

Just a flicker

A modded Stardew Fanfiction

Von Calyses

Kapitel 8: Adventures in the Cindersap

The next two workdays went by uneventful. Jasper was working on restoring the gem collection of the museum, so he had Sam sorting all available stones and tried to teach her how to prospect minerals. His expertise was apparent, but Sam had a hard time to recognize some of the more subtle differences between similar looking gems and minerals.

"Give it time. It will work out." Jasper told her when she began to get frustrated.

"Yeah, I know, but I can't help it. When I learn new things and don't get them right in a short amount of time I'm disappointed in myself. It was all so easy when I was younger, but it seems that if lost that touch since." she sighed

"You know it's the same for all of us?" Jasper answered.

Sam raised an eyebrow.

"I've heard, but it feels differently."

"That's because most of the things you will learn in live are outside of your comfort zone or completely new to you. By nature they are more difficult to learn. And most of the time you see and compare to others who already know what they are doing. You don't see them struggles with the stuff because they already have and have left that stage behind. So please, don't be so hard on yourself." he threw her a smile.

"Thanks." she said and both continued her training.

When her workday drew to an end Elliott arrived. Sam waved him over.

"Woah, that is definitely a choice." He reacted to seeing her. "I see your dyes have arrived."

"Yes, yesterday." She said grinning mischievously.

"And now she looks like she's fallen into a rainbow." Gunther had come over, a mug of coffee in his hand, to greet his friend.

"Gunther, how are you? It has been a while since I have been here." Elliott responded, "And I see you have a new colleague?" he pointed to the professor, who introduced himself.

He talked a bit with the other men, while Sam collected her things. As soon as she was ready both left and walked their way to cindersap forest.

"A whole rainbow?" Elliott ask. Sam snickered again.

"Yeah, I like it colorful."

"I cannot say I like it, but I do not have to wear it. So you do you."

"You will get used to it. In the main time show me, where you live."

Elliott complied, since it was more or less on the way anyway and Sam couldn't deny a little envy about the location.

When they entered the forest she tried to remember what Lewis had told her. To their right fences kept docile animals from walking into the woods. Sam stopped.

"Marnie's Ranch..." she muttered.

"What is it?" Elliott asked.

"Nothing, I just try to remember what the mayor told me on our tour here."

"Ah, so you were here already?"

"Yes, but only once and for a very short period of time. The mayor has a quick step.

"I would think so. Do you know he delivers the mail around pelican town, too?"

"No, he hadn't told me. He just showed me a few important buildings and locations I'm not supposed to be."

"Like?"

"The old community center. It appears to be a thorn in his side and I think he doesn't want me to snoop around." But I'll get him to let me, she thought.

"Maybe you can change his mind. You need some good arguments, though."

To their left a little house snuggled on the riverbank.

"Here lives my best friend." Elliott said. "She is not here right now, but she will be back shortly. Her name is Leah and she is an artist. You should meet her. I think you two will get along great."

They continued to walk along the river, past a bridge leading to a little patch of farmland with a run down farmhouse next to it. The owner had named it Fairhaven. Strawberries were planted there.

"Do you have something in mind or do you just want to wander around for a bit?" Elliott asked while they made their way further west.

"I've read something interesting about a vineyard deeper in the western forest, called Aurora Vineyard. The owners tried their best to keep their business running as long as possible in spite of the declining economy."

Sam told him.

"Never heard of it. But I have not been that deep in the woods. Normally nobody ventures beyond that crooked tower over there on the cliff." He pointed to the building looming over the lake."

"Why? It's lovely here."

"Dunno, maybe some superstition? You forgot. I am not from here either."

"Right, let's prove the people's fear wrong then."

They walked around the northern edge of the lake. A brightly colored traveling cart in a reddish purple with a green roof was parked under some trees. A massive purple colored pig was laying in the shadows and snoring the day away. Out of a hatch in the middle of the cart a turquoise haired woman greeted smiling and waved them over.

"Hello there, name's Suki. I'm a traveling merchant. Can I interest you in some of my goods?"

Sam and Elliott looked at each other. This was a strange place for a shop to pop up. Sam shrugged and walked up to the cart. She was curious.

"I'd like to see your wares, but may I ask, why made you camp here and not in the town square?"

"My companion", the lady pointed to the big pig in front of the cart, "doesn't like to be stuck on pavement the whole day. Here is much more comfortable." She left it at that. Sam started to browse her wares. Elliott joined in after a moment.

"Have you seen all the gotoran things? I bet that's the reason she's not coming to town directly." Sam snickered.

"No, what for example?" Elliott was curious.

"The plates. The decor is unmistakable gotoran. And some of the sweets maybe."

"How do you know?"

"A friend of mine is archaeologist. You learn to date and classify a lot of old ceramic during your studies. We made fun of it by trying to date modern mugs and plates. It became sort of a hob..."

"Shh...", Elliott motioned her to be silent and pointed between the trees in front and slightly left to them. They had passed the crooked tower and were walking through the thicket beyond the commonly known paths and to the west now. A sturdy old man, robed in black, with a black, pointy hat and green hair and beard stood beyond the trees in a clearing and was chanting something, they couldn't understand.

"Who is this?" Sam whispered under her breath.

"I do not, let us sneak past him." Elliott suggested.

They turned northwest and moved as quietly as they possibly could away from the man. The forest grew denser. Soon a fallen tree trunk blocked their way completely.

"Let us turn back.", Elliott suggested while they examined the obstacle, a hint of worry in his voice.

"Why?" Sam, asked. "We can, easily climbed over it."

"I do not know about this. Nobody goes into this part of the forest."

"But it's just wood..." Sam couldn't fathom why he was hesitant all of a sudden. "I think we just have to walk a bit along the path and turn southwest as soon, as we can, to reach the vineyard. It couldn't be that far from here."

"I have a, bad feeling, about, this. Look how dense and dark the woods grow behind, the log?" he added. Sam thought about it.

"Okay, we can turn back and wait for the weird man to leave." She answered downhearted after a few moments. She was about to turn, as she glimpsed something. A tiny, apple-like creature broke out of the undergrowth and ran down the

trail.

"Do you see it!" she nugged Elliott.

"Y-yes... What is this?" he watched the bright golden-colored orb hubble away on its tiny legs, as fast as it could.

"One of the creatures, that made me taking a bath in the mountain lake. Let's go after it and look what it's up to." With that she was over the log before Elliott could stop her.

"Stop! Oh, great..." what had he gotten himself into. Hesitant he followed her, the feeling of unease growing as he ventured into the unknown part of the woods.

This time Sam was a lot more silent and tried to follow the creature without being noticed. It didn't take long for Elliott to catch up to her.

"What are you doing?" He whispered.

"Following the little guy. It hasn't noticed us, yet. And it seems to be quite in a hurry. I'd like to know more about this creatures." She answered him under her breath.

The path in front of them opened up into a small clearing, with a little pond fed by a small waterfall on the northern side, where a small creek flew over the led not even as high as Sam was tall. The golden creature hurried right into the open and bumped into one of six green slimy balls with glowy red eyes. It was knocked back a little and revealed a even smaller apple creature encircled by the slimes and trying to escape. The arrival of their new opponent baffled the slimes a bit, but they soon began to coordinate their attacks accordingly. One would attack the big creature, another from the opposite side the small one. The big one tumbled and fell. The slimes closed in and tried to separate it from the small one.

"Oh, no, they are loosing." Sam whispered. "Let's help!"

"No! It is too dangerous!" Elliott replied under his breath.

"You stay here then. I will help!" Sam didn't wait for an answer this time.

She took the first heavy branch she could come by off the ground and stepped into the clearing.

"Wait! You can't!" Elliott tried to stop her.

But it was too late. Sam had already hit the first slime and send it flying into a nearby bush. The slime wailed in a high pitch tone unlike anything Sam or Elliott ever had heard.

She didn't lose a beat to go after the next one. And she was hitting hard. It flew into the bushes, too. The apple-creatures watched in shock.

"Run! I make an opening for you!" Sam shouted.

The big creature reacted first. It appeared to shake its head, pushed itself up on its feet again and nudged the small one to move. Unnoticed of both another slime crept nearer.

Elliott stepped up and kicked it away. He wasn't sure, but it seemed the walking apples waved both Sam and him a goodbye before vanishing down the path, they had come.

Sam and Elliott began to made their way back, too, when suddenly a whole bunch of the green blobs blocked there way forward. The slimes from behind closing in, the narrow path back to the tree trunk was the perfect bottleneck, Elliott and Sam had been caught in. The surrounding slimes started to attack immediately. Sam tried to use her improvised weapon to block. The speed of the charging slimes caught her of guard She couldn't parry.

"Ouch!" One had hit her thigh.

"These things hurt. Run!" She screamed, as another bumped into her with high speed. She tumbled.

Elliott caught her, before she could fall. Therefore he couldn't evade the next attack. He took a hit right in his gut. The impact took the air out of his lungs. He was gasping. Another slime prepared to jump him.

Sam caught sight of it. She stepped in the jump line, but could barely braced herself. Velocity and force of that thing were enough to push her into Elliott. The momentum of the tumbling woman pushed him back. His foot caught in a tree root. Loosing his balance he fell to the ground. In reflex, he tried to soften the fall with his hands. He winced as a sudden pain shot through his right arm.

But there was no time. He needed to get up and quickly. The slimes had them trapped. Sam took a stance right over him, holding of as many creatures as she could - with the branch, with her body... With every hit she took, her motions became more sluggish, more unsteady. Only desperation kept her going, it seemed. She reached for Elliott without looking.

"Get up! We have to get out of here. You must make a run for it. I'll be right behind you!" She tried to sound confident. He grabbed her hand and pulled himself up.

"You can barely stand on your own. I am not leaving you alone."

They backed away as far as the trees would allow. How should they get out? The slimes had them cornered. Aggressive with red glowing eyes they crept nearer. The first contracted, making themselves ready to attack. With her last strength Sam waved around the branch. The slimes weren't impressed. Like springs they released there stored power and jumped...

Suddenly a storm rose. Lightning and thunder tore the sky. A booming voice shouted:

"BEGONE!"

The strong wind carried some of the Slimes away. The others turned as quick as they could.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

The voice now targeted Sam and Elliott. In fear they stayed silent.

"EXPLAIN YOURSELF! NOW!" the voice boomed even louder. Thunder echoed over their heads.

A shivering, exhausted Sam stepped up.

"It's my fault. There were these golden creatures, like apples, one tiny, one bigger, and the slimy, green ones and the green ones attacked the the small golden one. I tried to help, but we were swarmed by the slimy creatures."

She looked at Elliott, who was holding his injured hand.

"I got my friend hurt. Could we please leave? He needs a doctor."

"IN THAT CASE..." the storm diffused as soon as it had come. The green haired man from before stepped out of the shadows. A little golden apple sitting on his shoulder.

"Come with me. You have to leave this part of the woods. You don't belong here."

As told Sam and Elliott followed the strange man. After the first few steps Sam stumbled and fell. Heavily breathing she pushed herself up again. The man stopped: "You need a doctor yourself dearie. Don't underestimate those small creatures. They can do a lot of damage and it seems they got you good. That's what you get for invading their space..."

But on behalf of my friend here," He motioned to the little golden apple," I have to thank you for saving it."

They followed the man all the way back to the fallen tree trunk.

"I've to sit down for a bit." Sam said and used the log as seat.

The man raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. Elliott reached in his messenger bag and pulled out a bottle of water. He drank a bit himself, then handed it to Sam. She took it gladly and drank, too.

"I'm sorry." She said after quenching her thirst, looking at Elliott. "I should have listen to you. I brought us into a dangerous situation and now you're injured because of me."

"I could have stayed back." He shrugged. "But I am glad I did not. I do not want to think about, what could have happen..."

"So", The green haired man interrupted them. "How exactly did you get into this part of the forest?"

Sam and Elliott both looked puzzled.

"We... just climbed over this log...", Sam provided as answer. The man laughed. He didn't seemed satisfied:

"...just... climbed... over here. How were you ABLE TO DO SO?" His voice grew louder until he was almost screaming.

"Like, with the use of our hands and feet?" Sam was taken aback by his sudden outbreak. Elliott stood by her, putting his intact hand on her shoulder reassuringly.:

"I can even do it with one hand? Should I demonstrate?" He hold the other mans stare. The bearded man shook his head.

"I apologize. I shouldn't have gotten loud. My point is: These trunks mark borders. Points where people normally turn around, because they just don't want to take a step further."

Sam wanted to ask how, but bit her tongue. Don't irate the strange man any further, she thought.

"I felt a little uneasy." Elliott admitted.

"A little uneasy, but the concern for a little unknown creature and a mere acquaintance was enough to shake the feeling off?", The man laughed again. "I truly messed up..."

Sam and Elliott looked him, then at each other. Elliott shrugged.

"Sir, can we leave or is there something you still want to know from us?" Sam asked. "We must see the doctor."

"Just one thing. Listen to your guts next time and keep away from places you're not supposed to be. They are off limits for a reason. Now, begone! I've got things to do."

As they went the little golden apple chirped and waved a goodbye.

Rasmodius watched while the young people went back to town.

"Simply climbed over the log... feeling a little uneasy..." he'd just renewed the barrier, so how were they even able to see through it? Unless he'd made a mistake. Had he lost his touch? Or was their situation this dire already? He felt for the magic around him. Nothing seems to be out of the ordinary.

The little apple chirped something in his ear.

"And you should be more careful, too, little one." Rasmodius lectured it without responding to what it had said.

"I hate to admit it, but if those two hadn't interfered, you'd be gone. And now off to your family."

It chirped again.

"Maybe,... time will tell. I'll keep my eye on them."

Elliott and Sam walked back to town in silence. Elliott glanced over to her. She stumbled, but caught herself before falling. Mucus had stained her partially torn clothes. Dirt and scrapes told the tale of their fight. He presumed he didn't look any better. The silence was welcome, he wasn't in the mood for talking.

His wrist started to hurt slightly and he was barely able to move his hand. That wasn't a good sign. In front of this strange man he'd played it down, but he was furious. Furious with himself for agreeing to such a stupidity and furious with her for being so reckless to get them both almost killed. If it wasn't for Sam being a heap of misery herself right now, she'd already gotten an earful. Instead he clenched his left hand to a fist, grinding his teeth together, trying to stay composed.

He looked at her again. Her footing had gotten even unstabler. She could barely walk in a straight line, even though she tried. Without thinking he closed in and steadied her, before she could fall over her own feet.

"Thank you... and it's okay, you know." Sam spoke in an almost silent voice, broken and barely audible. "You being angry I mean. Me acting without thinking got you hurt, maybe badly. I don't dare thinking what could have happened, if it hadn't been for that strange old man. I don't know if I'll be able to apologize ever enough for today, so scream at me, be angry, be loud..."

With a short gesture he silence her:

"I am angry, but I will not yell. Please, do not talk to me right now. I have to make sense of this whole, excuse me for that - shit - first. Little walking apples, monsters in the woods... Your blatant disregard for my concerns, that put us in that mess to begin with. I just hope, this", he held up his injured arm, "is only a very bad bruising."