

# ILLUMINATING YOUTH

## OCTOBER REQUEST STORY

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**“You know, for the man known as ‘The Luminary’ you do seem to fancy skulking around in the dark.”** It was late in the evening that the man being addressed had wandered away from the campsite he had established with his party for the eve. A full day of adventuring through this expansive forest had left them all fatigued and very ready for a breather. Not only were the trees thick, but it was likewise hilly which made for a difficult trek when paired with monster encounters. While most of the group had retired, the Luminary was restless.

But as he turned in response to a familiar voice, a small girl clad in red, he realized that he wasn’t as along as he’d first thought. Despite looking the part of a child Veronica was not one mentally -- she’d merely been struck with a curse that had wound back her physical clock in attempt to silence her prodigious powers. She was good company, albeit rather smarmy, but they’d made returning her to normal one of their journey’s goals.

**“You think so? I was just thinking the wildlife in this forest was unusual. These flowers for instance.”** He pointed to some bright pink flowers that decorated a moldy tree trunk, fingers notably cut and bruised from their constant fighting. He’d grown up in a small village and as a result was very interested in wildlife. It was essentially Cobblestone’s backbone after all. They lived in harmony with the environment.

As if responding to his interest, however, the pink flower began to glow. With the foliage above the surrounding area had only been dimly lit by the moonlight that filtered through, yet the light of the flower was very obviously born from within. It wasn’t merely the singular flower either, but every single one on the trunk lit up... and all around them. The grove the two had wandered into seemed to be

completely full of them. **"They're so pretty."** Veronica remarked, and the Luminary silently agreed. Curiously the girl knelt down to poke at one poking up and out of the soil, but the moment she touched it?

She disappeared. Poof! Completely out of the Luminary's field of vision. Which naturally caused a panic. **"Veronica? Hey! Veronica!?"** No answer, and what was worse all of the flowers nearby began to spew out violet spores. A violet that resembled Veronica's eyes. It happened so quickly that he wasn't able to avoid inhaling them, and damn did they burn.

Some were lodged in his throat, others stung at his lungs. It felt akin to being inflicted with poison, but the boy knew he needed to push past the discomfort to search for his missing companion. But violet spores were everywhere, the low visibility provided by the night sky serving to do little more than get him turned around in the mass of plant spew. **"Ver--"**, he coughed again, voice crackling as hands attempted to part the sea of purple in front of him desperately. **"Veronica!?"**

His anxiety was abated a moment. He definitely thought he could hear her voice now. **"Is that you, Veronica!?"** Again, he heard her. But the realization regarding its true source only served to make him more anxious. **"That's not Veronica. That's... an echo?"** Of his own voice at that. The exact some things he was saying were being echoed back at him by the forest in Veronica's voice.

No, he was speaking with her voice to begin with? Was it an illusion? An effect of the spores? Perhaps the trick of a monster? The facts of the matter were that the spores appeared to be unyielding, and his companion was still missing.

Had he checked with another party member like Jade before setting out maybe he would have been given the knowledge needed to avoid this situation altogether. Perhaps a cautionary tale regarding the flowers? After all they were an extremely dangerous, cursed flora. They would steal the essence of those that came into contact with them every ten years, ultimately distributing transformative spores that as a defense mechanism to imbue that essence into another.

But essence wasn't limited to mere voice. *Body, soul, personality.* All would bend to the form of the one stolen -- in this case Veronica.

The Luminary didn't know this though, and he'd already inhaled enough to make sure the complete transformation would be finalized. For example? His hair. Brown and straight alike, bangs in the front began to grow outward not in their regular color but a brilliant blond, covering his usually bare forehead as the hair in the back saw length extend at an even greater speed. It didn't merely grow longer in the back, nor did it merely gain the same blond sheen as the brighter color consumed his roots. No, hairs began to spiral and lace together. It was subtle at first, but as volume grew more and more substantial it became clear that the boy was no sporting a pair of braids not unlike Veronica's own, tied by a pair of orange scrunchies.

He didn't even notice them until a nearby noise caught his attention, the sudden turning of his head finding a braid smacking him in the face. "Wha!? Who put this mass of lemon fur in my way!?" Tone was both confused and haughty, a perfect match for Veronica's own as the young man tugged on the expanse of hair, and likewise noticed a second. **"These are like... Veronica's? But there's no way! Unless... Am I becoming her?"** Paired with the voice it was the most logical conclusion.

And he was beginning to think much more logically. The Luminary didn't think himself an idiot, but he surely didn't have the tactical mindset nor the intellectual gifts some of his peers possessed. This was only a relevant point because Veronica was one of the party members gifted with such an intellect. She was a magical genius, a sharp cookie, and that sharpness was beginning to plague the boy's thought processes along with a calm that allowed her to remain composed even after becoming a child.

It was most prominently magic knowledge he hadn't possessed before that seemed to wriggle its way in at first. He knew some magic from his own experience, but there were more complicated theories coming to mind as he tried to identify what was causing his transformation. **"I suppose the spores may have an enchantment property relating to the transference of one's essence, but the statistical chances that we'd encounter something like that here..."** Vocal observations were becoming more intuitive.

Yet his form had begun to diminish with little regard for the clothing he was wearing. In good sense the Luminary drew his blade from its scabbard, dropping it onto the ground beside him the moment he could tell his point of view was growing closer to the ground. There was no way a girl of Veronica's size would be able to swing a sword, a point driven home by how difficult it was just to pull the blade free now. It was an excessive weight to drop, fingers barely able to hold it not only thanks to smaller size but likewise because of the fact that the strength in his arms had faded, untrained softness taking the place of brawny muscle that had been earned by training.

*A caster has no need for muscles!* A voice rung in his head.

The vestments adorned by the boy seemed to pool around his form with haste as height dropped farther and farther. Sleeves slipped past hands that were not merely petite but soft with youthful vigor, pants falling to pool around his feet as legs became less and less realistic for a young man and more and more suggestively belonging to an androgynous child. Yet Veronica was not androgynous, she was a little lady, and his biology would soon match that.

It was only natural that his broad chest would lose its defining muscle just as his arms and legs had, but what was extraordinary was the emergence of two fat deposits in their wake. They were hardly abundant and only gave a slight rise to the

heave of the Luminary's chest, but paired with a set of slightly puffier nipples it was evident there would be room to grow in the future; just as the slight pudginess that had accumulated in a dramatically shorter stomach would one day thin out as he grew taller with age.

His dick had been shrinking along with him, surely, but it eventually reached a point where vacancy became evident. But *she* didn't even care. It was only natural to her at this point. She'd grasped the realization that there would be no resisting things any further, and considering the rarity of the flowers it would be best to inquire back at camp regarding their true nature.

Inevitably the spores subsided, but not before granting the child a more fitting outfit to correspond with her new size and identity. They swirled around her, cloth and blade beginning to glow the very same violet her eyes reflected. Tiny nose wriggled to avoid a sneeze as gentle lips went wide with surprise from the pollen's uncanny behaviour, but when all was said and done the Luminary's attire had been swept away, and she'd been left in the small red dress and hat that was typical of Veronica's ensemble. On the ground where the sword had once been? A staff that was comparative larger than the girl that would wield it.

**"How perplexing."** Veronica's calm, her reason, it was all perfectly replicated by the child that had once been a sixteen year old boy. **"While I'm very clearly Veronica, right down to her memories and mannerisms, I can recall that I'm the Luminary as well..."** As if to make sure she wasn't hallucinating, she wiggled both her bare hands and the tiny toes snuggled up in her orange socks with purple shoes. **"All seems to be real, but those spores..."** It was difficult with her stubby limbs, but she managed to catch one in both of her hands like a little girl trying to catch a butterfly, a soft **"Hup!"** escaping her lips in the meantime. She fumbled a moment, but managed to force the spore into one hand as she reached for her staff with the other, body crouched.

She'd take that spore back to the camp to study. With any luck, they'd be able to separate the Luminary from herself. Or was it herself from the Luminary? Despite initially being the boy, she wholly accepted herself as Veronica either way. It was such a strange instability that, she theorized, if she let go of that recollection she may forget that she'd ever been that boy at all.

So 'twas unfortunate that by the time the morning sun had risen, she had forgotten, having awoken fresh and confused regarding where the Luminary might have gotten to. The members of their camp spent the whole day tirelessly looking, including Veronica without a clue of what had transpired the night prior.

But only one clue was left remaining... A spore that had clung to one of Erik's bags.