

# Turns, Knots and Tangles

a *Disco Elysium* fanfic

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for *dornishvip*er

## Turns

THERE WAS NOTHING quite like feeling the keel under your feet cutting through the water, as Joyce Messier knew well. That was what true freedom was to a human, as the wind under their wings was to the gulls floating the opposite direction above her, towards Martinaise and its cornucopia of discarded fries, half-eaten sandwiches and overflowing trash cans. Joyce wasn't sure what awaited her on the other side of the canal. Still, it could hardly be any worse than what had become of the centre of Martinaise in the forty years since the Commune. And it would most certainly not be any worse than that annoying vagrant who thought herself an art prodigy on the merits of her anti-establishment convictions alone.

The nameless shanty town across the canal did indeed not boast any cutting-edge teenagers to surveil her. Instead, the pitiful dock was guarded by a woman a little younger than her who loitered near the jetty with a sword at her hips. The woman's relaxed pose was the first thing to arouse Joyce's interest. Against all odds, she found the woman rather striking, and infinitely more tolerable company than the vulgar *grafitera*.

As for Lilienne, the first thing she noticed was the sloop. Her shiny hull and powerful sails, the way her bow seemed to barely touch the waves as she glided through the bay... The sea ran deep in Lilienne's veins, and nothing could make her heart pound like the sight of a beauty such as that. A vessel that made her dream a bittersweet dream of freedom, of a different life, unfettered by the limitations and responsibilities of her own.

"What's her name?" she asked the stranger in the green raincoat after the woman had stepped onto the jetty and started lounging next to her ship.

Joyce couldn't help but sigh slightly – she had been asked the same annoying question twice in under a week. "*It* doesn't have one, nor does it need one."

"She's a fine ship, though."

"On that, we can agree," Joyce answered, before going back to the Cor-de-Leite '19 to work, leafing through the reports her – or rather the indotribe's, a fine but necessary

distinction – eyes and ears delivered. Tedious work, but it needed to be done. The RMC couldn't be trusted to handle something as delicate as the situation with the Débardeur's Union without any supervision, after all.

Lilienne went back to her own tedious work as well, tending to the tools of her trade. Compared to the sloop, her boat looked shabby, but she wasn't meant to race in a regatta – she was a working skiff. She didn't need to be pretty, but her hull needed to be watertight, which was why she was currently sunning her belly while the tar dried, and Lilienne was left with the unenviable task of tending to her nets. They were just as essential to her craft and needed even more maintenance than the boat. When she'd been young, she hated having to help her parents untangle the knots, but now, she found that there was a strange meditative quality to the work that she learned to appreciate as she grew older. She still let Lily play with her Lamby instead of having her help. She could do that much.

Strange as it was, both women felt less lonely in their solitary work while they were aware of someone else's proximity. A strange sense of camaraderie began to take form in their hearts while snow settled on the ground around them.

### *Knots*

Sooner or later, boredom got to everyone. It certainly got to Joyce Messier, after days of waiting for something to happen while nothing did. No, Evrart Claire stayed as mum as a mouse holed up in his container terminal, while the mercenaries kept stewing in their resentment, no doubt ready to light their fuse at a moment's notice to catastrophic effect. Nothing Joyce could do would change any of that. It was a most dissatisfying state of events. It was evening, yet again, and she had just opened a bottle of dry white from Ozonne when a thought struck her: what she needed was a distraction, and there was no better distraction than diverting company. Her choice was rather limited in that regard due to the circumstances, but the woman picking at her nets had a certain unvarnished charm.

"Say, I've just opened a nice bottle of wine, would you like to share it with me?" she asked the woman, clearing her throat. The woman stared at her blankly for a moment, eyes wary from years of a life Joyce was glad she'd never been subjected to.

"Sure," Lilienne curtly answered. The children were in bed, and she was about done with her nets. Besides, something about the stranger fascinated her – and she had her sword, should things escalate. She put her hand on the hilt as if to reassure herself that it was still there.

“It’s Joyce, by the way,” the stranger introduced herself.

“Lilienne.”

Now that they were close, walking side by side down into the cabin where the wine was waiting for them, Joyce finally got a proper look at her guest. Lilienne looked around Joyce’s age, but looks could be deceiving. It was obvious that Lilienne’s hard life had left its traces on her skin, but she was still an attractive woman who would have had to fight off men if there were any around. Her sun-kissed skin reminded Joyce of her youthful adventures. And then there was the way her mouth quirked and her eyes lit up when she saw the cabin...

“She really is a beauty, inside and out,” Lilienne murmured, letting her hand run over the wood panelling. She exchanged a look with Joyce, in full agreement, before comparing the Cor-de-Leite to all the other boats and smaller ships she’d seen in her lifetime – a luxurious apartment compared to shabby huts fashioned from corrugated steel. It was like stepping into another world, one where mere wine glasses were gilded. Even Joyce’s green raincoat looked expensive compared to her old oilskin jacket.

“I promised you wine,” Joyce said, offering Lilienne a glass before pouring one for herself.

“So you did.”

It was a familiar dance, once Lilienne got down to it. They both knew where it would end – with sweaty limbs entwining in those soft sheets peeking out from behind a discreet screen – the boat wasn’t that big, after all. She’d danced this dance before, even if it had been a while, before Lily, the twins and her husband. Lilienne had missed it, even if she was a little intimidated by someone like Joyce, who seemed to be a master of it. She toasted to everything and nothing as Lilienne watched her raise her glass wordlessly before taking an elegant, infinitely seductive sip. Her own gulps seemed awkward and inexperienced in comparison, the expensive wine a little sour as it went down her throat. The alcohol still did its job, however – it could always be relied on for that.

“Is it to your taste?” Joyce asked.

“Yes,” Lilienne lied.

Then their dance began in earnest – and Joyce enjoyed it far more than she had anticipated. It had been a while, she realised, just as she thought she should do this more often. Little distractions like Lilienne’s tired smile and eagerness were what made life so much more enjoyable for her.

The bottle wasn’t even empty when they had reached the point where Joyce leaned over for a kiss. A slow one – no need to rush anything, that was the point. A small gasp escaped Lilienne’s lips when they parted, and it was exquisite enough to send shivers

down Joyce's spine. Maybe there was no need to take things that slow, after all. She gripped Lilienne's sinewy arm and drew her close for another, more passionate kiss, their tongues brushing against each other in tandem with their chests. It didn't take long for Joyce to reach downwards, into Lilienne's trousers, to make her forget all about her dreary, dreadful daily life.

### *Tangles*

Joyce Messier was like the sea, at least as far as Lilienne was concerned. Always coming and going with the tide, never staying for long, both predictable and unpredictable. In a way, that suited Lilienne. She had enough on her plate already, with Evrart trying to destroy what little she had, with Martinaise being what it was, with the dance club that had set up shop in the old church attracting even more unsavoury people to the area. She didn't need a man to take care of as well – she had three children already. So Joyce suited her just fine. Always cordial and fun, trying to impress her with stories of her adventures.

Naturally, all those stories reminded Lilienne of how constrained her own life was. She didn't like feeling like that – like she and Lily and the boys didn't matter, in the grand scheme of things, like she was just a pebble on the shore, to be washed away by the waves and forgotten. But she liked the way Joyce made her feel when they weren't talking. Joyce was fantastic at that, her years of experience taking Lilienne to heights she'd never dreamed of before.

"When are you going to leave again?" she asked Joyce one night, as they shared the tiny bed and blanket on her boat. It had been a trying day.

Joyce had expected the question, and she didn't like it. For all that it seemed like meaningless small talk, it somehow reeked of more. Joyce didn't want more. She liked things the way they were: casual, passionate, and, most of all, uncomplicated. *More* always made things complicated.

"As soon as Evrart Claire deigns to respond to the board's proposal, which could be anywhere from one day to one month." Or a year, if the dockworkers wouldn't starve in the meantime. That was her one trump card: The Wild Pines Group could wait. The workers could not, even if Evrart had the patience of a saint.

Lilienne said nothing. She just sighed into Joyce's hair, making her shudder with a mixture of pleasure and something far less appealing. Joyce responded in kind, with a deep

sigh as she watched the moonlight dance across the ceiling of her cabin after reflecting off the water outside. The pattern it formed was curious and ever-moving, like Joyce herself.

“Sad to see me go?” she asked.

Lilienne hummed and turned to watch the lights herself. When Joyce looked at her, her face was pensive, her brow slightly furrowed. She'd gotten even more tanned in the last months, once the clouds and snow retreated and she got to go out on her little skiff again, making her smell of salt and adventure when Joyce kissed the sweat off her skin at night.

“I like you,” Lilienne confessed, although that wasn't quite what she meant. She liked what Joyce could give her, she supposed, which was close enough for someone like her. A respite from the drudgery, a taste of the wide world, and orgasms that could make her forget her very name.

The silence that followed that statement was heavy, and they both knew what it meant. The spell had been broken, and what they had would change forever now, whether it persisted or not. It wasn't that Lilienne loved her – if that had been the case, Joyce wouldn't even have considered returning. Love wasn't what she wanted, hadn't been even when she'd married her husband. But where their trysts had felt as smooth as their thighs rubbing together before, there now was a hint of sandpaper to their skins as she drew Lilienne close.

It was a pity – a thought that echoed through both their minds in an eerie whisper that neither woman paid much mind to. Maybe they would see each other again, touch each other tenderly, kiss the darkness away, but it wouldn't be like before. Maybe Joyce would never return. Maybe one day, these nights would be nothing but a bittersweet shadow of a memory. Either way, something had ended, as things were bound to.

That was the way of the sea, Lilienne thought as she drifted off to sleep, head pillowed on her lover's shoulder.

*Fin*