

Big Sister

By C. Jade Wyton

An early-morning fight with Sheshalan upsets Olivia into running away; but she is followed by another member of her party, Volante, who calmly talks her down and listens to her woes.

Contains descriptions of fighting, and mentions of abandonment and abuse.

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It was one of those days that Olivia did *not* want to get out of bed, even though it was pushing close to ten.

She'd spent almost all night out, much to Sheshlan's chagrin the next morning when she discovered the Olivia-shaped lump in their shared room was made out of pillows.

That old goat had thought she was *sooooo* observant, and she'd thought that she'd won their argument and that Olivia had been in bed until about four in the morning, when she'd gotten up to use the bathroom and had to go chase the tabaxi down!

Well, the joke was on her, wasn't it?

Well. Actually. No. The joke was on *Bertram*.

Olivia couldn't help but grin as she recalled that she'd thrown his boots onto the roof of the tavern on the other side of town.

He deserved it.

It had been about... what? A month? Since they'd picked up stupid annoying Blueballs from his stupid annoying town. And Olivia *still* didn't like the way Farren looked at him.

Even more, she didn't like the way that *Bertram* looked *back*!

It made her skin prickle and her fur stand on end when she saw it.

Bertram was trying to *steal* Farren from her! That stupid cowboy was attempting to *steal* the only person in the whole entire world that Olivia could still *trust*!

Well, she wasn't going to let that happen—

'Liv, get *up*!' Volante's voice called, for about the third time that morning. 'Or we'll leave you behind!'

Olivia gave a long, upset note of noise in response and slammed a hand into her bed in protest. 'Don't *say* that!' she growled. 'Farren would *never* leave me behind! Ever!'

Sheshalan gave a snort, and Olivia heard her *clomp*! to the side of the bed before she yanked the girl's blankets away. 'Sometimes I wish he would, with the way you behave!'

'That's not funny, Sheshalan!' Olivia hissed, finally looking up. 'Take it *back*!'

'No,' Sheshalan huffed. She took Olivia by her arm, then, and yanked her out of bed. 'Where did you put Bertram's boots?'

Olivia's ears pressed down as Sheshalan stomped a hoof, and she cast a furious glare down at the goatling. 'Take it back!'

Sheshalan's hoof stomped again and she let out a snort. 'Where are Bertram's boots?'

'Take! It! *Back!*' the last word broke in Olivia's mouth, and she felt tears starting to come to her eyes as her chest heaved in a bigger breath than she meant to take.

Of course Sheshalan didn't want to take it back; she probably *really actually meant* it! She'd been trying to get rid of her since Farren had first picked her up—trying to pawn her off to whatever orphanage or foster home would take her—and of course that hadn't magically changed just because she'd helped them take down *one guy* and not chased off *two* new members to their party! She was *stupid* to believe Farren when he'd said Sheshalan *cared* about her or *loved* her!

She was just like everybody else— She *hated* her and was ready to throw her aside as soon as she could!

*Just like Taarhir.*

The breath escaped Olivia in a furious, hard *huff!* and she stomped her foot to try and stave off the trembling that wanted to find its way to her jaw as she set it and cried, '*Take it back!*'

Sheshlan responded by stomping her own hoof again and setting her own jaw.

'Sheshalan, just tell her you didn't mean it!' Volante grumbled.

'Absolutely not,' Sheshalan threw over her shoulder, not breaking eye contact with the young tabaxi who stared her down. 'I'm not letting her think she can get out of trouble with me by throwing a tantrum, like she does with Farren. She's going to tell me where Bertram's boots are or she's going to face the consequences.'

'You're *upsetting* her!'

'Good!' Sheshalan snapped. 'Maybe being upset will mean she'll finally *learn* something! Olivia! *Where are Bertram's boots?!*'

'Sheshalan I don't think that's—'

'Take it back!'

'No. Where are his boots?!'

'Take. It. Back!'

'Where. Are. His. Boots?!'

'*Sheshalan, just—*'

'TAKE IT BACK!'

'WHERE ARE HIS BOOTS?!'

'*TAKE IT BACK!*' the shriek sounded more like a shrill squeal of a machine hitting the breaks than it did words as Olivia repeatedly slammed her clenched fists into her sides. '*TAKE IT BACK, TAKE IT BACK, TAKE IT BACK!*'

'NO! I MEANT EVERY WORD OF IT!' Sheshalan screeched back. 'I'M TIRED OF YOUR TANTRUMS AND I WISH FARREN HAD NEVER MADE US TAKE YOU IN!'

The tears finally escaped Olivia's eyes as Sheshalan's words stabbed into her heart and she took in a long, gasping, hyperventilating breath as the goatling slammed a hand over her own mouth and looked horrified.

'Olivia, I didn't mean—' Sheshalan was cut off by the wail of Olivia's exhale,

and she stumbled back as the girl rushed past her and out the inn-room door.  
'Olivia, no— Please, come back, I didn't— I didn't mean it!'

'Fuck, Sheshalan!' Volante growled as she ran out after Olivia. 'Why would you *say* that?! Liv! Liv, wait!'

Olivia didn't wait.

She didn't stop. Not even when Bertram tried to catch her at the inn's front door. She just went straight through him; using the momentum she'd gained from running down the stairs to shove him down into the street.

And when she glanced back she saw Volante leaping over him.

'LEAVE ME ALONE!' Olivia shouted out her sob as she tried to outrun the tiefling. She turned a corner, narrowly dodging an elderly couple, and pushed herself to move even faster as she heard Volante gaining on her.

'LIV!'

Olivia kept running as the woman pursued.

The distance between them began to close, and she swore that she felt Volante's fingers brush her fur as she tried to grab a hold of her arm.

'OLIVIA, WAIT!'

'NO!' Olivia's cry was accompanied by a mighty leap up at the closest building (it looked like some sort of church, though Olivia was too upset to really pay attention) where she dug in her claws and scrambled up the rough textured brick.

She made it to the roof in only a few seconds and stumbled on the slanted tiles.

There was *no* way Volante could follow her, now—

Volante's hand closed around Olivia's arm, and the tiefling held her tight as she gave a cry of surprise and tried to pull away.

'Olivia— Liv— Wait! It's just me! Stop! *Stop*,' slowly, Volante softened her voice; clearly trying to help bring Olivia down with it. 'It's okay. Look at me, Liv.... Liv, breathe. *Breathe*....'

Olivia couldn't seem to.

Her chest was heaving and her eyes were watering and her nose was leaking so much it was blocked.

'*Sheshalan!*' was all she managed to say through her sobs. '*Sheshalan! Sh-Sheshalan!*'

'I know,' Volante said in what was almost a comforting voice. 'I know. That was *awful*. I don't know what she was *thinking!*'

'She said— She said—'

'I know.'

'She said!'

'I know,' Volante repeated. 'I'm sorry.'

'*Sorry?*' the unfamiliar word pushed its way into Olivia's brain and she managed to take a breath.

The last time anyone had said those words to her —*those very strange, alien words*— had been the day Taarhir had tried to kill her.

It had been what that horrible elf said to her, right before he'd thrown her off the catwalk. And what Farren had whispered to her as he had carried her out to safety.

But she hadn't heard it again since that night. Not once.

Not said to *her*.

It shocked Olivia so much that she stopped struggling. And, as she relaxed her shoulders, Volante relaxed her grip.

And, then, when Volante let her go... Olivia sat down where she was and began to cry.

Broken, hiccuped sobs escaped the girl as she tried to stop herself from weeping, but it was no use. The more she tried to stop it all, the more it bubbled out of her. She could hear how pathetic she sounded with her sniffing of snot and sucking back of spit and choked out whimpers, and felt even worse with every breath.

And for a long, long moment, Volante just stood in silence and watched her; her long tail *swishing* back and forth like it did when she was annoyed.... But the look she gave Olivia when the girl dared to glance up made it clear the annoyance wasn't directed at *her*, and it helped her feel a little less terrible.

*A little more like she could breathe.*

She sucked another breath in, hearing the disgusting sounds of her emotions snort through her sinuses, and looked to her feet.

'Thanks...' Olivia mumbled, her voice quieter than she meant it to be. '*For standing up for me when Sheshalan was...*'

Volante sat down beside her, gingerly putting a hand on her back as she did. 'Mh....'

'I don't know why she hates me so much,' Olivia sniffled.

'Sheshalan doesn't hate you—'

'Yes, she *does*!' Olivia cried, her voice breaking. 'She *always* has! Ever since Farren first saved me, she's been trying to make him send me away!'

'*Saved* you?' Volante asked, confusion in her eyes.

'From the...' Olivia hesitated, swallowing. She folded her ears back as she averted her gaze. 'I was one of the Letter Park Gang. They didn't treat me good.'

'Oh.'

'When Farren showed up, Taarhir used me to escape,' Olivia continued; though she wished she would stop. She didn't *want* Volante to know about her past! But as she sniffled and wiped her eyes, she found that she just couldn't stop herself from continuing. 'He threw me off the catwalk into the machines, and Farren had to stop me falling so I didn't get ground up by the gears. Sheshalan wanted to give me to an orphanage, but Farren didn't want me to get into any more trouble, so he decided he was gonna look after me.'

*Oh*, the word was so quiet that it didn't even come out of Volante as a sound; just a silent breath and short mouthing.

'But Sheshalan doesn't want me,' Olivia continued, wiping her eyes and bringing her knees up so she could hug them. 'That's why she's always so mad and yells at me.'

'No,' Volante reassured. 'Sheshalan yells at everyone.'

'Because of me!' Olivia cried, feeling another sobbing fit rising in her chest.

'Because she's a bitch,' Volante corrected; her voice so matter-of-fact it practically slapped the sob in Olivia's throat right back down to her stomach.

It took a few seconds longer for the words to sink in... but when they did, Olivia felt a weak half-giggle escape her.

Volante's hand moved from Olivia's back to her shoulder, which she gave a soft squeeze before hesitantly withdrawing herself and sighing. 'Sheshalan really cares about you, Liv,' she said seriously. 'Even if she's shit at showing it.'

Olivia pouted, then, and looked away. 'How do *you* know that?'

'Because I've been in her position before,' Volante answered. Then, she scrunched up her nose. 'Sort of. Kinda.... I have a little sister, you know? And once I pushed her while we were climbing, and she fell and broke her arm.'

Olivia gave another sniff and slowly, wordlessly, turned her gaze back to the woman.

'I love my sister,' Volante said, simply. 'But I hurt her. I didn't mean to hurt her. Well, at least not *that much*. But I did. And it was a shitty thing to do. But it doesn't mean I hate her. Do you know what I mean?'

'No,' Olivia squeaked.

Volante shrugged. 'Sometimes we're shit to the people we care about,' she said. 'But we don't actually *mean* it. It's just a weird thing that we do.'

Olivia sniffed, slowly trying to process Volante's words.

She *thought* she understood it. Maybe a little.

Not completely, though.

Though, when she opened her mouth to say so, all that came out was:

'You're a big sister...? I'm a big sister, too.'

'What?' Volante looked taken aback by the statement.

'Yeah.... I don't remember him too well,' Olivia admitted as she rubbed a tear from her eye with her palm and tried to keep her voice even. 'But I had a little brother.'

'Really?' Volante's voice was soft. Perhaps the softest Olivia had ever heard it. 'Had? Not anymore?'

Olivia nodded, loudly swallowing down the lump in her throat. 'Before my parents got rid of me.'

'They got rid of.... *Oh*,' a dawning look crossed Volante's face, then; though Olivia wasn't completely sure what she was realising. But it was almost the exact same look she would get when she put a puzzle together in her mind and figured out why one of her constructs wasn't turning on... only, this time it was tinged with sadness at the edges, instead of the frustration or excitement that it usually accompanied. 'And... did Sheshalan... *know* about this? Your brother and your parents?'

Olivia shook her head. 'Only Farren does. And now you, I guess.... Please don't tell anyone?'

'I won't,' Volante promised, her hand tentatively finding its way back to Olivia's shoulder. Then she gave a stilted chuckle; clearly hoping that what she said next might cheer Olivia up. 'Who would I even tell? Bluebell? *Please!* Like I'd gossip with a *cowboy!*'

It was funny. Though Olivia was too tired to laugh as she slowly leant into Volante's side.

Volante looked hesitant as Olivia pressed against her. Though, to Olivia's surprise, she didn't pull away this time.

They sat together in silence for a long while before Olivia let out a heavy breath and sat up straight again.

‘You doing okay?’ Volante asked; letting out a relieved breath when Olivia nodded. ‘Thank the gods.... You let me know when you’re ready to head back, okay? Everyone’s gonna be really really worried about you, you know.’

‘Especially Farren?’ Olivia didn’t mean to sound hopeful; but she wanted to be important enough for Farren to worry about.

Volante nodded, offering Olivia a small smile.

And Olivia nodded back before lifting her shirt and wiping all of the disgusting gunk off her face. ‘Volante?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Can you help me get Bertram’s boots back? I threw them on the tavern roof.’

—END—

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