







JESTER'S
BEDTIME TALES





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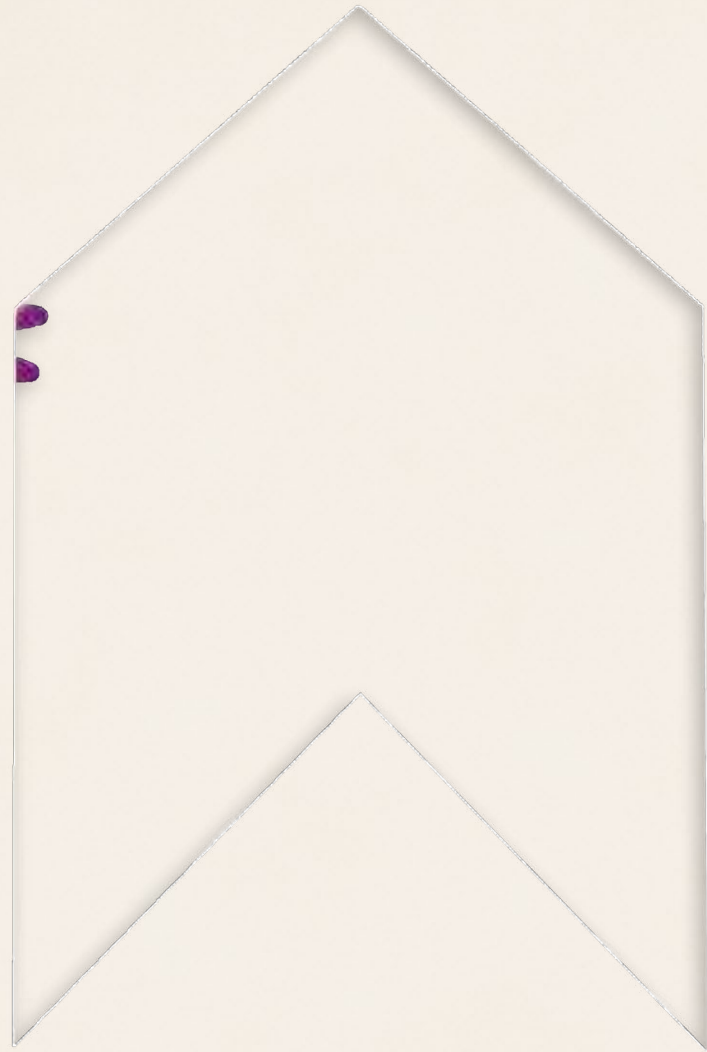
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Traveler!
 You're so crazy, some of
 those aren't even numbers!







One Bright Night

So when I was little, my mama couldn't always tuck me into bed because she was always working. I mean, she's soooo beautiful and soooo talented, so of course everyone wanted to be with her. But it was okay—I don't want you to think that things were bad because, you know, I was a big girl and it's not like I *needed* someone to tuck me in, and besides, the Traveler would come visit and tell me stories, so many fun stories!

Well, anyway, one night, Mama didn't have any customers. Maybe it was a holiday? Or maybe my birthday! I don't remember. But I do remember that she came into my room and said to me, "My darling Sapphire, do you want a treat tonight?"

She was holding a tray with some cupcakes and milk, so I said, "Oh, Mama, of COURSE I want a treat tonight! Thank you so much!"

Mama looked at the tray and said, "Oh! I mean, yes, THIS treat...but I have another treat for you! Put on your robe and come with me!" And she had a very special smile on her face that I knew was just for me.

So I put on one of my favorite robes—you know, the purple one with gold and pink hearts all over it—and followed her to one of the balconies we had at the Lavish Chateau. And Oh. My. A-Gosh. My mama had set it up with a little rug and cushions and blankets and the cutest table and a candle!

"Mama!" I cried out. "This is sooooo beautiful!"

She set the tray on the table and sat down, holding her arm out to me. "Come here, my Jester, and let us spend some time together."

So I went to sit next to Mama, and with a cupcake in my hand and my head against her chest, Mama pulled one of the fur blankets around us.

"Look, Jester." Mama pointed up at the sky. I remember that it was a very clear night, and even though we had a candle, most of the chateau was dark, so we could see all the stars in the sky, and you know, it was like it went on forever. "What does that look like to you?"

I looked up and tilted my head to the side. "Oh, Mama, it looks exactly like a horse with wings, like a Pegasus!"

"You're such a clever girl. I think so, too!"

"But what about the little stars above and below it? What do you think those are?"

Mama thought for a moment, and said, "You know, my darling, those have to be the Pegasus' children, right? I think this Pegasus must be a mama and loves her children—just like how I love you, my Jester—so she keeps her children close to her, even when she is flying through the skies. And look—one of the stars is a bright blue, just like you!"

So Mama and I spent much of that night just looking at the stars, and making up names for them and telling stories about all the things that we could see. There was an owlbear that went into war with the neighboring giants, a group of elves who got lost in a foggy forest, some baby kittens playing tug-of-war with a blanket they found...but mostly I kept thinking of the mama Pegasus, and what it would be like to have brothers and sisters, and how delicious my strawberry cupcake was, and how sweet my mama smelled, and how warm we both were, lying underneath the stars. And you know? I think that had to be one of my favorite nights ever.





30 Seconds Over Syngorn

It was a day when everyone stayed inside. The dead were among the living, more than usual anyway, Mama said. And, it was raining.

Good for business, but I didn't have anything to do.

"Traveler, could you tell me a story?"

"What kind would you like?"

"A scary story. Do you know any scary stories?"

"I can tell you stories of the most horrible things, of vampires whose heads fly free and chase you at night, of tentacled creatures that eat your brains and live in your empty skull, of nameless gods chained in the darkness between worlds..."

"What's the SCARIEST story you know?"

"The scariest, my love?" He looked at his hands and frowned.



The clown slumped onstage from the wings, dragging a laugh bladder behind him. One of its bells fell off and hit the wooden slats with a leaden thump.

"I don't want to be here, but I'm trapped, and so are you."

He took out a big brass horn from behind his back. The pitted metal was stained green with verdigris; it had a big dull red squeeze bulb on the end. *Blaat.*

"Nothing happened yesterday, nothing will happen tomorrow. Today will be the same day, just as it is now, forever."

He dug around in a pocket and pulled out a three-foot long slide whistle. *wheet-wooot.*

The slide fell out and clattered to the floor.



Is this what other jesters wear?

“None of your choices matter. If you walk out that door,” he pointed left with his right hand, “you will come in that door,” he pointed right with his left, “and vice versa in reverse.” He windmilled his arms.

He put the laugh bladder under his armpit. It made a limp farty sound.
frrrt.

He took out three bean bags and started a slow, sad cascade. Each bag slowly leaked sand as it arced from hand to hand.

“You will never hear anything new, meet anyone new, think anything new, do anything new, ever again.”

The bags plopped, one by one, to the ground.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

“The person to your left will ALWAYS be the person to your left. The person to your right will ALWAYS be the person to your right. A dreadful, tedious eternity with...Bob.

“You’re all horrible people, stuck here together, alone.”

He half-heartedly chucked a handful of crumpled confetti into the air and limped offstage.



“Traveler, I don’t understand. That doesn’t sound bad. That just sounds boring.”

The Traveler stared at nothing and shuddered.

*Seriously,
Traveler...
you're so
crazy!*



The Castle in the Clouds



As he flew through the soft, warm air of the Menagerie Coast, the Traveler sought the blue girl he had visited for some time. Small and full of whimsy, yet strangely pitiable, the child of the Ruby of the Sea was someone he wanted to get to know better. The girl played funny tricks with a light spirit and was quick to laugh, even when her eyes were sad. He could feel the sadness in her now as his ethereal form found Jester in the garden behind the chateau. She sat upon a blanket, hugging her knees tightly to her chest while looking up at the blue sky and wispy clouds. He wanted to be of comfort; to cheer her if he could. Settling his form beside her own, he left the ethereal to materialize as a mirror of her posture, hugging his knees to his chest, his green cloak pooling around them both.

“Tell me a story, Traveler,” his Jester implored him.

He had introduced himself as a humble traveler when he had first met the girl, and the name had stuck. What could he say? He liked the anonymity and mystery she lent him. It was romantic, and he was such a sucker for romance.

“My Jester. What kind of story would you like?”

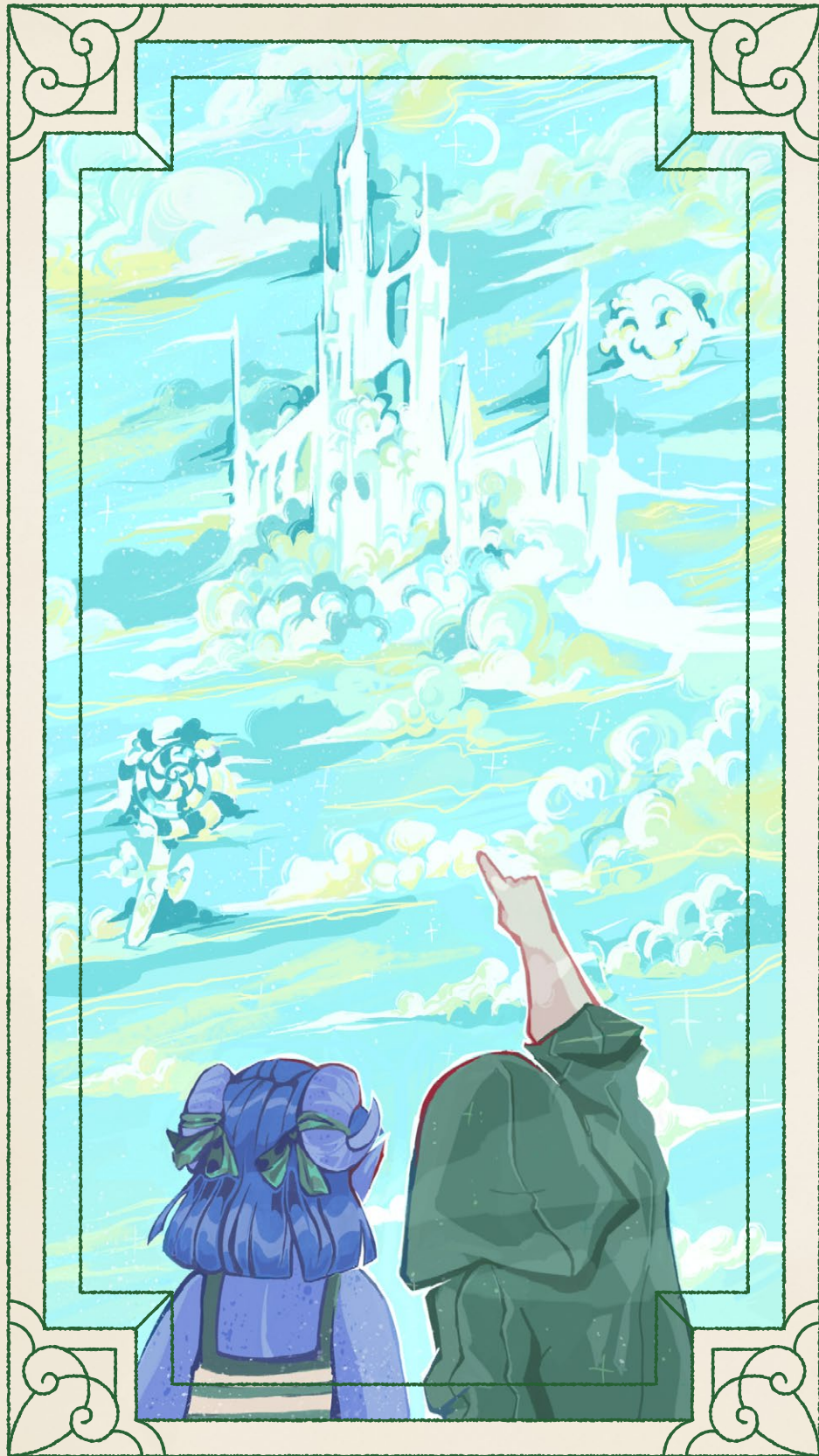
“One from far away from here,” his Jester sniffed and set her chin on her knees, “I hate it here.”

“You can always leave...”

This suggestion earned him a frustrated glare from the daughter of the Ruby of the Sea, his hands coming up, palms out to defend himself from her evil eye as he laughed.

“Very well,” he moved to sit with legs crossed beside her, “Have I ever told you about Princess Cirrus?”

His Jester shook her head while keeping her chin on her knees, the movement making her head look loose, as if on a marionette. She turned her head and looked at him, ready for the tale.



“Once upon a time, there was a kingdom called Afaraway. It did not have a king, however. Nor a queen. Instead, it had four siblings, all born at the same time.” He paused as she opened her mouth, face twisted in slight confusion.

“But how is that possible, Traveler?”

“Magic.”

“Really?”

“No, little one.” He arched a brow at her to quell any more interruptions.

She settled, though her lips quirked up in a tiny smile, the sadness surrounding her seeming to lift.

“Go on.”

After a moment, the Traveler continued.

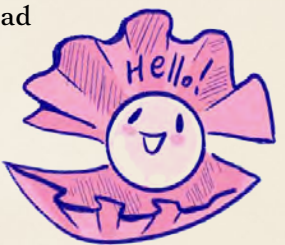
“Prince Stratus caused trouble wherever he went. He was a brute and felt that strong armies and magic would keep Afaraway safe. Princess Nimbus was difficult. She got along with very few people, but that was not always her fault. Prince Cumulus went out of his way to be supportive and gentle with all his siblings, favoring debate and diplomacy over force. And Princess Cirrus believed that kindness and love would conquer all.

“One morning, Princess Cirrus was visiting from Afaraway. She had wanted to get gifts for her siblings as their sixteenth birthdays were approaching. She spent the morning wading in the tidepools not far from the Menagerie Coast, searching for pearls and finding hermit slugs instead. She had managed to fill a large jar of them when an old lady came from the trees and asked for the jar.”

“Why did she want the jar?” Jester lifted her head, canting it curiously.

“Because, Little Sapphire, the old woman knew Hermit slugs are a delicious delicacy if prepared properly... and can also be used to make a powerful poison.”

“Oh...”



The speculative gleam in Jester’s eye did not sit well with the Traveler, but he continued.

“The old lady came closer to the princess, and Princess Cirrus could see kindness in her eyes and agility in her long, gnarled fingers. The woman’s clothes looked well-made and clean, and she did not seem addled, save for wanting a jar of slugs. Princess Cirrus smiled at the old lady and told her she would trade the jar for the woman’s cloak. It was a pretty color of blue,” he touched his Jester’s nose, “Not unlike some girls I know.”

His Jester giggled, tucking her face behind her hands.

“But the old lady declined the offer of the princess, continuing to search the tide pools for hermit slugs to no avail. Eventually, she left, and Princess Cirrus felt very guilty for having found them all – especially since she had truly little interest in the things. She did not like the taste of hermit slugs very much, and if the old lady did, she should have them. Princess Cirrus went home.

“The next day, Princess Cirrus went to the tidepools again, but this time to look for hermit slugs. She got twice as many as the day before and, when the old lady arrived to look for some hermit slugs herself, Princess Cirrus presented her with two large jars plus the one from the day before.

“I am sorry,” she said. “I was looking for birthday gifts for my brothers and sister and forgot that, just because I want something, I’m not entitled to it.”

“I love when you do the voices,” Jester piped in, her eyes shining with interest, the sad shadows gone from her eyes.

“Thank you, dear. May I continue?”

“Oh, yes,” she nodded.

The Traveler smiled and went back to weaving his tale.

“The old lady smiled and invited Princess Cirrus back to her home for tea and cakes. The princess accepted and followed the woman back into the woods by the shore. As she walked, she noted that the path she walked



was well-worn and sparkled with crushed shells from the beach. She was enchanted and began daydreaming as she was led away from the beach and deeper into the arboreal labyrinth.

“When they arrived at the old woman’s house, she was delighted to find a picturesque cottage seeming to grow from a copse of conifers, their needle-like leaves making the thatch roof of the dwelling. The interior was just as charming, and the old lady bade the princess sit and make herself at home while she brewed the tea.

“Princess Cirrus perched primly on a footstool while she waited, her eyes taking in the homey jumble of collected things scattered about the old woman’s home.

“I like your home,’ she said toward the kitchen area.

“Thank you, dear. I like it myself,’ the old woman approached with a large tray covered in cakes, cookies, and pastries, setting it down on a low table by the hearth. ‘Please do help yourself while I finish the tea.’

“The princess needed no further encouragement. She moved to sit by the tray to choose which sweets to sample first. The chair was well-cushioned, and she sank a little into its overstuffed folds, almost instantly comforted and unwilling to shift lest her languid feeling lessen.

“Suddenly, she caught a tiny blur of movement from the corner of her eye. When she sat up, she could make out a dusky auburn weasel of some kind. It darted under the furniture and made its way to the tray of sweets. It climbed the chair the princess had chosen in which to sit. As it perched on the arm, it swung its head in her direction, its beady eyes sizing her up and finding her less interesting than the offerings of the tray. And who could blame it, really?”

Jester laughed softly, drawing an answering smile from the Traveler.

“Princess Cirrus leaned forward, taking a cinnamon roll from the tray, and presented it on a napkin to the weasel. The weasel took the entire pastry in its little arms and began to eat it, crumbs flying everywhere.



“Alto! Bad boy. You behave,’ the old woman laughed from the doorway to the kitchen.

“She rolled a fragile-looking brass tea cart with a full service of tea clattering and clinking on its top, putting it beside the tray of cakes. Princess Cirrus rose to help her but was not needed and sat again. As the old woman joined the princess in an adjacent chair, she offered a hand to the weasel. He jumped onto the waiting palm provided, taking the remains of his cinnamon roll with him.

“Be careful with this one. He is a bit of a scamp,’ she chuckled and poured the tea for them both, handing a cup to the princess.

“Princess Cirrus laughed and sipped the sweet, red tea. Almost at once, she felt better. The princess had not known she had not been feeling her best until she drank the tea, but she indeed felt better. She smiled at the old lady.

“Forgive me. I do not know your name. I am Cirrus,’ she offered her hand to the old woman.

“I am Virga,’ the old woman reached to shake her hand, but Alto seemed to object, nipping the thumb of the princess.

“Princess Cirrus pulled her hand back quickly as Virga stood up, chastising the weasel, and putting him into an iron birdcage with his remaining cinnamon roll.

“I am so sorry. Alto is odd around strangers,’ Virga retook her seat, wringing her gnarled hands. “Did he hurt you?”

“Oh hardly!’ the princess lied around her wounded thumb in her mouth. It was only bleeding a little, and she didn’t want to seem baby-like. Her brothers teased her about that sort of thing all the time.”

“I wish I had brothers,” Jester interrupted wistfully.

“No, you do not,” the Traveler leveled a knowing glance her way.

“Do you have brothers?” Her tone was too excited.

“Do you want to hear the rest of this story?” His tone was less excited.

“Yes.”

The Traveler continued.

“Virga and Princess Cirrus had a lovely chat over tea and several cakes.

When it was time to leave, Virga offered her pretty, blue cloak to the princess. She had changed her mind and felt that her new friend was worthy of the gift, having been so thoughtful to catch Virga her favorite dinner.

“This is the Cloak of Coriolis,’ she told the princess as she folded it carefully to place in a bag. ‘It is magical and will protect the wearer from non-magical projectiles. If your brother has a rock thrown at him, it will simply divert to one side or the other and fail to impact him.’

“The princess’s eyes grew wide.

“I had no idea it was magic,’ she said, accepting the gift from Virga. ‘I am sure my brother will treasure it always.’

“As Princess Cirrus left the lovely home to follow the sparkling path back to the coast, she thought she heard a dark voice say...

“See that he does.’

“As she turned to see the speaker, Princess Cirrus only saw that the door to the cottage had closed, though there was a silhouette of an iron birdcage in the window.”

The Traveler stopped speaking, having finished his tale.

Jester smiled brightly.

“What happened then? Did the brother like the cloak? Was the voice she heard Alto’s?”

“Those are all tales for other days, my friend,” the Traveler stood, looking down at his Jester.

“But what happened to the old lady in the woods?” Her eyes were wide as she looked up at him.

“She was felled by a pair of siblings from REXXENTRUM. Hanna and Gregor, I believe.”



“But the old lady was nice!”

“Yes, well... One can never really know people,” He shrugged and tapped her nose, smiling. “Farewell for now. Maybe we will share another story soon.”

And he slipped back into the ethereal to watch his Jester a moment longer, her happy smile restored as she once more watched the clouds glide by.



Start Transcript: Provided by MyFirstDoty 830

J: Jester: Hello? Is this thing on? Oh I hope it works. I hope it does. Oh, this will be so great if it works. Hey, Traveler, look at this. It's my own DOTY—can you believe it? I mean, I know it doesn't look all that special, but just wait. It will write down whatever we tell it—isn't that just the greatest thing ever?

T: Traveler: How marvelous, little sapphire girl.

J: So I was thinking, you have told me so many jokes in the past, but I have so much trouble remembering them because, you know, a lot of times they are plays on words or use words I don't really understand, but they sure sound funny or whatnot, so maybe today could you retell some of your favorite jokes, please please please please?

T: Certainly, now let's see...What forest animal helps the druid color their armor?

J: Ohmygosh! I dunno, what is it?

T: A Dyer Wolf.

J: Oh, DYU—ahr wolf! Oh, that was a good one. What's next?

T: Why was the musician kicked out of the tavern?

J: What? I dunno. I mean, most people like musicians in the tavern. Why? Why?

T: He was barred!

J: Well of course he was a bard, you said music—oh not "a bard" but barred. Oh my, that's clever!

T: An orc walks into a bar with a parrot on his shoulder, and the bartender says, "Wow! Don't see something like that every day. Where'd you get it?"

"In a cave," replied the parrot.

J: Wait wh—Oh! The parrot answered? Oh, well isn't that clever, I wasn't expecting the parrot to answer! Go on, more!

T: An elf, a human, and a dwarf are all enjoying drinks in a tavern when each notices a fly in their glass. The elf places a napkin over his glass and pushes it off to the side. The human removes the fly and continues drinking. The dwarf pulls out the fly and starts screaming, "Spit it out you nasty thing! Spit it out!"





Z: That's kind of a weird one. I mean, who wouldn't just pull the fly out and keep drinking? What's the big deal really? Are elves really like that, Traveler? The dwarf sure was funny though. Spit it out!

T: What do you call a gnome psychic who's escaped from jail?

Z: Well, I mean, who was even guarding the jail and, oh what?

T: A small medium at large.

Z: A small...ummm. Dooohhh! I get it.

T: I once submitted ten puns to a pun contest, hoping one might win. No pun in ten did.

Z: You totally intended to...Oh, wait, I see.

T: How many dwarves does it take to change the wick in the oil lamp?

Z: Why would a dwarf change the wick? I mean, it's so high up on the ceiling, and he is so short—

T: It's only a joke, dear Zester.

Z: Oh, ok, how many?

T: Five. One to hold the wick, and four others to drink until the room spins.

Z: Wait! Why would the room spin? Oh, because of the drinking? Oh. Ohhhh!

T: How many High Elves does it take to screw in a new wick?

Z: Well, that's more like it! I mean, at least the elf could probably reach the wick...Oh yeah. Just a joke. Ok. How many?

T: Just one. He holds the wick and the universe revolves around him.

Z: You don't think very highly of elves do you, Traveler? That's ok. They're kinda weird. I mean, pale skin, and they don't even have a tail, so...Wait! I have one for you, Traveler. I heard this from a Chateau visitor, a very flamboyant man. Ok, ok, ok. How many tieflings does it take to change a lamp wick?

T: Hmmmm. Well, I don't know, Zester. How many?

Z: Three. One to hold onto the horse, and two to fill the bathtub with a variety of colorful flowers! Isn't that funny? I don't think it says anything nice about tieflings, but it sounds funny to me and it seems so ridiculous.

T: *muffled chuckling*

End Transcript: Provided by MyFirstDoty 830





The Tragedy of Delilah the Wise

And suddenly, he was there. You know, Journal, the Traveler. I have told you about him before, of course. He just appears sometimes and tells me stories, and this one was so cool I wanted to write it down. And so this is mostly sorta what I remember, I think.

“My dear friend, Jester, how are you this evening? Are you in need of another story?”

“Oh Traveler, it’s so good to see you again. Yes please, I would love another tale!”

“You’re getting a bit older now, little sapphire girl, so I’d like to relay to you a story the little deRolo girl told me about, which I found quite intriguing. It’s a dark, creepy story, but don’t worry. It’s only a myth, and it’s a story she learned when she was about your age. I call this story ‘The Tragedy of Delilah the Wise.’”

“You see, Delilah was a mage in the Empire’s capital and held an important post with the Cerberus Assembly, which is their fancy name for a Magi Council. One day, her husband (whom she loved so very much indeed, you see) fell ill from an unknown disease.

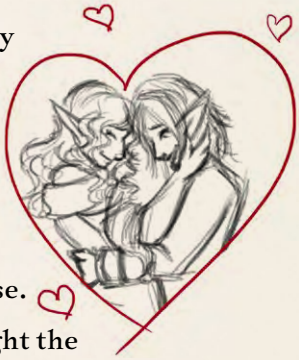
“Well, Delilah was beside herself with worry of course, and sought the best healing help available in her vast city, and even within her esteemed Assembly. Unfortunately, no one was able to help her husband, and he died. Delilah was very sad, as anyone would be having lost a loved one. But she knew there was a way to save him still; she just didn’t know all the details... yet.”

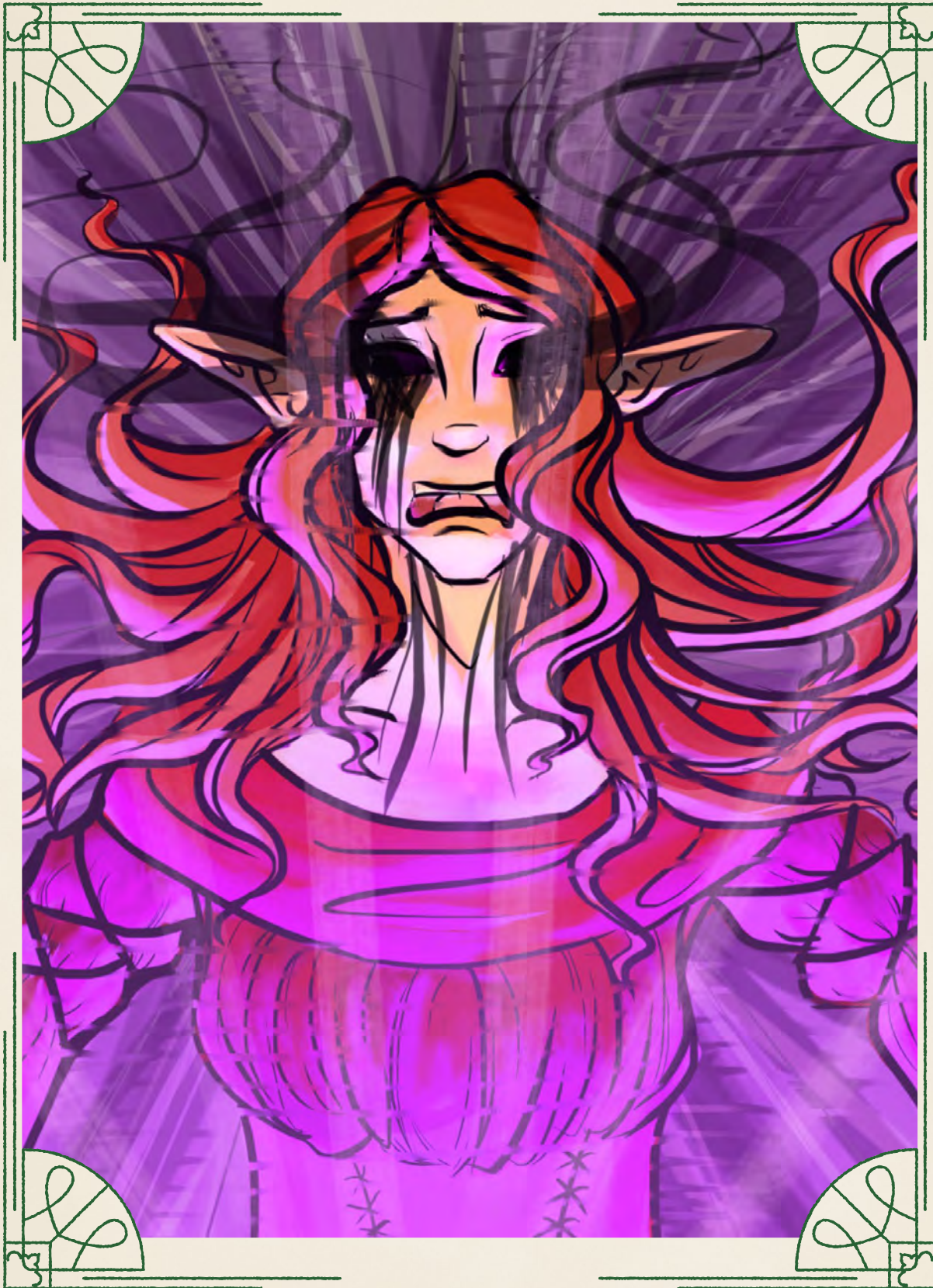
“That’s so sad, Traveler, so very sad. I hope the story gets better.”

“Yes, Jester, it was sad, but that’s not the end of the story.

“Delilah cried out to no one in particular for help one day, and do you know what happened?”

“Well, no, no I don’t, but please tell me.”





“A voice whispered back and told her that he could help her bring back her dearly beloved husband!”

“This voice actually... had a way to bring someone back to life?”

“The necromantic side of magic is a pathway to many abilities some consider to be... unnatural.

Delilah listened intently to these instructions, still committed to doing anything necessary to bring back her dearly beloved husband. And you know what? It actually worked! After much hard work and sacrifice, her husband was returned to her!”

“Oh Traveler, what a lovely story! But why do you consider that a tragedy?”

“The special magical art of necromancy was not accepted by her peers in the Cerberus Assembly, of which she was an esteemed member, so they forced her out and ostracized her. And so it was, she and her husband fled their homeland and crossed the Lucidian to the far away lands of Tal’Dorei. So the tragedy, dearest Jester, was the cost of getting back her beloved – complete estrangement from the life she had (friends, contacts, relationships), all forfeited to save her husband. While she found the cost to be acceptable, it was biting nonetheless.

“And that, Jester, is the lesson. Magic always has a cost, and you must accept the price should you wish to harness the power, even if you don’t know the price beforehand.”

“What happened to them, Traveler? To Delilah and her beloved?”

“That’s enough for tonight, sweet sapphire girl. Rest easy now, and I can tell more stories another time.”

And with that, he was gone. I drew a picture of Delilah, but it probably isn’t very good. I mean, you know, I don’t really know what an arch mage looks like and stuff, but I know she was in love and that’s really special, you know, so it’s a picture I like because it reminds me of this story.



The Ballad of Artagan

He came through the gateway
Of the place you know as Tal'Dorei.
For a time, he remained alone
In the mountain city of Whitestone
Until he decided to get away.

He made his way across the Lucidian,
Moving through the waters of obsidian.
Searching for an audience for his foolishness
And trying to tap into his inner happiness,
This is the Ballad of Artagan.

After a cacophonous boat ride with great squally,
He found himself in western Port Damali.
While he loved the facades
In the Gilded Esplanades,
He felt the vibe was far too melancholy.



Continuing inland as quick as a flash,
He came upon the Tri Spires of Zdash.
Seeking out flora that was greatly fragrant,
He found that and more at the Invulnerable Vagrant.
But unfortunately, the salve left him with a rash.

What's this? Another verse to obtain
More tales of his travels again.
Running out of real estate,
Perhaps an adventure at the oblate;
This is the Ballad of Artagan.





On he went to the capital of Herrentrum—
Just a lone man seeking a good dark rum.
So he visited the Grim Shelf Tavern,
Which left him with one reason to return:
For good food, good drink he would succumb.

He was reeling from rebuke.
While dizzy, he did puke.
Slipping and sliding he fell
Off the edge of Silberquel,
And that's how he landed in Supperdook.

He arrived at the port of Nicobranas
Where he heard of a scarlet-skinned songstress.

He took in a show
At the Lavish Chateau,
And found a fan playing tricks on Yussa Errenis.

Though more adventures are sure to write again,
It's time to kick back with some ice and gin.
Let the mysteries of my curiosities unfurl
As I entertain this little sapphire girl.
This was the Ballad of Artagan.



Bluud & Sand

“So you want a story?”

Bluud was making a sand castle on the spare room floor, but it wasn't very good. It was just a circle. The wall wouldn't stand up by itself, even; he had to shove more sand against it all around the inside. It looked like a big ramp with a flat oval part in the middle.

I had drawn a bright yellow sun on a piece of parchment to put behind it, and a blue sky, and some birds flying around.

One of the birds was pooping.

“Yes, Bluud, I would like a story, thank you very much.”

“I only know one.”

“Then you can tell me that one. But it better be good.” I stuck the parchment into the sand. It fell over. I pushed a chair behind it.

“It's the only one I know.”

“Then,” I said, with my finger in the air, “you may proceed.”

“Ok,” he said.

“There were two Minotaurs. A girl and a boy. They were from another place, far away. They were stolen when they were kids. They met in the cages.

“Minotaurs are good at fighting. That's why they were stolen. Men trained them, and they got real, real good. They were allowed to be... friends, because the men knew they would fight even harder.

“One day, they got tired of fighting other things for other people. They decided to fight for themselves. So Bluud...”

“Wait, the boy's name is Bluud, too?”

“Yeah.”

“Is he you?”

“No.”

“Are all boy Minotaurs named Bluud?”



The other Bluud



“No.”

“The girl better not be named Bluud, otherwise your story will lose some points.”

“Her name was Kaiola.”

“That is ok then.”

Bluud snorted. He poked his finger in the sand in the middle of the castle.

“Bluud and Kaiola waited for the next fight day. The men let them out. They...got past...the men.” He dragged his finger down to one of the castle walls. “There was a door with some guards. They got past them too.” He poked a hole in the wall of the castle and made another little line on the outside.

“They blinked in the sun. ‘Perfect day,’ said Kaiola. ‘No clouds, no rain. So much blue in the sky.’

“There were sounds behind them. The men were coming. Lots of them. Too many for two Minotaurs in the open. But maybe not so many for one, and one small door, for a short time.

“They looked at the door. They looked at each other. They pressed their heads together.

“Bluud said, ‘When it’s time, I will say your name. Seems a good thing to say, at the end.’

“I will...see things through.’



“That is good.’ Bluud stood. ‘Now run.’

“Kaiola ran. At first through streets and people. Then fields and wheat.

Then forest and scrub and stones. Then, far in the distance, she heard Bluud call, ‘KAIOLA!’ and she knew her...friend was gone.

“She ran a long, long time.”

“Did she get away, Bluud?”

“Yeah. She decided to leave her name behind though. She didn’t want to be reminded of the last thing her friend said, every time someone called her.”

“What new name did she choose?”

“Urdine. Means blue.”

“Oor-DEE-nay.” I thought for a while. “You know, Bluud, that’s a pretty good story, I think.”

“Hope so. It’s the only one I got.”

We spent the rest of the afternoon knocking over the castle. Bluud’s a pretty cool guy.



The best
Bluud



Urdine is blue
like me!

Forever and Never

When I was little, I was told that, one day, far away, there was a town that, simply, appeared.

Now, sometimes towns go away. Mines run out of gold, rain stops falling, a dragon decides it likes the patch of ground you happen to be standing on. Whatever the reason, people occasionally need to pull up stakes and find themselves another home.

The reverse happens too. New towns form over the course of months or years when opportunities or the stars align. This town, though, came into being suddenly, in an instant, with an audible pop.

Pop.

There are stories of wandering shops, stores crammed with odds and ends, mundane or magical, cursed or karmic, eminently useful or as useless as half an evening slipper. They might be staffed by a hag, or a mage in disguise, or a forgetful crackpot eager to usher you out the door, purchase in hand, before their establishment vanishes once more into the night.

Not here though.

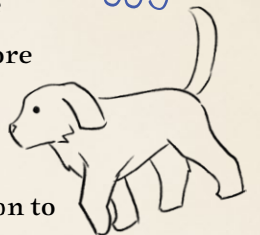
No stores, just houses, row upon long straight row, and not a person to be seen, halfling nor human, dwarf nor orc. Nothing on two legs stirred.

There were an uncommon number of cats, however, and the barking of numerous dogs.

Light flickered through the windows, not the warm yellow of hearths, but cold, pale blue. The sound of far away laughter, too, and talking, but... strange and removed, as if coming from deep within a cave.

Strangest of all, the town was without walls. Each house sat upon a square of land, perhaps enough for a kitchen garden, as if the capitol of a meadow, girded with scrub and trees.

Fluffe
Waggykins



Krispie
Princess ~~Krispie~~





A delegation from a village nearby, half asleep and stumbling, ran to confront the marvel, be it threat or boon or, more likely, something between; a gnome hedge witch and a tabaxi priest, a skinny mage's apprentice and the town's goliath smith, and a few more brave or foolhardy souls.

However, as soon as the mage's prentice — quite often the one that draws the short straw, my heart — put a foot to the town's strange road...

Pop.

Gone forever, and never to return.

The smith rounded on the boy in the patchwork robe, standing with his foot still held three inches off the ground. "The nine hells you do, flea bait?"

"Cripes, nothing! Nothing! I just took a step and the whole place disappeared!" He waved his hand around the general direction of the vanished town.



☆ "Umm...can I put my foot down?"



That whole week, the prentice denied doing anything, but half the town thought him cursed, either with bad luck or incompetence, and he soon needed to find himself a new town, of the more normal variety.

No one could say what had caused the manifestation or its meaning. Some thought it a relic of the mage wars, others a phantasm, still others an archfey's inscrutable prank. It was said, though, ever after, odd scraps of paper or indescribable things could be found where it had stood, as if the town had a hole in its pocket and was trailing spare change across infinity.





The Ruby, the Sapphire, & the Coatl

Marion Lavorre put on her long, silk robe and rose from her bed. The windows in her chamber were open just enough to let the ocean breeze flutter through her curtains. Her soft feet padded across the floor quietly as she slipped from her bedroom, taking care to close the door gently. Though the hallway was very dark, she could see candlelight from under the door to her daughter's room. Jester was still awake and waiting to say goodnight to her. Her Little Sapphire. Her blessing.

She walked on tiptoe to the door, opening it carefully. Jester was in her nightgown, lying on her stomach, writing and drawing in her journal. The candle by her bed was nearly gutted and flickered angrily, which cast eerie shadows along the walls of the room.

Jester's head looked up as her mother entered the room.

"Mama? Are you here to say goodnight?" Her daughter's voice was sweet and kind, filling Marion's heart with a new joy every time she spoke.

This was what love could create.

"I am, my Little Sapphire." Marion closed the door behind her, careful about making too much noise. Others were sleeping nearby.

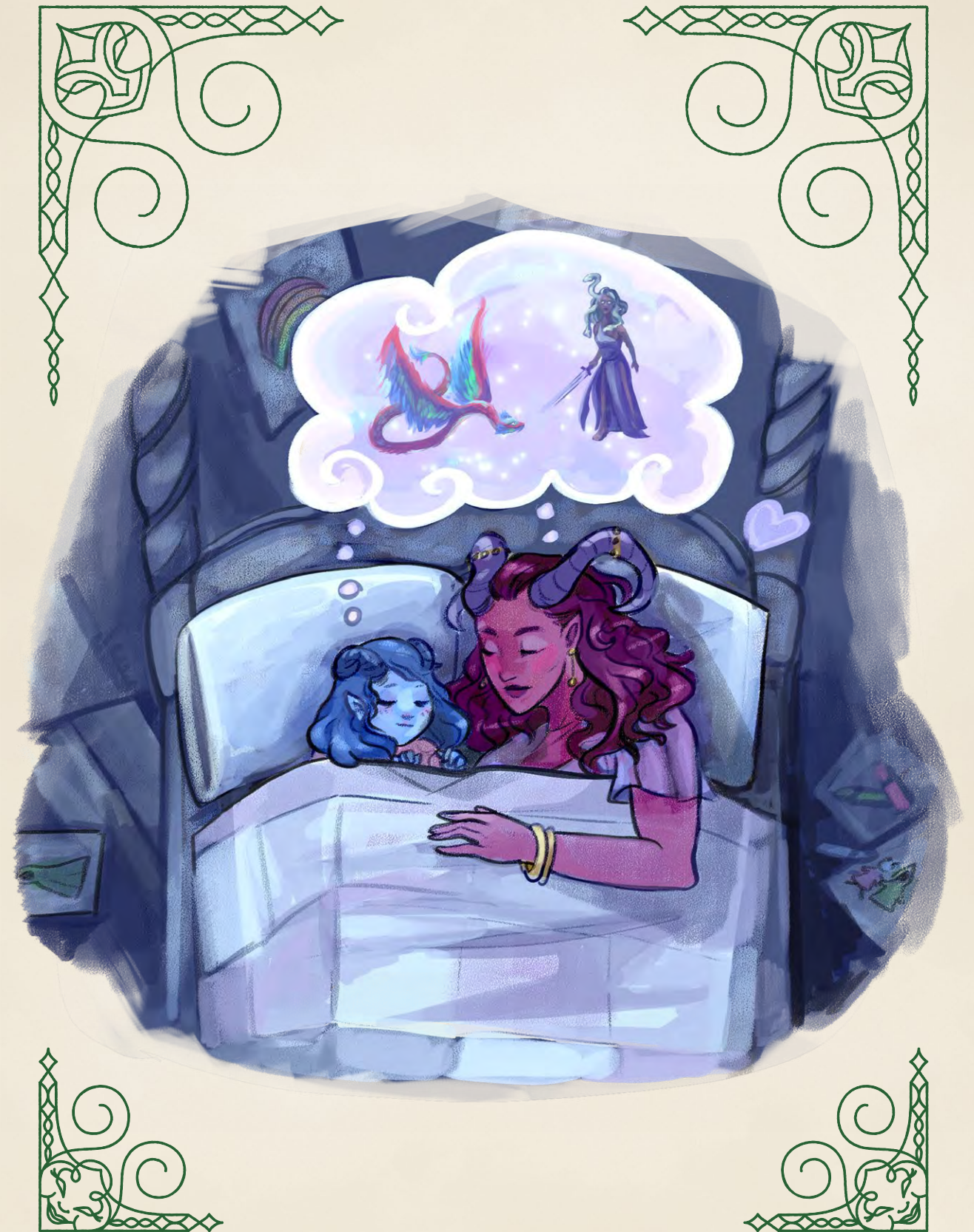
Jester closed her journal and slipped under her covers. The quilt was made from Jester's baby clothes that Marion had pieced and sewn together by hand. Jester lifted the corner of the blanket, and her mother accepted the invitation with open delight.

"Will you sing me a lullaby?" Jester faced Marion in the bed, their heads resting on the same pillow.

Marion thought of the sleeping people on the top floor of her Lavish Chateau and shook her head, her thick ringlets bouncing around her horns.

"Not tonight, my love," she whispered. "I could tell you a story, perhaps, if you like."

"Oh, yes please, Mama." Jester's blue hair fell over her eyes, and she tried to blow the locks back off her brow.





Marion tucked Jester's hair behind her horns, her light fingers glinting with heavy platinum rings. She then brought Jester closer, encircling the Little Sapphire with her arms to let her daughter's head rest on Marion's shoulder.

"Many years ago, deep in a faraway jungle, there was a couatl named Veradannos. He was a being of great power and he had been sent to the world from the celestial planes to hunt a coven of hags that were terrorizing the local tribes. It had taken years to find them, but when he did, they had hidden among the vast ruins belonging to a great medusa named Ipfang.

"Ipfang was not happy to host the hags as they brought unwelcome attention from the tribes. She had fought many warriors sent to kill the coven, for trespass into her domain was death for most adventurers. The latest champion of the tribes had become her favorite statue to date—a female tabaxi archer frozen in stone, forever aiming her bow. Ipfang, knowing she could not defeat the couatl, told Veradannos she would cause him no trouble if he planned on killing the hags, and let him search her ruins for the coven."

Marion looked down at Jester, still seeing her open eyes focused, though sleepy.

"Now, couatls are able to change their shape, and they are undetectable to many forms of magic. Veradannos chose to take the medusa form of Ipfang to lure each hag away from their lair within the medusa's ruins and kill them one by one.

“Having completed his purpose on the prime material plane, he began to cast the ritual to return to his home plane. Before the spell was finished, he beheld a statue he could not bear to leave. The tabaxi with her bow and fierce expression entranced him. Her face was calm, a single eye open to aim her arrow aloft, her prey long out of her sight. She was tenacity personified, and it pained him to think the tabaxi’s life was over before it could have possibly begun.”

“That is so sad, Mama.” Jester yawned, blinking back the gentle wave of exhaustion trying to overcome her.



“Some stories are sad, my heart.” Marion pressed a kiss on her daughter’s brow, comforting her before continuing in her soft voice.

“Veradamnos searched the ruins to find Ipfang to trade her something for the statue, but the medusa was having none of that. She felt the tabaxi was a beautiful warning to the tribes not to bother the ruins of Ipfang. Not willing to accept this fate, the couatl pretended to leave, then circled back and returned to the statue. Wrapping around the tabaxi, Veradamnos cast his last spell for the day to remove the petrification.

“As his spell finished, he felt the blades of Ipfang sink deep into his scaly flesh. She was no fool and was adept at silently stalking prey. Veradamnos screeched, his wings arching back wide to deflect her mortal blows, knowing she had struck true. But he also felt the warm fur of his tabaxi archer move. His wings curled tightly around her, an iridescent rainbow to shield her as she gathered her wits. Their eyes met, her green ones gaining an understanding as the life began to fade from his own.

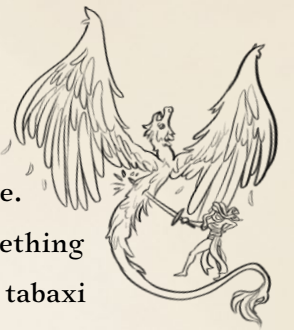
“The last thing Veradamnos beheld was his tabaxi roaring with life while fatally firing three perfect shots into the heart of Ipfang.”

Marion looked down to see her beautiful daughter had fallen asleep in her arms. She smiled and curled around her, keeping her safe from the world for a few perfect moments. Her whisper quieted to something only slightly more than breath as she finished telling the tale in her daughter’s ear.

“To this day, local tribes warn others away from the ruins, for many have seen the ghosts of Ipfang and Veradamnos still fighting through the statues in the jungle... and the tabaxi clan that now lives within the ruins itself does not like to be disturbed.”



Marion closed her own eyes and smiled as she, The Ruby of the Sea, fell asleep beside her perfect Little Sapphire.









THE BARDS

30 SECONDS OVER SYNGORN

*Story recorded by bard Jim Snyder.
Illustrations by artist Paula Martini Javillonar.
Sending sigils: @artandmartini (Instagram, Twitter)*

ONE BRIGHT NIGHT

*Story recorded by bard Tungche Angkham.
Illustrations by artist Shawnna Louise.
Sending sigil: @arts_n_dragons (Instagram)*

THE CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS

*Story recorded by bard Janann Davis.
Illustrations by artist Andra Placintescu.
Sending sigil: @it.s_just_andra (Instagram)*

MY FIRST DOTY TRANSCRIPT

*Story recorded by bard Michael Davis.
Illustrations by artist Amy Lane.
Sending sigils: @AmyLaneDraws (Instagram, Twitter)*

MY FIRST DOTY MANUAL

*Manual dictated to The Golden Grin Co.
(a subsidiary of TD™ Inc.) employee
Roberta C., sending sigil: @piogal34 (Twitter).
Technical illustrations by artist Amy Lane.
Sending sigils: @AmyLaneDraws (Instagram, Twitter)*

PORTRAIT OF MARION LAVORRE

*Portrait by artist Grace Berrios.
Sending sigil: @lassflores (Twitter), grrraace@gmail.com*

THE TRAGEDY OF DELILAH THE WISE

*Story recorded by bard Michael Davis.
Illustrations by artist Renee Penner.
Sending sigil: @insanitysketches (Instagram)*

THE BALLAD OF ARTAGAN

*Story recorded by bard Michael Davis.
Illustrations by artist Lorène "Kelgrid" Yavo.
Sending sigil: @kelgrid (Instagram, Twitter)*

BLUUD & SAND

*Story recorded by bard Jim Snyder.
Illustrations by artist M. Elizabeth Sharma.
Sending sigils: @DndQu33n (Instagram, Twitter)*

FOREVER AND NEVER

*Story recorded by bard Jim Snyder.
Illustrations by artist exmakina.
Sending sigil: exmakina.tumblr.com*

THE RUBY, THE SAPPHIRE, AND THE COATL

*Story recorded by bard Janann Davis.
Illustrations by artist Olivia Hintz.
Sending sigils: @oliviahintz (Twitter),
@oliviahintzart (Instagram)*



FAIR WARNING

Due to my boundless humility (and an old debt), I must say that the stories in this book would not exist without the group who inspired me to tell them in the first place. They are a source of inspiration and enjoyment for many and, in what may be the greatest trick of all, the reason that I am here now.

Laura Bailey

Taliesin Jaffe

Ashley Johnson

Matthew Mercer

Liam O'Brien

Marisha Ray

Sam Riegel

Travis Willingham

This group and their crew of wizards who cast mass sending spells weekly are a guild known colloquially as Critical Role. Their tales and adventures are a siren's song that are hard to resist and can consume your life. It is their command of emotion, mimicry, and sheer style that has ruined me for the theater forever. Stay far away, my dear Jester.



COLOPHON

The present copy of *Jester's Bedtime Tales*, adorned with gilded capitals, included personal ephemera, and embellished with drawings and sketches from the Little Sapphire Jester Lavorre herself, joined with direction and original artwork from many visiting bards and tutors (listed on the next page), having thus been fashioned by an ingenious method of printing and stamping to honor the Traveler and encourage playful trickery, and has been diligently completed by Roberta C., citizen of Exandria, in the year of 836 Post Divergence on the 24th of Thunsheer.

Title Font: Laura

Body Text Font: Sirene Text MVB

Paper Transmutation Assistance by Kait Jerome.

Accessibility Assistance by Dax Castro.



