

Chapter 7: Eric

In the morning I rode out to the vines with the other migrant workers where we would spend the rest of the day under the hot sun picking grapes. As I labored I thought to myself, "Someday I am going to own this vineyard."

Lady Hooks gaze fell upon me. She didn't recognize me. I was neither one of the local men trying to earn a few extra royales during the slow season nor was I one of the usual lot of migrant workers who came up the mountain following the harvest. I could see her face change as she placed me. Even with my beard she knew she had seen me before.

"Excuse me," she said, bustling over to where I worked. She closed her parasol and put it snugly under her arm. Her stern brown eyes focused on me.

"Hello your ladyship," I said. I was too sore to bow but I did tip my head a little.

She smiled.

"I won't hold you up long and I'll see to it that you are compensated for the time you lose by speaking with me."

Good lord, she's going to pull a Mrs. Robinson on me, I thought. "Of course, your ladyship."

"This may sound rather odd but you look familiar. You remind me a great deal of a young man who was serving drinks at the recent Jubilee. I do believe my daughter spoke to you for some length that evening."

"Yes, your ladyship. That was me."

She smiled. "I thought as much. I suppose there is more to chance than what brought you here."

"Yes, your ladyship." I had found that carefully telling the truth was often the easiest way to turn a profit out of a bad situation.

"You and my daughter are both adults but I do hope you and she are being sensible about how you conduct yourselves. Condoms and all that—" she whispered the last bit in my ear.

"Yes, of course, your ladyship."

"Good," she said, patting me on the arm. "How about you come back to the house and clean up? My husband underpays I'm afraid. Let's find you more suitable work. Any man who can snap my daughter out of mooning over a prince she cannot have deserves my respect."

"Thank you, your ladyship."

"Please, call me Sheyna. I'm not sure what Howard is going to think of you but you leave him to me. After twenty-five years of marriage I know how to handle the old grump." She laughed at calling him a grump.

I grabbed my shirt, slung it over my shoulder and followed Lady Hook back to the house. I wondered if my sudden inclusion into the family would prevent my later rendezvous with Susan. The thought of her naked resulted in an embarrassing hard-on.

She brought me to a house that I first mistook for the main estate. "This is our guest house. We don't use it much but you'll find a hot shower and a comfortable place to sleep. Where are you currently staying?"

"A place called Kathy's."

"Oh yes," she tutted. "Nice woman, that Kathy, but those cabins are so small and draughty. Wouldn't you rather stay here?"

Yes, actually I would. It was palatial compared to any place I had slept in the last few years but I had to think about Sapsis. I could continue footing her bill at Kathy's, let her find her own place to sleep or sneak her in here. She was waiting for my answer, nodding as if to prod me towards an affirmative. I did want that shower so I replied, "Yes. Yes, I would. That's very kind of you." I would figure out Sapsis later after I had time to better assess the situation.

After a brief tour of the guest house, a building which had enough room for a small army of guests, Lady Hook left me with a key and I was soon under the nozzle of that promised hot shower.

Sapsis:

While Eric had gone to get help from his *nagnestvisem*, I snuck from the cabin to *Ardaengobaetae Kerlixtulmon*, a place the humans were now calling Lover's Lookout. Despite their propensity for fucking on sacred ground, I could still feel constant hum of the *Vesajuma*. I sat on the damp earth and placed my back to the tree, resting against the *alv*. Aklee*ipse willing I would be able to harness energy long reserved in *Vesajuma* to both open my mind and to expand my magic far enough to reach Bagretoel.

Before I could begin, I had to take in the moments of Aklee*ipse's awakening and give thanks to her eternal wisdom. Aklee*ipse's *aewiad* was the most sacred of all the kenam memories as it marked the point when we rose above the animals. I opened my magic to Aklee*ipse's *aewiad* and the world went dark. I beheld the yellow-green eyes of Aklee*ipse. She was not as I expected. She looked more animal than kenam but I could see our future in her eyes.

Having taken in *Em abdoerumuenoph ugen Kenam* (the moment of the Awakening of the People) I set my mind on Bagretoel. A telepathic message sent across the seas could take many beats of the heart. How long would a message across the skies take? I didn't know but it must have been very far if ships had been needed. As I called my voice out across the expanse I felt nothing at the other end. The *tidudefab* ticked away and there was no reply. A *nopaviab* or two followed and

still no reply. I fell into a deeper meditation as I waited. At last I heard a faint reply.

"Hae baloe*i en Kagar?" So they had taken to calling themselves the dispossessed.

"Uh cind Sapsis," I began. "I have come on a long journey across the sea and up the mountain to the Vesajama. I want to help."

I had time again to meditate again before I had my reply. "The Vesajama is in human hands now. How did you get to it? How can one kenam so far away help us here on Bagretoel where it is too dark and too cold to keep our magic healthy?"

"I have human help. These humans know the future king. He is a sympathetic ear. I am also hopeful that Aklee*ipse may awaken further ideas and possibilities."

I waited for the reply. "Yes. There is one thing you can do. Take the Naga's son and teach him human ways. When he is older we will call him home to Bagretoel."

The Naga's son? She had given birth on Shadow? But how would they get him here? He was too young to teleport by himself.

"I will do it."

Rather than a message, a small basket appeared at my feet. Inside, swaddled in furs and rough blankets, I found the chief's baby. Pinned to his blankets were

further instructions. His name was Löth. He was to learn the cultures and languages of the planet. He was to learn how to behave like a human male.

"Sacrilège," I said as I picked up the basket and headed back to the cabin.

Eric:

I showered and changed into a suit I found hanging in one of the closets. It was a little tight on me but it would do until I could return to the cabin and pick up my things. I had also decided to do the right thing and offer Sapsis a chance to sneak here to the guest house. I would test the waters with Susan and her mother to see if they might be willing to have her live here. If not, she would just have to rely on her magic to keep herself hidden.

I was about to head back to the cabin someone knocked at the door. Cautiously I opened it. It was Susan. She burst in and shut the door with her body so that she was leaning against it, just inches away from me. She smelled like lavender. "My mother told me you were here. She says she's working everything out with Dad and that you're very handsome."

"Tell your mother 'thank you' for me," I replied, feeling warm and tingly again.

She produced a small package from her tight jeans pocket. "I grabbed one from my parents stash just in case you were interested in an earlier rendezvous."

I most certainly was. "Why not?" God how I loved this woman!

Chapter 8: Susan

After dinner with my parents, Eric and I walked to Kathy's to fetch his things. "Susan, Sapsis is staying at the cabin too. If I stay in the guest house, she's still going to need somewhere to stay," he replied.

"I think we can work something out. You say she speaks English. Perhaps we can find an out of the way job for her on the estate," I said.

"That would be nice. I don't know if she'll be willing to take it. She seems rather stubborn."

"Let me talk to her. Woman to woman."

As we approached, I could hear a baby crying. "Funny time of year to bring a baby to the cabins," I replied.

"Some parents like to vacation even with tiny babies," he replied.

Eric unlocked and opened the cabin door. He turned on the light by the door as it was getting too dark for his human eyes to see. He couldn't tell that the baby was also kenam. "Sapsis, how do you kenam reproduce? You didn't look pregnant to me."

"He isn't my child but this is what First Chief has entrusted me to do. She in her infinite wisdom wants me to raise the Queen's son to understand humans."

"How did he get here?"