

Mama Bear Part 1

The woodlands are such a wonderful place to be. There is a certain wonder to be had in a world of trees, and grass, and more trees... and dirt... and grass. Okay, in retrospect the woods aren't exactly that magical, but you gotta make do sometimes. Not everyone has as much as you do, and they're perfectly happy... sometimes. Speaking of someone with not a lot in the world, here comes the protagonist now. Though still a babe to some, this fine young man, who goes by the name of Bernie, is on the cusp of manhood. Not that he particularly cares about that. Aged 18, this young Otter has spent a good deal of his life moving from place to place, like a plastic bag caught by the gentle breeze. And much like a loose plastic bag, not many ever felt like acknowledging him, or even trying to pick him up. Rather tragic.

But despite this tragedy, he tried not to let it down. Even now he sings a song of his own design to keep his spirits high. "Walking through the woods... walking through the woods" he sang gently to himself as his old boots trudged through grass and mud.

The rest of him wasn't looking too good either really. His shirt he had looted from one of those charity bins, as well as the only pants he could find. Sadly they were two sizes bigger than he was, and thus were eternally kept aloft by two belts strapped as tightly as they could. His backpack had seen better days honestly, and his sleeping bag had given up a long time ago. Other than that, he didn't have much else in it beyond a towel, a spare change of clothes, underwear, socks, and two canteens for water. The bandana tied around his head was eternally damp from the sweat of his journey.

Despite everything he lacked, Bernie kept going despite the fact that he didn't know where he was going, or where he ended up in this forest; this was because he was completely lost. He didn't have a map, his water was running low, and he hadn't eaten in a day. Really it was nothing short of a miracle that he was still able to keep going as he did. His genteel singing was cut short from a furious rumble from his belly. He grimaced from how angry it sounded, his hand gently rubbing it in hopes to sooth the savage beast. He hadn't found anything edible in this entire forest, and everything he had hoped was edible turned out to be poisonous. He sighed sadly as he hiked up his backpack, continuing his sad little march as his tummy growled even more loudly.

His legs felt like lead, having been carrying him since early morning. Finding a good spot by the base of a mighty oak tree, Bernie dumped his pack and collapsed at its roots. He gently fanned himself with his hand as he drained what little water he had left from his canteen.

The water was so warm, but it was the best he had at the moment, though it didn't make him feel any better. His tummy rumbled cavernously, and he sighed sadly. Turning to the blue sky, he could not see a single cloud in it, and it was just so god damn hot in this damn forest. But, what was this? Squinting against the vivid blue sky, Bernie could make out a thin line of smoke gently wafting above the tall tree line. It was too thin to be a forest fire (unless it was a baby one), so, that could mean either a cabin, or a campsite of some sort. He didn't care which, he could only hope that they'd be willing to share their meal with a poor lost traveller. Wrenching himself off the tree, Bernie re-adjusted his pack and hastened as much as his tired legs could manage through the forest.

His hopes had spirited him so much that he managed to jog for a full twenty minutes, so that he may come across a truly wondrous sight. Surrounded by a dense layer of trees was a large wooden cottage, complete with a small flower garden and what also looked to be home-grown vegetables. This must've been someone permanent home Bernie concluded as he approached, silently walking across the stone steps. In the back of his mind he couldn't help but feel bad for asking food of someone who might have very little supplies of their own, but choices were limited and he didn't have any others beyond starve and die in the woods.

Finally at the front door, Bernie was amazed by how tall the cottage looked. It seemed so much smaller from far away, but everything was so... plus sized. The door was practically twice his height, and the doorknob was as large as his own head. Who on earth lived here? Well, it kinda didn't matter he thought as he politely knocked on the thick door. Each tap of his fist sounded more like a thump on the solid wood. After three knocks he waited patiently, his thumbs pulling on his straps as if he was wearing suspenders. He idly rolled on the balls of his feet until he could hear a thumping from inside the house. It got louder and louder until it stopped; whoever was making that sound was just beyond the door. The sound of locks being undone came from behind the door, and Bernie began mentally planning what he would even say.

He swallowed nervously as the door swung open, and all he saw was purple. Whoever had answered the door, well, he was now facing off with their chest. Craning his neck up, Bernie's eyes widened as they were met by the soft baby blue eyes of a gentle looking brown bear. Her fur looked so lush and soft, it looked to be flowing off her like a gentle river, or the breeze. Bernie took a sudden step back just to get all of her into perspective. Whoever this was, she was wearing a large purple silk dress that was utterly spotless, and shone like moonlight. She truly filled that dress out nicely, plus, her tits were huge. Which was always nice. Though, in retrospect, she also filled the doorway just as nicely. It almost seemed too small for her as well. "Can I help you?" she inquired firmly, almost regally even.

“Hum? Oh, umm, damn, what was I going to... oh right; I’m sorry to bother you ma’am” Bernie began.

“Miss” the Bear cut in in her same imperial tone.

“Oh. I’m sorry to bother you miss, but I’m a poor lost traveller who has come a long way, and is looking for a temporary lodgings and perhaps some food and water” he said hopefully.

The Bear lady pursed her lips together as she looked him over critically. Her eyes paid extra special attention to his boots. “And a shower, I suspect” she remarked.

“Umm, I guess?” Bernie said uncertainly.

The Bear lady closed her eyes as she rubbed at her first and second chins, clearly thinking over the request with great weight and effort. She smiled as she flashed her sweets eyes at Bernie. “Why certainly young man, my home is always, well, home to poor travellers such as yourself. Do come in” she offered, moving out of the way of the door frame.

As Bernie moved to enter, she placed her frying pan sized paw to his chest. “Remove the boots first,” she ordered. “I mopped the floor earlier and I don’t want muddy footprints” she explained and then retreated into her abode.

Bernie was quite happily to finally tear his boots off, considering he had been wearing them for a week straight. He grunted and heaved with effort as he wrenched the things off his feet. They came off with a slurp as his yellow and brown socks came into view. God those things reeked, and Bernie was happy to finally remove them, freeing his feet from the foul confines. Really they weren’t any better, and Bernie was gagging from his foul odour. And he had to deal with his body odour on a daily basis.

Ditching the boots and socks, Bernie finally entered the madam’s abode. It was dimly lit, and he appeared to be in a living space that was occupied by a rather large wooden table and three chairs of varying sizes. Numerous display cases lined the walls, all of them filled with an enormous volume of photos and collectible knick-knacks. Wow, she even had the full ’99 collection of glass animals. A fact Bernie didn’t even acknowledge as he didn’t like knick-

knacks. His gracious host was patiently waiting for him beyond the living space, in the stone layered kitchen.

There were numerous benches with various chopping boards and cutlery. A cleaver was rather unceremoniously impaled through a large block of wood. Normally, that would be terrifying, but something else attracted his senses. Hanging from a sturdy metal frame was an enormous black cooking pot, hanging lazily above a burning fire. So antiquated, but it's not as if a forest cottage would have gas or electric fires. And from within the pot came the most rich and beautiful smell ever. Just being near it had Bernie drooling as his stomach screamed out loudly for the food. The Bear lady gave a curt stir of the contents of the pot before she addressed Bernie. "Lunch is almost ready, so, I think it would be best if you wash yourself before you join me" she commanded.

"Oh, umm, okay" Bernie stumbled, not used to such a domineering woman.

"Good boy. Now, I have a working shower just down the hall on the right. Leave your clothes outside for me and put on your spare ones" she ordered.

Wait, how would she know that? "Ho-how do you know I have spare clothes?" he stammered out of shock.

"Call it woman's intuition" she replied lazily as she added a generous helping of salt and pepper to the pot. "Now then, off you pop dear. Don't worry, the food will still be here when you get back" she added with a sweet smile.

Well, that answer was complete BS, but, he was a guest and it would be rude to call her out on that. So, Bernie obeyed, keeping his backpack even more secure as he really didn't trust this strange lady. Following the instructions he came across the wooden bathroom, with a proper shower, naturally that woman's size. It looked so out of place here, but, she must've had some decent plumbing put in. Dumping his backpack by a wash basin, Bernie locked the door behind so he could slowly strip his clothes off. Well, considering how much they clung to him it was more of a peeling action really. He fiddled with the belts, as they were close to rusting into their locked position. Digging his claw in Bernie finally broke the damn things loose; his pants falling without their support. Gripping at his bandana, he removed it carefully, adding it to the pile of dirty clothes.

Standing in his underwear, Bernie felt incredibly exposed in this alien bathroom. He honestly didn't want to go any further, just in case this woman had some secret peep holes around or something like that. Unlocking the door, he peered out into the hallway, but his host was nowhere to be seen. With the coast clear he kicked his dirty clothes out into the hall, but he kept his underwear on as he locked the door once more and hopped into the shower, dragging the curtain around behind him.

Not even bothering with the hot, Bernie stood under a powerful jet of cold water, and it felt so good. He could feel everything wash away as the mud and sweat that had clung to him for so long pooled at his feet, draining down the plughole as he rubbed the water under his armpits vigorously, washing away the sin.

He stood in that jet for five minutes straight, until he finally felt clean. Stumbling out of the shower, water dripped from his fur as he felt ten pounds lighter. Unconsciously reaching out with his hand, Bernie gripped at his towel that was folded on the wash basin and rubbed himself aggressively. He was halfway down his back when he paused. When... when had he pulled his towel out of his bag? He didn't remember doing that, but, it was out there, he must've done it. He continued to towel himself off, concluding that he must've taken it out when he was being paranoid of that strange woman. It must've just, slipped his mind. Yeah, that was it.

Finally dry (enough), Bernie wrapped his towel around his waist so he could wriggle his underwear free. While it was rather rude, he just didn't completely trust a woman who lived out in the woods. It tends to make them rather... funny in the head. Finding his spare clothes, Bernie dressed himself with curt speed. Inspecting himself in the bathroom mirror, he smiled from how clean he looked. In fact, he looked cleaner than he ever had after a shower. Strange, considering there hadn't been any soap in the bathroom at all. Rather strange indeed.

Making his way back to the kitchen, Bernie had already found the table in the living space was already set with two bowls of steaming... something, and a stool prepared for him to get onto his chair. And of course, his host waiting patiently with her head resting on her folded fingers, her eyes closed in concentration. "Welcome back" she said slowly without opening her eyes.

Bernie was silent as he joined her at the table. "Thank you?" Bernie said hesitantly, not sure what to say really.

Her eyes opened slowly, and Bernie could feel as if they were looking through him, plumbing his very soul, plundering everything about him. "You're welcome dear" she said with a motherly smile as she picked up her spoon.

Bernie did the same as he inspected his meal: It was some guide of cream coloured stew with various lumpy things in it. It was honestly kinda hard to tell what was meat and what wasn't. "Two, four, six, eight, bog in don't wait" the Bear declared loudly as she dived into her meal.

Shrugging, Bernie dove in just as ravenously. Whatever this stew was, it was delicious, magically delicious. For a simple cottage pot stew all the flavours blended together so perfectly. It was so delicious Bernie barely even took the time to savour it; much preferring to inhale his meal. Even his host was finding it hard to keep up as after a minute of scoffing, the entire (rather large) bowl was emptied. Bernie shuddered in pleasure, gently rubbing his bloated stomach happily. He couldn't remember being so happily full for a very long time. He almost wished he had some bread to scoop up the sauce. Either way, he just reclined back in his chair, happily rubbing his full tummy as his host slowly and carefully savoured her meal to the last drop.

Once she was done, she gently placed her spoon in her own bowl and sighed contentedly. "I take it you enjoyed that?" she said with a smile.

Bernie nodded happily. He had tasted a lot of different home cooking over his years, but this was definitely top five. "That's good," the Bear said sweetly, her eyes twinkling mischievously, "because, I have a secret to tell you. Before you came out, I snuck in a special herb into your meal. A herb that, once ingested, will fatten you up like the little piggy that you are. And once you're nice and fat, you'll provide me with more meat for weeks to come" she said darkly.

If Bernie had still been holding his spoon, he would've dropped it in shock. So, instead, he chose to scream loudly as he gripped his gut in horror, already certain that he could see it growing. His host cackled loudly, but not evilly, rather, it was more light-hearted laughing than pure dang nasty evil. "Ha ha, relax my dear," she smiled, cheekily elbowing the terrified Otter. "I'm not some evil forest witch. I mean if I was clearly my house would've been made out of gingerbread" she added jovially.

Bernie just stared at her in terror, not even sure what to believe anymore. "So I'm not going to..." he said slowly.

“Blow up like a blimp? No, well, not unless you keep eating like *that*” she smirked, giving Bernie’s belly a sharp prod; his flesh shyly receding from her touch.

“Do you normally make a habit of scaring your guests to death?” Bernie questioned indignantly, though his voice breaking made it more of a squeak as his host gathered the bowls to dump in the sink in the kitchen.

“Actually, I do” the Bear admitted as she returned to her seat. “Gotta get my kicks somehow” she added with a sly grin.

“I... you... okay” Bernie mumbled, not even sure how to respond to such honesty.

“Oh don’t worry dear, I promise not to lay any more frights on your like that. Buuuutttt, now that lunch is over, I think we should begin something we should’ve started some time ago. Starting with, young man, your name” she said playfully.

“Umm, my name is Bernard. But, please call me Bernie” Bernie answered meekly.

“Bernie what?” the Bear inquired, her head tilted in curiosity.

Bernie shrunk a little in his chair, not very comfortable playing this game. “I don’t know my last name” he mumbled.

The Bear raised her brow to this, but she could see the troubled look plastered to the face of her young guest, and felt it wasn’t the time. “Well then, my name is Melissa York. But please, call me Melissa” Melissa explained with a smile.

“York, is that British?” Bernie queried, glad to be off the subject of his last name.

“Why yes it is, as a matter of fact” Melissa said with an amazed little smile.

“Odd, you don’t seem to have much of an accent” Bernie pointed out crassly.

“Well, once you’re out of your country of birth for some time you tend to lose ye olde accent. I admit I haven’t visited home in a long time now, but, it doesn’t bother me much” Melissa rambled, her eyes focused on Bernie like a hawk.

“I-I see” Bernie said, trying to maintain his interest.

Melissa hmm’ed quietly to herself as she rolled her jaw a little. Though she was the tiniest bit curious about this young gent’s own place of birth, somehow, she had the slightest feeling he didn’t like talking about it much. “So, a traveller are we? Where are you going?” she inquired curiously.

“Where am I going?” Bernie repeated aloud. As he thought about the answer, he absently looked off in a random wistfully. “Wherever the road takes me” he answered in his best philosophical tone.

“Ah, a lone wolf huh? I can relate to the need to travel, I did it a fair bit in my youth as well. You can end up in the darnedest of places. But, it is fortuitous then that the road lead you to me” she said, a tinge of sadness in her voice.

“Why is that?” Bernie inquired, staring at Melissa with piqued interest.

Though she smiled, sadness could be read in the Bear’s expression as her endless blue eyes belied loneliness, and sorrow. “I haven’t had company in such a long time now. Especially not the company of a gentleman caller” she sighed sadly.

Bernie certainly hoped she wasn’t referring to a “booty call”. As much as she had the traits of a MILF, he was certain she’d crushed him in an instant. “Though obvious to say it, choosing isolation certainly is a lonely road my dear Bernie. Sometimes, at night, I would pray for someone to come along to keep me company at night. What serendipity that you would come to my doorstep” she said happily, a small tear rolling down her face.

She rubbed it away quickly and laughed. “Sorry, sometimes I get a little emotional” she apologized.

Bernie laughed with her. "You don't need to apologize Melissa" he said with a smile, noting how her demeanour was a lot softer now, almost, motherly.

Melissa centered herself quickly. "So, do you have any plans for where you're going next?" she questioned.

"Well, not that I know of. I was trying to find this one town, but I got some terrible directions and ended up lost in this forest. I only even found your house by following the smoke from your chimney. If I hadn't, well, I probably would've died in that forest" he admitted, feeling the very weight of the idea that without Melissa, he most likely would have died.

"Well, if you have no plans, then, you're free to stay here with me as long as you need too" Melissa offered hopefully.

"I don't want to be a bother" Bernie replied, his conscious getting the better of him.

"It will be no trouble at all my dear. Of course, it won't be a free ride. I'll expect you to help me around the house with chores" she explained tactfully.

"I'm used to working for my meal" Bernie answered quickly.

"Wonderful" Melissa declared, clapping her hands together in delight.

Pushing away from the table, she guided Bernie down the hallway to an empty room, where a single bed stood alone, and unused alongside a solid wood side table, and a dresser for clothes. "This is the spare room, which I reserve for guests. I don't ask much, but I will request that you keep the room clean, and that you make your bed every morning" she explained sternly.

"Understood" Bernie replied absently, having gone over this before.

“Wonderful. Now, feel free to leave your backpack in your room and then meet me by the front door. I need to go out to gather herbs and you seem like the spry sort to help me out with that” Melissa explained, walking back to the kitchen.

Having retrieved his backpack from the bathroom, Bernie didn’t bother to unpack his things as he dumped his pack into the corner. Giving a distrusting look at the half-open door, Bernie took a quick sit on the bed. He sank slowly into the soft mattress, the springs barely making a noise as it grooved around his keister. “Better than the ground at least” he murmured to himself as he left with a pair of fresh socks in hand.

Melissa was patiently waiting for Bernie outside her house. She was wearing a pointed purple hat that looked like the same material her dress was made of, with ribbons that were gently tied around her chin to keep the thing on straight. Now, Bernie didn’t believe in magic, but, if Melissa was arguing against the idea that she wasn’t a witch, she was doing a pretty poor job of it. That dress wasn’t even very practical in terms of walking through the woods. If anything the only practical part of her ensemble was the shawl tied around her massive shoulders.

Melissa didn’t notice Bernie approach, as she seemed very invested in something off in the distance. Whatever it was, Bernie couldn’t see it. What he *could* see however, was that his boots were quite conspicuously clean. No trace of mud were on them, and they seemed less ratty than before. “I hope you don’t mind,” Melissa said out of nowhere, finally turning to Bernie, “but I took the liberty of cleaning your boots while you were in the shower.”

She... cleaned his boots? That was actually pretty touching, and maybe just a little bit creepy. “Thank you” he said happily, his heart felt like it would burst with joy.

“You’re welcome my dear. Now do pop your shoes on, we have a bit of a walk to find what I need” she explained, pulling a small golden sickle from out of her sleeve.

“Why not use a knife?” Bernie questioned as he put his boots on.

“Eh, sickles tend to get a nice clean shot. I don’t have to use one, it’s just my fancy” she rambled as the two took off into the forest.

Bernie had to work pretty hard to keep up with Melissa's pace, a fact the Bear noticed as she would slow her pace down so he could catch up to her. Side by side they walked, until Bernie felt something by his side; turns out, it was Melissa's large paw held out to him. It almost as if she wanted, to hold his hand. A questionable act, but she seemed quite lonely, what with being all alone in a forest cottage. He took her hand gently, and she took his in turn. A smile crept on her face as they walked through the woods for some time.

The wind blew gently, causing the canopy to shake and shudder, leaves fell like petals on the ground, and, Bernie could feel himself growing closer to Melissa, in a literal sense. By whatever force she was applying, Bernie found himself pressed up against Melissa's soft arms, and a rather weird thought came to him. He almost, wanted to wrap his arms around hers, to just bury himself in her fur. Unknown to Bernie, Melissa's smile widened as she could feel Bernie pressing into him. It was such a sweet gesture.

They continue to walk in silence, enjoying the scenery. That is, until Melissa stopped sharply, almost taking Bernie's arm off as her head snapped upwards at a nearby tree. Bernie followed her gaze as best as he could, squinting in the daylight as he caught sight of a small weed growing out of a crack in a tree. "Is that what you're after?" Bernie inquired.

"Indeed it is, it's exactly what I need. It's a bit high, but, just as well I have some to help me" Melissa said, turning to Bernie. She held her sickle out to him. "Be a dear and climb on my shoulders. You should be able to reach it from there."

Though Bernie took the sickle, he wasn't so sure as Melissa bent down, her mountainous back presented to him. She had such a pretty dress on, it would be a shame for him to get mud all over the shoulders. "Are you sure? I don't want to ruin your lovely dress" he explained.

"It's fine Bernie, I won't mind, trust me" she answered convincingly.

"If you're sure" Bernie mumbled as Melissa helped him climb up her back.

With him secure she stood up suddenly, catapulting him up the tree line. He waved his hands awkwardly to keep his balance as Melissa secured him by his legs. His constant

flapping ended up sending him lurching onto the tree, with the strange weed just above him. With his face firmly planted on the tree he kept the weed firm in order to cleanly snick it with the tool. "Okay, I have it" he said loudly with a face half-planted on tree.

"Okay, now, trust me on this: Jump down" Melissa said calmly.

"Jump down?" Bernie repeated, not very sure about himself.

"Trust me Bernie, just jump forward" Melissa called reassuringly.

Well, she hadn't lead him astray so far, beyond telling him he was going to turn into a pig so she could eat him. But, that was only one strike. He took a heavy gulp as he closed his eyes and jumped forward, clean off her shoulders. He sailed forward, only for something to catch him gently. He grunted loudly as he landed, and his eyes snapped open as he realized he was in Melissa's rather large arms. "You... caught me" he said slowly.

"Well of course, what, you think I was going to make you jump to the ground?" she said snidely and laughed.

Bernie actually laughed as well, it was kinda infectious really. And he felt like he could laugh so freely whilst held in those soft and gentle arms. So safe and secure... wow. He actually felt a little *too* comfortable right now. "Umm, could you let me down now?" he asked awkwardly, his face reddening.

Melissa acquiesced, gently lowering him to the ground, sickle and weed still in hand. "Okay, let's go home" Melissa said quickly.

"Right" Bernie said just as quickly, still kinda uncomfortable with what just happened.

Their journey home seemed much faster than their journey to that tree, and the two had been awkwardly silent the entire time. Melissa was quick to move over the threshold of the house as Bernie respectfully removed his shoes and socks again to join her. She seemed to be muttering something as she placed the herb Bernie had given her over the journey into a

jar. "So, what was that for, anyways?" Bernie inquired curiously as the jar joined a number of other jars, all with different plants in them.

"Oh, I use them as an ingredient in cooking sometimes. It's Thyme" Melissa explained apathetically.

"Oh" Bernie remarked, having no understanding of herbs. Though if he did, he would know Thyme doesn't grow out of trees.

"You know, I think I need a good sit down" Melissa declared loudly, and without warning.

Though Bernie expected her to sit at the table, Melissa instead guided him down the hall to the door at the end. Bernie expected this to be her room, but, no. It was what she called her Sitting Room, which was occupied by a very large rocking chair, and very comfy looking couch with a sheet draped over it. More of her display cases lined the room, and all of them had photo frames of varying times. "You must be tired yourself, feel free to lie on the couch" Melissa said with a yawn as she sat in her rocking chair.

She gently tilted herself back and forward, back and forward as she retrieved a knitting kit that was just dumped by the chair's side, just so she could continue on what looked like a scarf. The pattern was completely off, and, as Bernie lay down on the couch, he had to conclude that Melissa must be terrible at knitting. As he melted into couch, Bernie did realize that, yes, he was very tired, actually. He could not remember when he had ever felt so tired. He felt like he had run a marathon all day, and he really could not move an inch. He yawned loudly as his eyes fluttered gently.

"Tired little fellow huh?" Melissa said with a small smile, continuing her knitting.

"I've travelled all my life" Bernie admitted after a long yawn.

"Is that so?" Melissa remarked curiously.

"Yeah, I've been walking for a long time. And yet... I've never felt as much as home anywhere as I have had here. Is that weird?" Bernie wondered.

"No, not at all dear" Melissa said kindly.

"I guess not" Bernie yawned loudly.

"I've also travelled for a lot of my life too actually. I never felt happy being in one spot for very long. The only reason I even stayed were for the people in my life. But those sorts of things never last long" Melissa sighed sadly, missing a loop in her knitting.

"You don't make friends well?" Bernie questioned.

"I guess you can say I *did*. It's just that such relationships never ended well for me. People drift apart Bernie, they drift apart and sometimes, never see each other again" she said bitterly, her lower lip almost quivering. "Or never want to see each other again" she added as a quiet aside.

Bernie didn't hear that aside. That was probably for the best. "You must be pretty lonely, if you're so happy with a teenager randomly appearing on your doorstep asking for stuff" Bernie commented.

Melissa had to laugh at that. "Ha! I guess you could say I was, but, I like having you around Bernie. Bonds are what keep people going, and even just one is enough to give a person the power to want to see tomorrow. You make my little cottage seem brighter than what is normally does, even just for the brief time you've been here" Melissa said all misty eyed.

"You have a lot of faith in me. How do you know I'm not actually axe-crazy and will try to kill you in your sleep or something?" Bernie questioned crudely, trying to make it sound like a joke.

"I guess I could say, that you have too good a spirit to be an axe-crazy murderer" Melissa answered humourlessly.

"My spirit huh? You like that mystical voodoo stuff huh?" Bernie laughed.

"I guess you could say I do. Girl's gotta have a hobby" Melissa defended, holding up her pretty crappy scarf. "That they're good at" she added quickly.

"You're pretty cryptic" Bernie commented before yawning loudly again.

"Everyone is Bernie," Melissa said with a sad smile, "everyone is."

Her rather sincere remark was met with a deep breathing noise. Gazing over to the couch, Melissa found Bernie had nodded off. She laughed to herself as she pulled the blanket that was curled over the couch onto him, tucking him in gently. Her eyes twinkled gently as she stood over the sleeping Otter, and she gently tussled his messy hair. She smiled sadly as she returned to her knitting.

Bernie yawned loudly, his eyes snapping up as he lay in candlelit darkness. His body leaned upwards, hunching itself over his lap as his arms stretched to the roof, and he yawned loudly again. He scratched his back idly as his blurry eyes looked around, but Melissa was nowhere in sight. God how late was it?

Throwing aside the sheet that he was rather snugly coiled in, he staggered out of the Sitting Room, following the light from down the hallway into the Kitchen. Melissa was meandering around the pot again, barely even noticing him, until she sharply turned her head. "Good evening" she greeted with a raised brow.

"Evening?" he yawned in confusion, idly scanning all the lit candles. "What time is it?" he inquired.

"Oh, just a little after seven" Melissa answered absently.

After seven? Man he must've been pretty tired. "Sorry I nodded off" he apologized, scratching the back of his neck as he sat at the table.

"You're sorry for nothing Bernie, there's no being ashamed of being a tired little dickens my dear" Melissa said sweetly as she added copious amounts of salt to her pot.

Bernie blushed a little, averting his gaze from such embarrassing talk. "Ah geez" he flushed.

Melissa snickered loudly as she turned away from her pot, to let it simmer away. "Ah, sorry, did I embarrass you?" she inquired sincerely.

Bernie laughed awkwardly, turning to give Melissa a meek little smile, despite his rosy cheeks. "No, it's... kinda flattering really" he smiled weirdly.

Melissa smiled back, gently tussling Bernie's hair without any resistance. She could feel his body buckle beneath her paw, and he let out an involuntary purr. He tightened up immediately as he slapped his hands over his mouth, Melissa's paw seizing up from his sudden emanation. "Ah, I'm, sorry" Melissa apologised guiltily, returning to her pot.

Bernie uncertainly lowered his hands, but thankfully no other sounds came out. "It's... fine" he said stiffly, not sure what the hell just happened.

"I tend to get a bit touchy feely" Melissa explained as she stirred the pot, sighing into the cloud of steam. "I've never had kids of my own" she sighed.

"Couldn't meet the right man?" Bernie inquired, hoping to forget what just happened.

"You could say that" Melissa answered bitterly.

"Oh, I see" Bernie said awkwardly, staring into his own lap.

Was that why she was getting so close? Did she... want to make him her son? "This... might sound weird," he said aloud, catching Melissa's eye, "but, are you trying... to make me your child?"

Melissa paused in contemplation, though Bernie could see her back was seizing up? Seems like he had hit the nail on the head. "No" Melissa answered firmly. "No, I can't make you my child" she said with finality.

Bernie heaved a quiet sigh of relief, even though he most likely knew she had heard him. "Sorry if I'm making this weird, it's just, I'm not really used to people being so..." he trailed off, rotating his wrist trying to find the word.

"Clingy?" Melissa finished?

Bernie didn't answer, choosing to remain respectfully silent. Melissa chuckled to herself dryly. "I'm sorry," she apologised again, "it's just old habit I guess. I'll stop now" she declared, stirring the pot again.

Bernie nodded, still staring into his lap. This was getting incredibly weird, and he wasn't sure whether or not to leave the table or not. "How long do you plan on staying?" Melissa inquired curiously, and way out of nowhere.

"Oh, how long? Umm, well, I don't want to impose, so, however long you'll have me, I guess" he hazarded.

"However long I'll have you?" Melissa repeated, stroking her chin thoughtfully. "However long you want" she decided a little too freely.

"Umm, you sure?" Bernie inquired, not exactly certain about it.

"It'll be nice to have you around, it's not right for a lady to be on her lonesome after all" she said all prim and proper like.

"Okay, well, I'll be happy to keep you company, if you ease up on the touching" he put plainly.

"Wonderful, then it's agreed" Melissa agreed with a smile; a smile which Bernie shared with her.