

The Axnay Rejects

EPISODE TWENTY – ON THE NIGHTSHIFT.

The doghouse is very lonely place to be. A harsh place with only scowls and cold shoulders for company. Rico knew it extremely well. In fact, the doghouse was exactly where he currently found himself. And he only had himself to blame. The night before when Chi had asked if anyone was willing to do a night-time hunt the following day, he could have said no. He *could* have at least consulted his teammates. He most certainly *shouldn't* have gleefully volunteered his team without asking them first. It was never going to end well. And so, his time in the doghouse commenced. That evening, Sofia had mysteriously been overcome by a bout of tiredness and had opted sleep in her own room without him. Max and Tommy had taken it in turns to compare him to various types of genitalia and Leila had nagged him relentlessly ever since. His world was a very dark place right now.

At seven o'clock on the evening after his ill-fated decision to volunteer, Rico found himself seated at a table with his four teammates. They'd decided to have dinner at the guild before they left. Sofia had gone up to the counter to order. As a result, he'd ended up with a plate of lamb chops, smothered in a sauce he didn't like. Sitting there, trying to scrape the sauce off in order to salvage something, he looked more than a little peeved.

RICO: So... when you said you were over it, Sofia...

SOFIA: I may have exaggerated.

RICO: You mean lied.

(He shook his head.)

RICO: You're supposed to stand by your man through thick a thin, not starve him death every time he annoys you.

SOFIA: I'm not starving you; there's a perfectly good plate of food there.

RICO: That you know I won't eat!

SOFIA: That sounds like a you problem.

RICO: Babe...

SOFIA: And besides, *you're* supposed to stand by your woman! You're not supposed to volunteer her to work all night, when she'd rather be at home relaxing in the hot tub.

MAX: And count yourself lucky that *Sofia* ordered your dinner! You'd have got dried bread and maggots if I'd ordered it.

RICO: They don't sell maggots, mate.

MAX: Fine. I'd have got you dried bread then shit on your plate!

TOMMY: And pissed in your tankard again!

RICO: You...

(He flinched.)

RICO: What do you mean, again???

TOMMY: I think I've said too much.

(Rico winced with disgust.)

RICO: Is that why my last beer tasted funny?

(Max and Tommy just smirked then glanced away.)

RICO: You sick bastards!!!

MAX: Bollocks. It was the least you deserve!

TOMMY: Yeah! Fucking volunteering us for night duty! You know I like to spend my evenings whittling!

LEILA: And I like to spend my evening doing grown up things, like... *not* whittling.

TOMMY: No! Fuck off, Leila. I've taken a lot of shit from you lately and I've been fine with it. I earned a lot of it. But you do not make light of my wood-crafting! There'll be no coming back from that!

LEILA: Fine. Then I'll call you a cock and go back to looking at that muscly warrior's bum.

(She smiled.)

LEILA: You're a cock. And so is Rico.

RICO: Fuck sake...

(He sat back.)

RICO: So? Come on then. How long am I gonna be in the doghouse for?

MAX: Weeks!

TOMMY: Months even!

SOFIA: Um... not *that* long.

MAX: Bullshit. It'll be for a lifetime in your case, Sofia. Every time he does something wrong, you'll bring it up and use it against him.

SOFIA: No, I won't!

MAX: You will. That's what women do.

SOFIA: Not me.

MAX: Yeah? We'll see.

SOFIA: We will, yes. We'll see big time! In fact, we'll see all over your face!

(Max, Rico and Tommy gave her their most bewildered glances.)

MAX: What?

TOMMY: All over his face?

RICO: Sofia...

SOFIA: Um... leave me alone. You know smack talk isn't my thing.

(She then turned bright red.)

SOFIA: Oh no, how terrible. I suddenly feel the urge to run to the ladies room.

(She then upped and raced away to the toilets.)

MAX: Sweet. Now his personal healer has gone, we can kick him under the table.

TOMMY: We were doing that anyway, weren't we?

MAX: Yeah, but Sofia was healing him.

RICO: It was still really annoying.

MAX: Yeah, but that's what you get for volunteering us to do the nightshift.

(Rico bit his lip then sat forward.)

RICO: Actually, I need to talk to you about that, chaps.

TOMMY: And we need to talk to you! Violently.

RICO: Don't make a fool of yourself, Tommy. Just... listen.

(He then leant forwards and started to speak in a lowered voice. His two teammates just listened in, scowling coldly. Watching them from the front desk, Chi's assistant Kiki looked more than a little concerned.)

KIKI: They won't murder him, will they?

CHI: Probably. I'd murder you if you volunteered me to pull an all-nighter.

KIKI: Oh. I'm worried.

CHI: Nah. Don't be. He had his *reasons* for volunteering.

KIKI: Such as?

CHI: He really wanted to do a nightshift.

KIKI: Oh. That's a bit flimsy.

CHI: Yup. And it might just get him killed.

Just before eight o'clock that evening, The Axnay Rejects' carriage rolled out of the town gates and into the countryside beyond. Their regular driver, Dave, was once again at the helm. Inside the carriage, the mood was still somewhat sour. That sourness was, however, mild compared to how it'd been earlier in the day. At one point, Rico went a whole five minutes without someone calling him an obscene name. Sofia was particularly happy about that fact. She'd been rightfully angry with him. Max, Tommy and Leila, on the other hand, had been downright hostile. The reduction in abuse came as a blessed relief. Mentioning that fact, however, proved to be an almighty mistake.

SOFIA: This is nice. I mean... not nice, but... nicer. I'm glad you've all stopped calling Rico names.

MAX: We haven't stopped!

LEILA: We're just on a brief hiatus.

TOMMY: Normal service will be resumed shortly.

LEILA: Nobody asked you!

TOMMY: Shove it, Leila!

MAX: Hey! No! Pack it in you two, it's Rico we're angry at.

SOFIA: But... can't you just let it go now?

MAX: No!

SOFIA: Why not?

MAX: Because... and I can't stress this too highly... you do not volunteer your teammates for a fucking nightshift without bloody consulting them first!

LEILA: For whatever the reason.

MAX: Honestly, Rico. I should kick you right in the cock!

TOMMY: Fucking bell end.

RICO: Right...

(He sighed.)

RICO: Thanks for reopening that wound, Sofia. After a full five minutes of peace, I was starting to miss all this abuse.

SOFIA: I didn't open *anything*! I was just saying it was nice that they'd stopped.

RICO: Which served purely to remind them to start doing it again.

MAX: Stop complaining, Rico. You deserve everything you get.

LEILA: And more!

(She sneered.)

LEILA: If I wasn't saving all my cruellest jibes for Tommy, I'd be rounding on you like an angry Sofia in the heat of a calamity strewn battle.

RICO: I'm sure you *would*, Leila. In fact, I have no doubt about that whatsoever.

(He sighed.)

RICO: But don't you think you're going a little overboard?

MAX: Overboard??? Fucking nightshift, mate! Nightshift! Nobody wants that sprung on them!

RICO: I know! But it's not like you lot have never done anything that's inconvenienced other people, is it?

LEILA: *I haven't!*

RICO: Yes, you have. You're the worst offender, in fact. When did you last make the dinner when it meant to be your turn?

LEILA: Hey! I can't help that. It's not like I can pick and choose when to be conveniently unwell for an hour.

SOFIA: An hour. Thirty minutes. Sometimes an hour and a half; depends what we're cooking, it seems.

LEILA: Hey! What are you implying?

SOFIA: Nothing at all.

RICO: Yes, she was. She was implying that you fake illness to get out of cooking and that it inconveniences people. Just like Max inconvenienced me when he stole my fucking hobby!

MAX: Mate...

RICO: Shortly *after* he tried to inconvenience me by stealing my fucking tenancy! So don't fucking sit there getting on my case like you're all perfectly sweet and innocent. You're not.

(Max shook his head.)

MAX: You're a very bitter man, Rico.

RICO: I'm not though, am I. I've moved on. And even at the time, I didn't make half the song and dance about your thoughtless as you're making about mine.

MAX: That, my friend, is because I didn't lumber you with a nightshift!

(Rico scoffed.)

RICO: Yeah, right. Like having to do one nightshift is really that bad.

MAX: It is! And *we're* not the only ones who think so either! Watch.

(He then leant out of the window.)

MAX: Dave? What do you think of nightshifts?

DAVE: They're shit!

MAX: I know, right? Rico lumbered us with it.

DAVE: What a cunt!

(Max then looked to Rico arrogantly.)

MAX: See?

RICO: Oh, fuck off. Who cares what Dave thinks?

(A voice then yelled out from outside the carriage.)

DAVE: Dave does!

LEILA: That was a given really.

RICO: Oh, whatever.

(He rolled his eyes.)

RICO: Morons.

SOFIA: Right... so... anyway... we've all said our piece now, so how about we just let bygones be bygones?

LEILA: Fine by me. I'd rather be mean to Tommy anyway.

TOMMY: Or, Leila, you could just be nice for once.

LEILA: Nice? Like you were being nice when you took Chi home and put her to bed?

TOMMY: It was six fucking months ago!

LEILA: I realise that, but here's the thing. I said you were dead to me at the time and I meant it. Well, guess what, chummy? The dead don't come back to life. So you're going to stay dead forever!

TOMMY: Good. Fuck off and let me rest in peace then. Only if I'm *really* dead, you've essentially spent the last six months, coming to the cemetery every day, just to yell at my grave like a certifiable lunatic!

LEILA: That's a ridiculously woeful simile.

TOMMY: It was *your* simile! I just expanded on it!

MAX: Which was lovely an' all, but can we please just stay focussed on the matter in hand.

TOMMY: Which is?

MAX: Rico is a cunt.

TOMMY: Oh, yeah.

RICO: Oh, pack it in.

SOFIA: Go on another hiatus or something.

RICO: Yeah. Because this is getting annoying.

MAX: Give us one good reason why we should.

RICO: *Apart* from the fact it's annoying? Fine...

(He shrugged.)

RICO: If you stop giving me grief every five minutes, I'll buy us all the mega breakfast in the morning.

SOFIA: Eek... calories.

LEILA: But yummy calories!

MAX: We accept!

(Rico smirked coldly.)

RICO: Shouldn't you consult your teammates first? Or are you exempt from the ridiculously high standards you set for others?

(Max allowed his words to filter in his mind the thumped his knee in frustration.)

MAX: Fuck you've got me there.

RICO: Ha!

MAX: But then again... fucking nightshift, mate!

RICO: Let it go!!!

MAX: I... well... mega breakfast, right?

RICO: Absolutely.

MAX: Count me in.

TOMMY: I'll be in that too.

LEILA: Same. Even if agreeing with Tommy *is* a sign of poor judgment.

TOMMY: Fuck sake...

MAX: That just leaves you, Sofia.

SOFIA: I don't want a mega breakfast. It's *too* mega.

MAX: Fair enough.

(He smirked.)

MAX: Leila, Tommy and I have signed up for one, so I guess it's up to you to take the reins.

SOFIA: What reins?

MAX: The reins of hell fire.

SOFIA: What are you talking about?

MAX: I'm saying *you've* got to give Rico enough grief for all of us, obviously. *We* can't do it; we agreed to have a mega breakfast in exchange for our silence.

(He nodded.)

MAX: So, go nuts. Do us proud, Sofia. We're all counting on you.

(Sofia blinked at him nonchalantly.)

SOFIA: Um... I'll opt out of *that* too, thank you.

MAX: Yeah? Really?

SOFIA: Yes!

MAX: Right.

(He sighed.)

MAX: You're no fun. No fun at all.

LEILA: And you dress like a moron!

SOFIA: Hey! That was completely uncalled for!

LEILA: What? It was? But I thought it was *your* turn to take all the abuse. Did I misread the situation?

SOFIA: Yes!

LEILA: Oh.

(She shrugged.)

LEILA: Still... my point stands. I wore that you-style dress *once* and couldn't wait to take it off. I looked like a dork and I'm delighted to say, I haven't worn it since.

SOFIA: I noticed.

(She smiled.)

SOFIA: You haven't had that any compliments from men since you took it off either, have you?

(Leila just glowered at her coldly.)

LEILA: Shut up, you.

SOFIA: Right...

Over at the Elite's ridiculously over-elaborate base, at this time, Sir Mighty, Artful Shadow, Duke Thunder and Countess Brilliance were having the same conversation they'd been having for weeks. How to get The Rejects without Chi finding out it was them. That meant keeping whatever plans they came up with between the four of them. Velvet Vortex, their other team member, had to be kept out of the loop. It didn't help therefore, that Vortex had just walked in and plonked herself down at the table. Needless to say, her attendance was not welcome. They weren't about to tell her that coldly, however, so opted for what they considered subtly.

MIGHTY: So, Velvet... you're here, I see.

THUNDER: At the table with us.

BRILLIANCE: While we were trying to discuss a matter you're not supposed to be privy too.

SHADOW: Was that an oversight on your part or...

(He fished for an answer with his eyes.)

VORTEX: Or what?

SHADOW: Um... not.

VORTEX: Sorry. What was the question again?

SHADOW: Why are you here?

VORTEX: It's our team base! A team of which I'm a valuable member. Why? Where would you *like* me to go? The Rico's Girl's latest gangbang?

THUNDER: Well, no... we wouldn't expect you to go *there*, obviously. You'd never lower yourself to...

VORTEX: Actually, I *was* tempted, but after visiting Baron Staidly this afternoon, I think it's fair to say my girl parts could use a break.

(Her teammates looked to her in stunned silence.)

SHADOW: Um...

VORTEX: I'm kidding!

(She chuckled.)

VORTEX: You're so gullible.

(She nodded.)

VORTEX: I'm here because I figured you could use a night off from all that fruitless planning. You're all getting headaches, but no results, so just give it rest for the night.

BRILLIANCE: Right... well... we appreciate the sentiment, but we're not going to come up with anything if we keep taking evenings off.

VORTEX: You never come up with anything when you have nights on either, so what difference does it make?

THUNDER: Velvet...

VORTEX: And besides, there's no hurry, is there? I mean, it's only been a week since I stitched that Leila up good and proper. So it's not like an attack has become urgent.

SHADOW: Right...

(He scratched his head.)

SHADOW: Come again. You stitched Leila up?

VORTEX: Yes! Remember? When I paid her fine for her!

(She beamed.)

VORTEX: That was a truly inspired move. Genius. A world class piece of one-upmanship.

MIGHTY: Well... there's no denying that, I suppose. One-upmanship was indeed involved.

VORTEX: Thank you.

MIGHTY: But only in the sense that *she* got one over *you*!

BRILLIANCE: Mighty! We agreed not to tell her that on the grounds that she's mentally unstable.

(She threw her hand over her mouth.)

BRILLIANCE: Whoops. We weren't supposed to mention *that* either.

(Vortex was gaping in utter astonishment.)

VORTEX: What the hell, you lot? Mentally unstable??? Is that how you see me???

THUNDER: Well... that's what the psychiatrist we called in to observe you thought.

VORTEX: You did what???

(She growled.)

VORTEX: And how the hell can you say that Leila got one over on *me*???

MIGHTY: She did!

(He gave an exasperated sigh.)

MIGHTY: She offered to pay your fine for you then left. Claiming she was going to fetch her chequebook.

VORTEX: Yeah. So I swooped in and gazumped her! Ha!

MIGHTY: No, Velvet. She offered to pay your fine despite having no intention of doing so. Then she left, knowing full well, you'd try to get one over on her by paying it instead.

BRILLIANCE: She literally went for a walk and let you foolishly pay her fine for her.

SHADOW: That's right. She didn't get her chequebook. She went for a stroll then came back after she'd given you long enough to settle the bill.

THUNDER: She hoodwinked you good and proper.

(Vortex look at them coldly for a moment then gasped.)

VORTEX: That bitch!!!

BRILLIANCE: A-ha! She finally gets it!

VORTEX: I do, yes. And she's gonna pay.

(She nodded.)

VORTEX: And so are you fuckers. Mentally unstable??? Me???

SHADOW: Well... yes.

MIGHTY: And quite far gone too, according to the psychiatrist.

VORTEX: That's absurd! Why, I should shoot you all with twenty thousand volts for even thinking it!

(She ruffled her neck.)

VORTEX: And I would too... if I was mentally unstable.

(She sneered.)

VORTEX: But because I'm nice, I'm going to let it go.

(She nodded then climbed to her feet.)

VORTEX: But, because I'm angry at you bastards, I'm still going to storm out. And in doing so, I'll leave you no option but to start planning again. I hope you all get severe headaches! Or I would if I was unstable, but again... I'm not. Happy planning!

(She then proceeded to march toward the door. Mighty watched her go then whispered to Thunder.)

MIGHTY: Yeah right. Like we'd be able to come up with *two* plans in one night.

(Vortex instantly stopped.)

VORTEX: Two plans? You mean you already *have* one? You actually came up with something?

MIGHTY: Fuck. She's got hearing like a bat!

THUNDER: And you're really bad at whispering!

VORTEX: Well? You have a plan?

SHADOW: No.

VORTEX: Liar!

SHADOW: Fine... we do then! But as you well know, we can't tell *you* what it is! If we tell you, Chi will find out what it is next time she reads you.

(Vortex sucked her teeth.)

VORTEX: Hmm... actually it's worse than that.

BRILLIANCE: What?

VORTEX: I know you have a plan to get The Rejects now.

SHADOW: Yes, but you don't know what it is!

VORTEX: Doesn't matter! Next time Chi reads me, she'll read that I *know* you have a dastardly plan.

(She shrugged.)

VORTEX: Then she'll read *you* to find out what it is.

(Everyone stared at her blankly.)

THUNDER: Fuck! She's right.

MIGHTY: Meaning we're comprehensively screwed.

BRILLIANCE: And then some.

(Shadow sighed ruefully.)

SHADOW: I hate this. Why is torturing those damn Rejects so bloody hard?

VORTEX: Because the world we live in sucks.

(She shrugged.)

VORTEX: But that's a discussion for another day. Today, you should be telling me about this plan of yours.

MIGHTY: No, no. You know we can't do that.

VORTEX: Oh, but you can. I *know* you have a plan, so Chi's going to find out what it is anyway. So you might as well just tell me now.

SHADOW: She's right.

VORTEX: She *is* right.

THUNDER: Well...

VORTEX: She's pretty too, but let's stick with matter in hand. What was this plan of yours?

MIGHTY: Fine...

(He sighed.)

MIGHTY: If you must know, I've despatched a scientist friend of mine to The Reject's base at forty five Whitley Street to drill their wooden exterior beams and fill them with termites. Thus, their base will get eaten and eventually collapse.

VORTEX: I see. Interesting.

MIGHTY: Yes, well, I doubt Chi's going to see it that way when she finds out.

(Vortex shrugged.)

VORTEX: I wouldn't worry about it.

THUNDER: Wouldn't worry about it???

VORTEX: Yeah.

(She chuckled.)

VORTEX: The Rejects live at number forty four.

(Mighty gasped.)

MIGHTY: What??? Then whose house did we attack???

VORTEX: Who cares? It's only a poor person's house.

BRILLIANCE: I care! Because when Chi reads that...

(She sucked her teeth.)

BRILLIANCE: Attacking the public is a far more serious offence than attacking a fellow warrior.

VORTEX: Yes, Countess, but you're overlooking something.
BRILLIANCE: Am I?
VORTEX: Yes. I don't care about the people at forty five Whitley Street and will never give them a second thought ever again.
(She shrugged.)
VORTEX: So Chi isn't going to find out from *me*. And seeing as she *only* reads *me*...
(Everyone drew deep sighs of relief.)
THUNDER: Well, thank fuck.
SHADOW: We're in the clear.
VORTEX: Sure. On that crime, you are. But danger still lurks.
MIGHTY: Less dramatically, please.
VORTEX: Fine. You already *know* you can't tell me your plans. Now you're going to have to upgrade that to not telling me that you even *have* one. And that'll mean, you'll have to keep *pretending* to plan, long after you've thought of one, so that I don't get suspicious.
BRILLIANCE: Oh, goody. I do enjoy being trapped in this room for hours and hours on end.
THUNDER: Sucks, doesn't it? But you know, it'll all be worth it once we finally destroy the buggers.
VORTEX: Indeed. And because of that I'm happy to let you suffer. But... we're still not out of the woods. If I ever let it pop into my head that you're *planning* to get The Rejects one day... bad things will happen.
SHADOW: I thought you said you knew how to avoid doing that.
VORTEX: I do. I just pretend you lot don't exist, but one day... if I slip.
(She sighed.)
VORTEX: Revenge is a risky business, my friends. It really is.

A short while later, out in the woods, The Axnay Rejects first fight of the day was well underway. Having detoured from their usual route, they'd stumbled across a hoard of Bovianas. One of nature's strangest creatures, they were like a cross between a human and a cow. Sadly, their aggression was akin to that of a human. Placid they were not. They were powerful and focussed creatures. Right now, thanks to his Pulse skill, that focus was fully on Max.

MAX: Fuck me, these cunts pack a punch, mate!!!
RICO: I can imagine. They're not as easy to cut down either. They're fifty percent fat!
MAX: That's not what I wanted to hear. I'm getting thumped to buggery and you're gonna take a while to kill them.
(He bit his lip.)
MAX: Thank fuck we've got Sofia. With a lesser healer, I'm pretty sure I'd have been knocked out by now.
(A voice then called out from the back row.)
SOFIA: Probably. I'm having to use triple layers of protective shell.
LEILA: Triple?
SOFIA: Yeah. I only use one against Calibras. With Empies, I don't even bother. So you can imagine.

LEILA: Hmm... brutes, are they?

SOFIA: Would they be bashing Max if they weren't?

LEILA: Don't be cheeky!

SOFIA: Right. Sorry. I get overconfident sometimes.

LEILA: It has been noticed.

(She then rolled her eyes, before casting magic into the hoard of Bovianas that Rico had just raced through.)

LEILA: Ooh. Got a good few there.

(She sucked her teeth.)

LEILA: Timing it is tricky though. Rico usually runs right through a pack, but these things are so meaty, he's running out of steam halfway through.

SOFIA: Right...

(She glowered at her.)

SOFIA: Then make sure you focus. I need my fiancé alive and uncooked.

LEILA: What? *Completely* uncooked?

SOFIA: Not even slightly singed.

LEILA: Right. Raw then.

SOFIA: Yes!

LEILA: Then your love for him is clearly real.

SOFIA: What?

LEILA: It's true.

(She chuckled.)

LEILA: I have it on good authority that *true* love is rare.

(Sofia gave her coldest glance she'd ever delivered.)

SOFIA: Did you just compare my fiancé to a lump of meat?

LEILA: It was a joke.

SOFIA: A joke! This is not the time to be making jokes, Leila.

(She giggled.)

SOFIA: There's too much at stake.

(Leila groaned in despair then the two of them giggled childishly.)

TOMMY: What the hell am I seeing here? You two are acting like... friends.

LEILA: You take that back!

SOFIA: But Leila, we are becoming friends!

LEILA: Do you want a slap an' all?

(She ruffled her neck.)

LEILA: Cheek. Just get on and fight, will you? Friends indeed.

(Tommy rolled his eyes.)

TOMMY: Sorry, I spoke.

LEILA: Then be a good lad and refrain from ever doing so again.

TOMMY: Happy to.

LEILA: Apparently not.

TOMMY: Oh, shut up.

(He then stared at the battle and psyched himself up.)

TOMMY: I know exactly what this fight needs. A blinding spell.

SOFIA: A blinding spell?

TOMMY: My new technique. I can blind the creatures who haven't reached Max yet, easing the pressure on him.

SOFIA: Ooh. That would be pretty handy right about now. Those two are struggling to cut these meaty buggers.

TOMMY: In that case, Sofia... one blinding spell coming right up.

(With that, he stood akimbo, focussed hard then threw his arms towards the fight.

Almost instantly, the entire area around them vanished in a thick fog.)

TOMMY: What the fuck???

(Those sentiments were very quickly echoed from inside the fog.)

RICO: What the hell? Where did everyone... ow!!!

MAX: Mate!!! I can't fucking see!!!

RICO: I can't help you right now, mate! I'm being trampled on by fleeing cow-people!

MAX: Hit them with your sword!

RICO: I would if I could see them!!!

(Frantically healing everything in the immediate vicinity, Sofia was furious.)

SOFIA: Why, Tommy???. Why? Were you sent from another planet just to make this one collectively stupider? Why would you do that?

TOMMY: I...

SOFIA: In future, do nothing! In fact, stay at home! I'll even buy you a cushion, so you can be shit and useless in comfort!

TOMMY: You...

SOFIA: Is that why you took Chi home by mistake that time? You lost sight of Leila in a dim-witted fog of your own creation?

TOMMY: Just shut up and keep healing!

SOFIA: What do you think I'm fucking doing???. Oh, that's right. You wouldn't know because you can't fucking see me!!!

(Leila sighed.)

LEILA: What a calamity. No wonder Chi hates us.

(Rico then yelled out from deep in the fog.)

RICO: They've stop stampeding now! I think. I haven't been trampled on for a while any... ow!!! Never mind.

MAX: When you say stampeding...

RICO: They ran away from the fog, mate.

MAX: Great. There goes a lucrative bounty.

RICO: Yeah... but look on the bright side.

(He snarled.)

RICO: Oh, wait. You can't. We can't see shit for fog!

TOMMY: My bad!

MAX: Oh, okay. It's fine everyone. It's Tommy's bad. Not sorry or anything. Just a frank admittance to something obvious.

TOMMY: Fine! Sorry. Happy?

MAX: Do I look happy?

SOFIA: How would he know?

LEILA: You really are a knob, Tommy!

TOMMY: Fuck off. It was an innocent mistake.

(He ruffled his neck.)

TOMMY: I was meant to cast it at them *before* they reached Max.

RICO: Then why didn't you?

TOMMY: Well... in all this nightshift tiredness... I forgot.

LEILA: He's such a pro.

TOMMY: Yeah? Well, you *dress* like a pro.

LEILA: Fuck off, you.

(She then threw out an angry punch in what she hoped was Tommy's direction.)

SOFIA: Ow!!!

LEILA: Whoops. Sorry, Sofia.

SOFIA: Why would you hit *me*? *I'm* not the problem in your life! You are!

LEILA: Excuse me?

SOFIA: What? Just saying. The only reason you never seem to get over yourself, is because *you're* too much of an obstacle to *climb* over!

(Leila growled.)

LEILA: You're lashing out right now because I... um... lashed out... and because of your adrenaline, so I'll let it slide for now.

SOFIA: Then chase me all around the carriage once we're done?

LEILA: Probably. I mean, we wouldn't be us if we didn't.

(Just then, a relieved voice rose up from ahead of them.)

RICO: The fog's lifting over here.

MAX: Yup! I can just about see.

(He sighed.)

MAX: The enemies are long gone.

RICO: Yup. Not a sign of them.

TOMMY: My fault, lads!

MAX: We fucking know!

RICO: He's really shit at apologising, this bloke!

TOMMY: I already apologised once!

MAX: Oh. Well, we can't have you overdoing it. Go and sit in the carriage for a bit. Take a break. You must be exhausted!

SOFIA: Hey! *I* do the putdowns!

MAX: That's only *during* the fight! The fight is over! The enemies fucked off.

SOFIA: I see.

(She then squinted into the fog. Leila was just about visible.)

SOFIA: Shall I run now, or...

LEILA: Go!

(Leila then proceeded to chase her around the carriage while the fog continued to lighten.)

LEILA: I'm gonna kill you!!!

SOFIA: I didn't mean it!!!

(As always, Rico and Max headed over and joined Tommy; allowing the womenfolk to continue their ridiculous ritual.)

RICO: So... you're a cock!

MAX: A complete and utter knob end!

(Tommy sighed.)

TOMMY: I'd love to deny that, but in the face of such overwhelming evidence, I fear I'd be wasting my time.

RICO: Your fears are well-founded.

MAX: What made you do such a ridiculous thing anyway?

TOMMY: Well... you two needed help.

MAX: And that was it, was it?

TOMMY: No. I already told you, that spell is *meant* to be cast when a dangerous enemy is still charging. They get lost in the fog, leaving you free to escape or cast magic into the mist and get a head start. That detail just slipped my mind for a second.

RICO: Moron.

TOMMY: Yup. That's fair. I *am* a moron for making that mistake. But *you're* a moron for taking for a nightshift without asking us first.

RICO: Back to that again, are we?

TOMMY: Yes! Because it's relevant! Thanks to *your* moronic behaviour, *I* made a tired mistake! So don't try to dump all the blame at *my* door, fuck nut. Half of it belongs to you!

(Rico grimaced in bewilderment for a moment then looked to Max.)

RICO: Did he just call me... fuck nut?

MAX: I believe that *was* the term, yes.

RICO: Fuck nut?

TOMMY: It's a common phrase.

RICO: Where?

TOMMY: Axnay!

(He looked to where Leila was chasing Sofia and promising her a gruesome death.)

TOMMY: You're from Axnay, Leila! Fuck nut is a common phrase, right?

LEILA: I'm not talking to you!

TOMMY: See?

LEILA: But if Rico and Max are curious, the answer is the opposite of whatever you said!

TOMMY: Great.

(He sighed.)

TOMMY: Let's just get back in the carriage.

RICO: Agreed.

(He looked to where Leila and Sofia were still performing their idiotic post-battle routine.)

RICO: Come on, girls. We're buggering off now.

(Leila and Sofia came to a slow halt.)

LEILA: Where to? What's wrong with here?

RICO: Well... I hear there's good bounties to be made down by the lake.

MAX: Servicing the fisherman as the bring back their catch for their day?

RICO: No, you cunt.

(He gave a stifled laugh.)

RICO: I just heard some lucrative beasts like to use it as a watering hole.

SOFIA: Really? Where did you hear that?

RICO: At the guild yesterday.

SOFIA: When? I don't remember that. And yesterday I was clinging onto you like a barnacle because that new barman keeps giving me creepy looks.
LEILA: Of course, he did. You're like a magnet to creepy men. Look at Rico here.
RICO: Do you mind?
(He ruffled his neck.)
RICO: Trust me, Sofia. I've heard good things about that spot. That's why I wanted to try to nightshift in the first place.
SOFIA: I see... so that's why, is it?
(She shrugged.)
SOFIA: Fine. To the lake, it is.
LEILA: Agreed!
(Everyone flinched.)
MAX: You're not gonna argue?
LEILA: Nope. I'm looking forward to this.
SOFIA: Killing thirsty beasts?
LEILA: Yes!
SOFIA: Oh. Okay.
(Leila and Sofia then headed for the carriage. Rico watched them go then smirked.)
RICO: And it's all falling into place.
MAX: Right...

Some thirty minutes later, having given the driver directions, the Reject's carriage pulled up next to the moonlit lake at the edge of the woodland. Before the beast infestation grew out of control, this was a popular picnic spot. Now it was just another tragically picturesque vista that hardly anybody would get to see. Reflecting on that fact, Rico clambered out of the carriage carrying a small metal tin.
RICO: Such a beautiful place. It feels wasted.
MAX: Well... yeah. I know what you mean, mate, but the view certainly isn't wasted on me.
LEILA: Right? Moonlight on a glorious lake. It's the most romantic thing ever.
(Max gave her a sideways glance.)
MAX: Who are you and what did you do with Leila?
LEILA: What? It surprises you that I can appreciate romance, does it?
MAX: Yes.
LEILA: Oh.
(She shrugged.)
LEILA: Then you really don't know me at all. I can be extremely romantic when I want to be.
MAX: You just never *want* to be.
LEILA: Not when you lot are around, no. You, Rico and Tommy are enough to put a girl off men for life. And if Sofia's an example of what women are like, I'm happy to rule out lesbianism too.
(She exhaled.)
LEILA: But when I meet the perfect man... I'll romance his arse off.
(Sofia chuckled.)

SOFIA: With poetic phrases like that.

LEILA: Silence, blonde woman. Nobody has time for your buffoonery. I've got views to take in.

TOMMY: What? Didn't we come to fight some beasts?

LEILA: There aren't any yet, dead person.

TOMMY: Right...

(He shrugged then reached back into the carriage for his metal sandwich box.)

TOMMY: Might as well have my lunch then.

RICO: Sure. Why not.

(He then paced away and placed his small metal tin under a tree. Sofia watched him go and raised a baffled eyebrow.)

SOFIA: Where are you going? And what's with the tiny tin?

RICO: Um... that's my snack.

SOFIA: Oh.

(She grimaced.)

SOFIA: Clearly you weren't very hungry.

RICO: Yeah... well... yes.

LEILA: Anyway, let's get on with it, shall we?

SOFIA: Get on with what?

LEILA: None of your business.

SOFIA: What? What are you talking about? How is our business none of my business?

(Rico gulped nervously, then stepped up to Sofia and took a deep breath to calm himself.)

RICO: Actually, babe...

(Suddenly, a loud roar rose up and a swarm of roughly a hundred Empies came charging towards them.)

SOFIA: Empies??? These are your lucrative beasts, are they?

(Rico shrieked.)

RICO: Never mind that, we have to kill them!!! Quickly!!!

(He then took off like a rocket towards the hoard; not even bothering to wait for Max.)

MAX: Right... I know it's only a hundred or so Empies, but that's bloody reckless.

LEILA: Go after him then, fuck nut!

TOMMY: Ha! Told you it was a common phrase!

LEILA: Fuck!

(She watched Max charge up behind Rico then shook her head at Sofia.)

LEILA: Guess she'll have to wait a little longer.

SOFIA: Who?

LEILA: Nothing! I mean, nobody.

SOFIA: Hmm... why do I feel like you lot are plotting against me?

TOMMY: Because you're a ridiculous drama queen, perhaps?

SOFIA: Hardly.

(She then looked to where Rico was savaging the Empies like an angry lunatic in the middle of a psychotic episode.)

RICO: No cunt invited you, you little green bastards! This is supposed to be a quiet spot!!!

MAX: Mate! Calm down! Remember the formation!

RICO: Fuck the formation, just make them dead! Fast!

(Twenty thousand volts of electricity then rained down on the Empies at the back of the pack; killing half their total number.)

RICO: I won't lie, mate; that's definitely gonna help!

MAX: Yeah, that wasn't bad!

(Rico then called out.)

RICO: Nice work, Leila!

LEILA: Well, you know me...

SOFIA: Never mind that, just get back into formation, Rico! Charging about on your own is dangerous and you look like a tit!

LEILA: Wow. Was the tit jibe really necessary? You're not even angry!

SOFIA: What can I tell you? My adrenaline is *just* starting to flow. Good job it's not a difficult fight, really. God knows what I'd have called him after *this* ridiculous display of poor teamwork.

(She rolled her eyes then glanced up, just in time to see Rico zoom through the last dozen Empies. He'd slaughtered them in some considerable style.)

RICO: Ha! Now fuck off and don't come back.

(He then glanced around the area and bit his lip.)

RICO: Hmm... yeah... not bad. It looks like they failed to do any damage.

SOFIA: What are you mumbling about?

RICO: Well... if you must know...

(He then marched up to Sofia, gazing lovingly into her eyes.)

SOFIA: Um... this is a very public place, right now, Rico. Don't kiss me here.

RICO: I wasn't going to, beautiful.

(He glanced at Leila.)

RICO: Light her up.

LEILA: Happy to.

(She turned and blew Tommy's sandwich box to smithereens with her magic.)

TOMMY: Why???

LEILA: Why, what?

RICO: Wrong metal tin, Leila!

LEILA: What?

(She noticed Rico pointing to the tin under the tree then nodded.)

LEILA: Oh, yeah. My mistake.

(She smirked.)

LEILA: Such a terrible accident.

TOMMY: Accident, my arse!

LEILA: Silence, you. I need to focus.

(She then blasted the tiny metal tin that Rico had left under a tree.)

SOFIA: What the hell are you doing?

RICO: Just watch and see, babe.

(He then nodded her towards where a trail of light was snaking along the ground. It was a trail of gunpowder, which Leila had lit up when she blew up the small tin. Very quickly, it started to form words before Sofia's astonished eyes. Tommy, Leila and Max could only look on and smile at the sight before them. Rico was clutching a small box and waiting for the fascinated Sofia to read the message he'd written in gunpowder.)

SOFIA: Sofia... will you... do me...

(Rico shrieked. The gunpowder trail had suddenly ended there. It was clear to all that one of the Empies must have broken the continuous line.)

SOFIA: Will I do you? Why would you write...

RICO: Save the moment, Leila!

LEILA: Yup!

(With that, Leila blasted magic into the trail and lit it up again.)

SOFIA: Oh... there's more?

RICO: Of course there is. I wasn't going to leave it at "do me" was I?

SOFIA: Okay.

(She then continued to read. The next two words broke her steely determination to remain calm. She had an inclination as to what was happening, but had refused to get excited, just in case she was wrong. Seeing "Sofia, will you do me" followed by "the honour" confirmed what she'd hoped. Tears welled in her eyes and she shook from head to toe excitedly as the message finally appeared in full. "Sofia, will you do me the honour of being my wife." Whimpering through tears, she turned to face Rico excitedly, only to find him down on one knee, offering her a ring.)

RICO: Babe... you're alright, you are.

(Max rolled his eyes.)

MAX: Don't overdo it, mate.

RICO: Shut up, you...

(He grimaced.)

RICO: Actually, you're right. That's was rubbish. I'll start over.

LEILA: Good idea.

RICO: Thank you.

(He ruffled his neck.)

RICO: Sofia, before I met you, I was living every man's dream.

TOMMY: He was single.

RICO: Tommy!!!

(Tommy chuckled.)

TOMMY: Sorry. Sorry.

RICO: Don't be sorry; be silent!

(He then looked to Sofia again.)

RICO: As I was saying...

(Unfortunately, in that moment, his mind went totally blank.)

RICO: What was it?

LEILA: Just start over! Again!

RICO: What? Oh. Good idea.

(He nodded to himself.)

RICO: I can do this. You know, Sofia, there are lot of beautiful things in this world.

Such as...

(Once again, his mind went totally blank.)

RICO: Um... shit... I don't know. Flowers... and... seagulls...

(Max looked to Tommy in bewilderment.)

MAX: Where's he going with this exactly?

TOMMY: The gods can only imagine. Nowhere probably.

LEILA: I'll say! For pity's sake, Rico! Didn't you bother rehearsing what you were going to say?

RICO: No!

(He looked into Sofia's eyes.)

RICO: It wanted it to come from the heart.

SOFIA: Aw...

LEILA: And that's what's in your heart, is it? Bloody seagulls?

RICO: Shut up.

(He sighed with frustration then looked into Sofia's eyes.)

RICO: I'm making a bollocks of this, aren't I?

SOFIA: Well...

RICO: Trouble is, I don't think I can find the words to truly *express* how I really feel about you.

LEILA: Well don't you think you should try???

RICO: What does it look like I'm doing?

LEILA: Mumbling like a fuckwit.

MAX: She's right.

TOMMY: Yup. That's definitely what *I'm* seeing.

(Rico sneered.)

RICO: Yeah?

(He then sighed in defeat.)

RICO: Probably because that's what I'm doing. Fucking it up.

(He shook his head.)

RICO: But I won't stop trying. This moment matters. Because... um...

LEILA: For fuck sake, don't try to be poetic! Just tell her *why* this moment matters!

Why it *really* matters! In sensible, human words!

RICO: Why it *really* matters? Well, that's fucking obvious, isn't it?

(He looked to Sofia.)

RICO: You're the greatest thing that ever happened to me, Sofia. By far. In fact, the second best thing is shit in comparison. Now I have you, I feel happy all the time.

You've improved my life a thousand times over. More so, in fact. So, yeah... proposing properly matters because, if you say no, I'll die.

(He smiled lovingly.)

RICO: I can't be without you, babe. I want you in my life forever. And not just *in* my life, but by my side. My partner in everything I do. My go-to girl; my soul-mate; the other half of me. I want you to be the left side of our love cake and I'll be the right. And we can eat it together.

(Sofia could only whimper a heartfelt whimper. Her heart was beating at a million miles per hour. It was a truly exhilarating moment. Unfortunately, that feeling of exhilaration brought forth a sudden adrenaline rush. Which in Sofia's case, was not a good sign.)

SOFIA: Well, with a stupid bloody simile like that, what girl could resist? Help me get my knickers off! I always wanted to be half a cake!

RICO: What?

SOFIA: Fuck sake. If being married to you is anything being proposed to by you, you can bloody forget it.

(Rico quickly grabbed her hand and looked into her eyes.)

RICO: I love you, Sofia. You're all my wildest dreams come true and I want to be with you forever.

(He smiled.)

RICO: So take a deep breath and let that adrenaline subside.

(Sofia quickly did as he'd suggested.)

SOFIA: Right. Okay.

(She pouted.)

SOFIA: I'm so sorry I said those things. I didn't mean it. Any of it.

RICO: I know. I've understood your affliction since the day you told me about it remember? It just made me love you more.

SOFIA: No, it didn't.

RICO: Well, no, but it does now. Everything about you is endearing. Perfect, actually.

(He gaped for a moment then sighed.)

RICO: I've run out of things to say, Sofia. I really, really love you and I beg you, will you please, please marry me?

(Sofia's eyes lit up.)

SOFIA: Oh, Rico... I...

(She then passed out from all the excitement. Mercifully, Rico managed to catch her.)

RICO: Sofia???

LEILA: Aw, bollocks. Trust her to ruin it.

RICO: Never mind whinging, help me bring her round!

MAX: I'll do it. A good old fashioned slap is good for curing a fainting, I hear.

TOMMY: Not with *your* tree trunk arms, it's not. You'd knock her out.

LEILA: Fine. I'll do it.

RICO: No, you bloody won't!

TOMMY: Fine. Leave it to me then!

RICO: Fuck off. Nobody's slapping my future wife!

LEILA: *Potential* future wife. She hasn't said yes yet.

(Just then, Sofia mumbled in a daze.)

SOFIA: No, but I'm about to. Yes. Of course I'll marry you!

LEILA: Bugger. I rather hoped you'd marry *Rico*.

(Sofia released a dazed, stifled laugh.)

SOFIA: Trust you, Leila.

(She smiled then opened her eyes properly.)

SOFIA: Of course, I'll marry you, Rico. Like it was ever in doubt. I love you!

(Overjoyed by her reply, Rico jumped in excitement and punched the air; dropping Sofia in the process.)

RICO: Result!

SOFIA: Ow!!!

RICO: Shit!

(He stooped to lift her back from the grass.)

RICO: Sorry, babe.

SOFIA: Don't worry. I'm a healer, remember? Hurting me is hard work.

MAX: But it's not impossible, so don't tell her about your affair with Chi, mate.

RICO: Oh, I wouldn't dream of it. She might ask me to break it off.

(They all chuckled together.)

SOFIA: I'd never ask you to do that, Rico. I'd just go the guild and attack her.
(The others all giggled; partly at her joke, but mostly at the idea of the ultra placid Sofia attacking someone.)
LEILA: What a ridiculous thought.
MAX: Right?
LEILA: So? Are you done? Romance time over, is it?
SOFIA: Nope. It's only just begun.
(She exhaled.)
SOFIA: I'm so lucky. Being a woman means I don't have to propose. I'd have got so lost trying to find the right words.
RICO: Like I did.
SOFIA: No. Far worse. But one thing I would have mentioned is, how good you are for me. You understand me. Even during that god awful proposal when my adrenaline rushed, you knew how to bring me back to me. You really are the one for me, Rico. The only one who's ever tried to understand me. The only one who's been there for me, no matter how vile my insults get. I love you.
(Rico forced back a tear then quickly shoved the ring onto her finger.)
RICO: Sorry, babe, but I'm gonna have to kiss you now, before I start crying and the lads take the piss!
MAX: Too late!
TOMMY: Pansy!
MAX: Bloody wimp.
TOMMY: Yeah, you... they're not listening. They're kissing.
MAX: Yeah... apparently they don't care what we think.
LEILA: Has anybody ever?
MAX: Yes!
LEILA: I was talking to fuck face.
TOMMY: Can you stop calling me that?
LEILA: Yes, actually.
TOMMY: Oh.
LEILA: For now. First, I just want to savour this sweet, sweet moment.
(She exhaled.)
LEILA: Even if the two people involved *are* a pair of ridiculous morons, nothing beats a genuinely romantic moment.
(She then gazed out over the lake and exhaled. A few seconds later, however, a bitter voice rose up from behind her.)
RICO: *You're* a moron!
(Leila just sniggered then sauntered away giggling.)

Back at the warrior's guild at this time, Chi was packing her bag in readiness to go home. It wasn't unusual for her to work until midnight, but tonight, her shift had run way beyond it. The accounts from the guild's bar had been declared incorrectly and she'd had to waste her evening recalculating their figures. It had taken her long into the small hours to get it done. Unsurprisingly, she was not amused.

CHI: I mean, it's not difficult, is it? If you get a form with four columns to fill in, you fill in four bloody columns. Not one. Not two. Not three. Four! You fill in four. Morons. I knew that new bar manager was a cock, the minute I clapped eyes on him. That's the last time I let Kiki make a recruitment decision.

(Just then, a voice rose up from in front of her desk.)

THELMA: Do you always talk yourself like that, Chi.

CHI: If I want an intelligent conversation, yes.

(She then glanced up to see her visitor was.)

CHI: Oh. Wait...

(She raised an uncertain eyebrow.)

CHI: I know you, don't I?

THELMA: You do, yes.

CHI: I knew it!

(She grimaced.)

CHI: And where do I know you from?

THELMA: You slept with my husband and destroyed my marriage.

CHI: I see.

(She giggled.)

CHI: Can you narrow it down for me?

THELMA: What???

CHI: I'm kidding, I'm kidding. I remember now.

(She nodded firmly.)

CHI: But I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that *he* ruined your marriage, not me. I didn't even know he *had* a wife!

THELMA: Is that so?

CHI: It is, yes. Of course, it is. The thing about adulterous husbands is, they tend to forget to tell the other woman they're married.

THELMA: Yes, well...

CHI: Dark times.

(She shrugged.)

CHI: But that was fifteen years ago. I'm sure we've all moved on since then. So... how can I help you at this unholy hour.

THELMA: Help me? Oh, no, no, no. You've got it all wrong. I don't want you to help me. I want you to do as I say.

CHI: Is that right?

THELMA: Yes.

CHI: And why would I consider doing such a thing?

THELMA: Because I'm the new interim defence minister.

(She smirked menacingly.)

THELMA: Your new boss!

CHI: Ah.

(She sucked her teeth.)

CHI: Why do I get the feeling I'm not going to enjoy this visit?

THELMA: Because you're very astute.

CHI: That's a horrible answer.

THELMA: Really? I liked it.

(She sneered.)

THELMA: And as I outrank you, my answer stands.

CHI: Okay...

(She sighed.)

CHI: Fine. Talk to me. What's this visit about?

THELMA: You.

CHI: Me?

THELMA: Yes, you. You see, I have a little task for you.

(Chi's brow furrowed.)

CHI: What kind of task?

THELMA: Mandatory!

CHI: They're the worst kind.

THELMA: So I hear.

(She exhaled gleefully.)

THELMA: You're going to hate it.

CHI: Yeah... like you clearly hate *me*.

THELMA: Correct.

CHI: Right. So... this task... a one off, is it? Or are they going to keep coming until your tenure ends? Speaking of which, how long *will* I have tolerate you as interim for?

THELMA: About ten days. You know... until the *actual* minister of defence returns from his suspension. A suspension, I reduced in my capacity as interim.

(She shrugged.)

THELMA: I *could* have reduced it to nothing and let him come back to work right away, but you see, I want to have a little fun with you first.

CHI: Shit.

(She sighed emptily.)

CHI: Fine. Let's hear it then. What's this task of which you squeak. Speak!

THELMA: Your mandatory physical.

CHI: What? Who??? Mandatory physical? There's no such *thing* as a mandatory physical.

THELMA: Oh, but there is.

(She beamed menacingly.)

THELMA: They were deemed pointless fifty years ago, so the ministry stopped making people do them. Unfortunately for you, however, they never removed the statute from the rule books.

(She exhaled.)

THELMA: It brought joy to my heart when I realised. Because of that oversight, in my capacity as the minister of defence, albeit interim, I can legally come in here and demand that you take a two hour physical exam at any time. And here I am. This... is that time.

(Chi looked at her agape for a moment then scoffed.)

CHI: Nah. Fuck that. I'm off to bed.

THELMA: I wouldn't do that if I were you.

CHI: Yes, but you're *not* me.

THELMA: Quite. I'm not about to get fired.

CHI: Fired?

THELMA: Yes. Fired. That *is* the penalty for refusal, after all.

(Chi gulped.)

CHI: So... you want...

THELMA: Yes!

CHI: A physical exam?

THELMA: Uh-huh.

CHI: Now?

THELMA: That's right.

CHI: At god knows what in the morning. After a long shift.

THELMA: Correct.

CHI: I see. And I'll get fired if...

THELMA: Like a boulder from a catapult.

CHI: Right.

(She pouted.)

CHI: Mean.

THELMA: Yes, but at least it won't ruin anyone's marriage.

(Chi glowered at her coldly.)

CHI: You're a petty, petty woman.

THELMA: And delighted to be so.

(She smirked devilishly.)

THELMA: Now... let's start with fifty push-ups, shall we?

CHI: Fifty?

THELMA: That's right. Or would you like to do more?

CHI: No!

(She sighed ruefully.)

CHI: Fifty is fine.

(She then sunk down onto her knees and pouted miserably. For her, it was going to be a long, long night.)

In The Axnay Reject's carriage, one hour later, Sofia was sitting huddled up to Rico, beaming with delight at her engagement ring. To finally be able to wear it was a joy beyond a joy for her. In the carriage with them, Tommy, Max and Leila were all staring out of the windows quietly. The nightshift was starting to weigh heavy on them. Leila could barely keep her eyes open. As a result, the conversation for the past twenty minutes had been monopolised entirely by Sofia and Rico.

SOFIA: I can't wait to choose my wedding dress.

RICO: And I can't wait to pay for it.

(He winced.)

RICO: It's gonna cost an arm and a leg.

SOFIA: It doesn't have to. I mean, it's not like I have a shortage of white dresses, is it? Almost everything I own is white. I can just alter one of *them*.

(She shrugged.)

SOFIA: It would be nice to have a special *new* dress just for the day though.

RICO: Yeah? Then, you shall have one. You deserve it. And yeah... you do look good in white, so why not?

SOFIA: You're the best.

RICO: Well, that *is* why you agreed to marry me.

MAX: And because nobody else wanted her.

RICO: Hey!

SOFIA: That was rude.

MAX: It was a joke.

(He yawned.)

MAX: I was dozing off and needed a distraction.

(He shrugged.)

MAX: You two ridiculous love birds were a godsend in that respect.

RICO: I see. Then we're happy to be of service.

SOFIA: If only we could keep the other two awake as well. Tommy's well on his way and I think Leila's dozed off already.

MAX: Yeah, well, that's no surprise, is it? *She* dozes off randomly during the day; there was no way she was going to make it through a nightshift.

(The three of them nodded in agreement.)

MAX: Cock!

RICO: What?

MAX: Fucking asking for a nightshift. What the fuck were you thinking?

(Rico furrowed his brow.)

RICO: I already explained why I did that before we left the pub.

SOFIA: You did?

RICO: Well... no. Not to you, obviously.

MAX: He's keeping secrets from you, Sofia. Like his affair with Chi.

SOFIA: You already did that joke once.

MAX: Yeah, but...

SOFIA: Don't let there be a third.

MAX: Right... feisty.

RICO: That's my all-new confident Sofia.

MAX: Yeah... I don't like her!

(Sofia and Max shared a smirk then Sofia looked to Rico.)

SOFIA: So, why *did* you agree to a nightshift?

RICO: Do you really need to ask?

SOFIA: Well... for the proposal I'd assume, but I don't know for sure.

RICO: You do, actually. You assumed correctly. I asked Chi to offer us one so I could say yes. Then we could be out here at night, and I could propose to you next to the moonlit lake, with the words spelt out in lights.

(He winced.)

RICO: My crime was failing to letting the others in on it first. So I told them before we set out. While you were in the toilet.

SOFIA: So that's why they were slightly less hostile.

MAX: You catch on fast.

SOFIA: Sometimes.

MAX: Naturally, it'd be wrong to cease hostilities altogether, of course.

RICO: Would it now?

MAX: Yes. You still lumbered us with an unwanted shift, even if you *did* have a good reason.

RICO: Yeah... I can't argue with that. Rico, you're a cock.
SOFIA: But an awesome cock.
(She gasped in horror at herself.)
SOFIA: I'm not saying you *have* an awesome cock; you don't.
(She gasped again.)
SOFIA: I mean, you *do* have an awesome cock. I meant, *you're* not awesome!
(She gasped a third time.)
SOFIA: Yes, you are! You're ultra awesome! And so is your cock!
(She buried her head into Rico's arm and proceeded to die of shame.)
RICO: That was adorable.
MAX: Yeah... it pains me to say it, but that was really cute. I hate that.
RICO: Come back to us, Sofia. There's no need to be embarrassed.
MAX: Oh, there is.
RICO: Shut up. No, there isn't. Yes, she made a fool of herself, but look at the company she's in. Who *here* can judge her?
MAX: True. She really is one of us. An Axnay Screw-Up.
RICO: Reject!
MAX: What? Oh, yeah.
(He winced.)
MAX: How long have I been getting *that* wrong? Not too long, I hope. If so, I might have to redo our base registration renewal form.
RICO: I wouldn't worry about it, mate. Sort it out in the morning.
(He glanced out of the window.)
RICO: We should be back in Axnay soon, thank fuck. And I, for one, need a nap. Plus a little slap and tickle from...
SOFIA: Why would we be back in Axnay soon?
RICO: Because it's done. You've got the ring.
SOFIA: So? You signed us up for a nightshift!
MAX: Meaning we're out here until the sun comes out!
RICO: Fuck! I forgot about that! For a minute there I had it in my head that we did the proposal and we're coming home.
SOFIA: Wally.
MAX: Twat!
RICO: Steady on.
(Just then, the loud cry of a herd of Calibras rose up from outside the carriage. Stung into action, Max leapt to his feet, grabbed his sword then darted out of the carriage.)
MAX: Die fiends!!!
(A loud thud ensued.)
MAX: Ow!!!
RICO: Blimey. He really *is* tired!
SOFIA: Did he think we'd stopped?
RICO: I'd assume so.
(At this point, Leila opened her eyes.)
LEILA: Are we there yet?
RICO: Where?
LEILA: I don't know.

SOFIA: There are beasts outside. We're slowing down so we can get out and fight.

RICO: As soon as I've woken Tommy up.

LEILA: Leave it to me.

(She sneered venomously then stamped on his foot.)

LEILA: Ouch!!!

RICO: Steal toecaps, Leila.

LEILA: Aw. That's cheating.

(She then slapped him around the face instead.)

TOMMY: Hey!

LEILA: Never mind hey! To battle!

(She then darted out of the door in a carbon copy of the calamitous Max.)

LEILA: Why??? Ow!!!

(Sofia leaned out of the window and healed her.)

SOFIA: We're surrounded by idiots, Rico.

TOMMY: Charming.

RICO: She wasn't referring to you.

SOFIA: Well...

RICO: Still, never mind that. We're almost at a halt now, so let's get this show on the road.

(He then tumbled out the carriage, closely followed by an equally clumsy Tommy.)

RICO: Misjudged it!!!

TOMMY: Cheers, pal!!!

(Watching from the carriage as it slowly came to a halt, Sofia sighed.)

SOFIA: What did I agree to marry?

(With a chuckle, she then jumped down from the carriage and joined the others in falling into formation. Moments later, once the back and front rows had been formed, Max and Rico charged. It had been a thoroughly professional action. It was however, an action brought on by habit and muscle memory rather than professionalism. Nevertheless, their next battle had begun.)

MAX: Have at it, mate. I've got you covered!

RICO: Really? You've cast Pulse already?

MAX: Um... no. On second thoughts, you'd better wait for a bit.

RICO: You think?

MAX: I do, yes. But before you moan at me for tired mistakes, remember whose fault it is, I'm tired.

RICO: I might have known you'd say something like that.

(In that moment, Max raced into the hoard.)

MAX: I've cast Pulse!

RICO: A-ha! Then it begins!

MAX: Ow!!! Forgot to cast shield though!!!

(Sofia then called out from the back.)

SOFIA: Then it's a bloody good thing all the excitement of getting engaged woke me up a bit. I made sure you were covered.

MAX: Nice one, Sofia! You fucking rule.

(Hardly able to believe her eyes, Leila gave Sofia a sideways glance.)

LEILA: That's it? That's all the bollocking he's going to get?

SOFIA: Why would I give him a bollocking?

LEILA: Because it's what you do! He forgot to cast Pulse.

SOFIA: So? It happens.

LEILA: Yeah. And usually it's accompanied by a fanfare of vulgar abuse from you!

(Sofia threw out a limp wrist.)

SOFIA: Meh. Life's too short for all that.

LEILA: I see...

(She gave her a questioning glance.)

LEILA: Your ultra happy right now, aren't you? And it's made you sickeningly sweet.

SOFIA: I wouldn't have said sickeningly...

LEILA: Can you make me a glass of warm milk before bed?

(Sofia smiled.)

SOFIA: Of course. I'd be happy to.

(Leila beamed then glanced away and mumbled to herself.)

LEILA: Hmm... a loved up Sofia might be even easier to manipulate than the whimpering one. Interesting...

(She then cast her magic, obliterating a wealth of enemies. She'd done so with perfect timing. Rico was at the end of his run and turning around, well out of harms way.)

RICO: Spot on, Leila!

LEILA: Aren't I always?

(Silence ensued.)

LEILA: Why, you rotten...

(She then flinched at the sight of Tommy stepping forwards.)

TOMMY: I know what this fight needs...

LEILA: Is it fog?

TOMMY: No!

(He furrowed his brow.)

TOMMY: A little bit of my slowdown magic.

SOFIA: That a new skill, is it?

TOMMY: Yeah!

SOFIA: Then do us all a favour and wait to try it on Empies. The last thing we need is another of your new skill calamities.

TOMMY: You cheeky...

(He furrowed his brow.)

TOMMY: Happy Sofia's a cunt.

SOFIA: Charming.

LEILA: Ignore him. I think you're sweet.

SOFIA: Aw...

TOMMY: Suck up.

LEILA: Shut up and rest in peace, dead person. Like you're supposed to.

TOMMY: Whatever.

(Leila then beamed with fiendish delight. Befriending an overly nice Sofia could well be lucrative for her.)

LEILA: Like taking candy from a... nothing!

(She then looked to where Rico was zooming through the battle.)

RICO: That's another lot done and dusted!

MAX: Nice! You wiped out the ones trying to pile in on the front!

RICO: I know. And that takes some doing. I always *try* to get them for you, but the fuckers tend to surge while I'm full flight. It's hard to deviate.

MAX: Right... I didn't need your life story, I just wanted to say well done.

RICO: Fucking say it then!

MAX: Nah. It's too late now; the moment's passed.
(Rico then zoomed past him again, chuckling.)

RICO: You're a cunt.

MAX: Thank you.

(An explosion then rose up from behind them. Leila had unleashed a spell so powerful, she killed ninety percent of what was left.)

LEILA: Holy crap! How did I do that??? That was awesome!!!

TOMMY: I learned a magic boost skill.

LEILA: And used it on me???

(She turned around and started to slap him relentlessly.)

LEILA: I didn't give you permission to cast magic on me!!!

TOMMY: You loved it!

LEILA: No, I didn't!

TOMMY: You said it was awesome!

LEILA: I said it was *awful*!!!

SOFIA: No, you didn't!

LEILA: Butt out, Sofia you...

(Suddenly remembering her plan, she quickly softened her tone.)

LEILA: You... focus on the fight and leave arse face to me, sweetie!

SOFIA: Actually, there's not much fight left thanks to your amazing magic blast.

LEILA: Amazing? It wasn't amazing, it was reckless and I might have died!
(Defending himself from her violent hands, Tommy retorted angrily.)

TOMMY: Died? How?

LEILA: Overcasting!

TOMMY: That's a fishing term!

LEILA: No, it's not.

SOFIA: It's a sewing term.

LEILA: Yeah!

(She flinched.)

LEILA: I mean, no! It's when you overdo magic!

TOMMY: That spell guarantees against that!

LEILA: Says who???

TOMMY: Chi!

LEILA: Oh, what does *she* know?

SOFIA: Everything!

LEILA: Yeah, right...

(Leila pulled back from slapping Tommy then ruffled her neck.)

LEILA: Just ask me before casting it next time.

TOMMY: Fucking... fine.

(He then looked to the fight again and saw Max and Tommy strolling back towards him.)

TOMMY: Is it over?

MAX: No, we just got bored, so we asked them to fight among themselves while we have a quick tea break.

TOMMY: A simple yes would have sufficed.

MAX: True, but it wouldn't have highlighted the stupidity of the question, would it?

TOMMY: Right.

(He shook his head.)

TOMMY: You're all cunts. I'm going back in the carriage!

(He then stomped away and climbed back into the carriage. Left behind, Rico, Sofia, Max and Leila gathered in a bunch.)

RICO: So... are you not gonna chase Sofia round and round in circles tonight? The battle's finished, so it's about that time.

LEILA: Don't be ridiculous. Why would I pick a fight with Sofia? She's my best friend. (Rico and Max instantly fell about laughing.)

MAX: Good one.

RICO: She's a card, isn't she?

MAX: Right?

LEILA: You...

(She sighed.)

LEILA: Forget it. What time is it? Tonight has been too long and I want to go home.

MAX: We've got a few hours left, sadly.

LEILA: Tit, Rico.

RICO: Thanks.

LEILA: Stupid nightshifts. During the day we can work the hours we choose. We can come home after an hour if we like. So why are nightshifts a mandatory nine hour nuisance?

SOFIA: Probably because the bounties are higher on a nightshift, and they don't want people doing two hours at night then coming home again. That'd be cheeky. If you want double bounties, you need to do the full shift.

MAX: Tit, Rico.

RICO: I heard.

MAX: I just want to get back.

RICO: And jump into bed; I get it.

MAX: No, actually.

(He ruffled his neck.)

MAX: After our romance themed evening, I kinda fancy getting some loving of my own. So I might down to that all night café and chat up some of the nurses that get in there.

LEILA: Ooh.

(She beamed.)

LEILA: I'll come with you. Hopefully I can bag a doctor.

MAX: Or a male nurse.

LEILA: Yeah, right. They're more likely to want to go home with you!

MAX: Leila...

LEILA: What? It's true! A doctor it is.

(She exhaled.)

LEILA: I hear they're the best when it comes to the naughty stuff, being well versed in the human body an 'all.

MAX: Uh-huh.

(Leila beamed.)

LEILA: Yup. I'm definitely in! I'm looking forward to that.

MAX: Me too.

LEILA: As you should. Morning sex is awesome. *Especially* with people who understand human anatomy! And seeing as we're trawling in a place full of medical staff... well... what could go wrong?

Leila's question about what could go wrong was meant to be rhetorical. A throw away line to be consigned to history from the moment it left her lips. Unfortunately, when she woke up that afternoon following her morning's romance, she got a nasty shock.

LEILA: No!!! What are *you* doing in my bed???

MAX: I don't know!!!

(They paused for a moment to think over what had happened at the café that morning then reacted the only way they knew how.)

LEILA: No!!!

MAX: Why???

(It was fair to say that Leila had very much answered her own question.)

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