

“Froooooost!” Res’ voice cut through the commotion as a long tail wiggled above countless shoulders. “What took you so long!?”

Her smile shone like a star amongst the crowd. Frost didn’t even have to see her tail or hear her voice to know who that smile belonged to. An ecstatic Res practically bounced where she stood, her fluffy ears jiggling like they were made of marshmallows.

Like Frost she took on a tomboyish look. The black pants and white shirt had small speckles of paint. Small splatters of color were also seen around her cheeks, which she quickly wiped off like beads of sweat.

Her biology made zero sense, but it was adorable that her sweat, and tears resulted in color patches. Also, she wore the blue hairclip Frost gave to her many moons ago.

“About time!” Ber exclaimed, letting loose of a long sigh. Her tail despite this wagged furiously behind her at the sight of Frost.

Her style was a strong contrast to Res. She was the first to approach Frost, and she walked with such elegance that people couldn’t help but to stop and stare. Her beauty was unmatched, and only enhanced by the long, black, one-piece dress. Atop her shoulders was an unworn fur coat that served as a small cape.

Ber was by far the most groomed out of the three, with her hair brushed over to one side. It was clear that she had visited a stylist beforehand for the special occasion, not to mention that she wore other pieces of jewelry, such as a red-beaded bracelet and the half-broken onyx hairclip.

“Isn’t it gorgeous!? Ignis made me this the other day!” Ber fawned over the bracelet, proudly presenting it to Frost. “Isn’t she so sweet!?”

“I’m jealous. Ignis is getting creative now, isn’t she?” Frost laughed. “Maybe she can make me something too. Did you girls wait long? Sorry, I got a bit lost.”

“Yeah, don’t think we didn’t see you talking to those Elves over there.” Cer prodded with folded arms as she grinned mischievously. “Anyway, we just arrived. Tch. It’s so stuffy in these crowds. I forgot how much I hated these festivals. It’s the Last Solstice. The Blooming Week. I guess mourning is the other boring alternative.”

Cer sighed. She only wore the same buttoned up shirt she had always worn, carrying the subtle stench of a wet dog. Her pants were also the same Receptionist ones. The only difference was that she brought out the ruby hairclip which pushed her bangs away and let her hair down from its usual pony-tail style.

“Well, today’s the promised day!” Cer exclaimed as the three shoved their faces in front of Frost’s. “And you’re our special guest!”

“Huh? What’s happening –!?” Frost’s arms were suddenly secured by Ber and Res, and before she knew it, she was dragged off into the crowd as Cer led the charge.

“Don’t worry about a thing. Leave it all to us this time!” Res hushed her with her tail, wrapping it around her neck like a cozy scarf.

“Relax. You’re the one being pampered today, Frost.” Ber assured, grinning madly. “So just enjoy the ride!”

“Think of it like your kids wanting to take you out as thanks...” Cer marched on stalwartly, her voice trailing off towards the end all of a sudden. A wave of uncharacteristic embarrassment washed over her, and Frost could almost see her wolf ears turn a slight shade of red. “... O-Or something like that. Geez. The hell are you making us say!? This is just until we head over to Atlas!”

I didn’t even say anything.

Frost surrendered herself to their whims, allowing them free reign over her today as she wore a thankful smile. It was rare for someone else to take the lead. A large part of her squirmed with delight seeing the triplets go out of their way just for her.

They were overly eccentric which was odd considering the Blooming Week was a time for mourning. Res explained that the time for mourning was late into the night. On the final night paper lanterns were to be released into the skies, symbolizing their release of their loved ones.

But during the day? Celebration!

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Stalls sold delicious confectionery by the dozens. Sweet, savory, spicy, tangy – they had everything. Giant cones of fairy floss were held by children more than half its size, and sweet bread-like treats skewered on a stick were a common favorite of the Demi-Humans.

Their palettes were so varied and complex that simple sweets worked the best for them. Everything aside from chocolate and mint of course, as those were poisonous to some Demi-Human species.

From the brick paths of the main streets to the cobblestone alleyways, and the winding staircases that climbed the side of a hill that oversaw the entirety of the city – Frost was always taken aback by just how many different sides of the world there were.

The cityscapes of C6 were larger than any she had seen prior. The architecture was certainly similar. Sprawling parks filled with emerald trees occasionally cut the urban blue and grey. Spires and castles had spires so high that they seemed to reach the clouds. Those were the Academies and were the only buildings other than the Guilds that were permitted to be larger than two stories.

They had a distinct, magical style that distinguished them from everything surrounding them. No matter where one looked both the Nexus and those Academies could be seen over the skies.

Unlit paper lanterns decorated clothing lines and pipework, and even the Liquidators were seen participating in the festivities, some with deadpan expressions and others with child-like excitement.

Of course, the Liquidators with the most augmentations were the coldest.

A few Healers could be seen here as well under the direct protection of an allocated Moon. Not many Moons jumped at the opportunity to escort them, since they would rather spend the Blooming Week in the solace of other Moons.

The Healers and Moons present were also in casual apparel to blend in with the crowd. To onlookers they looked like they were on a date. Several noticed Frost but she was taken away before they could even greet her.

“You gotta try this!” Ber shoved a bar of stacked, savory pastries into Frost’s mouth as she went for a yawn.

“Ber, don’t be so aggressive!” Res reprimanded as she held a small paper bag filled with crunchy spheres glazed with a fruity jam. “These are nicer than pastry. Chew up Frost. Say ‘Aaaah~!’”

Frost, swept by the flow, did precisely that.

“Aaaah.”

However, as they climbed a serene staircase towards the summit of small hill –

“Don’t mind if I do!”

– Cer took the opportunity to place a grape into Frost’s mouth with every intention of getting bitten. However, she slipped her finger away just at the last second much to Frost’s surprise.

“Heh. Enjoy a Me-flavored grape.” She relished beating Res to the punch, causing her mouth to immediately be stuffed by handfuls of the glazed treats. “Mwwwf!?”

“Idiot. Don’t cut in line!” Res growled; her eyes wide in disbelief like she had just lost something precious.

“Then don’t be so slow next time. You’re telling me you wouldn’t take an opportunity when you see it? Hah. Guess you still have some room to grow.”

“Coming from you...?” Ber blankly blinked, unable to believe that Cer of all people was saying this.

“Well yeah. I know I got plenty of room to grow.” Cer placed both hands on her hips haughtily. “I’m still small. Look, give me some time cause I’m sure to be just as busy as you two. You’re just rock melons. Not even real melons.”

“No, that’s not what she meant... actually, never mind.” Frost never grew tired of their antics, knowing well that half of Cer’s idiocy was an act.

Yep. It’s an act. Definitely all an act.

“*But what if it isn’t?*” Nav sowed the seeds of doubt into her mind, causing a dangerous chill to run down her spine.

Please, Nav. Don’t say that. I’m getting chills just thinking about her poor last two brain cells.