

a secret table

notes from the  
**MUSEUM**

A history

5 fanfiction  
8 fanarts



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# ***COURAGE FROM ALICE***

*by Delacroix*

**W**aking up in the middle of the night when the rest of the city was asleep, felt like being reborn with the memories of a past life still fresh. Blue eyes and brown hair tied with a white ribbon. A wish that filled him all day: to pat the crown of her head affectionately and receive a sassy smile in return. The brush of a little finger against his skin, the other tiny hand holding a snake plushie. Sometimes the employees of the museum would tear it from her hands and Teddy would have to console her the next night. But always he found it again in a night or two and watching the little girl beam at him made all the effort worth it. Back then he had a job in the museum. He had a role, he was important to someone. Then again, it was a different museum back then, before the little girl was moved away to heavens know where.

Teddy stretched his back and got down from Texas. It was strange to spend all day up there, always worrying that the poor creature was having a hard time carrying him. What did the horse feel

like during the day? Was he chased by dreams of greener pastures? Did he wonder about the taste of grass and the warmth of the sun shining on his back? Teddy didn't much like animals. But even if a horse ride was more fitting for the real Roosevelt, Teddy still appreciated Texas. He was his only friend.

»You can rest now, laddie,« he whispered into his ear.

Teddy decided he ought to take a walk that night and he definitely missed the sensation of having his feet on the ground. It would be like sightseeing to him. The museum had changed quite a bit since he was introduced years, maybe decades ago.

There was once a whole section dedicated to his life. The battles he fought, all kinds of examples of his strength but also of his kindness. Like that time someone had tried to kill him before one of his speeches. Schrank he was called. The poor lad was ill in some way he couldn't quite understand, and had stuck a bullet in Teddy's chest. But he didn't demand for the execution.

»Don't hurt him. Bring him here. I want to see him,« he had told the authorities instead. Then followed with a «What did you do it for?» and «Poor creature.» The man was put into some sort of mental institution. He died around 30 years later, if he was correct, of something related with his lungs. It was ironic in a way. Teddy himself died of some lung illness as well.



**O**f course, he hadn't forgotten the crowds that were watching him, wondering if he was okay. »Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot, but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose,« he cheered between laughs. He was always good at making people laugh with his bravado.

It did not have much effect with his family though. Next to him stood wax figures of his family, the children and his second wife, Edith. Teddy didn't particularly like the woman, but he didn't hate



Art by: Tlalocactus

her either. It was not that she was rude or unpleasant. It's just that she was a choice made by another man. Still, he always respected her sense of humour and the regality with which she carried herself. She might have been made of wax but she was a First Lady through and through. As for the boys, he felt disinterested. He couldn't quite bring himself to hate little children but he would be lying if he said he didn't find them bothersome from time to time. Now, Alice was a different thing. She was unquestionably his daughter.

Just as he walked into the snake exhibition, he remembered that Alice loved to sit and observe the animals. Much like the real Alice, she was enchanted by snakes. But where Alice Roosevelt was brazen and willing to cause a scandal for the sake of it, his Alice was calm and serene. That doesn't mean that she couldn't throw a mean punch if she wanted to. He knew that well enough. The first time he had talked to her, Teddy had taken up a fatherly attitude

and scolded her for nearing such dangerous animals. Without a second thought, she slapped him.

»Don't you dare believe that because we play the father and daughter that you have any power over me. I might be tied down to you during day but at night I'm free.«

Teddy walked away and all the next day he could only think of what he would answer her. But when the night came, he was once again speechless, and could only tell her the truth.

»I'm lost if I'm not Teddy Roosevelt. And you are part of him. His daughter. So, I feel like you must be mine too.«

»I'm only a part of myself. That doesn't mean I can't be your daughter too. As long as you understand we aren't the Roosevelts.«

»What are we then?«

»Theodore and Alice. Father and daughter.«

With that they shook hands. Made a promise to always be true to themselves, to never forget they were more than the humans they had been shaped into. But she was still his daughter. She loved to spend time by herself, and her father reluctantly left her alone when she felt the need. Teddy, she said, was too loud; and she prized. Intimacy and secrecy. The very things Alice Roosevelt forwent easily because they were demanded of her, his Alice valued because as a museum exhibition, she didn't enjoy much of either.

As he continued his wanderings, Teddy found himself at the entrance of the Egyptian exhibition. *Ironic*, he thought. The night guard had told him that the pharaoh was parted from his parents. He was a perfect match for Teddy then: An orphaned son to his childless fatherhood. Teddy went inside, fearlessly walking in front of the jackal guards. After all, what did he have to lose? He had witnessed the Klondike and Nome gold rushes in the pictures of the exposition, but he had never seen anything quite like the pharaoh's tomb. It was almost too magical to exist. It turned creepy straightaway when he saw a note slip through the cracks of the tomb.

**Feeling sad about Alice again?**

It read.

»Nah, I'm just pondering ...« Teddy rushed to answer in need of reconstructing his persona. »Wait, how would you know about Alice?«

**I am a pharaoh. My tablet brings you all back to life every night. I know everything.**

And Attila the Hun feels lonely from time to time and has taken to telling me emotional stuff. Apparently he keeps it all in because he thinks it doesn't fit his persona.

»I see,« Teddy answered. »Still, that doesn't explain how an Egyptian mummy speaks English. And what are you even writing these notes with?«

**Are you kidding? Have you ever met a Cambridge scholar? Once they start talking about whatever obscure topic they are researching you'll never get them to shut up. And about the writing, well, I have quite a lot of paper and you better not know what I'm writing with.**

This made Teddy almost drop the note in suspicion.

**Anyway, about Alice, I know you are sad you no longer have your daughter - Attila was very specific about the whole thing. I think he had daddy issues. But the rest of the exhibits still need you! You can't get dragged down. You are the only one with a bit of common sense.**

»It's just, if I'm not Alice's father, I don't know what I am.«

We can all be your children. Take Attila. He could do with a positive father figure.

»I don't know ...«

Look, you can go around pretending to be a man who died a hundred years ago, or you can live your life now. One of your own. One that isn't borrowed or assigned.

»I'll think about it,« he conceded, although truly, he just wished to get out of the tomb that was making shivers run down his spine.

You could start with freeing me.

Teddy smirked, fully conscious of what a trap looked like.

»Ha! No chance! Whatever reason you were sealed for, I'm not about to go and figure it out.«

Damn you. 𐀀 𐀁 𐀂 𐀃 𐀄 𐀅 𐀆 𐀇 𐀈 𐀉 𐀊 𐀋 𐀌 𐀍 𐀎 𐀏 𐀐

The final note said, accompanied by what Teddy believed to be hieroglyphics for some awfully old curse.

Just like a bratty child. He couldn't help but remember the many tantrums Alice had thrown. And for the first time in a while, instead of tearing at the memory of his lost daughter, Teddy jiggled.

»See you later, young Ahkmenrah.«

Teddy left to check on his other children in a battle that would be harder than anything that the real Roosevelt had faced. And when he felt worn down, he walked to Alice's favourite spot and watched the snakes like she did. That always gave him courage.

*Fin*

## NEW YORK'S HOTTEST CLUB BY ONTHEMEANDER

"WHERE ARE THEY?" LARRY WAS ALREADY AT HIS WIT'S END. THEY HAD ONLY been at the club for an hour and he felt like he had aged thirty-six years. He had specifically asked everyone to stay together and of course, they didn't. Almost as soon as the bouncer had let them in, he had lost track of everyone.

The crowd of sweaty bodies all around him made it hard to move as he searched for his charges. Why was the floor sticky? You'd think it would be easy to find a bunch of people in historical costumes, but it was borderline impossible amongst the pleather harnesses, glowing skirts, and fur-covered accessories.

There, just inside the crowd, among a flock of muscle men, was Sacagawea dancing. Her braids whipped around her as she moved. Excitedly he went up to get her attention: they needed to stay together. "Wea, there you are!" Larry was so happy to finally find someone. Grabbing her attention, the woman turned around and was not Sacagawea.

01 "What do you want?" She said angrily. She did not like that he

had grabbed her by what he now realized was an incredibly pale bare arm. The girl was in a horrible braided wig, eurocentric features framed with jewels, and dressed in a revealing ‘costume’.

“Sorry. I thought you were someone else.” Larry quickly retreated, running to the safety of the bar.

Larry managed to snag a spot at the bar, by the garbage, watching the proceedings. Like any club, it was thronging with people looking for their next drink. The barely dressed bartenders were flitting about in a well-choreographed dance quickly serving as many patrons as possible with a smile. They all seemed to keep coming back to one end of the bar though. It was the busiest and at first, Larry thought that was why he wasn’t getting service. Then he noticed: everyone over there had a drink and seemed to be congregating around one man.

A very large man with a curly black beard and a mane of flowing black hair. It was Attila and he seemed to be crying in the arms of a gorgeous lady. Quickly rushing over, Larry wiggled his way into the crowd of admirers, watching as the woman cooed and patted the Hun’s head. Gently Larry grabbed the large man’s shoulder.

“Attila? What’s going on?” The Hun just sobbed louder, blubbering around his tears in slurred Hunnic. The crowd seemed to press in tighter and Larry felt his stomach getting crushed by the side of the bar.

“Gigantor!” Larry looked down and nearly choked on his tongue in fright. There on the bar in plain view were Jedidiah and Octavious, swimming around Attila’s martini like pint-sized burlesque performers. They were literally doing spins and splashing one another in fluorescent pink alcohol. Their faces were red, they were drunk.

“Guys!” Larry went to snatch them up but was pushed aside by someone. That’s when he noticed that no one seemed to have seen the miniature men. Everyone was too busy talking with Attila. Picking up the glass he asked the cowboy, “What happened to Tila?”

“Shoot!” Jedidiah enthusiastically screamed, “He is hotter than two rats in a wool sock.”

“What?” Larry was lost and Jed just clicked his tongue in annoyance at the confusion.

“What he means,” Octavious stepped in, “Is that our friend has seemed to be very popular here. Everyone is giving him drinks and asking for his Cellular number.”

“Okay, but why is he crying then?”

“The sunshine little lady over there called him Daddy and he started crying like a gun hole through a water barrel!”

Larry pinched the bridge of his nose, the headache at the front of his skull was now growing. Resigning to deal with the Hun’s father issues later, he pulled the breast pocket of his shirt open and let the two mini men slide into it. “Come on guys, let’s get you somewhere safe.”

He needed to find Teddy or Ahkmenrah, someone who had some common sense and could help him corral the wild denizens of the museum back home. Lord help him if someone was left behind and turned to dust in the morning.

As Larry walked through the doorway into another room, one just as big with a light-up dance floor, his heart stopped. Swinging from a steel floor beam to the excitement of drunk dancers were the neanderthals. La was screaming and cheering, excitedly showing off their new prize, a fire extinguisher!

“No! No!” Larry shoved his way through people, trying to rip the fire extinguisher from La’s hands. Just as he reached them, the trigger was pulled and a burst of foam exploded all around them. The neanderthals cheered as their fellow clubbers screamed in surprise. Oh god, this was it, they were all going to be thrown out.

Just as he was expecting a pair of man-handling bouncers to grab him, he saw a girl throw her arms up and screech “Foam Party!” The crowd about him erupted into cheers and seemed to dance with even more invigorating energy.

What the hell was next? Was Rexy going to make an appearance on the stage with their robot routine? Just as Larry turned



ART BY: SAFFASAS

to check the stage for his biggest fear, a stinging slap cracked against his cheek. The sudden strike knocked the air out of his chest. A small hot welt was surely forming on his cheek as he tried to find his assailant.

There, sitting atop some man's shoulder, "Dexter!" The tiny troublemaker was clinging to strings of the man's macrame.

"Woah buddy, the little dude didn't mean it." The scruffy guy said, holding up his hands. The monkey mimicked him, putting on an innocent smile and holding up its palms.

"Oh, yeah. Sorry, is this your ... Capuchin?"

"My what?" The man asked, looking all around him but ignoring the monkey on his shoulder.

"Your pet?" Larry tried again, really staring down the creature. It looked so much like Dexter, but what were the chances he was

at this club? Probably about as high as some random raver having a pet monkey.

“Nah, man. Here nobody is anybody’s anything!” The guy beamed, holding up his hand for the little monkey, who gave him an enthusiastic high five and smiled. The shit-eating grin on the monkey gave him away instantly. Larry did not know how Dexter had managed to get into the club. He needed a drink.

Seeing a darkened spot to the side of the dance floor, Larry trudged over there feeling the weight of a sleepless night finally crashing on his shoulders. Why did he think this would be a good idea? It had disaster written all over it from its inception. It was going to be a disaster trying to get everyone back to the museum. How was he going to make sure no one was turned to dust by dawn?

When he agreed to chaperone some of the museum’s exhibits to Nicky’s show he foolishly did not expect it to be the debacle it was. He should have known nothing is as easy as it should be when the museum was involved. It was supposed to be just him and a few of the more ... responsible exhibits. Instead of an easy night out for him, Teddy, Sacagawea, and Ahkmenrah; Larry found himself chaperoning the escaped neanderthals, wrestling Attila on and off the subway, who was convinced it was a trap set by a warlock to send him to hell, as well as keeping a turf war between Columbus’ statue and a street performer from breaking out. Larry was absolutely going to ban any more field trips for the foreseeable future.

This was absolutely not worth it.

Dejectedly settling into the plush black leather, next to some kid with side-swept bangs and an Ed Hardy t-shirt. He was weirdly talking into his hands which, clasped between the heavily ringed fingers, held a phone. “Voice memo: Tell Seth Meyers about this. This is New York’s hottest nightclub.”

... New York nightlife is weird.

“Lawrence!” Someone announcing his name pulled Larry out of his ruminating. “You must be so proud, my boy!” Teddy’s boom-

ing voice was the only one you could hear without having to nearly press your ear to the speaker's mouth. Had music always been this damnably loud? Oh god, he was starting to sound like his own father. "He has grown into an impressive young man." The boisterous president declared, smiling up at the stage, where the DJ stand was.

"You're right Teddy, Nicky is always amazing to me." Larry felt the warmth of his pride deep in his chest, it paired nicely with the top-shelf bourbon.

Larry wasn't even lying, Nicky had achieved something so much larger than life. He had somehow carved out a place for him in the world, one where he was surrounded by strobe lights, speakers the size of a house, nearly naked dancing women, and a lot of men in gold chains.

Movement in the corner of his eye captured his attention. He looked down to see the frantic movements of jumping and waving, that Jedidiah and Octavius were doing, trying to garner his attention. Quickly picking up the duo, he brought them close to his ear. "Larry! This is my music! Take us to the beats!" Octavius screamed at the top of his lungs, nearly sticking his head full into Larry's ear canal to be heard.

"Teddy, you mind taking Jed and Octavius over to Nicky's stand?"

"Of course Lawrence, come along gentlemen" Teddy held out his gloved hand to the small cowboy and Roman to drunkenly clamber into. Once they'd settled in his palm, Teddy made quick strides to where the action was.

Finally a moment of peace and quiet. Well, as quiet as a nightclub could be. Closing his eyes, he slumped lower in his seat.

"Larry, you are not going to join the festivities?" Ahkmenrah settled down next to Larry. Close enough that the soft aged linen of his gold weave skirt brushed against Larry's arm.

"Probably not, I doubt Nicky would appreciate his dad's dancing embarrassing him."

"I am certain you are being too hard on yourself." The young

pharaoh smiled at him, his cheeks flushed.

"You sure, have you seen the crowd? Think I can pull that off?" He couldn't help but snort into his drink. Ahkmenrah seemed to genuinely survey the crowd, evaluating the way they twisted and gyrated. It was just a crush of young people, pressed in tight, enjoying as their bodies rubbed against each other as they moved.

"You should join Sacagawea, she seems to be having fun," Larry suggested, admiring the young mother's exuberant stomping, spinning, and jumping. She had a pure joyful smile on her face, happiness only matched by Teddy's loving stare, having returned from delivering the miniatures to Nicky. With what seemed like a disappointing nod, Ahkmenrah stood up from the couch and went to join in the dancing.

He could help but notice how the lights glistened off Ahkmenrah's skin. It was glittering with either sweat or actual glitter that the go-go dancers were throwing around. A thousand little stars twinkling off his skin, like the goddess Nut, a descendant of his people's gods. Larry could feel the heat of all those little suns under his collar. Their warmth made moisture form along his hairline.

Fabric swirling, sweat dripping, abs flexing.

All too soon his dancing came to an end. With a heaving chest and stunning smiles, Ahkmenrah returned to Larry's side on the couch. "Thank you for this. It has been ... hundreds of years since I have danced."

"You should thank Nicky, he is the music master." Trying to hide his flushing face behind the rim of his bourbon glass.

"But you are the one that made it possible, you brought us here, you let your son follow his dream ... you let me out of my coffin." "I don't know if I can ever repay you."

"You don't have to repay me."

"What if I want to."

"I ... I wouldn't stop you."

The world around them seemed to be muted as Ahkmenrah slowly moved closer. Like a timid kitten, he edged away from Lar-

ry's ear towards his lips. Larry could feel his breath getting trapped, lodged between the racing of his heart and the bone-deep pulsating of the speakers.

Getting up the courage, Ahkmenrah surged forward and pressed a quick kiss to Larry's cheek. Harsh in its sudden action but under it all the soft timid heat of affection. Warm like the setting sun over the Sahara desert.

It was absolutely worth it. Larry thought that the whole way home. Even when they happened to find a lost Columbus statue trying to break into an Indian restaurant.

THE END

# Partners

by ClumsyGhost

Magic seeps through ancient bone like a whisper, stirring memories of life into action. Those born from human hands animated quicker, absorbing the tablet's wonder like a sponge. None woke into consciousness faster than the miniatures.

Blinking the sleep from his eyes, Jedediah S. Smith peered around his surroundings, startled. The dusty landscape of the Western exhibit was gone, replaced by strange, looming shapes. A tape dispenser, Jed identified after a moment. A pile of brochures were stacked near a mug full of worn-down pencils.

Ah. The Night Guardian's desk.

Octavius was stationed to Jed's left. The cowboy moved closer, watching as the Roman General came to. The look of surprise on Octavius' face smoothed into a small smile.

"Bonum vesperam," Octavius greeted him. "How lovely that your face is the first I see tonight."

Jed reddened. Dash it! This was the problem with Toga Boy - he got his dander up like nobody's business. The cowboy fidgeted and glanced around the vast and currently empty lobby. "Wonder what Larry wants to talk to us about. Hope it's not another lecture. Not like we did anything inappropriate last night."

"Minimē," Octavius echoed. "No, nothing inappropriate." For some reason, his face took on a wistful expression. It made Jed's head itch trying to interpret so he ignored the Roman's comment.

The sounds of the museum coming to life began to ring out in earnest. Several more minutes passed before Larry appeared. Dropping into his chair, he waved down at the miniatures waiting on the desk.

"Hi, guys. Listen, I'm sure you've noticed me spending time at the Mayan Civilization, right?" Larry referenced the third exhibit in the Hall of Miniatures.

"Sure have, Gigantor!" Jed answered cheerfully.

Octavius made a noncommittal noise in his throat. He thought it unwise to divulge that the status of his surroundings had slipped beneath his notice. Not good for a general. He had noticed that Jedediah's handsome eyes crinkled at the corners more lately.

"Keeping the Mayans locked up has never settled well with me, and I'm happy to say that we have finally reached an agreement. Before they venture out into the rest of the museum, they wish to meet with people from your times. There is a festival in three nights, and they have invited you to join," Larry continued. "From then on, I will keep the exhibit open so the Mayans can roam. Sound good?"

Jed turned towards Octavius in excitement. New people to meet! Another section of the museum that was regular-sized! During their long historic feud, the Cowboys and Romans had sadly only been concerned with the adjoining exhibit, and had ignored the existence of the other civilization. Now, perhaps, they could begin to make amends. And friends! Jed could not wait to retreat to their motorized car and talk over the exciting plans with Octavius.

"We must return to our places and prepare for this event," Octavius said before Jed could speak. "We need to select suitable gifts and choose our companions."

Or not.

"Sure thing, partner." Jed masked his disappointment with a shrug. They didn't spend every night in each other's company, but he had to admit that time with Octavius was the best part of his evening. He would just have to be patient. Three nights would fly by quickly enough, right?

**Jedediah was used to stares and whispers** as he walked down the cobblestone street of the Roman exhibit. What he wasn't used to, however, was being accosted by a suddenly materializing pair of soldiers. For a moment, the cowboy had a flashback of pre-truce relations and nearly reached for his holster.

"Woah, fellas. Octavius invited me here." He didn't want to add that the invitation included a bath. After two long boring nights, Jed had accepted happily.

The taller Roman soldier nodded dismissively. "Understood. We wished to discuss the matter of the Mayan festival. Tomorrow marks a new chapter in our history."

"I'm sure Octavius has—"

"New people. Fresh relationships," the other centurion piped up.

"Good first impressions are crucial."

"Could ya get to the point?" Jed asked impatiently.

"General Octavius is the head of state. He will approach negotiations as such. You should display proper acknowledgement of his standing by submitting to his precedence in the introductions."

Jed rolled around the words in his head and came up with .... Nothing. "What are ya jabberin' 'bout?"

"Don't walk beside him," sighed the first centurion. "Let the General go first."

"What? Ya think he's better than me or somethin'?!"

"Indeed."

Jed's jaw dropped. Indignation swelled inside him. He straightened to his full height and opened his mouth to deliver a message of the likes they'd never heard before, just as the pair of soldiers marched away.

"Yellow-bellied little ...." Jed grumbled to no one. The rest of the walk to Octavius' domus was rushed and the cowboy snubbed the entrance. Climbing over the tall fence proved a bit of a hassle, but it gave his temper time to cool down. Landing on the other side with a huff, Jed took stock.

The baths were deserted. This was expected. Due to Jedediah's shyness (Jed called it decency), Octavius made sure they were always alone whenever the cowboy indulged.

Jed took another glance around. He quickly stripped

and slipped into the water. The bath was the perfect temperature: cool and relaxing.

"My guests usually opt for the front door." Footsteps alerted Jed to Octavius' presence. He turned his back to the Roman to give him privacy, a somewhat empty gesture once he peeked over his shoulder. He was only looking to see if Octavius was in the water yet; it had nothing to do with seeing his best pal in all his glory.

"How are you tonight?"

"Fine."

"You look pensive."

Jed started. "Yer lookin' at my what now?!"

"I said you look pensive," Octavius replied shortly. "Are you nervous about tomorrow?"

"I weren't," Jed muttered. The centurions' words kept rattling in his head, needling him. Without too much thought, Jed skimmed his arm over the top of the water, rushing a wave towards the Roman. Octavius blocked the best he could. He was too well trained a soldier not to immediately react. Cupping his hands down into the water, he splashed Jedediah right back. The cowboy's yelp of excitement made him smile.

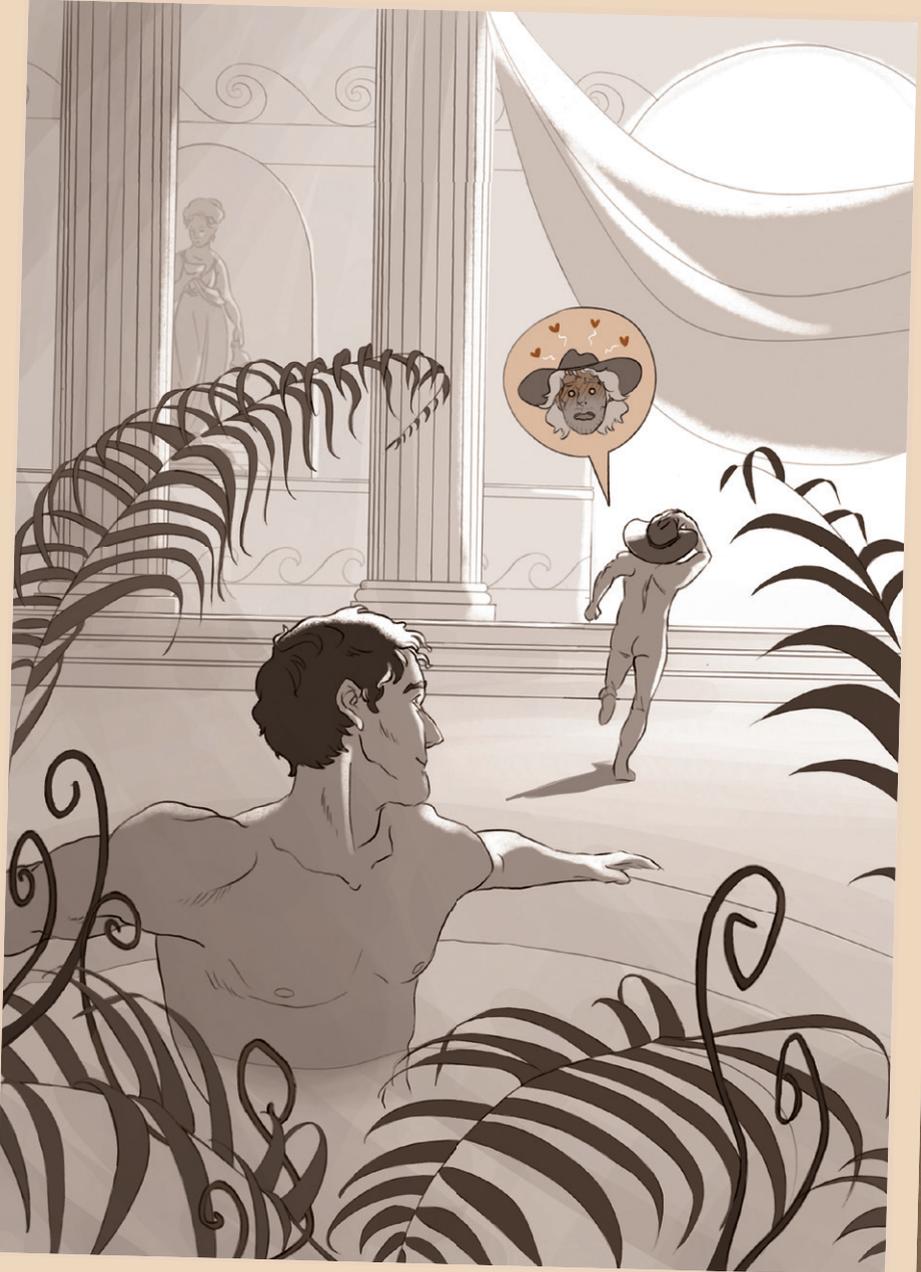
"Oh yeah? Take this!" The strange tension in Jed's face was fading as they exchanged drenchings. He snuck to Octavius' side as the Roman shook the water from his hair. An especially devious idea to dunk Octavius completely underwater was sadly thwarted by the Roman's quick hands.

"Cease, you barbarian!" Octavius' eyes were full of affectionate warmth. He held Jed's wrists captive but made no motion to attack further. "I'm fearful for the state of my baths."

Oct was mighty handsome when he smiled. Jedediah's eyes watched beads of water trace over that strong face, down, down towards those lips quirked up into an open grin. Suddenly aware of the scant distance between them, Jed cleared his throat and back-peddled. The baths were too warm now. He backpedaled completely out of the water. "Reckon I'm clean enough now."

"Don't slip!" Octavius yelled after the fleeing cowboy. He didn't bother pretending to not look.

Art by: Cnubbsy



**When the night of the festival dawned,** Larry was waiting by the Western and Roman dioramas, rolling cart in hand. The cowboys mingled in random groups as the centurions stood in perfect rows. It wasn't difficult to pick Octavius out in the crowd; the crisp white toga and the greenery of the laurel wreath drew Jedediah's eyes towards his friend.

He'd seen Toga Boy in his toga before. Lots of times. Yet the sight of those muscular arms and curls of hair free from the galea always took Jed's breath away. Here among his men, Octavius radiated every bit of discipline he possessed. There would be no hint of last night's playfulness, no room for laughter or panic-inducing smiles as he performed the role of leader.

It would be easy, far too easy for Jedediah to ruffle the general's feathers and break the stern facade away. Yet he could not bring himself to do it.

"Display proper acknowledgement of his standing ..."

Jed tugged down the brim of his hat and walked towards the cart. The crowd began to follow, and soon Larry was carefully rolling the miniatures across the hall. Octavius joined Jedediah at the front. He was flanked by two familiar centurions.

"Good luck," Larry whispered as they reached the Mayan exhibit.

The group of miniatures began their journey, walking past fields of maize and squash. In the distance, brightly painted faces decorated the bottom of the temple stairs.

"Hope you like steps," Jed commented. It was almost worth the elbow to the side. He snuck a peek at Octavius' suppressed smile. Yeah. Definitely worth it. He could feel the centurions' eyes boring into his back. Silently fuming, Jed slowed his pace.

"Not winded already, are you?" Octavius also slowed. He cast his friend a quizzical look as the cowboy silently swept his hands in a motion for him to continue. It became something of an odd game, Octavius stopping to wait for Jedediah as the cowboy's pace grew slower and slower. Jupiter only knew what their companions were thinking as the pair slowed down the entire processional because they could not walk at a normal pace. After several starts and stops, the pieces finally clicked. "I know what you're doing."

Why did Romans talk so darn much? "I have a stitch in my side, if ya must know."

"You do not. You're allowing me to go first. Since when have we faced anything if not side by side?"

"This is not," Jed gritted his teeth, "the time for grand speeches, Toga Boy."

The appearance of a Mayan citizen thankfully curtailed their argument. Jed removed his hat as they approached the courtyard. The village residents gathered at a distance behind their greeter; the strands of music softened as he began to speak.

"Welcome to the festival. My name is Eloy." The Mayan's long hair was deftly braided and wound around his head with a portion hanging loose behind. His hands were tattooed with intricate drawings. "Gather around. Let me teach you our greeting."

"In Lak'ech Ala K'in." Eloy placed his hand over his heart. "'I am you, and you are me.' Now you say to each other."

Jed reluctantly turned. Octavius' expression was soft and earnest. Jed repeated the phrase, feeling his ears burn as he stared into those warm brown eyes.

In Lak'ech Ala K'in. I am you, and you are me. He was the freedom of the open air and the humidity of the forest. Octavius was poetry, discipline, beauty.

"Please, go enjoy the dancing," Eloy announced, snapping Jed out of his thoughts. The Mayan motioned towards the courtyard as the music swelled into enthusiastic celebration. "Mingle. Talk. If your leaders will follow me?"

The Romans, Westerners, and Mayans slowly began to spread out and break into chatty groups. Jedediah and Octavius followed Eloy towards the buffet.

"To new acquaintances, Sajal Octavius." Eloy offered a cup from a side table to the Roman. The chocolate was frothy and bitter with laces of chili peppers.

Octavius took a sip, savoring the taste. He turned and held out the cup to Jed, meeting his gaze evenly. "And to old friends, no matter how stubborn they are behaving."

Jed drank deeply, and when the spiciness kicked in, began coughing. "Coulda warned me!" he sputtered.

"Could have," Octavius agreed, stone-faced. "But that would require us to communicate about issues that bother us. Which we apparently don't do."

Jed sighed and adjusted his hat as he handed the cup back to Eloy. "Thank you. Sorry about Toga Boy."  
Eloy smiled and said something in his native tongue. Both visitors stared blankly at their host. "Marital spat," he translated. "We have observed the coming and goings of this hall for many years. The two of you appear to be especially close," he added after a lengthy pause.

"Excuse us," Octavius pulled a beet-red Jed off to the side. "Who talked to you?" Octavius' voice was calm but firm. Authoritative voice, demanding all Jed's secrets. "Lots of people talk to me. Yer gonna have to be more specific."

"Someone put this notion of precedence in your head. I know you would never consider us less than equals," Octavius' voice softened. "I doubt any of your people care much, so it must have come from my senate."

"I disremember," Jed replied casually.  
"If anyone has an issue with you," Octavius spoke slowly, "They can address their concerns to me. As far as I am concerned, we're partners. Are we not?" He hesitated, then leaned in, bestowing a swift but gentle kiss to the cowboy's lips. "Partners," he repeated huskily. "Do you understand?"

Jed nodded, for once in his life unable to find words. "Good. Shall we get back to the party?"

"Sure ... partner." Jed began to smile.  
"... together?"

"Yeah, yeah. Together." When Octavius reached for his hand, Jed didn't balk. Life ... was going to be even more interestin' from here on out. Luckily he had the best fella he knew beside him. So long as Ahkmenrah's tablet gave them life, they would face the world together.

FIN.

# A WILD NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

**LARRY** taps his fingers against his flashlight in anticipation as he stares out the window. The last of the customers are clearing out of the museum, slowly but surely, and the sky is fading from soft pinks and oranges into deep blue, with the occasional star twinkling faintly. The museum would be coming to life soon, and the whimsical beauty of the night was a fitting backdrop for the magic that regularly takes place in the museum.

With a sigh, Larry turns away from the window and begins to walk through the halls to make sure that the building is clear before he locks the doors. He reaches up to scratch an itch on his nose and accidentally bumps his hand into the wide-brimmed cowboy hat that he's wearing. "Ah, right," he mumbles to himself, having almost forgotten about the special event that just took place. It was their Western Weekend at the museum, which was a few days that focused specifically on history relating to the wild west. There were special exhibits and lots of fun hands-on activities for the visitors, and Larry had the

idea to have the event run throughout the night as well, but this time specifically *for* the exhibits. He thought it'd be fun for them all to do something a bit different for once, even if it could be rather hectic.

Once he's sure that the halls are cleared, Larry heads back to the front to lock the doors. It isn't long before he hears chattering echoing through the halls, signifying that the night has begun. Approaching the miniature exhibits, he finds the small figures moving and talking, going about their nightly lives as usual.

"Good mornin', Gigantor!" Larry hears a familiar voice yell. With a roll of his eyes and a grin, he kneels down to get on the same level as Jedediah.

"Hey Jed," Larry replies. "Ready for tonight?"

"You bet your butt I'm ready! I may be small but I've got me some big ideas!" The small cowboy exclaims proudly.

Larry sighs, relieved. "Good. I haven't exactly thought of anything, so I need all the help I can get. Teddy's at least going through the halls and reminding everyone of what night it is, but I tried to do some extra research and—"

"Ah-ah, no worries there, amigo. I've got it covered. Now pick me up, and be sure to grab Octavius. He'll get cranky if I don't let him get involved," Jed says, crossing his arms and looking down at the dusty floor of his exhibit. Larry internally laughs. He's enjoyed seeing the relationship between the two miniatures develop.

Carefully picking up Jed, he makes the few steps to the next miniature exhibit. "So, what's first on your list?"



### **PING!**

The sound of a rusted, iron horseshoe hitting a metal post rings throughout the wide hallways.

"How in the hell did you land *another* perfect throw?!" Jedediah exclaims from his spot on Larry's hat. "You've gotta be cheatin'. Come on now, fess up, Ahk! What's your secret?"

"To be honest I'm not quite sure," the prince shrugs, lining up for

another toss. "I'm surprised I've never played this before. It's so simple yet fun!" And with that, he throws the shoe, but misses by a hair, making him grin and turn to face the small cowboy. "See? Not cheating."

Octavius simply laughs while Jed grumbles to himself.

"Oh, hey, be careful," Larry says, taking a step forward. Attila has just stepped up with a horseshoe, and the look on his face is as if he's about to ride into battle. He lifts the shoe over his head and rears back, about to throw. "Attila, wait, that's not-!" He's about to try and stop him when suddenly, Attila throws the shoe *much* harder than needed- and ends up sticking it straight in the wall. He grins proudly, not quite understanding the game, but happy with his show of strength. Everyone who was watching aside from Attila and the Huns freezes in place, silent, unsure of what to do.

"Um," Larry finally says, breaking the silence and stepping towards the large man, clapping him lightly on the shoulder. Internally, Larry's wincing; how is he going to patch that hole? "Great throw, Attila."

And with that, Larry is tugged into a bone-crushing hug, nearly throwing the miniatures off of his hat.

"Whew! I say we let 'im go again!" Jed shouts as he holds onto the band of Larry's cowboy hat. Octavius, who is struggling to stay up, shouts, "Absolutely not!"



**COME now Lawrence, life's all about adventure! And this is the kind of adventure you'll never get anywhere else. What's there to be afraid of?"**

Larry stares up at Remy and swallows rather nervously. Originally the idea of riding on the T-Rex like a bull sounded fun, but now as he gazes up at the fossilized creature he feels himself go pale. Remy suddenly seems *much* taller than usual.

"Um, well," he says as he turns to Teddy, who fixes him with an innocent smile behind his mustache. "I could potentially fall off and break something. I'd rather not shatter my pelvis, thank you very much."

This earns a laugh from the ex-president, who gently hits Larry

on the shoulder with his fist. "You've done scarier things than ride a T-Rex! Come on, I'll even join you." He starts to guide Larry over to where Remy seems to be gnawing gently on his favorite bone, and he seems calm, which is comforting to Larry. He doesn't exactly like the idea of riding an over-excited dinosaur.

Sacagawea is there too, watching over Remy, and she smiles when the two men approach. She softly says something to the dinosaur, making him crouch down a bit so that Larry and Teddy can get on his spiny back. Larry nervously looks between Remy and Teddy, and when Teddy quirks an eyebrow up at him, he sighs in defeat.

"Alright, alright, let's get this done and over with—"

"Now just hold on there! You ain't havin' a rodeo without us!" Jedediah's surprisingly loud voice rings throughout the area. Ahkmenrah is jogging over with the two miniatures in his hand, smiling at their antics.

"We were playing cards against the civil war mannequins and Jedediah heard that there was going to be a rodeo," the prince says, trying to catch his breath a bit.

"Yes, and Jedediah was trying to cheat, so it was a good excuse to make him stop," Octavius pipes up, crossing his arms over his chest and shooting a look at the small cowboy. Jedediah whips around, his brow furrowed as he gasps in defense.

"I was *not* tryin' to cheat! If anyone was playin' dirty, it was—"

"Okay, okay, that's enough," Larry interjects, walking over to take the two small men from Ahkmenrah. "I just wanna get this done and over with, so let's go. You guys wanna ride in my pocket, or on my hat?"

Jedediah places his hands on his hips and puffs his chest out, trying to seem bigger than he actually is. He doesn't exactly do a very good job of it. "No way, Ock and I are gonna be ridin' on Remy! We can handle it! I'm a 10 time rodeo champ, I can handle a buckin' bronco or a bull any day!"

"And I am a master chariot racer!" Octavius adds, trying to further their case. "If I can survive being thrown from a chariot at dastardly speeds, I'm sure I can survive being thrown from a T-Rex!"

Larry stares at the two figures exasperatedly. They were always so stubborn, and he knew he'd never hear the end of it if he didn't let them just do what they pleased. "Alright, alright. Let's go."

Teddy climbs up the side of Rexy first, slotting himself between two of the dinosaur's vertebrae, and Larry shakily does the same. His foot nearly slips on Rexy's ribcage, but Teddy catches him with a firm hand and a laugh. He deposits Jedediah and Octavius on the bones in front of him.



“So how exactly are we going to get Remy to, you know... buck like a bronco?” Larry asks, grateful that Remy hasn’t started moving yet.

“Nick left his remote airplane here once,” Sacagawea calls out from below, holding up a remote control. “He showed me how to use it. I tied Remy’s bone to it.”

Larry feels himself go pale. He really, really wasn’t getting out of this one. “Alright, let’s do— *WHOA!*”

Remy suddenly lurches forward, snapping at the air. Larry hadn’t even noticed that Sacagawea had started the plane, flying it in front of Remy tantalizingly. The T-Rex suddenly veers to the left, trying to snatch it again, and then quickly to the right as the plane moves again. Larry’s cowboy hat flies off at some point during the commotion, and he nearly gets thrown off himself, but Teddy wraps his arms around his waist to keep him in place. The night guard shouts and yells with every jump and turn that Remy makes, and he can vaguely hear the sound of Teddy laughing, and Jedediah and Octavius hooting and hollering.

“Remy stop!! Remy! Down boy! Stop!” Larry shouts, clinging to the vertebrae in front of him for dear life. Teddy is laughing so hard that tears are in his eyes, and the two miniatures are raising their fists and having what seems to be the best time of their lives. Sacagawea is also laughing at the sight in front of her, and finally lowers the airplane so that Remy can catch the bone and stop terrorizing the poor night guard.

As soon as Remy calms down, Larry hops off, visibly shaken. He points an accusing finger at Teddy, who simply smiles smugly at him. “Never again,” Larry says, turning to walk away.

He can hear the faint sound of Jedediah making fun of him as he leaves, and, okay. Maybe it was a little fun.





**COME on Larry, that one wasn't even scary!" Jedediah groans as he** takes another bite of his piece of marshmallow. "The hook was left on the car door? Oooo, so ominous," he says, making spooky gestures with his hands.

It's closer to sunset now, and a group of them sit around the fire in the caveman's exhibit, telling stories and making s'mores. Larry wonders why he didn't introduce the dessert to them sooner; it's like they can't get enough. Attila alone went through a whole box of graham crackers from eating so many.

"Well, your little story about cactus monsters wasn't exactly scary either," Larry comments. Jedediah gives an indignant noise, seemingly too tired to argue.

It's been a long, fun day at the museum, and Larry is proud of himself for setting it up. He'll have to do more themed nights like this again for them. They seemed to enjoy it, and it's good for them to learn about different cultures. After all, Larry learns something new each night that he works there, so why shouldn't the exhibits themselves?

He looks at all those around him, a small, content smile on his face. They've all brought him so much happiness, so much light at a dark point in his life and he's more than thankful for all the adventures that they've brought him. They may only be alive thanks to magic, but that doesn't change the fact that they've impacted Larry so positively. For pieces of plastic and wax, they sure are special.

Soon, they all join in on one of Jed's campfire songs, singing along even if they don't quite know the words, making it a jumbled cacophony of words. They're all smiling with their arms around each other, simply having a great time, feeling happy and unified. As the song finishes out, Larry suddenly sees something flash out of the corner of his vision, and the next thing he knows, he has a lasso around his midsection being cinched by none other than Dexter, who grins cheekily as he chitters in triumph.

Larry sighs exasperatedly and unlassoes himself. "Alright, who gave a lasso to the monkey?" He asks, an eyebrow quirked at the group.

No one fesses up, but they all laugh, which makes Larry soften up a bit. He's admittedly a bit tired of Dexter's antics, but he just can't bring himself to stay mad at the capuchin.

It isn't much longer before everyone's (mostly) cleaned up the museum and made their way back to their exhibits, the usual bustling that echoes throughout the halls quieting to a soft murmur. Larry walks through the building, double checking that nothing is out of place, and for the first time in a long while, he doesn't have to worry about a thing.

As Larry walks to the front of the museum, he bids Teddy goodnight with a nod and a grin, and he stops and stares wistfully as he notices the pinks and oranges of the sunrise peeking through the windows. He feels tired, but satisfied, having had such a great night. Crossing his arms and leaning against the front desk, he can already tell it's going to be a beautiful morning.

**THE END**

# The Food of Love

waistcoat35

Jedediah cursed as the magnifying glass toppled over again and fell onto his foot. Why couldn't he just get it to stay in place? It shouldn't be so darn hard! He'd tried leaning it against things – a peppermint box, an empty juice carton, a plastic bottle – and it always seemed to fall off again. If he kept this up it was going to break, and he'd have to take his team to rumble the gift shop all over again like a bunch of bandits.

He gripped the edge of the glass and pushed it upright to try again, this time limping a little until the ache in his foot went away. As he did, he heard gleeful chattering and looked up to see Dexter watching him from the desk chair, only the top half of his head visible. 'Yeah, yeah, laugh it up.' The last word was cut off by a grunt as he tried to hoist the weight. 'This ain't half as easy for me as it would be for you, just appreciate that.'

The chattering continued, so it certainly was appreciated – from a comedic perspective.

'Oh, whatever, just – would you fetch me something to keep this in one place with? I'll give you some of what I make when it's

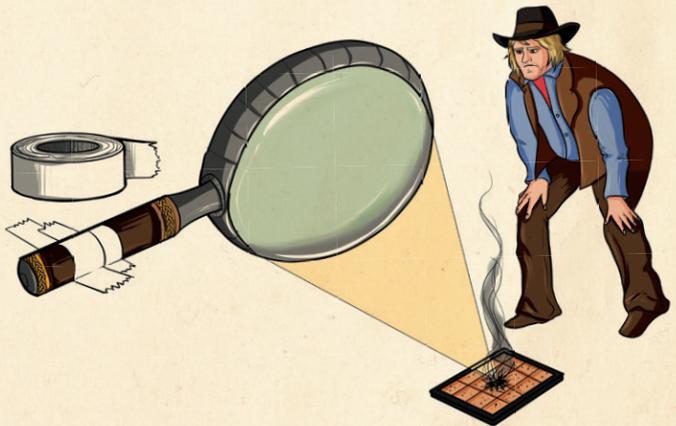
done.' Lured by the prospect of food, Dexter cooperated and, after a minute of ferreting through the desk drawers, pulled out a roll of scotch tape. Granted, he almost dropped it on top of Jed, but at least he'd been kind of helpful. 'Thanks, bud.'

Between the two of them they just about managed to hold the glass in place and tape it in the right position, tilted at an angle. Jed pressed the switch of the desk lamp with the heel of his good foot and watched as the yellow light from it fell on the magnifying glass. It'd take a couple minutes to warm up, sure, but then ...maybe his plan would actually work. He picked up the flapjack tray – he'd managed to make the mix up with Nicky's help after watching some videos on his phone of someone baking stuff in a doll-sized kitchen – and brought it over to the spot where the magnifying glass was beaming light onto the desk.

'So,' he said to Dexter as though he were even listening, 'I figure that if I just slide this under here, it should be able to- dang it!' Already the flapjacks had burned, but they still weren't done around the edges. 'Maybe I could just adjust the- ouch!' He leapt back and shook his hand in the air where it'd been burned – apparently the beam of light had warmed up a little *too* quickly. He examined his hand closely – there was a slightly pinker part, where the heat had damaged the wax. Hopefully it was small enough to go unnoticed. The tray lay face-down on the desk, contents splattered as he'd leapt away. He sighed heavily.

'Back to the drawing board, Kemosabe.'

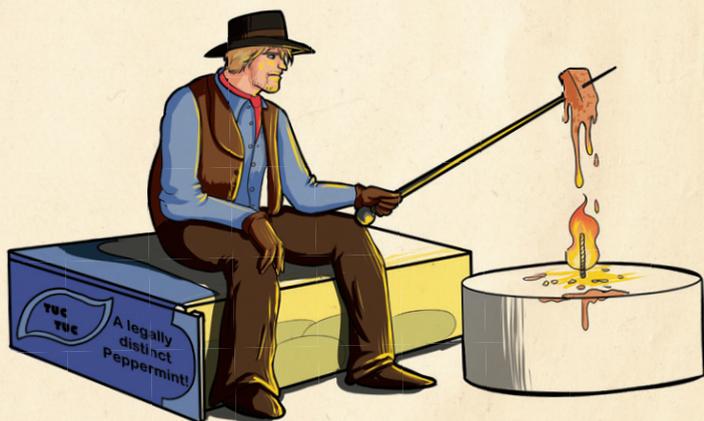
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The next time, he'd spent a decent amount of time pulling a candle from the security desk drawer to try and practice with. He had a matchstick ready to go, and he'd made sure he had a little pail of sand from the West nearby for emergencies – it was better to do it here near the sprinklers for he first time. He didn't want a lecture for almost burning down the diorama again. He didn't think he would've, though – he really knew what he was doing this time! He'd already mixed up the oats and a little bit of syrup and put it in a tray.

He struck the match and lit the candle, putting the match out in the sand before letting it burn for a few minutes. The best way to try, he'd decided, was to skewer part of the flapjack and attempt to cook it evenly over the flame of the candle. After getting a decent amount of the squidgy mixture onto the pointed end of a pin, he sat on an overturned peppermint box and held it carefully over the heat. It didn't seem to do much anywhere near fast – bits kept dripping off the pin and into the wax, making it spit. He jumped as a drop of it sizzled where it fell close to his boot. He didn't want any more injuries from this, thanks very much.

The candle's flame seemed to be dying down too fast, especially after pieces had fallen off, so he tried wafting it with his hat to encourage it to flare up again. That worked just fine until the hat got a little too close, and



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then he definitely needed the sand bucket, dropping the pin into the wax in his panic.

He sighed, singed hat in hand, sitting on the box. Maybe next time he'd make something edible. Third time was the charm, right?

**The third time, he had a plan.**

Nicky had let Jed sit on his shoulder to watch YouTube videos on his phone, and after falling down a rabbit hole of recommended videos had come across a series of videos in which people cooked real food, but in tiny kitchens. There were so many different ideas – tiny spaghetti, tiny cakes, tiny salads. There was one where tiny pancakes were made, in a little pan. Whoever had filmed it had placed a candle inside a dollhouse oven and used the hobs. He didn't think he could swing a doll-sized oven, but it sure had given him an idea ...

There was a new, temporary exhibit on France's *Belle Époque*, and the prized centrepiece was an antique dollhouse in the middle of the room. The rooms were all furnished with precise tiny replicas of household items, including the kitchen – he'd had Nicky fetch a tiny iron pan for him just before everybody woke up, so that he wouldn't have to fight off the dollhouse's inhabitants. He didn't speak French too good, anyhow.

This time, he'd dared to bring the candle into the diorama. Besides, he reasoned, there was plenty of sand there. He could just kick some over the fire and it'd all be fine and dandy – probably, anyway. He'd had the box of matches brought over too, and a bottlecap for if his plan worked, which it should. He'd mixed another batch of the flapjack mix. Everything was ready.

'Why is this so important?' Nicky had asked him. Jed had just shrugged and muttered something about wanting to prove he could do it to the others in the diorama, not wanting to mention the real reason. He thought back to that conversation in the



Art by **Jannerk**

Smithsonian, how Octavius hadn't known what a flapjack was. Boy, he was going to be pleased.

He scooped the mixture into the pan, holding it over the flame. He'd made sure the pan wasn't actually flammable, unlike his poor hat. He moved the mixture around over a few minutes, flipped it over, until it

looked edible, and then left it to cool. It was soon ready to be cut into squares, and arranged on a cut-out paper napkin on the bottlecap. Once it was set onto the matchbox, placed longways, it almost looked like a proper table.

He swallowed, and hoped that Octavius had got the message to meet him here. *Perfect Match!*, the box proclaimed. He sure hoped so.

'Good evening, Jedediah.'

He turned to see Octavius headed towards him. He'd forgone a horse to come here on foot, apparently, and alone too. 'Evening, Octy! Glad you could make it!'

Octavius smiled. 'Wouldn't miss it for the world.'

'You don't even know why you're here yet, pal.'

'Well,' Octavius tried to peer around him, 'I'm sure you're about to tell me.'

'Nah, thought I'd rather show you.' Jed stepped sideways to reveal the table, and the candle that something had told him he should keep lit for the occasion.

Octavius raised an eyebrow.

'It's just ... I remembered when you asked me what a flapjack was, and I had to explain it, and I just thought it was a real shame you never got to try one, so ...'

Octavius looked – pleased, actually. 'Why – thank you, Jedediah.'

He looked down and scuffed the ground with his foot. 'It's nothing, no problem.' He led them over to the makeshift table. 'Figure

we might as well try them before they get cold,' he said, picking some up on a tiny dollhouse fork. On an impulse, he held it out to Octavius, who took a bite from it without taking the fork.

'That is – excellent, actually. You should try it.' As Jedediah did, Octavius looked at his hand. 'What on earth happened to you there?'

'Ah – just from trying to cook them earlier, when it wouldn't work so well. No harm done, s'just wax, really.'

Octavius kissed the back of his hand as if to make it feel better. 'You're made of far more than just wax, I'd say.'

'FIN

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