

Ice Cream

“C’mon, c’mon! You guys are falling behind!” Pomelo said, a cheeky grin on her face as she skated along the boardwalk. Strap pursued her, scampering along as fast as she could on her little legs, but eventually giving up and letting her additional arms carry her, looking like a tentacled entity striding forth.

Ravanne, for her part, sighed. The girls could be rambunctious and sometimes needed to be kept out of the way of more officious endeavors. Usually the political kind, where a wrong word could end up irritating a supporting party.

So she took Strap and Pomelo out to the Monikan beachfront, the better to let them scamper around. She smiled to herself. Sort of like errant puppies, she thought.

A woman wearing a bikini and otherwise only a helmet and skates caught Pomelo’s eye, the liquid fruit girl stopping on a dime and skating in reverse to match the woman’s pace.

“Hi... come here often?” Pomelo asked, only for Strap, momentum carrying her forward, to careen into Pomelo. The two tumbled into a messy heap on the ground, and Ravanne rolled her eyes.

Ravanne moved swiftly, apologizing to the woman as the liquid came closer. The woman left, leaving Ravanne to kneel down to her counterparts. “Are you two quite finished?”

“Finished? We just *got* here,” Strap said, confused. Somehow, she managed to have her chin to the floor, lower body arced up and over with her feet dangling just above her head.

Pomelo liquefied and pooled separately from Strap, removing herself from the copious bandages, and reformed. Brushing herself off, she pouted.

“So am I not allowed to hit on cute girls while we’re here?”

Ravanne raised an eyebrow. “You caused a scene and randomly accosted a woman.”

“Oh, like you didn’t want to take her out for dinner yourself!” Pomelo said. Ravanne suppressed a giggle; despite being as sexual as the rest of the polycule, Pomelo did sometimes struggle being as crude as some of her counterparts. Ravanne liked that about her.

Strap snapped up, flipping onto her feet inhumanly and audibly cracking and snapping until she properly resembled her normal form. “That kind of hurt.” Ravanne glanced at the passerby but no one seemed disturbed by Strap's straightening up.

“Sorry,” Pomelo said, looking away. “Here.” She offered one hand encompassed by her sleeve, within which she inexplicably held a bunch of cereal loops, fruit flavored. Strap beamed and snatched them with each of her six hands, scarfing them down.

“Thanks, Pom!”

“Now we’re even!” Pomelo said, turning back to Ravanne. “Are we going anywhere in particular, by the way, or just kinda doing whatever?”

Ravanne drew herself up to her full height, towering over both Pomelo and Strap – not intending to intimidate, though she had a faint inkling they'd behave a bit more if she did. “Just wandering. Come on, there’s a nice ice cream shop down the way here.”

At the mention of ice cream, both girls perked up instantly, clinging to Ravanne. They rubbed their cheeks on her arms, evidently keen on the cold treat. She smiled, looking up at the sun. It made sense, what with the heat of summer. Maybe she should give into the relative weather and put on a nice outfit herself...

She thought back to the woman in the bikini from a few moments prior. Ravanne never wore that type of outfit, really. Glancing down at her body, she considered the visual. She could pull it off, of course. But did she want everyone ogling her?

As they walked (her counterparts thankfully letting her go after a few moments), she

concentrated. Her clothes molded around her body, the smaller liquids noticing and making a little “ooh” noise as they watched.

Ravanne let her liquid flow over the more solidified core of her body, accentuating things as much as she could. A string top with ample cleavage coverage, a matching bottom which didn’t reveal too much. Ange and Cocoa were the types to wear barely anything, not her. Actually, she thought to herself, most of the girls would be comfortable being mostly naked.

Finished, she did a little self examination, spinning in front of the other two. “What do you think? I wanted to fit in on the beach.”

The bikini itself matched her outfit’s usual vibrant colors, oranges and reds in effusive tones. Strap beamed at her, evidently keen. Pomelo took a more critical eye.

“Your skin is still teal, though? Like, sure, Strap will stand out more than you, now, but between the skin, the crown, and the four arms... “ Pomelo made a face, exaggerating her features. “Real innocu...innoc...” she paused, unable to say the word properly. “Real stealthy,” she finally managed.

Ravanne giggled openly at this, and Pomelo sucked her teeth in annoyance, kicking at the ground. Despite this, Ravanne noticed she kept stealing glances at the bikini, and smiled. She put a hand on Pomelo’s head.

“Come. Ice cream calls us.”

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The shop seemed cutesy, an exterior resembling soft serve ice cream and the name, *Mimo’s*, featuring related designs. A scoop for the dot of the i, a sprinkle for the apostrophe... it made Ravanne feel youthful.

Strap seemed uncharacteristically solemn, shrinking her large arms down to wrap about

her body and give her almost full mummy-like covering. *Maybe she's cold?* Ravanne pondered. Pomelo, on the other hand, almost bounced off the walls, eagerly jittering in anticipation of the sweets.

The shop, cool and refreshing versus the balmy Venephikan heat outside, smelled very faintly of ice and salt. Ravanne peered at the various containers, marveling at the colors. She historically didn't have access to ice cream through a lot of her life, and it never failed to amaze her how many flavors existed.

Pomelo brushed up on the glass, her sleeves flopping against it as she frantically indicated what she wanted to Ravanne.

“Mm?”

“Raspberry sherbet! Ravanne, they have all kinds of sherbet!” The liquid fruit seemed beside herself in anticipation. Her fruit slices on her head kept twitching toward the freezers, though what power compelled them to do so, Ravanne couldn't tell.

“Alright, alright, relax. We don't want to disturb the other customers.” Ravanne took a quick glance around. Only three others were in the building at the moment; despite the sun shining bright outside, it still was morning, and probably not prime time for the shop.

Of the others, one was an elderly couple who seemed totally unfazed by the appearance of the liquids, busy eating cups of ice cream by themselves. The other, a young man wearing a black bikini, kept stealing furtive glances at them and texting on his phone.

Ravanne raised an eyebrow at the young man, who put away his phone and stood ramrod straight, evidently terrified. Ravanne sighed and went over to him.

“Please, relax. We're just here for ice cream,” she said.

The man attempted to speak, but only babbling came out. Pomelo noticed this and skated

over, flopping a sleeve at him. “Oy, oy! Are you bothering Ravanne?”

Ravanne’s eye twitched, and she picked up Pomelo by the scruff of her neck. “Pomelo. Behave.”

She lost all her fight, immediately going limp as a kitten with a “yes, ma’am”. The man, to his credit, went from nervous to laughing in a second, and Ravanne smiled. They could fit in alright, after all. She gave a knowing glance at the man, who went back to his own business, ignoring them now.

She turned to look for Strap, who sat silently by the freezer. The small girl seemed almost forlorn, eyeing the various flavors. The woman behind the counter seemed puzzled by the behavior.

Ravanne came over after setting down Pomelo, and went down to one knee. “Are you alright, Strap?”

“There’s a lot of flavors...”

“Yes...? Is that a problem?” Ravanne furrowed her brow, not realizing it made her look angry.

“How am I supposed to pick?” Strap said, looking at her with tears welling in her eyes.

Oh dear, I hadn’t expected this, Ravanne thought. *She’s a bit simple sometimes, isn’t she?*

Without another word, Ravanne scooped Strap up against her, cheek to cheek.

“What flavor speaks to you the most?”

Strap stopped. “Um... I’d want flavors like the Rangers, I guess?”

Ravanne looked at the woman behind the counter, who shrugged in confusion. Pomelo leaned in.

“She means Power Rangers. The kung fu TV show for kids?” Pomelo played off like it

was all beneath her.

“Pom, you watched it with me yesterday...And it's not kung fu...”

As the two liquids and human worker watched, Pomelo turned a scarlet shade, muttering something under her breath as she turned away.

“Well, hm. I’m not familiar with them, Strap. Do they have flavors associated?”

“No, colors! Red, Green, Blue, Pink, Black, and Yellow were the original, but then later the Green Ranger became the White Ranger and—” Ravanne hushed her with a finger to Strap's lips.

“So. Here’s what we can do. You have six arms. You can get six flavors, one for each Ranger. Does that sound okay?”

“I love you, Ravanne!” Strap dived into her core and unfurled her arms, wrapping all six around Ravanne and squishing into her.

“I don’t need six, but... can I get a couple too?” Pomelo asked, still not facing them.

“I don’t see why not. How much will this get us?” Ravanne asked the clerk, placing a single coin on the counter.

“Uh. This is... wait, this is a palace gold coin, are you sure about this? It’s worth a lot...”

Ravanne pondered. “Well, we can get change, yes?”

The woman looked embarrassed. “Um... you’d be carrying around my cash register, basically...”

Both the smaller liquids looked up at Ravanne, a deer in the headlights look on the largest woman’s face. She hesitated, and rummaged, pulling out several alternate coins.

“I’m sorry, I’m not very good with money...” she said, the faintest rouge tinge covering her cheeks.

The woman behind the counter smiled gently. “How many scoops do we need?” They tallied up the interesting flavors. “Alright, this will do right here,” the woman said, taking a single silver coin from Ravanne's display. The liquid swept the rest into her own body, a mechanical whirring sound emanating as they all shifted inside her.

The woman stared, but shrugged and went to get the ice cream ready for the girls.

A few moments later, they wandered along the boardwalk outside, climbing over a small retaining wall to sit by the beach itself. Pomelo kicked her feet, happily eating a decidedly larger-than-necessary cup (more like a bucket, really) of sherbet, several flavors intermixed. The largest portion: raspberry, evidently her favorite. Ravanne made a mental note of such, the better to spoil her if she didn't get too bratty later.

Strap, by comparison, actively licked the various ice cream cones she had, rotating them out; she kept humming some sort of theme to herself. She finished two of the cones fairly quickly, and kept seeming to save the strawberry cone, presumably meant to represent the pink character. Ravanne couldn't be sure.

She herself held a cone of mint chocolate chip. She asked the clerk what might work for her which tea drinkers might enjoy, but not something directly tea-flavored. Ravanne licked the cone, the sweet flavor caressing her tongue, and she stared out at the ocean before her, all the people milling on the beach and playing in the water.

And tears began forming in the corners of her eyes. She didn't deserve this. None of it. Not playing with these other liquids, who never sinned like she had. Or the humans, welcoming and open in Venephika, even those who knew of what she and her fellow Jigokushio did in the past, what earned them that moniker. The Four Hellish Kings. Those who laid waste to the world, who nearly extinguished humanity.

Strap noticed her crying, and nudged Pomelo as stealthily as possible behind Ravanne's back, the bigger liquid sitting between the other two. Pomelo blinked, looked up, and registered the situation. She nuzzled into Ravanne's side, and offered a spoonful of her sherbet. Sharing food, for Pomelo, did not often occur. The generosity of the girl stopped Ravanne from sobbing, her crying stopped in its tracks, and she rubbed her eyes, wiping away the tears.

"It's okay," came Strap's quiet voice. "We know it hurts a lot."

Pomelo didn't say anything, just kept trying to push the sherbet into Ravanne's mouth. She accepted it, the flavor overwhelming, and smiled, despite how watery her eyes still were.

"You two are endearing."

Looking out to the horizon, the sun beaming down, she pondered. Maybe... just maybe, she could be allowed to indulge herself like this. And slowly, surely, make amends for things which came before. Strap picked out a strawberry hunk from her ice cream, giving it to Pomelo, who wolfed it down as Ravanne blinked in surprise.

And a slow smile spread across her face. *Yes. Yes, I think I can manage, if all my fellow liquids are with me.*