

1 ARRIVAL

WC:1532 | Rolls: Von ???, Monty ???, Grim (No Prompt), Curt (No Prompt) |

The cooking instructor was a small, short woman with medium brown hair and brilliant green eyes. She might not have a dragon, but she had something better--a professional cooking degree. She was passionate about the art and enjoyed sharing it with everyone. The bright smiles on the faces of people tasting their own food--and loving it--was what kept her going. That's why, when she saw a terrifying-looking dragon waiting next to a charming-looking boy outside, she didn't panic. Sure, the dragon was big and intimidating, but the boy was cute and seemed excited. In fact, he almost sparkled. Maybe he was single? They were about the same age. As she organized the kitchen and prepared for the cooking class, she had no idea what was coming.

Outside, Curt was dressed in a thick coat and scarf, soaking up the bright light of the midday snow shower. He didn't need glasses today, so his head accessory of choice was a simple beret to keep the snow off his hair. It was coming down in large flakes, landing gently on his clothes and melting in an instant. Would this sort of snow stick? He hoped so. Building snowmen was romantic for some people--his guides said so.

This is the stupidest idea you've ever had. At least you can blame your failure on the instructor; Maybe Vonius won't abandon you then. Grim made a deep groan, her way of saying she was annoyed and didn't want to be babysitting. Sitting out in the cold wasn't doing her skin any favors, either, and she had neglected to wear her cloth parts today.

Von wouldn't leave me unless I did something really bad, Curt replied. *This won't hurt him, will it?*

Debatable, came the answer. *I'll allow it, but in the future when I say 'don't do it,' there will be no room for disagreement. Understood?* The Rider nodded. Hopefully Vonius arrived before Grim's impatience reached its peak.

"Can I help cook today?" Monty asked from inside Vonius's warm hood while the boy checked his phone.

"Not today, and you'll have to hang out in the coat pockets once we get inside, or maybe the hood depending on how I hang it." Grim was there, but Grim didn't look like a mouse and act like a mouse, so she could attend in person. This earned pouts from Monty, but it wasn't like he had forgotten the treats on offer. He would live.

For once, the Rider was not sporting too heavy of a coat, but he did make sure to wear a nice fluffy scarf and a hoodie with a furred hood for the dragon to hide in. Underneath, he dressed lighter than usual. There were still layers of clothing—a casual dress top with a striped tank top underneath—but the fabric was lighter and let a comforting, chill breeze through. He had gloves and a hat, but he had tucked them away, enjoying the perfectly crisp weather that reminded him of home. Even the snow felt perfect.

Monty didn't agree with the sentiment, snuggling into the hood and scarf, wanting to head inside before exposing any piece of himself to the so-called winter wonderland. Unlike his Rider, he was no fool, and he knew snow was not the type of weather to underdress in.

"Do you happen to see Curt?" Von asked Monty, looking around.

"I see this fluff and this scarf, so no." Thankfully, it only took a moment more to spot Grim, and where there was Grim, Curt would not be far behind. Waving, he headed over to the two, happy to see Curt at least. He reached for his hand and was surprised by the cold fingers. "You're so cold! Here, borrow my gloves for now, they're very warm and have a little warming feature. I added them in when I bought them."

Curt smiled and happily took the gloves. He didn't have any since they messed with his sense of touch and made using the phone annoying, but a gift from Vonius was a good omen. "Thanks, Von. These will help a lot." He smiled happily, "Though I'm not sure how long I can wear these. We're going to be cooking today." He looked the other boy up and down, suddenly growing concerned at how underdressed he was. "Don't you need the gloves a little more than me, though? Today, I think the frostbite timer is two hours...we aren't staying out that long, but what if...?" Did he have hypothermia, is that why he was dressed so light?

Taking a moment to hold and rub against Curt's arms to warm him, Vonius was already at a comfortable temperature and was alright donating his extra things to try and warm up the freezing boy.

Curt still looked worried until he saw Monty's little ears poking out to listen. "I can just use Monty to warm my hands instead, so put your gloves back on." He pulled a walnut out of his deep pockets and held it over the rat-shaped bump in the scarf. When Monty reached out to grab it, Curt plucked him out with his cold fingers and held him tight.

Even if he is round, you can't use him as a stress ball. Curt released before causing trouble and Monty scrambled up into the warmth of his coat sleeves. He felt nausea sweep over him, but he would persevere. He had to. The relationship counted on this date.

You did that to yourself.

"Anyways, let's head inside. I want to make something nice for you two," Curt said with his normal dazzling smile.

"A shame, but fair. It's nice out here to me." He smiled, taking Curt's hand for now so he could share his warmth since Monty wasn't going to come back out until they were inside. "I didn't have the gloves on to begin with, the scarf is for Monty as well, he doesn't share in the same mindset."

"It cold!" Called Curts sleeve. That was a problem that could be fixed.

"Yes, yes, so cold, let's head in before everyone freezes. I'm curious about the cooking class, I've only learned from the maids and chefs back at home." They were very good teachers, but there was no way he was going to pass up a date opportunity. "I can't wait to have some more quality time with you, even if it hasn't been that long at all."

Don't forget about the party, you wanted to invite them. Kaiser reminded him, before he went back to being a lazy noodle, always on watch.

I'll ask at the end, I want to focus on the date for now.

They walked into the class, where several others were lounging around and waiting for the instructor to start. Vonius took in the decently sized room and figured Curt or Grim would have a preference on where they sat. Grim had to duck to squeeze into the building, and once inside, she shuffled to the back of the room and pointed to the table furthest from the front. "This is the best place." She couldn't lounge in the middle of the room, so if she wanted to keep an eye on the two 'lovebirds,' then they needed to be back here with her. There was no way the dragon would participate. Regardless of whether her hooves would work for cooking, she wanted nothing to do with a kitchen cursed by Curt.

Monty was starting to peek out now, the cold finally outside while they were in. Curt took off his scarf and oversized coat, freeing the poor rat dragon and putting his blood pressure into a healthier set of numbers. "Alright, here we are." Underneath he was dressed quite stylishly; His pants were solid red and made from a thick wool since he couldn't quite change them. For a top he had a collared white shirt covered with a thin red jacket. Were long sleeves a bad idea for a cooking class? Maybe. He could always clean it properly later or just make a new jacket.

Feeling a slight chill as they were near a window, Vonius's body seemed to return to normal and he regretted not layering a bit more. Something longer sleeved would have been

wonderful until they returned to the winter wonderland that was the outside world. That sort of inverse layering was required for him to be comfortable.

The instructor from before looked at the two sparkling boys with curiosity. Could they be...? The blond boy might not be single, but perhaps she would witness something more dazzling today...? She smiled and clapped to draw everyone's attention. "Alright, it seems like everyone's here! I hope you're ready to make a delicious winter dessert." She pulled out an example of the finished recipe: a beautiful cake decorated with white buttercream frosting, crisscrossed green holly patterns, and finally topped with a tiny gingerbread house and its inhabitants. She took out a slice to show it was just as beautiful on the inside--the chocolate cake had a soft and fluffy texture and the inner layer was lined with raspberries. "We'll be making this from scratch. Everyone check your materials and let's begin."

2 Taking Inventory

WC: 2320 | Rolls: Monty (???), Vonius (???), Curt (Diary), Grim (Diary, 900w exp) |

Vonius shed his jacket. In the back of the cooking class, Monty would be allowed to sit out and watch. It was a consolation prize for Monty's troublesome car ride on the way there. Once released, Monty climbed to an empty section of table, close to Vonius. He cleaned his whiskers and velvet scales while the two males took their seats. "Behave now, alright?" Vonius whispered softly, getting confirmation squeaks from the dragon. He checked their supplies while the other two settled in for the class.

Everyone washed their hands and returned to their seats for the start. Even from the back of the room, the other classmates were clearly visible. It was small enough that everyone was close. Vonius gave his sparkling smile to anyone who turned their way before leaning towards Curt and resting his head on the boy's shoulder. The class sanitized their work areas and started the prep work. Sleeves rolled up, jewelry off, hair tied back, loose jackets removed--everything was in place now. Vonius had planned ahead and worn simple clothing so this process would be easy enough. Curt did not have the same foresight; He wore not just one but two long-sleeved tops. One was red to match his pants, while the other was a simple white. Vonius nudged him gently. "You do look lovely today, very striking colors."

"I had to make sure you could see me in the snow," he replied, glancing at the recipe out of the corner of his eye and simply rolling up his sleeves. It looked simple and familiar enough; It just had many more steps than a usual recipe. Vonius recognized the recipe as well—it looked like a modified version of one of the maids' cake recipes, though theirs had less decorations, and was usually served with custard. To Curt, the cooking was a battle of endurance, rather than skill. Hopefully he would win and have a delicious cake to show for it.

Do not improvise, Grim instructed.

Curt followed the text with his finger and memorized each line. "These seem like easy instructions to follow. There's room for creativity in the decorating stage, but I'll stick to the recipe as close as possible before then. If I'm going to make it for you in the future, then I can't start off with improvising." He gave Vonius a wink, then took out his phone.

Vonius wasn't the most fond of this sort of recipe, since it was very rich in flavor, but Kaiser loved stronger flavored sweets and would love it. "Easy to follow instructions means she's a good tutor. I might take out the raspberries and ask for another fruit. I think I might have some in my phone, worst case." Strawberries would add a nice flavor and that red color. Hopefully it would work just as well.

Curt nodded, flipping through to his camera app. "Let's get some pictures of the process before we start." He snapped a few of the materials, then handed the very patient Monty one of his raspberries, and took several more of the berry's last vanishing act.

"Once I get my apartment, we should try to make dinner. Or maybe instead I can treat you to dinner, if you have the time. The Militia and Grim seem to like to keeping you busy." With that though, he set his phone up to record. Monty investigated it for a moment, but ended up sitting behind the camera so he wasn't in the way. "You don't mind if I record, right? It might be nice to add to your blog after editing."

"You have to send me the files for sure," Curt said cheerily. "Once you're home." There was all sorts of data that could be gleaned from files; The location it was sent from interested him most. All his data gathering was being foiled in some way or another, and it bothered him, and it didn't help that Vonius kept switching hotels. Even if he wasn't spying for work, it was reasonable to gain some intel on the likes or dislikes of a person. Since Grim wasn't interfering, there was another thunder dragon tampering with things. Allowed to tamper with things, I can prevent it if desired. Grim corrected. So a thunder dragon was certain, after all. He would worry about that some other time.

"Oh of course, I can send it after I edit out all the boring parts, if you want. I planned to have a watch through to grab pictures to save so it wouldn't be any trouble." Oblivious to

any other intentions, he saw no harm in sending the files once home. He did have a process to it, so it would take some time, but he was sure Curt would understand if he sent it in the morning after his online class courses and some down time to review the gallery.

After Curt was satisfied with his own still pictures, he put the phone in his pocket and started cooking diligently, reading and re-reading to make sure each of his moves were correct. As he worked, he zoned out and grew quieter.

Hey, wake up. Focus less on your cake and more on your date.

Curt set his things down and cozied up next to Vonius. "What's yours look like? Can I try it?"

With the cake wets and dries combined, the batter was rubbing in a nice smooth ribbon. Monty stared with intense desire, eyes sparkling even as he ate a raspberry. He needed to start making the strawberry jam filling, deviating slightly but following the steps closely. "I think mine looks good, want to try a taste?" Holding the spoon out for Curt to try.

Curt took the spoonful of batter and made a very polite smile. "Well, it still tastes too smooth, but that's to be expected. I'm sure it will taste better at the end when it's all decorated."

"It is rather rich in flavor at the moment, it should become more enjoyable once cooked."

The instructor hovered at the table next to theirs, giving advice to her students, but also keeping an ear out for any happenings at the sparkling table. Getting an apartment soon? Cooking dinner together? So her guess was correct, and they were further along than she thought.

Curt took a spoon of his own mix and offered it. "Why don't you try mine?" He offered a taste of his own batch, which looked quite innocuous--exactly the same as the students' around them.

At first, Von was more than happy to have his first try of the food, but the screen of his phone started flashing green squares, then swapped back to its normal mode. It was fast enough that no one seemed to notice.

The batter is cursed, make your excuse unless you want to find out what curse it may be. Well, Vonius wasn't surprised, but now he had to think of a sweet way to decline.

"I'd love to try, but I have a small stomach. I was planning to invite you out after this for some dinner, and I wouldn't have room for both. I'm sure it is just delightful, just as you are."

"Ah, that's a shame," Curt said sadly. He licked a bit of the batter off the spoon and took a taste. It seemed about the same as Vonius's, so he said, "Seems like we're both on track, unless we're both screwing up. Ah well, I have a pretty small stomach, too. I was going to eat a slice of cake when I got home, but dinner sounds nice." Vonius was taking the initiative and inviting him on the date? It seemed like things were back to a normal dating baseline, which was quite a relief.

The real relief is he didn't try it. What if he got sick?

But I'm following the directions perfectly. We're using the same ingredients.

As Grim raised her doubts, the class went on. The instructor made sure everyone was finished mixing--giving extra attention to the sparkling couple, and even complementing Vonius on his improvisations. "Just make sure to add less jam later, that way the layer is nicely portioned," she suggested. Everyone set their batter into the mold and scooted them in the ovens. Curt looked through the glass impatiently, watching the cake rise and slowly getting entranced. Before he could stare too long, the instructor clapped her hands and pointed to the decorations. "Alright, time to give you some free reign. We have some time while the cakes bake and cool. Let's use it to make the toppings for our cakes and the jam for the inside." She demonstrated how to shape gingerbread pieces, make holly leaves from frosting, and use syrup to give a bit of flair. Curt paid close attention, eyes sparkling, soaking up every detail.

With the batter done, it was on to the jam. He pushed his raspberries pushed to the side for a certain dragon to munch, then pulled some strawberries from seemingly nowhere. They were plump and red, shimmering gently under the lights above. There was something magical to them, but it wasn't immediately obvious.

The compliments of the instructor stoked his ego. He beamed and looked over to Curt with his sparkly eyes. He would take out a small slice for them to taste together later, but beyond that, the cake would be a sacrifice to his wonderful thunder dragon. When they both reached a stopping point earlier than expected, he took the moment to snuggle into Curt. He was quite content leaning on him, and he hadn't noticed their little fan stealing glances at the two dazzling boys. Monty had at least noticed their gaze and stared at the instructor's happy violet aura. It confused the metal dragon some, getting head tilts, but he said nothing as another red raspberry made its way into his mouth.

Looking at what was left to do, Vonius said, "I think I'm going to deviate slightly..." He wanted to make white gingerbread instead of the traditional brown, wanting the cookies to be a soft blue color that would be decorated later with white icing. "I want to make my family home, I think it would be nice." He wanted to impress Curt, though didn't think it would be too hard to make a gingerbread castle, if he focused.

"I'm sure we're doing fine with our recipes. I can tell you at the end what quality it is too. My phone does something really neat when I use my inventory storage on the items." He wouldn't say who made the system with him, as that was currently a subject he was dancing around, but he figured Curt would enjoy what his magical phone could do.

Curt blinked, then crowded around Vonius and the phone. "I want to see! Show me, what sort of thing does it say when you point it at Grim? What about me? Oh, and raw ingredients, before they're used?"

Do not grab his phone. It's a bad idea.

Curt genuinely pouted; He needed to know what sort of program was running, even more so than the magic. "How did you make a program like that? Does it say the quality of everything, or just hand-crafted? Do low quality ingredients affect end quality on the program, or is it based on real-life quality instead of construction?" In the moment, decorating was forgotten, and it was replaced by his need to know everything. He didn't need a glamour to sparkle for the moment.

Should I pull out more? Or will that be fine? Kaiser asked, tuning in quite well right now as he knew the treat was for him.

This should be good, thank you, Kaiser.

Letting Curt fire off his questions as he kept flattening out the pale blue colored gingerbread, it was like a strange song that just murmured on for a while and didn't seem to stop. Vonius was still cooking at least, the gingerbread cookies going into the oven and a new tray of gingerbread pieces was rolled out, shaped, and into the oven once more. It was rather pleasant having this background noise that was the pretty male, hearing his words even if he hadn't made any signs of acknowledging it.

Isn't it rude if you ignore your date, though?

It'll give Curt the chance to focus, he tends to zone out when he's doing so. I want him to have fun even if I'm not the main focus. Monty wasn't sure if that was a good idea, but he wouldn't argue against his rider's innocent wishes

You better not let him touch the phone, I will shock him without a care for your courting attempts.

You'll be fine, Kaiser. Just do a little zap if he does touch. He's just excited is all. You did a wonderful job setting up the system and den with me, and then for me where I lacked experience.

Grim did a low hum and Curt stopped talking instinctively. *Curt, you need to stop asking questions if you want him to have time to answer.* Curt stayed quiet and gazed at the other boy expectantly. When it became clear he had been tuned out, he got a bit miffed and started quietly constructing his gingerbread. Unlike usual, he was still attuned to his surroundings. It felt odd. Perhaps it was because he had something he wanted to know out there. He glanced at Monty to gauge proportions and started making a rat-shaped gingerbread cookie, complete with some chocolate chips and berry dye to make him look especially adorable. When he finished before Vonius, he gave a sly glance at the phone, looked back to the busy Vonius, then the phone...

Curt, you can do it, but it's not a good idea, Grim said in a voice that dripped with amusement. Well, that was all the permission he needed.

3 Digital Magic

WC: 2330 | Rolls: Monty, Vonius, Curt (Blacksmith III), Grim (No Prompt, 900w exp) |

Curt reached out to pick up the phone. Before it could get more than a centimeter off the stand, he felt a light shock go through his fingers and down his nerves. He dropped it with a clatter and withdrew his hand. *Told you so,* came a smug line from Grim.

Von was putting the last of the gingerbread in the oven—simply assuming Curt wouldn't touch things without asking—only to hear the clatter from the table. He looked at his toppled over phone, then to Curt with a blank expression.

Vonius heard Kaiser explaining through their bond. *He's like a horse that hit an electrical fence, he doesn't seem hurt but maybe check on the fool.*

He had planned to answer his questions once he was back to sitting, but now it seemed like he'd be the one asking questions. "Curt, why would you do that?" Vonius asked, picking up the phone, dusting it off once, and then setting it back in place. *You are unharmed, right Kaiser?*

I'm fine, yes. I sent out a warning shock and it seemed to do the trick. Good, good, now it was just back to staring at Curt waiting for answers. "Are you alright, it wasn't painful was it?"

"I just wanted to check," he replied plainly. "It didn't hurt." So there was the Thunder dragon. Normally it would make him shy away, but something about this one was different. Annoying. Grim nodded approvingly, though didn't encourage him further. A new emotion was a good step, and toward a dragon, no less. Monty didn't seem pleased about it, though, hissing as he was. The metal dragon could see what was happening more clearly than anyone else, which made Grim a little more excited, even if Curt was displeased with the situation. "If your phone is sending off shocks, it needs to be fixed," Curt said quietly. "I can give it some maintenance if you like."

"It is normally quite rude to grab at someone's personal belongings, in my case it does that for anyone but myself. Thankfully it was quite a low voltage." Von was still worried about Curt, even if he knew he deserved what little lesson he might have learned. He took his hands and started rubbing them to make sure he was fine. "If you lose feeling in the fingers any time soon, tell me. That isn't a good sign." The slightly rough hands were rather pleasant against his gentle skin, not that many people would agree. It was a sign of a hard working individual, a quality he did like in people. Once everything seemed normal, he smooched the back of his hands, then let Curt have them back so they could keep going with the class. "My phone does that on purpose, however. No one is allowed to maintenance it aside from myself. Just for everyone's safety, as there are many safeguards in it."

The instructor hovered over to the table, excited. In her eyes, the taller male was taking care of the sweet injured little one after some sort of accident. The sight was beautiful; It was a treat sweeter than any cake she could make. She looked at their decorations and complemented them happily. "Such lovely decorations! A cute little rat and a wonderful family. I can't wait to see what sort of frosting you add to it. Ah, but the cakes! They should be cool about now."

Perking up as the mentions of cake, Von was back to normal self. Excited for decorating time. "Let's go get our cakes and do the next step. Your decorations are looking so lovely right now, I can't wait to see how it turns out."

"Sorry, I'll be a bit more patient," Curt finally said. He smiled proudly at the mention of his work and set the thunder dragon and its system at the back of his mind--for the moment. He smiled and curled his fingers in and out until they felt normal again. "I said I'm fine, but

I wouldn't mind going for a walk and holding your hands a bit more. That should help the feeling get back to them." There was no residual tingling from the shock, but he liked how warm Von's fingers were, especially on this cold day.

They grabbed their cakes and returned to the table. Curt carefully followed the directions for applying the frosting--to the letter--and managed to make it even more beautiful than the picture. The rat gingerbread may not have looked like a professional work of art, especially compared to the careful smoothing and sprinkle application on the rest of the cake, but it was exactly the way he wanted it. He made a decorative border out of raspberry syrup, lined the edges with raspberries, and then set one little raspberry in the rat's hands on top. The extra went straight to the real rat beside him--or, at least, the real thing that looked like a rat beside him--and hopefully that would soothe the thing that was bothered by the shock. The phone crashing on the table was very sudden, so even a dragon might be startled. It made sense. He also pulled some of the walnuts out of his coat pocket.

"Once we're finished here, we can go for a short walk if you want. I think it would be relaxing even before dinner with such a dashing person as yourself. Just be sure not to do anything that might make your hands worse." With their cakes returned, he flattened his, layered the cake and its filling, and then frosted it with a smooth white color. He would decorate that with colored icing once he was finished setting up the base. It was a long process of making the cake beautiful now, one that Curt seemed invested in, so it was the perfect time for him to be as well. He still knew to answer at least some of Curt's questions, even if his questions were what got him in trouble in the first place. Answering them would keep Curt just distracted enough as he made quick work of building that resembled his home.

"The phone just gives general stats for people, and species. I made the program for my uses back when I was young and it's been being built ever since. It requires a lot of magic to make, and thankfully I had plenty to spare as a child. Storage is unlimited, thankfully, so I don't check much. It's a very customizable build that I'm proud of. I do tend to use fundroid for the phone, it's just easier and more intuitive for my sake." On the final steps of his cake, a towering gingerbread formation that was decorated with textures, window décor, doors, snowy covered areas, and even a stone laid path that led to the very outer rim of chocolate that had hardened and was carefully stuck into the cake to finish it off. It was a grand piece, but Von was very pleased with it.

"Starting around the third week of December, my family will be hosting a party for the holidays. I'll be staying there until the new years comes around, I would like it if you were able to join me then. I can send a more formal invitation to your superior if needed as proof."

"We would be honored to attend," Grim replied on Curt's behalf. "A formal invitation would be best, since I will be attending as well, and need a good reason to leave my duties."

With Grim deciding it, Curt went right back to his questions. "Oh, you made the program yourself?" Curt asked eagerly. "I'd love to see any sort of details you have on the process. That's--"

Limit of two questions per rally, you're at one now.

"Well, that's pretty phenomenal. Now I really, really wish I met when we were younger. Oh, maybe we could work on developing something together?"

Two, the end.

But that wasn't really a question, it was a statement.

It's about inflection. The end. Curt stopped talking, but he was already mentally making a list of more questions. *Curt, pay more attention to your date. What do you think of his cake now?* The boy gave the cake a glance, saw it was absolutely beautiful, then went back to waiting. Numbers and codes were much more attractive than even the prettiest food.

"I shall have an invitation sent for Curt and a separate invitation for yourself as well, so you can each receive your own for whatever purposes needed. I can get them done after the video is edited. I'm quite fast at neat, handwritten invitations, since I would send them with my mother in my younger years."

Taking his phone to slowly get many good video angles of both of their cakes, he thought them as beautiful in their own way. His in a more large sense, and Curt's in a smaller and cute sense, with Monty posing next to the cake to show off it's charm. "I was quite a child of chaos when younger so it is probably best we didn't, I've mellowed out quite a bit over my few years so far. I don't tend to do much in the same vein, mainly just making parts for dragons who need it. I have my final years of my doctorate degree to finish, my work with the Naki, my family, and any other events and classes I go to in-between all of that. Coding magical works is not my main focus in any way, but I needed something very specific."

Curt smiled sneakily. "Ah, but you didn't--"

Don't press the matter.

But he didn't say no, so it means he would be okay working with me now!

Last time you pressed the matter, we ended up needing to run around on our Hatch Day to patch things up. It was a lovely day, but it could have been better. Don't press the issue, am I clear?

Curt seemed a little listless for a moment, then snapped out of it. "A child of chaos, eh? I tried to keep my head down when I was little, so I suppose it's for the best. Still...it would have been fun to make something like that with you." He sent puppy dog eyes at him--both genuine and glaucous--hoping Vonius would get the hint.

"It could have been fun, alas, but we met at a more peaceful time that is better for the two of us. Though I'm sure you were quite the adorable youngling, so it really is a shame. I can only imagine the younger you." Maybe he was less strange back then, before there was time for things to go awry.

I inform you to be mistaken, he's always been a strange one even as a child. Kaiser shattered that illusion, but he could still imagine it as if he wasn't informed otherwise.

Grim sighed from behind them. *At least compliment him on the cake.*

"Your cake does look lovely though. Is it alright if I try a bit? Ah, but that would ruin it..."

"Thank you," replied Vonius. "Yours is so adorable. Monty seems to be enjoying it as well, though maybe he is also just eyeing the berries. It's hard to tell at times."

Curt pointed over to his own cake. "You're welcome to take this home as well, think of it as my treat for the treat before."

Grim snapped to attention. About to just confirm it and figure out what to do with it later, the possessive Grim became his savior. "Curt, we already discussed this, the cake belongs to me." She would promptly throw it in the trash, but it was hers nonetheless. Giving it to the Argyris boy would make him sick at best.

Vonius gave Curt a thankful look all the same. "If Grim wants it, then it's best to appease her and let her take it. We can try some of mine though, a small slice should fine after everyone gets their phones full of pretty cake images."

Some people, including the instructor, wandered to look at cake designs and end results. Vonius didn't care to, cuddling up with Curt in the meantime, taking one of his hands to hold tenderly. When they were done, Von was more than happy to cut a very small slice that wasn't even a full portion for himself. The insides were moist--a deep chocolaty color with

strawberry jam and sliced strawberries layered in-between. The insides didn't look as pretty as some cakes, but it wasn't boring and came out as it was meant to be. Holding a fork up to Curt, he let him try it first. "Here~ Tell me what you think."

Curt was reluctant to try something that looked so plain, but it was being offered by quite a pretty boy, so how could he refuse? He chomped down on it and just forgot what it looked like. There was another important factor to food, after all--texture. He made pleased noises for Vonius as he took the bite, turning up his sparkle. "It has a good texture--I love the berries in it. They're a lot more firm than the raspberries, so perhaps yours really did turn out better in the end. I do like soft things, too, though..." He leaned close to Vonius and gently touched the side of his face, close to his lips, then just as quickly removed his hand and started fawning over the structure of the gingerbread house. A little teasing was expected at this point, wasn't it? "It looks a little Victorian. Have you ever studied architecture? And the color of the gingerbread looks pretty. Maybe I should have made some changes, too..." the cogs in his brain started turning, and Grim saw no reason to hinder them now that the cooking was over. Rather, it was better for his machinations to focus on gingerbread than further teasing.

4 Misconceptions

WC: 1600 | Rolls: Monty, Vonius, Curt (No Prompt), Grim (No Prompt)|

Staring so sweetly into Curt's eyes, a light red color spread to his face even as Curt's hand pulled away. Teasing was within bounds--hints at what their future could hold if all went well, and both were into the idea of progressing to the next step. He knew it would mostly hinge on himself, since he was far too nervous to give in easily to any romantic thought he might be holding onto inside himself. He was still innocent in some aspects of his life, and dating was one of them, it seemed.

"Thank you, Curt. I have not studied architecture, though. This is my family house and I just remember it rather well, even if it has been a while since I've been home. Next time we cook together, we can make alterations to our hearts content. Maybe if we're careful, we can add lighting and such. I think some stain glass like windows would be interesting." Everything in Von's brain said to just lean forward and touch, maybe get a little too close, maybe stroke Curt's freckled face just that little bit more, all those thoughts that made him nervous but oh did he love the fluffy feelings when he did give in.

The instructor stole a glance just in time to see Curt incredibly close to Vonius. Her eyes mirrored the sparkles coming from the table, and she politely excused herself to 'look at the other students' cake.' She was looking at something, that much was certain. Jumping a bit as their instructor came by, Vonius's over-adoring look returned to his usual caring one, and he pushed that moment of temptation out of his mind. "Oh, hello Miss."

It seemed that the instructor missed the most important part—at least from her perspective—as there was no kiss after their intimate moment together. "How are you two doing? Your cakes turned out--" she gasped at the intricate design for Vonius's home and its careful adjustments. The recipe used all the same ingredients, and yet, it looked like a completely new recipe. She rubbed her eyes, then looked at Curt's. It focused more on cuteness than structure, but the gingerbread and frosting had the touch of an artisan. Not only were the men sparkling, but their cakes shone in the light, too. Was this the power of love? "These cakes...um...can I try them?"

"You can have the rest of this slice if you desire," Vonius replied. "It's not a big slice, but just a taste to tantalize your taste buds."

She took a bite of the beautiful cake and made a delighted face. "Mmm! It tastes a bit like heaven!" The adjustments were done at a professional level, and it almost seemed like a new recipe. She beamed with pride; That such a thing could result from a class of hers was an achievement indeed, even if it was the student that made the improvements. It was a remarkable day. He must have made it so tasty for his love to enjoy. Happy as the instructor's eyes sparkled, he seemed to have done well—someone who had a good sense of taste enjoyed it. That meant Kaiser was sure to like it, even if it was eaten in one bite. He would still enjoy the flavors it had, even if all the textures that didn't usually come together did. She took a glance at the other cake. Would it be just as good? She pointed at it with a pleading look.

Grim contemplated for a bit; This might be a nice, safe way to expose Vonius to the dangers of cooking without getting him to actually eat it. They had been lucky so far with him avoiding the food, but it would only be a matter of time before disaster struck.

As she turned her gaze to the other cake though, Vonius's smile faltered slightly as she was tricked by the beauty of the cute and charming cake. "I don't know if--"

Grim gave a nod to the instructor. "You may try a small slice. Curt, cut one for her." Vonius stifled his protest and just hoped Kaiser and the system were just overreacting, and the cake wouldn't be that bad. Curt obliged and did a tiny slice--about the same size that Vonius cut out for him--and plated it for her. He slid it over and looked at her with proud and hopeful eyes. She gently parted the slice with her fork, admiring the fluffy texture and proportions of jam and frosting, then took a careful bite. Oh, the expression on her face said something different than 'tasty.' Her face turned pale. The life vanished from her eyes. She

set the fork down and walked away without a word. The pleasure from the previous cake was wiped off her face. It looked like a cake, perfect in every aspect of the image, but something must have spoiled or gone wrong when it was made. How? Vonius wasn't sure, staring at Curt and wondering if he was cursed by a higher being.

Grim sighed. "Hmm...she's too polite. I was hoping for some honest critique."

"She just enjoyed it that much," Curt said happily.

Vonius sighed. At least he was warned ahead of time. Since the class was nearing its close time, he wrapped up his own conversations. "I don't want to keep you too late, so let us wrap up the cakes and head to dinner. I know I can only take up some of your time, and would be so saddened if our dinner date had to be cut short because we lingered too long here." Stopping the recording process, he picked up his phone and pointed it at the cake. The flashing green squares returned, then the cake appeared inside with stats automatically pulled up.

- ❖ Crafter: Vonius Argyris
- ❖ Item: Consumable (dessert)
- ❖ Quality: SSS
- ❖ A chocolate cake decorated to be based off the Argyris estate.
- ❖
- ❖ Effect: UNCOMMON
- ❖ Happiness- consuming this cake will give you feelings of bliss.

Recording the new stats, pushing a button at the bottom of an arrow going into a open box, the cake vanished and now was a item in his phone's inventory

Curt's eyes glittered. "What happened to the cake? Does it have a digitization feature? Or is it teleportation magic? Did an instance mage help? What does my cake say? Did—"

You are already over your two questions. Grim tapped her tail.

Vonius managed to answer what he could. "The cake is in my inventory is all; I can pull it out later when need be," he told Curt simply, not wanting to really delve into what it said for real creatures. They were usually unbiased and true, but he had learned not everyone felt the same. He didn't control the entries, and wasn't sure what actually did. Kaiser maybe, a good option that made sense.

Grim inspected the phone in a new light. It seemed the phone system had much more to it than met the eye. Perhaps they didn't need to be warned about the cooking, though she did

wonder what sort of thing it said about her. She leaned her neck over and demanded, "Before we go, show me my entry."

"Oh, uh, sure. I'll take a screenshot for you to see..." Worried, he didn't want to displease Grim, so there could be a losing battle either way depending on what popped up. Holding it up, the green squares focused on Grim's face and the stats popped up.

- ❖ Name: Grim
- ❖ Species: Dragon (thunder)
- ❖ Occupation : Security Consultant
- ❖
- ❖ STR 10
- ❖ DEF 10
- ❖ INT 35
- ❖ WILL 15
- ❖ DEX 10

Thankfully, there didn't seem to be a small blurb. There wasn't often, but hopefully it was acceptable to Grim as he took a screenshot for her to see.

Grim squinted incredulously. Was this really all there was to say about herself? Or was Kaiser purposely manipulating the results? Either way, she would let her Rider's curiosity run its course going forward--so long as he kept to the two-question rule. "You will show us more of this at dinner. For now, we don't need to know the specifics of Curt's cake. I'm sure you've already checked and know quite a lot about it. Let's clean up here and get going. Curt, box up my cake, and don't touch Vonius's phone without permission."

Curt pouted, wanting to know more, but what Grim said was final. Glamour certainly wasn't going to work on her, so it was time to go. Curt boxed up the cake carefully, using the provided ribbon to wrap it neatly, and even wove an intricate bow on top. He wanted to offer to put up Vonius's, too, but it had already been zipped into some sort of pocket universe. Instead, he gently took the boy's arm and huddled up close to him. "You promised to keep me warm until dinner, didn't you?"

"Why of course, only you." Vonius picked up the curious Monty and dropped him into his jacket. Once the scarf was wrapped as well, only the pink tail of the dragon hybrid stuck out. Soon it, too, slipped away into the warm shelter. He took Curt's hand into his warm one, then made sure they were ready before leading the way out. He sent Kaiser a poke to reserve some place for them, thankful that the dragon knew the ins and outs of technology and made his life easy. Being dressed on the casual side, nothing too fancy would do, but something still nice was still needed for the date. "After all, anything for someone as cute as you."