

The Boys and Bombolini

The original story was written by Jared Rosen at Riot Games for pride month [original found [here](#)], but I rewrote this version for several LGBTQ2SIA+ friends who found the original to be offensive and disappointing.

They always have a plan, or at least part of a plan, or have spoken briefly about how they need to have a proper plan before they jump headlong into the next heist, but after two decades and nearly every nation on Valoran, they both know how likely it is that their plans will work out nicely. They always go in with a plan, but it's when things start to go sideways that they do their best work. It just looks a bit grim right now, but bear with them. Surely it'll work out.

What “working out” currently looked like was a wharfrat-infested warehouse tucked *just* South of the Slaughterdocks—that's the good side, in case you can't tell the difference—crawling with the kind of vastaya who crawled out of the sea onto the Serpent Isles and eventually made their home in Bilgewater Bay. That, and two nervous-looking conmen with their backs pressed against one of the boxes loaded with gunpowder and explosives. “Who keeps all this in one place, anyway? It's just askin' for trouble.”

That last bit was said by Malcolm Graves, possessor of bad taste and several of the aforementioned explosives that he'd tucked away some of his many pockets. He turned to the man next to him, a man with a hat that's too damn fancy for a job like this and a beard that's almost as impressive as Graves'. Twisted Fate gave no indication that the fish-people bothered him at all as he flipped over the top card in his hand and set it on a nearby box, shook his head, shuffled it back in, and repeated the process. He'd been doing this for a good five minutes now, and it was making Graves downright twitchy. The only thing that kept him from taking aim and firing at as many fish-people as he could get in range of was the way Twisted Fate chewed the inside corner of his lip. Twisted Fate didn't really have *tells*—he was a conman and a card shark, after all—but when it was just the two of them, when he didn't have to put on an act, Graves could just tell. This was important. So he clutched Destiny close to his chest and parked himself right there next to his partner, and waited for the cards to tell him something. Anything. And soon, please.

“Seriously. One spark and,” Graves filled his cheeks with air and let it out, miming an explosion with his hand. “Fishsticks.”

“You'd need oil for that,” his partner responded, voice flat with focus.

“Huh? Last thing this place needs is oil.”

“To make fishsticks, idiot. You need oil.” Twisted Fate flipped over another card, then cast his eyes upwards, as if asking Nagakabouros to please, please give him something.

“I know that, and stop callin' me an idiot, I—”

“Shhh.” Twisted Fate held a finger to his lips.

“Why do I gotta be quiet! You’re the one who started talking in the first place. An’ besides, you only tell me to shush when I’m winning the argument.”

“Shh.” Fate said again, and it was only when he cast his hand towards Graves, resting his palm on his partner’s chest, that Graves realized he’d put the cards away. Twisted Fate never put his cards away before getting an answer from them unless things were about to get really hairy. “You hear that?”

Graves did, once he cocked his head in the direction Twisted Fate was looking. It sounded wet, and it sounded like it was getting closer, whatever *it* was.

“Malcolm Graves and Twisted Fate, if I’m not mistaken,” a voice called, accented with the South-Western shallows, affectionately called the Kraken’s Hook by the people who swam in its balmy waters.

“You think she’s talkin’ to us?” Graves hissed, but Twisted Fate only slapped his chest once, touched that finger to his own lips, and rested his palm back where it was. It was warm with magic still, and it made Graves think of morning. This morning, before they got up and got ready for another heist, or tomorrow morning when it’s all over. Either one, he thinks, would be nice.

“I’d know your *handiwork* anywhere, if you still insist on calling it that. Come on out now, nice and slow, and I’ll consider letting you keep your heads. Not your lives, of course, but you can keep your pretty bodies intact when we dump you in Deepwater Bay,” the voice continued. Something in it grated, like it’d been damaged.

“I know that voice,” Twisted Fate said, and his brow was really furrowing now. Graves furrowed his own—something twigged in his mind. He remembered the acrid scent of smoke, shouting, and the sight of Twisted Fate’s hat flying off his head as Graves had held him with one arm and held onto one of the ship’s ropes with the other, swinging them off and into the sea moments before—

“Bombolini!” Graves shouted, the memory snapping into place like a well-loaded slug. “Well, shit! How long’s it been?” He poked his head above the boxes and Twisted Fate, after a *very* stern roll of his eyes, did the same. “Never thought I’d see you again after—well, you remember.”

“I remember,” she said, and her eyes, about three feet apart, narrowed. She looked older than Twisted Fate remembered—a few more wrinkles and a lot more scars. Time had treated her about the same way it had treated the two of them, then. “You backstabbed me on my own damn ship! It took me a damn decade to make back what you stole from me.”

“Didn’t think you’d live,” Graves said, looking far more apologetic than he should be capable of, especially when apologizing for not killing someone well enough. “You still with Illusion?”

“Yeah. Got married last year.” The whole thing would be awfully heartwarming if it weren’t for the harpoon that Bombolini had levelled at their heads.

“Well, congratulations,” Twisted Fate said, “and give mine to the little lady as well.”

Bombolini tilted the harpoon towards him, aiming just below his treasured hat. “*You* be quiet,” she said. “We have unfinished business.”

“Still mad about the—”

“The *hook*. In my gills. Yeah, I’m still mad. That’s why I brought this.” The harpoon clicked as she waved it, as if expecting that the two men would just have noticed it.

“It *was* a bit insensitive,” Graves said. “I mean, a hook, T.F.”

“I was saving *your* ass!” Honestly, Fate has never been so —

There was a *BANG!* and something that looked a whole lot like a harpoon smashed into the box behind them, splintering the wood and spilling blackpowder up to their ankles. The chain went taut, after a moment and a *CLUNK!*, the harpoon was yanked back, hooking the brim of Twisted Fate’s hat and bringing it right back into the smooth grey hands of Bombolini.

“Well, shit,” Graves said as she placed Twisted Fate’s prized possession on top of her head, right between her eyes. “It actually suits her. Look.”

“Can we pay a bit more attention to the hammerhead with the harpoon?” Bombolini said, raising her voice so that the rasp left by Twisted Fate’s trap could be clearly heard. “I know you idiots have two brain cells between you, but could you rub them together long enough to give yourselves up?” There was another heavy *click* that told the pair that her harpoon was loaded again, and they both had a funny feeling that she wouldn’t aim for the box this time. Twisted Fate patted down his hair and straightened up, followed a moment later by Graves.

“Alright,” Twisted Fate said, lifting both hands and showing his empty palms. “You got us. We’ll just—”

“Not so fast,” Bombolini said, jerking her head towards one of her fishy underlings. “Take his coat.” And when Twisted Fate started to protest, she added, “and his boots. Definitely his boots.”

“I liked those ones,” Graves complained to no one in particular.

Twisted Fate wasn’t chewing the inside of his lip when the golby-looking vastaya took his jacket, but he was thinking. Graves shifted his gaze from that miraculously unbroken nose back to Bombolini and the hat that T.F. was no doubt eyeing up now. “Aren’t you gonna take my gun?” He asked, feeling a bit left out.

Only when Twisted Fate was standing there in his shirt and stocking feet did Bombolini grin, and what a horrible grin it was. Rows of jagged teeth and the amusement that sparkled in her glassy eyes were somehow *far* more threatening than the sidearm she bore. “In a place like this? Go ahead and fire; you’ll just be signing your own death warrant.”

Graves nodded once. “You’ve got me there. Makes me wonder if there’s anything you didn’t remember to take.”

Bombolini narrowed her eyes as a hissing sound filled the warehouse. If there's one thing she learned from being backstabbed by Graves and Twisted Fate, it's to not trust Graves and Twisted Fate.

Something arced through the air, tossed from Graves' hand, over Bombolini and her crew, bounced off a box with a *tinc*, then two more with a *tinc tinc tinc* before it came to rest with the *whss* of metal spinning on wood. The same sound Twisted Fate knows from spinning Silver Serpents on the tables at taverns, trying to get someone to take the bait and challenge him to a game.

All eyes were on the metal canister lying inert on one of the lowest layers of boxes, and a hush fell over the warehouse. It was Twisted Fate who spoke first. "Who in the depths were you aiming at?"

"No one in the depths, that's for damn sure," Graves grumbled back, looking pretty darn ashamed of himself.

Bombolini centered herself, straightening her shoulders and re-aiming the harpoon at Twisted Fate and his partner. The front of her gold-trimmed jacket was open, cutting a deep V to reveal a scarred chest and a gold necklace dangling in the center. "Now," she said with the blissful calm of someone who was about to make back all the money that was stolen from her and more. "If we could get back to the business at ha—"

The canister exploded, and the room filled with a dark smoke. "Reminds me of last time," Graves said, a moment before Twisted Fate grabbed his elbow.

"Go!" Twisted Fate shouted over Bombolini shouting and her coughing crew trying to get their bearings. Both men sucked in a deep breath as the dark cloud spread over them too, and then there was only chaos. Twisted Fate grabbed his jacket from the stunned crewmember, shrugging it on as they dove through the smoke. A dorsal fin crunched as Graves swung Destiny at one crewmember, and Twisted Fate punched another's gills, grabbing something and tearing it out only to flick it away and wipe his hand on Graves' already-dirty cloak. Bombolini was still shouting when they crashed through a window, sending smoke billowing into the air, and grabbed instinctually for each other as they plummeted three stories down.

They were collected by an awning with a series of "oof's and "ow's, and both men found themselves staring up at the shattered window as one of Bombolini's crewmembers staggered out of the window, searching for air, and met a much less lucky end on the cobblestones below. People screamed, glass shattered as a harpoon punched through another window, and Twisted Fate reached into the inner pocket of his shirt.

"You wanna do the honors, partner?" He asked, offering one of the building's prime explosives to Graves, whose eyes lit up like a lover on Heartseeker's.

"You stole one for *me*?" Graves asked, like it's really so shocking that Twisted Fate's sticky fingers would catch on something for him every once in a while. "Damn, I never thought

you knew a thing about explosives, but this one's gonna light the city up. You're, uh, gonna get us outta here, right?"

Twisted Fate offered a smirk that made Graves' heart twist up, that suggested that he really ought to know the answer to that by now, and brandished a card from his sleeve. "Hold onto me and don't let go, doll."

Graves grinned at Fate, wide and clear, and wrapped an arm around his partner's waist. Then, with a joyful cry, Graves launched the explosive into the shattered window with *much* better aim than last time.

The building exploded, but Twisted Fate and Graves were gone.

...

"Nice view from out here," Graves said, swinging his legs over the liquid fire beneath them. The warehouse, as promised, had gone up, along with most of the Slaughter Docks (again) and several neighboring businesses. Just another day in Bilgewater, really.

"You know I always get us the best seats in the house," Twisted Fate responded. This time, when he flipped over the top card in the deck, it brought a soft, reassured smile to his face. He lifted his eyes to the burning city—their burning city—and Graves could see the flames reflected in those eyes.

"It's the same damn spot as always," Graves grumbled, turning his own gaze towards the fires too. "Too bad about those explosives," he said thoughtfully. "Woulda loved to take one apart, make them for myself." He saw Fate's arm move, and watched with disbelieving eyes as Fate pulled out two more, held carefully between his rough knuckles. "No," he said, not daring to believe it until he held them in his own hands. "T.F., I could kiss you for this."

Twisted Fate ducked his chin like he'd like to hide his eyes behind that hat of his. "What's stopping you? Never met anything that could get between Malcolm Graves and—" He didn't get to finish his sentence, as Graves grabbed the back of his head and pulled him in, pressing their lips together in a kiss that said *Thank you* and *Shut up* and *I'm glad we made it* all at once. Even after all they'd been through, Graves' lips were soft, and Fate leaned into them as Graves' burly arm wrapped around his waist, yanking his hips closer so his leg pressed against Graves' all the way down to where his stockinged feet dangled above the burning tides.

When they pulled away, Graves brushed his nose against Fate's, lashes casting long shadows on his face in the flickering light, and murmured, "Shouldn't that damn hat be arriving right about now?"

Twisted Fate's hand rested on Graves' chest, promising another morning, another tomorrow, and he lifted his eyes to the smouldering horizon. "You're right," he said, puzzled, like he expected it to sail down from the sky and land neatly on his head. "Maybe this time it's finally

gone. Like my boots.” He liked those boots. Graves’ wheezing laugh caught Twisted Fate’s attention. Glancing sternly back at his partner, Fate started to say that, “You shouldn’t be so damn insensitive. You know that hat’s been with us since—” But he never got to finish.

“You’re a real damn idiot if you think this thing’s ever gonna leave us be.” Graves said, and pulled the hat out from underneath his cloak. “It’s been with us since that first night. It’s as damn stubborn as you, T.F.”

“*I’m* stubborn?” Twisted Fate said, even as Graves plopped the hat back on his head and adjusted it without another word. “Coming from *your* damn stubborn ass...” But Graves was smiling that soft smile that he saves for when they’re alone, and Twisted Fate’s shoulders slump a bit. “You’re a damn fool, Malcolm. You know it’d come back. She could’ve killed you.”

“Nah,” Graves said. “I’m too damn stubborn. Besides, I wanted this.” His hand unfurled to reveal the necklace Bombolini had been wearing, the metal tube looking so small in his burly hand. “Looks interestin’, don’t you think? And after last time, I doubt she’d keep anything valuable anywhere else.”

Fate rolled his eyes again, closing Graves’ hand with his own and pressing their foreheads together again, then their noses. “Let’s look at it tomorrow,” he murmured, closing the gap for another kiss. “I’d like to get the ash out of my hair before I have to smell it for a week.”

Graves sniffed, then wrinkled his nose. “Fishsticks.”

“What?”

“I smell fishsticks.”

Twisted Fate sniffed the air and grimaced. “Guess there was oil in there after all. All the more reason to get outta here.”

The smell was making Graves hungry, but he only shrugged. “Alright, partner,” he said, covering Fate’s hand with his own. He leaned his head on Fate’s shoulder, and a moment later felt the weight of Fate’s press on his in return. With the pair’s last remaining free hand, Twisted Fate pulled out another blue card that glinted in the orange light.

“Home again?” He asked.

“Home again,” his partner answered, and Twisted Fate and Graves were gone.

