

"Barman," Aether lifted his glass and waved at the man behind the bar. "Can I get another one?" The man put his rag down and grabbed a bottle of whiskey from behind him. "This one is fine right?" The man asked, Aether just nodded and tapped with his glass on the bar. The man pulled the cork from the bottle and poured the golden liquid in Aether's glass. "Drinking to forget?" The man asked, his voice lacking any genuine interest. Aether murmured his response. The man stood and plugged the bottle again, he responded in kind. Then Aether sighed, "Indeed. It is drinking to forget." The barman's eyes flickered up and then down again. Aether met his eyes and held them for a moment. "You want to hear more?" The barman looked out over his empty inn and shrugged. It was a sign that said, 'I got nothing better to do'. "Grab yourself a glass buckaroo, I got a story to tell!"

"So it all started with this job. I should have known from the briefing that something wasn't right with it." Aether started. "You see, I got briefed by an older rich lady who wanted me to steal a family heirloom. Nothing crazy, something she had lost in a family dispute and her brother sold off to spite her. I asked her if it was something of value but she assured me that it had only sentimental value. You see, I am a thief with morals. I won't steal from the rich for the rich." He sipped from his glass. "But looking from the details she gave me, I was sure it was something insignificant." Aether looked at himself in the mirror above the bar. He looked at the dark circles under his eyes. The dirt streaks on his face. His hair, normally in a neat, tight bun, was now messy and greasy. His fingernails, normally coated with a flashy yellow color, were now chipped and damaged.

"And?" The barman asked. Aether snapped out of his melancholy stare, looked the barman in the face. "What did the lady ask you to steal?" Aether picked up his glass and emptied it in one long gulp. He lowered his arm to grab his bag that was positioned between his legs. Aether reached inside and pulled out what looked like a decorative piece of fruit. There were streaks of flame all over the fruit. Also charred pieces that seemingly lay on top of the skin of the fruit. Behind those charred pieces, there seemed to shimmer a glow.

The fruit looked like something that stood at the center of the table and you could take the top off and you would find candy inside.

Except this piece of fruit wasn't an ornament. It was real fruit. The barman could see how Aether was holding it. How his fingers pressed lightly into the flesh of the fruit. The barman was mesmerised by the look of this strange fruit. Aether put the fruit back into the bag.

Smoke raised from his hand, he blew the wisps away.

The barman whistled through his teeth. "Is that what I think it is..?" Aether nodded, "Yup, that was in the flesh devil fruit."

"The old crook lied to me. From the beginning she wanted me to steal this thing. This thing could turn anyone into a living weapon of mass destruction. And like I said before. I am a thief with morals. So stealing something like this," Aether touched the bag with his foot. "I could not get that over my heart. We all have heard and read the stories about these kinds of powers." Barman nodded in agreement.

"So what are you going to do with it then?" Aether shrugged, "that is what I am doing here. Trying to come up with a solution to my problem." A small smile tugged on the lips of the barman. "I thought you were here drinking to forget?" "My priorities shifted." The barman shrugged, "Fine by me. Drinking to forget or drinking to think. As long as you pay, it's okay." Aether searched for a golden coin and placed it on the bar. "This should cover my tab." The barman moved away, back to his stack of dirty glasses.

The night progressed and the bottle in front of Aether slinked further down. He had drunk do much that he now had trouble staying awake at the bar. " just resting my eyes." Aether mumbled to no one in particular. "That won't hurt anybody..." his hand touched the bar. "It.. it feels actually quite nice..." Aether slimmed down, his head touched the wood and his loud snores began to fill the room of the inn.

The barman looked over, he had followed Aether's state closely. And now, seeing him passed out drunk. The man was being torn apart by possibilities and bad decisions. He couldn't get the image of the devil fruit out of his head. The possibilities such a thing could give a person were endless. From the moment he had seen the thing, he had started to think about stealing the item. Somewhere after Aethers first whiskey bottle, the barman had decided to steal it. Now he was just thinking what to do with it. He could always eat it himself and by a soldier for hire, a pirate or many even a high ranking marine officer. But deep down he knew that wasn't the life for him. The barman knew he was too meek for such a life. After coming to terms with his own weakness, he knew the only real option was to steal the damn thing and sell it. With the money he could get from the transaction, he could leave this damn place and finally really start living.

First things first, he needed to close up shop.he couldn't have anyone witness to his crime. He looked over to Aether and saw that the long haired youth was still busy sleeping it off. So the barman waited a couple of minutes longer before ushering the few patrons he had, out the door. They were all regulars and found it a bit weird that the barman would close up this early. The barman came up with a weak excuse on the fly.

"I am feeling a bit under the weather you see. Ate something bad. That new kid at the bar, he gave me something to eat and since then I have felt like dead." The barman said, and immediately cussed himself out internally. Why would he come up with an excuse and weave Aether in to it.the barman hoped that his patrons were as stupid as they looked and wouldn't connect the dots.

The barman closed the doors, slid the bolts in their locks and moved back towards the bar. He turned around and still saw Aether knocked out on the bar. He was pleased with himself. Giving Aether the hardest alcohol after his first bottle had been the right choice. Aether didn't pay for it, but the Barman thought that what he would get from Aether would pay for those drinks hundredfold, if not more. The barman krept towards the bar, trying to be as silent as he could. His old rundown bar didn't help in that regard. One after another the boards creaked as he moved forward. If the man had moved normally, Aether wouldn't have woken up, but now with all those irregular sounds. The longhaired man began to stir. "Wh.. Whu" Aether breathed out as he lifted his face and turned it before laying it down on the bar once again.

The barman swept the sweat that was dangling on his nose. He was not made for stressful situations. The barman laid himself flat on the floor and scouted the last centimetres over until he had the bag in armsreach. He reached inside With skilled fingers and grab the fruit at its spike. Already he felt the heat rising from the living fruit. Sweat Pearls formed on his arm. Silently he pushed himself back over the floor. At a safe distance, he grabbed the fruit in one hand. The heat from the fruit seared his hand on touch. His flesh sizzled and he cried out in pain. At that moment, his door jumped out of its hinges. Three men, who could only be described as the villainous type, stormed inside the bar. The front member of the gang had a small battering ram in his hands. The other two were more conventionally armed. One held a rifle, the other one had a rusty sword in his hands.

"Aether Grayspine, Lady Blackfell has sent us to collect your item. Hand it over peacefully and maybe we will let you keep your purse."

The barman looked up towards the bar, where finally, the raven haired man stirred.

Aether turned around, saw the scene in front of him, turned back to the bar and grabbed the empty bottle in front of him. "You were supposed to give me solutions, or at least let me forget my problems," Aether turned around towards the scene in the bar. "Not create more problems, stupid Alcohol." Then in a flash he threw the bottle at the guy with the rifle. Glass flew everywhere as it exploded on top of the guy's head. The rifle flew up high and fired into the ceiling. In a burst of speed, Aether grabbed his bag and moved towards the bandits. With the bag, he clouded the vision of the guy with the sword. With his other hand, he made a fist and planted it with all his force on the nose of the rifleman. The man crumbled to his knees, rifle dropped to the floor, blood spewed out of his nose all over his chest. Aether stamped on the rifle, it flipped through the air just high enough to block the swing of the swordsman.

"Aaaargh" with a roar stampeded the large bandit battering ram pulled back. The heavy swing connected. Air was forced out of Aether as he was sent flying through the dining room. Aether landed with a muffled thunk and skidded along the floor. He was now only a couple of meters separated from the bartender.

Aether noticed the fruit laying in front of the man, his hand covered in burn Mark's. "Did you call these guys down on me? Did you think they were going to reward you for snitching me?" The man sobbed silently as he shook his head. "They had just entered as I was closing up." Aether scrambled up and wanted to respond but had to engage the sword fighter. He grabbed a peg of a nearby broken chair to catch the downward stroke. "If you didn't sell me out. How come you have my devil fruit next to you." Aether said to gritted teeth his arms buckling under the force. With exertion he diverted the force so the sword slid off and got stuck between two boards. "I was trying to steal it!" The bartender cried out as the larger bandit had approached him. "Help me Aether!!" The bartender cried out as he skidded backwards over the floor like a crab. His hands pushing the fruit behind him. Aether rushed the larger guy and threw him off his course. A sudden realisation dawned on Aether. "Fuck" he muttered under his breath. "Shit" he sat on top of the guy, raining down fists. "If we both want to get out of this alive bartender, you got to throw me the fruit." The bartender looked from Aether to the fruit and back. All his possible futures flashing before his mind's eye and shattering if he threw the fruit to Aether. "now man!" Aether shouted as he heard the swordsman wrenching his blade free from the wood. The swordsman approached in fury as the bartender threw the Lavalike fruit through the air. Aether caught it with one hand and rolled off the large bandit. With a quick motion he brought it to his lips and took a large bit from it. "I hope this is a good idea." Was the last thing he thought before the piece of the fruit was swallowed and the blade bit into his flesh.

Blood didn't spill out from Aethers belly but Lava did. With a yelp did the swordsman lose his grip on his sword. The sword began to bend as the metal liquefied from the heat. "Fuck me. " Aether said as he stood up, little bits of Lava falling down and searing their way through the planks. "I am a bloody living weapon." He grabbed the large man's leg and turned his hand into Lava. The man started to scream and fell unconscious from the sudden and sharp intake of pain. His swordsman companion witnessed the scene while clutching his hand. He decided that he would no longer want any part of this and ran out of the inn.

Aether look at his magmafied hand.

"This looks like the end of my small time life..." Aether turned around grab ed his bag from the floor and walked out of the inn. Leaving the treacherous barman and his old life behind. Ready to start anew.