

Lulu was sitting at the bar in some old deadbeat tavern, up to her crooked hat in the cheapest of cheap lager.

The air was loud, with redfaced drunks bombarding about the room in a line to a chorus of raccous percussion and string, that was in itself a product of the attending redfaced, woefully underpaid Bard's college dropouts. Mavens of the Strings, they were most assuredly not.

“That tasted –” murmured Lulu, as she took yet another sip. “Oof! Never mind, I can't remember.”

The bartender had kept a close eye on her, knowing that Yordles were as much affiniated with mischief as they were with magic, and like any trueblooded Demacian he didn't care much for either. Sure enough, his suspicious were confirmed when his sights fell upon the stack of coins she'd put forward in remuneration.

“Mushroom caps!?” he said, taking and inspecting them in his hand just to be sure.

Pix, being the most sensible creature in the room at this point, glimpsed the righteous fury in the man's eyes and proceeded to tug at one of Lulu's ears.

“Time to go?” said Lulu, more concerned by the distress of her own overworked bladder than that of her companion. “It's okay – I *really* have to go too!” As she was hopping down from the stool, however, the barkeeper lunged and caught her by the collar. In her shock she let go of her magic staff and it fell against the counter, just beyond her reach.

“Aye, lass. Isn't there something else you're forgetting about?” said the barkeep.

“Oh, I'm sorry,” said Lulu, reaching for something in her hat as she smiled at the fuming bartender. “How about some acorns?” She retrieved a handful from the cache in her hat then dropped them unto the ground, distracting the bartender so she could grab her staff.

She leaned into him, ominously adding, “*squirrels* like acorns.”

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Outside, two other entities of vastly different sizes faced off.

At the epicenter of a crowd of curious onlookers, Poppy stood with hands on her hips in the looming shadow of a man at least ten times her size. “Look,” she said, “we can do this the easy way, or the way that involves my hammer. It's up to you.”

The man grunted. “What are my charges, little girl?”

She unfurled the wanted poster in her possession, then read: “Several counts of assault and banditry, and--” she abruptly glanced up from the poster, incredulous, “*stealing* a bridge in Velorus!?”

Ajax appealed to the onlookers with a shrug, grinning nonchalantly. “I always liked that bridge.”

Lulu stumbled out of the tavern, giggling through her nose. She rolled around in the grass where she fell, disregarding Pix's desperate attempts to help her up.

No one even seemed to notice her, however, over the fierce battle that was raging on.

The villagers jeered while Poppy ducked and weaved to avoid Ajax's attacks – denying them the blood they were so eager to see spilled.

Poppy briefly turned to them. “Whose side are you on!?” She said, before dodging another attack.

“Off with the fuzzy's head!” An older gentleman among their ranks loudly declared with aplomb, eliciting cheers of approval.

Hearing this, Lulu's ears perked. “Fuzzy?” She repeated, her curiosity piqued.

She squeezed through the throngs of onlookers to get a better look, just as Poppy was being backed into a corner.

“Guess they'd rather have a convict than a Yordle,” Ajax said.

Poppy was grateful for this temporary respite from his onslaught – even if it was just so he could gloat – since it gave her an opportunity to catch her breath. The taunt itself was nothing she hadn't pondered many times before, in countless prior occasions when the anti-magic sentiments shared by many Demacians was turned against her. Even despite how careful she'd been the whole time, so as not to hit any of them with too wide a swing of her hammer.

“I won't back down,” she said, nonetheless. Because *someone* had to bring this bridge thief to justice.

At the same time, the even more disorderly than usual Lulu was hatching an idea.

Ajax was setting himself up for his next strike when Pix suddenly perched upon the tip of his nose, where its gently fluttering wings sufficed to block the vision in both his eyes.

“Stupid bug,” he growled, failing at blowing it off his face.

Poppy observed this, then could only continue to watch in perplexity as Lulu twirled into the center of the ring, her staff glimmering with a peculiar aura.

“Tremendo!” the Fae Sorceress cried.

At first, Poppy felt a tug in her arm. Like an invisible force willing it to rise.

Magic coarsed from Lulu's staff, into the business end of Poppy's hammer. It started to grow, also becoming more heavy with each gradual progression.

“Lulu, no!” strained Poppy, as the hammer's head alone came to dwarf Ajax.

Pix flew away from Ajax's face, letting him see what it was that had the villagers all worked up.

“Damn Yordles--” was all he could manage to say.

The earth shook at the moment of impact, during which the onlookers stood back in stunned silence until the dust cleared.

Poppy's hammer shrank immediately after, revealing Ajax's mangled, bloody remains.

"I...killed him," she said, dropping to her knees at the edge of the formed crater. "Before the courts could give him his due process!"

After briefly mulling it over, she gasped. "I'm...a criminal!"

Faster than she could reprimand her accomplice for *her* role in the act, Lulu hopped onto her back.

"To the nearest restroom!" she decreed.

Poppy was not exactly in the mood to play piggyback, but a pursuing horde of angry townsfolk was, if anything, a good motivator.

Meanwhile, back in that old, deadbeat tavern, all of the people had mysteriously disappeared.

Rather, the place was crawling with *squirrels*.