

marinefic (1/ ) wip wip wip tktktktk

note: marine's song is taken directly from 'oblivion' by masayoshi soken. i didn't write shit

a year and a half after leaving the ship

"You want me to do what?"

The man looked away from Marine, and bitterly said, "Don't give me that..."

"It's a little weird."

"You're the demon-*freak* here –"

A small surge of fire exploded from the palm of Marine's hand, which she extinguished by tightening her fist around it quickly. Not something she intended to do, but judging by the man's agape reaction, it had a desirable, tone-setting effect.

"Watch it—" Her voice cracked and gave out from underneath her. She took an embarrassing second to clear her throat, rest her palm again.

She leaned forward, and intoned into the man's ear in a subduing whisper, "Watch it, okay? Just remember, you're paying me for my time."

The man gave her a frustrated but understanding nod. She sighed. She really wish she could give herself a moment to think about whether this was worth it. But the veneer of professionalism must ever be maintained.

She sat back down on the bed. "Just, start from the beginning. Say exactly what you want. And don't get yourself too excited this time."

The man didn't speak, but was visibly nervous.

“Sit down with me, okay?” She traced a clawed fingernail in a circle next to her.  
“You’re juuust fine.”

The man took a second to ‘compose’ himself. He sat down next to her, and with an intense look gathering subtly but surely in his eyes, relayed the details of his request.

“I want you to pretend that you’re my sister, and I’m your brother, coming home after a long trip away. You greet me, and then remark about how different I look since last we’ve seen each other. You, um, you take great admiration in the physique, I’ve grown, and as you run your hands, your um, your hands over them, you notice my scars–”

“Your real sister? Like, your sister from birth?”

The man gave a slow nod.

“Even though I’m a *demon freak*?” She motioned to her blue skin, her twisted horns.

“It’s not necessarily about that you look like me – I actually, um, my sister died of blight when I was 4.”

Marine recoiled and her nose scrunched up instinctually. “Please don’t tell me -”

“It’s not about her! It isn’t, I promise. It’s about - it’s just about, um.”

“The taboo?” Marine strode her hand up to the man’s chin, and being careful of her “claws”, grabbed him by it. His look of stupid enjoyment was almost enough to make her smile in spite of everything she’d have to do next.

She let out a sigh, and let go of the man’s face. “I’ll do it for thirty more gold, but the ‘roleplay’ is part of your time, so please keep it brief.”

“*Thirty?*”

“Perfectly reasonable,” she said, trying to downplay the man’s anger. “You’re paying not just for me, but for my performance,” she said, betraying a slight grin.

“You know, you’re not the only *whore* in this damned town–”

“*Watch it.*” Her eyes glowered. She saw a spark of yellow reflected back at her in the man’s, now terrified eyes. New. “I am the only *whore* in the room with you, right now. And I assume you want to walk out of here–” she sighed.

She was out of money, completely. Out of tricks, too. She hadn’t learned a thing since being in here, only that everyone kept a belt and a half between them and their coin, and there wasn’t much of that coin in the first place. It might be time soon to get out of here, pull up stakes. But for the time being, she needed to eat.

“*Refreshed and happy?*”

The john’s gaze returned to its tentative, half-aroused state. “I only have twenty more gold, is all.”

Marine’s eyes narrowed.

“Twenty, ah, twenty-eight, or thereabouts. You can check, check my pack over there, it’s –”

She gave herself one last sigh. “That’ll do. Okay, well, how do we do this?”

The man cleared his throat. “Well, I would be coming back in the room, on account of the – do you remember I mentioned the long trip away?”

“Yes.”

“So I walk in, and you could be doing something womanly, like chopping onions or something.”

“You have onions in here?”

“No, actually. But maybe you could like–”

“Is the *sex* not womanly enough for you?”

The man’s gaze shifted away. “Let’s just get started.”

He walked out of the room, gently closing the door behind him.

Marine fixed her earrings back on, though she suppose she ought to sell those soon as well. She didn't want to, though, seemed unsacred. They were a gift. It was bad enough selling her sword. As she got up and pulled her lute case over her shoulder, she thought of the day that might come when she would have to sell that as well. She shuddered.

"Hey, you got anything to eat?" Marine asked.

The man lay on the bed in half-sleep. His chambers were dingy and crowded, and the whole building smelled strongly of ale and faintly of two-day-old fish. It was extraordinarily unlikely, looking around the 10 by 10 foot space, that there would be any food here of the non-spoiled variety.

"Humm, uh. No..."

He didn't seem all that certain, so Marine went through his pouch anyway as she was collecting her payment. Not a crumb. What did men like this, who despite living so poorly, held tight their pockets full of saved-up coin for fancies like her, *eat* anyway? She imagined him scarfing down a freshly caught trout on some wooden raft in the sea. It almost made him seem more charming, at least in her mind.

"I'm playing a show tomorrow night," she mentioned off hand as she was cleaning out his bag. "You might like to come, lots of ballads and so on about the sea. I get about twenty minutes, and there's lots of other performers too. Some of them are actually half-good." She smiled to herself.

"Humm?"

"At the Rusty Pontoon."

"*Hunh?*"

“At the Rusty. It’s a bar.”

The man didn’t move.

“You ever been to a bar?” she asked with a high note of bored sarcasm.

“I don’t drink...”

“*Really?*”

“The temple, ah... don’t let drinkers in.”

She gave a surprised laugh. She was surprised further to realize he was being completely sincere.

“Well, I’ll be off. Thanks for your... yeah.”

She was eager to get out of the building. Bathing in the sea was far preferable to wading in that thick air.

It was still early evening, the last drip of sunset lost over the horizon, the sky now a gentle gray over the sea. Seagulls still cawed, peddlers made their last rounds before the streets became

“unsafe”. She tried to regain a bit of energy as she made her way down the street.

She tried to think about playing tomorrow, about her songs, about songs in general, about what she would sing, about what she would say to the crowd. How big would the crowd be, she wondered, her eyes casting back and forth along the wharf’s streets.

She saw old ladies with garments that looked like newspaper sweeping meaningless shops and selling meaningless fishes, and burly looking men with baker’s boy hats toting sacks of unidentified substances. Of all the rotten places to get dropped in, she was here, among the boring and old.

She supposed the world couldn’t just be full of energy and youth. She didn’t feel particularly energetic or youthful. There were days here where she just felt spent,

like she was blending in somewhere in between the gray of the sky and the gray of the sea. Even the pain of hunger, when it interceded, felt gray.

She had her moments though. Some things felt good. Sometimes even the sex, tentative as she was about it, felt good, when it was impassioned ... she was surprised by how much attention she'd gotten from the village of fishermen. When she was aboard the ship, she felt like she was never sure what was "real" about her appearance, like everyone was just playing some game with her, letting her feel what she wanted to feel, even Gren, who she knew liked her, it was just ...

That was how everything felt, her strange, flawed memories of a violent and fantastic life, and the here and now. On the ship and off the ship, two wholly different realities, one which was crafted by her insane and deranged loved ones, and the other by the sane and deeply uninteresting world...

Well, it wasn't as though the passing affection of a bunch of grunting drunks was going to be enough to make her feel "whole". It wasn't even enough to afford a decent living. She was stuck here, that was worth admitting, wasn't it? Stuck with no way out. It was like she was a kid again, and she had best hop aboard another pirate ship to get out of here.

She was bored. There was nothing to do today but hang out by the bar and spend her little pittance away on the usual soup and maybe a fish from the market if she felt particularly extravagant. She didn't even really feel hungry anymore.

She thought about what the man said. "The temple". She had to think, but she knew vaguely where it was. What it was, what it was about, was another question.

She knew what she believed – that's what she thought, "*back then*". But in the gray and uncaring expanse of the world, it seemed her belief in herself didn't matter. She could call herself a spark of orange flame, descended from demons and dragons and the leviathans and pirate-kings of yore, but she would still be crushed by the sand and the waves all the same. *Mortal*.

Meaningless. “Demon-freak”. “Whore”... she wondered how many of the other fishermen’s friends called her that. Did they make fun of him, she wondered, as he went to spend his pay on the little stray demon-freak that washed ashore? She wondered what else they said.

It was little wonder she wasn’t able to pull more appreciative audiences in this town. She felt grim, drained. She was worn out from what little walking she’d done. She wanted to collapse, and cry, right there on the gravel of the street.

Curiously, she was at the temple.

Marine gazed at the temple doors, red with rounded tops. The building was yellow clay. She pressed her hand against it, to confirm that it was just a normal building. “I didn’t catch on fire,” she giggled to herself. Of course, “her catching on fire” had been happening a lot lately, and it didn’t seem like something she was particularly in control of. It was just one of those things she assumed everyone had to deal with. Or at least something similar.

She listened at the door. No sound came from within. Her curiosity, or her boredom, or her desperation to act out got the better of her. She leaned gently on the door until it swung in for her, and took a peek inside.

*For the last time*

*I won’t say goodbye*

“What’s that?”

“Nothing,” Marine murmured. She folded up the slip of paper and let it gently fall beside the bed, disappearing somewhere into that mess.

“You’re writing another song, show me.”

“No,” Marine made a joking scowl at him. “It’s not ready yet.”

“I show you my drafts.”

“It’s *different*. Also, your stories come out good.”

“You— You’re just buttering me up,” he protested, but his sweet smile betrayed him.

“And what if I was?” Marine pressed herself into him.

“You’re changing the subject! The song, show me the song,” he said, laughing and jokingly pushing her off. Marine was naturally deeply hurt by this, but she did her level best to shrug it off.

“There is no *song*, it’s just an idea of a lyric for a song. I can’t show you, it’ll... it’ll be so much less profound!”

“I find you very profound, you know that?”

“Shut up.”

They kissed. It was still fresh and violent and meaningful every time. Marine didn’t want to stop kissing him, ever. She let her hands feel his skin, not wandering down, but just holding onto him, remembering his touch. It was like he was warm in a way no one else was warm. Of course, maybe the two of them were really warm in a way that no one else was warm – their *infernal legacy*. She let go of his mouth.

Being in love was a terrible affliction. It made everything too real and far too serious. The truth was, she didn’t care if anyone read her lyrics or her draft of lyrics ever before that moment. In fact, she would gladly share them or sing horrible little improvisations to complete louts like Hogger and Mildew, who were as likely to burp to the melody as anything else. Gren made her uniquely sensitive, uniquely vulnerable, because everything she said meant too much, threatened the tenuous connection that bound their souls and minds and not least of all bodies, the little temple of secret knowledge they shared which was founded on them knowing each other more than anyone, being a part of each other, that could be threatened far too easily and severely by cracks arising from that foundation. She loathed to admit this, because she was the type of person who insisted that all the world could be bent to her will had she the voice to bind them to listen to her, but



she hated to consider him not liking her songs, even her drafts of songs, even her drafts of lyrics of songs. She hated the idea of watching him look at her pathetic little scrap of paper and going, “hm,” feigning a polite interest he didn’t actually possess, with his superior writerly intellect allowing him to see through her cheap bardly tricks. She hated the idea of him pretending, saying, “no, really, believe me, it’s so good!”.

Marine just wanted to gaze into his soft, forgiving emerald eyes forever, and while she hated to admit this too, but for the first and only time in her life, she wanted for none of this to matter, she just wanted to disappear into those eyes and she wouldn’t be some flawed, sensitive half-girl creature aboard a ship to nowhere. She could just be “with him”.

Why couldn’t this last forever?

“Marine. Are you okay?” Gren quietly proffered, his lips moving slowly as he spoke like he was worried of breaking a statuesque impression.

“Yes, fine. I’m fine,” she said back, though she realized –

“You’re just staring at me.”

“Is that so bad?”

“Um, no, I’m kinda into it, actually.”

“Shut up.” She tackled into him, really just pulling herself into him again so she could naturally be held in his arms. She thought to herself, “This sucks, I hate this,” but it was also nice to be held. She breathed deeply of the two feelings for a while. Thankfully he didn’t get hard again, she was enjoying just this.

“Your, um,” Gren lowly murmured. Her horn had somehow caught on the chain of his necklace.

With a bit of awkward in and out, she untangled herself from this predicament. She put her hands on the necklace. It was cold, wrought steel that matched the chain, but the back of it was somewhat wet with Gren’s chest sweat. It was a

uniquely shaped star, made up of several symmetrical arcs, with a small circular hole at its center. A symbol of the All-Mother.

“You really believe in that stuff,” she felt herself lowly whispering, and as she had just let it out, she instantly regretted it. A threat to their love, their understanding of each other being the only thing that mattered, and she had produced it out of thin air.

“Mhmm,” he said, his half-closed eyes and smile reassuring her that not all was lost just yet. “Well, I don’t know.”

“You don’t?” She quizzically turned an eyebrow up.

“I do, I do. It’s not the um, well. I’m not a monk or anything. I wouldn’t be here otherwise, right?”

She smiled at him. They were on a pirate ship!

“But, yeah, I believe in it. The All-Mother, the three Sisters. That there was a point to this Creation.”

She gave too much of a pause at this, and in the silence gathered too much uncertainty. There was nothing else in her mind but what she thought, so she finally broke down and just said it,

“But where does that leave us?”

“What do you mean?”

“We’re...” She touched his skin pointedly. “Demons. Fiends. We’re half-souls who don’t belong in this world.”

“I don’t think so.” Grenoldt never betrayed the same sensitivity to ‘being a tiefling’ that Marine did. He wore it naturally, like it was no different than his hair color. Marine looked at her skin and remembered blunt kicks landing in her stomach, bottles flung at her on the street, loud shouts roaring at her from out of nothing, out of the void, out of the corner of her eye.

“It’s just. She made everyone ‘this way’, right? She made all of Creation, and all of us, or whatever?” She fidgeted with the chain, pulling on it.

“That’s the gist of it.”

“Then why make us ‘this way’; why make us demons and hated, and, and criminals? Why make me...”

Gren’s face turned as he realized what she was saying. He grabbed her hands. He could be so sweet at the wrong moments. She just wanted to yell and cry or something, like she usually did when she thought about things like the fate of the universe. Marine saw him start to form words to break the silence, but she felt the need to purge herself further.

“They’re all against us, you know? They only want to hurt us. What does it matter – their gods, or their chains – I’m sorry –”

“It’s okay, baby, you’re okay.” Gren took her in closer. She could feel tears starting to well up, which made her hate herself. Why couldn’t she articulate herself for once? She was just trying to explain herself, and she had broken down like a child. Why did being around Gren always make her such an embarrassing child, she thought, pulling out of his embrace.

“I’m sorry, I - no, I am, I am, Gren. I just want to know, like, what you see in it.” She was staring into his eyes again, too intently, but it helped her center herself.

“I... You’re right, you know. I don’t know why all of Creation is the way it is, or why we were born like this, or why anyone was.” His hand drifted to hers, almost desperately. She held it sympathetically.

Gren continued. “I know it’s hard. I don’t think of the Mother as someone who ‘helps’, really, if that makes sense. I just find that the world is, you know. It’s full of misery, and wrongness, and injustices, but it’s also beautiful. Isn’t it, don’t you find it beautiful that...”

He fretted with some tuft in the blanket for a second. “I find it beautiful, being here with you. And I don’t think you’re a half-soul, or a demon, or anything. I think you’re beautiful, and wanted, and I think that’s how the Mother made you. And I think it’s beautiful that – that I can be with you, and the moments we spend together even on this blasted damned ship are – they wouldn’t be possible, they wouldn’t, um, make sense to me,” he fidgeted with the chain now, himself, “if there wasn’t something behind that beauty.”

After a moment of silence, Gren, unable to make sense of Marine’s ponderous reaction to this, offered, “That’s why they call her the Heart of Creation. Not because she’s literally down there, like, at the center of the planet or something, but, because no matter what ugliness is on the outside, the heart of all things is beautiful.”

Marine hummed. “You’re so...”

“What? What’s wrong?” Gren sounded genuinely concerned.

“You’re so fucking - you’re such a fucking dork!”

Marine pushed him down by his wrists and kissed him violently wherever she wanted.

“I - hate - you - you - know that?” she suggested, between kisses.

Gren laughed, enjoying himself too much, “I know, I know - ow!”

“You like it.”

“Just don’t leave too much of a mark, please... Zork keeps giving me shit for it...”

“Don’t worry,” she said, coming up for air and adopting a purposefully ridiculously sultry tone, “I’ll leave you just the way the Mother made you.” A moan eclipsed Gren’s mouth before he could offer a reply.

The temple, such that it was, appeared completely empty, dusty and still in the tranquil darkness of nighttime. It became curious to Marine why the doors were unlocked, but she supposed there must be little of value in such a place. “The temple at the end of the world!” she thought to herself. “The temple at the precipice of nothingness! The palace of oblivion!”

She walked the aisles and ran her hands along the dusty pews. She tried to remember seeing people go into this church – not many, as she could recall. She wondered what the “service” was like, as she approached the central lectern. She had never seen the priest about town, though it was understandable why their paths rarely crossed.

It was too dark to clearly see, so she produced a small flame in her hand, cradling it gently forward. She was tired. More than that, she was *tired*. Of everything. Of the then and the now, of the waiting, of the long gaps between what felt like living, of her passions disappearing into memory, of herself disappearing against the disgusting fantasies of idle fishermen. She wanted to be so much more than this. “She would get there”, is what she wanted to tell herself, but she wondered at the how. What circumstances would bring her into being a captain of the seas when she could barely negotiate for the lesser half of a fisherman’s monthly salary?

Sitting alone in the dark temple, it felt peaceful, but nervous. She could feel herself “freaking out”. She slung her lute case in front of her and unbuckled it, pulled it out just to feel it in her hands. She picked at the strings, not touched in days, reverberating a little dust off of them. She set the flame in her other hand to float nearby.

She re-tuned her instrument. It was beautiful, the most beautiful thing she’d ever owned, would ever own. She gave it a satisfying strum once it was in tune. Something about the acoustics of the abandoned temple made it sound particularly beautiful. She ran her hand along its handle. “Thanks, Gren,” she said out loud to herself. “I miss you.”

She looked around. The temple was still dark and still. She felt the presence of no gods, no mothers, and no fishermen.

“This one’s for you,” she said, a bit louder. “I hope you’re with the Mother now. I really do.” Her words, said to no one, felt more true once she had said them.

She started playing, a light and gentle strumming melody she had known forever.

“Staring at death

I take a breath

There’s nothing left.”

“Now close my eyes,

For one last time,

And say goodbye,”

“For the last time,

I won’t say goodbye,”

“Excuse me, young - you there?”

Marine dropped her lute out of her hands in surprise. An old man with a white beard in pajamas held a candlestick out from a door Marine hadn’t seen in the right-back corner of the temple.

He had a warm, serene smile, and he spoke in a gentle and unalarming tone. It was only his appearance which had caught her so off guard – the man’s white beard and white pajamas made him look something like a ghost. Or what she had heard ghosts might look like, anyway.

“I’m afraid the temple is closed for the day...”

“Oh, I’m - I’m sorry, I’m really sorry –” She gathered up her lute, and noticing the flame next to her had suddenly grown in luminosity, decreased it back to a normal dim light.

“It’s okay. Our next service is at Munday at 9.”

“Oh that’s – that’s okay. I’m really sorry, I just didn’t think anyone was here.” She picked herself up and got ready for a quick and spirited exit, once this horrifying interaction was over.

“Unless, well. You’d like to talk some? Make a confession?” The old man implored. There wasn’t accusation in his tone, more, “curiosity”?

“Oh - oh dear. No, I’m really sorry, I just wandered in here, I guess because it was a bit chilly outside.” That wasn’t even particularly true. “I really have no, have no reason to be here, I’m sorry.”

“Oh, it’s quite alright. The temple is a place of respite for everyone. That is what the Mother teaches us.”

Oh boy...

“I quite enjoyed your singing.”

“That’s, that’s nice of you to say. But really, I’ll–”

“You have a gift!” He had an authority in his voice that made it seem as though when he started talking, it was the gentlest thing and you couldn’t possibly have so cold a heart as to interrupt him. It was beginning to dawn on Marine that this priest was something of an odd character, and she had best extract herself from this situation with greater urgency. And yet, what she said was, “Thank you, I actually play at the Rusty Pontoon tomorrow night.”

“Ohhhh, wonderful. I’m very happy for you.” He sounded somehow mildly happy for her. “And the flames too? Very nice.”

“Oh that’s – I’m sorry, I can put that out.” She did so, leaving only the candle in the old man’s palm illuminating them.

“Woah!” the old man said. “Quite impressive. Unfortunately,”

Marine couldn’t find it in herself to walk out of the door.

“I won’t be able to attend your concert. See, there’s nothing forbidding me necessarily from going to the Rusty Pontoon, it’s just that the temple-going people might see me there and feel awful guilty about their drinking and gambling and whatnot.” He gave a wide warm smile about this, illuminated now somewhat eerily by the candlelight, as though he derived serene pleasure from the thought.

“Right, right. Temple-goers.” She was suddenly reminded of the man saying he had gone to the temple, which was what had made her come to the temple in the first place. This wasn’t even an hour ago but seemed ages in the past. “I can imagine that would be difficult, um. Managing morality. In a place like this.” What was she saying? She was a tiefling who had just pretended to be someone’s sister in bed. She needed to get out of this awful place.

“Oh, you don’t know the half of it, I’m afraid.” Marine felt she did in fact know the half of it. “What brings you to town, anyway? It’s not often this place sees a new face.”

“Oh, I’m just...” Passing through? That wasn’t exactly true. “I don’t know, really. I just washed up one day, I guess.” That felt painfully true, once it had left her lips.

The old man gave a curious smile.

“Perhaps you might like to tell me how that came to pass?”

Oh, fuck.



