

Waves of Gold

Von abgemeldet

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Kapitel 1:

Waves of Gold

By Maerad

Based on: Asterix & Obelix

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

The morning sunlight lit up the plain wooden beams and floorboards of Asterix and Obelix's hut, glancing off the leftovers of a hearty boar breakfast

"Have you heard?" inquired Asterix, casually adjusting his helmet. "Panacea's come. Visiting her parents for the harvest season. The carriage came last night when you were sleeping."

Obelix looked down at the pitcher of goat's milk he was drinking and gripped it with both hands so as not to drop it. He squeezed so hard that the pitcher broke and milk exploded all over the floor, the table and his striped pants. So much for pretending indifference. He tried anyway.

"Oh? That's...nice."

His deep rough voice came out as a squeak. He cleared his throat. "Tragicomix, too?" That wimp, was on the tip of his tongue, but he did not say it.

Asterix said it instead, smirking. "That wimp, is what you're thinking. Don't tell me you're still hung up on her, you big marshmallow!"

Ever since that day on Panacea's front steps, when she got the letter from her handsome fiancé, Asterix had found a gold mine of joke material to tease his friend with. Sometimes it took enormous control for Obelix to stop himself from picking up the smaller man by the collar and tossing him right over the village wall.

"I'll just clean this up," he mumbled instead, his fingers itching to do some damage rather than sopping up the spilled milk with an old rag. Where was a company of Roman soldiers when you needed one?

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Later that day, hammering, chopping and chiseling away in the menhir quarry, Obelix did his best to ignore that queasy, almost-but-not-quite hungry feeling in his stomach. Handling huge blocks of stone was something he was good at, something no one else could do. Even if there was no practical use for them. He sighed and coughed as the quarry dust flew around his face.

Of course there was that one time he carved an enormous heart out of stone, put a red ribbon on it, and almost got to Panacea's house with it before Asterix, know-it-all that he was, stopped him. "What kind of a gift is that for a young lady?"

Silly Obelix who couldn't do anything right.

Now even his stone sanctuary reminded him of her.

He remembered her as far back as their childhood. Unlike some of their schoolmates, who first bullied him and then became afraid of him after the potion incident, Panacea had always been polite. He had a vague impression of hip-length golden braids with violets woven into them; a perfect silver voice rising above the others as they chanted the multiplication table; a bowlful of strawberries from her father's garden. ("Don't give them to him, he'll eat the whole bowl!" "I said everybody and I meant it. Hey, Obelix! Would you like some strawberries?" He only took a handful after all; he had lost his appetite.)

Then she had gone away to Condatum (leaving behind an uneasy feeling for Obelix, like a persistent headache) and come back looking...impossible. If she had been pretty before, now she was a vision. A mirage shimmering through the dappled green of the forest, with hair like a fountain of gold and eyes like the clearest summer sky.

Obelix had turned to watch her walk away, to see her long white skirt swirl around her trim ankles, to watch her light steps that barely made an imprint on the grass.

Then he'd walked into a tree and knocked it over. Without even noticing Getafix harvesting mistletoe up there. Not to mention Dogmatix mourning the tree with one of his ear-piercing howls.

It was a bad beginning. He should have realized it would only end badly.

"Don't cry, Panacea. We'll get your Tragicomix back for you."

Never mind that all his instincts cried out to leave the pretty-boy in Caesar's army to fend for himself. Never mind that his heart broke like a menhir hit with a well-placed hammer blow and he fell to pieces as soon as she was out of sight. For once, tactless Obelix had said and done exactly the right thing.

Small comfort, that.

He was so lost in thought that he had dropped his tools without realizing it and was simply staring at his half-finished menhir without seeing it. He did not hear the slight crackling of pebbles under light footsteps or smell the familiar scent of violets. So when Panacea touched him lightly on the shoulder and asked, "Are you all right?", he jumped and whirled around as fast as his bulk would permit, fists raised.

Then he recognized her, dropped his hands, and froze.

It was as if she'd materialized right out of his thoughts.

"Sorry," she said, giggling. "I didn't mean to startle you. It's just, you were kind of spacing out so..."

"I'm fine," he rasped. The place on his bare shoulder where her fingers had been was still tingling. Just how dusty and sweaty am I? he thought, beginning to panic. And what do I say to her?

"So...how are you, Panacea?" That was okay. A little bland, but polite. Maybe some of Asterix's social skills had rubbed off on him over the years after all.

But instead of replying "Fine" as people usually do, she dropped her eyes to the pebbles on the ground and sighed.

"Not so good, actually," she said, leaning against the menhir and running her fingers over it. "Tragicomix and I broke up, you see. I thought it'd be all over the village by now." She looked away from Obelix; was she about to cry? No. She took a deep breath and looked up at him with a shrug. "You know what they say about first loves, right?"

"I'm so sorry," he blurted out. "If there's anything I...we... can do..."

His arms wanted to wrap around her, pick her up and carry her away somewhere beautiful, like that meadow in the forest with all the violets. She was so small and delicate, he could carry her in one hand. Instead he locked his hands behind his back and just looked at her, like a thirsty man looking at a clear stream of water just beyond his reach.

"That's sweet of you," she said quietly. "But don't worry. I'll be fine."

She walked away, with a final nod and goodbye. He raised his hand to wave just a second too late – her golden head was already turned.

Dogmatix whined and tugged on Obelix's pant leg, startling him again. He'd completely forgotten that the dog was there.

"No need to be jealous, little one," he murmured, his big hands ruffling Dogmatix's fur with the gentleness he showed to no one else. "She doesn't...she wouldn't...anyway,

let's get back to work. Fetch me that mallet, will you?"

Dogmatix, happy to have his master's attention back, set off with perked ears and a wagging tail.

Kapitel 2:

Waves of Gold

Based on: Asterix & Obelix

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Part 2

“Panacea, my dear! How lovely to see you!”

The young girl almost had the breath knocked out of her by a tight, lavender-scented hug from Impedimenta. They were standing around the well, along with several other women and girls, who were all crowding around Panacea like she was a lost sheep returned to the fold. Not all the looks and questions directed at her were friendly, however; some of them, while sounding friendly on the surface, set her teeth on edge with their veiled hostility.

“What an...interesting dress you’re wearing. Is that the fashion in Condatum?”

“Brave of you to show that much cleavage.”

“And how’s that gorgeous fiancé of yours? You broke up? Oh, I’m so sorry! Men are jerks, aren’t they?”

Panacea swallowed several angry remarks, smiled and gave neutral answers. This sort of thing was the reason why she visited so rarely. These petty, gossipy, narrow-minded women had always resented her, just because she was born with a pretty face and because she had traveled to get an education. It made her want to scream.

Impedimenta, reading the look on her young friend’s face correctly, linked arms with her and swept the others with an imposing First Lady glare. “How would you like to step over for a snack, sweetheart? We have so much to catch up on. Yes? Well, excuse me, ladies. We’ll just get going then. See you later!”

A few minutes later, safely ensconced in the Chief’s hut, Impedimenta and Panacea sat down opposite each other with a plate of fresh honey cakes between them. The older woman’s face was lined with concern.

“Don’t let them get to you,” she said. “Those vultures. They think this place is the axis of the earth and anyone who leaves it is a fool. I’ve always admired what you did – going off on your own, making a new life for yourself. Sometimes I think I’d like to do the same – only,” she rolled her eyes, “Who would take care of Piggywiggy? Not to mention running the village? Without me, everything would go to the dogs.”

Panacea smiled. She had heard all that before. The truth was, Impedimenta loved ordering people around – her husband included.

“But enough about me,” said Impedimenta. “What about you? I heard what happened between you and Tragicomix. What a pity. You made such a beautiful couple.”

That was enough. Panacea snapped. “Not you, too! Everyone keeps saying that - as if looking beautiful together were the only reason to date someone! See, that’s just it – beautiful was all I was to him. Nothing else. I was this trophy girlfriend he used to show around at parties. When I tried to talk to him about school and what I’d learned, he used to kiss me just to shut me up. I know there were lots of girls who would’ve killed to be in my position...but...I wasn’t really happy at all. The spark was gone - you know? So I left.”

She nibbled slowly at her honey cake.

"It's still hard, though," she continued. "I miss him. Well, not him – the idea of him and me together as this beautiful couple, like you said. I miss being engaged. Having some kind of certainty. Knowing there'll always be someone to take care of me even when Father is gone."

"You did the right thing," said Impedimenta. "It's hard, being married to someone you no longer love or even respect."

They sat in silence, Panacea wondering what that meant. Impedimenta certainly never showed much respect for Vitalstatistix. Did she love him, though? Was that why she still called him Piggywiggy, or was it just a leftover habit?

"Anyway," the older woman teased. "Don't worry about your future. With your looks – and brains – you could marry Caesar himself and get him to leave the village alone. How's that sound?"

They laughed so hard, the table shook. Panacea, feeling much better for a bracing round of girl talk, popped another pastry into her mouth and began describing the course in modern philosophy she had been taking in Condatum: Plato, Aristoteles, Socrates and more. But in the back of her mind, a series of shadows kept flitting past, like in Plato's Cave Allegory: She and Tragicomix, reunited after Asterix and Obelix's fabled venture behind enemy lines to rescue him. Thinking their bliss would last forever. Then the chilly silences, the coldly civilized arguments. Feeling like the loneliest girl in the world when spending time with one's fiancé had to be a bad sign. It was partly her own fault, of course. She could have been more patient, more accepting, when he revealed himself as less of a Prince Charming than she had thought. How naïve of her, to put him on a pedestal and then get disappointed because he didn't live up to her ideals.

Anyway, it's over now, she told herself. I just have to put it behind me.

Huh. Easier said than done.

Kapitel 3:

Waves of Gold

Based on: Asterix & Obelix

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Part 3

It was late afternoon; Panacea and Impedimenta were taking a walk along the borders of the forest, picking herbs and berries, chatting about the upcoming harvest dance. It was the middle of October and the leaves were tinted red and yellow, spiraling down on the wind like birds in free flight. Panacea wrapped her long blue cloak tightly around herself, trying to keep out the autumn wind.

"The men should be coming back soon," Impedimenta remarked, squinting into the shadowy forest. It was a dangerous place, easy to get lost in, with deep, faraway places where only the most skilled hunters of the village went. Like Asterix and Obelix, for instance. Speaking of which...

"There they are. Hey, you two!" Impedimenta spotted the returning hunters first and waved them over imperiously. "Have you seen Piggywiggy? If he stays in the forest overnight again I swear I'll..."

At first, Asterix and Obelix wore matching looks of annoyance as they listened to Impedimenta's harangue about her good-for-nothing husband. But as soon as they spotted Panacea – very soon, because of her height and distinctive hair – Asterix's mustache began to twitch with mischief. I know something you don't know, his eyes said, darting between Obelix and the women. As for Obelix himself, he stopped in his tracks, flushed scarlet, and said nothing.

"No, I'm afraid we don't know where the Chief is," said Asterix. "Don't worry, he'll turn up. Hello, Panacea," he added, doffing his helmet. "Nice to see you. You remember Obelix, right?"

"Of course. I just saw him working on a menhir this morning," said Panacea. She could see him carving the stone column in her mind's eye, the muscles in his arms bunching up, sweat gleaming on his skin. He was such a big, powerful man; looking at him made her feel tiny and fragile. He could lift you up bridal-style as if you weighed no more than a feather...

Wait, no! What am I thinking? She could feel the blood rushing to her own cheeks. Since when was Obelix, the shy, chubby boy who once smashed his abacus in school because he couldn't get the sums right, fantasy material? She made herself look away, focusing instead on the small, scruffy, black-and-white dog next to the two men.

"Hi there, Dogmatix! Come here – you remember me, don't you?"

She dropped to her knees and held out one hand; Dogmatix approached, sniffed the hand and, apparently remembering her, made no protest as she scratched behind his floppy ears. His tail began to wag; this, after all, was the girl who had looked after him for several months while his master was away in Africa.

"Aww, you're so cute. Good boy."

Dogmatix licked her hand and attempted to jump up into her arms, but due to his small size, only left two muddy paw marks on her cloak at knee level.

Obelix gave a sharp whistle, the first sound he had made during this meeting. "Back,

Dogmatix!" he ordered. "You're getting the lady's dress dirty. Sorry, Panacea. He's too excitable."

The dog scurried back to his master, looking contrite. Panacea laughed.

"Oh, I don't mind. He likes me. Father used to have a dog – remember, Impedimenta?" The First Lady wrinkled her nose. "Oh yes. That big, hairy brute who used to ruin my linens."

"Oh, I know! But he was the sweetest thing, our Lupus. When I came home, he'd always run up to me like he was so happy to see me. And he was a great guard dog – when that fox was sneaking around the village, our chicken coop was the only one he didn't get to."

Obelix nodded, taking a small step closer. "Lupus? That was your dog? I remember. They're so loyal, aren't they? A dog will love you no matter what happens, as long as you treat them right."

"Just like your Dogmatix. He missed you so much when you were away that time... he used to sit by the gates every day, waiting for you to come home."

She did not say how often she had joined the dog in his vigil, looking down the road until her eyes strained. Waiting for Tragicomix, of course, but also for the two brave men who would risk their lives for a stranger. Dark days, wondering if the three of them would survive. Hating herself for being too afraid to join them.

Don't think about that now.

"I left him in good hands," said Obelix. "I knew you'd look after him."

He had an interesting face, she decided. Not as perfect as Tragicomix's, but likeable – bright red plaits of hair, a round knobby nose, jaunty mustache, and black eyes with crinkly lines around them, as if he laughed often and spent lots of time in the sun. Kind, warm eyes.

"Well, it's cold out," said Asterix abruptly. "We'd best be getting home, right, Obelix? Aren't you hungry?"

"Huh? No, not really."

Impedimenta's eyebrows shot up in disbelief. This from the man who could polish off three or four roasted boars in one sitting?

"Well, I am. Come on, Obelix, we're wasting the ladies' time."

"Oh. Right. Good night, ladies."

Obelix lifted his helmet, put it on backwards, and hurried away with surprising speed, Asterix trudging after him with an irritated sigh.

The women, following them to the village at a slower pace, exchanged looks. Impedimenta was scowling.

"What's up with Obelix?" Panacea asked. "He was so...polite. This morning, too. He never used to talk to me before."

"You don't know?" Impedimenta rolled her eyes. "Oh, my dear, how dense can you get? Obviously he's in love with you."

Her face burst into flame again; a fluttery feeling rose in her stomach. After her plain and gawky teenage years, it was still hard to get used to people finding her beautiful. It was always a shock when she heard things like this, whether they were true or not.

"Me? Oh, come on. He's just shy around women, that's all."

"Shy, eh? Well, let me tell you, no other woman we know of has ever distracted him from eating. Not even Cleopatra herself. Idiot. As if he could ever stand a chance with a girl like you."

"What do you mean?" Panacea found herself bristling like a hedgehog, hardly knowing why.

"I mean that with your beauty, you could have any man you wanted. Someone rich, handsome, clever..."

"...Like Tragicomix?"

"Well, yes. You have to admit he was a good match. Aside from, you know..."

"The little fact that I was miserable with him. All I want is a man who will love me, not just my body."

"Well, that rules out Obelix for sure. He's like an animal; he only cares about one thing. Well, three. There's also food and fighting." Impedimenta snorted.

"You're being cruel, Impedimenta." Panacea increased her pace so the older woman had to jog to keep up. "Obelix is the kindest, bravest, most honorable man I know. Without him and Asterix, the Romans would have crushed us dozens of times. Your husband would be Chief of nowhere and walking everywhere by himself!"

They had reached Panacea's house; she paused with her hand on the door and shot a scathing look in Impedimenta's direction.

"And besides, if all he cared about were physical things, he'd have fallen for Cleopatra - the most beautiful woman in the world. Good night, Impedimenta."

She slammed the door.

Kapitel 4:

Waves of Gold

By Laura Schiller

Based on: Asterix & Obelix

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Part 4

"Getafix?"

"Hmm?" The old druid looked up from the cauldron he was stirring to find Obelix wandering in, a lost expression on his normally cheerful face. His hands were behind his back; he paced aimlessly around the room, pretending to look up at the bunches of dried herbs hanging from the ceiling, looking anywhere but at Getafix.

"Do you have... a potion somewhere... that could heal a broken heart?"

Getafix had been expecting this, ever since Panacea's parents first announced that she was coming to visit. It took some control for him not to laugh, silly as the question might be. Instead he composed his features into what he hoped was a wise, druidic look of sympathy.

"I'm afraid I can't help you that way, dear boy. Emotions are more complicated than that."

What Obelix said next took the druid by surprise.

"No, not me. It's Panacea. She broke off her engagement and she's really upset. The look on her face...it was like..." he stared into the fire, watching it dance and leap as if it were the only thing in the world. "Like that time when me and Asterix weren't speaking to each other. Or when I saw her with Tragicomix. She was hurt like that. Or worse." He scowled at the fire like a personal enemy, fidgeting, then abruptly turned around and began to pace again, back and forth.

"Man, I wish that pretty-boy was here!" he rumbled. "I'd pound him! I'd smash his pretty face so no girl would ever look at him again! I could run all the way down to Condatum and..."

"Now, now, Obelix. Calm down," Getafix interrupted, spreading his hands in the air.

"That wouldn't help anyone, especially Panacea."

"Then what? What should I do?" Obelix turned to look Getafix in the face for the first time. He'd forgotten to shave, his hair ties were coming undone and there were purple shadows under his eyes, as if he had spent a restless night. This was a problem that couldn't be fixed by drinking a potion, throwing punches or travelling somewhere by boat or cart. This was a journey of the heart – the most frightening and unfamiliar territory any man could travel.

"Wait and see, my friend," said Getafix sadly, giving the younger man a pat on the shoulder. "Time is a great healer. Greater than any potion I could make. And perhaps you could try to talk to her, get to know her. And by the gods, don't look so frightened!" This time he really couldn't stop the chuckles that came out. "You demolish Caesar's soldiers by the thousand and get scared of a single girl. How is that possible?"

"Think this is funny?" growled Obelix, pretending to be annoyed but looking perceptibly brighter. "You and Asterix just won't stop laughing at me. Thanks anyway."

You're a good pal."

Obelix clapped Getafix on the back, knocking him over ("Oof! Go easy on an old man, would you?") and left, humming tunelessly and looking his old familiar self again, at least for the moment.

Getafix picked himself up off the floor, smoothed his white robe, and went back to watching the newest batch of super-strength potion. Things might be quiet on the Roman front, but he wasn't about to leave the village unprepared. The thick green liquid bubbled sluggishly in its, looking like a perfectly ordinary herb and vegetable stew. If it weren't for the power-up effect, he wondered, however would he get the carnivorous villagers to eat their greens?

The potion. Poor Obelix had been too worried even to try and sneak a taste. Was that a good sign or a bad sign?

Thinking about the potion and Obelix together always made the druid feel queasy, even after all these years. It was all his fault, really. If he'd just locked the door that day, or covered the pot, or something...but how was he to know one of the children would sneak in and try to drink it? Now Obelix would never be normal again.

What would it be like, to grow up as a freak of nature? Knocking on doors only to have them smash at your slightest touch? Frightening your parents and your peers when all you ever wanted was to be accepted? It was a wonder the boy had turned out as well as he had.

With his power, he could have challenged the chieftains of every village in Gaul and become the ruler of them all. Instead he had joined Asterix to protect and defend their home, and Getafix's oversight had proved a blessing for them all. The gods certainly worked in mysterious ways.

Suddenly the old man's ruminations were interrupted by a quiet knock on his door.

"Come in," he called.

A red-faced, disheveled Panacea stumbled inside, propelled by a blast of wind. Pushing her tangled hair back from her face, she hovered by the door as if expecting him to shoo her out. "Are you very busy, Master Druid? I'd like to talk to you about something, if that's all right."

"Of course it's all right, my child. You know I'm never too busy to talk to you."

Tall and beautiful as she was, he could still see the little girl she had been, timidly asking him to teach her another story about the gods or explain the use of a certain herb. She had been his best student; if she were a man, she would be his apprentice by now. Too bad the men of this village were too stiff-necked to accept a female druid.

"Pull up a chair, that's it. Now, how are you doing? And don't just say you're fine. I really want to know."

She sighed, slumped over in her chair, then straightened up again, remembering years of admonishments about bad posture. "I don't know. That's just it. I'm all confused."

"Why don't you try and tell me. If you put it into words, maybe it will sound simpler."

She paused for a while, biting her lower lip, as if struggling to find the right words.

"It's just...there's this guy... who's apparently in love with me. A friend of mine said it's so obvious the whole village knows, but I never noticed 'till she pointed it out. It would explain a lot though...like, why he gets so nervous and absent-minded around me."

What a sweet girl, thought Getafix smugly. She thinks she can protect his privacy by leaving out the names. But if that's not Obelix, I'll eat my cauldron.

"And on my last visit, he even showed up at our house once with a bunch of violets. He just stood there, didn't say anything. It was kind of sweet, actually. How did he know

they're my favorite flower?"

Getafix felt like jumping up and down, he was so happy for Obelix. This was better than either of them had hoped.

But then Panacea spread out her hands in a gesture of helplessness and confusion.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm just not ready to get involved with someone...what if everything goes wrong again? But he's just...he's so nice. I don't want to hurt him."

That sounded less promising. "So you have no feelings for...this person?" Getafix asked, trying to clear things up.

Panacea made a face. "Well, I shouldn't. But I don't know what I feel. Is it because of what my friend said, or a physical reaction, or what? Because the other day I...we were talking in the forest and..."

Her hands moved to cover a sudden, brilliant blush. Getafix raised his eyebrows inquiringly, making her blush even more.

"Just talking," she clarified. "Nothing happened. Except in my imagination, and that's what worries me. I'm supposed to be still getting over Tragicomix, and I am. Daydreaming about this other man just makes everything more complicated."

Getafix cleared his throat awkwardly. This was one of the hardest part of his job; Obelix was easy to understand, but the mysteries of the female mind, even after so many years of mentoring, were still as complex to him as the Minotaur's labyrinth. Just when he had his piece of advice ready, however, she spoke up again.

"And on top of everything, I had a fight with my friend. She doesn't approve of him at all – the other man, I mean, not Tragicomix. She said some nasty things and I... I slammed the door in her face."

"Sometimes our friends can be overzealous in trying to protect us," said Getafix. "I'm sure she thought she was only looking out for you." He didn't know who this friend was – was it a girl her own age, or one of the older women?

"I know...I'd better go and apologize. I'm sure she didn't mean to be unkind."

"Yes. And about your other problem...it's your decision to make, but I suggest that you think carefully. Don't make any rash decisions. Wait until you're certain of your feelings – I don't know how long that will take, though, since it's different for everyone."

He wanted to give her a good strong hint that she could do much worse than choose 'the other man', but restrained himself. He was a druid, not a matchmaker, and this was the most sensible course of action he could think of. Of course, given the froth and bubble of her youthful emotions, being sensible was no easy task. Had he ever been this young?

"Thank you so much for listening, Master," said Panacea, with a sigh as if dropping a heavy load. "It really helps. I've got to get going now, though. Mother's expecting me to help her with the strawberry preserves."

"Oh, that's right. Your famous preserves." Getafix glanced over at the shelf where he was collecting his winter store, various sealed clay pots full of pickles, fruit or cured meat. "Bring me over a jar sometime, won't you, my dear? Just a small one. You know how men are about sweets."

He would have liked to hug her and stroke her hair as he used to when she was little, but she was a young lady now and her dignity might be ruffled.

Just before opening the door, she paused, a faraway look on her face.

"Strawberries...now what does that remind me of?"

Kapitel 5:

Waves of Gold

Based on: The Asterix comics

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Part 5

Panacea's resolution to wait and see lasted for several weeks. She threw herself into the old familiar work of her childhood – spinning, carding wool, weaving, taking care of the livestock and working in the fields with the rest of the village women. At the end of the day, she was often too tired to worry about anything but her aching arms and back; after years of easy living in Condatum, she had grown soft. The potion, of course, was being kept for emergencies and Getafix refused to tell her where it was. The day before the equinox, Panacea found herself lost in the forest, trying not to panic. Or think wicked thoughts about Getafix. After all, it wasn't his fault that he was laid up rheumatism and couldn't climb trees to cut mistletoe anymore, requiring someone younger to take his sickle and do it for him. Mistletoe was an essential ingredient in several druidic recipes. Unfortunately, looking for it had led her deeper into the forest than she'd ever gone before, and the clumps of bushes, gnarled old trees and carpet of rotting leaves all looked the same to her.

I've turned into a city girl after all, she thought ruefully, looking around at the tall dark shadows of trees all around her. Every step of hers made a loud crunch, alerting all the wildlife around for miles. The forest did not welcome her, that was clear. How did hunters spend so much time in here without going mad?

The clearing where she stood was small, but the drops of sunlight gathered in it were a relief after so much brown and grey. One enormous oak stood in the middle of it, spreading its branches like an old grandmother spreading out her arms. The patch of ground in front of it was bare and dry now, but somehow it looked familiar.

Is this...the violet patch? It can't be. That was much closer to the village...or have I found my way back without realizing it?

She sat down at the foot of the oak tree and looked up through the branches to see how it would look from there; yes, this had to be it. Her favorite spot from childhood, where she used to sit among the sweet blue flowers and watch the wind dancing through them. She used to pretend it was an enchanted place where no worries could enter.

Well, I know my way back now...but I'm just so tired, surely a few moments sitting down will do me good...

She closed her eyes. The wind whispered through the trees, laughing dryly; somewhere a woodpecker was hammering with all its strength. An ant crawled over her shoe; she ignored it. Just a few moments of peace...if only the violets were still blooming.

Violets. Now why did she have to think of Obelix, silently handing her a bouquet and letting Asterix do all the talking? Had he picked them here or somewhere else? Had Tragicomix known she liked violets? Probably not; all she could remember him giving her was jewelry, because flowers didn't last. But then, a glittery pendant was not alive; it could never grow or change.

She was so lost in thought, sitting curled up with her head on her knees and staring at the ground, that she never noticed the footsteps approaching until they were right in front of her. The first thing she noticed was another voice breathing; she looked up...and up. Scuffed leather shoes, blue and white striped pants, a broad bare chest and arms. Warm brown eyes that, for a moment, met her glance with undisguised love.

Obelix shook his head and the look was gone. He stepped back, like a little boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar, and waved his hands in front of him.

"Uh, hello," he muttered. "Excuse me, am I interrupting...?"

"Oh, no! I was just...thinking."

"That's what I was going to do here," said Obelix, nodding seriously. "Do you mind?"

She smiled. He could be so cute sometimes. "Go right ahead, I don't bite."

He sat down next to her, somewhat to her surprise, and they both said nothing for a while. She stole sideways looks at him as he frowned fiercely at the air – whatever he was thinking about couldn't be pleasant. The sun picked up golden highlights in his auburn hair; she'd never noticed that before. It was funny; he was not handsome, but the more she looked, the more small charms and quirks she found to like.

There were so many things she wanted to ask: When did you fall in love with me? And why? Is it just because of how I look, like Impedimenta says? I'm just an ordinary girl – what is it about me that makes you so shy and nervous?

The silence became tense, reminding her of the last time she had visited. Sitting with Obelix in front of her house, sniffing his flowers, impatiently waiting for him to come to the point of his sudden visit. And then the postman coming with his note...Tragicomix, drafted into Caesar's army. Sailing to Africa to meet death. Her perfect world crashing and tumbling around her...and in the middle of it all, a kind, gruff voice anchoring her to the ground. "Don't cry, Panacea...we'll find him."

He did it for me, she realized. Because he loves me.

She felt that if she didn't say something right now – anything – she would burst. Something harmless, relaxing. Something far away from love and heartache.

"I've really missed this place," she said.

He turned to look at her.

"It's different in Condatum. Paved roads, stone buildings and everything, like a mini-Rome. You can walk in the streets all day without seeing anyone you know. It gets a little...lonely."

"I don't like cities," he said. "They're too crowded. How can people stand to live on top of each other like that? And it's so easy to get lost."

"Condatum's not all bad. I like the university. And shopping, too – all the latest fashions from Rome and Lutecia. And I have plenty of friends there. But this will always be my home."

Obelix's eyes and lips crinkled into a tiny smile. He loves this place too, she remembered. That's why he always protects it.

"You know," he began. "This is one of my favorite places in the whole forest. Did you know there's a whole bunch of violets that come up in the summer?"

She laughed. "Don't !! I used to come here every day when I was little. Anytime something upset me, I used to sit right here and cry."

"And you came back with violets in your hair...I remember."

"Yes. I thought they could make me prettier."

He snorted in disbelief.

"What?" she snapped, unexpectedly hurt. I know I was a homely child, but that's so

rude!

"You? But that's just..." A rush of color flooded his face; he looked away, then back at her with glowing eyes. "You were the prettiest girl in the village already," he said, all in a rush. "Flowers or no flowers. You didn't need them."

It was not an elegant compliment, but its glowing, open sincerity took her breath away. He was such a sweet man...there had to be some mistake.

"No, no, that was Veruca. Big green eyes, gorgeous reddish-blond hair, dimples...I was the skinny one, remember? My figure didn't fill out 'till I went to Condatum."

Obelix shrugged dismissively at the mention of the girl who had horrified the village by marrying the ninety-three-year-old Geriatrix. "Veruca never shared sweets," was all he said.

Ah. Now I get it. Her lips twitched into a smile. He really does love his food.

"What happened with the strawberries that time, anyway? I thought you were going to eat the whole bowl, but you only took a handful. Was there something wrong with them? The others didn't notice."

"You remember that?" He smiled. "Gosh, that was so long ago...no, there was nothing wrong. Best strawberries I ever ate. I wasn't really hungry, that was all."

"Were you upset because Fulliautomatix and Veruca didn't want you to share? It was so unfair, I know."

"It's not that. You see...I've always been hungry. Ever since I can remember. Maybe it's the potion, or maybe I was born that way. But no matter how much I eat, it doesn't go away. So maybe it's not hunger, but something else, I don't know what." He shrugged and shook his head.

"But you...when I saw you that day, holding out your strawberries – not scared or disgusted at all – that hungry feeling went away. It was like... I'd eaten the sun and it was shining inside of me."

No one had ever spoken to her like this before. She could almost hear her own heart pounding; she blinked, and though the clearing had not changed, it was suddenly charged with clarity and meaning. Everything was precious: the squirrel shimmying up a tree; the shape of a golden poplar leaf on the ground; Obelix's voice and eyes and solid, unshakeable presence next to her.

"Why would I be scared or disgusted by you?" she whispered. "You're a good man, Obelix."

Any loud sound now might disturb the beautiful, breathless hush of the moment. Just as softly and carefully as she spoke, she placed her hand on his in the grass.

A small shudder ran through him as soon as they touched; he looked down at her hand, so small and white on top of his broad, fleshy one, and abruptly pulled away.

"Oh, Panacea. You don't have to feel sorry for me," he said hoarsely, getting to his feet with great care as if he felt dizzy. "I need to go now. Bye."

Bye, she tried to say, but no words came out. She lifted her hand to wave, but he trudged away with his head down and did not look back.

Panacea's hand was tingling; she could still feel that brief, innocent touch. She felt empty inside – hungry, as Obelix had said – without even knowing why.

She wanted to jump up and run after him, but it was as if she were tied to the tree with spiderwebs, powerless to move or speak.

Kapitel 6:

Waves of Gold

Based on: The Asterix comics

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Part 6

Obelix had lost his appetite again, and not in a good way. He couldn't remember ever feeling so disgustingly fat, and at the same time too exhausted to move. It was as if he had overdosed on potion again and turned into a walking, breathing stone statue of himself. A statue knew nothing about pleasure – it could not fully appreciate a hunt with Asterix, a beautiful sunset or even a roast boar.

"I'm done," he said, pushing his plate away.

Asterix, who had been increasingly twitchy all day, slammed down his mug of beer and glared at Obelix across the table. "Okay, that's it. Whatever's bothering you, just say it. And stop moping, by Toutatis, it's driving me crazy."

Nosy little bugger, thought Obelix. He knows me too well.

"You'll only laugh at me," he snarled, remembering countless chuckles Asterix and Getafix had shared due to their friend's infatuated state.

Asterix put on his gravest face. "I won't. Word of honor. Just tell me, okay? Maybe I can help and if not, you'll feel better anyway."

"Hmph." You may be smart, but I doubt that even you can fix this.

"It's about Panacea, isn't it? Let me guess – you told her how you feel and she turned you down."

Obelix's gloom was almost lifted by a wave of astonishment at his friend's perception.

"How did you do that?"

"Easy. You're not eating, which means she's got to be involved, and you look like something Dogmatix dragged in. I'm right, aren't I?"

"Yeah." He made a face; putting it into words would be like living it all over again.

"See, I didn't mean to say it...and it came out wrong, all flowery and embarrassing...and she just looked at me and touched my hand."

"That doesn't sound like a 'no' to me," remarked Asterix.

"What else could it be? She's a nice girl and she didn't want to hurt my feelings, but...just look at me, Asterix! Look at these hands – I could break her fingers without even trying to."

Asterix's sharp face softened with concern.

"The worst part is...for a moment, I actually hoped, you know? That it was possible. Her and me. But then I remembered who - what I am, and..."

Obelix buried his head in his hands to hide the incoming tears. It was like finding out about Panacea's engagement all over again, an iron clang of hopelessness, only worse. Telling himself that the reason why she didn't love him was because she was happy with Tragicomix was much easier than knowing it was only due to his own repulsiveness.

"What do you mean, what you are?" Asterix demanded. "Just because you fell into the potion doesn't make you some kind of monster! It's not impossible that a girl could love you, any more than making friends with me was impossible. Are you listening?"

Obelix!"

Obelix stumped off into his room and slammed the door so hard it shattered into fragments. He sat down on the bed; the frame groaned as if in pain, then splintered in two as it had been threatening to do for months. Dogmatix, who had been sleeping under it, gave a shrill yelp of surprise and shot out into the corner of the room.

That was the last straw. He jumped back up and stormed out of the house. The dog tried to follow, but Obelix rounded on him and shouted, in a tone he had never used towards his companion before: "Stay, Dogmatix! You won't like what you see."

Dogmatix whined and gazed after his master with beseeching black eyes until the door – the front door, not the one to his room - crashed between them.

Obelix did not return until midnight; his hair was a mess of tangles, his trousers torn and muddy, and several scratches on his face, chest and arms. He was covered in leaves and dirt from head to toe. He carefully eased himself past the ruins of the front door, only to find his best friend waiting there, looking bone-weary, as if he would have waited all night.

"You had me worried sick, you fool," said Asterix. "What on earth have you been doing out there?"

"What I do best," Obelix growled. "Wrecking things."

Kapitel 7:

Waves of Gold

Based on: The Asterix comics

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Part 7

Panacea was six years old, with a pronounced lisp and an outright fear of people, especially boys. She was playing alone with her pink rag doll, Cora, when suddenly she felt a painful tug on her left pigtail. Someone – Fulliautomatix, the blacksmith's son, who was three years older – yanked her to her feet by the hair, laughing.

"Hey, Panathea!" he sneered, mimicking her lisp. "You're so smart, tell us who rules Rome!"

"J-juliuth Theathar," she stuttered, causing him and the surrounding children to roar and shriek with laughter. Twisted faces were all around her, a solid ring of them, with no way to escape.

"And this village?"

"V-Vital..thatithtictih."

She mustn't cry. That was what her parents said. It would only encourage them. But that choked, burning feeling was already rising in her throat, panic smothering her like a wave of ice water. Why? she wanted to scream. Why can't you just leave me alone? Suddenly another boy elbowed his way through the crowd and shoved Fulliautomatix aside. He was smaller, pudgy and uncoordinated, with a mop of red curls and huge brown eyes blazing with fury. He shook with fear as he faced the sturdy smith's son, but did not turn away. "Get away from her!" he ordered.

A very short, skinny blond boy followed. They were a pair of misfits, those two, of no interest to anyone but each other. "No, Obelix, it's not worth it!" he hissed, tugging on his friend's arm. "He'll just beat you up again!"

"I don't care. You," rounding on Fulliautomatix, "You leave Panacea alone, or I...I'll hit you."

"Oh yeah?" The older boy snickered. "Let's see you try it, fatso!"

"I'm not – oww!" Fulliautomatix punched Obelix in the stomach, making him double over in pain. Panacea noted that her pigtails were free and backed away quickly, rubbing her injured scalp and watching anxiously to see what was happening. She didn't want Obelix to be hurt on her behalf, but what could she do?

The wall of children was between her and them; she could hear raucous chants of , "Fight! Fight!" and the occasional yelp of pain. the wall parted and Obelix stumbled into her view, covering a black eye with his hand, sporting a cut lip and bloody nose.

"Loser!" shouted the children, Fulliautomatix the loudest of all.

Panacea went back to the empty schoolroom and hid behind her desk, hoping to be safe there until Getafix returned from his break and could start the afternoon lessons. The place was blessedly quiet; she closed her eyes, still shivering, trying to erase the image of the fight from her mind.

Suddenly new shouts rose up from the yard – fear, surprise.

"You did what?!"

"I sneaked into the druid's house and drank the potion," declared Obelix. "And I fell in

the kettle and got soaked all over, but that's okay. I'm super strong now. Watch!"

Gasps. Squeals. Panacea's curiosity got the better of her and she ran outside.

Obelix was glowing with yellow light, just the way her father looked before going into battle; it radiated off him in waves. He seemed to have grown by several inches, and his injuries from the fight before were completely healed. He was holding Fulliautomatix up by the shirt collar, dangling above the ground.

"Now, the next time you're mean to Panacea – or anyone, ever – you answer to me. Got it?"

The smith's son nodded vehemently; it was his turn to tremble.

Obelix lifted him up, flung him into the air, and turned away contemptuously. The other children backed away in fear. Asterix stood next to him, shaking his head with a mix of chagrin, affection and pride; he couldn't believe his friend had been so reckless, but he was glad of the way it turned out.

(Fulliautomatix landed in the branches of the tree where Beatnix the bard lived, just at the moment when his young son Cacophonix let loose with one of his horrible screeching songs. The memory of that humiliation was to haunt the smith for the rest of his life.)

A few days later, Panacea came to school with a bowlful of strawberries - to show that she was ready to forgive and forget, and to be accepted into the group. They were also the only way she could think of to express her heartfelt gratitude to Obelix.

He took three berries and no more, mumbling an almost inaudible thank-you and staring at his feet. She took that to mean that he resented her – after all, helping her had earned him a beating, a soak in potion, and a new outsider status as the monster with superhuman powers. So she kept her distance from him throughout all of their childhood and adolescence, pushing those memories away so that nothing was left of them except a vague sense of inadequacy, of not being good or smart or pretty enough.

A lack of confidence stuck to her in spite of her schoolmates' unflinching fear-induced courtesy, and did not leave her even in her university years, when her body finally gained its womanly curves and she freed her hair from its pigtails. So when handsome, dashing ladies' man Tragicomix began to seek her company, she was grateful and flattered enough to fall head-over-heels in love and accept his proposal without thinking.

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And look where I am today, thought Panacea, smiling ironically. No wiser than I was twenty years ago.

Dawn was rising; it was Samhain, the day of the dead. And now, it seemed, her old memories were coming back to haunt her along with the spirits of her ancestors.

She remembered Obelix's confession in the clearing. "When I saw you that day, holding out your strawberries – not scared or disgusted at all – that hungry feeling went away. It was like... I'd eaten the sun and it was shining inside of me." No wonder he had been tongue-tied.

Obelix wants to protect everyone. Asterix, Dogmatix and me...That's why he hates the Roman invaders - it's Fulliautomatix's bullying on a national scale. This is what made him the way he is.

And it's why I love him.

Kapitel 8:

Waves of Gold

Based on: The Asterix comics

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Song performed by Lisa Kelly.

Part 8

An enormous bonfire blazed in the center of the village square, making the air tremble with warmth and giving off a sharp scent of burning wood. The villagers sat around it in a semi-circle, laughing, eating, drinking and doing their best to ignore Vitalstatistix's pompous speech. Eventually he gave up, poured himself a generous measure of ale and joined in. Even Cacofonix, sworn to musical abstinence and strictly watched by Fulliautomatix, had been allowed to attend the feast. Everyone was having fun...with two exceptions: Obelix and Panacea.

"Twenty-five trees, my dear, imagine that!" said Impedimenta, her eyes gleaming with excitement. Panacea, who had seen the destruction with her own eyes, listened with a growing feeling of dread. "Some knocked down, some lifted clear up and thrown, taking others with them – however did it happen? No one knows!"

Panacea said nothing. She had an uneasy suspicion as to how it had happened, and she prayed she was wrong.

"Could've been a storm – but what a strange storm, to concentrate itself in one area like that - the anger of the gods, or even one of us under the influence of the potion. Getafix swears no one came near the kettle last night, that he's hidden it in a safe place, but we all know the old man's been slipping a bit lately. And come to think of it, whom do we know who doesn't need the potion to uproot trees?"

The First Lady sent a meaningful look down the table at Obelix, who was single-mindedly and mechanically chewing away on his fifth boar. Asterix was saying something, but Obelix barely looked at him. The scowl on his face did not encourage conversation.

"My, my," Impedimenta remarked. "Someone got up on the wrong side of the bed. This wouldn't have anything to do with you, now would it?"

Panacea squirmed. She hadn't told him her feelings yet. Besides, maybe it was something else – it would be too vain to suppose that if Obelix was upset, it had to be because of her.

Apparently Impedimenta thought so too, however, and she was good at reading people.

Panacea checked to make sure no one was listening – on her other side, Unhygienix and Fulliautomatix were having a shouting match – and whispered: "Impedimenta? Would it really bother you? If Obelix and I, you know..."

The older woman looked startled. "You mean it? Well, child, I suppose...not really. After all, there's no doubt he would treat you well. But are you sure? He's so..."

"I'm sure." Panacea smiled. Honestly, though she would have chosen Obelix even if all her friends and family forbade it, it was still a load off her mind to know her mentor approved.

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Later on, the dancing began. Cacofonix, whose lyre playing was much better than his voice, twanged away with enthusiasm, accompanied by drum and tambourine players. When a singing voice was needed, Panacea stepped in; her voice was untrained, but she could at least carry a tune. Besides, there was no man in the village who didn't enjoy seeing her onstage.

Obelix did his best not to look at her, but couldn't help glancing up now and then. She wore a light blue dress with flared sleeves and a long skirt that swirled around her as she walked along the stage. Her small white hands tapped out the beat of the song on a tambourine. She flipped back her hair – ripples of fire, cascades of sunshine, shimmering waves of gold. And her voice...he could hardly stick his fingers in his ears in public, but even if he did, he'd keep on hearing it. A voice like honey and silk and glossy spring leaves.

"My true love sits in a forest glade
in the springtime's golden light.
The flowers, they dance in the gentle breeze
and the warm sun shines so bright.
And of all the flowers in the forest
and all trees that do abound,
the ones that please my heart the most
are green the whole year 'round.

Green the whole year 'round,
green the whole year 'round:
The holly, yew, and the ivy tree
are green the whole year 'round."

Could she be thinking of that day in the clearing where the violets grew? No, of course not. The song was Cacofonix's choice anyway.

This situation as sadly fitting, thought Obelix: Panacea onstage, with admiring eyes on her, glowing with beauty as she sang. He himself alone in a dark corner, looking up at her and knowing that was all he could ever do.

"When summer comes and the days are hot
and the birds are full of song:
in the quiet shade of that leafy glade,
that is where my heart belongs.
For I know whenever I look for you,
that is where you can be found
as you take your ease 'neath your favorite trees
that are green the whole year 'round."

Their eyes met.

It was mortifying – like knocking someone over or smashing a door by accident. Obelix looked down abruptly at his empty plate. She'd caught him staring – the last thing he needed. Did she know about the trees yet? Oh, but of course – nobody could keep a secret in this place.

Panacea almost forgot her next line and came in a beat too late. Cacofonix raised an eyebrow at her; she shrugged an apology and kept on. These lyrics were just a shade

too personal. To be exact, the real trees were not green the whole year 'round, but it was rather uncomfortable singing about her 'true love' right in front of said person, who wouldn't even look at her. Was it just shyness again or something else?

Once the song was ended, she excused herself on the grounds of a sore throat and left the stage. Her throat was fine – it was her hands that were cold and sweaty, her head that was spinning, and her feet that felt like lumps of lead as she walked over to the table where Obelix sat. It was like being about to take her exams at school in Condatum, only harder.

To her relief, she found that Asterix was gone. He always left parties as soon as possible, to avoid being targeted by flirtatious women. Obelix, who stayed as long as there was food and drink, was working on his sixth boar. A bit too much, even for someone with superhuman strength who required extreme amounts of energy. Panacea's stomach hurt just watching him eat; he really needed looking after.

Someone tapped her on the shoulder; she turned around. It was Fulliautomatix, looking her up and down with what was meant to be an inviting smile.

"Hello there, Panacea," he slurred. "Wanna dance?"

Kapitel 9:

Waves of Gold

Based on: The Asterix comics

Creators: Goscinny & Uderzo

Song performed by Lisa Kelly.

Part 8

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