

ענין חן וחסד
והנהגה

במחבר

Dear Traveler:

You are likely here because you have connected with Octopath Traveler in some way. Its rich and alive worlds, its mesmerizing music and visuals, its touching tales and the characters that make it so—all this too is why we have gathered to celebrate Octopath's anniversary.

This unofficial, non-profit anthology, Eight is for OCTO, has come together and was made possible solely through the efforts of fans and their love for this series.

So, whether you started this journey in its beginning years ago, watching the teaser trailer for a "Project Octopath Traveler," or found your way through a subsequent addition, making the title "Octopath Traveler" mean more than just a single video game, let us join in that joy.

Thank you for joining us for this special occasion; here is to a happy 8th anniversary to Octopath Traveler. Fair farings to you, and may the road ahead be a merry one.

*Sincerely signed,
The Eight is for OCTO Mod Team*



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This non-profit fan-anthology was released on the 13th of July, 2026.
Links for downloadable content can also be found on 8isforoctopath.carrd.co.

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Eight is for O T T O

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Volume I: Orsterra



Time is the Longest Distance

by Postal Ninja

General || Olberic/H'aanit || 1,665 Words

Post-Canon, Pining, Love Confessions, Epistolary

H'aanit,

It has been too long. I hope you will forgive me not writing to you before now. Things have settled in Cobbleston since last we journeyed together. Though I have seen some of our former companions on occasion, I have not had business in the Woodlands and I regret that lack. Truthfully, visiting you should have been reason enough, and I apologize that I have not yet made the journey.

I hope that you are well. I imagine you've received numerous hunting requests since your victory in Marsilim. A triumph such as that is worthy of recognition. If any such happen to bring you to the Highlands, I hope that you will have the time to visit Cobbleston. I would gladly share a drink with you and hear tales of your recent deeds.

Again, please accept my regrets regarding my silence. It would gladden my heart to hear news of you.

*Yours,
Olberic*

Olberic,

'Tis good to hearken from thee again. Permitted me to also express my regret in not having written to thee. Time seemeth to pass us by without notice, but that is a poor enough excuse.

I think back often and fondly on the days of our travels. 'Tis perhaps silly to waxen nostalgic upon a time of turmoil in one's life, but when 'twas spent in good company it seemeth not so strange. I, as well, have had the privilege of reuniting with some of our former companions, and am overjoyed to hearken that thou, like them, remainest in equally good health and good spirits.

I agree that a reunion between us is overdue. I would be pleased to receive thee in S'warkii at any time, or would gladly journey to the Highlands for that purpose alone. Or perhaps we shall have reason to travel to the same region to attend to other matters – it maketh little enough difference so long as we are able to reunite.

Until such a time, I hope that thou art fulfilled and content in Cobbleston. Pray, let us not leave such a lapse between future correspondence.

*Thine,
H'aanit*

Dear H'aanit,

Thank you for your swift response. I concur that we should make arrangements to meet, otherwise fate or else procrastination may conspire against us. What say you we do so now? I would gladly make the journey soon, as the approaching autumn will be better for travel, and winter here in the mountains does not allow for mobility overmuch.

Shall I come to you in S'warkii, or should we meet halfway? And if the latter, should we

take the east or the west road? I will gladly endure the heat of the Sunlands if you are loath to traverse the frigid Frostlands.

Of course, if now is not a good time, we can certainly wait for spring. It is for you to decide.

Awaiting your answer,

Olberic

P.S. If we are to meet, would you like me to bring anything from Cobbleston? There is a lovely local tea blend that you might enjoy, and I would readily pack a tin of it for you.

Dear Olberic,

An autumn journey soundeth wonderful. Letten us meet in the Flatlands – perhaps Theatropolis? I mindeth not traveling through the Frostlands, and truthfully, Linde enjoyeth the snow. I shall at once indulgen her and keepen thee from perishing in the desert: a sacrifice well worth making.

Shall we setten off with the new moon? I shalle gladly accepten thine offer of tea, so long as I may gift thee something in return. Perhaps some wildberry preserves? Those shalt keepen well until thy journey home. Unless thou preferest to indulgen before then, in which case, we can visiten a local bakery for a loaf or two of fresh bread. I recall quite a wonderful selection of baked goods being available on our last journey through the Flatlands.

Sayen the word and I shalle begin preparations for the journey as discussed.

Until then,

H'aanit

P.S. I am sending my reply by thy self-same courier in hopes that it maketh good time. Forgiven its briefness, for I wished to senden it with due haste.

Dear H'aanit,

If you await my word, then consider it given. I would be most happy to meet with you in Theatropolis. Perhaps we can attend a play – I have not done so since my youth, when my parents took me to the theatre in Everhold. I would gladly revisit such an experience in good company.

I am following your example and sending the courier back with my reply, and so it shall be equally brief. Suffice to say that I will set out with the new moon, as planned, and meet you in the city. I will await your arrival at the inn's common room, so that we do not miss one another.

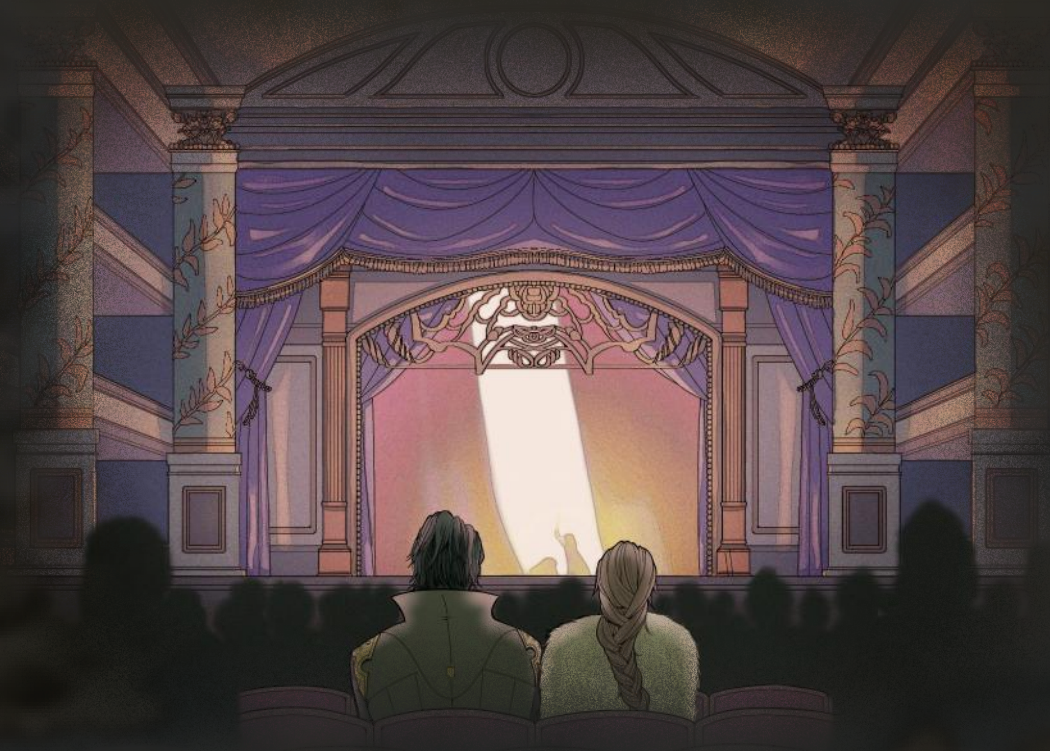
*I look forward to our reunion. Until then,
Olberic*

Dear Olberic,

I do not know why I have chosen to write to thee at this moment, given that thou wouldst surely have begun thy journey already by the time this missive would be delivered. I suppose I simply wish to express my anticipation of fulfilling our plans. As such, perhaps I shall simply deliver this letter to thee myself.

I shall see thee soon.

*Expectantly,
H'aanit*



Dearest H'aanit,

I write to you now, after our reunion and subsequent respective departures, with regret in my heart. Not for the time spent in your company – entirely the opposite, in fact – but for my own cowardice.

The too-few days we spent together in Theatropolis were among the happiest in my memory. Each moment in your presence after so long apart filled me with joy such as I have never yet known. And I was too afraid to tell you in person the way I feel.

I hope that this truth is not a burden to you. Simply know that upon our parting, when I kissed your hand in farewell, I was allowing myself but the merest expression of my affection for you. And on the road to Cobbleston I have done nothing but lament that I did not have the courage to be honest with you. I must rectify that mistake now.

It was no accident that correspondence lapsed between us for so long. I will admit, I was

afraid to see you again, afraid of the strength of my own affection, that I would somehow damage the friendship we forged if I allowed myself to seek your company. And now I know that my suspicions were, to an extent, correct. After seeing you again, I have proven to myself that I cannot pretend to a lesser admiration of you than I feel.

The fear of losing our friendship remains, but I could no longer stay silent. Though it may have been cowardice that stayed my tongue in your company, I at least have found the courage to put my words to paper, insufficient though they surely are.

I ask nothing of you than to know this. I do not wish to force an answer to my feelings from you. If it is your wish that we do not speak again, I will accept this. Having seen you again will be enough.

Please forgive this outpouring of my heart. I am unused to such things, and I apologize if I have made you uncomfortable.

*With affection and sincerity,
Olberic*

Dearest Olberic,

Forgiven the lateness of my response. For this, I could not simply tellen the courier to wait until I had composed my reply, else he would haven waited for days.

I am not particularly adept with words. But I shalle tryen my best to expressen my thoughts.

Thou hast no need for regret, nor for begging my forgiveness. In truth, I am overjoyed to hearken how thou feelest. I had never dreamed that thou couldst harboren such affection for me — affection such as I haven long held for thee in return.

Thy words echoed mine own thoughts to such a degree that I wondered whether I read a

letter written of mine own hand. That thou heldest back for fear of offence, of shattering what we already shared? I have felten that fear in mine own heart, and it stayed my tongue in turn.

But just as thou desirest me, I desire thee in turn. Had I allowed myself, I would haven gladly kissed thee on the lips soon as I had glimpsed thee at the inn. When we sat together at the theater, the urge to holden thy hand nearly overwhelmed me. I blush to put these words to paper, but they are the truth. Since returning to S'warkii, I have consoled myself of thine absence by indulging in the tea thou gifted me, that it may reminden me of our time together and the warmth that we shared.

Such fools we aren, to haven both missed such an opportunity. Affairs of the heart aren amongst the most difficult to navigate, methinks – I only thanke thee for having the courage to writen thy last letter and sayen what we both feel. Now, we need not fearen rejection, nor offence, and the way forward is open.

When can we see one another again?

*Thine, with love,
H'aanit*

My darling H'aanit,

Your letter has lifted my spirits to heights they have hitherto never soared. Truly, I could not have dreamed to hope that you returned my affections – I am at a loss for what to say.

No; what I must say is simply that I will return to you in S'warkii as swiftly as possible. I send this letter off today and will prepare for the journey with haste. Perhaps I shall even make better time than the courier and precede the letter with my arrival – do forgive my unannounced visit if this is so.

Wait for me, dearest. We have lost too much time already; let us not lose a moment more.

*Yours, forever and always,
Olberic*



A Letter to Octopath Traveler

by Kianthia

I remember exactly where I was when the original Octopath Traveler was announced for the Nintendo Switch.

An out-of-state friend of four years was visiting me for the week, and we sat huddled together on the floor of my family's guest room with my laptop in front of us. She jokingly asked why the Nintendo Switch was a rave machine, bringing out laughter from both of us. We watched as the presentation continued.

Then, a peculiar game trailer caught my interest, starting with a map that had the name "Kingship" written onto it. I watched in awe as the story of eight travelers was revealed to me, soon realizing this was a game made by the same team of another series I loved so much. I went and pre-ordered my own Nintendo Switch the next day, Team Asano's next project fresh in my mind.

Project Octopath Traveler.

Little did I know back then how much of an impact this series was going to have on my life. The demos, picking up my special edition from GameStop, and my mom offering to go into the other room so I could use the TV to play, all things I remember from those early days. Only a few months later, my entire creative life would explode into something fantastical, all from two characters alone: Therion the Thief and Tressa Colzione the Merchant.

Over the years that followed, I had my ups and downs with the series: a small following, creative burnout, a spark of hope to keep living, and excitement as new games joined the world. No matter what happened though, I always knew that my love for the series was something that would always be with me. Even now, the stories these games told are still in the back of mind, and it all started with a friend, a map, and single word.

As I sit here writing this, I am warmed knowing that so many others share my love for this fantasy world and those who dwell within it. Creativity

was found by everyone in all sorts of ways, whether it was art, writing, cosplay, music covers, and more. We came together to build this anthology and say one thing:

“I love Octopath Traveler.”

So here I am now, 9 1/2 years post-announcement and 8 since release, sharing my love with all of you too. We’ve all laughed, we’ve all cried, and we’ve all made connections through these wonderful games. Some of us wouldn’t even be who we are today without it.

And that same out-of-state friend from that day? I just texted her only minutes ago, telling her I was writing about why Octopath Traveler has meant so much to me.

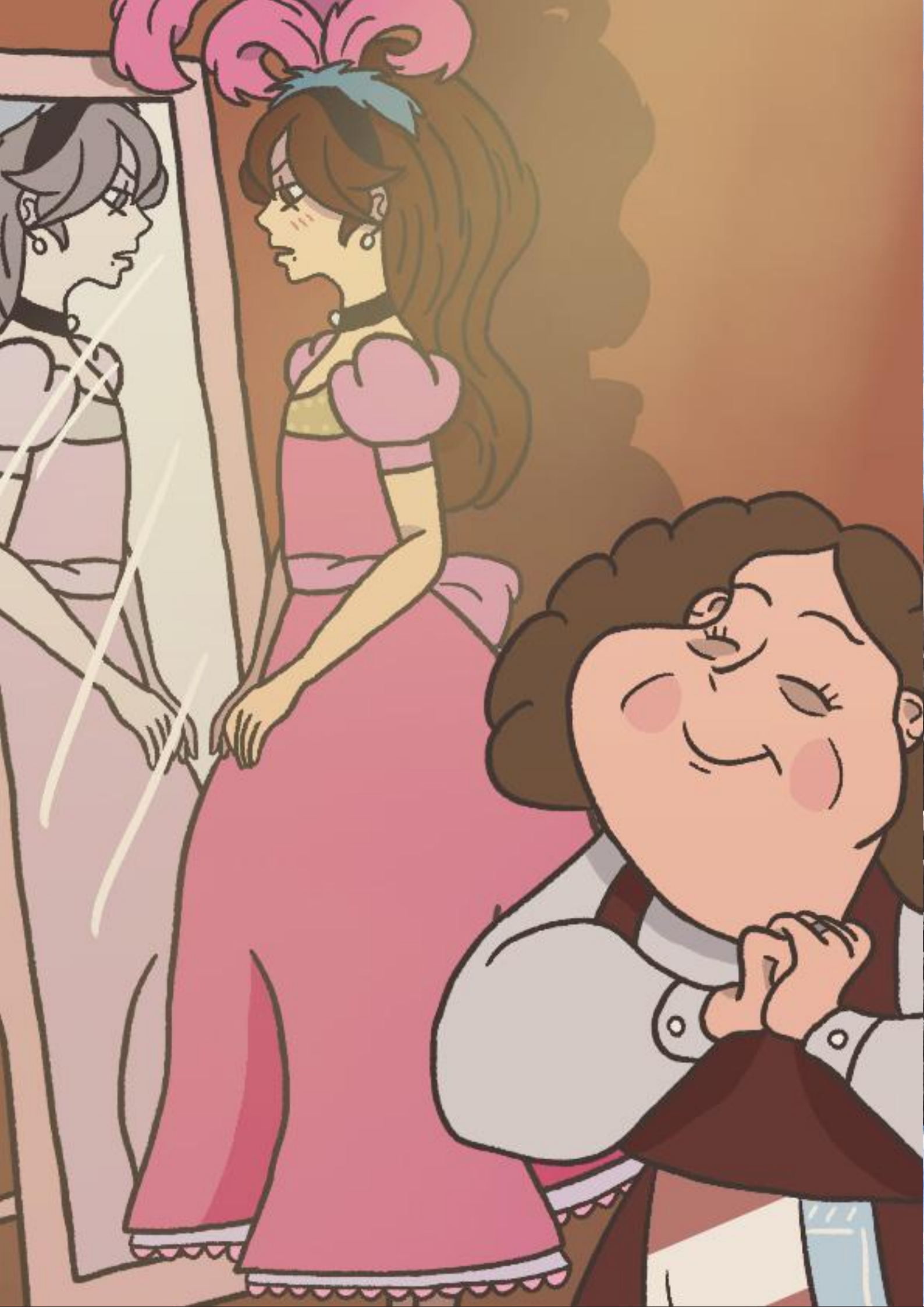
- Kianthia

P.S. She still thinks they made the Nintendo Switch look like a rave machine.













Before the Fall

by Spitfire Rose

**General || Therion-Centric,
Alfyn Greengrass, Chosen One || 1,983 Words**

Trust Issues

Therion hides a scowl behind his scarf as he slips into the shadows of what could only be described as some backwater town in the countryside. The thief needn't bother perusing the pockets of passersby to know there's nothing to bother stealing, which is just his luck. He could grumble and complain that he doesn't even know why he's here, but that would be a lie.

After all, he's the one who volunteered.

As far as taverns went, Therion had to admit Wishvale's wasn't half-bad. The atmosphere was moderately pleasant and their hometown specialty attracted travelers from all over, which served his interest in gathering information well. It was from his usual secluded spot in the corner where he overheard the local cleric, architect, and hunter-turned-barkeep anxiously reading a letter aloud:

'Hey there.

My name is Alfyn Greengrass and I'm an apothecary here in Clearbrook. Long story short, a monster poisoned Cai with its venom and so I've been taking care of her -- but not to worry! Cai is in very good hands and I expect her to fully recover in no time! That being

said, I'm still going to want her to stay an extra few days just to be sure. I'd feel real awful if she were to leave and fall ill again, y'know? I've got to go, but feel free to write me back. I'd be happy to keep y'all updated and answer any questions you may have!

-- Alfyn'

Now while the master thief rarely felt remorse over his actions, a part of him did feel like shit listening to the trio express genuine concern over their childhood friend. From the moment their paths first crossed, Therion could tell Cai was too soft for her own good. Too trusting of everyone she met. Maybe that was what compelled him into bluntly telling her so and that he'd keep both eyes out for her -- for whatever worth a thief's word was. Whether or not he could've prevented her injuries, she at the very least wouldn't have been left at the mercy of an apothecary. If anyone couldn't be trusted, it was them. With a lifetime's worth of painful memories in mind, Therion stood up and offered to go in their stead. He could reach Cai the fastest and besides, Wishvale needed the three of them more than it needed him. It was definitely strange to be the subject of gratitude given his occupation, but maybe it really shouldn't have surprised him all that much.

Not when their precious companion was a tea leaf too.

Back to the present, Therion scours the streets for Cai and this alleged apothecary just oh so happy to be of aid that they neglected to mention a price for their services. Therion knows the type. Apothecaries that go out of their way targeting patients so desperate for a cure that they're willing to fork over their lifesavings and whatever interest their savior feels like tacking on. Then again, it beats the alternative he's encountered more times than he cares to count. Clerics who prided themselves in serving the Sacred Flame by helping all those in need, and yet shut the door in the face of people like him. Therion's witnessed death a dozen times over -- often by his brute of a partner's hand --, and even he can't stomach the thought of Cai suffering more than she already has.

That ring must be some piece of jewelry. The thief muses not for the first time and certainly not the last. Can't say I'm all that familiar with the Flamebringer, but for a heavenly god he's sure putting Cai through hell. Not

that I've any room to talk, but is all of humanity really worth saving? Worth all of this pain and loss and betrayal? How do you endure all that, and still find it within yourself to trust people? I just...don't understand.

Therion doubts he ever will.

Eavesdropping on townsfolk peacefully milling about their day, the thief learns that there's actually two apothecaries residing in Clearbrook. While he could care less about the other guy and his kid sister, Therion keeps it in consideration should Cai need a second opinion if Alfyn tries capitalizing on her goodwill. It doesn't seem like that'll be the case if all the high praise sung their way is of any indication, but he'd still much prefer to judge a person's character for himself. With a bit more sleuthing and playing the part of a weary traveler seeking aid, Therion is pointed in the direction of his target's home clinic located north up the stairs. The ailing actor is warned ahead of time that the healer may be preoccupied which he pretends to know nothing about.

The reaction from hearing about Alfyn's own sick mother is real, though.

Knocking on the door gentler than he'd intended on originally, Therion is not at all prepared for the giant lumberjack of an apothecary opening the door, much less his stupid hair that's an abomination between mullet and ratkin's tail.

"Hey there. Don't think I've seen you around before." Alfyn Greengrass greets the complete stranger with a warm, welcoming smile. If that wasn't a clear sign to which of the two camps he falls into, his reaction to Therion's stunned silence seals it as he regards the thief with more kindness than he rightfully deserves. "If it's help you need, you've come to the right place. I'm an apothecary, y'see, so if you're hurt I can --"

Therion shakes his head. He's handled patching themselves up just fine throughout the years, and even if he was injured, he sure as hell isn't about to have some random country bumpkin take a look at him. He'd sooner jump off a cliff.

"I'm here for Cai." He states, quick and to the point. Alfyn appears genuinely surprised and a little impressed.

“Shucks, you’re faster than the post, hehe.” The apothecary chuckles while gladly moving aside to grant Therion entry. “C’mon in and give your feet a rest. You’re welcome to help yourself to anything you need.”

Careful. I might just hold you to that, medicine man. He thinks smugly while following Alfyn inside who starts telling the whole story as to how Cai came to be under his care. Like Therion hasn’t had that damn letter playing through his head on repeat since he set out. He’s only half-listening while giving the place a casual lookover and is mildly shocked to find nothing of interest outside of tools and dozens of plants he has enough sense of self-preservation not to fuck with.

Us beggars can’t be choosers, but come on. You’d think a guy with the whole town wrapped around his satchel would be swimming in leaves, no pun intended. Sure wasn’t any left for me.

That must be why the apothecary was so eager to treat the Ringbearer chosen. Honestly it’s kind of hilarious to Therion if Alfyn really thinks she’s made of riches. Cai might fight like a thief, but she sure as hell doesn’t steal like one. Her reasons were her own, and Therion respected that. Stealing out of necessity to survive was where it all started for him too, once upon a time. He severely doubts it fair to compare his lot in life to the tragedy that is Cai’s, but. He’s glad she at least had someone she could turn to, somebody she could trust so she hadn’t wound up like him who had neither until that fateful night in the gaol.

Yet here you are. A long way from Wishvale, from a whole town full of folks who love and care about you so much that they sent me of all people. All to save your dumbass from being scammed by some overgrown asshole with stupid hair. Therion thinks bitterly as he’s offered a seat at Cai’s bedside. He doesn’t know why he takes it. He’s no expert on comfort, and is probably the last person she’ll want to see when she wakes up -- not that she’d ever say so. It’s not like it’s really his fault she’s here when he’s not anybody’s babysitter, but still. Therion can’t tell if she looks this exhausted from fighting off the poison, or if the dark circles under her eyes were always there behind a smile. He reckons that’s what happens when everyone’s trusting you to be a champion of the continent.

Still, he's.

He's here.

For whatever that's worth.

Therion sighs and glances to where Alfyn's grinding medicine for who he assumes is his mother coughing in her sleep. It doesn't escape his notice that there are no other beds.

Okay, fine. Maybe not an asshole, but that other point still stands.

"Hey, medicine man," The thief waits until the sick older woman is settled. Alfyn looks up, apparently unbothered by the nickname. He'd been too focused on his general appearance to realize he's tired, too. "We've no leaves."

Alfyn grins and those shadows disappear.

"Don'tcha worry about it. I don't charge my patients a thing."

"What?!" He exclaims sharp enough to disturb Cai who grumbles incoherently.

"Wouldn't feel right to call myself a healer if I turned down patients who can't pay, y'know?"

Well isn't that just great. First a thief and now an apothecary both not in it for the money because they're godsdamned idiots with a moral code.

"You have to know what we are, right?" You can't be that stupid to trust us. Trust me.

Alfyn shrugs.

"Well you're still people, aren't ya? Shucks, I haven't even asked your name yet." He walks over and extends his hand as a show of goodwill. Of trust. "I'm Alfyn, 'case ya forgot and you're..?"

"Leaving." Therion jumps to his feet as the man splutters that he only just arrived. Cai mumbles what he swears is his name, weak yet hopeful like she trusted he'd show up eventually and he immediately takes three steps back.

He can't do this. He can't.

He won't.

Why did he ever come here? Was it to secure some peace and quiet for himself after feeling trapped by everyone's care and concern for Cai? If so, why venture to Clearbrook? Did he do it to provide them with peace of mind

over her wellbeing, or himself? And why did they even trust him in the first place? Sure, they were grateful he volunteered so they could make sure she still had a home to return to, but that doesn't make them friends. There's only one person Therion calls partner, but even then what they have...it isn't the same.

It isn't like this.

Something that despite his penchant for stealing, can never allow himself to take.

That small spark of warmth that makes him feel like he's burning alive.

Have you been away from Darius too long to forget? Therion curses himself as he sprints out the door and flies down the stairs. Alfyn shouts after him, but he's faster. Thieves like him, like them, have to be if they want to live -- to survive another day without being caught. No getting too comfortable in one place for too long. No trusting anyone but themselves. That's all this is. Was. A stupid mistake by the world's biggest idiot.

He'll return to Wishvale, if only because Therion hates leaving unfinished business. After that, he'll find whatever it is Darius has been up to all this time. If he's lucky, he'll never see any of their faces ever again, including Alfyn's. Cai'll be sad, sure, but she'll understand with a weary wisdom beyond her years. At least he's not stabbing her in the back like most everybody else she lets get too close. Therion isn't...can't be like her. Just like she won't steal to hurt people, he won't trust only to get hurt.

He won't let anyone catch him, even if he falls.



Colbypuppy

Never Had a Dream Come True (Till the Day that I Found You)

by twistingmyleg

Teen || Alfyn/Therion || 1,996 Words

Post Canon, Minor Spoilers, Established Relationship, Reflection,
Weddings, Happily Ever After, Other Background Relationship

For life is a journey... The places you go... The deeds you do... The tales whose hero you become... and every path is yours to take.

Across the sandy shoals, Therion's not sure he can recognize all of the people gathered here. But, he supposes it doesn't matter anymore. Especially not today.

He likes to think that eight years have done a lot to ease him out of his guarded tendencies, even if the others annoyingly tease him about his 'soft heart.' Every time he meets up with Primrose, she calls him a house cat, all cozied up in domesticated life compared to the street rat he was before. The days of being a wandering vagrant in the shadows, pulling off heist after heist just to survive another day, and dancing with death constantly are long gone. And the thief that foolishly got outwitted by an old-timer, lamenting his fate and struggling to grapple with long-suppressed trauma amidst the sands and the snow has grown his own wings. Now, he's simply Therion. A man standing upon an ornate altar atop the Goldshore beaches, waiting anxiously for the moment all this pomp and ceremony is over and he's able to stand side-by-side with the one who stole his heart.

Despite only inviting a handful of people, the seats are already filled,

and he knows someone is scurrying around to grab more. Cordelia is near the front row alongside Rondo, her erstwhile brother (he's still shocked that the current Flameguard was the missing heir to the house, but the memories of fighting by his side are cloudy these days). Despite him explicitly telling her not to, she's already sobbing, dabbing her handkerchief to her eyes and smiling widely at him. Rondo's trying his best to calm her down, and his enigmatic partner (the former Flameguard; the fact he lost a bet to H'aanit on that revelation still irks him) does nothing to assist. Heathcote only watches fondly, the bastard.

Members of the Guardians of Light are also among the crowd. King Richard and Queen Alaune keep apologizing to the others surrounding them as their son pulls at the decor lining the aisle. King Solon and Lady Eltrix simply laugh, though he knows it's difficult for them to hide the memories of wrangling Riven and Edoras' rulers during the age of the Bestowers. Lord Bargello and his posse are seated toward the back, delighted to supply as much wine and mead as physically possible for the event. Even the Ringbearer, long thought to have left the continent after Wishvale's complete restoration, is among the crowd, seated with the architect, hunter, and cleric they call family.

Of course, those who journeyed alongside him have their place in this ceremony, standing on both sides of the altar. Ophilia's situated behind the papal, flipping through pages of her scripture and humming under her breath to focus up. Primrose and H'aanit stand across from him, quietly laughing as they adjust the roses pinned to their dresses. Tressa and Linda are next to Ophilia, self-declared 'ringbearers' ready to perform the most 'important task' of this ceremony. Tressa also took it upon herself to provide most of the decorations for the event, courtesy of the wares she proudly shelved in her shop in Grandport. They're gorgeous, decadent, quaint, and in some areas, bewildering. Therion's familiarized himself plenty with the language of flowers in his newfound downtime, but some of the choices are... puzzling.

"And what the hell are the snapdragons doing in the bouquets? That makes absolutely no sense."

"Really? Who made you the flower king? My choices are all intentional, thank you!"

“My wedding, my kingdom. Are you trying to tell the audiences that we’re deceiving them?”

“No! Don’t you know snapdragons have multiple meanings?”

“Nervous, Therion?” a calculated voice pipes up behind him, snapping him out of that peculiar daydream. On Therion’s side of the altar, Cyrus and Olberic stand behind him, dressed in standard black suits that make him do a double take each time he sees them. It’s so odd to see Olberic outside of his typical gear, and even more to see Cyrus without his cape neatly fluttering behind him. Perhaps he could say the same of the ladies, but he’s no stranger to the amount of times he was dragged on their shopping sprees across the continent.

Still, he does his best to hide his bewilderment (and assumed anxiety). He still has some reputation to uphold around them. “Me? Never. I’m still trying to decipher some of Tressa’s bizarre decor choices.” A loud ‘hey!’ shrills behind him but is silenced quickly by hushes. Regardless, Cyrus scoffs, a knowing smile on his face that only serves to tick him off.

“Come now, my friend. ‘Tis not wise to hide secrets from us, on your wedding day no less. Though if you’re so desperate to keep up the farce, I’m more than happy to list out some of your nervous ticks to prove myself correct. Did you know that you mutter about your surroundings when--”

“Think you need your ears cleaned Professor.” And I need to keep my mouth shut, because Cyrus isn’t wrong, but he’s not about to admit that out loud. Eight years ago, Therion would have chewed his head off for daring to point out a weakness, and they both know it. Cyrus places a hand on his shoulder, squeezing slightly.

“Everything will be fine, Therion. All the preparations are in place, the audience is in good cheer, and the Twelve have blessed us with an auspicious day.” Behind him, Olberic nods, though he keeps his gaze focused on the far end of the beach, toward the cobblestone stairs where an ivory curtain divides the moment from the rest of the town. He’s ever the sentinel, and Therion’s never been more thankful to have someone watching their backs. There are no hidden daggers in his own white suit to defend them with, should the worst come to pass. Even so...

“It could piss rain and I’d be fine with it. But...” He forces himself to

take a deep breath, and it's shakier than he'd like it to be. The damn ceremony hasn't even started yet. "I struggle to believe that this is real. That the last eight years have been real. That's all."

Once, eight years ago, he had been in a similar position, toasting to a fruitful mission against the lizardmen in Wellspring's tavern. Surrounded by this strange group of travelers, he thought that maybe, just maybe, he'd be able to live freely once his mission was said and done, and happiness was a surefire guarantee. But not before Darius had dredged up the past and reminded him that all good things were not his to keep. Despite recovering the dragonstones, despite felling the Thirteenth God twice in his lifetime, despite settling down in a quiet riverside cottage and hanging up his mantle, he refused to let himself believe that any of this is permanent. Hells, even saying yes to getting married did nothing to assuage this constant undercurrent of fear.

Cyrus hums his acknowledgement, releasing his shoulder. "I understand. Perhaps, in light of everything we have experienced in our lifetimes, this all seems like a wonderful dream waiting to rupture and bring us back to some dreadful reality. And yet, our trials and tribulations, harrowing as some of them were, are proof that this is the life we are currently living. At least, that is the truth at which I have arrived. And I'm confident our friends would agree." As if on cue, a growl interrupts them, Linde shoving her face against his pant leg, beady eyes boring into his soul.

"Duh! Of course we do!" Tressa's louder than before, now locking her arms around his shoulders as she practically swings on him, despite how he immediately snarls and swats at her hands, the brat. "I swore we stuck it in your thick skull several times, but I'm happy to do it again for old time's sake!"

"Tressa, dear, don't. I spent a long time fixing up his hair, and I'll not have you ruining it," chimes Primrose, and he's relinquished from Tressa's hold, despite the gremlin pouting. So much for being 26 years old, honestly. Just as quickly as the arms snake off his body, it's replaced by a quick flick against his forehead.

"Mind telling me what that was?" he grouses, rubbing a hand against his forehead. It's nothing like the old injuries of lifetimes ago, but damn if it

didn't sting.

"Because despite me trying to protect your image, Tressa and Cyrus are both right. You made this reality. You overcame everything to get to this moment. There's no more tests to pass. You've won. You deserve this." She's smiling; a genuine thing that's nothing like the saccharine sweetness that laced her every sentence when they first met. Behind her, H'aanit is smiling at them, though she doesn't add anything else to the conversation. There's no point. They're all unanimous about this one fact, and nothing was going to change that: not now, not eight years ago, not in the future.

Ugh, and now he's blushing. His scarf is draped neatly over a chair far from here, and with the ocean at his back, there's nowhere to hide from H'aanit's knowing laughter or Cyrus' quirked lips. But suppose he's alright with that. Just this once.

"Come now, everyone," Ophilia says, tapping her staff gently against the altar. "It's time to start. Back to your places." She's stern, being the master of this ceremony ("and it's my first time officiating a wedding too!" she had said a couple of months back, eyes wide upon hearing the request). But her eyes are alight with joy, and her smile towards Therion unwinds some of the tension in his nerves. Finally, everyone lays off him, though Tressa manages to get one last bear hug on him and Olberic gives him a pat on the back. A quiet reminder that they have his back, just as he has theirs. Always.

A violin pierces through the crowd, silencing the audience as they rise for the procession. The curtain at the top of the steps is pulled back, Nina holding it dutifully. The twin girls that once excitedly followed their every footstep, Ellen and Flynn, skip down the aisle, tossing flower petals everywhere while failing to get none of them stuck in their hair. As they finish up, giggling and smiling toothily at Therion, the attention shifts back to the start of the aisle while the music crescendos, and suddenly, little matters to Therion. The ceremony, the decorations, the audience; all of it fades away. Alfyn.

Zeph accompanies him down the aisle as the guests rise, matching smiles echoing a prelude to today's joyous outcome. At the front row, the apothecary pats his shoulder firmly, watching misty-eyed as Alfyn takes the last few steps on his own. Therion does not hesitate to hold out his own hand,

which is happily clasped between two strong, calloused ones as Alfyn takes his place in front of him. Hands that have saved him from certain demise, held him in the darkest nights; hands he can't imagine living without. It's the greatest comfort he's ever known, and the best thing to ever happen to him.

"Hi," Alfyn manages out, past obvious tears that smears the makeup Primrose spent who knows how long applying. Neither of them care.

"Howdy to you too, medicine man," Therion responds, his throat tightening. He's sure he's mirroring the same expression Alfyn's wearing: a smile that rivals the sun, streaked with tears.

"You ready?"

"Are you?"

"Answering a question with a question. How typical." The audience chuckles, but Therion pays them no mind. "Ready when you are." Therion brings his other hand to hold Alfyn's, squeezing. It's enough for both of them. Ophelia clears her throat, grabbing everyone's attention.

"Then let us begin."

Every path is ours to take indeed.





Home Is Where the Pack Is

by PokeLoulou

General || Linde-Centric || 861 Words

Spoiler Free, Animal POV, Third Person POV,
Fluff, Introspection, Found Family, Character Growth

There was a time where the world around Linde was only as tall as the trees
of their forest home.

Home meant the warmth of the village, of the people and its hunters.
Home meant father Z'aanta and Hägen, their laughter often sign of good
omen.

But the most important part of her world, of its warmth and its life?
For so many years, Home was her soul sister H'aanit.

They are partners, sisters, everything.

They are one.

And for years they lived in this comfort.

But everything had to change one day.

And in that day came many things;

In that day; Home was forever changed.

New smells of the new people as they one by one joined their journey was
something that took a long time to get used to.

She watched as the pack slowly grew, and how they all mashed together.
Her sister was still in distress, so Linde made sure to keep her distance from
them – she vowed to stick to her sister to the day glorious death come from

them after all.
She would forever put H'aanit first – her and her only.

It all changed again one perilous day.
The trek through the Frostlands is one Linde is used to – but even she is
aware that humans are slow to it.
They make easy prey, their legs catching in the snow without any grace,
their tracks easy to follow and their pace slow and unsteady.
They make for a good meal for any starving beast in the harsh snow.
Their pack isn't too different – only a few seem to have any experience in
the snow, the rest are tracking behind.
It's making Linde uneasy, so she doubles her efforts into leading the pack.
That ends up not even mattering as a pack of frost wolves ambush them.
The fight is unsteady, but Linde's pack is stronger.
But the Mother Nature has other plans for them.
As their fight shook the valley – a thundering noise rang above them.
The animals around them quickly scatter – but the pack isn't fast enough –
as snow barrels down the hill close to them.
And just like that – it all falls quiet.

Digging through the snow is easy for Linde.
She was born in this snow, raised in the frost before finding warmth in the
forest home.
She is quick to find H'aanit in the remains of the frost plain that just
flooded in snow.
Her sister had fought off bravely with such bad conditions – but she is
injured, unable to move from the safe spot that they have found.
“Find them, Linde.” Her partner whispered, “Bring them safe, I beg thee.”
And thus Linde did.

The hunt is familiar, and she has had time to learn the smells of the pack.
First Linde finds the lady in white – another child of the frost – who was lucky to find a safe spot with her experience. Guiding her back – the relief in her sister's heart is strong enough to taste.

Next, Linde spots the soldier and the teacher – both huddled together as the soldier was wounded in the fight. It's funny, to also smell their joy in seeing her in the distance.

Next, Linde finds the red flower, the pelt gifted to her was not enough to hide her shivers. That one is just as much a predator as Linde is – and she can respect her feline grace.

Next, Linde smells the herbs off the kind healer from far enough, and thus is quick enough after the last ones to assist him as a tree had fallen on him. Their trek back is slow, but steady, and the man is giving her enough pats to forgive him.

The next two were harder to guide back – the snow had taken a hold of them, and Linde lost their traces in it fast.

But...they were pack.

It took digging until her paws were numb – but she found them.
She found the quiet one and the loud one – who were often shouting and baring teeth – yet this time they are holding onto one another as a pack. The cold has taken them hard – and they almost don't recognize her – but the quiet one is quick to wake up; and together they slowly trek back as slowly as it takes them.

Her paws are still numb as they joined back the warmth of H'annit's safe spot, but her sister is quick to hold her in her arms.

The joy of seeing them all here – the pride of being the one to have done it – it all makes her feel so warm she almost couldn't hear them over her purrs. They make a soft bedding for her to rest, and the red rose lays down next to her – her soft calloused hands brushing her fur.

As their voices fade around her – Linde has one final moment.

One thought as she felt the warmth coursing through her fur.

Maybe, one day, she'll know all their names.

For to this day;

Home has become Pack.







seth



Curtain Call

by Wordsmith57

General || Gilderoy/Auguste || 672 Words

Master of Fame Spoilers, Angst, Hurt/No Comfort

Schwartz—no, *Auguste*—noticed that the group’s leader was more tense than usual.

The entire group was tense, shoulders by their ears and postures ready to pounce. They all watched the play from the side of the stage, waiting for Schwartz’s sign. The group’s leader—Gilderoy, his name was; lovely, handsome, bright-eyed Gilderoy—stood behind the ladies of the group, and he was the most tense of them all. His breathing was quick too, like he was on the verge of a decision, or a panic attack.

Auguste hoped it was the latter.

But then Gilderoy stepped back from the group and took Schwartz’s hand. He pulled Schwartz a few steps away and turned to face him.

“You don’t have to do this,” Gilderoy murmured to him. “We can leave. *You* can leave.”

Auguste sighed internally. He never imagined *this* courageous man would get cold feet. He put on Schwartz’s persona and stated, “I have wanted this revenge for many years, Gilderoy. I will not stop now, not when it’s so close to fruition.”

“Schwartz, that’s—” Gilderoy sighed in exasperation and shook his

head. “Have your revenge. I don’t mind that but let’s walk out of here *together*, Schwartz. Please.”

Schwartz blanked, but Auguste knew what to do. Schwartz was *not* going to walk off the stage. His role was nearly over.

So Auguste pulled Schwartz’s hand away—but Gilderoy grabbed his other hand. The one with the ring on it, under the glove. Gilderoy must have been wearing his ring under his glove too, because Auguste felt a crackling current between them. It was a soothing and gentle thing, and he lik—no, he didn’t like it.

“We can just let him die,” Gilderoy said vaguely, but Auguste—no, *Schwartz* understood the meaning behind those words. “He can stay there, and—and we can go somewhere else. Somewhere new, on the other side of the world or something. We can make a home there, find you inspiration, something new. You and me. Us.” A shaky pause. “Ya said you wanted to tell stories, right? They don’t gotta be on stage—your letters are amazin’ reads, and I got no doubt you’d be able to write books if ya wanted to.”

And Schwartz imagined it then—a home for the two of them, far away from everything they’d known. Maybe in a small village, somewhere with plenty of sunshine and nature. Maybe in a city, full of people and their lives. Gilderoy would be coming home every day after hawking his wares or working in his workshop. Schwartz would be out and about, or stay at home, and write to his heart’s content. They’d develop new connections—with Gilderoy’s being better than his, and once books were printed, they would use those connections to sell all of them. They would sell under Schwartz—under *his* name, and not Auguste’s.

They would grow older together. Be happy together. Maybe they would marry. Maybe they would adopt—animals or children, it didn’t matter. He wished for a cat, though.

He could start over. He could leave it all behind and be *happy* for once in his life. And Gilderoy would be there. Always there, forever.

It would make a beautiful conclusion to what they started in Valore...

...His ring finger burned.

Auguste pulled his hand away. The soothing current between them broke.

They were far too deep into this to change the ending. It was written before the players were ever cast. They would stay here, and Schwartz would play his part until the end.

A series of emotions played across Gilderoy's face, from hurt to grief to helpless acceptance. He let out a shaky breath then stood taller.

"A'right." He nodded decisively and turned back to the stage. "I think the scene's about done, yeah?"

Auguste stared at him for a moment more, as Schwartz said his anguished goodbyes inside of them. Then he turned back to the stage, eyes on his double, and nodded. He chose to ignore the odd ache in his heart, and chose to ignore the tears glistening his star actor's eyes.



fantasy





Garthale

THE FLAME GUIDES YOU.



centellear

Flame's Succession

by eros-vigilante

General || Sazantos-Centric || 700 Words

Bestower of All Spoilers, Character Study, Drabble Collection

The Flame in his hand cast his shadow on the snow, its edges ragged and sparkling.

“Sir, is it blasphemous to use the Flame to stave the cold?” his successor stuttered, shivering.

“Would Aelfric be offended to see one huddled by his brazier amidst a storm?”

“Not at all! I- What I mean is, I think he would want us to find comfort in him, sir.”

“Then there is your answer.”

“Ah... thank you, sir Sazantos!”

“I did nothing.”

“On the contrary; I think you make quite a philosopher.”

“My condolences to any others you may have met.”

“What?! Hey—”

His blade shone through the air like sunlight. Strikes calm and intentioned. He always gathered a crowd when he practiced. It was easily ignored. It was in combat that he disliked spectators. No matter how disciplined at home, his ferocity followed him. Rushed, uncounted blows until his vision cleared. His hands shook in their grip on the hilt no matter how refined his technique.

He disliked Rondo watching most of all. At first his gaze was full of awe, but he was a devoted mentee. He saw the burning, the shaking. Sometimes, though silent, he looked concerned.

Sazantos kept practicing.

The boy, to whom Sazantos' heroics were the meaning of the Flame. There were plenty of knights like him, with hearts you could see through their armor. Few of them Sazantos had met more than once.

And then there he was, outside Flamesgrace. Almost dead. Looking up at him. Like telling him he was weak was a challenge. Like seeing him bleeding out in the snow was the proof Sazantos wanted. And so the church claimed another child.

No matter how cold he was, Rondo wouldn't understand what he meant—it would eat his heart. Sazantos didn't bleed. He burned.

Yet the stars in his eyes persisted. Every day, including the grim, unresolved assignments, that innocent, sky-blue flame met his gaze. Saying, one day, we'll make it all better. Sazantos couldn't stand it. Rondo was the best poster child the church could have. They'd probably prefer he be coddled, preserved. Trapped ripe in ice. He could feel it when chastising him in public. Go easy on him, their sympathetic smiles. You're so cold.

Flamesgrace was cold. The shadows the Flame didn't reach were cold. The cellars beneath the church were cold.

Sazantos wondered when he stopped noticing. When Rondo would.

Aelfric's ring shone a bright blue. Like ice, like a clear sky.

Sazantos often gazed at the sky. Up and away, far from mortal perils.

The rings altogether glittered like a constellation. He held the stars in his hands. Stars you can only see when the sky is deep, dark, black.

When Sazantos passed out, a sky without stars. Lonely, dark, black. A single star, too far away. His light unable to reach anything. No colors of the morning. No mornings at all. Losing track of the days, taking after his mother.

They say sometimes stars explode when they die.

Sazantos wielded an ice pick, every word a strike until water leaked through the cracks. Clouded in Rondo's eyes. Disbelief. Splintering, caving in, drowning. Despair.

His own face, meanwhile, frozen over. The shadow of a sneer under the surface.

Knights in the Frostlands sometimes shove one another into water as a hazing ritual. Coping with the shock response was a valuable skill.

That's all it was. A lesson in faith. Sazantos passed his when he learned the truth. Even now he stayed true to salvation. Rondo would have made a fine Flameguard. But this was something only he could do.

Nobody is free of desire. Why did he do any of this, if not at his own whims? That was what made him a savior rather than a hero. He would take it all to

design a perfect world. A world where you want for naught is ones with your desires already met.

He would be the giver, the sinner. They would want for naught.

And yet...

They claimed the future was worth the present. The hope was worth the dread. The desire was worth the lack.

How strange.

Well, they've earned their damnation.

May the Sacred Flame light it.





Pine

by Hazel Gatoya

Teen || Lumis/Chloe, Lumis & Stead || 930 Words

Modern AU, Pining

Lumis brushed her fingertips against a photo in Stead's clandestine scrapbook.

She knew he took photos of people when they weren't looking. Stead was her best friend, which meant that she knew the man was a wheeler and a dealer. Blackmail was his lifeblood. She wasn't safe. No one was.

The pictures he kept in his scrapbook were all much higher quality than the massive album he no doubt had on his phone. None of them were blurry or too dark. The subjects in them were all very clear.

The one she was looking at now had been taken during sunset. Snow glowed where the soft golden light touched it--a direct contrast to darkness in the shadows of the pine trees. The light reflected on Lumis' blond hair and turned it into spun gold. Chloe's flowed like rich chocolate.

Chloe was laughing in the photo, with one gloved hand elegantly held up to her lips. Her eyes were closed and her cheeks were flushed. The pink fur of her coat added to her warm, glowing presence.

Stead's camera hadn't caught the sparkle of tears on her cheeks. Lumis could still hear the breathy admission that Chloe had never laughed so hard in her life.

Chloe told Lumis her deadpan way of speaking was funny. She

wasn't the first to do so. She was, however, the first person who could make Lumis' stomach clench, especially when she made a comment about Lumis' appearance or the way she acted. Lumis didn't feel the crushing guilt around her that she did around other people she wanted to impress.

Lumis wanted Chloe's beautiful smile to be hers alone. She couldn't have it, and it had nothing to do with what Lumis did or did not deserve.

That was the wildest part of their relationship. Chloe transcended the scale of how Lumis interacted with the world. Lumis didn't deserve good things. Chloe was certainly a good thing, but she was also just enough of a bad thing. The karmic scale was not the complicated part of Lumis chasing Chloe romantically.

Placing her heart in Chloe's hands was asking for it to be shattered. Only romantically, though. Chloe was devoted to her platonic friends.

Lumis really should be happy with what she had. She should be happy to be able to stand among the pines with Chloe. She should be happy that Chloe trusted her with her tears. She should be happy that Chloe considered Lumis a stalwart bodyguard in dangerous areas.

She traced the curve of her own smile in the picture. She wondered if Chloe could see the longing in it.

A shadow in her peripheral vision warned her to widen her stance and brace herself seconds before a weight landed on her back.

"Perusing my illicit materials, Lulu?" Stead asked. His back was pressed against hers, his hands in his pockets.

"Revisiting an old memory," Lumis corrected. She kept staring at the photo. "I didn't know you followed us out on that picnic."

"Vi insisted that we make a bet about if you were gonna confess or not that day, so we both followed you. "I assume you won."

"I'm not a gambling man, Lulu. I don't make bets on situations that I don't know much about." Stead shrugged. "You had me sweating for a while there, though. It was a beautiful day. Looked and sounded like you two had a lot of fun together."

Lumis closed the scrapbook.

"Vi thinks that your crush on Chloe is gonna destroy you if you don't

talk about it,” Stead told her. “I told her that it’s not her business, but you *know* how that sounds coming from me.”

Lumis huffed, unable to help a small smile. That *did* sound awfully hypocritical from Stead’s mouth. “Letting a crush wither and die in my chest won’t kill me. I’ve survived much worse.”

Stead tilted his head back so that it rested on her neck. “...What if this pine is actually evergreen?”

Lumis held the scrapbook behind her back for him to take. “I’ve lived with chest pains for nearly six months now,” she replied. “I can live with them for however long they decide to stay.”

“Brave woman.” Stead took the scrapbook.

Lumis heard a coin clink behind her and caught the leaf when it fell in front of her face. “Doing what’s necessary for my own well-being isn’t brave. It’s self-preservation at best.”

“I dunno, hon. You’re pretty bad at self-preservation.”

“Get off my back.”

Stead laughed and stood straight. “Chloe comes back to town next week, right?”

“She does.” Lumis turned around and smiled. “Her work went well enough that I’d be willing to attend another party for her.”

His devilish smile eased the ache in her chest. “Noted. I’ll talk to the girls. I’m sure that they’ll be more than happy to let us have the house to welcome her back.”

“Of course they will. Chloe’s basically one of their own, and you’ve got the proprietress wrapped around your finger.”

“Oh, I would *never* agree with that,” Stead chuckled. “It’s bad business for a man to admit that he’s got significant influence at a whorehouse, you know.”

Lumis couldn’t help but chuckle with him. She didn’t know how she had survived so long without roots of friendship and steady work. She knew that she would be weeping uncontrollably over her ill-advised crush on Chloe if she didn’t have others supporting her through it.

Nothing lived forever. This would pass eventually. Until then, she would count her blessings and carry her pining with their help.



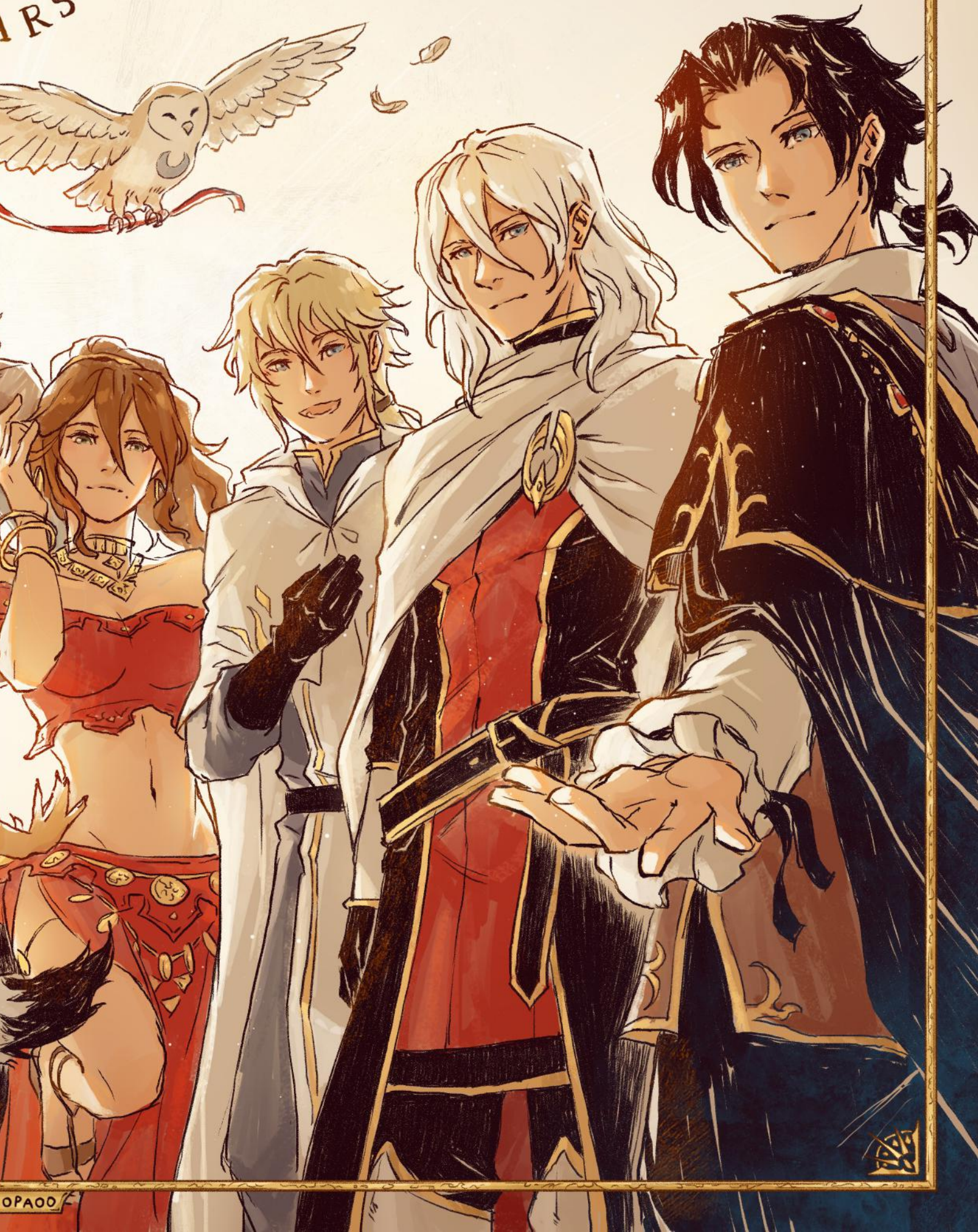


ОСТОПАТН

8
YEARS



3 TRAVELER RS



Eight is for OCTO

An Octopath Traveler 8th Anniversary Anthology