

Just a flicker

A modded Stardew Fanfiction

Von Calyses

Kapitel 6: Small Talk

"Ehm,... are you doing this on purpose?" Elliott asked, firmly looking into his teacup, as Sam pulled a shirt out of the trunk and put it on. She looked at him puzzled.

"I mean, are you not embarrassed to be topless around a stranger? I know a lot of women, who are very shy while dressing and you on the other hand act as if I am not even here."

"Oh,...", Sam shrugged, "Sorry, if I put you in an awkward situation. It's just I'm not thirteen anymore and I have brothers. Besides, being in a bra is not topless and if I'm so stupid as to not take my shirt with me, it couldn't be helped anyway." She helped herself to a cup of tea and slumped on the only chair, her room provided, facing her guest.

"Are you not even a bit afraid or cautious, that I could do something to you? You said it yourself. I am a stranger to you, therefore I could be dangerous."

Sam looked at him.

He was sitting on her bed, snuggled in a blanket, sipping on his tea. Sam had given him an old tracksuit, she had snatched from her father, while his wet clothes were draped around the radiator for drying. With the cup clutched in his hands, a towel wrapped around his hair and the slight pink tint around his nose, he looked rather cute than dangerous.

"I'm new in town. How should I get to know people, if I'm too scared to talk to them?" She locked eyes with him:

"And even with the long hair and the slight flamboyant mannerism..."

"Hey, I have really dialed it back since I live here!" he interrupted grinning. "but go on."

"Even with those, I don't think you're a vampire."

He brought one hand up to his chest and sported a theatrically expression:

"Darling, I am offended by this. I am a noble werewolf." He stated as dry as he possibly could, while trying to keep the corners of his mouth down.

"Okay, Mr. Werewolf", Sam snickered, "it's not a full moon night out there, so there's no need to eat me, but if my life would be a horror movie, there would have been ample opportunity to make terrible things happen to me, already. We have been in the woods, alone... That would have been a perfect moment."

"You are mistaken. It is neither night, none of us was naked, nor had we have sex. These are basic requirements."

"If that's what makes the screenwriter happy, we could make up for that next time."

The moment the words left her mouth, Sam realized what she just said. Oh, shit... She clutched a hand in front of her mouth, eyes wide open.

Thinking first, then talking! Thinking first! She repeated mantra-like in her head.

Elliott's jaw dropped while Sam worked on a way to sink into the ground. For a few moments only the hard rain pattering on the window was audible.

"I...I...", Sam was mumbling, her face now red like a tomato and burning hot. "Sorry, I got carried away." She stared very hard into her teacup, not to accidentally lock eyes with him.

The silence carried on. The moment was almost unbearable for Sam as she was contemplating, if she could salvage the situation somehow.

Suddenly Elliott bellowed with laughter:

"I am flattered, but if that is an offer, I have to decline. At the moment I am neither looking for a fling, nor a relationship. Besides..." his expression grew serious. "... I do not think I am a good catch. At least not now. My life is too unstable." He thought about the phone call a few days back.

"I really must finish my book."

Sam was relieved. He could have really taken that worse.

"Now you know one of my flaws. Sometimes my mouth runs without checking with my head first. And I'm neither interested in a relationship nor something similar. I've plan to stay here to write my thesis and after that, I don't even know where my live takes me, but that reminds me, we almost forgot your notebook." Sam got up and shuffled over to her nightstand, glad to change the subject. From the drawer she produced the small book with the worn gilded pages and handed it over.

"Here. You must have it a long time. It's well worn, as far, as I can see. I'm glad I didn't take it with me today. It would be ruined otherwise."

"It was a gift from someone who means a lot to me. He gave it to me, when I left home to become an author. So I am glad to have it back. Not only for the scribbling inside", he sighed in relief.

"You have some pretty good lines in there."

"Oh,..." his voice sounded slightly less warm in an instant. "You read my stuff?"

"In hope to find some clues about your whereabouts, I flipped through the first few pages. When I didn't find anything I tried to stop reading, but I was drawn in. I'm sorry if I've overstepped my boundaries here."

"Thanks again for bringing me the book back, but yes, you have overstepped. I do not appreciate it, if someone is looking through my stuff - especially my writing - without my permission. I know you meant well and your reasoning was sound. So just keep it in mind for the future." There was a hint of grieve and hurt in his voice. Barely audible and easy to miss.

"Point taken, won't happen again." Sam responded, while watching him closely.

"Without arguing or defending your behavior?" Elliott was somehow baffled by the simple acknowledgment.

"I made a mistake... And I think I hurt you with that more than I can fathom. So, I must own up to it." she answered, now herself a bit puzzled why he would ask her such a question.

Elliott relaxed a bit. The bitterness that had crept through his face left almost as quickly as it had come. "That is a relief to hear... You said you liked my writing?" his curiosity for Sam's opinion had won over, so his tone changed almost immediately, as he asked her about his work.

"Yes, your style is pleasant to read. It flows easy and naturally. The way you describe your settings really let me see those places before my inner eye and the snippets of dialog, that I've seen, are witty or really emotional. So I'd really like to read your finished book, when you are done." she answered.

"Tell all these things to my editor. She has a different opinion." he said.

"Well, she's a professional and I've seen only snippets. If you'd like, I would read your draft. Maybe your editor is just a big oaf, but I have to see more of your work to form a sound opinion."

"Ah, it is a ruse to continue reading my stuff." he laughed.

"But a clever one if I end up with your permission." Sam answered smiling cocky.

"Nah", Elliott hold out one hand flat, palm down and tilted it slowly from side to side, "I would not say clever. Quite see-through I would rather say."

Sam laughed. "Okay, you caught me. I would really, really like to read some more. So why not helping you at the same time. I will give you my honest thoughts and opinions."

"I will think about it." Elliott responded. "But in the meanwhile: What do you enjoy to read? Mystery, science fiction or romance even?"

"Oh, I'm a sucker for a nice piece of humorous fantasy, preferably with a good amount of social and economical criticism weaved masterfully into an intriguing story with love- and hate-able characters, to get you start thinking. Ironic and sarcastic, but warmhearted at the center..."

"Let me stop you right there. I get the feeling, you have a very specific book or book series in mind."

"Yeah, and I still postpone to read the last book." she lowered her voice and looked away while saying the last part.

"Why, though?"

"My favorite author died a few years back and if I read the last book, than it's over. I can't bring myself to do it."

"Then it is time for you to find a new favorite author." Elliott grinned, his eyes glittering cheekily. "But you will not find me writing anything related to comedy soon." He added. "It is the highest form of literature if pulled of the right way and I know my limits in this capacity."

"Fair point. I've read my share of not so good books in this genre, I've to admit. But, does that mean I've got the permission to read your draft?" She smiled at him cheekily, too.

"I have brought that on myself, have I not?" he asked.

"Yes, you have. Do you have any suggestions on what we could do now. The rain doesn't seem to stop anytime soon and your clothes are still soaked." Sam asked.

"How about you tell me a bit more about you? You said, you are writing your thesis? Is it why you are here? Where do you work? And I would die to know why you wanted to go to the mines. Why I have found you in the mountain lake, you already explained, although I do not know if I should believe it." He took the chance to ask more questions.

"I finished my last semester at university and have only the thesis left to write. I want to write about the valley and what impacts the more recent historical and economical developments had on it's small communities and their inhabitants up until now. Therefore I decided to move here to do my research at the source. And to be able to do that, I have to work at least a half-time job. I got lucky that there was an opening at the museum. The curator and librarian there – Gunther – let me use the library in my

spare time. I'm also exploring the valley bit by bit to link my experiences with the things I read. I think that explains why I wanted to go to the mines. I was told there had been an accident that caused one of the residents to end up in a wheelchair. Afterwards the mines were abandoned and only explorers and adventurers go there now. So I wanted to take a look myself."

"So you hired a guide and where supposed to meet up with them today?"

"No, why should I? The mines are stabilized now, as far as I know."

"Alone? That is stupid and dangerous! Do you want to get hurt or worst?" Elliott proclaimed a tad louder than necessary. Sam was startled by his outburst.

"But, the mines are open to the public and I think the most dangerous parts are closed off." She tried to explain.

"There are things down there! I thought every new member of the town is told that. You should not go there alone." He became agitated even more.

"I can handle myself. Thank you very much." Sam got defensive.

Elliott bit his tongue. He had gotten loud again. He could see the flicker of anger in her face. Now he had done it again. The first person in ages don't looking at him funny, while they were talking and he ruined it.

"I am sorry", he said. "I did not mean that you are incapable. It is just... have you been to the mountain path behind the train station?"

"No, I haven't." Sam answered, still sour.

"It is lined with graves. All of so called adventurous who had gotten too self-assured. Too confident for their own good. So, please forgive me for losing my temper. The mayor should really close the mines or at least there should be signs warning about the dangers deep down. But nothing..."

Sam's features grew softer. She could clearly see that most of his anger stemmed from worry.

"Hey, don't worry. I'll be cautious and if it makes you feel better, I won't go alone. By the way I wouldn't call this little outburst losing your temper. I think you overreact slightly, that's all." Sam sported a reassuring smile.

Elliott sighed and took a deep breath: "No, when I get irate I get loud and I do not like it." It reminded him to much of his father, a truth he liked to ignore. "Especially if I get loud with a person the anger is not really directed at. I am – excuse my colorful language here – pissed at Lewis, the adventurers guild and whoever is responsible for making the mines look safer than they are." he scratched the back of his neck and downed the rest of his tea.

Sam motioned to the kettle and he acknowledged the unspoken question with a small nod. As she poured she spoke:

"As compensation for your little anger management problem." she winked. "you could answer me a question."

Elliott shrugged. "Sure, as long as you do not want me to do the mine diving with you. I hate the thought of meters and meters of suffocating stone above my head."

"No, it's about something else."

Elliott got suspicious. As far as he had figured Sam was nobody to beat around the bush. Now she hesitated quite a bit.

"Out with it or have you grown shy over the last few minutes?" he teased.

"So, there was this girl on the train. She really wanted to talk about you, when you left. And not necessarily in a good way. "

He raised an eyebrow. Sooner or later it had to come to this.

"So you want to know about what happened in the graveyard and the other strange stuff she probably told you about, I assume?"

"Yeah, I'd really like to hear your side of the story. Some of the villagers seem to be not on the best foot with you."

"Figures", he paused. "It is a rather embarrassing story and those spread quickly and stick for a long time. I would rather like for the memory to fade into the mists of time." He paused again. He pondered, if he really should tell her. After a brief second he decided to credit her trust.

"I told you my lecturer did not like my draft. It was not the first one to get shredded. I had been to a meeting and it was devastating. The following days my mind was enwrapped in doubt. The thought of failure barely let me sleep. I tried to figure out where I went wrong and how to fix it, but my head was a pure mess, ready to crumble away under the pressure I felt myself in.

The cold grasp of winter had already taken hold and sunk its claws deep into the valley. After a sleepless night, filled with fruitless attempts to write something new, I decided to get out. I left the cabin of mine to clear my head. It was still dark, with only a hint of sunrise when I left. The cold and crisp morning air and the glittering stillness of that particular morning hushed the valley and helped me to collect my thoughts. The sun came up, while my steps took me to the graveyard. I have been there many a times, when I needed peace."

He took a moment to continue.

"You have seen the graveyard, I assume?"

Sam nodded

"For a town so small it is quite big and has some impressive graves and headstones on it. Some old, crumbly statues, either. There is one grave in particular I like to visit. Have you been to the graveyard or just walked past?"

"I've taken a look, the day I made my rounds with the mayor."

"Have you seen the one with the weathered and worn down stone angel, looking like it is about to spread its wings and enwrap the poor soul laying beneath?"

"The one with all the floral motifs around the sides?"

"Yes, that one. It is my favorite among the old graves. I made a very dumb decision that day. I do not tell you this to justify my behavior, just to make it a bit more understandable. I was weary, worn out and deprived of sleep, the cold air made me sleepy and suddenly it looked like a good idea to sit down and rest a bit."

"On the grave?" Sam interjected

"Yes, like I said. Not the brightest or most glamorous idea I ever had. So, I sat on the stone plate and leaned against the angel. My thoughts trailed off and the next thing I remember is Haley laughing and filming me."

"You had fallen asleep on a grave, in the dead of winter?"

"I have to admit, yes. I know it can be dangerous, but luckily I was only out for maybe half an hour before being awakened by that woman. I came away with a cold anyway."

"What happened then? There's more to the story I assume?" Sam asked.

"Unfortunately, yes... I do not like to be filmed or photographed without my permission. She also made comments about me being a drunkard. So I told her to stop and delete the video. She ignored my pleas and just laughed.

In an attempt to stop her, I might have broken her phone. Now she is telling everybody, I am a lunatic and that I have attacked her."

He paused. The story clearly was hard for him to tell.

"Ah, that's why I've been warned about you. But you didn't?"

"Actually I kind of did." He swallowed the lump forming in his throat, "After she ignored my pleading to stop, I tried to snatch the phone from her hands to delete the recording myself. That is when it dropped.

I apologized and paid her for a new one, but the damage was done." He painfully remembered the large dent it had left in his finances and the looks the other villagers had shot him, after the word got round.

"Yeah, I can see that. The whole thing wasn't cool... from neither of you."

Elliott nodded silently.

"So now you know."

Silent fell upon them. Elliott watched Sam closely, while he was waiting for a response.

"I feel you. You put yourself into a really difficult situation there."

"Yeah, I feel like everybody is watching me now, whenever I am in town, so I avoid being around people much, since."

"Do you think it's really that bad? I mean I've been told that you are kinda weird, but nobody deemed you violent or outright dangerous. And you have at least a few friends or acquaintances here, don't you? Anyone who knows you better than stupid rumors?"

"There are a few. Leah, my artist friend from university, who lives on the edge of Cindersap Forest and Willy the old fisherman, but both are away from the valley right now.

I consider Harvey somewhere between friend and acquaintance. And Gunther of course. When I first came here I spent a lot of time in the museum. But do me a favor. Let us change the subject. I do not wanna talk about it anymore."

Sam nodded. It wasn't surprising after what she'd heard.

"How about you tell me about your time before you came to the valley?" She asked.

"Oh no. I think I should ask you something first, before answering another of your questions. What was it back on the train...? You said I am the nosy one?"

Sam snickered.

"You are right. Ask away then."

Elliott thought about his question.

"Okay you know about my most embarrassing moment now. So tell me yours."

"Fair. I've to think about it for a bit though. I've a few to select from."

Elliott raised an eyebrow.

"What have you done?"

"When I was in University, I lived in an old dorm with showers and kitchen outside on

the floor.”

“I know these. Fortunately I had the luxury to live in a more fancy apartment with a tiny bathroom and a small stove. ”

“Do you mean the apartments with the whole bathroom made out of a tub of icky plastic, that doubles as a shower?”

“Exactly.”

Both had to laugh.

“Anyway, I managed to lock myself out of my room, while showering. So I had to ask around for help with only a towel wrapped around me. Another time I somehow threw my bra out of the open window instead of my laundry basket and I had to fetch it as stealthy as I could manage. Safe to say: It didn't work. I was the laughing stock of my peers the next few days.

One of my teachers saw my shortened name and mistook me for a guy, so I became Mr. Vaughn at some point. Took a time for me to realize I was meant. Mr. Vaughn please. Is Mr. Vaughn in today?

And a thing I'm very proud of “, she winked, “happened when I tried to dye my hair for the first time. Do you know what happens when you hop into a pool of chlorinated water with fresh bleached hair?”

“No, it is nothing I ever tried.”

“The hair turns green.”

Elliott chuckled, picturing Sam with green hair.

“I told everybody that I dyed my hair green on purpose. It was so embarrassing.” Sam chuckled too.

“Should I go on?”

“No need. You are a little magnet for chaos, are you not?”

“You can say so. One learns to live with that, but it makes for hilarious stories.”

Now Elliott was laughing hard.

“You are hilarious, you know.”

Sam couldn't help, but laugh herself.

“You say, you dye your hair? It does not look like that.”

It's not at the moment. I was unsure how the townspeople might react and since I need the job here to fund my endeavor, I thought playing it safe was my best option. Now I wait for the colors to arrive."

"Lewis and Pierre can be a bit conservative at times. I give you that. I myself am not a huge fan of dyed hair either. I prefer natural colors."

"Easy for you to say with that gorgeous red mane. You see my hair. It's the most boring shade of muddy brownish blonde anyone could come up with. And growing it out it gets all thin and fuzzy. "

"The undercut suits you, though."

"Thanks"

For a moment they sat in silence, enjoying the warm tea, until Sam remembered something.

"You said you lived in a dorm, so you studied at university, too?"

"Yes, I was enrolled at ZCU."

"Oh, you, too? Let me guess. Linguistics?"

"No, not at all. I hold a masters degree in economics. Was not by choice, though." his thoughts trailed off.

"I never would have guessed, but that's brilliant. I think we can help each other out. Just tell me, what do you mean with 'not by choice'."

"My parents have a small business, so they made me, because: 'All comes down to economics, son.'. It was not that bad though. To stick with it and see it through was my own choice."

"And now you're doing something entirely different.", Sam laughed. "I thought, I am studying a subject with no use for my future."

"Well, what is the use of staying in a carrier you are unhappy with?"

"Exactly, but tell that to my parents."

Elliott rolled his eyes. He could feel that very well.

"Don't get me wrong. My parents are supportive and all, but they use every opportunity to nag, if they're not 100% on board with my choices."

I wish I could say the same, Elliott thought, but only said "Parents." and shrugged. "So you said, my studies may help you? How so?"

"You can put my findings about the economics of the valley into perspective. From a professional point of view, I mean. So I thought, "I can help you with your writing and you can help me with my research."

He thought about the proposition.

"I will consider it."

"Cool, let me give you my number then. It's fun to run into you by chance, but for us maybe working together, I've rather a way to contact you on purpose, with less water involved."

"My pleasure, my lady." Elliott quickly fetched his phone and typed in the number Sam gave him.

"By the way, I plan to visit Aurora Vineyard, an old, abandoned property in the woods southwest of Pelican Town this Friday. Would you like to accompany me there?" Sam asked while Elliott called here.

"An old, abandoned vineyard in the depths of the forest? I am intrigued. Count me in."

"I work until around 14.00. Where should we meet?"

"I will come and get you. I have not been to the museum for a while, so I can use the opportunity to talk to Gunther for a bit."

"Sounds good. What should we do now? The rain doesn't seem to stop soon?"

... SQUARE INFINITI! Rasmodius bellowed. He hold his breath moments before the ball of water engulfed him. He could feel the heat of the flame surging towards him, but the water kept him save.

The eyeless sockets gleamed dark red, as the beast shuck his massive skull, looking angrily for a new target. It tried to grab the warrior next to it, but he jumped in a swift motion on it and jabbed his sword in the place right between the sockets. The creature screamed and tried to shack it's opponent off. The warrior held on. The creature rose one of it's enormous hands and brought it down on it's own snout, but the warrior was gone, He had jump off right in time. The creature slammed the warriors sword even deeper through it's thick skin. It howled in agony before keeling over to it's side and drawing it's last breath. The warrior took his sword from the corps, turning to the next monster.

The other warrior was surrounded by spirits known to Rasmodius as wraiths. Dreadful spirits of swirling smoke, able to breath green fire balls. She held off four of them with well timed swings of her sword. The enchantments on these weapons are

impressive, the wizard thought.

He dissolved the water and sent it as waves of sharp shards of ice into a new oncoming line of enemies.

"WHAT HAPPENED HERE? WHY ARE THERE SO MANY CREATURES OF WRATH?", he screamed at the top of his lungs, as the monsters fell. One of the warriors landed beside him.

"Act now, talk later!", he said calm, but firmly and was gone again.

The wizard pondered his next move. They need something bigger or their efforts would prove futile in the end.

"By the light of a thousand suns! It's worse than at night time! ", the warrior fighting off the wraiths exclaimed.

"Just a little bit. Belinda is coming to!" the girl named Bliss was shouting.

LIGHT! That's it! Rasmodius knew what to do:

"Close your eyes, quick!", he shouted. Without waiting for a response he conjured his spell:

"CLARA LUX!"

The wave of light was merciless. In an instant the harsh brightness had swallowed all in it's way. Monsters dissolved screeching with wails of agony. In a blink of an eye it was over. Rasmodius slumped to his knees, breathing heavily. He had to put his all into that spell.

The warriors made short with the few remaining beasts and brought their attention back to Lady Belinda, who now was surly coming around. It took a few more minutes before she was able to sit without support not to mention talking in straight sentences again. One of the warriors hold up a waterskin.

"Thanks, Jio." She took a sip.

"Let's get back to base." she was referring to the wooden house on the other side of the moat. "I've to tell you something."

"We've a problem. I couldn't get hold of the mountain spirit. She tried to reach out to me, but something powerful was blocking her from me."

"Someone spoke through you, my lady." Bliss said. "If it wasn't the mountain spirit, who was it?"

"Oh? I don't know. What was it, the conjured spirit said? I can't remember something using me as vessel."

"It was a warning. Something about helping the magic. Helping the farmer to intervene something." Jo provided.

"The farmer? I'm not sure of that." Rasmodius mused. "They haven't shown any interest in the magic of the valley." Belinda thought about that.

"Please try to exactly repeat to me, what I said and how I said it."

Elliott turned around and looked back. He wasn't sure when he last had met someone acting so nonchalantly around him. It was kinda refreshing. Nonetheless there had been a few awkward situations, but it had been a fun afternoon and talking had been so easy. He had back his most precious belonging, too. No matter how much he had tried to fool himself into thinking, that losing it wasn't a big deal, his thoughts had lingered on his loss far too often. A smile formed on his face, as he started walking down the path to Pelican town. Sam had given him a few things to think about. He wasn't quite sure what to make of her, yet, but he could feel ideas and inspiration coming back to him as he made his way home. Could that be the spark he was missing? A trivial talk full of dumb ideas and nothingness, to free his mind from the shackles he had restricted himself with? The next days surely would tell.

Museum, she had said. Maybe he should leave his abode more often to pay Gunther a visit once in a while...