

An Ominous Book

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Chapter 1

“I am totally against it. The idea of taking in two children I never have met before isn’t my responsibility.”

“Come on Spaulding, the kids are a delight!”

Spaulding was sitting in his study room with his arms crossed while he stared outside the window. He took a brief look at his friend who wore medium green robes and spare looking black armor as he drank rice wine with tranquility.

“Look at those savages, unkempt, poorly dressed and making a huge fuss over the architecture of my castle. Bring them back to their land and leave me alone.”

“I swear to you they are your blood relatives Spaulding!”

Spaulding stared at Trevilin with hatred. “What in the hell were you doing over in Ayrtain anyways? I understood that your deployment was going to last well into the autumn this year.”

Trevilin started to grin with confidence. He got Spaulding’s attention all right. “I was chasing a petty criminal across the border.”

Spaulding spat some wine when he heard that. “Is this a joke? You know perfectly well that we can’t cross the border without an...”

Trevilin pulled out of his robe an edict that was signed by an Äimite that guarded a nearby post.

Spaulding grabbed the scroll and read it. "Okay, this seems like a reasonable excuse to cross the border. But why in the hell did you stick around and find those savages to give to me as a gift?"

"Well Spaulding, this is the fun part. The petty criminal happened to be a trafficker that was a member of some gang that wanted to sell those poor children to a foreign land. I was doing the usual when we are in town and found the stingiest looking tavern, sat down on a chair with a few beers and waited to listen to the latest gossip."

"Ah seedy taverns, the best place to hitch some good gossip."

"Which is why it's always a pleasure for me to keep my friendship with you, Spaulding, because you know what our field work is like."

Spaulding tied the scroll and gave it back to the black haired elf looking slightly less upset. "Okay, so I presume some stupid humans started to yap about these two children that are from a noble family."

"I would dare mention from a *disgraced* noble family, my dear friend."

"I don't get it."

"Well, the issue is that their parents are dead. Apparently the father had some outstanding gambling debts and he didn't want to pay. When someone murdered the father, the regional government took away the properties to be sold in an auction and the mother I believe killed herself to avoid the shame."

"So the little boy is a nobleman without a coin in his pockets, oh the joy!" Spaulding stood up and stared at the boy with messy black hair that was arguing with his little sister from the upstairs window. His elliptically shaped pupils straightened out and noticed something was missing from the boy's hand. "Is this some sort of joke Trevilin? The boy inherited a nobility title and he isn't wearing a ring."

"Well, you are just not letting me finish my tale Spaulding! Please let me continue. In the tavern, I overheard a couple of humans talk about a pair of noble children being sold for very little money and they were planning on having the sale at the southeastern border. They were going to sell the boy as an indentured servant and sell the girl I presume as a prostitute or something of the sort. I didn't care too much about the petty issues of foreigners, but when they mentioned the name of the middleman, my interest was piqued."

"A human with an unusual name I presume."

"You're correct once again Spaulding. So basically I slugged the men for the fun of it once they left the tavern and they told me where I could find the criminal I was looking for. I passed off as a middleman with a carriage in the assigned meeting spot."

"So you spent our government's generous endowments on rented carriages? Keeping things classy like usual Trevilin."

“Oh you know me, I have ostentatious tactics. The rest of the story is sort of boring. I killed the men, cut the right index finger of the man with a bounty on his head and sealed his bloody fingerprint on the edict and now I was stuck with two human children.”

“Go babysit them yourself! Who cares what happens to those savage creatures!”

“I wasn’t going to leave two orphaned children in the street Spaulding. As you know, I speak human with excellent fluency and I started to interview the poor kids. Turns out the little boy named Richard is from the House of Earlose.”

“Never heard of the clan.”

Trevilin grinned because he knew Spaulding was hopelessly ignorant regarding foreign affairs. “I found it strange that the boy was a nobleman with a veritable story that I confirmed when I checked the city auctions registry. I didn’t initially believe the boy because he didn’t have his ring.”

“Even without the ring, you could verify his account of noble birth with a registry office.”

“Which is what I did Spaulding. Turns out that from their maternal bloodline, they are the great-great-great-great grandchildren of the younger sister of your human ancestor.”

Spaulding’s face froze and he stared at Trevilin who was casually seated on a comfortable black leather chair. Spaulding rushed to him, grabbed his shoulders and stared at his face.

Trevilin stared at Spaulding’s medium brown eyes and couldn’t help smiling. “I swear on my oath as a ranger of the Elf Kingdom that those children are your distant nephew and niece.”

Spaulding stared at his eyes and realized Trevilin was speaking the truth. He slouched on his leather chair feeling stunned.

“The boy gave me detailed accounts of the names of his ancestry. Spaulding, these children are not making this up. Richard knew the entire bloodline from top to bottom. The average con artist would need the help of an adult to visit the registry office and in this case, there would be little to gain by trying to deceive you because no human knows about your hybrid ancestry.”

“My bloody mortal curse that is!”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself Spaulding. I wished I could be a mortal like you are. You are still very young but someday if you don’t die in battle, you will die peacefully in your sleep. It’s a perk that immortals such as me will never be able to enjoy. Either we die from starvation or the sword.”

“But you will be eternally young. You don’t know what it felt like seeing your father wither and die.”

Trevilin started to grunt after he heard that. “I saw your father on his deathbed and I was mightily depressed for his loss. But he managed to live a longer life than your grandfather did. With each passing generation, your increasingly pure elvish bloodline expands its longevity.”

“Great, I’ll enjoy another fifty years of youth, big deal.”

“Which is why you became a ranger in the first place despite being a clan leader in order to make better use of your time.”

Spaulding’s face suddenly turned grave. “As my closest friend, I will believe your ridiculous tale that those two humans are my distant relatives. I will not put that into doubt. But why in the hell did you bring them to Tesafar? Give them to a human relative.”

“I didn’t tell you what happened to Richard’s ring.”

“The criminals sold it, big deal. Little use if the registry office states the name of the true heir.”

“Someone else took the ring.”

“This sounds interesting. I presume it was a nobleman.”

“That is a half-truth Spaulding. Their commoner but politically well-connected maternal uncle stole it from Richard and he sold the children to get rid of them. He wanted to con the king into giving him the nobility title with all that it entails.”

“Stupid humans and their greed. So I can assume when they became orphans their idiot uncle took them in only to kick them to the curb the minute they overstayed their welcome.”

“You have learned a lot as a ranger. Your ability to predict human criminals never ceases to amaze me.”

“Basically, you take an elf and remove any fair sense of decency, immortality and most of all, their usefulness in the world and there you go. Thinking like a human has never been easier.”

Trevilin couldn’t stop laughing with politeness when a servant entered Spaulding’s office carrying a tray with some elvish cakes. “How nice! The servants brought some sesame seed cream cakes this time.”

“I presume humans don’t eat civilized food either.”

“In that respect, I can assure you that our nation is a better place to live. Humans eat meat with every meal.”

Spaulding shuddered at the very thought of tasting meat. He lived in a society where almost everyone practiced a strict vegan diet out of choice. He looked grave as he had another cup of wine. “You decided to bring them here because you couldn’t find any decent human relatives?”

“More like I was overstaying my welcome in the human lands. I have to return to my post immediately or else, I might risk being stuck working all winter.”

“Ah winter, the absolutely most dreadful time of the year to camp in the forest with our bitter weather. I can understand why you didn’t choose to stick around that much longer.”

“Well, the edict Lord Yuhara gave to me was only good for the human I ended up killing. I could have asked him for permission to locate the family of those children.”

Spaulding started to laugh very loudly and seemed more cheerful than before. "You always say the funniest things Trevilin. An Äimite couldn't care less about the comfort of a ranger much less the lives of two foreigners. From what I can understand, you were stuck bringing those nuisances to my humble castle."

"Look, try to put up with them for a few months. I swear I will cover any unpleasant shift the guard assigns me and I will bear the brunt of covering a month or two during the winter so that he lets me off the hook sooner and then we can try to locate a more redeeming relative together when the snow starts to melt."

"Did I just hear the word we?"

"Well, they are your blood relatives Spaulding."

Spaulding pounded his fist on the desk. "You do realize my next deployment will begin in the spring, right?"

"Well, it is early autumn and you just barely returned from your last assignment. Just try to put up with them during the winter. It will give you something useful to do for a change. When its spring and I am off duty, we'll take them together and find a human relative that can meddle with the problem."

"What about Legarha?!"

"Speak to your regional guard and land a good deal to begin your next assignment a few weeks later than usual or make up an excuse that you need to cross the border for some petty criminal and discreetly get rid of those children. In the worst of cases, they will be dead in sixty years and you won't have to worry about them ever again."

Spaulding sighed with resignation. "Fine, I will put up with their obnoxious petulant presence in my humble castle for six months. I guess I could set them up with some Elvish language classes or something and have someone from my clan put up with their unwanted presence as I rest. What are the names of these children again?"

"The boy's name is Richard and the girl is Nelida of the House of Earlose."

"The boy has a common name, but the girl's name is most unusual indeed."

"The little girl seems a bit jaded from the traumatic experience so try to be easy on her. She is only six years old which for a human can be a bit of a difficult age. Richard is eight but he does seem rather mature for his age."

"How long did the carriage travel? Did you get to know the children any better during your trip?"

Trevilin crossed his arms and started to think. "I guess the trip took us two weeks. They initially acted like I was a demon and gave me some trouble, but they seemed to have warmed up to staying here."

"I know you are telling a half-truth Trevilin but I guess I'll agree to let them stay here for a while."

Spaulding drank a cup of wine and started thinking attentively. After a few moments, his eyes shone and he put his palm on his face. "I almost forgot Trevilin! Now that these pestering humans will be occupying my limited free time, I was planning on doing something important but it seems like I may need someone else to do the task for me."

"What kind of task?"

"I need someone that is highly reliable of high noble rank to transport a certain object to the capital as soon as is considered reasonable."

Trevilin slightly frowned at the comment. "I presume you'd ask me, but because I am not a nobleelf, there would be too many questions asked."

"Precisely why I need you to request someone outside of my clan of high rank that can do this little favor. If you promise me you will find someone suitable to take something to the capital, I'll take care of these children without complaint."

"Well, it seems like a strange request but I guess I can find someone suitable. When do you need that package delivered and how high nobility rank is needed?"

"Doesn't have to be a clan leader, but perhaps someone of important lineage would be ideal. If the package can be sent immediately, it would be even better."

"I think we have a fair deal Spaulding. I have to leave immediately which is a shame because I'll miss dinner, but I really thank you for doing this favor. I'll come by when I am free to help you and I will find someone to fulfill your request."

Trevilin stood up, put on his black hood and mace, bowed at his friend and promptly left the room. After a few minutes, Trevilin was visible in the garden from the window while he spoke to the two children as they begged him to stay. Trevilin seemed to politely bow and left in haste making the children look visibly upset.

Spaulding saw the scene and sighed with resignation. "The sooner I meet these two brats, the sooner I can leave their care to someone in my city." Spaulding left the study room, climbed down the round staircase and was soon outside seeing the boy making his little sister cry. He reluctantly approached both of them immediately.

"Pleased to meet both of you. My name is Lord Spaulding, the master of Tesafar Castle. I have already spoken to my acquaintance Trevilin and I will allow both of you to stay in my city for the next few months." Spaulding politely bowed at the children who looked surprised at his unusually polite demeanor.

"Um... the pleasure is mine Spaulding. I am Richard and this is my sister Nelida."

"I don't want to stay here Richard! I want to go home! Why is the black haired demon leaving us in here?"

“Please be polite, Nelida. Trevilin already told us many times that the elf we were going to meet is our long lost uncle.”

Nelida’s piercing green eyes stared at the fair elf that wore rather plain looking beige robes that seemed to float as he elegantly walked. As Spaulding stared at both children, she tried to hide her fair face behind her brother with shame.

“I know that this is a difficult situation for both parties. You didn’t know that you had a distant uncle that lived in the Elf Kingdom, and I didn’t know I had any living human relatives that were noblemen without a home or family to take care of them.”

Spaulding knelt and smiled at both children trying to be polite. Richard blushed a little bit at Spaulding’s utter kindness whereas Nelida continued being distrustful.

“This is an awkward meeting for me, but I promise this will only be a temporary solution. My friend had to return to his military post immediately and when the snow melts in a couple of months, we will set off and locate your human blood relatives.”

“I want to come back home now!” Nelida stomped her foot on the ground.

“I’m sorry Nelida but you are going to have to put up with living here. Life is not always fair but I believe both of you will enjoy living in my quaint city. It will only be for a few months and you will soon be able to return to a normal life among humans where you belong. Please enter my home because you must be weary from your long trip.”

As Spaulding invited both children inside, the first surprising thing they noticed was a strange stair with white slippers next to a small wooden closet. Richard stared at the odd sight for a while feeling uncertain what to do.

“I forgot that humans enter their castles and homes with mud in their boots. This stair here is a dividing section between the outside world and our sacred home. We use these special shoes when we are inside of a home and leave our muddy shoes in this small closet. I would greatly appreciate that in order to maintain the order of my home, if you could always remember to remove your shoes when you walk inside.”

Both humans looked at the closet and unanimously frowned.

“There aren’t any shoes that will fit us.” Richard said.

“I’m very sorry about this. I’m not used to having guests at my home and much less children. For today you can walk barefoot inside and I’ll request someone from my town to mend appropriate indoor shoes for both of you.”

Nelida seemed distrustful but both children seemed to comply as a servant placed both sets of shoes in the closet.

“Please come this way.”

The two children followed the strange blond elf that wore his medium length hair in a ponytail as he hastily walked past several narrow hallways with elegant dark bamboo flooring and

white walls. Richard stared at the strange but aesthetically pleasing architecture while Nelida clung to her brother's right arm as they were escorted by Spaulding across several empty large rooms with strange straw mat floors and sliding wooden doors that were fully open. Spaulding proceeded to climb down a light grey granite staircase while the children hurried behind as they walked across another similarly narrow hallway to a bamboo door.

"I am presuming both of you are weary from the long trip. My friend Trevilin told me mostly everything so there is no need to repeat, children. This room has a nice bath with comfortable hot spring water. My servants will assist both of you as you have probably never bathed in one before."

Spaulding moved an elegant violet curtain with the traditional crescent moon and sun symbol of his clan revealing a medium sized room that had several dark bamboo closets with beige robes. Both children looked inside but remained in the hallway.

"Mister Spaulding..." Richard began to speak.

"By the way, as I am a nobleelf, it would probably be most appropriate to address me as Lord Spaulding."

"I'm sorry Lord Spaulding, but this is very new to me."

"The servants will assist both of you as I am certain humans have different customs. Hopefully you will both find my hot spring to be most pleasant. There is something I must do so please enjoy your bath and we will be seeing each other for dinner."

Spaulding politely bowed at both children which surprised them. In Richard's country nobles never bowed at anyone of inferior social status. The fair faced elf that he just met that chilly day seemed rather hospitable. Without waiting for the servant to direct the children inside, Spaulding raced outside of the main entrance, put on a pair of brown leather boots and walked to the courtyard where he was greeted by another servant.

"Lord Spaulding, who are those strange humans and why did Trevilin leave them here?"

"Apparently they are very distant human relatives of mine from my paternal bloodline."

The servant looked quite surprised at the revelation. It was well known by everyone that Spaulding was a hybrid but his human ancestor died around seven hundred years ago. "Will they be staying here for long?"

"I agreed with Trevilin to house them here for the winter."

"Aren't you weary from your latest tour as a ranger? You were on duty for five months nonstop this time."

Spaulding sighed from the revelation. "I guess if the children don't cause me too much problems, I'll have enough time to rest. Once the ice melts and before I am again on active duty, Trevilin and I will take them together to a human relative."

"Well, you are the lord of our clan. Are you planning on going somewhere? "

“I am going to visit my friend Hamarin and ask him for a small favor. If the children cause any problems please inform me.”

“Certainly my Lord.”

The servant bowed with politeness as Spaulding walked outside, climbed down a perfectly paved stone road across the white streets of Tesafar while always being saluted with politeness by the small city’s citizens. He soon reached a large wooden house of good decorative taste with a gigantic garden of immaculate beauty. He pleasantly smiled when he found the person he was looking for and approached him.

“Lord Spaulding, what an interesting surprise.”

A tall, thin elf that perpetually exuded an air of sadness on his blue eyes and fair face stared at the elf that approached him. Hamarin always had the penchant for wearing long white robes that covered almost the entirety of his body and liked to wear his immaculate knee length black hair loose to cover as much of his face as possible. He was sitting on top of a carpet drinking tea when Spaulding arrived.

Spaulding politely bowed and after he removed his boots, he sat down. “I am sorry for coming unannounced Hamarin, but a strange incident happened and I would like to know if you could assist me.”

“Certainly my Lord, what is the favor you ask?”

The two elves started to talk with each other for a while that tranquil early autumn afternoon when the servant Spaulding briefly talked to a while ago hastily ran to the garden.

“What’s wrong Floydin?”

“I pardon to interrupt your leisure my Lord, but the little girl is having a terrible argument with the other servants. Could you please come?”

Spaulding put his right hand on his face with frustration whereas Hamarin remained indifferent.

“I presume it’s the culture shock, Lord Spaulding. You’re not used to treating with noble humans. I can assure you this will not be the first time those children will give you trouble. You should go and see what the issue is and we’ll continue our chat tomorrow.”

Spaulding smiled with hesitation, put on his boots, bowed at his friend and ran back to the castle. Nelida was wearing a towel while she screamed at a female servant whereas Richard had already changed into a beige and blue elvish robe. “What seems to be the problem?”

Richard stared at the elf looking concerned. “Lord Spaulding, my sister doesn’t like the robes your servants gave to her after we finished our bath.”

Spaulding sighed when he saw Nelida pulling her dress from the servant’s arms. Spaulding hadn’t realized it before, but Nelida had unusual lilac colored hair in a very short haircut. If it hadn’t been for the dress, he would have assumed she had been a man. He knelt in front of her

with a worried look on his face. "What seems to be the problem Nelida? Did you find the bath to be unpleasant?"

"No Spaulding, that was nice but I hate the ugly robes your servants gave to me and my robe doesn't fit me! I want to wear my dress but the servant wants to throw it away."

Spaulding turned around and noticed her dress was tattered and looked unamendable. He placed his right hand on her shoulder with reassurance.

"Unfortunately your old dress is ruined. I am sorry that the robe my servant brought doesn't fit you perfectly, but unfortunately in our lands it's very unusual to see children. When you visit my city, you will soon realize you will only see adult elves everywhere. I will request a tailor to come here tomorrow and make human clothes of your size and to your taste so you will either have to wear the robes that don't perfectly fit you, or you can have dinner wearing that towel and nothing else. However, I cannot permit per the customs of hospitality of my nation to allow my humble guest to eat dinner in a ruined dress."

Richard stood nearby in contemplative silence when he finally understood the reason why his robe also didn't perfectly fit and watched how Nelida hugged the elf while she cried nonstop.

Spaulding wasn't very sure what to do and stared at the boy. "Is your sister always this emotional? I'm not very used to dealing with children."

"I am also a little bit surprised Lord Spaulding. Your friend Trevilin told us many things are very different in your nation such as the streets are very safe with very few criminals and that this city doesn't have soldiers."

"My city is too far up north from the human borders and there is no need for foot soldiers here."

"There aren't criminals here?"

"Everything here is very new to you. It's nice that I finally met a human that doesn't call me a demonic monster for once."

Richard had a hard time understanding the elf's comment.

After crying for a while, Nelida started to calm down. "Spaulding, can I call you uncle?"

Spaulding stared at her tearful face with a certain degree of indifference. "If you stop crying and put on the robes for dinner, I'll make an exception."

The girl hugged him as he awkwardly patted her back. Richard timidly smiled at the graciousness of his host. The girl finally calmed down sufficiently to return to the changing room and allowed the servant to dress her as Spaulding and Richard waited in the hallway. Nelida came out a few minutes later looking slightly comical in the long robe that had to be folded with a tight blue belt. Spaulding slightly smiled at the amusing sight while Richard laughed which annoyed her.

"Please come over this way, children, as you now look presentable for dinner."

Spaulding once more directed the two children across a long series of similar looking narrow hallways that had several empty rooms with straw mat floors, white walls with a lot of intricate paintings with the clan's emblem and wooden sliding doors. Richard really liked the pleasant sparseness of the castle whereas Nelida had a hard time understanding the purpose of having so many empty rooms. After a few minutes, they climbed a couple of wooden stairs to a very large room that looked very similar to the other ones, but it featured a large dark wood table. The children were surprised there were no chairs and the table was barely elevated at all.

"Where are the chairs, Lord Spaulding?" Richard looked around with incredulity.

"Take a look below." Spaulding sat on the back corner as the master of the castle in front of a very intricate wall painting of the clan emblem, and the children sat on top of two flat pillows next to him. They instantly noticed there was a large hole beneath the table to place their feet.

Richard was incredulous. "I have never seen such a strange looking dining room before."

"You will get used to it, Richard. Human dining rooms just seem a little bit too informal for my taste."

The children looked at the room and instantly noticed there were a lot of supporting beams made out of beautifully carved wood with intricate golden leaf designs. A servant suddenly opened a lateral sliding door that faced a wooden hallway and farther away a beautiful garden was now visible. Both children were fascinated at the maple trees that were starting to change color that complemented perfectly with the sheer simplicity of the greenery outside.

"I have never seen a garden like that before." Richard said.

Spaulding casually looked outside, being used to seeing it every day.

"I am not that familiar with human gardens, but we generally don't like to use plants that produce flowers. We kind of like our gardens to have a monochromatic appearance. In a couple more weeks, the maple trees will turn bright red which will give it an interesting contrasted color. The servants will bring us something to eat very soon. Are you familiar with elvish food?"

The children stared at each other, looking confused.

"Are we going to be eating lizard eyes and witchcraft potions?" Nelida asked.

Spaulding laughed with politeness. "Is that what the humans in your nation think elves eat? How amusing!"

The children stared at each other, wondering why Spaulding was laughing. A couple of minutes later, two servants placed a plate with assorted vegetable based dishes, unusual looking long forks, small knives and a second plate with strange white wafer cakes with assorted fillings inside. A second servant served everyone a ceramic cup with sweet tea and promptly left the room. Spaulding blessed his food and started eating quietly. After a few moments, he noticed neither child was eating anything.

"Is anything wrong? The food is delicious."

“Lord Spaulding, what is this? I don’t see any meat.”

Spaulding balked at Richard’s comment. “Elves are for the most part strict vegans.”

Nelida turned to face the elf, looking more surprised than her brother. “You mean you don’t eat newt eyes?”

“Of course not. We aren’t the demonic monsters humans seem to believe. We can eat meat, but we are simply raised in a culture where eating meat is socially unacceptable unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

“But why don’t you eat meat? It tastes delicious.”

Spaulding wanted to belch at Richard’s comment. “You may find it appetizing, but I absolutely detest the flavor.”

“But won’t your body become weak if you don’t eat it?”

“If you take a close look at the dishes, you will see some small white cubes that have a gelatinous consistency. Those cubes are made out of a sort of plant that is rich in protein. I can assure you that our diet is much more nutritious than what you are accustomed back at your home.”

Richard’s hunger took a hold of him and he eventually tried out the food. It had a pleasant soft flavor, not too seasoned, and the natural flavors of the vegetables complemented each other. He quickly grinned and looked at his sister. “Nelida, you should really try this! It’s delicious!”

However, Nelida just like a while before stared at her food with disgust. “This is not food! I’m not a cow!” Nelida tossed her plate of food on the table and ran out of the room crying.

“Nelida!” Richard tried to stand up but Spaulding softly tugged his arm.

“Please don’t, Richard.”

“But she tossed her plate of food on your table!”

“I expected this behavior from her. I’m glad that you decided to give our food a chance and enjoyed it. I was briefly talking to a close friend of mine in the city and he told me a little bit about how humans raise their noble children. Apparently noble parents don’t even raise their children. They are raised by servants that let them do whatever they feel like and don’t teach them decorum, with disastrous results.”

Richard paused as he stared at the mess on the table. He turned around and tried to bow in apology to the elf. “I’m so sorry, Uncle Spaulding for my sister’s behavior! Please don’t kick us out of your castle and sell us to criminals like my uncle did!”

Spaulding only smiled with kindness. “I can assure you that elves treat their guests with the most utter respect and I will try to be more understanding with your sister. However, I think this will be a good opportunity for you to experience our nation, which is something very few humans ever get to enjoy. Finish your meal and go to rest.”

“What about my sister?”

“As kind as I am, I am not going to serve meat in my humble abode. She can either eat meat with the human laborers that work in our farms like a common peasant or be a noble guest of honorable repute and eat with us. For tonight if she goes hungry, that will be her problem.”

Spaulding quickly finished his dinner, encouraging Richard to do the same, and once he was done, he stood up and bowed at the boy.

“As much as I would like to continue getting to know you better, I am still weary from my recent deployment as a ranger and I haven’t recovered yet. I am going to rest and you might not see me tomorrow morning. The servants will direct you and your sister to your room. Tomorrow you can have a free day wandering around my city and get to know it better. The servants will have a pleasant breakfast awaiting both of you when you wake up.”

“What about my sister?”

“Like I have said before, she can continue starving until she decides she has no other choice but to eat what my castle has to offer, or she can eat in the street with peasant humans. If she chooses to eat with the humans, I would prefer it that she doesn’t continue resting in my castle because it would give mixed messages to my citizens of how I treat my guests. I bid you goodnight and I will see you for dinner tomorrow.”

The elf once again briefly bowed and left the dining room. Richard walked outside and stared at the garden that had a small pond with some fish in the distance. He sat on the wooden hallway enjoying the peace and tranquility of his mysterious uncle’s castle until a servant showed up after nightfall and bowed with politeness.

“Good evening, Lord Richard. Your guestroom has been fully prepared, please follow me.”

Richard followed the servant that wore simple beige robes in awkward silence. As he crossed the maze of similar looking narrow hallways, he stared at the ceiling and gasped. “What are those things?”

The servant turned around and noticed Richard was staring at a series of strange circular lamps. “In our nation, we illuminate our homes with special lamps that are not made out of fire. Is this the first time you have seen them?”

Richard blushed with embarrassment at his ignorance and nodded. The boy was impressed how the lamps maintained excellent illumination due to some alien technology.

“Please follow me, my Lord.”

Richard was soon directed to a pleasant guestroom where his sister was already in a corner crying nonstop. “Nelida, you insulted our uncle by not eating the food he gave us.”

“I want to go home! This place is awful! Those demon beasts eat cow feed, dress in ugly bed sheets and look at the beds!”

Richard turned around and noticed their sparsely decorated room had two flat heaps of thick fabric with elegant blue and violet blankets with the familiar family emblem along with flat

pillows. Richard turned around and noticed the wooden closet of the room was open, revealing other bed sheets on the shelves.

“Now I understand why the castle has so many empty rooms Nelida. They are actually bedrooms and they store all of the furniture in the closet. What an interesting way to save space and make the castle easier to clean! I don’t know about you, but this is the most awesome place I have ever been to!”

Nelida continued bawling nonstop in her corner, which made her brother frown.

“I don’t think you seem to understand how lucky we are that Trevilin came to our rescue and brought both of us to his friend’s residence even though he was going to get into trouble at his job. I had a friendly chat with our uncle a while ago and he seems like the nicest person I have ever met. He isn’t like our other uncle, Nelida, so stop acting like a spoiled brat because nobody cares about your complaints. Instead of complaining about your pitiful life, you should enjoy staying here. I am actually falling in love with it and I can’t wait to explore the city tomorrow. Good night.”

Richard instantly put himself beneath the cover and went to sleep. After freezing in the cold for a while, Nelida grudgingly pulled herself beneath the blanket and realized that the flatbeds were immensely comfortable once you got used to sleeping on the ground level. Her stomach churned nonstop as she cried herself to sleep.

Chapter 2

“Was the amazing experience I had yesterday a mere dream?”

Richard instantly woke up, stretched his arms, opened the bamboo screen and looked outside of the second floor window. The boy was smiling nonstop as he enjoyed the pleasant view of the small city that was built on a slope that had a nice contrast between the fog, forest and the mostly white buildings that dotted the landscape. Richard instantly rushed towards his sister.

“Nelida, wake up! You have to look outside the window!”

Nelida woke up feeling dizzy from starvation but she seemed considerably calmer than yesterday. The girl rubbed her eyes and stared outside the window. Her green eyes instantly shone at the sight. “Wow, what an amazing city! When we were in the carriage we didn’t get to see almost anything.”

“Uncle Spaulding told me that he wasn’t going to be around today and that a servant was going to have breakfast ready when we woke up.”

“I don’t want to eat that yucky food!”

“He told me that if you want to continue sleeping in his castle that you have no other choice. You can either starve for no reason at all or you can eat all the meat you want and sleep in a hut with some farmers.”

“I am not going to sleep with some farmers, Richard!”

“He looked very serious about not relenting to your whims, Nelida. Don’t waste your time crying and complaining. I am sure you had a very fun night with an empty stomach.”

Nelida’s stomach started to grumble, which made her blush and turn away.

“Give the food a chance, Nelida! It actually tastes very good!”

In that instant, a servant quietly knocked on the door. Richard turned to the side to answer. “Who is it?”

“It’s one of the servants of the castle, Young Lord Richard and Lord Nelida. I have come to inform both of you that your breakfast is ready. Please accompany me after you have washed up to the dining room.”

A couple of minutes later, both children followed the servant to the same dining room and noticed their plates of food were already served. This time the space reserved for their uncle as the master of the castle lay empty which slightly surprised Richard. Both children sat down on the exact same place where they sat yesterday and started to eat. Richard gorged on his food without even chewing whereas Nelida nibbled on the food more out of a need to stave her hunger than anything else. Richard smiled that at least his sister had the dignity of trying out the food this time. A few minutes later, a servant arrived to serve everyone some more tea and sweet elvish cakes.

“I have a question.”

“Yes, Lord Richard? “

“Where is my uncle? “

“He is currently unavailable, my Young Lord, but rest assured he will be available when you have dinner tonight. A tailor will arrive shortly to make suitable clothing for both of you. After he has finished mending at least one suit, both of you will be free to travel the city.”

“We won’t have a chaperone?”

“That will not be necessary, Young Richard. Tesafar is very safe because criminals don’t dare venture in this area especially when the Master is protecting the city and everyone speaks human.”

Richard frowned with curiosity and began to think to himself. *“I never realized elves spoke their own tongue. That explains why they speak my language with a strange accent.”*

The longer he spent in the country, the more he wanted to learn about it. Nelida seemed ambivalent but at least she seemed decently excited that the tailor was going to soon arrive.

“When is the tailor arriving?”

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