~~~~

Reese shut the door to his bedroom where Elias rested peacefully. In the other room, Gabriel was also asleep, the window the goblin had come through, boarded up.

"How you doin', kiddo?"

I looked up from where I sat on their couch, my hands having been twisting together in discomfort. "I'm fine." My palm did not glow. The faint trace of grace that was normally there was flat and dull, the skin there looking puckered and burnt. "How are they?"

Reese looked entirely like a man that wasn't sure how he was supposed to answer such a question. Fine, was the typical response, but we would both have known he was lying. "Elias can't give any more of his grace," he said. "He's given too much already and he is dangerously close to tipping to madness."

I nodded. Each Fallen had a threshold and the fact that Elias was even here at all was more of a nod to his strength than anything else. "How long have you two been together?"

"About a decade," he said. "Maybe more. I don't know. My world was destroyed and I was cast out into the endless sea. Elias literally fell from the sky and wrecked the side of my raft. We were out there for some time."

"He's been a Fallen for ten years?" I knew that the surprise was written in stark lines across my face but honestly, I was more amazed than anything else. "Fallen rarely last a year alone."

"They just don't have the right help," Reese said. "Not their fault that people are fuckin' idiots and put an expiration date on them."

I bowed my head. "I didn't mean any offense by it."

"Did I say you offended me?" The table in front of me squeaked as he sat down on it. I could hear a few bottles clinking together and a cork pop. "You drink?" I shook my head. "You're one of those sweet souls, aren't you."

I frowned, not really sure what he meant. "I try to be kind to all..."

Reese nodded. "And you do it because you like it. Not a lot of people are just nice because it's in their nature. Most people are just nice because they want something from you. You're refreshing, Graceling."

"Thank you?"

He laughed. "Point and case." Taking a long pull from the bottle in hand, bourbon if I wasn't mistaken, he didn't even grimace. "Alright, so you obviously are something that people are looking for. You were hella hard to find but now I'm kind of thinkin' the goblins got your number. So, I'm gonna take care of that."

"How are you going to take care of that?" I asked. I couldn't have him with me all the time.

"You like cats?"

"I- yes? They're cute."

"Well, you ever get into any trouble, you just tell the cats. They'll come get me."

"You have cat agents?"

He grinned around the lip of his bottle. "Don't fuckin' tell anyone." Standing, he moved to the kitchen. "I'm going to make food. You can decide if you want to stay here a bit. I only have the couch to offer you but I figure it's better than going out there and dealing with whatever we just dealt with. Also, I've done some investigating and your place is a shithole. You know that right? Like, it's a fucking dump."

It was a hole in the wall blocked together by a few stray pieces of moldy plywood. I was well aware.

"I really do not want to impose..." I said softly.

The door to the right opened and Gabriel, looking far more put together than he had before, stepped out. "If Reese is offering you kindness, I would suggest taking it. I hear it only happens once a year," the man said.

Reese snorted in laughter. "Twice. And you should be in fuckin' bed."

"I've been in bed for days and I feel better. I would prefer to sit out here and get to know the individual who saved me."

"Oh," I said, pitching my gaze down. "Elias did most of the work. I just lent him the power."

"Gabe, put a shirt on. You're making her blush. She's a sweet girl and you are a wall of muscle. It's scarring her."

Gabriel frowned. "Are humans scarred by the skeletal system?" A shirt hit him in the face.

"What did I tell you about taking everything literally? Fuck. I hate that about you celestials. No sense of humor and when you do get one it ends up being twisted." Reese went into the kitchen then, muttering to himself about comedy and leaving Gabriel and I alone in the living area.

"We have not been properly introduced. Or," he paused. "At least I do not think we have been. I was a little worse for wear when I woke early."

"It's alright. You may call me Graceling. And I already know you are Gabriel. Though I don't think I have gotten your last name."

"Caine."

I smiled at him. "Like Caine and Abel?"

"I am unsure."

I waved him off. "It's an old religious tale from my own kind. I have yet to find out if the things I believed in back home even exist here."

"It's the Night Market. I have found that nearly everything exists here."

[[Ask him how he met Reese and Elias]]

[[Ask him if he fell to the Night Market or had to travel here]]

[[Ask why he felt the need to save you despite not knowing you]]

[Dev Blog 11/14/22](#)

[Nov 14, 2022](#)

I'm doing some end game route coding today and then chapter nine should be off to the editors. I didn't realize when starting this how immensely important this chapter was going to be for the end game scenario. There is one choice that was clearly going to shape the game a bit going into Book 2, but as I've been writing, I've realized it is going to make your character possibly look like a hypocrite in Book 2 if the routes are not chosen a certain way.

This is of course not to say that there is any one "right" route. I'm not about right or wrong routes. But, it is to say, that this is a weighty chapter. Remember that going forward. Especially when the end game happens.

Other than that, everything is on track this month. On a personal level, we have adjusted to being a working household once more and the new shift changes that my husband is on. Some weeks I get a lot done. Other weeks I don't. It does force me to be productive no matter what though because I do not have the luxury of wasted work hours.

Motherhood has been a struggle the last few weeks but I think it has been an improvement in my own goals in life to see that I can do both. Be mom and be a writer. Some days I am excelling at it and other days I just curl up in front of the fire at night and breathe. Also, I have a hankering for snow and really wish mother nature would hurry it up already and give me some. :)

I hope everyone is doing well this first half of November! Welcome to all my new members and thank you for your support. I can actually do Christmas shopping for the kiddos this year and that is a relief. :)

Love,

Zinnia

[Belladonna - Post Chapter Eight](#)

[Nov 17, 2022](#)

A/N: A conversation between Belladonna and Gabriel after the events of Chapter eight. Assuming it is a few days later after the dust has settled.

Belladonna waited.

She was very good at waiting. Some might say she was too good, in fact. There was a distinct possibility it may be a fault because it didn't allow her to move on from any single slight. Mainly, because she was willing to wait years to see things through. Not many knew that about her. It was a secret that she alone managed to keep. Unless, you were the other person in the Night Market that was supposed to know entirely what was going on.

Finding Gabriel standing in the middle of her parlor did truly give her pause. She wasn't surprised by much these days, but this sight was strange enough to make her believe she was dreaming. If she dreamed, that is.

"Warden Caine." She tried not to let her discomfort known. Of course, she knew he would eventually come around. The fact that he hadn't yet either meant she was giving him more credit than he deserved, or he was giving her more respect than she required. "Is this a social call?" she asked.

"You know it's not."

He stood in the middle of the room. Flashes of a younger man with messed hair and an all black uniform blazed before her. Although, she had never been disappointed in the midnight blue he now donned.

"We have strict policies, Warden. No one that has been in my employment gets to buy my services." She walked over to the tea table, flicking the rune that would light the hearth and set the delicate plum teapot boiling. A gift from the Book Baron. Perhaps the only Baron at this point she had respect for.

"Have you heard back from the Baron of the Mists?" Gabriel asked, ignoring her. She noticed that he made no move to make himself comfortable. Now that she thought about it, he hadn't been here since the day he had been fired.

"I have not. Though, you know Kavatti. Fashionably late each and every time."

He nodded curtly. "She was not looking well at the last Baron meeting." Kavatti had some sort of human disease before she was a vampire. One that had ravaged her body and left her with eternal death as her only option. It was supposed to pump youth back in her. Said youth was waning rather quickly, however.

"Unsurprising," Belladonna said. "Though, I will admit, a tad bit disappointing. She had such potential not be a horrendous little creature and yet here we are."

Awkward silence passed between them. While they had been working together much more often these past few months, it was still odd. It was this oddity that bothered Belladonna the most. There had been a

time when she could sit with him in silence and find peace. Now, the silence only stretched through the room in an odd tendril of tension.

"I would like to discuss her, if we may."

"After all this time? Why the curiosity?" Arguably, Gabriel had more access to the Baron of the Mists than Belladonna. He oversaw the monthly meetings between the Barons. Belladonna hadn't seen Kavatti since being released from her services. Which, had been long before Gabriel was even Warden.

"Because you will be taking our market friend to see her and I do not think that is wise for the two of you to go alone." Straightening, ever the good soldier, he stood at attention. "I would like to attend this meeting with you."

Belladonna blinked at him. His expression was unchanging and his posture stiff, as if awaiting his next orders. "No," she said slowly.

While it was expected, his gaze still ticked towards hers. "Ms. Malady, I do believe it is a mistake..."

"I'm sorry. Were we not just having a similar conversation about Elias? Wasn't I just the one who did not feel it right for you to go to the Dollmaker due to a personal nature? You all but told me to shove it up my ass, Gabriel dear, so you'll excuse me if I find your request laughable." Irritation swept through her. She hadn't fed in some time and knew that little detail would need to change soon. She was always so much quicker to temper without fresh blood coursing through her.

Gabriel's jaw clenched. He was not a stupid man. He had to have known that would come back and bite him. "I do not believe, going forward, we should let our past hurts with one another become an issue."

"Your past hurts," she said pointedly. "Not my own. I have offered you kindness, Gabriel. I have offered you a chance to work with me once more. I have offered you friendship. But you were the one that could not step forward and meet me halfway." Oh but how he liked to play the different narrative. How Gabriel liked to look the victim with what had transpired. It was much easier to believe a viper a villain than a man created solely for good.

"And do you truly expect me to after what you did?" he hissed. She understood his refusal of events in front of others. But here, in the very room it all had happened...

"Are you referring to my job? How I got the position in the first place? Or the fact that I created a backbone in you and kept you alive?"

He shook his head. "I did not come here for this."

"No. You came to demand that you be in attendance to something that has nothing to do with you."

"Kavatti has burned bridges with many, Ms. Malady. You may have known her far better but I still believe the situation is one that does require some levelheaded thinking. And while you are many things, you

are not level-headed when it comes to someone who has hurt you.”

“I will be taking my sweet little darling namekeeper, Warden. I assure you, they will keep me level-headed.”

“You and I both know that their presence will not dissuade you from what you are about to do.”

The kettle popped, signalling that the tea was done. Belladonna did not turn however, her eyes locked with Gabriel’s. “And just what is it you think I’m about to do.”

Stepping forward, he stared at her, eyes tipping into the dark silver of the Fallen, the grace in his pocket glowing bright. “Belladonna, it is not worth it. This is no longer a fight you need to have. You have risen far higher in the market than you thought you ever would. You have proven your point. It is time to be done.”

It struck her, cutting through her in a twisted barbed edge of a knife. Of everyone, he should have understood. He had been there. This wasn’t about proof of who was better. This was about setting right a history that had gone so horribly askew.

“And tell me, Gabriel,” she said softly. “Do you really believe this, or do you just not want the mess that you know I am about to bring to your door.” The Warden, after all, would have to be involved and it seemed like Gabriel’s worst nightmare to help her with anything

When he looked at her, she felt herself falter, however. A much more familiar gaze was cast upon her now and she didn’t know if she liked that she had opened that pathway once again. “I hope you bring it to my door,” he said after a long moment. “If you are about to do what I think you are, I hope that you bring it to me first. At least so I can protect the innocent that will fall in this situation.”

With that, he walked past her, taking the teacup that sat on the table and turning it over. A dismissal of an invitation that Belladonna hadn’t even been aware she’d given.

“And me?” she asked before he could go. “Will you protect me despite no longer being friends?”

Gabriel sighed. “I said I would protect the innocent in this situation. Whether or not you believe yourself to be one is up to you.”

[Paper Moons Part Six](#)

[Nov 18, 2022](#)



“How did you come to meet Reese and Elias?” I asked. Fallen didn’t often get the chance to associate. They were either killed for their leftover grace, or went mad with their cut connection from the Knowing. The fact that two were living under one roof was one of endless fascination to me and now that the danger had begun to pass, I was curious.

“Reese stopped me from swimming home.”

I frowned. “Swimming home?”

“There is a point in the ocean where the water meets the stars. It is my belief that that is where the Knowing is. I was trying to swim there, but Reese explained to me that I would never make it. That my body is now more akin to that of a humanoid than a celestial. He has promised me a boat eventually.”

“Oh.” It was all I could say. Perhaps the Night Market was different and there was a slight possibility that where the sky and ocean met was the point of the Knowing, but as far as I knew, there was just an endless expanse that went on until you hit land once more.

“You don’t believe me?” A wry smile crossed his face as he looked down, laughing a bit. The sound of it was soft and felt like a brush against my skin. “I don’t think Reese does either.” When he lowered himself onto the sofa, it was with a stiffness that I knew his body was still adjusting to. The fluidity of a celestial versus what he was now was probably still taking a toll on his body.

“So he stopped you from swimming,” I said, trying to steer the conversation. “And then brought you back here?”

Gabriel nodded. “He knew what I was. Told me that he lived with another Fallen. I didn’t entirely believe I was one at the time but I’m still here so...” he trailed off shrugging.

“Do you- do you know why you were cast out?” I shouldn’t have asked it. It wasn’t appropriate by any means. But I wondered what someone would have to do to be pushed from their entire species. It had to be horrendous.

“I don’t, actually.” Sitting back into the cushions, he looked out the small window that overlooked the meadow we had just been in. The windowsill was crowded with multicolored glass orbs. The kind that

were fished from the ocean. “I still think that maybe it was a mistake. Perhaps I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“But wouldn’t the Knowing call you home?” I asked. Immediately, I regretted it. “I’m sorry. You don’t know me and this is all very personal information. I’m prying.”

“It’s alright. It’s refreshing, actually. I find that people here speak in a strange manner.”

“What do you mean?”

“There is a double meaning to everything that is said. I do not understand it. Elias claims that you get used to it and you can see lies like fragmented layers of light, but I have yet to truly have a long enough conversation with someone to practice that ability. But I do like hearing truth in your voice. You seem curious about me for curiosities sake. Not for the sake of using me.”

Turning, I clasped my hands in my lap. “I don’t get to talk with people often,” I confessed. “When they see that I am a Graceling they tend to get that look in their eyes.”

A flinch lashed across his face as his bodies became stiff. “I am familiar with that look. The one that says they are trying to weigh the morality of using you or not.”

I nodded. “Everyone is so hungry, though. Much hungrier than I think they let on. At least the people native to the Night Market are. The ones who are just here traveling seem a bit better off but I tend to stay away from those areas as well. Crowds of people make me a bit nervous. They’re too unpredictable. I can’t control my surroundings and keep me safe when the room gets too large.”

I paused. I had heard before that celestials had that way about them. That you would open up to them without meaning it. It was something about the comfort of the Knowing. It was a curiosity that even though Gabriel had fallen, he still held on to some of that old comfort. It sunk into my bones like a warm blanket and had me gravitating towards him.

Clearing my throat, I tucked my hair behind my ears. “So you came back here,” I said, wondering when we had gotten so off track. “It is probably what has saved you.”

“Having Elias help me navigate what he has already gone through has been helpful. I do not think I would be alive today without them. My hope is to become stronger and make my way back to the Knowing. Make my case for Elias. I think his fall was a mistake as well. He only wished to help Reese. Do good. I do not see why that would make him an outcast.”

I frowned. “That is odd.”

“Either way, I do thank you for continuing to stay with us, Graceling. I am unsure yet what your presence will mean for me but I am hopeful that I can grow stronger.”

"To be honest, I am unsure as well. You will be the first Fallen I have actually helped. I know that Gracelings are technically made for miracles, but your people have all succumbed to madness before I've been able to ease their minds."

"The idea behind your grace is to just ease the transition, is it not?"

"That is what I've come to know. But I have never seen proof of it. It is just a vague idea that I for some reason hold true. As if I now come with a set of rules that I have memorized but can't quite remember where I heard them from."

"How did you get your grace?" His eyes ticked down to my hand.

I rubbed my thumb across the smooth area of skin, the grace feeling like glass. "I believed," I told him with a small smile. "You should get some more rest. I am going to straighten up this house. All of you obviously don't know how to keep a home." The place was a mess. Clutter was piled in every corner and the dishes

"I don't think you should do that," Gabriel warned with absolute seriousness. "Reese is particular."

I laughed a little. "I'm sure it will be fine."

It wasn't.

When Reese woke the next morning I had flour in my hair, several dishes were swept into the waste bin, and I couldn't get the water to shut off in the sink.

"What the fuck did you do?"

"I'm sorry!" I shrieked as the water began spraying everywhere, dampening the counters and forming small puddles throughout the room. "I was trying to clean up. As a thank you."

"You're doing a bad job of it," he told me. Walking over he twisted the contraption on the sink several times over and turned the water off. Then, slowly, he observed the kitchen. When his eyes landed on me, soaked and pasty, I couldn't meet his gaze. "How?" was all he ended up saying.

"I was trying to wash the dishes," I said with a small snuffle.

"Generally, washing the dishes means you don't break them."

"I know. I'm sorry. They were just so fragile."

"They were clay."

I clasped my hands in front of me, biting at my lower lip until blood was drawn. It was then I heard Reese sigh.

“Just go sit at the table and try not to move.”

I nodded. “I may have broken the chair legs.”

“How?”

I didn’t answer him. I didn’t even know how.

Choosing the sturdiest chair I settled myself down, feeling the cakey paste of flour in my hair. My hair had always been on the mousier side. Not the red of my mothers like I had always wished. I wondered if I could add dye to the paste and make it a little deeper and...

“Do I even want to ask what you were trying to make?”

My eyes snapped upwards at the bowl that Reese was holding. “Breakfast?”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, he shook his head. “Alright, Graceling. Alright. It’s apparent you need more help than just some protection. What’s on the agenda today for you then? We need to figure out what all it is you need to do to start helping Gabriel. And along the way maybe give you a lesson or two into cooking.”

[[(Practical) I need to go get some herbs from the local apothecary]]

[[(Pious) I need to go to the nearest temple and pray for guidance in how to proceed]]

[[(Hesitant) I need a few things, but we might have to steal them...]]

[Gabriel Post Chapter Eight](#)

[Nov 21, 2022](#)

A/N: A bit of a different format. I felt after chapter eight it was more important to have another follow up scene between Gabriel and the MC. And since I am American and it is the time of giving, I give you a short that is twice the normal length of what I usually do, and a slightly steamy ending. Enjoy!

It had been days. Three, to be exact. I had not seen Gabriel since the night of Elias. Since we had gone back to his place and sat in a bare living room, listening to Reese sing loudly as he destroyed the kitchen but made quite possibly the best meal I had had since arriving in the Night market. That evening, Gabriel had walked me back to the apothecary and kissed me softly on the lips. I had not seen him since. Several times, I had tried to contact him, going so far as to making deliveries in the areas I

knew his patrols took him. But Gabriel was nowhere to be seen. So, on the third day, when I came downstairs for work and Hazel handed me a picnic basket with a pointed look in her eyes, I grabbed my cloak to protect myself from the chill, and made my way to the office. If Gabriel was not there, then at least someone may know where he would be.

Gabriel was buried under a mountain of paper work. Next to the door, I could see his coat. It was wet and hanging from a hook, a puddle forming beneath it. Next to it, leaned his sword and an overflowing wastebasket. At his desk, Gabriel sat slumped, one hand threaded through his hair as he leaned forward, scribbling furiously at forms.

Sighing, I stared at him for a long, uninterrupted moment. The normally very put together facade of Gabriel Caine was a mess. It was clear he had not changed his clothes in days, his shirt wrinkled and slightly stained at the collar. His face looked drawn and the normally vibrant grey of his eyes looked dull in comparison. I could see him muttering something under his breath, a note of irritation threading through the room. Reaching out, I rapped at the door, so as to gain his attention. It took two more tries before he even looked my way. When he did, his eyes flashed silver, his body tensing as if he were ready to yell at whoever dared to interrupt him.

His gaze softened as he spotted me instead.

"I was not expecting to see you here today," he said, markedly trying to bleed the tension from his shoulders.

I tried to keep my expression warm. "May I come in?"

"Of course." Rising, he made his way to the other side of the desk where the chair I normally sat in was covered in boxes and file folders. For the first time since I had known him, I saw Gabriel without his vest, his shirt untucked.

Moving some of the papers out of the way, he made it so I had a spot to sit. When I gently pushed him to sit in it instead, he looked at me, blinking in surprise. His hands came up to steady himself, brushing against my sides.

Setting aside my picnic basket, I tipped my head towards him. It was clear he had not slept. The front desk had said that he hadn't taken more than a fifteen-minute break at his desk for days. "When's the last time you ate?" I asked him.

For a moment, I wondered if Gabriel was the type of man who would dare lie in the face of something he had clearly done. There was a flicker in his eyes that said that perhaps he was. But, he had been caught and he knew it. Slumping back in his seat, he looked up at me, a slight blush of chastisement coloring his cheeks. "That would require me to be aware of what day it even is."

"Gabriel," I sighed. Turning, I grabbed the wrapped sandwiches Hazel had packed and handed one to him. I then hopped up on the desk. If I had to sit here and guard him until he had a decent meal, I would. "Noel at the front said that you haven't been home. Not even to one of the little guard houses."

"A celestial can go an infinite amount of time without sleep," he told me. Both of us knew that was not true. Mainly because while Gabriel called himself a celestial, he was still one that had fallen from grace. I didn't know what that made him anymore but the perks he had had while in the embrace of the Knowing were far different from the ones he had now.

"Could you do me a favor?" I asked.

He finished his sandwich in record time and didn't hesitate when I held out the second one to him. "Of course."

"Could you take a walk with me today? I know you are busy but I would like to spend some time with you."

Something in his gaze broke a little as guilt washed over him. "I'm sorry that I have not come to see you."

Reaching out, I cupped his cheek. "I am not concerned about that. I'm concerned about getting food in you. But, I would very much love for you to accompany me somewhere that isn't here. I still get a bit nervous being this close to the docks."

Gabriel was on his feet immediately. It was something I had been trying with him recently since learning he liked his partner to be more in control. I wasn't sure if I could ever be as domineering as I'm sure someone like Belladonna could be. But soft assertive energy was one he responded to just as well. In situations where he was clearly not taking care of himself, it worked the best.

"And eat that on the way," I told him, motioning to the second sandwich. He nodded, grabbing his cloak from the closet since his jacket looked like it would take days to dry.

"I'm sorry. Yes. Of course. We should leave here. Go some place else."

"Some place quiet," I suggested.

"Of course. Of course. I have just the place."

Gabriel wasn't normally a verbal person. He kept his words closely guarded. Oftentimes, I found myself filling in the blanks with small questions or things I had observed. Today, I let that silence pass between us while he ate. And when he was done, I handed him a warm mug of tea that Hazel had prepared, certain that it would have the herbs and tonics in it to help him. Hazel was always very good at anticipating what a person needed.

Sipping at it, he took my free hand in his and led us up a small back section of the beach. Far away from the docks and up a slick set of steps carved out of the obsidian mountainside that jutted from the dark. So covered in shadows this portion of the market had been, that I hadn't even noticed it before now. But the winding path that cut through the rock was one that Gabriel had obviously traveled several times before. His hand upon mine was certain as he gently guided my body around loose stone and

cracked steps, until we reached the precipice of the mountainside and stepped out onto a craggy plateau and into a field of stars.

I gasped at what lay before me. Endless bits of light littered the sky, stretching out into a soft curve until I was aware of nothing but a purpling night and the soft glow of silver light that shone throughout. Leading me over to the edge of the plateau, Gabriel held me close as the two of us sat, our legs dangling over the cliffside. Below, the ocean churned, white caps rushing into electric plumes of grey as the creatures beneath snapped their tails. The lanterns were gone from this section of the market, either having never been created or fallen to the salty brine below long before I had stepped foot here. I curled closer to Gabriel, feeling his arm wrap firmly around me as my hand rested on his thigh.

"I came from there," he said after a moment. I tipped my face towards him but didn't say anything. Letting him speak in his own time. "Where the ocean and the stars meet. I believe that is where the Knowing still exists."

I looked out towards the horizon, straining my eyes until I could no longer separate the sky from the sea. There was a thin cast of silver there. So faint that I almost wondered if I was making it up.

"It's funny really. Elias and I both considered that home for so long." His voice cracked on Elias's name. It fell strangely flat around us, as if the word itself had been tumbled over sharp juts of rock and now resembled something completely different than it had before. "We used to obsess about getting back to there. We would sit up at night and speak of it. Of how to fall back into the grace of the Knowing. Of the things we missed. The places we would go sit and bask within once we got back. Endless nights were spent trading memories back and forth with each other. It is what brought us so close together, I suspect. We were the only ones who knew of what each other spoke. There was comfort in that."

"You both were a connection to home," I said. Despite what I thought about Elias, it was clear that the man had once meant so much more to Gabriel. I didn't know if I would ever be able to view him as the man that Gabriel described, but at this moment, it was clear I didn't need to.

"That's what I find so frustrating about it all," he confessed. "We were so focused on the home of the Knowing that we did not focus on the home we had right here." He shook his head. A small lock of hair fell from its place, slashing across his silver gaze. Two star points, I now realized, lighting him from within. "Reese was home," he said firmly. "He was the one who saved us both. He dragged Elias from the madness when it first started taking hold and dragged me from it as well. And if Reese didn't know how to do something for us, he went out and found someone that did."

I ran a hand soothingly up and down his leg. "He seems like a very good man."

"He's not," Gabriel laughed. "He could have been but... everything got so fucked up during those days." I startled. It was rare to hear Gabriel speak in such a way and for whatever reason, it cracked through me in one long burning line of pain. Like a breaking of a bone. Gabriel was in pain. The time spent at Elias was still haunting him and the mistakes of his past were rattling around in such a way that was threatening to tear him in two. I could feel it all. Here. In the endless dark. I could feel his pain as if it were my own.

"The things that had happened are ones I never wish to repeat," he told me softly. "But they were preventable. I believe we could have prevented this. Saved Elias. Saved Reese. They could have still been together if they just hadn't wished to save me."

"Gabriel," I swallowed the lump in my throat, feeling the tears that now coursed down his cheek. "They loved you. They still do. While I don't know what happened, of course they saved you. That's what parents are supposed to do."

He was silent for a moment as he looked out towards the line of silver. "I wish they hadn't."

"Why?"

"Because it makes it so I can never save them."

I didn't understand. I knew I didn't and I was now wondering if I was meant to. I just stared at him, squeezing his hand tightly to try and offer him comfort in this moment.

"I need something from you," he said, a fervor of determination in his voice. "And you must give me permission because I do not wish to take anything from you that you do not wish to give." Even if it would help him. I could hear it. He would rather sit in discomfort than cause me to feel any of my own. It made my heart ache for him even more.

"What do you need?" I asked.

"Allow me to kiss you." His head ducked down. "Please."

"Gabriel," I huffed in surprise. "You of course can kiss me."

His hands were on my hips before the sentence could even finish and with strength that was terrifying to behold, he swung me onto his lap. My thighs bracketed his own and I was aware that the only thing that was keeping me from falling backwards over the edge and into the void, were the clasped hands at the small of my back. He slotted me firmly to him, pressing me tight against his lap until his belt buckle dug into my stomach. Then, his lips were on mine. They were full of demand and raw need and I felt my heart flip over in my chest as I feared the world would give out beneath me and I would fall into the ocean below. But before me was a storm. One that pulled and grabbed and begged for me to take away his pain. And by the Knowing did I want to. More than anything, I wanted to take away his hurt and toss it to the creatures below where it would be buried in the Deep.

Pressing myself forward I felt a deep moan rumble through his chest as he gripped me tightly, rolling his hips up towards mine. Warmth pooled in my stomach as he tilted his head in just such a way, asking me to control the kiss even further and inviting me to run my tongue past the seam of his lips. Gabriel's hold on me remained tight and unrelenting as we explored each other's mouths beneath the stars. Slowly, he began to lean backwards until I was stretched across him in one long line, our legs tangling together. I could feel his heart thundering beneath my fingers as my hand snuck up under his shirt to rest upon his chest.

Pulling back, he stared at me, his eyes a deep silver. The hold he had on me was all consuming. It pulled me in, not allowing me a second to breathe or shiver without him. It was then that I knew. Falling in love with this man would be brighter than any light from the great beyond. Falling in love with him would burn me from within and push and pull me into something far more than I ever thought I could be. And in return, Gabriel would give me each and every in of himself until the two of us could no longer tell where one began and the other did end.

"We should stop," he said, though he looked as if he didn't want to. His breaths were coming out in stuttered pants and his pupils were blown wide with desire. His hand came up to cup my cheek, thumb catching on my bottom lip. "Tell me we should stop."

I didn't want to. I wanted to feel his skin against mine and understand what made him tick. I wanted to have those hands grip me and tug my body against the naked expanse of his own. I wanted it all. But I didn't want it to be in response to grief. I didn't want Gabriel to regret a single second of it.

So touch. Touch would be what I would give him for a brief moment more, knowing that he trusted me enough to stop him before it went too far. "Just a minute more," I told him.

Rolling us, he braced his arms on either side of me, locking eyes with my own. His gaze was deep and intense and ever so slowly, he lowered his hips down onto mine. I arched beneath him, gasping at the contact and the hard outline I felt there. Keeping his eyes locked to mine, he began rolling his hips softly, my legs falling open as a shiver rolled across my spine.

"One minute," he repeated.

Leaning down, he captured my lips against his own again, gasping into my mouth as I ran my hands down his back.

And above us, the star twirled, and upon the horizon, a silver cast of light flared.

[Story ideas](#)

[Nov 22, 2022](#)

I'm itching to do a Malcolm scene here soon. He's been bouncing around my head. What kind of story would you guys like to see though?

Malcolm struggling with being the Gatekeeper

Cute one shot of Milo and Malcolm's first date

Domestic one of a family dinner (Milo, Malcolm, and Hazel)

Other (send in your prompt)

81 votes total

[Paper Moons Part 7](#)

[Nov 26, 2022](#)

“I’ll need to go get some herbs from the local chemist. I think there are a few, out-of-the-way things we could collect, that might help stem the madness a bit. I hear there is a store at the end of Apothecary Lane that specializes in items that are a bit harder to procure.”

Reese nodded to me before opening up a particular cupboard that looked as if it were full of half drank whiskey and bourbon bottles. Shoving them aside, I heard them clang around before he pulled forward a leather bag stained with oil. When he dropped it onto the table, I heard the sound of coin jingle within.

“Whatever you need,” he told me.

I stared at it with wide eyes. I was certain if I opened it, it would be more money than I had seen in my entire life. “If you have so much money...” I shook my head. “How have you not bought a cure for the madness yet. Surely someone has something that could help.”

He blinked at me. “Because I know nothing about it. I wouldn’t know if I was getting gifted. If someone sold me some shit that would kill Elias or Gabe instead. But, that’s where you come in.” He raised a brow towards me. “You think you coming here last night was just so I could see what you could do? Needed to vet you. Needed to know I can trust you.”

I looked at him softly. “Why trust me though? You don’t even know me?”

The gaze he leveled on me was one that would stick with me for a long time coming. It was the kind of look someone gave you when they were counting on you and for reasons unknown, I did not want to disappoint him. “Because it’s clear that you would put yourself in harms way for my boy and I appreciate that. I think it’s a fucking dumb move because it’s clear you can’t do anything but slap at someone, but I do appreciate the sentiment.” Turning, he grabbed a plate and loaded it up with breakfast. It was one of the few plates he had left. “Now eat before you go.”

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Reese fed me far more than I thought I could possibly eat and I left his place patting my stomach and feeling almost sleepy with the amount of food I had just consumed. A walk was probably going to do me

some good after all of that.

It was not a long trip to Apothecary Alley but I took it a bit slower than I normally did, keeping my eyes peeled for more goblins. After last night, I felt like I had a target on my back. I had my gloves on and my palms turned towards my thighs to hide any of the glow that may have pulsed as my grace was refilling. Passing the three-tiered fountain that served as the focal point for this portion of the market, I stepped under the wisteria arch that led to the district, my shoes tapping against the clay colored cobblestone beneath my feet. The market always smelled fresh here. As if a soft Spring rain had just doused all the hanging pots of flowers and herbs that wrapped around each lantern. They all hung in lines down the entirety of the alley, the soft diffused light from the lanterns peeking out between blooms of marigolds and purple pansies and soft silver leaves of lambs ear and pale ivy. On either side of the alley, the shops were lit with the bright buttery light from the storefronts, their doors and windows open. Bubbling cauldrons of stews and spits of fresh crackling meats hung suspended over large hearths while shop keeps packed their wares and sold their tinctures. Most people were happy here. Their faces rosy and smiling. Their eyes dancing with light. There was a certain amount of peace that was sequestered away in this alley that was far different from what I had seen from the rest of the market. Families existed here. Children played in the streets and most vendors, had brick and mortar shops as opposed to the stalls that littered nearly everywhere else. You couldn't help but smile when you entered this district alone.

But then there was the end of the alley.

The further through the alley you walked you could see signs of it. Nervous glances here and there. Little ticks of the eyes as you kept on walking and refused to stop at one of the brightly lit buildings. I tried to smile at most of them, hoping they wouldn't remember my face. I didn't want them to think wrong of me but I knew that if I were to get something that wasn't entirely on the sanctioned lists of the Velvet Guard, Lucinda Albright's place was where I needed to be.

The entrance to her shop/home was a single stone arch with blue thistle growing up the sides. I pushed at the wood gate, the slates of which were tied together with long locks of black hair. Swallowing, I tried to remind myself to be brave. This is what a Graceling did, after all. They helped where others could not.

Stepping through, I made my way to the door, raising my hand to knock. But the door swung open on its own. The shop itself was dark and smelled of rye, a musty kind of earthen smell lingering in each corner. It was far quieter in here than the bustle of the streets beyond and as I stepped through the shops lobby, I could hear each creak beneath the sole of my boot.

"Ah," a voice said, startling me. I shrieked, turning to stare at a woman. She had long black hair and deeply tanned skin. Her eyes were soft brown and piercing along with the sharp edges of her cheekbones. "Graceling," she said. "How can I help you?"

My eyes ticked down to my hand as if I expected to see the glow of the shard through the black of my wool gloves. But there was nothing. Turning back to her, I curled my blessed hand close. "You know what I am?"

She smiled at me. I wouldn't have said it was a cruel smile but it was not one that offered a lot of welcoming warmth. "Your aurora," she explained. "It shines with the light of the Knowing. Yet you do not have the eyes of a celestial. Ergo, Graceling. Don't worry though," she said, moving from the shadows, each step fluid, as if she and the dark were as one. "Many people claim to be aura readers and most are simple charlatans looking for coin."

The woman was tall and willowy. She wore a simple shift of black with a gemed belt around her waist that held several swirling tonics. Her hair hung in multiple braids down her back, each end tipped with a bone bead. Rounding the counter, she stood behind it, a wall of questionable jars behind her. "Lucinda Albright," she introduced herself. "Again, I ask, how can I help. It is not often we see someone like you come to our end of the apothecary."

"Someone like me?"

"Someone with good intentions," she explained.

"What kind of intentions do you deal in?"

"Desperate and sometimes unkind." She raised a brow. "Do I need to ask the question again?"

I shook my head, squeezing my eyes shut and knowing that I needed to not dwell here. "I'm sorry. I am looking for something for a celestial. A Fallen, in fact. Madness is on the brink of their horizon and while I can help guide them through it, I have heard rumor that there may be certain herbs that can ease the transition. Or that can protect us while we work."

The woman looked at me curiously, her eyes narrowing into slits. "Fallen are often not worth the effort, dear heart."

"Maybe not but it is my duty to try."

She looked at me. As if I was suddenly an enigma that was worth figuring out. I didn't like the gaze that she had turned upon me and had a suspicion that she would love nothing more than to use me as one of her spell components as well. It was a risk continuing to stay in this shop, with her knowing what I was. But it was also one that I needed to take. It was doubtful that the other shops that lined the streets would have anything of the likes I spoke of.

"What direction would you like to go in then," Lucinda asked after a moment. "Are you wishing for a hallucinogenic to take him through his madness and then guide him to the other side? Are you wishing for a sort of training tonic that will send him a zap each time the madness tries to take hold?"

"What?" I startled. "Of course not. Is that a thing?"

"Pain is a powerful motivator. Far more powerful than a lot of methods I've seen. It can train the brain not to take certain neural pathways." She almost seemed bored by our conversation, her mind beginning to wander.



"No, I just... I wish to help him. That's all. I wish to take away some of his pain. I think he is a good man and I am concerned that when the madness takes hold that he will do things against his own accord. If I can help him continue to have a bit more clarity, I believe he could fight this."

"So you are banking then on his strength and not the strength of anything else." I nodded. "He will die if you do that."

I shifted in place. I didn't want Gabriel to die. I knew I didn't know him well but the last thing I wished for was his death. He had saved me, after all. I merely wanted him to feel as if he had some agency within this new life he must learn to navigate. So many Fallen did not.

Across from me, Lucinda sighed with a roll of her eyes. "You are young," she started. "You do not yet know what the Fallen are capable of. It is better to put them out of their misery than let them continue on."

I swallowed thickly, my cheeks heating with a sort of anger that I kept curled in my palms. "You won't help me then?"

The woman opened her mouth to respond, but was interrupted.

"Mother."

The voice was soft and hesitant and came from the top of a winding staircase that led to the rafters above. Lucinda rolled her eyes, looking instantly irritated.

"Aren't you supposed to be dusting, Hazel?"

Looking up, I saw the girl in question standing at the top of the steps. She bit her bottom lip hesitantly. Dust and soot from the fire sprinkled across her cheeks, sending grey streaks through her pulled back hair. She looked young. Yet, the woman in front of me looked young as well. Far too young to have a daughter of that age.

"I am but I couldn't help but overhear your conversation..."

"Ease dropping is more like it."

"I'm sorry, mother. I just really think that we could help and—" the girl yelped as her mother raised a hand upwards. The girl rubbed at the back of her hand, the skin there suddenly looking red and burned.

"Pain," Lucinda said with a smile. "It is a wonderful motivator. Now, my suggestion to you would be this. Give the Fallen a hallucinogenic. If their mind is as strong as you claim it to be, they will navigate it just fine. If not, then they probably do not need to be within this world to begin with. If you wish for a more effective tonic, the likes of which you will probably not be able to afford, I can do some research for you and hopefully come up with something. But I will need time and I will most likely need a few ingredients



that are not readily available. Or, you can turn and look elsewhere. I'm sure Mr. Vanhilick down the road will have some paltry little tonic to sell you."

It didn't sound right. A hallucinogenic to wander through an already maddening mind would only make the process worse. Even a depressant ran a high risk of making the receiver fall into patterns more detrimental than not. And whatever spell she was speaking of felt like an effort to get more money than anything else. Or perhaps, it was something that was merely said to test and see if I had the coin.

Glancing up towards the girl at the top of the stairs, I watched as she continued to rub her hand. I could call on her as well, but it was unclear whether she would be able to perform whatever idea she had. Not without her mother's help, at least. And part of me did wonder if asking her a more direct question would cause her more strife than it was worth.

**[[Leave. I don't think you can help me]]**

**[[Show Lucinda the bag of coins and see if that changes what she is saying]]**

**[[Ask the girl up top for help instead]]**

[Paper Moons Alpha Game Access](#)

[Nov 26, 2022](#)

Hey everyone. Here is the link for the alpha build and the code to get in. Please be patient with me. It is a very rough draft over there and I have yet to put in anything to the side bar. But all the alternate choices are there. The password for the build will also be changing once a month.

<https://the-night-market.itch.io/paper-moons>

Password: DecPaperBarons

[Hazel - Post Chapter Eight](#)

[Nov 26, 2022](#)



Hazel didn't have a good reason for coming downstairs when she did that night. When she awoke, staring at the peeled stars of her ceiling, she had assumed the wisps had roused her. But even they were dim in the late night hours, hovering outside her window but not bothering her or attempting to come inside. She did try to go back to sleep. To roll over in the massive amounts of comforters she had and snuggle down into a dreamless night. But, in the end, her eyes remained open and she continued to just stare at the shadows in her bedroom. With a heavy sigh and the knowledge that she was going to be tired come midday, she rose from her bed and dressed for the day, intent to get started on her morning chores.

When she stepped foot within the apothecary lobby, she froze. Her left foot hovered above the floorboards as she looked around the room, almost certain she would find it filled with the dead, all staring at her in silent dismay. But the shop was empty. The fire had a low burn of embers and the stained-glass windows were dim with light. But the silence was far too eerie to not take notice of.

The second her foot fell flat against the floor the front door burst open, wind rustling leaves and bits of dried flowers across the entrance. It slammed with a bang that reverberated through the entire shop, a wispy mist billowing into form right in front of her. The sad expression of a man peered at her through the half formed cut of a mask, their eyes black. Two empty sockets devoid of a soul.

Hazel stepped back, nearly stumbling over her own feet. "You are not welcome here, omen," she said.

The visage of the man smiled sadly at her as his feet touched down upon the floor, his body gaining form, but his skin still a sickly grey. "I am not here for you, bog witch," he said evenly. There was something more to him. A life that had once been lived. But now he was nothing more than an echo. All omens were, in fact.

"I have warded myself from the likes of you. The entirety of this home is warded from your kind," Hazel said, the desperation and panic clear in her own tone.

"It is and you have. But," he leaned forward. "You have also been playing in magics you should not. Your wards are weakening. If you wish for all the things of the world not to come knocking at your door, you might want to slow it down on the dark magics."

Hazel stared at him, eyes narrowing slightly. The fear was still there, but the suggestion of stopping when she was so close, was enough of a boost to keep her from running. "Why are you here?"

"As a warning," he said. Soft, pale hair fell in a slash across his face. He looked as if he were once someone that held himself well. Hazel wondered if he had had friends or a family. "There is an upcoming ball. Do not let your loved ones cross the thresh hold."

Hazel frowned. "What?"

"I cannot give you much more than that," he told her.

"You have to," she protested. Her mind reeled at the information alone and it was not anything of substance to even begin to understand.

"Rules are rules," the omen said with an indifferent shrug. "You know what omens are. You know what my limitations are."

She looked him up and down. "Omens often mean impending death. Especially when they are made from the soul of a banshee from a far off fae land."

He smiled, the edges of it cracked in sorrow. "I have not had someone come so close to calling me by who I am for so long. I almost forgot where I came from."

Hazel softened. The omens tone had a hint of a voice from so far away. "Do you even remember your name?"

"No."

"Your old life?"

"Nothing," he said with open palms. "I have impressions sometimes but they are nothing more than images that I might be able to grasp," he reached out, as if to take one, "but the second I do," he let his hand drop. "Nothing. They disappear as nothing more than a memory that is no longer mine."

Hazel wanted to help him. It was in her nature to. Yet, she hesitated to even get near the creature. To change the passage of time and find herself suddenly on the receiving end of his words. Taking a full step back, she crossed her arms in front of herself, wrapping them around her waist. "When is this ball?" she or anyone that she knew had not been invited to one. Nor did she really see a situation in which they would be. The balls all took place upon the eternal staircase or on private properties. All the places Hazel and her loved ones did not attend.

"Soon," the omen said. "Far sooner than you would like."

"And someone will die if we go?" she asked.

"Pain will shatter into lantern tears upon the ground."

Behind him, the door opened again, with less drama than before, but still on its own. Hazel held her breath, simply waiting for the omen to leave, knowing she was not truly safe unless he did. But still, he looked at her, his jaw flexing as if he were trying to tell her something more. The words were stuck, however, voiced perhaps only in his declining mind.

"Wait, why are you seeking me out to tell me this omen," she said. Omens only were given when you were unfortunate enough to fall into them. They did not seek their prey out in the middle of the night and they certainly did not make house calls.

"Because fate will unravel no matter what I do, but perhaps I can ease the passage."

"Why would you care?"

"My life was already put upon a pedestal. I do not wish to see anyone else end up the same." Turning, his feet lifted from the ground, dragging across the floor in spindling reams of mist. "Beware the bells. If you hear them, it will be far too late."

When the door shut behind him, the apothecary shivered. Hazel stared at the door, feeling her heart pound and outside, the remnants of her actions howling at her door. It wouldn't be much longer now, she could feel it in her bones. But with the presence of the omen, she didn't know if she would make it. When it was a race between her own machinations and fate, surly fate would be the victor.

[Malcolm Albright - Gatekeeper](#)

[Nov 26, 2022](#)

A/N Takes place before Malcolm's death, during his years as the Gatekeeper.

"What exactly happened?"

Malcolm hissed in pain, falling back on the soft bed of kelp. His shirt was discarded somewhere, having been torn through with sizzling cracks of electricity, the lines of which burned across his skin, slashing through his tattoos and previous scars.

"Too many gates," he said through gritted teeth. "There were too many to close at once. Not with magic at least. Had to do some of them by hand."

Kamille looked at him, crushing bits of oyster within a small bowl and adding the glittering waters from the pool held within the corner of the room. "You can't keep doing this, Malcolm. I don't want to keep patching you up."

Malcolm looked up at her, a small smirk etched painfully across his face. "Oh, Kamille. I know you just want to get your hands on me. Ours is a torrid love affair."

She rolled her eyes before scooping out a handful of the concoction and slapping it on the sizzling wound. Malcolm flinched in pain but held himself still. "You have friends. You have family," she pointed out. "Your co-worker is not the one that should be patching you up at the end of the day."

"You're far more than just my co-worker," he pointed out, eyes cast downwards to look at the crushed shells. It was a salve that Hazel would have loved to get her hands on. She didn't work much with the ocean but it would still be a handy one to know.

"What even happened today?" Kamille sat next to him, crossing one dark leg over the other. Malcolm almost preferred it better when she had the tentacles. Felt more Kamille like than the human form she took. "Is this another sign of the market dying?" she asked.

"I don't see how it couldn't be," he said, trying to relax as she tended to him. Her fingers ran across his chest, over the moon shaped scars. Long ago he had learned that Kamille was a tactile person. A former courtesan of the market, he thought she might just miss touch. "There are too many trade gates open," he continued. "People coming and going freely from different worlds is causing everything to be split."

"And then you keep opening the doors to the refugees. You need to close one before you do that."

"I should just close all the trade doors. I shouldn't have to make permissions to save someone's life."

"Most would find it an inconvenience, though. Closing off their yearly shopping trips." Her tone was laced in bitterness. He always had liked Kamille's dry sense of humor.

"It doesn't matter. They're slowly falling out of my control. That's what's more concerning. I open one and then three more pop open in areas of the market I didn't even know existed. How many gates do you think are open in the outlands?" he asked with a raised brow. "Because I can feel them, Kamille. Like these endless voids in the pit of my stomach. There's just so many." Head falling back on the settee wrapped in soft green seaweed, Malcolm closed his eyes, lashes sweeping across tanned skin, dark hair falling in front of his face. He blew it out of the way with a huff of breath.

"You really feel them?" Kamille asked curiously.

He nodded. "Yeah."

"Does it hurt?"

"Constantly," he laughed. "It's like this dull ache in the base of my skull. Then, each time a new gate opens it feels like there's some sort of laceration against me. Or an endless void that is trying to consume me. I wouldn't wish this power on anyone. Not even my worst enemy."

Kamille frowned. "I didn't feel anything like that upon becoming a Baron."

"I have a suspicion that becoming a Baron and becoming a Gatekeeper are two very different things."

Shifting, he winced. The salve was doing its magic, along with the squid ink he had ingested early. The doors were now more like a dull ache despite having taken strips of his skin to bind them closed. He was tired. So very, very tired.

"Why have you not told your sister yet?" Kamille's tone was admonishing.

Malcolm laughed a bit. "Because she would want to help. Hazel had a bleeding heart, Kamille. A beautiful one. If she knew what I was, she would be consumed with my own pain and refuse to live her life. I'm not going to do that to her."

"Your mother?"

"Dead. Hopefully forever."

"Is there anyone else that cares for you? I do not like you alone when you go home. Baron's need more than what we seem to think we deserve."

Malcolm smiled wryly. "We're on a break."

"What does that mean?"

"Means he stabbed me years ago and is currently elsewhere licking his wounds because he's scared to come say sorry. Milo always did have a little bit of a problem with taking accountability for his actions. Or shouldering responsibility."

"But you care for him?"

"What can I say. He's a mess of a man. I may have a type." Eyes closing again, he sucked in a sharp breath, thinking of Milo. Thinking of Hazel. He wanted to tell them. He had wanted to tell them the second he became the Baron. But he had never known how. And then the pain had started coursing through his veins and the market began screaming in his head. So much pain contained within a cosmic being and all of it on his shoulders. Malcolm didn't want to just make the screaming stop, though. He wanted to ease the pain. To soothe the weeping and the tears that he often cried that he knew were not his own. Malcolm wanted to save the Night Market. But he didn't know if by doing so, if it would cause him to fall into nothing. Yet, he would willingly sacrifice himself if it meant they were safe. Malcolm supposed falling in love was like that.

A soft blanket was pulled up over his chest and tucked under his chin.

"I still think you should tell someone," Kamille said. "This secrecy thing will kill all of us."

Rolling on his side, Malcolm curled the blanket close. "I will. One day. Either when my hand is forced or when we can laugh about it all. Until then, let them live in bliss. Those two deserve happiness."

When Kamille's lips pressed against his temple, she ran her hand across his cheek. "You do too."

Malcolm smiled. "Told you. Torrid love affair, you and I."

He could feel the eye roll as she walked out of the room, dimming the lights. Gates were still open across the market and each one of them burned through Malcolm like a live wire. But, he had closed so many as well. He could feel the content that created through the market itself. How they were happy. As Malcolm tipped into slumber, he listened to that happiness. In his dreams, he listened to the Night Market sing.

## [Chapter Nine Early Release](#)

[Dec 1, 2022](#)

Chapter nine is here! I have to admit, it is terrifying coming this close to the end of the game. I'm both incredibly excited about this chapter and equally terrified. I hope you all enjoy and please, have faith that it will be okay. :)

Code for the access is

rav3n93nd.

## [Chapter Nine NSFW](#)

[Dec 1, 2022](#)

The chapter nine NSFW scene is with Belladonna this chapter. I was not going to have any scene with her until the next book but she decided to take the lead on that one and barrel into one. Sounds about right for her.

The code for hers is as follows.

Belladonna's code: 9b311a.



[Dec 4, 2022](#)



Glancing hesitantly up towards the top of the stairs, I felt my gut twist. I didn't trust the woman before me. But her daughter perhaps would be able to help much more. "I think I would like to hear what she has to say," I said, nodding towards the girl. She looked at me with wide, hazel eyes rounded in awe but also struck through with panic.

Before me, Lucinda tilted her head, the candlelight flickering into dark beads of black orange light. "Why?" she asked simply. Her voice held no more of the firmness from before, but I felt as if I had overstepped. Somehow.

"Because I would like to exhaust all my possibilities," I said. "Have all my options before me and make a decision from there." My heart was racing. I was looking at raw power. The likes of which I knew I would not be able to do a thing against.

"Well," Lucinda said slowly, letting the weight of her word press down on my shoulder with the bony hand of fate. "Hazel," she called to the girl, not pulling her eyes from me. "Come down here and regale us with what you know."

At first, the girl did not move. She was staring at her mother with deep uncertainty, debating whether she should just turn and run. I wondered what made a daughter so fearful of the one who bore them.

Slowly, she began to come down the stairs and into the candlelit lobby. The white bone of animal skulls chattered at her as she passed, their mouths stuffed with herbs, incense steaming from their eyes. Hazel was not a tall girl and was obviously not a confident one either. She stood before me, wringing her hands in the pattern of her skirts. A black homespun fabric covered with a green moss apron.

"Speak," Lucinda demanded of her daughter. "You had so much to say before, I don't see why you are suddenly shy."



Hazel's eyes snapped upwards, looking at her and then at me. "I just... I think that there is a way to help. It would require us to rework a spell but I think we could take the same type of spell that is used to control the wolves during their moon turn and enhance it in a way that would keep the madness from the absence of the Knowing away. It may not be a solution forever but it could be a temporary one."

It sounded almost exactly like what I needed and yet my chest was full of a frozen breath as I looked between mother and daughter.

Lucinda's eyes narrowed. "Wolves are controlled by herbs from the land because they are deeply connected to the roots of the earthen floor. Celestials are connected to the sky and the cosmos. The eternal night."

Hazel nodded. "There is rumor that there is a point in the market that you can touch the moon. If we could get a piece of its light, I..."

Lucinda laughed. "Moonlight? Child, I thought you were trying to be helpful?"

Hazel looked down, cheeks a deep crimson. I could see her slowly shutting down, her shoulders hunching in on herself as her fingers picked more violently at the frayed edges of her apron.

"Where would the location of this moonlight be?" I asked.

Hazel shook her head. "I don't know. It's really just a rumor. It could be nothing at all."

"Go back to dusting, dear. You have wasted enough of our time." Lucinda turned to me.

"Hallucinogenics," she told me. "They will buy you time to do whatever it is you need to be doing. Run back to your celestial and ask him what it is he would like to do. You are merely a vessel after all and should most likely be doing the bidding of the life who has mistakenly put themselves in your hands."

My jaw clenched. I had been raised to never speak ill of my elders. To treat people with respect. For most of my life, I had followed that edict but never before had it been so hard to hold my tongue as it was right this moment.

Bowing my head, I spoke through thinned lips. "I will do so." I tried to look at the girl before I left. Tried to give her a small nod of my head as if to tell her that I saw her. I wondered if many people did. She was already in the back of the shop though, dusting. I wondered what kind of punishment would befall her for me even asking her to speak.

~~~~~

When I returned to the cottage, I was greeted with the absolute enticing smell of suckling pig. Reese was out back around a fire pit, roasting an entire hog. Elias sat in a chair nearby, looking as if he had regained some of his color while Gabriel sat next to him, hunched over. As I rounded the corner of the house, his eyes lifted though, perking up a bit.

"You're not dead," Reese proclaimed. "Good for you."

I stood on the outside ring of the family, looking in on them. I could see a few empty bottles sitting around, a mug of tea or kafe, nearby. They looked as if they had been casually conversing and I hesitated to interrupt them.

"Were you successful?" Elias asked hopefully. I couldn't help but notice the dark rings beneath his eyes. This was important to him in several ways.

"I...."

"Elias," Gabriel started. "She should eat. It's been a long day and she does look famished."

"Oh, I don't wish to impose," I said quickly.

"I have an entire pig here. You think you're taking food from us?" Reese asked with a raised brow.

Elias nodded. "Reese's new job gave him a bonus today."

"It would be nice if he would now tell us what his new job is," Gabriel said softly. Normally, that statement would be laced with suspicion, but the two celestials only looked at the man as if he could do no wrong. They were proud of what he had done and all that he had provided. "Truly, Graceling. Come sit with us and feast."

I took my place near the fire, holding out my gloves hands. The warmth seeped into me. It wasn't exactly cold out but I still liked the heat. It reminded me of home.

"I have a few options for us," I told them. "I went to the apothecary and was able to talk to the chemist at the end of the alley."

"Lucinda Albright?" Reese whistled low. "Surprised you came back at all. Shouldn't have gone there with the power you have."

"Yes," I said, looking down at my covered grace. "I am coming to understand that now."

"What did she say?" Elias asked.

"She suggested that I might be able to guide Gabriel through the madness but to use hallucinogenics to do so. I do not believe this is a method that she truly believes in and was merely testing to see how stupid I may be."

Reese snorted. "Sounds about right."

"But she did say there were perhaps some other spells she could do. She would need time and a lot of coin."

"Why didn't you do that one then?" Reese asked.

"She didn't give me the option. She said I should come home and ask the man that this truly effects." I looked at Gabriel. He had been mainly silent, staring at the fire. The flames reflected silver in his eyes.

"You said there were multiple options?" he asked.

"There was a girl there who spoke of the moon. She said if she had a bit of moonlight, she may be able to manipulate a wolverine moon spell into being effective for you. It would at the very least keep the madness at bay until we can figure out how to navigate you through this world."

Gabriel nodded but said nothing for a long moment. The fire crackled along with the hog. "I do not wish to trust a woman who knowingly would have given me a hallucinogenic for the sake of getting you out of her shop," he said carefully. "But do we know what the legitimacy of this other spell?"

I shook my head. "I know very little of spell work." Gabriel lifted his gaze to both Reese and Elias. Both of them shook their head though. We were at a loss.

"Well then," Gabriel intoned. "We shall go find the moon, I believe."

"We?"

"You will not be going alone," he stated. "And seeing as you are taking this journey because of me, it is only logical that I join you."

"You are not strong enough, Gabriel," Elias implored. "You can't just walk out into the Night Market. You don't know what it contains."

"I trust the Graceling," he said softly.

"Gabriel..."

"My decision is final."

Reese looked between both Elias and Gabriel, looking as if he wanted to say something. Instead, he pulled a paring knife from his pocket. "Who wants pig cheek?"

I watched that night as they carved into the pig. As plates were passed around, mine given to me in a warning not to break anymore. The three of them put aside their disagreement and spoke kindly through the evening and by the end of my second plate, I found myself relaxing into their candor and bouts of laughter. I mainly listened, feeling myself smile at the familiar feeling of family once more. When the night grew chilly, Gabriel set a blanket around my shoulders, coming to sit by my side. Reese and Elias were off in the fields, holding hands and slow dancing beneath the light of the moon.

"They are beautiful," I whispered.

Gabriel nodded. "Their love is unique."

Turning to him, I shook my head. "I will do this quest for you without your help. You can stay here with them if you wish."

"I do not."

"Why?"

There was very little contemplation to my question. The answer to it was one he had already thought well on and were now engrained in his bones. "Because it is important to make my way in this world if I choose to live within it as well." I felt a small thrill at his words. I had always felt that way and very rarely had I been given the chance to prove myself.

"I do not even know where we should begin looking for the likes of a moon," I laughed at him, expelling the excitement and the nerves that I was felling over our upcoming journey. "It seems like a quest straight from a fairy tale."

"Fairy tale?"

"A book," I corrected.

"Well, where do these books suggest you start?"

[[We must find someone that perhaps has knowledge of the moon itself]]

[[We must simply look for the highest point in the market where the land and sky can touch]]

[[We must find a tavern. All great journey's start in a tavern]]

[Paper Moons Alpha Game Access](#)

[Dec 4, 2022](#)

Hey everyone. Here is the link for the alpha build and the code to get in. Please be patient with me. It is a very rough draft over there and I have yet to put in anything to the side bar. But all the alternate choices are there. The password for the build will also be changing once a month.

<https://the-night-market.itch.io/paper-moons>

Password: DecPaperBaron

[Milo and Malcolm](#)

[Dec 5, 2022](#)

A/N Just a oneshot that came to mind about Milo and Mal back in the early years.

This will not count against your normal RO shorts. This is just kind of a bonus content for the month.

Malcolm opened his door to a very wet and disheveled Milo. Not a completely foreign sight through the years but still not one he had expected. Not tonight at least. They were on rival jobs and when they took those contracts, they spent their time apart, not even glancing in the other's direction until the contract was complete. Hazel hated it. She claimed it spread disharmony. But for the two of them, it worked. It gave them a chance to be apart. Made them remember that there were things worth coming back to when they got too snippy with each other.

Without a word, Malcolm stepped aside, letting Milo shuffle through the front room, dripping water all over his hardwood floors. Normally curly hair was plastered to his head and he kept his hands in his pockets as he toed off his shoes and socks with minimal movements. Malcolm left him do it, going and fetching a towel along with a soft pair of sweats and an oversized sweatshirt Milo had left here at some point. When he tossed it to Milo, Milo caught them with a nod of thanks and began to strip. Malcolm gave him privacy and went to the living room, making sure to light a small fire to chase away any of the chill.

Milo joined him when the fire was roaring. It was at least twenty minutes later and he still had not talked. Instead, he had gone into the kitchen to make himself tea, busying himself in there by himself. Malcolm gave him the space he needed. Milo often times needed time to gather himself. When he came and sat beside him, curling his bare feet under his legs, he looked at Malcolm out of the corner of his eye.

"Hey," he said, voice raspy.

"Hello."

"Today sucked."

Malcolm nodded. A childish sentiment that was all Milo. "Do you need comfort, to vent, or actual discussion?"

"I need you to tell me why today sucked." It was said with such an air of petulance that it actually made Malcolm smile a bit.

"Because life sometimes feels like that. A series of moments that are not enjoyable and they can bog us down if we have too many in a frequency that we cannot keep up with."

Milo shook his head. "No. I don't think that's it at all. I think people are just horrid pieces of shit we should put through a meat grinder."

"That too."

Milo's shoulders slumped forward. For all the world, he looked as if he had deflated. Malcolm wanted to wrap him up in a blanket until he felt like himself again. Seeing Milo like this was never easy. "Sorry," he muttered. "I know you don't like me talking like that."

"I don't. But if you need to in order to get something off your chest, I'm right here."

"I'm trying, Mal," he started. Malcolm didn't know what exactly the man was talking about but he had the idea that it didn't matter. Milo always felt like he was at the edge of a cliff, ready to tumble into nothing. And every time he got there, he knew it was his own feet that would eventually walk him off the edge. "I'm trying with everything I can to do the right thing but somehow I keep fucking it up."

At that, Malcolm frowned. "What do you mean 'do the right thing'?" Milo often got in over his head and it was the main thing that kept Malcolm up at night.

"I can't tell you," he said softly, tucking his feet further under him. "It has to do with the job."

"Are you in trouble?" The steel in Malcolm's tone hardened and he had to remember to soften it. Milo didn't respond well to anger. Not from the people that had seen his heart.

"No," he said, and then winced a little at the knee-jerk lie. "I don't know."

Malcolm rose, looking for his jacket and the runic bits of magic that he kept nearby for protection. There was a look on his face that Milo was very familiar with. It was the one that showed when one of his loved ones was in danger.

"Where are you going?"

"To null and void the contract. I'm not working it if it's putting you in danger." The hand that wrapped around his wrist was tight and unrelenting. Pausing, he looked down, watching as Milo stared back up at him with tired eyes. For a moment, Malcolm thought about pulling away. It would be so easy, after all. Milo was exactly strong. But in the end, he relented with a sigh. He could break the contract after he took care of Milo.

Sitting back down, he stared at the younger man. His hair was drier now and the chill had been driven from him. He looked ridiculous though in all his oversized clothes.

"Stop looking like that," Milo demanded.

“Like what?”

“Like that.”

Malcolm sighed wearily. “This is just my face, Milo.”

“Well your face is making me think you’re going to go on a murder spree and I kind of hate it because there are much better things your face could be doing.” He paused, a slow quirk of his lips curling at each end. “Oh. That’s a good one. I’ll have to save that pickup line.”

Malcolm snorted. “It was a three at best.”

“What? That was clearly a solid six,” he protested. “On my pickup line scale, that was one of my best.”

“Re-evaluate your best then,” Malcolm snarked back. Reaching out, he twisted his fingers within Milo’s shirt and tugged him forward, the two of them falling back on the couch.

Milo quirked a brow at him. “Against the rules, Mal. No bumping uglies unless we aren’t on a job, remember?”

They were shifting against each other, trying to get comfortable. Milo ended up elbowing Malcolm in the rib and Malcolm ended up kicking him in the shin. “Is everything always about sex with you?”

“Yes.”

Malcolm rolled his eyes. “Liar.”

“I know,” he grinned. “But it makes me feel better to make you pissed.”

“I know.”

“I know you know.”

Maneuvering them so they laid side by side, they ended up staring at each other, sharing the same breath, hips and legs pressed together. It was comfortable and familiar and with each steady rise and fall of Malcolm’s chest, he could see Milo begin to relax even further.

“Can you still do that thing where you make pictures appear on the ceiling?” Milo asked.

Reaching around, Malcolm pulled the little device from under the sofa, tapping at a few buttons until something appeared up ahead. Milo grinned in delight, snuggling down and turning so he could watch the cartoonish images above them. Malcolm laughed softly, tossing the device down and settling in with the man. They did have rules in this situation. They did make sure to keep their distance. But today could be an exception. At least for Milo’s sake.

Reaching out, Malcolm took Milo's hand in his, pulling it to his chest. Milo didn't say a word, but he smiled all the same, tapping him softly in tune with whatever the images up above were singing about.

"Thanks for breaking the rules for me," Milo whispered after a long moment. "I like dragging you down to my level."

Malcolm squeezed his hand tight. "It's not dragging when I willingly go," he whispered. They were both asleep long before the pictures above blinked out.

[Dev Blog 12.5.22](#)

[Dec 5, 2022](#)

We are at the end game. Holy shit we are at the end game.

I have three more chapters to write and then Book 1 is complete. Right now, I'm considering just taking an extra week or two and writing them all out. Getting them all on paper while this excitement is thrumming through me. And then going back and implementing the choices. It might mean that the next chapter doesn't get out to you guys until the second week of January but I think it might be a more polished final product.

Also, I want to finish this before I get too inside my head because the ending? Oh, the ending is going to be something else.

For a technical standpoint, I did update some things within the Night Market interface itself. You now have an option for a dark mode and the save screen now has a lighter text to it to hopefully make your saves show up a bit better. I have so many plans for how I want to set up the interface for the final product but I want to save those for the copy that is bought.

Speaking of that, the game that is released on Steam, Apple and IOS will have more content. I am considering doing interludes between certain chapters. Times for you to go on dates with your RO's or just go out and get to know them as people. They will be skipable for the people that want to just focus on the game but I think it would be a lot of fun to join in on a Milo and Hazel game night. To redesign Gabriel's office. To go to the blood bar with Belladonna and watch her in all her Belladonna glory. :) There might also be some opportunities to speak with certain Barons a bit more, along with NPC's. Caliban anyone?

I hope everyone is doing well this month. A lot is about to happen with the Night Market itself and I am so ready for it.

Zinnia

[Discord](#)

[Dec 8, 2022](#)

Hey everyone. I wanted to do a poll to discuss the future of our discord. Do we want to open it up to the public or do you guys feel like that infringes on your Patreon status? I don't know how many of you are here for discord specifically.

Open it to the public. The more the merrier

Keep it small and closed

Open it to public but have Patreon specific channels

73 votes total

[Gabriel Post Chapter Nine](#)

[Dec 9, 2022](#)

A/N Assuming you freed Caliban and talked to Gabriel afterwards.

When the old Warden had died, dozens lined up to take his place. They vied for the role as if it were sport, laying laws down with no real jurisdiction and placing the market in a militant venue of opposing sides and rule. Gabriel, had not wanted the job. They had not been one of the ones to come forth while the old Warden's body was still cooling. Gabriel, in fact, had liked his current position. That is until it had all gone south.

In the end, the role of the Warden fell to Gabriel because there was no one left. The market was desperate for order and the lawless districts that had been running amuck and treating their sectors as if they were king, were quickly brought to heel. It left Gabriel sitting on the so-called throne. He never did take the warden's office though. He had renovated one of the cells inside the main hall. Anyone who escaped had to go right past his door.

He looked around that office now, as if somehow it would be changed. The market itself felt as if it had shifted that night and it left Gabriel looking into every corner, trying to find the noticeable changes that he could feel lingering in the air.

Caliban was gone.

It was an odd sentence to say and he supposed he should probably tell Reese. Eventually. Neither of those men had any notions of love with each other but they had filled some sort of void that Gabriel had not understood. Not that Gabriel understood much, he was finding.

"Warden?"

Gabriel's eyes snapped up. Hazel Albright stood in the doorway to his office, a basket of something delicious in her hands.

"Ms. Albright. Did something happen?" He was up and out of his seat, rounding the desk with fear easily written across his face. While he didn't know Hazel well, she was one of the kinder souls he had ever had the pleasure of knowing. For Hazel to leave her shop, something dire had to have transpired.

"Well," she started, "I think we both know something did happen." She gave him a weak smile and Gabriel paused.

"I assume you have been filled in."

"I have. I also got told about the dressing down you received and thought maybe you could use some muffins."

Slumping against his desk, Gabriel crossed his arms in front of him. A shield, of sorts. "That is very kind of you but I assure you, it is unnecessary."

"So you're not taking into consideration what they said to you?"

He was. He was far more than he should admit. Acknowledging that he had done wrong all these years was a bitter pill to swallow but one he thought he could endure. But fixing it?

"The market has always been a certain way, Ms. Albright. You know this."

"Please, after everything we've been through couldn't it be Hazel?" She set her muffins down, unwrapping them and placing one next to him on the desk. She would not push him to eat, but the request was clear. "And yes, the market has always condoned things like the docks and the auctions. The flesh pits. But it doesn't mean it has to."

"We are a nexus point, Ms. Albright. We must respect that what some cultures deem wrong others do not."

"We are a nexus point. You are right. But we are a nexus point that has our own set of rules. Why are we catering to everyone else's?" Sighing, Hazel reached out, patting Gabriel on the shoulder awkwardly. He startled a bit. It was clear the two of them were acquaintances that never would have run in the same circle if the circumstances had been different.

"I cannot just overhaul an entire system," Gabriel said softly.

"I believe that because you are a Warden, that is exactly what you can do."

When he looked at her, he found no judgement. Hazel's mother had been harsh and had nearly brought the market down with her. She was well aware of the bitter truths of the Night Market. Yet, she held firm to what she believed was right. Gabriel didn't know if he could say that any further. He had never actually sat down and considered if he viewed his actions as right or wrong. He supposed, he was simply someone that had inherited a title and was going through the motions of the previous ghosts who had walked his path.

"Ms. Albright, do you think you could do me a favor?"

She perked up at that, looking both startled but pleased. "Yes. Of course."

"I have a feeling I will be working very long hours in the future. Ones that will take me well into the night. And there is a certain someone we both know who will most likely show up with food. Could you please give them a pay raise so they are not wasting their money on me? And in return, I could pay you handsomely for the endless amount of wakeful tonics I will be requiring."

Hazel laughed, hiding it behind her hand, her eyes shining bright. "How about I just send over some meals with them and an enchanted rune to keep everything fresh?"

"That would be beneficial."

"Strictly off the record, of course," she said. "Since we aren't supposed to have magic."

"I do suppose that bit of hypocrisy is going to have to end as well."

"Maybe just don't go on a witch hunt for those of us that can easily still do it," she suggested. He nodded at her solemnly. She had played the game well for so many years, he owed her an overturn of policy.

"Well," she said, brushing her hands off on her skirts. "I should be getting back. If there is going to be a bit of restructuring, then I suspect I can sell the spells that truly need selling instead of doing that behind shadowed doors."

"Do you wish to reopen apothecary alley?" he asked. "We could see about riding it of the spirits and having people come back in to set up shop."

Clearing her throat, she smiled at him nervously. "I don't think the spirits will be a problem for much longer." Then, nodding towards her muffins, she turned to take her leave.

"Hazel," he called after her. She paused at the door, looking over her shoulder. "Thank you. You are a kind soul for being a daughter of the market."

She smiled softly at him. "And you are a good man for having fallen from the Knowing."

She let the door shut behind her with a gentle click. While Gabriel, began drafting a report to send out to his lieutenants, and a plan of action for the ones who would defy him.

[Paper Moons Part Nine](#)

[Dec 12, 2022](#)

A/N: To gain access to the alpha build with all the current choices, joining the Baron tier for the code.

Curling my knees to my chest, I looked up towards the sky. It was rumored that the moon wasn't even real. That it was made of pressed paper and bits of flowers that were dried between its pages. It looked thin and gauzy up in the black, surrounded by stars that were merely reflections of the lanterns below. Tucking my knees to my chest, I blinked up at it, not knowing how I was supposed to get a piece of the moon, let alone some sort of essence from its light.

"We have to find someone who knows about what we seek," I told him. "A scholar perhaps?" Did the Night Market even have scholars. I was used to them back home. They lived in the big cities and wore fancy clothing made from the local shops. My mother had taken me through the streets once, when father had been conducting a sermon at the local parish. I could remember how soft everything looked. How vibrant the clothes were. It felt decadent somehow and I knew if I ever got the chance to own clothes like that, I would be extremely fortunate.

I supposed now those shops and those clothes didn't exist any longer. I wondered if everything was an empty shell back in my world or if the world itself had been wiped from existence.

"I'm afraid I may not be much help to you in who to contact about obscure lore," Gabriel was telling me. "But that does not mean I won't be willing to be by your side the entire time. Given what you are, protecting you may be my only purpose now."

Turning my head, I regarded him softly. He too was looking up at the sky, a furrow between his brows that spoke volumes of his drifting confusion. "Do you view me as that? A purpose."

"Yes."

"But my entire reason for being here is to help you." I was supposed to be the one to save him from the madness. To pull him back from the brink and help him walk a path that was filled with far more pain than the Knowing usually allowed but pain that was survivable nonetheless.

"That is your reason," he said. "It is not mine."

It was then that I realized, I did not know Gabriel's true feelings on what we were doing. Reese was a demonstrative force and one that had been saying from the second I arrived at his doorstep, to save his son. Elias was quieter but no less willing to do what was necessary, but so far, I had seen Gabriel do nothing for himself.

"Gabriel," I asked with a small frown. "Do you wish to be saved?"

His eyes were flat as they drifted down from the moon, dimming the further from the celestial path he got. He stared out at Reese and Elias, watching the taller man twirl the blond haired Fallen, the two of them laughing as they kicked up willow wisps from beneath the wildflowers.

"I wish to save him," he said, nodding towards Elias. Out there, he almost looked normal. Not the sickly man riddled with worry for the ones he loved. "My existence doesn't matter but if we can find something that helps me, perhaps it would help him as well."

"You mustn't think like that," I told him. "If we are to find something to help you, you are going to have to want to steer away from the madness. For you."

"I have lived my entire existence never once thinking of me. You want me to be strong? To have a drive to beat back what is going on in my head? This is how I will do it. I care very little about my own existence past the point of how it affects others."

I didn't know what to say to that. It felt hopeless somehow. Like if this man didn't believe he was deserving, this was all for nothing. Then again, I wasn't sure what I was doing at any given moment and was practically winging every action in some hope that one would stick and make sense. Gabriel, with his lack of faith in himself, still sounded far more confident than me.

"Well, then we find a cure for you. For Elias. And perhaps along the way I can convince you that you are worth it."

A small smile quirked the edge of his lips. "Yes. Perhaps."

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I didn't know what we hoped to be doing when we set out the next day. Someone with knowledge of the moon. It sounded like the key to what we needed but was nearly impossible in nature. Not when the Night Market was vast. It wasn't as if we could simply go within the markets stalls and start asking for moon scholars. Though, I suppose I wouldn't have put it past the market to have a district dedicated to that.

In the end, we had wandered the streets for an entire day, our direction aimless and discouraging. For me, at least. Gabriel's expression seemed to never change.

"I'm tempting to just start hiring the town criers to call out for our information," I muttered.

"What's a town crier?"

"Someone that goes around yelling at inconvenient times." I had only seen a few in this world. I supposed it was more of a staple in mine.

Ducking beneath draped clothes of vibrant orange and purple, winding around stalls glued together with pine sap and gold, we found ourselves almost lost within the market. I was tired. Fed up. And completely understanding that I was in over my head. A Graceling. It was a name that had weight. It was simply just not a weight I could apparently handle.

Sitting on a dirty edge of wall that had crumbled and never rebuilt, I looked out of the silks that fluttered in the soft breeze. It was a pretty district and smelled heavily of dye. The heat boiled in copper vats, pigment drifting upwards and staining the lanterns above. Head in hands, I groaned loudly in frustration. Gabriel stood by stoically and I nearly had to laugh and how unmoved he was by all of this.

"Hear you need to find someone with knowledge about the moon."

My head snapped up. Gabriel's stoicism had not changed, but his sword was now pointed at a man that stood a few feet from us. His black hair was tied back in a knot, a few strands of it falling across his eyes, hiding a piercing gaze. He didn't look concerned with the weapon pointed at him. He didn't even look at Gabriel at all.

"How did you hear that?" I asked, suspiciously.

"When a Graceling and a Fallen are going through the market asking about the moon, it's a little hard to ignore," he said, tipping forward a bit. "You two may want to be more subtle."

"Who are you?"

When the man made to move forward again, Gabriel did not move. The sword dug into the man's chest, finally shifting his attention upwards towards Gabriel.

"I'm going to have to ask for you to lower that sword," he said.

Gabriel looked like he was far more likely to just run the man through but I held up my hand, trying to show him that it was okay. When the sword finally fell, he didn't let the man get much closer. It was clear he was still going to use himself as a barrier between me and this stranger.

"Don't make me regret this," I told the newcomer.

He smiled at me. "I have the information you seek. There is someone you can contact, in fact, that is considered a child of the moon."

I perked up at that. "A child of the moon."

"That's what she calls herself. I took the liberty of looking into her. She comes off as crazy, but perhaps there is truth in her insanity. It is the moon after all."

My heart fluttered. It was a lead. If it wasn't a good one then we could move on, but at the very least, it was something. "I would very much love this information," I told him.

"Good. You are going to have to pay for it."

Gabriel stepped in front of me. "You should be giving the lady the information simply because she asked."

"Technically, she didn't ask. And technically, I don't have to do anything you say. I am asking her to hire me. Not you." Peeking over Gabriel shoulder, he quirked a brow at me. "Do you need a moment to confer?"

I shook my head, pulling out the bag of coin that Reese had given me. "Speak. Please."

He eyed it in a bit of surprise. Perhaps I had tipped my hand into how desperate I was for this. But the money was supposed to buy our information.

With a low whistle, he nodded, gesturing towards the bag. I opened it, so he could see the coin and the amount that was contained inside the sack.

"You are looking for a small village on the outskirts of the market. I can draw you a map to there. You are going to want to prepare yourself with weapons and rations because it is going to be about a two-day journey. There, is a girl. Not quite a child but certainly not a woman yet. She is said to have a spell upon her, keeping her in a liminal state. She was cast from the market and now lives within this village, forced to remain until she perishes. But at night, she sings to the moon. Claims to know it."

"And why should we trust that this information is real?" Gabriel asked.

"I don't know," the man said. "The people who live on the outskirts have not outright killed her which I believe is a good sign. You don't usually keep problems like that around unless they can give you something. And from my knowledge of the moon, the ones who deal in its light, are soothsayers. I don't know what you're looking for or how that would help but..." he shrugged.

"Thank you," I told him. It was more than we had. Standing, I handed him the coin, noticing that Gabriel kept himself near the entire exchange. "Can I ask your name?"

"You can," he said with a crooked smile. "But it's probably best I don't give it to you. You need me though, I'll be around." Taking the coin, he turned, whistling as he disappeared within the silks once more. I could hear the clang of coin long after he was gone.

"Do you trust it?" Gabriel asked.

"I don't know."

"But are we following the lead?"

"It's the only one we have." I told him. There was a heaviness in my gut over it. We could have very well bought information that would lead us to the middle of nowhere. The outskirts were unkind and not inhabited, from what I knew. The odds of us returning did not feel well.

Looking at Gabriel, I took a deep breath. It was clear he was looking to me for how to proceed.

**[[Let us leave immediately]]**

**[[Don't start the journey tired. Rest for the night and get to know your companion]]**

**[[Grab your supplies and make camp on the outskirts in order to get a better idea of what you're dealing with]]**

[Belladonna Post Chapter Nine](#)

[Dec 14, 2022](#)

The knock was familiar. She always did give a bit of a lighter touch to her welcoming than others that appeared at his door. Rising from where he had been trying to sleep in vain, Reese opened the old cottage door with a creak. Belladonna stood on the other side with a bottle in hand.

"Thought we could share a drink," she said, holding up the bourbon. It was Reese's favorite. She always had impeccable taste.

Stepping aside, he motioned for her to come in. She looked out of place in his derelict home, what with her sheer lace and crimson hair and manicured nails. She had certainly come far in the world

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" he asked, shutting the door and heading towards the kitchen. He was sure he had some bread and cheese around here somewhere. She ate very little these days but she usually partook in the process while drinking with him.



"I came to talk about your wayward bird." Her tone was guarded.

"What he'd do now?"

Taking the tumblers from the top shelf, Belladonna blew the dust off of them before rolling her eyes and running them under some water. Decorum. It was the only reason he kept those particular glasses. Belladonna liked to be a lady for the first two drinks before the two of them ended up just drinking straight from the bottle.

"He flew the proverbial coup," she said. Pouring four fingers worth, she handed him his glass. Reese looked at it contemplatively, feeling a small pang of regret shoot through him.

"Not surprising. He was only going to be able to last for a short time here. Fucker ran straight to a place that Odin had already set up shop." He swallowed the tumbler in full. "Boy deserves more than what this hellhole has to offer anyway."

Belladonna refilled the glass, along with her own. When Reese raised a brow at her, she shrugged. "I was there."

"How bad?" No one could hear her here. Reese had taken great pains through the years of keeping this cottage safe. After everything with Elias, he had wanted to move, to burn this home to the ground, but he had never been able to bring himself to destroy this particular memory.

Leaning against the counter, Belladonna shook her head. "I do not envy the choices that were made tonight. I also wonder just when I became so heartless that I didn't step in and have an opinion over such a wretched display."

Reese laughed. "You're not heartless, Bella. You have more heart than most I know. You just also know how to protect it."

She side eyed him. "That is not a good trait to have, I am starting to believe." Because, like Reese, she protected her heart. Yet here the two of them were. Alone.

They migrated towards the living room. Towards the old brown leather sofa's that were cracked with age. Belladonna sat on one end, kicking off her heels and tucking her feet beneath her, while Reese sprawled out on the other side, resting his boots on the table.

"That all you came here tonight for? Commiseration about a man you hardly knew?"

"Would there be another reason?"

Reese grinned, gold capped tooth glinting in the low light of the room. "You're close, aren't you."

"There are a great many things I have in motion, Reese, you will have to be a tad bit more specific."

"I don't think I do."

Huffing, Belladonna stared at the bottom of her empty glass before tossing it aside and grabbing at the bottle. Reese roared in laughter as she took a long swig of it, fingers wrapped around the neck and holding it close.

"Should have brought a second one tonight," he commented. "You seem a tad stressed."

"I feel disquiet," she said, as if the word itself was vile. "After everything with Caliban I went to go relieve some stress. Had a wonderful evening with someone I know. I thought if I could put myself in control, give pleasure, I would feel okay again. It would get the nervous energy out. If anything it has made me even more wrought with anxiety and I wish it to go away."

Reese leaned forward, grabbing the bottle from her. She glared at him as he did so. "When you making your move?"

"A few days from now."

He nodded, already planning his part in it all. "Send word. I'll patrol the streets that night. Make sure you got nothing coming your way."

"You do not have to do that."

"Given the bullshit rules, this is going to be the last time you and I see each other again," he said. He tried to keep the pain over that little fact from his voice but knew it shined through. "I'll absolutely do this for my daughter."

The sentiment made her smile. "You need to stop calling me that. It hurts Gabriel."

"If it hurts Gabriel he can come over here and tell me himself. Besides, you were supposed to be my daughter-in-law."

It was Belladonna's turn to laugh. "I was never going to marry that man and you know it. Don't go rewriting history like that."

"Fine. I wished it."

"If wishes were horses..."

"That is such a fucked up saying. Who wants a bunch of fucking horses around?"

"Ranchers." At the confused expression on his face, she took the opportunity to steal back the bottle. It was more than halfway empty now. "I am sorry about Caliban." Belladonna hadn't known him other than in passing. But the fear she saw on his face tonight was only a look she wished upon her enemies.

"Yeah," Reese said. "Me too." Wrapping an arm around her shoulder, he hugged her close. The weight of her head fell on his shoulder, staying there as she gave a stiff sigh. He could feel her swallowing

reflexively. Belladonna Malady did not cry. Neither did Reese. It was an understanding they had. "You don't have to do this, kiddo," he told her gently.

"The only thing stopping me from doing this is you," she said. Her weekly dinner and drinks with Reese. And the presence of one other. One she wished more than anything would not be harmed. If she could, she would be keeping them from the top of the tower.

"You're sweet," Reese said. "And a liar."

"Learned from the best."

Dropping a kiss to the crown of her head, he then shoved her off. "Come on. Let's get drunk and cause mischief in the market for Gabriel. He's been entirely too serious lately."

Belladonna laughed, wiping her eyes as Reese gave her a few minutes. Almost there. Almost done. Just a little bit more time and for the first time since she had come to the market, she would no longer be someone else's pawn.

She just hoped that a certain life would not blink out in the process.

[Milo Post Chapter Nine \(NSFW\)](#)

[Dec 19, 2022](#)

A/N: Be warned that this is NSFW. And it is angsty.

With his head tossed back, Milo widened his stance, back butted up against the table. The tavern was empty now, the patrons having cleared for the night leaving nothing but a low burning fire in the hearth and the soft sound of music elsewhere.

"Is this what you wanted?" they asked, looking up at him from between his legs.

Reaching down, he cupped their cheek, thumb catching on spit covered lips. "You know I'll always want you," he told them. He couldn't see them. Their features were hidden in the flickering light of shadow, the swinging lanterns above having long since gone out.

They smiled. It was that soft and sweet smile that made Milo forget about everything bad in the world. The one he knew was just for him. It made him feel cherished and zeroed his entire world in on the feeling of actually belonging for once in his life. When it was followed up with a long lick up the length of his cock his back arched and he hissed in pleasure.

“Answer me, Milo. Is this what you wanted?”

His chest rose and fell, hair sticking against his forehead. He could feel the way his belly tightened under their fingers, the muscles shifting and tensing in desire. He didn't know what they wanted. He just wanted to make them happy. To keep them safe. Why couldn't they understand that? Why couldn't he understand that? As the heat licked up his spine, twisting around him in a tight grip of pleasure, he shook his head back and forth.

“Answer me, Milo.” Their breath was ghosting across him, causing him to become red and aching. Their lips were so close, wet and open and so very teasing.

“I don't know what you're asking,” he panted. If he knew, he would answer them.

“Did you want to be in control? For once?” They sucked gently on the head, causing Milo's mouth to fall open and his hands to grip the edge of the table. “Didn't you want to control something and call it your own?”

“What?” he frowned as he looked down at them. “No. What are you even talking about? I never wanted to control you.”

The smile twisted a bit, turning slightly cruel. “You sure about that?”

He didn't know how it happened but suddenly he was inside them. They were flat on their back, moaning and writhing as they fucked themselves wantonly against him. Milo's head dipped, his nose running up the line of their collar bone. Slowly, his hips began to move, the table beneath them creaking with each thrust.

He could hear his own voice, a low whisper in their ear. “I never wanted to control you,” he breathed against them, thrusting hard to elicit a soft whine. “I never wanted any of that. I just wanted you. Your body. Your heart. I wanted something for me for once in my god-damn life.” The table slid across the floor as he thrust into them hard, holding their thighs and bending their legs up near the chest. A sharp hiss of breath filled the room as sweat rolled down their bodies, the two of them sliding together in the muggy dark of the old tavern. “I want to make you feel good,” he whispered. “I want to be inside you. I want to make your eyes roll back in pleasure and when you're a shuttering mess beneath me. I want to tell you how fucking beautiful you are just for giving it all to me. When you walk through the market I want you to feel my cum dripping down your thighs and I want you to ache for more.”

Reaching between them, he began to play, wringing every ounce of pleasure from them as he could.

“And in return, I want to feel the same,” he told them, twisting his wrist and pumping himself deeper inside them. “I want to see your fingers inked into my skin the next morning because you gripped me so tight. I want my cock to ache with how good I fucked you. I want every inch of me to be boneless because you rode me so hard that I forgot my own fucking name,” he growled. Spreading their legs wide, he began to fuck into them in earnest, feeling his balls begin to tighten as his own release was near.

A soft hand came up, cupping his face, turning his amber eyes towards them. "Then just let me be yours," they whispered. "Tell me I'm yours and I can be it."

With a growl, Milo lunged forward, capturing their lips. "Mine," he whispered. "You're fucking mine, you hear me? No one else's. I don't care about the rest of the world. I don't care about what will happen, I deserve to have you."

"Yes you do."

"I want to have you."

"You have me."

He dipped his head down on a broken sob. "Why can't I have you?"

Milo woke with a start, aching and sweaty as he stared up at the shadowed ceiling of the distillery. The rafters had once been wound with soft string lights, small little lanterns that dimmed as the day turned. They had burnt out so long ago now and Milo had never gotten around to changing them.

Scrubbing a hand over his face, he let out a shaky breath. He had returned from the tavern only hours ago, after dropping them off at Hazel's. The two of them had been pressed together outside the gate, mouths hungrily devouring each other as hands wandered just a little too low. Milo had grinned, nipping against their lips as their hand snapped at his suspenders before snaking down to cup him through the tight fabric of his trousers. They had gotten bolder. Far more likely to surprise him now than he was them. It was perfect really and sent Milo's heart fluttering in his chest with a sense of happiness he hadn't felt in a long time.

And just like that, it was all snuffed out.

Like everything else in his life, it was a fleeting feeling that would never last.

Tossing the sweat slick sheets from his body, he hit the mattress with his fist, gritting his teeth as he felt that familiar pulse between his legs. He had things to do today. This was the last thing that he needed to be indulging in.

Yet when his hand went down to adjust himself, he felt his cock twitch in need.

"Fuck," he whispered.

Gripping himself, he squeezed tightly, his thumb dragging slowly up the thick vein, circling the head and playing with the slit. He turned his face to the side, burying it in the pillow as he huffed out a pained breath. He shouldn't be doing this. He absolutely shouldn't be doing this.

But the dream had been so good. It had felt so good. Why couldn't he indulge in it just a little longer?

Tossing his free arm over his face he began pulling at himself roughly, wincing at the tight drag of skin and lack of slick. He didn't care if it hurt or left him raw. He just wanted it done with. He just wanted to spill across his closed palm and get a few more hours of sleep before he had to start the shit fest that was his life. But it wasn't enough.

Rolling over, he got on his hands and knees, jerking between his legs and imagining them beneath him. He imagined spilling against their skin, rubbing it between their naked thighs before going down on them himself, bringing them to completion and feeling their pleasure against his tongue. Sucking on a finger, he reached around, playing with his backside, seeking out his puckered hole to feel the tight burn. He squeezed his eyes shut, imagining it was them. Their fingers. Their tongue. Their body fucking him over and over and over again until he was left screaming into the pillow for more.

But it wasn't enough.

It just wasn't ever enough.

Collapsing, Milo cried into his pillow, feeling tears of frustration wet his cheeks.

He would never be enough.

He hadn't been for his mother or father. He hadn't been for Malcolm or for Ever. He wasn't for Hazel. And he certainly wasn't enough for *them*. He had failed them above anyone else.

Curling his body into a tight ball, he hugged his pillow, his father's words coming back to haunt him still. "You will always be alone. Who would want someone as corrupt as you."

"Shut up," Milo whispered against the ghost of it all. "Just shut the fuck up."

A hand ghosted down his back, something soothing and warm. Startled, Milo sat up, looking around the room. It was empty, just as it had always been. But he had felt it. That slow glide of comfort.

Wiping at his eyes, he looked around nervously. "Hello?" There was no answer.

Taking the blanket, he pulled it up to his chin and laid back down. He had a few hours yet before he needed to get up. It was best he got some sleep.

As he closed his eyes, he tried to clear his mind. And outside the window, the one high above in the distillery that led to the rooftop, the lanterns swayed.

[Paper Moons Part 10](#)

[Dec 19, 2022](#)



In the end, we gathered our supplies from the local vendors and headed out towards the last bits of town. There was a long stretch of land that wrapped around the market walls before spiraling out into the unknown. It was there that we made camp.

We didn't venture far from the market. The amber lights still swung comfortably in the background while before us, was a sea of stars and a moon so bright that it felt as if it were about to fall upon us. I looked up at it as Gabriel began making camp, digging a small fire pit and laying out a few sleep sacks that were supposed to protect us from the night cold. It was far more bitter out here, the lack of lamplight to heat the streets making it nearly frigid.

When the fire was blazing, I began to venture outwards, searching the area. It was almost as if it were a different world here. The liveliness of the market couldn't be heard, despite not being far from the walls at all. The sounds of revelry, the music, the laughter, all of it was gone. Though I supposed all of that was only a mask for the desolate nature of the darker parts of the alleyway to begin with. As if they spoke of their joy and wonder loud enough, they could forget about the pain that drove them to the Night Market to begin with. Because that's what this place was. A place for wandering pain, desperate to be forgotten.

Crouching down, I ran my hands over the soil beneath. It was thick with pebbles and dry, porous dirt. I couldn't see a spread of grass anywhere. That in itself wasn't as surprising as the lack of cobblestone streets. I missed the grass, though. I missed the sweet smell of hay. I missed my home.

"It is quiet out here," Gabriel said, voice coming from behind me.

I startled, not having heard him approach. As I turned, I saw that he had gotten the fire burning bright and had pulled out some of our rations that Reese had made sure to pack. It was as if he were sending both his children to Sunday school for the day. I laughed a little at the thought.

"Is the quiet amusing?" he asked.

"No," I said with a small shake of my head. "It was thinking of Reese. He is very protective."

"That is a way to look at it," Gabriel agreed. We both looked out into the dark. It was pitch black despite the light of the moon. That was what concerned me more than anything. There should have at least been shadows. A looming structure. An outline of a tree. Instead, it looked as if there was a wall of nothing that not even the light of the starlit sky could touch. I didn't know how we were supposed to venture forward.

"Is the plan to just walk?" he asked.

"We were given no reason to believe that we would not be accepted by the village." I had a small map in my hand. The village was about a day's journey from here and I could only hope that it was worth it.

"From what I can tell, we head in that direction, making sure the moon and the brightest star stay to the right of us."

"There are creatures wandering out there," Gabriel said. He peered into the darkness in such a way that I wondered if he could see them.

"What kind of creatures?"

"Ones who wish for blood." He tipped his head to the side, eyes sparking silver. "And perhaps something more."

"What do you mean by something more?"

"There is a hunger out there. A painful one. It is as if..." I put my hand on him to stop him. His skin was beginning to glow with grace.

"You cannot access your powers like that," I told him. "Preferably, until we figure this all out, you shouldn't be using your grace whatsoever."

He frowned, clearly bothered by this sentiment. "I am a celestial," he stated. "How am I supposed to not use something that is innate to me?"

"I don't know. But if you use it, you could also be a beacon for whatever is out there." Celestials were not hunted. Not like Gracelings. But Fallen's were looked at as something easy to control. I had seen it happen all too often. A Fallen was just desperately looking for comfort. They would take it however it was given. I shuddered to think of someone like Gabriel, broken at someone's feet like that. "Come," I suggested. "Sit with me by the fire. We should eat and get a good night's rest."

I looked back into the dark, to the spot Gabriel had been looking, trying to see if there was anything lurking in the dark. While I couldn't see a thing, I in no way felt protected. The small knife strapped to my thigh was going to do nothing against whatever was watching us.

Closing my eyes, I shoved aside my paranoia and walked back to the fire. It was warm and did wonders to drive off the chill. I pulled one of the blankets out and wrapped it around me as Gabriel handed me a



few slices of bread and dried meat that had been packed. I ate them gratefully, never one to turn down food. I had eaten more in the last few days than I had in months.

We were silent, the sound of the crackling fire the only thing around us. It made Gabriel shift uncomfortably and I could see that he too was not as comforted with our sleeping arrangements as we had once thought to be. The lack of sound that was coming from the outskirts had me far more concerned than if I had even heard a howl on the wind.

Finishing my food, I laid down on my sleep sack. I was no stranger to the hard ground, having spent my youth having slumber parties in the old barn out back and sleeping on the hay. I noticed Gabriel did not lay down.

"Do you sleep?" I asked curiously. I had seen him in rest of course but I wasn't sure if that was due to the grace leeching from him or actual exhaustion.

"Not often," he said. "Though, I do feel a sense of tiredness." The moon shone silver, cutting across him in stark lines. It played across his dark skin in hues of silver, lighting up the cracks where his grace should be like old scars.

I curled my arm under my head, staring at him. "Does it hurt?" I asked quietly.

He knew what I was speaking of without me having to really explain. My eyes were heavy across the paths of his skin. The fault lines a map of where he had been and how far he had fallen. I didn't know much about celestials or the Knowing, but I did know that the higher within their rankings they were, the more grace was bestowed upon them. I wondered with the way Gabriel's skin looked, if he had been someone important once. And what exactly he had done not to be there any longer.

"Not the body," he said. "Not anymore. It did when I first fell. I felt as if I was on fire and yet I was cold all at once. Now, it is the mind that bothers me more. There is such a silence there that I find disorienting."

"Is that what the madness is then? A silence?"

"Yes. The absence of everything. No comforting embrace of the Knowing. No knowledge of what is to come or feeling as if the path I am taking is the most righteous. When the madness overtakes, you cannot even hear the sound of your own voice. There is nothing. Nothing but this bleak and desolate world."

His eyes ticked to me.

"But then I heard you. That night you came to Reese and Elias's, I heard you."

I looked at the soft glow of my hand and the smooth glass like skin upon my palm. "It's because I'm a Graceling. Something in me allows me to break through the madness." Or at least I assumed that to be true. I didn't quite know. That was the problem in the end of it all. I knew I could help. I just didn't know how.

"How did you become blessed?" he asked.

I curled my knees a bit tighter to myself, the thick scent of a burning world filling my senses. My father screaming for me to come back home.

"I trusted that the Knowing had answered my prayers when others did not," I whispered. He looked as if he were about to say something more but I turned away. My back was to him as I looked out towards the paper moon. Tomorrow, we would begin our journey. Tomorrow, we would find it and collect its light to help Gabriel and to help others like him.

I just hoped we could reach the moon in time.

~~~~~

I woke that night with a scream on my lips. The town had been burning. The church bell had fallen from the tower and smashed upon the ground wetly, the heat from the sky turning the golden steel into nothing more than mush. I was begging them. Begging them all to please just come with me. Not to stay. But they weren't listening. Each one of them were on their knees, holding their loved ones and praying for a quick defeat. Because they believed. They knew this was the path our world was supposed to take. Our time to join the light had come.

But I didn't want to. I was seventeen and not ready to die.

The heat was unbearable though and my legs felt as if they could move no longer and the children were crying all around me and...

"Shhh...." Strong arms were around me and the grace in my palm pulsed bright, lighting the dark lanternless world around us. I was on the ground, fingers curled in the dirt, with Gabriel kneeling beside me, holding me to his chest. I reached out to cling to him, simply for the source of grounding as the world turned into something less fiery.

My throat tasted like ash and my eyes burned with tears. Gabriel was cool against me however, leaving my heart to calm.

"You were having a nightmare," he told me.

I was reliving a memory.

Pulling away from him, I wiped at my eyes.

"Do you wish to speak about it? I hear that is helpful."

I shook my head. "No. I— No. No I don't wish to speak about it." We sat there, kneeling upon the ground. I suddenly felt unsafe, the grace in my palm stinging. "Something is wrong," I told him. The pain was sharp, as if cutting through me. I gasped, clutching my hand to my chest. "Something is terribly wrong."

A wet growl could be heard somewhere in the dark, along with the clacking of teeth.

[[Go investigate the dark]]

[[Find a place to hide]]

[[Pack up and move towards the village. Stay wary]]

[Dev Blog 12/26/22](#)

[Dec 26, 2022](#)

I hope everyone has had a Happy Holiday's!

It has been a while since I wrote a development blog and I apologize profusely for that. The holidays have cut my work time in half meaning I've only been getting about ten hours a week to work on the Night Market. It's been a bit nuts and I am feeling constantly behind.

I am so sorry for the wonky Paper Moons schedule. I am going to get it up this week I just am not sure when. I think once things calm down I can get back to consistent posting once more.

As for the Night Market in general. I would say I am about 60% done with the current chapter. There are a lot of patches that will be going into the next update too, so the weird pronoun shifts that you may have caught on Gabriel's route and some of the minor code breaks, should all be fixed.

On another note, you all know that some things went down for the Night Market in terms of pirating. I got caught up in the entire ordeal but I was by far not the one that was the main target. From what I could gather, Choice of Games authors were. I just for some reason got lumped in there despite refusing to publish with them. I'm not sure why.

It is fixed now to the best of my ability but going forward into book 2, NSFW codes will be a bit different. But we will address that when the time arises. As for the harassment that I was receiving on Tumblr, I know that a lot of people have been suggesting to turn my anonymous asks off but I have made the decision that I don't really want the assholes threatening me and my family, to dictate that. Because I do receive a lot of wonderful things from anon readers and I don't want that to go away. Thank you very much for the support that you guys have been giving me and believe me, this is all something I will be paying forward when my family is on their feet again. I know the Night Market is going to be a game changer in my household and I will one day have the ability to help others, just as you guys have helped me. I want to thank everyone for the last eight months. My family was threatened with this stupid piracy

thing (all because I called them out) and if I didn't have such a wonderful community, I probably would have quit. So thank you to you guys. I am hoping to get a ton more content out to you in the upcoming months and to keep this crazy ride going.

With love,

Zinnia

[Hazel - Post Chapter Nine](#)

[Dec 26, 2022](#)

Hazel woke with a start. Her gasp for air echoed throughout her room with such a tumble that she was almost sure it could be heard from the market all around. Sweat beaded against her brow, dappling her skin in perfect beads of dew before falling in slow lines down her cheeks. Swinging her legs out of bed, she leaned over, hugging herself for one long moment before getting the will to rise. She swung a soft robe of cotton over her shoulders, tying the sash tightly before padding out into the living area with bare feet. She paused though. The light in the kitchenette was already on.

She expected to see her roommate, as sleep probably was alluding them after tonight. But instead, she saw Milo.

He stood silhouetted in the kitchen, the stolen lantern a dim glow across his skin. The kettle was boiling and he was making himself some sort of drink. When she noticed the cup that sat beside his own, she felt her heart clench a little. It was all familiar. Back when he had been such a fixture in this area. When Mal had been alive and it was the three of them against the world.

"I almost believe myself to still be dreaming," she whispered. The crooked smile that touched his lips could be seen only in profile.

"I'm making hot chocolate. If you want any."

"Milo, you haven't been up here in close to ten years. Why are you making hot chocolate."

"Because I haven't been up here in close to ten years," he said wryly. Removing the kettle from the stove he began going about making cocoa. Frothed milk steamed from the small little pot, chocolate already placed within the cup. Hazel watched him quietly, still feeling as if she were waking from her nightmare. Dream? She wasn't sure what she could really classify it as.

When Milo pressed the mug in her hand, he bumped her hip, nodding towards the gathering of sofas before the fire. "I put more wood on for you," he said.

She smiled at him in thanks, settling down in her favorite chair, watching as Milo gravitated towards the spot he used to fall asleep in.

"I had a nightmare," she said softly, clutching the ceramic mug between her palms.

"I know. I heard you."

"You were already here?"

He nodded once, sipping at his own mug. If Hazel hadn't watched him, she would have thought it would be spiked with something extra. His drinking was getting bad again. "Want to talk about it?" he asked.

"I don't know if you'll want to hear it."

"There are a great many things I don't want to hear or do and yet..." he gestured around him as if to show her the end of that sentence.

Tucking her feet beneath her, Hazel tapped her nails against the ceramic lightly, the small plinking sound mingling with the popping of embers. "I was following Malcolm through the market," she said after a long stretch of time. "He couldn't see me. I tried calling for him, throwing something, anything to get his attention but he just kept walking." She looked off towards the closed door. She hadn't moved anything from in there since long before he had died. Malcolm had lived on his own for most of their adult life but she had always kept his childhood room for him. It was where he slept when he had been too tired to walk home. Or when he knew Hazel needed someone in the house that night. "I don't know if it was a dream," she confessed.

Milo's brow rose over his mug. "Meaning?"

"I think he's wandering the market, Milo. I think he's lost." The tears that sprung to her eyes had been ones she had been trying to keep away since waking. The idea that Malcolm had been walking these streets unseen for years broke her in ways she didn't think possible.

"He would hate that."

Her head snapped up, looking at Milo with wide eyes. She had expected a fight. For him to tell her it was just a dream. Keep up his mantra of Malcolm is dead and he's not coming back. But instead, Milo's eyes were fixed towards the closed door, something distant in his gaze.

"He would," she whispered.

When Milo stood, he went to the door. For a brief moment, Hazel wondered if he would open it. She was rarely brave enough to do so. But something had changed about Milo in the recent months. She was

sure something had changed about her as well. But instead of opening it, Milo ran his fingers across a framed painting, hung just to the left. Something small and delicate that Hazel had found long after Malcolm had passed. He had been attempting to paint the lanterns. Soft colors bled into the black canvas, the muted amber light of the spice distract shining through the shadows that threatened to take the world.

"He was a prick, you know," Milo said, still staring at the painting. "I love him but damn did he fucking drive me up the wall. Took everything in me sometimes not to shove him into the nearest pool of water."

Hazel laughed wetly at that, wiping at her eyes. Malcolm couldn't swim. It had been the chink in the perfect facade for so long that Milo had latched onto it and used it to his advantage. She remembered Milo swimming out to the middle of the pond once just to get away from an argument with her brother.

It was a good memory, one that brought a smile to her face. A smile that fell as she registered his words. "Love?"

Milo turned to her, shrugging. "I'll always love him, Hazel. Just as I will always love you."

"Then why have you been acting like this? Any time I talk about getting him back you fight me on it. You—"

"Because I want you to move on," he interrupted. "Because you have been spending your life in these old walls built by your mother, fixating on the ghost of your brother. You aren't living your life, Hazel. And every time I think you might start trying, something happens, a new little bone gets tossed your way and you are back to having a one track mind once more. All you can think about is Mal."

"He's my brother," she protested. The only family she had left and he had died unfairly. "I promised—"

"You think he would want you to keep a promise that locked you away just as your mother did? You think Mal would look at that and encourage it? He hated her. More than anything in this world, he hated that woman. There is not a moment he would wish to be like her."

Tears tracked down Hazel's cheeks as she stared at him. They were words that had always been danced around but Milo, as he had grown, was not one to protect her anymore. Not in the way he maybe used to. "He didn't hate her," she whispered.

Setting aside his mug, Milo took three strides to her, kneeling in front of her. Desperately, he clutched her hands in his.

"Yes he did," he said firmly. When she started shaking her head no, Milo squeezed her fingers tightly, trying to keep her from running. "I would catch him sometimes when he was in the kitchen. I'd wake and he'd be standing there, staring at the herbs and spices, lost in some memory of her. Remembering how she could take the smallest pinch of something and control you two through your food. Do you know he stopped eating once? Back before she died. He stopped eating because he thought for sure she had

gotten into his pantry and slipped something in there. Was certain that even if he threw it all out she'd do it again."

"No," Hazel shook her head. "No. That's not true."

"You hold Malcolm on this perfect pedestal ever since he died and you shouldn't. He had his problems. He was wonderful and beautiful and full of life but he also came from a broken home just like you and I. He could be too harsh. He could play his games just as I could and he could be stubborn to the point where he would forgo comfort and love because he didn't know how to just apologize and be wrong."

"And so what? I shouldn't want him home?" she cried incredulously.

"No," Milo said softly. "No. That's not it at all. I know you, Hazel. You are stubborn just like him. You are going to do whatever it is you're going to do. But whatever it is you're going to do, I hope that it's the end. Bring him back or put him to rest forever because I want you to be happy. You have a chance at that, you know."

"I'm bringing him back, Milo. I am." There wasn't an option not to and she couldn't understand why he thought differently. He had been there. He had felt Malcolm pass. He had been the one to hold him through the final moments.

Milo looked defeated. Head dropping between his shoulders as it became clear he wasn't getting through to her. "If you do, I hope you are not disappointed."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Mal doesn't sit idle. You'll have your brother back, but it doesn't mean he is going to stay a prisoner in these walls like you are."

"I'm not a prisoner," she said softly.

"By your own making, yes you are."

When Milo stood, he ran a hand through his unruly hair, looking back at Malcolm's door once more. As if he expected Malcolm to just walk through it. Hazel knew the feeling. She felt like that every day.

"Be safe," Milo said quietly. "I don't know all of what you're doing, but please be safe."

"Are you leaving?" She didn't want him to. The upper floor had been so lonely these past years. The life and love of her family had all faded away up here, leaving her to hold it all together with old photos and bits of memories that only she seemed to hold dear.

Milo glanced around the room, the walls feeling smaller to him than before. It was a bigger step than he would admit, being here. Hazel was looking at him imploringly, willing him to stay. Just for a bit.

Walking across the room, he grabbed his hot chocolate before sitting back down on his spot on the sofa. His spine was straight, and his hands were reflexively gripping the mug. But he was here. He was here because of Hazel. Taking the opportunity, Hazel wiped at her eyes, trying to cast aside the last few moments. She didn't want to think of them. She didn't want to dwell on his words. Adding more wood to the fire, she slowly started gaining composure.

"You're my sister too, you know." She heard him say from behind her. "No matter what you do, Hazel, I'll love you. I'll be pissed, but I will love you."

She closed her eyes. It was doubtful Milo knew how much she would be counting on those words in the upcoming days.

[Paper Moons Part 11](#)

[Dec 28, 2022](#)



"I don't think this is the right place for us," I said, trying to keep my voice low. Gabriel was already packing up the meager supplies and dousing the fire to our camp. Without a word, he ushered me off towards a darker portion of the outlands. When I began digging the map from my pocket, he waved me quickly off.

"I memorized it already." I glanced down at the paper in my hand. To my knowledge, he had only seen it for a brief few moments. "It is a perk I obtained after the Fall," he told me. "I need only look at something once." His footsteps were rushed as we set out away from whatever was lurking in the dark. I wanted to find a source of light to read the map myself, but as the lights of the market began to fade, we were faced with nothing but an inky horizon. Placing a hand in front of me, I struggled to see even the barest outline of my fingers. Even my grace was swallowed by the pitch of night.

When I stumbled, Gabriel caught me by the elbow. "You do not have night vision," he observed.

"No. I was human before coming to the Night Market."

I felt his grip shift on my arm then, holding me in such a way that guided me. "Is this alright?"

His hand felt warm against my skin, gripping me just a bit too hard as he helped navigate me over what felt like an unbearable rocky terrain. Though, I had a suspicion it only seemed as such due to my lack of sight. It was odd, being without one of my senses. The vision I had taken for granted was all but gone now and I was relying entirely on Gabriel to lead me to safety.

"It's alright," I told him.

"If you would like, I could carry you. I am almost certain we would move faster."

Suddenly I was wondering what his arms would feel like. If I would be weightless in his grip. If he was gentle. I felt my heart flutter a little in my chest over the romanticism of it all but quickly pushed it away. I had read more than my fair share of romance novels in my youth and my thoughts were starting to wander. All this man was just trying to do was get us where we were going without me falling and breaking my neck.

"I prefer to walk," I told him. "Though your guidance is appreciated."

He didn't respond but kept us moving forward, the faint glow from his eyes providing a soft sort of comfort. It did little to light the way but offered a soft outline of his face, the line of his jaw the only thing I could see.

We walked in silence for a bit and after a while, I let myself trust him. After all, he was a celestial. The very creatures that I had prayed to for guidance as a child.

"What do you know about the outlands?" I asked him.

"Very little," he said. "Only that it is what surrounds the market itself. I am assuming it is a place of exile."

"They say that the Night Market was not even up top years and years ago. That it was once a sprawling city underground. But then everything began to cave in so they had to move up top. The Outlands may be the ruins of the old city." I paused. "Or, they are exile encampments. The Velvet Guard does seem to send the worst of their lot out to wander this terrain." It was a death sentence. If you couldn't see in the dark, I didn't see how you would survive out here unless you were able to stumble upon civilization.

"I heard the Velvet Guard has other means to punishment. Why would they exile the worst of them outside of the city when their flesh pits and auction blocks are much more profitable?"

I shivered a little. The flesh trade in the market was far worse than the Velvet Guard wished to let on. I knew that my hand alone was worth more than a year's pay for most.

"Maybe they feel bad?" Though it was clear I was just trying to make sense of a nonsensical situation. Panic was beginning to swell within me the further we walked. "Do you think we have made a mistake, Gabriel? Coming out here like we are. Do you suppose that these people will even help us? If they are the ones that not even the Velvet Guard will keep, what reason do they have to show us any sort of compassion?"

"Because it is the correct thing to do," he told me.

"Not everyone operates under that assumption."

"Perhaps not. But most I believe do. The world is not a terrible place unless we make it one."

I had believed that. It was what I had been taught my entire life. But what was I supposed to do in the face of a world burning. What had we done to deserve that? Terrible actions fell upon my people and for reasons I couldn't fathom. Then again, maybe I had not known the full extent of my village's actions. Maybe we had deserved death in the end.

"You seem contemplative," he observed.

"It's nothing. I just wish to make it to the village."

"Then we will focus on that."

The night grew cold. Far colder than either of us were prepared for and along with the sound of our crunching boots, I could hear my teeth chattering. I could no longer feel my toes and each breath I took felt like a sharp pain that was slicing across my chest. While Gabriel gave no indication that he was cold, his fingers felt stiff against me. I was near suggesting that we find a source of light to look at the map, simply for something to say out loud, but at this point, we had been traveling for hours and had found nothing nearby that could offer us shelter. The only logical thing I could think to do was make another fire and hope that it did not attract the wrong sort of company.

But just as I was about to suggest this, the sky burst with light. The moon appeared from behind a large mountain I had not even known was there, silver and heavy in the sky. I gasped as I looked upwards. It was far larger than I had ever seen. I lifted my hand. As if I could touch it. My skin was frosted in the moonlight, crystallized with bits of ice. When I turned to Gabriel, he looked fragmented through the ice that clung to my lashes.

"The village has to be nearby," he murmured. "The map indicated it to be right here."

I looked but there was nothing. Not even a speck of smoke. Just the looming mountain range and the moon perched atop its peak.

"We could travel upwards towards it," Gabriel was saying. "Though I cannot determine how long it will take, and your heartbeat is slowing to a concerning extent." He looked none too concerned about it but it had the desired effect of making it pump a bit harder.

"No, I don't think we were duped. I believe our map to be accurate. We just have to look a bit more. Maybe they are behind one of the bends of the mountain or..."

There was a humming that echoed through the mountain.

It took a moment to follow the sound but when I did, I saw the silhouette of a form, bathed in shadow and moonlight. The girl was dancing upon the jagged ridge of a worn mountain trail, her pointed feet bare and hopping from rock to rock. She wore a ragged dress, torn and frayed, and her long blonde hair fell in dirty waves down her back. Yet there was a beauty there. Something I was not quite used to. She was young and unassuming and looked as if she belonged to the night.

"She is singing to the moon," Gabriel said.

"How can you tell?" I couldn't make out what she was saying which was odd all on its own. The market usually translated all languages for us but we may have been too far back.

"I can feel it," Gabriel whispered with a frown, not understanding his own words.

Approaching, we tried to keep our steps loud so as not to startle her. But even as I called out to her, she did not stop her dancing. She only laughed, looking at the two of us before curtsying. Then, she danced down the side of the mountain as if it were nothing.

Without a discussion, we followed her. Walking as fast as we could, we wove through the mountain path to where she had been, spying a faint glowing hole within the rock surface. The amber light of a warm fire danced across glass steps that led down into the earth.

"Do you think this is the village?" I asked. Gabriel exchanged a look with me. Hand on his sword, he began making his way down.

The stairs were a straight shot and I had to keep my eyes forward so as not to feel like I would tip into the abyss below. The walls were all made of juts of glass and crystal, reflecting beautiful frozen images of fire from within. They gave off heat though, warming my nearly frozen skin and dousing my hair with sweat. As we rounded a bend, the cavern suddenly opened up below, boasting the same frozen fire glass along with a sprawling city beneath.

"Halt," a soft rumble came from the depths of a hooded cloak. I had been so enraptured by my surroundings I had not even seen the spindling gate of moonstone before me. Nor the man that stood shrouded before it. "State your business," he drawled.

[[We've come to seek the moon]]

[[There was a girl that we followed down here]]

[[We were given a map to a village though we may be lost]]



[Milo Next Full Body](#)

[Dec 31, 2022](#)

Done by the wonderful mooreaux.

Happy New Years from everyone at the Night Market!

[Chapter Ten Early Release](#)

[Jan 4, 2023](#)

Welcome to Chapter Ten! There was a lot of coding in this one. A LOT! I am hoping that we got all the code breaks, but please go to discord to report any that you might see.

In order to access this chapter, go to your save and when prompted please type in the following code

c10b@r0n

Please note that both of those are zero's in the above word.

Enjoy!



[Gabriel Safe For Work](#)

[Jan 7, 2023](#)

Here he is, a bit shirtless here. Just unwinding from work.

To see him further unwind, go to the NSFW version at the Velvet Guard tier.



[Gabriel NSFW](#)

[Jan 7, 2023](#)

He may not have gotten a sex scene, but he is the first RO with a picture.

[Dev Blog 1/8/23](#)

[Jan 8, 2023](#)

It has been a hell of a few weeks. LOL!

So first, I want to thank you all for your patience with me. I know posting has been all over the place and I'm either flooding Tumblr or completely inactive. The holidays were crazy around here and then to top it off, my best friend's birthday is a few days into January, my youngest two days after theirs, and then my middle child is mid January, along with my wedding anniversary being at the end of this month. So, coming right off the holidays, we have still crazy busy weekends and my work days are the only flexible ones in the house, so my work time was cut almost in half this last month.

That all being said, I really hope you guys are enjoying Chapter 10! Everything in it has been something I have been so excited to write for so long. I will probably go on a gush about Belladonna on discord soon. :)

As we enter the last two chapters, I still plan to get one out a month but I am feeling a bit nervous about it. One, because it is ending, and two, because I have a beast to edit after this. I'm also incredibly concerned that Book 2 will never live up to this one but that is a future me problem.

I love that you guys are starting to get active on discord too! If you are a discord member and haven't joined, I highly recommend that you do. I am on there more than anywhere else and you can reach me pretty easily. I also love answering your guys questions there.

I'm going to get back to Paper Moons tomorrow and start writing the monthly shorts to get everything queued. We are in the final stretch of all of this and it is mind blowing to think about.

Can't wait to hear for you all!

Zinnia

[Update](#)

[Jan 9, 2023](#)

Just want to clear a few things up as we get to the end of the story. There will be 12 chapters to this game. I will still be keeping to my month to month schedule so the last chapter should be released early March. From there, I will be keeping the wip up, but will be taking a few months to go back in the game, fix some of the major code bugs that I have, add routes and interludes, and beef up some of the content and descriptors of the market itself. All NSFW scenes will be available with purchase of the game. I will be releasing the game on Steam and on Itch.io. If I can figure out how to release it on Apple and IOS I will absolutely be doing that as well.

All of the Patreon content that I have been writing for the last year that pertains to Book 1, will also be released as a separate entity on itch.io and maybe Steam (I'm not sure about the logistics of that one). I will also be adding some artwork and stories to that which have not been released on Patreon. That should be coming out either the end of March or the first week of April.

As for the interlude between books, I will still be writing content on Patreon that will not be released publically yet, in order to keep hype going and in order to tell a bit of a story that would just not work within the books.

If you have anymore questions, please feel free to message me. We are coming to the end of it all and I know a lot is starting to happen and I want to communicate it all with you as best as I can.

Zinnia

[Paper Moons Part 12](#)

[Jan 9, 2023](#)

I stuck close to Gabriel, knowing just how precarious this situation could become. The heat from below was nearly sweltering, causing my blouse to stick to the back of my neck and my hair to become lank. No one was supposed to be living in the outlands. This was the place where the exiles were sent. Yet, I could hear the clambering of a small village beyond where the guard stood. Wagons behind pulled through thick layers of dirt and the echo of laughter.

"There was a girl," I started hesitantly. "She was up on the mountain ridge. We followed her here."

The man rolled his eyes, though the gestured was not directed towards us. There was a slight indignation upon hearing our words. As if he almost should have expected them. "That was no girl that you saw."

My eyes ticked up to the craggy ceiling and where I knew the dark sky lay. Her silhouette had been ghostly against the backdrop of the jagged mountain expanse and the light of the full moon. Wisps of silver tinted hair had danced around her as she gracefully stepped from rock to rock. It would have been so easy to see her as a phantom dancing on the wind but I couldn't shake the image of her in my mind.

"She certainly looked like a girl," I started, not knowing what else I was supposed to say.

"Ay, I'm sure she did. But that's a creature of the night and I doubt she is the youth that she appears to be."

"Creature of the night?" Gabriel asked.

"Vampire." The man had a gruff voice to match his even gruffer appearance. As he stepped into the torchlight, I could see his pocked face, a scar lashing down across one eye and a beard that was in desperate need of grooming. He was big and tall and towered even over the bulk of someone like Gabriel. "Did she lure you down here?" he asked.

"I do not think so," I told him. "We were already out here."

"Exiles then?"

Gabriel was about to correct him when I put my hand on his hand. "Yes," I lied. I could feel the stern look coming from Gabriel as I said it but I didn't want to explain to this guardsman why we were here. Not unless it became necessary. It was best for him to think that we were one of them.

He nodded. "You're lucky you found this place. Next outpost is several miles out. Probably a blessing Kavatti was up there."

"Kavatti?"

"The vamp. She's an odd one. She goes out to the edge of the cliffs and dances beneath the moonlight. Says it gives her power or some such bull." Stepping aside, he leaned against the wall, clearly no longer on guard. "You're going to meet a lot of odd ones down here. You'll get used to it after a while though."

Both of us stood hesitantly, staring at the burly man like lost little lambs. When it was clear we were not going to move right away, he sighed, gesturing down the staircase with the butt of his ax. "Go on then. Plenty of people down there to help you acclimate. I'm sure I'll see ya around."

With a hand to the small of my back, Gabriel pressed me forward, urging me to go. I felt my feet stumble over one another but made sure to smile at the man in thanks as we passed. I could hear him mumbling as we descended into the makeshift mountain village.

"Like little ducks," he said. "Imprinting. Damn I need a new job."

The stairwell darkened briefly as we turned a corner. I could still hear the life bustling below but for a second, we were blinded.

"Watch your step," Gabriel intoned, helping guide me down.

"No one should be living out here, Gabriel," I whispered, as if the people down here didn't already know that. "The Velvet Guard sends people out here to die. We all know it."

"That may be the current Warden's intent but it is clear that life has persevered."

The stairwell opened into a deep and rolling cavern. Torches lit the walls and big basins of fire hung from the ceiling. Bits of light spilled from them, falling like rain into small magma pools beneath where some creatures were lounging. Dirt roads were carved between these pools, twisting around a small village of dirt cobbled huts with slate roofs. I felt myself stumble once more as I looked around. Dozens of people were down here, existing together, happy and content. They looked no worse for wear as they went about their lives, trading fresh bread with each other. Bending down to share a conversation with their neighbor.

"There's the girl," Gabriel said.

I could see her. The dancing girl. She was out on the edges of the cavern, still twirling, but obviously not welcome into the inner sanctum of light. Her dress looked dirty down here in the light of the torches and flames whereas up top it looked as if it had been made of moon silk.

"The guard certainly didn't seem as if he liked her," I pointed out. "Do we go and speak to her or someone else?" The information we were given had said the individual we were looking for was between a child and a woman. Stuck in a liminal space. She was someone who sang to the moon and while this girl had danced and not sang, she was the closest so far to the description we had gained.

"Do you have hesitation about speaking with her?"

I nodded. "It is convenient?" I hated that my mind had turned this way but ever since coming to the market, I felt as if it was too easy, it was usually too good to be true. And despite us traveling into the dark lands that we were not supposed to be, the journey had been relatively easy. There were back alleys of the market that were far more dangerous than what we had just experienced.

"So then we stay on guard," Gabriel reasoned. "You read people far better than I. If you have a reason to walk from the conversation, I will walk with you."

I looked towards him, completely unused to the kind of loyalty that he was giving. Not even back home did I receive this. I was a woman. We were meant to be silent. Not to lead.

I said nothing as we started through the village. A few people noted that we were newcomers but waited for us to approach. I wondered how many people came here and how often? If there were more places like this? If entire communities were thriving outside the Night Market proper, becoming one of the best kept secrets of this world.

As we approached the girl, I saw what the guard meant. She presented as a young girl. Not quite a child but perhaps a teen of sorts. Someone blossoming into womanhood. There was something about her face though. Lines of ancient history spreading from her violet eyes. This was not a creature that was young despite what she wished the world to believe.

"Excuse me?" I approached her, making sure to keep my distance and stay in the light. I knew nothing about vampires, but the girl seemed to not like the torchlight. In the end, it may have been nothing more than an illusionary safety.

She stopped, toe poised in a perfect point, toenails yellowed and gnarled as her foot hovered above the dirt floor.

"We couldn't help but notice you above," I started. "You were the one dancing, correct?"

A smile stretched across her face, skin paper thin and cracking at the corners of her lips. "You seek the moon," she whispered.

I startled a little. "How did you know that?"

She tipped her head upwards, as if to look towards the sky, and began swaying slightly back and forth. She did not answer us. Her eyes suddenly vacant as she began to slowly twirl.

"I do not know if she has the presence of mind to help us," Gabriel said.

"Considering that we are attempting to collect moonlight for a spell, I think presence of mind is perhaps not our biggest concern." Stepping closer, I crouched a little, trying to get down on the girl's level. "You are Kavatti, correct? We were sent here. Perhaps to you. We need help."

Suddenly I was on the flat of my back, the girl upon me, her bony fingers digging into the earth by my head. "So hungry." Gabriel pulled her off, flinging her back into the shadows but I could still feel it. The skeletal protrusions of her limbs. I could still see the feral need in her eyes.

Slowly, sitting up, I tried to keep my motions slow and concise.

[Alpha Build - Paper Moons](#)

[Jan 11, 2023](#)

The alpha build for Paper Moons is all up to date. Thank you for sticking with me during the craziness of the holidays. I'm hoping to at some point this month get some more graphics and sidebars in there to make it look a bit prettier.

Access code is still going to be DecPaperBaron due to some mix ups from last month. Hope you guys enjoy!

[Milo - Post Chapter Ten](#)

[Jan 12, 2023](#)



His palm came down upon the lantern, scattering the rain across the streets. Colored drops fell like gems across each cobblestone, bouncing along until they dissipated within the market's cracks. Milo looked upwards, squinting into the rain, hair sticking to his face and shirt plastered to his chest. Opening his mouth, he stuck out his tongue to catch the drizzle before shaking his head vigorously, watching as the water dripped off of him in glittering buds of dew.

Ducking his head, he bent beneath the archway of the old stone walkway that led towards 'home'. The torches were dim as the eve had struck, but the whirring of the sewing machine brought a smile to his face. "Bastard," he chuckled to himself. Taking the steps two by two he jumped the last one, landing on his feet in an old stone room with a blazing hearth and a giant of a man slumped over a still running machine.

Milo approached Feebus, looking at his adoptive father figure, the man who had taken him in at such a young age. It was with intense fondness that Milo remembered his time here. Even if at the time he couldn't wait to leave. Feebus was snoring, nearly louder than the machine itself and when Milo flipped it off to silence the room, the redheaded giant nearly jumped awake.

"Won't your wives be lookin' for you by now?" Milo asked with a raised brow.

Feebus blinked, the past and present colliding as he remembered a young boy with dirt streaked cheeks and a temper to boot. "What'd you do?" he asked, narrowing his eyes.

Milo flopped down on one of the chairs nearby, crossing one leg over the other and placing his hands on the arms. He sat in repose, his body loose and unencumbered. It wasn't often anymore that he felt comfortable in his own skin. Hazel's used to bring that relief but in recent months even that succor had been whisked away. "You know, eventually you are going to need to understand that every time I show up here doesn't mean that I fucked up in some way."

"But did you?" Feebus asked, stretching. His back cracked loudly. There was no reproach in his words. Just an understanding of the street kid he had cleaned up more times than he could count.

"Did I what?"

"Fuck up."

Milo held up his fingers, a hair breadth apart, squinting one eye. Feebus rolled his eyes and stood from the machine, groaning. The cocky grin on Milo's face was a defense mechanism he had seen through since the kid was eight. He ignored it now.

"What are you working on?" Milo asked, dropping his own hand. "I heard that the shipments weren't getting through anymore. Why's that?"

"Markets been a bit off," Feebus said. "Certain crafters are packing up shop and trying to go to safer ground. Too many cracks are showing in the sky and people are worried the worlds about to cave in. Slowed down what fabric I can get. And what help."

"I'll look into it," Milo told him.

"What exactly do you plan to do about all that boy?" he asked with a raised brow. "You aren't exactly a connoisseur of diplomacy. Doubt they're going to listen to your efforts to speed up shipments."

Milo snorted. "No. Probably not. But I can find a problem like it's no one else's business. Maybe I can solve their location problem for them."

Feebus walked over to a large ice box, pulling it open and pulling out two bottles of what looked like milk. He handed one to Milo who popped the top as if it were muscle memory. When Milo couldn't sleep as a child, he'd come to Feebus's workshop. The man always had a glass of cinnamon milk for him. Some things never changed.

"Alright," Feebus said, sitting on an oversized wooden chair. "Tell me what you did."

Milo stared at the man for a long moment, the amusement gone from his face. A puddle was pooling beneath his feet as he stared at the man evenly. "I don't know yet," he said in all seriousness.

"How do you not know?"

"It's funny really," he said with a shrug, kicking the dripping rain around the workshop floor. "I should know but I don't. Could be nothing in the end. Fates have yet to spin their tale."

"Stop speaking in fucking riddles boy and just talk."

Peeling the label off the bottle, Milo sat in the dim light of the room. The cold was starting to penetrate him but he wasn't shivering. The market had grown cold lately. Far too cold. It was a bitterness that Milo had gotten used to.

"You kill anyone?" Feebus asked.

"Not recently." There was for once, no blood on his hands. He had kept them pretty clean these last few months. Kept them clean for *them*.

"You thinking about killing anyone?"

Leaning forward, Milo set his milk aside. "I got a favor to ask you," he said evenly. The real reason he had shown up tonight.

"Figured."

"There's going to come a night that I'm going to need somewhere to hold up. Won't be able to go home for a bit. I haven't quite figured out where I'm landing yet, but could I land here first? For a few days?"

At that, Feebus slowly narrowed his eyes. He wasn't asking to come home with Feebus. He was asking to sleep in the loft of the shop. Where the thimbles and the discarded bits of fabric were kept. He was hiding. "Ava and Marie aren't going to like whatever you've got goin' on."

"They don't have to know I'm here."

Feebus looked at him, weighing the option of lying to his wives vs helping the son he never had. When it came down to it though, Milo would always be housed in that soft spot of his heart. There was no getting around it. Taking a slow sip of his milk, Feebus nodded. "Alright," he said slowly.

"And," Milo continued, "can you check on Ever?"

"Why you leavin' that girl alone, Milo?"

"To hopefully keep her safe. Now will you check on her?"

Feebus nodded solemnly, drawing a small sigil in the air. A promise from the old culture. One Milo had never understood but it had always meant something to Feebus. "You know I will."

"Thanks." Milo leaned back in his chair contemplatively, still fiddling with the bottle.

"Boy, if you're in trouble, you know there are people who love you. Who could help."

"I don't want help, Feebus," Milo said, staring at his untouched drink. "And for the first time, I actually do know what I'm doing."

"You sure? Because you certainly don't look like it." Milo looked like a man dead on his feet. Surrounded by demons who were waiting to be cruel.

"I'm sure."

They were words far too weighty for Feebus's comfort but there was nothing he could say to the conviction. So instead, he leaned back in his chair. "Drink your milk, boy."

Milo took a sip, nearly sputtering. He held the bottle up to the light, watching dim notes of amber and honey swim in a tornado within. "Is there whiskey in this?"

"Damn right there is." The big man lumbered to his feet, downing the rest of his own drink. "Now, if you are going to be here asking me these things you can make yourself useful. Grab a needle and some buttons. I'm behind on work."

Milo laughed. "Alright, old man. Whatever you say."

When Feebus walked away, he muttered something that suspiciously sounded like 'idiot'. Milo smiled at the old sentiment, feeling his heart ache at the same time.

[Next Short](#)

[Jan 15, 2023](#)

The monthly shorts are now going to start including Malcolm. But, given this chapter and how it ended, do you guys want a Malcolm short all on its own, or one that combines Hazel and him?

The one all on its own would probably be an internal monologue of what he thinks might be going on.

The one with Hazel will be the two of them reconnecting.

His own short

One with him and Hazel

57 votes total

[Paper Moons Part 13](#)

[Jan 16, 2023](#)



The girl look emaciated. The bones in her cheeks were sharp cuts across her skin and her eyes were a deep violet that pierced through the shadows. I looked to her hands, the ones that had been braced near my neck and into the light of the fire. They looked thin and blistered, as if even the smallest amount of light was a detriment to her.

Gabriel stood between the two of us, his back corded, ready to strike if necessary. I brushed my hand across his arm, trying to tell him silently to stand down. There was no doubt that the girl in front of us was a dangerous creature but I wondered just how many people considered her dangerous without trying to understand.

"We aren't here to hurt you," I tried to assure her. "In fact, if you are the person that we are here to seek, I would say we are here to help you more than anything else?" She cocked her head to the side, the motion causing her joints to crack loudly. I tried not to flinch. "Do you need help with anything?" I needed this girl to trust us. I needed her to know we were not her enemy. And in the end, I needed to know that we were not about to succumb to another trick of the market. Perhaps if we got to know her a bit better, we could ask her what we came here for.

"Help?" The girl began to laugh. It was loud and shrieking and as I glanced over my shoulder I saw some of the villagers begin to move away. "Help the moon? Why would you help the moon?"

"You are the moon?" Gabriel asked, confused.

It somehow made her laughter higher pitched. Behind her I could see the fissures of stone race up the cavern wall at the mere sound of it. I winced as I stepped forward, Gabriel bracing at my side as if to stop me.

"We just want to help," I told her. "And maybe receive help in return. Would you like to talk with us? Is there somewhere more comfortable we can talk?"

Her eyes flashed. "Hungry," she hissed.

I turned to Gabriel hesitantly. He could see the question already in my eyes. "No," he stated firmly.

"She looks sick," I reasoned. Perhaps if I could just give her a little bit of my blood then she would be able to help us. Be clear-headed.

Gabriel was clearly having none of it, however. "You must eat down here. Where do you procure your food?" he asked.

When her gaze flicked over to a small hovel, both Gabriel and I turned. It looked worn, and the roof looked as if it needed patched but there was a candle in the window, flickering brightly.

"There?" I asked. "If we get you food from there will you speak to us?"

She receded into the shadows, crouching upon a rock and beginning to hum to herself. Rising to my feet, I gestured towards Gabriel, asking him to follow. The two of us slowly made our way towards the house.

"Do you believe this is the wisest course of action?" he asked me.

"No. But if she is the girl we are supposed to speak to, which I do believe she is, what other choice do we have? She looks practically starving, the poor thing. Even if she is not the person for us, we should at least tempt to feed her. We can't just leave her like this."

Gabriel's face looked pinched but he said nothing to disagree with me. I was starting to wonder if he could. It was something I noted to speak to him about later.

There was no door to the hut. To any of them in fact. As we approached the one Kavatti indicated, I ducked my head inside. It was one circular room, barely wide enough to fit more than three people. There was a small shelf off to one side, lined with different jars and a set of stairs that led down into what looked like a cellar.

"Hello?" I called out.

A woman popped up, her frizzy hair tinged with blue and her coke bottle glasses sitting on the crisp apples of her tanned cheeks. "You new?" she asked.

I nodded. "Yes. I uh- there's a girl out there. Kavatti. She made an indication that there could be some food for her here?"

The woman chuckled, a deep and low hum. "Did she now?" Climbing up from the cellar, she went over to the bookshelf. "Did she give you anything to trade for it?" We didn't have to answer for her to know. "No. I don't suppose she would." Kicking the cellar door shut, she sighed, placing her hands on her ample hips. "Here's the thing. Kavatti gets a bite of one of the locals here and there to keep her calm but any of the other donated blood, she does need to pay for. She has used up her rations for the week already."

"Rations?"

"Yup," she said with a pop. "We all got them here. Never a plush month." Her eyes ticked over my shoulder to Gabriel. "What do you need Kavatti for anyway?"

I cleared my throat, unsure of how much I could really trust these people, but at the same time, if we started lying our way through everything, I didn't think we were going to make quick friends.

"She might have some information we need," I stated diplomatically. "But the state that we found her in doesn't seem as if its going to be very helpful."

"Probably not. She keeps going up top and talking to that moon out there. Deplete her energy."

"Do you know what she is attempting?" Gabriel asked.

"Communing with the future, according to her. I don't put much stock in it. No one here really does."

"I'm sorry. I do have to ask. We were under the impression that no one was out here. That the beasts got all the exiles."

The woman leaned forward with a grin. "Because it's important for you all to think that," she said.

"Because if you knew there were options, Velvet Guard wouldn't have control."

"But why not shatter that illusion?"

"Because we are small. And there are children. And sometimes, it is best to be forgotten," she said sadly. "Now, what do you want to do about, Kavatti?"

[[We have nothing to trade. Feed her yourself]]

[[Trade your dagger for blood]]

[[Try to find someone within the village that can help or donate blood]]

[Jan 18, 2023](#)



The upper floor was far quieter than expected given the destruction that was downstairs. Willow branches shot through the floor and arched over the bookshelves to form a gate that while closed, still sat suspended before the front counter. Blood stained the unbroken boards and sigils painted in grave soil and the soot from the fire lined the entirety of the room. Upstairs, however, there was almost the ability to pretend like none of it had happened. Except for the fact that Hazel didn't want to.

Malcolm was asleep in his bed. Old drawings littered the walls, some of them hanging on by only the rusted point of a pin. Hazel didn't wish to disturb him as she leaned in the doorway, looking in on his sleeping form and trying not to blink. For she was almost certain if she did, he would be gone from her once more.

Gabriel had helped drag him upstairs and get him into bed while the others had followed behind. Tea was made and the fire was stoked and everyone sat in a kind of numb quiet because no one was sure what they were supposed to be doing now other than maybe staring at the wall and processing everything that had just happened.

Then again, Hazel should have known that Belladonna was not everyone.

When the woman's fingers wrapped around her wrists in a surprisingly harsh grip, Hazel yelped as the vampire pushed her the rest of the way into the room and closed the door behind them. Quickly, Hazel jerked her hand away and put a few steps between them, looking at the simmering eyes in the otherwise grey room while also frantically glancing behind her to make sure that Malcolm did not wake.

"What did you do." It did not fall from her lips as a question. Accusations rarely did. And while Belladonna had always been someone who had left almost everyone to their own paths, something

about tonight had settled against her in a way that left her silence to be nearly impossible.

Hazel looked at her, trying to find the bravado she had held so tight earlier. That was before she had nearly bled herself dry and let the spirits of the dead wander through her like a revolving door.

"I did what I said I'd do from the beginning." There was a waver to her voice that denoted the lie and later, Hazel wouldn't even understand why she had tried. Vampires smelled mistruths as if it were the blood they craved.

"You nearly killed yourself tonight," Belladonna said. "And don't pretend like you didn't because I can hear the heart in your chest and how it pumps with practically nothing. You are being held up by magic and magic alone. How dare you do something so stupid and childish."

"Childish?" Hazel looked at her in shock. It was the last thing she had expected to be thrown at her. Not in this situation. "He died for me. I promised him I would get him back and for ten years I have been trying. How is this situation childish?"

"Because you should have known to go about it better," Belladonna hissed. "The spirits from the alley are gone, Hazel Albright. Do you know what that means? Your mother, is gone."

Hazel took a deep breath, tears filling her eyes. Her mother. Lucinda. There were such complications to the emotions that came with her. Lucinda had died by her own hands so long ago and while her spirit had certainly remained, it was one Hazel was willing to sacrifice so Malcolm could be returned to them in the flesh.

"I do believe I may have been the only person to have loved my mother so I really don't see how this is a hardship to anyone that she is no longer wandering that alley."

"It is a hardship," Belladonna hissed, stepping forward. "Because it is not her spirit that was broken, tonight. It was the hold that kept her there. With the little stunt you pulled, you may have very well returned an ancient back to the market proper. And I doubt she's going to be very happy given the way she died."

Hazel felt what little blood was in her, drain from her face. It wasn't possible. She had been very careful with that spell. It was meant for the dead. To take their remaining energy and channel it to bring Malcolm back to this spot. Lucinda's was the darkest of them all but the essence that contained the most power. During life, Lucinda had done very little for her son. Hazel ironically thought that she could somehow make up for it now.

Shaking her head, Belladonna closed her eyes, forcing her anger to leave her in a whisper of a bat wing that fluttered somewhere high above. "You were supposed to be better than all this, Hazel," she said softly. "And instead, you let another individual's life, dictate how you lived your own."

"Malcolm is my brother."

Belladonna glanced towards the bed. "Yes. And I wonder how your brother will feel knowing that his presence back within the living, may have brought back the woman who nearly destroyed his home and his family."

Hazel felt a tear slip from her cheek. She couldn't tell him. Maybe she wouldn't even have to. If Lucinda walked the cobblestone streets again, maybe she would just stay away.

Reaching out, Belladonna caught the tear, cupping Hazel's cheek within the hollow of her palm.

"I do hope that this is worth it for you," she whispered. "And I do hope you start living your life for yourself, and not the twisted memory of a man who had made peace with his death."

When Belladonna slipped from the room, Hazel stood, frozen. She stared at the door that had quietly clicked shut. Paint had chipped from it long ago. A pretty sage green that had been one of Malcolm's favorites all his life. He always did love earth tones. She would need to repaint for him. Make his room more comfortable until he got better. There was a long road of recovery and...

Her hand came up to stifle the sob that threatened to escape her. Turning, she closed her eyes from the door. From the world that existed outside of it and from the carnage of the shop below. Lowering herself onto the edge of Malcolm's bed, she reached out, pressing her fingers to his warming flesh.

Turning, she looked at her brother's sleeping form. "Please don't hate me," she whispered. But Malcolm didn't hear her. Just like the last ten excruciating years, he didn't hear her.

[Malcolm - Post Chapter Ten](#)

[Jan 18, 2023](#)



Malcolm Albright was dead.

It was a funny thing to say, really, especially once he realized he was Malcolm Albright. It was a whisper he had heard for as long as he could remember. Some rejoiced at his demise. Others felt such deep sorrow. And some, sought him out. He remembered in the early days how there were spirits that would greet him but when he only stared at them with a blankness and a memory that had crumpled somewhere in another world's ether, they had begun to leave him alone. Now, with his memory back, he did the same to anyone that passed him. Mainly because he didn't like the notoriety that came with his name. It wasn't as if he could do whatever it was they wanted him to do in the first place. Whatever powers he had were gone. And in their wake was nothing but that aching feeling of the Night Market tearing itself apart for reasons he had yet to coax out of them.

Hands in his pockets, he walked the streets. Looking at the walls, running his fingers over their cracks. Hoping that something would become clear. The challenge of what to do when it did was another one all together but he figured the only way to continue was with one foot in front of the other and little room for a conversation that wasn't about fixing their home.

He found Hazel first. She was the easiest. She was out in the garden picking herbs. Malcolm knew he had been here before. Dozens of times he had wandered towards her with no idea why, watching her hum within her garden, petting her cat and having full conversations with the creature as if he were her oldest and dearest friend. Once or twice he tried to reach out, letting her know he was there. Occasionally she would get that look in her eyes that said she knew something was off but it was never enough. Malcolm didn't know how much time had passed but by the state of the apothecary, he was assuming it was a lot.

He had tried to go see Kamille down in the deep, hoping against hope that she had not been taken out like so many of the Barons before her. The selkies had set up their wards though and despite Malcolm having come from there, apparently he was not welcome back. There was too much up top he was supposed to be seeing.

The thing was, up top hurt. It knifed through him like a dull ache and took his breath from him every few steps. As the market gasped around him, seeking out some way to heal, he felt every inch of it run along his skin. He didn't understand how everyone else couldn't hear the screams. Hear the dying gasps of their world. How did everyone just go about their day like it was nothing?

When he found Milo it was in the back of a bar. It had taken him an exceedingly long time to track him down and Malcolm couldn't help but think that was somehow by design despite the younger man not knowing he was even there. Milo sat in the very back, a half drunk tumbler of whiskey in front of him and a distant look on his face. When Malcolm sat in the chair across from him, he could almost pretend, at least for a moment, that this was like all the other times they had sought refuge in the quiet.

"Hey, Button," he said with a sigh. "You look like shit."

Milo took a small sip, swirling the amber liquid in the dirty glass. Leaning back against the cushion of his chair, he sighed, staring down into the contents.

"I probably will too," Malcolm said conversationally. "Half expecting to be a rotted corpse." Worm food, as Milo used to call the dead. He wondered if he did anymore. "Went to see Haze. I know she's up to something. Something not good." he frowned. "Why aren't you with her, Milo? Why are you here? She's going to do something stupid and..." and what? Hazel wasn't Milo's responsibility. It was only the anger that wanted to blame someone else for what Malcolm knew was going to be terrible actions on her part.

Across the way, Milo downed his drink, signaling for another. It was replaced by a young waitress with breasts that spilled from her top. Milo's go to on an uneasy night. Yet, he didn't even look.

"Well," Malcolm said, "either you've grown up or shit got bad. Given the dark circles under your eyes, I'd say, shit probably got really bad. You're not sleeping again, huh? Probably aren't taking care of yourself either. You never did understand that you have to eat something green to maintain health."

Leaning back, Malcolm crossed his arms, observing the man. The one he had wandered the streets with once. The one he had gotten into trouble with. The man who had driven him to such anger and yet inspired such fierce loyalty. Malcolm used to say he never knew if he loved Milo or hated him. Milo used to smirk and tell him something about fine lines.

Scrubbing a hand across his face, Malcolm shook his head. It wouldn't do to dwell. Not here. Not while the tears across the market were widening. And certainly not with a man who couldn't see him.

Standing, Malcolm took one last look at the mop of dirty blond hair and the ringed fingers. "I'd say I'll be seeing you soon but..." there was nothing to say. Nothing he could say. A stab of pain went through him, like it had all the times before as he walked the streets. It flared to life much larger this time though, gathering around his midsection and gripping him in a band of steel. Head thrown back, he let out a shallow gasp.

The next thing he knew Hazel's arms were around him and she was crying into his shoulder while the lamp light next to her pulsed with unsteady life. He didn't see himself get flung through the opening gate. He didn't know what was happening. And he certainly was not aware of the pair of amber eyes that had locked onto him the second he had been called home.

[Dev Blog 1/19/23](#)

[Jan 19, 2023](#)

Holy hell it has been a month!

I have the last two chapters written and I am beyond excited for this. I still have to put in the choices (which will start tomorrow) but then I can get the ball rolling on having the last of this wip up and out and starting the edit and other projects that I have had tumbling on the back burner. The last chapter of this game is slated to come out somewhere between March 2 and 5th.

Currently, I am also going through all my Patreon shorts. I am refining and compiling them for a season 1 release, along with some of the art work that has been drawn. Hopefully I can commission a few new ones that will be exclusive to that book for now and write some new stories to go with it. Overall, I think there will be around 60 short stories in that release and I am planning on putting it out for 9.99. I have no idea if I can release it on Itch.io but I can at least release it in an e-book format.

Stickers are also upcoming. The NM artist and I are working on a few things and this is one of them. I don't know yet if they are going to be Patreon exclusive or if they will just be sold in a bundle but I'll keep you all updated on that too.

On a personal note. I started writing the Night Market up to my ears in debt. During this journey, my husband was on strike for over two months where we had no paycheck other than what was here. My daughters went through some medical issues that wracked up even more debt, and we had to get a new car because in the span of six months, both our cars died on us. Currently? I have about 10 grand to go and I'm out from under EVERYTHING.

I cannot and will not ever be able to express how much each of you mean to me. This story has quite literally changed how we have been able to live. So, I promise I will continue to work hard for all of you and put out the best story I can.

I cannot wait for the content that is coming your way and I hope everyone has a wonderful end of January.

Zinnia

[Ro Interaction](#)

[Jan 21, 2023](#)

As the characters all get to know each other, I'm realizing I'm starting to do a lot of shorts that involve the RO interacting with each other. This is a bit of a shift from the ones I wrote when the Night Market first came out.

Which do you guys prefer?

I like to see the RO's interact with each other

I like seeing the RO's go off on their own with the focus mainly on them

It does not matter to me

119 votes total

[Bella and Gabriel - A conversation](#)

[Jan 22, 2023](#)



The stack that was dropped on upon the slick table echoed around the chamber with a deep boom. Several books, a thick envelope filled with parchment, and several stone tablets, now took up residency on the obsidian desk before Belladonna. The piece of furniture had been the first thing she had moved to her little tower. After chucking every item that belonged to Kavatti, out an open window.

Leaning back in her velvet lined chair, Belladonna crossed one leg over the other, raising a perfectly manicured brow at Gabriel. "Warden," she said in greeting.

"Baron." He stood at attention, hands folded behind his back and gaze set resolutely forward, not meeting her eyes.

Belladonna rolled her eyes at the formality before nodding towards the paraphernalia he saw fit to scatter across her workspace. "Would you care to give me an explanation?"

"You are expected to read this material before your first Baron meeting near the full moon. There will be no quiz but I do suggest an effort to at least know the rules before engaging in any sort of political conversation with the others. Upon arriving, you will be sworn in, which usually is a blood right, but the Book Baron has suggested that perhaps that is not what should be done for a vampire so recently gorged on blood. So it will be more symbolic than an actual swearing in."

Belladonna stared at him, amusement curling at the corner of her lips. "Do I get an honorary plaque that makes me a part of the Big Boys club?"

"There are women in this club too so I would say not." Tapping the leather volume, Gabriel brushed past the obvious eye roll on her part. "I would start with this. It is what I use the most for calling order in such situations when all Barons are allowed to be in the same room."

The volume in question was thick and dusty and looked as if it had not been cracked open for centuries. "You cannot possibly believe the Barons are reading these handouts."

"I believe the Baron of the Books has, yes. Though he has said he used them as kindling." Belladonna would read them. They both knew she would. Whether she admitted to it was another story all together. "I shall see you in the upcoming days in case you have any questions," he said. Turning, his task apparently done, Gabriel made to leave.

"Reese sent flowers," Belladonna said, effectively halting his departure. There was a large vase of deep plum roses filled with lily of the valley and night blooming jasmine. Belladonna's favorites. "And Elias sent a mirror that screams every time I look into it," she said with a tight smile.

Gabriel sighed. "I will talk to him."

"No. It's honestly the nicest thing he has sent me. But, will talk to him. It is time Elias and I have a bit of a reckoning." She was examining her nails but looking at his corded back at the same time. Monitoring his comfort and wondering if he was simply about to bolt.

"Don't kill him."

"I can make very little promises there."

Turning, Gabriel looked at her with tired eyes. "Bells."

"Fine," she said primly.

Standing, Belladonna walked around her desk, perching herself on the corner of it. Gabriel stood at alert still, in full Warden mode, as if awaiting an order from his superior. Belladonna had always hated that stance and he knew it.

"Dear heart is correct, you know," she said after a long moment.

"They often are." His words were short and clipped as he kept his time with her as professional as possible. It was that tone that he knew Belladonna hated, however, and even he could see the way her nails tapped against any available surface in a staccato rhythm of irritation.

"Please stop being the Warden for a moment."

He lifted his gaze towards hers. "And who would you like me to be then, Ms. Malady?" he asked tightly.

“My friend.”

It took a long minute. One in which Gabriel was clearly warring with himself, unable to decide if this was the road he wished to take. Belladonna waited, her eyes still trained upon him but not demanding. When his shoulder relaxed, she breathed a sigh of relief.

Pulling up a chair, Gabriel sat in front of her. Belladonna curled her legs beneath her, still using the desk as her seat. She rounded her back, forcing herself into something more relaxed. With effort, the two of them tried hard to mimic who they had once been. Back when conversation had flowed freely and council was sought out of respect and not force.

“I am willing to attempt friendship,” Gabriel said slowly. “But I do ask that you do not press about our past. Not yet. I am not ready to look at that with anything other than anger.”

“I do not shy away from your anger, Gabriel. In fact, I highly wish you would get angry more.” Gabriel didn’t look as if he agreed and remained silent on the matter. Shifting, Belladonna paused, still letting his words linger. “You know, I think that is the first time that you managed to state your needs to me without an apology.” When began to bristle, she held up her hand. “That was not a criticism, Gabriel. I am proud of you for that. You need to do far more of that.”

He took a moment. It always took a while to shed the visage of the powerful man that policed the market. But there was effort. There had been so much effort given to change lately and it was leaving him feel raw. “I am proud of you, too,” he finely said. Belladonna raised a brow at him. “Kavatti,” he said in simple explanation.

Belladonna grinned. “You never did like her.”

“From the day we met her, yes. Duplicitous little bloodsucker was playing you and I from the very beginning.”

Belladonna laughed loudly at that, shedding some of the fear she had been harboring deep within over her decade long grudge. “There you are.”

“I have always been here,” he said succinctly. “I have just been angry at you. What you did was not necessary.”

“I thought we weren’t talking about the past.”

“You had no right to do what you did,” he snapped at her. The soft tentative middle ground they had been forming was ripped away with his words as the past came hurling towards them, breaking through the dam they had patched for far too long.

“I wish I had done better by you,” she said.

"Then why didn't you?" His silver gaze was heated, and his fingers curled along the chair arm. "You could have said something to me. You did not have to—"

"I did," she interrupted. "I told you to leave several times. You refused to listen." Belladonna had all but begged for him to go out into the world. Find what brought him joy. And each time he had looked back at her with a dying expression. As if his wings were being cut from his back all over again.

"Then you should have made me," he hissed.

Eyes flashing crimson, she looked at him sharply, feeling the recent consumption of blood flushing her skin. "What do you think that night was?"

"A display of how little our friendship truly meant to you."

"You truly believe that?" she looked at him incredulously. "I risked everything that evening. I hated myself when I saw the look in your eyes. What we had was— the family that you offered me. I lost it all that night, Gabriel. And if I had seen any other way I would have done it but I felt as if I was killing you by keeping you at my side."

"Instead," he said cruelly, "you nearly killed me by sending me out into the world. Angry and alone."

"You think that's what I did?" she laughed. "Who do you think the donor was for your position within the market, Gabriel? Who do you think paid the dues and had your name spread like wildfire through the streets."

He looked at her with dawning horror. The sudden job withing the guard. The promotion only weeks later. The absolute unwavering support from people he had never even met. "I did not ask you to do that."

"You're correct. But, I did it because I knew you were the right man for the job and you were never going to see it yourself."

Standing, Gabriel took a heated step towards her. "You say that you wanted me to live for me but did you ever once consider that by your side was where I wanted to be?"

"I considered it," she said evenly. "But being by my side never once meant that you should continue to kneel at my feet."

"I wasn't—" he turned from her, needing to place distance between them. What he remembered of their time and what she twisted it into now felt two very different scenarios. He didn't know in which the truth lied and for a man like Gabriel who dealt in absolutes, he could not fathom that there may not be one. "You speak of wanting me to become my own man but you do not respect my own wishes."

"Not when they are hurting you, no."

"I would never dream to do the same to you," he told her. "I sat and watched you throw yourself repeatedly into danger for the strangled attempt at power. I never once said a thing, however. Because I trusted you. I trusted that you would know if it was too much."

"Did you now?" she laughed. "You never once had an issue with what I was doing? You never once demanded that I do better?" He was silent. "When I was whoring, sleeping with individuals far more powerful than I, who could so easily hurt me, what did you do, Gabriel?"

"The two situations are not similar."

"Are they not?" she laughed mirthlessly. "Low self-esteem and the reliance on makeshift love may wear different masks but they tend to be much the same when you rip all the pieces away."

They stared at each other, silver eyes meeting crimson and the air around them cracking with light and the flutter of wings.

"Are you?" he demanded.

She drew back. "Am I what?"

"Still whoring?"

Pushing from the table she shook her head. "By the Knowing, Gabriel." Walking away from him, her back to his own, she rested her face in her hand. Her shoulders were bunched and the long line of her tattooed spine shifted beneath her skin. The monster inside restless after such slaughter.

When her laughter began to trickle through the room, Gabriel startled. It began low before it echoed across the bell tower, wrapping around the darkness and driving it away. Turning, she looked at him, amused.

"You're an idiot," she told him.

He blinked at her, staring as she continued to laugh at him. When his own smile cracked across his face, he couldn't help it. Laughter began to rumble through him as well.

"I believe we both may be," he said.

Coming back over to him, Belladonna sighed, leaning against the desk. She crossed her arms in front of herself, letting the argument and the past roll down her skin. She could see Gabriel do the same.

"It's ironic, you know," she said, staring up at the rafters above and wondering if she could get better lighting up there. Kavatti apparently enjoyed living in a cave. Made sense, given where she came from. "When you wanted to apologize, you used to bring me books."

Gabriel glanced down to the stack of Baron reading at her side. "I brought you several today." Standing, he reached around her, plucking up the volumes and placing it in her hands. "A comprehensive history

of the Night Market.” Taking another, he stacked it on top of the leather-bound novel. “Baron responsibilities. What it means to be a Baron. Rules and Regulations.” He patted the stack that was now in her hand. “This should be light reading for you.”

“You know this is all fiction, don’t you? There is probably not a single bit of truth in any of these.” She was still looking at them eagerly.

“And I am sure you will extensively mark each passage you find to be wrong and our next meeting will be a lengthy one.” Sighing, he looked at her, perhaps for one of the first times in a long while. “I wish to be better, Bells.”

She nodded. “Because of our dear heart?”

Partially. They both knew everything had changed the moment they had stepped foot in the market. That this moment had been brewing since that fateful day. “For me,” he said softly.

Setting the books aside, Belladonna tipped her chin upwards, looking at him, hopefully. “Well, Warden, I cannot wait to see who you become.”

He smiled gently at her. “And I cannot wait to see the hell you bring down upon this city, Baron.”

[Paper Moons Part 14](#)

[Jan 23, 2023](#)



We had nothing. The supplies we brought with us were only just enough to get us back home. There had been no expectation to find anyone out here and part of me had not been expecting to even find

this so-called child of the moon. It was clear we were wildly unprepared with the information we had received. Then again, I didn't know how I was supposed to prepare for a blood starved vampire that communed with the night.

"Nothing," I said simply, trying to give the woman a warm smile. "I'm sure we can just speak with her. Find a solution."

The woman dismissed us when it became clear we were not going to buy or trade for anything. Standing awkwardly before her for a long moment, I realized that they probably didn't get a lot of outsiders within their small village. We had probably looked like hope to this woman.

"Perhaps we can return here at a later date," I said. "Bring some food and—"

"Don't bother," she said quickly, busying herself within the small hovel. "We don't need anyone from the market out here. Besides, if you're out here with us, I can guarantee you're not going back to the market any time soon."

"Why do you say that?" Gabriel asked.

"Cause no one returns from here," she said with a shrug. "We're all exiled out here for a reason. The Guard isn't going to let you back in."

I glanced at Gabriel but kept quiet after that. Instead, the two of us bid our farewell to the lady and stepped back outside into the sweltering heat of the cave.

"Now what are we to do?" Gabriel asked. I watched the way his eyes moved around the cavern, looking for the weak spots. The point of opportunity in which someone might take advantage of us.

"We need the information from that girl," I told him.

"We have no blood to give her," he pointed out absently.

With a sigh, I looked back towards where she danced. Just on the outskirts of light. The bones of her ankle were frail and knobby and I thought they would snap given one wrong step. "Yes we do," I said firmly. My father had always instilled in me that we help the people who are unable to help themselves. That we were blessed but we were only blessed because the Almighty wished for us to care for others.

Walking across the way, I pulled my knife from my boot. I wouldn't have to give her much. Just enough that I could feed her. Keep her sane. Perhaps if I just sliced open my palm it would stem some of the bleeding. Vampires traditionally sipped from the arteries but I didn't think that decision to be the wisest course of action and....

"What are you doing?" Gabriel stepped in front of me, his bulky form blocking my view.

"We need answers," I told him.

His eyes ticked down towards the dagger. "Answers should not come at the price of your pain."

"It is my decision, Gabriel." And it would help. It would help him. That was my job, after all. My purpose.

"I am not comfortable with a feral beast taking away what essentially keeps you alive," he told me firmly. "There are other options."

But as I looked around, I noticed how the people looked at us. How they were giving us a wide berth. There were other options but they were ones that would take time we did not have and resources I was not confident we could obtain. Ignoring him, I made to step around his solid form, heading towards Kavatti once again. His hand shot out and grabbed my upper arm before I could get far.

Slowly, I turned and looked at the grip he had on me. Almost immediately, he let it go, dropping his head. "Apologies," he whispered. "I just— I do not want you to do this."

"Gabriel—"

"If you do this and you die, then I am dead as well, am I not? I would have no Graceling to help me. I would slip into madness."

That, gave me pause. The idea of leaving him out here all alone was not ideal. And I had made a promise to both Reese and Elias. To take care of him. The sadness on Elias's face and the disappointment on Reese's was not one I wished to see.

"Perhaps we could just bleed me and give it to her through a cask?" It sounded silly to say but it was a solution. One that made Gabriel shoulders drop in relief as he nodded his head.

"We can empty one of her canteens and bleed you that way. Nothing much, however. I do not wish for you to become faint."

We moved away from the village at that. Away from Kavatti. Finding a secluded place where the heat did not seem so sweltering and the eyes so curious, we settled down against a rock wall. Gabriel emptied the canteen we had brought for drinking, looking at me warily.

"I'm just going to slice open my palm," I told him. "Give her a small bit of it. Nothing much." My words were meant to assure both of us.

As the dagger slid across me, splitting open my skin, I tried not to wince. I remembered how my father used to butcher pigs. One quick slice against their throat that ended up staining the hay red. Steam had risen from the barn on those mornings. I used to sit on the fence line and watch him, twisting the corn husks into little dolls for the children of the village.

Squeezing my fist together, I held it over the opening, watching as a few drops dripped within. It was agonizingly slow and I had to make one more pass with the blade as I realized it was not deep enough. Gabriel sat by my side the entire time.

When I got all I thought I was willing to give, I handed him the canteen. He set it aside before gently taking my hand. Already he had brought out the bandages from our pack and he began cleaning me up efficiently. His fingers were rough and dry, still cracked through with the lack of grace that was coursing through him.

"May I ask you a question, Gabriel?" I asked, watching him tie off the cloth around my palm. "Do you feel the madness? Do you feel it sometimes coming for you?"

He didn't look at me as he began putting away our first aid. "Yes," he said simply. "It gets worse every day."

I felt the urgency of the situation latch onto me much differently then. I was not willing to let this kind man fall. Not if I could give him a second chance.

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Eagerly, she drank from the bottle we handed her, slurping at the contents and allowing none of it to spill. I could see my own blood glowing as it slid down her throat, lighting up her paper thin skin into a healthier flush. When it was gone, she whined into the opening, trying to tear the metal apart to lick it clean. I felt my stomach roll at the sight of it.

"More," she whimpered.

"We have no more," I told her.

"I need more!" The canteen clattered against the cave wall as she stared at us with bright, lavender eyes. I watched as she grew a bit taller, the appearance of the gaunt child fading as she rose to her feet, her body filling out in a much more womanly manner.

Gabriel stepped in front of me, ready to defend me. I shook my head sadly though. So much fear went into the things we did not understand. I doubted anyone had ever given this woman enough of their time to make her feel understood. "I want to help you," I told her. "I will help you. But I also need information about the moon."

She perked at that, the word penetrating through whatever haze the blood had just taken away. "The moon?" her voice was softer. Set within a dream. She was still thin, the bones of her collar jutting out in painful edges. But the swell of breasts had formed and the sultry pout of her lips were crimson with my own blood. "I know plenty about the moon."

"We need to harvest its light for a spell. We need a way to mimic celestial grace."

"Oh," she breathed. "How pretty."

"Can you help us with that?"

"I can ask. You cannot take from the moon. You would have to ask. Do you wish to take all the light or just some?"

I didn't know how much light we even needed. The very idea of bottling it felt beyond me to begin with.

"We only need some," Gabriel told her. "Is this something you can do?"

"I shall ask," she giggled. Thought when she smiled again, it was something far softer. Far more inviting. "Would you like to come with me, warm blood?" Holding out her hand, she looked directly at me. I felt my blood thrum in response to her. "We can leave the broken one behind."

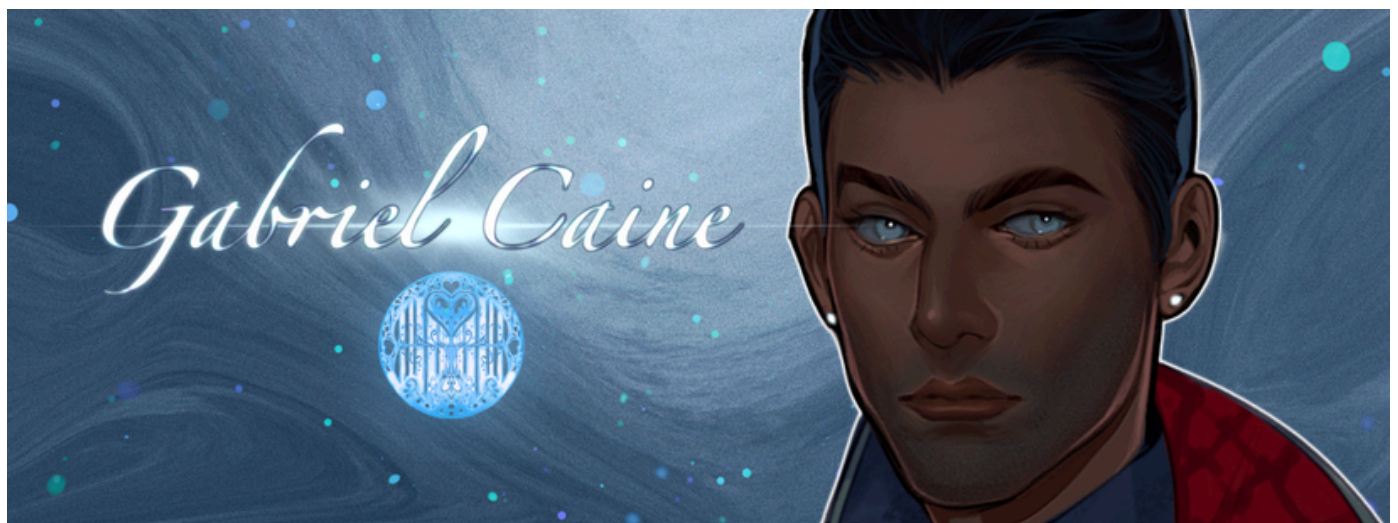
**[[Go with Kavatti]]**

**[[Go explore the village]]**

**[[Demand that Gabriel comes with you two]]**

[Gabriel - Post Chapter Ten](#)

[Jan 23, 2023](#)



The blade slashed through the creature, spraying rotted flesh across the white marble floor in a dark brown smear. It died with a wet scream that was cut short by the edge of the celestial blade. Gabriel stared at the thing, panting heavily, while Elias clapped in the background.

"Good job, son!" His voice rang proudly across the meeting hall, echoing upwards towards the fresco ceilings. Gabriel looked down at his blade, taking out the prepared cleaning supplies he always had at

meetings like this, and wiping his weapon down before the rot could fester. Reese never did send a proxy that was too dangerous. Not after he learned Gabriel was the one having to take care of them.

Setting aside the dirty rag, Gabriel looked upwards at the semicircle of thrones that sat before him. Nine of them. The monthly Baron meeting came on the heels of Kavatti's demise so her chair remained empty. So did the Gatekeepers, like usual. Along with the Dockmaster's since Reese never came to the meeting in order to keep up the ruse that he was dead for Elias. But, it seemed as if today, most of the Barons did not seem to deem it necessary to attend their meeting. The Baron of the Deep only had a conch shell in her place, having called in from the depths of her castle instead of making her way to the surface today. Odin was irritated at his inability to get back to the Nine Realms like he initially thought he would so easily do, so his other raven, Huginn/Julien, Gabriel didn't know which he wished to go by, was sitting surly in his place.

In fact, the only true Barons attending today seemed to be Elias. Perhaps, Lady Chrysanthemum.

"Does anyone know where Lord Taliesin is?" Gabriel asked, sanding in front of the semicircle of half empty chairs and proxies.

"Probably cowering within his gemstones," Chrysanthemum said airily.

"Lady Chrysanthemum, I notice Lord Taliesin and you do not attend the same meetings. I thought we agreed that the two of you would get past your altercation at least once a month."

"Did we?" she asked, tipping her head to the side and smiling sweetly at Gabriel. "I do not remember this. Though, if you wish for us to get past it, please, summon him. I would love to see him." The way in which she tapped her nails made Gabriel nervous. A redcap princess from the notorious fae realms and the daughter of a bloodthirsty king. Drops of fresh blood dripped from her nails onto the arm of her chair with each thrum of her nails. Gabriel doubted an agreement between her and Lord Hynsin was going to be amicable.

"Oh, son," Elias cooed. "You are doing wonderfully. I think the turnout today is absolutely wonderful." He snapped his head towards Chrysanthemum. "You are dirtying that chair." His face was tight with the desire to wipe it all clean. Especially when Chrysanthemum looked him in the eye and gave another pointed roll of her fingers.

Huginn snorted and rolled his eyes, crossing his arms and sinking further into his seat.

Gabriel looked at him tiredly. "I am assuming The Allfather had something pressing?"

"Yeah. The Nine Realms," the bird responded cattily. "You know, an actual civilization and structure of governance. Unlike this sad excuse."

Elias rose to his feet. "Take that back, you feathered fiend. My Gabriel—" Gabriel raised his hand, stopping Elias in his tracks. "Oh, I'm sorry, son," Elias said. "I forgot that you do not wish to be acknowledged as my child during public meetings." He turned to the clamshell next to him, whispering

conspiratorially into it. "He fears it undermines his authority." The clamshell blinked, though Gabriel didn't know if that meant Kamille was actually listening or if she just had the damn thing on a timer to pretend like she was.

Shaking his head, he set his sword aside, pressing his hands to the table in front of him. "First thing on the docket is the matter of the Baron of the Mists." He gestured to the empty seat. "Belladonna Malady has been promoted to that position and will be attending meetings starting next moon."

"Booo," Elias hissed.

"She won the role of Baron fair and square, Baron Elias."

"Did she?" he asked suspiciously. "Because I do think that she probably cheated her way into that."

"And since when has that stopped any of us?" Chrysanthemum mused. "I am fairly certain that no one has this position without a little bit of underhanded play."

"It does not matter how she got the role," Gabriel said shortly. "She now has it. I expect everyone to adhere to the rules that are in place and treat her as an equal among your decision-making."

"What decisions?" Julien asked. "The ones that get talked about and never actually exacted? You know everything here is a joke, right? I mean, these are supposed to be the rulers of your so-called land?"

"Huginn, is it?" Gabriel asked tightly. "If The Allfather cannot attend a meeting, I do ask that he sends a missive ahead of time. I do not think it necessary for you to attend for him."

"He would have," Huginn nodded. "But, see, I think he might be a bit bitter about your and yours getting rid of his favorite pet."

Chrysanthemum perked up at that. "Did Caliban go home? Oh, good for him. Hopefully that means Odin will follow and we will be rid of his stench as well. I will miss you, however, dear Julien. Your bitterness has always brought me such joy." Ironically, Gabriel didn't think Chrysanthemum was lying. And Julien even looked slightly pleased by this.

"As it stands," Gabriel continued. "Next month will need to be her initiation."

"You may have to think of a different initiation for her." A black tear formed in the room as Noctine Sala stepped through. Chrysanthemum immediately looked towards her husband, a soft sight on her lips.

"My darling," she cooed, holding out her hand. He wordlessly took it, pressing a kiss to the back of her knuckles. "Taliesin didn't show again," she pouted. "Bastard."

Noctine gave her a fond smile, reaching down to brush a lock of hair from her eye before passing his hand over the swell of her stomach where their baby laid nestled within her womb. When he turned to Gabriel, all softness was gone.



"Belladonna Malady is a vampire. One who has recently gorged herself," he pointed out. "A blood rite is not going to be the correct course of action for her for an initiation. Unlike Kavatti, Belladonna has class and should be respected. I have already begun a binding process for her new Baron ring and will enact the ritual myself."

"I object to that," Elias said. "He cannot have control over another Baron ring."

"It is not control, Dollmaker. It is an assurance to both her and I that certain people within this room do not take old grudges and wield them like a blade."

"Because you never do that," Julien muttered.

Chrysanthemum patted her husband's hand. "Don't respond, darling. Julien just lost his brother. He is grieving." Rising, she kissed Noctine's cheek, snuggling in close to him. "Buy me something pretty," she said. "There is nothing of actual importance in this meeting today. Not for you and I."

"Of course, my darling." Noctine wrapped an arm around her and headed towards the tear.

Gabriel sighed, pinching his nose. "There are things to discuss today," he called after them.

Chrysanthemum looked over her shoulder before disappearing. "Then I would suggest, you discuss them with the people who actually are deserving of that conversation. Because it is certainly not the mockery of what is in here."

Gabriel didn't watch the two of them go. Mainly, because he couldn't disagree. The monthly Baron meetings were a joke. Not a single person in his room was making a difference to the dying market. They were sitting back and letting the rest of them do it.

"I cannot tell if I enjoy her and her husband or think they are rude and in need of a good cleanse," Elias mused. "They do have the prettiest set of clothes, however."

"I'm done." With a burst of feathers, Julien/Huginn disappeared from the room. While the conch went silent.

Slumping in his seat, Gabriel stared at the empty chairs despondently. Elias sat on the other side of the table, looking up at him with his bright blue eyes, coated in a silver film.

"This needs to stop," Gabriel said.

"These meetings? Yes. They do seem like a waste of time."

"No," Gabriel said sharply. "This. All of this." The mockery. When was the last time one of these meetings was productive? When was the last time any of them even all showed up? They were the nine that was supposed to guard the world and yet they were consumed in petty fighting and a deep lack of concern for the people that were struggling while they showered themselves in jewels.



Turning, he looked at Elias. One of the men that had raised him. Who had taught him to always do right. The disappointment he felt in that man could level an entire district.

"This stops now," he told Elias. "I am the Warden of the Night Market. I am meant to protect it and yet I have been sitting back, playing nursemaid to all of you."

"Gabriel"

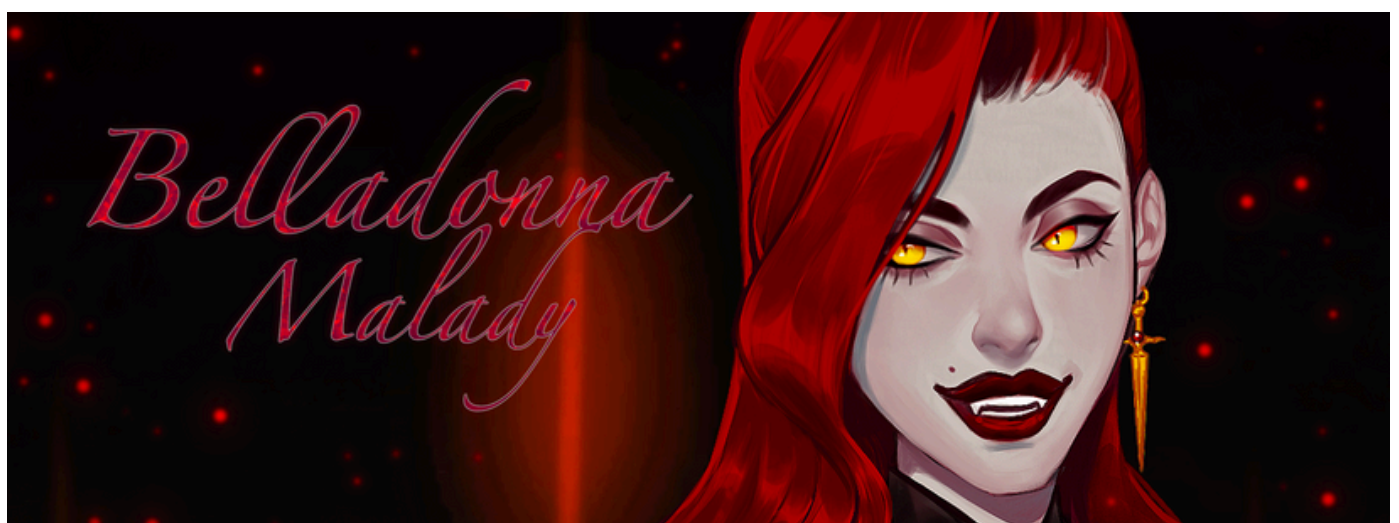
"No." He didn't move. He didn't even flinch. Elias startled at his tone all the same. "I no longer will be seeking permission. If none of you wish to take the time to protect this world, then don't. I will do it myself, if I have to. I no longer will be answering to the group of nine."

"That is not the way things work, Gabriel."

"And yet, it is the way I will be conducting my business from now on." Pushing himself out of his seat, he grabbed his sword, belting it to his waist. "This is not a discussion, father. This is me informing you of how life will be from now on." Turning, Gabriel didn't dare look at Elias. Didn't give him the opportunity to say anything more. He had work to do, after all. And here was the last place he would be conducting it.

[Belladonna Post Chapter Ten](#)

[Jan 27, 2023](#)



Blood splattered across the floor in one long streak, a scream falling short in a wet cough. Belladonna tipped her head to the side, a bit of a frown marring her crimson lips. You couldn't see the carnage on the black flooring. She loved obsidian but it didn't do well for setting such an example.

Looking at her “guards”, and oh how she hated calling them that, she waved her hand. “Next.” They came forward, dragging away the decapitated form of some low life vampire trying to still lick Kavatti’s boots long after her demise. At the same time, another was pushed forward. “State your grievance.”

Belladonna sat on a velvet lined throne. A gift from Feebus. It was adorned with the softest plum fabric and lined with black and gold. The filigree across the arms were lightly etched with pages from several of her favorite books. He must have been working on it for a while. Big softy that he was. Belladonna bet he knew she was going to make her move years ago and had been working on it ever since.

The woman that was pushed forward was one that Belladonna had seen before. One of the vampires that lounged around on the bottom levels of the cathedral, half naked and coaxing anyone that came her way towards her chase lounge. She had several dozen kills under her belt and her fangs were stained pink from blood.

“I am here on behalf of a good measure of us,” the woman began. She had her chin tilted upwards, her long black hair cascading down her back to brush the backs of her knees. “We have spent quite some time with Baron Kavatti. She has allowed us to build our business here, supplying us with unlimited blood. What do you plan to do for us?”

Belladonna looked at her, blinking rapidly as if to feign shock. “Nothing.”

It was the end of the sentence. Period.

The vampire stared back at Belladonna, as if waiting for an explanation, but when none came, she began opening and closing her mouth, scrambling for the words that would put her back in the bargaining position.

“So you would see us all die?” she finally sputtered.

“I was operating under the assumption that all of you are perfectly capable of taking care of your own needs. I wasn’t aware that you still needed to be spoon-fed.” She looked around the room at the vampires gathered. The ones that had not come to Kavatti’s aid but instead cowered under their seats down here, hiding until Belladonna made her way downstairs covered in their master’s blood. “What?” she asked them all innocently. “Having problems unlatching from Kavatti’s tit? Well, children, you have a new mommy now. So, either learn how to take care of yourself, or simply wither away into nothingness. I assure you I won’t care either way.”

“How dare you,” the woman hissed. “You cannot just come in here and—”

When Belladonna stood, she stopped talking. Slowly, Belladonna walked down the marbled steps towards the woman, the lace of her dress leaving her hips and legs exposed with each carefully placed step. Stopping to stand in front of her, Belladonna reached out, sweeping a bit of hair away from the woman’s face.

"So very pretty," Belladonna murmured. "Practically perfection, I might say. The amount of men and women you must have lured to dark corners. I am sure it is impressive." Grabbing a fist full of her hair, she yanked the woman's head to the side, her own lips lingering over the long dead pulse point. Her fangs extended, scraping across the quivering column of neck before her. "Looks are not everything, my dear. In fact, I find when an individual relies on them too heavily, they are nothing more than fodder for the masses. Dispensable, really. Are you something to be thrown out with the trash?" Belladonna lips wrapped around the raised skin, sucking a bruise into the woman's neck.

"No, m'lady."

Shoving her away, Belladonna looked down at the sprawled figure on the floor. "Then how about you start acting like it, hm?" Turning to the hushed room, she stared at them all. They were unmoving. Their breaths frozen in her chest.

"From this day forward, there are going to be some rules. You wish to ply your trade? I will not stop you. But, we want a good relationship with the guard. We want to be able to walk the market streets freely. So, death is not on the docket anymore. There will be no second chances under my house. It will be a life for a life. As of today, I will be dissipating the mists. There will be no more calling the naive into the fog for our pleasure. You want blood, do it right. You want to cause pain, then find the ones seeking it. If someone needs to die, you come to me and if I find your cause worthy, we will give you your day of vengeance. But, no longer do you lot get to run yourself silly in this barren cathedral. We are creatures of the night living in a world of dark. It is time we start walking the streets again as opposed to hiding among the mists. Understood?"

"Yes, m'lady," came a chorus from beyond.

She smiled. "Good. Now, as for the ones that simply agreed and will be going off to plan my demise at a later date, please, if you are going to die, eat something sweet beforehand. I find I like the taste of blood a bit more after citrus is consumed."

Turning, she looked at her guards pointedly. "Let me know."

They both nodded.

Climbing the spiral staircase into her now office, Belladonna kicked off her heels. She walked to the rounded window. The one Kavatti used to stand at, surveying her paltry excuse of a kingdom. The mists were still present but she had been assured they would be gone by this time tomorrow. Now, she only needed to wait. Wait for the fog to clear. Wait for the bloodshed that would inevitably come to her door. And wait for the Night Market to open its loving arms to her people for the first time in what seemed like forever.

With a pleasant sigh, she began picking up the things that had been Kavatti's. Trinkets. Pictures. Old artifacts meant to control beauty and youth. One by one, she chunked them out the window, smiling devilishly as they fell with a crack against the streets below. A new era of the Night Market was underway, and Belladonna planned to be at the helm of it all.

## [Paper Moons Delay](#)

[Jan 29, 2023](#)

Paper Moons is going to be delayed a week. Tomorrow is my wedding anniversary and I have been spending the work time I do have right now, getting the rest of the Night Market completely finished. I'm sorry for the inconvenience. I will resume it the following Monday.

## [Chapter Eleven Early Access](#)

[Feb 1, 2023](#)

Here it is! Second to the last chapter. I am both nervous and have also been so ready for you guys to read this one. Everything will start getting clear soon.

Also, if you wish to discuss anything this chapter, head on over to discord. There is a private channel there. Do not go there unless you wish to be spoiled.

Chapter Code is : f1g@t3k33p3r1u

## [Paper Lanterns](#)

[Feb 2, 2023](#)

Hey everyone,

I'm getting close to the time that I start getting Paper Lanterns out there for a release and not just a community IF. Which format would you guys like to see it in? A linear story (the more canon version) or a playable IF (a bit more on rails since it has to fit with Night Market). Or both?

IF Game

Linear Book

Both

67 votes total

## [Paper Moons Part 15](#)

[Feb 6, 2023](#)

Slowly, I shook my head. The last thing I was planning on doing was leaving Gabriel behind. Going anywhere within the outskirts without him was not an option and as the young woman before me looked at me with hungry eyes, I knew that I couldn't let myself be pulled away. Taking a step back, I made sure my shoulders brushed Gabriel's.

"He comes with us," I said. "Or else I just stay here and wait for you to come back."

Kavatti laughed. It sounded like two different voices at once as she continued giggling. The raspy voice of an older woman and the small lilt of a child merging into one. The longer it went on, the more uncomfortable I became. Without the firm presence of Gabriel at my back, I would have ran.

"Suit yourself," she said, her laughter cutting off like it had never been there before. "But I think the moon would be prettier without him." Turning on her heel, she began dancing into the dark. I could just barely make out a path there. One that cut through the mountainside and up through the cave.

"Do you really feel this is best?" Gabriel asked, just over my shoulder.

"No." I looked at him, remembering the cracks in his skin and the way his eyes had dulled as his grace was expunged. "But what other option do we have?"

Silently, we both followed her.

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The top of the cave opened up into a wide open cavern with jagged cut-outs dotting the ceiling to let in the light of the nighttime sky. The moon felt extraordinary bright here and as I spied it through the openings above, and looked far closer than it had before. A faint fluttering sound echoed around us, like paper being waved back and forth. Kavatti had not talked to us as we went up top but we followed the sound of her humming until she stopped, bathed in the silver light above.

Hesitantly, I looked at Gabriel. He was standing there, not happy with the turn of events, but I knew he would not leave me. Nor did I want him to. "We need to harvest the light of the moon," I told the vampire.

"Is that something that is possible?" I had images of a bottle. Something we could use to fill with light. It was a silly little girl's fancy, I supposed. Or the sign that I had read far too many books where the solution to the hero's problem was easy to come by.

"Harvest the light, yes," Kavatti said softly. "I can do that for you."

"How?"

She held out her arms, spinning in the soft glow of the moon. "Let me take it into my body. Let me commune with it. I will give it back when I am done."

"The girl cannot even hold her own mind," Gabriel said. "I do not wish for her to hold the future of mine."

My lips thinned. It wasn't that he was wrong, I just didn't like that he had said it out loud before her. It did nothing for trust. I got the sense that Kavatti took each word we said and sharpened it until it was a blade that would cut us the moment our backs turned.

"Is there another way?" I asked. "We have to bring the light back into the city and—"

She was upon me in an instant, arms scrambling up my side as she tried to climb me to look into my eyes. Gabriel moved to push her away but I stopped him, holding the young woman steady in front of me as she pressed her nose to mine, her lavender eyes burning.

"Take me back to the city," she begged, her grip tighter than I expected. "Take me to where there is food."

Gently, I pushed her away. "Get us the light of the moon and we can discuss that." I tried to keep my fear under control. This was not something I was prepared for. I may have been given the gift of becoming a Graceling but that did not mean I knew how to navigate any of the problems that may come with it. Including helping the Fallen at my back.

"No. I need assurance. I need to know that you will do as you are told." Kavatti's voice was filled with far more clarity than it had been before.

"That is not something we can promise," Gabriel said firmly. It suddenly became apparent that I didn't even know how Gabriel and I were going to get back into the Night Market. Could we simply just walk back in? No one had stopped us from coming out, but would it be the same if they saw us wandering out of the dark?

"Then you do not get your moonlight," Kavatti said. The child was gone now. The visage of it only used when she still thought she could gain sympathy. Innocence worked on many and would have gotten her a long way. Now, Kavatti was far more the person she truly was. Emaciated. Dark streaks of bone jutting across her cheeks. And a look so full of instability that it spiraled out from her in drifting waves of discomfort.

"We can go elsewhere," Gabriel intoned. "There has to be another way."

Perhaps there was. Maybe there was something even more obscure that we could do. Or perhaps there was an old text that we had not uncovered. It wasn't as if we had really looked. But what if the goblins came back? What if someone saw Gabriel and decided that he was an easy target? What if we needed his grace to leave here and he used it all up, with no solution in sight?

Looking at Kavatti, I nodded my head. "If I can get you in, you have my word."

"I need more than your word," Kavatti said. "I need your bond."

I didn't know what that meant. Vampire custom was foreign to me. They were scarce, even within a place such as the Night Market. I had never asked why or had found myself caring, but I knew the night walkers kept to the mists, luring people to their prey through the call of the fog.

"I'm sorry, I don't know what that means."

Kavatti stepped close, the bottomless pit of her eyes staring up at me with a knowing smile. I felt myself tipping forward. As if I needed to get closer. Needed to be able to truly see who she was. "It means, that even if you wished to double-cross me, as I'm sure your friend there would like, you could not. You have to get me within the city. It's as simple as that. Once you do, our bond can be broken and you can be free to go."

"What do I have to do?" My voice felt far away, the sounds of the night fading into nothing but white noise and the sultry sounds of the voice weaving before me.

"Just a kiss," Kavatti said. "Simple as that."

Her lips looked spit slick and perfect. Plump and so full of life in this desolate place where the lanterns didn't touch, and the moon was paper thin. I found myself leaning forward, my breath heavy across my chest as her fingers came up to caress my cheek.

Gabriel yanked me backwards and I startled. The beautiful woman that had been before me was no more. Instead, the gaunt form of a monster with sunken bruised eyes, hissed, blood already coating their lips. She was glaring at Gabriel, eyes narrowed in such anger. I felt my back pressed against his chest, my heart racing as I looked upon what was before us.

"You will not get your moonlight without a bond," Kavatti intoned.

Fear thundered through me as I felt myself tipping towards her words. Like a longing call. Something kept pulling me there and I knew without Gabriel's hold on the back of my tunic, I would have gone to her once more. Would have forgotten the monster and let the woman play me to her will.

"Fine," I heard Gabriel mutter behind me. "You wish for a bond, then it is mine to make." With force, he shoved me aside, causing me to stumble and giving me no way to stop him. With three strides, he

walked over to Kavatti, grabbing her by the shoulders and pulling her off the ground. Their lips crashed together and I heard a deep moan rumble from them both. Light poured from Gabriel, his grace shining bright, with Kavatti became fuller, flushed pink as she sipped from his lips.

When they pulled apart, I could see her feral smile. "Well done, celestial," she purred. He shoved her away harshly before turning to walk a few feet away. Kavatti's laughter echoed loudly through the cavern.

"I'll get your moonlight," she sang. "I'm feeling strong and satiated on grace. Shouldn't take long now." She walked a few feet from us, turning around the corner in the cavern but still making enough noise that we knew she had not gone far.

Standing, I walked over to Gabriel. He stood at the edge of the cavern, looking out one of the blown out portions of the cave and into the night that swallowed up the market's distant lights.

[[Respond in anger]]

[[Respond in fear]]

[[Respond in gratitude]]

[Paper Moons Baron Password](#)

[Feb 8, 2023](#)

Hey guys

The Alpha Build for Paper Moons has been updated. Thank you for being patient. The link to it is here <https://the-night-market.itch.io/paper-moons>

and the password this month is FebBGKBaron

[Gabriel Date Day](#)

[Feb 10, 2023](#)



It was uncharacteristically warm the day that I met Gabriel at the edge of the bridge. The ocean waves were loud and the clambering of something below echoed across the rolling dunes to the right. A group of individuals, far bigger than I had seen in the market, began patching the recent erosion to the Velvet Guard's walkway to the caves. I stood patiently as Gabriel stepped out of the metal door down the way, nodding his head at the receptionist before checking that his sword was strapped to him. He walked briskly towards me then, uniform perfectly pressed, not a hair out of place.

"Shall we?" He held out his arm in that gentlemanly manner that I wondered if he had learned from observation during his patrols, or if it was something innate to him. Reaching out, I bypassed the crook of his elbow to reach for his hand, lacing my fingers within his. When his grey eyes glanced downwards, there was a brief twitch of a smile on his lips. "I thought we could get something warm to drink before our dinner reservations," he said. "Perhaps walk around the market a bit."

I nodded, falling into easy step by his side. "That sounds nice. There is a new place I discovered, if you want to follow me." It was far from where our dinner reservations were and in a part of the market that I didn't know if Gabriel ever traversed. Given the state of his office and his home, I thought it to be doubtful. "It has tea and little steaming shells full of something that Hazel calls Soa and also these really big twirling bottles of steam that apparently turn to liquid when you drink from them."

"Only drink those if you are of the dragon kin or if you have an esophagus more prone to the heat."

I blinked, looking up at Gabriel as I tried to decide if this was one of his dry jokes or if this was something I needed to be aware of. His face held no mirth and so I decided I should just err on the side of caution.

"I have a question about that," I started, the two of us navigating the market alleys. "Why is it most people are human presenting? I mean, occasionally, I see people with horns, or their skin will shimmer. Or like the workers down below. They looked far bigger than the average individual. Why in a nexus point is there not more differences?"

"Your eyes have not adjusted yet."

"My eyes default into bipedal humans."

"No," he laughed. "Your eyes adjust not to see the magic."

"The magic that does not exist here?" It was such a joke at this point to claim that it didn't, but Gabriel still seemed to cling to the idea of it not.

"I am not sure how to describe it to your satisfaction. But essentially, the market can appear one way when you arrive and then the longer you are here, layers are pulled back to reveal something far different."

I thought about that. About how the market had been changing before my eyes. It was a slow change. One that I didn't realize was happening at the time. But the horrors of the market suddenly took on a different tone, the lanterns had adjusted from their bright and overwhelming light, the smells had evened out to something richer and far more intriguing, and the people that walked the street became to grow in shape and size.

"It doesn't make sense," I said. "But nothing about here really makes sense." Rounding a corner, I tugged on his arm. "Oh, there. That is the place I was talking about."

The drink cart in question was embedded into the side of the alley wall. Just enough room for two women to sit behind the counter, with three different samovars of liquid. They poured the contents into the container of your liking and the contents changed based on the container.

But really, there was no magic within the Night Market.

The two of us ordered tea that was placed in steaming ceramic mugs that we got to carry throughout the wandering alleys. There was not much in the mouth of this district and I purposefully kept Gabriel here as we drank and exchanged small talk of our day. He had just arrested several individuals who were trying to illegally tunnel beneath the market. I was trying out different pots of milk for Mr. Billows because he clearly did not like the one we had on hand this week.

After a few moments, I turned to him. "So," I stated, dragging out the syllable. "Would you be upset if we didn't go to dinner?"

He frowned. "We have reservations."

"Would you be upset if I said we canceled said reservations. And by we, I mean me?"

His frown deepened even further at that, the lines across his forehead becoming dark in true confusion and slight displeasure. "Why?"

"Because, Gabriel," I said, this time looping my arm within his like he had wanted me to earlier. "I think there is something much more important that we need to do today. Something far grander than dinner. But could still be a fun date."

He didn't get the chance to ask what that something was. Because I was leading him around the corner that opened up onto sprawling hills, rolling upwards towards the night sky where children ran and hit the lanterns, laughing as they were showered in dew.

"Why have you brought me to the flea market?"

"Because you need furniture, Gabriel. Your office has two broken chairs and your house only has a sofa and a table."

"And a bed," he said.

"A tiny, uncomfortable bed. We are getting you new furniture."

"At a flea market."

"Yes."

He stared at me evenly. "A flea market."

"Okay, I'm sensing a theme here. What is wrong with a flea market?"

"It is not exactly my taste in furniture."

"Your taste in furniture is to have no furniture so I don't really think that's an argument."

His face looked pinched as he stared out over the tiers of stalls, all slowly rounding upwards. The market was packed today, people milling with baskets and some with carts for the bigger things. I had scoped it out a few days prior and had found an entire section with handmade furniture. I was determined to at the very least, get him a night stand today.

"Everything is bright," he said.

"I promise you, there are darker colors for your furniture selection. Some even black. We just have to look a little."

Gabriel was the Warden of the Night Market. Daily, he apprehended criminals in some of the seediest corners of the world. Yet, this, this place, somehow brought a sneer to his face.

Hugging him a bit closer to my side, I waited for him to process what we would be doing. Because I was not letting him get out of here without buying something.

"I could just order from the catalogs if you are truly wishing for me to get more furniture."

"You could. And maybe we will look at those catalogs tonight. But, I think it is good for you, Gabriel, to get out among the people and actually buy their wares. Make time for yourself as opposed to pointing at a page and saying 'that' and then letting whatever you bought sit in a box all season."

I didn't know if he actually did this but by the look on his face it was clear it was pretty close to the truth.

With a sigh, he looked at me. "This is what you would like to do for our date?" he asked.

"Help you with tasks that you shove aside because you are a workaholic? Yes."

Defeat crossed his face. "As you wish." Before we took another step though, he leaned forward, capturing my lips against his own. It was a kiss slow and sweet and one that he took his time with. I grinned against him, feeling his body respond as I trailed my hand up his side. "Will you be picking things out for me?" he whispered against me, his tongue flicking out to play against my own.

"No, that is your job," I told him with a small laugh. "But I will be making sure you do as you are told."

When he pulled back, he smiled at me, something dark playing across his eyes. "I hear I take orders well," he mused. Straightening, he locked my arm within his, and then looked out at the flea market as if it were a battleground. Nodding resolutely, he stepped forward, the two of us falling into some makeshift march.

And with each thin and slightly patronizing smile at my furniture suggestions, I felt myself fall for him a little more.

[Patreon Content](#)

[Feb 12, 2023](#)

I would like some community feedback

I do not feel Paper Moons is working. The story I wanted to tell is starting to fall apart and I think I need to take a step back from it and revamp it. But, since it is a Patreon perk, I want you guys to have a say.

I have a few things I can do here. I can either take a step back and revamp Paper Moons. This would mean me putting it on hiatus for a few weeks.

Or, I can just start focusing on the lore and codex entries instead, tabling Paper Moons and instead just releasing it for a Tumblr interaction all together

I can also replace this content with character Q & A's where you send in your questions to the characters.

Or, I can start putting out monthly short podcasts where I answer your questions that have been sent in.

Please let me know what kind of content you would like to see. I think I need a little direction on what you guys are feeling right now.

Take a hiatus for Paper Moons and revamp

Focus on the Lore and Codex instead

Character Q & A's

Monthly podcast

81 votes total

[Belladonna - Post Chapter Eleven](#)

[Feb 13, 2023](#)



A/N: Slight NSFW. Some dirty talk and exhibition.

"So what does an example date with the infamous Belladonna Malady consist of?" The day itself was cool, and the lanterns were swaying above us in a dusty rose hue. We were in the back area of the pleasure district, sitting at one of the more obscure tables that offered us an eye to most of the district, but kept us hidden well into the shadows. Belladonna's eyes glowed in the dark as she kept her them trained on the copulating forms all around. Only once did I see a guard discreetly remove someone as they dropped to the floor. The ambrosia taking the best of him as it was clear his intention within the market was nothing pure.

"Dinners mainly," Belladonna said, not taking her eyes off the people around us. "Lots of dinners and listening to small talk and pretending like I care."

I laughed a little at that, almost fearing the amount of tedious conversation she had to partake in. It wasn't that Belladonna did not like conversation, it was simply that she enjoyed stimulating ones far more.

"And that's it?"

"Of course that is not all but I am not going to share my client's intimate details with you, dear heart. No matter what kind of look you give me."

"Look?"

"You have this way when you become pouty. Its adorable, really." She was making notations in a leather-bound book. Small little ticks within various columns. If anyone were to pick it up, it was doubtful they would even know what it was.

"I didn't think I was pouting," I said, truly not knowing what face she was speaking of.

"That's why it's adorable. Unintentional pouts are my favorite. The ones used to weaponize a situation are rarely done right. Then again, most individuals do not know the art of manipulation. Their attempts are paltry at best and when they try to turn them on a professional it can get rather uninteresting rather fast."

She sighed a little as she pushed the book back, examining her words. A man was approaching us, hat in hand as he hesitantly made his way to our table. Without even looking up, Belladonna held her hand up, halting his motions, before shooing him away. He made a wide turn and didn't attempt to continue.

"That was impressive."

"Weeds out the interesting ones. The ones with courage I will usually give five minutes too. It's clear he will do far better with someone like Sandra. She is soft and will coo in his ear about how manly he is. Stroke that ego."

I leaned back in my own chair, watching the district, letting my eyes slide over most of the gyrating forms and trying to see the world in the manner Belladonna saw it. Though, I suppose that's what most paid her for. So they didn't have to look at the world with cynicism, knowing the dangers that lurked in the corners

"How much does it cost?" I asked curiously.

"For me?" Too much."

It was what she continued to tell me but I was realizing now I had never once gotten a number. Nor, did anyone seem to know. With the conversion rate within the Night Market, it was doubtful one number would mean anything compared to another.

“Are you truly curious?” she asked after a moment, still writing in her ledger.

My eyes snapped to her. “Of course I am.”

“I could give you a taste of it,” she said. “What I do. It could clear up some questions.”

“Yes,” I said. Because why wouldn’t I take the opportunity? I was beginning to learn when Belladonna made suggestions like this, it was her way to show that she was interested. Pathetic or not, I clung to those opportunities.

“Wonderful,” she murmured. “Get on your knees.”

I startled at the sudden demand and when she didn’t raise her head to look at me, I wondered if I had heard her correctly.

“I don’t want to have to ask again.”

Slowly, I rose from my seat and walked around the table to kneel in front of her. It was awkward and I could feel my chest tighten, and my heart begin to pound as she still did not raise her eyes in my direction.

“I have a little bit of work I need to do, dear heart, so rest your head on my thigh, alright?”

Slowly, I scooted forward to rest my forehead against her knee, feeling her chuckle as she felt me try to get comfortable.

“No, dear heart, I want your cheek upon my thigh. There is a difference. Scoot up please.” Slowly, I inched forward, my cheek resting on the thick muscle of her thigh, a puff of air escaping me as I scooted half under the table, halfway just laying between her legs. When Belladonna’s hand came down, her nails scratching against my scalp, I felt a shiver run down my spine. “Good little sweetling. So willing to be obedient.”

I could hear the scratch of her quill as she continued to work, her fingers petting across my head. They paid her for this. They paid her to kneel at her feet and breathe in her scent, all the while she ran her fingers across them. I didn’t understand it. I couldn’t conceptualize why that would be something someone would even ask for. Or maybe you didn’t ask Belladonna. She instead let you know what you needed.

“Ms. Malady?” I startled at the sudden new voice and almost rose to my feet to scramble away. She tapped my shoulder once, letting me know her displeasure at my movement. “I have the reports you wanted.”

“Wonderful. Just set them on the table. Thank you.”

There was a shuffle and my heart felt as if it were racing as I struggled not to look at whoever was shuffling around my prone body to give Belladonna the latest reports on the market. My breath was coming faster and faster, blaring in my own ears. I didn't know when he walked away.

“Rest,” Belladonna said with a husky whisper. “You have had so much to do lately. Let me take care of you. Know that nothing else matters other than my voice, my touch, my very presence. Let the rest of the world slip away.”

“Bella....”

“I didn't say you could speak,” she interrupted. “It shall of course be forgiven since I did not lay out the rules prior. But, I do expect you to just sit there until your knees go numb.”

I didn't know how long I sat. I fell into the sound of the quill scratching against the paper and Belladonna occasionally taking a sip of her wine. But nothing more. After a certain amount of time, I felt her push back in her chair, leaning against the wing back to look down at me.

“Oh, look at you,” she breathed. “Kneeling so pretty. I should reward you for this. Just what kind of reward should it be? Should I allow you to slip under my dress and use your lips to your heart's content? Or, should I spread you over this table and run my tongue over your body?”

I felt my breath hitch and my cheeks flush. I didn't dare answer her, too afraid that she would push me away.

“No,” she murmured, none of those seeming quite right to her. “Perhaps I should strip you bare and play with you for a while. See what you like. I do wonder what it would take to make you moan before a group of people. If I could make you scream. Then again, I am feeling a bit peckish. Perhaps I should be the one to kneel between your open thighs and take a sip from you. Would you like that dear heart?” Pulling my head up with a quick hold of my chin, she looked at me with a blaring intensity.

“Yes,” I whispered.

Belladonna smiled fondly, cupping my cheek.

Then, she rose, gathering her ledger and leaving me panting and breathless, still on the ground. “That, is an example of what I do, my heart. Does that answer your questions?” Staring up at her, I knew my mouth laid agape as she stared down at me, still at her feet. “Aw, you're speechless. How cute. I'll go put my things away. Did you need help getting back to Hazels?”

I swallowed. “I....”

“Right. I'll just give you a few minutes.”

As she walked away, I watched as she looked at several of her guards. They stepped a bit closer to where I was, clearing giving me the time to recover from whatever that was. Still kneeling, I merely looked at my hands though, wondering just how I had gotten myself into this situation. And if Hazel would give me a raise.

[Milo - Post Chapter Eleven](#)

[Feb 15, 2023](#)



A/N: Takes place sometime before chapter eleven.

I opened the door only to have a bouquet of bent flowers shoved in my face, the pollen bursting around me in a shimmering cloud. Coughing, I waved my hand, trying to displace the dust as I peered through the golden fog to see Milo standing on the other side.

“What the...?”

“H-hi. I— I’m Hazel’s friend. She said to pick you up here?” His eyes were round and innocent, his hand trembling. I only returned his look with a blank stare. The sad bunch of flowers were between us as if acting as a barrier to his nerves. “She did tell you, right?” He shuffled his feet awkwardly but when I still didn’t answer, he winced, dropping his hand. “Stupid. Stupid stupid stupid.”

“Milo, what are you...?”

“Oh! So you do know my name! For a minute there I thought she hadn’t told you about our date. I know blind dates are kind of old hat but I really thought we could make a go of it, yeah?” He winked at me, his lips curling at the sides before falling back into an awkward bumble.

Feeling the confusion bleed away, I laughed. "Alright, I'll play. It's nice to meet you, Milo. Hazel has told me so much about you."

"Excellent. I have made reservations at a beautiful riverside café. Frogs on tiny gondoliers serenade you as kelpie burst from the water in synchronized swim. It is quite stunning. Although, do not get the fish for dinner. Abysmal really."

"Even though it's a riverside café?" I asked, grabbing my jacket. "You'd think they'd specialize in fish."

He shook his head as we exited Hazel's, walking down the back steps and out into the garden before rounding the house to make our way to wherever it is he was going to take me. "No. No, fish folk never specialize in their own kind. Because of cannibalism and all. They'd much rather cook with hearty staples of the earth. Have you ever had stone soup? And I do mean actual stone soup. It's also not good but occasionally you can catch a hint of oregano in it that leaves you wholly unsatisfied."

"Well, you have sold me. The café sounds delightful."

I followed Milo along, feeling my heart flutter with whatever it was he was up to. It had been a few days since I had seen him, the two of us having gotten caught up in our own life for a while. He looked better rested than the last time I laid eyes on him and it looked as if he had actually done laundry for once. His clothes weren't wrinkled.

"Thank you for agreeing to this. I know that blind dates can be a little tedious. You never know when you are going to get a troll. And I don't mean that in the sense of someone being unattractive. I don't believe in someone being unattractive. I do, however, have experience with literal trolls showing up at my door and let me tell you," he shuddered a bit. "They know how to dance."

Taking my hand, he twirled me around, ducking under my own arm before pulling me back to his chest, arms locked around me in a tight embrace. Milo didn't look like someone who was the strongest guy, but when he had me in his arms like this, I could feel the muscle corded across each bicep. We walked awkwardly along, him singing something in my ear, off-key, making me laugh as we stumbled through the streets, pressed together.

"I don't think this is appropriate behavior for a blind date," I told him, smiling at him over my shoulder.

"Ah," he released me with a flourish. "You are correct. I was going with the fae customs I had learned where you mock capture your date in a fit of war."

"Know a lot about fae customs?"

"Very very little but what I say sounds correct."

The café in question truly was a riverside one. It was located near a small tributary leading up from the docks where a series of wooden mushroom tables lined a boggy little creak. Frogs hopped about but

not in the way Milo spoke of and I didn't quite know what a kelpie was but I certainly didn't see one in sight.

Going up to what looked like a bar, located beneath a curtain of dripping algae, Milo leaned against the surface, looking at the toadlike pouring small mushroom caps of a plum colored liquid.. "I had a reservation for Monsieur Next, plus one."

The frog blinked at him. "Fuck off, Milo. Go sit at your usual."

Milo tapped the bar and nodded. "Thank you kind, sir. May you and yours be doing wonderful this eve."

The toad rolled his eyes at Milo but looked at me with a small bow.

"Come here often?" I asked, as Milo lead me around back towards the more watery area of the... tavern? Restaurant? I wasn't really sure where we were.

"I may be seen as a regular. Who's to say." Holding out his hand, he dragged me towards a small portion of the silt river that split into several rows of still ponds and ebbing creeks. Wooden row boats littered the area, anchored down so they did not move. I could see groups of people enjoying their drinks from within and when Milo pulled me into one, I was almost surprised at how clean and kept the boat itself was.

Hopping up on the table that bisected the boat, Milo spread his legs wide and pulled me close.

"Hi," he said with a smile.

"Hi."

"I'm done pretending I don't know you."

"I kind of liked it."

"I'll do it again then. But not tonight." Tipping his head forward, he caught my lips in a hungry kiss, hands kneading my sides. "I missed you. No one laughs at my jokes like you do."

"I'm not sure what that says about me." I leaned into him, wrapping my arms around him in return and threading my fingers through the back of his curls. He moaned a little as I scratched at his skull and it sent a bolt of heat through me. "Hazel said you were running a delivery for her," I said. "Near the outskirts."

He hummed in response. "Not a fun one. A very wet one, in fact. I think my feet will never get dry."

"Then why did you take me to a café where we are on a boat?"

He stopped, as if he actually hadn't considered that at all. When he tilted his head to the side, contemplating this answer, he shrugged. "I'm not the brightest man," he said. "But, I can say, that I

thought you would like it.” Turning me, he pulled me back against him again, resting his head on my shoulder. “I don’t think you’ve really gotten to see the parts of the Night Market that I like,” he said. “With everything going on you’ve seen a lot of danger and a lot of busy but the Night Market isn’t like that. There is such beauty in this world.”

I stared out over the expanse of meandering rivers and grass cut islands. Little boats scattered around us, different individuals huddled together around the floating candle lanterns for warmth. I grinned. There was a peace here. Something a bit more slowed down than the other parts of the market.

“I didn’t always think this way, you know,” he told me, his voice much softer. “I used to hate it here. Kept saying I’d find a way to get out. Used to tell the people in my life that I’d just one day be gone. I’d get a job and then I’d disappear. No goodbyes.”

“But you’re still here,” I pointed out.

He nodded. “I got the opportunity to go once. I couldn’t do it. The money was in my hand. I had actually secured passage through a gate, and I just couldn’t do it. I realized that during all my bitching and complaining about the trash heap of this world, I fell absolutely in love with these streets. Made a family for the first time in my life. Had a home that I chose. Why would I leave that?”

I rested my hands upon his, lacing them together low on my belly. “I’m glad you stayed.”

He said nothing to that as he tucked his head closer to mine, nuzzling my neck and dragging slow presses of his lips across my skin. “Want to come back to my place after we have dinner?” he asked.

“You’re not too tired?” I teased. “Such a long and wet journey you had.”

He snorted. “Honestly, I don’t give a shit what we do tonight. I just want to be with you like this. For a bit longer.”

Craning my neck, I looked over my shoulder. “You have me, Milo. I’m not going anywhere.”

His amber eyes flickered. A sharp knife of light and pain, blazing brightly before fading back to the mischievous burn that always lingered across his gaze. “You’re too good for this damn world,” he said.

“I thought you liked this world.”

“I like you better.” A waiter came to our boat, dropping off two platters of food that made the two of us move. Milo sat as close to me as possible, keeping his thigh pressed to mine. I looked down at the food, none of which I could name, and felt Milo sling an arm around me. “Best to just take the plunge, darlin’. Don’t think. Just do.”

And didn’t that just sum up the entirety of Milo Next.

[Patreon Tier Changes](#)

[Feb 16, 2023](#)

Hey everyone

I have added and shifted so much to Patreon since I started that I am going to post it here. Everything that has been added today will be highlighted in bold.

Bog Witch:

Early Access to chapters

Access to polls

Development Blogs

Courtesan:

Everything from the previous tier

2 monthly short stories from RO's perspective

NSFW scenes when available

Character Q & A's - Monthly

Bi Monthly Paper Moon stories and voting rights

A monthly lore entry about the Night Market

Velvet Guard

Everything from the previous tiers

2 additional RO short stories (total of 4)

Art when available

Access to any additional stories that are written monthly

An additional lore entry about the Night Market

Baron

Everything from previous tiers

Access to Alpha Build of Paper Moons

Your name in the credits - Message me for details

A customizable lore entry of your choosing. Can be an object or NPC - Message me for details

Gatekeeper

Everything from previous tiers

The chance to name a Night Market NPC

A monthly short story written of your choosing. Guaranteed 1500 word minimum

[Dev Blog 2/16/23](#)

[Feb 16, 2023](#)

So for as quick as I wrote Chapter Eleven in order to give myself all the time in the world for Chapter Twelve? Chapter Twelve is at a snails pace. I think there is just so much that I want to wrap up. So many conversations I want to have. And doing so requires time and coding that I am not used to giving on a chapter. However, I think this is a good indication of how chapters will probably go in the future. The more variables I have, the longer it is going to take to write it.

That being said. Milos route is done. Gabriel's route is almost done. Bella's is done and the Gabe/Bella poly scene is done. I have a few things I want to put in the platonic route. And Hazel is giving me trouble, the little sweet thing she is. I am hoping tomorrow and Monday will provide the time needed to get it out to the beta's.

Also! Good news for you Gabriel mancens out there. There is a NSFW scene for him. While I was not going to put one in this book, a situation arose that felt very right for it to naturally occur. And since I listen to my characters more than I listen to myself, angel boy is going to get laid.

Hopefully I'll have a more concise update for you soon! I'm dealing with some sick kids so my brain is a bit fried. Hope everyone is doing well!

[Character Q & A send in your questions!](#)

[Feb 20, 2023](#)

Monthly Character Q & A will be posted on the 28th! Send in your questions for the RO's or for me through here or through Tumblr.

[Milo/Mal/MC - Date Day](#)

[Feb 20, 2023](#)



“He’s taking us somewhere to kill me. You know that right? This is all part of Mal’s master plan.”

Milo held out his hand, as he helped me down a set of damp and rocky steps. They had been carved into the depth of a cave and had crumbled a bit over time, but the passage itself still looked secure.

“Why am I involved then?” I asked him, keeping my eyes on my feet as I navigated downwards.

“I don’t know.” Milo stumbled, bracing himself on the wall. The two of us exchanged looks as we waited for the floor to crack beneath us or something horrid to descend. When nothing but silence greeted us, we both breathed a sigh of relief. “Maybe you two are in on this together,” he continued. “You both conspire. Just the other day I saw you two with your heads bent together. Whispering. Laughing. Disgusting really. You really need to get that pda under control.”

I rolled my eyes. Milo's paranoia was something I had to learn over the years to take with a grain of salt. He never truly believed what he said. And it was normally followed up with a joke of some sort. It was more of a way for him to empty the thoughts that were rattling in his head and in the end we all agreed that we preferred it to his silence.

"You really think that?" I asked.

Grabbing me by the sides, he helped lower me down off of a steep drop-off. His fingers lingered against me as he pulled me flush against his front, rocking our bodies back and forth. Head dipped and hair hanging in front of his face, he grinned a little. "Darlin', I have learned never to underestimate you two." Leaning forward, he placed a lingering kiss on my lips, fingers searching to sneak beneath my shirt.

"Date day," I reminded him, nipping at his bottom lip. Malcolm had sent us a message early that morning. It had been days since the three of us had been able to see each other, and in true Mal fashion, that was not going to stand. "Malcolm is waiting for us," I told Milo as he showed no signs of stopping.

Pressing me against a wall, Milo lifted one thigh to wrap up around his hip. "He can wait a little longer." He rolled his hips against mine, our breaths hitching as our grips became far more desperate and filled with heat. Milo pushed himself forward, rutting up against me, hand snaking between our bodies.

"Button."

Milo's head fell forward and I had to stifle a laugh as it hit the jagged expanse of the cave wall. "Fuckin' mood killer."

I patted his back sympathetically before extracting myself from his embrace.

Malcolm leaned against the entrance to a cavern, arms crossed in front of him as he stared at us with amusement. I had a feeling he had watched us from the start. Milo often called him out on such tactics but Malcolm never admitted to any of it. Just gave us a sly smile as Milo continued to curse him out.

When I walked up to him, Malcolm took my hand, pulling me towards him. The kiss he placed on my lips was so different from Milo's. It was soft and sweet and yet burned with a deep current of desire that snapped tight around me and yanked me in.

Milo was all chaos and heat and right the fuck now. Malcolm was a slow burn you languished within until you couldn't breathe anymore.

"Hey, Lamplight," he said, brushing his fingers against my cheek. "Make it down okay?" I nodded, still curling close to him and feeling strong arms wrap around my middle. "Button? You pouting?"

With his head still banging against the wall, Milo held up his middle finger. I could feel the laughter rumble through Malcolm's chest.

"Aw, don't be like that," Mal said. "Got a surprise for you too."

Pushing away from the wall, he walked up to the two of us. Eyes narrowed in irritation and all ire directed towards Mal. "Any other fun moments you would like to interrupt? Any more dreams you wish to crush?"

"So many," Malcolm mused. "It's what I live for, Milo. Being your fun sucker."

I wrinkled my nose. "Oh, I don't know if I like that phrasing."

"I do," Milo laughed. "Want to suck some fun, Mal?"

I pushed away from both of them, hearing Milo's laughter echo throughout the cavern as Malcolm only shook his head. Looking over my shoulder at the two of them, I felt a small moment of affection. It was nice to finally see them at ease in each others presence.

Malcolm took the lead after that, guiding us through the slick cavern passages until the sound of trickling water echoed around us. The air was thick with heat, creating beads of sweat against our skin. We emerged into a vaulted cavern only moments later, the three of us stopping to marvel at our surroundings. A deep pool sat in the middle of the room, formed from the cavern itself where purple and green stones glowed far beneath the surface. Heated streams of sweet smelling water trickled down the sides, pouring in front the ceiling like rain. The room was filled with steam, rippling across the room and as I tipped my head downwards, I could see to the bottom of the pool where a thick layer of swaying seagrass lulled.

Milo let out a low whistle. "Where did you find this?"

"Knew about it years ago," Malcolm said with a shrug. "But I ventured down a few days ago to see if it was still here."

Milo raised a brow at the two of us, practically rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet. "Soooo.... Skinny dipping?"

We found ourselves naked and in the water in no time, the steam bubbling up around us and sinking into our aching bones. Milo was swimming smack in the middle of the pool while Malcolm was lounging on a nearby ledge, the water butting up against his chest, his arms glistening with sweat.

When Milo dived beneath the water, we were easily able to track his movements. He kicked as he made his way all the way to the bottom, twirling his hands within the grass before plucking something from their depths. When he came back up, he spit the water into the air, slicking back his hair. Swimming up to me, he held out a small shell, the likes of it a color I'd never seen.

"Admit it," I said, taking it from him. "This is nice."

"Never," he whispered. His smile was relaxed and free as I admired the shell, vowing to tuck it away with all the other trinkets he occasionally brought me. "Now dance with me," he demanded.

"In the water?"

"Yes. Become one of the aquatic ones with me." He pulled me into a familiar position, holding one of my hands and wrapping the other around my hip. I could feel the way he was kicking to keep us both afloat. "Let us cast aside our life of sin and make our home beneath the sea."

"I don't think I can hold my breath that long," I said with a grin.

Tipping his head towards mine, he hummed a soft tune in my ear. "You, darlin', can do anything." He twirled me within the water, dancing me from rock to rock as he pushed off the walls and propelled us through the hot spring. When Malcolm's arms wrapped around me from behind, I startled. Milo had danced us straight into his arms.

"Clever," I told him.

He grinned. "I know."

Scooting back, Malcolm made room for the two of us, maneuvering me so I sat between his legs, my back to his chest, while Milo treaded water in front of us, making sure to stick close. With one arm looped around me to keep me steady, Malcolm reached forward, raking his fingers through Milo's hair.

"I missed you two," he said softly. Life had gotten in the way. It often did with us. And while we all circled each other on a near constant, the journeys we were on often pressed against us so hard that we forgot what this was. That the three of us were together. That after the fighting and the disagreements that sometimes filled our day, we had promised to come together with laughter and support each night.

Leaning back, I rested my head against Malcolm's shoulder. "Thank you for doing this, Mal," I whispered. His lips pressed against my cheek, lingering at the corner of my lips. I could feel when his eyes shifted to Milo's. He always held himself a bit stiffer when it came to the golden eyed man. He told me once it was because he never knew which Milo he would get to hold that night. "Button, c'mere."

Milo raised a brow. "What'd I do now?"

Malcolm kicked out with a foot, snaking it around Milo's backside and drawing him close to us. "Don't argue," he admonished. Milo opened his mouth to do just that, but Malcolm swooped in for a kiss before he could get too far. Pressed between them, I watched the way Milo melted against us and the way Mal always treated him so gently. When they pulled away, Milo rested his head contentedly on my shoulder, closing his eyes when I brought up a hand to twine within his hair.

Around us, the gentle sound of water filled the cavern, along with the heat from the steam. It lulled us, rocking the three of us gently in a comforting embrace.

"I'm gonna fall asleep in here," I murmured.

"Me too," Milo yawned.

Malcolm clutched us both a bit tighter. "Rest," he whispered. "I've got you both."

[Lore Entry - The Graveyard](#)

[Feb 24, 2023](#)



At the edge of the market is a graveyard. It sits nestled among a grove of trees and expands outwards into a sea of mausoleums and faded headstones. This is where most go when they die. When a soul passes, a grave appears, waiting for its occupant to be laid beneath the dirt. Their name is etched upon a headstone where a single clock hangs over the front. There, it ticks away, letting family members know when the soul can return to the market, to resume their life. Sometimes this takes days. Other times it takes years. No one quite knows why some return sooner than others.

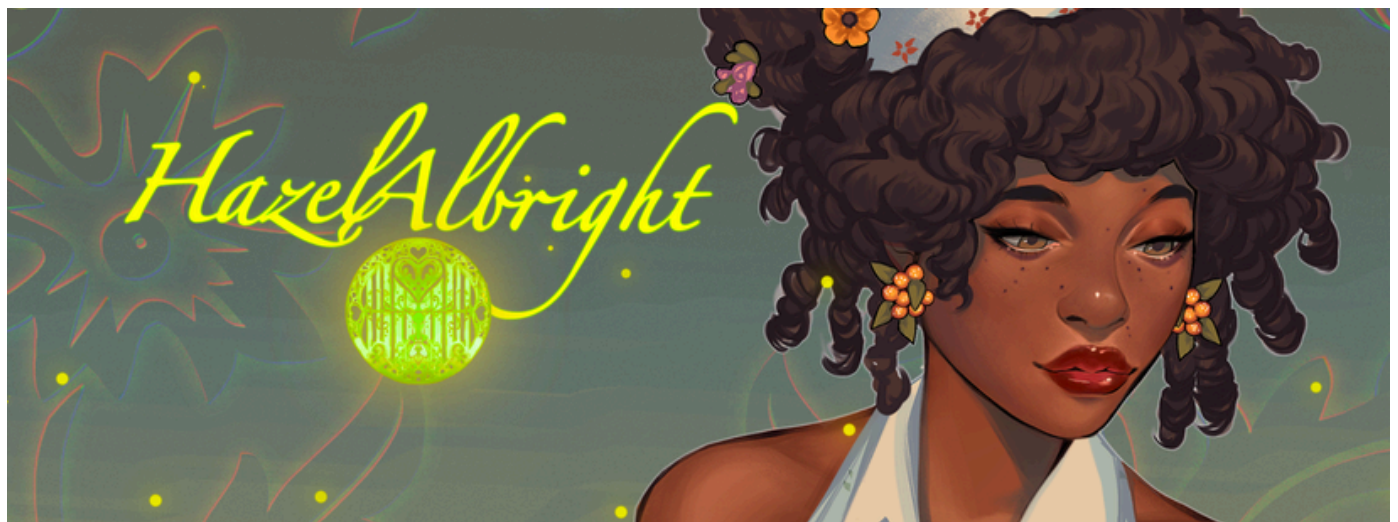
Family is often waiting for them upon exhumation day. Small celebrations are held for the rebirth of life. Upon returning to the world, the soul is often weak and disoriented. If there is no family waiting for them

to take them home, the graveyard keeper invites them to stay for a few days. Just until they are on their feet. Others, do not return to life. Deciding that their life was complete, they let their clock crack. From there, they seep into the market and preside in the afterlife until one day, their grave fades away.

The Graveyard is watched over by an elderly man named Victor and his son Herald. They live in a cobbled together church at the top of the hill. Victor, a retired doctor/scientist, helps with the process of embalming the bodies and bringing them back from the dead. His son Herald, can often be seen, a coffin strapped to his back, wandering the market to bring the dead to their resting place. The two of them protect the graveyard together, a ferrier of the dead that seems just as eternal as the graveyard itself.

[Hazel - Date Day](#)

[Feb 24, 2023](#)



The wisps were gathered at the gate when I got home that night. They hovered around the knots of pine, chittering across the latch in excitement. I raised a brow towards them, the temptation to ask them what exactly they were up to quite strong. They wove around the strips of wood, causing small sprigs of valley lilies to bloom along thick braids of grapevine. Reaching out, I brushed them away, pushing the gate open. The day had been fraught with several deliveries, all of which had taken me further into the market than I had been before. I was looking forward to a hot cup of tea and then sleep.

But as I stepped through, the smell of a bubbling stew greeted me. Something thick and earthy. I looked up towards the bent iron chimney where lavender smoke usually puffed from the cracks within the broken vent. It wasn't rumbling with use today. An unusual sight since it oftentimes felt like Hazel was always bent over that cauldron, mixing brews or at least, soups.

“Over here.”

I heard Hazel's voice come from around the corner of the apothecary. With a small frown, I dropped my bag at the door and followed it. She was on the opposite side of where the garden sat, near the big tree that was just outside my window. Rounding the corner, I spotted her. A thick woven blanket was set out on the ground while small flickering tea lights hovered in the air around her. The tree was lit with the wisps and the ground was laid with fresh, plush moss. Hazel beamed at me.

“Hungry?”

Slowly, I made my way over to her, looking at each thing she had laid out. Mini cauldrons sat, the smell hovering around them sinful. A bottle of something amber and bubbling chilled in a churning bucket of ice and a full tea service was laid out in her emerald green teapot with the bone carved handle.

“What is all this?”

Her cheeks were pink as she shifted from side to side. “I uh- I thought we could have a date,” she said, dipping her head down. “I mean, if you want. If you're not too tired. I know it was a busy day so I would understand if—”

“Hazel,” I interrupted. She looked up at me with big round eyes. “It's perfect.”

The smile that melted across her worries was enough to bring me to my knees. I curled up on the thick blanket, sitting close to her. Reaching out, I took her hand squeezing it in thanks. When she leaned forward to kiss me, I felt my world stop. Hazel had this way about her. The sweetest woman I had ever met, who could absolutely tear the world apart in a fury of black voidless eyes and roots from the earth.

“I made soup,” she murmured against my lips. “I had a few different things in the cellar that needed to be used up so I just tossed it all together.” For Hazel, tossing something all together was an all day event. I knew this was something she had probably planned, starting it the second I left the shop this morning. “I also have fresh baked rosemary bread and custard for desert.”

“You're spoiling me,” I told her.

“You deserve to be spoiled.”

So did she. I vowed to find something for her the next time I was out wandering the market. I had learned that Hazel loved gifts. It didn't even matter what kind. She just adored little bits of the world that made me think of her. Each time I found something, a wood flower, a petrified piece of bone, she acted as if it were the first time I had gotten her something. It was a reaction that brought me warmth each and every time and made me want to do it more and more.

“Eat,” she said. “You look absolutely famished.”

As always, the food was impeccable. Far better than anything I could have made myself. It was clear that it brought her joy and the act of doing it was something in which she took great pride in. Digging in, I realized I was halfway through my bowl before I had even said anything. When I looked up at her, she had her brow raised, and was hiding her laughter behind her teeth.

"It's really good," I told her.

She laughed. "I can see that."

When she handed me a piece of bread, I sighed at the warmth of it, the fresh smell of yeast filling the air. "I know you said once that the people in the market taught you how to cook. Anyone in particular?"

Grabbing her own bowl, she began eating. "There was an elderly banshee that used to live in a small little grove in the spice district. She had about six trees that she wove between, making soups and little hand pies with the wood she chopped every day. I used to hide within those trees when the market became too busy. One day, she offered me a bowl of stew. Then the next she told me to go get her some turnips. After that I think it was a head of cabbage. She had me running errands for her all over the market," Hazel laughed. "Until one day she was teaching me how to cook."

It was an odd thing to contemplate. The idea of Hazel running free throughout the market at one point. "A banshee taught you how to cook?"

Hazel nodded. "There's a misconception about banshee's. They are not all about death. They can be quite full of life if they can simply focus."

Pouring a glass of the amber liquid, I realized it was her store of honeyed mead. She made big batches of it each month, sending it out as herbal tonics to any of the districts that were struggling with disease. Not once had I seen her ask for anything in return.

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"I don't know. One day I went there to go and have a visit and her trees were dying. They slowly withered away within the spice district and I just never saw her again. The cauldron I keep over my fire in the main room is hers though. I made sure to bring it back. I couldn't stand the thought of someone not respecting what was obviously so important to her."

I felt sad for some reason. Maybe because it was another loss for Hazel's. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be," she said with a small wave of her hand. "Banshees are fickle. They struggle to stay in one place for too long. It is honestly amazing that she did. I have a theory that that little grove of trees was a gate. I don't think she was just toiling away her time within that grove. I think she came and went and continued to cook from time to time for whoever needed it."

Which was what Hazel did, I realized. She never charged for her food and made big batches to give away. Because someone had done that for her once.

"What was her name?" I asked.

"Isolde."

"You think you'll ever see her again?"

Hazel laughed. "Most don't wish to see a banshee at their door but... I don't know. It would be nice. To know what adventures she has been on through the years. I would like to cook for her too. Show her how much I've learned."

There was an eagerness to her face. One that said she wished desperately for this woman's approval. "I hope you get to as well. I think she'd be really proud of you."

Again, that blush. It was going to do me in.

Shifting, Hazel reached forward, pushing aside the half-eaten cauldrons of soup, which were refilling the longer they sat. She cleared the surrounding area before hiking up her skirt and slinging a leg across my hips. I felt bare skin press against the cloth of my own clothes.

Biting her lip, she looked at me through her lashes. "Want to do something that she wouldn't be proud of?" she asked coyly.

I laughed, taking her by the hips. "Out here?"

"It's not like the wisps haven't seen us. Besides, I've kind of had a fantasy of seeing you lit only by the light of nature. I think you'd be beautiful." She rolled her hips against me, pushing me slowly back onto the bed of moss.

We spoke no more from that point. As she slowly began to play my body, I could think of no words to say. Only that as I looked up at her, her bodice having come unlaced, I never wanted this moment to end. Hazel claimed I was beautiful beneath the light of the wisps. She would murmur it to be for days to come. But there were no words to describe how she looked, hair loose around her shoulders as she hovered above me. Her cheeks were dark with exertion, her lips parted in pleasure. I didn't think I would ever see anything as beautiful as her, for as long as I lived.

[Paper Moons - Part 16](#)

[Feb 24, 2023](#)



“What is wrong with you?” I snapped, my voice breaking across the cave in which we stood. “Why did you do that?”

“Because if I had not,” he said patiently, “you would have.”

“I am aware of that, Gabriel. And that was my choice to make.”

His laugh was condescending. “You think that’s what that was? Consent? She had you under her thrall and you weren’t even aware.”

“What I’m aware of,” I yelled, “is that I have been hired by your fathers to protect you and yet you seem hell-bent on putting yourself in harms way each time. Tell me, would you like to let the madness consume you or would you like for me to actually do my job?”

Gabriel’s jaw was locked tight, his eyes refusing to look at me. I could feel my own anger bubbling within as I stared at the pinched wound on his neck. Blood and spit still lingered against his skin, all signs of the bond he had made with the vampire for my namesake.

“I am going to make something very clear to you now,” I told him. “I am my own person. The decisions I make, whether they are good or bad, are my own to make. You do not get to make them for me. Continuing forward, refrain from it, understood?”

Silver flared in his eyes but he did not argue. “Understood, Graceling.” The words were thin and came out like a cracked blade.

Straightening, I looked out over the desolate stretch of land before us, tipping my chin upwards. “Let us get back to the market,” I said firmly. “We shall take this moonlight and conduct the spell to make you better. We have floundered but we are still on the right track. We just simply should have been better. That does not mean we have failed.”

Gabriel looked at me out of the corner of his eye. “We are assuming the moonlight will work.”

“Of course it will work,” I said with conviction.

"How do you know?"

"Because I will allow for no other truth."

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We found Kavatti dancing, having forgotten about us. Her hair glowed silver however, and her skin looked flush. She blinked upon seeing us, as if it were for the first time. Then, her smile grew even further. "Moonlight," she said with a bow. Bits of dust trickled from her fingers, the light from the sky swelling within her.

I made no comment towards Gabriel or her as I walked towards the opening of the village cave. The man that had stood guard was still there and as I walked past him, head held high, he said nothing. We were within the outskirts once more, ready to walk across the cold stretch of land to a market who may or may not let us back in.

The bravado I had possessed only hours before began to wane as the village behind us disappeared into the dark and the night market lights weren't even a blur on the horizon. Kavatti lit up a small patch of the land around her as she pirouetted forward, dancing to a show all of her own. I watched her, wondering what kind of life she had had before. If she had family. If anyone missed her.

Next to me, Gabriel kept touching at his wound, an unconscious swipe of his thumb against where the bite mark had once been. It had faded into a crack however, as if it were no more than a tear against parchment.

"Does it hurt?" I asked.

He frowned. "No. But it does not feel right."

"How so?" I had heard things about bite marks from vampires. They were used within brothels and pleasure districts to control men and women. Secrets were excreted from those bites. But Gabriel didn't look to be verging on a source of pleasure. If anything, he looked as if he wished to peel the skin in which Kavatti's lips had touched, pushing it far from him.

"I do not feel myself," he stated.

"Is it the loss of grace?" My heart skipped. When Kavatti had fed, did she take the rest of the grace from him? Had we already stopped our mission long before it could come to fruition?

"No," he said with a small shake of his head. "But my head feels fuzzy and there is a buzzing noise. Something distant. I—" he stumbled. Reaching out, I grabbed at him, looking him over for injury. His skin looked ashen and felt clammy. "It's the madness," he told me, all too calmly. "It is calling."

"Calling?"

"I can hear it," he whispered. "Elias says he can hear his in the middle of the night. The world," Gabriel winced. "It is too quiet out here. There is nothing to distract me from the thoughts in my head."

I glanced ahead to Kavatti who had stopped. She was staring at us now, a beacon. "We need to get to the market. Faster."

"Fastest way to the market is to go underground," Kavatti said. "Dig dig dig."

"You are not helping," I snapped. There was nothing nearby. No cave entrance. No convenient tunnel that could lead us beneath the land. Just miles and miles of nothingness. "Okay," I said, trying to gather my thoughts. "Okay. We just need to keep walking. Gabriel, can you do that on your own or do you need help?"

"I am fine."

He looked far from fine but I had no other option than to hope that he would last. "We just need to get you to Elias and Reese," I assured him. "You'll be okay once you are there. You'll—"

There was a splitting crack that sounded. It shot through the air like thunder. Eyes wide, I looked towards Kavatti, watching the smile cross her face. "Rivers rush through to valleys far and true," she sang.

I had no time to question her. No time to do anything other than stare at her as the land shifted beneath our feet. I felt my stomach plummet as we dropped downwards, falling over ourselves as we tried in vain to hold on. But an icy plunge of water rushed in around us, filling our lungs and dragging us down. A flood of water shifted beneath us and I grabbed at Gabriel, trying to hold onto him as we tumbled against rock and stone, hitting against jagged edged walls, being consumed by the dark.

With a solid hit to the side of my head, the world went black.

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I opened my eyes slowly, a distant whisper circling me. My mother stood not far away, her fire red hair shining in the sunlight. She was bent at the knee, her arms held out for me as I ran through a field of wheat to get to her. I could smell the day's harvest and see the workers bailing the gold spun grass. We would be turning it to grain soon. The village would smell like bread.

"Kiddo," I heard her call. I ran faster, trying to get to her but noticing that it didn't seem to matter how far I ran, she never got closer. Her smile was stagnant as the big rolls of wheat began to burst into flame, exploding against the bright blue sky as she continued to call for me. "Kiddo!"

"Mama!" I screamed, my voice far younger as I tried to run towards her. The world began to roll into a pit of fire and the fields in which I used to play turned into nothing more than cloying ash. "Mama!"

I sat bolt up right, muscled arms surrounding me as I gasped for air. I chocked, spitting out water, bending at the waist as salt and bile burned my lungs.

"Easy there, kiddo." The voice was familiar but it was not my mothers. They patted my back as I coughed and heaved, still keeping a firm hold on me. When I lifted my head, I saw Reese, the dark eyes of the man staring back at me. When he reached up to wipe the hair from my face, I felt the tears run free.

He pulled me in then, cradling me against his chest and rocking me slowly. "It's gonna be alright, kiddo. You're safe now."

I didn't know how long I was like that, rocking back and forth, feeling the world around me spin. The sound of rushing water was all I could hear and the sight of my mother was all I could think about. Reese protected me through it, waiting for me to come to my senses again.

I did with a start, jolting out of his embrace as I looked around. We were in a cave but I could see the ocean just outside the opening. White capped waves rolled to the shore, splashing against obsidian cliffs and forming small barnacle filled tide pools. Gabriel laid nearby, breathing steadily, sodden and covered in sand.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Was gonna ask you that." Gently, Reese extracted me from his arms where I shivered in the breeze coming off of the ocean.

"We're home?"

"The market, yeah," he said, scratching his head. There was something different about him. He looked far more dangerous than he did bustling around the kitchen, making breakfast each morning. Here, he was shirtless, his bare chest riddled with scars, a sword strapped to him that I had never seen before.

Sitting up, I wrapped my arms around myself. "Is Gabriel okay? The madness... he said he was hearing a call?"

"Fuck." Reese looked over at Gabriel, several warring emotions filtering over his face at once. "Did you get whatever the fuck the ingredient to that spell was?"

Kavatti. I looked around but she wasn't here. I lost track of her when the ground had swallowed us whole. "I'm sorry."

Reese stood there for a long moment, fists clenched at his sides before a scream of rage erupted from his throat. I held my hands over my ears as he yelled, the rocks around us crumbling. Stalking out of the cave, I saw him draw his sword, lighting swirling over the ocean. I didn't see where he had gone but I could hear his curses on the wind. Crawling over to Gabriel, I checked him over, not knowing what else to do. I didn't even know where within the market we were.

"Come on." My head snapped up as Reese entered the cave again, blood dripping from both him and his sword. Lightening swirled in his eyes.

"Reese?"

"We're gettin' him back to Elias," Reese said. Without preamble, he came over, bending to take Gabriel in his arms in a fireman hold. "You can either come with me, Graceling, or stay here. Tides' gonna be comin' in though."

I didn't move. As I stared at the man at the entrance of the cave, Gabriel limp in his arms, I just didn't move. Even his voice sounded far more like steel than it had all the times I had spoken to him before.

"Kiddo, come on," he snapped.

Something was off. There was something about him that was far too different from the caring man I knew. And it seemed far too much of a coincidence for the ground to open just to spit us out right at his feet.

[[Follow him silently but stay wary]]

[[Try to get Gabriel away from him]]

[[Run from him and get help]]

[Paper Moons Part 16 Choices](#)

[Feb 24, 2023](#)

Choices for part 16 of Paper Moons.

For access to the full game so far, join the Baron tier for the link and code.

Follow him silently but stay wary

Try to get Gabriel away from him

Run from him and get help

19 votes total

[Feb 27, 2023](#)

How do marriage ceremonies work in The Night Market? Do they just have different types for where everyone is from or is it just a type of ceremony that is unique to The Night Market?

They tend to be unique based on the different cultures that have immigrated to the market. There are probably too many variations of marriage to really talk about if you consider that so I'll focus specifically on the traditions for the people who are native to the world.

Marriage is more of a life commitment within the Night Market. Instead of a metaphorical bond and a promise to be together kind of vow, they have physical ones. When individuals decide to "marry" one another, a ritual is performed. It combines their blood and joins them through a soul bond link. When one partner is hurt, the other can feel it. If one dies, so does the partner. Due to that, marriage is not often something people conduct. Mainly because we are talking about beings that have the potential to live for a very loooooong time. The people who are available to do these ceremonies are very rare as well and it would require a lot of time and dedication to find someone to enact it. Most individuals instead have a commitment with each other without the form of marriage. Families within the market are rarely seen, however, with a dual partner trope (husband and wife, wife and wife, husband and husband). Instead, partnerships are much more based on the choice to be around that person for the time being. A lot of couples do go their separate ways after a while or when they have finished a life task they had set out to do with each other. There is much less of a focus of being together forever in marriage and much more of a focus of being together in the now.

That being said, they all are great about raising children. If partners do end up splitting before the child is an adult, normally, the partners will take great care to either still live with each other, or near each other. The Night Market has a much more village mentality when it come to child-rearing.

All of the ROs seem to have pretty terrible parents 😬 Soooo do any of the ROs (Mal included) want to have children either biologically or through adoption and how many?

Kids are always a fun topic when it comes to these characters. We will start with the Albright's.

Hazel does not want children. Though, Hazel has suspected most of her life that she would be going through life on her own and she predominantly, did not want to raise a child on her own, or put that type of companionship onto a child. She would be far more interested in adopting or mentoring children but she does not wish to become a mother. That being said, I think Hazel's viewpoints could change based on the partner she is with and having stability within that partnership.

Malcolm wants kids. He has always wanted children. But, he also knows the type of job he has (or had) and has never quite figured out how to keep a child safe. Along those lines, I don't think he likes the idea of having a child of the Night Market (no pun intended) mainly because he does believe that when a life cycle ends, it should end. He doesn't like the idea of his child living for eternity and seeing the end of their world's existence.

Now, Milo? He is a different egg all together. Milo was just a baby when his mother abandoned him. He has no memory of her other than the soft smell of an apple orchard. And his father, we have learned, is abusive. In theory, Milo does want children. He genuinely enjoys children and would be the parent that got excited over each new discovery they made. But, he is terrified of being his dad. He does know he has his father's temper and that scares him. So, he has always wistfully thought of it, but never made a move to make that happen.

Gabriel does not understand the concept of children, to be honest. Where he is from, there were no children. Celestials were just in existence one day and could function fully as an adult. So, the concept of tiny humans to him is not one he quite grasps. He doesn't get how babies would need to be cared for. And, as he had no actual parents, he doesn't understand needing to care for them. That being said, he is forever grateful to Reese and Elias because they did take him under their wing and gave him a home. He calls them his fathers because he doesn't know what else to call them. But the thought of being a father himself has never crossed his mind.

Belladonna actually had a good upbringing. She had a wonderful mother and a wonderful father right up until the end. The belief in their form of the Knowing and the fear of the end of the world, was too much for her father and he made a poor choice. But, overall, Bella's childhood was actually very loving. Due to this, she does want one. She would love to have a baby and rock them late into the night. Given that she is a vampire, however, she cannot carry a baby of her own.

What would each of them be like with their kid(s)?

Ultimately, I do think each RO, would be a good parents if a child was involved. They have enough experience with a lack of support that I feel they would not allow that to happen to their child.

Hazel would be an earth mama. She would teach the kid the ways of the land, how to brew tonics and heal people. And you better believe that kid would be cooking with her from the time they were born. I think she would be a loving mother but one that kept her kid busy and constantly learning.

Malcolm would be a balanced father. I think he would want to be a helicopter dad but have enough sense to know that kids need to learn some stuff on their own. But I think he would always be silently hovering.

Milo would be the dad that would go on adventures with his kid. But, I think Milo would also be an incredibly strict dad. He would be quick to forgive and I don't think he would be ever truly mad at his kid, but he would expect them to toe the line.

Gabriel would be confused. I think he would have the biggest learning curve and would constantly be trying new things, worried he isn't doing it right. But the second that baby laughs for him for the first time, he would pledge his entire life to them.

Belladonna would treat her child like royalty. She would spoil the shit out of them and make sure they understood that they should accept nothing but the best. I think she would be the mom curling up with her kid at night to read though, finding it to be her favorite pass time.

If the characters were going to watch a play or show, what genre is their favorite? Comedy, mystery, drama, musical, something else?

Hazel's would be musicals and suspense. If you could somehow find her musical suspense she would be over the moon.

Malcolm isn't too into shows or plays but if he was to go to one, I think he would like one to be heavily influence by music. That is more of his passion and you are much more likely to find him in a music club.

Milo is all of the above. Milo loves to just consume, consume, consume. Especially if it is something he hasn't experienced before.

Gabriel is mystery. He would try to figure the plot out before the main character could.

And Belladonna loves dramas with a touch of horror. It delights her and gives her ideas. But if any of them are based on book she will immediately consider them garbage.

I would like the characters to describe their perfect date. I will accept both the actual answer and the Miss Congeniality cringe answer.

Hazel: "Oh, that's easy. My perfect date would be a picnic somewhere. A place where no one else is. I would like to lie out on the softest blanket and eat good food and stargaze well into the night, talking about our hopes and dreams. Cuddling up under a massive quilt until we both fall asleep sounds like absolutely perfection."

Malcolm: "Going to one of the underground music clubs, listening to music, drinking some wine and watching people dance. I would want to sit in one of the dark alcoves and have good conversation where I could get lost for hours in what my date is saying."

Milo: "My perfect date would be mid-summer when the evening breeze is just right and the toads are croaking a song so wildly romantic that when I look at my lover, it is with hearts in each of our eyes."

Gabriel: "I would take my date out to dinner. We would eat. And then we would walk home that night without criminal interruption."

Belladonna: "Obviously my perfect date would be a night out on the town, seeing the wonderful sights of the Night Market. People watching. Experiencing the joys of my date's company. Before taking a night cap back at a mutually agreed on place where we could get to know each other better, per the parameters of our agreed upon contract." (Bella may not like dates, it turns out)

[Chapter Twelve - Gabriel NSFW F/mc](#)

[Mar 1, 2023](#)

I could feel the hard line of him against my hip. As he loomed over me, eyes tinted silver, I could see the tension within his arms. The way he was holding himself, waiting for my command. Reaching up, I ran my fingers through his hair, feeling the strands of it fall forward out of the hold he put them in every morning. Locking eyes with him, I rolled my hips in way of answer, feeling the way he trembled at the sensation. I surged upwards, taking his lips against mine and feeling the way he opened to me. Grabbing me by the small of the back, he pulled me upwards, situating me until I was in his lap. I shoved at his shirt, wanting to feel the heat of his skin against my own. Meanwhile, he pushed and pulled at my top, discarding it along with his own, both hands coming up to cup my breasts.

Looking down, I watched as his thumbs rolled across me, eyes bright with what he saw. I felt him arch up, his cloth covered cock seeking out the wet warmth between my legs. He was enraptured. It was the only word I could think of as he stared at me longingly. As he kneaded my breasts, I could see the way his lips parted, eyes suddenly eager for whatever I was going to allow of him.

"Go ahead," I told him softly, curious if he was waiting for a command.

With a hand at the small of my back, he bent me backwards, my breast on display for him. Slowly, almost reverently, he leaned forward, flicking his tongue across the hardened point of my nipple, groaning as he dove forward and unabashedly began sucking bruises against my chest, his tongue sneaking out to lave the hurt. My back arched, hand slipping within his hair to encourage him further. He grunted as my own hips came down on him hard, the hand at my back digging into my bare skin.

I could feel the desire building within me. Gabriel was a man that threw himself wholeheartedly into what he was doing and this was apparently no different. As he nipped and sucked, his hand coming up to squeeze each breast, I felt myself gasping, tumbling into the sensations of his lips on mine. When he showed no signs of stopping, I tapped him on the shoulder, having to push his head away from mine. Eagerly, he dove towards my lips, sucking my bottom lip within his mouth, his tongue coming out to lick the seam of my lips.

"Gabriel," I panted, pushing him back. His eyes were bright silver, casting a soft glow in the room. I could feel the length of his erection and the dampness between my thighs. With a pointed look, I reached between us, slowly undoing the buckle of his belt. It echoed within the room, the sound of it clattering as it slowly came undone. I popped open the line of buttons and scooted back in his lap as inch by inch I took down his zipper. His cloth covered erection strained against its confines and as I slipped my hand inside, Gabriel's head tipped back with an anxious groan.

He was hot against the palm of my hand, thick and veiny and something I desperately wanted more of. Slowly, I pulled him out, watching as his erection rested against the muscled wall of his stomach. The tip was already dark with need and glistening with the desire for release. Slowly, I began pumping him up and down, his hips jerking beneath me and his hands coming around to knead my ass slowly. He scooted back so his head could rest against the back of the sofa, his eyes closed as he enjoyed what I was giving him. Swiping my thumb across his slit, he cried out, the sound like music as he panted and twisted beneath me.

"I want more," he whispered.

"What do you want, Gabriel?" I wanted to hear him say it, suddenly wondering if something filthy could fall from his lips.

"You," he begged.

"Tell me though. Tell me what it is you want," I encouraged.

He squirmed beneath me, his cock pulsing in my hand. "I want to taste you," he whispered. "I want to run my tongue across you and bury my face between your legs." I felt a rush of warmth beneath me as I began grinding myself down on his thigh. Unconsciously, his hands went to my hips, his leg rising a fraction to encourage the movement. I could feel the swollen bud of my clit as it was dragged across the thick muscle of his leg. My grip on his cock tightened.

"I want whatever you wish to give me," he continued. "I want you to use my body for your pleasure. Please, I—" There was something there then. A struggle within him that I could see. Tugging on him, I leaned forward, capturing his lips in a soft and sweet kiss.

"Tell me," I whispered.

"I want to bring you pleasure," he said. "But I want you to deny me my own."

I felt my belly tighten at his words. His grip on me was intense, and his eyes were bright and shinning. Swallowing thickly, I nodded, standing from my position on his lap and undressing the rest of the way. Gabriel watched me like a man starved, each inch of my skin revealed something he was desperate to get his hands on. When I stood before him, naked, my chest rising with the erratic beat of my heart, I held out my hand to him, giving him silent permission to continue.

Gabriel pulled me to him then, laying flat on his back on the sofa. With deft hands he maneuvered me until I was hovering above him. The slide of his tongue against my wet folds had me gasping as I scrambled to hold onto the back of the sofa. His grip on me was tight as he pulled me down against his mouth, his tongue flicking back and forth over my clit until I was squirming above him and I was almost certain he couldn't breathe. He didn't stop though, his lips moved against me as he hardened his tongue to a near point, dragging it up and down. I could feel my thighs trembling with the effort to keep myself hovering above him but as he yanked my weight down on top of him completely, I felt myself start to let go. I rocked my hips against his lips, listening to the muffled sounds of pleasure he made as he continued to lick and suck, spearing his tongue inside me and teasing the muscled walls. When I felt myself flutter, releasing across him, it was so sudden that I gave him no warning. Gabriel let out a lengthy groan though as I spilled across his chin, before he pushed me forward until I lay on the flat of my back.

Holding his cock at the base, he teased it up and down my wet slit. "May I?" he asked.

My body was still trembling with orgasm as I nodded my head towards him. Gently, he eased himself past my opening, barely inserting himself before pulling back out. I watch the dark head of his cock become shiny with my own need, all the while Gabriel looked down at where I was spread open, licking the taste of me from his lips.

Arching, I panted, gripping onto the arm of the couch behind me and trying to push down on his cock. "I want you inside me, Gabriel," I told him desperately.

He paused, the thick length of him partially inserted. "Please don't let me cum," he told me and then thrust inside. I gasped as my body adjusted to him, my mouth open in a prolonged moan. He didn't move, instead pressing soft kisses up and down my neck and chest, waiting for me. When I rolled my hips, giving him permission, he began to move as well. The fluid motion of his hips had me groaning as he pushed into me, pulling himself all the way out before thrusting forward again. Gabriel was loud during sex, grunting and panting, squeezing his eyes shut as he fought his own need. I saw him several times squeeze the base of himself as he pushed and pulled at my hips. But he never stopped. He kept the rhythm, his lips grazing across my body as he began murmuring something in a language I didn't understand, straight into my skin.

Bending my knees, I felt him slip deeper, his fingers coming up to play with my clit. It wasn't going to be long now. I wanted to feel the pulse of him, that thick cock playing me until I was left a quivering mess. His eyes glowed silver as I looked at him and he nodded, hair falling in front of his face. Ducking his head, he began fucking me with earnest, the slow roll of his hips picking up speed as he reached between our bodies and rolled my clit between his calloused fingers. I could feel it then. The wind up at the base of my spine. I arched my back as he leaned down, catching one hardened nipple between his teeth. When I felt myself let go, it was with a scream as Gabriel continued to fuck me through it, not letting up his pace until I felt my muscles clench around him once again and I was clinging to him for dear life.

When he pulled out, his cock was hard and shiny, the tip covered in my release. He stared at me like a wild animal as he gathered me to him. I could feel the pound of his heart and the way he buried his face in my neck.

“Thank you,” he whispered. I nearly huffed out a laugh. He was still rock hard, and his cock looked angry with the lack of release. But he was running his lips across me as if I had just given him the most precious gift. “Thank you, thank you thank you....”

I held onto him just as tight, refusing to let him go until his cock went soft against my thigh.

[Chapter Twelve - NSFW Gabriel m/Mc](#)

[Mar 1, 2023](#)

I could feel the hard line of him against my thigh. As Gabriel loomed over me, eyes tinted silver, I could see the tension within his arms. The way he was holding himself, waiting for my command. Reaching up, I ran my fingers through his hair, feeling the strands of it fall forward and out of the hold he put them in every morning. Locking eyes with him, I rolled my hips in way of answer, feeling the way he trembled at the sensation. I surged upwards, taking his lips against mine and feeling the way he opened to me. Grabbing me by the small of the back, he pulled me upwards, situating me until I was in his lap. I shoved at his shirt, wanting to feel the heat of his skin against my own. Meanwhile, he pushed and pulled at my top, discarding it along with his own, his fingers dancing up and down my body.

Dark calloused fingers trailed down my chest and belly, stopping at the hem of my pants. I watched as Gabriel's eyes focused in on the bulge there, his tongue coming out to lick at his bottom lip. Slowly, he reached forward, cupping me. I could feel the flesh twitch in his grip and I rolled my hips against him. Looking up, I saw the eagerness in his eyes, feeling the way his thumb teased the head of my cock through the fabric between us.

“Go ahead,” I told him softly, curious if he was waiting for a command.

Not waiting, he slipped me out. Licking his palm, he brought it back downwards, slowly pumping me up and down, the wet slide of his saliva combined with the heat of his hand providing a near mind blanking sensation. I felt his lips against the side of my neck, sucking bruises against me as he trailed his tongue down across my chest. I gasped as his teeth enclosed around one pert nipple, tongue lapping at it as if to soothe the hurt. Meanwhile, his thumb was catching the drop of precum gathering at my tip, sliding it down across me. When I opened my eyes, I could see the silver glow of his own as he stared down at his own hand and how perfectly it fit around my cock.

I could feel the desire building within me. Gabriel was a man that threw himself wholeheartedly into what he was doing and this was apparently no different.

"I have a small confession," he said. I looked at him, panting harshly. "I have not lain with a man before." He didn't look fearful and this was obviously something he knew was coming, but I realized then, he didn't know how to proceed.

Reaching out, I cupped his cheek, the line of his jaw tense against my hand. "Do you want to stop?"

"Absolutely not," he said with a huffed laugh. "If anything, I am eager to learn." He renewed his grip on me, jerking me up and down, apparently fascinated with what he saw. I could see the hard outline of his own cock through his pants. It was a thick line against his thigh and left me salivating with the need to see it. As Gabriel continued to nip and suck at my neck, his free hand squeezing my ass, I felt myself gasping, tumbling into the sensations of his lips on mine. When he showed no signs of stopping, I tapped him on the shoulder, having to push his head away from mine. Eagerly, he dove towards my lips, sucking my bottom lip within his mouth, his tongue coming out to lick the seam of my lips.

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"I want whatever you wish to give me," he continued. "I want you to use my body for your pleasure. Please, I—" There was something there then. A struggle within him that I could see. Tugging on him, I leaned forward, capturing his lips in a soft and sweet kiss.

"Tell me," I whispered.

"I want to bring you pleasure," he said. "But I want you to deny me my own."

I felt my belly tighten at his words. His grip on me was intense, and his eyes were bright and shinning. Swallowing thickly, I nodded my head, standing from his lap and undressing the rest of the way. Gabriel watched me like a man starved, each inch of my skin revealed something he was desperate to get his hands on. When I stood before him, naked, my chest rising with the erratic beat of my heart, I held out my hand to him, giving him the silent permission to continue.

Gabriel sunk to his knees in front of me, his fingers gripping my thighs as he licked at the head of my weeping erection. The slide of his tongue against me was firm as he licked up the underside before wrapping his lips around the head and gently bobbing forward. I laced my fingers in his hair, looking down at him. When he looked up at me through the thick of his lashes, silver eyes bright and filled with passion, I felt myself twitch in his mouth. It was all the encouragement he needed as he pressed himself forward, letting me hit the back of his throat, before swallowing me. I gasped as I felt myself push down his throat, my own hand clenching convulsively, encouraging him as he continued to suck me off. I could feel my thighs trembling with the effort to keep myself standing, my hips rolling against his face as he silently begged me to just fuck him.

I pulled out of him with a pop when I felt my orgasm beginning at the base of my spine. Gabriel was panting before me, his lips puffy and shiny with spit. Slowly, he kicked his pants off the rest of the way, crawling towards the glass table in front of his leather clad sofa. He rested his arms upon it, looking back over his shoulder.

"I would like you to fuck me now."

I gave out a huff of laughter at how incredibly insane it was to hear him even say that and yet somehow, made me even harder. "I have to prep you," I told him. "I can't just—" My words trailed off into a groan as he slid his own fingers inside himself without warning, something silver and high pitched chiming through the room. I watched as his fingers slid in and out of himself, a grunt falling from his lips. Coming forward, I draped myself over his back, the scent of magic in the air. He was murmuring something in a language I didn't understand, and as he pulled his fingers out, he reached around for me, lining me up against his puckered entrance.

"Please don't let me cum," he told me, just before I thrust in. I heard the whine punch from his lungs followed by a heady groan. He was unbelievably tight and I rested my forehead against his sweaty back, feeling my own pleasure skitter up and down my spine. Rolling my hips against him, I slowly pulled out, thrusting back in and feeling the delicious drag of friction. It was not going to last long. Gabriel was panting beneath me, gripping the base of his cock to keep from coming, and my own

erection was pushing beautifully inside him, splitting him in two. I could stare at where we were pressed together all day, listening to the sounds erupting from him, filling the room.

Pushing him forward, I felt myself slip deeper. His eyes glowed silver as he looked at me over his shoulder, a desperation there that said he was close. Picking up my speed, I fucked him in earnest then, feeling my balls draw up. Within moments, I was shouting my own release, my fingers leaving bruises into his hips as I held him close to me.

When I pulled out, his cock was still hard. Gabriel stared at me like a wild animal as he turned, gathering me to him while we remained on the floor. I could feel the pound of his heart and the way he buried his face in my neck.

“Thank you,” he whispered. I nearly huffed out a laugh. He was still rock hard, and his cock looked angry with the lack of release. But he was running his lips across me as if I had just given him the most precious gift. “Thank you, thank you thank you...”

I held onto him just as tight then, refusing to let him go until his cock went soft against my thigh.

[Chapter Twelve - Gabriel NSFW transfem mc](#)

[Mar 1, 2023](#)

I could feel the hard line of him against my hip. As he loomed over me, eyes tinted silver, I could see the tension within his arms. The way he was holding himself, waiting for my command. Reaching up, I ran my fingers through his hair, feeling the strands of it fall forward out of the hold he put them in every morning. Locking eyes with him, I rolled my hips in way of answer, feeling the way he trembled at the sensation. I surged upwards, taking his lips against mine and feeling the way he opened to me. Grabbing me by the small of the back, he pulled me upwards, situating me until I was in his lap. I shoved at his shirt, wanting to feel the heat of his skin against my own. Meanwhile, he pushed and pulled at my top, discarding it along with his own, both hands coming up to cup my breasts.

Looking down, I watched as his thumbs rolled across me, eyes bright with what he saw. I felt him arch up, his cloth covered cock seeking out the wet warmth between my legs. He was enraptured. It was the only word I could think of as he stared at me longingly. As he kneaded my breasts, I could see the way his lips parted, eyes suddenly eager for whatever I was going to allow of him.

“Go ahead,” I told him softly, curious if he was waiting for a command.

With a hand at the small of my back, he bent me backwards, my breast on display for him. Slowly, almost reverently, he leaned forward, flicking his tongue across the hardened point of my nipple, groaning as he dove forward and unabashedly began sucking bruises against my chest, his tongue sneaking out to lave the hurt. My back arched, hand slipping within his hair to encourage him further. He grunted as my own hips came down on him hard, the hand at my back digging into my bare skin.

I could feel the desire building within me. Gabriel was a man that threw himself wholeheartedly into what he was doing and this was apparently no different. As he nipped and sucked, his hand coming up to squeeze each breast, I felt myself gasping, tumbling into the sensations of his lips on mine. When he showed no signs of stopping, I tapped him on the shoulder, having to push his head away from mine. Eagerly, he dove towards my lips, sucking my bottom lip within his mouth, his tongue coming out to lick the seam of my lips.

“Gabriel,” I panted, pushing him back. His eyes were bright silver, casting a soft glow in the room. I could feel the length of his erection and the dampness between my thighs. With a pointed look, I reached between us, slowly undoing the buckle of his belt. It echoed within the room, the sound of it clattering as it slowly came undone. I popped open the line of buttons and scooted back in his lap as inch by inch I took down his zipper. His cloth covered erection strained against its confines and as I slipped my hand inside, Gabriel’s head tipped back with an anxious groan.

He was hot against the palm of my hand, thick and veiny and something I desperately wanted more of. Slowly, I pulled him out, watching as his erection rested against the muscled wall of his stomach. The tip was already dark with need and glistening with the desire for release. Slowly, I began pumping him up and down, his hips jerking beneath me and his hands coming around to knead my ass slowly. He scooted back so his head could rest against the back of the sofa, his eyes closed as he enjoyed what I was giving him. Swiping my thumb across his slit, he cried out, the sound like music as he panted and twisted beneath me.

“I want more,” he whispered.

“What do you want, Gabriel?” I wanted to hear him say it, suddenly wondering if something filthy could fall from his lips.

“You,” he begged.

“Tell me though. Tell me what it is you want,” I encouraged.

He squirmed beneath me, his cock pulsing in my hand. “I want to taste you,” he whispered. “I want to run my tongue across you and bury my face between your legs.” I felt a rush of warmth beneath me as I began grinding myself down on his thigh. Unconsciously, his hands went to my hips, his leg rising a fraction to encourage the movement. I could feel my swollen center as it was dragged across the thick muscle of his leg. My grip on his cock tightened.

“I want whatever you wish to give me,” he continued. “I want you to use my body for your pleasure. Please, I—” There was something there then. A struggle within him that I could see. Tugging on him, I

leaned forward, capturing his lips in a soft and sweet kiss.

"Tell me," I whispered.

"I want to bring you pleasure," he said. "But I want you to deny me my own."

I felt my belly tighten at his words. His grip on me was intense, and his eyes were bright and shining. Swallowing thickly, I nodded, standing from my position on his lap and undressing the rest of the way. Gabriel watched me like a man starved, each inch of my skin revealed something he was desperate to get his hands on. When I stood before him, naked, my chest rising with the erratic beat of my heart, I held out my hand to him, giving him silent permission to continue.

Gabriel pulled me to him then, laying flat on his back on the sofa. With deft hands he maneuvered me until I was hovering above him. The slide of his tongue against me had me gasping as I scrambled to hold onto the back of the sofa. His grip on me was tight as he pulled me down against his mouth, his tongue flicking back and forth over my center until I was squirming above him and I was almost certain he couldn't breathe. He didn't stop though, his lips moved against me as he hardened his tongue to a near point, dragging it up and down. I could feel my thighs trembling with the effort to keep myself hovering above him but as he yanked my weight down on top of him completely, I felt myself start to let go. I rocked my hips against his lips, listening to the muffled sounds of pleasure he made as he continued to lick and suck, spearing his tongue inside me and teasing the muscled walls. When I felt myself flutter, releasing across him, it was so sudden that I gave him no warning. Gabriel let out a lengthy groan though, his hands fumbled for something I couldn't see. When I managed to blink down at him, I saw him slick up his own erection, tossing the bottle aside as he pushed me onto my back.

Holding his cock at the base, he teased it up and down my opening. "May I?" he asked.

My body was still trembling with orgasm as I nodded my head towards him. Gently, he eased himself past my opening, barely inserting himself before pulling back out. He licked his lips as he slowly began to stretch me, taking his time to ease into my body while holding my legs apart.

Arching, I panted, gripping onto the arm of the couch behind me and trying to push down on his cock. "I want you inside me, Gabriel," I told him desperately.

He paused, the thick length of him partially inserted. "Please don't let me cum," he told me and then thrust inside. I gasped as my body adjusted to him, my mouth open in a prolonged moan. He didn't move, instead pressing soft kisses up and down my neck and chest, waiting for me. When I rolled my hips, giving him permission, he began to move as well. The fluid motion of his hips had me groaning as he pushed into me, pulling himself all the way out before thrusting forward again. Gabriel was loud during sex, grunting and panting, squeezing his eyes shut as he fought his own need. I saw him several times squeeze the base of himself as he pushed and pulled at my hips. But he never stopped. He kept the rhythm, his lips grazing across my body as he began murmuring something in a language I didn't understand, straight into my skin.

Bending my knees, I felt him slip deeper inside. It wasn't going to be long now. I wanted to feel the pulse of him, that thick cock playing me until I was left a quivering mess. His eyes glowed silver as I looked at him and he nodded, hair falling in front of his face. Ducking his head, he began fucking me with earnest, the slow roll of his hips picking up speed as he reached between our bodies. I could feel it then. The wind up at the base of my spine. I arched my back as he leaned down, catching one hardened nipple between his teeth. When I felt myself let go, it was with a scream as Gabriel continued to fuck me through it, not letting up his pace until I felt my muscles clench around him once again and I was clinging to him for dear life.

When he pulled out, his cock was hard and shiny, the tip covered in my release. He stared at me like a wild animal as he gathered me to him. I could feel the pound of his heart and the way he buried his face in my neck.

"Thank you," he whispered. I nearly huffed out a laugh. He was still rock hard, and his cock looked angry with the lack of release. But he was running his lips across me as if I had just given him the most precious gift. "Thank you, thank you thank you...."

I held onto him just as tight, refusing to let him go until his cock went soft against my thigh.

[Chapter Twelve - Gabriel NSFW transmasc mc](#)

[Mar 1, 2023](#)

I could feel the hard line of him against my thigh. As Gabriel loomed over me, eyes tinted silver, I could see the tension within his arms. The way he was holding himself, waiting for my command. Reaching up, I ran my fingers through his hair, feeling the strands of it fall forward and out of the hold he put them in every morning. Locking eyes with him, I rolled my hips in way of answer, feeling the way he trembled at the sensation. I surged upwards, taking his lips against mine and feeling the way he opened to me. Grabbing me by the small of the back, he pulled me upwards, situating me until I was in his lap. I shoved at his shirt, wanting to feel the heat of his skin against my own. Meanwhile, he pushed and pulled at my top, discarding it along with his own, his fingers dancing up and down my body.

Dark calloused fingers trailed down my chest and belly, stopping at the hem of my pants. I watched as Gabriel's eyes focused on the gathered fabric, his tongue coming out to lick at his bottom lip. Slowly, he reached forward, cupping me. I could feel myself twitch in his grip and I rolled my hips against him. Looking up, I saw the eagerness in his eyes, feeling the way his thumb teased me through the fabric standing between us.

"Go ahead," I told him softly, curious if he was waiting for a command.

Not waiting, he slipped his hand inside, running his fingers along my center. I could see the way his chest hitched with pleasure, his fingers crooking against me. Slowly he began working me, bringing his hand out momentarily to lick his fingers before diving back in. I felt his lips against the side of my neck, sucking bruises against me as he trailed his tongue down across my chest. I gasped as his teeth enclosed around one pert nipple, tongue lapping at it as if to soothe the hurt. When I opened my eyes, I could see the silver glow of his own as he stared down at his own hand and how I fit perfectly against him.

I could feel the desire building within me. Gabriel was a man that threw himself wholeheartedly into what he was doing and this was apparently no different.

"I have a small confession," he said. I looked at him, panting harshly. "I have not lain with a man before." He didn't look fearful and this was obviously something he knew was coming, but I realized then, he didn't know how to proceed.

Reaching out, I cupped his cheek, the line of his jaw tense against my hand. "Do you want to stop?"

"Absolutely not," he said with a huffed laugh. "If anything, I am eager to learn. I have come prepared for this day." Reaching around, he pulled a small box from beneath the sofa. When he opened it, my eyes shot up through my hairline, my lips parted. "It has magical properties. You would be able to feel the sensation as if it were your own." I could see the hard outline of Gabriel's cock through his pants. It was a thick line against his thigh and left me salivating with the need to see it. All the while, next to us, was a thick strapon and a bottle of lube. The idea of seeing Gabriel split at the end of it was one that I suddenly couldn't get out of my head.

As Gabriel continued to nip and suck at my neck, his free hand squeezing my ass, I felt myself gasping, tumbling into the sensations of his lips on mine. When he showed no signs of stopping, I tapped him on the shoulder, having to push his head away from mine. Eagerly, he dove towards my lips, sucking my bottom lip within his mouth, his tongue coming out to lick the seam of my lips.

"Gabriel," I panted, pushing him back. His eyes were bright silver, casting a soft glow in the room. With a pointed look, I reached between us, slowly undoing the buckle of his belt. It echoed within the room, the sound of it clattering as it slowly came undone. I popped open the line of buttons on his pants and scooted back in his lap as inch by inch I took down his zipper. His cloth covered erection strained against its confines and as I slipped my hand inside, Gabriel's head tipped back with an anxious groan.

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"I want more," he whispered.

"What do you want, Gabriel?" I wanted to hear him say it, suddenly wondering if something filthy could fall from his lips.

"You," he begged.

"Tell me though. Tell me what it is you want," I encouraged.

He squirmed beneath me, his cock pulsing in my hand. "I want to taste you," he whispered. "I want to feel the weight of you against my tongue." I felt a rush of warmth as my balls drew up tight and I began grinding myself down on his thigh. Unconsciously, his hands went to my hips, his leg rising a fraction to encourage the movement. I could feel myself drag across the rough material of his trousers as I fucked myself against the thick muscle of his leg. My grip on his cock tightened.

"I want whatever you wish to give me," he continued. "I want you to use my body for your pleasure. Please, I—" There was something there then. A struggle within him that I could see. Tugging on him, I leaned forward, capturing his lips in a soft and sweet kiss.

"Tell me," I whispered.

"I want to bring you pleasure," he said. "But I want you to deny me my own."

I felt my belly tighten at his words. His grip on me was intense, and his eyes were bright and shinning. Swallowing thickly, I nodded my head, standing from his lap and undressing the rest of the way. Gabriel watched me like a man starved, each inch of my skin revealed something he was desperate to get his hands on. When I stood before him, naked, my chest rising with the erratic beat of my heart, I held out my hand to him, giving him the silent permission to continue.

Gabriel sunk to his knees in front of me, his fingers gripping my thighs as he licked at my center. The slide of his tongue against me was firm as he licked one long stripe upwards before wrapping his lips around my sex. I laced my fingers in his hair, looking down at him. When he looked up at me through the thick of his lashes, silver eyes bright and filled with passion, I felt myself twitch in his mouth. It was all the encouragement he needed as he pressed himself forward, nipping and sucking at what was before him. I gasped as I felt myself pushed against his face, my own hand clenching convulsively, encouraging him as he continued to suck me off. I could feel my thighs trembling with the effort to keep myself standing, my hips rolling against him as he silently begged me to just fuck him.

I pushed away from when I felt my orgasm beginning at the base of my spine. Gabriel was panting before me, his lips puffy and shiny with spit. Slowly, he kicked his pants off the rest of the way, crawling towards the glass table in front of his leather clad sofa. He rested his arms upon it, looking back over his shoulder.

"I would like you to fuck me now."

I gave out a huff of laughter at how incredibly insane it was to hear him even say that and yet somehow, made me even harder. "I have to prep you," I told him. "I can't just—" My words trailed off into a groan as

he slid his own fingers inside himself without warning, something silver and high pitched chiming through the room. I watched as his fingers slid in and out of himself, a grunt falling from his lips. I reached for the toy that he brought out, strapping it on me and feeling the sensation of flesh mold against me. While I had nothing to compare it to, suddenly, it felt as if it were my own. With a curious hand, I reached down to grip the appendage, feeling pleasure course through me. My mouth dropped open and I could only pray to the Knowing or whoever was listening, that this was not the only time I would be using this device.

Coming forward, I draped myself over Gabriel's back, the scent of magic in the air. He was murmuring something in a language I didn't understand, and as he pulled his fingers out, he reached around for me, lining me up against his puckered entrance.

"Please don't let me cum," he told me, just before I thrust in. I heard the whine punch from his lungs followed by a heady groan. He was unbelievably tight and I rested my forehead against his sweaty back, feeling my own pleasure skitter up and down my spine. Rolling my hips against him, I slowly pulled out, thrusting back in and feeling the delicious drag of friction. It was not going to last long. Gabriel was panting beneath me, gripping the base of his cock to keep from coming, and my own erection was pushing beautifully inside him, splitting him in two. I could stare at where we were pressed together all day, listening to the sounds erupting from him, filling the room.

Pushing him forward, I felt myself slip deeper. His eyes glowed silver as he looked at me over his shoulder, a desperation there that said he was close. Picking up my speed, I fucked him in earnest then, feeling each inch of his muscled walls. It sent a burning tip of white hot euphoria cascading up my spine and I knew I was not ready for just how could he would feel, clenching around me. Within moments, I was shouting my own release, my fingers leaving bruises into his hips as I held him close to me.

When I pulled out, his cock was still hard. Gabriel stared at me like a wild animal as he turned, gathering me to him while we remained on the floor. I could feel the pound of his heart and the way he buried his face in my neck.

"Thank you," he whispered. I nearly huffed out a laugh. He was still rock hard, and his cock looked angry with the lack of release. But he was running his lips across me as if I had just given him the most precious gift. "Thank you, thank you thank you...."

I held onto him just as tight then, refusing to let him go until his cock went soft against my thigh.

[Chapter Twelve Early Release](#)

[Mar 1, 2023](#)

Hey guys,

We're going to do this a bit different this time.

Go to your normal save file of the Night Market, open your save, then download it to disk. Then, open the following link below, download that game, and upload your save file into that game. You should have your old saves now on the new server.

Server is: <https://the-night-market.itch.io/the-night-market-patreon>

Password is: 12end234

I love you all and it has been an absolute honor to write this for you guys. It feels surreal to even be posting this.

[Paper Moons Part 17](#)

[Mar 3, 2023](#)



Scrambling to my feet, I went after him. Gabriel was not moving in Reese's arms and was almost comically dangling from the hold he held him in. The older man's footsteps were sure and quick as he navigated us out of the cave and into the night ocean air. I could see the tide he spoke of. The way the waves were crashing against the rocks with an eerie amount of speed. The waters lit up with thunderous flashes, the sky up above boiling as a storm began to move in.

Frantically, I looked around. There was something that wasn't right. There was something off about Reese down to the way he looked. The voice was the same but his demeanor was cold. The warmth

that radiated from the man as he cooked in the kitchen, the affection that shone in his eyes as he wrapped an arm around Elias at the campfire. I saw none of that now.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"I told you. To Elias."

"Will that help?" He didn't answer. "Reese. Will that help?" When he kept walking forward I knew without a doubt, I couldn't let this go any further. My job was to protect Gabriel. I had been hired by this man to do so.

Picking up a piece of driftwood, I gripped it in my hands. I made my way up to him as silently as possible. Flexing my fingers, I swung. The wood connected with the back of Reese's head, sending the man stumbling. He caught himself at the final moment, not dropping Gabriel as they both went stumbling to the sand. Reese rolled quickly, hand on his sword as he cast violent eyes on me.

Standing over him, I stared down, hair whipping in my face as I held the piece of wood up in defense. "Answers," I demanded. "Because right now, I'm thinking you're not even you."

He stared up at me with cold dark eyes. "What the fuck kind of assumption is that?"

"The kind I make when someone decides that I'm not worth giving five minutes of an explanation to."

"You think you deserve an explanation? You were tossed here at my feet, in a completely secluded area, and my boy, the one you are supposed to be protecting, is looking far worse in your hands than before he left."

I narrowed my eyes. "Then perhaps, if you wish to see this done in a different light, you should be working with us, instead of sending us off into unknown territories, based on a story!" I shouted.

Reese stared at me. I stared back. The ocean waves tumbled back and forth, lapping at my feet, but I did not balk. My breaths were coming in heavy pants as the fear from the day began to cloud me and all I wanted at that moment was answers. Answers, I was learning, were apparently incredibly hard for the people of this world to give. At least truthful ones.

Holding up his hands, Reese began to stand. He kept his movements slow, trying to show me that he meant no harm. "Alright, kiddo," he soothed, his voice much more of the one I was familiar with. "Alright. You want answers, I'll give them. But we can't keep Gabriel here."

"Why?" It felt far more dangerous for him to be moved constantly than to just find a dry spot to hold up. That is, until I saw the hesitation on Reese's face. "You don't want him seeing where we're at," I said slowly. "There's something about here, about you, that you don't want him knowing."

"Why the fuck—"

"Your clothes are different. Your demeanor is different. That sword you have strapped to you is one I've never seen before. You said yourself that we just appeared in a secluded area. A secluded area you happened to be at and one you wish for us to exit as quickly as possible. What is it you don't want Gabriel to know that you are hoping I won't figure out."

He blinked at me. "Anyone ever tell you that you are far too astute for your own good?"

"My mother."

He laughed at that. A short burst of disbelief. Keeping eyes on me, he bent down to pick up Gabriel. "There's a shack just up on that bluff. We can get him warm and dry. And I'll tell you what's going on. You deserve it after whatever the fuck that detective work just was." Hefting Gabriel onto his shoulders, he looked me up and down. "Keep your stick with you if you want. You got a good aim. I'm actually a little impressed."

When he began walking, I kept pace with him. My stick raised at his back the entire way.

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The shack in question was nothing more than a small one room building with weathered plank siding. A ratty sofa was in the center of the room along with plates of waxy candles. Reese deposited Gabriel onto the sofa, going around the room and lighting the wicks as the wind outside began to howl. It cast the entire place into an eerie flickering glow, the plank siding doing nothing to keep the chill from seeping in.

I stood there, wet and tired, staring at Reese shivering. When he finally turned around, he gave a pointed look at the stick I still held. "Don't ever use the same weapon twice on someone," Reese told me. "You don't want them to ever see you coming."

Blowing out the match, he went to a trunk along the back side of the room, digging out a few blankets. He tossed one to me before covering Gabriel up. "What happened?" he asked.

"You need to give me some answers first," I told him, refusing to back down. "Why are you acting so secretive? What even is this place? Where's Elias?"

"Elias is home," Reese said calmly. "And I would appreciate it if you didn't tell him about this place at all."

I couldn't fathom why such a dingy place would need to be kept a secret. Unless Reese was doing something that Elias wouldn't approve of. But, I had seen the two of them. They doted on each other. Elias looked at Reese like he hung the moon.

I felt my stomach drop. "Are you having a secret affair?"



“What?” Reese looked at me like I had grown a second head. “No. What the fuck are you— I’m the fucking Baron. I’m not fucking around on my husband.”

I stumbled. “What?”

Sighing, Reese dropped his head back. It hit the edge of the sofa, bumping up against Gabriel's knee. “I’m a Baron, kiddo. Harbormaster, to be exact.”

He was well known for cutting bloody swathes through the market. If you received the Harbormasters ire, you weren’t going to last the night. “The Harbormaster is one of the most cutthroat and bloodiest Barons to date.”

Reese held out his arms and took a bow.

“And you’re him?”

“I’m him,” he said bitterly.

My eyes flicked towards Gabriel. “And they don’t know.”

“I’d prefer they didn’t but I’m assuming Gabe is about to.”

I looked around, feeling my throat go dry. I was sitting in a room with a killer. A man notorious for violence. Yet, he called me kiddo and had made me hot cakes the morning after I had crashed on his couch. “I— I don’t understand.”

Reese sighed. “Didn’t expect you to.” Motioning to a chair, he had me sit down while he settled on the floor near the sofa. “Elias isn’t doing good,” he said. “He hides it, but the madness was getting worse. And I tried to find options for him but the fallen that have been here before have all but died. There are a few that are left, I hear, but they're gibbering madmen more than anything else. And each day I had to sit and watching as Elias got worse and worse and worse. Now, I just am not a man that's going to accept my lover's fate. So, I did something about it.”

Extending his legs outwards, he unsheathed his sword, tossing it far off to the side. I doubted, if he wanted to kill me, he would need such an item, but it did make me feel a bit better.

“Barons have connections. Far more connections than they let on. And they have free rein and access to magic. Especially magic that is innate to them. I needed more options available to me so I could hunt down the Knowing.”

My eyes went wide. “What?”

“You heard me.”

“You can’t just hunt down the Knowing?” I protested. It wasn’t even possible. But Reese raised a brow at me in challenge.

"Because the all powerful deserves a free pass in life? Nah. Whatever that s.o.b is, tossed two people I care about, to their death. They're gonna have to answer to me now."

"Have you found anything?"

"Not yet." He kicked off his boots, looking suddenly much more the househusband he had made himself out to be. "I was kind of hoping that you could stave off some of the madness with this moonlight bullshit. I wasn't ever expecting you to cure the entirety of this though."

"Why not tell Elias?"

"Because he worries. And I want my Elias to be happy."

There was always such softness in his voice when he spoke of Elias. A tenderness there that I rarely heard him give to anything else. I never doubted his words when he spoke of the other man. I just had to wonder, how deep he was willing to go for him.

**[[Don't you think Elias and Gabriel are going to have an issue with your plan to go after the Knowing?]]**

**[[Isn't being the Baron putting Elias and Gabriel at more risk?]]**

**[[Is the Knowing even a physical being that can be confronted?]]**

[Dev blog 3/3/23](#)

[Mar 3, 2023](#)

Holy hell it is done.

Well, not done done, but pretty close to being done. Eventually, I will be writing my thoughts out on this process and posting it but for now, I'm just kind of still in shock. It doesn't seem real. And maybe that's because I know I have an entire slew of edits that are on my plate now but it just seems really weird that I am a year into this. When I started the Night Market, my daughter was still night waking. My husband used to sleep on the sofa so he could hear her and go rock her back to sleep on the nights I was writing. And me, being the guilty mom, would be turning my headphones up so loud because I kept telling myself I shouldn't be writing while having small children.

I'm really glad I didn't listen to those thoughts. And I'm also really glad she is sleeping through the night now. Mostly. LOL

Just some technical updates for you guys. Heading in tonight and tomorrow to fix some code errors within the game so that should be all updated. I also updated the transmasc NSFW Gabe scene because I was apparently on a little too much cold medication while writing that one and just kind of decided on some wrong genitalia. \*face palm

That being said, thank you to the reader that did point that out to me. I really do appreciate when you guys send me messages about that kind of stuff. I never mean it. I just sometimes have so much I'm writing and editing in a session that I think things get muddled. Also, fun fact about me. I'm blind in one eye. So, staring at a computer all day can get a bit problematic. I will never get upset at a correction like that though. I promise, half the time I will be responding with, Oh fu--! :)

I have some really fun things planned for the upcoming months and when I feel a bit better (we all have the stomach flu) I'll give you guys a big update on them. But for now, know that I am so incredibly glad that you all have given me the opportunity to write for you. It's just amazing to see people care about these characters. I have met some of the kindest and most supportive people through this process and I will greedily keep writing because I want you all to stick around so I can hoard you. :P

Love,

Zinnia

## [Commissioned Art](#)

[Mar 3, 2023](#)

Well, you guys reached the full 2,000 a month goal. I promised that for every month I reached this, I would commission some NSFW. So, we have some decisions to make. Do we want full nudes (kind of like the Gabriel one from a few months ago) or, do you want tasteful nudes. More pinup style.

Full raunchy nudes

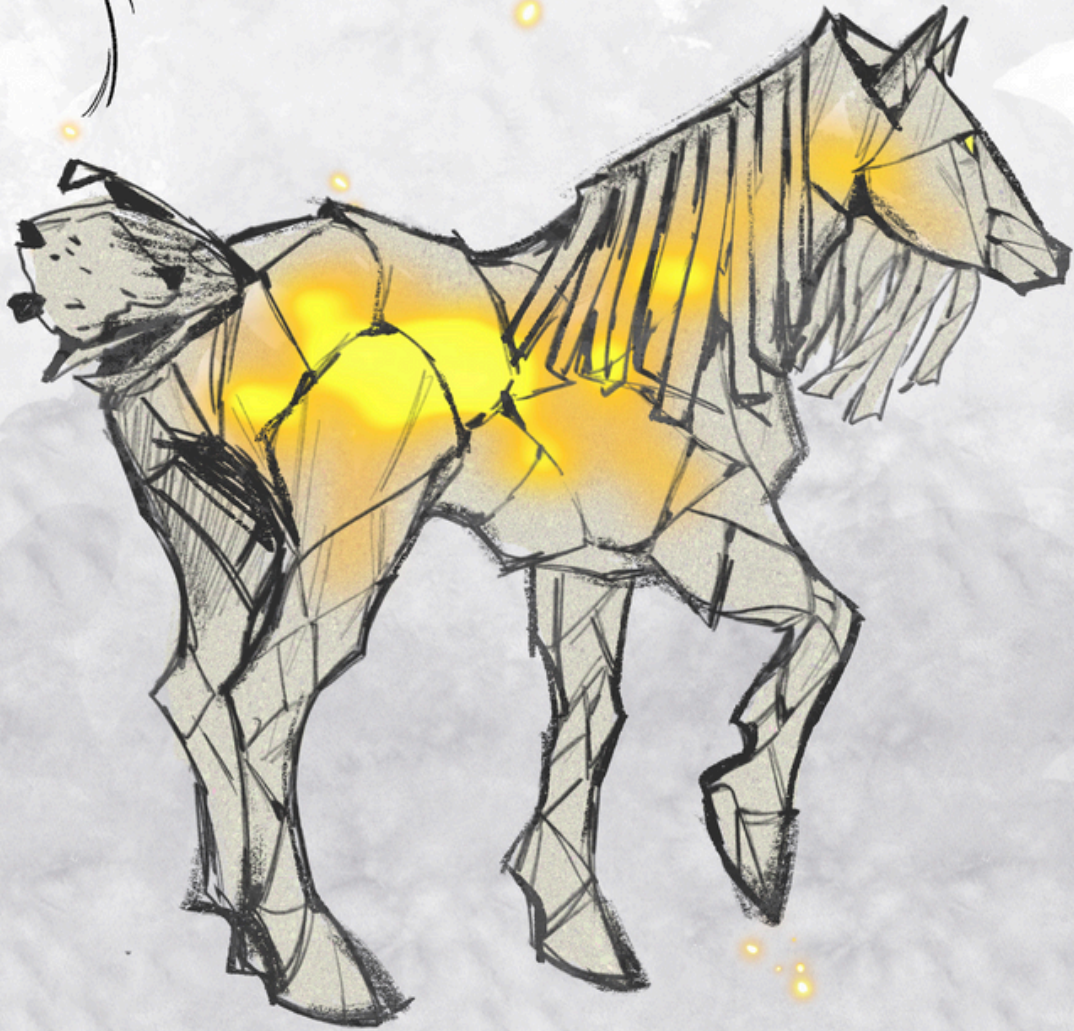
Artful pinup

167 votes total

## [Lore - Paper Animals](#)

[Mar 4, 2023](#)

# *Paper Animals*



## *The Night Market*

While animals can be found within the Night Market, for reasons unknown, they do not survive for long. Perhaps it is due to the convergence of realities or the lack of diverse habitation for them within the market proper. But organic creatures like animals, are not common within the Night Market walls. Discovering a lack of them, a group of market stalls decided to sell paper animals.

Folded into intricate versions of their true form, paper animals are made from patterned paper and sold at market stalls throughout the districts. They flutter and move on their own, performing tricks to anyone



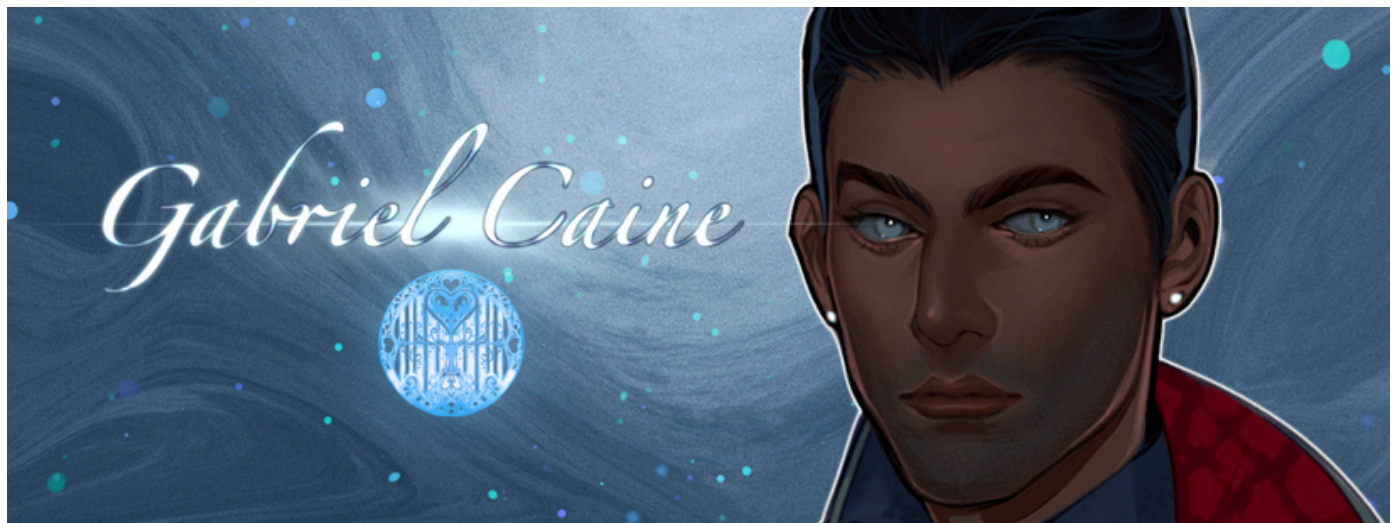
who wishes to be entertained. Once purchased, if their owner wishes to see them at their full size, they simply must toss them into the air for them to unfold. There they will become the mimicry of the animal they were folded into.

Despite paper animals being a commodity within the market, they are sneaky little creatures and quite a few have escaped. Often times, paper animals can be seen in the corners of the market, running wild. It has become a nuisance to the Velvet Guard over the years. These animals do not need food or water and will not die unless they are torn. Due to this, thousands can sometimes be found in the dry portions of the market. Children have been known to play pranks with them, filling their pockets with these creatures and throwing them into crowded areas.

Currently, the Velvet Guard is working on managing the production of paper animals.

[Gabriel - Post Chapter Twelve](#)

[Mar 10, 2023](#)



“Do you think it’s possible though?”

“Is what possible?”

“For you to take the weekend off.”

Gabriel looked upwards, staring across the way at the person who sat across from him. They had surprised him once again with muffins made from Hazel’s kitchen and a warm thermos of tea. The market had been abhorrently cold as of late and it was a gesture that he greatly appreciated. Then again, they had taken to coming to his office so frequently that he no longer considered it a gesture. It

was a part of his routine. A soft smile played at his lips at that. When had it become routine to let someone in again? To allow his guard down enough to be taken care of. Just for a bit. The very idea that Gabriel did not have to go home to an empty house, that his day was not consumed with the monotony of patrol and new recruits, filled him with a warm sense of comfort that he was simply not used to. It was their smile, in the end. Gabriel wanted to do whatever it took to keep that smile and jealousy guard it for his own. Including taking the time off he had been promising them for half a year.

“Yes,” he said softly, setting his quill aside. “I think I could take some time off.”

The look they gave him was one of pure adoration. A pang of guilt shot through him as he remembered all the times he had declined this particular request. So many weekends had gone by with them following him on patrol. Dates had been made and canceled. The status of the market had always been more important. Not any longer, however. Gabriel was making a point now to spend more with the people he cared for. Life was far too hollow without their delicate beauty to light his way.

“Where would you like to go?” Getting up, he rounded the desk, coming to sit at the edge and stare down at them. He was tempted to just call it now. Take the rest of the week off and whisk them from the office towards the remote places of the market. Get a room somewhere and not leave for the first few days. Take an evening stroll along a riverbank, perhaps. Dinner. A show. All the things that couples should do and which Gabriel had completely forgotten about until food started appearing at his desk at a much more frequent rate.

“Anywhere,” they said. “As long as it’s with you.”

Reaching out, he moved to cup their cheek. To place his hand against the curve of their jaw, feeling the warmth of their skin beneath his palm. The door to the office burst open though, a nameless recruit searching him out with wide and uncertain eyes.

“Warden Caine, I am so sorry to disturb you. I know you just got back from patrol, but there’s a problem.”

Gabriel blinked. Before him sat an empty chair. Not even a memory to keep it warm.

It had been a week. One week since the lanterns had gone dark. Since the ballroom had erupted into complete destruction and he and Belladonna had tried to make it to the fountain. It had been a week with no light to shine upon the streets. Without that soft laugh. Without the voice that he was afraid he was already forgetting.

“Warden Caine?”

Gabriel’s eyes snapped upwards. There were so many new recruits now that Gabriel honestly couldn’t remember when he had arrived. “Yes? What is it?” He was moving away from his desk, away from the chair that held no one.

"There's been another outbreak," the recruit said. "We think it's near the Spice District but no one is sure. The walls are rearranging themselves."

Strapping his sword to him, Gabriel frowned. "What do you mean the walls are rearranging themselves?"

"We've been noticing the candles moving. They are being swallowed up and now we are starting to realize that the walls themselves are shifting. The alley that lead here is gone, sir, and there are four others in its place. People are getting lost within the market. They're wandering home and finding that home has moved."

He looked afraid. The recruit couldn't have been any older than twenty odd years and this was certainly not what he had signed up for. Looking around, he seemed terrified of the prospect that he might not make it home that night. Lost not in the line of duty but because the world had been plunged into chaos and was clawing to right itself again.

Buttoning his coat, Gabriel placed a hand on the recruit's shoulder. "Take a break. I'll go and inspect. You said I am needed in the Spice District?"

"Yes," the recruit swallowed. "There are some misplaced people there and the vendors are getting mad at the amount of food being stolen."

Theft had been the main thing they had been dealing with the last week. That they knew of at least. But now, it seemed as if a new problem was arising. One that Gabriel had no idea how to address.

Leaving the recruit behind, he walked through the prison halls, the cells full to bursting at this point. Frantic guards walked up and down, trying to grasp just what their job was now that the new decrees were in place but quickly crumbling in light of recent events. Bursting from the prison walls and into the night air, Gabriel paused. Screams had been coursing through the market. People calling for help as they were unable to navigate the dark. The lanterns swayed above, refusing to relight. The world was now lost in a sea of candles, small flickering flames that acted as a guide and were so easily snuffed out.

Gabriel stood for a moment, utterly paralyzed. He could still see them. Lying on the ground, their chest ripped open with an eerie light glowing from them. Their eyes had gone black before they closed. Their body limp. Gabriel had tried to scoop them into his arms, but someone had held him back. He didn't even know who at this point. Just that someone had him by his shoulders and told him not to move. Not until the gate was closed. The gate that was a yawning hole in their chest getting dimmer and dimmer until they were nothing but a sleeping form upon the ground.

The market had descended into chaos after that. As the entire world blacked out, panic ensued. Gabriel hadn't even gotten the chance to bury them. He hadn't visited their grave. Honestly, he hadn't left the office or slept either. Part of him was hoping this was nothing more than a terrifying dream he would wake up from.



As a loud cry echoed through the cobblestone paths, he knew that he would not be so lucky. Why hadn't he just taken time off for them? Why hadn't he whisked them away for a long weekend? Held them tighter. Listened to them a little more. They never should have gone to the ball that night and it was a mistake that had cost all of them. They never should have trusted Milo Next.

Wiping the wetness from his cheeks, he walked across the stone bridge, feeling his heart beat at an unusual speed, his chest constricting, and his eyes casting a silver glow. He had not needed the candlelight that everyone was starting to carry. The grace in his pocket was dimming but the grace from within was burning through him at an alarming speed. Stumbling, he caught himself on the stone pillar that marked the entrance to the prison gates. Pain lashed through him, striking a wince across his normally placid features as a cold heat began burning from within. He could see the fault lines. Could see the cracks racing across him, peeking through with a silver glow that threatened to split him apart.

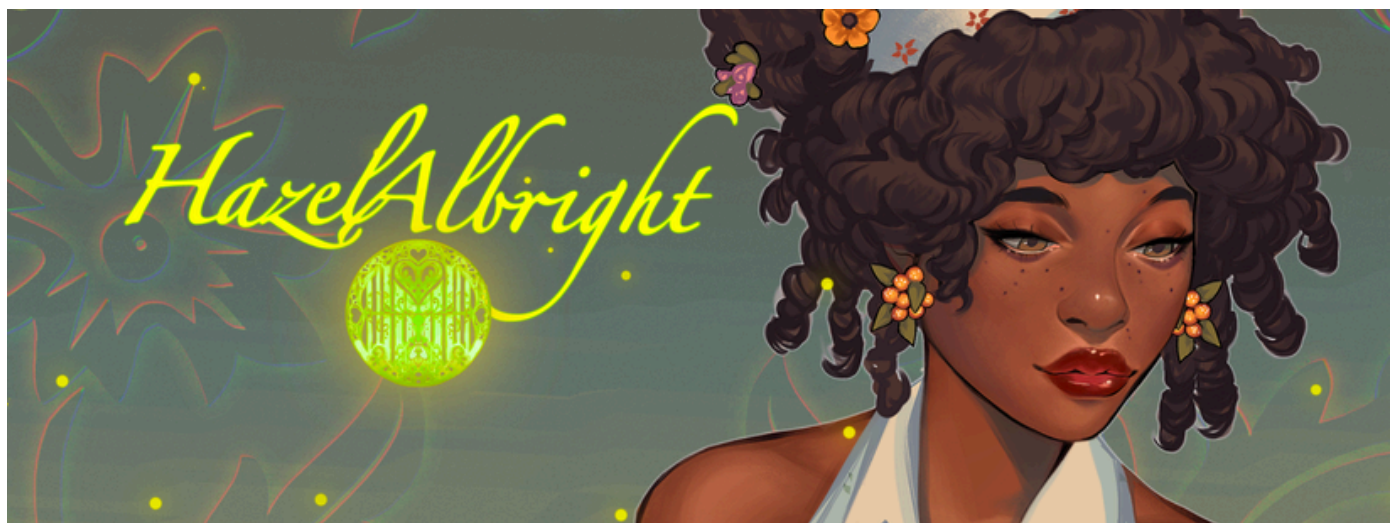
"Not now," he growled to himself, flexing his hand and trying to shake it away.

The market needed him. He didn't have the luxury to acknowledge whatever was happening to his body. He certainly didn't get the luxury to grieve. He needed to continue on. He needed to do his job within the confines of a world that was slowly dying, protecting the people they had torn themselves apart to save.

And Gabriel. Gabriel would only occasionally remember the bright burning light that had graced his light for a time. It was all he could do. It was all that was allowed. And only occasionally would he admonish himself for beginning to even hope that he was strong enough to keep them safe.

[Hazel - Post Chapter Twelve](#)

[Mar 13, 2023](#)



The three tiered fountain was set aglow. It was the furthest Hazel could bring herself to walk in a world that was now plagued by darkness. But she had made this area, at the very least, a small beacon. Fat,

waxy candles were perched across the rims of the fountain, their flames flickering from the falling water but not burning out. Hazel had carved enchantments into their wicks. She sat there now, a box of unlit ones, watching over the small memorial she had made. A burning ember in the dark, dedicated to someone that had been taken from them along with the lights.

Hazel wiped furiously at her eyes, looking at the fountain. The moss that had always grown around the edges was browning and dead now, covered in thick layers of wax and crystallized water. Hazel had played at the fountain as a girl, always liking the lights that were strung up in this little courtyard. They were dead now, and the different paths that had woven outwards to reach the rest of the market, were lost as they continued to try and arrange themselves into something that made sense. The screams that echoed through the market were starting to die.

That's what happened when people lost hope.

Malcolm had held her after that first night. He had left in the beginning and had come back, covered in rain, taking her in his arms and holding her through the night. If she hadn't been watching out the window, she never would have believed it. But she saw him. She saw Milo press his hand to their chest and the way the light budded from their skin. She had screamed. Right in the middle of the ball she had screamed loud and long, prompting Gabriel and Belladonna to attack. For people to start running in fear. For the ones that both Gabriel and Bella had put in place for if anything did go wrong, to move quickly. Nothing mattered but getting to that courtyard. And all the while, Hazel watched. She watched as they slid to the ground. As Milo knelt there for a moment, staring at them as if they were now a mirage that was fading from sight. Hazel had felt a part of her die that night. Briefly she wondered how much heartache she could take.

Leaning forward, she replaced the candles that were about to gutter out. She wasn't sure what else she was supposed to be doing. She had told Gabriel that she could provide everyone with tonics. Help if anyone had become stuck within a moved wall or crushed by the chaos. But he hadn't gotten back to her. So she had wandered out here and lit the fountain, hoping it offered someone, somewhere comfort. Maybe if she could make it bright enough, it could light the tearing sky. And someone, somewhere, could find peace.

"Oh, my dear girl."

Hazel startled at the voice, nearly knocking the candles over. She hadn't heard the footsteps, but the sound of the voice was loud and clear. It caused her to freeze as a familiar sense of responsibility and anxiousness began to course through her.

Slowly, she turned. "Mother," Hazel swallowed. "I didn't know if you would be showing up."

Lucinda Albright was a tall woman. Statuesque and filled with a presence that demanded attention and submission. Her long black hair fell down past her shoulders to her mid-back while her green eyes burned brightly against her dusky skin and high set cheekbones.

"I wanted to stay away for a bit," she said. "I was worried my presence wouldn't be a welcomed one. But after hearing you cry for the last week, why, how was I supposed to stay away?"

"You heard me cry?"

Lucinda looked at Hazel with a mixture of compassion and condescending nature. "Of course, my child. You are my baby. A mother always knows when their child is in pain." When a tear tracked down Hazel's cheek, Lucinda sighed stepping forward and gathering Hazel close. She began sobbing in earnest then, pressed against her mother's chest as Lucinda stroked her hair making soothing noises. "Oh, my darling girl. What has happened?"

"You don't know?" Hazel sobbed.

"I know why the lanterns are out. That the Night Market persona was sacrificed but I'm afraid I do not understand entirely what it has to do with you. You have barely left the apothecary these last years."

Hazel felt her heart crack. She had stayed a recluse. Had let the world come to her. Maybe if she had been braver, she would have been able to see this. Stop it before it got too far. She should have known that Milo had not changed. She should have been able to see the signs. He was a terrible liar and she had simply chosen to fall beneath his spell. Maybe if she had been a better person, she would have been able to save *them*.

"I loved them," she said simply.

"Who?"

"The Night Market." She dissolved into a series of tears then, unable to even say their name. Because it hurt too much. There was a grave out there with their name etched upon it. Being watched over by strangers, buried in a sea of the dead.

"Oh, my darling girl. You have finally reached for what you deserve," Lucinda said softly.

"And lost it."

"Nothing is ever truly lost, Hazel," Lucinda admonished. "They are just simply not quite as they seem."

"You think they'll come back?"

"I think that we are all still traversing this world so they are not dead like you are grieving them to be."

Looking up at her mother with a tear stained face, Hazel only dared to hope. Maybe they would come back. Not the Night Market in general, but Hazel's Night Market. The one she loved. But her heart fell. Because the clock on the headstone was not working. They had no indication that they ever would come back. And even if they did, would they have wanted to?

And then there was Milo...

"Don't think of him," Lucinda said, reading the look on her daughter's face.

"He was my best friend," Hazel rasped. "I defended him."

"And you were wrong to do so," she said coldly. "What have I always told you, Hazel. Milo Next is a parasite. He will do nothing but bring you down in this world. And I think he had proven himself quite nicely at this point to be exactly the kind of man his mother and father intended him to be. They tossed him to the market for a reason, Hazel. Not even they loved him."

It sat wrong. It all did. But Hazel couldn't shake what she saw. Couldn't shake the fact that he had lied for so long. Had kept her in the dark because he knew that she could stop him. Closing her eyes, Hazel took a deep breath. It hurt lately to do so. It hurt to even get out of bed. She wondered when that would go away.

When Lucinda gathered her close again, she waved her hand, lighting the candles brighter and sending up a soft glow around the courtyard. "I am home now, Hazel. We have time to work through all this. I am not leaving you again, my darling girl."

Hazel rested against her mothers' chest, eyes becoming wide and unseeing as she faced the reality that was ahead of her. The Night Market was dying. Her love was dead and buried. They didn't know where Milo was and Hazel was unable to help anyone. With her ear pressed against the newfound beat of her mother's heart, she clung to the sound.

Maybe, with Lucinda back, with Malcolm back, they could tackle this together. Maybe they could be the family they were never able to be. Hazel closed her eyes. Family. Maybe she had been focusing on the wrong kind. Maybe with the lanterns going out, it was a sign to start new.

"Don't worry, Hazel. Mommy is here."

Closing her eyes, Hazel let herself hope.

[Malcolm - Post Chapter Twelve](#)

[Mar 15, 2023](#)



The dark was a sinister place to be. Rarely did it offer anything friendly. Instead, it hid those who would look into the face of nothing and smile at the opportunity it gave them. Malcolm knew the dark well. He had traversed it for years. Used it to his advantage. And as the lights around him were snuffed out one by one, he felt it consume him in a way that he hadn't for so very long.

Hazel greeted him with tears. An explanation of some sort falling between broken sobs. He knew he should wait with her. Hold her through it all. But he walked out into the night, the chaos swirling across the tearing sky in a miasma of pain and confusion. He wasn't going to let him get away. Not this time.

He found Milo in a dilapidated hovel, half in rubble. Broken spinning wheels lay splintered on their side while jars of buttons and thimbles were cracked across the floor. It used to be where Milo had worked, back when he was a child. Apparently, it was nothing more than a forgotten memory, important only to the two of them.

Milo looked up as Malcolm entered the room, his face pale and his freckles standing out in the small pulsing light that remained in the corner. His lips were parted, hands clasped desperately before him and he looked at Malcolm like he could make it all just go away.

"Are they alive?" he whispered.

Malcolm stalked halfway across the room, watching as Milo scrambled off the crate he sat on, stumbling over his own feet as he tried to escape. Whatever look he had seen cross Malcolm's face was not one of compassion and open understanding.

"What did you do?" Malcolm hissed.

Milo put a broken wheel between them, gripping the wood of the spokes and staring at Malcolm pleadingly. "Fuck, Mal, are they fucking alive?" he shouted.

Malcolm knocked the wheel out of the way, shoving at Milo's chest until the younger man's back hit the wall with a dull thud. Milo grunted in pain, moving to escape, but Malcolm held him there, fingers gripping at the chains around his neck, pulling them tight while his other hand splayed across Milo's chest, pinning him in place.



"Do you care?"

"I was trying to save them!"

Malcolm slammed him hard against the wall. "Sacrifice is not saving, Milo."

"The market is dying, Mal. You knew it then and you know it now. But instead of the muffled screams you heard back when you were around, it's a deafening roar. I can barely even hear myself breathe!"

"You think that matters? You think your pain in this situation means anything? You were supposed to protect them!"

At that, Milo shoved back. Both hands planted on Malcolm's chest, he pushed with everything he had, sending Malcolm careening back and knocking into the broken wheel. "I am protecting them! I have given up *everything* to protect them." The last word ended on a crack. When Malcolm looked up, he could see the tears gathering. Milo's hands trembled as fear and sorrow and emotions he probably couldn't understand coursed through his body until he was a shell of a man Malcolm knew he could be.

"Every day," Milo began. "Every day I felt them dying. It didn't matter how hard I held them. It didn't matter how much I tried, what I did, they just kept dying. This was the only way."

Standing, Malcolm shook his head slowly. "It wasn't, Button. Whatever this is, it was not the only answer. Life doesn't work like that."

"It does when you're me."

Malcolm felt his heart drop. So many years and yet Milo had never found another. No one to trust. No one to fill the void. Malcolm had hoped that when he died, Milo would find love. He would feel the market and understand that he was worth so much more. Capable of so much more. But if anything, the love of the market had crushed him, burying him beneath inadequacies that he had woven within his bones.

"Why didn't you talk to anyone?" Malcolm asked. "Why didn't you ask for help?" He could feel his throat thickening. Why hadn't Milo just asked?

"Who was I going to turn to? You?" he mocked with a shaky laugh.

"Anyone, Milo! Literally anyone!"

"Fuck you! You don't even believe that shit so go fuck yourself, Mal. I had no one. *No one.*"

"You had them," Malcolm shouted. Milo had had the Night Market. He had the one person that could have understood him. Seen Milo for who he was and not care at the mess that festered beneath every beautiful smile he tossed their way.

Milo shook his head. "They never felt like mine," he said brokenly. "They always felt like yours. From the second I realized they were real, that it wasn't a sick joke or a construct wandering around with a lack of sentience, I knew."

"Knew what?"

Milo smiled then. It was thin and full of so much pain. "That I was a placeholder."

Malcolm stared at him. "They loved you. You have to have known that."

"The thing that wasn't supposed to be real, loved me. The thing I brought here, summoned with the book of your dead mothers, the one woman in the market who could have actually brought this all to ruin. I was supposed to believe that? I wanted to. I wanted to so fucking badly because fuck you Malcolm. Fuck you for dying. Fuck you for coming back and..."

Malcolm stepped forward, gathering Milo in his arm. He gripped him tight, pulling his head to his shoulder and feeling the tears wet his shirt.

"Fuck you," Milo muttered weakly, hands coming up to cling to him. "They were perfect, Mal. I never had anything like that before. It was so damn easy to be with them."

Malcolm felt the tear slip free, leaving a salty trail down his cheek. Milo shook in his arms, ugly sobs wracking his frame as he begged Malcolm silently to take tonight away. To make it okay.

"Milo," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. "You need to come home. You need to come back and explain what has happened so we can fix this."

"They'll kill me."

"They won't," Malcolm insisted. "I'll protect you. They won't lay a hand on you."

Pulling away, he shook his head, wiping at his eyes. "I don't care what they do. I just— I want them back."

"And maybe we could get them back. All is not lost. Not yet."

Milo laughed. The sound echoed hollowly around the room. "Why would I do such a thing? I summoned them here once and they knew only pain. Why would I summon them back? For me? To put them in peril again? To tear apart the market again and again and again..."

Malcolm grabbed him roughly, both hands cupping his cheek. He could feel the stubble beneath his palms. Milo's eyes were brighter than Malcolm remembered. Two amber pinpoints, glowing in a world without lanterns any longer.

"Button, come home. Please."



But his gaze was already growing distant. "It's good that you're back, Mal. The world wasn't doing good without you."

"Milo." He shook him, trying to push the fight back in his bones. "Don't do this. Don't you dare fucking run."

But it was too late. Malcolm should have seen it coming. Milo always went lax right before he burst into a fight.

Malcolm's legs were swept out from under him and he hit the ground hard. By the time he even knew what was happening, Milo was already at the front door, looking back at Mal, as if to drink in the sight of him again.

"I missed you," he said, fingers curled around the door frame. "If I can make this right, I will."

"Milo," Malcolm shouted. But by the time he hopped over the rubble and made it to the door frame, Milo was gone. Disappearing into the dark, slipping away between the screams that erupted across the night.

Malcolm winced, leaning against the door frame. Closing his eyes, hands balled into fists, he hit the wall, feeling it crack beneath his knuckles, the skin splitting apart. As he slid down to the floor, feeling his newly returned body ache with disuse and his heart break for the loss of the two people he loved, his hand slipped. Wiping the tears from his eyes, Malcolm looked down.

A button sat beside him, a glowing lantern embossed into the metal.

Curling his fingers around it, Malcolm worried that this was what death truly looked like. That this was the end.

[Dev Blog 3/19/23](#)

[Mar 19, 2023](#)

We have met our Kickstarter goals!!!!

It is still open for the next 12 days but at the end of that, I will be getting a schedule together so I can get merch out to supporters and also started mass editing book 1 for a Steam release.

In other fun news, my book 1 of short stories is at the point where it has been added onto and edited by me. So now I'm off to send it to another editor while the art is being put together. :) I was hoping to have

the book out by next month but I have no idea if that is possible. My little idea became a big one. Essentially, what it is though, is all the short stories from the last year, compiled and added onto. Along with about 12 new short stories that have not been seen before. On top of this, we have a ton of art that is being added to it. It will be available on e-book and physical copy.

Today I'm trying to get caught up on all my Patreon entries, short stories, asks on Tumblr, etc. I was really hoping to get Paper Lanterns up and done as a test run before the Steam release of book 1 but I am no longer sure that is going to be feasible given my time constraints. But, it will be coming out soon! Hopefully before mid summer. I might just put it as a DLC to the main game.

In personal news, we are doing good here. For the first time in a very long time, my husband and I are feeling like we can breathe a bit financially. I actually get to have a date with my husband again which feels like a luxury. We have been crazy busy with school events for the teens, homeschooling for the littles, holidays, birthdays, family outings, and all of the above. I feel like we have been none stop since November so we are all looking forward to having some relaxing time here at the house and being able to just chill for a bit. Or, at least me and the hubby are. My kids are feral.

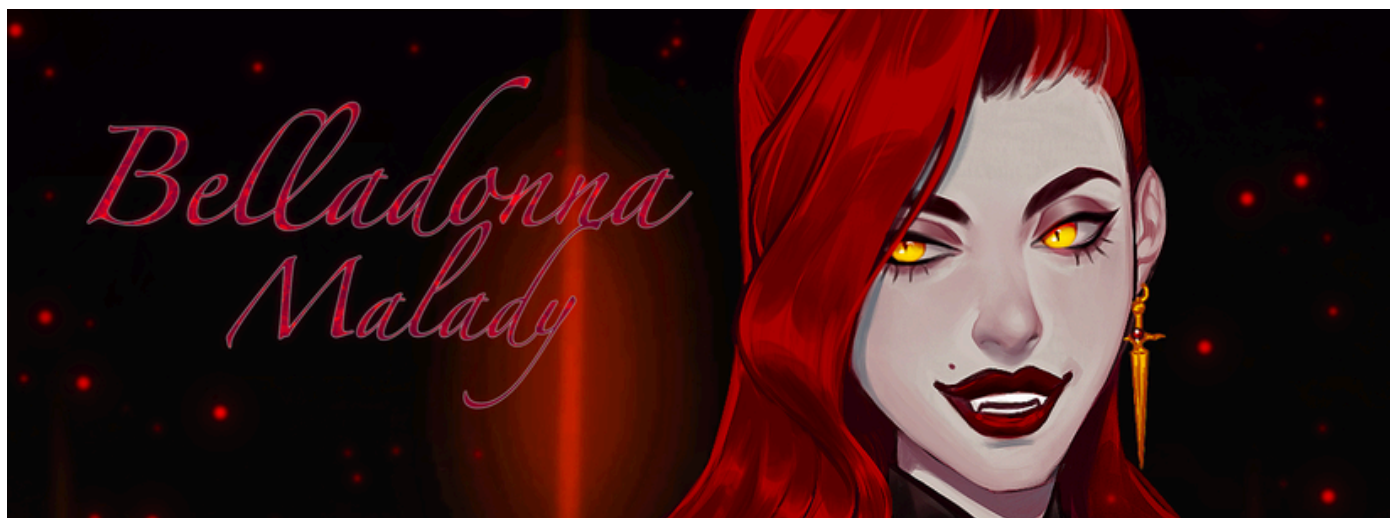
I hoped everyone is doing wonderful! I have to say that it has been one of my favorite things to talk with you all on Discord. I hope that you all stick around for that for a long time.

With love,

Zinnia

[Belladonna - Post Chapter Twelve](#)

[Mar 19, 2023](#)



The fires reached high above the market walls, lighting the dark sky and burning the broken lanterns above. They hung from snapping cords, paper melting beneath the heat until they were nothing but ash that drifted away like silent tears. Belladonna stared at it dispassionately, remembering the glow of their eyes. How they reflected the lights above. With them buried beneath dirt and memories now, what did it matter if the lanterns were gone? The lanterns had only existed to reflect hypnotically from their gaze. Nothing more.

"Belladonna, you have got to stop this."

Staring at the flames, she did not turn to the voice of anger, barreling towards her from behind. She dared him to touch her. She would revel in the consequences of such an action.

Arms crossed, she heard the screams. They were all across the market now. Blood was spilled within the streets, soaking the cobblestones red while the fire blazed high, a beacon to a man that had two choices. Let death remain his mantle, or, come out of his hiding and answer for his sins.

"Belladonna," Feebus's voice was a bark against the surrounding panic. The gentle giant rarely raised his voice, especially to her. Apparently, this was what she had to do to elicit his anger. "This is highly unnecessary." His shadow flickered across her, the light from the fire making him seem bigger than he was.

"Is it?" she asked curiously.

"This is my property, Belladonna. *Mine*. Whatever you are trying to accomplish with this fiery reign is doing nothing but adding to the fear and destruction across our land." The button factory was burning. One of Feebus's older ones. The one he used predominantly years ago when he was still sewing by hand. When he had a young boy in his employment with shaggy curls and amber eyes.

"And what would you like me to do, Feebus?" she asked curiously, watching as her people roamed, free to drink whoever smelled of lies. And oh so many of them did. "Would you like me to pretend that the slight your wayward son committed was nothing more than a social faux pas?"

"Milo has nothing to do with here," Feebus snapped. "He had nothing to do with the bar that you burned down. He had nothing to do with the food carts you have destroyed or with the hovels you have put in ruin. You are going around and burning bits of the market due to your anger alone."

Her smile was cold as she finally turned to him. The well put together man that he had once been, was nothing more than a frazzled absentee father who knew his son's death would be upon them soon. She still had not decided if she would allow him to bury the boy. Depended on how much the fae blood begged.

"You think this is due to anger, dear Feebus?" she asked. Her eyes were bright embers shining back at him, her skin flushed with a recent kill. Belladonna could feel her heart fluttering against her chest as it pumped the fresh blood through her, brining her to fleeting life. "This isn't about anger. I am well past

anger. Something that was *mine*, was taken from me. And I know who took them. So, I'm not angry, Feebus. I am merely exacting the justice that no one else is brave enough to do."

"By destroying public property?" he roared.

"No. But destroying all that was ever important to him. By going to his favorite haunts and burning them to ash. By finding the people he may have confided in and asking them if they are hiding him. And then, by killing them if I sense a lie. Now, thankfully, until this moment, it does seem like Milo did not involve many in his little plan and so I have only killed the ones that disrespected my love so thoroughly, in one way or another. But here, Feebus? Your people here seem to know something." Tipping her head to the side, she could smell the fear over the fire. "When did he leave?"

Feebus stared at her, jaw clenching. Belladonna wondered if he would hit her. If he would try to save Milo. Defend his actions. She hoped not. Belladonna did genuinely like Feebus. It seemed to her that he was also tainted with the cancer that was Milo Next, however.

"He left four days ago," Feebus said after a moment. "Now you're going to leave my people alone because the ones that do know something, only know that they saw him lurking one morning when I told him he needed to go."

Belladonna smiled. "So you two did have people lie for you then?"

"No, Bella. No one is purposefully lying to you. They are afraid. Fear and lies smell awfully similar. You know that."

"I do," she agreed. "But I won't be taking the chance."

Behind her, the flames shot higher into the sky as the roof to the old sewing factory lit. The straw that covered the slates went up in flame, floating high into the night to speckle the sky with burning stars.

"If you see Milo, tell him I'm looking for him. Hopefully, he won't let something like this continue to happen. Would be a shame for all of you to realize how little he does care about you." Stepping past Feebus, she began walking into the dark. Down alleys that were twisted and crying. Little offshoots into a world that couldn't understand what was happening to it and trying so hard to claw for purchase somewhere.

"Belladonna," Feebus boomed. "Do not make an enemy of me and mine," he warned. "You can stop this nonsense as well."

Looking over her shoulder, she softened her gaze. "I truly do not wish to fight you, old friend. But if your son continues to be the pig that he is, hiding somewhere in the filth while others pay for his sins, then that is the choice we will both have to make."

The shadows enveloped her as she walked away. Leaving the giant to try and put out the flame. Belladonna didn't care. Perhaps the smoke plumes would be enough to call Milo home. Dragging her

nails across the stone walls, Belladonna walked into the dark, chaos only a distant echo around her.

“Don’t worry, my heart. Your pain will stop soon. I’ll make sure of it. And when you return, we will drink Milo’s pain together. Just hang on a bit longer.” She patted the stone wall, caressing it lovingly.

Above her, the lanterns remained dark.

[Tunnel Goblins](#)

[Mar 19, 2023](#)



# Goblins



*The Night Market*

Considered to be pests by many, tunnel goblins are goblins with a singular purpose in life to make new paths within their home realm in order to break into adjoining realms, ultimately causing mass destruction. Their primary goal is to gain more land for their species, acquiring areas in which their realm can spread. The mirror realm, in which they live, is overpopulated with the tunnel goblins themselves. But more and more are being produced in an effort to combat other species and wipe out their kingdoms. Currently, they have the biggest hold in the Fae realm and have driven the four fairy kingdoms back behind their borders, while destroying the epicenter of the fae capital city, Meridian, for what might seem like no discernible purpose beyond greed and hunger.

Tunnel goblins are weak in nature but they make up for it in numbers. They share a hive mind, controlled by the bits of glass that are pushed into their skin. Most goblins prefer to have the glass in place of teeth and believe that the more glass they obtain through their journey, the closer to their ruler they are. They believe they are getting direct orders from the Goblin King himself, though no one has seen from the Goblin King in quite some time.

Tunnel Goblins are only one of the species of goblins and yet are the most noticeable of their kind. Without extensive knowledge of the fae realm or the mirror realm, most think that goblins are comprised of tunnel goblins and hobbes. While tunnel goblins are by far the most numerous of their race, they are not an accurate reflection of the species itself. Instead, they are used as a distraction while other movements take place.

Their presence in the Night Market has so far been controlled but it does seem to be curious that they have not entered the market through a gate. Instead, they tunneled their way through, first bursting forth through a cobblestone wall near the gem district. A man by the name of Taliesin Hynsin was instrumental in blocking up the passage.

#### [Paper Moons Part 18](#)

[Mar 20, 2023](#)



I pressed my fingers to my eyes. To kill the Knowing. It sounded like an impossibility that I had only read of before. And the stories I had read about such atrocities, did not put the killer on the right side of such stories. To think of Reese as someone capable of that, of someone who could walk through to the heavens and slay the divine, made my stomach roll.



"Reese, I am not trying to get philosophical here but is the Knowing even something that could be confronted?" I had been a good girl. I had read my books on faith and had gone to my father's sermons. I believed. I believed with all my heart. But to think the Knowing could even be something that a mere flesh and blood individual could slay was not something in which my mind could wrap around.

Then again, that felt like the entirety of the Night Market at times.

"Elias says it is." He was holding his body with such stillness, walling himself off to my questions.

"That doesn't mean anything. You hear how they speak. They are..." I trailed off, not wishing to disparage what both Elias and Gabriel believed in.

"They are what?" Reese asked. "Brainwashed? Yeah. They fucking are."

I was growing frustrated. There was a fury behind Reese's eyes. One that said it did not matter if he killed himself with this mission, he was going to do it anyway. I had never known hatred like that before. I prayed that I would never have to.

"You are not even listening to yourself. You gained more magic, hid yourself away from your loved ones, so you could go on a crusade to go kill a being that you have no knowledge of. You don't know what this entity looks like. How it could even be killed. Reese, you don't even know how to get to the celestial court."

His eyes were dark, swimming with the kind of pain that was bred so thoroughly from fear. "Not yet," he said. "But I will."

"That's not what Elias would want," I told him. "Nor Gabriel."

"You don't know what the fuck either of them would want," he spat. "You forget that you're new here. You don't know my family. You aren't watching the people you love die every day." But I had my family die. Was he forgetting how I even came to the market? How my mother and father were now at rest in a desolate world filled with ash?

"You are far too close to the situation to see that your actions are only going to cause them harm," I fought back. My mother's smile and my father's eyes were flashing through my mind. "You do not like the Knowing for what they did to them? Fine. But do you think killing that entity, hiding who you are, amassing power to go and do such a task that will most likely end in your death, is going to keep the madness at bay?"

Thunder roared outside, rolling across the night sky and cracking into the sand that was just beyond. I startled, seeing the same electric shock reflected in Reese's eyes as just beyond my sight, the low roar of a beast prowled.

I felt my heart hammer against my chest. "That's what this is about, isn't it. The madness is coming for Elias. Far more than any of you have let on."

"More than he even knows," Reese gritted out.

I felt so small suddenly. The life that I had walked into was far more than I had bargained for. I had always wished to help people, but this felt far grander than what I was ready for. Nor did it even seem possible.

"Reese," I said, trying to keep my voice calm. "There has to be a way to help them. Both of them."

"You think I haven't looked? You think I haven't tried to contact other Fallen? There are none. None with their right minds, at least. The worshipers of the Knowing are all as brainwashed as Gabriel and Elias and the scholars of the damn thing are nothing more than cult leaders, trying to get others to flock to their congregation."

I felt myself bristle at that. "That's not true."

"Isn't it? Your dad was someone like that, right? Someone that believed in a higher entity and then told others about it. Tell me, kiddo. Did he charge for his services? Did he use it to manipulate people into doing and believing what he wanted?"

"You don't know a damn thing about my father," I snapped. "He was a kind and loving man. He was someone that actually cared. He would never—"

"Never what? Use people's kindness and generosity to help his family?" Reese sneered. "You probably had the biggest house in the village, huh? You probably had people with real problems, being shamed into acting a certain way because your Pa deemed it to be wrong from whatever fucking entity you believed in. But here's the thing. What did he do when you came forward and told him to run? When you came forward and said that this entity had offered salvation? He didn't take it, did he? Because it didn't serve him to lose that kind of control. To be ousted as a—"

"Enough!" Gabriel's voice boomed across the room.

He was standing, one hand against the wall to brace himself. His silver gaze glowed brightly in the dimness of the room, so much so that I didn't know how we hadn't seen it before. I felt my vision blur though and my breaths come raggedly. Shoving past Reese, I fled from the shack, needing the crisp air and a moment to myself.

The storm raged just over the horizon, out against the cosmos where Gabriel claimed he was from. I felt the sob erupt from my throat as I braced my hands against a rock fence, head hanging over the cliff face to look blearily down at the moors below. My hair was sticking to my back and my clothes were getting drenched through with rain, but I couldn't bring myself to go back inside.

How dare he. How dare Reese speak of my family at all. He did not know them. The anger that was consuming him was so palpable that it was threatening to poison everything he held dear. Something in which I had been hopeful I may be able to become a part of. Because I had no one in the market. No one. And then I got a glimpse and this beautiful make shift family and just like that it was all crumbling

apart. How could the Knowing have let something like this happen? How could Reese not see that he just had to have faith? To trust that it would all be okay?

Why had the Knowing let my family burn though and why were they actively maddening good souls who wished nothing but compassion for those that came their way?

I squeezed my eyes shut as the sobs wracked my body, bending at the waist as my heart physically hurt. I had left them. I had left the ones I had loved and trusted in the Knowing. I didn't fight. Who was I to tell Reese not to?

"Graceling?"

It was Gabriel, his voice soft and soothing as he approached. I said nothing to him though.

"Graceling," he repeated again.

I was sick of hearing it. I didn't want to hear that title anymore. It was cursed. It wasn't who I was.

A callused hand laid across my shoulder. "I am so sorry," he whispered.

I felt the laughter bubbling in my throat at that. Gabriel was sorry for something he hadn't even done. He was the victim in all of this and yet he was the one offering such care. Another cry ripped from me, ragged and painful, and when he wrapped his arms around me, I allowed myself to be pulled into his chest.

"How much did you hear?" I mumbled against him.

"Enough to know what is going on." His hand was on the back of my head, fingers stroking against me in a soothing manner. "He had no right," Gabriel whispered. "I know he spoke in anger but he had no right to say what he did to you. Not about your family."

**[[He was wrong. The Knowing has a plan]]**

**[[What if he was right? The Knowing has only brought destruction]]**

**[[I don't know what to believe anymore]]**

[Paper Moons Choices Part 18](#)

[Mar 20, 2023](#)

Choices for Part 18 of Paper Moons.

Alpha build has been updated as well for Baron tier and higher.

He was wrong. The Knowing has a plan

What if he was right? The Knowing has only brought destruction

I don't know what to think anymore

44 votes total

[Milo - Post Chapter Twelve](#)

[Mar 24, 2023](#)



A single flame sparked, glowing bright as Milo breathed in, the smoke curling from his lips a moment later. He flicked the ash to the side, staring at the headstone that was before him. It was unmarked. Probably Malcolm's doing. He was smart enough to not advertise this death. Not when so many could take advantage of it. Milo knew it was them, however. Could feel them, still beneath the ground. Wrapped back up in the embrace of the world once more. He supposed with being fae, this should have given him comfort. A return to the land. The source if you will.

It only made him feel sick.

"So, I guess this is it, yeah?" Crouching down, he looked at the stone before him. An open pocket watch was draped over the grave marker, that hands of which had yet to move. Milo didn't know if they would. There was little doubt in his mind he would ever see their face again. The Night Market was said to always return, as the story goes, but most likely not in this lifetime. Milo didn't think he had much of a lifetime left, really. Looking up towards the night sky, the tears were not stitching themselves back

together, but they were not splitting either. The gates were closed. The Night Market was cut off from the rest of the realms. He had succeeded. He had saved the market. So why did it feel like he had killed them.

"I didn't enjoy any of this," he said softly. It was a confession only made in the midst of a graveyard where no one was available to watch him. But Milo had always been at his most honest when the rest of the world had turned their back on him. "The amount of times I almost told you everything, you have no idea." Bitterly, he laughed, taking a long pull on his cigarette, hearing the burn of the carbon paper. "Not that it matters, right? Because I didn't. I didn't tell you. Who the fuck is going to care about what I wanted to do when what I actually did is so far from reality?"

There was very little room to explain his actions and in truth, he was tired. He didn't want to. Because the one person that deserved that explanation was already gone. Let the others think what they will. He didn't deserve their sympathy.

"Here's the thing, here's what I hate," he scrubbed a hand across his face. "You weren't supposed to be *real*. Do you honestly think that I brought you forward, flesh and blood, and just was okay with destroying you? I know I'm not a good man but this? You were not the blood I wanted on my hands. But you knew that, didn't you. I have a feeling you know far more than I do. Far more about me than you should. I could see it sometimes. The way you would look at me. The way you'd reach out. It's like you knew things that you really shouldn't have. That I had kept from you because I didn't want to get close. I..."

He flicked the ash from the cigarette, biting at the flesh of his thumb. His eyes had grown brighter since their death. Twine flames eternally burning. Cause for concern on another day though.

"I spoke to Neve. Fucking Baron of the Fates has been serving me kafe since I was a child. She knew. Did you know that? She knew I would one day be this. Some bullshit rule about not being able to tell someone their own tapestry or some shit." His hands were shaking down as he fought the tightness in his chest and throat. "She told me this was ordained. That you knew what would happen. That you accepted it. Why the fuck would you accept this? If you knew why the fuck wouldn't you have stopped me? I wanted you to stop me. Why didn't you...?" he trailed off, his words becoming choked. Pressing the palm of his hand to his mouth, he took deep breaths, staring at the unmarked grave. Eyes were upon him from the chapel up above. The graveyard keeper tasked with most likely reporting on who sat by this grave. Let him report. If Mal really wanted to find him, there was no doubt he would.

"I know it sounds like I'm fucking blaming you," he started. "I'm not. If anything, the fact that you came here as a human? Got me to fall... Well, I thought that was nearly impossible. I *wanted* it to be impossible. But you did it. You took every little bit of me that I laid before you and eviscerated it." Milo laughed, bowing a bit to the stillness of the stone. "Well played."

He stared for a long moment, face impassive as he became nothing more than an unmovable stone in the midst of the dead. He willed the clock to move. He willed it with everything he had. But it remained silent. The blessed sound of a soul that wished to return to the market not beating.

"I'm gonna try to come back here," he told the gravestone. "I want to check on you. I— I really don't know if you're gonna want to return but... fuck, I never had hope with Mal but I want to have so much fucking hope with you." Eyes filling, his heart began to crumble. Mal had died all those years ago and he had taken a part with him. And just when he was getting it back, the world had begun to scream. "I fucking hate that you made me hope again. Why did you have to make me fucking hope?"

Tossing the butt of the cigarette aside, his head hung low as he breathed deeply. Control. It was what Mal always had taught. Milo had never mastered it. Filled with too many emotions and too much anger. Plus there was probably something about him being a fucking fae in there that had something to do with this bullshit.

"Sorry," he muttered. "Fucking shitty of me to put that one on you." Standing, he pushed his hands in his pockets. "I stand by what I did. I was going to lose you either way, it seemed. But at least this way, you have the chance to come back. Maybe fall in love with someone that is worthy of you. Now, Taliesin on the other hand? Now there's a fucker we're going to be killin' real soon, darlin'. I don't know how much you approve but as your Gatekeeper or whatever bullshit I'm sure Mal filled your head with, I'm gonna clean up my mess. Because that's where my mistakes lay. Believing the masked fucker and every bit of his lies. I'll deal with that one. The market will be safe again. Hopefully someone doesn't off me beforehand, yeah? Whatever fucker inherits this godforsaken role after me is going to be a sad son of a bitch."

He kicked at the ground. His time was running short. He had a passage outside towards the Outlands. Answers might be waiting there.

Pulling one of his chains off from around his neck, he pressed a kiss to the cool metal before he laid it across the grave.

"Take care of yourself, darlin'. Worlds depending on it." With one last look, he cleared his throat. "I'll see you soon."

[Milo - Shirtless](#)

[Mar 28, 2023](#)







[Milo - Strip Poker NSFW](#)

[Mar 28, 2023](#)





[Mar 31, 2023](#)

**What kind of sleepers are the ROs when in a relationship? Do they want to cuddle all night? Do they like head-on chest? Do they want to spoon? Do they not want to be touched at all when sleeping?**

**Hazel:** Hazel likes to go to sleep with her head on her lover's chest. Tucked under just the right amount of blankets, the window open so the wisps can light the sky like fireflies. She goes to sleep with a soft sigh and looks almost like someone out of a fairy tale. Now, what happens during the night, only Mr. Billows really knows. Because she will wake up the next day, hair completely in disarray, laying half on top of her lover, half off the bed. The blankets will be across the room. She may have changed clothes in the middle of the night. What is known though, is she is never without contact with her lover. She is constantly touching them from the moment she falls asleep until she wakes up. And if they have to get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, they might have a snoring Hazel holding onto them as they try to get out of bed.

**Gabriel:** Gabriel does not move at night. He sleeps incredibly still but wakes quite often. Every sound and every movement has his eyes open but he has mastered looking as if he is fast asleep. With his lover, he does enjoy them in his arms, if only so he can protect them if anyone tries to break in. He lies on his back mostly so a lover would be forced to sleep curled up at his side or next to him where his hand is usually clasped in theirs. He is the last to fall asleep in the relationship though and the first to wake up. And it is a bit of a treat if someone wakes with him still in bed. He tends to like to get up before his lover does to fix them something to eat in the morning. Gabriel is big on breakfast in bed.

**Belladonna:** Do not touch her. Once she wishes to go to sleep at night, she is going to roll over, back to her lover and go to sleep. She likes her space. She likes her own blanket and she will not hesitate to punch anyone that tries to crowd her while she is asleep. Now, a lover can perhaps get away with a snuggle when she is in a deep enough sleep and can try to spoon her but let's face it, that might not end well for them in the morning. However, up to that moment, she is up for almost anything. She will hold someone, sometimes allow herself to be held, have plenty of pillow talk among other things. But the act of actually sleeping is something she wants to do alone. In fact, it takes quite a lot for Belladonna to even spend the night with someone.

**Milo:** A serial snuggler. Milo treats his lovers as if they are his own personal comfort objects. He will attach onto them, arms and legs, wrapping himself completely around a lover or having them wrap themselves completely around him. He doesn't mind being the big or little spoon, as long as there is a spoon involved. Mainly, Milo recharges from touch. Sleeping alone brings him a lot of nightmares so being able to sleep with someone is one of his favorite things to do in the entire world. It makes him feel

safe. That being said, Milo also is not someone who falls asleep with others easily. Only when he truly trusts someone does he fall asleep with them and use them as his personal body pillow.

**Mal:** Malcolm is a light sleeper who likes to sleep on his back. If he does want to spoon someone, he is normally the big spoon and likes a lover who can curl in the crook of his arm. He is up and down quite frequently through the night so most often, a lover will wake to find him reading by candlelight but still in bed. But, if he knows that it's important to his sleeping partner, he will stay with them the entire time until they are ready to rise in the morning. Then he likes to serve a full breakfast. He is very easy going in what his sleeping arrangements are but he hates snoring. Loathes it in fact. When the quiet is disturbed at night, that's when Malcolm will not look rested.

**What would the ROs do/ how would they react to hearing an MC with a beautiful singing voice? Like they've never heard it before til that day, and they just happened to be walking past while the MC was out doing chores or something.**

**Gabriel:** This would affect Gabriel the most. Singing was huge in the celestial court. He was surrounded by it constantly and he is always searching for something that sounds like home. If he found out an MC could sing so beautifully, I think he would fall even more in love. He would be a man completely entranced and MC would become one of the most precious people in the entirety of his life. The art of song back home was held higher than anything else, so an MC with a voice like an angel? Gabriel would be a goner.

**Hazel:** Hazel would want to join them. She also has a very pretty voice and the second she found out that MC could sing, she would want sing alongs constantly inside the shop. Cue a self playing piano in the corner of the apothecary so her and MC could sing their voices raw every single day. Being surprised by an MC who can sing would not be a surprise for her ultimately. In Hazel's eyes, there is nothing the MC is not capable of doing.

**Milo:** Milo would very much like to use this. He is going to see an MC sweetly singing on their own and go no no no no. Time to go karaoke. Time to hit the taverns. Time to make money off of tips. He would be MC's biggest hype man and go around bragging about how he knows someone with the best voice in the world. If MC ever wanted to pursue singing, Milo would be the bouncer.

**Belladonna:** Bella would quietly appreciate it. She would let MC have their secret and not let them know she heard them. But, she would make it her mission o hear them again and again and again. I imagine it would become a little thing between them. Bella sneaking up on the MC singing, the MC pretending they don't know. The two of them would never speak of it, but Bella would always smile a little softer after hearing them sing.

**Malcolm:** Malcolm would let them have their secret for a bit. Because, as an artist, he values his privacy too. But eventually, he would coax it out of the MC. At night, he would put old records on while he cooked in hopes that he could catch the MC humming along. He would never look at them if they were shy but afterward, when it was dark, he would tell the MC how wonderful their voice was and he would jealousy covet those moments as his own.

**What would each of the ROs find the most surprising about our world if they suddenly found themselves in it? With them being aware of different worlds existing, I imagine it must be pretty difficult to surprise them.**

**Belladonna:** She would be surprised at how repressed people are. How people are so afraid of different lifestyles and sexualities. There is not a single part of Belladonna that would understand why everyone is so obsessed with sexual orientation and gender because she very much has adopted the idea of those being more accessories to a person. The amount of conversations we have as a society about it would boggle her mind.

**Malcolm:** I feel like Malcolm would actually adapt the easiest to our world. I don't know if there is really much that surprises Malcolm in general within the world he lives in so I don't know if he would really be thrown by here. I think he would be a little surprised that we love fantasy so much but also don't think it exists outside of books. But if he knew that was just part of our world he would accept it pretty quick.

**Hazel:** Modern medicine. I don't think she would be against it, but she would be absolutely floored by modern medicine. This girl would walk into a hospital and want to know how everything works. Why it works. What they use to make it. Then, she would be angry about how much it costs. At least from the perspective of the United States.

**Gabriel:** Everything. And I do mean everything. Gabriel is about order and there is very little order in the world. I think he would also be surprised how there is a guise of order but it is one that most don't believe to actually be real. Whereas in the Night Market, even with the guise of order, people trust it and believe in it, to his knowledge.

**Milo:** Money would confuse him greatly. He would be surprised by the set prices to everything. Milo is used to barter, trade and flat out stealing. He really does think this is the best course of commerce. To have our system here, he would not understand why someone would pay more for a product that is the same as the off brand product and why they wouldn't just barter some bits of metal or pay what they think it's worth.

### **Spicy or Sweet foods**

**Gabriel:** Neither. He likes more savory than anything else. When he gets the chance to eat.

**Hazel:** She is for sure partial to sweet but does not mind spicy. She just tends to be more of the baked goods kind of girl. But her stews usually have a bit of a kick in the winter season.

**Malcolm:** Spicy. All the way.

**Belladonna:** Sweet vintage for her. She loves sweeter blood. When she was alive though, she did enjoy spicy food and now kind of misses it.

**Milo:** He's kind of into any food but I think he tends more towards the spicy and savory than the sweet. He is big into just trying new food in general.

## **What are the RO's like when they get sick?**

**Belladonna:** She doesn't get sick. She will tell you this point-blank. Once or twice she's had to disappear for long vacations where she goes to a spa for a break from her duties but it was only for her mental health. That is all. Don't question her.

**Gabriel:** He actually can't get sick. Not with a traditional cold. But if he does seem sick, that is usually a sign for him to panic because the madness is setting in. And that is an entirely different issue to deal with.

**Hazel:** She just wants to be snuggled when she is sick. Hazel wants to hide under a blanket and have soup and someone take care of her until she feels better.

**Milo:** Quiet. He is very quiet when he is sick. I think he tries to continue his life like normal until someone makes him sit down because it is clear, he is going to hurt himself if he isn't forced to stop on his own.

**Malcolm:** He is a bit of a health nut so he gets angry when he gets sick because he feels that his body has betrayed him somehow. Best to just leave Mal alone. He is not pleasant to be around when he doesn't feel good.

## **When did the RO's fall in love with the MC and when did they realize/admit it for themselves?**

**Malcolm:** Malcolm has loved Lamplight since the day he became the Gatekeeper. I think he was aware of it then but didn't quite understand it. So, he spent a lot of his journey to the present moment we have, unpacking that and realizing that his love started then, but grows as he gets to know the MC. He has always been aware and honest with himself about this. But he kept it and still does, to himself.

**Hazel:** Hazel fell in love gradually. I think MC and Hazel were in a relationship before she truly fell in love with them. But, Hazel has never been in love before so she didn't know what to really look for. I think Hazel thought she was in love from the first moment the MC agreed to help with everything and showed compassion and understanding. Hazel didn't truly understand what love was though until the ball. The MC leaving that night without her was her moment where she finally got it. And then she raced to be with them as fast as she could.

**Gabriel:** I don't know if Gabriel knows he's in love yet, to be honest. He wants to protect the MC. He has a desire and an urge to be close to them. But he doesn't understand why or how just that he must do it. I don't think we have seen a Gabriel fully in love. I think what kind of has mattered most to him though, is an MC that has fought him a little. It forced his mind to wake up for the first time in a long time and he doesn't want to let that feeling go.

**Belladonna:** Belladonna knew very early on something was happening. MC smelled different to them. More intoxicating. Which, means they were supposed to be hers. Now, while she could smell this, and knew what that meant, she refused to acknowledge it until after Kavatti. There was no way she could entertain being in love with the MC when she was planning on killing the Baron of the Mists and knew

the MC was going to be involved. It felt like a betrayal of any trust that they would build within love, so she didn't admit anything to herself until the second Kavatti was torn to shreds.

**Milo:** Milo was infatuated from the beginning. He looked at the MC, who he brought to the market, and thought they were some sort of cosmic joke. There was a punchline somewhere that he wasn't seeing. Then, they had a personality. They had a voice. And he started wanting to be around that because it was new and interesting and they just seemed to say and do everything right in his mind. After the Deep, he realized it was love. When the MC showed up at his door that night, he knew from the second he locked eyes with them, he had fallen in love. And it hurt to have that knowledge. And that's right about the time he started pulling away.

**What is everyone's most treasures possession?**

**Milo:** A necklace that he has. He was told it was his mothers.

**Hazel:** Mr. Billows.

**Gabriel:** The shard of grace he often fiddles with.

**Belladonna:** Her books. Especially the ones gifted to her. And the locket she has that has her mother and father's faces in it. Though, she did lose that over the years.

**Malcolm:** His freedom.

**What would the RO's want as their epitaph?**

**Milo:** *If you are reading this, you are too close*

**Belladonna:** She would not have an epitaph. She would just have a beautiful onyx statue of herself, proclaiming she's the one true Baron

**Hazel:** *Flowers are always brightest in Spring. Like a flower, I will bloom again.*

**Mal:** *Don't let Milo choose my epitaph* - chosen by Milo

**Gabriel:** *May the embrace of the Knowing be eternal*

[April Personalized Content!!!](#)

[Apr 3, 2023](#)

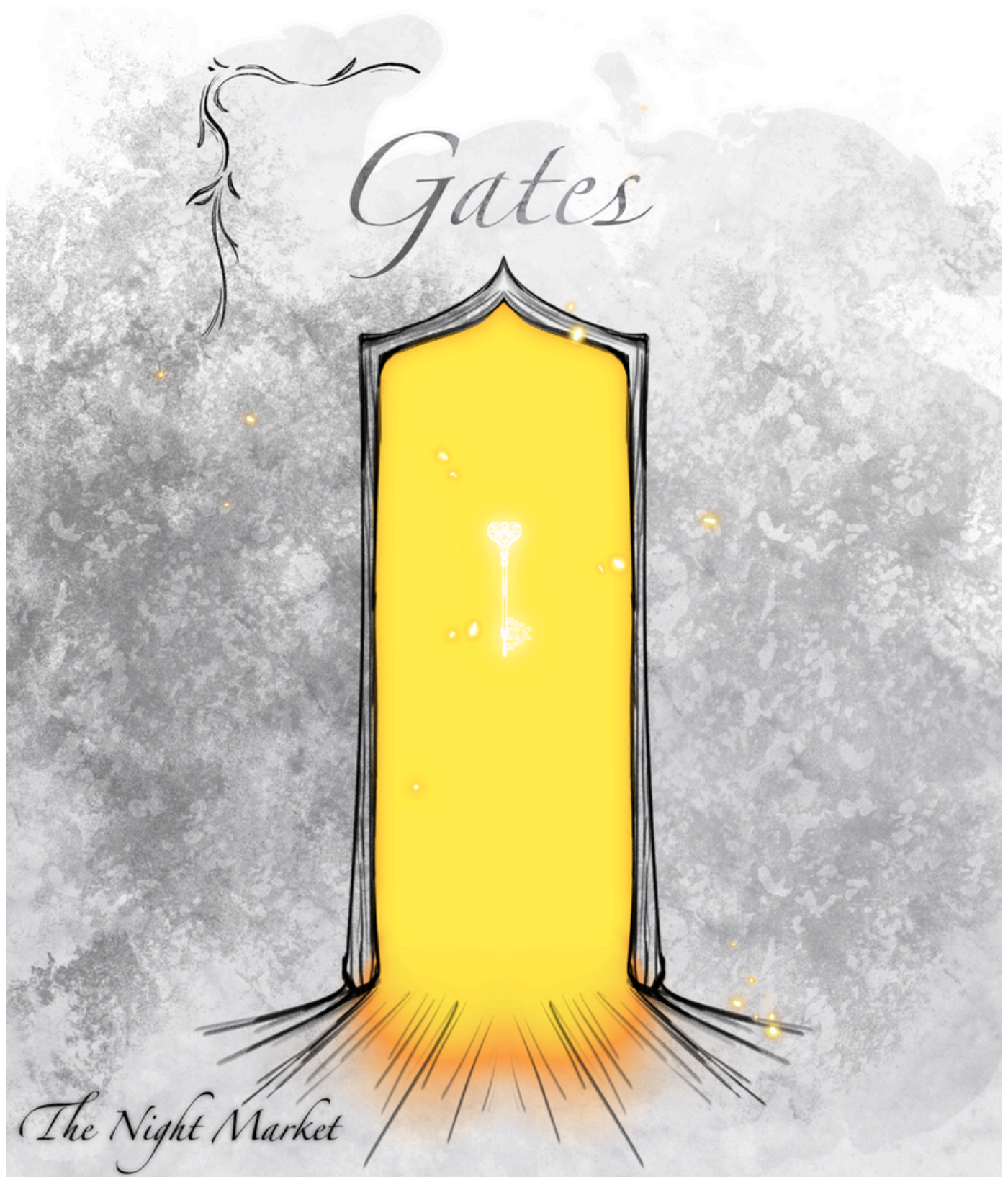
Hey guys!



It is the first of the month! Send me in your personalized lore content ideas if you have one. Again, no stress if you do not and you can send them at any point this month. Just getting my portion checked off the to do list. :)

[Lore - The Gates](#)

[Apr 3, 2023](#)



Gates are a permanent structure within the market though only the strongest can be seen by all. Their origin is unknown but it is widely accepted that they offer trade between worlds and tourism from other realities. A gate to the Night Market exists in nearly every world but is often times hidden. Unless you specifically know what you are looking for, or have an invitation from the Night Market yourself, you will not be able to pass through. In the beginning, the gates served as a way to broaden the market's populace and to provide a variety of cultures to come together. Now, gates are a sign of refuge for the outer worlds and an omen of sorts, perhaps even highlighting that that particular world is about to come to an end.

Stationary gates within the market that still provide tourism and commerce are heavily monitored by the Velvet Guard. The more problematic gates are the ones that are popping up seemingly at random through the market. The Velvet Guard has tried their hand at closing them in unsuccessful ways and now are forced to wait for the Gatekeeper to close them or, hope that they do not bring anything through that is untoward. Often, the Guard is unaware of a gate even opening. It is closed before they become aware, or the gate is so weak that many can not see it. Although, recent theory suggests that the inability to see a gate is due to the magic surrounding it.

In order for a gate to form, it does have to cut a hole through the fabric of the Night Market itself. While the gate is open, the hole is patched. But once a gate is closed or dissipated, the market has to close the wound left behind. In recent years, the toll it has taken on the market has been catastrophic, entire districts suddenly disappearing, along with all the contents. If a gate is left open too long, it does run the risk of decaying, leaving an even bigger tear through the market's reality.

Currently, the gates are being monitored, but there is little solution to how to control them. The Velvet Guard is trained to bring the Gatekeeper in as soon as they learn of their identity. The only time they managed to arrest a Gatekeeper, the man escaped, leaving an open gate within the holding cell. There is no word from the Velvet Guard if that gate ever closed.

[Malcolm - Interlude](#)

[Apr 5, 2023](#)



"He's not here."

Malcolm stood among the burnt out remains of a button factory he had not stepped inside since his youth. The walls were intact, a small miracle really, but the old machines were nothing more than ash

and various thimbles and little coin sized paraphernalia, littered the charred floor. Malcolm looked up at Feebus, watching the bigger man sort through the wreckage, muttering to himself.

"I know," he told him softly. "I actually came to see if I could help you with any of this." Walking across the room his footfalls crunched the rubble beneath. Belladonna had done a number on this place and others. Burning old haunts that Milo loved in hopes of flushing him out.

Feebus paused as he looked over his shoulder, eyes tracing the form of what should have been a dead man. "Still cleaning up his messes, I see."

Malcolm shrugged. "Could look at it that way."

"There another way I should be looking at it?" he asked.

"Just thought you might need the help, Feebus. You're important to Milo and I know he'd want me here."

Feebus scoffed. "Then he should be back here in the market putting a stop to all this. I didn't teach that boy to run." It was a funny sentiment really. Malcolm didn't know if Milo was running or if he was playing it smart.

"He steps into the market proper and he's as good as dead," Malcolm reasoned. "You and I both know that. If he has any chance of survival, he's going to need to keep low for a bit. Belladonna will calm."

"And in the meantime, anyone that is in her path just has an unfortunate day?"

Malcolm grimaced. "I never said I had all the answers to that. And for now, I'm trying not to get in her way." Walking over to him, Malcolm crouched down. There was nothing salvageable in the pile Feebus was rummaging through. Nostalgia was a potent anchor, though. "What can I do?"

"Get him home," Feebus growled, tossing what looked like the metal head of a machine, straight to the ground. It thunked loudly, cracking the thin wood floor. Turning to Malcolm, Feebus shook his head. "Do you know where he's hiding?"

"No." Arguably, Malcolm probably knew all of Milo's old haunts the best. Which meant, Milo was going to be avoiding them. Hiding out in places Malcolm hadn't been alive to see, or creating new safe spaces while he figured his shit out. "I'm sure he's making his rounds but right now, he's a few steps ahead of me."

"So you are going to drag him back."

"When it's safe. I'll figure out what actually happened and then I'll make a decision on what to do next."

There was confusion that crossed the bigger man's face. Malcolm didn't know if the two of them had ever even shared this many words. "You don't know what actually happened that night?"



"The only two people I assume know the truth to that night, is a man on the run and someone who I had to put in the ground last week. And even then I wonder how much they actually knew or if they were a pawn for someone else."

There were things not adding up. From the moment Malcolm had stepped back into the land of the living and Milo's coiled ball of events began to unravel, Malcolm had been seeing the flaws. Milo had always been someone that approached his problems alone but not to this extent. Not to a detriment. That, and when Milo learned to care for someone, he would move the world to keep them safe. With how that night went down, Malcolm knew there had to be something more. He just wasn't sure what but it reeked of a desperation that he was unfamiliar with.

"A pawn," Feebus said, interrupting his thoughts. "I'm not excusing Milo for whatever the fuck it is he has done but from what I understand, Taliesin Hynsin disappeared that night."

"The Baron?"

"The one running the ball that Milo invited everyone to. Couple of my spies said that he was in the garden with Milo and your friend right before it went down. They can't seem to remember where he went from there. Leaving me to believe either they didn't see it, or his vampire enforcer is making her wishes known."

"You believe whoever this enforcer is has scared them into silence?"

"Carmella Malavia. She has a knack of making people believe they saw something entirely different than they did. Psychics can do that to you."

Malcolm filed the information away. He should have been there that night. There were so many moving pieces and they were all ones he was slowly coming to understand through the eyes of everyone else. If he had just been there, Malcolm didn't think any of this would have happened. He wouldn't have let Lamplight out of his sight and he certainly would have seen through Milo's bullshit almost immediately.

"Feebus, I know you and I have never gotten along but I need to know everything you do. I'm in the midst of ten years of catching up and then Milo goes and just lights a bomb."

"First off, it's not that I never got along with you, boy," Feebus said. "It's that I think you and Milo were bad for each other. That could have been on you, that could have been on him, but the two of you were little disasters that liked to bash each other's hearts against the wall. And secondly, Milo did light a bomb. He really did. Doesn't mean you got to douse its flame for him. He's made his bed and might not be deserving of a friend right now."

Malcolm raised his brow at him. "You practically raised him and you're going to speak of him like that?"

"I'm disappointed that he decided to do something so stupid without coming to any of us for help. He's done it before, Malcolm, but this time, I think he may have gone too far."

"We don't even have a clear picture of what he's done," Malcolm reasoned.

"The lights are out all over the market. The walls are moving and districts are disappearing. You said it yourself, you had to bury a friend."

"He's killed before." The blood that stained both their hands was nothing to be proud of.

"Bad people. He's killed bad and questionable people before. Not like this." Feebus leaned in close. "I know you've always had a way of protecting him. And he's done similar for you. But it might be high time to let him fall without catching him."

He remembered the way Milo fell against him after the ball. How he had shook. That was not the actions of a man who was happy with what he had done. "With all due respect? That's exactly what he wants. And if the rest of the world chooses to believe the worst in him, I'm not going to join them. Not until I have all the information. Not until I hear from his own lips what went down that night."

"And what about your friend?"

Lamplight. Oh, how Malcolm wished their glow was within the streets. More than anything, he wished he could speak to them. Confide in their soft light and feel that warmth. One day. Malcolm knew they would return. He only hoped he could provide answers and a comfortable world for them to return to.

"My friend will need to explain to me their part in all this as well."

"And if they want Milo dead?" The words were said without the bitter harshness Malcolm knew Feebus wanted to be there. Despite what had transpired, Feebus was still holding out hope that he would see Milo again one day. If only for a moment.

"Then they are not the person I have come to know them to be."

Feebus looked confused. "You've only been back for a few weeks."

"I've known them a lot longer," he said. "Now. How can I help? Because if Milo even knew about any of this, you know he'd be here, risking Belladonna's wrath. So, I'm going to take a wild guess and say he's skipped town entirely for a bit."

Feebus rolled his eyes. "You came here with the intent to see if I was actually hiding him."

"I did."

Shaking his head, he gestured to a broom and dust pan. "Start sweepin'. This place was due for a makeover anyway so I guess Bella did me a favor. Going to change it into something else."

"A halfway house wouldn't be a bad idea," Malcolm said.

"Yeah. We'll see. Don't know if I'll be adopting anyone any time soon."

"For the record, I thought you were a good father to him. Even if he didn't always like what you had to say."

"For the record, I thought you two were good when you actually could both pull your heads out of your ass. Which wasn't often."

"No, it was not."

Standing, Malcolm grabbed the broom and began cleaning the small little hovel that Milo had spent hours in as a child. The one place he had admitted in the dark, that actually saved him. Out of the corner of his eyes, he watched the man that had tried his damndest to set Milo on the straight and narrow.

And for the life of him, Malcolm just couldn't understand how they had all gotten to this point.

"Button," he whispered. "Where are you?" But, there was no answer.

[Belladonna - Inbetween Books](#)

[Apr 10, 2023](#)



The mists had dissipated and the bodies that had piled up could have formed a wall. It wasn't as if Belladonna cared. She had known the kind of show that Kavatti had run and suspected that what lay within her little fog filled domain was not going to be anything less than a horror show. But, the sheer amount of it did surprise her. Most were decaying by now, others crushed bones beneath the weight of the dead. Belladonna looked at them all with the same kind of dispassionate gaze that one might give while picking up tea towels. This wasn't where she wanted to be, after all.

"Well this is a tad bit different."



Belladonna's eyes narrowed. The voice was unfamiliar and it was certainly one that she was not in the mood to welcome. She had suspended all meetings to this point. Not wishing to deal with the petty plights of the Night Market citizens.

"My office hours are closed," she said curtly, not even looking towards the man.

"From what I understand, they are always closed."

She turned to look at the newcomer with an impassive gaze. He was a tall man with russet skin and dark eyes. A long plum colored coat was swung across his shoulders, sitting in contrast to the black corset and skirt he wore, both accented in gold.

"Who are you?"

"Deucalion Gray," he said with a bowed flourish. "At your service. Well, not your service precisely. I more come with a message."

"And that message being?" She'd give him one minute. One minute and she'd either kill him or walk away entirely.

The man stared at her for a long beat, making sure he had her attention. "He's not here."

Belladonna's gaze hardened.

"Now, before you pin me to the wall— oh, you're going to just do that anyway." Deucalion was slammed back against the cathedral, Belladonna's long fingers a pale grip around his neck. She flexed her grip on the man, a snarl curling her lip. "I can't die, darling, so even if you rip my head off it will be a waste of time and only get your pretty clothes all a mess. Clothes, I might add, that are fabulous."

"Where is he?" she demanded. Milo Next. The bane of her existence and the little shit that had somehow evaded her within the market. No one slipped beneath her gaze, so just how was a street rat like Milo managing to do so.

"Now that, I don't know. He was smart enough to send the message through several channels. I take it he is a paranoid bastard? I have been paid handsomely to come tell you that he's gone, however."

"And if you value your life, you are going to tell me all about those channels," Belladonna hissed, her eyes burning crimson.

"Again," he said with a grimace. "Cannot die. It is why most hire me. A rather large bargaining chip gets taken away when you do not have the ability to cease to exist."

"There are other ways to inflict pain, dear heart." Her fingers bruised his skin, just to make a point. Deucalion nodded, looking as if he was rather impressed by the display, but still not moving to correct what she clearly saw as a faux pa.

"Look, you can keep doing what you're doing. I get paid no matter what. But, what I am trying to tell you, is he isn't even going to see your handiwork. Nor care, I suspect. So, you are kind of tipping over into that territory where you have no reason for your destruction other than throwing a bit of a temper tantrum."

The way in which Deucalion's body crumpled against the opposite side of the courtyard gave a satisfying crunch. One Belladonna would have once greatly appreciated. Today, it all just felt hollow. Deucalion groaned as he rose to his feet, staring at the vampire from across the way. Belladonna could feel her bones cracking, her fingers curling into a mimicry of talons and her skin itching to burst from the form she often kept hidden beneath.

"I have a proposition for you," he told her, stumbling to his feet. "See, you are the eyes and ears of the Night Market. The queen, really. You have very little dealings with the outskirts, however. The Outlands are an untapped territory for you, yes? Not for me. If this Milo ran anywhere, it's most likely out there. Hire me and I'll find him."

"Why should I hire you for anything? You have just proven you are nothing more than an underhanded messenger who plays for the highest bid. Who is to say he won't just offer you more for your silence?"

Deucalion grinned. "You could pay me more than he could ever afford to avoid that. Or, you could simply trust that I will always see my job through. That's what I've done here. I was hired to deliver the message. Now, you can hire me to track down where that message came from."

Belladonna stared at him. It was more than perhaps she had. It was also the only lead that didn't require her to continue just watching the market burn. Her heart would not be pleased when they returned. That soft and gentle nature of theirs would look at the burnt remains of Belladonna's anger and be displeased. In the end, Belladonna was struggling to care, however.

Feeling her bones recede, and her body settle once more, Belladonna rolled her shoulders. The night was cool and the courtyard dark aside for the light of the fake moon. So much stock had been put into the moon once. Then the lanterns. Belladonna was starting to wonder if she had slipped somewhere along the way. Began to trust that everything would work as it was supposed to. The night of the ball had proven that not to be true.

With a sigh, she began walking towards the cathedral. Her charges were watching, their eyes staring at her from the dark as she stepped over the brittle bones of bodies that had long ago departed. When she reached the double doors, she looked over her shoulder at the curious man. It was refreshing to have one not afraid of her.

"Are you coming?"

He feigned tipping a hat towards her before following her inside. Belladonna would decide, after he was done with the job of course, whether she would destroy him or not for even trying to leverage his position. While this Deucalion Gray may not be able to die, it did not mean he had the privilege of living.

"I think we will work well together," Deucalion said.

"I think you should learn when to speak."

He mimed zipping up his mouth, locking it and throwing away the key.

Belladonna rolled her eyes. Another con man. Joy. As Baron, she wondered if she would be able to rid the market of them.

Tipping her gaze up to the lanternless sky, she wondered if there would even be a market to rule much longer.

### [Announcement](#)

[Apr 14, 2023](#)

I'm going to be suspending Paper Moons for a time. I am feeling very overwhelmed with these edits for the base game and don't think I can split my brain. It's funny that I could pump out the story no problem but I'm having some sort of crisis going back through it all. I just want to focus in on that. Monthly short stories and lore content will still come out, along with the Q&A's but I think I want to take a break from an entirely different story for a bit. It's not gone forever. Just gone for now.

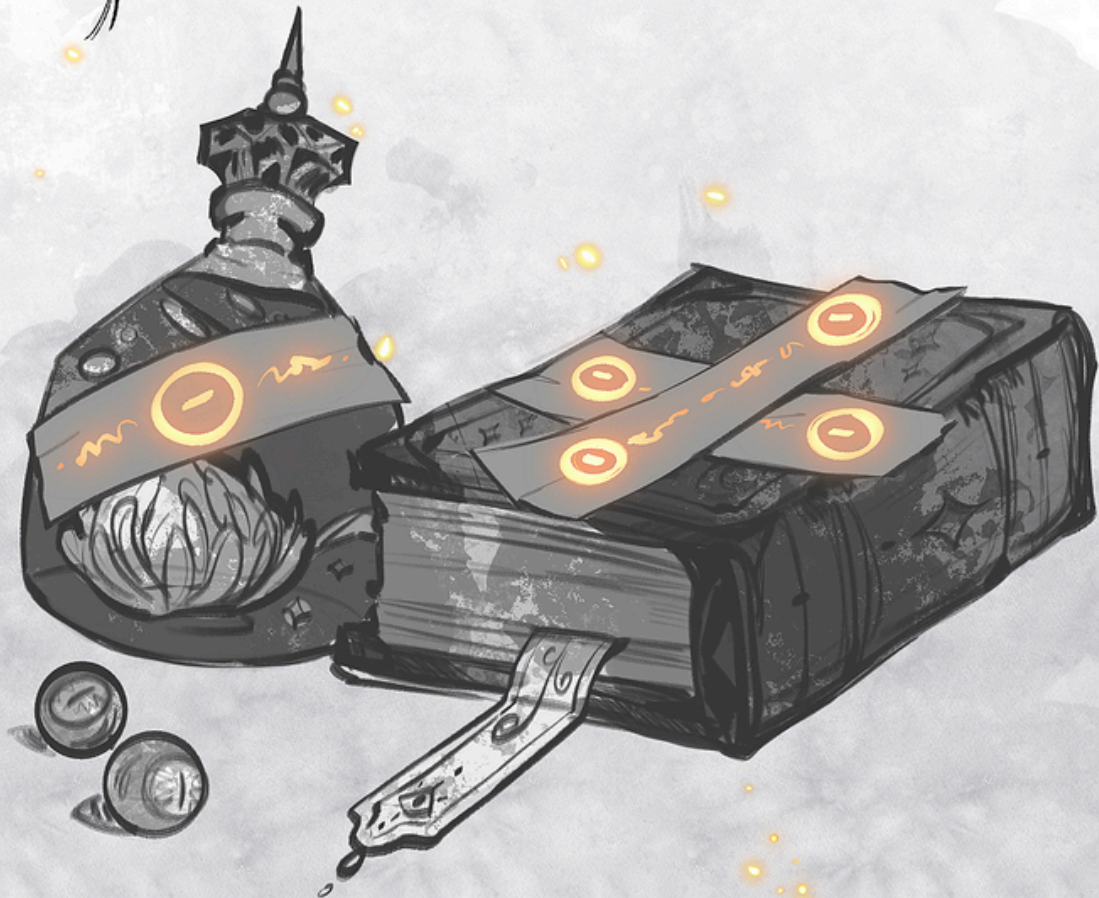
Thank you for understanding,

Zinnia

### [Lore - Magic Ban](#)

[Apr 14, 2023](#)

# *Magic Ban*



## *The Night Market*

Magic was banned in the NM year of 1752. The Velvet Guard had been campaigning for the ban as the usage became so rampant within the districts that there was no order or real ability to facilitate law. Magic could alter minds, memory, and physical situations, leaving a lot of crimes to go unpunished. During the NM 1752, the Velvet Guard was finally able to convince the Barons to come together and create a dampening tool for whoever entered the market. Each person that passed through a gate would automatically have their magic taken from them, only returned when they passed through a gate to leave the market at a later date. It took another year to perfect but by NM 1753, the market was magic free unless an individual specifically bought Velvet Guard sanctioned items that had limited magical use.



With any sort of ban, there was backlash, and the underground markets became riddled with magical contraband. The Warden at the time was a Baron, however, and was able to curb most magical influences within the market proper.

As for the rumors that some of the stronger magic users have either maintained their magic or have found a way to access their magic despite the ban, nothing has been confirmed. The only individuals allowed to have free rein of their magic are the Barons.

The Outlands are still lawless and have full control of their magic.

[Between books - Milo](#)

[Apr 14, 2023](#)



The waves rolled over each other in a mimicry of a storm, warning off whoever entertained the thought of walking out towards the desolate sea. A thick brine of sea salt coated the rocks as kelp and dead eels smacked against their unmovable walls. Standing above it all, was Milo. Hands in his pockets as he looked down at the roll of the Deep and the churning underbelly of a beast waiting to swallow him whole.

“Haven’t heard from you in a bit.”

His lips twitched. He hadn’t heard the crunch of boots as they snuck up behind him. They had gotten better over the years. Lighter on their feet. “Been a while, yeah?”

Next to him, a lithe form stopped. They were dressed in their typical black pants and cropped top with the black leather harness across their midsection. Their hair fell across their eyes in a blunt cut, darker now with age. Or damp. It was fucking cold out tonight.

"How've you been, Rooke?" he asked.

"Better than you." Piercing green eyes turned to him. He could count three knives on their person but they weren't reaching for a single blade. He had requested they come at peace and hoped that they hadn't accepted a contract before then.

"Nose has been broken since I last saw you."

"Twice," Rooke responded. "What do you want, Milo? Entire market wants your head on a pike. I don't really fancy being near you right now. People are going to associate me with your ass and that's just bad for business."

"Oh, I don't know. Once was you liked my ass," he smirked.

"It's flat and bony. Reminded me of a fish bone pancake." Turning, they quirked a brow towards him. The ring above their brow had been ripped out leaving a nasty scar. "Killed two people to get here without a tail. Speak, Next. Or else I'll shove you over this cliff and delight in the way the eels eat you."

The threat somehow made Milo feel far more comfortable. At least he knew they were taking things seriously. "I'm gonna leave the market for a bit. Got a few things I need to suss out and I don't really think the answers are here. So, I need you to keep an eye on a few things for me."

"Like?"

Turning, he handed them a stack of folded papers and a pouch of coin. "There is an unmarked grave. Clock hasn't started ticking and I don't know if it ever will, but it's an important one. I'm a bit worried it's going to be messed with."

"Who the fuck would mess with a grave?" Rooke asked, taking the papers and looking them over. It was a map to the burial site. Rooke whistled long and low. "Let me rephrase that. Who the fuck is going to mess with a grave in the Frankenstein domain."

"You'd be surprised. I left my old necklace on it. Make sure no one disturbs it and keep track of anyone that comes by. Far as I know, only Belladonna Malady, Gabriel Caine, Hazel and Malcolm know it's there."

Rooke did a double take. "Mal came back?"

"Yup. The bastard." Milo kept seeing him too. Just around the corner. Arriving wherever Milo was about to leave. As far as he knew, the older man had caught sight of him yet. There was a dull sort of amusement in the fact that Milo had gotten better than him over the past ten years.

"Why aren't you having him watch the grave?"

"Because the asshole is tailing me. I'm not getting within his reach. I don't need a heart to heart right now, Rooke. I need to get shit done. Mal will want to talk about feelings and hold hands. I don't have time for that."

Tucking the papers in the back of their pants, Rooke tossed the coin bag up and down, feeling the heft of it. "You know, for someone that has lost yet another lover, you don't look that broken up over it." Milo shifted at their words. "Yeah, I heard about it. Also heard rumor that they were the Night Market themselves? That why you need me to keep track of that grave?" Milo didn't answer. He wouldn't. Too many ears could fall on his words and the last thing he needed was to be at fault for yet another one of the market's deaths. "Come on, Milo. You aren't this cold-hearted. Not when it comes to the ones who matter."

It was strange to hear it out loud again. A sentiment that he had grown up on, really. Milo was cold-hearted. One of the most cold-hearted bastards in all the Market. He had certainly proven that through the years and had worked his way to the top because of that reputation. But when it came to his own, the ones he held dear, he fell apart at the slightest provocation. Except this last time. He hadn't known where the hell he'd gotten the strength. Or if it was just because his own selfish desire would have gotten the rest of them killed.

"What do you want me to do? Throw myself a pity party? That's a level of selfishness I'm not entirely into."

"Interesting take."

Milo laughed. "Is it? I made my bed, Rooke. I'll lie in it. Out of the people involved in that scenario, I'm the last one that gets to be upset."

"How magnanimous," they commented. They stared out at the ocean, watching the undertow. How many lives had the Deep claimed? How many had been deserving of the gentle hands of death and how many had been forced there because the world worked in horrid lines of murky gray. "I'll take the job if you answer me a question."

"Shoot."

"Did you love them?"

Milo didn't flinch. It was the question that had been hanging in the air for so long now. He fucking hated it and yet it haunted his dreams. When he was able to sleep. "I've said those words to exactly two people in my life. If I ever say those words out loud again, it will be because they are standing in front of me. Until then, those words are my own."

Rooke shook her head. "Need to get you a shirt that actually buttons. Think the chill in the air is causing you to become stupid."



Milo snorted. "I'm just done, Rooke. I'm fucking done. I'm done being controlled. I think I've been playing someone else's game my entire life. And if there is one thing I realized after losing someone important to me for the second time in my life, it's that following everyone else's rules has given me nothing but heartache. And it's certainly done jack shit for the world as a whole. So," standing, he bowed to them with an exaggerated flourish and a self-serving grin. "Milo Next. Gatekeeper of the Night Market. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a job I need to go do."

"You're fucking what?"

"Watch over them. Give Mal a wink for me. Make sure Hazel is protected."

Rooke looked as if they were going to throw a knife right between his eyes. "You're the fucking Gatekeeper? You asshole! You are so not responsible enough to have that shitty job!"

His smile was far more a grimace than anything else. One full of teeth that stretched eerily across his face. "Blame Mal. He's the one that gave it to me." Then, he stepped backwards, off the face of the cliff and into the ocean below. The water plunged around him. He never did get to look up in time to see if Rooke even looked over the edge to watch his descent. He really hoped their face was one of blinding shock. Meant he still had a few surprises up his sleeve.

The water plumed up around him, tossing him over and over as the selkies eyed him from beyond. The ocean was growing darker as he sank. A weight that was his entire life finally dragging him down. Blinking, he looked upwards, watching as the light of the moon disappeared until he was left in nothing but complete darkness. No sound. No movement.

Just him and his thoughts.

And for the first time, Milo listened.

[Dev Blog 4/17/22](#)

[Apr 17, 2023](#)

Hello!

Wow is the editing process not as fun. LOL! Believe me, if I could pay someone to take my brain and rewrite the scenes I want rewritten, while also going through and fixing dialogue, adding options, and cleaning up paragraphs? I would. Hands down this is my least favorite part of the creation process. I

remember saying that not reading my stuff and going back through it later would be future me's problem.

I am future me.

I am suffering the consequences.

Will I learn from these consequences? No.

On a serious note, I am hella behind on a lot of stuff right now so I really am appreciative that everyone has been patient. I have kickstarter e-mails to respond to, books to get editing, and content for Patreon I need to post. On top of this, it's been a busy time in my household. Spring always seems to bring in this firm desire in me to do more for my kiddos with the weather getting better so I do not feel like we have stopped moving. I'm hoping to feel back on track soon but I honestly think I am going to feel behind until this editing process is done.

There is a lot that is changing in Chapter One. The concept of it all is still the same, but the delivery is a bit different. I've cleaned up some routes too because there was a lot of repetition that didn't need to be there. Gabriel's dialogue has a complete overhaul. Milo has had to have some tweaks. Hazel's is a complete overhaul as well. I am hopeful that by the time I get to about chapter three it won't be as much work because I had more of an idea of what I wanted to do at that point but we will see.

As for book 2 itself. I have so many ideas. All of which are ones that I am letting stew. But I might need to give a little PSA given the baseline of what I am seeing post game reaction. The way that things are going to go in Book 2, might not be the way everyone is logically thinking it will go? Which, I think at this point we should maybe just accept I am probably that kind of writer. I don't like going down the routes that are explored constantly. And that isn't to say those aren't good routes to explore but I am an avid reader and I would get bored with writing those types of routes. And in the end, the only reason I was getting content out the way I have done in the last year, is because I was excited for what I was writing. So, we'll see how that will end up going.

Heading out to continue chapter one edits and bang my head against the wall.

Zinnia

[Gabriel - Between books](#)

[Apr 20, 2023](#)



“Are you sure this is okay? I know this place makes you uncomfortable.” The room itself was bright with a large arched window that showcased thick shafts of artificial sun. Just outside, hedges of blue hydrangea and pale indigo wisteria filled the garden beds. A stretch of water ran down the center of the lawn, lined with white marble and statues that moved every hour on the hour. They had long ago had their sweat glands burned off so as not to perspire during the endless heat.

Turning, he felt a sigh heavy in his chest. He had been told to discard the uniform upon entering the estate. It apparently made some of the staff uncomfortable. It left him in his standard work slacks and a dark blue tunic that had grown tighter in the last year. Too much good food, he supposed.

Too much good food because of *them*.

Eye ticking up, he looked towards where they stood in the corner of the room. They had been circling. Just walking the perimeter, offering small shakes of the head or a smile in answer to most of Gabriel's questions.

“I can leave,” he told them. “It wouldn’t be the first time. And what does he really have to offer? What is he even trying to fix?”

He had come to Elias’s on the behest of Hazel. He had run into her during an grueling patrol that had ended with him at the three tiered fountain. Hazel had been sitting there lately in silent vigil for those that were dying every day. Almost immediately the young witch had reached out to him, enveloping him in a hug. She startled when she laid her hands upon his back.

He was sick. For some reason people kept believing that. Gabriel found it to be nothing more than lack of sleep. There were times in the past when he got like this. Trying to explain that to Hazel had been futile and in the end, he had only been let go due to the promise of seeking out Elias. The only celestial they actually knew that had not shattered apart because they could no longer be a part of the stars.

His fingers twitched on his thigh. They hadn’t spoken for about a day now. He hated when they did that. It made him feel like he did something wrong. It had to be because he had come here. But he had a suspicion that if he were to disregard Hazel’s request, they would be equally mad. In reality, he just needed to get in and get out.

"I'll be fine," he tried to assure them. They stopped then, turning to look at him with black and voidless eyes. There was no pigment to them anymore. As if they had gone dark right along with the lanterns. "This is all temporary. What we really should be focusing on is letting people know you are back. I don't know why you won't tell them. They would love to hear your voice—"

"Gabriel?"

The door opened behind him as Elias stepped in. He was not a tall man and was someone who had always been slight of coloring. Since becoming a Baron, his skin looked paper thin and his hair had what little color it once had, drained from the once wavy locks.

"Who are you speaking to, son?"

Gabriel ticked his eyes up towards *them*, but they only shook their head. Not yet, he supposed. It was still not time.

"No one," he told Elias.

Lavender eyes sought out his own, ghosting over him warily. The tap of Elias's leather stitched shoes echoed across the tiled floor as he approached. Gabriel found that he couldn't quite meet his eyes when he lowered himself to his knees in front of him.

"Oh, Gabriel," Elias sighed. "I do know how it feels. When Reese died, I thought I saw him everywhere. I once followed a man through the scope of the market, certain it was him."

Gabriel didn't look up. Reese wasn't dead. Just dead to Elias. Part of a clever ruse meant to keep Elias from falling towards the madness and in the end, was what pushed him there entirely. Though, not to the extent of the other celestials, he supposed. Reese claimed it was for the best. Belladonna and him had been forced to listen. That was the funny thing about being children in a time of uncertainty. The most ludicrous schemes were hatched and they had been too young to know any the wiser.

"How long have you been seeing them?" Elias urged.

Gabriel ticked his eyes to the corner where they still stood. Their outline was far more solid today. "I am here about my grace, Elias. Hazel says that it is waning."

Elias looked disappointed but he did not press the issue. "I've examined the shard that you draw from and it is certainly depleting. Along with that, your own reserves are non-existent, or soon will be. You've been drawing on them when you know you are not supposed to." Emotion is what did it. The high intensity of feelings sent Gabriel reaching for reserves he did not have. "I can have my people fabricate artificial grace but I do warn you, it is addictive. If you miss even a doze you will not be yourself. Which does run the risk of you drawing on the rest of your reserves."

"I will not miss a dose."

Elias patted him on the hand. “Ever my fastidious one,” he said. “Which is why I already took the liberty of putting in the order. I will just need you to stay calm for a few more days. Nothing too strenuous, alright?”

The market was in chaos. People were dying in the streets, being consumed by the walls and falling victim to passages that led to their own demise. Crime was up to an abhorrent rate and as people tried to flee the realm, the active gates that they had come to know, crumbled at the merest touch. Being the Warden of the Night Market was far more than strenuous. It was soul crushing.

“It will be fine, Elias,” he said firmly.

“Well good. I’ll have one of my runners deliver it in a few days. Or, you could come to dinner? I know the last time was bad but I do very much miss you. I would like it if you and I could form a relationship again. Be a part of each other’s lives. We— we are all we have left, after all?”

Standing, Gabriel grabbed his jacket and sword. He would show Elias respect and not put them back on until he was at the front gates that led back to the dark. But he was not staying here longer.

“A runner will suffice.”

Elias didn’t answer. Gabriel could see his head hanging low out of the corner of his eye, but that was not where his concern need me. Elias was fine. He would always been fine. The market was not. Gray eyes ticking towards the corner, he looked at their voidless stare. *They* were not.

He made a gesture as if to ask them if they were coming and watched as they pushed off the wall and walked right through Elias and out the front door. Elias shuddered, trembling suddenly on his knees. When Gabriel looked down at him, it was with a blank expression.

“They don’t like you,” he said.

Elias snapped his gaze upwards, mouth agape. But Gabriel had already left the room. Perhaps with this fabricated grace he would be stronger. Perhaps he would be able to convince them that it would be in their benefit to show themselves.

Perhaps, if Gabriel could not stave off the madness, they could be mad together.

Without looking back at Elias he left the estate. But he lost *them* in the light of the sun.

[Hazel - Between Books](#)

[Apr 23, 2023](#)





The ash had cooled in the hearth, a soft mound of grey with flecks of lavender and sage. Hazel crouched before it, kneeling on the apothecary floor. Behind her, the floorboards were still split from Malcolm's return but the gate had all but crumbled away. The worst of the glass had been cleaned up. Hazel had done most of it alone. No longer did she have the help from those soft eyes. Malcolm had promised he would come and try but he had bigger things to do she supposed. And Milo... well, Milo probably wouldn't be coming around anymore.

Dipping her finger within the burnt remains of last night's fire, she began dragging the ash in intricate circles around the blackened brick floor. Small flecks of fire guttered beneath her fingertips, sinking into the sigil before disappearing into the foundation of the shop. It was odd, in the end. Hazel hadn't been the one to start the fire for so long. It had never been a comfortable action for her. Since the ball, she had to convince herself each morning to light the flame. Taking the match and striking it. Setting it against wood. Trying not to remember the night of the fire and the heat upon her face. So many souls had perished in that alley, waiting hopefully for a moment to return.

And then Hazel had taken that opportunity from them as well.

"Oh, my darling."

Startled, Hazel swept her hand across the ash, watching the magic beneath her fingertips die. As she stood, she wiped her hands off on the folds of her skirt, turning towards the front door.

"Mother," she said with a small smile. "I did not hear you come in."

"Your open sign is not on," Lucinda said, marching into the apothecary. Her home. This had been Lucinda's home long before Hazel and Mal had ever been born. The structure had changed and most of Lucinda's touch had been eradicated, but Hazel had always felt the ghost of her mother within the corners of the shop. Like blackened and burnt shadows, reaching for her.

"I don't really think there is much in the way of customers out there right now," Hazel said. She had been making tonics to parcel out where she could, pushing herself to leave the shop more and more. Each night she returned, exhausted from the panic that seized her chest.

"Yes, your Milo saw to that." Lucinda crossed the room to where the old gate was, her pointed boots scattered the last of the willow that lay there. She looked at the back wall where the tonics and dried herbs were stored, clicking her tongue at what she saw. "Where are you getting your supplies, my dear."

"I grow a lot of them." Halting halfway to her mother, she looked down nervously. Lucinda hadn't asked her to approach. A faux pas she had learned the hard way when her mother had been working. "I'm a little sparse right now. The market got cold early this cycle."

"Hmm, yes. You're going to need to combat that. I wonder if my suppliers in the gray market still are up and running."

"The gray market is gone, mother. Has been for years."

Lucinda turned to her daughter with a pinched look on her face. "I am sure that is what they wish for you to believe, dear, but it is doubtful the gray market has been killed. I'll make some inquiries. You are severely lacking on some of the most basic components. I don't even see bone marrow."

Marrow from the young. That's what Lucinda was referring to. Hazel had done away with the large jar of it the second the shop had become hers.

"I don't deal in hexes anymore. I deal in remedies."

Lucinda didn't respond to that as she continued to take stock of what her daughter had on hand. Hazel twisted her fingers within the holes of her skirt. It was remarkable how quickly she felt like a child again in the presence of such confidence.

"Have you spoken to your brother?" she called, pushing aside jars and murmuring a list to herself.

Malcolm had been here the first few days but after, he had wandered into the market with the intent to set this right. Hazel knew that meant he was looking for Milo. She hoped he was safe. With the way the walls were moving, she wasn't even sure if he could get back to her. The streets were too dark for Hazel to venture far enough to see if she could get to his apartment.

"A little."

"Does he know I'm back?"

Swallowing, Hazel tried not to let her head fall in shame. "No." Malcolm would not be pleased and Hazel had to wonder if he would storm in here and try to kill Lucinda himself. "I— he's only recently returned. I think maybe some time for him to acclimate to this world again might be the better option."

"Acclimate to a world that is in chaos? Oh, my darling girl, there will be no acclimating to this. The home he remembers is gone. He will need his family now."

"Mother, I don't think—"



"Yes yes. I know him and I didn't see eye to eye but I told you Hazel, I wish to change that. How am I to prove to him that I only have his best interest at heart if he isn't even give the opportunity to know me?"

Hazel knew this was more of her problem than anything else. Lucinda was right. She should at the very least tell Malcolm that their mother had returned. Let him decide what kind of contact he would like with her. It was so easy to pretend that she hadn't told him due to his absence. But if Malcolm were to walk through the front door tomorrow, Hazel knew she would conveniently forget to say anything.

Across the way, Lucinda sighed. It sounded like it was born of irritation but when Hazel looked up, there was compassion on her mother's face.

Crossing the room, she took Hazel's hands within hers, pulling her close. Hazel wondered why she did not get Lucinda's height. She barely made it to the woman's chest.

"I know, my darling. This is all so much for you. Malcolm left you for years. Your friend betrayed you. And now your love has died. I understand this to be far too much. I do not wish to push you, my dear. If we need to wait to tell Malcolm, we will wait."

Hazel nodded. "I think it would be best."

"You know him better," she said.

It was the first time Hazel had heard any sort of concession like that from her mother. Even if Hazel had been right in the past, Lucinda had never admitted it.

"I just hope he is not spending too much time on that boy."

"We need to find Milo," Hazel said softly.

"For what reason, dear? Hasn't he done enough damage?"

Hazel frowned. What Milo had done was unforgivable. She didn't understand any of it. And then he had run. That was the part that hurt her the most. If his intentions had been pure, why did he run?

"Because," Lucinda said, stroking her hair, running her fingers down her arm. "Boys like that are cowards. They take the path of least resistance and then expect everyone to fall in line. Don't forgive him, Hazel. Harden your heart to his lies. Don't let him continue to hurt you. He took the one you love. He was unhappy and scared and he sacrificed the good in your life for his own gain."

Tears slipped from her eyes. "It hurts. It hurts so much." The sob ripped from her throat in a painful gasp, her knees buckling. Lucinda held her tight, hushing her. How could he do this to her? How could Milo take the good in her life like that? All because he had none? Did he truly need to drag everyone down to his level?

Curling into her mother, Hazel brought her hands up to cling to her. She just wanted them back. She just wanted to be held. To slip into bed next to them and look into those soft eyes. Feel their skin upon hers. Why did they have to go from her so soon?

"Will they return?" Hazel asked Lucinda. "You always told me that those of the Night Market will return. Couldn't they?"

Lucinda sighed. "I really don't know, dear. More research would need to be done. Would you like me to look into it for you?"

Hazel nodded, pulling away and wiping her face. "Maybe- maybe you and I could do it together?"

Still holding her hand, Lucinda squeezed it, giving her daughter a smile. "I would love nothing more, my daughter."

A small part of Hazel's chest felt sewn back together with those words. Perhaps the rest of the world had abandoned her, but her mother was here. She had made mistakes but she was the one that was here now. And that had to count for something.

Hazel *needed* it to count for something.

[Dev Blog 4/24/23](#)

[Apr 24, 2023](#)

Hey everyone!

So, if you haven't seen it yet, I am now on Steam. Release date is TBA but if you are able to, head on over and put me on your wishlist. It helps boost the game to people who may not know about it.

This week:

I finished up the edits on Chapter One. I'm pretty happy with what I did because man did it need to be cleaned up. It may be a bit shorter than the previous version, but there is less arbitrary choices in my opinion.

Heading into editing chapter two today which I feel is going to go waaaay quicker.

In the formatting stages of the book one short stories that is going to be coming out. The art is looking fantastic in it. Just plugging in the pieces at this point and trying to decide if we need more.

I should be talking to all my kickstarter supporters beginning of next week for their personalized content so if you are one of them, expect an e-mail from me soon. :)

Also, make sure if you have signed up for any of the specialty stuff here on Patreon, to please email me. This includes name in credits, lore posts and personalized stories.

Hope everyone is doing well.

Zinnia

[April Q&A](#)

[Apr 28, 2023](#)

**Q&A time! Who is (or at least has the reputation of being) the most powerful individual in night market history?**

Oh, that is an incredibly tough one. I thought this would be an easy answer but the more I sit and think about it, all the RO's are pretty damn strong. I think if we went by reputation alone, the ladies win. Bella has a reputation of being someone that can take an individual down without lifting a finger, mainly because her vast network of connections is so large.

Hazel, however, is the child of a woman who nearly destroyed the Night Market. Lucinda Albright was feared by many and there were several attempts on her life that Hazel can remember. They all assume that Hazel has the same amount of power. Which, she kind of does, she just chooses to be a better person.

I think in the case of the men, there is strength but it is a bit different from just full on power. Milo is far more sneaky and that makes him dangerous. I think he is someone that can get in and out of situations with relative ease. I think he also is used to being betrayed so he has back up plan after back up plan. There is danger is a man who never expects to win.

Gabriel is the Warden of the market and so he does have brute force behind him and can make laws that his men will and have blindly followed. That is a scary position to see because he just has sheer masses.

Mal I would say is probably the weakest when it comes to power, but he is someone who speaks very well and I think can gain a lot of power that way.

Over all, I think the ladies do win this though. I wouldn't want to come up against a pissed off Bella or Hazel.

**If Gabriel knew how this would all end, what would he do differently?**

Not work as much. Not be so concerned about what *should* be done and be far more concerned about enjoying the time with the MC that he had. Gabriel held himself back in this book because he wanted things to go a certain way. If he had his way, he would have courted MC. Slowly gotten to know them. Taken them on several dates, showered them with gifts, and taken them to balls where he could show off how lucky he felt. But, because he was the Warden, he always put things off. He kept things close to chest because he thought he should put everyone else first. It was his responsibility.

Knowing what he knows now, I don't think he would have approached the MC the same way once he knew he was in love. And in Book 2, I am very hopeful that he will have learned his lesson that life, even in the Night Market, can be fleeting.

**Has the night market ever been invaded or threatened by a greater outside force?**

Now, this is subject to change as I develop the story and as I kind of figure out my own lore, but I am pretty sure the original settlers here, the Ancients, were invaders. I know they came from a different realm all together and before that, I think the persona of the Night Market, was just happily existing. So, that might be something we begin to deal with late book 2 and in to book 3.

As for other forces, yes. A lot of the reasons why they have such strict attention to the gates, and want it to be by invitation only, is because of this situation. I think Milo even says at one point, what do people do when they learn of untapped power. They go to war for it. Those gates were destroyed permanently and I do not think there are second chances for those worlds. The Velvet Guard goes to great lengths to shut and destroy those gates.

**How smug is Belladonna in the poly route? She's a Baron and has both the captain of the guard and the physical manifestation of the market itself wrapped around her finger.**

Smug as can be. The moment things calm and she is able to look at what she has, she is going to not let anyone hear the end of it. Bella is the woman who is going to be at a party and casually work everyones titles into the conversation. "I was at the council meeting the other day, you know, the one for Barons, and my partner, I mean, the Warden, was discussing a new policy I think you would find interesting. You should really give it a look. Get yourself behind it all now. You know what they say. You are either on the side of the Night Market or you are not. Oh, look. There's my side now." Grabs MC into their arms.

**What are each of the Ro's favorite texture? (leather, velvet, linen, etc)**

Belladonna likes anything expensive really. Leather and Lace are her favorites.

Gabriel enjoys the feel of silk but rarely indulges.

Hazel loves soft, worn cotton. That kind that has been passed down through generations.

Milo doesn't care. Which is odd since he is a tactile person.

Malcolm loves the feel of smooth clay.

### **If the Ro's were an animal, what would they be?**

Belladonna is offended by this question because she is perfect the way she is.

Gabriel doesn't understand the desire to even want to be an animal so he refuses to answer.

Hazel would love to be a little snow owl. Or a field mouse. Something tiny that gets her into small places.

Milo would be some sort of mutt puppy though he would claim he would be a fierce dragon of some sort.

Malcolm would be a bear or an elephant. Something that is just kind of calm.

### **Orpheus and Eurydice. Which RO looks back?**

I can guarantee that Malcolm and Belladonna would not look back. They would trust the process. Hazel and Gabriel absolutely would though.

And Milo would blindfold himself and sing a loud song so nothing would tempt him, but he might still fall victim to looking back.

### **The following questions are follow up to a recent Lore post about the Magic Ban**

#### **How would this (the ban of magic) work for someone born within TNM post ban?**

It is claimed they are born without magic. Now, we know this not to be true because of Hazel, but for the most part, the magic looks as if it is dying out. Whether that is by force or by choice, it is unclear. Magic is far more prominent outside the market proper though, in the surroundings areas called the Outlands. Though the Velvet Guard kind of lets everyone believe that no one can survive out there.

#### **Similarly, if you died and came back to life, would you return with your magic and need to have it taken away again?**

If you are a Night Market native (born in the market), then no. It is innate to you and they can't do much other than penalize you. If you cause too many problems, they will lock you up or find an excuse to put a dampener on you. But the ones born in the Night Market pre ban, tend to have kept their powers no matter what.

If you are not a native and you die, you would need your powers taken again. Which, is a fun little work around if you are brave enough.

Sometimes, I think there are people who die though, and come back with magic they didn't even know they had because it was taken from them when they were so little.

**As the outlands are a part of TNM I'm guessing you can just walk out of there with magic, is there velvet guard border patrol to keep contraband magic from entering the market?**

The walls itself are the border. Once the alley walls disappear, you are outside the market and outside Velvet Guard jurisdiction. The Velvet Guard have patrols that go through those areas to see if anyone is coming or going, and they do have magic set up to ping if someone crosses the wall, but most people do not return from the Outlands so they are not too concerned.

**Now that we have TNM years, what year are we currently in? Do people recall their birth year?**

Everyone disagrees on what year we are currently in and so birth years have kind of become irrelevant due to that. No one has any official agreement on time and while the Velvet Guard tried at one point, it got messed with quick. Time passes more in experience for people than it does linearly. You can also cross your own timeline within the market if you are not careful.

[First Meeting - Gabriel](#)

[May 5, 2023](#)

A/N: This is taking the first meeting of Gabriel and an MC on the flesh pits route. A little insight into Gabriel's head during this time.

There was a certain smell that lingered around the pits. A mixture of decaying flesh and waste along with the fishy sea salt brine that washed across this area of the beach come high tide. The moans were drowned out by the crashing of the ocean. The ones who screamed loudest were often silenced if they could be heard from over the gavel of the bail block. Gabriel stood there, watching the proceedings, and waiting to toss in the newest addition. They were certainly not an individual that would be conducive to the market. And given their insolence, he was almost positive they had barreled their way into the realm for some sort of nefarious purpose. The fact that they reportedly came thorough tear was far more concerning than their attitude though. It hadn't taken much for Gabriel to decide not to bother with whatever was going on there. They hardly seemed repentant and given the kind of year he was having, he didn't need to add another problem to his list.

They stood only a few feet away, eyes wild as they looked down at the pit. *Good*, Gabriel thought. *Perhaps they will think twice about questioning authority.*

Solia was busy with Elias so it looked as if he was the one who would do the honors. Really, he didn't have time for such mundane tasks. He needed to go check out this tear. Gabriel didn't believe for an instant that they didn't remember who they were and he needed to make sure more like them wasn't about to come crashing through.

Turning to them, he sighed wearily. He used to give some sort of speech before leading them to the edge of their tomb but he found that to be a bit too pretentious.

"I will need your wrists," he told them.

Their gaze snapped back to his. There was always fear at this juncture. Some pleading. Gabriel had become numb to it. While he didn't normally escort individuals down to the beach himself, he had heard the cries and the bribes enough not to care.

"Why?" they asked.

"So I can take off your cuffs." Black marks burned into their skin. Gabriel had used a bit too much magic on them today. Better safe than sorry, however. There was something lingering around them that he couldn't quite discern. Something that called to him. A siren meant to lead him to his end, he was almost certain.

When they stuck out their wrists he felt a small bit of relief over this particular job almost being done. There was a way that they looked at him that Gabriel disliked. They had a gaze that brought forth the hollowness in the pit of his stomach. A nagging voice in the back of his head that said he could be doing better. It was one that he had known quite well after his fall but one he had isolated. This, was different. This stranger looked at him with such utter fierceness that Gabriel felt his back bending to that will. Normally, insults and pleas did not get to him. And while he had kept his face passive for most of their discourse, their words were still there. Still ringing in his ears even now.

*What happened to you to make you think this is an answer to any situation?*

Yes, best he was just done with this. Whatever sorcery they were using to get under his skin was not something Gabriel was interested in.

Curling his fingers along the black cuffs, he focused, willing them to disappear. Long fingers wrapped around his own wrists with a grip born from panic, yanking him backwards. Gabriel only had enough time to look up, eyes wide, as he was pulled down into a pile of bodies.

They got away from him embarrassingly easily as the mass of souls around him writhed and grabbed, hooking on his belt and his coat. The roar that went up around him mimicked the ocean as the drowning prisoners realized just who was now among them. They began to lash out. Blood smeared across him, along with sand and other liquids he did not wish to think about, his own skin breaking open from clawed grips.



Gabriel could see them disappearing. Swimming away from him as they pushed their way through the bodies. Anger bubbled up from within, surfacing from a deep well he had worked hard on locking down through the years. Hands gripped his hair, tearing at his scalp as triumphant screams rang across the beach.

“Just let me go, Warden!”

The call came from somewhere he could not even see, rising up in a mockery of his job. Of his very being.

The cuffs were still there, dragging at his skin now in ways they should not. They were not supposed to work two ways. They should not have been able to pull him further and further down. But as the prisoners helped, pushing him and gnashing their lips in hopes of tearing him in two, he knew that those damn cuffs were not working the way they should. That whoever this person was had magics that he had not seen before.

Having enough of this, he closed his eyes, gathering on that icy tear that he could feel just against his ribs. When he opened his eyes again, light swelled within the gray murk, the bodies flung to the sides, pinned to the wet sand walls. Gabriel cut their cries of pain with a curl of his fist, shattering them midair with a pulse of grace. Meanwhile, prisoner 47b scrambled back on their haunches, slipping through silt and bone.

“Enough,” Gabriel snapped, yanking his arms to his side and pulling them forward. He breathed through his nose as they got up on the platform, rising to the beaches surface. “You are far more irritating than you are worth,” he mumbled. He didn’t know if they heard him. It didn’t matter.

They had used his magic against him.

That shouldn’t have been possible.

Grabbing them by the forearm, grip bruising, he dragged them away from the pit, uncaring as they stumbled, struggling to keep their feet under them. Covered in sand and mud, hair wet with both the ocean and blood, Gabriel marched forward, watching as the sea of people parted for him until he could get them into a darkened area.

“What are you?” he demanded, done playing games. Their gaze was distant, the lanterns from beyond reflected in their gaze.

“Warden? Are you alright?”

When they broke off into a run, Gabriel felt a roar of irritation rise in his throat. They were easy to catch. Easy to pin down into the sand. And far too easy to subdue.

Flipping them over, he was ready to kill them right there. Bury their body within the sand and let the Deep take them.

But he froze.

*This is barbaric.*

*You must realize that the punishment does not fit the crime.*

*You can't do this. I did nothing wrong.*

The warmth of the Knowing's embrace had been ripped from him leaving him shredded and alone on a desolate beach, screaming to the stars. He was meant to protect. He was meant to help those in need. It was his calling.

Yet, the years had not shaped up to that.

Somehow, this one person was reminding him of that.

Gabriel knew he shouldn't listen. He knew he should snuff out the light he saw in their eyes. They were certainly a problem that he did not need. His fingers flexed, the power to do so burning beneath his gloved hands.

And yet nothing.

He didn't do it.

Because in the end, Gabriel was nothing but a fallen. A weak excuse for the kind of person he should be.

He grabbed them that night, leading them out of the beach and sending them towards the Albright girl. A place to simply shove them until he could figure out what was wrong with him. No one person was supposed to affect him like this. He had been beyond that for quite some time and yet tonight, without due reason, something flickered in his gut. A suspicious amount of guilt was creeping in and this stranger, prisoner 47b, was to blame.

When he entered his office, he sat down. Old food having spoiled in the corner of his desk.

He didn't even know their name.

And yet, their eyes haunted him. Searing into his soul. Try as he might, he couldn't erase the look of disappointment they bestowed upon him when he closed his eyes. Nor could he shake the feeling that they expected more out of the Warden of the market.

Gabriel stared at his desk that night, trying to lose himself in paperwork. All the while, he could feel the stranger's fingers still curled around his wrists. As if they too had marked him.



[Bella Art - NSFW](#)

[May 5, 2023](#)

[Dev Blog 5/6/23](#)

[May 6, 2023](#)

Trying something new this weekend!

So, I've been a bit absent lately. Not going to lie, my mental health took a nose dive right around the time that I finished this book. The nights I released the last chapter, both public and for Patreon, I had some really shitty family stuff happening and I released the chapters for something good to counter it. Then, while life has not been bad, I had to come to the realization that writing is such a coping mechanism for me, that by not writing, and instead editing, I lost the thing that was kind of keeping me focused on the good in life.

But! I took care of this. I've gotten some help and I am feeling better. Editing though? Not something that is sustainable for long periods of time. Not for my sanity, at least. And what I thought was going to be a really easy process for me, turns out, is an incredibly long process instead. Which, is not going to do well for me at all.

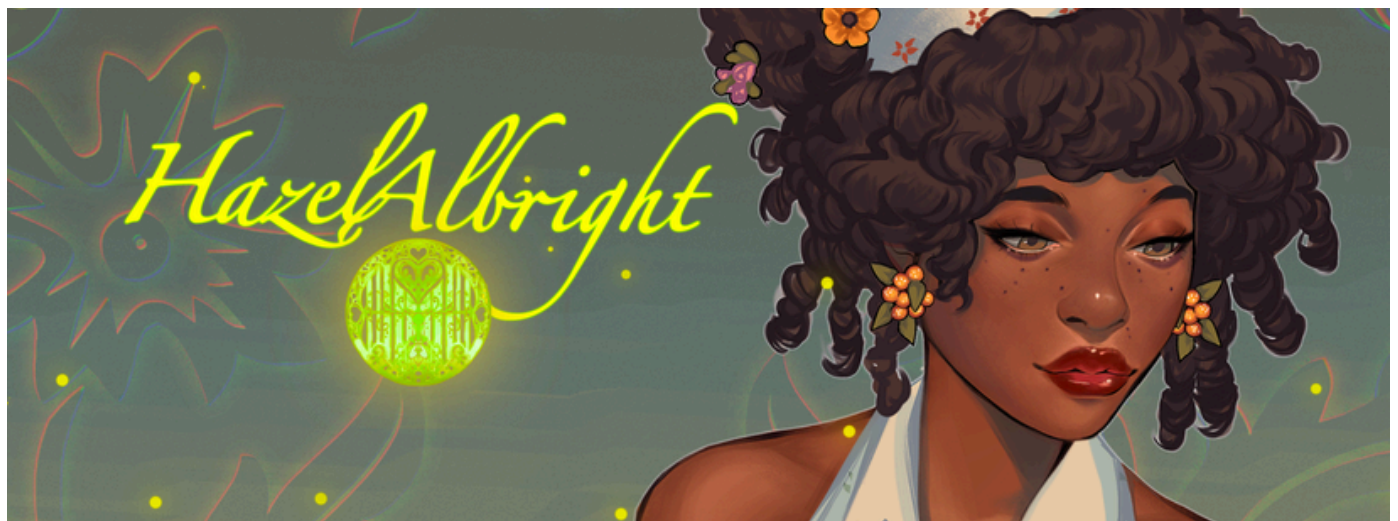
So today, I am trying something new. My husband is off on the weekends and him and I have decided that for the time being, we are going to just tag team this house and the kids. Normally, I kept the weekends free for family time. I think we are in a period however that that might not be possible. So, I'm working straight through weekends now in hopes of getting these edits DONE because I do not want to be doing this during the summer break. My teens have about a month and a half left of school. My littles get me all to themselves during the weekdays. So, I think it is time to just do some crunch time work and see if that can get these edits done and over with. Because boy do I need them to not go on and on and on. I keep having to remind myself that a happy and not stressed mom, is going to be a far better mom for these babies. And, since we rely on my Night Market money, the option to just let it drag out isn't really one I'd like to take.

So, throw those Tumblr asks my way. Shout out at me on Discord. They keep the work day interesting. I'm starting to edit chapter three today. I'll give you an update at the end of my work day on Monday to let you know how far I managed to get. :)

Zinnia

[Hazel - First Meeting](#)

[May 13, 2023](#)



Viewing the world through a constructs eyes did not do it justice. Hazel had always been very aware of the limitations her magic provided. While she could travel through the streets through a body made of sticks and twigs, she could see and feel very little. Yet, it was a comfort in a way. Knowing that if someone did say something, or if someone tried to do something, the effects would be dulled. Hazel herself would wake back up in the safety of her apothecary, feeling drained, but still safe. It was a small concession that got her through her day.

It wasn't that Hazel didn't like people. She very much did, in fact. It was the unpredictable nature of people that bothered her. The unpredictable nature of the market, in the end. But the market couldn't get to her here. She used to think that the apothecary was separate. Its own little dimension somewhere. The stretch of land she called her own had attached itself to the end of the market and had existed there without complaint. It was of course a fairy tale that she only told herself. But when the panic filled her throat, it helped calm her down.

The sound of footsteps echoed down the stairwell. It had been two days since her newcomer had arrived at the shop. They had mostly slept. Hazel had peeked in on them from time to time, casting protection through the room, allowing them a dreamless sleep. Their body was still healing and while Hazel didn't know exactly who this person was, she did know that most of the time, a hurt body didn't know when to slow down.

"You're up," she chirped.

They looked startled, their eyes skittering around the room until they landed on her.

Hazel felt her stomach clench and her breath freeze in her chest. They were so beautiful. Or handsome. She supposed a person could be any. Either way, standing there bedraggled and half asleep, Hazel couldn't help but think about how perfect they were.

It had been the first thing she thought when she had seen them, scared and alone.

It could have been an act. It had been numerous times before.

So who was to really blame her for casting a premonition charm to make sure that this soul wasn't about to cause her harm?

Clearing her throat, Hazel gathered her skirts and went towards the back counter. The charm had settled. The puff of smoke dissipating. It wouldn't be long now.

"I have some food over there if you're hungry."

There hadn't been, of course. She had quickly flicked her fingers and filled the table with enough bread and cheese to cover the expanse of it, along with a large pot of tea that would change to whatever they liked upon drinking it. For some reason, that excited her the most. She desperately wanted to see what kind of tea they enjoyed. Hazel could tell a lot about a person given their tea preferences.

“How long have I been out?”

“Two days.”

“What?!”

Hazel took a step back. She probably should have handled that a bit more delicately. Sometimes she forgot that people needed a bit of time. That news needed to be broken gently to them.

“It’s okay,” she said softly. “You obviously needed your rest. And who could blame you after everything you’ve gone through? Now, please. Eat.”

There was a warm sense of pleasure that washed over her as they went to the table and began gathering some food onto their plate. Hazel bounced on her toes as a pleased expression crossed their lips at the first bite of bread.

“You really didn’t have to do this,” they were saying.

She didn’t do much of anything really. And if they were already showing such joy at food that was conjured, Hazel could not wait to bake something with her own hands. They didn’t know bliss until they had a slice of Hazel’s homemade sourdough with fresh harvested honey.

“It was no problem at all,” she answered. “I just finished filling my orders.”

Hazel watched them closely as she went to sit by their side. There was something different about them. Hazel had helped many refugees during her days. She had sold tinctures and tonics to a good portion of the market. To say she was familiar with a wide walk of life was an understatement. But this one, this individual, was something so much more.

Hazel couldn’t put her finger on it.

Already, there was such a draw. One that she wanted to explore. Hazel had very little experience in life with any sort of close and personal relationships. A few near misses in the past. A couple of encounters that she thought she had wanted but ended up walking away from in the end. Being the daughter of the very woman who nearly burned down the market, didn’t make for a lot of friendly faces to appear in her life.

But this one....

It was the way they looked at the world around them. As if they unconsciously could see so much more. They had a willingness to believe in what they could not see and a kindness that Hazel could feel like a gentle wind upon her cheeks.

Whoever this stranger was, they were pure. They were good. They were here for a purpose that would sweep Hazel up into a tumbling rush of emotion and joy that she didn’t wish to shy away from. For the



first time she wanted to dive headlong into that chaos and relish in what it had to offer.

"I'm sorry I didn't stay awake to help with all this."

The words startled her out of her reverie as she looked at them once again. Flashes of holding them. Being held by them. Lazy mornings lying on the couch upstairs while the wisps hummed them into wakefulness. Long herbal baths with roses and wandering hands. The world singing around them.

Clearing her throat, Hazel gave them a smile. "Milo was a trooper and helped out last night."

Whoever this was, they were hers. Hazel could already see it. Could already *feel* it. And her heart felt giddy for the future that was about to unfold.

### [Malcolm - First Meeting](#)

[May 13, 2023](#)



Malcolm stormed through the streets. Like a fool, he had wound up at Milo's last night, shaking and sweating as raw power coursed through him. There was nowhere else he could think of going and if he was going to die, he wanted it to be in Milo's arms. On a good day he could admit it was because the two of them would always be connected. That the love they shared had not diminished. On a bad day it was because he wanted to hurt Milo just as much as he had hurt him in the past. Have the last say in an endless argument between the two of them. Not one of Malcolm's finer moments, he was sure.

The Gatekeeper.

It was knowledge that had slowly pushed its way into him. Like an old scar being rediscovered. The man who had died had been the Gatekeeper. What luck Malcolm had for him to simply run into his knife, hot



blood spilling across his hand. It was an accident. That was what Malcolm kept telling himself. But there was a very small part of him that thought that maybe the man had wanted to die. And really, what did that say about this job if that was the only way out that a person saw.

Winding through the alleys, blindly going where his feet carried him, Malcolm shook his head. He had gone to Milo last night because he needed to rest. Paranoia had crept along his mind in intrusive ways and the only thing he could think of, when he was honest, was getting to the one person he knew would not stab him in the back. Hazel had been his other option but in the end, he already felt as if he had given his sister the raw end of a life deal. This wasn't something he was particularly happy to bring to her door. At least Milo was used to the falls of life.

When he woke, Malcolm had slipped from the distillery, stopping to spend a moment with Ever on the way out. She looked more corporeal this morning and he didn't know if that was from his newfound powers or if she was special like her brother. From there, he had just walked. Not wishing to go home, unable to sit still.

He walked and walked until he came to the forgotten portions of the market. The ones where the lights were either burnt out or flickering in a dying beat of a listless heart. He could feel it. Here he could feel the pulse of the market itself. His surroundings turned gray and dim and the world around him began to bleed like wet paint, puddling on the ground before sinking between the cracks in the cobblestone.

"Hello."

Malcolm stopped, turning around. No one was there and he was sure no one had followed him. He could hear and see everything so much clearer now. Already his skills were refined. Malcolm was trained to know if someone was on his tail. With the added power that was ravaging his body...

"Over here."

Again, his head whipped to the side. There was no one. But the voice had sounded as if it were right in his ear.

"I can't see you," Malcolm said hesitantly. The voice was neither man nor woman. Something other. As if it were trying to settle on a persona itself.

"Oh. Sorry."

A light shimmered before him as something appeared. And something was really the only description for it. They flickered between images of people that Malcolm knew, pulling in little bits that stuck out the most. Milo's hair. Hazel's skin. Rooke's smile.

The eyes were different though. Two bright lanterns, glowing with a steady pulse.

"Hi," they said.

Malcolm sucked in a breath, unable to keep the shock from his face. "Hello."

"You're the new one then. The Gatekeeper."

Malcolm had known. He had *known*. And yet— Hearing them say it somehow made it painfully real.

"Are you up for the job, Gatekeeper?"

"I'm not sure I have a choice." Death was his other choice. And he didn't want to leave Hazel. Milo could survive his absence. He didn't believe his sister could.

The being smiled sadly at him. Malcolm didn't see them so much as walk as opposed to shift in front of him. He didn't flinch as they reached out, their hand cupping his cheek. It felt like nothing. There was a firm pressure, letting him know they were there, but no heat. No ridges or bumps. As if this being was trying to mimic life and hadn't figured out how.

But the eyes...

"You won't be the Gatekeeper for long," they said sadly.

Malcolm startled. "What?"

"I'm sorry." Their voice was filled with such sorrow that tears pricked Malcolm's own eyes. "I tried to change it," they said. "I hoped— but you can't do what needs to be done. So Fate will step in. Self-preservation is awful sometimes."

"What are you—?"

They leaned forward, pressing their head to his. He felt a breath shudder through him. A strong resolve that it was going to be okay. That his end was not the end. A tear slipped from his eyes.

"So I'm going to die."

"No," they whispered. "But your greatness will not come from being a Gatekeeper. It will come from something so much more."

"What?"

"I can't tell you," they laughed, the lights above lighting bright and bursting into sparks of glitter before dissipating into the thick gray around them. "Gatekeeper," they said softly, still pressed close. "My Gatekeeper."

"You just said I wasn't meant to be one."

"Not for long," they said with a shake of their head. "But the things you will do for me," they sighed softly, their breath rushing over him in a calm. "I am only sorry for the pain that will come with it."

Malcolm swallowed, feeling the grief spill across him. "Whose pain?"

"All of ours."

There was a violent shake of denial. He made to step back. He made to leave. Yet, he found himself pressing closer. "What are you?" He had to know. The air rushed around him, twisting and pulling as a future was set.

"Everything," they said simply. "Life. Air. Experience" Their eyes ticked upwards.

"Lamplight," Malcolm said softly.

The smile they gave him in return was blinding. "I like that."

When they stepped away, Malcolm sucked in a deep breath, feeling his knees wobble at the unsteadiness of the world around him.

"You are not meant to save me, Gatekeeper," they said. "But I appreciate the effort in trying."

Malcolm was on his hands and knees. Alone. The dirty cobblestone alley feeling harsh beneath his palms as his skin scraped against the ground and split open. He caught a sob behind his teeth. Something that shook him and that may not have even been his own. He was connected though. To the world. To the lights. To the Gatekeepers of the past and the future. He could feel the pull in every direction. The gates that existed. The way they cracked and some of them tore.

It was overwhelming. Far too much. And he had felt as if he had been going mad.

And then their touch.

Just like that, the storm had calmed.

The Lamplight had saved him.

Staring up at the broken lanterns above, he rolled onto his back, blinking at their despondent shape.

He was going to die.

And so were they.

And there was nothing he could do.

[Milo - First Meeting](#)

[May 19, 2023](#)



The flames stretched high into the night, bonfires and torches dotting the beach to stave off the shadows. Milo walked among them, maneuvering between the walls of heat, eyes cast down towards the ocean waves. The cages were stacked high tonight, filled with more people than he had seen in a while. He recognized most of them. People that he had danced with in the taverns. Ones he had worked with for a time. It was easy to tell the newcomers apart from the people who had been here before. Repeat offenders trapped within those bars looked bored. Either because they were planning to escape or because they already had someone lined up to buy their bail. The newcomers, however, they had a stench of fear around them. It was the kind that made the crowd rabid. They became hungry for it, heckling the prisoners as they sat in old wing back chairs, sipping their wine and enjoying their night.

Except for one.

There was one cage that only a few passed by. The one at the end of the row, nearest to the cave system and at the edge of water. The light didn't really reach them. Somehow, it made most circumvent the individual all together. Or maybe something was pulsing through the beach, keeping most away.

Taking a drink of his ale, he tipped his head, looking at the individual within the bars. It was a joke. It had to be a joke of some kind.

The sky had torn open with a bloody rip against his side. The pain had pulsed through him and the rest of the market as a silent scream rolled through the alleys to reach him. Milo had expected it. Had been ready for it. What he was not ready for, was the fact that a person was dragged towards the cells. That the Velvet Guard apprehended someone. When Milo had rushed towards the alley, he expected to find a glowing orb. A broken portion of a lantern.

A rock.

Instead, there was a fully formed person being dragged away, a cowl over their head as they breathed heavily with confusion.

Milo had stood there for a few minutes before going towards the tear, picking up every pebble and stray bit of alley wall. He held the debris in his hand, willing it to be the piece of the market he brought forth. Because that's what was supposed to happen. A piece. Just a piece. Something he could keep close, let gather power, and then destroy in order to patch up the sky. But everything felt flat in his hands. No spark. No trace of magic. Just dust and concrete and mortar.

So Milo went to the beach. Because the only thing he could think of was to go find the one that had been dragged away. They had to have stolen the piece of the market he needed. They probably had the fucking rock in their pocket.

He watched as they reached through the bars, feeling against the cogs for the lock. He snorted a bit into his beer as he watched them fumble. "Holy fuck," he whispered. They acted as if no one could see them. They were leaned halfway out of the cage in what they thought was some sort of inconspicuous manner when in reality, it was clear what they were trying to do. Yet, the guards didn't seem to notice. No one seemed to notice.

Milo looked at them incredulously. "Oh, darlin'," he whispered. "Come on," he urged, cheering on the blatant display of rebellion. "Almost there. You got it." He hissed in sympathy as they flinched, stumbling back as someone passed them. Losing their confidence momentarily as they stared around the beach in confusion. Far too much confusion for a Night Market resident.

Downing the rest of his drink, Milo approached. They were a thief. Someone that might be working against him. Someone had caught a whiff of who he was and what he was doing and they had been there to intervene. He was just going to go up there. Get that rock and... and they were trying to break out again.

Planting his feet in the sand, he stood right by the cage, leaning against it. "Bold." They jumped, having not noticed his approach. Okay, maybe not a thief then. "Breaking out while dozens of people mill about. Not to mention the set of plain clothed guards that are watching you as we speak."

They looked at him with wide eyes and for a moment, Milo thought he saw the glint of light within them. It was nothing more than a reflection of the flames beyond.

"Didn't notice them, did you," he commented, continuing to talk as he looked them over. They had no pockets. There was no way they could have hid something from him. The guard would have patted them down. Confiscated their items. Milo had checked the log though for Prisoner 47b and there was nothing that was on their person. Maybe whatever it was, was just that small.

"Can you help me get out of here?"

And they spoke. They spoke in a way that curled against him, tugging right beneath his belly button. Milo gripped the cage to keep from tipping forward towards the voice.

*What the fuck?*

“How’d you wind up here, darlin?”

*Tell the truth. Tell the truth. Who the fuck are you?*

“Wrong place at the wrong time.”

Milo felt his body vibrate. There was that tug again. The one that sang. It was the same tug he felt when a gate was about to open. The kind of tug he felt when he was lying in pain, screaming into the night and that soothing embrace of the lantern filled sky descended on him to hold him until he calmed.

It was the same tug that he had felt each time he had tried and failed to save the Night Market.

*What. The. Fuck.*

Oh, he was going to get them out of here. Whether it was him to break the lock or them, he was going to get them out of here. Because they had what he needed. They had to have what he needed. But it was a game. The dance of the market. Someone who was sussing out the Gatekeeper.

Milo may have been a paranoid fucker.

Or, perhaps he already knew and just couldn’t fathom what that would mean.

Later, as they fled through the tunnels, as they ducked through the guard and into the escape route he had used most of his life, Milo looked at them. Their eyes glowed. He could see it. Twin points of light deep within their gaze.

“Are you going to kill me?”

Milo’s heart dropped. If they were real, if they were a person, this was not what he had intended to call forward. There had to be a catch. There was something on them. Something they were going to produce. Milo was aware that magic never went the way one expected but the discrepancy of thinking he was going to get a rock, and instead getting, *this*, was a little too wild. Even for him.

“You– shit. You really don’t know who you are. You just walked down this tunnel with a stranger, hoping I wouldn’t leave you down here to die?”

What the hell was wrong with them? Milo’s heart beat wildly in his chest as he thought about it. No. No no no. They were going to produce whatever he needed. Whoever this person was, they were an innocent bystander. Someone the market had chosen to lead him to the last component of the spell. His dousing rods, if you will. Because the market was not this cruel. He had called on it for help. Delved into dark magic to talk to the market itself. There was no way the market sent a sentient version of them, for him to kill. It was cruel and unnecessary and when he looked around the world, he didn’t think that was who the market wanted to me.



No, this person would produce what he needed. They would find it. Milo just had to stick by their side. Make sure this person wasn't going to get caught up in the fucked up crossfire that was this spell and the market's dark sense of humor.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. Because he was. This person was innocent. They weren't meant to get caught up in this game.

As he led them out of the tunnels and towards the market, Milo tried to gather himself in the dark, listening to their footsteps behind him. Poor thing. They didn't even know what they had gotten themselves into. And fuck the market for bestowing this upon someone so naive. Milo shook his head. He'd protect them. Or at the very least, keep them out of harms way. Then, when he found his rock, he'd get them to safety.

[May Q & A Questions](#)

[May 26, 2023](#)

I need questions for this months q & a please! Drop them in the comments, send them through Tumblr, or on discord. Look forward to hearing from you all!

[Belladonna - First Meeting](#)

[May 26, 2023](#)



There were two things Belladonna liked to do on her day off. Curl up in the solitude of her room to read a book and not see anyone. So, when Milo Next asked for a meeting, her initial reaction was absolutely



not. In fact, her initial reaction was to laugh uproariously at him and remind him that she worked for no one. And then, she had paused. In his inquiry he stated that the person he was sending her way was new to the market. Without memory. Not exactly an unheard of situation within their world but then he went on to say that there was something different about this one. That he was willing to owe her a favor if he was wrong.

And Belladonna did enjoy collecting favors from erroneous men.

But when Belladonna met them, she forgot about that.

Lost. It was what they thought of themselves. A lost little lamb unintentionally walking to the slaughter. It was a persona they wore like a cloak, huddled beneath the shroud without the knowledge of how to shed it from their skin. There was something very different about this dear heart. Lost but intentionally so. Confused but with purpose. It was an odd thing to observe, and something Belladonna was unsure if she was even correct about.

There was something to their eyes, however.

A light that Belladonna was familiar with but she didn't know why.

It called to her.

"So you're telling me I'm just supposed to sit back and do nothing?" they asked. There was a range of emotions behind their eyes that she just wanted to take. To toss elsewhere. But anyone that was going to live in the market had to stand on their own.

"I am. Because that is how chess is played," she told them.

Whether they were here on their own volition or not was not so much the concern Belladonna had. What she was far more concerned with was the call of blood. The way it began to sing to her. The longer Belladonna was around them, the more their heart matched to the beat of her own. And that was not good.

The meeting was done and Belladonna should have sent them away. Technically, she fulfilled her obligation to Milo upon taking the contract. She had given this poor little one more information than she thought was necessary considering it was free. And yet...

"The information portion of our meeting is done," Belladonna said softly, "but that does not mean you have to leave. Please. Rest with me a while. Allow me to take care of you."

The words that escaped her surprised even herself. This was not her way. She did not give handouts except for those initial meetings. When she was evaluating the type of person they were and deciding whether they were a threat to the market. The fact that she was inviting them to stay was a red flag. But when they agreed, oh did her blood sing. It called to them, wishing to curl them closer, her fangs pricking at the bottom of her lip in preparation for a bite.

Outwardly, she knew she showed nothing more. That she was the perfect picture of poise. But heat crawled within her as she was pulled towards this soul, desperate to take them and make them her own.

It was a dangerous road and one that she didn't want to go down. She had heard rumors of what that did to individuals. She had seen the results of it coming to fruition once or twice. But this was too much. When Belladonna had been young she had succumbed to the feeling and lounged in its bliss. But she was older now and knew far better.

Placing them in the water, Belladonna pressed her luck, getting behind them, bare thighs squeezing their shoulders. Her fingers itched to press down further, to curl beneath the water and coax pleasure from them. To drink the sound of their moans. The desire curled around her with a tight grip that she knew she would have to sever. Because now was not the time. There was so much more that Belladonna had to do. She could not afford such obsessions such as the one in front of her. No matter how warm their body was. How pliant and supple they could be.

Dipping her head, she ghosted her breath across their neck and watched them shiver. It gripped her tight.

When they left, Belladonna stood, staring at the place they had sat. The candles in the room flickered with their movement. Eyes flashing red, she breathed in deeply their scent. It was home. Warm light with a richness of copper and the beautiful taste of rushing blood on her tongue. Food would taste like ash now until she could sip from their neck. Life would seem duller.

Belladonna sighed in irritation. She had found what was hers and it couldn't have come at a more inopportune time.

[May Q & A](#)

[May 29, 2023](#)

**Spoilers ahead for Book One. Read with caution.**

**What is something that can make the characters genuinely laugh? What's their sense of humor like?**

Hazel laughs when others are happy. She is one of those people that if people around her are enjoying themselves, she is smiling and laughing, whether a joke has been told or not. She finds it hilarious when people can poke fun at themselves. And of course, any time Mr. Billows does anything cat like, she thinks it's adorably funny. She also likes puns. The ones that make absolutely no sense.

Gabriel is a tough one to get to laugh. Though, I think when he does laugh, he is even surprised by the sound of it. Very standard jokes with linear punch lines will get him every time though. Humor was not a big part of the Knowing so the jokes we all roll our eyes at, he finds fascinating.

Belladonna has to be taken by surprise to genuinely laugh. She is in control of herself so often that even if she does find something funny, she can keep it close to chest. But when someone says something that surprises her, or that she finds unexpected, she will laugh. Her humor is a much more dry sense of humor, however. Very tongue in cheek.

Milo finds antics funny. He is a practical joke kind of guy and people playing pranks on others he thinks is hilarious. If Milo can pull off a prank, he is full of joy. But if someone can pull one over on Milo? That's what he truly finds amusement in. He still laughs over the idea that MC was able to lock him in a cage (if you chose that route) And puns. Milo is a puns kind of guy right along with Hazel.

Malcolm laughs at cleverness. Clever jokes. Clever quips. Things that require a bit more thought to them. Dumb humor is not his thing. But he also finds a bit of joy when someone proclaims boldly they can do something and then fails miserably at it. He's pretty big self-important people getting their dues, though he will never admit it.

### **What do the RO's truly fear the most?**

Hazel fears losing the people that are close to her. She does not have much in the way of family and friends and what she does have, she keeps close. She also fears society in general and rarely leaves the apothecary unless she forms a construct to do so.

Gabriel fears disappointing the Knowing. Despite having Fallen and having no contact with them, he does fear that he is not on the path that they wished him to be on. He fears his purpose in life and the Knowings are not the same.

Belladonna in general, fears nothing. Which, is actually a fault for her in the end. Which we will hopefully be exploring in book 2.

Milo fears his father. He still has nightmares of that man coming back for him. In those dreams he's helpless to do anything against it.

Malcolm fears death. He does not want to be a spirit wandering the market alone. He also has a fear of his mother, though that one he has worked through a bit more.

### **What is something that our Lamplight can do for the RO's that would make them feel all warm and sappy on the inside?**

For Hazel, it's baking with her. Being genuinely happy to exist by her side is something she melts to. Before, it has always been about what Hazel could do for others. When someone doesn't want her to do anything other than just be there, she is overwhelmed with love for that person.

For Gabriel, bringing him food. Someone caring for him without prompt gets to him every time.

For Belladonna, reading to her. Taking a quiet moment to lay with her in front of a fire and read or be read to.

For Milo, holding his hand. It is such a small gesture but for Milo, it is a way to ground him. Milo can so easily be scattered elsewhere do to being the Gatekeeper. A hand in his helps keep him calm.

For Malcolm, caring for the ones he loves as well. He finds someone who cares for the people he cares for, to be some of the most genuine and wonderful people around. And he will guard them jealously.

### **Are there dragons in the Night Market?**

I mean, there's got to be, right? How could there not? There are rumors of large, predatory creatures in the Outlands. I think if real ones existed, they would be there. Paper ones I'm sure have been constructed at some point. And, down in the Deep, depending on the path you take, you do meet a dragon like creature. :) More on him later.

### **If Milo had shared his plan and the fact that he's the gatekeeper with the other ROs and Barons, who among them would have agreed to help? If anyone agreed, would they then have changed their mind once they realized the piece of TNM they got was a person instead of an inanimate object?**

This will absolutely be talked about in book 2 a bit more. I think the idea of the ritual itself is something that would have caused a lot of divide. What Milo used to get the MC here is something that I truly do think some would consider an asset while others would think it a detriment. Those opinions could have easily shifted from day to day as well. So it is harder to say who would have been on board from the get go. I mean, Milo wasn't even on board for what he was doing. He just had run out of options.

As for what they thought when the realization came that the summoned object was a person? Hazel and Malcolm would have been the ones that would have said crossing this line was too far. While in the end, the outcome would have maybe been the same, they would have adamantly been against it. Going so far as to probably try and thwart it.

Gabriel and Belladonna however, would have agreed with Milo. Because it was for the greater good. Without the sacrifice, they were all going to die and Gabriel and Belladonna are both people who measure out every outcome. Not sacrificing the MC just simply would not have been an option for them because there would be no world left. Gabriel is supposed to protect the market at all costs. And Belladonna is a woman who can make the hard choices without question.

**This is specifically for Bella because I'm curious to see her reaction. What if MC comes back to life but with no memories of her and their time together? I don't take Bella as someone who would let her dear heart go easily.**

I think it would be a shock to her in the beginning. I almost see Belladonna as someone who would not quite know what to even do in that scenario. She is a very calculating woman. But, if the MC continued not to remember her? Belladonna would not be letting them go. In fact, now, Belladonna has the playbook on what MC likes and doesn't have to hold back because the issue of dealing with Kavatti is not standing in the way.

So you better believe MC would suddenly be courted very intensely by a sexy vampire lady.

**If all the RO's had a tumblr blog, what would they post about? What kind of blogs would they follow or how would they interact with people?**

Oh, I love this one.

Hazel would be a cat blog. She would be posting homemade sourdough starter recipes, aesthetic pictures of herb gardens, and all of the cat memes.

Gabriel would have a Tumblr with nothing on it. He may have reblogged one post six years ago about rules and order and then realize that it was mocking rules and order and had to delete it.

Belladonna would be posting book reviews under an entirely different name.

Milo would be posting and following anything that is a meme. He would be making fun of himself, others, and posting landscapes with inspirational quotes on it, so Hazel could find them and reblog them.

Malcolm's would be a music blog. That man loves music to no end and would be posting about different shows, supporting local artists, concert dates, etc.

**Why did Milo set up the meeting with Belladonna?**

I have been waiting for someone to ask this. :) Milo was being a bit sneaky with this one. There are two ways to look at it and I will let you decide which one you believe.

One.

When he saw MC, he thought to himself there was no way in hell that was the piece that got summoned forward. That it was obviously a ruse. A joke. A person that held a little piece of the night market in their pocket. So, with Bella being the eyes and ears of the market, he sent MC there to be found out. Because surely Belladonna would suss out what was actually happening. That this person was a fraud.

And then Bella didn't.

And then Bella confirmed there was something different about the MC.

And Milo began to freak the fuck out and work through some major denial.

Two.

He was hoping someone would stop him.

[Milo, Malcolm, Hazel - The past](#)

[Jun 4, 2023](#)

Authors note: Set right after the fire that burned the alley outside of Hazel's home.

Laying back on the floor, Milo watched the dust swirl up above. Little flecks of gold rained down around him in a swirling, slow motion miasma. It was beautiful really. Like an evening rain shower. That is, until it got into his eyes and nose and he was coughing and sneezing with a beam laying over his chest.

"Are you okay?" Hazel shouted at him from above, peering down at him from the rafters.

"Yeah," he coughed. "Great, actually." Getting hit with a wooden beam absolutely did not hurt or make him question why he felt he was an adept carpenter. "Just going to lay her for a while in case my spine is broke. Might decide to make this my home."

The little squeak of worry that escaped Hazel was accompanied by her scurrying down the ladder and to Milo's side. Her hands fluttered around him, helping him push the wooden beam from his front.

"Can you move? Can you talk?"

"Definitely cannot talk." When she smacked his chest, he cried out in pain, in turn making her shriek again, her hands fluttering, the cycle starting all over.

"Oh, Milo. I'm so sorry. I thought I had it."

Milo had lifted the beam to her, asking her several times if she was going to be able to keep hold of it. She was using magic of course so he wasn't really concerned about her strength. More her focus. It had been fickle as of late.. Ever since the fire and Lucinda. Hazel had assured him, however, that she was fine and so Milo let go. And the beam was lifted high into the air until Hazel's eye caught on something in the alley beyond and she dropped the beam. Right on Milo.

"What did you even see?" Milo asked sitting up.

"It's nothing," she assured. There was a hole in the roof of the apothecary. It gave the perfect view of the still smoldering alleyway. "They're still looking for survivors, you know."

Milo's heart fell a little at the look of hope on her face. "It's been two weeks, Hazel. I think what we're hearing from that alley is spirits not moving on."

"No, I know." She ducked her head, moving her fingers through the dust on the ground. The soot had all been swept away at this point but they could still smell the remnants of that day. "Do you think mom is in there?"

Milo hoped not. He hoped Lucinda burned and he hoped it was painful. But he wasn't going to tell Hazel that. What good would it do? The woman at least couldn't hurt her any longer.

"Hey," he said, "let's forget about the beams today. Want to get the front counter built? You got all those shelves up too. We need to be putting your stuff on it."

Hazel's eyes ticked towards the back wall. There were a few bottles that had survived. Tonics and hexes that had always been there. "I mean, I have some stuff."

Milo nodded. Getting up, he took a spare box and went over to the shelf, eyeing the contents curiously. Bestial hooves floated in some sort of amber liquid while other tonics hissed at him from beneath their cork. One by one, Milo started putting them in the box.

"What are you doing?"

"Disposing of them."

"Milo! That's product. You can't just—"

"Nope. Non negotiable." He shook his hand as a particular vial tried to bite him. "This is your moms shit. Not yours. And if you want to make the apothecary something helpful, then her stuff needs to go."

"But—"

"Haze," he turned to her, putting the box aside. "You are so much better than your mom. Get the creepy cows heads off the shelf and put your herb bundles up there. Flower vases. Affirmation shit and crystals or something."

She blinked at him. "You really have no idea what ingredients go into potions do you?"

"No. But it's not going to be this shit."

With a sigh, she walked forward, beginning to help him. When he bumped her hip she giggled a little. With each remnant of her mother that was taken away, it was as if a shroud lifted from the shop itself. If Milo had it his way, he was going to erase every bit of Lucinda Alright from this home.

"I was thinking of making Mr. Billows his own little sanctuary on the upper shelves. Give him something to climb."



"You sure you don't want to set him loose? I'm sure he would be much happier down at the creek."

"Milo, that's my cat."

"It's really your own personalized demon but sure. We'll go with cat."

The front door opened, a draft of cool air breezing past the dust and broken boxes that littered the floor. A few wisps ducked inside, making their home in the upper corners of the shop, shedding light on just how much work had to be done.

"Brought food."

Milo looked over his shoulder spying Malcolm with several bags. His hair was pulled back today, his pants and shirt loose. Milo wasn't going to lie, the new look was doing it for him.

"What the hell, Button?" Malcolm asked, setting down the bags. "Why do you look like you got in a fight with a tree and lost?"

"It was a beam, thank you. And Hazel tried to bludgeon me with it."

When Malcolm looked at his sister, she just nodded primly. "He was mouthing off. Someone had to silence him."

"Alright, both of you need to eat. You've been at this all day. I'll take over for a bit."

"Fine by me." Milo began digging into the bags as Malcolm grabbed some of the nearby tools. He had been working on getting the hearth back in order, dragging stone up from the creek to rebuilt it. "The hell, Mal? There's too much green in this food!"

"Yeah. Weird. It's like you need a vegetable occasionally."

"Oh! Sokolata stew," Hazel cried. "My favorite. Thanks, Mal."

He smiled that small little smirk of his and just nodded to her before beginning to plaster the mortar of the stone.

As Hazel munched happily, Milo picked at his plate of root vegetables. There was chicken and rice in it but he was almost certain they were spinach, disguised as protein. "What were you doing today?" he called out to Mal. "Thought you were going to be here this morning."

"Was taking care of something."

Milo paused. He knew that tone. It was the one that said he was taking care of something that directly was going to fuck with Milo.

"Am I going to pick up my job tonight to find that I've already failed?" he asked.

"Don't know," Malcolm said with a shrug. "But, you probably shouldn't go out and buy anything big."

Milo tossed aside the food, and really, he had just been looking for an excuse to do so. "Fuck you, Mal. You could have at least given me a head start."

"Not the way it works," Malcolm sang at him.

Hazel looked back and forth between them. "You two really need to stop taking the opposite jobs. It's just cruel at this point."

Neither man said anything to that. They had discussed it a few times but ultimately, the thrill of trying to one up each other won out each time.

"I'm going to go down to the creek and grab a few of the big willow branches. I want to make a welcome totem for over the door. Want the rest of my stew, Milo."

"No. I want actual food."

Hazel shrugged. "Suit yourself."

She left with a hum.

Milo watched Malcolm for a minute as he moved stone from one side of the room to the other, piling it high before slapping mortar across the surface and leveling it out. It was going to be a huge fireplace. One that could practically see Hazel standing up in. Malcolm's idea was to make it so she could cook several things in there at once. That, and he planned to buy an enchantment for rose colored fire. Something that wouldn't look like the orange flames that had shot through the market a few weeks prior.

"Did you really fuck up my job?" Milo asked.

"Did you really mess with my client last week?"

"I didn't mess with him."

"What do you call breaking three fingers?"

Milo thought about that for a moment. "Collateral damage?"

The look that Malcolm shot over his shoulder clearly said he was not amused. His client probably wasn't either. "Cute."

Pushing away from the back shelves, Milo came over to him, sitting by his side. "I know. I'm pretty adorable. Irresistible, some might even say."

"I don't think anyone says that."

"I would make a 'your mom' joke here but, you know, gross." Even Malcolm was wrinkling his nose at that.

"Are you going to be helpful or are you going to annoy me?" he asked him.

"I can be both." Milo didn't hand him any of the stone though. Instead, he laid down on the floor, stretching his legs out before him, his head placed inside where the hearth would be. "I've been thinking," he started.

"Don't hurt yourself."

"That old cellar, down where your mom kept her torture shit. It would be a good art studio."

At that, Malcolm paused.

The cellar was always locked but the three of them had heard the screams that came from there most of their childhood. Had smelled the blood and piss.

"I've already cleaned it all out," Milo said quickly. "Just need you to say yes."

Malcolm shifted, not quite looking at Milo. "What makes you think I'd be able to create art in the very place my mother conducted her rituals? It's probably infused with her magic."

"I think it'll be hard," Milo said with a nod. "But, I also think it would be the best fucking middle finger to Lucinda since she hated every ounce of art you ever created. So why not take her pride and joy and turn it into a place of creation? Draw really nice things. You know. Everything she hated. Like happy families. Me. You."

Setting his tools aside, Malcolm turned towards him. His head was bent, the subject of Lucinda never having been an easy one. "I want to tell you how messed up that line of thinking is."

Milo smiled. "But you're kind of into it, yeah?"

Malcolm broke then, that small twitch of his lips signalling that Milo had won. "You gonna help me get it all set up?"

"As long as you don't drop a beam on me."

Reaching out, Malcolm brushed some hair from Milo's eyes, fingers linger for a moment. "Go into the boxes that I brought in. There's a burger there."

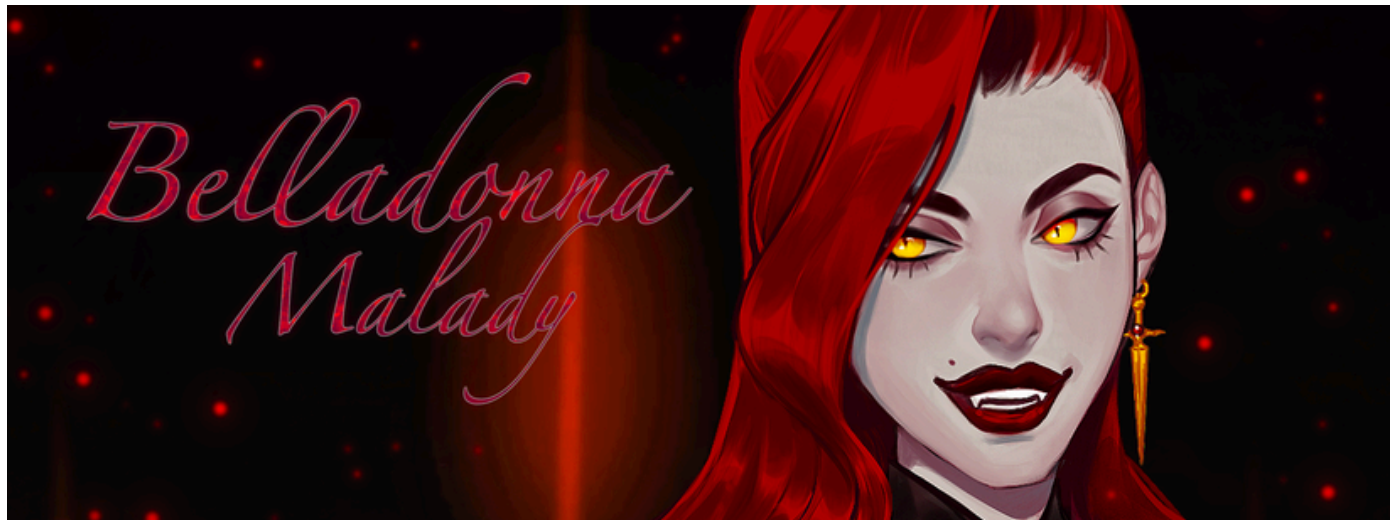
Milo's eyes went wide. As he scrambled away, he could hear the low rumble of Malcolm's laughter follow him.

The apothecary may have once been Lucinda Albright's home, but between Milo, Hazel and Malcolm, they were going to rip it from the cold grip of her dead corpse and make it their own. Because if there

was one thing they all agreed on, they would be damned if they were going to let anyone take them from each other.

## [Belladonna - The Past](#)

[Jun 16, 2023](#)



“You stupid, good for nothing, piece of off colored detritus. You had one job! One job and you failed to accomplish even that mediocre task.”

Gripping the stalk of wheat tight, Belladonna crouched down, putting her full weight on her haunches and pulling back. The wheat stuck stubbornly into the ground, refusing to budge. Brown booted heels slid across the ground, embedding deep grooves into the soil, splitting roots in half and displacing pebbles.

“I am a farmer's daughter,” Belladonna grunted. “I know the ways of the Lord and he provided me strength to pick the likes of you. What is wrong with you that you will not do your damn job!”

The wheat slide through her fingers, sending Belladonna sprawling backwards to land harshly on her butt. She let out a growl of frustration, huffing her hair from her eyes as she narrowed her gaze at the offending piece of wheat.

“Can I help you, ma'am?”

Eyes ticking upwards, Belladonna gritted her teeth. Of course a man was the one to come out here. Damsel in distress and they could not resist. “What? You see a woman and you decide she needs help? Is that how it is?”

The man was tall and broad shouldered, kissed by the sun. His hair was tucked beneath a wide brimmed hat, sleeves rucked up to his elbows. He had workers hands. Calloused and leathered.

"No, I saw someone struggling to pick some wheat properly and wondered why you weren't using any tools." He held out a sickle, the blade curved at the end and the handle made of raw wood.

Belladonna kept her face even, despite the embarrassment rising on her cheeks. Getting to her feet, she brushed off her skirts. Stomping over to the man, she grabbed the sickle and tilted her head upwards. "The wheat on my farm is something you can pick with your hands. It is not my fault that your wheat is faulty."

The man nodded, a smile quirking at the corner of his lips. "Right."

Hiking up her skirts, Belladonna went over to the offending stalk of wheat and clipped it through with one swipe.

"You the pastor's daughter that's gone missing?"

She looked over her shoulder. The sun cut across her, keeping the man before her in shadow. "Of course not. Would a pastor's daughter be out here?" A pastor's daughter was supposed to be darning socks. Sitting within the pews and praying on their knees. A pastor's daughter didn't have a name such as Belladonna. They had something pretty they were called. Something pious.

"Can I give you some pointers on how to use that thing? I'm kind of afraid you're going to chop off your hand," the man said.

Belladonna turned her nose up. "I know how to use it." Occasionally she had tended the fields behind the house. When they were still cared for. She had been so young then. Back when there had been time.

"Don't doubt that. But sometimes, we all need some pointers to improve ourselves."

"Is this an excuse to touch me?"

The man's brow rose through his hairline. "No, ma'am. Some of the other workers using those excuses on you?"

Belladonna had stayed away from the other workers. It absolutely wasn't because she was afraid or because she was not allowed to be near boys without an escort.

The man held up both his hands, taking a wide step back. "Ma'am, my name is Olden. I own this here field and employ the ones who work here. If anyone is mistreating you, we have a no nonsense policy on that. Even if you did sneak onto my fields and started working without actually being hired."

Belladonna tensed. The braid her auburn hair was twisted in hung heavily over one shoulder, fraying in the middle. "I thought I should prove my worth, first."

He nodded. "Appreciate that. But no need to do so. Anyone that needs a full belly at night gets to work. No questions asked. I got too much going on here to go worrying about qualifications."

Of which she had none. They both knew it.

The sickle tapped against her thigh, the midday sun beating down on her and sending sweat dripping uncomfortably against her spine. She had run away from home three days ago and hadn't even made it that far. The next town over. Because she couldn't stomach going any further.

"You eaten?"

Yesterday. She had used the last of her reserves she had stolen from the larder. "I'm getting by."

The man snorted, angling his head. "Come on. Let's get you to the main house. Get some food in you. Maybe get you something to wear to protect you from the sun. Got a sister who is about your size."

"Everyone always says that," Belladonna spat. "Everyone always has a sister or an aunt or a mother about your size."

Olden nodded. "You're not the trustworthy type. That's probably a good thing. Now come on."

He began walking off, making his way towards the big blue farm house at the edge of the field. For a moment, Belladonna didn't follow. She considered taking her sickle and running. But her stomach was growling and she really didn't know where her next meal was going to come from. On top of that, if she was trying to impress this man to get paid for the four stalks of wheat she had pulled, she probably shouldn't be stealing his tools.

Stomping across the field, she followed him, her skirts wrapping against the stalks as she stumbled around. They reached the house just as the sun was becoming too much, the lazy drawl of the overhead fan providing luke warm air that felt amazing all the same as they burst inside.

The kitchen was large with powder blue cabinets and tanned scuffed wood floors. A large table was situated in the middle, big enough to fit twelve or more people. Olden gestured for Belladonna to sit as he went to the counter, pouring a large glass of water and gathering a plate of bread and cheese. He placed it in front of her. Belladonna reached for it, tucking into her food with gusto.

"Why'd you run?"

She froze. The food felt heavy in her stomach, weighing her down. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Without a word, he reached into his pocket, unfolding a paper that was weather worn on the edges. It was a drawing of Belladonna. The likeness incredibly accurate. A reward was posted at the bottom.

Her eyes ticked up towards Olden. "Are you going to return me?"

He tucked the paper away. "None of my business why you aren't home with your daddy. I just don't like seeing someone so young out in the fields with no food and nothing to protect themselves. That's how mistakes happen."

"I wasn't hit, if that's what you're thinking." She had an urge to make that clear. She wasn't running because she needed to. Belladonna had a good life. A caring father. A community that loved her.

"I wasn't thinking anything," Olden said. "Just worried about you."

She shifted in her seat, feeling herself tense. "There is no need to be. I'm fine."

"Alright."

"Oh, don't you alright me," she snapped. There was this itch. This desire to run. To find out who she was outside of her community and the church. "Is it so wrong to try and live for yourself? Or is it my duty as a woman to continue to do what I'm told?"

Olden leaned forward, steepling his fingers beneath his chin. "Ma'am, like I said, more concerned about you walking around without a plan. You are lucky you stumbled onto my farm and not the Fulton's down the way."

"What's wrong with the Fulton's?"

"Everything you can think of."

Belladonna slumped back in her chair. At sixteen, she wanted more. So very much more than what was being provided for her. "Why should I have to take care of babies all day and wipe the brows of the sick? Why is it that I cannot go to school and find out who I am? Why do I need to follow in my fathers footsteps all because my mother died?"

Olden shrugged. "Don't think you need to."

"You're the only one."

"Your father pushing that on you?"

No. It was an easy answer. He wasn't. It was just what everyone had told her. When her mother died, they had said she had to pick up the slack. Take over her role. Help her father. But she didn't want to. She wanted to find her own way in the world. But how was she supposed to break her father's heart and do so.



"Look, I'm not in the business of forcing people to go places they don't want to go. But, can I ask you to stay here until you figure things out a bit more? My sister is going to be home soon. She has the house across the way. You can stay under her roof if that makes you more comfortable. You want to work in the field, we can discuss it. Just don't go wandering off in this world without food, coin, or a weapon."

She narrowed her gaze, crossing her arms and mirroring his position. "I'm to believe you aren't going to collect on my reward?"

"You can believe whatever you want," he told her. "In general, I don't think you should believe words so much as actions but you don't know me so I don't think you can really make a distinction of either."

The sun was bright outside, heating the land and causing the wheat to shine golden on the horizon. Home was only two towns over. She could be home by tonight, if she wanted to. Collect the reward herself. But there was an entire world out there. One in which she was so small when compared to. Belladonna didn't want to be small. She wasn't like Madeline. The week girl who just did as she was told. Who was destined to live forever at her father's farm.

The chair scraped loudly as Olden stood. "Take your time and eat. You can let me know what you decide. If I come back in and some of my food is stolen and you're gone, I won't hold it against you."

Belladonna watched him go. He ducked his head as he went back through the front door, his booted feet thunking down the steps.

Sitting alone, Belladonna sat alone in the stranger's kitchen, her hands shaking, her mind scattered. For the first time in her life, she was faced with a decision and she didn't know what to do. How anyone did this to begin with. She should have just gone home. Her father would open his arms and hug her, asking no questions. Ms. Timely down the road would have brought over stew. Mr. Cardel would have asked if there was anyone he needed to shoot.

But there was more to the world, wasn't there? There was so much more.

"Olden! It's too hot. Call the workers in," a woman's voice called from outside. The sister, she assumed.

Grabbing the bread and a few of the supplies from the pantry, Belladonna slipped out back. The sickle was still at her hip.

[Quick Update](#)

[Jun 23, 2023](#)

Hey everyone!

Just want to do a quick update. If you are someone who receives monthly content from me (this does not include the RO shorts) you need to e-mail me with your prompts. I started trying to email people individually but things have been getting lost in the messages I do receive or I was just emailing with no response back and spamming peoples boxes. So, if you have a monthly lore or short or a MC short, please email me on Patreon or discord.

Hope everyone is having a good day!

## [Hazel - The Past](#)

[Jun 23, 2023](#)



“Get back here.” On her belly, Hazel scooted across the verdant moss, hands clasped together as she tried to catch the squeaking ball of fur that was scurrying away from her. Twelve of them chirped behind her, confined in an iron barred cage, their wings beating in tandem to try and pull the box into flight. Hazel huffed, head banging against the ground. The loamy scent of the earth filled her nostrils, the dew laden lichen cooling the pinks of her cheeks. She was told not to come home until she had enough of these creatures. The task had taken her well past lunch and her belly rumbled loudly. But, twelve would not be enough. Not for her mother. She wanted to prove to her that she could catch more than a dozen and even if she didn’t come home until late into the night, Hazel wanted at least thirty in that cage to give her mother a long-lasting supply.

Just as she was about to reach out for another one, a wet scream echoed in the alley. Hazel grabbed the cage, scurrying backwards behind a jagged rock. She had gone deeper into the alley than she had before. Into an area she was unfamiliar with but one that she knew held more of these little animals. Heart thundering in her ears, Hazel tried to silence them in the pen, hushing their cries with soothing pulses of magic.

The alley went silent, the wind brushing against her in a gentle whisper as the footsteps of the surrounding districts faded. Silence was never good in the Night Market. It denoted something to come. Hazel had learned a lot from the silences through the years and the kind followed by screams was not welcome at all.

“Hazel?”

She jumped, twisting her head around and pulling the small bone knife from her pocket. Glowing eyes peered at her through the dark where the lanterns did not yet meet the opening of the alley. When the person stepped forward, Hazel let her grip relax. A warm and familiar face appeared, his dark skin picking up the dim amber lights above.

“Lakin?” She stood, brushing her skirts from the debris on the ground. “I’m so sorry. I- I thought I heard screaming.”

Lakin looked over his shoulder, down the alley he came. There were several others that jutted from there, leading off into winding corkscrew districts. “I think there was an altercation,” he said. “I saw the Velvet Guard running two alleys down.” When he turned back to her, his smile was gentle. “What are you doing out here? This doesn’t seem like one of your usual spots.”

Her eyes ticked guilty to the mice. Bat mice to be more exact. Little creatures that had come through a gate somewhere, scattered within the market to breed a new exotic race that Lucinda Albright wanted to ‘study’.

“Oh, I’m picking some stuff for my mother.”

Laikin looked down at the cage where the creatures began scurrying. “Oh?”

“It’s not what it looks like,” Hazel said quickly.

Laikin held up his hands. “I don’t know what it looks like really.”

“It looks like nothing,” she said. “I just need to catch some of these creatures. They aren’t native to the market. No one is going to miss them.” Hazel’s voice rose in volume as she clutched the cage tightly. The creatures squeaked inside. “What are you doing here?”

She saw Laikin once a year, it seemed. She had met him when she was a small child. He had saved her from a group of kids chasing her through the streets. Since then, she ran into him. Some kindly older gentleman with shining eyes and wrinkles around his mouth when he smiled. She liked him. He always brought a sense of comfort to her.

“I was passing by,” he said with a shrug. “When I heard the Velvet Guard running through, thought I’d take a little detour. Wouldn’t want them thinking I was involved.” There was a patch of grass nearby that he went to sit on. His limbs were lanky and curled beneath himself in odd angles. Like he wasn’t sure how to sit properly. “Would you like to join me for a bit?”

She needed to catch the rest of these creatures and get back to her mother. But, she was tired and from out of nowhere, Laikin was producing food. It smelled far better than anything she had had in the last month. Her mother had decided they needed to go on a cleanse to be closer to the spirits. Other than when Hazel went to visit Malcolm, she had been kept to bread and broth.

"Want some?" It was a steaming meat pie, the crust flaky and golden.

"I shouldn't," she whispered.

Laikin shrugged. "Suit yourself. Just unfortunate. The vendor gave me far more than I'll ever eat. Five more than I asked for, in fact. I can't eat all those. Or if I do, I will not move for a week."

Hazel inched forward, her mouth watering. "Maybe just one."

He held it out to her with a smile.

Hazel took it, sitting down next to him and eating it quickly. Without a word, Laikin handed her another one. This one she ate a little slower.

"It's been a while. Tell me what you've been up to. Did you learn how to make that souffle like you wanted?"

Hazel laughed a little. "I forgot about that. I did, actually. A wonderful cheese and fig one. It's my brother's favorite."

"Oh, I'm so very pleased. What are you onto next?"

"I'm not sure. I've been given more responsibilities in my mother's shop lately so that has taken some time."

"Is that so? Sounds interesting. You have a desire to take over one day?"

"What?" she laughed nervously, looking around. "No. No, of course not. That will always be moms shop. Not mine."

"You don't want something of your own one day?"

Her cheeks pinkened and she curled her legs close. "Mom needs help. I'm still fairly young. I have a lot to learn from her. The magics she uses are ones that I couldn't even hope to obtain in the next few years."

Laikin nodded. "And you want to learn her brand of magic?"

"Of course. She's a powerful caster. One of the original ones within the market. I— she is respected and the amount she can do with her power. No one messes with her."

“Huh.”

Hazel turned to him. “I know she can be seen as a little cruel at times but we have had a lot of conversations. Sometimes bad things have to happen for the betterment of the world. She is just the unfortunate one that has been chosen to do those bad things, sometimes. But people always thank her in the end. She’s a woman who makes the tough decisions because others are too weak too. I aspire to be her, really.”

Laikin chewed thoughtfully, listening to her words. “I never really aspired to be anyone, really. Never looked up to anyone like that.”

“You don’t have a mother?”

“Or a father. Was born from the need to exist,” he flashed her a toothy grin. “Have plenty of siblings though. We all took care of each other. But it fostered in me a sense of independence. An independence that has served me well over the years and has also landed me in quite a few pickles.”

Hazel nodded. “I wish I was confident enough for that.”

“For independence? Oh, I think you’ll get there. You already seem much stronger than last year. Aside from the darkness, that is.”

“The darkness?”

He hummed. “Your mother’s magic, I assume. Has a bit of a tinge to it. It’s doubled this year. Makes sense if you are studying more with her.” He took another bite, unaware of the horror on Hazel’s face. “It’s not a bad thing, really. You need to remember that. It’s a choice. One you are making.”

Hazel looked away. Was she making it?

“I mean, no one is going to come out here and capture terrified little creatures on whim, right?”

Looking at the cage, Hazel felt tears well up in her eyes. The creatures were looking back at her. They had stopped jangling the cage, aware now of their fate. Instead, they were curling in on each other, taking comfort in their last moments. Hazel knew how this was going to end for them. As soon as she handed them over, she knew what would happen.

As a tear slipped down her cheek, she caught a shuddered sob behind her teeth. Laikin continued speaking, unaware of her sorrow.

“But maybe your mother is right. Sometimes we have to step on the little ones in order to keep the cogs of the world working.”

With a small cry, Hazel lunged forward, unlocking the cage. The little creatures scurried out, taking flight into the sky as soon as they could, their cries sounding like sobs that were scattered on the night wind.

Hazel buried her head in her hands.

She was willing to condemn thirty of them. All because she wanted to impress her mother. To show her that she could be her one day and make the hard decision.

An arm wrapped around her shoulder, curling her in. Hazel buried her face in Laikin's chest, smelling the faint traces of coal and warm milk. "I'm sorry," she sobbed.

"You don't need to apologize," he told her. "There was no harm done."

"I was going to let them all die," she wailed.

"But you didn't." Tipping her face up, Laikin took out a handkerchief, wiping the tears from her cheeks. "And that is strength."

It didn't feel like strength. Hazel felt as if she were spiraling into nothing. Heading into an abyss that she would become lost in forever.

"Now," Laikin said. "Let's take a break. I was going to go look at some plants in the market. Go down to the greenhouses and spend the afternoon there. How about you join me."

Hazel sniffed. "My mom—"

"Isn't expecting you back until dark," he reasoned. "Besides, I have a suspicion she'll forget all about the little micabae's you had there."

"What do you mean?"

Helping her to her feet, Laikin grinned. "Just a hunch really. Don't you worry about it. Now come. I want to hear about your year. How your brother has been doing since his change. How your studies are going. Do you still have a keen interest in herbology?"

Hazel smiled, laughing a little. This perfect stranger took far more interest in her than her own mother. It hurt and felt ridiculous all at once. "I do," she said slowly. "I'm trying to cross-breed apples and basil, right now."

Laikin looked at her fondly, pride filtering through his eyes. "Fascinating. Tell me all about it, please."

"Are— are you sure? It can be really boring."

When he stopped to look at her, Hazel startled, her feet skidding against the old cobblestone. Laikin usually smiled. He was a jovial man with a passion for life and stories. But the way he looked at her now, Hazel felt his intention like a pin in her soul. "Noting you say would ever be boring to me, Miss Hazel. That, I promise."

It was a promise that wrapped around her, causing her to gasp. She knew that kind of magic. That was an unbreakable gift. And this man, this *stranger*, gave it to her freely. It caused her throat to tighten as she clenched her jaw to keep from crying further.

"Come," he told her, giving her the space and privacy to process his words. "I am hopeless when it comes to plants. Perhaps you could help me pick a few out today."

She nodded, looking over her shoulder at the open cage. "I would love to." She left it, abandoned in the alley for someone else. She didn't want to be the kind of woman that picked it up ever again.

[Send in your Q&A's](#)

[Jun 26, 2023](#)

I have no Q&A's for Patreon this month. Send your questions in here or on Tumblr or discord soon please!

Zinnia

[Gabriel - The Past](#)

[Jun 27, 2023](#)

*"He's young, Reese. Very young."*

*"How can you tell? Looks about as old as us."*

*"I can still see his grace. He's a fledgling. May have only had one or two jobs. His wings have probably only just come in."*

*"Weird sentence."*

*"His grace is beautiful. I wonder why he was cast aside. He doesn't look tainted. A little bent around the edges, but that could be because of the fall."*

*"He was cast aside because your Knowing is a megalomaniac who values pain far more than comfort."*



*"You know that's not true."*

*"You know it is."*

*"I will not have this argument with you again, Reese. I— Oh, is he waking? I can't... Shhh... you're safe. It's all going to be okay. We've got you. We've got you."*

~~~~~

When Gabriel woke, it was to a starlit room. For a moment, he thought he was home, lying on one of the cots in the shared haven, staring into the cosmos and listening to the other celestials sing. When he shifted, he felt the scratch of a blanket across him and the chill from a nearby breeze. It carried with it the scent of something foul causing him to roll on his side and curl his knees to his chest. He was not home. He would never be home again. They had hung him over the precipice and recited his conviction before dropping him into the depths.

"Do you wish to have some water?"

Gabriel startled, sitting up in bed only to spy a slight man across the room with white blonde hair that shone like the moon. There was a familiarity about him. A sickening sense of home that he shouldn't desire. Because if this man was here, he had fallen too.

"Get away from me," he rasped. "You are cast out from the gates. Exiled from the embrace. A monster now meant to rot outside the light of the Knowings glory."

The man dipped his head in shame. "I am. But I just want to give you some water. Maybe something to eat."

"I will take nothing from a degenerate monster as yourself" Gabriel snarled. He was a creature not meant for this world. The fallen dissipated into nothing, sinking down into the aching depths of the land to become nightmares that fueled the innocents dream.

"I understand that you are scared," the man tried again, hands fluttering at his side. "I was scared too. But you need to take care of yourself. The madness—"

"Get out!" Gabriel roared.

The door to the room banged open, revealing a dark skinned man with black locks of hair that coiled around his ears. "Enough," he said, looking directly at Gabriel. "I'll throw your ass back out if you keep this shit up."

"Reese, no. Don't—"

"Elias, you wanted to help him. But if he's going to treat you like shit then he can go drown back in the ocean that I dragged him from." Storming over to the bed, the man named Reese loomed over Gabriel.

"You fucked up, kid. You fell from the Knowing which might be the best thing that's ever happened to you. And that man," he pointed to Elias. "Is going to be able to help you navigate a life down here so you're not drooling in your soup. But you keep berating him, and I'll run you through myself."

"You are human," Gabriel said, pushing the blankets from him to get out of bed. "He has corrupted you. We are meant to protect but it is clear he has not done so. You do not understand our ways. You—"

"You don't understand shit," Reese said calmly. His arms were crossed over his chest, stance wide and poised for a fight. "You understand what you were force-fed. Now, make your choice, here and now. You want help? Or do you want to let that madness rot your brain. I don't care either way."

Gabriel was about to retaliate when Elias stood across the room. "I care," he said. "He is just a child, Reese. You don't get to make these calls. Now, if you remain unhelpful, you can leave."

The bigger man did not look pleased with the outcome and if it was anyone else, Gabriel suspect the results would be a very different conversation. Instead, Reese took a step back, leaning against the door frame, eyeing Gabriel with a look that said one wrong move and he was liable to snap.

Elias approached slowly, hands held where Gabriel could see them. "What is your name?"

He shouldn't have answered. A name was sacred. You did not just give it to anyone. But, this was his brethren. A superior. And even if they were fallen, was he supposed to listen? "Gabriel," he said. Though he frowned at the sound of it. It didn't sound like his name anymore. It didn't have the lilting ring or the peace woven within its syllables. It felt flat now. "Gabriel," he said again. Nothing. There was nothing.

"Gabriel," Elias said with the same flat tone. "I am Elias. That is Reese. We are here to help you. It looks as if you have fallen. Do you know why?"

Imperfection. There was something about him not being quite right. Or maybe that was his own thoughts swirling. He couldn't think of any reason to be here. He had received top merits for his previous jobs. He was helpful within the community. He prayed for far longer than his brothers and sisters.

"It has to be a mistake," he said. "I wish to go home."

"You can't," Reese said from the doorway.

"I'm sure if I just explained I could—"

"You came through a gate. I watched it close after you were shot through. Unless you know how to open them, you're not going anywhere."

A sticky, hot wetness started at the back of his neck. It crawled across his skin sending white-hot shivers across his body as his chest seized into a vice. His vision began to grow into a spotted mess and the roar of the ocean from far beyond swelled within his ears. It blocked the sounds of home. That was why he couldn't see it. Everything here was loud. It smelled foul. It was not what the Knowing wished. This

was clearly a test of some sort. A way for him to prove that he was better than what they perceived. And with each stabbing inhalation of air, Gabriel knew he deserved this. That the pain, the denial of comforts and home, would only bring him closer to the Knowing. It would be his salvation.

A pair of strong hands were on him, bending him in half. "Breathe," Reese ordered. "You're going to fucking pass out."

Elias was fluttering somewhere in front of him, fussing as he retrieved water and a damp cloth. Gabriel could only laugh though. The pain that wracked him was unbearable. When he returned to the Knowing, he would be strong. He would be looked upon as someone who had endured. With a grin, Gabriel welcomed the pain.

[June Q & A](#)

[Jun 30, 2023](#)

I know you probably can't get into too much detail for certain reasons but has the Market ever opened a gate to a pre-existing world? For example, Westeros? Middle-earth? Gotham?

If it exists, the Night Market has access. One of the reasons I came up with the concept of the Night Market is because it allowed for crossovers in our Pathfinder and RPG campaigns. When our group got wacky and wanted to kind of experience something new or we wanted to do a mash-up of some of our favorite characters, I wanted a place that we could all use to easily provide that. Everyone in my group switches off DMing every six months so sometimes we ended up doing little crossovers just because we really wanted to be with another character for a bit. Caliban, Chrysanthemum, Noctine, Taliesin, Anemone, Reese and Elias are all characters either from RP's that are written or ones that are played out, in fact.

So yes, I think it is quite possible gates are open to those worlds. Because let's face it. I have a major obsession with Peter Pan. I really want to figure out a way to bring that in. :)

Will we get to confront Lucinda? She's vile to everyone else overall and she did technically try to kill us.

Oh Lucinda. There is going to be a lot going on with Lucinda in the upcoming book. There are going to be plenty of opportunities to talk to her, confront her, agree and disagree with her. Depending on how you play things out, this will allow you more access to certain RO's. I'm very excited for her involvement and also incredibly curious to see what everyone thinks of her due to their own experience instead of through the eyes of the RO's.

Is vampirism a human only thing or can other beings be turned?

Any type of creature can become a vampire, humanoid or not. I think it is more common to see a humanoid vampire because of pre-conceived notions. Becoming a vampire is usually a very sexual thing so most vampires are turning ones that they are sexually compatible with. This does leave the ability for elves, orcs, dwarves, etc, to all become a vampire. When you get into beasts, it might get a bit more complicated. Though, I wouldn't say it is unheard of.

Do any of the characters speak more than one language?

Technically, you do. I don't remember if it was clear or not in the WIP but the Night Market translates for everyone. With people coming in from all over, there is no way they are all speaking the same language. So, they speak their native tongue, and the Night Market translates, leaving the person to hear the language they understand.

That being said, it does mean that most people have no reason to learn a different language. The only one who knew multiple languages before entering the market, would have been Belladonna. But it was just remedial Latin.

Does the Market have mass transport (trains, carriages, airships) or does everybody just have to hoof it/ride privately transport?

It doesn't. Which is designed a little bit on purpose. With a lack of transportation, the Velvet Guard is able to keep things under control a bit more. If something like transportation was implemented, the market is far too vast for them to be able to keep up. As it is, there are paper animals that people sometimes ride and those animals are highly regulated by the guard.

But, I am thinking it might be a bit fun to start introducing those kinds of things in the next book.

How powerful would our Lamplight be at supposed full strength? Could we tell the Barons to effectively get lost?

Spoilers!!!

Yes. I don't believe that Lamplight knows the amount of power they actually have when connected with their whole form. I don't even think the entire form realizes how powerful they were. Compared to a lot of worlds, they are a baby. When they first awoke (back in the beginning of the market), the ones who guided them through the revelation of their power, may not have had the world's best interest at heart. But more of that will hopefully be coming to light soon.

If their paths had led them to the Night Market differently, what would the RO's have ended up doing, personally or job-wise?

I think Hazel would have always been on this same path. She probably wouldn't have taken over her mother's shop, but I think she would have always been in a helpful role and would have opened a shop

to put her magic to good use within the market.

Milo would most likely own a bar. Or maybe Malcolm would own the bar and he would work as bartender. I don't think Milo is someone though that would stay at one job for long. He would have become a jack of all trades, perhaps in a bit more of a respectable way. But I do not believe you can take the fae out of Milo. I think thievery would have always been involved.

Gabriel would have pursued relief work if he had come to the market with intention. He would have tried helping the refugees and spreading the faith of the Knowing.

Malcolm would have been an artist if he had the chance. He did try for a while but he didn't have a lot of support and couldn't make a go of it.

Belladonna is who we would have seen the most change from. Instead of coming to the market and making her way up through the ranks, I think we would have seen Bella pursue love. She would have been looking for companionship. On top of that, Belladonna has always had a thirst for knowledge. I think she would have found other cultures fascinating and begin to learn about them. Eventually, I think we would have seen her in a mediator role. Helping to solve differences between cultures and have them live within the market in unity. Overall, she would have been a far softer individual.

I don't know if it's been answered before buuut what are the ROs thoughts in the final moments of MCs life?

Hazel didn't believe it at first. She was in denial in those initial moments, thinking it was all a dream.

Gabriel's only thought was getting to the MC. Carving a path to them in order to save them. He was certain there was something he could do as long as he got there in time.

Belladonna had no thought. Only rage. She didn't quite know what was going on but she did know that blood was going to spill and she was going to bask in it.

Malcolm wasn't there but when he found out, he only thought of regret. That he should have gone.

And Milo's only thought was that it wasn't supposed to be this way. Why did it have to be this way?

What is Mr. Billow's favorite treat? He deserves ALL the treats tbh.

Hazel is *convinced* it is sweet cream. Honestly, the cat loves rock candy.

What's a skill/talent/hobby the ROs wish they could do?

Hazel really wishes she knew how to ride horses and just be better with animals in general. She is obsessed with animals but has no talent with them. Billows is the only animal that doesn't run from her in fear.

Milo wishes he knew how to play an instrument. He loves music and he loves dancing and would have liked to broaden that part of his life.

Gabriel wishes he knew pottery. Strange but he loves a good piece of ceramic.

Belladonna wishes she knew how to write. She *loves* books but she cannot write to save her life.

Malcolm wishes he knew how to dance. He is terrible at it, no matter how hard he has tried to learn.

What would the ROs do if they met a clone of themselves?

Hazel would absolutely become best friends with herself. Having another person who thinks like her and can do all the tasks within the apothecary? That would be wonderful.

Gabriel would be convinced that it is some sort of sign from the Knowing. And, with permission, he would extract the clones grace to try and get back home. But, if the clone is thinking along the same lines, they probably would do that as well, which would lead to a very circular argument.

Malcolm would meet his clone and wish them well but not really want them a part of his life.

Belladonna would use her clone to become a figurehead so she could have more time to read and pursue personal interests.

Milo would kill his clone. Maybe sleep with them first. But for sure kill them.

Do the ROs suffer from nightmares? If so, what are those dreams about?

Gabriel and Hazel don't really suffer from nightmares. Hazel blocks them with tonics if they become a problem and Gabriel rarely sleeps enough to dream.

Milo suffers from a lot of nightmares. If you are on his route, it is hinted at that he sometimes goes a very long time without sleep because they get so bad. Hazel has to provide him with tonics and even then, they sometimes get through. His nightmares usually are about the things he's done. During book 1, it was about what he was going to do to MC and the guilt that was plaguing him from that. After Malcolm died it was dreams of Malcolm telling him he should have saved him. But in general, it is dreams of his father. He has been terrified of seeing that man again and even more terrified of becoming him.

Belladonna has nightmares of her world burning when she becomes too stressed. Sometimes she dreams of her parents and the looks on their face as she ran for a gate. Her nightmares tell her that her fathers final moments were being disappointed in her choice for life as opposed to choosing her family.

Malcolm has nightmares of Lucinda. He wakes at night, convinced that Lucinda is in his house. Or that she has someone managed to get in. Sometimes he wakes in the middle of the night to throw out all his

food and herbs, thinking his mother has gotten in and messed with them. Even after she died, he still did this

If the night market is dependent on imports for its survival (for food for example), how is closing the night market completely a viable solution for its survival?

It's not. Milo even knows it is not. But, with everything else going on, the solutions he had on hand wasn't given him any better alternatives.

Now, that is not to say that the market cannot provide its own food. They struggle to provide it to the capacity that is needed but they can provide some. So, with the gates closing, the world isn't in danger of completely going hungry. But, it cannot last this way forever. A fact that Milo is very aware of. But, the first step was just getting the market to stop tearing itself apart.

What was your inspiration for the night market? and/or for the ROs?

I don't know if I had any one thing that I looked at and decided I wanted to emulate. My brain kind of does this thing where I toss around little bits and bobs and until something sticks. Looking back, I can say that I watched Spirited Away around the time I began writing the Night Market. But I'm pretty sure I had already created the concept then? I can't remember. For the RO's, I didn't have any one type of person that inspired me. I just started writing characters that I would enjoy writing. Which, kind of bit me a bit because I really struggled to write some of them every chapter because there just wasn't enough conflict to give them ample screen time.

The only one character that had inspiration was Belladonna. I wanted to write a character kind of like my OC Chrysanthemum but a bit harsher. I just like writing that type of woman the best.

Milo may have been inspired by my love for Peter Pan and tragic antiheroes but I also am just a sucker for that kind of writing so I knew it was going to get tossed in there somewhere. LOL

What inspired you to start writing in general? You have such a lovely way with words, like super evocative descriptions that just transport readers into your worlds and it's so fun and inspiring

I have written for as long as I can remember. I think I've spoken a few times before that I wrote a story when I was in the fourth grade, passing it around in a blue spiral notebook to my friends. As an adult, I have rewritten that very story to become something more. I'm hoping to publish it one day.

But what made me really really want to write? That's a story that I've actually been struggling with

So, I was a Buffy the Vampire Slayer kid. I loved that show. I loved Angel and Firefly. I was part of the server that crashed when Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog went up. The dialogue and world building spoke to my teenage heart. Not only that, but, I lived in a very small town. To see stories of strong females was an example that I sorely needed in my very religious driven school. I idolized Joss Whedon. The way he was able to twist words. The very way he made characters that you felt were so very very real. It influenced my writing more than anything else. I remember an interview once where he said that after

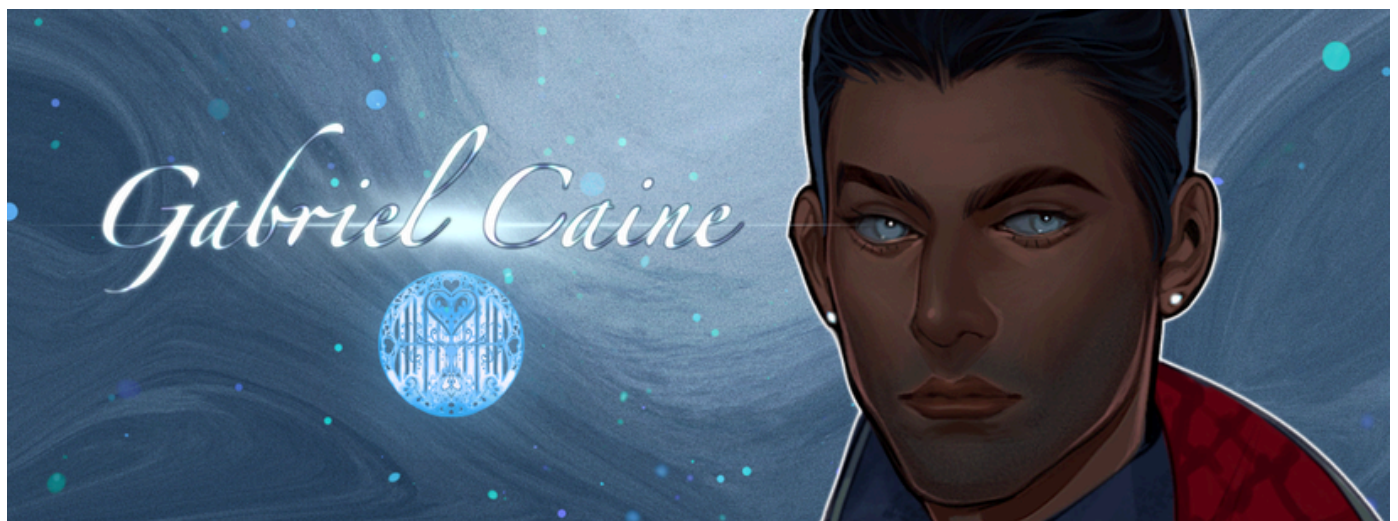
you've written a scene between two characters, you should delete all the narration and then go back and read it the next day. If you can't tell who is talking, then your dialogue isn't strong. I have used that technique countless times.

When it came out that Joss Whedon wasn't the kind of idol I should have? I was heartbroken. It messed with me a lot. Because I can hands down say, that he was my influence. I don't know if his work made me want to write professionally but it was what gave me a passion for stories. Knowing now that he wasn't a man that was kind to women. That he took the things he said and did and saw no fault in them, hurt. I was crushed when I heard it all. Because how could I take advice, how could most of my teen years, be shaped by someone like that?

I still struggle with it at times. I can't really fix what shaped me during a time when I had no idea of the full picture. I think that's what helps ease it all a bit. I have also come to the decision personally, that the content can live outside the person who created it. Because in anything, movies, TV shows, comics, books, there are so many other people involved in the creation. The fans and the community built around it are also a big part of the experience. So, I still say I am a fan of those shows, but I condemn the man. I do plan to take the good that I was taught however and go out and try to turn that situation into something much better.

[Book 2 Gabriel - Sneak Peek](#)

[Jul 7, 2023](#)



I found him like I always did these days. Like all the times before, he was on patrol. Wandering the markets with a vigilant gaze. Except, now the walls were different. Something in my body was out of control and the streets kept shifting as if they were old bones, stretching with aching pops and groans. Tonight, Gabriel was making sure to light the waxy candles that were stuck to the walls. The only source of light within the market anymore. They were easily blown out by groups of people wandering by, some by accident and some on purpose. Each night they regrew, the cream-colored drips that cascaded down

the stone receding in a mimicry of passing time before relighting again come 'morning'. Gabriel had taken to making sure the main roads were constantly lit, walking up and down them several times a day. There were bags beneath his eyes and his normally dark skin was taking on a greying tone as his hands and arms were shot through with paper thin cracks where the last of his grace leaked from him like beads of sweat.

"Oh, Gabriel," I sighed.

He looked over his shoulder, just as I knew he would. It hadn't taken him long to see me. Something about his celestial nature let him view past the veil that usually hid secrets from the view of the public.

"You should be resting," he told me gently. There was supposed to be a firm undertone in there somewhere but he had lost all sense of it in the last few weeks. The unrest of the market had completely beaten him down.

"I'd say the same for you," I told him, falling into step by his side. "You do not have to do this. I can take care of this, you know."

It didn't hinder his steps. Instead, he walked towards a candle that looked as if it were failing and fed it a small bit of soot. The flame sputtered and bloomed before settling, its light spreading across the district in steady waves.

"You cannot take care of everything."

"Neither can you," I told him. It was the standstill that we had been at for some time now. Gabriel wishing to do the market's work. Me wishing to as well. Working together may have actually achieved the goals we both desired, but the problem with that was my time in the market was in flux still and the further Gabriel descended into his madness, the further away from reason he drifted.

"I am merely lighting candles," he told me. "You are brighter with each flame I maintain."

"That's what is frustrating me, Gabriel. I fear you are not lighting flames to keep the people who live here safe. You are lighting them to see me."

He frowned. "I am lighting them to keep the market safe."

"I am the market."

I saw the way he twitched. A flinch of his head, like a nervous tick, his skin glowing for a momentary second before falling away as if it had never been there at all. Before, Gabriel's placid expression had been the mask in which hid every emotion. Now, it was breaking, revealing just how much he felt and kept from the world.

Sighing, I knew I wasn't going to get anywhere. It always ended this way. He was becoming more and more agitated lately. Reaching out, I brushed my hand against his. I had perfected holding him without

my form sinking through his own.

"Would you like the company tonight?" I asked.

He nodded resolutely. "Yes. I have several routes to cover and then I need to go and check on the dissipation of the mists. There have been reports of vampires hunting in the absence of the candles and I will have to take care of that situation."

"You could ask Belladonna to take care of it," I suggested. They were her people, after all.

"I do not need others taking care of my problems," he snapped. "Besides, Belladonna needs to focus on being a Baron and getting her district in line. Something she has failed to do."

"I think she is doing what she can," I said.

"What do you know? You are not here. No one else can see you. Do you know the needs of the market or are you merely projecting what you think needs to be done?"

"I think I may know the needs of the market far better than you," I told him.

His footsteps were becoming uneven, his body jerking down the streets, sword clanging against his hip with a loud crash. "You do not see," he said feverishly. "What lurks. What is waiting. Only I can see. I am the one who can purge the sickness from this realm. It was why the Knowing sent me here."

I paused. "You fell, Gabriel."

He shook his head. "Did I? Or is that what I was made to believe?" Stopping, he fed another flame, this one flickering across his eyes in such a way that made my stomach flip in terror. The voidless black of the cosmos was reflected in his gaze. "I believe I had it wrong. I had a vision, no long ago. A vision where I avenged this realm. Cleaned it of its murk. The Knowing blessed me as one of its strongest warriors and my calling is now."

"Gabriel..."

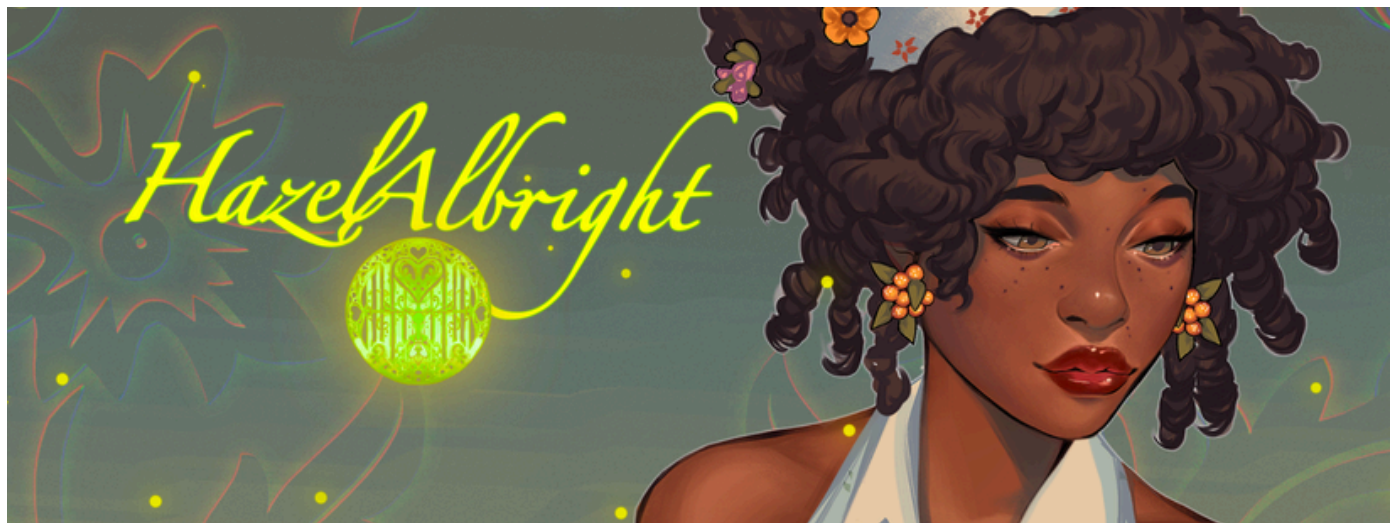
"And then you can come home." Reaching out, he took my hands within his. My fingers sunk through his skin and yet he didn't even flinch. "Once I clean this realm, you can come home and we can be together. You will be my reward."

I felt tears prick my eyes and my throat close. Somewhere, behind my belly button, I could feel the pull of the grave. It wouldn't be long now but I didn't want to leave him. Not in this state.

"Gabriel, I don't think..."

My eyes popped open in a grey and monochromatic world, the streets empty and the candles nothing but watery images. I sighed. A conversation for another time then.

[Jul 17, 2023](#)



There was a sad softness to Hazel's face. The kind that had my stomach turning half the time while anger bubbled elsewhere. I couldn't touch. I couldn't interact. Yet, Hazel was the one wandering the apothecary like a ghost. Sticking to the shadows of her home and going through the motions with a distant look on her face. I couldn't stand it. Given who she was before, the way she always had a smile for anyone who passed her way, this version of her felt faded. Like she was an old photo of herself that had been worn down with time.

Getting to the apothecary had been difficult. Stretching myself further and further had taken several attempts. At least until I became strong again, connecting with parts of myself that I had severed when I came down here the first time. It had been worth it, though. For her. Now I just had to figure out how to get back home before she lost herself even further.

"Hazel, did you bring in the beets from out back?"

Hazel sighed. The failure I saw in her eyes was disheartening. "They didn't winter over, mother. I could go down to the market and get more."

There was a shift in the air. As if the entire place made room for Lucinda Albright as she entered the room. "Weren't you supposed to do that yesterday?" She swept through the room almost silently, followed by the whispers of the dead that were often at her back.

"I was. I just got caught up with the herbs. With the wisps not around as much, they aren't producing like they're supposed to. I have to baby them a bit more." Yet, I had seen Hazel yesterday. She had spent

most of her day sitting in front of the bushels of mint, just staring.

Lucinda walked over to her child, cupping her cheek. Her thumb traced a tear track that had long dried. "Oh, my darling. You must snap out of this melancholy state you are in. There is no point to it."

"No point?" Hazel asked, looking upwards. "Mother, my friend is dead."

"They are not." I felt myself straighten at Lucinda's assertion. Could the woman see me? Did she know? "They are the Night Market, my dear. That means they are in every street that winds through this realm. Every breath that you breathe."

Not quite. But it was more than I expected from her.

"The Night Market is alive," Hazel said. "But not my friend. Not the person that I came to know, at least."

Lucinda sighed. "One day you will realize it was all the same thing. You should merely feel honored for knowing them the way you do. For loving them." Then, Lucinda's lips twisted into something sour. "At least that cretin did something right with his short life."

Hazel sniffed. Shrinking in on herself. "We don't know if he is dead," she whispered.

Milo. He had not shown his face for quite some time.

"If he's not he should be." Lucinda reached forward, pulling her into a hold. "For what he did to you. For what he did to your friend." I was almost certain that the ones after Milo now were at Lucinda's behest. She was bound and determined not to let that man come back into her daughter's life, taking any choice of the matter away from Hazel completely.

Pulling away, Hazel straightened her skirts and looked down towards the bundles of herbs she still had not dried. "I'll go to the market now. Maybe some fresh air will help me."

"I think it will," Lucinda said. "Pick up some extra powdered mushrooms while you are there. You are severely lacking in your hex bags here and the mushrooms will help the spells keep while we rebuild your clientele."

"Yes mother."

I followed Hazel as she went into the back room, grabbing her basket and cloak. I didn't know what that said about her that she was going into the market so willingly. Before, she could barely set foot down the alley. Either way, I wanted to reach out to her. I wanted to take her hand and ask her what I could do. To tell her to rest instead of listening to her mother. She didn't need whatever clientele Lucinda was trying to bring.

There was a crisp trill as Mr. Billows jumped down from the shelves up top. The light in Hazel's eyes was reignited upon seeing him. "You're alive." Scooping the cat up in her arms, she held him close. "Oh,

Billows. You're alive. I thought mother had done something to you."

Mr. Billows snuggled up under her chin. The cat had been missing for days now. I had a feeling it had been keeping its distance.

"You need to get out of here, Hazel," I said tiredly, leaning against the wall. "Find Malcolm. Find Milo if it comes down to it. Hell, even just go to Belladonna. Just find anyone to make you see the lies that she is telling you. Don't stay here."

I was afraid. Not for the first time since walking these streets like this, was I afraid for my friends. If only I could let them know. Tell them that I would be back. It was just going to take some time.

If only I could tell Hazel.

As I watched her hold the grey cat close, I walked up to her, looping my arms around her from behind. I knew she wouldn't feel me. That I may as well have been dead. But as I heard her soft cries into the fur, I wanted nothing more than to let her know that eventually, it would all be okay.

Resting my head on her shoulder, I swallowed thickly. "Soon," I told her. "I'll be home soon."

I felt her stiffen against me, her spine going rigid as she looked up, Billows jumping from her arms. I froze. I could hear the steady sound of her heart through the room as it sped up and she stepped from my embrace to look around. She had heard me. She just had to.

"Hazel?" I whispered, willing her eyes to meet mine. "Hazel, honey. I'm right here. I'm right in front of you. I'll be home soon, I promise."

She looked right at me and my heart stopped. Briefly, I thought that maybe I had come back. Maybe the decision had been made for me and I was returning sooner than I realized. While my job was not done I found I didn't care. I just wanted her in my arms again. To go upstairs and curl up in her bed and whisper to each other until the wisps took root in the tree once more. I wanted my life back.

But as Hazel stepped towards me, hand outstretched, she walked right through my body to something on the other side. Dissipating me and sending me back to the graveyard. Yet again, I was standing in front of my grave, the feel of her forgotten.

"I love you," I whispered to the air. A wisp fluttered by in response. Maybe they would go home and tell her. I just hoped she could hold on for a bit longer.

[Milo - Book Two Sneak](#)

[Jul 19, 2023](#)



"Fuck!"

A blade clattered to the floor, bent at the tip and caked with something soft and spongy. Two bodies lay inert, their faces pressed down into the boggy soil. The sludge of the river that ambled by was tinted red and murky brown. Milo collapsed against the side of the drain tunnel, a hand pressed tight to his side.

"Fuck," he muttered again, sliding down, legs weak. There was a bruise blooming on the side of his face and his lip was split. His surroundings were dark, the opening to the storm drain at least a mile in either direction. His eyes glowed softly within the circular enclosure, bouncing a soft amber light. Just enough for me to see the death that encircled him and the discolored wetness to his shirt.

"Milo," I started, "that wound really doesn't look good." It fell on deaf ears. He couldn't hear me. He couldn't even see me. But, I didn't want the only sound in the tunnel to be his ragged breathing.

Closing his eyes, he audibly swallowed, working himself up to something. There were echoes above that sounded like feet running towards us and while I was pretty sure he was safe, for now, it was clear he couldn't stay for long. They were looking for him. Most of the market was, at this point. Whether it was because Belladonna had sent out a manhunt or the guard was trained to bring him in, didn't actually matter. It was the people looking for a leg up that were the dangerous ones. The ones who thought they could be the Gatekeeper. They had nothing left to lose and no rules to dictate their lives by.

When Milo dared to peel his eyes open again, he looked down at where he pressed his ringed hand against his wound. Slowly, he pulled it away, whimpering a little at the side of the torn flesh below.

"Okay," he whispered. "Okay. Not too bad. Been in worse situations. Been close to death plenty of times. Just got to get up. Walk out of here. Just got to—" As he planted one booted foot beneath him, it slid against the ground, sending him stumbling to the side. "Or not." He rolled onto his back, panting and gritting his teeth.

When I splashed across the waters towards him, I made no sound. What I could and could not affect was still at random. But I couldn't just leave him there. It was funny, really. The blood that dripped from

him was far more than what had ever dripped from me. My wound was made of light. It had shone with a blinding brightness that had sucked out the rest of the lanterns. Milo's was made from blood, leaching between his fingers and pouring life down onto the concrete. Little bits of moss tried to grow as his fae blood mingled with the soil. They failed to thrive, though and guttered into nothing just as soon as they came.

I knelt by his side. There was a small and bitter part of me that still echoed that he deserved this. That the pain was something he should wallow in. It was the human part. The one that was angry. But along with that, the soft and forgiving part of that personality, wanted to reach out to him. They warred with each other, both caught up in a power struggle. It was an incredibly confusing thing to be alive and shrouded in such narrow opinions.

"So this is how it ends, huh?" he spoke to no one. "Me, alone. Bleeding. With only my sins to keep me company. Yeah, that sounds about fucking right."

He was giving up. The bruises and wounds that littered his body were roadmaps, falsely glorifying the last few months. It was out now. That scrawny kid that was seen laughing in taverns and dancing on tables? He was the Gatekeeper. I wondered if the ones wielding the blade against him knew what they were getting into. I certainly didn't want them for my protector.

"Milo," I said, close to his ear. He startled, eyes snapping open and blazing in the dark. "You need to get up. Find help."

His breath came out in a soft wheeze. "Oh, gods. I'm dying. This is me dying."

I pressed my hand down on his wound, feeling the pulse of life beneath his skin. The way it stretched out through the tunnel, a living thread in the fabric that was my world. "You're not dying," I told him, not sure if he could hear me. "Not if you get up and out of here. But you can't just lie here and give up."

The fight had been fleeing. It had been doused repeatedly. Now, I thought he got up on sheer stubbornness alone. But down here, in the dark, I wondered if he would finally let go. No one but me was here to witness this. No one was here to stop him.

"I miss you," he muttered.

I startled, looking down at him as a tear escaped the corner of his eye.

"I know you can hear me. Don't know how much it matters. But I do miss you."

"Then get up," I urged. "Get up so we can have all this out when I come back. I want to yell at you, kiss you and hug you and in return I need you to do the same to me. We need to make everyone uncomfortable with our odd little thing we got going." I pushed my fingers through his hair. "We need to chase each other's nightmares away."

I didn't understand how much I wanted that until that very moment. For most of my time wandering, I had ignored Milo. He was often too far from the Graveyard for me to appear and I still didn't quite know what this new form was turning into. But I knew I was coming back. That it was imminent at this point.

I didn't want a new Gatekeeper to take his place. Given that the people around him were dead, it was just going to get shoved on some unsuspecting soul which felt like a death sentence all on its own.

And on top of that? I just wanted Milo around. He made me feel alive. And it was a feeling I desperately craved.

"Get up, Milo," I demanded. Not as me but as the Night Market, speaking to their Gatekeeper.

Slowly, he sat up. "Kay," he mumbled.

I scrambled backwards as he slowly rose, looking at him with searching eyes because I was almost positive he had heard me that time.

Bracing himself against the wall, he began moving down the tunnel, still clutching his side. For one more day, he would continue to walk the realm. Continue to try and make this right.

[Belladonna Book 2 Sneak Peek](#)

[Jul 25, 2023](#)



"We were under the impression that you would be making a bit more of an effort."

Belladonna forced herself not to roll her eyes. I could see it now. The small twitch along her hairline that said she was hiding the way she truly felt. While she was a master at keeping her emotions and her ire

under locks at these meetings, I couldn't help but notice it had gotten harder and harder for her over the last few weeks. Before, she dealt with individuals one on one. Speaking to them beneath mood lighting and coaxing her desires from them with soft touches. These were full meetings. With desks between them and stern looks. While I doubted she was a stranger to such a thing, it was certainly a change in pace.

"And what exactly is it you wish for me to do, Calliope? I have provided our people with blood services. There is very little shortage."

"Oh please, Belladonna. There is a shortage and you know it. We cannot just go around making thrall after thrall. The Velvet Guard would surely have something to say about that. Even if the mandate comes from you."

Calliope was a woman of tall and curvaceous stature. She had a stern face and pink hair that was tied back from her honey skin. I wanted to hate her when I had initially seen her. Taking her to be like all the other vampires out there throwing their little tantrums. But Calliope, while she did not agree with Belladonna, did not seem inclined to stage a coup.

"For the time being, we have sustainable resources for food," Belladonna said patiently. "I have a feeling this is far less about hunger and far more about the thrill of the hunt."

"It is in our nature." Alright, I would have to give it to the woman. She at least was not trying to bullshit the only vampire Baron they currently had. The only one, from my experience, that seemed to give a shit for the time being.

"Not mine," Belladonna parroted. "It is not innate to our kind."

"Your blood is diluted, Belladonna. You are fourth generation and sired by a very sick vampire."

"Diluted blood. Oh come on," I said, rolling my eyes for Belladonna. "She's probably one of the most powerful women in the entire realm. Diluted blood my ass."

"A woman," Belladonna continued, speaking over my own words. "That ruled you for quite a bit of years. So let us not pretend that bloodlines and health mean anything, hm?"

Calliope sighed as if she were having to explain something to a child. It was a look I had seen on her face often. She was far older than the other vampires and the knowledge she had gained through her life was invaluable. If not just a tad bit outdated. According to Belladonna, at least.

"All I am saying, is the urge to hunt and kill has never been strong with you. But that does not mean it does not affect others. You remember what it was like to be a fledgling. The hunger. The desire. You think a fledgling will sip delicately and woo their meal? Do you believe that the ones that have only known the pride of the kill should be allowed to go near a civilian?"

Molten gold eyes stared across at the milky brown of Calliope's. Belladonna had one leg crossed over the other as she stared at the woman, flanked by three burly guards all of which looked as if they had freshly fed.

"As always, Calliope, I will take your suggestions under advisement. But, I am afraid I will have to be cutting this meeting short. I have several meetings with development in hopes of moving out of this dreadful cathedral."

Calliope rose, staring at Belladonna with pity. "Do not take long, Baron. There is a war that will be on your hands. And without support, you will not be able to handle it."

"I have never had support a day in my life. I do not plan to start now."

Calliope sighed, looking as if she wished to say something, but instead, she snapped at her guards and left the room.

Moving to the window, I saw Belladonna lean against the frame of the circular stained-glass portcullis. It was open to the evening air. She watched as Calliope exited the cathedral moments later, followed by her guards. They disappeared into the market, having to navigate new paths in the dark given that the walls moved nearly every day. When they were out of both sight and earshot, Belladonna sucked in a sharp breath.

"Bitch," she muttered.

Turning back to her desk, she sat down in her seat, grabbing angrily at the pile of papers before her. They had only served to get bigger and bigger. Requests. Summons. Invitations to the latest ball. Though, Belladonna had not been one for parties. Not since that night.

Walking over to her, I placed a hand on her back, wishing I could feel her even just a little. Wishing she could feel me. But her skin was iced in death along with my own and she remained entirely unaware that I was even here. She had from the day I stepped foot back in her cathedral.

"There has to be another way," I told her. While I didn't like to admit it, this Calliope was right. The vampires were not going to give up their hunts. And they certainly were not going to sip their blood from goblets in any sort of civilized nature. But Belladonna knew that if she allowed them to peruse the streets at their own discretion, they would once again be forced to stay in a small district. The vampires were prohibited from leaving most of the mists and pleasure zones. Belladonna was actively fighting for so much more.

Leaning forward, she put her head in her hands tiredly. I wanted to comfort her like she had me so many times before.

"Ms. Malady?"

"What?" she snapped, looking at the new arrival.

He was a young man with bright red eyes and stained teeth. "There is a request for you to put out the fires along the waterways."

"No."

"Imports cannot get in and..."

She stood slowly. "I have refrained from killing one individual today. I do not think I will be able to do it again."

He swallowed. "Yes, ma'am." And quickly, he left.

"Oh, Bella," I whispered brokenly. As she sank back down into her chair, I felt my heart break a little more. "What am I going to do with you?" I had to get back to her. I knew that. I just needed her to be patient a little longer. Just until I was done. "I'll be home soon," I vowed. "And I promise, I'll explain everything."

She didn't move. Didn't even look my way. To her, I was officially dead.

[Need Questions!](#)

[Jul 28, 2023](#)

Hey everybody!

I still have not received any questions for the end of the month Q&A. Please send them in with a tag saying they are for the Q&A. Also remember spicy questions are allowed here on Patreon. :)

Zinnia

[July Q&A](#)

[Jul 31, 2023](#)

Q&A questions:

What can we expect for Bella's route?

Book 2 is going to be an interesting point for Bella. Most of book 1 was spent with her playing a lot of things close to chest as she continued to plan her revenge on Kavatti and take what she believed was her rightful position. But, like with many things, the grass is always greener. We will be seeing Belladonna struggling with Baronhood and the rules and limitations that are applied to her now that she is within this position. While she was once a woman who prided herself on discovering the secrets of the market and knowing what others did not, it is doubtful that she will be able to extract that information like she had before. This leaves Belladonna at far more of a disadvantage than she has been in a long time. It will be an exploration into how she is going to deal with that and a romanced MC will have a bit more access to those conversations than one who is not.

Do different types of blood taste different? Like human blood vs orc blood?

Yes. The vampires within the Night Market are very few at this point and are very limited on where they can hunt. Something we will also be seeing in book 2. But, the 'wine' trade among the upper echelon of vamps, includes varying types of blood that are bottled for parties. It is part of what Belladonna offers at some of her blood bars that she owns.

Can a celestial be turned into a vampire?

A true celestial can but would be cast from the Knowing immediately for the perversion. The likelihood of them not going mad is very slim and they most likely would not survive. A Fallen that has already begun to battle the madness might be able to survive the transformation. But, it really does depend on how much they still believe in the Knowing. Vampires are considered dirty to the Knowing. They are creatures that are foul, unclean, and tainted. So, a celestial, fallen or not, is going to have to dismantle that. Otherwise, they probably will not survive.

How long until they can be vulnerable around their s/o? What are they like in this state?

Hazel I think is vulnerable rather quickly. I think there are plenty of moments where we have seen that within the first book. She does not necessarily have a hold up about showing vulnerability to those she trusts. She is someone that just needs assurance when she is in that state.

Gabriel struggles to be vulnerable around anyone, even a s/o. It takes a lot of emotional turmoil, fear, and heavy emotions to come down for him to essentially break and become vulnerable. I'm not sure if he is a person who will ever choose to be vulnerable but he when it does happen, he needs someone to talk him down. I think Gabriel is someone that can work himself up further and further unless guided back down to a safe and loving space.

Belladonna is also not someone who likes being vulnerable around anyone. It is a weakness and a callback to her human life. While she does not need to 'break' in order to be vulnerable, she will be incredibly embarrassed and irritated by her vulnerability. It is something she does not like within herself. An MC that assures her that she is not weak would be needed in those moments.

Milo is not vulnerable with most. It takes a building of trust and friendship for him to get to that point. And even then, I think his default is to joke about something or even have sex as a deflection. When Milo is truly vulnerable, it is usually brought about my soft touch and getting him to a place where he can feel safe. Milo has no problems showing his feelings, as long as he feels like it is not going to be thrown back at him.

Malcolm is one I actually do not have an answer to. I keep thinking I know what his limits are and when he would open up but I am not sure what his vulnerable situation would be. I think that is something we will have to discover in book 2 together. Maybe even book 3.

How easy would it be for MC to sneak up on the ROs and give them a surprise hug or kiss?

An MC who snuck up on Hazel would scare the crap out of her. I don't know if the kiss or hug would happen because she would scream in surprise and the MC would have to calm her down because her heart would be racing so much.

It would be extremely hard to sneak up on Gabriel but I do think it is possible. If an MC managed to do it, after an initial startle, Gabriel would melt into them, happily accepting the affection.

Belladonna would hear and smell the MC coming so it would not happen. But she might humor them and pretend to be surprised.

It would be incredibly hard to do to Milo within the market because he is usually very aware of his surroundings. But if it was at home where he was comfortable, probably pretty easy. And he would adore it.

Malcolm is pretty similar, trained to know his surroundings at all times. But he would delight in an MC who was able to sneak up on him and show affection.

Are there other Markets/living realms out there and are any of them connected to the market or are at least aware of them?

So all worlds and realms are connected to the Night Market. It is a nexus point for everything. Most places are not aware of the Night Market at all. Doors are usually unassuming and would only be made by invitation. But, there are realms out there that do have complete knowledge of the Night Market and how to get there. Trade between them and the Night Market is far more common. They are all similar destination points where they are a conglomeration of all the worlds and have a certain amount of magic system implemented so there are not a lot of language barriers between them in order to continue trade.

If each RO had their druthers, what would their happy ending with the MC look like right now?

Hazel's happy ending would be the MC and her together at the apothecary, running a farm and the shop together. Hazel would love to have animals there and raise more crops. Basically, having someone who will work with her and work hard and *enjoy* it just as much as her. Starting a life with that person is

Hazel's happy ending. She would love nothing more than to live something more simplistic and purposeful while having Milo and Malcolm over for family dinners and game nights.

Gabriel's happy ending would be having the MC back in his arms and for the entire revelation about MC being the Night Market, to have never happened. He would love nothing more than to have MC back, take some time off, and go on a vacation together where MC could berate him into self-care and he could in return, showing MC with love and affection.

Belladonna actually does not dream about happy endings. To do so is dangerous and I do think she stops herself. The only thing she has ever thought about that I do not think she would tell *anyone*, is that she would really love to have a night with the MC where the two of them lay naked and lazy in front of the fire, reading to each other.

Milo's happy ending would be for all of this to have been a dream. For him to wake up and the MC is there and just tells him it was one of his nightmares. He would then just hold them. Whispering into their skin the horrors of what he saw and how scared and lonely it all felt. And then having the MC hold him the entire time before suggesting they go find Ever and Malcolm and all of them go get some noodles together.

Malcolm's happy ending would be for MC to be back, to be at full power, and realize their potential. Working with the MC, bringing balance to their life and world and existing within each other's circles in this incredibly supportive and caring way. He would want a family with the MC and he would want to know that what they were doing had purpose and they were both living to their potential.

Will we be able to learn about the Night Market past incarnations?

I really really hope so! I have no plans for it right now but I have always wanted to explore what those incarnations might look like. I think it would be interesting to see when the Night Market decided to walk their streets and what problem they were trying to solve at the time. Because the Night Market does only come down when they are absolutely needed. When a solution cannot arise without them. Knowing what those previous times might have been would not only offer insight into the character of the Night Market as a whole, but I think explain so much about the society that lives there.

Spicy Questions Next:

On a scale of 0 to Leather&Whips where do the ROs fall? Or could fall, given the right circumstances?

Hazel: About a 2. She falls more on the food kink variety and maybe some soft blindfolding for her partner with some sensory play. Hazel would very much enjoy using magic on the MC to tease them to their limits. It would be all pleasure filled and very little pain play. She would feel far too guilty about that.

Gabriel: He falls on the Leather&Whips. He likes a little bit of pain with his pleasure and he likes it done to him. There is very little pain he would like to enact on the MC but tying him up? Making him reach

orgasm. Ordering him around? Yeah, Gabriel is into that. Give him a ball gag and some handcuffs and MC will have a happy Warden on their hands.

Belladonna: 10. To the MC. Not to herself. She will never allow a stranger to do anything to her really and as of yet, I do not think she knows what her limits are in a relationship. But, in relation to what she would do to her partners, it would be far more an exploration of how many times can she get the MC to cum and in how many different ways. Having them shaking and not knowing their own name afterward is her goal.

Milo: MC wants to try something? Hell yeah. But impact play is out. He is into role play, over stimulation, humiliation, praise kink, etc. Milo will pretty much try anything once as long as it does not mean he is getting hit. He gets a little nervous with being tied up but I think that is something he would be interested in working through.

Malcolm: Tantric. Malcolm is big into making his partner wait. For Malcolm, the foreplay is where it is all at. This leaves him on a leather and whips scale for sure, as long as his partner wants it. But, as for what is done to him? Malcolm struggles with giving up control in that arena. He would rather do unto others than have anything done to him. But, I will say he has plenty of strap on's to fuck his partners with and does adore watching them be spread open for him.

Can you give us something spicy about Gabe's route what to expect?

I'm not sure how spicy this is, but there is going to have to be some scenes where the MC and Gabriel figure out just how their sex life is going to work. Especially since Gabriel really likes sex, but sees it as something wrong at the same time. There will probably be a bit more of an exploration onto his more sub side in book 2. If MC wishes for him to be more dominate they will have to learn how to speak to him in such a way that orders him to take the more dominate role. They will also have to dismantle how that is going to make him feel afterward because that is not something Gabriel believes to be morally okay.

[Milo Next - FemMC - NSFW](#)

[Aug 11, 2023](#)



Authors note: Between Milo and female MC. Set in an undetermined time

The scent of beer and sweat filled the heady air around me as I entered the small tavern. It was a literal hole in the wall, located at the bottom of a hot spring where leaky pipes made the passage way down muggy and nearly unbreathable. So of course this was Milo's favorite spot. Because why wouldn't it be.

The tavern itself was dimly lit with small geysers placed around. My tunic was already damp and sticking against my skin. I spotted Milo sitting at the end of the bar, on top of the literal bar top. He had a mug of ale in his hand and was having a lively discussion with some woman who looked as if she was about to smack the ale from his hand just to wipe the smile off his face. I couldn't say that I didn't understand the sentiment.

"Hey, darlin'," he drawled as I stepped up. He scooted closer to the edge of the bar, wrapping one arm around me and spreading his legs to pull me between them. He gave me a sloppy kiss, his tongue tasting of stale ale. His curls were damp and sticking to his neck. "Isn't this place great?" his smile was lopsided and loose. Milo was happy tonight. A rarity given the weight on his shoulders.

"Don't you dare tell him it is," the woman behind me stated. Twisting in his hold, I eyed her curiously. She had a stern look to her, but her eyes were lit with amusement. "He is trying to weasel out of his share of upgrades."

I frowned. "You own this place?" I asked

"Gods no," he laughed. "But I have a special interest in keeping it open so I may have pledged some start up money."

"Five years ago," the woman said.

"I've been busy, Rooke. Come on now."

The woman, Rooke, shook her head, holding a dismissive hand up to him. "I'm done with you, Next. Get me the money by tomorrow."

“Yeah, yeah.”

“You won’t drink for free if you don’t.”

That seemed to sober him a bit as she walked away. But, he turned to me, any of his worries instantly sliding away as his eyes raked over my form. “Want to save me from getting too drunk and have the rest of my beer?” he asked.

“Sure,” I told him. I yelped a little as he hopped down off the bar, plopping himself onto the stool and pulling me to half stand and half sit between his legs. It gave me ample view of the show going on behind the bar itself, men and women tossing drinks into the air and flicking their wrists to shape the liquid into different shapes. Some of which were vaguely filthy.

“What are they doing?”

Milo’s hand was on my thigh, kneading the muscle there. “It’s kind of an entertainment bar. Moderately fun to watch but incredibly impressive when you are drunk. Which, most people are. So enraptured are most of these fine patrons that they will let even the most obvious of things slide.”

His fingers slowly started pulling up my skirt, bypassing the knife I kept sheathed on my thigh to wander between the apex of my legs. Looking over my shoulder, I shot him a look. One he returned with a raised brow. “You’re playing with fire, Next.”

“I’m playing with you,” he corrected.

Behind the bar, a glass was tossed into the air, hovering for a moment before bursting into flame, the liquid within becoming a vibrant green. Milo’s lips fell upon the apex of my shoulder then, beginning to mouth his way upwards to nose along the shell of my ear.

“Missed you,” he muttered.

“You saw me yesterday morning.”

“Others were around. Couldn’t really get my hands on you like I wanted.”

I took in a shuddering breath as his knuckles brushed against my center, the cloth there heated and slightly damp. I pressed my thighs together, trapping his wandering fingers. “And how is that?”

I felt his laughter rumble through his chest, running up and down my spine. “Would you like me to tell you?”

I was entering that territory with Milo. That one that said he held a secret that I did not. And like most things with him, I opted to tumble forth, trusting that he would see me through to wherever this would go. “Yes,” I breathed.

Suddenly, I was cinched up against the counter, Milo shimmying so as to block me from sight. To the rest of the world, we looked like two lovers, curled up close, watching the show, but I could feel the way he twitched beneath me as his fingers began wandering beneath the fabric of my wraps.

“Do you know how hard it is to see you wandering around like you do? All I want to do right now is bend you over this counter and push into you.” His fingers parted my wet lips, thumb swiping up and down my clit. “First though, I’d get you all prepared. Kneel behind you and lick you open. Get you all loose and sloppy.”

My breath hitched, my fingers coming up to grip the edge of the counter.

“Would you like that, darlin’? Skirts rucked up over your hips and me kneeling between your thighs?” Slowly, he began circling my opening, dipping the tip of his finger inside. “I wonder, would you squirm against me or would you stay still and let me get you off like that. If I reached up and undid your bodice, would you play with your tits for me?”

“Keep dreaming,” I gasped, trying to keep my eyes front and center. I could feel my cheeks heat and my lower half began to squirm. I could feel him though. Right in the crease of my ass. He was hot and warm and achingly hard beneath me.

“Oh, darlin’. You are literally what makes up my dreams,” he said, sucking a bruise just below my ear. “Thinking about sliding my cock into you, pushing in and out and feeling you squeeze me. I wake up hard at night just thinkin’ of you. The way your face looks right as you’re about to cum. Think we could get you to do that now?” Before I could answer he slid his finger all the way inside, crooking it slightly as he began to pump it in and out, his thumb swirling over my clit.

My eyes fluttered closed as I dipped my head downwards, trying to control my breathing.

“Oh, no, darlin’, keep those eyes up. Wouldn’t want anyone to become suspicious.” I tipped my head back upwards, pressing my back to his chest. “Good girl,” he whispered.

“Milo,” I gasped.

“What’s wrong?” I could feel his grin. “No ones watching. Just keep those beautiful eyes of yours forward and let me take care of you, yeah?” He added another finger, causing me to stifle my groan. “Now, where was I? Oh yeah,” he thrust his hips against me, rolling them and pressing me close with his free hand. It splayed low across my belly, keeping me still as he ground against me. “The things I wish I could do to you right now,” he said, sweat beading on his face as he continued to suck at my neck. “I want to mark you. I want your scent on my hand so everyone knows I’m yours. Want to feel you flutter around me and fuck you through it.”

My body ached, my thighs tensing as he swirled his thumb against me. I widened my thighs, trying to give him more access. Desperate for him to fuck me harder. At this point, I didn’t think I cared if he unzipped right here and brought me off. I was so desperate for release that I would have taken anything.

"You want my cock, darlin'?" he whispered against me. Two seats down, a woman and her partner sat, giggling in each other's ear as they watched the show behind the bar. Little did they know of the show that was happening right there. "Want me to sit you on my lap and have you keep me warm all night?" He licked the sweat from my skin. "Or, you want me to take you around back. Pull you into the alley and fuck you up against the wall until you're screaming my name?" I was panting now, unable to control my breathing as he fingered me with deep and steady strokes, flicking at my clit with his thumbnail and whispering dirty things in my ear.

"Want to cum?" he asked innocently. I nodded my head. It took everything in me not to tip it back and moan out my release. "Gonna need you to say it then," he told me. "I'm going to need you to say, Milo baby, I need to fuck myself on your hand until I am nothing more than a moaning mess in your palm."

"Fuck you," I gritted out.

"We'll get the strap on out later. Now say it." He bit at my neck.

"Milo, baby. I need you to finish what you started or else I won't let you near me for the next week."

"Mean," he pouted. "But affective."

Pushing me flat against the bar top, he shifted to get a better angle. "Act like you are reaching for those napkins." I did as I was told, reaching out and stretching my body somewhat inconspicuously across the bar while he fucked me hard. My eyes rolled back in my head and just as the bartender finished their show, I felt a flood of release course through me, sending me shivering just as I curled my fingers tightly around the napkins.

Milo pulled me back and straightened my skirt immediately, twisting me so I could now rest against his chest.

"You okay?" he whispered as my heart rate came down. "Too much?" His hand stroked across my hair, walking down my spine as he kept me close.

"When you asked me if I was okay with PDA, I didn't exactly know you meant this?" I mumbled. I could feel him stiffen a bit and I reached down, palming his erection. "You're good," I told him. "I would have stopped you if I really felt uncomfortable." Immediately, he relaxed.

"Want to get out of here?" he whispered, tipping my chin up so he could kiss me softly.

"No, I want the drink you promised me."

He laughed against my lips. "Anything for you, darlin'. Anything."

[Aug 14, 2023](#)



Authors note: Between Belladonna and female MC. Set in an undetermined time

“Kneel.”

Leather straps crisscrossed over Belladonna's body, wrapping her in black and pushing her ample breasts upwards. Dark, strappy heels laced up to the meat of her thigh as she walked around me. I dropped to my knees, swallowing thickly, chest red and heaving. I had entered a dark room, with only a small spotlight in the center and had been told to strip. From there, I waited. Not moving. Hardly even breathing. Not until Belladonna joined me, her body tantalizingly on display while still covering every bit of her I wanted to see. I didn't know if we were alone. I didn't know if there were others lurking in the dark. That was exactly how Belladonna wanted it, though.

“Do you know why you're here?” she asked, her voice sultry and sweet. It was the kind of voice that felt like honey, dripping down my spine.

“You are not pleased with me.”

“You are not please with me, what?”

I swallowed. “You are not pleased with me, mistress.”

“Oh, I very much like when you say that.” Yanking back my hair, she ran her tongue up the side of my neck, licking the sweat there. “Do you know why I'm not pleased with you, my heart?”

“Because I promised not to touch myself.”

“And did you follow through on that promise?”

"I mean, technically..." The sharp slap of the paddled smacked at my bare hips.

"Try again," she sang.

"No," I told her. "I touched myself this morning." Belladonna could smell it the moment I walked into the cathedral today. I had awoken from a dream with her, my body aching for release. Reaching between my legs, I had fingered myself quickly, getting myself off in a moment, not quite awake enough to understand what it was I had done. Despite showering, however, Belladonna could still smell my release. And she was clearly not happy.

"And what did we discuss the other day?"

"That my pleasure does not belong to me any longer. That it belongs to you."

"So why are you kneeling right now, naked?"

"Because I've disappointed you, mistress."

I felt the paddle slide between my legs, tapping my thighs apart as it patted at my slick center. I felt the vibration knock through me, sending a gush of heat within my body.

"Now, just how am I going to have you make it up to me?" she asked. I of course knew that she already had a plan. That this was just a drawn out way of heightening the anticipation. "Clearly, since you do not listen, we will have to do something about that. I would put a chastity device on you but I feel like those things are barbaric and rarely teach such a lesson."

"Thank you, mistress," I sighed.

"Good. You are learning."

Another whack to my center sent me gasping and nearly falling forward to my hands and knees, I caught myself, doubling over as the paddle rubbed against the lips of my cunt, parting them to seek out my clit. I shivered, feeling that familiar ache burn through me, heightened now as she drew blood down to my center with the flat of the paddle.

"Oh, you are positively dripping, dear heart." Another smack knocked against me, sending me gasping and to all fours. "Stay just like that," Belladonna commanded.

Three more succeeding smacks had me gasping, my hips seeking out the friction. I rolled against the offending object, trying to find some relief. Each hit didn't hurt per se, but they had my hips hiccuping helplessly for something *more*. With one last smack, Belladonna was on my back, paddled tossed aside as she cupped both my breasts, tugging on the chain there. Looking over my shoulder, I could feel the pout on her lips.

"It's a shame you are being punished right now. I would very much have liked mutual play tonight, dear heart. It has been a long week." Trailing her hand upward, she dragged a nail across one puffy nipple, delighting in the yelp it produced. Her other hand came down to cup my sex, allowing me a brief but pleasurable moment to grind down against her palm, the rings she wore cool steel against my heated skin.

"You are not coming tonight," she assured me. "Nor are you to touch me. This could have all been avoided if you had just listened."

"What— what are we doing then?" I asked, uncertain what my job was supposed to be.

"Oh, dear heart. You are doing nothing. I, on the other hand, will get to play. Bringing you to the brink over and over again until you are screaming my name. And even then, I will not stop. But, under no circumstances, do you get to come."

She began to rock against me in some sort of mimicry of sex, trailing her hands along my body and dipping her fingers between my wet folds. When she brought her hand back up, it was to wrap her lips around, a pleased moan filling my ears at the taste of me. My head fell forward, pressing against the floor. I felt something press into me from behind

I wanted to touch her. I had awoken that morning, my thighs already sticky. I swore I could smell her on my pillow. Taste her on my tongue.

"Why'd you do it, my sweet?" she murmured, rolling my clit between her fingers.

"I had a dream."

"About me?" I nodded out a whimper. "Tell me about it."

Grabbing me, she flipped me onto my back, pulling me until my ass rested on her knees, my legs spread on either side of her hips. I was wide open for her to view and I knew that any embarrassment I felt had to be quelled. I was never allowed to hide myself from her.

"I—" I gasped as she pulled out a long dildo from behind her, teasing my opening with the bulbous head. "I dreamt of you. Pleasuring me. Drinking from me."

"Did you?" she quirked a brow, slowly pushing the fake cock slowly inside me. I felt full and stretched, the toy far larger than anything she had made me take before. "And where was I drinking from?"

"My neck?" I squirmed.

"Well, then that is surely a dream. Rarely do I drink from the neck, dear heart. No. In fact, my favorite place is right here." She ran a hand down the vein on the inner part of my thigh, dragging her nail across my skin until blood bloomed in a thin line. Leaning down, she licked it off of me. My body arched beneath her as I squeezed myself around the rigid line of the cock, feeling her spit dry on my skin.

“When you touched yourself this morning, did you think of me? Did you dream of all the ways I could get off?”

“Yes.”

“Was it anything like this?” she asked, fucking me with the thick implement. “Or was it my tongue?”

“I— you were doing this while I got to lick you,” I said. “Then you flipped me over and drank from me the moment I reached orgasm.”

“Well,” she whispered, giving a sharp thrust, following my body as it bucked and squirmed. Leaning down, her eyes glinted red. “Perhaps if you hadn’t of touched yourself like we discussed, we could have made that happen for you.” Pulling out, she stood, staring down at me. “But instead, dear heart. I’m going to need you to get dressed and come with me. I have some shopping in the market to do today and you will need to attend.”

Pulling one of her robes out she draped it over her shoulder, tossing the blood tinged locks of her hair over one shoulder. I was left naked and aroused on the floor, legs still spread open. She came over, just as I was about to get up, putting one healed foot on my chest. She took an appreciative look over my body and under her dress, I could see her own curls glistening.

“Beautiful,” she said. “Now, hurry up, darling. I don’t have all day.”

“Yes, mistress.”

She grinned, flashing her teeth, pleased. I made a vow to be extra good today. Because as much as Belladonna loved giving up punishment, she loved giving out rewards far more.

[Gabriel f/MC Spicy](#)

[Aug 18, 2023](#)



Authors note: Between Gabriel and female MC. Set in an undetermined time

Pushing his chair back, I climbed in his lap, my legs hugging either side of his hips. When I took the quill from his fingers, there was mild irritation that crossed his eyes. The kind that said I was reaching a boundary that he did not wish for me to tread. Of course it was going to be a work-related boundary. Gabriel rarely pushed back when it came to his own comfort, but was a stickler when it came to his work.

“What exactly are you doing?” he asked me.

“You have been working too hard.”

Days had gone by. All of which showed Gabriel sitting at his desk, bent over files and worksheets. The likes of which I really didn't care to understand. According to him, there was a coup down at the docks. One that Reese had somehow made worse which then sent the entire group of “cretins” towards the swampy district of the bog lands. There, more contraband was found, a guard went missing, and the shops there had to be shut down. In the end, it was a paperwork nightmares that Gabriel had been dealing with along with the rest of his Warden duties and it was taking its toll. He had not left the office for anything other than work in over a week. He forgot to eat. And the time him and I shared was shoved between filing away his forms and small bites of food I absconded from Hazel.

“I do not believe in the term, working too hard,” he told me. “Someone that believes they are working too hard is someone who does not value work at all.”

“I don't think that's true.”

He hummed at me, not responding. I could tell he disagreed but rarely anymore did he like to do so out loud.

“Why don't you take a break?” I asked him, wrapping my arms around his neck. “We could go get some food. Walk the market for the evening where you can glare menacingly at people. Maybe go back to your place.” I rolled my hips suggestively against his own, delighting in the surprise that crossed his face.

"As much as I would love to do all of that," he said, clutching my hips tightly. "This is time-sensitive. I cannot take the entire evening off."

"But you could spare a few hours?"

"I hesitate to give you an answer because I feel as if you are going to take advantage of that."

"Absolutely I am," I laughed. Despite his hold on me, I ground my hips down against him, feeling the length of him twitch beneath his trousers. His pants had grown tighter over the last few months as he actually ate real meals. Which gave the delicious effect of showing off what he hid beneath the blue of his uniform.

"I really cannot," he insisted. Yet, he shifted himself downwards, his fingers kneading the flesh of my hips as he tipped his head back. Like I suspected, his hips began to give small little rolls against mine, seeking out the heat of my core.

"You sure?" I whispered. "So tense, Warden. You sure you don't need a little bit of release?"

He groaned loudly as I thrust against him, dragging the fabric of his trousers up along the length of his cock. I could feel myself grow wet, my mouth beginning to water at the idea of him helpless and squirming beneath me.

Sliding down his legs, I got on my knees, spreading his thighs. Slowly, I began popping the button of his pants, his ragged breaths shredding the air around us as he tried to keep himself still. The leather of his chair creaked as he tightened his fingers around each arm and his feet were planted on either side of me. He looked down at me with hooded eyes, lips parted and grace beginning to glow around us. With deft fingers, I reached inside, wrapping my hands around the warm and dry length of him. He twitched in my hand, blood filling his erection as I squeezed him before popping him out.

Gabriel was thick and hard, jutting upwards. He trembled as my breath ghosted across the dark head, a pearl of precum beading at the tip. Leaning down, I licked it from him, flattening my tongue to run across the veiny underside. He was hot and heavy against my lips and the moan that escaped him when straight to my center.

"Do you want me to continue?" I whispered.

I knew he did. But Gabriel never asked for these things. He never liked to rely on anyone. But it had been so long and I could see the way his thighs began to tense.

"What do you want from me?" he panted. I knew he ached to reach out and touch me. To hold onto me. Gabriel loved to give pleasure. Listen to the way my breath hitched and my eyes rolled back in my head as I gave myself to him. He denied himself often though and tonight was no different. Not unless I commanded it to be so.

"What do you want, Gabriel?" I murmured, dragging my lips across him. He sucked in a harsh breath, hips arching off his chair. "Can you tell me?"

He strained upwards, clearly wanting more. It was the *how* that I was interested in. Getting him to tell me any of that, given who he was. Sex was wrong. Unclean. It was something beneath a celestial. But the man before me was very good at getting dirty and I loved watching how he fell apart each time.

Twisting in his seat, he gritted his teeth. "No," he stated. "I don't think I actually can."

"Oh, Gabriel," I sighed. Then again, maybe tonight was not the night. Maybe instead of pushing him, I just needed to take care of him. There was a balance to be struck with this and we had come so far already. I needed him to know he was safe in my arms just as much as I was safe within his. "Alright," I told him softly. "No more playing."

Leaning down, I took him into my mouth, feeling him hit the back of my throat. The broken groan that fell from his lips made a burst of heat shoot through me. I rubbed my thighs together as I bent forward, my nose pressing against his groan, breathing in the musky scent of him.

Above me, I could see the light of silver fall from his eyes, reaching out through the room and filling it with song. I reached between his legs, cradling his balls and feeling the heavy weight of them. How many times had I brought him off like this, only for him to rise, cock slick with my spit, as he drove into me. For a man who felt as if he had to repent each time he had sex, he certainly had no trouble getting himself back up over and over again. Stuffing me so full that I struggled to walk the next day.

Hollowing my cheeks, I sucked him the way I knew he liked, feeling the weight of him against my tongue. On his desk, the bottle of ink fell over as he jerked his hand out, trying to gain some sort of purchase as he pulsed his hips upwards. He grew impossibly bigger within my mouth, spit beginning to gather as my lips were stretched wide. I grabbed his hand, pulling it so it threaded through my hair to help guide me. He kept his grip loose but bent one knee at the act. I knew it wouldn't take him long. Not with how much stress he was under.

Bobbing my head up and down, I felt my throat strain. My jaw ached and I found myself pressing myself forward, to rub against his leg for a minor amount of relief. His eyes closed as I dragged my teeth lightly against him, sucking at the tip of him before pushing myself back down. I could feel the moment he let go. His hips shot upwards, a guttural sound was ripped from his throat, and his balls tightened in my hand.

Tipping his head back, the light of his grace glowed through his body before shooting down through him and straight down my throat. My own body shuddered, pleasure rocking through me at the warm feel of him, while above me, Gabriel silently screamed, the papers on his desk fluttering down around us.

When his body slumped back into his chair, I stood up, wiping at my mouth. He reached out for me, pulling me into his lap. Post-coital was the only time I felt like he acted upon his own volition. He curled me close, tipping my chin upwards and placing a kiss on my lips. His tongue snaked out, licking the roof of my mouth and tasting his own release on my tongue. His fingers trailed downwards, pressing at me

between my legs. I groaned at the friction, feeling another spark of desire shoot through me as he began rubbing his palm against me.

“Tonight,” I whispered, pulling back.

His eyes ticked towards his desk. At the work he had. The choice was clear. Me, or piles of parchment that would still be there tomorrow.

Sighing, he tipped his head against me. “How late am I allowed to work?”

“I want you home before the turn of the day,” I told him. Midnight. I wasn’t about to have him pass out at his desk yet again.

His nose wrinkled and I couldn’t help but smile at the perturbed look on his face. “One in the morning.”

“Midnight,” I reaffirmed.

“That is certainly not enough—”

“Midnight I start taking care of myself,” I told him. “Your choice.”

“I’ll be there at midnight.”

I laughed as I stood. His cock was semi hard still and sticky against the front of his pants. Leaning down, I nipped at his ear. “Don’t put it away yet,” I told him. He looked at me with wide eyes. “Leave it out as a reminder of what you promised me for tonight.”

Kissing him quickly on the lips, I stood up, walking out of the room. I paused at the door to watch as he scooted back under his desk, hiding his lap from anyone that may walk in. He took a shaky breath, going back to his work. By the time he got home tonight, he would be more than ready for round two.

[Hazel f/mc Spicy](#)

[Aug 21, 2023](#)



I woke to a crash. At first, I assumed the wisps were at it again. They had been fighting with each other lately and had been knocking over the fence and ceramic pots outside during their scuffles. But, when it sounded again, I realized it was not only coming from inside the house, but was accompanied by muffled little sounds of irritated distress. Getting out of bed, I went to investigate, blasted back into my room the second I opened the door. A wave of heat engulfed me. Humid and oppressive. Instead of the air smelling of smoke it smelled of fresh bread and basil.

“Oh,” the little squeak came. “Stop it. This is absolutely not what we spoke of.”

I frowned, squinting through the heat soaked haze, only to find Hazel standing in the kitchen, her skirts hiked up and her corset and blouse discarded. She stood in a small scrap of fabric, tied around her breasts, her hair high off her neck as a sheen of sweat coated her skin.

“Hazel?” I asked.

Turning, she looked at me with wide eyes and flushed cheeks. “The wisps have broken the temperature regulators,” she said. “And try as I might, they are refusing to put it back or even try to fix it.”

Several wisps flitted around the top of the room, circling up above in the vines, cackling. I could already feel the sweat soak my shirt. There was only one small window that was in the kitchen. The only way to let in a nice breeze from outside. It was doing nothing to battle the heat.

“What do they want?” I asked. Because wisps always wanted something.

“To be obstinate.” Hazel was glaring up at one wisp in particular. It was unlike her to become irritated, though I supposed anyone would in this heat.

Walking towards her, I looked around. Bags of flour and sugar were out on the counter, along with some cracked eggs. “Are you baking?”

She looked at me. “I didn’t know what else to do!” she cried. “I just wanted to make such an irritating situation into something good.”

I rolled my lips into my mouth, trying not to smile. Even during this, she was trying to make the best of it all. "Okay," I stated slowly. "But do you really think pumpkin bread is the way to go when trying to battle a magical heat?"

"I am hoping if I feed them, they will calm down and listen. No one is at their best when they are hangry."

I felt the laughter bubble in my chest. The idea itself was so ridiculous that it just may have worked.

"Alright," I told her, tucking up my own skirts, "how can I help?"

"Mix that batter. I'm going to make a sugar icing."

I went over to the large mixing bowl, picking it up and trying to get the thick batter inside to incorporate together. Looking at Hazel out the corner of my eye, I watched as she poured powdered sugar into a bowl, shaking the bag and being engulfed in a cloud of white smoke when it all dropped in at once. The sugar granules stuck to her sweaty skin, coating her in a fine layer of sticky sweetness that suddenly had my mouth watering. I watched as she wiped the sweat from her brow with the back of her hand, her chest rising and falling in the heat. My mouth watered. Suddenly, the batter didn't seem all that important. Getting my hands on her and licking the sugar from her breasts felt far more urgent than pumpkin bread.

Dropping the bowl on the counter, I went towards her, wrapping my arms around her from behind. She startled but then leaned back into me, tipping her head so she could look over her shoulder.

"Are you okay?" she asked concerned. "Did the wisps bite you again?"

"No," I said with a slow shake of my head. My hand began to trail downwards, over the swell of her breast, the curve of her belly, and down to the meat of her thigh. Hazel's breath hitched at the feel as she widened her legs, my fingers gathering fists fulls of fabric as I pulled her skirt up even more.

"I'm supposed to be baking," she panted.

"You look delicious."

I could feel her body shudder, her eyes tipping downwards in embarrassment. It didn't matter if I complimented her every day for the rest of her life. I didn't think she'd ever get used to such attention and loved seeing the peach tinge to her cheeks each time a blush washed over her body.

Slipping my hand between her legs, I felt the perspiration that gathered between her thighs. As my fingers walked upwards, I felt the damp curls and the puffy slick of her lips. I looked at her in surprise.

"It's hot," she protested.

"Then we better get the rest of this off."

She twisted in my arms, her eyes black and hungry. "You first." She shimmied my skirts down my thighs, pushing me until my back was hitting the counter. I hopped up as she nudged me, while also reaching for her bands. Her breast bounced full and free, her dark nipples turned upwards. My hand slipped through the spilled sugar on the counter and as I widened my legs, I reached out to knead her breast, tweaking each nipple and watching them turn puffy and raw. Hazel groaned wantonly at me, spreading my thighs and dragging her thumb across my clit.

Leaning down, I licked at her skin, laving at her chest and capturing one pert nipple between my teeth. She tasted of soft spun sugar and fresh herbs. The taste made my mouth water as I ached for more.

Pushing me back she bent a little, pulling me to the edge of the counter. Without preamble, she buried her head between my thighs, licking my slit and moaning loudly within the folds of my pussy. I tipped my head back, trying to gain purchase on the counter as she dove in like a woman starving. I felt her gather some of the spilled sugar on her fingers, coating me in it before diving back in and licking me clean.

"Hazel," I moaned.

She looked up at me, lips wet with both my juices and confections. Her tongue darted out for more of the taste, a filthy sound escaping her. "Get down here."

I hopped off the counter, following her down to the floor as she hiked up her own skirt and dragged me across her lap. I felt the heat pool deep in my belly as I spied the swollen bud she kept hidden away. Locking my hips against hers, I began grinding down, dragging myself across her and watching as she squirmed beneath me. Hazel was vocal during sex. Her cries echoing through the kitchen as she lost herself in ecstasy. I watched the way she writhed, her breasts bouncing with each move as she gripped my hips tight, bringing me down harder and harder against her.

I felt my own pleasure building. Our bodies gliding together with the heat of the kitchen, our thighs coated with our abandoned attempt at baking.

"Kiss me," she whimpered.

I leaned down, locking my lips with hers, feeling the way she began to lick lewdly against the roof of my mouth, her tongue battling with my own. She began gasping into my kiss. Short little stuttered gasps that reached higher and higher as her hips hiccuped against me. I could feel my clit rub against her own. Her heavy and swollen cunt dripping as her knees came up to bracket me and lock my weight against her. She came with a shout, her body arching off the floor and the wisps up above bursting into light before raining down on us like absent stars. I followed soon after, clutching her close as I felt my core tighten and my body quiver. My orgasm rocked through me, seizing me in its grip as I spiraled higher and higher before free-falling off the precipice of an unknown cliff. I screamed into Hazels neck, my hips bucking helplessly against hers as I continue to cum.

Afterward, when I could breathe again, she held me. Her fingers petted down the knobs of my spine as she hummed magic through the air, wrapping the two of us in a rocking comfort. Something soothing

ran across me and she murmured incantations against my skin and for a while, I let myself float in her embrace, safe and warm as the heat lulled us halfway to sleep.

I lifted myself slightly off of her before I could completely pass out, looking down to see her brown skin marred with sugar and flour. I laughed a bit, knowing I was in much a similar situation. "We are a mess."

"I like you messy," she grinned.

The oven beeped at us loudly and Hazel's eyes went wide. "Oh! The croissants are ready."

"You made croissants?" I asked as she rolled from beneath me. Naked, she padded over to the oven, opening it up and taking out a tray of flaky and buttery looking rolls.

"I did. I was going to make several things. I didn't know what the wisps would like best." My juices mingled with her own, shining on the insides of her thighs. She stood before me with her baked goods, naked and bitten raw with passion. Yet her smile was the sweetest thing I think I had ever tasted.

"You're perfect," I told her.

She bit her lips, ducking her head a little in a blush. "So are you," she whispered. "I think you might be the best thing to ever happen to me."

Standing, I came over, making sure not to touch the hot tray. I captured her lips in mine once more, this time, slowly kissing her. When I pulled away, I watched her eyes flutter as she took in a deep sigh.

"Would you like to bake naked with me today?" she asked.

I laughed lowly, running my fingers down her side. "I would love nothing more."

[Gabriel Male MC - Spicy](#)

[Sep 4, 2023](#)



A/N Spicy scene between male mc and Gabriel. MC takes the more dom position.

Falling to the flat of my back I stared up at the ceiling. Rocky grey cavern walls loomed above me with little specks of too bright lights. The floor was only partially soft, a mat beneath me to protect my spine. Gabriel stood, towering above me dressed in only a tight shirt and joggers.

"You are going to need to do better if you have any hope of meeting your goal this month."

I groaned. His goal, to be more exact. We had agreed last week that I would start training with him. Gabriel thought it was because I wanted to improve both my agility and my endurance. In reality, I just wanted to spend some time with him, but the man was a work aholic that I needed to sometimes trick into a break. Tossing me around and sparring felt like something he might like to do. Afterward, I was usually able to get him to sit and eat a meal with me and rest his head in my lap.

"What is my goal again?" I groaned as I stood up.

"We want to add some muscle and make sure that you do not lose your breath so easily."

"Right," I nodded. Then, "and why is that?"

There was such a sigh that escaped him. As if we had to have this conversation constantly. I was starting to wonder if in Gabriel's head, we did.

"Your body is your best asset in this life. Keeping it strong and nourished should be your top priority," he told me.

"Strong and nourished," I repeated. "Says the man who eats a bag of chips for his dinner most nights."

His face twisted up into displeasure, eyes crinkling at the corner. I had to hide the smile that expression always brought. There was little doubt I got him there.

"Tell you what," I said, stepping up close to him. "I am done for the day. Don't really want to do the entire training thing."

“It is—”

“Important to spend time daily focusing on these tasks. Yes. I know. But, I thought we could do training of a different sort. The kind that will help my endurance. Keep me active. But also be far more fun.”

He blinked at me. It was adorable sometimes the amount of things he did not get. “What is it you have in mind? Running? There is a nice stretch of alley that...”

I grabbed the back of his head, pulling him in for a kiss. I felt him seize against me, body stiffening as my hands threaded through his hair, breaking the hold it was in and messing it up. I walked him back until he hit the wall behind us with a grunt, hands coming down to start teasing the waist of his sweats, palming him through the soft black material.

“This is not what I had in mind for your training,” he panted against my lips.

“No? Funny. It’s exactly what I had in mind.”

His cock jumped at the rough scratch of my words, poking me in the hip. I grinned against his lips. For such a stiffly in control man, it was so very easy to rile him up and get him needy for me.

“I want you to touch me,” I told him. “This is about your training too, of course. We should both focus on our endurance.”

I felt his own lips twitch at that. Gabriel was a no nonsense man in charge of an entire battalion within the market. He wasn’t supposed to respond to such antics. I was merely the unexpected exception to his rule.

Rough hands were on me, gliding down my back and encircling my hips. He pulled me towards him, grinding himself against me. The slide of sweats against my burgeoning erection dragged just right, causing me to surge forward and take his lips again. I pushed at his shirt, dragging it up and over his head, my fingers tracing the scars against his chest. I could see the faint glow of his grace, shimmering just under the surface. With my hands firmly on his shoulders, I pushed him down until he laid on his back.

“Take your pants off,” I ordered him. Always one to follow his orders oh so well, he shimmied them down off his hips, the impressive bulge tenting the front of his briefs. My mouth watered at the site of it. I wanted to take it out and stroke it while I fucked him, feeling my own cock encased in his tight ass.

Palming at my erection, I stepped over him. “You want it?” I asked.

He licked his lips. I could see it in the way his eyes twitched, flashing silver.

“You need to ask for it, Gabriel.”

His hands came up to run up the back of my calves, fingers kneading at the muscle there. "May I suck you, please," he rasped out. "I would like to bring you pleasure."

"So polite," I teased. Kicking my sweats off, I lowered myself until I was kneeling on either side of his chest. Taking my cock in hand, I ever so slowly fed it to him, his lips parted and wet in invitation. I slid myself in, inch by inch, watching the way his lips stretched, and his eyes rolled back into his head, fluttering as I hit the back of his throat. Seated up to the root, I took a deep and calming breath. He was beautiful like this. My big and strong man, resting peacefully within my care. The world slipping away other than this moment here where his only responsibility in the world was to take care of me. I loved him a little bit more in these moments, reveling in the trust that he gave to me.

He tapped my hips to signal for me to move and slowly, I began pumping in and out of his mouth, feeling myself getting lost in my own pleasure. In the way he ran his tongue against the velvety skin there, stoking my hips in thanks with each pass I gave him. He brought his knees up, the length of him nestled between my ass. I thought of the way he stretched me the other night. The burn as he pressed himself in, sweaty above me and moaning out his own pleasure as he drew it from my body.

A bang sounded on the door, the handle rattling. I paused, looking down at Gabriel and wondering what was going to happen if his subordinates walked in to his mouth stuffed full of cock. He gave a particularly hard suck, trying to tell me to ignore it, grabbing at my hips roughly to hopefully pull me back in. I bucked my hips against him, listening to the sound of his breathing as he swallowed me, throat pulsing tightly around the length of me.

The bang sounded again, this time accompanied by a muffled demand.

Gabriel lifted me off of him, grabbing my sweats and helping me put them back on. I could see the fury on his face and the way he looked murderously at the door.

Standing, Gabriel pulled his sweats back on, storming over to the door. Ripping it open, he stared at the two men on the other side. "Is there something I can help you with?" I saw the way their eyes ticked down at the way his pants bulged impressively.

"Uh, we were here to train, Warden."

"If a door is locked, do you believe that to be an invitation for you to come in?" he queried. I ducked my head, trying not to laugh. Oh, he was pissed. I would be too if I was aching like that.

"We thought it was a mistake," one bravely responded.

"It is not. Now leave." He slammed the door shut, clicking the lock shut before turning back to me. His eyes were bright silver, his jaw tight with irritation.

"Would you like to finish?" I asked him, trying not to laugh.

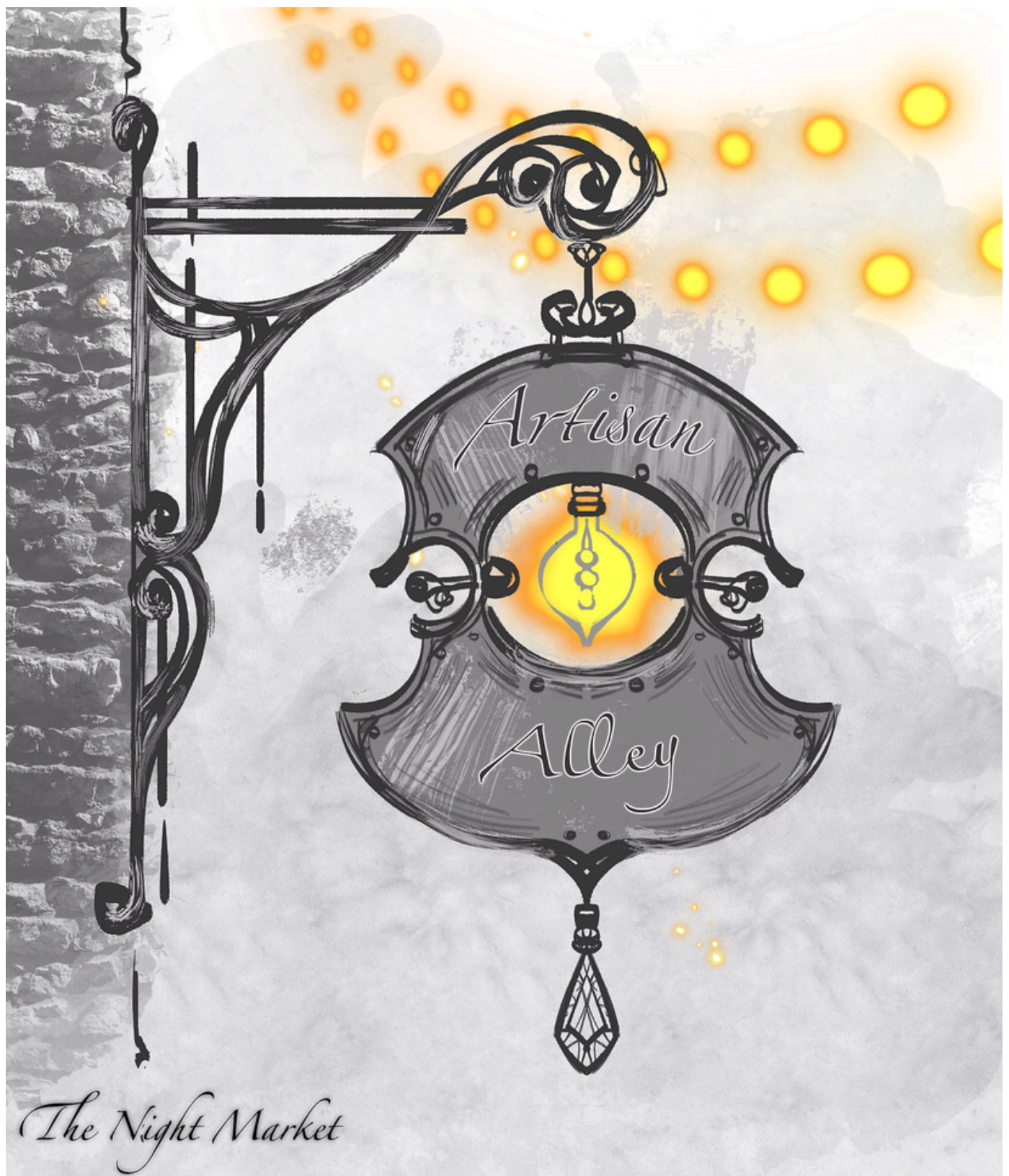
"I would. But may I request we go back to my place."

“What? No more training for the day.”

Stepping up, he reached down and grabbed my hand, pulling me up and flush to his body. “I would like to partake in an entirely different type of training, please.” He licked at my lips, palming me with those big rough hands of his. And really, who was I to tell him no. He was right, after all. Taking care of our bodies was obviously the most important thing.

[Lore - Artisan Alley](#)

[Sep 8, 2023](#)



There is an old wooden sign that has hung within the market far longer than anyone can remember. It was once embossed in gold, but time slowly faded its luster. Trinkets used to hang from the ornate metal that clutched the sign tight. Baubles of cogs and gears, gemstones and muffins, all hung from the plaque. Yet, there was no alley. Not until recently.

One of the newer portions of the Night Market, Artisan Alley appeared overnight. No more than a few shops deep, the small little alley is strung with the typical lanterns of the night market, but has also been fitted with gas lanterns that cast the alley in an eerie green when the lanterns are not lit. There is only

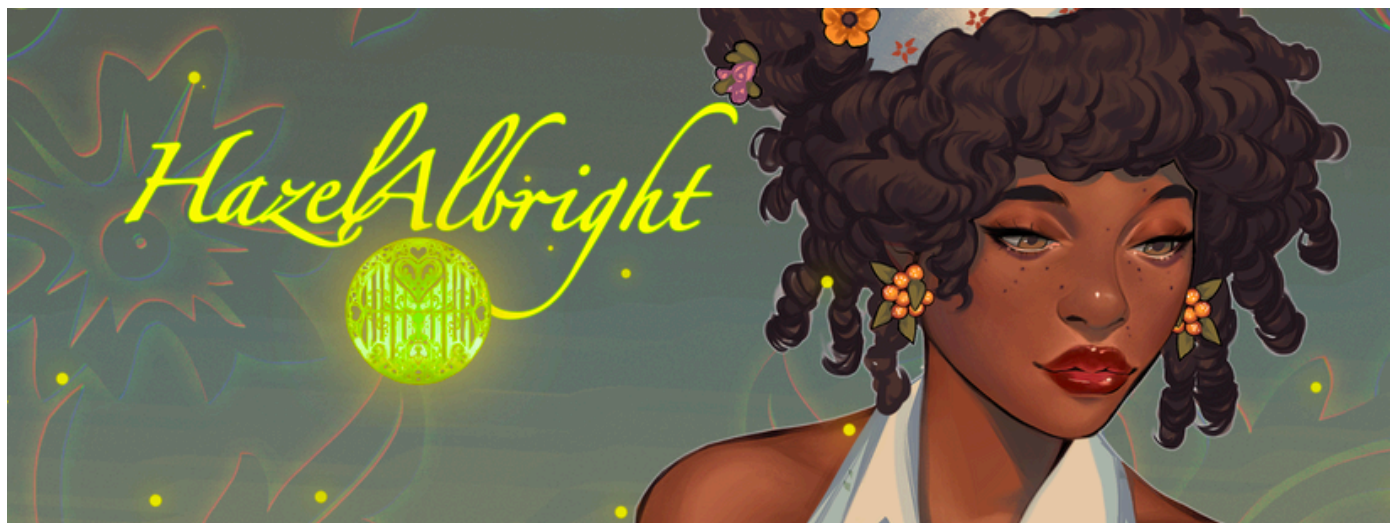
one motto within the alley. If you cannot make it out there, you can certainly make it in here. The motto was formed by the local baker and has not been given official license yet.

While most of the alleys within the Night Market are subject to the changing whims of the world, Artisan Alley remains a safe haven. Here, time is relatively frozen. An odd little trait given that the clockmaker at the end of the alley repairs the timepieces of the graveyard. Like most places, Artisan Alley opens their walls and homes to anyone who needs it. And while located very near the heart of the market, it remains an alley that the Velvet Guard does not have jurisdiction within. The guard often times forget it even exists. It is how the residents of the alley like it best.

Recently, a small home has appeared at the end of the alley. There is no door to the inside, but there is a single window. When peering inside, the only items to be seen are a bed and a blanket. Neither are anything special to look at, but the blanket does seem to be folded and waiting for someone. Meanwhile, the residents of the alley have most certainly not tried to break into that room. Never. Not even once.

[Hazel MaleMC Spicy](#)

[Sep 8, 2023](#)



There had been a flurry of wisps that morning. They fought just outside in the garden, bursting into crackling balls of flame. Hazel had looked out the window with a small bit of irritation but hadn't seemed all that concerned. Meanwhile, I was almost certain that a fire was going to start. Apparently, the wisps just did this a few times a year. It was their mating ritual. The little ember sparks we saw afterward was the product of their coupling.

"Are you saying that they fill the air with their...?"

Hazel cleared her throat loudly. "We don't speak of it. They get embarrassed."

I didn't see how they could get embarrassed given that they were doing this all out in the open. I had much more of a suspicion that Hazel was the one who was embarrassed. She still blushed each time she undressed in front of me.

The wisps coupling made the air humid that day. When I stepped out into the back garden, a wall of heat hit me, causing small beads of sweat to dot my temples. Hazel was muttering to herself in the corner of the garden. She was bent over something, corset already tossed somewhere in the herb patch. I tipped my head to the side, admiring the roundness of her ass. The one that was fully on display with the way her underskirt was sticking to her.

Stepping down the two cracked steps, I called out to her. "Do you need help?"

Her face was deep in color, her eyes practically black as she tugged and tugged on a verdant leafy green stalk. "Can you tell these potatoes that they are past their harvest?" she asked me. "Because they do not seem to be getting the message."

"I don't think I speak potato," I told her, coming up behind her. She looked over her shoulder, brown kinky curls falling across her sweaty face.

"Everyone speaks potato if they put their mind to it." She winked at me before turning back, tending to the garden. Bending further forward to reach for her trowel, the curve of her bottom swaying dangerously close. I felt my cock fill at the sight of it. "If you're going to help I would take off your shirt," she said without looking. "The wisps really did a number out here. It's hotter than normal."

I pulled the shirt from me in one swift move, tossing it to the side and kneeling behind her. When she straightened, she was pressed right up to the front of my trousers, my length hard against her. I felt her gasp, her chest rising and falling. Biting her lip, she wiggled back a bit. I placed my hand on her hips to steady her.

Audibly, Hazel swallowed. "The cabbage is going to wilt in this weather," she said, starting to roll her hips. "Hopefully the wisps won't be doing this for long."

Leaning forward, I pressed my lips to her neck, licking the salty sweat there. Ever so slightly she tipped her head to the side. "How long do they usually go for?"

"Uh, just an afternoon." Her thighs widened a bit. The woman was shy about sex up until the moment she was not. I was realizing just how quickly she could get to that 'not' stage.

"Your cabbage should be fine by tomorrow then." Slowly, I edged my fingers under the loose fabric of her blouse, going slowly in case she wanted to stop. She arched her back just so, her nipples dark brown and prominent through the near sheerness of her tunic. I brought my hands up, fingers seeking out to tease a breast, pinching the nub there and relishing in the mewls of pleasure that escaped her lips.

"How important is gardening at this moment?" I asked.

She was reaching behind me, untying the front of my trousers. "Terribly important." Deftly, she untied each knot until the front of my pants were open, my cock springing free. "Do you know what one of the best things for the land is?" she asked, her tanned fingers wrapping around the length of me and slowly tugging at my hard cock. I felt a dribble of pre-cum bead at the head. My body always ready for whatever she felt me worthy enough to have. "The act of creation. Some say, that it is a ritual as old as time. To yield good crops, you have to plant your own seed into the earth."

I grinned, looking at her over her shoulder. "Do you now?"

She hummed. "We should probably test that theory."

"Absolutely." Shimmying my pants lower, I rucked up her skirts. I was hard and ready for her and she was already dripping for me. Pushing aside the thin and warm layer of her panties, I swiped my thumb across her clit, watching as her hips hiccuped before grinding down on me. She was still stretched from this morning, my seed sticky on her thighs.

Maneuvering myself forward, I pressed myself in. Slowly, I sheathed myself in her soft confines, draping myself over her back. She gasped at the intrusion, leaning down, her tunic falling open and breast falling free. They hung heavy from her, brushing against the churned soil she had been tending. Fully seated, I planted my hands in the earth next to her.

"More," she demanded. "I can take it."

Hazel moaned wantonly as I began to pound into her, bracing herself on either side of the potato stocks she had been scolding. Around us, small plants began to grow, curling up from the earth and blooming with large bell shaped flowers.

"Harder," she said breathlessly.

I slapped my hips against her, my balls drawing up tight as I continued to fuck her. Leaning back, I watched my length slip into her again and again, her ass and thighs jiggling with each pump. Hazel dipped herself forward, chest and cheek pressed to the dirt as she began grunting, the two of us rutting within the garden. Above us, a burst of heat rained down as the wisps joined in. The sparks hit our backs, sizzling against our skin and sending bolts of pleasure racing across us. I felt the way my stomach tightened with each push into her body. I held onto the meat of her hips, feeling the way she gripped me. She was muttering unintelligibly beneath me, leaving large marks in the dirt.

It was enough to draw my own pleasure close. Reaching between us, I began rubbing at her slick center, feeling the way her puffy lips hung full and wet. Rolling her clit between my thumb and forefinger I watched as she began to squirm. With my free hand, I gripped her hip, keeping her still as I felt her release wash over me, rolling her within my fingers until she was screaming my name. Around us, the plants burst to life, bolting up towards the sun, full and heavy with vegetation. I came moments later, my body shuddering as I groaned in her ear.

We lay there together panting, the evidence of our coupling drying on our skin. Rolling off of her, I dragged her until she was laying across my chest. Her lids were hooded as she looked at me, lips bitten from where she tried to keep her pleasure subdued.

"I will help you garden anytime," I told her with a small smile.

"Oh, that's good. Because I have a stubborn patch of blueberries that needs tending."

I laughed at the way her eyes shone with mischief. Tucking the hair from her face, I gently ran my fingers down her cheeks, walking them down her back, massaging at her hips. "I'll give you anything," I whispered to her.

"Anything?" she asked with a slow blink. I nodded. "Then," she started, leaning down to nip at my lips. "I would like to request one thing and one thing only."

"And what is that?"

"Learn to speak potato."

My laughter rang out in the humid air, scaring away some of the wisps and bringing with it a cool breeze. Hazel was just staring at me though with a very serious expression. It cut my amusement off entirely.

"Wait. Really."

Standing, she straightened her clothes. "No more 'gardening' until you do, my love. Better get to it." Walking away, she made her to sway her hips, knowing I was going to be watching her. Somehow, I was going to need to learn to speak potato. It was imperative now.



[Night Market Wallpaper](#)

[Sep 11, 2023](#)

Feel free to download this wallpaper to use as your own. :)

[Book 1 li poster.png](#)

[Milo MaleMC Spicy.](#)

[Sep 11, 2023](#)



“I’m not fucking you in an alleyway,” I said, walking out of the bar with a dejected Milo trailing behind me.

“I will quite literally give you anything you want for you to suck my dick at this point,” the man whined. I could feel his heat as he pressed himself against my back, the two of us walking down the street together. He was hard and aching, as he had been for most of the night. His skin flushed and sweaty, curls prominent as they stuck to his forehead.

“You are the one that took a strange pill from someone in the bathroom,” I chided. “You did this to yourself.”

“Correction. It was not a strange pill. It was a pill I was fully aware of. I just thought that you would be absolutely lovely and get under the table and help me out with this little problem.” He thrust his hips at me, trying to grind them against my ass.

“And why would I do that?”

“Because I’m cute.”

When he batted his lashes at me I knew this was one of those nights where Milo was feeling rather full of himself. “Not that cute.”

He nipped at my shoulder. “Mean. But also incredibly fair. The ogre and owlbear that spawned me did not give me physical perfection.”

I snorted. “Owlbear, huh?”

“It’s why I’m fury.”

Milo had very little hair on his body. A full head of it and a small trail beneath his bellybutton. But he had far more freckles than anything else. “You should be punished for this, you know. That was incredibly stupid of you to do.”

His hands tightened on my stomach. “Yes, punish me. I will bend over for you and everything.”

Pulling him into a small alcove of the alleyway, the bustling streets at our back, I pressed him against the wall. His pupils were blown, lips puffy from the way he continued to bite them. "You need to behave," I told him, trying to keep my voice firm. I wanted to laugh at the pout that was on his lips, however.

"Never," he whispered. Grabbing the back of my neck, he pulled me close, smashing our lips together. His tongue was persistent as he licked his way inside, our teeth clashing. When Milo kissed, he kissed with his entire body. Pressing himself completely against me, angling our heads until we fit together. I felt his thigh sneak between mine, grinding against my slowly thickening length. He groaned at the feel of it. One of the biggest turn ons for him being my own pleasure.

"I'm not doing anything until we are back at home," I told him. I was pretty certain at this point Milo really had a voyeuristic kink.

He was panting against my lips, hands circling down to my hips and pulling me close. "And then when we're home, you'll do something?"

"Yes."

With one hand, he slapped it to the wall behind us, the crackling of amber magic swirling in a deep arc. I pulled away, quirking my eye at him. He had the biggest shit eating grin because of course Milo Next was going to be the kind of person who was going to open a gate just so he could get to the main event faster. Holding me tight, he began shuffling us backwards, sealing our lips together until we fell to the shitty little bed in the Distillery.

"I believe this is an abuse of power, Mr. Gatekeeper."

"Perks of the job," he said, sealing the gate shut behind us. "Now get your pants off."

And who was I to really deny such a sweet sentiment as that.

It didn't take long for the two of us to wriggle out of our clothes. Flipping us, he laid across the top of me, dipping his hips down and rolling them against me. His eyes rolled to the back of his head at the contact. With a single glance I saw the way his cock was red and weeping, the head so swollen I knew he had to be in pain. He left a sticky trail as he rubbed us together, my own erection quickly reaching heightened points.

"I want to fuck you," he whispered to me. "Then, just as you are about to cum, I want you to flip me over and rail me into the mattress." He licked a long line across my neck. "I want to scream your name into the sheets, darlin' and be left boneless afterwards. Think we could do that?"

His hand was already reaching behind me, slipping across my ass. Something sticky was on his fingers as he circled my hole. My head arched back with a hiss. The tidal wave of pleasure beginning to build and build as he slipped one finger inside and began stretching me. I felt my cock pulse against the crease of his hip, my own hand coming down to grab at him and pump him within the tight enclosure of my fist.

"Fuck," he whimpered, breathing hotly against my cheek. "The things you do to me," he babbled. "Dream of you. Wake up hard and aching for you all the time. I don't want you leaving anymore. I want you here with me. Want to be able to feel you stretch me wide each night. Want to feel your cock stuffed in my throat. Want to be able to fuck you so hard you forget your own name."

Pulling my knees up, I looked at him, pressing my hand to his mouth. "Shut up and just do it," I told him.

He playfully bit at my hand but moved in such a way that his cock lined up with my hole. Ever so slowly he pushed past the tight ring of muscles, his mouth going slack. Each time I watched him like this, I felt my heart ache. The sheer joy and trust he gained from moment likes this got me hotter than any of his filthy words. Pulling my knees closer to my chest, I pushed my hand through his hair, scratching at the back of his head and motioning for him to continue.

He began pumping in and out of me, our bodies rocking together as one. My back arched upwards as he found that perfect little spot, a moan beginning to bleed from my lips.

"There you are, darlin'," Milo grunted. "Sing for me. Want to hear every little bit of pleasure I can ring from you. Would have done this in the bar if you let me. Would have bent over a table for you."

"Fuck," I muttered, feeling my breath catch. The heat was beginning to boil, my belly tightening as I felt the way he dragged against me. This was far quicker than either of us had been indulging in lately. But Milo was full of surprises. Quick and dirty hadn't been something we had done for a while.

"Oh," he laughed breathlessly, sweat beginning to drip down the sides of his face. "Would you have liked that? Would you have liked to see me bent over the table, ass on display for everyone? As you just gently push in over and over again, making me fucking scream?" He leaned down, capturing my lips and licking the ridge of my mouth. Swallowing my cries as my body was bent in two.

"Or," he started. "Would it be you that was in that position? You like the idea of me markin' you, darlin'? Pushing into you with my cock and stretching you wide while everyone just stares. Or would you rather me take you to a dark corner. Jack you off and then lick the cum from your fingers?"

My cock jerked against my belly, caught between the two of us and pulled at with each aching movement from Milo. He rolled his hips just right, eyes darkening as he hit my prostate again and again. He had found his prize and didn't wish to let it go. He always did have a one track mind when it came to sex.

"Fuck," he muttered. "Just look at you. So fucking hot. You don't even know it, do you. The things you do to me? Do you know how often I see you wandering around the market and I want to just drop to my knees for you?"

I was close. I could feel my body tensing in pleasure and the way Milo's arms twitched as he held himself above me. Without saying a word, I pushed him off of me, rolling him to his belly and watching how he scrambled to get on his knees. I could see him already slick and prepared and pushed myself inside him, watching his body bow beautifully as he screamed into the sheets. With three pumps his

body twitched, spurting his release all over the mattress while I continued to fuck him through it, angling myself to hit his prostate over and over until he was collapsed beneath me, panting and whimpering to himself.

I felt my own orgasm approach then, slapping my thighs against his ass as I shuddered deep inside him. Leaning down I bit down on one freckled shoulder, feeling the way Milo reached behind himself, squeezing my thigh and digging his nails into my skin.

After, as the sweat was cooling and we laid on our backs panting, I felt Milo turn, running his fingers gently across my skin... Our cocks were both sticky and spent, our bodies sore, the tension of the day bleeding from our shoulders.

"I didn't take anything," Milo said.

I blinked at him. "You said you did."

"I insinuated I did," he said. "Not technically a lie."

"Wait. So you just came back from the bathroom that horny?" I asked with a laugh.

His grin was lazy as he leaned forward, pressing a soft kiss to the corner of my mouth. "Never doubt the things you do to me, darlin'. Just lookin' at you half the time gets me ready to go."

I rolled my eyes at him but pulled him close all the same, pulling a blanket up and over our bodies. He rested his head against me, the two of us tipped together and sharing breath.

"I meant it, you know," he said sleepily.

"Meant what?"

"I want you here. All the time." His thumb was making slow circles at my back, massaging the dip just above my tailbone. "You don't need to answer me now but, I would really like to move in together. I'd give up this place for you." he paused, swallowing thickly. "I'd give up everything for you."

I didn't know if I could answer him yet. I didn't know what the future would bring. But I leaned forward and kissed him, feeling the way he melted against me. Tonight, that was enough.

[Book 2 Intro](#)

[Sep 15, 2023](#)

Welcome to early access to book 2. I was going to be posting this with chapter one but I thought that since it's been a bit, I wanted to touch base with everyone. See what you all are thinking and hear where you think the story is about to go.

To gain access follow the link below and type in the password. It will play in your browser on itch.io

<https://the-night-market.itch.io/the-night-market-book-2>

Password: Merripen2

[Dev Blog 9/22/23](#)

[Sep 22, 2023](#)

It's been a bit!

I hope everyone is doing the best they can out there and that heading into the end of the year we are all giving ourselves peace. This blog is going to be in two parts. First is going to be the technical stuff for the development of the games and the second part is more of my personal stuff.

Part One:

Well, book 2 is underway. From the second I finished book 1 all I wanted to do was write book 2. And man was it a chore not to. To the point where I was actually sad about it. LOL! But, it is now underway and I am so excited. It will be published in the same format as book 1 where I will be posting it chapter by chapter with early release here on Patreon. I would really love to do month by month chapters, but the variation in this one is going to be a bit more vast so I don't think it will quite be like that any longer. More like every two months, most likely.

I am also taking all the stories from Patreon and getting that up as a DLC for both itch.io and for Steam. It has extra stories in it and a TON of artwork. So be on the lookout for that very very soon.

Book 1 will still occasionally be updated as I find bugs and/or spelling errors. I want to apologize for how many issues there was on release. If I had known it was in need of that much more work, I would have held off for a bit longer. But, I know better this next time around and will be able to have a better time frame and expectation when Book 2 finishes.

That all being said, I am so excited about the introduction of some new shopkeepers, brought to you all by Kickstarter. I am also over the moon about the character of Pen.

Part Two:

Now onto the personal stuff. Skip if you are not interested in my frustrations.

Full transparency, life has been a bit harsh these last few months. Sadly, a friend took their own life and within a few days we found that my stepfather has cancer. That, coupled with having teens who are going through some of their own personal issues due to having a split family, and raising littles, it's been rough. And I'm going to be honest, the internet got to me something bad upon the full release of the game. I immediately got bombarded with people mad at me for the game and bug reports and it just stressed me out to no end. In the beginning, I had far more bad reviews and asks coming in than anyone being excited about the game or enjoying it. Then, to top it off, I started getting people just bad-mouthing me in other forums and blogs, even though it was clear they had not even read the game. They were just mad about my decision to have a poly and not a monogamous route with Milo.

I'm going to be really honest with everyone on that one. I am so tired of it. The entitlement that comes with people thinking that these characters are something they can lay claim to is incredibly frustrating. So much so that I have held back on certain content because I just do not wish to even deal with the asks. Because when I say they are bad, they are fucking bad. I don't want to write a monogamous route with Milo. I feel strongly that he is a character that would do far better with two people. And I am very excited for that romance. Doing a solo route with Milo is not something I am interested in writing. I don't think it is within his character. And the amount of people that are telling me that this is an IF so I have to give them a choice is just irritating as hell. I don't have to do anything for the sake of other people's entertainment.

On top of that, oh boy am I angry about the weird sense of access anons seem to feel like they deserve to my work. I have chosen not to do stats. I have chosen to railroad the MC in certain situations. Why? Because it is my story. It is what I want to write. And each time I get someone being angry that they aren't given a choice or a path, I feel like telling them to write it themselves.

Also, the amount of hurt that people want to do out there is truly disgusting. The people who wish for me to write the MC being able to kill and have a "dark" route is just gross to me. All because you were "betrayed" (you weren't). And even if you were truly betrayed, that's your response? I've been hurt so I want to hurt others. Even ones who have nothing to do with the situation. I struggle with that A LOT. Mainly because that is something I have pushed from my life actively.

And that's my rant.

To be honest, I am so incredibly thankful for the readers I do have that are along for the ride. Who enjoy seeing the twists and turns in the story. That is the community I love. The one that hides behind their computer screens and their anonymous asks are a bit harder. And knowing how they have been lately, I fully expect this rant will get posted somewhere else and there will be more complaints on it. But, for those who have been supporting me, thank you. I am really hopeful that you will enjoy book 2 just as much as book 1.

Zinnia

[Sep 29, 2023](#)



"You will not be fucking me tonight."

I sighed, lying on my stomach, wrists and ankles tied to either side of the bed. "I don't know of any night where I've been allowed to fuck you so that is not a surprise."

The painful glide of soft and buttery leather cut across my skin. I hissed in response while Belladonna stuck out her lower lip, clucking her tongue in disapproval. "Are we feeling a tad bit bratty today? Or are you just really in the mood for pain."

I sucked in a small breath. "Got to keep things interesting."

Another snap of the leather came down on me. The tails biting into my skin before being soothed by the soft fur that ran along the edges of each of the floggers tails. "Oh, dear heart. You spoil me."

Belladonna walked around me, her heels particularly high today. They clicked smartly across the marbled floor as she circled me in nothing more than leather straps around each thigh and small bits of black lace that covered the parts I wanted to see most.

"Eyes up," she commanded, another snap of the flogger running across my naked back. I was positioned on my belly, my head craned to the side to see even a little bit of her.

"I can't turn my eyes more up than they already are," I told her.

She grinned. "Cheeky."

Slap slap slap

I grimaced in pain. The last one had come across my buttocks, the tips of the leather wrapping around my balls. Belladonna was in a playful mood today it seemed.

"Now, dear heart. While I love to see your skin get all pink and flushed, I also feel as if you are denying me."

I almost asked her how I was possibly the one to deny her given how aching and swollen I was, but I didn't think I would be able to catch my breath after another hit. She had this uncanny way of making every nerve I had on fire. Lighting up my back and thighs and making me want to beg for more.

"This is really punishment for me," she said, suddenly so very close to my ear. I could feel the points of her breast dragging across my back, running over the welts she had lovingly painted on my skin. "Do you know why you're being punished, dear heart?"

I didn't. I actually really didn't. I had come to Belladonna's like I did most evenings and she greeted me at the door with the flogger in hand, pale skin on display. Frantically, I racked my brain, trying to think of what slight I could have done to cause such a thing. I hadn't seen her in a few days but that wasn't particularly abnormal for us. Belladonna was busy. Mostly with being a Baron. And she refused to give up some of her contracts from the Pleasure District as well. I didn't know if I had even had time to commit such a crime in her eyes.

"Your silence tells me that you don't understand." Her tongue darted out, licking a long stripe down my spine. I felt all the blood I had rush to my cock, my head becoming woozy as I tried to grind myself down onto the bed. She had made sure to put a soft pillow beneath me, however. Giving me absolutely no relief.

"Bella..." I whined.

She pulled away from me. "What was that?"

"Mistress," I breathed. I could feel my cheeks heating up. My body shivering in discomfort.

"Good boy," she murmured. It didn't stop the flogger from coming down on me once more, dragging across the already red skin and causing me to cry out.

As if to soothe me, Belladonna was suddenly straddling my back. The wet heat from her pussy dragging across me. "Now, my little muse," she whispered. "Do you need me to explain to you why you are being punished? Be honest."

"Yes," I groaned. Her hips were rolling in soft circles, rubbing up against me and yet never allowing enough pressure.

"What are you supposed to do when you see me again after three very long days?"

"What?" I gasped. I just wanted some sort of friction. Some sort of relief.

“What. Are you. Supposed to do. After not seeing me for three days?”

I had no idea what she was talking about. We of course had set up several rules and regulations for our time together. Ways that we were both comfortable. Safe words. Boundaries. Appropriate and approved punishments. But I couldn't remember ever talking about what we were supposed to do after three days other than.... Oh. Oh shit.

“Ask if I may kiss you,” I told her.

“Mmmm,” she hummed, draping herself completely over me to begin nibbling at my ear. Her fang nicked me and she sucked at the bead of blood that bubbled to the surface. “And what did you do?”

“I... I didn't ask.” I had just kissed her. A small peck on the lips as I walked inside, my arms full of the things she had asked me to pick up for her from Hazel's shop.

“You didn't ask,” she breathed, licking the shell of my ear. “And now, you'll be punished.”

The cry that erupted from me was sharp and sudden as she pushed off of me and began flogging me with earnest. She kept each strike steady, building a dizzying rhythm that had me squirming against my restraints. I could feel my heart thud against my chest as she focused on my lower thighs, ensuring that I would not be able to sit for the next week or so. But my mouth salivated. Wanting more. Wanting to get to my knees and kiss her feet while telling her ‘yes, mistress’ and ‘whatever you wish, mistress’.

“Oh, you are lovely,” she breathed. I could hear the hitch in her own voice. The one that said she was very pleased with the way the blood was rising to my skin. I heard the flogger drop to the ground and the bed dipped as she crawled near me. Reaching beneath me, she pulled the pillow away, cupping my weeping erection as she laid against my back, grinding herself against my ass.

“I want nothing more than to sink my fangs into you, my heart. Suck the blood from this cock of yours and savor such sweetness.”

I cried out at the thought, the image of her between my legs, feeding from me such a potent thought in my mind.

“Would you like that? Never getting your own release but letting me nourish myself with your body?” I could hear the hiccup in her voice. She liked the thought of it as well.

Squirming against her palm, I felt the tears begin to gather in frustration in my eyes as I bucked my hips against her, my back burning. I felt her gasp behind me, her tongue swiping across the crisscrossed marks of my back. Then, just as she gripped me tight, she leaned into my ear.

“Cum,” she commanded.

And I did, spurting all over her hand in a messy heap while my body bucked and shuddered. Belladonna held me through it all.

Afterward, as she unchained me, I rolled to my back, looking up at her with blurry eyes. Blood marked her belly and her breasts as she licked her lips.

"Look what you made me do," she pouted. "I was supposed to be punishing you."

"Sorry," I said with a raspy voice.

"No matter." Her smile told me that this was no the end of it. "I'll just have to gag you next time while I fuck that delicious little ass of yours. Now, go wash up. I'll pour us some wine and you can tell me about your week."

As she sauntered away, I let my head fall back against the pillows. She was going to be the death of me.

[Milo - Trick or Treat](#)

[Oct 6, 2023](#)



A/N: An AU story set far in the future with an MC that chose to have children.

"Trick or treat!"

I heard the proclamation from the kitchen as I was trying to get together the last little bits of enchanted candy so we could set out a bowl. The night was still early but in a place like the Night Market, trick or treating began from the time the little ones awoke, ghosts and goblins wandering the streets handing out their wares. Certain areas of the market had been filled with this underlying current of autumnal/samhain celebration for the better part of the month, all accumulating to this very night where the children dressed up and seeking out their bits and baubles from participating vendors.

"You're not supposed to trick or treat your own house," I heard Malcolm laugh.

"Aw, c'mon." Milo's voice this time. "Look at these little faces."

I came around the corner, bowl in hand, to see Milo standing at the front door, hat tipped forward and straw blade between his lips. Cowboy, he had said. We had to convince him to wear a shirt beneath his vest.

On his hip was a little boy, nearly the spitting image of him with wild curls and freckles that were bright. He had a gummy little smile, only his front teeth having come through at this point. And next to them both was, Ever. Her cherubic little face shining brightly as she was done up in all glitter with big iridescent wings at her back.

"Having fun?" I asked, handing Malcolm the bowl and taking the babe into my arms.

"Mini Mart is charming the pants off of everyone," Milo beamed proudly. "And while he does that, Ever goes in for the fae kill and steals the candy."

"I don't steal," Ever assured us. "I ask politely and use my pleases and thank yous."

Malcolm brought her in with one arm, leaning down to place a kiss on her head. "Always the more mature of the Next siblings." She giggled at him before shoving her way into the house.

In my arms, 'Mini Mart', as Milo dubbed him, lay his head on my shoulder. I had dressed him in a glowing onesie, letting him go out into the world as a lantern. It somehow felt appropriate for the first Halloween that he was able to somewhat hobble down the cobblestone streets. Last year, he had to be strapped to any one of us and had slept most of the time.

"How much candy have they had?" I asked Milo.

"Twelve buckets," he shut the door behind him, leaning in to kiss me softly while reaching out with one hand to shove Malcolm in the chest. "You two are coming back out with us, yeah? You should see the way Mini and Ever work the crowd. You've never seen a more dynamic duo."

I shook my head. We had been blessed with a baby nearly two years prior and since then, Milo had never been happier. It hadn't always been like that. Genuine fear gripped him when we first found out. But in the end, he had been there every step of the way. And the day he held his son in his arms, I knew for certain that I had seen Milo's heart completely unguarded for the first time.

"I'll put the bowl out and make sure Ever has something warm on," Malcolm said. "Then we can go back out."

"Get the pillow sacks at the door too. They've gotten quite the haul."

"Button, they don't need this much candy," Malcolm groused as he dragged the bags in.

Milo looked at him like he was an idiot. "It's definitely not for them. I worked hard for that stuff. There are full chocolate bars in there. Small children do not need that."

"Oh, of course," I laughed.

Malcolm came over, rubbing a hand down our son's back. "He's out," he whispered to me, laying a gentle kiss on our babies cheek.

"He's also way too much like Milo. He'll smell the candy and fun and be up in an instant," I told him. It wasn't as if Malcolm could disagree. We had seen it in action several times before.

"Ever, baby," Malcolm called out. "Put on a cloak. It's getting cold out there."

There was a rummaging in the other room and then a loud bang. "I'm okay," Ever called out. Malcolm just shook his head, going to go check on her.

"So," I started, turning to Milo. "How much trick or treating have you done?"

Stepping close to me, Milo wrapped his arms low on my hips, sandwiching our baby between us. Slowly he began swaying back and forth, dancing to a soft tune that only he could hear. "I may be excited," he laughed.

I grinned at him. He had been up and ready to go before the kids had finished their breakfast. "May?"

"I didn't get to do this," he told me. "When I was a kid, Hazel, Mal and I were little delinquents. We stole our costumes. Or well, Mal and I stole our costumes and then told Hazel we bought them. But the point is, 2e didn't have parents that made a big deal out of all this kind of stuff."

My smile dropped a little. He didn't really have a childhood. So, he had been determined to give his sister and his own child as much of one as possible. Every day was a day that Milo greeted with a certain amount of fear, and yet he couldn't help but face it head on and do his best for the ones he considered his own. I couldn't fault him for going head first into the insanity.

"Alright," Malcolm stated, walking in with a bundled up Ever. "The fae princess is now a fae vampire," he declared. A black cloak was around Ever's shoulders and fake blood dripped from her mouth.

"To the rich side of the Market!" Milo declared.

The lanterns above were all dimmed orange, painting the streets in a low flickering light. The alleys were strung with live bats and cobwebs as fog curling in from over the alley walls to coat the streets. Around every shadowed corner, a nightmare lurked with a bucket of candy held out for the children, whispering for them to come and take a peak, their glowing yellow eyes peering at them with mischief.

I felt a stirring in my arms as sure enough, our little Mini Mart came alive, hopping down to hold onto Ever's hand. He babbled at her, looking up at her with wide, lantern filed eyes. They glowed, changing

colors based on his mood. The bright pink that they were now meant he was happy. Normally they were this hue when around Ever

Ever nodded. "The witches are for sure scary," she said. "But we got this. Tonight is about facing our fears, remember?" Milo had of course told them a story last week about witches that ate children's toes and lurked in the shadows of the market streets. Neither child had slept well all week. And of course, this year, the witches seemed to be the ones giving out the best candy. As was confirmed as we rounded a corner and saw a green faced hag hunched in the corner. But she had a large cauldron of glittering candy in front of her and a tray of cupcakes.

I stood back, watching as the two of them carefully went up to the shadows, calling out for the witch with the candy. Both Milo and Malcolm hovered nearby, ready to jump in at any moment. When the witch popped out, Ever screamed trick or treat while my son, my unafraid little boy, took his jack o lantern bucket and began hitting the witch with it to protect his Ever.

Malcolm swooped in immediately with apologies, picking him up. While Milo silently cheered, trying to hide his smile.

Meanwhile, Ever was sweetly talking to the witch, explaining how her nephew had nightmares and that the only thing that would fix it was more candy. I couldn't help but notice how she palmed the little sweets into her bucket as the witch wasn't looking.

Head in hands, I sighed. This was my family. My insane, little delinquent, family.

"Alright, no more sugar for the babies," Malcolm intoned.

"Oh, come on, Mal! It was deserved. She was scary looking," Milo laughed.

"Everyone's going to be scary looking," Malcolm protested. "It's the night of scary looking things."

"Exactly."

Milo crouched down, opening his arms to Mini Mart, enveloping him in a tight hold when the boy ran to him. I watched the two of them. Mirror images of each other. Each time I looked at them, I couldn't help but feel my heart grow. That boy was Milo's world. "Want me to carry you?" he was whispering to him. "We'll protect Ever together?"

The boy nodded.

As we walked down the street, letting the kids trick or treat, Malcolm slipped his hand in mine. The two of us watched Milo with the kids. Watched as he went up to each market stall and yelled trick or treat with them. Watched how he gave the evil eye to anyone that seemed like they were not going to give them two pieces of candy each.

"He's happy," Malcolm said.

"He is."

"Thank you for that." I glanced at Malcolm out of the corner of my eye. "You've made him so happy, Lamplight. More so than I could ever have. Just— thank you."

I didn't know what to say. Malcolm didn't often speak with such vulnerability. Something had been working on the last few years. But I could feel it in the way he clung to me. He meant it. Life without me was not one he wanted to entertain.

Squeezing his hand back, I watched Ever and Milo get the childhood they never had, while our baby chewed on his fist, glowing just as brightly as the lanterns above. And even with the cackling witches and the hunting vampires that Milo discreetly got rid of with a well-timed gate, it was the most normal night that we had had in some time.

Life in the Night Market, finally felt at peace.

[Book 2 Chapter One](#)

[Oct 16, 2023](#)



Here we go!

The time has come to get this thing officially rolling. :) Welcome to book 2 of the Night Market. Complete with Intro and Chapter one and running a 107k words. As always, this is a wip so please expect some errors here and there. You can report anything you see to the bug channel in discord or through messaging in Tumblr.

The link to the Patreon early access is below, along with the chapter. If you are someone who played the Introduction, I would suggest a quick play through of it again because Pen's coding got an overhaul.

I hope you all enjoy!

<https://the-night-market.itch.io/the-night-market-book-2>

Password: Merripen@Chap1

[Belladonna - Trick or Treat](#)

[Oct 20, 2023](#)



"I don't see why we have to do this."

Belladonna was behind the changing screen and had been for the last hour. Meticulously preparing herself for tonight. She had come home irritated, saying that there was some sort of problem with a current batch of fledglings and she had half a mind to just kill them all and use their bodies as decorations. Which promptly sent our daughter running into the other room, screaming. Somehow, we had wound up with the kindness little soul for a child and it surprised Belladonna each and every time she looked at one of us with unshed tears. Belladonna had gone to apologize and not even ten minutes later I heard giggling from the lavish room they had sequestered herself in. Emerging, Bella gave me strict orders to go get dressed and to leave the child alone. She was 'preparing'.

While they both preened, I had been sitting on the settee in front of the fire, which is where I still resided closed to forty minutes later.

"It's important to her," I told Bella. "All the other kids are going out tonight. We can't just make her stay in."

"Why not? We'll give her candy and she can run around the room on a sugar rush before passing out in front of the fire. Then you and I can go have our fun." She said it was that telling purr of hers. Dipping her voice into something raspy and low.

"You and I can still have our fun," I pointed out. "After trick or treating."

There was a huff from behind the partition. She had refused to let me come see what she was wearing for the night. I had to trust it would be somewhat appropriate. Then again, it wasn't as if anyone was going to say anything. Not with her being a Baron.

Behind me, the door burst open as our daughter came barreling into the room. Our little mini, we often called her. Given any specific light, she was the spitting image of either of us. Jumping into my arms, she threw herself at me, wrapping herself tightly around my neck and waist. I snorted in laughter as I saw what she was wearing.

"Vampire, huh?"

She grinned. "Just like mommy."

"Not just like mommy, dear," Belladonna said from behind the partition. "You are not old enough to dress just like mommy."

Mini grinned. "Just like mommy," she repeated. If there was anything our daughter was good at, it was sheer stubbornness. She wore a black dress and tights with little embossed bats on it. And a long velvet black cape. Her auburn curls were pinned up on top of her head and she had clearly stolen some of Belladonna's jewelry and dabbed her lips with rouge to simulate blood.

"I think you look exactly like mommy," I told her, brushing my nose against hers and making her giggle.

"Not tonight." Belladonna stepped out from where she had been hiding and I nearly choked on my spit. She wore a short all white latex dress with knee-high white leather boots. Above her head she fashioned a glittering halo and had strapped white feathered wings to her back. I would say her expression looked very demure except for the fact that her breasts were nearly falling out of the dress in some display of gravity defying stubbornness.

"Oh, mommy," Mini sighed. "You are beautiful."

Belladonna smiled softly at her. "And you are perfectly ghoulish tonight, my little baron."

Mini clapped, hopping down from me and running to get her basket. Belladonna turned to me with an arched brow.

"You dressed up," I said, throat dry.

"Of course I dressed up. It's Hallow something or another." Stepping towards me, she wrapped her arms around me, pressing herself firmly to my front. "You know, where I am from, this was the night of devil worship."

"Is it?" I squeaked, feeling the blood rush through my veins at her chilly embrace.

"Mm hm. So I was thinking," leaning forward, she brushed her lips across the fluttering pulse of my neck. "You could worship me tonight, if you'd like." She bit down on the meat of my neck, sucking just hard enough to bruise.

Before I answered, Mini came bounding back into the room. "Ready!"

Belladonna stepped away, as if she had done nothing. I cleared my throat, rubbing at my neck. She hadn't broken the skin but she was close to it.

"Wonderful," Bella started. "I thought we would go trick or treating at the Warden's first."

I snorted in laughter, trying to regain control of myself. "Yes, because I'm sure he'll be so very pleased at your outfit."

"I see nothing wrong with it. Come along, darling," she said to our daughter, picking her up and holding her close. "Tonight's the night of goblins and ghouls. When the moon is pumpkin orange and the spirits rise to walk in the world. It is a night of magic. Of deception. Of pure and utter terror."

"And candy," Mini reminded her.

Belladonna smiled. "And so much candy."

True to her promise, we walked out into the market, surrounded with orange pumpkin shaped lanterns and children running around in homemade costumes. Vendors set up their booths, handing out candy to any that passed by, and if anyone lurking in the shadows dared to scare our little girl, Belladonna silently slipped off to take care of it. It looked as if tonight was filled with treats for her as well.

Coming back after one particular incident, she licked her lips.

"You need to stop doing that," I whispered to her, watching as the children of the streets ran wild.

"No." A spot of blood was on her pure white dress. With the pad of my finger, I wiped it off, the latex suddenly making far more sense as the stain came out immediately. While our daughter went to retrieve more candy, I held my finger up for Belladonna. Her tongue reached out, licking it from me, her fangs grazing my finger as my own blood bubbled forward. Her pupils dilated to near black at the taste.

"Mommy," Mini sniffled.

Belladonna turned to our daughter immediately, as if she hadn't just been fucking me with her eyes.

"Yes darling?"

"They were out of candy. That was the one Billy said had the good stuff too."

"Well that is unacceptable." Turning to me, she looked me up and down. "I'll go take care of this."

"Bella," I warned.

But she was already off.

Picking Mini up, I sighed, watching as Belldaonn berated the shop vendor for being out of candy before her daughter got there. The vendor was scrambling, trying to find something she could give us while the adjacent vendors began to make sure they had enough for the little baron heiress that was coming their way.

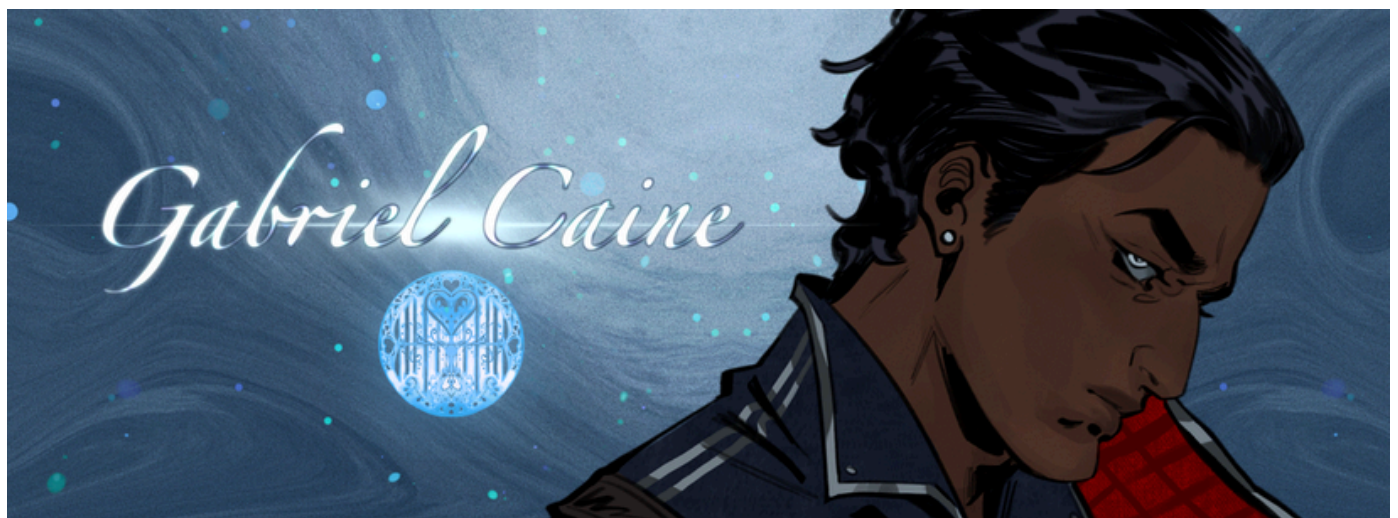
In my arms, Mini sighed. "Mommy is scary," she said in a dreamy tone.

I cuddled her close as Belladonna stood there in full angel glory, flashing her fangs and describing in detail how she would ruin this person's entire life if they did not produce at least a candy apple.

"Yes," I agreed. "Yes she is." And I loved her for it.

[Gabriel - Trick or Treat](#)

[Oct 23, 2023](#)



“He’s not coming.”

I looked at my daughter out of the corner of my eye, the blond wisp of her hair curling across her grey eyes as she stared into the dark alley.

“He’ll be here,” I assured.

“He probably had to go stab someone,” my son said. “Daddy’s good at stabbing people.”

I sighed. “Your father is not stabbing someone. This is just one of his busiest nights of the year. He probably had to stop and talk to someone.” And most likely stab someone. Halloween wasn’t exactly a calm night. But Gabriel had promised the kids that he would come trick or treating with them. And to make sure that he was actually going to do that, we were waiting for him on his patrol route, ready to ambush him.

“Should have had the grandads take us,” my son muttered bitterly. “At least they would have stolen most of the candy by now.”

“Brother,” our little girl said. “Don’t speak such blasphemy. The Knowing is always listening.”

“Okay,” I said a little louder than necessary. “Let’s not get into the discussion about the grandads, the Knowing, or stabbings right now. We are supposed to be having fun.”

Both kids looked at me with equal pouts on their lips, arms crossed in front of them sullenly. I silently prayed for Gabriel to hurry the fuck up and get here.

Thankfully, we didn’t have to wait long. I could hear the clang of his sword against his hip before I even saw him and both children’s faces lit up as they hid in the shadows. I kept to the darker portion, waiting for Gabriel to walk fully down the street. He came around the corner in full Warden regalia, a stern look on his face as he kept a vigilant watch on the alley at hand. He caught my eye almost immediately and I put a finger to my lips. Giving me a barely there nod, he made sure not to falter in his patrol.

The shrieks that pierced the alley were ear-splitting as the children jumped from the shadows and on to him. He made a good show of grabbing for his sword but in the end, fell dramatically backwards onto the wall as the kids climbed all over him.

“Daddy!” they shrieked. “We got you! We got you!”

I had been with Gabriel long enough to see the barely there twitch of his lips. “You did,” he said solemnly, holding the twin, one in each arm and settling them on their feet.

“You promised to take us trick or treating,” our daughter said.

“It’s Halloween,” our son added. “Did you forget?”

"I did not. I was on my way to you," he told them. I could see the strain on his face. It was clear that the night had already been a taxing one. But when it came to the children, Gabriel caved each and every time.

"Our house is that way," they both said, pointing in several different directions.

I took this as my cue to step out of the shadows. "Are you done with your patrol?" I silently willed him to say yes. Mainly because the kids had been jumping up and down all day in anticipation to go trick or treating and I was pretty sure we were going to have a full scale mutiny on our hands if we didn't take them *now*.

"I can patrol while we are out," he told me. It wasn't exactly what I wanted to hear but I would take what I would get. Given the dull shade of his blade, I knew he had already had to use it a few times tonight.

"You have to wear a costume, daddy," our daughter said.

"Yes, we brought one for you," our son chimed in.

I smiled, feeling a bit of payback for him being late coming home. Stepping forward, I pulled a pirate hat from my bag, along with a plastic hook hand and a stuffed animal parrot. He stared at me, waiting for the punchline of the joke.

"The kids picked it out," I said sweetly. I could see the way his teeth ground together. We both knew there was no way he was going to be able to refuse it if that was the case.

"It's what I always wanted to be," he said smoothly. The kids cheered in triumph, dancing in a circle. Meanwhile, I stepped forward, reaching out to place the hat on his head.

"Is this really necessary," he whispered.

"It is," I said. "Because you were supposed to be here two hours ago. So payback is a bitch." Linking my arms within his, I kept my laughter at bay. Gabriel looked miserable. A miserable pirate with his happy colorful little parrot.

"Let's go!" the kids shouted. They began running down the street and I could feel Gabriel tense beside me.

"Slow down," he yelled. "Don't you get too far ahead. And remember we do not take candy from strangers!"

I looked at him curiously. "It's Halloween. That's the entire point."

"It's a dangerous holiday for so many reasons. I do not see why we find this acceptable."

"You're one of those people who believe there are razors in the apples, huh? Or drugs in the chocolate."

"You should never be too vigilant," he told me, his footsteps picking up as he tried to catch up to our kids. Bursting into the main square of the market, we were surrounded by pumpkin lights, decorative bats, and witches that had decided to really lean into the stereotype.

"They're happy," I told him, leaning my head against his shoulder.

"They are going to have entirely too much sugar. One piece tonight and no more. We will be giving the rest away. There is no need for this much chocolate in the house."

"Gabriel," I laughed, "breathe. They are having fun. They are not going to be hurt. Just enjoy them. They're only this young once."

It took him a moment, but he sagged his shoulders a bit. As we watched the kids run around the square, collecting candy and hollering just for the hell of it, even he couldn't help but smile.

"Why a pirate?" he asked, after a long moment.

I snorted in laughter. "Because you are the pillager of the market."

He looked at me in shock. "The children did not say that."

"No," I grinned. "I did." I kissed him, wiping the incredulous look from his face. I felt him lean into it, the entire time, his eyes still on the children. "Happy Halloween, Gabriel," I whispered.

He sighed against me. "I do not condone this holiday," he said seriously. "But, perhaps later tonight, after the kids are in bed and I am home from patrol, we could partake in an evening of pillaging?"

I laughed long and loud, the words sounded almost nervous from his lips. "I'd like that," I told him. "Very much so."

Together, we watched our kids race around the market, switching their costumes so they could get double the candy, and only once did Gabriel arrest anyone.

[Hazel - Trick or Treat](#)

[Oct 27, 2023](#)



"We call upon the dark forces. We gather you into our arms and home and bid you to do our... bidding. We offer you this humble offering of last year's candy and this year's left over pumpkins from the garden. And we call upon you for your protection. Love. Security. And humbly request at least four more chickens this spring."

I raised my brow at my son, his little cherubic face staring back at me hopefully. "I like it," I told him.

He pumped his fist in the air, jumping up and down. "Yes. I knew it. It's got a ring to it for sure." He was dressed in his finest. Patchwork pants made by Hazel and a long sleeve shirt that he had stolen from his uncle and then made his own. It was too big for him but he had been on a kick of being a grown up lately and so we decided it couldn't do much harm. Especially since he belted it around his waist with one of his multicolored scarves.

"Do you think mama will like it?" he asked, that bit of trepidation crossing his face like it always did when it came to magic.

"I think your mother is going to be proud of you no matter what." I pulled him forward, wrapping my arms around him. He was still so young and yet his childhood was disappearing from Hazel and I in a blink of an eye.

"But more importantly," he asked, head buried in my shoulder. "Will it bring more candy tonight?"

"I don't know about that one," I told him seriously. "You asked for more chickens. Not candy."

"Drat," he giggled.

We could hear Hazel before she entered the room, the chiming sound of Mr. Billows' collar ringing in the stairwell. The door to the upper floor opened and I did a double take. It turned out it wasn't Mr. Billows that was ringing after all.

"Are we ready?" Hazel asked.

Hazel was dressed in a baggy, furry grey cat onesie. Topped with fluffy ears and a nose that she had cast upon herself to mold against her actual face. With her, she carried a disgruntled Mr. Billows in her arms. A cat who was obviously the inspiration for such a costume.

"Is Billows coming with us?" I asked.

"Of course not," she chided, putting him down on the counter. When she looked towards our son, she beamed. "Look at you! You look like a true little warlock."

He bounced on his feet, running towards Hazel and flinging himself in her arms. "I even created my own spell," he told her excitedly. "I'm going to call upon the dark forces for all the candy tonight."

Hazel looked at him solemnly. "We must do our dark forces dance then."

"Oh," he stated with big eyes. "Yes please."

Knowing that there was no stopping it, I went to go sit by the hearth while they took their place in the middle of the apothecary. With a wave of her hand, Hazel cleared the way. Shelves and barrels of herbs were all flung to the side of the room, sending the shadows scattering and singing towards the rafters.

The two of them faced each other, hands crossed like an x and held out before them. Slowly, they began circling each other with intensity, chanting in a language that I was positive they had made up. Though, I had never once asked. Most magic was about belief anyway. So who was I to say it wasn't real?

It was a ritual they had done from the time that our son was born. Something silly and unique to them alone. Because Hazel was healing. The birth of a boy in the Albright family had never been looked upon favorable, and when both him and Hazel had nearly died during childbirth, she thought it to be a sign that this was the curse. That our first born would be taken from us. Born without magic and too weak to survive in the world.

I woke up two days later to her doing this ritual with him in the middle of the apothecary. And when I asked her if there was any actual magic to it, she told me no. But she wanted to make sure that her child understood that while magic was to be respected, it was never something to fear either. And even if he had no magic in him himself, he was not going to be ostracized for it. He was going to be strong. He was going to know the ancient traditions. And he was going to grow to see the world thrive.

Little sparks lit up the corners of the shop as they finished their ritual. I saw the way Hazel's fingers twitched. Candy began to rain down from the rafters, the wisps swooping in from the trees outside to bring him more.

I watched our son giggle as he began gathering his spoils. Hazel came over to me, wrapping herself around me, the whiskers from her nose tickling mine as she kissed me softly.

"Don't you think he's going to get enough candy during trick or treating? You know Malcolm has saved the good stuff for him."

Hazel leaned against me, the fur from her costumed tickling my bare arms. "I think that as long as he is interested, I'm going to make sure every moment is magical like this." She paused, staring at him with a small frown. "Though, we may have to give him a new set of teeth one day."

I laughed, looping my arms around her. "I love your costume."

She grinned. "You can't trick or treat in something skimpy, as much as Belladonna disagrees. I'll be all snuggly warm. Which is a must seeing as we are not going home until the jack o lanterns burn out."

"That could be days," I reasoned.

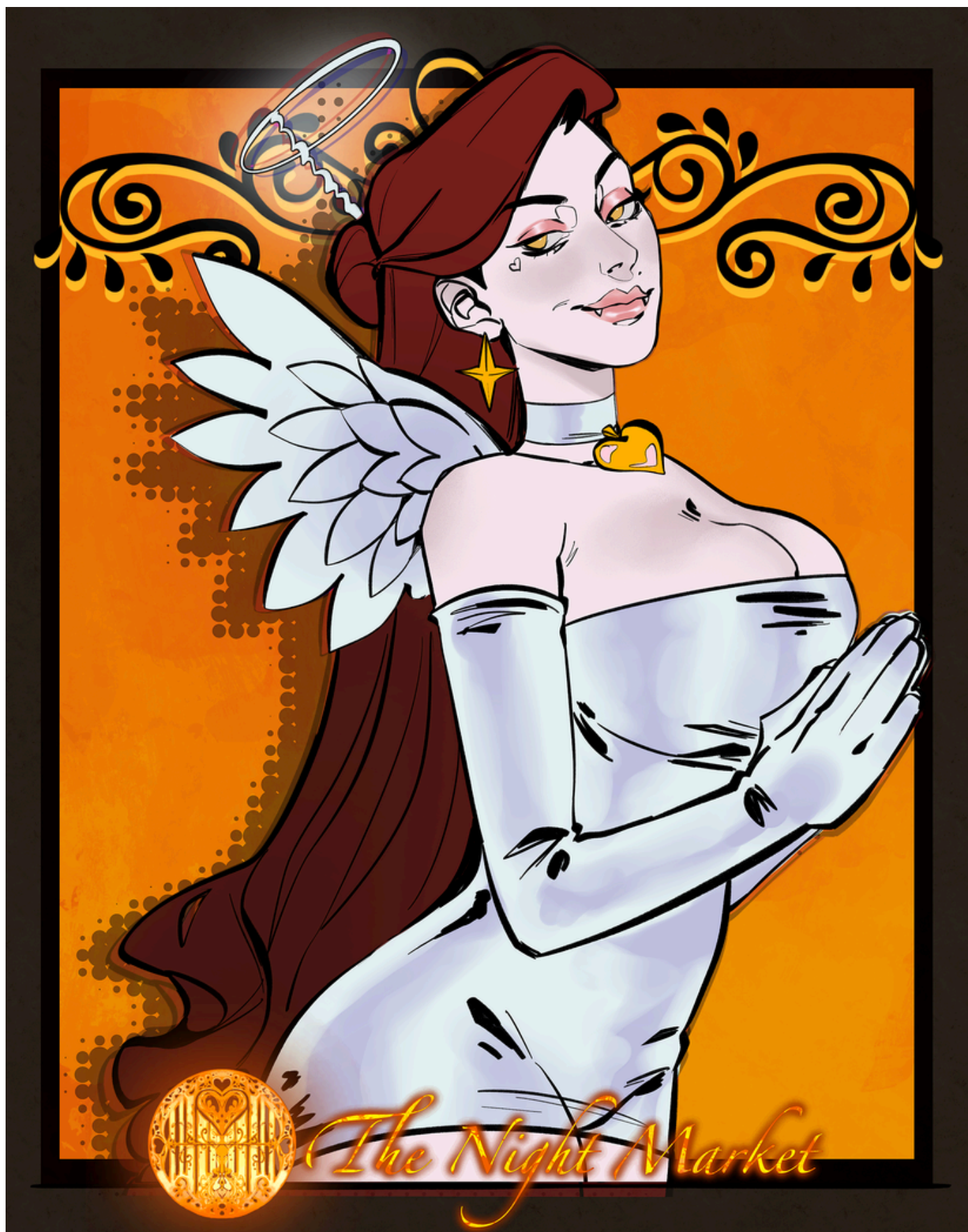
She looked at me over her shoulder. "Better get your walking shoes then." Stepping away, she clapped her hands, gathering all the candy in a giant bowl that sat next to Mr. Billows on the counter. "Come along, baby warlock. To the Uncles!"

"To the Uncles!" he shouted.

I sighed. Somehow, I knew that tonight would end with me carrying our son home, dead asleep in my arms. Meanwhile, Hazel would continue to collect candy for him, gathering a haul so he woke up to a mountain in the morning. And I would watch her, not saying a word. Because finally, Hazel was content in the world, and the world welcomed her back. I wasn't going to ever take that for granted again.

[Halloween Art](#)

[Oct 27, 2023](#)







The Night Market



[Lore - All Hallows Eve](#)

[Oct 30, 2023](#)



While not every district celebrates the holiday, the ones that do turn the night of Halloween into a month-long event. The alleys are decorated with pumpkin lanterns. Live bats swoop through the cobblestone streets. And every vendor, every shop, carries candy for day and night trick or treat session. Kids young and old partake in the event, all of it leading to a weekend long carnival of dancing, bobbing for apples, spooks and scares.

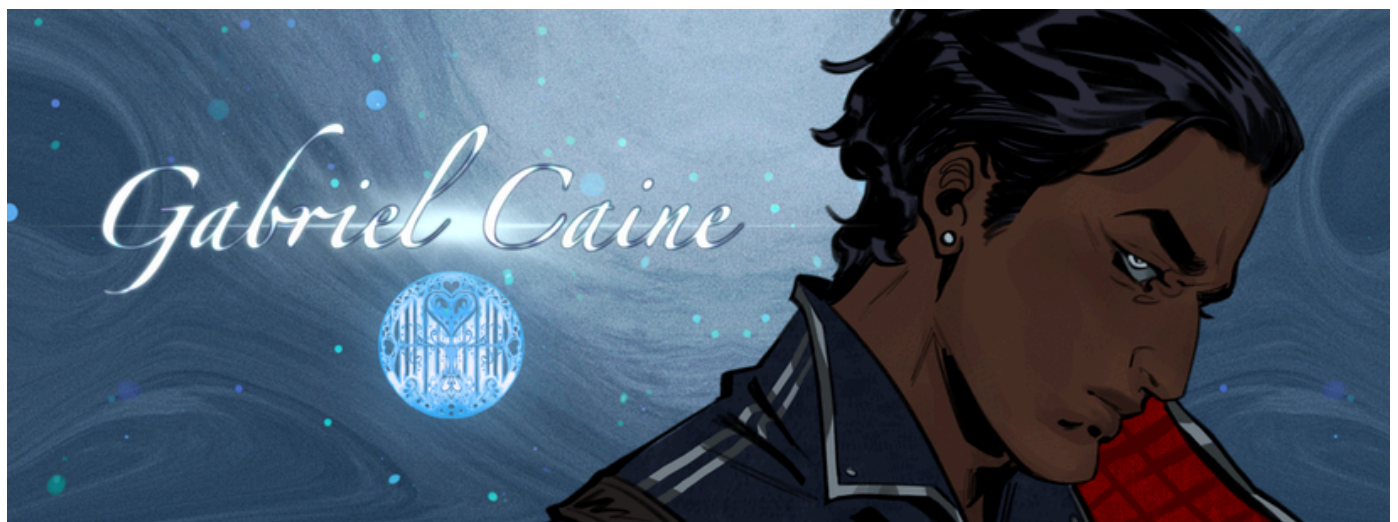
This is far more the lighter side of the event. The shadows try to edge their way in during this month. Swallowing unsuspecting individuals whole. More lights and lanterns are put up in an effort to keep them at bay but if someone is caught within the dark shadows edges of the Night Market, they do not return. No grave is created for them in the graveyard and the Well of Souls never receives them for rebirth.

Mists and fog were outlawed several decades ago due to vampires using them as a cover for their hunting grounds. Furthermore, candied apples are regulated due to an outcrop of poison apples. More arrests are made for magic use during this month than any other but certain guard members try to let it slide seeing as it is all in good fun.

No one is quite sure why the Night Market celebrates this holiday or where the influence came from. It certainly did not start this way. Long ago, when the market was still underground, the celebration of this month was the convergence of magic. It was a time when a Gatekeeper was not needed to open doors to other worlds and instead the citizens themselves could. They could visit the homes they were from or vacation in different worlds for a time. But much more importantly, they could steal others to populate the market, locking them on the other side of the gate and building their community by picking who they felt would be most beneficial to the growth of their society. While the practice is not condoned any longer, there are rumors of it still being enacted out in the deep recesses of the Outlands.

[Gabriel - Post Chapter One](#)

[Nov 8, 2023](#)



Knees cracking against the ground, pain pulsed through him as he was doubled over, hand on the wall before him in an effort to try and ground himself. It wasn't often that Gabriel was taken down. Especially by something so lesser. But today, his heart had been beating erratically and sweat and coated his brow in a winter chill. So when the goblin appeared and blasted him in the back, he had gone down with

some surprise. Goblins had very little in the way of magic. Not like this. They had numbers and brute force. But this one was different. It salivated, its teeth gnashing together as it stalked unsteadily forward.

Turning, Gabriel took care of it with a single swing of his sword, separating the thing's head from its body.

The eyes continued to blink, even though it was dead. The glass stuck in its gums falling out onto the cobblestones and turning to dust. Slowly, Gabriel pushed himself to his feet, breathing heavily. The skin on his hands cracked open and instead of blood, silver light dripped sluggishly from his wounds.

Kicking the body aside, he sighed. His body collapsed against the stone ground as he looked up at the night sky. The stars were rare at this point. Rarely did they come out to shine anymore. He wondered if the Knowing had officially abandoned them.

"Are you okay?"

The voice sounded as if it came through a thick fog of water. It was small and full of hopeful curiosity. Turning, he spied the pale form of a girl, peeking out from around the other side of the wall. His gut twisted into guilt. Of course she was here now.

"Hello, Miss," he said softly. "I am alright. Are... are you?"

Her eyes flicked towards the goblin lying on the ground and the lifeblood slinking from its open wounds. "I was afraid they were going to see me," she said. "I'm glad you came along when you did."

But he hadn't. The girl before him was his greatest failure. Dead and gone long before she should have been. Gabriel hadn't been able to save her. He had failed to deliver her to her brother before her last breath filled her chest.

"You look like you might be hurt, Mr. I thought big people didn't get hurt."

Gabriel looked down at himself. The grace was minimal at this point. Barely coursing through his veins. After the ball, it had all but dissipated. And he had given the last of it that he could spare to the grave that sat out in the sea of dead, waiting for retribution.

"We can get hurt," he muttered. "We can be devastated."

The hand that slipped within his was small. It felt odd. Bones that had never really formed. Breakable. They should have been dust by now.

"Are you sad, Mr?" she asked.

Gabriel blinked down at her gaunt face. The puckered lips and the curled ends of her washed out hair. She looked like her brother. "I am angry."

"Why?"

"Because someone hurt someone I love."

Milo had taken away the one good thing in Gabriel's life. The one thing he had looked forward to. And now the fates had put a mockery in his way in the guise of the girl he couldn't ever save. The sister to the man that had ruined his life.

"I'm sorry. Sometimes people do bad things and I don't understand it."

"Yes," he agreed, trying not to squeeze her hand. She was already dead. She could not be leverage against the man he truly wanted to kill. "Can I escort you somewhere?" he asked. "To your brother, perhaps?" Maybe she would know where the wretch had been hiding. Maybe this wasn't a mockery after all but a gift.

But the girl shook her head. "No, thank you."

"I really think you should go home. You are too young to be wandering."

"I was too young to die too," she said innocently. "But you still allowed it. Why couldn't you save me?"

The words were a shot through his chest, spreading his ribs open and splaying his heart to the world.

"Did you not save me because you weren't worthy?" she asked. "Because the Fallen are nothing more than distorted reflections of something pure? Because that's what you are, right Gabriel? Nothing. Just an echo of the good that you used to be." She tipped her head to the side. "Do you think that's why the Night Market died? Because you couldn't save it? Because you just weren't good enough?"

Gabriel ripped his hand from hers, staring down at the anguished face. The tears seeping from her as sobs wracked her small body.

"Why did you kill me," she hissed. "You aren't capable of loving anyone. You are nothing more than the trash tossed from the heavens. The market died because of you."

"You will hold your tongue," he said, drawing his sword.

"Or what?" she asked. "You'll kill me again? Do it! Do it, beast! Filth! Mangy excuse for something pure and brave. Coward—"

The sword came out and she lunged for him, her fingers elongating into curled talons that ripped through the front of his shirt. Gabriel lashed out, sinking the sword into her chest. He looked at her as the light faded from her face. Again.

"The Knowing was right to abandon you." But it was no longer Ever that stared at him. But the market themselves.

The guttural wail of rage that ripped from Gabriel's lungs tore through the alley, grace rippling outwards and sending the dirt and debris scattering.

Before him, there was nothing. No bodies. No market. Not even the goblin from earlier.

Instead, Gabriel knelt in the filth, silver dripping from his eyes as he stared up at the heavens, his chest rising and failing in pain. But the heavens had turned their back on him long ago. And they certainly were not going to answer tonight.

[Hazel - Post Chapter One](#)

[Nov 10, 2023](#)



“Billows! Billows!” Hazel was walking around the garden, hands on her hips. “Where did that cat get to,” she muttered. She had a bottle of cream in her hand but no cat butting up against her ankles for his treat. It had been a few days. And while that wasn’t entirely unheard of for Billows, it didn’t leave Hazel feeling the best about his disappearance. However, she had a tendency of being overly dramatic at times and needed to remember that just because Billows was taking a jaunt, didn’t mean anything was seriously at odds.

Humming to herself, she poured a small bowl of cream just in case. It wasn’t as if there were other animals around to drink it. She then went and did her evening chores around the garden. It was far more lush this year that it had been in the past. Her herbs were particularly vibrant, giving off a spicy scent to the entirety of the garden. Thankfully she had gotten rid of those wisps. They were so obviously the ones that had been killing things around here. The day Hazel burned the birch tree was the day that everything started coming back to life again. Granted, that birch tree kept trying to revive itself but in the end, it really wasn’t a match for her magic.

Gathering a few heads of cabbage and a lone winter squash, Hazel walked back inside. Magic crackled through the air, giving off the pungent scent of myrrh. Lucinda was behind the counter, mixing a few

brews. The woman had been at it all week, trying her best to revive the apothecary to its glory days. For Hazel, of course.

Coming up to her mother, Hazel popped up on tiptoes to give her a kiss on the cheek. "Should I put some tea on?" she asked.

"That would be lovely, dear. It's been a long day."

"Mother, you should rest," Hazel admonished. "I can see to whatever this is."

"I moved back here to help you, Hazel. Not to sit and be pampered."

Hazel rolled her eyes. "Oh, mother. Please. That is ridiculous. I'm not a child anymore. I certainly do not wish for you to be doing all of this on your own. You did so much when I was a little. It's your turn to take it easy."

Looping her arm within Lucinda's, Hazel pried her away from her spells and took her to the mismatched sofas near the hearth. "Just rest," she said. "I'll take care of the last of the orders and then I'll get some dinner on."

With a wave of her hand, a tea service appeared. Dark notes of bergamot and anise filled the air, just like Lucinda liked.

"Did you have fun out in the market today?" Lucinda called out.

Hazel smiled, beginning to add the last little bits of blood to the tonics her mother had been packaging. "It was lovely. The market has a long way to go but it is shaping up to be something truly spectacular again. With the population down I think there is going to be much more room for the kind of expansion that actually means something, you know? I heard that they were going to re-open the flea market soon. I'm very excited to go there. Oh! And Mr. Vicker from the Obol District said that he was looking forward to some of my homemade pumpkin soup."

"Yes, well, just be careful, my dear. Mr. Vicker is looking for a new wife and it isn't as if that is going to be a step-up for you."

Hazel laughed. "No. I would never, mother. He is a very nice man but he is certainly not someone that I am looking to marry. I want someone that is going to be a help here. Not someone with ambitions to become a Baron."

Lucinda raised a brow. "You'd do good with a Baron, my dear. Often times you can become a Baron yourself just by being married to one. The mouthpiece behind the figurehead."

Hazel's nose wrinkled. "No, mother. That's not for me. I want love. Real love. Not a political status." She corked the last couple of bottles and snapped her fingers for them to hop to their own boxes for

tomorrow. "Now," she said, turning to Lucinda. "What is all this talk about love? You know that doesn't interest me."

"No, I know my dear."

"Mother," she said, sitting down next to her. "We've talked about this. I only have one true love in my life. And that is this shop." She patted her mother's hand, leaning her head against her shoulder. "I want to learn everything you have to offer. I want to make you proud, mother. No more of these silly games."

"You have no idea how wonderful it is to hear you say that," Lucinda crooned.

"Love doesn't interest me. I am sure one day it might. Perhaps I will find someone kind. Someone that can help carry on the Albright line. But I am not worried about something permeate. I dare say you had it right. Sending the suitors in your life away."

Lucinda sighed. "They can be quite bothersome. Malcolm's mother was just a wretch through and through. Greedy for all of my time. And your father was nothing more than a demon. Out for our souls and our power. I do so hope you are better in the aspect of love than I am."

Hazel smiled. "You'll find someone. One day. I still believe in you. And now, with you back, I'm here to help."

Curling up close to her mother, she blinked, letting the fire grow bright. It burned much liked it did the day the market had attacked her mother and they were forced to burn down apothecary alley. Sometimes it felt as if the world was against them. Attacking at every turn. Hazel wondered what this realm would be like without people like her and her mother, however. Everyone certainly relied on them enough.

Sighing, Hazel shook her head at such silly thoughts. Not that it mattered. Life had taken an upturn. With Lucinda home she felt safe again. Now she just needed to bring Malcolm back into the fold. Their childhood had been rocky but they were adults now. Surely they could let bygones be bygones.

"I'm glad you're home, mama," she said with a small smile.

"Me too, my daughter. Me too."

[Milo - Post Chapter One](#)

[Nov 13, 2023](#)



"You're a fucking idiot."

Milo arched in pain as the needle stuck through him and a black thread was laced within his skin.

"That's what I've been told," he said through a grimace.

"Stop fighting goblins, dipshit."

Milo lay back on the rickety bench, looking at the individual with the jet black hair and piercing eyes. Rooke had certainly never been one to sugar coat words. They were also one of the best back alley medics he knew. Which was unfortunate since they were fucking hard to find at times. Up until a few months ago, he had assumed Rooke to be dead. Turned out they had just gone deeper underground and had taken on some of the less pleasant contracts within the market underbelly.

"What would you like me to do? Let them attack me?" he asked. It wasn't as if Milo sought out the goblins.

Rooke snorted. "Yes." When they placed a pad of iodine on his side, he caught his groan of pain behind his teeth. "Now, while I love that I get to inflict a little bit of pain on you, and while I'm even happy to see you, you need to stop avoiding Hazel and go talk to her."

Milo rolled his head up to look at the ceiling, breathing through his nose. "No."

"Wow. It wasn't a question. Statements and questions are two different things." Taking a roll of tape, they began bandaging the gauze to his side and his shoulders. The goblins had actually done a number on him this time. He was getting sloppy. That, and he was tired. "I can only keep infections from you for so long. There's going to come a day when I'm not going to be able to help you. Hazel is a witch. And a damn good one. Go ask for her tonics."

"If it gets too bad I will. But don't underestimate yourself." The needle stabbed through him again, the pull of skin scraping against the nylon of the thread.

"I don't underestimate myself. I rightly estimate myself and think you're a no good stubborn mule that needs to suck up your abandonment issues and say the words I'm wrong. I'll never do it again."

His eyes rolled to theirs. "I'm wrong. I'll never do it again." When Rooke jabbed her thumb into one of his wounds he flinched. "Ow! Fuck is wrong with you!"

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" they shot back. "Stop being a petty little bitch boy, Milo. And..."

Milo doubled over, vomit expelling from his stomach in a violent jolt. The sweat on his back began to gather while his skin felt as if it was being ripped from him in thin shreds. Somewhere he could hear Rooke calling to him but it was as if their voice was from behind a brick wall. Inch by inch he was being flayed.

"No no no no no," he gritted out, holding onto his stomach. "Stop," he begged. "Stop doing this."

The burnt end of a knife shot through him, twisting against his spine and pulling at his insides. Milo felt the scream ripping from his lips as his body arched and contorted, the recent stitches popping at the seams.

And then there was nothing. He was slumped over to his side, eyes half lidded and looking off into the distance, unseeing. Blood pounded in his ears and fought to remind him that he was still alive. Death was not coming for him.

"Shit," Rooke hissed. "Did another gate try to open?"

Milo nodded his head, eyes blank.

"Did you stop it?"

"Think so," he rasped. He didn't dare move. His stomach still shaky. That, and he was almost certain his inside would pool out of him if he dared to flinch.

It had been getting worse. When he had done the ritual he had assumed that would be it. Not that the Night Market would violently rebel against him and try to open gates to new worlds anyway. He now just had the power to stop it. Didn't mean the market was going to be happy about it. And they certainly weren't an entity to listen.

"I don't want to fight you," he murmured, turning his face to the wooden seat. "You got to understand. I never wanted to fight you."

"Milo?" Rooke took him by the shoulder. "Hey, Milo. You with me or you somewhere else?"

He wanted to be somewhere else. He wanted to be back in the distillery on a cold night. Curled up on a mattress with a warm body next to him and his lover safe in his arms. But instead he was here. Ready to lose what little lunch he had managed to stuff down today.

Not that he didn't deserve it.

"Help me sit up?" he asked.

Rooke slowly helped right him, looking him up and down. "That didn't look like it felt great."

"It was fine," he said. "Super enjoyable, actually."

"Yeah, I'm gonna have to go over your head and contact Mal on this one."

Milo's hand shot out, wrapping around their wrist. "Don't."

"Milo, you're death warmed over and while it's your choice if you die or not, given that you're the Gatekeeper, we should maybe talk a bit about who needs to be around when you do kick the bucket because I don't really want a goblin controllin' the damn gates."

"I'm not going to die," he said through gritted teeth. "Leave Mal out of this. He's got enough he's got to do."

"Like what? He's literally been looking for you!"

Milo couldn't really explain it. He didn't know why or how but he just knew that the market wasn't going to stay buried for long. Malcolm's Lamplight would come home and while that meant that Milo may have somehow failed in his ritual, he couldn't bring himself to care. Every fuck he had went out the window a while ago. But if they did return home and managed to beat the odds, they were going to need someone. And Malcolm couldn't be tasked to look after two lost souls. It was better if Milo just stayed out of the picture.

"Just, let me handle this, alright? I'll get him if things get really bad."

Rooke looked non too convinced. But there wasn't much they could really say. "Fine," she muttered. "But if you die I'm going to break your damn grave clock myself. Make sure you never return."

"I'll actually hold you to that," Milo said with a bitter smile. Oblivion was sounding good right about now.

[Belladonna - Post Chapter One](#)

[Nov 15, 2023](#)



Belladonna felt her stomach roll. Pushing aside her goblet, she stared at it for a long moment, her nose wrinkling in disgust. It just hadn't tasted quite right lately. The blood was too thick and congealed.

"Please, mistress," someone was begging. "We are not harboring the man in which you speak. Please. We just..."

Their face turned purple as they began to gasp, the necklace around their neck tightening and tightening until their windpipe was crushed. They fell to the ground, thrashing like some bloated fish. Served them right. Belladonna was pretty certain they had given a room to the trash that was Milo Next. Maybe they hadn't known it was him, but really, was it Belladonna's fault that the innkeeper was so stupid? The word had been put out there. Milo was not to live. The fact that no one had brought him in yet was a bit concerning, however. It meant he was either far more intelligent than she wanted to give him credit for, or the people she employed were just plain stupid.

"Would you like me to clean this up, m'lady." Gadora said, standing by the carnage.

"Yes, but make sure that you make a display of carrying out the body. I know there are a few downstairs that have been thinking of staging a coup. Please show them how easy it is for me to snap."

"Yes, m'lady. Of course."

There was a knock on the door, and Belladonna felt herself sigh in irritation. It was a far busier day than she had expected and she simply did not have the energy for it.

"Come in," she called, settling herself behind her desk.

The door burst open with a force of heat, a silver boiling fire cascading into the room. Belladonna shot up and out of her seat, while Gadora stood, blocking the light with her hand and putting herself up as a barrier between her mistress and the intruder.

But as the light settled, Belladonna's eyes grew wide.

A man stood there, his face weathered with the afternoon sun. A straw hat was upon his head and his clothes were that of his Sunday best. A cross shone on his neck and as he looked at Belladonna, it was with such sad eyes.

She rose from her seat, staring at him. "Daddy?" she whispered.

A soft smile came to his lips. "Madeline. Oh, my darling girl. I wish I could hug you."

She stumbled forward, intent to do just that, but he put up a hand. "No. You cannot touch me, sweetheart. You'll burn if you do."

Gadora was still blocking the magic. Whatever this light was. The silver grey dawn over an open field. Suddenly, Belladonna felt so young again. Staring out at the cow pasture as she watched her father head to the parish for the day. It wasn't until she was older that she could follow him. Help him with his work.

"Maddie, sweetheart. You need to listen to me. I come with a message." His eyes were imploring, begging her to not dismiss him just yet. "What you are doing is wrong, my sweet. But there is absolution. You only need to want it."

Belladonna stared at him. "Excuse me?" The love for her father, a man she hadn't seen in so very long, was startled out of her at his words.

"Honey, the Knowing is willing to forgive you. To bring you back to the fold. But you need to want that forgiveness. You need to put a stop to all of this."

"What are you even talking about? Put a stop to what?"

He gestured up and down her form, his eyes averting at the sight of her. There was no disgust. Not disappointment. Only a sad knowledge that he had led her astray somehow. "Everything. Please. I know you've lost your way, but it was not your fault. No one can blame you after the terrors you have seen. But there is hope yet. There is a light at the end of the tunnel."

Belladonna took a step back. "You're not my father." Her hands unconsciously came up to her chest where a locket had once laid. She wanted to gaze upon the picture that had been there. To compare it with the image of the man before her. They couldn't possibly be the same.

"I am," he said sadly. "I just think you don't want to hear this."

"My father is dead," she barked. "I watched him die because he couldn't believe his little girl enough to save himself. Whatever you are is just a poor attempt, exacted by the Knowing for hellish reasons. Get out."

"Madeline."

"My name is Belladonna. Now get out."

He looked stricken. Grief flickering across his face in palpable waves. "I love you, my daughter. Please remember that."

And with that, he faded, and along with him, the light. Gadora let her hand drop, panting deeply. Whatever had just appeared before them had zapped her of a considerable amount of energy.

"What just happened?" she breathed.

Belladonna stood and stared at where her father had once been. "I don't know," she said. Her eyes ticked down to the goblet of blood she had cast aside. Untouched. Just sitting there innocently.

Briefly she wondered how much longer she would be able to hold out.

[Book 2 Chapter 2](#)

[Nov 17, 2023](#)



Chapter Two is now up!

I'm not going to lie, this was some coding hell. Please report if you see a code break. I clicked through most of it myself so I am hoping I caught them all but one or two always seem to slip through the cracks. Especially in the second half of the chapter with all the variation.

Hope you all enjoy! Code and link are below

Link: <https://the-night-market.itch.io/the-night-market-book-2>

Code: Chap2@hell

[Malcolm - Post Chapter One](#)

[Nov 20, 2023](#)



Malcolm was tired. Far more tired than he wanted to let on. Coming back from the dead wasn't supposed to be easy. It wasn't like he had ever encountered anyone that found it invigorating. But this was different. Like he couldn't get enough sleep. At any given moment, his entire body still wanted to sink beneath the ground and rest. Wandering aimlessly inside the grey space of the market, without a single reference to who he was, didn't actually provide the reprieve that he always imaged death to be.

Sighing, he took the tea kettle off the stove. There really wasn't much of a choice he had but to just keep going. One foot in front of the other. One day at a time.

The knock came to the door, stopping him in his tracks. Not many people knew where Malcolm lived, and it wasn't as if there were visitors lining up for him. He wondered if it was Hazel. While his sister had helped him over, she still was not keen with traveling across the market on her own. The few times Malcolm had thought about going and getting her, something else always got in his way.

But when he opened the door, it was not Hazel on the other side. Instead, it was Herald Frankenstein. The man from the graveyard with the stitched face and the uneven gait. He had a coffin slung onto his back and was looking at Malcolm with a fierce intensity.

"Well, I would greet you, but I'm a little worried you're here because it's my time or something."

Herald shook his head. "No, sir. I'm not a reaper. I only collect the already dead."

Malcolm nodded. "Right then. What can I help you with today, Herald Frankenstein."

"I was sent to fetch you," he said. "I was told to tell you that Lamplight has returned."

The mug fell from Malcolm's grip. "What?"

"Yes, sir. Don't know how yet. I didn't take them from their grave. But it is the one that's buried out there that I see you visiting often."

"Where are they?" he asked, ready to race out the door.

"Artisan Alley. They have been wandering for a bit, but today they seemed to be able to materialize. At least there. Can't leave otherwise."

Malcolm could barely hear any of it as he felt the rush of blood flow through his ears. He had to get there. To see them. To know that they were truly alive.

"They also asked me if you could track down a Milo Next?"

Malcolm froze, his expression going bitter. Milo hadn't even crossed his mind. Not for this. So much of his time had been left cleaning up that man's mess, trying to track him down and understand what had happened that night. And yet he had been blown off. Milo hadn't given him the time of day in ten years. Malcolm didn't really feel like telling him that Lamplight was home. He could figure it out himself. He was the Gatekeeper, after all.

But of course Malcolm would go and do this. Find him. For Lamplight.

"I'll be there soon," he told Herald.

"They're probably at Miss Kimber's. So, head on there."

Grabbing his coat, Malcolm nodded. "Thanks, Herald."

He didn't follow Herald back into the market. Instead, he walked down the long tunnel that lay outside his door, walking through the dark. It was a familiar path for him and one that he had taken more times than he could count. If he continued forward, he'd wind up near the docks. If he veered right halfway down, he'd slope down into the lower portion of the market, where messages could still be sent.

Malcolm hurried through, walking with quick movements down towards the messaging center, where the heat from the underground sulfur pools still heated the cavern. Flickering scrolls blinked in and out of existence, while the buzzing of wings filled the room with a hum.

“What can I do for you today?” A small pixie flitted up to him with a pen and paper.

“I need to get a message out to Milo Next.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, sir.” The bubblegum pink pixies said, bobbing up and down. “We are not allowed to send any messages to a one Milo Next.”

Malcolm sighed. Fucker figured out how to block his mail. Because of course he did. “Why?” he said with a strained tone.

“I am not privy to say, sir. If you would like to file a complaint, we can get back to you in twenty-seven moon cycles.”

Malcolm shook his head. “It doesn’t matter.” His shoulders slumped as he began walking away. He could at least say that he tried.

“Uh, sir?” he turned back around. The pixie flitted forward, hovering right at the tip of his nose. She smelled sweet and the dust trickling from her wings coated his lashes. “While I cannot deliver messages to him, I can tell you that I may have just delivered a promotional poster. There is a fight going on in the lower section of the market. His name is on the docket.”

A fight club. *The* fight club. The one they used to hang out at. Drinking until all hours of the morning. Laughing with their friends. Malcolm thought the place had gone to ruin. It must have been rebuilt after he died.

“Thank you,” he told the pixie immediately. Her wings shook with joy over doing such a good deed. A fact that Malcolm found highly amusing, given that he knew for a fact that these pixies had the ability to make or break the entire communications of the market. “I don’t have anything now, but I’ll bring you some spun sugar tonight.”

The pixie giggled as she flew away, flying up towards the other pixies and whispering excitedly. It caused Malcolm to smile. He’d bring them the biggest pouch of spun sugar he could find.

Exiting the cavern, Malcolm took a moment, feeling another wave of exhaustion pull at him. “Just a little bit longer,” he muttered. He wanted to go see his Lamplight. To look at them. Make sure they were okay. Help them in some way. And, if they truly wanted to see Milo, he’d bring them to him. But he wasn’t leaving. Milo lost the privilege to be alone with them. Lamplight was far more important than a lost boy’s insecurities.

Letting his eyes close for a moment, Malcolm felt himself float away, his mind wandering as sleep beckoned him. His mind and body wanted to go to where lanterns would sway. Towards a dream where

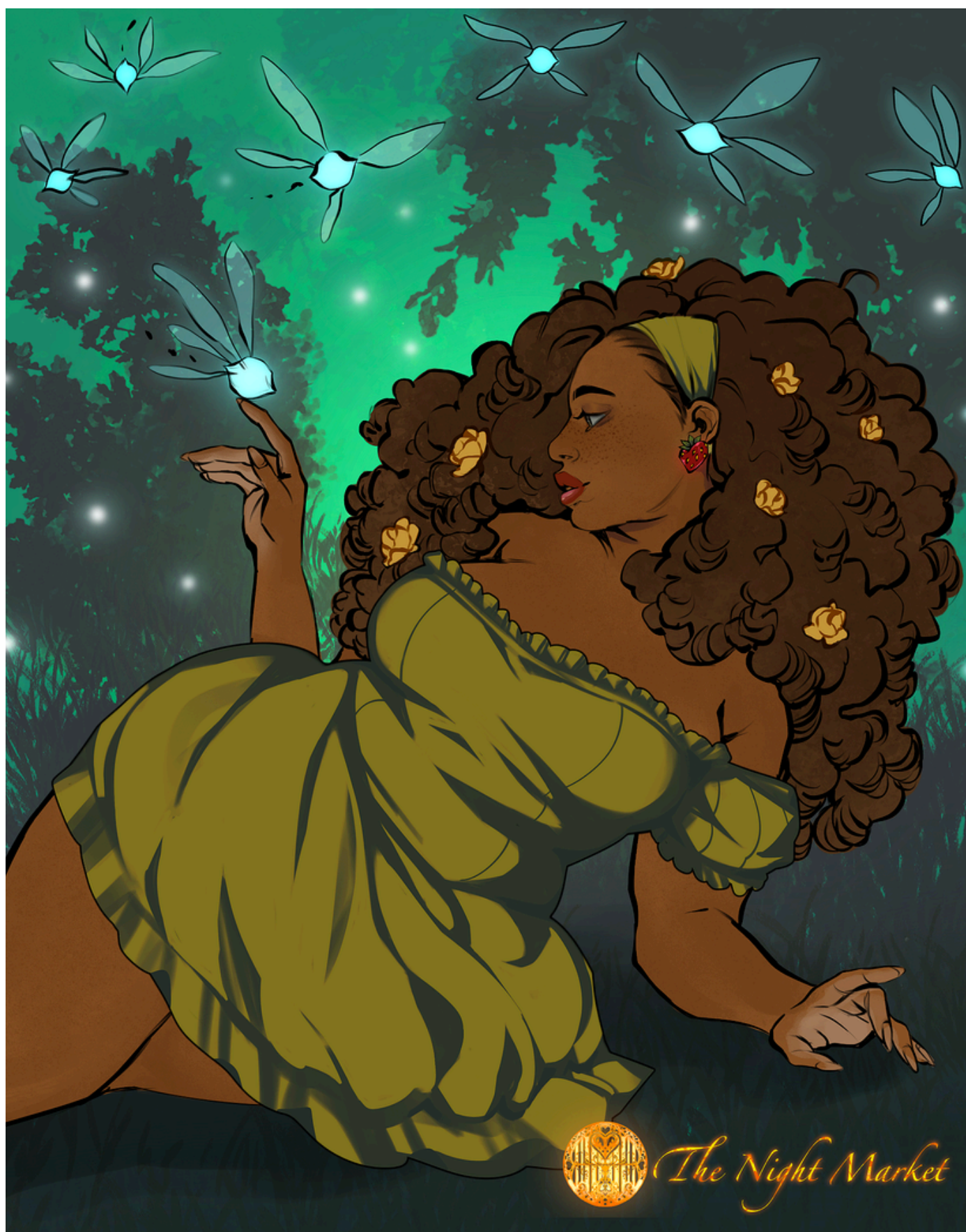
soft hands would reach out for him, not because they needed something from him, but because he was simply enough.

But just like that, his eyes snapped open again because it was just a dream. Reality was dark.

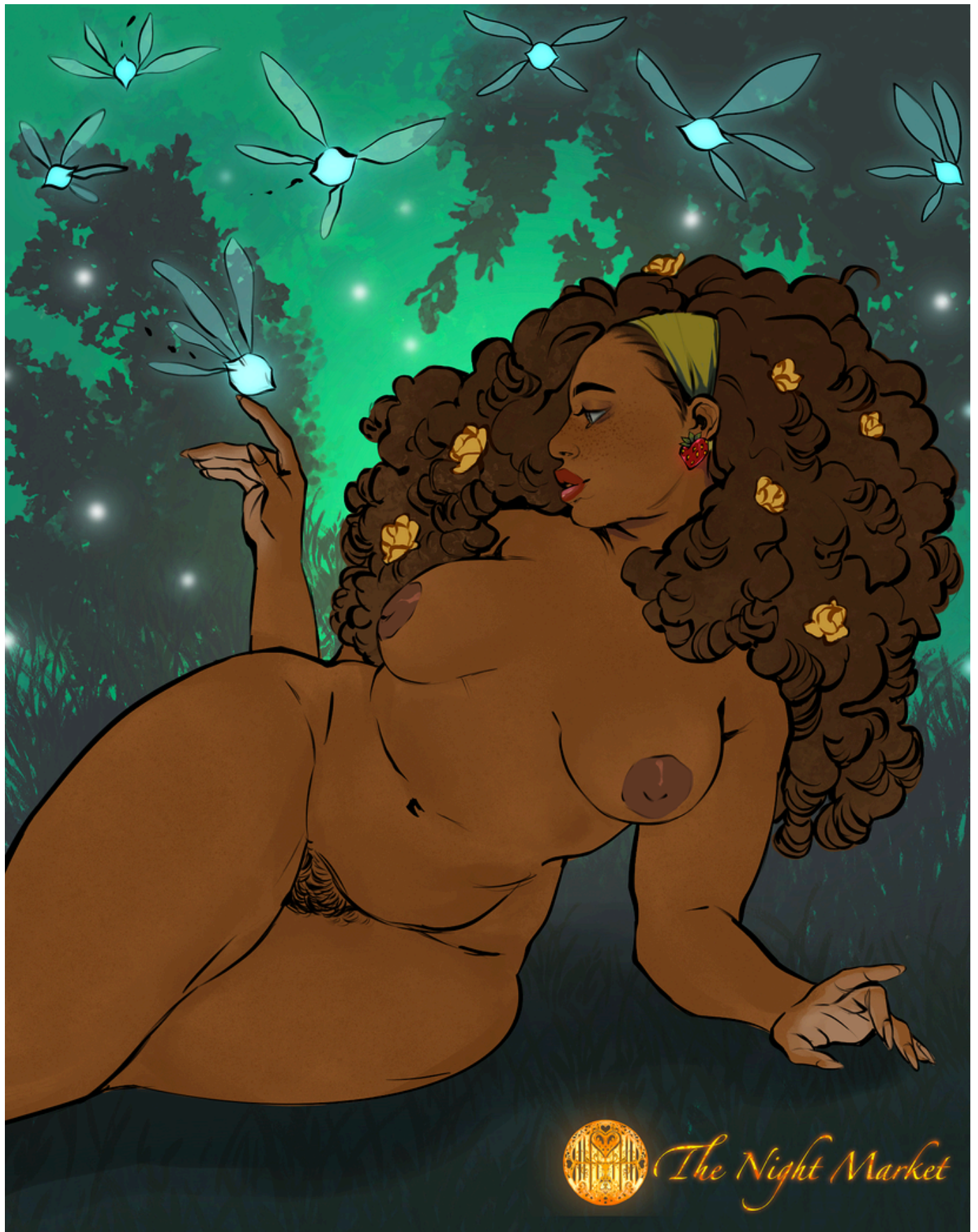
But maybe it wouldn't be dark for long.

[Hazel SFW](#)

[Nov 27, 2023](#)



[Nov 27, 2023](#)



[art](#)

[Nov 29, 2023](#)



The pixie messenger service is below the Night Market streets. Within a low hanging cavern, the pixies conduct the biggest trade within the market, being responsible for generating most of the commerce while also solely responsible for long distance communication. Pay enough of a fee, and they can even get a message outside of the market walls to different realms. As long as a scroll or letter have the specific pixie stamp, the pixies will come when no one is looking, snatch up the message, and get it to where it needs to go. Guaranteed.

However, because they are the only sanctioned messenger service within the Night Market, not everyone is happy with their services. Whenever another company tries to pop up, they quickly fail. Whether from fire or a general disappearance, any modicum of success within another messenger service is short-lived. And while no one can tie it back to the pixies, they do have powerful fae connections. More than likely they are cutting out the competition before competition is formed.

Furthermore, if someone is so inclined, they can petition the pixies to not deliver certain letters or packages. Getting in good with the pixies is perhaps the smartest move anyone could make within the market. But, when making these pixie deals, it is important to be careful with how a request is phrased. Because pixies are notorious at finding loopholes.

After a pixie service is complete, a gift of spun sugar is preferred. They take other payments, but the small wisps of candy floss are their favorites. A pixie always remembers and may not be quite so prompt to a customer that has stiffed them.

The pixie wars of the year of Emerald has been redacted.

[Sick Day/Snowed In - Milo Next](#)

[Dec 7, 2023](#)



"You've got to be kidding me." Milo was banging his head against the frosted window, pressing his fingers to the glass like a little boy, disappointed that he couldn't go out and play.

"It's not so bad, is it?" I had a blanket wrapped around me and was peering out at Milo through the very small expanse that I allowed for my eyes and nose. "We could still get home."

"Sure," Milo said with a bob of his head. "If, you know, we had a sled of dogs that breathed fire to melt the massive amount of snow that is piling up everywhere."

"That's really specific."

"It's the only way we're getting out of here, darlin'." Turning, he opened his mouth to complain further about the snow that was accumulating outside our little makeshift vacation home. His jaw clicked shut the second he laid eyes on me, however. It was a true testament to how pathetic I probably looked.

"Fuck, you're not doing any better, huh?"

"I'm fine." And to prove the point that I was fine, I began coughing wildly, doubling over and holding my stomach tightly as pain shot through me. There was a cold sweat that had doubled as an unbearable heat, coursing through my veins. Ignoring it had yet to make it go away but given that we were now stuck behind a frozen sea, I wasn't quite sure what else I was supposed to do.

Warm and dry hands snuck beneath the comforter, running up my arms and wrapping around the back of my neck and skull. "Breathe," Milo whispered. With each breath, I coughed something wet and rattly. Trying to hide my face into the crook of my arm was futile, as my limbs didn't seem to want to do what I told them to. Milo only brought my head closer to his shoulder, letting me use his soft sweater to hack a lung into.

It passed before long, my head feeling light and fuzzy and while I tried to pull back to collapse on the couch, I couldn't seem to move. My skin felt far too heated and itchy and my mind was not understanding the commands I was trying to give to pull back.

"You have a fever," Milo stated.

"Which seems ridiculous given that the entire market is frozen," I groused. Shouldn't we be going through a heat wave or something if I had a fever? There should have been tropical beaches outside our door. Not glittering expanses of snow.

"No, you like really have a fever." Shifting my bleary eyes up towards Milo, I didn't quite process what he was saying. There was concern there that I knew was not normally present in his eyes. The kind that made him look like a frightened child.

Reaching up, I cupped his cheek. "You'll be okay," I told him.

"Fuck," he hissed. I wasn't sure why. "You are going to hate me."

He got up so abruptly that I fell a little forward, only catching myself by leaning sideways onto the sofa. I curled the blanket tighter around me, and I was somehow now tipped to my side, shivering through the latest bout of chills. Milo was somewhere. Maybe he had run away again. He liked doing that when he got scared. Fight or flight and Milo tried not to fight because when he did, things got bloody.

Plus, you couldn't really fight disease. Not with fists, anyway. Which was Milo's preferred method of action.

"Come on, darlin'." Milo's voice came back to me as he picked me up, slipping his arms beneath my back and knees. He lifted me effortlessly, and I snuggled my face into the crook of his neck. Milo always smelled good. A feat I didn't know how he achieved, given the state of his own home. But I breathed him in, filling my senses with the faint scent of amber and bergamot. He was always warm as well.

"Thought you would be in the snow," I murmured. "You love the snow."

"I do," he agreed.

"Want to go for a walk out there?" I asked sleepily.

"Nah," he said. "I think you're not going to like snow much in a few minutes." He brought me into the bathroom. There was a small wooden stool that he sat me on, steadying me as I began to tip to the side again. I frowned. He didn't bring my blanket.

"Are you undressing me?" I asked, feeling his fingers brush across the bare skin of my belly.

"I assure you, I wish it was in an entirely different way."

"Oh," I said, not quite understanding. All I knew was that he picked me up again, and he was warm and felt nice and then holy fucking hell the world was nothing but ice.

My eyes shot open as I flailed my arms, a sharp gasp ripping through my chest. Milo's hands were steady on my shoulder, holding me down. As I looked around, I realized he had placed me in the bath. Bits of snow floated in the water.

"I know," he said with a grimace. "You can pay me back however you want, but your fever is scary high, darlin', and I'm not sure what to do."

"Cold fluids," I said with a gasp. "Ice packs. A billion other things than this." He still held me steady.

"I did that," he told me.

"No you did not."

Dipping his head low, he stared at me, eyes round. "I did. I've been trying to get your fever down for an hour."

I stopped. I had vague recollections of drinking something. Maybe something cool against my forehead? It was as if the fever burned the memory out of me. The ice coiled around me, soothing the aching heat that had caused me to shiver and while I was still shaking, it felt for an entirely different reason.

"Just a few more minutes," Milo said. "I don't want to keep you in here for long."

I breathed in deeply. "How bad is the snow?" I asked, teeth beginning to chatter.

"We won't be going anywhere anytime soon," he said. "Hopefully Mal's not a fucking idiot and stays home."

We were supposed to be here on a getaway. A few nights away from the typical little haunts of the market. We had rented this small little cabin on the eastern side of the walls. It overlooked the entirety of the maze like alleys and when the evenings were clear, you could see the different lanterns and the districts they mimicked. Milo and I had gone ahead with the promise that Malcolm was going to catch up to us in a day or two. After he wrapped some things up with Hazel. Now, all I could think about was him trapped out there.

Milo lifted me from the bath, wrapping me in a soft towel. "Don't go there," he murmured to me.

I lifted my gaze to him, but he wouldn't look me in the eye. Instead, he just towled me off before marching me to the living room again. There was a large wrought iron bed that looked out upon floor to ceiling glass windows, hugging the frame of a hearth that Milo had at some point stoked to blazing. I wondered if he had left me in the bath to do this or if he had it going the entire time.

Tucking me into the bed, he went over to the hearth, tossing on a few logs before stripping his suspenders down and pulling his shirt from his trousers. He had put on a little weight the last few years. Looking far healthier than before, as he packed on fat and muscle and honed his body once more. He caught my look then and that slow and easy smile edged over his face.

"Darlin', you need to get some rest. I deny you access to this body until you're better."

"I can still look," I pointed out.

He shucked his pants off with a flourish, causing a snort of laughter to escape me. It immediately set the pounding in my head to nightmare mode. Wincing, I closed my eyes against the pain. I felt the blankets lift then, as Milo curled in, wrapping his bare body around mine.

We shifted for a minute until we were both laying on our sides, me tucked up to his front. He ran his nose across the shell of my ear. "Get some sleep," he murmured. "I got you."

"You won't leave?" I could feel him wince when I asked. The last time I had been this sick, I had awoken to an empty room. Not seeing him again until we became pawns at a ball.

"I won't leave," he said, holding me tighter. "I never want to leave you again. Now, get some sleep."

Curling against him, I watched the fire. The flames dancing higher and higher. And in the circle of Milo's arms, I felt my body succumb to rest.

[Sick Day/Snowed In - Malcolm Albright](#)

[Dec 7, 2023](#)



When I woke, Milo was no longer wrapped around me. The fire was blazing and the warm scent of earl grey tea filled the air. My stomach rolled in protest, wanting both food and wanting to snuggle back down into the blankets and ignore the world forever. The clanking of porcelain was forbidding me from sinking too far into my dreams, however. And with Milo next to me, snoring softly, there was no reason for the sound.

Forcing my sticky gaze to focus across the room, my breath caught in my throat. Malcolm leaned against the kitchen table, a warm mug of tea in his hand, looking completely unruffled given the snow pile up he would have had to walk through to get here.

"Good morning," he whispered, sipping his tea.

"Malcolm?"

"I hope so."

I glanced towards the windows. The ones that were situated on either side of the fireplace. The snow had reached the top, giving us a wall of glowing white. It felt like the closest we would get to daylight.

"How did you even get here?" I asked. Milo and I had come to the small cabin ahead of him. We were getting the place set up for a small trip away from it all when the storm hit. And I got sick. A fever took

me so suddenly that we had no way of getting back out and had become trapped here. My fever had gotten high enough that Milo had to stick me in a snow bath.

"I was close when the snow started getting really bad," he said with a shrug. "Stopped off at a small little enchantment shop when the flurries started and got a charm to melt my way through."

"You walked here?"

"More or less." Setting his tea aside, he came over to my side, reaching a hand out to brush across my skull. "How are you feeling?"

I was better. Not great, but I was hopeful I was at least cognizant. It had been touch and go there for a bit. "Tired," I told him. "And my throat feels on fire."

He nodded, like he already expected as much. "You think you can get up and have some tea? Maybe a small something to eat?"

"I don't know if I'll be able to keep food down."

"We'll start slow," he told me. "I want you to keep your strength up." His fingers laced within mine as he helped me untangle from Milo. The man just rolled over in his sleep, grabbing my pillow and holding it close. My heart felt soft towards him at the sight.

"Why are you naked?" Malcolm asked, going to pull out one of his sweaters.

"Snow bath," I told him.

He paused, holding the black cashmere in his hands. His eyes traveled up and down my body, and I felt far more exposed than I was comfortable with. Despite it only being a look of concern on his face, I fought the urge to cover myself. Seeing this, he walked over, tugging the shirt over my head. It fell right past the top of my thighs. The room was thankfully warm enough that I didn't feel like I needed much else.

"Your fever was bad then?"

"You'll have to ask Milo about that."

I was certain he would grill the man. As soon as he was awake.

Getting me settled at the kitchen counter, he went off, digging a pair of socks out of his bag. When he came back, he knelt in front of me, taking my foot gently in his hands and pulling on the black wool. Leaning forward, he placed a kiss on my knee.

"I'm glad you are safe," he murmured against my skin. I felt my breath hitch as he looked at me from beneath his lashes. "I'm sorry you don't feel good."

"I feel better now that you're here," I told him, wincing at how corny it all sounded. There was a pleased expression that crossed Malcolm's face however, and I couldn't regret it too much.

Rising, he bustled around the kitchen, making me a cup of tea and some plain toast. "Drink this," he told me. "It's going to help with whatever is going on."

I stared down at my food and drink, feeling the nausea roll again. Knives were buried in my stomach and threatening to race up my esophagus.

"Hey," Malcolm soothed. I hadn't heard the whimper that escaped my throat, and only became aware of it as Malcolm wrapped himself around me from behind. "Take it slow," he told me. "Small sips, okay? Don't push yourself." His hand rubbed soothing circles on my back. It helped ease the nausea.

"Is this what feeling sick is like?" I asked. "Like someone is taking a small hammer to the inside of my head." I wondered if someone actually was taking a small hammer to the inside of my head. There had been a lot of construction in the Night Market lately.

"I suspect that as you explore more of *living* you are going to find things like this to not be as pleasant. Especially because you've gone so long without experiencing it."

"I hate it."

"And yet, you are still a better patient than Milo back there," he laughed.

Settling next to me, he kept a hand at the small of my back so he could catch me if I fell. I was staring at the steaming mug of tea with an angry frown. "This was supposed to be a vacation for us," I told him.

"It is."

"We're snowed in. You had to brave certain death to get here. And I feel like crap. How is that a vacation."

His lips were soft against the corner of my mouth. Malcolm never smiled wide. He never showed his teeth. But when he did smile, it was something you could just *feel*. "The snow is beautiful," he countered. "We have plenty of wood and food to last us. So, excuse me if I don't feel like this is a dire situation, given that I now have an extended amount of days with my lovers where I get to sit naked with them in front of the fire."

I felt a small shiver at the way his words curled against me.

"And, I did not brave certain death. I went for a hike. Something I wish I could do more of. However, I do feel bad that you don't feel well. Which is why I demand to wait on you hand and foot until you are better."

"You don't have to do that," I muttered.

He placed the back of his hand on my forehead, checking for temperature. "No, I don't. But I want to. Now, finish up, and we'll go sit in front of the fire. You can lay your head in my lap, and I'll either read to you or we can watch the snow if you want some silence."

"The snow is piled up past the window," I pointed out.

"I'll go melt some of it then."

It was then that it clicked with me. Malcolm could get us out of here. If he had that charm, he could at least get us back to a portion of the market not covered. Suddenly the situation seemed a little less dire and my shoulders relaxed. We had a way out of here. But that didn't mean anyone else needed to know that. For the first time since all of us were together, we would be able to settle down with each other without the rest of the world howling outside our door.

I leaned my head against his shoulder, coughing a little. "There might be some merit to your line of thinking."

"I am known to have the occasional good idea. Now, I'm going to tell you to do the same thing I used to tell Hazel and Milo when they got sick." He tipped my chin up with a single finger. "Tell me everything that's wrong. Get it off your chest."

I thought the action ridiculous. That is, until the words started bubbling out of my throat. "My head hurts. My throat hurts. Even my eyes hurt. I feel like I'm going to throw up. I'm tired. The thought of moving from here to the sofa feels like too much. And I just wanted to have a weekend with the two of you and while I know it's not as bad as my brain is making it out to be, I'm still upset."

He rubbed his thumb across my chin before leaning forward and brushing a kiss against me. "That's awful," he said. "I'm so sorry."

Oddly, I felt validated. Like I just needed someone to listen.

"Would you like me to help you to the sofa? We can try the toast in a bit. Maybe you could nap on me?"

"I'd really like that."

"Then that's what we'll do."

As he got me to the sofa, settling me against his side, I sighed deeply. There was a sense of comfort that came with Malcolm. A soothing balm. He was that quiet amidst the storm, and as I rested my head against him, I felt my spirit calm.

"Get some sleep, Lamplight. I'll keep the fire going for you," he whispered.

"You and Milo are very demanding about my sleep," I yawned.

"We like watching you while you are all soft and curled up," he teased.

“Creeper.”

“Get some sleep, and we’ll watch Milo and really freak him out when he wakes up. Maybe tell him we saw a bear outside the window.”

“Okay.”

And with that, I felt myself drift off again. With Malcolm’s fingers running up and down my spine, a soft hum filter through the room as he sat back to watch the fire and snow, holding me close.

[Sick Day](#)

[Dec 11, 2023](#)



A cold hand was on the back of my neck as I was marched into a private room and forced to sit on the settee. I fell unceremoniously, feeling my entire world spin.

“What were you even thinking?”

Belladonna stood over me, eyes lit bright gold with anger. Her hands were positioned upon her hips, drumming against the bare skin of her thighs. She wore a series of straps that held up thin pieces of gauzier fabric. When I stumbled into the chapel today, she had been holding court. Every vampire in the room turned towards me in tandem, their eyes dilated and tongues salivating.

“I forgot,” I mumbled. I wondered if she would be okay with yelling at me while I laid down.

“You forgot? You forgot that nearly every vampire within the market was going to be in the chapel today? You forgot that you smell delectable? You forgot that there are ones out there that would love nothing

more than to sip from the Night Market's neck? The very source that is giving them life? You just forgot?"

I winced a little, curling my legs in on myself. "Too loud."

"They could have killed you. I have control over a great many things, but the entirety of the vampire race is not one of them. What were you thinking? If you were one of mine, I would slit your neck where you stand. The only reason you are getting away with stumbling into that *closed door* meeting is because you are my mate."

My eyes felt heavy and sticky as I curled in on myself. Oh, look. I had laid on my side. It was curious that I didn't remember quite when that happened.

There was a brief moment of silence and I wondered if Belladonna was still talking, but I just couldn't hear her, or if she was waiting for my response. From experience, Bella was really good about waiting for someone else to speak. She didn't mind the silence. It soothed her.

When her hand touched my forehead, I leaned into the dry coolness. It felt like a sip of water after so long without.

"You are burning up, dear heart," she said, her voice suddenly changing.

I swallowed dryly. "I think I'm sick."

"What does it mean when the Night Market gets sick?"

"I think we're about to find out."

She sighed deeply, her face close to mine. When I peeled open my eyes, I could see the indecision on her face. There was a taciturn look that was twisting her lips. The anger still lingered, but beneath it all I could see fear.

"Alright," she muttered.

Standing, I watched her walk to the door with a clipped stride. She pulled it open, looking out at the vampires still waiting for her council. But instead, she looked at two of the night guards she had employed for the meeting. "Reschedule," she said primly. "Something far more important has arisen."

There was a series of hisses and outrage as the vampires stood, their protests rising. But Belladonna ignored them as she slammed the door shut, cutting off the sound of the outside world completely.

She stared at me for a long moment, her expression going soft. Slipping her heels off, she came to crouch by me once more, brushing her hand across my sweaty forehead. "I am going to take us back home," she said. "Get your scent away from here. It's stronger today, and I suspect that is because of the fever."

“Oh.” It was really all I could think to say. I wasn’t sure I understood any of it.

“Close your eyes, please,” she requested. “I do not wish for the journey to make you sick.”

I did as I was told, feeling her scoop me up and hold me close to her. Like a child, I curled into her chest, seeking out that desperate coolness that lay across her skin. I felt her bones crack against me as she shifted into her true form, and felt the moment she took off from the window. Within moments her feet were back on solid ground again, and I could smell the familiar scents that were the inner sanctum of Belladonna true home. I knew I could open my eyes now, but I just wanted to stay in the quiet for a bit longer. I hadn’t realized just how loud the chapel had felt.

She laid me down on a soft bed, slowly stripping me of my clothes. When I opened my eyes, it was to the sheer curtains that hung around her bed frame and the dark purples and blues of her room. The fire was already blazing black in the hearth, pumping out heat. It felt uncomfortable against my already too heated and scratchy skin. I must have made a face because Belladonna shushed me as she crawled into bed.

“I’m not about to have you freeze,” she reprimanded, “but I understand that you are burning with a fever, so I’ll stay close to help cool your skin down. You’ll want that fire after some time. Now drink.”

She helped me sit up, handing me a small obsidian cup. “What is it?”

“Blood.”

I felt my stomach recoil. “Am I dying?” Was she about to turn me?

“Don’t be so dramatic. It’s a concoction that is often used through the market for human lovers. Just a touch of vampire’s blood along with a vitamin enriched tea. Drink it. It’ll help.”

“It’s your blood?”

“Just drink it.”

It tasted infused with cinnamon, the under notes being sweet. My mind wanted to say that it tasted foul, but in the end, I was too tired to care. I dutifully drank. Belladonna took the mug away before it could tip out of my hand with exhausted. She then wrapped herself around me, pulling the blanket up tight.

“I feel awful,” I told her.

“You look awful,” she said.

“Thanks.”

“It’s not a bad thing. Just an observation. I suspect your throat also hurts. And you are shivering and sweating terribly. You’ll need a bath in the morning.”

“Sorry.”

She nuzzled against my neck, breathing in deep. “You smell delicious, dear heart. Remember that vampires like the smell of sweat.”

“I still find that gross.”

“Gross or not, you should get some sleep.” Her arms were a tight band around me, trying to hold me together as I shook through the fever. “This will be gone by morning.”

“What if this is doing something to the market,” I worried. “What if—?”

“Hush,” she whispered into the shell of my ear. “Just hush. You do not need to worry about the state of the market tonight. You let me worry about that.”

“You’re not worrying about it. You’re worrying about me.”

The bed was soft, and despite trying to fight it, I could feel myself being lulled down into the deep chambers of sleep.

“Sleep,” Belladonna whispered. My blood sang at the sound of her voice. Helpless to her call. “Sleep and in the morning, rise anew.”

“Stop hypnotizing me,” I muttered, my eyes too heavy to stay open. I felt her laugh against the back of my skull.

“Stop fighting me,” she commanded.

I wanted to tell her ‘never’. That I would fight her until my last breath. That I would challenge her and love her through every bit of her life. But my body was heavy, and before I could open my mouth, I had drifted off to sleep, safe in Belladonna’s arms and care.



[Happy Holidays](#)

[Dec 18, 2023](#)

From my family to yours, Merry Kristus!

[Gabriel - Sick Day](#)

[Dec 28, 2023](#)



"Here."

I opened the window of my home to a large mug of something steaming and foul being shoved into my face. When I tried to move out of the way, the mug followed me, floating right in front of my eyes, the stench of it making them water.

"Gabriel," I coughed. "Stand down. What is that?" I waved a hand in front of my face, retreating into my little home. Gabriel was a rather big man, and for him to climb through the window was going to take more than a minute. It was the tiniest reprieve from whatever he was trying to shove at me.

"You will drink this." A leather lined cup was held steady as he awkwardly tried to get inside my house. If I hadn't felt like my head was on fire, I may have even laughed. As it was, he was going to spill whatever that concoction was, all over my floors, and then I was going to have to live with that scent forever.

"I don't want whatever that is," I told him.

It was with that, that he tipped through the window, somehow managing to land gracefully and keep a hold of the strange mug. Standing, he straightened himself out, running his free hand down his navy uniform. "You said you were ill."

"I am." I had been coughing for a few days, and last night I was pretty certain that I was destroying whole swaths of a district with the amount of pain that I was in. I had contacted Gabriel, afraid of what I had unconsciously done. Maybe he was here to tell me that the silk district was underwater. "Is the market okay?"

"I have individuals patrolling, looking for lost sections. So far, nothing has been reported."

My shoulders sagged in relief. "Good. That's good. I—" My lungs seized as I nearly doubled over, hacking up an awful amount of phlegm. Though I couldn't remember it, I was certain by now that I had swallowed a flaming sword in some ill-fated feat of magic. My head was swimming, on top of the raw throat, and I couldn't tell if I was laying down or standing up any longer.

When Gabriel's arms wrapped around me, curling me towards his broad chest, I had to kind of assume that I had been about to face plant onto the floor, only making matters worse.

"Sorry," I muttered, burying my face close. The sound of his heart beat steady just beneath his uniform.

"To apologize for being sick is an odd and completely unnecessary thing. It is I who should be apologizing. Clearly, the other day when you said you were fine, you were not. I should have told you that you were misinformed and followed you home to take care of you."

I frowned. "I saw you the other day?" When Gabriel's grip tightened on me, I realize that now was maybe not the time to joke. Even in my fevered state, I could see the worry creasing at the corners of his eyes. Lifting my hand, I cupped his cheek, feeling the rigid tension of his jaw. "It's okay," I told him. "I'm going to be okay. I was more worried about the people in the market."

"Yes. Well. They are fine."

He didn't actually know that, but I had a feeling he also didn't care. When it came to my well-being, Gabriel always put me above anyone else. Because there was no Night Market without me.

Gently, he lowered me onto my bed, grabbing the extra comforters and piling them on top of me. When I started to cough again, he propped me up with more pillows than I even realized I had. And once again, the foul smelling drink was shoved under my nose.

"I am going to need to pull rank on you and require you to drink this."

My nose wrinkled up in revulsion. "You don't have rank on me. So no."

"In any situation, when a commanding officer is unfit for duty, the line of responsibility passes to the next in charge. As the Warden of this market, that would be me." Puffing out his chest, he looked down at me. "I am officially declaring you on hiatus from all Night Market duties until you are actively fit enough to make clear and concise decisions. I will be taking over. Now, drink."

I just stared at him. Trying to think if I had ever heard him talk to me as such. "You're kind of sexy like this."

He said nothing. Never a man to be distracted by flirtation. Instead, he patiently held out the mug, silently vowing not to move until I had finished off whatever was in the brew. It was most likely better that I didn't know.

Snatching it from his hands, I readied myself and took a big swallow. It was a testament to how quick Gabriel's reflexes were because he caught the mug before I could throw it across the room. Sputtering, I looked at him in betrayal. "No," I told him. "That's poison. That is not anything that is good for anyone."

"It is. And you will be drinking it. Even if I have to hold you down." Despite the firmness to his words, he sat down next to me, kicking off his boots in the process. "It is a blend of all the local herbs and spices

for detoxing a body from any foreign ailment. And while it may taste like the excrement from a sewer demon, I swear to you, it will make you better faster than anything else in this market.”

“Sewer excrement?”

“There is none in there. I did have it tested. It only tastes as if it were such a horror.”

“Gabriel,” I nearly whined.

Sighing, I caught the roll of his eyes as he took a large sip of the concoction himself. He didn’t even flinch. “There. Now you cannot say I am torturing you. Drink this.”

Knowing this was a battle that I had surely lost, I once again grabbed it from his hands and began drinking it down. “You could have at least said please.”

I was surprised when he caught me by the chin, tipping my face upwards. Slowly, he pressed his lips to mine, tongue licking the taste of the medicine from my lips. “Please,” he murmured.

I shivered. But dutifully drank the rest of what he offered.

When I was done, he placed the mug aside, pulling the blankets further over me. “Now, I want you to rest. I am going to cook you some soup and clean your house.”

“Clean my house?”

“Yes. It is a nice gesture to do for someone when they are not feeling well.”

I caught his hand as he went to leave the bed. “Or you could just stay here with me,” I whispered.

“I really think a fastidious house would be better for your recovering.” Upon the look on my face, however, he sighed. “But perhaps I could make an exception to the rule. Just until you fall asleep.”

He snuggled in close then, wrapping his arms around me and tucking my head beneath his chin. As much as I loathed to admit it, whatever he had given me was making me feel better. My headache was beginning to ebb, and the knife in my throat had all but disappeared.

Before drifting off, I felt a small kiss on my temple. “I will protect you.”

I smiled. “My Warden,” I breathed. Feeling safe in his arms, I fell asleep.