

It appeared to be night by the time they arrived on the island.

Atello awoke a few hours before, his room almost completely dark save for the orange glow from the lamp. There was a silver tray on the table across from him, covered by a metal dome. Abner was leaning over the table, inspecting the tray without touching it or lifting the covering.

The younger angel walked over from the bed, pulling the blanket off and wrapping it around him in an attempt to fight off the chill that had begun to wrap his body. It had rapidly gotten colder throughout the duration of Atelo's stay, likely due to the ship approaching land, causing the weather to become more constant and extreme. Occasionally he would see snow when looking out his window, which he now kept shut in an attempt to further keep out the cold breeze. When he reached out to pull off the dome, the metal encased his hand in the feeling of ice, stinging his palm.

When removed, the dome revealed a plethora of small foods that Atelo had either seen in passing or not at all. Various missions had taken him and Abner across the plains for many years. While they'd rarely bought anything, the two angels would frequently look at various trinkets and objects that were being sold. Atelo had never paid the food much mind, opting to ignore it in favor of goods provided to the platoons. Abner, however, had enjoyed walking around food markets and bakeries, savoring the scents of meat, bread, and various pastries. Atelo saw how the older angel's eyes darted around the platter, recognizing the food before finally stopping on one thing. A small pastry shaped like a fish, covered in an almost fully opaque deep brown sauce. It was the one thing Atelo had ever witnessed Abner purchase on a mission, specifically their mission in Ikerra. The older one had dragged Atelo along with him to wander around the food markets at the dead of night because the smell of roasted meat was preventing him from sleeping. Abner had seen the fish shaped pastry, supposedly filled with a mix of cheese and pork, and had wanted so badly to buy it. They were about to leave after Abner realized that neither of them had any money, but he'd come across a discarded wallet and decided that it was a sign from god that they were to buy the food. And now, Abner was looking at the same "god ordained" pastry as though it were an oasis and he was a parched man. The other food was quite good as well, little sandwiches with lettuce and roast beef and some kind of sauce, cakes that oozed melted chocolate when cut in half, and puffs of sugar that melted in Atelo's mouth, filling it with the taste of cherry, watermelon, lemon, and mango.

The somewhat loud sound of footsteps approaching the door broke Atelo from his sweet induced daze. The angel had enough time to face the doorway before it was abruptly opened by a woman dressed in pink. Atelo had been expecting Bowes, who, despite his snarky quips and constant eye rolling at what Atelo said, still had the common decency to knock. The pink woman

was unmistakably the same one who had captured Atelo the day this wretched imprisonment began. He hadn't been able to get a good look at her then, she moved far too quickly for him to make out anything but a dreadful pink blur before being slammed onto the deck and tied up. The woman's skin was a deep sepia tone, and slightly darker freckles were sprinkled around her face, neck, and, presumably, her shoulders. Curled, almost black, hair fell down just past her shoulders, a few sections had pink ribbon intertwined with it. Much like the others on the ship, the pink woman dressed in a way that would have caused much uproar back at the tall palace. She had large, circular and golden frame glass with pink tinted lenses that rested atop a hawk nose. She wore a fitted t-shirt, colored the slightest shade of light pink, covered by a coral and white jacket with hot pink hearts. Her shorts were white as well, neatly reaching just above her knee, showing off just how strong her legs really were. Any socks she may have been wearing were covered by the tall black boots that had various pale patches in them, derived from something Atelo could not figure out at the moment. She was absolutely gorgeous, and Atelo knew that he had seen her before.

Her eyes looked to the food, then to the messy bed, then finally to the angel wrapped in a blanket, turning slowly from one place to another as though simply looking was a task she was above. Atelo knew he'd seen her before, wanted posters pasted around the cities he was sent to with Abner, videos of her attacks shown to his platoon by their handler. The Bleeding Heart as she was known, Cassiopeia. The moment she looked at him, she did not look away, barely even blinking. Her lips, painted the color of carnations, were upturned into a grin. It was not quite as cruel looking as Aceldama's, who seemed to revel in the fear she instilled. Cassiopeia's smile was patronizing. The same smile Atelo had received time and time again from Abner and the others around him. A smile he quietly despised, and one that followed him even into his dreams. The woman in front looked to the angel with such *pity*. She knew that she could defeat him and countless others, she had done it before. She was so sure of herself, so confident and proud and just... Just like Abner.

"You," her voice was light and informal as she pointed to him. "Come with me".

She left no room for arguing, and so Atelo followed behind. Cursing himself for not having more pushback.

Cassiopeia led Atelo out of the room and down a long hallway, opposite of the one Bowes had taken him down before measuring. Within their brief interaction, Atelo had decided he much preferred Bowes to the woman. All he could hope for was that wherever he was being led to would

have the man there as well. The hallway passed many rooms, all with the doors closed. The silence that had fallen over the duo was broken as the woman spoke again.

“Why didn’t you eat the Firle?”

“The what?”

“The fish pastry. You ate everything else, why not that?”

“I was saving them for Abner.”

“Who-”

“You’re here!” The gods had heard him. Bowes’s voice broke through their conversation, the man himself located just at the top of the staircase. He was dressed much more plainly; long, brown pants that hid the strength of his legs, a plain white tank top with his wool lined coat over top. A broad brimmed hat covered his hair

“You didn’t give him too hard a time, did ya, Cas?” His amused grin was plastered on his face. “Cas” hummed in response.

“Ey! You’re awake, Atla- Atelo. I had come by earlier to see if you wanted to have lunch but you were asleep. How’d you like the food?”

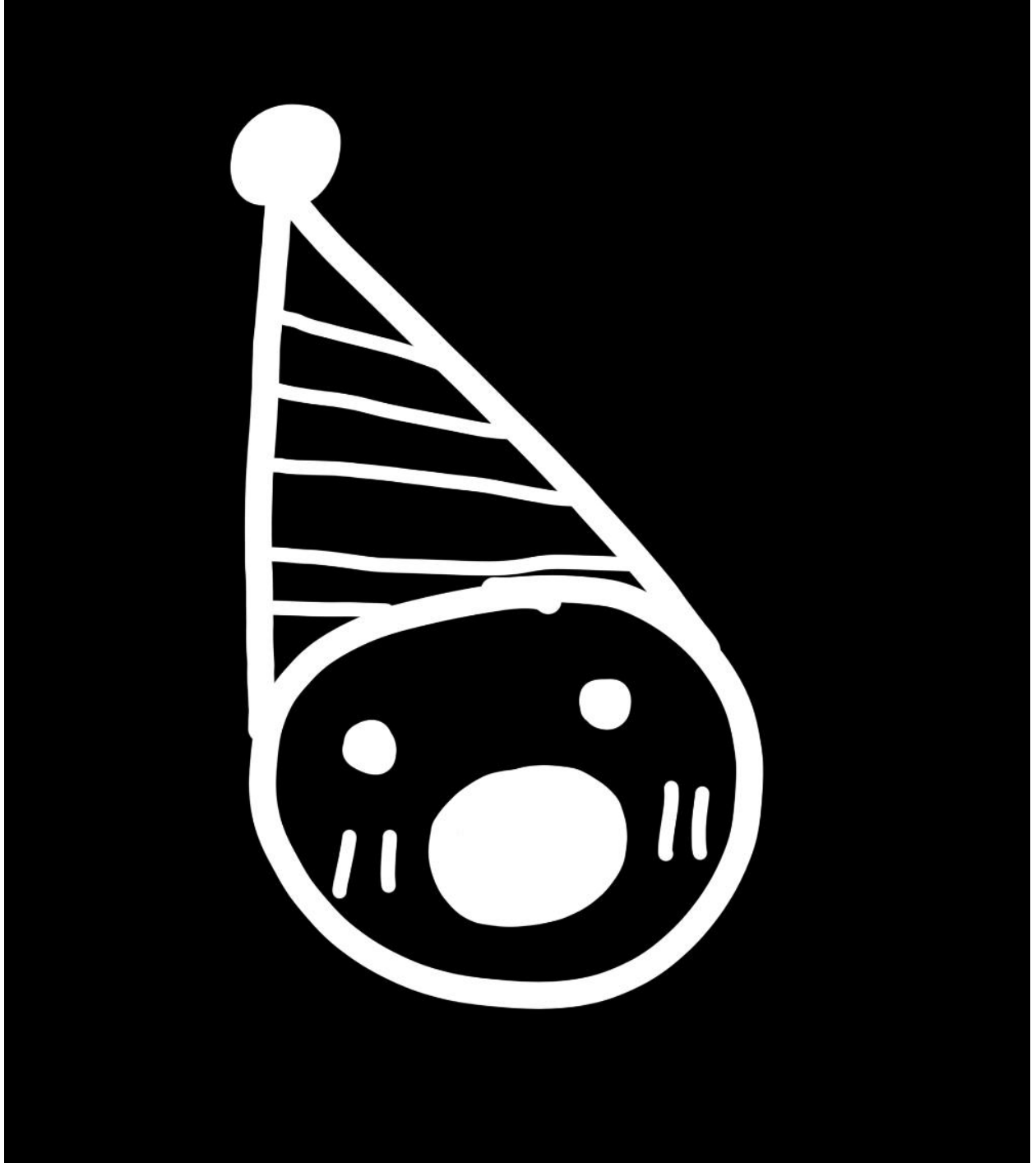
“It was good, thank you. I liked the little sugar puffs, whatever they are called. I don’t believe I’ve ever had anything like it before,”

“That’s Ringul! We’re actually just about to dock at where it’s from.”

They all stepped onto the deck, and over the nearby railing, Atelo could see land just about 5 minutes away. There were clouds above them that grew so thick all light was blocked from entering the sky below them. The angel knew of this island, despite never being sent to it. Noxterram, the

land where clouds grew so thick that it was covered in an infinite night. It was not currently night, but it did appear so.

Holy cow this chapter was a pain to write. I will very likely rewrite this at some point. If I do, I'll say so in the author's note of the latest chapter.



Clown Army