saucy victorian ankles

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/876.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Queerphobia
Categories:	Femslash (F/F), Slash (M/M)
Fandom:	Hazbin Hotel
Relationships:	Cherri Bomb/Molly (Hazbin Hotel), Angel Dust/Husk (Hazbin Hotel), Arackniss & Sir Pentious (Hazbin Hotel), Angel Dust & Molly (Hazbin Hotel), Angel Dust & Cherri Bomb (Hazbin Hotel)
Characters:	Cherri Bomb (Hazbin Hotel), Molly (Hazbin Hotel), Sir Pentious (Hazbin Hotel), Angel Dust (Hazbin Hotel), Arackniss (Hazbin Hotel), Husk (Hazbin Hotel)
Additional Tags:	Humor, Fluff, Beach Episode, Slice of Life, Bickering, Siblings, Slurs, Culture Shock, Mild Hurt/Comfort, Not Canon Compliant, Bikinis, Italiano | Italian, Spider Siblings (Hazbin Hotel)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-08-21 Words: 3,074 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

Sir Pentious experiences dress code culture shock (again), courtesy of Cherri.

Notes

(Victoria as in the 19th century era or the Australian state? The answer is yes.)

See the end of the work for more notes

"GOODNESSSS GRACIOUSSSS ME!"

Everybody stopped to stare at Sir Pentious.

Angel and Molly quirked identical, quizzical eyebrows at his outburst. Cherri tried to stifle her cackling behind her hand, and failed. Arackniss smacked his palm into his forehead and growled something Italian under his breath.

Husk gave the snake the most withering, attack-eyebrowed glare he could muster at ten in the morning. He had a hangover, as usual, and his ears and brain were *throbbing.* "Oh, fuck, what is it now?"

Pent clapped one hand over his eyes and pointed approximately in Cherri's direction with the other. "WHY isss ssshe NAKED?"

Cherri was not, in fact, naked. She was wearing a swimsuit, which is what you wear when you're at the beach. And they *were* at a beach, the six of them, and they were *all* wearing swimsuits: Pent in a goofy-ass vintage bathing costume, 'Niss and Husk in trunks, Angel in a flattering high-cut one-piece, and Cherri and Molly in bikinis.

There was nothing really that scandalous about Cherri's scarlet halter-top-&-tie-side ensemble, nor Molly's turquoise bandeau top and boy-shorts bottoms.

Unless, of course, you were straight out of the Victorian era.

Which Sir Pentious was.

"What's the matter, old man?" Cherri teased, cocking a hip and fluttering her eyelash innocently. "C'mon, you can say you like what you see, don't be shy…"

Pent peeked between his fingers, shrieked, and covered his eyes again. "A gentleman is not sssupposssed to sssee any of - of THAT -" he gestured up and down in her vague direction, presumably to encompass the cyclops's cleavage, midriff, and thighs, "- in a public sssetting!"

"Oh! Is it the ankles that bother ya?" Cherri asked, faux-innocently.

Behind her, Molly squeaked, choking back what sounded like a giggle. Angel didn't even bother trying; there was a soft thump as he dropped to the sand and began to roll about, *screeching* with mirth.

The snake turned a truly fascinating shade of mauve, letting out a piercing hiss not unlike a kettle coming to the boil. He forgot to cover his eyes, offence outweighing propriety, and clenched his fists at his sides as he wound up for a scathing retort.

Which gave Cherri the chance to saunter right up to him, swaying her shapely hips as she did, and get right up in his face, leaning forward *just* so. "'Sides, who said I like my men *gentle?"*

"Stop flirting with 'im," Arackniss scowled, while Pentious quailed and shrunk back as if Cherri's chest was a pair of live bombs.

"Aw, c'mon, 'Niss," Angel chirped, wiping away tears of laughter. "Be a lil' more open-minded, would'ja?"

"I ain't takin' no advice from some no-good second-rate stag-film hophead."

"Eh, ye're missin' out on some good times, shorty."

"Vai a prenderlo in culo, succhiacazzi-"

"Piacere mio, caro fratello –"

"BOYS!" Molly barked, rolling her eyes. "Cut it out!"

Angel and Arackniss stopped at once. Angel picked himself up, and began brushing the sand out of his fur, being sure to flick some of it at his brother. Husk yanked his boyfriend away with a grumble before any further escalation could occur.

Molly stepped forward and pulled Cherri back from the near-catatonic snake's personal space, with a stern pinch on the cheek for good measure. "You too, cherry pie. Quiddit."

"Aww, I was just starting to have fun," the bombardier whined, but acquiesced at the disapproving look on her girlfriend's face.

Molly shuffled up to Sir Pentious with an earnest, apologetic look on her face; big eyes and all. "Pent, I'm so sorry for my brother an' girlfriend's behaviour. I hope they ain't got ya bent too out of shape."

But Sir Pentious meeped and covered his eyes again. "T-thank you, miss Molly," he blurted out in a rush, "but-but I ssshan't impinge upon your dignity any l-longer. In fact I ssshould think the Egg Boisss need minding right now!"

And he turned tail and slithered away across the sand, nearly bumping into several other beachgoers in his haste.

"Now look what'ja done," Arackniss humphed, giving his sister the most sour look.

Molly blinked, confused and doleful. "I don't understand. I weren't being provocative or nothin'."

"It ain't the attitude, it's whatcha *wearin'*. He don't know how to deal with midriffs," her elder brother grumbled, as if it were the most obvious thing and his sister was a fool for not thinking of it.

"Oh," she mouthed in dawning realisation.

"It's coz he's a prude," Angel chimed in. Arackniss kicked sand at him.

"He's *sensitive* to these things, *idiota."*

"Oh, who th' fuck *cares*, 'Niss?" the taller brother spat, before his face split into a grin. "Do *you* care? Is dat what dis is all about? You gettin' all mushy for ancient-and-slithery ovah there?" He pointed - with two hands for emphasis - to the distant figure of Pentious, busy overseeing the Egg Bois building a sandcastle.

There was the faintest red blush beneath Arackniss's charcoal fur as he scowled more than ever. "None of your damn business, *leccaculo."*

"Awww, never took you for the caring type, shorty?" Cherri cooed.

"Thought the princess was supposed ta be teachin' ya manners and respect." The spider's rough voice took on a mocking, condescending lilt, "Whaddabout all that *'changin' yer sinful behaviours?'"*

"And why should we change the way we dress just to not offend one slithery old chauvinist from two centuries ago?" Cherri shot back. She glanced back at Molly, hoping for agreement or backup - but her girlfriend was starting to look decidedly uneasy and conflicted.

"Take that back," Arackniss looked ready to throw hands, all 6 of them. *"Puttana arrogante-"*

"AY!" Angel shot right back at Niss, marching up to his brother and dragging a cringing Husk with him. "You got a problem with my bestie, you got a problem with me."

"For fucks sake, Angel…" Husk moaned, futilely trying to hold his boyfriend back.

"Non so perché continuo a uscire con te e i tuoi amici di merda, puttana del vicolo-"

"Do NOT fucking call him that!" Suddenly very invested in the argument, the barcat stormed forward, thrusting a claw in Arackniss's face; and now it was Angel trying to shoulder past his boyfriend for the right to fight his brother.

"Chiamerò mio fratello come dannatamente mi piace-"

"Oh yeah, come on 'Niss, whaddaya wanna call me? Huh? Whaddaya want ta call me?"

"Ti dirò come voglio chiamarti, FROCIO-"

"THAT'S ENOUGH!" Molly roared, eyes aglow and her demon form furiously rearing up over the beach, rearing up over the three boys about to brawl. She loomed over them all much, much more than she usually did - especially her older brother. "NO, MARTIN ARACKNISS RAGNO, NO. You do NOT get to call our brother that. *Vergogna! Vergognatevi!"*

Husk, who had been winding up to take a swipe at Arackniss, baulked and beat a hasty retreat.

Arackniss just met his sister's demonic gaze levelly for several seconds… then shrugged and huffed unrepentantly. "Whatever." And with that, he slouched off down the beach, in the

direction that Sir Pentious had gone.

Receding back to her usual form, but no less irate for it, Molly whipped around to face Angel. "And *you!"*

"Me?!"

"You were rilin' him up! I really thought the Princess was workin' on that sorta thing with ya, 'Tony! On not taking the bait!"

"Whaddaya expect me to do, Molls? He's gonna call me a f*g even if I don't talk back ta him in th' first place. An' he's one ta talk; you saw how he was bein' sweet on the old man." Angel waved two hands in the direction of his brother and Pentious, who were now sitting together repairing the collapsed parts of the Egg Bois' sandcastle. "Look, he still is. Cherri, babe, back me up on dis. What does dat look like ta ya?"

Cherri made a show of scrutinising the two bros who were definitely less than five feet apart. "Like they both need to be forcibly removed from the closet."

"No, no, enough of that, both of ya." Molly snapped, hands massaging her forehead. A little lump of guilt settled in Cherri's gut. "I'm setting boundaries. He's my brother, we're *family.* We're not supposed to be fightin' like this all the time - I don't want that! I don't want him usin' slurs at ya, an' I don't want ya goadin' him - I just wanna have a *nice* day out, where we all - get - *along!"* She hunched in on herself, letting out a despondent sniffle - aw jeez, now Cherri really felt bad.

For a moment something like regret flashed across Angel's face; then it was replaced by old pain and a half-hearted jeer. "Ya just don't want to think about lil 'Nissy gettin' it on, do ya, sis?"

"Anthony!"

"Yeah, *Anthony,* enough." Husk chuffed, taking Angel by the hand. "They need space. You need a drink. *I* need a drink. We're goin' to the bar over there, an' don't try arguin'." And with that, he yanked Angel away in the opposite direction to Arackniss and Pent; the spider suddenly quite happy to comply, flirting with him all the way.

Cherri watched their figures recede for only a moment before turning her full attention to Molly. She tiptoed forward and cautiously placed a hand on her girlfriend's back.

"I'm sorry, babe."

"It's fine," Molly sighed, "Well… it ain't fine… but it weren't all you, Cherri. It was a bit of, well, everyone." But she still wasn't looking at Cherri, which was a bit of a worry. She'd played her own part in the chaos, and she knew it, and she also knew that if the solution to a problem wasn't 'chuck a bomb at it', she was a bit lost.

A little humour, perhaps?

"Is it coz I flirted with Snakey?" she asked, playing with her hair awkwardly.

An incredulous laugh spluttered its way out of Molly's mouth, and finally, finally she turned to look at Cherri, and Cherri could see there was no resentment in her eyes at all; just her endless empathy tinged with exasperation. "What? Cherri, no - doll, I *trust* ya, I trust ya to be true. But…" She shook her head, sending her bangs & tendrils flicking back and forth. "...why you gotta keep riling Pen up like that too, huh? You can't seem to go a day without pickin' some sorta fight with someone, '*specially* him!"

"Coz it's what we do? We've been going back and forth practically since the day I died." She flicked her hair back over her shoulder. "You know, once I was a bit crook and outta action for a few weeks, and I kid you not, when I got back out there he sounded *relieved* to see me - well, before I blew up his stupid airship again."

Molly seemed doubtful. "You sure he enjoys it as much as you do?"

"Yeah. Seriously, I know part of his whole deal is to have a worthy nemesis, and who am I to not oblige, especially when I wanna rule shit as much as he does." Cherri shrugged, pacing a little. All this nervous energy bottled up inside her needed even the smallest fidgety outlet. "He could just easily give up, slither off, tail between his non-existent legs, go and take over Imp City or something easy, but he keeps coming back for another round. He likes me."

Still Molly looked dubious; both her pairs of arms were folded. Cherri pulled a face. "Oi, it's hardly the most fucked up friendship down here."

The spider winced a little at her girlfriend's language, as she always did. "Maybe," she conceded. "But I still think it's a shame." She started to stroll idly closer to the water's edge, and Cherri followed.

"Like, just me and Pen', or in general?"

"It just don't sit right with me when liking each other is so… hidden. Layered. Confusing, y'know?"

"We're all confusing and layered, Molls," Cherri pointed out. "Like onions. And we sometimes make each other cry too, there's that."

"Yeah, but sometimes I wish it could be easy, obvious, y'know. No mixed messages, no 'layers', just clear-cut, 'I care about you and you care about me.' 'Cause we *can* do it; everybody's capable of it if only they'd try."

"You almost sounded like Princess Cha-cha there."

"Please, if only I had half her never-ending cheer," Molly groused. Cherri neglected to mention the times she'd seen the limits of Charlie Morningstar's bubbly optimism be tested, the brief glimpses at what lay underneath.

Molly continued. "I know what being nice is… mostly by omission… but I could always tell 'Tony cared. He showed it, even when he was strung out. Marty - 'Niss, he did too, when we were all younger, before Pops made him a *capo* … he still cares, I know it. An' he does show it more when others ain't around. Just… have to look a bit harder than I used to."

"I get it, the old tough guy 'men don't have feelings' schtick," Cherri commiserated, rifling through memories of her past life. "The whole *'no daughter of mine is showing that much skin at the beach, if you get caught scribbling graffiti on them bloody walls again you're grounded'* sort of caring." She waggled her hips in time with her mocking patter, aping her father's gruff voice. "Did 'Niss get all grouchy too the first time you wore a two piece?"

"Well, if he thought guys were taking too much of a gander he'd get more protective, at least. He did get worse in the sixties." Molly looked thoughtful for a few moments. "Y'know, that makes me realise - I reckon I figured out Pent and his whole fuss 'bout our bathing suits deal."

"Yeah? Wozzat, then?"

"I think he's having trouble adjustin'."

Cherri scoffed. "For real?"

"Yeah? The whole steampunk thing, the fashion sense, I don't think it's just a… whaddaya call it these days, a 'vibe'." She made air quotes with her top pair of hands. "I think he is living in the past. I've seen it with a lot of the guys in the family, dressin' and talkin' like it's still the 30s."

"Pent *has* been here longer than us, you know Moll. If anyone's had more time to get used to things, it's him!"

"But it makes sense when I think 'bout it. He's been burying himself so much in tryna take over the pentagram that he hasn't stopped to process that the times are always changin'. Maybe he don't even wanna admit that things have changed from what he was used to, that *he's* been left behind, so he clings to what he knows." Molly shuffled a foot idly, raking abstract shapes in the sand. "I mean even when you are tryina adjust, it takes time. A lot of th' things I saw down here took getting used to. 'Tony making stag films, that was one of 'em."

"Mmm." Cherri couldn't help but ponder the things she hadn't got used to yet. She liked to think she was adaptable, flexible, able to keep up with the times - she'd gotten used to the changes in technology, weaponry, and music alright. Hell, the new throbbing beat of EDM was her jam just as much as the hard rock and club tunes of the eighties had been; the music that she'd lived and died to.

But she had to admit some stuff was hard to get to grips with. How she'd ended up staying at the hotel, for one. How she no longer had the monopoly of being Angel's one-and-only bestie now that he and Husk had hooked up, for another. What she was going to do with her afterlife if she didn't have the joys of blowing shit up, showing the afterlife what a scrappy gal from inner Melbourne was capable of, or duking it out with Pentious.

What she was going to do if redemption was an avenue open to her, and she had to leave the afterlife she'd made - and the demons she loved - behind.

Cherri didn't really know if she even wanted an answer to that particular question.

"I guess I get that," she finished lamely, then chanced a peek back at Pentious and Arackniss's direction and decided to change the topic. "Does 'Niss even know Penny likes him back?"

Molly let out a little chortle, a genuine one at that. She glanced back too, in time to spot Sir Pentious sliding just a *little* bit closer to Arackniss. "Doubt it. Never could tell when a dame was dizzy for him back in the day."

A self-deprecating smile and a blush popped up on her face. "Runs in the family, I guess."

"You *were* such a useless lesbian," Cherri agreed, grinning. Fond memories came to mind, of reducing the spider sheila to a blushing flustered mess with just the right purr in her voice and a finger reaching up to stroke her chin.

"And weren't' cha the sweetest bi disaster," Molly cooed, tilting her head sideways to rest it atop Cherri's.

"Oi, I was not!" Cherri exclaimed, though she knew full well she'd completely short-circuited when Molly had started flirting back.

"You were!" Molly laughed. "Ya silly sweet cherry pie!" She ruffled Cherri's hair and kissed her on the cheek, and Cherri knew all was forgiven with that.

They stood together like that for several serene moments; Cherri nestling her head comfortably against her girlfriend's shoulder, slinking an arm around her waist, drinking in the feeling of closeness and the warm breeze on her skin and Molly's fur tickling her cheek.

And then Molly started walking backwards towards the ocean, beckoning with two hands. "C'mon!"

"C'mon where?"

"To take a dip & cool off. 'S'why we came to the beach, ain't it?"

Cherri meandered along behind her, swinging her arms. "I mean there are loads of reasons for going to the beach, though? Surfing, bodyboarding, watching the shark biscuits get caught in a riptide and laughing at 'em… dumping hot sand in someone's budgie smugglers…" she snickered at the thought. "...giving the boys sandcastle envy and then blowing *all* the sandcastles up…"

"Holding hands," Molly interrupted.

"Eh?" Cherri blurted out, just as Molly took hold of her hand and laced her fingers between Cherri's. They were as fuzzy and smooth as brand new velvet. "Oh… yeah, yeah, I reckon holding hands is pretty ripper too."

Molly looked back with a smile as she led her girlfriend into the foaming pink surf.

End Notes

Italian translations

Vai a prenderlo in culo, succhiacazzi | Go take it up the ass, cocksucker

Piacere mio, caro fratello | My pleasure, brother dear

idiota | dumbass

leccaculo | asslicker

Cagna arrogante | arrogant bitch

Non so perché continuo a uscire con te e i tuoi amici di merda, puttana del vicolo | I don't know why I keep hanging out with you and your shitty friends, alley whore

Chiamerò mio fratello come dannatamente mi piace | I'll call my brother whatever I damn like

*Ti dirò come voglio chiamarti, frocio | I'll tell you what I want to call you, f*ggot*

Vergogna! Vergognatevi! | Shame! Shame on you!

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