

The Judges Chronicles: The Fairytale Slave

Introduction: The Child Trade

It was a sunny morning in Shavron which summed up most of the spring season in the land. Many of the Shavronites were just waking up to start the day of labor and trading. Among the Shavronites were two creatures: one pulling the other by the hand as if they were late for a meeting. A young pup and his step-mother traveled quickly down into the grand shipyard where the crowds and horse drawn carriages came zipping by without concern for any innocent pedestrians. It was important to keep their wits about them, for the busy dock rarely allowed a mistake. The youngster kept his senses alert as carriages towered over him. The child's step mother quickly took hold of his hand the second time, with more of a grip, as not to lose it again. She guided him through the crowd in earnest of the goal. He was pulled with such aggression and force that the child wondered why he was hurried in such a manner, after all he was going on a vacation.

"You haven't told me yet" said the youngster, "Which island are we going to see?"

"Many of them," said the step mother looking around the dock.

"When are we coming back?"

"You'll be gone for some time-- there!" she said finding the exact ship, "Hurry up now."

The ship in question was immense, known to carry cargo and other good long distances across the oceans. Once on board the child's step mother gave a simple command.

"Don't move, wait here until I call you over," she said.

The child watched as a male cheetah, a porcupine, and his step mother began to debate over an issue. The three creatures talked quickly in whispers as not to unsettle the child. A few times they glanced over to the youngster; the porcupine himself smiled, but the expression concealed a secretive plot that the young pup was unaware of.

"Let's not waste too much time," said the porcupine, "How old is he?"

"Seven, but will be eight next month." said the step mother. "His parents died and their will gave him to me. He's an extra mouth that I don't want to feed."

"Is he healthy," replied the cheetah.

"As fit as you and I."

"His name?" asked the porcupine.

"Flint."

Finding the information to his liking, the porcupine took a folded sheet of paper from this jacket. The sheet of paper contained the bill of sell. Oblivious, the child obeyed the command of his step mother.

"Come along Flint our room is ready down below."

"Its nice to meet you Flint," said the cheetah with a whimsical smirk as they passed.

"We'll have plenty of time to get to know one another."

In the hull, the young pup was taken to a room. Inside was a small bed and crates of cargo.

“Now, I’ll be right back.” said the step mother earnestly, “I’ll be back.”

As Flint turned to unpack his bag, the door was closed and locked from the outside. A voice came from behind him, and Flint saw that he was not the only one in the room. Two other kids came from behind the crates, both looked to be ragged in dress and manners.

“Well, he’s new.” said the first kid, “Won’t be long though before they break him in.”

“Yeah, that’s the hardest part,” said the other,. “He’s a dog though, he’ll work in the factories.”

“Work? Factories?” said the sold child, “I...I’m going on vacation. My step-mother...”

Both children chuckled.

“He’s stupid too.”

“You don’t know what has happened, huh?” said the other child. “You’ve been sold.”

Suddenly the cabin door opened. The cheetah and porcupine entered the room. The other two children retreated behind the crates.

“I heard you were going on a vacation,” said the cheetah smiling, “I will be one of your escorts, the name is King.”

“And I am Chim,” said the porcupine.

The child stood afraid and called twice for his step-mother; when there was no answer, he began to believe what he was told by the others. King slowly strolled forward, patting a cudgel in his hands. The shadows that engulfed the room made him look like a specter.

“Now if you mind me, you and I will get along very well, but first there’s something we have get straight first.”

“Don’t damage him.” said Chim sharply, “I’ll get my money back at slave block.”

King, with the cudgel, proceeded to accost the child. The blows came quick and only lasted a few seconds, but it was enough to make the point. The child fell to the floor weeping profusely. King stood over him satisfied with his work.

“Let this be the first and last beating you get.” said the porcupine. You were sold to me and what I say goes. I’ll feed you later, and you two,” the porcupine said to the other children, “if he starts yelling give me a call.”

The cheetah smiled wickedly and left the cabin with the porcupine, The door was slammed behind them. The child stayed on the floor weeping wanting as the nightmare began.

Here the sixth chronicle begins

Chapter 1: Wickedness Working

With the generations of judges that have passed, a new generation had come: one of them was Caleb, the judge of instruction, was the nation’s new leader in all things holy, right and true. The borzoi hound of the rightful age of forty, was frequently found carrying a copy of the holy writ under his arm (just for show); ready at all times to expound some great encouragement to anyone who salute him throughout the day. He was very much liked and dared not to hinder his popularity. The Shavronites, although aware of their history, were not overly inclined to hear about “obeying God’s” commands, repenting (if they knew what it was), or other things dealing with the Holy One. In fact it was beginning to bother them that the any preacher in Shavron would waste the time to remind them of the “old ways”.

Caleb agreed with his fellow Shavronites, and made it an official edict to have only the “encouraging parts” of the Holy Writ spoken openly, and any violation of this, would be an instant removal from the pulpit and payment of a heavy fee. Needless to say the edict was unanimously obeyed.

This judge had one relative that he had legal been given to him due to honoring a will of his late brother. The arrangement, although an act of honor, was not welcomed by Caleb himself, but he had given his word to adopt his niece Esta if anything has happened to her parents.

Her history of her abandonment is far beyond this story and will be left out, but in short her parents had died in light of their service to God. Esta was very young when this happened, and could not remember them. She only knew of her Uncle Caleb, who did his best to care for her from the age of two. Esta never believed he truly loved her. She was a mixed breed (or mutt) and Caleb, although not outrightly belittling her, he never praised her for doing good, or read her a bedtime story, nor did he buy any toys for her to play with. She was extra baggage or an obligation thrown on him by Shavronite society; and Esta felt it deeply by the way Caleb treated her. However, she was given food, and nice bed to sleep on, and was sent to school to learn. Caleb would always remind her to do well because,

“At sixteen you are to leave and make your own way into the world. There are plenty of apprenticeships in Shavron. It will be better for the both of us when that happens.”

Although she had no toys to play with, she did find one thing to do. Whenever her uncle was out or sleep, she would always read the Holy Writ that he carried under his arm. In a way it intrigued her, and wanted to know what was in it. At first, she was unable to even understand the verbiage; it was as she said to herself, a bunch of gobbledygook. However she wanted to know what was in that big book, and in a childlike way asked God to help her. One day, she came upon a story of Glory. She read the four accounts that told of his birth, life, death, coming to life again, and his soon return. For Esta it was an amazing tale, that she believed deeply; and just for fun, she memorized every detail with such skill that she could tell anyone without even thinking about it.

As the days passed, Caleb thought it would be good to get some fresh spring air at the park. Usually, Esta was left behind to tend to the chores, but today she was met with a pleasant surprise.

“Get dressed Esta. Let’s head to the park!”

With in seconds she was standing before Caleb with a big smile on her face.

“I’m ready!” she said clapping her hands.

“Aren’t you bright and cheerful,” her uncle said

“I bet its bright at the park too.” she said grinning. “With games, and rides, and food, and...”

“Let’s get a move on.”

As they traveled to the park, a horse drawn carriage came up beside them. Esta noticed the elegance of the cart, and the horse pulling it was groomed with such gaudiness that Esta thought royalty was on the road, and in fact, it was. The door swung open and out from within the carriage appeared a impressive asiatic black bear, intimating for them to get on board. Sheepishly, Caleb (with Esta following behind) did so, and after instructing the horse to proceed they were on their way.

“Good morning Ursus,” said Caleb, “How are you today?”

“I’m doing fine my dear judge,” said the bear in a deep baritone voice, “I’m am glad I was able to catch up to you. And who is this young one?”

“My niece, Esta. Say hello, Esta.”

Esta wave. Ursus lowered his head to acknowledge her.

“So where are you two headed?”

“The park!” replied Esta excitedly, “Uncle Caleb usually doesn’t take me. I’m always doing chores and such.

“Esta, please---too much information.”

“The park!” said Ursus smiling, “I was headed there myself. In fact your uncle and I are going to talk about a lot things at the park.”

Instantly Caleb, glared at the orange and blue crest hanging comfortable around Ursus’s neck.

“Really?” said Esta, “Like what?”

“That’s enough, Esta,” said Caleb nervously breaking into the conversation. “Just be quiet now. Ursus, a little mercy until we arrive.”

The bear gave a clever smile and taking his hand he made “zip-like” motion across his lips.

Gideon's Gallery, the park named after the famous judge of battle, was the usually attraction for most of the city. Jugglers, and musicians lined the walkways to entertain to receive profit from any patron in their sights. There were merchants selling farm goods, and cooking fine meals. Children ran together with kites or played tag on the wide grassy plains. A Penny-Farthing (A bicycle with one large wheel and a smaller one) passed near them, and Esta giggled at the silly sight.

Another attraction was gradually gaining popularity: steam power. With this popularity, every serious and half witted inventor did their best to take advantage of this new form of energy. There were steam carts, steam engines, and steam instruments. So it wasn’t a surprise that Esta insisted that she ride the “steam merry go round”

“Please, please, please, please,” Esta said tugging on her uncle’s arm.

“Esta, it cost ten dollars for one ride, its too expensive.”

“You’re the judge of instruction,” she said rolling her eyes, “I know you have money.”

Caleb gave his niece a stern look, however, the protruding lip, big puppy dog eyes, and incessant whimpering made him yield.

As he was watching Esta on the ride, Ursus addressed him.

“You’ve done well, Caleb. The council is very proud of you. We were beginning to worry.”

“I gave Shavron what it wants.” Caleb said looking around. “What more do they want?”

Ursus put his large heavy hand on Caleb shoulder, the hound seemed to buckle under the weight.

“To make me High Judge and to support the Child Trade,” he whispered, “your support is desired or should I say demanded.”

“No.” the judge said with little confidence, “The judge of battle and commerce may have succumbed to that, but I’m not a monster like they are. Just because you have two crests around your neck, doesn’t mean you get to boss me around.”

“Whoa whoa! Don’t get all high and mighty now,” said Ursus, “You became a monster the day you stopped preaching truthfully. I may not be a believer, but I’m not ignorant of what that old book says. Besides,---”

The conversation was interrupted by Esta, whose merry-go-round time had ended.

“Can I go again, Uncle, please, please, please!”

Ursus pulled out a large money note and handed it to Esta.

“As many times as you want.”

“Thank you, sir.” she said running off.

Ursus turned his sights back on Caleb.

“The Shavronites are beginning to be doubt your loyalty. You could lose everything by the end of the week: your money, your title,.....your life.”

Caleb gave Ursus a frightful stare.

“That’s right. You know Shavronites are prone to dispose of its leaders in violent ways. All it takes is a little nudge. Do you really want to hang from a rope?”

Caleb brought his trembling hand to his neck.

“Alright. I’ll sign any document you want.”

“I don’t need you to sign anything.” said Ursus, “We’ll have an official ceremony and I need you to sell something.”

“Sell something? Sell what?”

Ursus’s eyes darted over to the merry-go-round. Caleb eyes followed.

“You said many a time in the council meetings that she was a thorn in your side.” said Ursus, “You resent her because she’s a half breed and you know it. Giving her up to the Child Trade will show the Shavronites that you’re serious. Once you do, Shavron will become the richest nation in the world, the money that will pour in will be beyond belief-- and you’ll be praised for it. I will make all the arrangements. Remember Caleb, you can’t fight the world. It’s either you or her. Make a decision.”

Chapter 2: The Elephant with the Yellow Balloon

It was time for recess. The students were let out into the open yard to play games and to enjoy some relief from the ardent studies placed upon them. Tag, jump rope, and hide and go seek, were just a few of the games that gave the children some means of relief from the drudgery of learning new subjects. Esta quickly joined her usual group of friends to play her favorite game of hide and go seek. No one was able to beat her and the youngster relished in fact that she was undefeated. The game went on as usual, but unaware to the children, were higher stakes at hand than just bragging rights.

Watching from a distance were two kidnapers watching closely at the children, positioning themselves far away from the open yard, but still in sight of their target. The first was a male cheetah(of whom you've meet before), who carried himself in such a charismatic mood that his nickname was "Slick" although he preferred not to called anything at all expect by his true name: King.

King's sleazy demeanor stayed with him like a bad rash. He had a sleazy smile, a sleazy look, and if sleaze needed a representative, King would win the vote. With his name, the cheetah considered himself a patriarch within his repulsive occupation. King was a trapper (slang for kidnapper) who stole and sold children to work in factories, fields, and other places to deplorable to even mention.

The cheetah sat patiently as any predator would, watching the children playing, and taking note of their movements. He finally spotted and knowing his orders, he turned to his partner in crime with a slight smile.

"That one right there," he said pointing at Esta, "Ursus wants this done quickly. I'll make about two grand on her. She do well for a house slave or saloon waitress."

His helper was a veteran to this type of work as well, although quite young in age. Since she was a year old, Pogisa moved from house to house, factory to factory, and sometimes country to country as she was bided out as a worker to the highest buyer. She was a child slave and had faired much better than some of her peers by learning how to survive and thrive in the vile industry she was sold into. She was a beautiful, smart young elephant with an addled soul. The lying, cheating, and treachery gradually corrupted her, and she was just as sleazy as King.

Now at the tender age of three, she was smart as any adult, if not smarter (for elephants are quiet intelligent) and had gained some notoriety at her trade, although cautious as not to overstep her bounds in front of her superiors; and when she did, a few lashes reminded her of her place. Those marks were covered by a dingy ,decorative drape she wore over her back to hid her punishments. She held in her trunk a yellow ballon.

"You know what to do," said King to Pogisa. "Make friendly with her, use the balloon, and get her near me. I'll handle the rest. Now, move!"

With the nod of her head, Pogisa went in pursuit.

It was the third round of the game as Esta hid behind a tree. Posiga slowly trotted up to her and said:

"Hello."

Esta turned in fright, but her fear quickly disappeared when she saw the young elephant with the balloon in her trunk.

"Who are you?" asked Esta.

"Sorry for scaring you. I'm Pogisa--I'm new here--it's my first day of school." Pogisa started prancing in place excitedly, "Ooh! Hide and Seek, it's my favorite!"

"Shhhh!" went Esta as quietly as she could, "You'll give my position away. I'm the champion and I'm not about to lose today."

Pogisa moved closer to her.

"Good spot to hide, they'll never find you here." she said softly.

"It's the best hiding spot in school."

"Wow, I'll remember that, what's your name?"

"Esta," she said and then took note of the balloon, "Nice, where did you get it from?"

"There's a cat giving them away. He has a bunch of them!" Pogisa said spinning in a circle, "Red, blue, pink, and green! He has ones that have pictures on them too! You want one it's not that far--oh, wait-- what about your game?"

Now Esta knew better as not to leave the school grounds, and better yet, she knew better not to trust strangers, but Pogisa had quickly earned her trust and besides, Esta was tempted to get one of those pretty balloons.

"Half the time I'm bored anyway," said Esta, "We'll be back before the schoolmaster calls us."

"Perfect, come on! I'll show you the way."

So off they went talking and laughing as if they'd known each other for years. The young elephant frequently looked behind to ensure that no one would hear or see them. When the open yard was out of sight, Pogisa suddenly stopped.

"What's wrong?" said Esta

"Oh, I forgot," said Pogisa sighing, "There weren't many balloons left when the cat gave me this one. They are probably all gone by now. Hey, you can have mine if you want?" Posiga presented Esta with the balloon.

"Well, I--I"

"I insist," said the elephant extending her trunk further, "You're my new friend. Besides, every champion deserves a trophy."

Esta reluctantly took the balloon. Instantly, Pogisa wrapped her trunk around Esta's forearm. At first she thought it was a sentimental act, until the elephant's grip tightened. Esta winced in pain as she pulled to break the elephant's hold.

"OUCH!" she screamed, "STOP IT!"

"I'm your friend," said Pogisa coldly, "Don't you trust me?"

Pogisa's eyes drew upward to a figure behind Esta. The elephant's grip loosened. Esta pulled back, bumping into King.

"Hello, little missy!" said the cheetah.

Instantly, a cloth of chloroform came over Esta's face. She swooned and passed out into the arms of the cheetah. King tucked her under his shoulder and disappeared into the neighboring brush with Pogisa trotting right behind him. With the new cargo in hand, King quickly made his way through the back woods.

"Wait up," Pogisa said running as fast as she could. "You know I'm not as fast as you are."

King continued to run through the wood until he arrived at a horse drawn wagon. Esta was placed inside and covered with a tarp. Pogisa finally caught up, and was nearly out of breath when she arrived.

"Let's go, slowpoke!" said King growling at her, "I told you we needed to be fast."

"Ok. ok," said the young elephant getting into the cart.

King gave a few orders to the horse and the wagon traveled briskly down the beaten road.

"King, why did you grab her anyway?" said Pogisa lifting up the tarp, "She's not much to look at."

King gave Pogisa askance, the young elephant quickly turned her gaze away.

"Don't worry about why I took her."

"It's pretty bad when you uncle turns on you."

"So!" said King irately. "What do you care?"

"I don't, just saying that's all."

"Well stop saying anything," was the cheetah's sharp reply. "Be quiet and keep any eye on the new merchandise."

When school was over Caleb followed his usual routine of meeting Esta at the front steps of the school, but to his surprise he saw the headmaster and three teachers standing nervously in the place of Esta. Caleb's first thought was that she had gotten into trouble. The judge was already formulating a plan of punishment as he addressed the faculty.

"What did she do? Talking during class. Running in the halls."

"I wish she did do something," said the headmaster barely able to form his words, "Esta is.....She has been.....We believe her to be....."

"What," replied Caleb beginning to worry, "What's happened to her!?"

"We can't find her," said the first teacher, "She's not in the school or around the school grounds. She may be lost or....."

In the back of Caleb's mind he knew that Ursus was behind it all. The bear has followed through with the plan. As not to divulge the arrangement he made with the bear, Caleb told the faculty not be alarmed and that a public announcement would be made. The following day Ursus with the council held a an open meeting in the public square. Caleb explained his support for the Child Trade, and also relinquished his position as judge of instruction. The green crest was given to Ursus, thereby making him, the first High Judge in Shavron. There was round of applause and then Ursus took center stage.

It would take pages to explain every lie that came from the bear's mouth, but by the end of the speech he had the entire crowd believing that Esta had been a heavy burden to Caleb and that the Child Trade would help youngster to be productive. Strangely the sunny day, quickly became cloudy and a drench of rain sent the crowd away. Caleb decided to do the same, but the new High Judge called him.

"Hold on," Ursus said, waving him back, "I have something for you."

Caleb came over and was handed a check for five hundred dollars.

"Its for your niece. You won't have to worry about her any longer. Use the money as you please."

Sheepishly, the hound placed the check in his jacket pocket; and without another word, he proceed home through the downpour.

Chapter 3: Spoiled Goods

The ox pulled the wooden carriage gradually down a worn path passing between two mountain sides. The landscape, in all its beauty, was not to be adored by King who was reclined on the carriage's seat. He rolled a piece of dry grass along his mouth playfully looking forward to a smooth ride to Morbid Market in wait of a profitable return. A sudden bump in the road derailed his train of thought and he immediately accosted the

ox below for his negligence. From then on, the beast of burden made it a priority to look out for any more bumps in the road to avoid receiving one himself.

The wooden carriage, if you can call it that, was more like a cage on wheels. The vehicle was comprised of old wood nailed together haphazardly giving it the appearance of contraption of torture. The door on the back was secured by a rusty lock that jangled with every movement of the ride. Inside slept four creatures: the first was Pogisa. The second was a young beaver wearing a ragged grey coat, resting quietly in the corner of the carriage. The third was another unfortunate child, a panda of the age of five. The fourth, was Esta still under the influence of the chloroform. The bumpy ride began to wake her up, and when she finally came to her senses, she began to look around wildly.

The dim, claustrophobic cage gave her no relief, and her new friends looked just as terrible as she felt. Finding her surroundings changed dramatically, Esta began to shake wishing that this was all a nightmare. Suddenly a fit of fear overcame her and she began to scream out.

"Help! Help! Uncle Caleb!"

Pogisa sprung up.

"Be quiet, shut up!" she said poking her with her trunk.

"Where am I?" she said trembling, "I want to go home!"

"Shut up." said Pogisa again more sternly, "You'll get us in trouble."

The rickety carriage came to an abrupt stop. The children heard King descend from his seat in fury.

"What's all that racket in the back?" he said annoyed. "Do I have to make you brats walk the rest of the way?"

The lock was removed and the carriage door swung open. Pogisa stared into King's menacing face. The elephant pointed her trunk at Esta. King looked over child as she wiped her tear eyes.

"Now what might the problem be, little missy?" he said with a grin. "I like a quiet ride when I'm headed to the market."

Esta couldn't find the words to express her terror, and looking into the face of the cheetah did not help.

"I asked you a question--are you stupid or something?" replied King coldly,

"Please," said Esta softly, "take me home."

"Home!" replied King with baring his teeth, "I've got a quota to meet. I've got investors who need little hands in their factories and little servants in their homes and farm fields. Don't worry little missy I'll find you a good home. Now keep your voice down." King turned his sights on Pogisa. "Keep her quiet. If I have to stop this cart again, you're walking the rest of the way."

The door was slammed, the lock was secured once again, and the carriage started to move. Esta looked at Pogisa. Her fear gave way to anger, especially against the young elephant. Pogisa checked the beaver who recoiled from her touch and the panda responded in suit. When she turned to Esta she was met with a different response.

"I hate you." said Esta.

"So." replied Pogisa apathetically. "Its not my fault you were stupid enough to trust me." Esta sprung up and started to pound Posiga on her head with her fist. The exercise was futile; and with little effort, Pogisa pushed Esta to the carriage floor. The elephant laughed seeing the defeat.

"You mutt!" said Pogisa nastily, "That's what I'll call you: a half breed mutt!"

"HEY WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE!" shouted King.

"Nothing," said Pogisa looking at Esta, "Nothing at all."

The carriage began to pick up speed under King's command. The ride was more uncomfortable than before, and Esta despised every moment of it. The party stopped for the night to rest. The children were given a surprisingly hearty meal; but not out of the kindness of King's heart, but to keep them looking well to sell.. The next morning the carriage only traveled a few hours before stopping again. Immediately, the children were ordered out. Once the ox was out of sight. King removed a revolver, brandishing it to ensure that the children saw it. With Pogisa's help, King rounded the children up and lead them on foot across an open prairie. As they traveled, King frequently recited a prose which he made up:

Little servants, little workers
All in their proper place

They make the money to please my soul
I will be rich and finer than gold

Little servants, little workers
All in their proper place

They bring me money
and a smile on my face

Esta believed she had traveled at least an hundred miles (it was only three), and if she had the liberty to complain, she would have. A push from Pogisa's trunk (which the young elephant enjoyed) kept her in step until finally they came to a hill. The climb was easy and over the ridge was a small port with a zeppelin an its owner. King waved his hat and the captain below responded in suit.

"Let go, kiddies. Time's a wasting"

The zeppelin was simplistic: two steam engines for propulsion, and a large cabin connected to the balloon below for passengers. The captain was paid and King discussed the arrangements.

"Make sure we are in Chetz by by next week. I'm broke. I need to sell all of them soon."

"If you want to be in Chetz it's double the price," said the captian.
"You'll get your money once I make a sale. I'm under orders by Ursus."

Like merchandise, the children were placed side by side against the cabin wall. Pogisa sat in front of them. They were given a solid meal of potatoes, bread, and broth. Lowering her head, she prayed over her food quietly. The young elephant, intrigued by the act scooted, closer.

"What ya doing, mutt?"

"That's not my name." said Esta strongly.

"Well whatever you were doing, it isn't going to help you."

Esta ignored her, taking a bite out of her bread.

"Still hate me, huh?" said Pogisa saucily, "Don't like me, eh?"

"Shut up." Esta said looking up from her bread with a cold stare.

Posiga crossed her front legs with an arrogant smile.

"If I'm a mutt." Esta said. "You're a monster."

Pogisa trembled with rage, and in her wrath, she knocked over Esta's broth, flinging it across the cabin floor. Some of the broth fell on Esta and the other two captives.

"HEY!" growled King, "I warned you!"

"She called me a name," said Pogisa quickly.

King found a rod and hit Pogisa twice across her back. The young elephant winced in pain and retreated to the other side cowering in a corner. After finding the punishment adequate, King turned his sights on Esta.

"And you!"

Esta backed away as the rod was pointed at her.

"Another word from you and I'll peel your hide." replied King sharply, " Now eat!"

Another bowl of broth was given to her. Pogisa did not speak to Esta for the rest of the journey, which was a great relief for the young pup.

They remained in the air for nearly seven days, only stopping to refuel and to rest. Esta and the others were not allowed to leave the ship while King went for supplies. The same process of landing for supplies repeated until they arrived at the coast of Chetz. The zeppelin descended near the water's edge sending a constant stream of mist over the vessel as the massive port gate awaited them. The gate itself was surrounded by two turrets each standing like giants in comparison to the coming vessel. A guard from one of the towers spotted the airship. Once the nations flag was recognized, the gates parted allowing the vessel to pass through.

The week's voyage came to an end and at the docking station awaited a large crowd eager for a deal and for new labor. Esta and the other children were lead out into the crowd, some already offering King money for his young merchandise. Although

tempting, the cheetah gave no response to the hecklers. His destination was the slave-block. The crowd gathered around a wooden platform where each child would stand to be viewed. Turning to Pogisa, King said to her:

“Alright, get lost. If I need your help again, I’ll find you.”

The young elephant left the scene.

The young panda, and the beaver were sold quickly gaining King seven hundred dollars. Now it was Esta’s turn. As she shivering from the callous looks from the buyers, King stood to the side, as the bidding began. The price for her started out at one thousand dollars, but there were no buyers. King walked up to the auctioneer, whispered in his ear, and the price immediately dropped to five hundred. Still there were no takers for the last sale of the day.

"Oh come on." said King to the crowd, " Five hundred is a great deal. What's the problem? Buy her!"

"She's spoiled goods," said one buyer in the crowd, "She couldn't work a week without dropping dead. She's looks fragile."

“And that means she worth more.” said King. "This pup can be a house servant for the upper class or a waitress in a saloon."

"We don't need that," said another from the crowd. "We came for workers that can work in the steam mills and fields. We don't want her."

King gave the crowd a murderous scowl and then turned Esta.

"You fetch me no profit, " he said to her, and pulled her from the wooden block. “Bad call from Ursus.”

Taking his earnings in hand, King pulled Esta along by the hand, caring not for her crying along the way. The long march to the main city gave Esta a few moment to see her new surroundings: there were no trees to be seen nor grass. Only stone, and metal. The streets and sidewalks were thronged with citizens going about their business. Esta felt smothered by all the creatures. Suddenly to her horror King, let go of her hand and disappeared into crowd.

“Huh? What are you doing? Stop don't leave me here!”

With all help gone and none to console her, Esta started to make her way between the pedestrians who either ignored her existence or outright scolder her for being in their way. To avoid being trampled to death, the young pup retreated to an alley away from the noise and smell of the busy metropolis. She slouched down in the alley and started to cry. After drying her eyes she looked up to heaven and asked God to help her. Instantly to know effort of her own, she felt as if everything would be alright. She stood to her feet, thank the Lord for His help, and slowly entered the busy metropolis once again.

Chapter 4: The Rag-Tags

Left alone to fend for herself, Esta had become something that the Chetzians called a "rag-tag". They were children who were once purchased and eventually released from a mistress or master, which made them a "rag" (something to be used and disposed of at will) The term "tag" came from their profession of thievery, which unfortunately was the only means of survival. With such a grand, energetic city it was impossible to know who was stealing and who was not, therefore, the rag-tags did their best work and found a small niche in the dregs of the Child Trade.

Now Esta was hungry and asking for help was out of the question at this point. Not too far from her was Pogisa leading a group of three kids who were up to their business of stealing. Pogisa spotted Esta, and with sly smirk, she announced the target before her.

"Everyone, we have a target."

The other three children looked over Esta.

"She's just as ragged as we are." said one of them, " She doesn't go a dime on her."

"I'm not after that." said Pogisa, "I want to have a little fun with her, come on."

Pogisa approached as the group followed behind her. Esta turned and saw the young elephant and quickly concluded that her day was going to go from bad to worse.

"You fetch me no profit at market." said Pogisa repeating King's phrase in a mocking tone. "You're worth a lot less than I thought. Actually, you're worth nothing at all."

Esta held remained silent.

"What's wrong?" said Pogisa circling her, " Come on, I know you want to say something. You weren't afraid before to use that smart mouth of yours."

"Leave her alone, Poggie," said another kid.

"Poggie?" said Esta chuckling between her words, "That's you nickname--Poggie?"

"Don't call me Poggie!" said Pogisa turning on the others, "Not in front of her!"

Esta was doing her best not to laugh, but the chuckles came through and Pogisa did not approve.

"Let's make her apart of our group."

"NO!" said Pogisa quickly. "I don't like her! Nobody likes her!"

A small disagreement began to erupt, but a kind word was spoken that put everything at rest.

"Please stop," said Esta. "No point in fighting over me. Pogisa, I'm sorry for calling you a monster. It was wrong for me to do that."

The elephant lifted her head proudly not willing to accept the apology. Esta started to walk way until she was called back.

"Hold on." said Pogisa, "You can hang with us for a one day."

"I thought you didn't like me?"

"I don't," said Pogisa getting in her face, "After today you're on your own and if you die on the streets its good riddance."

With that unkind induction, it was decided it was time to get some breakfast. Pogisa brought them to a open bazaar. It was the perfect place to snag a piece of fruit or some bread without anyone noticing. Placing her trunk on her brow, she surveyed the scene like an explorer in a deep rainforest.

"I thought that you were with King." said Esta.

"He has no use for me now," said Pogisa still looking at the fruit stands, "I'm on my own until he finds me. All right rag-tags you know how its done: wait until the owner turns his back and grab one apple for yourselves and one for me."

"You're stealing?"

"Uh, yeah." Pogisa said giving Esta a weird look, "There's no charity around here."

"Stealing is wrong."

"Says who?"

"Says God." Esta said firmly.

Pogisa gave Esta a blank stare, shook her head, and ordered her crew to carry our her command. They did so with such skill and alacrity that the owner nor any of the surrounding crowd saw them. They returned to their spot with apples in hand. Pogisa ate her apple right in Esta's face and belched.

"Nice and juicy," she said smiling, "Oh, Esta, everyone else has an apple. How come you don't have one?"

Although it would have been easy to do what the others were doing, Esta made up in her mind not to steal. She approached the fruit stand waiting to be recognized by the owner. When she was, she immediately did a curtsy and stated her purpose.

"I would like an apple, sir."

"Fifty cents."

"I don't have any money to pay you."

"Then I don't have an apple to give you." replied the owner unconcerned.

"I can work for the apple," said Esta in good spirits, "Any odd jobs around to be done?"

The owner, although caring nothing for a Esta, did respect that she was willing to work. He told her to sweep behind the stands, and stack the oranges crates for the customers. Once complete, the owner was so impressed with what she did that he gave her three apples, a bundle of grapes, and two bananas. Esta returned to the rag tags. They were amazed, astonished; and to be honest, a little jealous. After thanking God for His help, she ate voraciously inviting the others to join her. Pogisa turned her back, sulking over the matter. Esta came over with a banana.

"You can have some too if you want."

"I'm--I'm full." said the elephant with a grunt. "I don't need it."

"Suit yourself, but I'll leave the banana right here just in case you change your mind."

The elephant turned her face away, jealous that Esta's way fared better than her own. Out of the corner of her eye, Esta saw Pogisa quickly placing the banana in her mouth.

"You're welcome." said Esta smiling at her.

"Oh, shut up." was Pogisa's reply.

Chapter 5: The New Hire

Needless to say Esta stayed with the ragtag for many days. During the nights as they slept in the alleys, Esta told the story of the Holy One's Son, Glory. The group listened quiet as Esta painted the picture of those many years ago, when God became flesh, living amongst the Shavronites. At times they did not believe her, but Esta said that it was all true.

Esta's two weeks in the city had given her a new education concerning surviving. Most adults never paid her any mind, but she found that if she wanted to eat she would offer to help with any small jobs. By the grace of God she was fed for her services and never went hungry. In fact, sometimes she was given money to buy food. Pogisa and the rest of the rag-tags couldn't explain it, and the young elephant jealous was reaching a pinnacle. Esta's wit and good character was affecting the rag-tags for the better; and Pogisa leadership role was threatened. The young elephant finally made up her mind to get rid of her.

One day, the group was walking through the streets of Chetz, when Pogisa stopped them abruptly.

"Ok. This is the place."

"The place for what?" said Esta.

"To do your thing," said Pogisa grinning, "Go in there, do your magic, and get us some food."

"But it's a restaurant. I don't think---"

"If you're afraid, we could start stealing again." said Pogisa, "Does God want us to do that?"

"No." said Esta quickly, "We'll do it the right way."

"Yeah, that's right" said Pogisa smirking, "the right way. Now hurry up."

The target was "The Charming Bistro". It was a small restaurant with a few customers enjoying their meals. When Esta entered, Pogisa took the rag-tags around the back of the eatery. The back door to the restaurant was held closed by a flimsy lock. Pogisa turned to one of the rag-tags and said:

"Pick it!"

At the front, Esta approached the counter, where a chameleon was cooking his next order. His name was Charm, owner of "The Charming Bistro".

Esta couldn't help but smile at the comical movement of the lizard. His large eyeballs twitched in all directions as he chopped and grilled each meal to perfection. Charm wore a white triangular hat, that was much smaller than his large head and a white apron in need of a wash. He didn't notice Esta until she came around to counter and cleared her

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