

# Astrid and Ingrid

in

## Flying High

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It was a calm spring night, the windows were open, and Astrid and Ingrid's final exams had finally come to a close. Because of the hecticness of the past few weeks, the two roommates had had very little time to spend quality time together, much less an entire night of one-on-one fun. Ingrid had promised Astrid a proper celebratory smoke session, the likes of which she had claimed 'would be right up your alley', but Astrid still did not know what exactly that entailed; nonetheless, her eager criss-cross-applesauce posture telegraphed her pure-hearted happiness at this moment finally arriving.

Ingrid, on the other hand, kept her cool, and spoke in a nonchalant tone while preparing the joint. "This is the stuff my mom smokes. She says it sets her free or whatever. Whenever she lights up, we don't find her for a whole day." Ingrid tried to remain calm, her slight reservation at trying something this strong masked beneath her concentration at packing it in the rolling paper evenly. Still, she was with her best friend, so whatever happened would be manageable as long as they stuck it through together— they had all weekend free, anyways.

"Is it magical, really? That's so cool." Astrid spoke, her efforts to seem unfazed by the prospect of getting way too high with her bestie unsuccessful. She had worn her most

comfortable outfit: her favorite Farling University sweatshirt from when she got accepted, and these massive gym shorts that had survived the rhino incident; both were ratty yet treasured possessions to her.

“That’s what they say, but I don’t know for sure.” Ingrid flicked at the lighter she had gotten for a buck last summer. The shirt and pants she was wearing, too, were a cheap acquisition from a gift shop in Montana; she had learned better than to wear nice clothes when having a lengthy hangout with her best friend, but this was a consolidation that came from no place of malice, just a recognition of the kind of antics the two of them often got into.

Ingrid took a deep first and second hit, letting the thick smoke wash through her system. Her hand lowered offeringly and Astrid reached for it with a giddy grin stretched across her face. Astrid hadn’t smoked in a while, but was determined to seem like a pro, despite knowing she really didn’t care of her friend’s opinion of her. Astrid took her first hit like a weed sommelier, letting the texture and flavor of the joint be noted. It went in and out smooth.

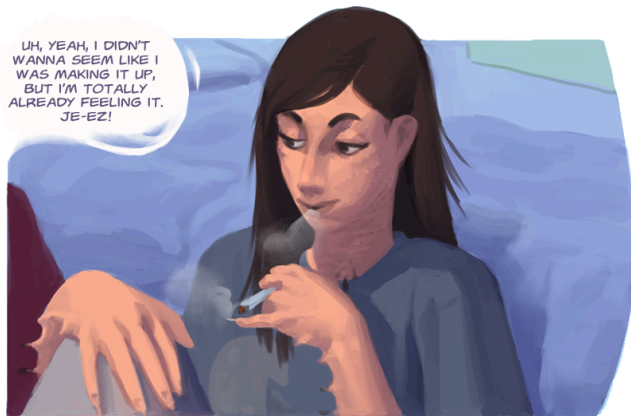


“Ooh, wow, it goes down easy. This is high quality stuff!” Astrid spoke matter-of-factly. Ingrid blinked, slowly. There was no way this joint was already hitting. That would be impossible. It didn’t feel that strong, and yet it washed over her like a cool breeze, unless that was coming from the window the two of them had purposely left open across the room. Astrid took a deep inhale, and sent the joint back Ingrid’s way.



Ingrid took the joint, while her eyes settled, unfocused, on the ground in front of her. “Apparently, the high hits crazy fast too, like ‘bong’ fast.” Her mind buzzed as she took a healthy breath of the blend, her lips pursing around the paper with a tight grip. Ingrid’s hair felt like it was being held near something with a static charge, a soft buzz tingled along her scalp to accompany her slowing brain. She hadn’t noticed it yet, but uniform goosebumps were beginning to speckle lines across her cheekbone and neck. Back to Astrid.

Astrid’s eagerness got the better of her, for she nearly dropped the baton during the exchange. She readjusted the cig in her hand, fiddled with it for another moment, and then took a deep breath in. She wiggled in her seated position as the burnt sensations of the smoke made her thoughts fly... her noggin drifted backwards for a moment, as a strong wall of brain fog passed through her mind... ‘whuuuuoh...’ she thought, letting the forceful daze work its magic on her. She must’ve not spoken that ‘whoa’ in her head, because ingrid’s slightly tilted head seemed as if it was waiting for a continuation to her sentence. “uh, yeah, I didn’t wanna seem like I was making it up, but I’m totally already feeling it. Je-ez!” Her voice hilted for a second, as she extended the joint back to her friend, already wishing she would have taken a second strong hit as soon as it was returned to her roommate. That same subtle zipping feeling ran down Astrid’s hair as well, all the while her eyes rested idly on the view of the wall behind her friend.



“I’m so glad I could do this with you,” Ingrid spoke calmly, allowing the dopey smile on her face to remain angularly adjusted to that position as her hardening lips pursed tightly around the joint. The lower half of her face pulled magnetically towards the joint as she partook, allowing her mouth to be the center of attention as it reached ever so slightly towards the point of inhalation. Her eyes drifted slowly from the ground to her pointed fingers. The sight of her fingertips slowly crushing inwards to a sharp edge and beginning to stretch outwards set off no alarms in her half-baked mind... instead, her smile remained. Her arms, though she could not see them well, dressed themselves on the sides with spikey protrusions, pulling further with each deep breath as if intending to rip through the fabric of her skin. She took one more hit, the upturned mouth remaining plastered on her face; her hair frilled out in stiff, flat directions while each clump of hairs took on a mind of their own amongst the bunch. Her stretching hand outstretched the joint to Astrid.





In a final moment of clarity, Astrid responded, “I’m glad I can do this too!! And the night is only starting, we ne-eded some roommate time like thi-is.” Even without a smile, Astrid’s resting face looked particularly dopey as well. The skin between the bottom of her nose and top of her lip began to rise to form a proper bridge between the two elevations. Her nose still remained a safe resting place for her glasses, but all other parts of her face were pulling outwards to meet the joint, chin included. In went the smoke, and out went more of whatever was holding her together. Her eyelids sunk slightly, as her eyes darkened in color. Her left pinkie, which was notably extended at the moment, shot out into a point quicker than the other fingers, which were trying their best as well. Her hair shifted slightly, as muted blue hues began to take over hidden dry patches of stiff hair that were developing near the top of her neck. Beneath her comfy sweatshirt, a squadron of bumps began their journey away from her skin, poking against the fabric all over. To Astrid, it all just seemed an idle tickling, not unlike the sensation swimming around her mind.

Ingrid’s head bobbed backwards as she took her next hit through plastic-knife-like fingers, her eyes squinting to help her concentrate on the sensations whirling across her. As the smoke traveled down her throat, the rows of bumps outside began to bloom, revealing strips of small, stubborn flaps that aligned around the circumference of her neck. They were slightly off-color from her hair, a shinier shade of black, but as they grew they began to tussle with the thick strands of hair that lay around her nape, forming a feathery clump of growths as her changes continued. If the neck flaps were blooming, the growths on her arms were sprouting exponentially. They stuck straight out from her bent arm, touching lightly against the bed she was resting on, as her pointed free hand gripped her slightly baggier sweatpants. Ingrid had to restabilize herself. Her bent leg kicked towards her chest as her longer, gnarled, yellowing foot found a better grip against the wood flooring. Her blackening nails arching naturally downwards. Her dried lips taped against each other in between haphazard joint hits. Her left arm extended weakly towards her roommate, and her shifting eyes wandered towards the ceiling.

Astrid must have grabbed the joint out of a force of habit, and with a convicted body, prepared to take the largest hit yet. Her toes curled at the end of her lanky feet, allowing the sharp, thick nails at the tips to tear at the sock fabric they had been pressing against. As she inhaled, her face grew with it, the entirety of her face pulling outwards with her breath as the tip of the blunt mountain that was her mouth/nose dulled in tone. Feathers clambered over one another in an effort to grow out from her nape. Her ear began to be covered by the dark blue-grey shades, as her hair became more and more speckled with this shade. Other shades revealed themselves further forward on her neck, of muted oranges. Astrid took into account none of the growths across her body as her still-feathering hand slapped lightly against her thinning thigh, for the only thing on her mind was getting as much out of this hit as possible.



It was too much: the moment the joint removed itself from her proto-beak, Astrid flew into a coughing fit, allowing her nose to pyramid out with every rough exhalation. The cough launched the joint away from the two women. Astrid's vocal chords twinged and tensed as her solid lips darkened, the high pitched wheezes becoming more sing-song-y. "Coff cwee twur— n-twee!" Her Robin-equine voice adjusted itself as if it were instinct. With each twee, invisible ripples danced across her skin, letting the feathery coatings around her face win the battle against her hairline. Her glasses' temple tips lost their footing, tilting backwards as her earlobes receded underneath the seam between the feather and hair textures. Astrid's legs rubbed against the wood floor, her exposed heels pulling ever farther away from her trident toes, toes that were blossoming from her socks and worming their way towards the fresh weed air. Light segments began

to impress themselves over Astrid's thinning legs, but only slightly. There were more important changes to worry about, like how the separation between Astrid's sweatshirt (which was being pulled in many directions from the new space needed for this invasive wing feathers) and shorts now sported brave downwards tailfeathers.

The inhuman utterance from Astrid's amalgamated face humored Ingrid, inspiring her to let out a hearty laugh in response. Her throat caught for a moment, feeling the rigidity of her vocal chords as they vibrated... "Hahaha- n-keeAHH!" It sounded like a shrill screech, the kind of avian call that could snap a girl out of her stupor. And it did. Ingrid's wide eyes widened, the lengthy feather fingers at the tip of her right wing-arm stabilizing her changing center of gravity against the floor. She stared at Astrid with a sobered expression, trying her best to make sense of what on earth was going on. She breathed deeply in an effort to calm herself, but it was no use: the rise and fall of her textured neck feathers cancelled out any benefits from meditative relief.

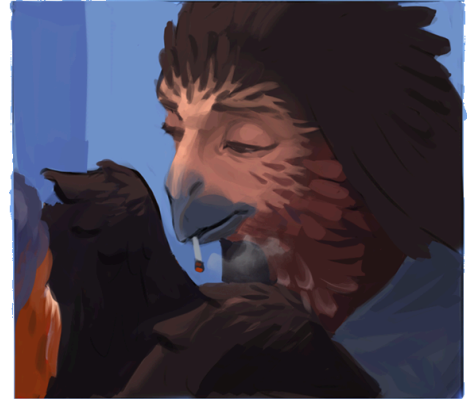
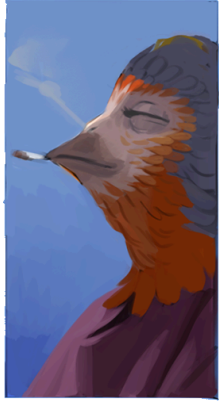
Without missing a beat, Astrid descended towards the joint that was sitting helplessly alone on the ground. Her neck craned towards the floor, displaying a developing array of feathers across her head as her round glasses tumbled down after having lost both anchor points of ears and nose now that the bridge of her nose was moving to meet her pointed mouth. The fan of feathers that was once her right hand splayed upon meeting their destination. She could make out the sight of two dark fingers on either side of the joint, but couldn't understand how these fingers couldn't close together to grip the thing. 'No matter, I have other ways of getting it.'



Ingrid waved her arms to get her roommate's attention, but it was no use. Ingrid's hair draped over the side of her morphing head in big, thin clumps, dressing the whole of her hair with layers of feathering. Her eyes receded slightly, allowing room for her nose to meld with the rest of her developing beak, one that was taking on a darker, matte hue as her upper and lower lips clacked together in wordless concern of making another screech like before. She stared down at Astrid's appendages, beholding the thin, evenly segmented legs and the feathered wings that revealed more pent-up feathers every time her sleeves gave them the chance.

Astrid readjusted herself, shuffling up onto her flat bird's-feet and tucking her receding knees against her chest. Her sweatshirt rode up her torso as she bent over, allowing Ingrid a perfect sideview of her tail feather area, a carpeting of feathers over her receding rear end that pointed playfully outwards towards the bed behind them. Her two wings braced against the floor, spreading out like paper fans. Her eyes squinted as she tried to focus her mind on the joint, and it was at this moment that something clicked within her. The motion of bobbing and pecking flowed like an instinct as this method of grabbing wormed its way into her mind the more she did it. Her first peck missed, dotting the floor just below the joint, but the mere joy she found from the act of pecking successfully covered any shame at having missed the target. She took another idle peck, to the right of the joint, before finally, carefully, twisting her hard pointed lips to clasp around her prey.

Ingrid's eyes darted back and forth, what with the spectacle of Astrid's proud grey-feathered tail and bright red decoration around her face as well as Ingrid's own arm being overtaken fully by the wash of feathers all happening simultaneously. Her beak tapped in nervous anticipation as Astrid finally made her catch, stepping excitedly in place, leaving Ingrid to hear with receding ears the sounds of her friend's hard fleshy talons tapping against the wood. She couldn't see it, but Ingrid could feel her hair pulling farther back, sleeking itself downwards as if it were melded by the strongest hair product known to man, a dressing of plumage now draped down her neck: the beautiful dark feathers of a hawk.



Astrid lifted her beak in a moment of catharsis, letting her sunken eyes remain closed as her airtight beak pinched at the remaining roll of weed. Smoke ran through her system, forcing her chest to rise and fall as it, too, became decorated with layers of dense feathering. Her chin receded under the cover of the red-orange, allowing her bold grey beak to be the proper focal point of her profile. Smoke streamed through her shrinking nostrils as if she were an avian teakettle, the sight of her contour under the window light seemed to evoke the image of a creature ready for change, a docile half-bird ready to push itself into completion.

The last patches of pale skin began to shrink away as Astrid turned calmly towards her roommate, twiddling the joint sideways at the tip of her pointed beak as if to offer her friend one final hit. Astrid's dopey-high smile contorted, the upturn at the ends of her lips conforming to the permanent contour of her beak. Ingrid pulled back from her friend's offer, her eyes focusing on how the joint seemed to will itself towards her lips as Astrid's stiffened beak just barely held onto the end. Ingrid's motion caused her receding chin to crush up against her chin feathers, which were now boldly bursting from her shirt collar in dark red shades. Some of Astrid's smoke whirled into Ingrid's thin nostrils, and as a response, the woman's body moved in instinct. Ingrid's mouth pecked forwards, stabilising the transition with her massive wings that covered nearly the entire size of Astrid's face upon their placement. Her neck bobbed along, sliding forward and backwards as the joint slipped effortlessly into Ingrid's blue-grey beak. Ingrid's eyes began to shut instinctively the moment the magic smoke began to rush through her system; now, the lifted position of her hulking wings felt right, and they



now sat idly by the sides of her beak as if they themselves were deciding which direction was the right way to move.

Ingrid dropped the joint into an ashtray, allowing her legs to take on the same once-foreign-now-comfortable bend that Astrid had employed as she rotated horizontally. The two friends looked at each other, knowing looks on both of their faces, but no words exchanged. Astrid's mind began to shrink in the mind fog, her priorities slimming as time began to pass in strange, blurred moments of clarity.



Some things remained clearer than others in Astrid's memory; she recalled jumping up onto her bed, and allowing her wings to flap experimentally, taking on strength and confidence with each swing. She hopped around on her mattress, the sensation of her small tri-tipped feet against the soft bedding a euphoric one. At one point, she recalled falling on her back, the view of her baggy sweatshirt overtaking her feathered torso a vivid one. At another moment, she recalls picking up the tv remote, and gripping it with her sharp claw-toes, her beak pecked at the buttons, and the screen shimmered with mesmerizing lights. She remembered talking with Ingrid, joking and arguing throughout all of this, but with their vocal capabilities, it must've sounded to an outdoors passerby like two chatty birds.

It took them a while to realize that something else about them was shifting. It wasn't until Ingrid realized that she had to jump to get on her chair to realize that their sizes had finally decided to adjust themselves. Ingrid fought against her clothing in a different way than Astrid's; while Ingrid shook and tore against her thrifted tee, writhing like the fearsome bird of prey she was becoming, Astrid squirmed and failed to make any waves

against her thick sweatshirt, becoming – for a moment– a pathetic prisoner to the burgundy fabric. The two birds stepped tentatively towards each other, not seeing a competitor as their instincts would have suggested, but rather as the best friends they had always been. Without another word, they headed for the fridge.

It was a comedic sight, whatever memories of the attempt could be recalled the morning after, the image of a patient red-tailed hawk sitting in disappointed silence as she watched a tiny robin waggle beakfirst from a fridge door in futile attempts to pry it open. The hawk's attempt was no better, either, and the two of them sat in a moment, their deep black eyes blinking slowly as their eye contact suggested a brilliant brainstorm between two bird-minded individuals.



Astrid was the first to offer an idea, a shrill call that danced between notes effortlessly. “twee twur— n-tweee” (wanna see what food is out in the park?)

Ingrid stood for a moment, tilting her head. How could she understand that? And why did it sound like such a good idea?

“ke-AAAAH!” (I’ll get the rats, you get the worms?)

Astrid nodded, in a satisfied twitching motion. The two of them hopped up onto the open window sill, their knowing, avian eyes locking for one final time before their take-off. That afternoon, a robin and a red-tailed hawk took flight from a college dorm room window, both the best of friends, and both *incredibly* high.