

Water Weight and Fruit Juice, Part One

A Story in Arvos

by Cerine Hero

Peaking high through the treetops in the thick forest were the tallest tiers of an ancient pyramid. It was built some thousands of years ago, long enough to be completely covered in moss and vines from its foundations to the intricate water channels at the very peak. A deep but mostly-dry moat surrounded it on all four sides, with canals running off in all four cardinal directions, at least until they were buried beneath piles of dirt pushed into them by wind, rain, and tree roots.

Zaress sat on a thin strip of sandy shore just outside of the tree line. Her feet were tickled by water from a lake that spanned near to the horizon, and her large, fringed ears were full of birdsongs. She wore a strip of black fabric wound tight about her chest and a matching cover about her hips, leaving her arms, legs, and stomach bare.

The morning was getting on, and she was hunting for lunch. Across her lap rest a slender tree branch that she had found in the undergrowth, and she was busy breaking the smaller stems off and smoothing it down with a heavy-bladed knife. Once the shaft was acceptable, she looked around the beach for one hand-sized rock and one boulder. She picked up a lake rock that she could just barely grip in one hand and then walked over to a large spur of water-smoothed stone jutting out of the beach. Gripping the rock in both hands, the muscular drake closed her eyes and then brought it down with all her might against the boulder. The stone split in two, and the boulder was left with a fist-sized chip in it. Shaking the tingling sensation out of her hands, Zaress gripped the half of a stone and smashed it again, breaking it into smaller pieces. Once it was merely broken shards of sharp limestone, she sifted through them all until she found a perfect piece. It was roughly triangular, and mostly flat. Gripping it tight, she ground the stone down on the boulder, flattening it some more and carving a sharper edge along two sides of it. Zaress took the now dagger-like stone back to her tree branch, split the end of the wood a few inches deep, and then wedged the stone spearhead into the gap. Fortunately, she thought ahead and brought some twine, which she tied around the end of the spear to help fasten the stone in place.

It had been quite a while since the drake had made or even held a spear. She never needed one living in the city, especially since the Veiled Way outlawed weapons among the citizenry. In fact, she hadn't needed one since she was among the clan, years and years ago. For a moment, the drake was lost in thought. Staring at the sharpened edge of the spearhead with her toes digging into the sand beneath her feet, she was back home, feeling the desert wind across her skin and scales. The warmth of the sun beat down on her flowing, white cloak. She inhaled and could smell the acrid smoke and the scent of burning-

The drake snorted, clearing the imaginary scent from her nose with a whiff of smoke. No sense dwelling on the past. She had a new clan now, as much as *some* members of it aggravated her. And they would be getting hungry. Clutching the spear, Zaress found a high point on the rocks along the beach to crouch and peer over the water. The water here was fairly deep, with the shore dropping off abruptly a few dozen feet under the gentle waves. Zaress had never had many opportunities for spear-fishing, but she found it wasn't very different from hunting back in the rocky, open lands where the earth drakes lived. In fact, fish were fairly dumb and easy to ambush, unlike sandstriders.

A shadow passed by underneath her vantage point. Her ears perked up. It was a big one. Standing tall upon the rock, the drake watched for the shadow to come back around once again. It swam by once more, probably looking for an easy snack to eat in the lighter water along the shore where smaller fish congregated. Unlucky for it. Zaress reared her spear back and hurled it with all her might straight down. It shot faster than the eye could see into the water and stuck through the shadow. The drake then leapt off the rock and into the water, splashing underneath the surface and disappearing.

The water bubbled and churned for several moments before going still. Then, back at the sandy

beach, Zaress burst above the surface, the tail of a three-hundred-pound fish clutched in her hands. Water streamed off her as she dragged the fish onto the beach. Her fangs glistened as she panted for breath, overjoyed with her catch. She was pretty sure it was a giant tema, and would make a fairly good meal. Too much for the three of them, but she could smoke some and take it home before returning the rest to the lake.

Zaress was still basking over her catch when a distant roar of rage shivered the treetops. She *knew* what that sound. She knew exactly what *color* of thing it was.

“Those impatient little- ergh!” she swore, reluctantly leaving the fish behind on the beach and charging headfirst into the woods.

Near the highest tiers of the pyramid, each bigger than a large dwelling in the city, was an open passageway, barely penetrated by the nearly-noon sunlight. Mito came running out of that passageway, panting hard. She had her quarterstaff in one paw and a leather pouch in the other, and fear in her eyes. There were a *lot* of stairs between her and the ground, but the staircase was narrow and a shallow-ish incline. The marten bit down on the pouch with her fangs and gripped her quarterstaff in both paws. She jumped into the air above the stairs and hooked her staff on the sloped tops of the walls on either side of the stairs. Metal scraped on stone, but she zoomed down towards the pyramid's lower, wider tiers.

Several tiers beneath her was a larger, wider entranceway into the pyramid, once sealed with stone doors carved with impassive faces. The doors now lay in a large courtyard at the front of the pyramid, covered in dirt and moss. From within the dark hall leading into the pyramid came a roaring monstrosity of wings and scales. Snorting flames that heralded its coming, the dragon galloped out into the light in the courtyard. Its brown scales were dull and caked in verdigris from its long slumber, but its eyes were well awake and glowing with intensity. Two pairs of wings unfolded ominously along its back and it spat curses in every direction before leaping into the air to find the interlopers who disturbed its sleep.

Mito hit the tier floor at the bottom of the stairs at speed and rolled end-over-end twice before finding her feet. Scampering, she tucked herself behind a statue of some unrecognizable creature as the dragon beat its outer wings to gain altitude. It started circling over the pyramid to get a better view, and the marten kept herself pressed against stone and down low as much as possible as she worked her way down to the forest floor.

Cerine was jogging as fast as her chubby thighs could take her away from the pyramid. She'd been near the bottom tiers, inspecting some of the stonework when she heard the dragon roar. It was a shock; she figured the old pyramid was completely uninhabited. She hardly expected it to be a dragon's lair! When the vixen reached the half-collapsed bridge leading into the woods around the pyramid, she was joined by a sprinting marten and together they bolted underneath the cover of the trees.

Mito grabbed Cerine by the satchel strap and tugged her against the trunk of a huge, old oak. They stopped, backs against the bole, and listened to the rhythmic flap of wings, the occasional draconic taunt, and the pounding of their own hearts. Cerine held out her left paw, focused her will on the silver ring on her finger, and conjured her sword from within the ring to her grasp. Mito looked at her weapon and furrowed her brow.

“Really?” she hissed.

Cerine looked at her, down at her sword, and then shrugged. “I don't know. You have your staff, there's a dragon... made sense in my head.” She mentally tapped on the ring again and the sword disappeared in a thin glimmer of light.

“You haven't even used that since you got fat.”

“Hush!” Cerine opened her hip satchel and dug around for any useful potions. Her fingers wrapped around the neck of two and she tugged them from their pouches inside the pocket. “Drink this.”

The marten didn't bother asking what it was. She popped the cork and drank it while Cerine did the same. A few moments later, Mito looked down at her fur to see that it was beginning to change. It stopped being a solid brown and started to shift and shimmer between brown and green, taking on the colors of the landscape around them. She looked at Cerine and for a moment thought she could see straight through the vixen, except for her clothes. The fox's pink and white fur, and her long hair, were a blotchy forest tone, the outline almost nauseating as it half-blended with the space around her.

"This doesn't work super well with clothes," Mito told her, holding up her arm and flexing her paw. Her leather bracer seemed to float on top of a hazy outline of forest green and earthy brown.

"Better than fire or teeth," Cerine reminded her, taking her paw and leading her further into the woods. The farther away from the pyramid, the better. But after several paces, the roles reversed, with the marten tugging the plump vixen along behind her. The copper dragon still wheeled overhead, roaring uselessly as it searched for whoever broke – or in this case, stumbled – into its lair.

It landed into the woods several dozen yards away from the girls, and they dropped down quickly into a ditch dug up by tree roots. Peeking their camouflaged heads over the root, they watched as the dragon angrily splintered a centuries-old oak with the broad side of its tail like it was firewood. Zaress's strength was a pale imitation of the terrible power hiding within the dragon. It thrashed about in anger for a while, kicking up clods of earth and shouting things in a language few of the lesser races could understand. Multiple slitted eyes along the sides of its face, each separated by a thick ridge of hard scales, searched the forest before the dragon stormed off, taking wing once again.

Mito and Cerine hid in the hollow beneath the tree for several minutes, clutching one another by the arm. They continued hiding even after the wing beats vanished from the air overhead. They were still half-hidden when tan-skinned hands grasped them by their clothes and hauled them easily out of the hollow. Zaress, her hair still damp with lake water and wearing black smallclothes that clung to her muscular figure, glared at them both.

"Why did you two go into the pyramid without me?" she asked, her green eyes narrowing dangerously.

Cerine wriggled in her grip, feeling her chubby belly hang out of her top. "Wh- how were we supposed to know a *dragon* was hiding in it?"

"Not the point. There could've been anything taking residence inside there. Those places are ancient and probably full of twisted magic." She huffed, and smoke shot out of her nostrils. "I'm upset. You could've been eaten."

"Uhm," Mito ventured, "Cerine's potion did a pretty good job of hiding us from the dragon, though. So I think she deserves a little credit."

"That's right," Cerine added. "I finally got a chance to test it."

Zaress rolled her eyes and looked at them both. "You know that *I* can see you plain as day, right? You look like bright silhouettes to me. Just because you're the same color as the woods doesn't mean you're not warm. How do you think I found you?"

The vixen's eyes shrank. "Ah... oh. Shit. The dragon could've seen us, couldn't it?"

"*Mhmm*." Zaress put them both down and fixed Cerine's shirt over her belly. "Whatever. It flew off back to the pyramid and went inside. The dragon won't be fully awake for a few days. It was probably already exhausted after just that much exercise. As long as we head further away along the lakeshore, we'll be fine. Now excuse me."

The drake turned and began walking off back into the woods, her muscular tail snapping in frustration behind her. Cerine and Mito shared a glance between each other, confused.

"Zare, where are going?" the fox asked.

"To get my fish."

An hour of walking later, and they felt like they had put enough distance between them and the pyramid to feel safe. If the dragon decided it really did want to get out and find them, Zaress's sharp

hearing would detect it long before it came their way. Cerine was grumpy that she didn't have a chance to study the ruins any more closely, but Mito bobbed happily at her side as they traveled along the shore. They were slowly winding their way back northeast towards the city.

Mito looked at her arms, still shimmering with green and brown colors. "Um, how long does this potion last?"

"This one's a little different," Cerine told her. She took a waterskin out of her satchel and wet her paw. As she rubbed her fingers together, the odd coloration began to melt away, revealing the naturally black fur on her paw. "The liquid held a bunch of particulate that reflects light really well, and the suspension I used helped it get into our fur and skin really quickly. After a few minutes, the particles get on the outside of our fur, so they can just be washed off." Cerine looked ahead at the drake walking in front of them. She was carrying a tremendous giant tema across her powerful shoulders, easily equal in weight to Cerine and Mito combined. "Zaress? Think we could stop and camp for a bit somewhere so we can wash up? Maybe there's someplace along the lake we could find."

"Fine by me," the strong drake replied, hefting her catch higher onto her shoulders. "Need to cook this soon anyways."

After a bit more walking, they found a river running through the woods before it emptied into the lake. Traveling upstream a bit, they found a secluded pool at the base of a curved cliff, with a waterfall plunging about ten feet into the otherwise placid pool in a raw stone basin. There was a terrace of rock on one side with an overhang long since carved into the stone by water ages ago they could settle into and cook lunch while hidden from view. Zaress made a makeshift grilling rack and got started on preparing the fish while Cerine and Mito stripped down to jump into the watering hole.

Mito watched as the vixen stripped her clothes off. The chubby vixen, from her ears to the end of her long tail, looked stone-gray with the bare rock all around. The marten couldn't stifle a giggle. "Okay, *now* it works great. All I can see are nips and nose!"

Cerine blushed underneath the camouflage and wrapped one arm around her heavier bust. "I-it doesn't work with skin! Unfortunately. Sorry, Zare."

"Don't care."

"Alright, then." Cerine wriggled her very visible nose on the end of her muzzle. Next to her, Mito stripped off her leather gear and then her clothes, too, dropping them beside the vixen's. She notably pulled a small pouch out of the inside of her jacket and tossed it down with the rest. Now that the fox had time to pay attention, Cerine noticed that the blue streak in the marten's hair was still visible. She made a mental note that the potion likely wouldn't work perfectly on anyone with tattoos or dyed fur.

Grinning, Mito got a running start and then leaped into the water, holding her knees to her breasts. There was a modest fountain of water that burst upwards from where she struck, and then the nude marten surfaced again. "Aha, it's *cold*!" she squeaked, tucking her arms around herself. The pool was only about five feet deep at its center, so Mito could stand in it without needing to tread water – though she had to stay on top of her toes sometimes.

As the water ran through the marten's hair and fur, the light-shifting particles began to be washed away. An oily, reflective smear spread out from her in the water before fading away, and the translucent marten started to be visible once again. Brown fur began to reassert its true color, and Mito's pale-furred face appeared beneath a fringe of wet, dark brown hair.

"That was so weird," she said, holding her wet paws above the surface and wiggling her fingers.

Cerine, noting Mito's comment that the water was cold, sat down on the edge of the pool and slipped her legs in before hopping in fully. It must have run down from the highlands in the north, because it was frigid. Cerine's whole body shivered as the water penetrated straight through her fur to chill her skin. Once she was better acclimated, she dunked her head underneath the surface to wash out the potion's effect. She, too, left a blob of reflective light around herself in the clear water that eventually dissolved as her pink and white fur reappeared. It washed over her fuller breasts and rounder

belly while her long tail free-floated in the water behind her. The vixen's feet were happy to be in the water for a bit. It had been several months and she still hadn't stymied her weight gain. At this point it was pretty unequivocal that she was a rotund alchemist. She'd completely changed wardrobes to adapt to her new figure, but she didn't mind it too much. Zaress was still cuddly in her own way, whenever the drake went seeking some affection. In her mind, Cerine likened the drake's softer moods with oases in the desert: rare, but desperately needed. She was even getting intrigued glances from Gray around the guildhouse, too.

As if she was reading the fox's mind, Mito paddled over to the vixen and squeezed her tummy. Cerine blushed and looked down at the marten's mismatched eyes before hugging her close. They bobbed together in the water, giggling through wet hair. On the shelf of dry rock, Zaress kept an eye on them, her face a stoic mask while she prepared the fish.

"You're feeling bigger," Mito teased, pushing her hair back behind her ears with one paw while the other pinched some fat above Cerine's rump. "You're just going for it, huh?"

"Not on purpose," the fox lied. Technically, her now long-standing feud with Sarelina was entirely her fault, so it *was* on purpose.

"Then when are you going to start working it off?" Mito asked, sliding a paw up to cup the fox's breast. She wasn't rebuffed.

"I'd like to think I'm doing that right now," Cerine told her. "The further I am from Sarelina's cooking, the better. And we're getting plenty of exercise out here." She raised one of her arms up and flexed the pudgy flesh with a grin. "I should be toned up some when we get home."

"Not a chance," Zaress interjected. She slammed two flanks of tema down on the makeshift grill rack. "You're about to eat twenty pounds of fish."

Cerine's ears flattened down to her wet hair and she mumbled, "Not the worst thing, I guess..."

After a couple minutes, the smell of grilling fish got too overpowering for Cerine and Mito to stay in the water. Their bellies grumbled hungrily as they climbed out and sat far away from Zaress's grill and campfire while the water was still draining from their fur. It took Cerine's tail an especially long time. Once they were less soaked with cold water, they sat near the fire and dried their coats. They'd smell of wood-grilled fish for days, but it was worth it.

"Oh, yeah, hey," Mito said, suddenly remembering as she dug through her clothes. "I actually managed to snatch something from the dragon's hoard. I forgot about that."

"You did what?!" Cerine gasped, sitting with her legs tucked in and her tail across her lap while she covered her breasts with her forearms. She glanced towards Zaress. "Are we going to be alright?"

The drake shrugged. "Did it see you take it?"

Mito shook her head. "No. It was in a different chamber below where I was. When I heard it roar, I just snatched the closest thing and ran." She held up the little pouch she'd stolen from the pyramid. "Plus, there was a lot of stuff. I don't think it's going to notice one thing missing from the pile."

"And that's *all* you took?" Cerine pressed.

The marten huffed. "Yes, this is all. Are you going to lecture me on stealing from a *dragon*? I bet it didn't even know what was inside here." Under her breath, she added, "Stole from an arbitrator and no one said anything..."

"All of a dragon's wealth is stolen," Zaress agreed. "A long time ago, they used drakes to raid for plunder. But since the drake clans threw them down, the dragons just sit on their hollow fortunes. Might as well reclaim them."

"Thank you! For once." Mito blew a kiss towards the drake, who snorted and turned back to her cooking. The marten shrugged and scooted herself over closer to Cerine on the other side of the fire. The fox's fur was warm and inviting, and Mito used her thick tail as a makeshift table, setting the pouch on the fluff. "Okay, let's see what we've got."

Mito opened the pouch and stuck her fingers inside. Cerine was somehow still consistently

shocked by how cavalier the marten could be. For her, consequences were temporary. Mito fished a small collection of unfamiliar coins from the pouch and handed them to Cerine for inspection. She recognized none of the markings nor could she read the engravings. They were probably coins from a long-lost kingdom, and possibly worth something to a collector.

“Ooh, what's this?”

Cerine put the coins down and looked. Mito was holding a blue stone between her fingers, crystal clear, but the facets seemed random and rough. Overall, it had a teardrop shape, like a droplet of water trapped in perfect ice. Cerine blinked twice and leaned in to look at it. “It's gorgeous. That's not a sapphire, though. I'm not sure what it is.”

Mito held it up to the fox's face and smiled. “It's the same color as your eyes. Zaress, you had some string on you, right?” A few seconds later, a small ball of string landed in the marten's outstretched paws. “Thank you!”

Cerine watched as the marten wrapped the string around the gemstone in a quick harness and then fashioned a loop to hang it on, making a quick pendant. Mito slipped the string over the fox's neck and then took the liberty of brushing her hair out from underneath it, running her fingers along the fox's neck and shoulders with a soft chirp. The crystal rest on top of the fox's breast, and Cerine gently touched it. On the other side of the campfire, Zaress cracked a smile and then quickly forced her muzzle back into a scowl.

“Thank you,” Cerine whispered. She touched the marten's face and lifted her chin up for a kiss. Mito's tail flicked outward and went bushy as they kissed, and she chirped louder and more eagerly. Cerine broke the kiss and glanced across the fire towards Zaress. “I'm saving some for the cook, too.”

Zaress winked at her.

“You two need to be friendlier,” Cerine added, turning back to Mito and snaking her arms around the naked marten's body. “I feel bad being the one in the middle all the time.”

“I'm trying.”

“You are not.”

“Okay, fine.” Mito brushed her hair back and looked at Zaress. The drake stared back, cocking an eyebrow quizzically. “I'm not sure how.”

“Start by not being annoying,” Zaress told her.

“Cerine, it's not working.”

The fox sighed and rolled her eyes in mock exasperation. “I'm not your mother. Honestly, I think I'll just brew a love potion and fix you two *that* way.”

“Those are real?” Mito asked, her eyes going wide.

“Yes, but she doesn't make things like that,” Zaress answered.

Cerine sighed. “My poor joke.”

“Sorry,” Mito said, laughing. She picked up the pouch from Cerine's tail and ran her paw through the thick fur. “Hey, wow, you're already dry.”

Cerine touched her tail as well. It was true, and she was shocked. Normally her tail took ages to dry, given how large it was, but it was done dry. All of her fur was, in fact, even though Mito was still a little damp to the touch. “That's odd,” she mused, but she could only shrug.

With the fox dry and the marten at least dry enough, Mito and Cerine climbed back into at least some of their clothes and sat near to the fire as Zaress provided them each with more fish than they dared to expect. The taste was mild, because all they had for seasoning here in the wild was some salt from Cerine's alchemy bag, but it was pleasant none the less. They debated better cooking methods while they ate, and Zaress provided them with plenty for seconds and thirds. Once the fox and marten were flattened onto their backs, tummies bulging with fish, the drake took the rest of her catch and left it where it could be returned to nature.

The sun was low in the sky as the drake was coming back to the hollow by the pool, so they decided to remain there for the night. Zaress shrugged off her wraps and joined them in the pool,

alternating piggyback rides for them both. When she held Cerine, she snuck in her kiss and toyed with the pendant on her chest.

"It does match your eyes," she said, her voice low. Grinning, she trailed her hand down to the vixen's breast and ran her thumb over the nipple. Cerine blushed sheepishly as the drake teased her, but a shadow flicked across Zaress's face as she cupped her fingers under the breast and lifted. "You feel... big. Bigger than I remember."

"Wow, really?"

Zaress opened her mouth to explain, but she was cut off by a voice above them. "Behold, mortals!" She and Cerine both looked up to see Mito standing atop the cliff by the head of the waterfall.

"Did she just call us-"

"She did."

"Amazing."

The marten cannonballed into the water from above, this time sending a far more respectable plume of water into the air. She kicked off from the bottom, surfaced, and grinned at the dripping fox and drake.

With the stray thought about Cerine's size forgotten, the three again dried by the fire and then picked a dry space in the shelter to curl up for the night. Cerine took a clay pot from her satchel and poured it out evenly across the space, and the leather-brown liquid inside spread across the flat stone like syrup. A few moments later, the substance rose as it set and became thick and soft like padding. She didn't have a proper name for it yet, since "oil of makeshift bedding" wasn't terribly clever.

The fox laid down, sandwiched with Mito on one side and Zaress on the other so they could keep warm. At least they weren't grumbling about sharing a bed space. Cerine tucked her head underneath the drake's chin and felt Mito's cheek snuggle into her cleavage. A firm claw gripped her belly. She sighed mentally; this is why she wanted those two to be at least a little closer, so she didn't have to play the plump buffer between them. But whatever, she was warm, at least.

The sun set and the forest went dark – all save for the embers in their cooking fire, and a soft glow from the pendant around Cerine's neck. The ice-like stone shimmered as if it was wet, and the fox's figure began to fill out slightly more. Her skin tightened slightly around her belly and hips as she gained even more plump curves, and her breasts perked as they grew. Mito mumbled in her sleep and her muzzle sank down deeper between Cerine's fuller bust. Zaress's palm overflowed with even more stomach.

And all the while, pools of water they'd left on the flat stone of the terrace in the shelter evaporated swiftly.

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