

So I've been doing a little bit of research between jobs, wanderer, and I'm still not turning up anything that could link you back to reality. All of the jobs I've had recently have been pretty cut and dry, easy enough to find and get the people back home, but no one is so missing that I think they would be you. It's... Strange, honestly, how you could've disappeared without a singular trace of where you came from. I've actively cleared through all of our jobs every day and still there's no sign of you. (sigh) I'll keep digging, of course, I just... Well, I guess I just hope you don't mind all the waiting around you have to do. It's not like I have much that can keep you entertained and, well, hearing about people who are getting home when you can't...

It's not an unfamiliar feeling is all I'll say.

What's this look? It's not *my* story you want, is it? Because I'm afraid there's not very much to tell. I've always been here, in this space on the fringes with Minerva. An exciting life in that my job is exciting but other than that... It's nothing extraordinary. It's nothing like the lives of the people I send home— people who work and live and fall in love and make friends and have families... Nothing special at all for me on the fringes.

But enough about that! There's another job coming in! Are you sticking around again, wanderer? I think Minerva has got her video system back online if you'd rather take a look at some of the different realities. No? Alright then, let's get to work! What've we got, Min?

Naomi Brightwind, they/them, from reality 2812 K.

They had been lost before, but never quite like this. Celeste always told them that the way their brain wandered away from them would lead to them getting hurt some day, but Naomi didn't recall any pain that would've caused this level of confusion and discombobulation. It felt as though one minute they had been walking through the fields taking pictures of the nearby cows only to be lost in a city somewhere a minute later. There were no cities near Naomi's home, they knew this, and yet here they were, wandering the streets lined with towering buildings and wondering how in the name of Peace they had gotten so lost.

"Bright sides," they mumbled to themselves, trying their best not to catch any attention from the people in the bustling streets around them. "You've always wanted to visit the city! And... And this one looks nothing like the pictures of Magiccenter, which is very cool! Magiccenter... Peace above, you're such an idiot Naomi!"

Ducking down a nearby side street, Naomi started to call their magic to themselves only to feel... nothing. It was as though their magic had been locked in their chest just out of their reach and they couldn't seem to grasp it, couldn't hold it in their hands to cast the spell they needed to send themselves home. "I... How far from home am I?"

The next thought— one that didn't make much sense given they hadn't been able to access their magic already— was to try to reach through the magic to Celeste. Their life partner was the first thing they turned to for comfort, and so to have the connection fizzle into nothingness in their mind was...

Heartbreaking.

No homing spell, no comfort of a partner's words, no... No magic at all except for the bit that they knew was still flowing in their veins keeping them alive. What would happen if that magic faded while they were stuck in this place with its towering buildings and stuck magic? Would they perish without being able to tell their partner goodbye?

Stumbling back into the packed streets of the city, Naomi contemplated asking for help. But what would they even say? 'Yes, hello, I'm incredibly lost and I can't reach through the magic to contact my queerplatonic partner, do you have any magic I could borrow?' As they looked around, though, seeing the carriages moving on their own and the wires strung high in the sky as light that came from something other than a candle spilled onto the street, they knew that asking to borrow magic would be fruitless. Any magic here would be far beyond what they knew and would be able to harness for themselves, far too complicated and far too technical for them to do anything with it.

Naomi's power stemmed not only from inside herself but from nature as well. It was part of the reason why they never tried to visit the city despite Celeste's insistence that it would be fine. "They have parks in Magicenter for this exact reason!" Celeste would reassure, showing Naomi map after map of the different parks and how Naomi would never be far from the thing they derived their power from. "Plus you'll have me. Even if the city somehow makes you too weak to stand— something it *definitely* won't do— you'll have me to lean on and get you home."

The two of them had been planning a trip into Magicenter together, something that Naomi had been cautiously optimistic about until they found themselves alone in an unknown city. Would they even be able to go back to explain to Celeste why they no longer wanted to go to Magicenter? Would this city they were lost in now be better if they had Celeste's hand in theirs, her rough hands keeping Naomi grounded and in the moment rather than floundering in their own mind?

They were so lost in their own mind that they barely noticed they were about to walk into a street, only snapping back to reality when they felt someone pulling them back. "Christ, is this your first day in the city or something?" the person snapped, all but yanking Naomi over to a side street where they could calm their racing heart. "They don't tell you to look both ways before crossing the street for nothing, you know."

“I’m sorry,” they murmured, trying their best to get their vision to come back into focus. “I... I’m lost. Very lost. To the point where I don’t even know where I am and I guess... I guess I just got lost in my own head as well as being lost in this place. Thank you. For pulling me away from the street.”

The person breathed out something that could’ve been a swear, though it didn’t sound like any of the swears Naomi was used to. “Right, look, I... I’m sorry for snapping at you. It can’t be easy being lost in the city like this. I’m Gillian O’Connor but you can call me Gil.”

“Naomi Brightwind,” they said, staring at Gil’s outstretched hand, not quite sure what to do with it. “I’m... Very much not from around here so if this is a threat—”

Gil tilted her head to the side. “Are handshakes a threat where you’re from?” Gil’s hand was soft when she grabbed Naomi’s, so different from the work calloused hands of Celeste. “You’re starting to make me think aliens are real or something, are you from another planet?”

“I think I would know if I somehow managed to not be on Seena, thank you very much.” Gil gave them a blank look and the world proceeded to crumble around Naomi. “This... This is Seena, isn’t it?”

“Try ‘Earth’ next time someone asks, you wouldn’t want to scare anyone, would you?” Gil smiled as she spoke, though, taking Naomi’s hand again. “Come on, let’s get you some food and figure out what place you’ve fallen in from since it’s certainly not any planet I’ve ever heard of.”

Naomi allowed herself to be dragged along to the streets again, feeling more grounded with Gil’s hand in theirs. It wasn’t the same kind of grounding that Celeste would give— one of love and understanding, laced with the smallest bit of calming magic; This grounding was a bit rougher, a bit more unsure, without a trace of magic to it. And yet it felt like friendship, like the joy of finding someone in the crowd who would actually care enough to help you out. The buildings around them were still too tall and too unnatural, but connection to another person would always have a sort of magic to it, even if that magic wasn’t the type Naomi was used to.

They were ushered into something that Gil called a ‘diner’, led over to an oddly sticky table and given a ‘menu’ that they couldn’t quite read. The letters looked similar enough to Seesian but it wasn’t quite right, words not fully forming in front of them. “I... I don’t know what this says.”

“Right, you’re not from around here,” Gil said thoughtfully. “Okay, how’s this: sweet or savory?”

“Sweet, I suppose.” Sweets were a rarity in Seena, but Naomi enjoyed them when they got them. That seemed to be enough for Gil to go off of, as she ordered for the both of them before looking back at Naomi, studying them intently. “Thank you again.”

Gil waved them off. “It’s fine. Could... Could you tell me a bit about this Seena place?”

“Oh, certainly! I’m from a little village called Foliage, quite a ways away from Magicenter but it’s always been a lovely place to live. Lots of greenery around the farm, which has always been better for me as my magic is drawn towards nature. Everyone in my family has had an affinity for nature, hence why we’ve lived in Foliage for so long. My partner, Celeste, deals more in metal magic. She’s a blacksmith, one of the few blacksmiths in Foliage. It’s taught her to work quite closely with fire magic as well, though I suppose we all can tap into the different types of magic... Affinities are more like what we’re best at rather than all we can do, I suppose, but I tend to stick to natural magic. Being in nature makes me... calmer. I’m a weaver by trade, though I’m also known to do a bit of baking. Foliage thrives on a sense of community, you can feel it bouncing between us in every aspect of our life, like a shared magic pool except that isn’t how magic works. But I’m sure you know all about how magic works given that you live in a city with such incredible magic tech!”

Gil scoffed. “The only magic in New York is whatever they’re doing over on Broadway. You... You actually have magic? Can you do any now?”

They tried desperately to reach into the magic they knew would usually be flooding around them, but it was like Gil said: there wasn’t any magic here to reach for. Naomi had assumed they just didn’t know how to wield it, but it was really truly absent from the daily lives of these people. “It’s... It’s too far away for me to reach properly. It’s like there is magic at the center of your world but not enough of it in the air for me to conjure anything. I guess that’s why I wasn’t able to reach out to Celeste... I hope she’s not too worried about me.”

“You don’t think your girlfriend is going to be worried you’ve gone missing?”

“Not my girlfriend,” Naomi bit out, thankfully being interrupted by the waitress coming back and placing two identical plates of food in front of them. Gil said that it was called a waffle and offered her some kind of honey to put on it. “She’s my partner,” Naomi explained as they started eating. “But not... Neither of us are really into the romance aspect. I love her, of course I do, but it’s not– we’re not– She’s the most important person in my life. We live together, sleep together, spend time together. But not romantically. Just... Just together.”

They had never had to explain their relationship with Celeste before, plenty of people in Foliage taking part in queerplatonic partnerships rather than romantic relationships. To have Gil

immediately assume that Celeste was their girlfriend hurt somewhere deep in Naomi's soul and they bit almost angrily into the waffle.

"I'm sorry," Gil said softly. "It's... It's pretty cool that you live in a place where being aro isn't like a huge weird thing. Sometimes I forget that... That other people get to have that."

They shared a small smile and, for a moment, it was almost possible to forget that Naomi was lost in a place they had never heard of. It was almost possible to forget that magic couldn't be called and that Celeste was who knows how far away. Smiling at Gil, they felt that sense of connection washing over them once more and they knew that they would be able to find a way home because they had a friend who would help them out.

That's all we've got for now, Min? I guess we did catch this one pretty early on... Okay, well, we at least know a decent bit about the world they ended up in I guess? New York, on Earth, no magic. How many Earths with a New York and no magic do we have, Minerva? ...29 isn't bad, all things considered! How many Earths with New York do we have full stop? 1089, okay yeah 29 isn't bad at all!

Okay, okay, let's think of all of the things that were brought up in there that might clue us in on where they are... Waffles maybe? Minnie? ...down to 8! Wow, that's a lot of New Yorks without waffles, those poor people... Okay, so we're down to 8. Broadway is the one constant across all of the New Yorks, trust me, I've tried that one before, so what else... How common is Gillian O'Connor, Min? In each one? Wow, okay, hmm...

Has any more information come in at all? No? Then there's got to be *something* in this story that can help us find Naomi and get them home. Let me take a look at it again. Naomi pulled their magic from nature, right? Or at least in part? Min, how many of these places have a park in them at all? All but two of them? Okay, give me the two that don't have a park. I'd be willing to bet they're in one of these.

We kind of talked about this when we talked about Alasdair, but... there *is* magic in all of the realities. It's what they're made of, after all, it's just not as easily accessed in some realities. Raw magic often becomes technology in those places, hiding away the magic that makes everything work under the guise of science. The reason I asked about the park is that, well, had Naomi been able to find one I think they would've felt at least some of the natural magic that stems into the worlds. Surrounded by concrete and iron, they're not going to be able to feel any of magics pull on reality, which means they had to be too far away from any large source of greenery for them to, well, survive, honestly.

It's hard to say whether or not people from magical realities would survive in realities without magic. We're all made of magic, of course, but people from magical realities... They have a connection to it that can be felt to the very core of them. It's like Naomi said in their story, they could feel the difference between being in a world with magic around them and being in one without. They reached for something only to find nothing there, and that would happen to anyone supplanted from a magical reality to a non-magical one. The good thing is that we work quickly and make sure we get people home before this becomes a problem but...

But I can't help but fear what would happen to people from magical realities if they were in non magical places for too long.

Anyway, I've found Naomi Brightwind's file! They were in reality 420-BI and have now been slotted back into their correct reality. I'm gonna watch after them for a little bit to make sure that they're... readjusting well. It's been a while since we've had someone with magic end up somewhere without magic at all and I just worry that it'll have negative effects even if they forget their experience.

Min, can you do me a favor and wipe memories of Naomi from Gillian O'Connor's file? It doesn't seem to have been removed automatically like it usually does and I don't want her worrying about where her newfound friend has gone. There's already enough worry in her world, we don't need to add Naomi to that list.

That seems to be the last job for the day, wanderer. I'm going to do some more digging into where we might find you and see if we can get you home. You should grab some food, it's been a while since you last ate. I made some waffles, funnily enough, please help yourself. I'll be here if you need me, okay?