

Winter City Walkabout

By Alypia, with thanks to Savin

Summary

Etheryn spends time with the Champion as she takes them on a tour of the Winter City. This is designed to be a repeatable date event.

The event is broken into four segments.

1. First, there is a short scene where the Champion asks Ryn to hang out.
2. Second, there is a sightseeing scene, where the Champion and Ryn visit one of three randomly selected places around the city.
3. Third, there is a food scene, where the Champion and Ryn visit one of three randomly selected eating establishments. This is independent of the random selection in the sightseeing scene.
4. Finally, there is a short transition that dumps the Champion out in either Etheryn's Winter City sex menu or the tile with her throne.

Scene content varies significantly based on Ryn's Confidence. Low-Con Ryn acts shyly and is warier of crowds, while high-Con Ryn is more assured in dealing with her subjects, more active in the scenes — and much more romantic toward the Champion. In addition, depending on who is in the active party, companions can appear in the sightseeing and food scenes.

The individual date scenes, along with the intro, will probably each require first-time flags, because each one of them has some variation for repeat versions. You'll also probably need flags for whether you've done a given date scene with certain companions; I know that Tui and Cait have different repeat versions of their scenes, for example.

Tone: Using Tobs' negotiation scene as a guideline, I attempted to strike "cautious optimism" with respect to the situation in the Winter City, especially for high-Confidence Ryn. In addition, I tried to make it as cute as reasonably possible while still being, y'know, Ryn stuff, with eMoTiOnS.

Status 15 OCT: Content complete and submitted! (Even if I keep tinkering with it here and there on the margins.)

New Lore

12 OCT: I decided to put this in for at-a-glance consultation.

Most of the new lore ideas that are in this event are (somewhat) natural outgrowths of previously discussed content. I'll try to enumerate them here. Please let me know if these assumptions aren't safe or if they run counter to what's already been envisioned.

- The Winter City marketplace tile description mentions game and bread, so both of those things appear in the text. I assume that the elves grow colder cereals, like rye and barley, on the edge of the Frostwood, while the sources for game are obvious. I also suggest that they significantly augment their diet with fish, as many cold-weather cultures with access to water do. There isn't an explicitly stated source for the fish in this event — I have the elves carting wagonloads of fish to the market from somewhere unspecific — but I figure the Winter City can't be *that* far away from the water.
- Therefore, boreal elven cuisine in this event is heavily based on Scandinavian food, especially the fish. Cait and Ryn talk about Norwegian-style fish balls, while Ryn and the Champion eat Swedish SOS-style pickled herring and drink *akvavit*. The sausage with potato chunks is based on a Finnish and Swedish recipe. I base the single example of a boreal elven accent on Swedish-pronounced English (a "ch" becoming an "sh"). Also, there is a silly mode reference to a Swedish metal band. This all mostly follows on Savin's comparison of the frost elves to Norwegians and Swedes.
- I construct a justification for having something vaguely like a modern restaurant or inn by saying that elven laborers need a way to eat indoors away from home during heavy snow events.
- Tobs has said that the eastern half of the Frostwood is basically a peat bog, so I added in some turf-fire cuisine (and peated whisky, which is *not* just a Scottish thing) as well. In addition, Ryn suggests that the ancient pale elves would sacrifice to the Wyld by sinking things in the bog, sometimes while the sacrifices were still alive; this is a reference to a very old Northern European practice. This is an embellishment on her earlier commentary about druids burying their dead in the bog.
- In the marketplace, Ryn talks about brooches, describing a commodification process for items once used solely as badges of office or affinity. (A similar process occurred in the later Roman Empire with the so-called "barbarian chic" style of outfits.) The quoit brooch style that Ryn calls out specifically is a type in Anglo-Saxon and North Sea Littoral archaeology. I also suggest that the Winter City lacks public arms/armor vendors (as far as I'm aware, none are planned); since it's a larger settlement than Hawkethorne, it can probably support enough vendors for each to individually specialize more. The military armorers just deal directly with the royal guard and with what used to be the nobility. Without constant passage of mercenary companies and common thugs through the area as in Hawkethorne (even Ogrish doesn't sell or make much military gear until the Champion and the Marked Merks show up), there's probably not much call (or desire, on the part of the state) for public arms vending, so the leatherworkers and smiths I describe in the public Winter City marketplace just handle civilian items.

- The Cathedral of Lumia is briefly mentioned in Ryn's [Talk] on the Winter City, but makes a full appearance here. I gave it stained-glass windows from Godswar-era trade with TyChris, a steeple with an eternal flame because Lumia, interior tapestries similar to the ones described in the Ice Palace tile descriptions, and statues of the other Six Living Gods as appear in the Hawkethorne chapel. The large sun icon that dominates the sanctuary is based on the one that appears in the Ice Palace chapel. It's also lit well enough from the inside to allow nearby pedestrians to discern the art on the stained-glass windows. Its construction by Atheldred was confirmed on Discord.
- Ryn has a conversation with the Champion about private religious observance vs public religious observance that I mostly base on the existence of the palace chapel. Historically, chapel construction was something that started in earnest when some elites stopped attending cathedral services shoulder-to-shoulder with the poor and started searching for more personal and meaningful (and *separate*) connections to their God, sometimes building side-chapels in cathedrals and sometimes putting them in their own homes. I have Ryn grapple with the same issue of balancing her desire for a personal connection to Lumia with her desire to build connections to her subjects, with changes based on her Confidence.
- The Lumian hymn that I reference in the sausage vendor scene is based on a pilgrim's hymn from fourteenth-century Catalonia called *Stella splendens*. The song was preserved along with some of the music, so people have made reconstructions and arrangements for it that sound pretty good! Sunbeams over the mountains are also a fun Lumian image.
- Ryn's ice magic is written in one part as getting snow to stick together well enough to make complex snow-sculptures instead of just misshapen mounds of snowman.
- Ryn refers to elven families owning ancient druid-cut wooden furniture.
- I have included a small daily druid trade mission under armed royal guard escort in the turf-cooked meal scene, since the dates take place after the initial negotiations between Elthara, Hethia, and Ryn.
- Named elf characters: Delanel (m), Findis (m), Telfir (m), and Garadelle (f).
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New Button: Spend Time

//Add a button called "Spend Time" to Etheryn's interaction menu in the Ice Palace.

//Should only be accessible **from 0800 to 1600, once a day**, after spooquest has been completed.

//I feel like this kind of event should probably also carry with it a Confidence boost, possibly the same size as her once-a-day hug (+10), but idk

//TT: Now that you and Ryn have free run of the Winter City, why don't you ask her to show you around and see the sights?

//TT nighttime: Ryn would probably love to show you around the city during the day. Ask her about it later.

//TT daytime, but already done that day: Ryn had a wonderful time with you today. Wait until tomorrow before going out again.

Initial Variant

From your place next to the dais, you have a pretty good view of the throne room and its decor. One tapestry in particular stands out: a red-maned valkyrie soaring above a glacier and raining blazing glory on unseen foes below, none other than the Sunbringer Queen herself. The artist chose to depict Atheldred as an uncomplicated heroine, a warrior of light... not entirely untruthfully, and it's an understandable tack to take for something on display in her descendants' throne room. But from your encounter with Athel's shade in the crypt, you know what *isn't* on the tapestry, namely, an awful lot of messy reality — shattered hearts and sundered peoples.

[pc.isChamp

|It's pretty heavy to think about, and you can only imagine how Ryn feels{reunited Athel and Synne: ; even the happy reunion she *did* have with her grandmothers was almost unbearably bittersweet}. As much as the two of you have been through together, what you could both probably use at this point is something straightforwardly pleasant and fun. Something the pair of you could do as monarch and Champion. Hmm...

|As far as you're concerned, being cooped up in the palace with all that nonsense is suffocating. You haven't got time for that shit. What you need is some fresh air, away from all the ice and misery in this palace. And apropos of that...

]

Ryn clears her throat softly, breaking you out of your reverie. "What's on your mind, [pc.name]?"

You were wondering: how well did she get to know the city while she was Alissa's prisoner?

"Not as well as I'd like," she sighs. "I've learned about our history from books and tutors, but I never got to visit unless I sneaked out... and when I did that, I tried to hide in the shadows as much as possible. It's been strange to just walk in the streets without having to worry about the guards snatching me and taking me back to the palace."

But she <i>does</i> know her way around, more or less?

[etheryn.InhConfidence

"I... I guess," she mumbles confusedly.

Perfect. Wouldn't it be fun to be able to visit the streets without fear or worry? Just the two of you, taking in the sights and having fun[pc.isChamp

|. maybe as a sort of pick-me-up after everything the two of you have been through together

]?

Ryn gapes at the sheer audacity of your proposal. "R-really? We'd just... go out? But what about..."

[pc.isDK

|Seriously? You

|You

] raise a finger: no buts. It'll be fine. You promise.

"I... I..." It takes several seconds for her to steady herself from babbling querulously to quiet resignation. "O-okay, [pc.name]. I'll... go out."

Attagirl. This'll be great.

Fortified by your cajoling and guided by your hand on her shoulder, Ryn finally comes down off the dais and leaves the throne room. Slowly, the two of you walk down the blue-lit entrance corridor and to the enormous wooden portal. As the guards haul the doors open, one of them gives you a surreptitious thumbs-up, and then you and Ryn emerge into light and frost.

[Ryn's look turns pensive. "I do. Why do you ask?"

Well, you'd been thinking about spending some time in the Winter City, and who[silly
|mst

] better to be your guide than a genuine native? Somebody who could use a break from being a {\\coronation: queen //else: regent} in order to enjoy herself with her friend?

"I don't know," comes her sheepish reply. "I'd like to, but it'd be a little irresponsible, wouldn't it? With everything else that we have on our plates?"

Nonsense. Everybody needs to relax once in a while, {\\coronation: queens // else: regents} included... especially ones who've been through so much lately. If that's not enough, she can call it an expedition to better get to know her subjects.

That draws a laugh. "That sounds a little tendentious to me, [pc.name], but I'll go — to spend time with a friend."

All right, then: it's a date.

Relieved of her burdens, the elven monarch fairly skips alongside you as you traverse the ice-blue entrance hallway, passing[hethia.isHostile

|

| a certain smirking druid and

] several royal guards. With a blast of icy chill, the doors open: the Winter City awaits.

"Sure, [pc.name]," she says with a smile. "Why — did you want a personal tour?"

She read your mind.

Ryn descends the dais to take your hand in hers. "I'd been thinking about offering to show you around, but we've always been rushing off somewhere or other and I never managed to find the right moment. But if you have the time to spend with me now, I'd love to show you around the city." Her big sapphire eyes sparkle. "Maybe we can call it a date."

Well, now. That sounds wonderful. You punctuate your assent by bestowing a big, wet smooch on the royal fingers, and receive a royal giggle in return.

Hand in hand, the two of you walk down the long corridor, past sumptuous elven tapestries and waiting, saluting guards, and open the doors to reveal the cool light of day.

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[Go Sightseeing]

Repeatable Variant

[etheryn.lowConfidence

|Once again, you approach the shy elven monarch with an offer: after having such a fun sojourn in the city with her last time, you'd love to have her guide you again today.

"I... I'd like that. I'd like it a lot better than sitting on this throne, anyway." Etheryn massages her temples as she descends from the dais, clearly glad to be free of the burden of rulership — at least, temporarily. "Where to, [pc.name]?"

[[pc.hasHelmet

|You doff your [pc.helmet] with a flourish, then[pc.bg noblescion

|, drawing on all the courtly manners you can muster, you genuflect to the throne before taking

|, with your best impersonation of proper ceremonial, you take

]

[[pc.bg noblescion

|Drawing on all the courtly manners you can muster, you genuflect to the throne, then take

|With your best impersonation of proper ceremonial, you take

]

] a knee in front of the dais. Raising your hand to Ryn, you ask, with just the right amount of seriousness, if she would give her Champion the honor of her company on a visit to the city.

[etheryn.highConfidence

|Ethereyn giggles and claps, rising from her seat to take your hand in hers. "You know I don't like to stand on ceremony," she says softly, "but I can't help myself when you're being romantic. Of course I will. I love going on dates with you..."

|"I'm sorely tempted," she admits, "but there's always so much to do..."

Hey, now. She knows what they say about all work and no play.

"I guess I do. All right, [pc.name]." Ryn stretches as she leaves the throne, yawning out the tension of monarchical responsibility, then offers a friendly hand to you. "I can manage anything that comes up while we're gone. Let's go have some fun!"

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[Go Sightseeing]

Go Sightseeing

//TT: Go out and have some fun in the city.

//One of these three options will appear randomly.

//Two to three hours should elapse for this page.

//Random Option 1: Visit the Cathedral of Lumia, where Ryn shows off the art and architecture of the elven people and the two of you have a religious experience. Azyrran appears in the background of this scene if she's in the active party.

//Random Option 2: Wander the Winter City marketplace, where Ryn talks about the wares on offer and the two of you meet a little elf boy. Although Kiyoko doesn't appear in this scene directly per Tobs' recommendation, the Champion will think about her if she's been freed.

//Random Option 3: Walk down a side street, where you and Ryn build a snow elf and then get into a snowball fight. Atugia joins the snowball fight if she's in the active party.

Cathedral of Lumia

Stark and beautiful amid the lightly flurrying snow, the church of the Dawn Maiden towers above the wood-and-stone dwellings around it. You and Ryn pace the perimeter, examining every angle: the glowing sunburst icons in relief; the enormous dual welcoming and warlike statues of Lumia flanking the portal; the multitude of smaller spires ringing the roof around a central tower bearing an open eternal flame, blazing a beacon of the Mother's love to every corner of the city. From within the cathedral's many windows, an otherworldly, if gentle, light shines, making it just possible to discern a multitude of colored glass panes[pc.bg acolyte scholar

| showing classic Lumian motifs

| in beautiful religious designs

]: the goddess lovingly hugging her children, descending from the heavens near the walls of the Winter City, raising a flaming greatsword against a horde of wraiths emerging from the Frostwood, comforting an expectant woman.

Normally, you'd expect stained glass to only be visible from the <i>inside</i> of a building, through the shafts of sunlight coming in from without. This close to the walls, though, the light coming from within is just enough to make the window art discernible to the casual [pc.race] on the street.

You mention this to Ryn, and she nods. "Like sunlight, Lumia's love radiates to the whole city. It's reflected in the architecture, with the internal light of the temple making the window designs more easily visible from the outside, and it's also reflected in the temple's activities. Sun priestesses come out to the rest of the city to minister to the people, whether by tending to the sick and needy or just using their magic to melt snow. But just like Lumia herself, the cathedral has two roles: its love shines out to the rest of the city, but it also enfolds all who come to worship in a motherly embrace. You'll see when we go inside."

Has she actually been in to worship, then?

"Only a few times, and those mostly since we freed the city; as a prisoner of Alissa, all I could visit was the royal chapel," she says with a wan smile. Your feet crunch through the snow as you continue to circle the cathedral's walls. "But I've read a lot about its design and construction. Building it was one of the crowning achievements of Grandmother Athel's reign, so of course there were a lot of books about it and panegyrics to it. Now that I know what I know, I have to wonder about the people of that time. How much of what they said and did was belief? How much was fear? Even in the most effusively praising works, it was sometimes awkward for the poets and writers to discuss imported materials and a then-freshly imported goddess."

Imported materials? Does she mean the glass?

"It's all from Tychris," confirms Ryn as you stand beneath one depiction of an apocalyptic struggle against the wraiths and their corrupted armies in magical reds, purples, and greens. Snowflakes drift onto the panes and melt instantly on contact. "Delivered back when we still traded with the outside. Then the glasswork dried up, the Frostwood became the preserve of the druids, we turned our eyes to the north... and we found different problems to handle." She crosses her arms and sighs feelingly. "We made such beautiful things with others' help."

That sounds like a good reason to try to reestablish trading ties; even if there's more important things to do right now than create beautiful art, once the crisis has passed...

A golden-blond braid twists through Ryn's fingers as she thinks. "It'd be wonderful, no question. But trade only works if each party has something the other wants, and if it's worth enough to both to justify the cost of travel. {//finished Inheritor of the Idols: If our traders could make use of the Ways Between, it'd certainly be much easier. //else: But it'll be a lot of hard work to make the roads and rivers safe enough to travel quickly again.} It's something to work toward when we can, but I don't want to underrate its difficulty. [etheryn.InhConfidence

|It feels like just about everything a ruler has to do is difficult.

|Besides, what with everything that's been going on, it might take a long time for our people to trust outsiders again.

|With you at my side, though, I know we can do it. You showed me just how much elves and outsiders can help each other. Maybe we can't be friends with everybody out there, but some ties are better than none!

]"

[pc.isDK

|Hmp. Well, you can't say that you're terribly interested in the Winter City's isolation, but you <i>are</i> interested in being compensated for fixing the problem.

|You'll be sure to keep an eye out for anything that makes that burden easier.

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[etheryn.lowConfidence

|"Th-thanks, [pc.name]." She exhales tiredly. "I think I'm done with politics for now. Let's j-just go inside."

[Ryn gives you a little side-squeeze. "Then I'm glad I have a Champion of Winter to do that. Come on, let's go in."

]

You understand what Ryn had meant about the temple's embrace as soon as you cross the threshold. Well-lit and warm despite its cavernous size, the interior feels as safe as being in a mother's arms without being cloying and uncomfortable[pc.bg acolyte

|; it's the same sense of palpable divine power that you remember from your initiate days

]. There's no service going at the moment, so robed acolytes walk to and fro, cleaning the surfaces and maintaining the candle lighting. In the pews and alcoves, congregants hold quiet, private meetings with elven priestesses in gauzy, revealing clothes. You can see a few couples, [party.has azyrran

| Azzy — who waves at you and Ryn cheerfully from across the sanctuary before returning to her conversation with an acolyte —

] one off-duty guardsman, and many women at varying stages of expectancy... several of whom, of course, belong to the clergy.[pc.isPregnant

| You rub your own [pc.belly], more attentive than ever to the growing life inside you. Any worries you may have had about delivery and your beautiful bab{single fetus: y //multiples: ies}-to-be melt away like stray snowflakes in the cathedral vestibule.

[[pc.hasKids

| They remind you of your own child{ren}, bringing a sigh to your lips; whether through the goddess' power or through your own subconscious desires, you can't help but think fondly about the possibility of having another baby.

[[pc.fertilityRange 4

| The sight of them all is enough to spur a powerful urge inside you, a more-than-idle dream of lovemaking, pregnancy, and holding a beautiful child in your arms.[silly

| It's a case of baby rabies severe enough to make your ovaries sob.

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A blue-skinned priestess walks up to greet you, but she stops short, mouth open in shock, when she realizes her visitors' identity. With a placating smile, Ryn introduces you, but then

[etheryn.lowConfidence

|shyly

|gently

] pushes her away, saying that you're just visiting and don't want to be a burden.[pc.ra valkyrie

| Even so, after that little exchange you can sense the awe-struck eyes of all on your angelic wings, and hear the susurrations of religious business die down to a bare whisper. For the elves in the cathedral, seeing their monarch out for a stroll with their goddess' living Champion is a religious experience all its own.

] Arm in arm, you and Ryn peek into alcoves to examine religious statuary and crane your neck up to gaze on the brightly woven tapestries. Ryn has a description for everything, from the statues of the other Six Living Gods to votive dedications in unreadable boer'alvarin script. The sweet thing's enthusiasm is infectious as she greets art she's barely seen outside a book like an old friend, and you let her carry you along as she goes, borne on the wave of her excitement about her people and what they can do.[pc.bg acolyte scholar

| You add what you can from your own studies, contrasting the designs and themes of the art from similar temples elsewhere, and Ryn thrills to your tales of what southern Lumians have created for the glory of the Dawn Maiden.

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You end up in a pew, illuminated by the warm light of the immense sun icon at the altar. Firmly clasping her hands together in prayer, Ryn stares up at it with wet eyes. "For the longest time, I didn't have anybody. El and Jael'yn were... they were nice to me, but I couldn't confide in them. I couldn't share how awful I felt about everything that was happening. The only person I could share my feelings with was Lumia. For even a tiny bit of comfort..."

[pc.isChamp

|And, for the briefest moment, she is with you, too. <i>MY CHILD... YOU ARE LOVED.</i>

Then the presence of awesome majesty passes through you and beyond.

<i>That</i> was more than a tiny bit of comfort. You give Ryn a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

|Hmm. Well, if that's what helps her live with herself.

]

Ryn whispers something under her breath, then looks[etheryn.lowConfidence

| furtively

] around the sanctuary. [etheryn.InhConfidence

"The palace chapel is a safe place where I can be alone with her. But here I can just feel everybody watching me. All their lives depend on me, and I can't live up to that. I can't be the queen they need me to be." She exhales a dejected sigh. "Visiting this place is nice, but... but it's intense, [pc.name]. Can we go do something else now?"

You think she's being a bit hard on herself, but sure, if that's what she wants.

"For a long time, all I had was the chapel. It's more personal there. It's a place where I can imagine that it's just me and Lumia, and it feels... more powerful that way. I don't know. I liked coming here, but I don't know if it'd be right for me to intrude on the rest of the city's worship. The cathedral is supposed to be for everybody, and normal elves probably don't want to think that I'm watching them even when they're trying to be closer to her."

Maybe so, but Ryn worshiping alongside her people could also make them feel closer to *her*, as though all elves pray to the same goddess, rather than having a Lumia for royalty and a Lumia for everybody else.

"That's true," she says, chewing on her lip. "Maybe there's a way I can balance those things. It's something to think about. Anyway, this was fun! What else should we do?"
 "I'm going to come here more often. Not all the time, but much more frequently than Alissa used to. In the palace chapel, worship is more personal, but it's really just for the great and good. Here, I can be with everybody else."

Accessibility to one's subjects is a laudable goal, but what about the majesty of her office, and suchlike things?

"There's a time and place for that," Ryn says firmly. "Someone needs to govern in the palace, or nothing works; you saw what happened under my sister's rule. But as for religion? I need to be able to show my people that both they and I worship the same goddess... especially if I want us to welcome the druids into the fold."

That's pretty clever, even if striking the proper balance of royal dignity and accessibility will take some thought. Still, you can't imagine the likes of Alissa ever bothering to ratiocinate to that degree. It's attention to questions like these that makes Ryn out to be a ruler with a lot of potential.

The elven monarch accepts the compliment with an inclined head and a grin. "A hungry one, too. Let's get something to eat, [pc.name]."

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[Get a Bite to Eat]

Winter City Marketplace

The harsh sunlight glinting off the snowy roofs of Winter City dwellings turns dull as clouds begin to darken the sky. By the time you and Ryn reach the main market square, fat snowflakes are slowly spiraling down from above. But whereas in the south the snow'd be enough to drive pedestrians indoors, the boer'alvar pay it little mind, apart from putting the food under cover. Casual customers drift from shop to shop, tarpaulin-covered wagonloads of fish and grain roll through the square, and in the out-of-the-way spaces, you can even see children diving into the deepening snowdrifts.

"Didn't I tell you it snows all the time here?" Ryn giggles. "This isn't really a big deal. Now, if it gets to be a proper blizzard... well, in that case, [etheryn.libidoRange 25

[we'll just have to go inside and warm up together, hmm?

[getting under a roof would probably be best.

] But for now? Let's take a look at what's available!"

She seems pretty happy about being in the marketplace. You wouldn't have really figured her for someone who likes to shop.

"I'm not — well, what I mean is, it's not why I like being here. When I could get away from Alissa, this was one of the best places to just... be. I'd hang in the shadows, or near one of the side streets, and just watch people being people. I'd watch kids play in the snow, or old friends take each other out to dinner, or couples buy each other gifts. Even the arguments and the haggling over prices never seemed too mean-spirited."

Sort of a way for her to live vicariously through the rest of the city?

"In a way, maybe," Ryn muses. "But it was more like reassurance. Reminding myself that most people are just good people, with love in their hearts and joy on their faces. Not... monsters.[etheryn.lowConfidence

| That's what I hoped, at least.

] She shakes her head. "Anyway! Let's start over there."

The 'there' in question happens to be a stand with leatherwork — with no tannery out back, thank the gods. You see soft leather messenger bags, belts, and boots, all with a sort of interwoven geometric pattern stitched, and sometimes embossed, along the edges.[pc.bg noblescion

| Conspicuously, however, the river emblem of House Ridell is missing; you guess that it's probably restricted to the livery of royal guards and other such servants of the crown.

] It's all good leather, if not quite up to the standards of, say, Alissa's armor. Actually, come to think of it, <i>none</i> of the gear here seems to be particularly martial in nature.

Ryn looks up from the water-skin she's examining. "It wouldn't be. Apart from the royal guards and the aristocracy's retainers, there's not much call for leather armor in the Winter City. It's not like we have an endless stream of thugs, soldiers of fortune, and mercenary companies passing through the city like in Hawkethorne or Tychris; from what I've seen, hardly anyone south of the river even knows we exist. So without public demand, the military tanners and armorers just deal directly with their buyers rather than setting up shop in the marketplace. Even poorer huntresses usually skin their kills themselves and work one-on-one with a tanner."

In an actual city, unlike underdeveloped little Hawkethorne, it'd make sense for merchants to specialize more. And for someone who produces gear for combat, you could see how it'd be less than profitable to open a premises on the square[pc.bg slumrat

|, especially if they have a problem with light-fingered people like... well, like you, for one, but let that go

]. Does she think that'll change if the city opens up to outsiders more?

"Probably. It's not really a good or bad thing, it just is — at least for the moment." She hefts the water-skin. "I think I'll get this. It'll be good to have a replacement in case my old one gets damaged in a fight."

A fine purchase indeed. {first time:You wonder, though, if there are any places to get <i>clothes</i> rather than just accessories.

"Sure! There's one down this way."

The seamster's is an actual building rather than a stand, decorated well enough to imply at least something of a well-off clientele, and[etheryn.lowConfidence

| fortunately for your shy elven companion,

] it's empty of anyone save the proprietor — which means that, after the usual effusive greeting, it isn't too hard to steer him toward business. After a critical look at both you and Ryn, he pulls out a widely-varied array of outfit types to help you narrow things down. Elven outerwear, from what you can see, tends toward two extremes. Many of the garments reflect the boreal elves' indifference to cold: soft leather that leaves a great deal of skin exposed, the sheerest of silks, and so on.[pc.bg courtesan

| Some of them aren't even that different in style from what you used to wear as an escort.

] But even ignoring the cold, the frozen north is still quite the hardy environment, and some of the other outfits the seamster lays out are sturdy traveling clothes and work outfits that wouldn't really be that amiss elsewhere in the Frost Marches.[kiyoko.isFree

|Although many of the clothes are either undyed or in relatively muted colors, one garish orange cape brings to mind your beloved Kiyoko. Missing the feel of her divine fluff, you finger the bright twill... but, of course, it isn't the same. Sadly, she can't come out into the Winter City, not without you there to chaperone her, and that would've turned this little date into something else entirely. Even though she'd probably disavow any special claim on your time — "I don't wish to monopolize you, beloved" — you still feel a little guilty about not having her out with you. You'll have to think of some way to make it up to her the next time you see her.

]

[pc.mf

|Ryn breaks into your thoughts with a cough. "You know, [pc.name], it would probably be a good idea for us to get you fixed up with some formal wear — you know, for court functions and all, in case you have to attend any of them as my Champion."

That's a pretty good idea. You and the proprietor work together to select something that looks appropriate. The eventual choice is relatively light and airy, smart without being quite so ornate as some of the fancier clothes down south.

Not being born a boreal elf yourself, you'll probably have to add a cloak to keep warm in the Palace of Ice or wherever else these social functions might happen, but with the right color coordination, even that could work out quite well. You duck behind a screen to try it on, and when you emerge, the seamster goes over you with a fine-toothed comb, asking about adjustments, fit, and feel as Ryn looks on approvingly. Once everything's noted down, you strip off the outfit and put on your [pc.armor], letting Ryn hash out the price.

Before you leave, though... this establishment wouldn't happen to deal in anything other than outerwear, would it?

[etheryn.highLibido

"You mean intimates? For Her {coronation: Majesty //else: Highness}? Sure, easy peasy. I mean, it'll take a little longer to source some materials appropriate for you, Your Worship, but we can absolutely handle the job."

Ryn giggles. "{done the panty raid: You're building quite the collection for me, [pc.name]. //else: "Oooh, thank you, [pc.name].} I can't wait to show them off for you..."

Well, you do want her to be at least a <i>little</i> surprised. You'll have to visit the seamster's on your own sometime later to go over the details.

"That works for me, Champion," he says easily.

Your elven lover's still giggling as you walk her back out into the snow, all aglow at the thought of getting to look feminine and sexy for you.

[Ryn's eyes bug out at you. "[pc.name]![etheryn.lowLibido
| N-not in front of...

]"

"Oh, absolutely, we can do intimates," the seamster says smoothly. What a professional. "Might take a little while to make something fit for a queen, but I'm sure we can manage."

Outstanding. You'll be in touch later to talk about the details... in private.

"Sure, sure."

You thank the proprietor and guide Ryn back out into the square.

]

[etheryn.highConfidence

[Ryn clears her throat. "If you had to pick a formal dress to wear at a court function, [pc.name], what would you choose? And yes, it has to be a

dress," she adds sheepishly. "I can bend a lot of our traditions, but not all of them."

[pc.bg noblescion courtesan

[Ooh! You know exactly what would work; you've had to dress for the high and mighty plenty of times before, after all. You sort through the clothes on the counter, searching for what you'd noticed earlier, and eventually pull out a sheer dress on clean lines, with just enough ostentation to fit the aesthetic of the elven court without going too far overboard into absurdity. From the impressed looks on the two boreal elves' faces, you know you chose well.

[A court function? You? W-why would you need to...?

"Because you're my Champion, of course! You'll need an outfit appropriate to your station."

Okay, but you don't know the first thing about fancy dress! Or the second, or...

"Well, let's see if we can figure something out between the three of us."

Ryn and the seamster walk you through the rudiments of lines, shape, comfort, and color selection, illustrating their points with outfits from the shop's back room. Eventually, with their help, you alight on something gorgeous that, before you turned to adventuring, would've cost more than you'd have made in a year.

] Satisfied with the selection, you head behind a screen to try it on. As you remove your [pc.armor], you can't help but overhear little quiet snippets of conversation in the boreal elves' native tongue. That distraction aside, though, it's not too difficult to slip into the dress.

The two elves ooh and aah when you emerge, and met by compliments like those, you can't help but do a little twirl to show off your new look. Then they swarm all over you, measuring and adjusting, asking your opinion about colors and fit, and interweaving compliments about how lovely you are. A blush warms your cheeks as they flatter you; the praise of a {*//coronation: queen //else: princess*} is enough to make you feel like the prettiest [pc.boyGirl] ever.

Eventually, the details are ironed out and the proprietor has the adjustments to send on to the tailors. You redress, leave him the outfit

and a bagful of hawks, and wave as you walk out the door, arm in arm with Ryn.

"I can't wait until it's done, [pc.name]!" she gushes. "It's going to look so amazing on you..."

Awww! You have her to thank for her help. By the way, what was she talking about back there? Something in boer'alvarin?

"It's a surprise. Forget you heard anything!"

[pc.cunningRange 40

|Wait, what other clothing could she have been... wait...

<i>R-RYN!</i>

She's inordinately pleased with herself. "I know you're going to look [pc.mascFem

|stunning

|gorgeous

] in it, [pc.name]. Just, um, pretend to be surprised, okay?"

Despite the falling snow and the frigid air, you feel incredibly warm.

|You affect a gentle smile. [silly

|All right then, she can keep her secrets.

|Well, whatever it is, you can't wait.

]

]

|"[pc.name]?" Ryn looks a little flushed. "What do you think of that dress?"

What, this one? Well, it's —

"C-could you keep looking at it? For, um, for a while?"

Okay...

Ryn hesitantly taps the counter and asks the proprietor something in quiet boer'alvarin. He leans in inquisitively and she repeats herself, a little louder and more intelligibly, and then the two of them start up a quick, staccato series of questions and responses, punctuated by several glances at, well, <i>you</i>. An embarrassed smile spreads across your face as you pretend to look at the dress Ryn mentioned, but otherwise, you try not to intervene in the awkward conversation.

Once they're done, though, you turn back to them — Ryn sporting a deep, scarlet blush while the seamster grins smugly — and ask what that was all about.

The waifish elf stammers, "It's... um... it's a s-surprise."

[pc.cunningRange 40

|Is that so? Well, you know you're going to <i>love</i> showing it off for — er, that is, you can't wait to see what it is.

|Well, whatever it is, you know you're going to love it.

]

Ryn's blush creeps up the length of her long elven ears. She musters a "y-yeah", nervously tapping her fingers against each other. "D-do you like that dress, too?"

It does look very nice, but you'll need to try it on and compare it with other dresses, of course. Why does she ask?

"Well, if you're the Champion of Winter, you should probably have formal wear... you know, so you can be dressed for negotiations, court functions, and things. If you like it, we could get something for you now."

Aha. Well, that sounds like a lot of fun!

You, Ryn, and the seamster sort through the dresses, trying on a few and discussing adjustments and color. Eventually, you settle on an appropriate one, along with the necessary modifications. Ryn passes a bag of hawks to the smiling proprietor, and awkwardly marches you back out into the square.

]

]

//repeat version:

Ryn smiles. "You never can have too many of these! You should see how many of them I go through every week."

Fair enough. How about something a little more frivolous, though. Like, say... clothes?

"Oh, Lumia! That sounds great!"

Telfir, the seamster, waves the usual cheerful greeting at you. Your outfit's not quite ready yet, but that's okay: the real reason you're here is to try on clothes.

[etheryn.lowConfidence

|Putting Ryn in dresses is enough to make the normally-shy elf perk up, so that's where you start, sorting through different styles to properly suit her. Whether from your encouragement or from the excitement of trying on new outfits, a smile slowly spreads across her face, and by the time she actually gets into one, she's happy enough to do little spins for you to show off.

|Ryn goes straight for the dresses, asking for your opinion about each one; when she tries them on, she twirls and preens for you, soaking up your approval. You work together to make sure her hair is perfect as she tries pose after pose in the lovely outfits, and eventually, she alights on one, [rand

|a frilly, poofy thing suited for an outrageous social debut

|a slinky backless v-neck that [etheryn.breastRange C

|offers an eyeful of her lush cleavage

|she wears with poise

]

|a deep blue gown that brings out her eyes with some sort of magical weave that glitters with starlight

|an off-the-shoulder dress with a leg cut that the newly confident beauty inhabits perfectly

].

] But eventually it's your turn to shine. [pc.mf

|Ryn fusses over your outfit, insisting on the absolute best look for her dashing Champion. Eventually, you settle on something appropriate, and once you try it on, she fawns over you, posing together as if you were attending a royal ball.

|As usual, Ryn insists on putting you in a dress, and after careful consideration you select a daring, eye-catching outfit that'd have everyone in a southern court utterly besotted[etheryn.highConfidence

| — and one with a style and color that aligns perfectly with hers

]. When you emerge from behind the screen, she greets you with her usual enthusiasm, suggesting poses[pc.hasHair

|, adjusting fit, and fiddling with your [pc.hair] to try different looks.

| and adjusting fit to give you something that presents just right.

]

] The two of you look amazing together in your formal duds, and it's with great reluctance that you finally return to your everyday outfits and bid farewell to the shopkeep: until next time.

}

Moving from stand to stand, you notice that there's a remarkable amount of high-quality stone-and metalwork on offer. Even elves that don't look particularly well-off at least have artistic brooches for their cloaks, intricate bracelets, rings, and ear-studs. There's plenty of decoration about, if not finery.[pc.bg arcanist

| Many of them even seem to be minor magical foci, cheap means to make spellcasting easier for the average elf.

]

"That's right," says Ryn as she fingers her own falcon pendant. "A brooch, pendant, or belt buckle can be a symbol of office or affinity for people, even if they're not in the nobility... but we often just wear them because we like the design. Sometimes they have a little history behind them, too! Take a look at this one." She gestures to a large, disc-shaped brooch with a hole in the middle and a fastening pin. "This is a quoit clasp, called that way because of the shape — quoits are like rings or hoops, you know. See how there are little designs of game animals facing each other in pairs around the outer edges? This used to be a huntress's brooch style, but then it just kind of... got popular. People really ate it up during Alissa's reign; she didn't care much for Lumia, not like Grandmother did, but she loved to show off her hunting prowess, so fashion took a cue from that instead. Now pretty much anybody can wear huntress styles."

[silly

|Brooches, she says? It strikes you that having an extra inventory slot for something with such obvious cultural and sartorial value would be quite nice.

"Hey, stop it," she says plaintively. "There aren't going to be any more changes to the inventory system. Just leave it be. Besides, Hirrud Grune's cloak already has a brooch."

Fine, fine.

|Beautiful and useful without being ostentatious, the quoit brooch is certainly a fine example of craftsmanship[pc.bg soldier

|, far prettier than the sorts of cloak-fasteners that officers in your old outfit used to wear

]. It's also the kind of thing that'd make a lovely gift. You make a mental note to see about getting Ryn a cloak fit for a queen, along with a House Ridell river clasp or Lumian sun brooch.

]

Fingernail-sized flakes keep falling as you stroll over to a smithy further down the way. As with the leatherworker's, it doesn't look like there are many implements of war on offer. Just like Ogrish{seen Jen arguing with Ogrish: — before the arrival of the Marked Merks, anyway — // else: }, the well-muscled elf-maiden sweating away at her forge mostly has everyday tools available for sale: bronze nails, hammers, and so on. The amazonian bronzesmith puts on a real spectacle for the small crowd outside, exaggerating the movements of her glistening arms to throw real power into her hammerblows as she shapes a large cauldron.

[etheryn.InhConfidence

|A sudden bump at your side jolts you out of your appreciation of the scene. It's Ryn, tugging on your arm insistently. "[pc.name], can we... can we move on? It feels like people are noticing us."

Briefly scanning the crowd doesn't turn up anything in particular. It's probably just her nerves.

"N-no — just, can we please get out of here? Everybody's staring at me. Look at the little boy over there."

You finally notice a small blue-skinned elf-child, one hand holding onto his inattentive father, whose eyes keep sliding between the hardworking smith and Ryn. He's just a kid — why doesn't she say hi to him? Press the flesh and all that?

"I can't, [pc.name]," she whines. "P-please."

Okay, then. You wrap your arm around her shoulder and guide her out of the crowd. None of the other elves turn their heads.

Ryn beelines for an alleyway between two shops, apparently a favorite hiding place from back when she'd been running from Alissa. Once you're both safely ensconced in the shadows, she gloms onto you in an embarrassed hug, sniffing into your [pc.armor].

Hey, now. You give her a pat on the head and hold her closer. It's okay.

"[pc.name], I couldn't... I couldn't even look at them..."

It was a lot of people to deal with at once. She's... well, she's definitely going to have to get a better handle on that if she's going to be a good queen. Maybe baby steps would be best.

Besides, before that happened, your trip to the marketplace had been going great! You really enjoyed wandering the shops with her. Maybe the rest of it'll be easier next time.

"O-okay," she sniffs. "I thought... well, I thought that it was fun, too... at least for awhile."

There, there. How's about taking a few moments to catch her breath, and then going to find some food? A tasty snack will make everything right as rain.

Ryn swallows and nods. "That sounds good, [pc.name]. Thank you."

"She's really putting on a show, isn't she?" comes the murmur at your shoulder.

Indeed. It's an interesting blend, raw power with just a touch of finesse. You suppose elven amazons have that reputation, though, even when they aren't huntresses.

"Yeah..."

Something wrong?

When she doesn't answer, you turn, to see Ryn looking awkwardly at a young boy a few paces away, holding tightly to his father's hand. While everybody else's eyes are on the smith, the boy's looking at Ryn with the sort of wide-eyed stare usually reserved for Living Gods or particularly exotic insects.

Cautiously, she raises a hand and daintily waggles her fingers at him; just as cautiously, he raises his unoccupied hand and waves. Then, with a shy smile, Ryn raises her finger to her lips, and once again, the little kiddo imitates her. Finally, they exchange farewell waves before Ryn takes your arm and steers you out of the crowd.

What was that all about?

"I didn't want to make a big scene," she says bashfully. "But... you know... it was kind of cute to be able to say hi."

After a fashion, anyway. If she keeps up with this queen thing, she'll need to do a lot more meeting and greeting than just that.

"You mean, with the negotiations and everything? Yes, I know. But being the center of attention in a crowd really isn't my style." Ryn grimaces ruefully. "Well, not yet."

Center of attention or no, you certainly enjoyed wandering the marketplace with her.

Ryn opens her mouth to respond, but a low rumble from her tummy interrupts her. "Um. Well! I had fun, too, but I think it's probably a good time to get something to eat."

You couldn't agree more.

{//first time:

Ryn, however, is a bit distracted from the show; a few feet away, a little elf-boy — looking as young as five, not that that means the same thing to the boer'alvar — stares at her as he holds his father's hand. "Hey, there, little guy," she murmurs, leaning down with her hands on her knees. "What's your name?"

Both the blue-skinned kiddo and his father have eyes the size of dinner plates now, but instead of making a scene, the dad nudges his son. "Can you tell the... nice lady your name?" The son shakes his head mutely, eyes still locked on Ryn, and the father lets out a tolerant sigh. "His name's Del, m... ma'am. Delanel."

And he himself is...?

"Findis, ma'am. It's, ah, it's an honor."

"It's okay to be shy, Del," Ryn offers. "I used to be extra-shy, too." She glances over at the smith meaningfully. "Do you like watching her work?"

Del nods silently. "Every time we have to buy from here," his father adds, "he'll just stand and watch her as long as he can. You want to try it for yourself, don't you, kiddo?" That gets a nervous, jerky nod from Del.

As a parent, how does *he* feel about that?

Findis grins. "Smithing's better than what I do for a living."

"It's a pretty good job," Ryn agrees. "I know *{met Rags: a few orcs who're really good at it. Just like this lady, they're big and strong, they love what they do, and you're going to have to work hard to be just like them! else: an orcish smith who's really good at it. He's a little small for an orc, but he really gives it his all. If you work as hard as he does, you'll turn out to be a great smith, too!}*" She kneels down in front of Del and gently touches his arm. "And when you do, maybe you can sell what you make to me or my children. How does that sound?"

Little Del smiles despite himself as he nods vigorously.

"Thanks for that," his father says. "I... um, Your —"

Ryn straightens up and lifts a coy finger to her lip. "You don't have to say anything. Thank *you*... thank you both. Lumia bless you. Come on, [pc.name]."

After a few dozen feet of walking, she blows out the breath she was holding. "Gods, that was hard."

Maybe so, but it was also pretty awesome.

"Thanks. I don't know if I have the energy to do that with everyone I meet — at least, not yet — but yeah. It was good." She wipes a thin layer of sweat off her brow.

By the way, what was that about her children?

[pc.hasVag

"W-what?" Ryn jumps slightly, her mask of composure slipping. "I just — I — I mean, queens have to — and you —" She swallows. "Uh, I-let's just get something to eat."

"I wouldn't be a very good queen if I *didn't* have heirs," Ryn says evenly. "But they're a long way off. Anyway, I don't know about you, but I'm pretty hungry. Let's see if we can find some food."

]

//repeat:

The pair of you see little Del and his dad Findis in the mass of spectating elves, and you wave them out of the crowd for a little small talk. Now that the kiddo's familiar with you, he's happy to open up about all kinds of things, chattering about the new hammer the smith's using, and how he's learning to read, and how much hard work it was to dig their way out of the house after the last big snowfall. Then, he insists on playing "I Spy" with you, and the four of you pass several minutes finding the things that the eagle-eyed boy notices in the marketplace. When it comes to your turn, all the elves laugh hysterically when you inform them that you spy with your little eye something... white.

When it finally comes time for you to part ways, Ryn makes sure to give the little guy a big ol' hug before leaving.

As you walk off in the direction of some food, you give her a little nudge. She really likes spending time with kids, huh?

"Yeah," she says dreamily, as her eyes mist over a little. "Kids — everyone's kids — deserve all the love you can give them." She blinks a few times. "A-anyway. Let's go get some food."

}

]

[Get a Bite to Eat]

Play in the Snow

Fat, wet snowflakes fall thickly from the slate-gray sky as you and Ryn walk down the Winter City's main thoroughfare. It's a heavy snow, if not a hard one, sending even the city's native boreal elf population running for temporary cover. The sounds of a waking community recede into the white shroud that falls silently onto pavestones and houses alike, and already you can see drifts forming that you hadn't noticed on your way into the palace. With most of the city retreating under its roofs, the normal pastime activities aren't available to you. Instead, wading ankle-deep, Ryn guides you down a side street, past normal elven houses and homes, all wood and stone, chimneys belching fragrant woodsmoke to hint at the warmth of their hidden inhabitants.

What might have been eerie under other circumstances is peaceful and idyllic. The silent snowfall doesn't cut you off completely from the multitude in the city; they're still all there, and you can see signs of life in the flicker of firelight through windows and in the occasional passerby. But the relative solitude leaves you feeling something close to privacy despite the public nature of the space you traverse. You and Ryn pass quietly through the streets, separated from everyone else by a semipermeable bubble that neither of you has any interest in popping.

By the time Ryn leads you to your destination, a small open space at the T-juncture of two roads, the snow's nearly up to your knees and shows no sign of abating. There's no sign from any of the stave-built homes around you to show you why you're here.

"Well," says Ryn when you prompt her, "it's... hmm. I don't think I can explain this quickly.

"For one thing, the houses are pretty nice. They've been built and rebuilt a dozen times over, so there's not much original decoration on the outsides, but on the insides... if we looked through their windows, we'd be able to see absolutely ancient druid-cut wooden furniture, homely stone hearths etched with Lumian reliefs going back to Grandmother's reign, and, well..." She sighs. "Happy families."

Ah.

"One of the times that the guards caught me was when I was looking through that window, right over there. They had to drag me back to the palace, and when Alissa saw me, she... she..."

You lay a hand on Ryn's shoulder. [pc.isDK
 |There's no use in her reliving the past.
 |She doesn't have to say anything else.
]

Ryn closes her eyes and takes a deep breath before continuing. "Anyway, I thought that maybe, now that I'm free from her, I can make good memories to write over the bad ones. Maybe I can remember spending time with [etheryn.highConfidence
 |someone I love
 |a friend
] instead of one of the worst days of my life." [pc.isChamp
 |

You can't help but pull her into a cheery, tight-squeezing hug. It'll be a happy memory for <i>both</i> of you when you're done.
 | She stands there awkwardly for a few seconds, then grabs you in a ferociously needy hug.

Yeah, yeah. Okay, if that's what she wants out of this.
]

When you separate, Ryn bends down and scoops up a handful of the white stuff. [silly
 |"In that case, [pc.name], do you want to build a — no, sorry, I can't finish that question. You... you know what we're going to do. Please don't sing."
 |"Well, then! I don't know what it's like where you're from, [pc.name], but up here we know how to play in the snow!"

] She packs it down into a tight clump, adding more and more material, until she's got a chunk large enough to serve as the nucleus for a snowman. "Let's make this a little bigger..."

The pair of you set to work with a will, mounding snow into huge balls that you stack, one on the other. But no simple design will do for the two of you — not with all the frost magic at your fingertips. [pc.isMage

|Using the formless pillar of snow as a base, you and Ryn carefully pack and mold everything, blowing magical frost-breath onto shaped limbs and facial features in relief to make sure that they keep their shape.

|You work in tandem, shaping clothes and facial features in relief so that Ryn can freeze in place with a magical breath. Then you do the same for the snow-being's limbs, making a sculpture with the precision of carved ice rather than snow.

] By mutual consent, the snow-being is to be an elf, and your last and most difficult task is to give it big boreal ears. Ryn bounces with joy to see the final product, a work of art that, if not quite up to the statuary of Old Belhar, at least puts the traditional sort of snowman to shame.

Content with a job well done, your elven companion lets herself topple over backward into a snowdrift. You're not quite as oblivious to the cold as she is, though, and stay standing, rubbing your arms as you gaze upon your masterwork. [etheryn.InhConfidence

|But gradually, an inchoate idea takes shape in your mind. You bend down and scrape up another handful of snow.

Ryn pokes her head out of the drift inquisitively. "Did you want to make another one, [pc.name]?"

Not quite. Say, do frost elves do anything else when they play in the snow?

"W-what do you mean?"

Smirking, you juggle your newly-formed missile in your hand.

Her sapphire eyes widen to the size of saucers. "A... a snowball fight?"

It's only a fight if she fights <i>back</i>.

"But I — aapff!" she splutters through the fresh coat of snow on her face.

|It's definitely beautiful, but there's something that's just <i>too</i> idyllic about this whole scene. Your eyes slide away from the snow-elf down to the real elf lying in the snowdrift... and notice that she's doing the same thing to you.

"So, [pc.name]," she says, as a smile spreads across her face, "do you do anything else with snow in the south?"

You both scramble for powder, hurriedly forming your handfuls of snow into clumps heavy enough to toss, and hit the mark at just the same time.

|Really, you and Ryn made this thing look gorgeous. You wonder if there's anyth —
<i>whap</i>.

You whirl around, rubbing the back of your head, to see Ryn sitting up in her snowdrift, grinning as she packs another clump of snow together.

[pc.isDK

|Hey, what the fuck?

|H-hey, no fair!

]

The {*//coronation: elvenqueen //else: elf-princess*}s smile only grows. "I thought you wanted to have fun in the snow, [pc.name]..."

Oh, it's <i>on</i>[silly

| like Donkey Kong

] now.

]

Peals of laughter ring out as you barrage each other with snow, hurling handful after handful at close range until your fronts are both coated in white. Ryn's the first to retreat under fire, falling back behind a drift that she quickly starts packing down into a proper fort. Once you notice that your snow's only splattering uselessly against her rising ramparts, you do the same, taking cover and raising your own fortifications. Behind your hastily-erected walls, you conduct trench warfare, carefully aiming every snow-shot at Ryn every time you see a peek above the parapet. Her ears put her at a marked disadvantage in stealth, but she makes up for it with sheer archer's aim, planting shot after deadeye shot exactly on target at every opportunity.

[party.has atugia

|Soon, the two of you abandon your original snow forts and move from cover to cover as you seek an advantage. Ryn shifts right, building a new wall next to your snow-elf, and hurls fresh snowballs right into your unprotected flank. You move to counter, hastily throwing up a new wall further to the left.

Absorbed as she is in the running battle, Ryn doesn't notice the small, shadowy figure that materializes out of the thick, white shroud behind her. It's Atugia, who waves at you cheerfully as she struggles through snow up to her waist. But then she notices Ryn, only a dozen feet away yet still totally oblivious to her presence, and a devilish smirk spreads across the little dullahan's face. She bends down, quietly gathering a whole armful of powder. Then, with nary a sound, Tui shuffles through the snow and dumps the whole load directly on top of Ryn's head.

{//first time with Tui:

"Aaaah!" Your elven companion's reflexes are top-notch — but maybe a little too hair-trigger. She whirls around without looking and shoves a very surprised Tui aside... toppling her directly into the fragile, magic-formed snow-elf, which immediately disintegrates into a cloud of white.

Ryn's hands fly to her face. "Sorrrysorrrysorry!" She scrambles to sit Atugia upright as you rush out from behind your fortress to join them, your winter war forgotten.

"Oof," the dullahan says woozily. "You've got an arm and a half, Ryn. I'm lucky my head didn't pop off!"

Is she okay?

"Price of admission for the prank," she grunts. "Sorry about the snow elf, though. Looked like you two put some time into it."

[etheryn.lowConfidence

|"Y-yeah," Ryn says dejectedly. "It was all my fault it got destroyed, though."

"Nah, don't worry about it. It was kinda my fault, too." The dullahan pats Ryn's arm. "Hey, next time I might just help you out with the sculpture, instead.

|"I'm just glad you're okay. Besides, nothing lasts forever." Ryn smiles. "Maybe you can work on the next one with us."

Tui chuckles. "I think I'd like that.

] But I'm all funned out for now. Don't know about you, but I'm feelin' pretty hungry, and now that the snow's lettin' up a bit, might be a good time to grab some grub."

You were thinking the same. Is she okay to walk?

"Me? Yeah, sure. You two go have your little meet-cute, and I'll do my own thing." Atugia dusts herself off and grins. "I'll see you when I see you."

//subsequent times with Tui:

Ryn's seen this particular trick before, though, and she knows exactly what to do: scoop up her own armful of snow to shove at Tui. The pair of them thoroughly dust each other at point-blank range, laughing hysterically as they shove unpacked powder at each other with no thought save chaos. All tactics and strategy forgotten, you abandon your post to join in for a few minutes, and by the

time you're done, all three of you could pose reasonably well for snow-beings like the elf you made earlier.

The three of you are leaning on Ryn's abandoned fortifications, letting the giggles pass, when Atugia clears her throat. "You know, last time, didn't I say somethin' about helpin' you out with those snow-creatures?"

She certainly did.

Ryn claps. "Oh, that sounds like a great idea! Let's make some more!"

Once again, you set to work, adding a pair of fresh snow-beings to stand next to the elf. [rand

|It might be a little too cutesy, but the three of you can't help it: the other two are to be a dullahan and [a] [pc.race], of course.

|Slowly, a goblin and a lupine take shape — although by common agreement, the three of you don't spend much time on the lupine's fur.

|This time, it's to be a pair of beefy brawlers: an orc and a minotaur.

] You and Tui mound snow upon snow, drawing features into your sculptures to be finished by Ryn, and eventually all three of your creations stand together, completely finished and pretty as anything.

The little dullahan looks up at them with her hands on her hips. "Damn. These are great. But... hmm... I think they're missin' a little somethin'."

What's that?

"Well, you remember what happened last time?"

Oh, right.

Having spent all that time putting the snow-beings together, the three of you hesitate for a few seconds, but soon enough raw nihilistic fun takes hold of you and you stampede into the sculptures' midst, clotheslining and shoving and stomping and laughing delightedly as you reduce them to nothingness.

Clutching her sides, Atugia looks up at the pair of you. "That was somethin' else, you two. You really do know how to have fun in the snow up here! I think I'm done for now, but we should do this again later."

"That sounds great!" Ryn chirps.

"I think I'll leave you be, get some food. Have fun on the rest of your date, and see you when I see you!"

}

]As the snow piles up, you and Ryn each devise new tactics to try to get an edge over the other: moving cover to cover behind newly formed snowdrifts, extending the length of your fortifications, employing trickery and misdirection. [pc.bg hunter

|It becomes a real game of cat and mouse as the two of you draw on all your stalker's experience to catch the other out. Those who hunt the most dangerous game play for keeps, after all — even if the consequence of a slip-up is really just a faceful of snow.

|Much of that misdirection goes to waste, though, as shouts of triumph and uncontrollable laughter give away both of your positions as often as telltale glimpses over the snowy parapets.

] It takes a long time for you to tire of the game, but eventually the snow lets up and your energy goes down, and the two of you end up leaning against your snow forts, laughing tiredly, ready to call it a draw.

Etheryn walks over to your castle and flops down against its outer wall. "Oh, Lumia, that was great! I haven't laughed this hard in a long time." She gazes up at you meaningfully. "I'm going to keep this memory forever, [pc.name]."

Hey, so are you. Leaning over the wall, you take hold of the tips of both of her big, sensitive ears, gently rubbing them with your thumb and forefinger.

She shudders happily and melts back into the snow. "Ohhh, [pc.name]... that feels... ohhhhh..."

There, there. Now, <i>that</i> is how you felt about your little snow adventure with her. You offer a hand and pull her up into a standing hug, [etheryn.highConfidence

|receiving a sweet kiss on the cheek in return

|one that she returns as vigorously as she can

]. The two of you should do this sort of thing more often.

"Yeah!... but for now, we should probably get something to eat. I don't know about you, but all that fun made me awfully tired and hungry."

That sounds good to you.

]

[Get a Bite to Eat]

Get a Bite To Eat

//TT: You're famished! Go take Ryn out for some traditional elven grub.

//One of these three options will appear randomly.

//About 90 minutes should elapse for this page.

//Maybe add a small cost in EC to this? I dunno, don't really care much either way.

//Random Option 1: Enjoy some hot sausage and make some goofy puns. Brint and Brienne appear in the background of this scene if they are in the active party.

//Random Option 2: Try the adventurous route with some Scandinavian — er, elven — ichthyoculture. Cait and Quin appear in the background of this scene if they are in the active party.

//Random Option 3: The return of the druids has meant easier access to Frostwood peat! Splurge on roast duck and chase it down with some peated whisky. Arona and Berwyn appear in the background of this scene if they are in the active party.

Sausage Vendor

Lumia's light peeks through the clouds as you head for the food stalls ringing the market square. Now that the snowfall is no more than a light dusting, the plaza is jam-packed with elves wandering to and fro in search of food. You and Ryn join them, angling through the crowd in the direction of the meat curers and smokers.

"One of the few things we still do in the Frostwood is hunt for game — even if only on the edges of the forest," Ryn tells you. "All our huntresses have to have something to do, after all. Between the outer woods and the glaciers, they do pretty well. Even Alissa would go out on the hunt with them to show off her skills. It's one of those things that warrior queens are supposed to do, after all, and unlike the rest of her duties, she thought it was fun."{//met Harrick:

Ryn's not so bad at it herself. If elvenqueens are traditionally expected to hunt, well, she and Harrick will do great.

She looks up to the heavens, where her hawk circles idly amid the sprinkling flakes, and smiles. "Thank you! We make a pretty good team."}

You pass a venison vendor with racks and racks of deer jerky and steaks [party.has brint
|under intent examination by Brint; the big minotaur notices you passing by, waves
amiably, and returns to his meats.
|giving off wonderfully enticing aromas.

] Next is a stand with all manner of poached and plucked game birds: arctic ducks, quail, ptarmigan, and grouse. The crowds are even denser here, as hungry elves gather around the stalls to drop a few hawks on an easy meal, and you and Ryn have to work to squeeze by; even if she could probably clear a path by just announcing herself to the crowd, she's much too [etheryn.lowConfidence

|shy

|considerate
] to disrupt everybody else.

[party.has brienne

|Above the rest of the madding crowd, you spy a familiar pair of horns amid flowing blonde locks, and soon Brienne herself comes bounding over to smoosh you both into a huge hug. "Heyyy, you two! Ohhh, you look adorable together! How's the date going?"

Ryn beams at her. "It's great, Brienne! [pc.name] and I were just going to pick up a bite to eat. What've you been up to?"

"Oh, this and that," the bovine brawler says vaguely. "It's been really cold today, with all the snow and everything. I'm no northern minogirl, so I had to warm myself up, and there's this great sausage vendor just up the way that serves 'em piping hot!"[pc.hasRealCock

|

Hey, what's wrong with <i>your</i> sausage?

"Your sausage isn't food, ya goof," she titters.

]

Well, that sounds like as good a place to rustle up some grub as any.

"I definitely recommend it!" Brienne gives her [brienne.belly] an exaggerated rub.

"Anyway, I don't wanna mess up your romantic meal, so I'll get going. Have fun, you two!"

|Ryn hops up to get a better view over the sea of taller elves, then points to a cluster of elves a few stalls away. "It looks like there's a vendor smoking sausages over there. How would you feel about something nice and warm?"

Yeah, you could absolutely kill some hot food right now.

]

Soon you find yourselves standing in the crowd at the stand, persistently — if gently — pushing forward every time a customer leaves with their food. [silly

|These bloody elves can't be arsed to queue, can they? They're just bumbling about all over the place worse than Americans.

|Even if there's no line, the customers all seem pretty agreeable, chatting amongst themselves to ensure that those waiting longest are served first.

] Naturally, this means that some people notice you and Ryn standing around waiting for food, and <i>that</i> raises an immediate hubbub; warm food is temporarily forgotten in the presence of their monarch. Ryn [etheryn.lowConfidence

|frantically

|valiantly

] attempts to address the multitude of concerns from those awestruck, those irritated, those praising, and those mildly annoyed at the disruption.[etheryn.highConfidence

| On the bright side, most of the reactions seem relatively positive.

] She struggles with all the attention, straining what royal presence and poise she has to the limit, but eventually you manage to take advantage of everybody's distraction to procure two smoked sausages, placate most of the crowd, and make your escape.

You end up in the middle of the square, sitting next to the {//completed Inheritor of the Idols: fountain that doubles as your entrance to the Ways Between //else: fountain of the busty elven maiden with ice-water pouring from her tits}. The throng's not nearly so dense here, away from the stalls and storefronts on the edge of the plaza; househusbands give their tired feet a break as their children play in the open, while[etheryn.highConfidence

| other

] couples lean against each other, hand in hand.

Now that you're once again ensconced in a relatively idyllic part of the marketplace, you settle down to enjoy the meal. Ryn digs out a hunter's knife and shares it with you as you each carve off slices of sausage[etheryn.highConfidence

| for the other to enjoy

]. The meat's still nice and hot, spurting bubbles of thick fat into your mouth with every gristly crunch. There's something else in the casing, along with the meat and gristle: potato chunks, from the taste of them, possibly with some kind of seasoning. You savor every bite, letting the sausage warm your mouth and sit on your tongue before washing it down with sips from your water-skin.

Braving the crowd for something as tasty as this was definitely worth it.

[etheryn.InhConfidence

"I'm glad you think so, [pc.name]," Ryn says with a shiver. "That was... overwhelming, but yes. Worth it.

[Ryn nods. "I think so, too. I know I don't do well in crowds, but at least it's calmer now, and the sausage is pretty good.

"Definitely. Dealing with everybody was a little difficult, but I'm going to have to keep getting better at maintaining my composure if I'm going to be a good queen!" Ryn swallows another bite. "And it is a tasty sausage.

] Sometime I'll have to show you what else we can do with ground meat... when I was younger, the palace meatballs were some of the best things I ever tasted!"

At her whistle, {//met Harrick: Harrick //else: her hawk} streaks down from the heavens to join you. "It wouldn't be great to feed him this," Ryn mentions as she stuffs another hunk of sausage into her mouth, "mmm... but he deserves a little something so he doesn't feel left out." {//met Harrick: As usual, she //else: She} flicks a strip of jerky at him, and he fields it with his beak like

a pro, holding it to the ground with his talons so he can tear away pieces small enough to fit in his mouth. "Hee hee. You're such a good little guy."

As you eat, the mealtime rush dies down. Elves start to linger in front of stores and stands again. With less helter-skelter bustle to occupy your senses, you relax and take note of other things: the calm, endless trickle of water from the fountain of the elven maiden; a small procession of women singing [pc.bg acolyte

|a well-known Lumian hymn about the goddess' divine sunbeams reaching over the mountains

|a mellifluous religious piece

] as they make their way to the Dawn Maiden's cathedral; the hammering of the bronzesmiths; the murmurs of idle conversation. [pc.isChamp

|It's pleasant to have the reminder that, despite everything, people still get to have normal lives. Hopefully you can make sure that it stays that way. Besides, where else are you going to get a sausage like this?[silly

|

You know, apart from Kas. Or Brint. Or Berry. Or Quin. Or Arona. Or Garr— fuck it, never mind.

]

|These people are hopeless, oblivious fools, desperately trying to shut out the apocalypse happening around them. At least they make decent food.

]

Eventually, though, your hot little meal is finished. Sated for now, the pair of you relax into each other, arm in arm and head against shoulder, and enjoy watching the bustle of the unseeing crowd. [etheryn.InhConfidence

|Too shy — and overwhelmed by social interaction — to say anything other than a quiet thank you, Ryn hums softly as she snuggles up against you.

Well, you had a great time, too.

|"You're right, [pc.name]," Ryn says cheerfully. "This was a great idea. I'm glad I could just get away from it all for a while and be with my friend."

So are you.

|Ryn turns to plant a kiss on your cheek. "You really know how to make me feel special, [pc.name]. Did you have fun, too?"

With her to show you around? You absolutely did.

]

[etheryn.libidoRange 25

|[etheryn.isCaged

"Well, if you liked it so much," she continues, "we can keep our little adventure going even **after** we get back to the palace..."

What a tempting suggestion.

"I did notice one thing, though." She turns to face you, eyes twinkling mischievously. [pc.hasRealCock

"You really liked our northern sausage... but you haven't offered me a taste of southern sausage yet."

[pc.isBimbo

|Oooh! Is she talking about your dick? Because it, um, it tastes good?

|Come to think of it, that *<i>is</i>* quite the oversight. You might need to remedy it in a more intimate setting.

]

"Mmmhmm." Ryn giggles. "Well, anyway, give it a little thought."

"It looks to me like you've developed a taste for, um, boreal elven sausage."

[pc.isBimbo

|Like, does she mean her cock? Because... hee hee... you do like the way it tastes.

|Mmm. Maybe you have.

]

"We might be done with our day **out**," she adds, "but I'm sure we could keep it going indoors..."

]

]

"I'll have to think of something else fun to do for next time, then!" She wiggles happily. "It's a shame we can't just stay out here all day..."

Indeed. Then again, maybe you could continue this little date in a more, ah, private setting.

]

You think it over on the walk back up to the palace and, once Ryn has resumed her place on the throne, you have your answer.

[Sex] [Finish]

Fish Market

Your nostrils flare at the stench of the Winter City's daily catch. A whole corner of the great market square is devoted to the bounty of the sea, where hoarse-voiced trawlers hawk every kind of fish imaginable to crowds of elves seeking ingredients for their evening meal. You and Ryn skirt the edges of the throng in search of a more prepared meal, but as you pass by, you notice the other purpose of the fish market: gossip. The appellation 'fishwife' — although in the Winter City, half or more are really 'fishhusbands', and many of the rest are half-sexed — has never seemed more appropriate as you watch elves idle in line yammering on about their neighbors, the prices, the druids, and the recent political upheaval.

Between the raucous calls of the fishmongers and the animated discussions of their customers, nobody really notices the two of you. Ryn, however, definitely notices *them*; you can see her big ol' ears twitch every time she catches part of a political discussion.

[etheryn.lowConfidence

|The poor thing blushes furiously to hear her actions under such intense scrutiny, even if, as far as you can tell and given your limited understanding, there's little strident criticism of her reign so far.

|She frowns in concentration as she tries to pick up what political intelligence she can from the snippets of conversation.

] But the market talk notwithstanding, you maintain a brisk pace, moving quickly to avoid the public eye.

[party.has cait

|In fact, the only person who *does* notice you is Cait, who waves excitedly from the other side of a wagon piled high with fresh-caught cod. You and Ryn round it for privacy, and as soon as you do, the kitty priestess gives you both a big hug.

{//first time with Cait:

"Oh, Mallach, I never knew you had so much **fish** here!" she titters. "I might just stay here and never go back to Hawkethorne. It's just like the markets back home in Jassira!"

"**I** never knew that you liked it so much!" giggles Ryn. "We're really proud of all the ways we prepare fish. Did you try the little balls that we make out of mince, eggs, flour, and milk?"

Cait nods. "Mmm, they came with some shrimp and tasted **amazing**."

"Oh, if you liked them, you're going to love all of the other ways that we prepare fish! There's the one where we ferment it and then leave it to hang out to dry for

months, there's the one where we bury it in the ground, there's salt-cure, pickling —"

"Pickling!" Your catgirl friend grabs Ryn by both shoulders. "No. Way."

"Yeah, we pickle a lot of fish, especially herring. It's one of my favorite things ever, especially when it's served with this wonderful marinade. You didn't smell it?"

"Mrrr..." Cait bites her lip. "{//leocait OR thicc cait: Okay, you sold me — not that that takes much doing! I've still got plenty of room, after all. //else: I really shouldn't, but I have such a weakness for fishy dishies... I'll see if I can find a place that sells it. Just for, umm, you know, future reference!} But enough about me. How's the big date going?"

//repeat with Cait:

"It's so good to see you guyys!" she squeals. "Oh, you should never leave me alone in this fish market. It's just too much! I tried some of the herring... and some of that smoked stuff... and some of the fermented shark... oh, Mallach, if only it didn't take so long to prepare fish the elven way, I'd be able to have it on my own all the time!"

Well, the boreal elven merchants are probably very happy to take her business. If she sticks around, they might even start giving her discounts.

The kitty flutters her eyelashes coquettishly, placing her hand to her chest in mock outrage. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean. Th-that would be an... abuse of my priestly authority, [pc.name]!"

You meant it as more of a repeat customer thing, but if that's where she wants to take it...

"Oh! Right." Cait clears her throat. "Anyway, how's the big romantic date?"

}

[etheryn.InhConfidence

|Ryn smiles shyly. "It's... it's the most fun I've had in a long time."

"Awww! That's sweet.

"|It's nice! Very relaxing." Your elven companion beams. "We're making some wonderful memories."

"Hee hee, you guys are so cute. I'm glad it's going well.

|[etheryn.libidoRange 50

|Instead of responding, Ryn [pc.heightRange 70

]hops up into your arms and plants a big kiss directly on your [pc.lipsChaste], letting you hold her aloft for several decadent seconds before dropping back to the ground again.
]leans over and kisses you deeply, dragging it out as long as either of you dare before turning back to Cait with a proud smile.

]

[You and Ryn share a meaningful glance. "It's... it's magical," she says warmly. "I'm just so lucky to be able to spend time with a [pc.manWoman] like [pc.himHer]."

She's made it magical for the both of you. You'll always treasure these moments with her.

]

Cait claps gleefully. "You two are the most romantic dorks ever and I love it!

] Anyway, don't mind me!" The pretty kitty waves over her shoulder as she turns to leave. "You just keep enjoying yourselves, and I'll see you later!"
]As you walk, the fish-smell becomes overpowering, and to take your mind off it, you turn to Ryn. So, where does all this fish come from? And what looks good?

"There is an awful lot here, isn't there? Fish is the every-elf's meal: it's abundant and cheap. I know we're not right on the sea, but we're not that far away from it, either, and it's cold enough here to make sure that the fish keeps until it gets from boat to market. And as for varieties? Almost anything you can imagine! We get cod, haddock, herring, salmon, ling, pollock, all kinds of shellfish and crustaceans..."

You understand. In a colder climate like this, fish would naturally make up a pretty big proportion of one's diet. It's not like there's much space for boreal elves to keep large herds of stock or grow vast fields of grain.

"Right! We can grow a little cold-weather rye and barley on the edges of the Frostwood — that's where the bread comes from — but up here, it's mostly game and fish. And that means we have to get really creative with the way we prepare our food. We ferment it, we bury it in the ground, we hang it out to dry for months, we make dumplings out of it, we salt it... and my favorite: we pickle it!" Ryn half-closes her sapphire eyes. "Mmm... I could really, really have some pickled herring right now..."

That's a pretty heartfelt recommendation. Who makes the best pickled herring, then?

"I have no idea!" she laughs. "Let's find out."

]

The isolated elves of the Winter City don't get enough visitors to make inns profitable. But they do have some things vaguely akin to them, namely: indoor public houses to provide the urban laborers around the market square with some cheap grub, along with shelter from the worst blizzards. {//repeat: You pick a different venue from last time, not so much from dissatisfaction as from your ongoing quest for the best herring joint in the city.} Subsiding snowfall has partially emptied the place of its customers, [etheryn.highConfidence

|but when the two of you queue to order, it causes a stir all the same, with Ryn briefly mobbed by its multicolored clientele. With all the placating and thanking that the two of you have to do, it takes several minutes before you can finally buy your food and head for a quiet corner to try it out. All told, you've got a pair of ceramic cups with some kind of weird-smelling liquor in them, plus the herring, with bread, butter, and a hard cheese on the side.

|but Ryn's still feeling a bit skittish. While she quietly keeps your table in an out-of-the-way corner, you brave the line, sandwiched between boisterous frost elves with a middling command of heavily-accented Belharan. At one point, you make the mistake of actually introducing yourself, and end up buried in a sea of backslapping amazons and elf-men, all calling out "Shampion!" and raving in boer'alvarin about... well, probably about whatever rumors have made it into the city since your battle in the Palace. It takes several minutes for you to finally reach the half-sexed vendor, who leans on her wooden counter with a faintly amused expression on her face, and negotiate for a meal of bread, butter, cheese, herring, and some very cheap liquor.

]

Ryn perks up once you're safely ensconced in the corner with your food. "Okay! First comes the liquor. Now, you don't want to shoot this."

Really? It's in the right kind of little cup and everything.

"No, don't! We sip it slowly, over the course of the meal." She raises her cup to yours. "[silly
|Skål!
|Tal'asha!

]"

The liquor's — oof, it's fucking <i>hard</i>, but not bad-tasting; weirdly, it reminds you of elven bread. Then, at Ryn's recommendation, you taste a fragment of the herring. It's firm, easy to bite through, with a sort of vinegary taste. As fish, it's pretty good, not too overwhelming, and extremely salty. Ryn beams to see your smile of approval as you chew, and pushes more ingredients at you, mixing and sequencing the bread, butter, liquor, and cheese to push your tongue into a whirlwind of new taste sensations.

Your dinnermate keeps pace with you in both food and drink, but she starts developing a rosy blush before her liquor cup's halfway gone, and you can't help but bring it up. At first, Ryn's eyes widen, but then she lets out a delayed "Whaaaaaat? Nooooooooo!" that she only barely finishes

before collapsing into helpless giggles. When they subside, she continues, "[pc.name], I grew up in the palace. I don't drink much hard liquor."

And when she does, she doesn't drink much.

She leans forward. "Right."

So all that stuff about sipping it slowly...

"It's true! It tastes better this way. Well, it tastes... something."

Okay. Well, if that's the case, she's going to need to have a little more bread.

"Yes!"

Some time later, you and Ryn lean against the back wall of the establishment, gazing idly at your empty plates. The highlights of a commoner's meal are that it must be cheap and filling, and this herring serviced both ambitions quite nicely. Happy with your choice, you sit back, rub your [pc.belly], and sip from your waterskin to wash out some of the taste of fish and liquor.

Ryn, slightly less flushed than before, yawns and stretches in her seat. "I... I... aaahhhmmm. I told you it was good, right?" she mumbles sleepily.

She certainly did, and she was completely right. As far as {*//first time: new //else: boer'alvarin*} foods go, this one hit the mark, and it made for a lovely capstone to your fun trip to the city.

"I'm glad you think so. You're the one who makes it all special, you know. For me."

What an astonishing coincidence. You were about to say the exact same thing.

"Well," she says, "that makes me happy, too." [etheryn.highConfidence
 |With that, her lips meet yours in a tender, drawn-out kiss.
 |Shy though she normally is, Ryn's buzzed enough to lean over and give you a quick, unprompted peck on the cheek.
]

When she pulls away, she notices your unfocused eyes and frowns. "Something wrong, [pc.name]?"

No, nothing.[pc.isChamp
 | Nothing could *<i>ever</i>* be wrong.

] That was just the right way to end this little trip. It's just that... given her current semi-ebriated state, Her {*//coronation: Majesty //else: Highness*} is probably going to need a steadfast and doughty escort back to the palace.

"Mmm, I will," she agrees. "I think that my Champion would be perfect for that role.[etheryn.libidoRange 25

| Maybe I should even reward [pc.himHer] for [pc.hisHer] help when we return..."

[pc.isBimbo

|Ooooh, does that mean cummies? You'll work extra-extra-hard for those!

|You promise to take that under very serious consideration.

]

[party.has quin

|You and Ryn manage to keep to a more or less straight path as you make your way out of the fish market and back toward the palace, but you're still unsteady enough for others to notice — like Quin, relaxing with his book by the fountain. The bunny-boy chuckles and shakes his head, throwing you an approving thumbs-up before returning to his reading.

|The walk back passes uneventfully, apart from the both of you getting your sea legs back; it hadn't <i>really</i> been that much alcohol, after all. You weren't drunk. You were just tipsy. Weren't you?

]

As you walk arm in arm, you ponder whether to call it a day here or to abscond with your {/coronation: queen //else: princess} to her chambers, and by the time you reach the throne room, you have an answer.

|" She rises, more or less steadily, and holds out her hand for you.

Still feeling the effects of the booze, you shakily make your way out of the fish market.[party.has quin

| Naturally, Quin happens to be relaxing with his book near the fountain and sees you and Ryn as you push through the plaza crowd on rubbery legs; he laughs knowingly and throws you a joking salute before returning to his reading.

] You both manage to regain your equilibrium on the walk back to the palace, and as you do, you consider whether your little date has to be quite over just yet. You're sure that Ryn wouldn't mind a more, ah, explosive ending to your little meet-cute. Should you bring it up when you return to the throne room?

]

[Sex] [Finish]

Turf-Cooked Meal

With the white shroud lifting as the heavy snow abates, the whole of the Winter City marketplace is open to you. Crowds swell in front of the street food vendors and eating establishments as elves, hungry as you are, seek out their next meal. From here, you have a

clear view of the elf-maiden fountain, the long thoroughfare down to the gated walls, the workmen busily expanding the fortified perimeter, the tips of the Frostwood's trees, and, far in the distance, the foothills rising to mountains.

The normal hubbub of the plaza dies down as a small procession makes its way through the square. Elven pedestrians clear away as ten elves on wargs slowly pad in the direction of the gate. Four of them, the two in front and the two behind, are clad in the gear of the royal guard, but the other six wear much simpler, wilder outfits — outfits that draw silent stares as they pass the marketgoers.

"The daily druid trade mission," Ryn whispers to you. "It's been, um, interesting trying to manage things so that they have access to what they need without antagonizing everybody." She surveys the scene. "I... well, I don't know that we've quite gotten there yet. Believe it or not, the guards are there to protect the druids, not the crowd."

The silence is pretty eerie, true, but at least nobody's yelling, let alone fighting. From what you've learned about the grudges the boer'alvar can hold, that's quite the accomplishment.

"I guess so. Hopefully this is just temporary... and hopefully it gets better, rather than getting worse. With Kasyrra and Alissa's depredations fresh in everyone's mind, a lot more people are thinking about unity than they normally would be. If that memory wears off, and we still haven't managed to come together more as a people..." She sighs. [etheryn.InhConfidence

|"I'm not the kind of person who can lead us through that. I don't know what to do."

|"My nerves are shot just thinking about it."

|"It's a pretty powerful incentive to keep working as hard as I can to make sure everything goes smoothly."

]

At least she knows it's not just her: El, Hethia, and plenty of other elves want unity, too. The problems in their way are real, but the commitment to solve them is just as real.

"I hope you're right." Ryn gives you a one-armed hug and pulls herself in close — close enough for you to hear her little tummy rumble.

So, yeah, about the original reason you were wandering the market square.

"Yes! Let's get some food." She pauses. "Hmm. I wonder if the druids' trading partners are selling any."

Would they?

"Sure. After all, that's one of the reasons they're buying from us: food supplies in the Frostwood and Old Forest are a bit less secure with all the chaos down south, and some of the druids are

further away from their normal haunts anyway as the negotiations draw them closer to the city. Let's retrace their steps and see what we can find!"

[party.has berwyn

|As you follow the track of the druid delegation, you pass street vendors hawking fresh bread — and Berwyn, leaning against a building as he munches on something wrapped up in paper. You veer over to meet the little pup and exchange greetings, asking what he's found for himself.

"This? Oh, it's just a cheesy bread. Rye, I think? It's still hot, and it's actually really good."

It certainly looks it — his fluffy white tail won't stop wagging.

"Yeah, okay," he snorts, but then his expression softens. "Anyway, it tastes good, and I'm enjoying myself. What about you two?"

Ryn smiles. "Oh, we've just been doing this and that. It's been a pretty good day, all things considered. Did you happen to notice where that druid delegation came from?"

"The people on the big wargs?" Berry frowns. "I think it was down that side street over there. Something smells a little weird in that direction."

Bad weird?

"No, just weird weird. It's kind of familiar, but I can't quite put my finger on it."

Hmm. Well, you and Ryn will investigate, and let him know later.

"Okay. Have fun, I guess. See you."

A minute later, as you follow the side street, your nose confirms Berwyn's description. It <i>is</i> a pretty strong smell, but you're not quite sure what it is.[pc.bg barbarian

| It dredges up old, raw memories — cookfires on brown, rocky plains,

lighthearted meals with your [pc.ora wyldelf

|troupe

|tribe

] — but you can't quite remember why.

]

|Following the druids' path, you notice an odd smell coming from a side street. It's strong, but not unpleasant, and interestingly, the warg tracks in the fresh snow seem to have come from that direction.[pc.bg barbarian

| The smell's a good, not-quite-familiar one, one that forces old memories to the surface without you understanding why. You remember cookfires on the plains, rocky outcrops amid low brown grass, and boisterous [pc.ora wyldelf

|meals with your troupe

|tribal meals

], but can't quite put your finger on the thing that draws them all together.

]

]

{//first time:

Ryn's the first to connect the dots. "Is... is that peat?"

Who the what now?

"Peat!" She belatedly realizes that this isn't helping and tries to clarify. "You know, turf from bogs? It makes for good fuel, if you can cut it."

[pc.bg barbarian

|Of course! You and your people always called it bogearth, but it's clearly the same thing. When you were out on the moors, far from forests and easy wood fuel, you'd cut little turf bricks to keep the fires going instead. You remember how the meat you cooked over the, um, <i>peat</i> fires had a unique taste — one you wouldn't mind having again. So the boreal elves have access to the same stuff up here, do they?

|Huh. You might've heard of this before, but not seen it in action. So certain kinds of mud are worth scooping up and burning?

]

"Exactly. {//unlocked a tile in the Icemire: Remember the eastern Frostwood? There's a reason we call it the Icemire: it's a giant frozen peat bog. //else: We haven't been there before, but the whole of the eastern Frostwood is a huge peat bog called the Icemire.} Ancient pale elves would bury their dead in the bogs, and in return, the Wyld would give them peat for the fires. Here in the City, people used to say that the druids would even make sacrifices in the bogs — not just of animals, but of unwary travelers, too. I wonder how much of that is just a blood libel, and how much is a real memory of our most distant past." She purses her lips thoughtfully before moving on. "Anyway, I guess the druids still cut peat bricks out there in the woods, and they've been bringing them up to the city to trade for whatever they need."

Well, in that case... you wonder what sort of things the boer'alvar can do over a peat fire.

"Let's go find out!"

//repeat:

Of course, you eventually figure it out: it's the peat smell from the brewery, and as soon as it drifts across your nose, you and Ryn decide that you'll be going back for a return visit. Visions of roast duck and tasty whisky dance in your heads as the thick aroma fills your noses, and with your minds so occupied the journey there seems to take almost no time at all. As you walk, Ryn, ever the one to share, chats about more stories she remembers about the old pale elves and the peat bogs. Apparently there are weapons hidden in the bogs, placed there by the druids during the burial rituals for the Winter Queens and Kings of old, with strange, magical powers: fruits of the knowledge of the Old Wyld, of Belhar, or of something even more ancient. You wonder whether the bogs have preserved them in working order... or if they've crumbled to uselessness under the weight of peat and time.

}

The druids' trading partner is a multistory establishment, made more from stone than wood, with a proudly-swinging sign over the door. You enter to find a large common space around a bar area, with tables and wait staff and food much like the Frost Hound's... but this space is full of inebriated elves laughing, joking, eating, telling stories to each other, singing, and, of course, drinking. [silly

|The main entertainment, though, is on a stage against the far wall, where a band of amazonian elves shreds through an uptempo metal song amid a jubilant crowd. Their lead singer, a musclebound, mohawked purple-skinned woman wearing a sleeveless top in imitation of armor (and, bizarrely, a pair of sunglasses), huskily roars a paeon to war as the elves below her go nuts. They've even got a little half-sexed fan in the air, crowdsurfing the riotous multitude from end to end as she waves a flag blazoned with a yellow cross on a blue field. At their tables, the rest of the patrons cheer along, grunting, chanting, and throwing horns as appropriate — but you can barely hear them through the percussive blasts of the drums and the impossibly loud guitar.

|In the middle of the floor, a large space has been cleared of tables and chairs to make room for a collection of clearly-drunk elven half-sexeds and men, singing something loudly, a cappella, and off-key as the rest of the clientele cheers along and bangs rhythmlessly on the tables.

][party.has arona

|

And, of course, who'd be more at home here than your big green [arona.isSub

|beta

|alpha

]? Arona's sitting at the bar, cackling at the elves' antics as she swigs from a big ceramic cup. Naturally, you gravitate right toward her.

"Ha!" She slams her mug down on the counter. "If it isn't [arona.isSub

|the big, bad [pc.mf

|bastard him

|bitch her

]self!
 |my favorite little beta!
] How the fuck are ya?"

Great — better than great. You and Ryn have been having a wonderful day so far.

"That right? You bein' nice to lil' Ryn?" Arona leans toward her unsteadily and raises a meaty finger. "[pc.name] treatin' you right, kiddo?"

Your elven companion giggles. "[silly
 |Kiddo? You know I'm, like, more than twice your age, right?
 |You don't have anything to worry about, Arona.
] [pc.heShe]'s been good to me — actually, I haven't had this much fun in a long time."

"Damn straight," grunts the Mean Green approvingly as she downs another swallow of her drink.

It seems like she's a little in her cups. What's got her drinking so heavily?

"Pft, this? You think I'm getting pissed off this pansy elfshit whisky? It's way fuckin'
 smoother than the rotgut that old fucker Vaush [arona.isExiled
 |usedta make
 |makes
]. Seeeeee, look at —" She leans over ponderously to show you her mug, but
 overbalances and has to grab your shoulder to keep from spilling all over the floor.

What was that again?

Arona gives you a tusky grin from close enough for you to smell the whisky on her breath. "Aaah, maybe it's sneakin' up on me a liiiiiiittle. But later, I'll be sober, and yooooou'll still... uh... how'd that go again?"

Oh, Arona. Maybe you should let the bartender know that she's been overserved.

"Hey, [arona.isSub
 |don't be an assass... ass... asshole.
 |know your place, 'kay?
] I got this. You have a try, see how much you like it. It's good shit." She claps your
 shoulder cheerfully, straightens up, and turns to the barkeep. "Gara! Take care of these
 two, yeah? Make sure they have a good date."

]

{//first time version:

The bartender — Garadelle, by brief, stammering introduction — gawps at the sight of a monarch and a Champion in her establishment, but after recovering, she insistently summons some help. Soon a waitress is leading you into a well-furnished and empty side room for privacy. Gara herself joins you there, having temporarily handed off her duties to somebody else; now that you can see her out from behind the bar, you notice not only that she's got plenty of tattoo ink up and down both arms, but that she's very much expecting.

[pc.isChamp

|Naturally, you and Ryn offer your congratulations.

|Ryn congratulates her effusively, and you somewhat less so.

]

"For me? Um, wow. Thank you, Your Worships.[pc.bellyPregRange 5

| And, uh, likewise.

] This one's my first."

How far along is she?

"Twelve months," she says proudly. "Only another six to go, with the Dawn Maiden's blessin', before my husband and I get to meet our lil' stranger."

Yikes. No wonder so many pale elves took to Lumia.

Gara grimaces ruefully. "You're tellin' me, [pc.mf

|sir

|ma'am

]. Best part about this job, apart from the company I keep and the pay, is havin' a lie-down afterward.[pc.bellyPregRange 5

| You know what I mean, right?

] She tips you a wry wink. "Anyway, I gotta say, I'm not used to servin' royalty. What, ah, what can I do you for?"

"Can you think of anything that's particularly popular?" asks Ryn.

"Easy," the bartender says crisply. "We do a nice roast duck, goes well with a little stuffing and some of our, uh, perfectly legal specialty beverage. Beer distilled over a peat fire, kind of like a whisky. Gets a lot of that peaty flavor in it. We've had it on the menu for a while now, but prices are way down now that we can just buy the turf from the druids instead of cuttin' it ourselves... beggin' your pardon, Your Worship, but you're kinda the reason it's sellin' so well, in a roundabout way."

[etheryn.lowConfidence

|"M-me? Are you sure?" Her lip twitches. "Um, well, thank you. A-anyway, the

[She laughs. "I think it's probably got more to do with the cook, but thank you for the compliment anyway. The
] roast duck sounds perfect."

You completely agree.

After Gara waddles back to the kitchens, you nudge Ryn gently. She didn't bring up the whole druid trade thing to the barkeep despite an obvious opening. Why not seize the opportunity to take the city's pulse, so to speak?

[etheryn.lowConfidence

"I... I don't think that's a good idea," she says worriedly. "W-what if she gets mad about the question?"

[pc.isDK

[Who cares? Ryn's in charge, isn't she?

[You see what she's saying, but isn't Ryn the {coronation: queen //else: regent}? What does she have to worry about? Besides, what if everything's fine and ordinary people are more okay with the druids than she'd thought? Wouldn't that be worth knowing?

]

"But what would be the point of antagonizing her? I just want to spend time with you and have some nice food, not start a fight." Her big ol' ears droop expressively. "It's better this way."

"I probably wouldn't get a useful answer," she says carefully. "Even if Gara likes the druids beyond just doing business with them — and this place doing business with them at all says plenty, given who we are — the fact that it's me asking the question instead of somebody else would color her answers for sure. Besides, this place seems busy, and I'd feel bad about monopolizing her attention more than I already am; I might be sitting on the throne, but I'm still me. There are plenty of other ways to get a sense of what's going on in the city." She reaches across the table for your hand. "More than anything, I'm here to spend time with you. Everything else is just... else."

]

Well, fair enough.

//repeat:

As soon as she notices you, the motherly elf at the bar waves cheerfully and gestures for a server to come cover her place. All a-smile, Gara chatters happily with you about your adventures and how you're doing as she brings you to the usual private table, while you and Ryn reciprocate, asking after her and the baby. [rand

|Apparently, the kiddo's not making it easy for her today, judging from the grimace she greets your question with, but the barkeep manages her best hospitality smile for her answer.

|From the blissful, eyes-half-closed grin on her face, it's been a good day so far — whether through Lumia's blessing or natural pregnant euphoria.

] She takes your usual order and leaves you with a lit candle on the table and a wink as she waddles off to get your food prepared.

}

The duck and whisky arrive faster than you'd expect. As Gara waits[silly

| (sigh)

] expectantly, you try the roast, chewing through the crust of fat between the bird's skin and the meat, and there's the meat: a dry, smoky tang that sits and lingers on the back of your tongue. The bird itself is good, too, a tender, fatty meat with a little flavor of its own, definitely worthy of a slow chew. After a few bites and a try of the stuffing, both you and Ryn are nodding happily, gushing about the taste, and that's enough to give the bartender a pleased, maternal smile.

"Thanks, Your Worship. You two don't mind if I let other people know how much you like the food, right?"

Ryn swallows another bite. "By all means. Customers, staff, anyone. This is wonderful!"

"You're gonna make me blush, ma'am," chuckles the motherly elf. "I bet you two want your privacy, but I'll have the staff peek around the corner from time to time, make sure everything's good."

She's most gracious. You both thank her for the food[pc.isChamp

| and wish her Lumia's blessings

].

Next up is the whisky. It's got the same burnt smoky scent as the duck, an aroma that crowds thickly into your nose before you even start drinking. With a clink and a "Tal'asha!" you and Ryn take your first sips, letting it sit on your tongue a bit before you swallow. Even with only a sip, the taste lights you up inside, straining every muscle in your throat, and you barely keep from coughing. Ryn isn't quite so controlled, but after the fit passes, she manages a crooked smile.

The meal passes in companionable silence as you savor the taste of the bird and the drink, but eventually, your plates are cleaned and your cups are empty. A server comes by to clear them away and settle up, and once he leaves, you and Ryn lean back in your chairs and listen to the din of merrymaking in the other room.[pc.bg minstrel

| It's almost enough to make you want to go out there and give them a proper show, but between the meal and the drink, you're not really in the condition to do so. Maybe if Ryn's feeling a little less shy, you can serenade her in front of the audience at some point. You file the idea away for later and shift your gaze back to your elven companion.

]

"That was a great way to end a day out, [pc.name]," she says with a smile[etheryn.highConfidence

|, reaching across the table to take your hand

]. {*//first time: "I've never eaten anything quite like that before." //repeat: "I love coming here for the food; it's warm and comforting, and it tastes great!"*}

Hopefully, what you find next time will be just as fun.

"I'm looking forward to it." She yawns. "Oof. I think that we should probably head back now, though. I need to digest, or something.[etheryn.libidoRange 25

| Then again... do you think we've eaten too much to indulge in, um, strenuous activity afterward?"

[pc.isBimbo

|Uuuuummm... does she mean sex? Like, lots and lots and lots of really hard sex?

"Maybe I do," she coos. "Maybe I mean lots and lots and lots of really hard sex."

|Hmm. You don't know about that. As Champion, it's your responsibility to ensure the physical well-being of the Winter City's monarch.

Ryn flutters her eyelashes at you. "Well, think it over as we're walking back... but I'm willing to risk it."

]

|"

"Or something" could mean a lot of things, including hanky-panky in the royal chambers. That could be worth bringing up to Ryn when you get back.

]

It takes the two of you a little while to retrace your steps back to the main thoroughfare, but eventually you find your way back to the palace. As Ryn settles back into place on her throne, she looks at you expectantly. Should you wrap things up here, or let the good times keep rolling?

[Sex] [Finish]

Sex

//TT: Take Ryn up to the royal chambers and end your date with a bang.

//Leads directly to the Winter City sex menu. Should fit in well enough with the existing sex menu intro text.

Finish

//TT: You have a headache.

//Next button leads to Ryn's throne tile in the Palace of Ice

You politely thank Ryn for a lovely time, but remind her of your obligations as Champion: adventure waits for no one, after all.

[etheryn.InhLibido

|"That's true. Well, I can't wait until next time!" she says brightly.

|She purses her lips and the skin around her eyes tightens, but she nods anyway.

"O-okay, [pc.name]. M-maybe next time..."

|"Hnnn." She forces a smile. "All right... just, um, please don't make me wait too long."

]

Attagirl.

[Next]