

It was well known that Opal loved to design and make clothing. It was an often overlooked skill of his ever since he had moved into Elna Manor with the rest of the self-proclaimed "Spice Rack" and though he rarely actively sought the explicit approval of others, Opal desperately wanted to prove that he deserved to be there. He was out of place compared to the rather drab coloration of his companions, and he didn't even really know why he had been allowed to stay considering Habanero loved to remind him of how ruthless "the Boss" was and how terrifying he could be when caught in a bad mood.

Even Clover was hesitant to get on the bad side, but Opal had yet to see it, and he most certainly hadn't heard it. Though this was more because he slept like a log in winter when it came time for his beauty rest than anything else.

To be quite honest, Paprika was rarely present within the manor. The place was immaculate and sat upon a steep hill that overlooked a glassy lake. It was wreathed in spires and guarded itself with cast iron spines. Below the steep hill, in line with the lake, a forest stretched for miles in every direction, only sporadically broken up by worn trails, signs of failed attempts to temper the forest down into a part of some sprawling infrastructure.

The closest place to Elna Manor was Woolhope and Opal had been instructed to never go there. He hadn't tried. All his wants and needs were fulfilled in the manor, and it had modern amenities that he would have never been able to afford in Corriedale. Like live-in maids. Yes, he loved the live-in maids.

"So, what's on the agenda for today?"

Opal had found himself in the communal study. It was a massive library that dwarfed him in size, despite being a respectable standard Scarfox, and he had managed to find not one, but thirty different books about knitting, crocheting, and other sewing techniques for the "dumb, uninitiated, and the deplorable". Clover, the undisputed head of the house, had joined him at some point, pushing around a little cart with tea and crumpets on it like he usually did. Opal wasn't always in love with the tea, but the crumpets were delicious.

"I'm going to make something for Paprika," Opal said confidently. "A sweater, I think. Or a scarf."

"A scarf for a Scarfox, hmm?" Clover asked, placing the teacups and saucers on a small table. He took a seat shortly after pouring tea for the two of them, immediately helping himself to some sugar and milk. "Any reason why you're so inspired?"

"Nope!" Opal said. "Tis the season, I guess. He doesn't seem like he gets many gifts. You either, but you're also just a little bit of a stick in the mud so I understand that one."

Clover feigned offense. "I am not!"

Opal stuck his tongue out, and his tentacle tail curled around playfully. The suckers made small popping noises against the dark wood of the bookcases. "Are too. You think I don't hear you and Haba fighting all the time? He's a stick in the mud too. Just a different kind I think. Taller."

This made little sense to Clover but he didn't bother to ask for clarification. Opal just came from a different time, and these youths with their confounded terminology were a mystery to all. So long as everything was going smoothly. He sipped his tea pointedly, not looking at Opal, who was continuing his search through the books about knitting for dimwits.

"He doesn't."

"Doesn't what?" Opal said.

"Paprika," Clover added. "He doesn't get many gifts. Didn't really live a life that afforded him such luxuries."

"That's pretty sad. Guess I'll change that."

Clover didn't have the heart to tell him not to bother. Opal had been pretty hard to entertain lately, and if this would give him that stroke of inspiration, then Clover saw no need to dash those hopes. Maybe Paprika *would* like a gift this year. Especially if it was a scarf or something equally adorable. Maybe this year, his guard would break down a little bit more.

"And I can get whatever supplies I want, right? That's what he said when he brought me in." Opal stood tall in an eerily similar way to Paprika as he took a deep breath and made his best impression. "Anything your heart desires within the inspirations of your craft, little bird. Anything that makes you warble." Opal snorted. "Who talks like that?"

Clover snickered.

"So I need like one hundred yards of yarn and some knitting needles."

"Noted."

"And some argyle print. Green and orange."

Clover sipped his tea more. "Okay."

"And sequins. And felt. You can pick the colors, but they have to look good together."

"I can do that." Clover placed his empty cup on the cart and eyed the cup he had poured for Opal, which had gone untouched. "Are you going to drink your tea?"

"No, probably not."

"Then I'll leave you to your research."

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Clover was the only one who could disturb Paprika during his brooding. He was ornery even on a good day. Tall and haughty, a living talon with features that offset it but just barely. He often took to staring into the distance, lounging on his balcony when the weather allowed for it, which was more often than not. The lake below was cloaked in fog. It was atmospheric.

Some would even consider it romantic if it weren't for the players involved.

"I told you that I did not want to be bothered," Paprika said.

Clover remained silent. Opal had asked him nicely to deliver the parcel, and it was a cute parcel. Loud and ornate. Glittery and out of place. Just like him. But it was a kind gesture, and Clover wanted Paprika to receive it well.

"Opal wanted to gift you something."

"Preposterous," Paprika replied without missing a beat. A series of bright purple balls of light seeped from Paprika's fingertips, morphing into bats and flitting around Clover curiously. "Opal does not know his place."

Clover swallowed. "I think he does. But he's still doing it anyway. He was adamant. You know how he is."

"No," Paprika said, still not tearing his eyes away from the horizon. "I do not."

"Well you should," Clover replied, nudging the boundary between them. Paprika didn't like others entering his personal space, even if they were family. Clover could toe the line to check Paprika's temper, and when Paprika did not snarl at him and chase him off, Clover knew he could cross the threshold onto the balcony.

He placed the box on the stone railing with a soft sigh.

"I think he thinks you hate him."

"Does he fear me?" Paprika asked.

"I'm not sure."

"He should." Paprika looked down at the box and the neutral line of his mouth spiraled down. "There is no point in keeping him around if he will not ultimately fear me."

Clover hummed. "Of course. Are you going to open it?"

Paprika rolled his eyes. The eyes in his ears blinked in irritation and closed. Without another word, he pulled the gaudy ribbon undone and peeled the top off. There was a scarf within. Knitted with soft black yarns. Paprika pulled out the whole garment and four smaller garments rolled out as well. Clover caught them and held them up, thinking that they were a part of some kind of ensemble. They were smaller cuffs. Perfect for the bat wisps.

"Remind me why you keep Opal around?" Clover said after an appropriate amount of silence.

Paprika, wrapped up in the scarf, returned to his brooding without another word. Clover took his cue and went to grab the box.

"Leave it."

And so Clover did.