

After trudging through the snow, the pair of lost souls would come across a sudden change in scenery. Grass, actual grass was growing in the new area, and Blue delighted in foliage, breaking off the cobblestone path to sniff at the...goldenrods? Still dressed in a hooded cowl to cover the rest of her questionable physical traits, she turned to Tretesta, dark eyes inquiring. “Do you think the plants here have the same names as their counterparts in our world?” She certainly had a skip to her step, not-so-hidden tail wagging merrily. So many new things to discover!

Up ahead and past the stone wall, a couple guards patrolled the gates of what their map called “Revenant’s Toll”. It certainly was an outpost of some sort, perhaps even a fort at some point. Strange rocks and glowing crystals spread over the man-made building like some kind of fungus. Odd, but that didn’t seem to stop the daily goings on inside, as the sounds of peddlers advertising their wares and the squeals of children playing could be heard in the near distance.

“Possible. Some plants are named after what they look like, after all...” Tretesta replied distractedly, catching sight of the gate through the gloom and what looked to be people manning it. He pulled their map out again, looking between it, the gate, and the sky in rotation, then folded it back up and returning it to his coat “I’d say that’s the outpost. On guard now, dear, can’t guarantee we’re going to be saved by an old man this time, and I don’t see much chance of sneaking in there. But if Truneaux was right? Shouldn’t need saving from anything but the wildlife.”

Aganbold leaned on his pike, munching idly on an apple, watching a pair of strangers come walking down the path. At the other side of the archway, young Clifton was suddenly alert, shading his eyes as he looked up the trail “Oy! Here comes trouble! Look’t them! A shady lookin’ character, rummagin’ around everywhere and a scruffy man in a scruffy coat!” Aganbold didn’t immediately acknowledge the younger man’s outburst, much more interested in his afternoon snack. It wasn’t until Clifton grabbed his spear and started yelling, “Hey! Hand-” that the veteran would loudly bang his pikeshaft on the rocks “Pipe down, pup. Nothing wrong with them, look at them. Walking out in broad daylight, staying on the path, they’ve clearly seen us and they’re still coming just as they please.” One final bite to finish his fruit, Aganbold tossed the core at Clifton’s body in reprimand, continuing after “You’ll see all sorts out this way, now that you’re posted here. Some folks don’t like to be looked at. Might be disfigured or something. Some folk’s been traveling long and far to wind up at this little camp. But bandits and robbers don’t generally come in the front door if they can help it. Leave ‘em be and keep quiet.” As the strangers approached the gate, Aganbold nodded to them “Welcome to Revnant’s Toll. There’s both rest and work aplenty, courtesy of the Adventurer’s Guild” Clifton, feeling quite chided, did not offer much greeting, keeping his gaze focused on the road leading out to the wilds and Coerthas.

The new travelers entered beneath the recently erected sign with the outpost’s name into a developing settlement. It seemed everyone was quite occupied in one way or another to develop the Toll into sometime more livable. Tret escorted Blue through the bustle of the camp, making their way to what looked like a small market area, sparsely populated by people selling

mostly staples for survival in the harsh land. "I wasn't expecting a big city, but it looks like we've caught this place during a remodel...Keep that hood on, though. I haven't seen any of those Lupins you're supposed to be yet. Maybe they're just a legend."

Blue nodded at Tret's words, though her ears flicked in clear agitation. It was true though. As the woman glanced around them at the small assortment of people selling wares or building up foundations, she noticed many different types of folks, but none so being canine. Still, the variety was refreshing as Blue caught a glimpse of a small Lalafell selling what looked like ornate jewelry. She nudged her partner and pulled him closer.

"Enhance your beauty with these one-of-a-kind sunstone earrings, straight from the blessed hands of the most renowned goldsmiths in Ul'Dah!" The lala noticed the pair approach and as if on cue, puffed out her chest proudly. "Ahh, I see the woman notices fine craftsmanship does she? Part ways with your hood and give these here earrings a try. The Sultana herself would be jealous!"

Blue was about to do just that before Tret stepped in between them. One hand went about the robed torso, and he smiled apologetically, patting himself with his free hand "My my, the sultana you say? A pity, we've hardly the money for a crust of bread, much less priceless gems fitting of her majesty. Excuse us." They quickly steered away from the market area much to Blue's disappointment, ducking behind what appeared to be a circus tent and away from prying eyes.

Tret ignored the pouty look from beneath his partner's hood, and spoke up before he could be scolded as they sat down on a crate in a quiet corner, "Let's get a feel for the area first, Blue. I promise I'll find you some pretty odds and ends soon enough. I didn't lie entirely. We have no idea what kind of money they're using, but I know I don't have any..."

Blue sighed and nodded. "I suppose you're right. And it's true..we don't really have any money either.." Even before the odd development that landed the pair in a new world, both hadn't really had the need to carry around currency, the shapeshifter especially.

Tretesta poked his head around a low wall, eyeing the direction of the few stalls, then sat back and rubbed his chin slowly. An odd groaning sound escaped him, and he'd look down, frowning "I think we need that crust of bread sooner rather than later. And a place to lay tonight. The guard said there was work out here, and I doubt we're going to get much of a handout."

Leaning against the crate, Blue flicked her tail in response. "I hunger too, Love. This is a modest bustling area though...we could choose to do some odd jobs in return for food and a place to stay.."

Before Tret could answer, another voice chipped in.

"Odd jobs ye say?" A gruff voice sounded from behind one of the building foundations. Out stepped a large, bulky-looking Roegadyn, adorned in heavy chainmail. A busted up axe rested at his side.

"Are you adventurers? Of course you are. Bet you've never seen a place quite like Revenant's Toll" The stranger looked up at the surrounding buildings in admiration.

"You are in the last respite of civilization that is actively fighting back against both man and nature. And I've got just the job for a couple of wanderers like yourselves, if you have the desire to fight for some good ol' 'Dhona comforts."

Sometimes the universe just provides. Tret hopped to his feet and approached the... Holy hell this man is **huge**. He was forced to look up to the man's face, but still put on an eager smile, placing his fists on his hips "Well aren't you just in the nick of time! You just point us at whatever man or nature needs fighting, and we'll have it dealt with! But, I don't suppose we could get a small advance on that comfort? It's a long walk from, ahh- Coerthas! And we've not had a bite between us since sunrise."

The Broegadyn considered the smaller man for a moment, then gave a hearty laugh, slapping his own chest "BAHAHAHA! You keep talking like that and you'll have everyone in this camp lining up to work you to death! Come right this way, you two. I can certainly find you sometin' to nibble on while we discuss the task at hand." The giant would shoulder his axe and leave them, heading down the hill.

Still a bit in awe at the size of the lad, Tret turned back around to Blue, who had also been in awe throughout this entire exchange, tail wagging merrily. SO GIANT. Tret shrugged, and offered her his hand, "I hate to blindly trust anyone right now, but he's offering to feed us. Though looking around, I'm guessing there's not a lot of room or tolerance for robbing and thieving one another. Whatever he's got for us to do can't be all that bad, right?"

Blue nodded, a huge grin on her face. "You know, we've known plenty of giants. But he seems so friendly!" The woman took Tret's hand and both followed after the Roegadyn. They certainly wouldn't lose him even in a crowd, for he forged a path through the marketplace like a moving boulder.

The heavy clank clank clank of metal came to a stop in front of a modest-looking building in the central plaza of Revenant's Toll. A hanging sign, with enough scrutinizing, would read **Seventh Heaven**, and the rousing smell of food permeated outside the doorway.

"You can't call yourself a camp without a place to drink your wearied heart out!" The large man laughed and gave a merry wink. "They make decent meals too." He held the door open for the two wanderers to step through.

The room smelled of sizzling meat and fresh ale, the latter being clinked together in large metal mugs by a pair of drunken guardsmen sitting at a table. A miko'te woman stood at the front of the bar, busily dusting off her apron before greeting Tretesta And Blue with a smile and a yell.

"Come, take a seat, let Ol M'alli have a look atcha." She motioned to a table in the corner of the room, tilting her head at the Roegadyn who led them there. "Friends of yours, Caepfborn?"

"Not yet," he hollered back, waiting for the pair to claim a chair before he sat down himself. "But I'm hoping they'll be soon enough. Bring us bread and some of your famous stew, M'alli. On me. These folks are buying next time."

"Of course! Next time..." after pulling a chair out for Blue, Tretesta would seat himself, watching their possible employer settle. Leaning on the table, he launched right into it "So...Caepfborn, yes? Apologies if I did not hear that right. You've got two strangers, new to town, desperate for food and bed, willing to do whatever it takes for payment. Seems it's your lucky day!" The roe sat back, grinned, and nodded "Aye, Lucky lucky me. A strappin' pair like y'selves shouldnt have any trouble with the minor task I've got in mind for ya. Nothing more than a bit of wildlife getting a bit too close to the Toll here."

Thinking this makes for a good time to a scene transition. Either coming back from or going out to the hunt. Leaning towards coming back. Ideas for hunt: Uppity Morbols, Kurrea: A rank hunt Mudpuppy. Need to also have Blue pick out a form at some point, Mor Dhona having Doman refugees makes for a good chance to find an Au'ra to mimic.

"Wildlife??!?" Blue sat up attentively. She'd quickly find Tret's hand on her shoulder to keep her from shooting up out of the seat and out of her cowl entirely. The woman squirmed against her partner's grip and looked to him with a grin. "I bet there's a bunch of beasties out here! Cute and slimy and scary.."

Caepfborn looked amused as Tret gave her shoulder a squeeze and assured her. "All sorts, Dear. Tell us, friend. What manner of wildlife is it that's worth so much and needs travelers to deal with?"

Their answer would not come immediately, as a distraction in the form of stew and bread loaves were placed before them by the barmaid. "Hot stew for three hungry souls! You all tuck in now, it's not everyday I see this big lug buying!" With a laugh, Caepfborn waved her off, then broke a loaf of bread in half for himself. "Away with you! You'll scare 'em off with that mess, Alli! Eat, eat you two! no sense in worrying yourselves about this job just yet."

The traveling pair looked at each other, then back to their employer. Blue needed no invitation - she was ravenous - tearing off a large chunk of bread to dip into the stew. Tret was more weary,

watching his companion to make sure her hood still concealed her face. He then studied Caepfborn for a few moments, suspicious of how much trouble they had gotten themselves into already, before following suit and eating. Surely the food and resting space would be worth it. Right?

That. Was. Awesome. Blue was giddy, practically skipping in her mud-soaked cowl as the pair made their way back to Revenant's Toll. Tretesta was less-so, dragging a large, slimy tail behind him. The both of them were drenched in mud, dirt, and saliva, and their clothes were beyond salvaging. Still, the gigantic mudpuppy was slain and their proof would net them a few more meals and a place to stay for at least a couple of nights.

The female glanced back at her companion, dropping back to his side to elbow him playfully. "Admit it! That was fun! Don't know what they'll end up doing with this tail, but we did a good thing!" "Ahuh." Tret replied absently and readjusted the tail over his shoulder, noticing that the path back would involve going up a rather steep hill.

Blue began counting on her fingers all the other strange creatures they'd come across on while on the search for their quarry. Gigantic teathy tentacle bushes, floating spiky electric things, malnourished angry bird creatures that didn't want to be friends...further out, beyond the swampland packed with tentacle beasts, Blue had caught a glimpse of black armored people, but just that. They were lucky to find the giant slimy lizard snoozing at the the river's edge, and had no need to explore further.

"Uff..this would..be much...easier if you could get out of your cloak and not make heads turn." Tret paused and used his free hand to pat her head. "Have you thought about how to blend in better? Sad to say I think your time as a Lupin might be over, for now."

Blue frowned at Tret, shoulders sinking a bit. "I've thought about it plenty. This isn't the first time I've had to hide away before." She leaned over and kissed his cheek. "I know we don't want to stick out." "No more than we already- Heeho day... I hate this hill!- do." Tret grunted and stopped, throwing the tail off his shoulder and sitting on a rocky outcrop. In the distance, the corrupted crystal spike that jutted out of the old encampment stood ominously and held the man's gaze as he rested for a few minutes. "Hate to make you change, but we saw what happened last night, afterall. Seen anything you like yet? If not, we can probably replace that robe with something less... shredded for now."

Blue pursed her lips in thought before shaking her head. She sat on the giant mudskipper tail, making sure it didn't wriggle away. "We saw so many different sorts of folks. The small ones and the large ones. And humans in general are there too. But no beast race. The closest might be like that lady with cat ears but...cats."

As she pondered and Tret rested, a wagon slowly traversed down the hill they were trying to climb. Blue's jaw dropped when she saw the brightly-colored birds at the front of it and before Tret could do anything, she ran out in front of the moving vehicle in all her mud-ridden glory. Arms up, fingers outstretched, Blue made grabbing gestures for the strange feathered mounts who stopped and kwehed in confusion. The driver of the wagon blinked and gave a shout, "Ey you! What're you doing blocking my- what are you doing with my birds?!?"

Eyes glimmering, the shapeshifter was rather busy petting the big birds all over, giggling happily. The chocobos themselves seemed to enjoy the attention. Looking between the coach driver and Blue, Tret could only sigh, heave himself up, and walk to the wagon, leaning on it and looking up at the driver "Easy now, friend. She ain't doin' nothin' but petting them. Quite fond of the... Bird... Horses, you know? Be a right shame if they got spooked. Cart might go down the hill the fast way, neh?" Leaning over, Tret eyed the cliff the hill ran down and clicked his tongue, looking back up to the man "A minute or two of your time, we'll get that big tail out of your way and let you be on your way."

From the back, restless voices were heard "What's going on out there? We can't be there already! We can still see the gate to Revenant's Toll from back here!" Before anyone could reply, a young Au'ri girl burst out of the back of the covered wagon and stormed around to join the men, quite irate "HEY! We don't have time for idle chit-chat! We are burning daylight and I don't want to wait any longer than I have to get to the altar! Lets GO." Completely cowed by the hot tempered woman and not really wanting to, Tret backed off the cart towards the chocobos and his partner, hands held up in front of him disarmingly "Sounds like we'll need to cut petting time short, Dear. We're keeping these nice people from their trip." He pulled lightly on her shoulder, then moved to drag the hunting trophy out of the way of the cart's path.

Blue was enamored by the giant birds, but even she stopped at the audible sound of restlessness coming from inside the wagon, blinking as the Au'ri girl joined the group. She tilted her head quietly, analyzing the brazen young woman with midnight blue scales adorning her face and arms. Black ear fins framed each side of her face and a lengthy scaled tail whipped around in agitation as she confronted the driver. The shapeshifter was pulled from her musing by Tret and she shook her head, following after him.

She'd offer a haphazard curtsy to the driver and the fuming woman. "My apologies. I haven't seen very many birds like this before. What are they called?"

The driver looked at the disheveled Blue with disbelief at her question but it seemed the topic had intrigued the Au'ri girl. Quickly switching from furious to eager, the girl responded with a grin. "Ah, so you must be a newcomer here as well! These are called Chocobos. Quite cute, aren't they? I do miss the horses on the Steppe though.." Last words were spoken wistfully before the stranger shook her head. "But, enough about that. We've got places to be. Live well and die well, travelers. May you be reborn in Nhaama's embrace." She smirked and went back

into her wagon. With a tut the driver got his chocobos to move again, Tretesta and Blue watching after them.

“...I think I know what I’ll change into.”

“...with a rusty spoon! GRAH!” The door of the Seventh Heaven banged open to reveal a thoroughly unamused Tretesta, teetering back off balance from the door kick and the burden he carried. He righted himself and took a few steps in, looking around and stopping when he locked eyes on Caepfborn. With a very wet SLAP, the tail of Kinnah was unceremoniously heaved onto the floor, and the Roegadyn would be admonished loudly “LITTLE SALAMANDER TROUBLE? THE HELL IS LITTLE ABOUT THIS?” He shook his head and ran a grimy hand through his hair, muttering a string of unintelligible curses and pulling an unused chair out to sit and catch his breath. In the middle of Tret’s outburst, Blue wandered in as well, looking to be in a much better mood; she was practically skipping! What remained of her hood was finally pulled down, revealing dark skin, darker scales, and a flounce of blue hair trailing down past her shoulders. With a grin at the ready, she stepped over to Caepfborn and bowed. “It was fun! You chose the right people to take the lil beastly down!”

The bar had been stunned into silence at the outburst and the grotesque display of hunting. Only Caepfborn’s laugh broke the tension as he got up and approached the pair and their trophy “BAHAHAHA! Thal’s balls, you two are something else! We’ll be having mud puppy stew for a few days with this!” He then gave Tret a hearty slap on the back, which nearly sent the smaller man onto the floor “I did send ya out to deal with the mud puppy issue, but I didn’t expect ya to run up on old Kinna, much less put her down! Huh, looks like she got tangled up with something else before. Must’ve wandered too close towards Coerthas” Caepfborn got down and inspected what looked to be a large bite mark on the tail. Behind his back, Tret looked at Blue, who bit her lip and looked away. “Bah, no trouble, it’ll cook up all the same!”

Some minutes later, the tail had been hauled back to the kitchen to be cleaned and prepared. Tret, Blue, and Caepfborn sat around at their own table once more, all with a drink in front of them this time. The now-lizard-woman brought a mug of hot chocolate to her lips, pausing to admire the black scales over her hands before taking a sip.

After taking a big swig of his beer, Tretesta sat back and crossed his arms. “I believe we’ve done the job, or something close enough to it. It’s getting late now - would there be a place for us to stay?”

The roegadyn nodded, thumping his chest with a fist. “Of course! Ol’ Caepfborn always keeps his word! You did Revenant’s Toll a greater service than I’d hoped- Ol’ Kinna tended to muck up supply runs down around the swamp. Also allegedly ate a Lalafell. Ahem.” The large man

fiddled around his person before pulling out a simple brass key and handing it to Tretesta. "This is the key to a small apartment above the bar you can use for a day or two. M'alli won't mind a bit, and you've earned more than your fair share of meals until you are ready to leave the Toll."

Blue set her cup down as Tretesta pocketed the key. "Ah, is there any chance we could also get a change of clothing? That mudpuppy was so slippery and slimy.."

Caepfborn laughed and nodded. "Certainly. It does look like Kinna made quite a mess of you two, but at least I can see mysterious Miss Hood at least." Blue blushed and waved her hand distractedly. "I uh..."

The man opened his arms in a welcoming gesture. "No worries. If you weren't already aware, we don't ask questions around here. As long as you don't make any trouble, all we can ask of you is to help our little band of outcasts and adventurers." He leaned over and elbowed Tret in jest. "Yet, it's amusing to see such a polite Xaela. They tend to be...rather aggressive. You'll have to tell me your secrets." Caepfborn suddenly paused. "I don't even know either of your names yet, do I?"

"She was much less so out in the field, believe me. Not many better partners to have on the hunt. I'll let you know my secrets as soon as I figure them out myself!" Tret gave an elbow back with a laugh, then finished his beer and leaned on the table "Ahhh. Tretesta. And the Mysterious Miss is Blue. A couple days rest may be just what we need to start off. I know a lot of the others are staying here to rebuild and wait to return home, but we're not so sure yet. We might chance it in another region, immigrate permanently, neh?"

Caepfborn rubbed his chin in thought for a moment "I heard the refugees were denied asylum in Ul'dah... might be the same if you asked around the other two..." He snapped his fingers as an idea struck him "You two could just as easily get going with your new lives at one of the adventurer's guilds! How'd I forget about that? No one's going to care who you are or where you're from, long as you take their jobs and do 'em as well as you dealt with mine!" "Guilds, you say?" "Aye, Guilds. Outside of the shop we have set up here, closest one would be Gridania, by foot."

Blue mused. "That wouldn't be the worst idea, dearest. We're more than capable to be doing odd jobs for others while we figure things out." She turned to Caepfborn. "How far would Gridania be from here?"

The large man closed his eyes and thought about it for a moment. "Been quite the while since I've set foot in Gridania. I'd imagine if you went by chocobo, it would be about 3 to 4 hours at a brisk pace. But add some time for resting and it might be around 5 hours. You'll have to go up through Dragonhead and all the Coerthas weather before making it to one of the closer villages. On foot...possibly half a day."

Blue was at full attention with the mention of chocobos, bringing her hands up to clap them with delight. Tretesta smirked at her and shook his head. "Ah, the horse birds. Chocobos. We finally got to see a few of them for ourselves. Are they the main form of transportation in these lands?"

"By bird or by airship, and airship is a wee bit dangerous with the Garleans attacking anything that flies over their forts. I'd recommend a chocobo. If you grow to like being around them enough, they even have a rather renowned stable in just south of Gridania that probably wouldn't mind a couple more fieldhands. That is, if you decide the adventuring life isn't quite for you."

Caepfborn grinned and stood up, moving over to shake Tret's hand and offer the Blue a gentlemanly bow. "I'll leave you two to it then. It has been quite the day and I'm sure the both of you are exhausted. I've got guard duty in the morning, but if you spy me here in the evening, come grab a seat and join me in drink again. I'd be happy to weave a tale or two."

As the clanging of their new friend's heavy metal faded in the distance, Blue lowered her voice, sidling her chair next to Tret as she grabbed for his arm to squeeze in reassurance. "Part of me feels like this is going too fast. Distraction after distraction, while we don't know what's happened to our friends or the Grotto or why we're even here...are we really going to just make our home in this strange land without knowing anything?" The lizard girl frowned. "It's only been two days..."

"I think we need some distractions right now, if they're all this helpful. We're in a strange land, have no money, don't know anyone or much of anything, and have no idea how to get back. But... we speak the language, and have our own abilities that seem like they'll get us by." Tret sighed heavily, wrapping an arm around Blue's shoulders and pulling her in tight against him "If this is one of Pith's tests, it has a solution. He has purpose in his actions, so we should be able to free ourselves. Until then? We've got each other still, so it could be so much worse." The key they were given was fished out from Tret's much more ragged coat, the sleeve of which finally gave out and slid down to his wrist. He stared at the unfortunate scrap of cloth and shook his head. "We'll get home. But until we do, we have to survive. Blend in. Not going to look good on us if we run around telling people we're from another world and are trying to get back. Imagine if someone had told us that at the Grotto. We'd call him crazy and he'd likely get bopped." He smiled a bit at the thought, then laughed aloud, turning to kiss the top of Blue's head.

Blue sighed softly and nodded her head. "You're right. We are in this together after all, so at the very least we aren't alone. I'll follow your lead dear. And you know I'm pretty good at blending in." She rubbed her head against Tret's chest and dipped her hand into his pocket, fetching out the two maps they carried. "Maybe we can study a bit before bedtime then. Fresh start tomorrow, with hopefully fresher clothes."

Tretesta laughed and nodded, squeezing Blue's shoulders. "We can only hope." He rose and made for the bar to ask the Miquote about the spare apartment. Blue followed after her partner,

fingers clenching softly around the maps in her hand. The two would spend the next few days talking with the myriad of adventurers and merchants moving in and out of Revenant's Toll, learning more about the country around them and taking the odd task to pick up a bit of traveling money. But they were obviously restless, and left without a word to the inhabitants of the growing settlement. Departing back for Coerthas, the blue pair sought out their next story.