

Journal of James Collins, August 12th

In the grand scheme of things, the little Kingdom of Maikro was easily ignored. Their trade does not reach far, they've never had an empire, they're a tiny island that has never developed far; even now, in an era wherein the powers that be have discovered how to sail the world in less than half a year, and one empire in Europe can stretch to every corner of the world, the art and architecture seems to quite resemble that of our Greek and Roman forebears, and the clothing is quite distressingly minimal.

However, it definitely does not feel like Maikro may be ignored, under any circumstances. Despite what the philosophers have writ, the truth of this place can only be described as mystical in nature; from what we were told upon reaching their capital, each Queen (they've not had a proper King in a few odd centuries, or so they say- personally, I have my doubts that they could have survived this long under the exclusive rule of ladies, although twould explain the stagnant nature) has been given the right to pass one divine Law during her rule, which shall affect the entire Isle from that point onward. Given that it has been a month since my arrival, I have found a few odd things that would correspond to this magic: The birth of children is instantaneous and painless, the rains are always soft, the soil eternally giving, the waters so clean so as to eliminate the necessity of wine and beer (although the former is present at celebrations of every sort), men are exceedingly rare on the whole (the cabin boy reported that sexual relations between two women could result in one bearing child in nine days instead of nine months, but I refuse to deal in such nonsense), and physical illness vanishes in but a day, without fail.

Ah. And one other thing:

Foreigners who do not bow to the feet of the Queen are reduced in size, and shrink further by the day.

It is by some miracle that I, the linguist and naturalist assigned to this colony vessel, have survived this long, but I doubt my ability to live much longer. Whilst my clothing, pens, and journal have reduced with me due to the magic of Maikro, food has not. I've not eaten in a week, having been unable to fit even a single crumb of their rough bread into my mouth, but that is a situation that has changed. I find myself in the house of a quiet, mannish blacksmith, who has bought herself a large supply of grapes to mash into a personal supply of wine. Dregs she may leave at the base of a bowl should make for easy eating, given the soft flesh of the little purple fruit; she is unlikely to notice a man the height of a flea pilfering a smidgen of grape.

In the meantime, though, her stomping in the bowl has made a great deal of noise.

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Closing his leatherbound journal with a sigh, the young gentleman looked up at the wooden boards that creaked so noisily above him, but he'd grown quite used to the noise- it was no louder than any other time his host, who he'd forgotten to mention in his entry was named Lida, walked across the wooden floorboards in the second level of her cozy home. Those huge, stomping feet, frequently quite filthy despite the leather sandals, had nearly been James's inglorious end on more than one occasion. Definitely *not* a fitting send off for a young man of such high familial standing back home in London.

Today, however, Lida's feet were much cleaner, having been washed in a basin and dried with a clean rag mere moments before stepping into the bottom end of a barrel she'd evidently repurposed into her mashing bowl- a wine connoisseur like his father would know the term far better, and be ashamed, again, that his spawn was so lacking in interest in the pursuits of a blue-blooded nobleman.

Finally, however, the stomping was done; the noise had ceased, and Lida had walked off to grab something. The most likely scenario was a bottle, at least in James's mind, so he eagerly set to climbing the back end of the barrel bottom, deciding that a drop or two of juice to go with his meal of grape might perk up his spirits.

Another thing he'd neglected to mention was a little pet Lida kept- some sort of bird or rodent, who had been cupped in the Amazonian (even compared to the other Maikronians, she was decidedly very tall, and quite muscular given her work with iron and bronze) woman's palms, definitely injured, but that had been receiving food for the past two weeks and slowly nursed back to health. It had no relevance, given that it was kept on the second floor at all times, by Lida's bed if he'd gotten his translation properly, and as such would never interact with him.

It was as he peered over this ocean of wine-to-be that Lida rushed into the room again . . . before heading upstairs in a hurry, stomping feet quaking the ground beneath the tiny Englishman and sending him careening into the drink, munching angrily on the flesh clinging to a mostly flattened grape skin. He'd already accepted his fate- drowning to death in a bottle of wine as Lida awaited fermentation- so there was nothing about to stop him from living it up in the moment. He chewed and chewed his way across the grape, eating a king's feast in a matter of minutes.

By the time Lida came down the stairs, he heard her speak for the first time today. |This is wine, Arice. Wine,| she repeated slowly in her own language, completely oblivious to the Englishman in her drink. However, this came with a response James had never expected . . . one in English.

"What?" A woman's voice, far smaller than Lida's but definitely feminine, asked softly. "En-a-men?" she repeated, bastardizing the pronunciation but getting enough of the gist of the Maikronian word for "wine" that Lida accepted it without correction.

[Wine! Good girl, Arice!] Lida grinned excitedly, lowering an iron goblet to the surface of the recently stomped grape juice, dragging James into it with the basic force of physics- he was in no way able to cling to the grape with his comparatively quite tiny arms, having eaten most of his real handholds before this current could drag him back . . . and, when the iron goblet leveled out, he was hit by a colossal head rush of alcoholic fumes. The bronze, dark-haired, bright-eyed young Maikronian stood to full height rapidly and gracefully, dragging James under the surface of the grape juice that had fermented in instants, holding the goblet out to her pet foreign girl, Arice; a Maikronian pun on “explorer” and “lover”, given the pretty little blonde's insistence on climbing over every inch of Lida's body in the week and a half since she'd recovered from her run-in with the Queen's pet cat. This was a linguistic subtlety James hadn't managed to pick up on in a month, especially given his steadfast belief in their cultural inferiority.

When little Arice, known back in England as Catherine, worriedly backed away at being offered a drink from the massive iron goblet, Lida frowned softly. [No, no, Arice. Wine! Wine is good, a drink for celebration! Look . . .] she murmured, taking a long draught, two solid gulps of dry red wine (and a tiny hint of Englishman), before offering the goblet back to little Arice. [Take a sip. Please?]

Catherine hadn't learned too many words of Maikronian since arriving, especially without Mr. Collins helpfully translating for her, but “riolo” she'd learned. It was used all the time in front of the Queen, and even after she'd done what everyone else had refused to and kissed that woman's toes, only halting the horrifying process of getting tinier by the day, it had been demanded of her. It was their please, just as “iolo” was their thank you. Not one to be impolite, she pulled the massive goblet to her face . . . excitedly recognizing the bouquet of wine. This lovely giantess who'd nursed her back to health had offered good red wine; Catherine drank deeply, now getting the connection. “Enamen” was wine, and Lida had been teaching her the word. “Ee . . . roll . . . oh,” Catherine murmured slowly, trying to get the word exactly right.

Lida happily ran her fingers through Arice's pretty golden locks, happy to hear her being so polite.

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James Collins sat in Lida's cavernous belly, in a lake of wine, as acid dripped from the ceiling and came up from the floor . . . far too drunk to care. In his abortive attempts to swim, he'd swallowed more wine in ten seconds than any man could take whilst maintaining sobriety, and so the life of the last nobleman aboard the colony ship *HMS Zephyr* ended with a whimper . . . well, it was more of a gurgle.