

Barbecue Chicken

By C. Jade Wyton

Olivia has spent the day obediently trailing after Veruca, one of the adults in her adventuring party, and soon learns the reason; the satyr wants to teach her how to cook. And while Olivia doesn't want to do it, she can't think of a way to get out of it.

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Olivia trailed after her satyr guardian in silence; barely looking up from her feet as she struggled to keep pace with the long-legged adult.

She still had trouble looking Veruca in the eyes.... Even after Volante had told her she didn't need to be scared of the woman, Olivia still couldn't bring herself to go against anything the sharp-eyed bard told her.

Actually, perhaps she was even a little bit *more* scared of Veruca, after that conversation. Because even though she and Volante'd had it in private, Veruca had seemed to know about it and had made a point to lean over Olivia at dinner that night to quietly remind the girl of her authority while retrieving the salt.

Well... she hadn't actually *said* anything. But Olivia was *sure* that was what she meant by that look: Veruca somehow *knew* that she'd called her a twinkled-toed nanny, and was silently warning her off ever doing it again.

So, now, Olivia couldn't bear to look any higher on Veruca than the lacy white trim of her otherwise dark dress.

It made it hard to follow her through the street, as with every couple of steps the satyr *clacked!* out against the pavement, her hooves would move forward too quickly for Olivia to keep watch of and the girl would have to put on a burst of speed to catch up.

She thought they must have looked like a very unusual pair.

Veruca was always so well-dressed, with her striking piebald patterns and beautiful curved horns. Her polished cloven hooves kissing the ground with a ballerina-like grace that made her confident strides even more authoritative.

And then here *Olivia* was; grass seeds stuck all through her dark raggedy fur, with toe-claws too long to retract enough to stop them *clicking* and *scraping* on the ground with each step. Worse, she was still in the shirt she'd ripped while trying to escape over the inn's back fence just earlier that morning.

She wanted to complain. To open her mouth and ask *where* Veruca was going and *why* she'd told Olivia she had to come.

But she didn't dare.

The last thing she wanted was for Veruca to be mad at her! The woman was already so scary, when she spoke calmly; Olivia couldn't even *imagine* how terrifying she'd be if she raised her voice!

Olivia didn't want to think about that, and how scary it would....

Olivia blinked, feeling her pace slow as she spied something by her side. She *swore* they'd passed by that store already....

Yes! They *had!* She knew they had, because she'd had to resist the urge to

steal from their street-front display!

Olivia's brow furrowed, and she glanced back to Veruca— And quickly rushed forward to catch up before she was left behind!

She fell back into place behind the satyr and tried to figure out what was going on.

Veruca knew where she was going.... Didn't she? Or maybe she'd taken a wrong turn somewhere?

Should... should Olivia maybe... *say* something...?

Maybe....

Yes? Yes.

She should.

She knew she should.

But it was such a scary idea.... But... she had to.

So she took a deep breath, and....

'V-Veruca?' she managed, quietly. Though the satyr didn't hear her, so she had to swallow down her fear and raise her voice. 'Um, Veruca?'

Veruca stopped short and turned to Olivia, eyeing her in a cool, attentive silence.

All of Olivia's fur rose, and she had to try and will it back down. 'Um....'

'Yes?'

'I... think... we passed by here already,' Olivia pointed out. And then, when an impish grin found its way to Veruca's lips, Olivia felt her fur puff back out again. 'Are you leading me in *circles*?'

'Hah!' Veruca gave a laugh. 'You are finally noticing! I was wondering how long it would take.'

'*Why?*' Olivia could *hear* the offended tone that squeaked out of her as her voice broke, and she stomped her foot (something she rarely directed at Veruca) and threw down her hands against her sides. 'I could have been spending time with Daimon! We both had nothing to *do* today and we were gonna hang out!'

'This is being more important,' Veruca said, playfully.

Olivia dared to stomp her foot again, and she stopped trying to flatten her fur down; letting it up as tall and puffed out as it wanted to stand.

Veruca just looked humoured, and turned away again. 'I was seeing opportunity to teach important lesson! You are being observant and not following blindly with no questions, which is good,' she said, starting down the street.

'Coming along, now.'

'Why *should* I?' Olivia challenged— Though, she did it as she trailed after Veruca. 'How do I know you're not gonna lead me around for nothing again?'

'You are not knowing,' Veruca said, casting a sly grin to the girl. Then she waved a hand. 'No, no. I am joking. We are going shopping. You are cooking dinner.'

'What?!' Olivia somehow managed to spike out her fur *even more* than before. 'But I *can't* cook!'

'Yes you can,' Veruca said, simply. 'You are being smart child. You are learning many spells! Cooking is just like casting spell, but components are being edible.'

Olivia frowned, deeply, trying to express her displeasure. 'I don't know how to

cook,' she repeated firmly.

'Then I am going to be teaching you,' Veruca retorted, simply.

Olivia thought that sounded like a *terrible* idea, but the way Veruca said it made it clear it wasn't something she was going to be able to argue about; so instead she kept after the satyr as they weaved through the crowded streets towards the market.

Though, as she caught up, she found herself blurting; 'What's the point of it?'

'The point of what?'

'Cooking.'

'You are cooking so you are having food,' Veruca said; looking very unimpressed by Olivia's question.

'But.... But Daimon can already cook!' Olivia pointed out. '*He* can just make me food.'

'You are wanting to be relying on Daimon forever?' Veruca asked, stopping again so she could turn to Olivia and raise a brow. 'You are wanting to be giving Daimon control of what you eat forever? *Daimon?*'

Olivia winced.

*Veruca had a point....*

A soft hand found its way to Olivia's shoulder and she glanced up at the woman who looked down at her; her usually-sharp eyes softening at the edges.

'You are being very smart girl,' Veruca said, gently. 'I am not wanting to see you being unable to look after self. I want to see you being smart and grown. With all opportunities. I am not wanting to see you miss out. Understand?'

Slowly, Olivia nodded. 'I think so.'

'And, if you are doing good job, maybe I can be convincing Farren to be letting you have allowance.'

'I already get an allowance,' Olivia said. 'To look after Meth with.'

'Yes. But that is *all* allowance is going to,' Veruca pointed out. 'You are not getting enough to spend on self. You are deserving to enjoy self, too. Especially when you are making good priorities and being responsible and you are spending money on what it is for.'

'Like Meth.'

'Yes. You are spending your money on Meth,' Veruca chuckled, giving a wide grin.

It took a moment for Olivia to make the connection. Though, when she did, her grin matched the satyr's.

Veruca seemed to like that Olivia smiled at her (it wasn't a common occurrence, after all) and tussled her hair playfully. 'You are being little ruffian!' she said, before turning back around and continuing. 'What are you wanting to cook?'

'I dunno,' the girl shrugged. 'What do you want me to make?'

'There is being no point in teaching you how to be cooking food that *I* am liking,' Veruca said simply. 'The point is being that *you* will be being able to looking after self when on own. What are you feeling like for dinner?'

'Oh, uh....'

It wasn't a question Olivia got asked, often; usually whoever was cooking would just make what they wanted to make and everyone else would have to put

up with it.... The only time that Olivia had really ever been asked what she wanted was when they went to eat at the taverns— And, usually, Sheshalan would remind her to go for the healthy options.

‘Does it have to be a *meal* meal?’ Olivia asked. ‘Or can it be something like fudge?’

‘Meal,’ Veruca answered. ‘But we can be learning fudge next time, if you are wanting.’

‘Hm. That makes it harder...’ Olivia admitted. ‘Uh... hm. I like chicken! Can we make chicken?’

‘Yes,’ said Veruca. ‘What kind?’

‘Grilled...? Maybe with barbecue sauce?’

‘Yes. That is being good choice for beginner cooking,’ Veruca praised. ‘And what side dish are you wanting?’

‘Side... dish?’

‘Yes. To fill in meal. Chicken on own is not being full meal.’

‘Oh, uh... something with... cheese? Oh. Maybe avocado? Or tomato?’

‘A salad?’

‘Yeah, some kind of salad,’ Olivia agreed.

‘I thought you are not liking salad?’

‘Daimon likes salad,’ Olivia said, feeling her cheek puff up in a blush.

‘Daimon would like chicken with garlic sauce,’ Veruca pointed out. ‘He is not being picky eater.’

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Buying the ingredients had been the easy part.

Putting them together —cutting the salad, mixing the sauce, and getting all of the little pieces of chicken onto the wooden skewers— was much more tiring.

Olivia tried to get out of it at *least* three times. But every time, Veruca made her keep going.

The satyr had been watching her far too closely (“for safety while you have knife,” she’d been assured) for her to sneak away.

And so now, just a few hours out from town, Olivia found herself using a metal-wire grill to cook chicken over the party’s campfire.

‘Smells good, spitfire!’ Bertram complimented; earning a very rude poke-out of Olivia’s tongue.

‘Do not be looking at him!’ Veruca scolded. ‘Be looking at where your hands are! Do not be burning self.’

‘It’s *fine*,’ Olivia whined, feeling herself blush as she moved her gaze from Bertram to Veruca— And then to the floor when she saw her terrifying Veruca’s stare was.

‘Olivia— What did I *just* telling you?’ Veruca scolded. ‘Looking at *hands*! Hands are not being feet! You are not doing hand-stands! Eyes looking *up*!’

Olivia obediently looked to her hands.

‘Good,’ Veruca’s tone turned to a praising one, and she pet Olivia’s ears playfully. ‘Now. Being telling me; how are you knowing when chicken is cooked?’

‘Um...’ Olivia thought about it for a moment... then lifted one of the skewers

and made to take a bite out of it.

'Absolutely not!' Veruca exclaimed, grabbing Olivia by the wrist and yanking the food away before she could taste it. *'Never putting raw food in mouth!'*

'But I was just gonna see if it was raw—'

'Not by putting in mouth!' Veruca scolded. *'You are going to be giving self infection! You are being smarter than that! That is Daimon thing to do!'*

'What's a me thing to do?' Daimon called from where he sat under a nearby tree.

'Eating raw meat.'

'Oh, yeah. Sheshalan says I have to stop doing that,' Daimon commented; pushing himself to his feet and taking the skewer from Olivia.... And immediately biting down into it.

'Daimon!' Veruca snapped, trying to knock the chicken from his hands but failing as he stood up to his full height and took another bite. *'You are literally just saying Sheshalan was telling you not to eat raw meat!'*

'Aw.... Yeah. Right,' Daimon said. *'It's okay though; it's cooked.'*

'You vere not knowing that before!' Veruca scolded. Then, she shooed the boy away and turned back to Olivia. *'Augh! Shoo! Getting out of vay, now! Go! Olivia— Do not be doing Daimon thing. Ve are going to be checking chicken properly!'*

'But Daimon said it's cooked—'

'Ve are learning how to check chicken properly,' Veruca interrupted. *'Be getting knife, and putting piece of chicken on plate.'*

Olivia, though she didn't want to, did as she was told.

'Cutting chicken.'

Olivia cut into the chicken, watching as the steam and delicious-smelling juices escaped from the flesh.

'Is juices running clear?' Veruca asked.

'Yes, Veruca.'

'No red?'

'No.'

'No pink?'

'No.'

'What colour is inside of chicken?'

'Um...' Olivia peered at the chicken. *'White... ish. Grey... ish. White-ish grey? Or. Kinda grey-ish white. Mostly white.'*

'It is done,' Veruca told her. *'Taking off fire, now.'*

'Okay,' Olivia did as she was told; moving the chicken from the campfire grill to the plate. Then, she muttered under her breath. *'Daimon said that already, but whatever....'*

'I am not caring about vhat Daimon says,' Veruca said flatly; causing Olivia to flinch. *'I vill not let smart girl like you be acting like barbarian— No offence, Daimon.'*

'None taken,' Daimon purred from where he lingered nearby. *'Do you want me to get the others?'*

'Yes. Thank you, Daimon,' Vercua said. *'And be telling them they must be thanking Olivia properly, or they vill not be eating dinner.... Tonight, or for*

entire next week!’

—END—

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