

Lino perched on top of Radice's shoulders, giving a huge yawn with her toothy beak. She had shrunk down to sleep in the same cot as him, though her dark goopiness was still seeping everywhere, including onto the bunks below them. They wouldn't be happy when they woke up. Radice lazily scrolled through his daily tasks, morning still fogging his mind, when he saw something peculiar. *Apprehend Suspicious Character; Strange female Bestia spotted, suspected of: Violating personal boundaries, entering the city without screening, theft of clothing. Some reporting inappropriate displays. Does not appear intoxicated.* Radice lingered on it. "Sound easy, Lino?"

The dragon licked her front paw and started cleaning her spines. "What's the plan after apprehending her?"

He shrugged. "We'll find out after meeting her." He rolled out of bed quietly—careful not to wake the people sleeping below—and grabbed his uniform and a light jacket to deal with the autumn air. Lino hopped into his shadow, and off they went to the stables. When they were ready to exit the building, Lino emerged at her full size—large enough to carry her Rider, and then a little bit extra. Radice gently laid a blanket on the dragon and then fit one of the softer saddles on her back. He hopped on and they were off to the city outskirts.

He checked his phone to make sure they were heading the right direction. The tall highrises of the inner city gave way to smaller businesses and then crowded residential areas. Eventually, the buildings started to mesh with the forest. This was probably where their quarry was 'terrorizing' people. It was easy to sneak into the city in an area without roads, after all. For all he knew, she had wandered in on accident. *Do you see anything, Lino?*

The dragon scoured the area with her true sight. She saw plenty of animals roaming through the plants, but only one of them fit the description. She seemed almost deer-like; But, unlike Bestia, there was a distinct plant-like aura around her. *Something similar to a human, but...a plant?*

*That will do.*

It wasn't often that Rozaliya wandered out from the forest that was near the town, but with the trees becoming colorful and years of curiosity she had finally given into exploring a bit. Once winter hit, it was far less entertaining as animals would lay to rest or migrate elsewhere, and each year it just grew more and more dull waiting for spring and the new set of baby animals to arrive. She enjoyed the entertainment of playing with the curious little ones, but the wait for their arrival was excruciating. It wasn't odd either for some of her species to mingle with other cultures, even if they usually stayed in the forest, so she had decided to test the areas outside of her home.

In the woodland areas, she wandered mostly naked, only adorning herself with flower crowns and small accouterments to add some spice to her life. When towngoers passed through though, they were fully clothed and with their fleshy skin covered. She knew enough to try and blend in, so after some naked wandering it was time to find clothes. The forest gods smiled

upon her when a larger dress shirt was found on a rope—or so she thought at first. Small clips held it in place and it was left abandoned, so she assumed it was free to take. After all, why else would clothes be outside on a line? It made enough sense to her at least, even if that wasn't the case.

She followed after wild animals that lived close to the town, and when she finally reached the outskirts, she found some of the younger ones to play with. Their parents' eyes had strayed away from their children, but the moment their attention returned, they whisked the kids straight away and started shouting at her. *Well, all fun has to come to an end at some point, right?* she thought to herself. Nonetheless, it was all so exciting! She spotted and inspected so many new things and met plenty of new people, even if they looked at her soft peach fur oddly. Their looks gave her a feeling that she was unwelcome, but that didn't dampen her mood any. Maybe she could become like one of the more 'civilized' folk and find a home among them.

For now though, she had found a large patch of flowers to pluck growing along the gravel path. She picked a few as the wind made her baggy shirt flow around her. She fastened what was once a clothesline a bit tighter so it didn't billow too far out, then started organizing the flowers so she could hold even more of them.

The two from before swept low, gently landing next to the unsuspecting cervid. A bit of Lino's scales dripped off from the momentum of their landing. Radice reeled in her reins and the two turned to look at the strange creature. Just a glance confirmed some of the accusations. Up close, she did appear to have more plant-like features than a normal Bestia. He grew wary; If she was from the Chronoscape she could have all kinds of weird powers he knew nothing about. At the same time, his gut feeling said the woman decorated in flowers and strawberries probably wasn't a threat. Lino sent a feeling of affirmation, agreeing mentally with her Rider.

The woman seemed oblivious to their landing, so he made a small cough.

Her goat-like ears perked up as she heard him finally. She let out a small gasp of excitement and hopped up to meet these new things. One looked a bit drippy, but that just added to the charm of...whatever it might be. It looked like a lizard with wings—was this one of those dragons she had heard about? She wanted to touch it but knew better, so instead just stared curiously and made sweet cooing noises to see if it responded in a friendly manner.

"Those flowers aren't for picking," Radice said in Abrendese, pointing at a small sign among them that said 'Community Garden.'

Hearing the other though, her ears drooped a bit and returned to their lax position. Her eyes widened as she struggled to think of the right words to say. The bigger male-looking person wasn't speaking in her mother tongue, but she did recognize a few of the words from a separate language she was learning. She sort of knew what he said, but didn't know how to respond back fully. "P-pero, why... no?" She had a small handful of blossoms, looking more like petals than fully grown flowers, and she knew they were edible. "They... comida?"

"Esas flores no son comida," he replied in Shéar, switching as soon as he heard 'pero.' "But they're still important. They help with pollination so that there are fruit and vegetables in the spring." The Worm on Lino's tail wiggled as it heard about fruits and vegetables. Barring Lino herself, those were the tastiest treats. While no one was watching, it opened its toothy petals to try and detect something tasty. There was something fruity around. It just needed to find it.

"Are you lost? Where are you supposed to be?" Radice weighed her up and down. There was definitely no space in that breezy wear for a wallet. "You can't be in this part of town without proper identification. If you're from somewhere else, I suggest you head home as soon as possible."

Huffing as she was told they weren't food, she at least calmed when he explained why he claimed otherwise. Understandable, but she wouldn't be a good fawna if she ate all the plants and didn't know which ones could bloom daily. She never really figured out why, but it was good for small snacks or adding spices to food.

"They bloom every day, just a few snacks doesn't hurt. Here, have some!" At least left to her mother tongue, she was quite fluent. The language was close enough that they could reach an understanding. She held up one of the flowers to his mouth. Radice was about to relent and taste one of the blossoms, but the fawna was the first to notice the Worm wiggling on the tail of the dragon and took back the flowers before he could. Ignoring everything else for now, she plucked one of the ripe strawberries from her hair, offering it to the squirming bit of the dragon that seemed to be chomping on air, cooing still sweet words at the beast she didn't know much about. She wanted to befriend this creature, dragon or not. It seemed neat.

Radice glared at it, but Lino was all too happy to curl her tail around so the Worm could reach the strawberry. "Please don't feed that--" he was about to say, but the Worm was well ahead of him and scarfed the strawberry down in one bite.

Lino hummed happily. "It likes you," she told the fawna. "What's your name? Where are you from?"

"I'm Rozaliya, and I'd love to know more about a strange creature like you. I'm from the forest, and I've come up to see what happens in the town. Everyone travels through my home, so I figured I can travel through theirs as well."

The Worm started reaching around, searching for all the other nice, edible things it could smell. It found one of Rozaliya's fingers--still smelling like strawberries--and chomped down excitedly. Not aware of the Worm's appetite, she let out a surprised yelp as it bit her. It didn't hurt much--she was used to little woodland creatures being a little too rough at times--but she yanked her hand back out of instinct. Tears welled up in her eyes and she sniffled, keeping her hands away from the snappy tail as she side-stepped away from it. She liked the tail less, but creatures were creatures, and couldn't be stopped sometimes.

"That was very mean, you don't bite the hand that feeds you or the hand doesn't feed you anymore."

If the Worm understood, it wasn't showing it. It still wiggled around looking for sweets. Lino wiggled her tail as if to scold it, getting a few drops of black scales scattered around, then held it high off the ground and away from the sweet-smelling creature. It wouldn't be able to cause mischief up there. "My name is Lino," the dragon said sweetly. "I'm sorry for the Worm's behavior. It doesn't know what it's doing. I don't think it even has a brain." When she saw Rozaliya's tears, her eyes darkened with worry. She nuzzled at Rozaliya's hair with her beak, trying to preen her like a wind dragon would and calm her down.

"Mr. Worm is very mean, but you're very nice, Lino. You feel strange, but nice." Letting herself get preened like the wild birds would often try, it had a nice sense of familiarity as she stroked Lino's goopy neck. She sniffled once more before trying to shake off the trauma of the munch. Mr. Worm tail didn't know better, it was just a snappy thing.

"That's why it's best not to feed it," Radice said matter-of-factly. He couldn't blame Rozaliya for trying, though--if anything, it meant she was kind. All the more reason to finish this quickly. She needed to get out of here before word spread that she was a new creature. "Even if you let people walk through your home, that doesn't mean they'll let you walk through theirs. This place is very dangerous." He tried to think of all the things that could cause her grief here, but didn't want to scare her. "Even more dangerous than the worst beasts in the forest. You should hurry home before something happens."

She looked up from touching the strange Lino, pouting as she wanted to stay and look around some more. The area was so interesting and she hadn't even wandered that far in--there was so much more to see!

"But sir, I want to look around! It's full of so many new things." Gasping, as if having an idea, she extended her arms to cup his face. "You could show me around, and then I won't be in danger or trouble. Then we both win."

Before Radice could reply, Lino happily nodded. "We'll show you the whole city."

*Are you sure about this, Lino? We have a lot to do today. This is just one task, and I don't feel like explaining why the whole day took so long.*

*You could always blame it on me, Lino replied coyly. I'm bored of the usual things. Plus, she's not wrong--if we personally escort her, she'll stay out of trouble, and we can make sure she wants to go home at the end of the day instead of loiter and get into trouble. Let's show her all the boring things.*

Radice weighed the options, but eventually relented. *Alright, you 'uncontrollable' dragon. You win.* As Lino beamed with happiness, he had her lay down so the dragon's saddle was easier to reach. He held out his hand to Rozaliya to help her up. "Hop on. Where do you want to go?"

Clapping her hands happily, she climbed on and wrapped her arms around Radice's waist to stabilize herself. She rested her head against his back until the dripping dragon stood. "Thank you sir, and Lino. I can't wait to see where we go!"