

## **“Yuletide Harmony”**

*A Short Fable of The Second Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **I - Tobiah Wrensong**

-----

Rocky jumped a mile high out of his chair when a rather large book landed on his chest waking him from dozing. “Bloody hell! What the feck is this?” He started and Calum grinned.

“Learn it my dear. Baritone lines have been highlighted for you.” Calum winked and Rocky flipped through the book.

“This is Christmas Music, it’s bloody just turned September!”

“Aye, plenty of time to learn it before Uncle Eran holds auditions in two weeks. I told you last week he was putting together a proper philharmonic symphony and choir for Xanadu. Uncle Taran is building us a real honest to goodness concert hall like you find in New York or Chicago! I’m so excited and if I’m trying out, YOU’RE trying out.”

“Are Papa and Mama auditioning too?” Rocky asked remembering and getting just as excited.

“Aye. You know Uncle Eran will never forgive us if we don’t sing for him. Since he and Willem moved back here and Eran quit touring he’s been suffering with lack of music to make him happy. He’s just now getting back on his feet again and this is the best way to support him. He needs this.” Calum said and Rocky nodded.

“Aye. Five bloody years and Anatole’s memory still haunts him sometimes. Willem has been a godsend on his psyche. You know I’ll be there if Eran is ready to return to what he loves.” Rocky said as Abaisha, eight months pregnant, shuffled into the room with a vibrant four year old clinging to his hand.

They were wearing matching dresses, Abaisha in a gauzy summer shift of sky blue and little raven haired Kaisha in red.

“Don’t you two look divine. Where have you been?” Calum asked, picking up a joyful girl and getting a kiss as he settled his daughter on his hip.

“Willow’s garden, playing with Sabu and Kira and just enjoying the sunshine. It’s a beautiful day out today, even if I am getting hot flashes every five minutes.” Abaisha said with a wink.

“You’ve dropped. I say two weeks tops and Rhain’s gonna be here. You’re like Cay, you just run out of room there at the end what with all the extra anatomy still inside.” Rocky said reaching over to rub Abaisha’s distended stomach.

“I ran out of room three months ago, your son is wrapped around my spine and tap dancing on my bladder. He doesn’t kick, he dances like a Radio City Music Hall Rockette!” Abaisha said slowly lowering himself into a chair he knew he’d need help out of later.

Calum chuckled. “Aye. I thought Kaisha was going to puncture something I wanted to keep a few times. Just be happy Rhain’s not sitting on your sciatic nerve. That hurt worse than labor.” Calum said as Kaisha crawled into Rocky’s lap.

“What’s that Daddy?” She asked pointing at the book he held as she settled in his lap.

“It’s music Papa wants me to learn. Are you gonna help Daddy practice Princess?” Rocky asked and Kaisha, the most adorable thing he’d ever laid eyes on beamed.

“AYE!” She caroled and Calum smiled.

“Good girl. Did you eat lunch yet honey?” Calum asked and Kaisha nodded.

“Aye. Uncle Saioshi made me peanut butter and jelly!” Kaisha grinned and Rocky smiled.

“He does make good peanut butter. I’m almost jealous.” Rocky chuckled, leave it to a dryad to make pure peanut butter for his own protein and have every child in the palace at his doorstep wanting some.

“Aye, not to mention his jelly. What flavor Kaisha?” Calum asked and Kaisha smiled.

“Blackberry and he even made the kind with no seeds! I like that kind best. Seeds are icky.”

Abaisha chuckled. “Aye, and it was darn good too. Who knew I’d crave peanut butter and jelly pregnant?” Abaisha laughed and Calum chuckled.

“Better than my horrible jalapeno pepper cravings, I just now got my tongue back and she’s four!” Calum laughed and Rocky nodded.

“Amen, having me transport to Mexico every week and back! At least Baby just makes me walk downstairs! You had me earning frequent transport miles!” Rocky said and Calum wrinkled his nose.

“Who told me not to transport? I would have gone myself you realize and just talking about it, I want a tamales now really badly. I’d kill for a cook here who knew how to make Mexican food.” Calum said and Rocky winked.

“You and Mama, you love spicy food. Just watching you two eat sometimes makes me sweat and my tongue revolts in sympathy. But you’re right, I could go for some nice fish tacos and cilantro myself now that you mention it, I hate when you make me crave food that is not easy to get!” Rocky mumbled and Calum grinned and leaned over and kissed his brow.

“Ah, but you forget dearest, I’m no longer on no transport rules. I’ll go. Aisha-Baby, want anything?”

“Just those tortilla chip things. I can never remember what all that food is called you like, it makes my tongue fall all over itself trying to pronounce. That green avocado dip thing and chips. I like not burning my tongue to ashes like eating a firebird raw.” Abaisha shivered and Calum laughed.

“Guacamole and Chips it is. Fish Tacos for Daddy and Tamales for me! I’ll bring back regular tacos and Churizos too, Kaisha loves those.” Calum said jotting down a list.

“Are they those cinnamon stick bread things?” Abaisha asked.

“Aye.”

“Make it a sack full! Kaisha isn’t the only baby who likes those.” Abaisha quipped and Calum nodded.

“I’ll be back soon!” He said vanishing from the room.

“Where do you two go for this stuff?” Abaisha asked Rocky who was playing cat’s cradle with Kaisha.

“There’s this dive in Tijuana that makes the best we’ve found. It’s right by a gate so it’s easy access and Jesus knows us now by sight. I think we’re his only fair folk customers. Some human food has not caught on here yet.” Rocky said and Abaisha nodded.

“Aye. I never heard of a buritta-whatever until Cay was pregnant with Kaisha. Let alone half the strange things you go out and get all the time. Like cheeseburgers and English Fries.”

“French Fries.” Rocky laughed and Abaisha shrugged.

“Whatever. Fried Potato sticks in Red Tomato sauce and beef in a bun. I like those, but my favorite has got to be that round flat meat pie in a box. The one you get all the meat and melted cheese on and the fresh vegetables baked.”

“Pizza.”

“Yes, pizza. Now that is a human dish that needs delivery service here, they’d make a fortune from me alone.” Abaisha chuckled and Rocky nodded.

“That’s not hard to make you realize. David loves Pizza, if you told him he could open a franchise here tomorrow he would.”

“I love David. I agree with blondie, he has good taste.” Abaisha said as the air shimmered and Calum was back.

“That was fast!” Rocky said and Calum winked.

“No line at the window! Come eat!” Calum said setting out their tinfoil wrapped bounty on the table and handing out plastic utensils.

Grace was knocking at the door almost immediately. “Tell Mama you were going?” Rocky asked and Calum nodded.

“Of course, she’d kill me if I didn’t bring her back Chorizo Enchiladas!” Calum chuckled as Grace waltzed in sniffing the air.

“Goodness I love Mexican Food. Cay dearest, thank you!” Grace said seating herself next to her granddaughter.

“Anytime Mama. No Kaisha, eat your taco first, then you can have your Churizo. That’s dessert.” Calum said and Kaisha sighed and wolfed her small taco before devouring her sweets.

“Someone has a sweet tooth like her daddy.” Grace grinned looking at Rocky who grinned right back.

“She wouldn’t be my baby girl if she didn’t. She may look like Cay, I cannot deny she’s all mine inside.” Rocky said and Calum snickered.

“Tell me about it. She’s going to turn my hair gray.” Calum said and Grace laughed.

“Honey, if I survived yours AND Rocky’s antics without gray, you’ll manage.” Grace said savoring her spicy dinner.

“True, what a ride huh?” Calum asked and Grace smiled.

“Oh Aye. Pains in my Keester and All I’d not trade a single water balloon memory.” Grace said watching Kaisha make short order of her treat. She was every bit a blend of her parents. She saw a little of each of her sons in her granddaughter and couldn’t wait to get her hands on her grandson.

She was walking down memory lane, when her seven-year-old youngest came rushing into the room carrying a ribbon and brush. “Aisha, will you do my hair? I can never get it right.” She asked and Abaisha grinned and just held out his hand for her brush. Braiding her hair like he braided his, he absolutely adored his littlest sister-in-law and any chance he got to help her primp he jumped on.

Between Calum, Fiala, Kira and Kaisha he had all that gorgeous black hair to play with. He was a happy peacock playing dress up. All except for Calum who only let him braid it simply, there was no way he’d let Abaisha ‘tart him up’ as he liked to joke. He did, however, allow Abaisha to dress him ‘properly’ now. Gone were Calum and Rocky’s drab little threadbare wardrobes. He never let his mates out of their room without looking fabulous.

Calum may be a Representative on the Council in the House of Lords and Rocky was a high-ranked healer and on the board of directors for the Hospital, but Abaisha ruled the roost in their quarters and he made damn sure his mates passed inspection and his high standards before he allowed them out in public.

-----

“For the last time, Tobiah! NO!” Yorinda hollered at her son who held a coveted paper flyer in his hand announcing auditions at the palace for what was called a philharmonic symphony and choir. Tobiah didn’t know what a philharmonic was or a symphony but he knew what a choir was and he wanted to go.

“But mother, please. I want to try.” Tobiah begged and Yorinda ripped the paper out of his hands and tore it into a dozen pieces.

“It’s too close to harvest and I need you HERE and not gallivanting off to the palace on a pointless dream! We need every hand! You know how many we lost in the war, bless the Six for our lives, and every harvest is vital. Xanadu needs farmers not singers. Let the lords play their musical games, you get used to your lot in life Tobiah! Almost one-eighty and still dreaming like a boy. Face the truth, you are nobody and will be nobody until you die. Like MOST folks.” Yorinda shouted shoving a basket of linen in Tobiah’s hands.

“Hang those up then bring the sheep in for the night!” She ordered storming off.

“Aye Mama.” Tobiah said turning and doing as told, as he always did. He’d never told her ‘no’ his whole life and he was well passed the age of adulthood but he still obeyed like a dutiful son.

Tobiah sighed as he hung up the bedding on the line to dry then grabbed his crook and whistled for his dog as he went to bring in the sheep off the mountain and pen them safely for the night.

They lived far to the Northeast, at the base of the mountains where the plains ended and the high snow covered mountains loomed purple and majestic. It was a high plateau and cool most of the year but perfect for sheep which they tended for meat and fleece. Even in September the air was cool and Tobiah wore a light wool jacket embroidered with colorful patterns on the hem, collar and cuffs. His snow white hair tied simply at the nape of his neck with a bit of spare wool twine to confine the thick locks away from his face. His strikingly pale eyes, like frozen sky in ice and ringed in sapphire stared forlornly at the road leading southeast, to the palace.

A place he had always wanted to see and probably never would. Even by horse he’d never make it to the palace in time to sing anyway, it was a dream and he knew it, even if his mother’s words stung with bitter truth.

He was nothing, nobody. Just a foolish and lonely boy living with his mother and little sister, with an old working dog and a small herd of sheep. The village itself only boasting twenty families with no one even close to his own age. They were either much older or much younger. Tobiah was alone with his melancholy mood as he gathered the sheep and headed back home.

Old Gabberth was leaning on the fence as Tobiah closed the gate. “Just leave boy. You’ll rot here.” He snorted and Tobiah sighed and turned.

“And leave mother alone? She’s forbidden it.”

“She’s not a lad of one-eighty with talent and alone in a village by himself. She can’t see past her loss your good father. She chains you here and you’ll suffer. She gives you not a chance to find your mate locking you up here as a replacement for your father. He’d be spitting mad if you didn’t follow your dreams. He wanted you to be your own man and she’s not letting you by making you feel guilty every time you mention wanting to spread wings long past the time of flight. One hand less will harm us not.” He said and Tobiah sat on the fence and looked down the road.

“She’d never forgive me.”

“She’ll get over it lad! You’re a grown bloody man, you do what you damn well please boy! Your Mama will have to learn to let go, you’re not a boy anymore. We all think you should go, even your Mama cannot deny you can sing better than a firebird to the sun! You’ve always wanted to go to the palace, now’s your chance don’t let it pass you by.” He said and Tobiah chewed his lip.

“Auditions are in a week, I’ll never make it in time.”

“Tish Tosh! Now yer just making excuses! I know you’re a gentle one lad, but grow some balls! Take the damn horse and ride until you drop! Do you want this?”

“Aye.”

“Then make your dreams happen! They don’t get handed to you boy!” He snorted tossing the boy a purse of coins. “We took up a collection for ya, to help feed you on the way. The horse is all saddled, you’ll make Greenwich Point by tonight if you ride hard.” He said with a wink. “My shacah is keeping your Mama busy, pack quick.”

Tobiah smiled and hugged Gabberth’s shoulders as he raced inside and threw his clothes and whatever necessities would fit in an old burlap sack and kicked the horse into a gallop hearing his mother’s shouts as he vanished down the road.

“Let him Go Yorinda! The boy will die here! You know damn well he’s not a farmer but a bard! He’s not Tobka and Tobka is spinning in his grave the way you’ve shackled him to your apron strings woman! He’s got nothing here! He’s fey as the night is long and even if he weren’t there ain’t a lass or a lad here for him. Let him go!” Gabberth said and Yorinda scowled at him.

“He’s too young!”

“He’s one-eighty! He’s a man face it Yorinda! For Feck’s sake, let him live for a change. You’ve never let him do anything he wanted and he never once disobeyed you! I think he’s bloody well earned his right to stand on his own two feet woman! Be glad he’s as mild tempered as he is! Had you been my mother I’d have run years ago! Be thankful and just pray he can catch his dreams.” Gabberth said leaning on his cane as he walked up the path in a huff, his shacah on his arm.

Yorinda went inside and slammed the door behind her. She knew they were right and that’s what made her so furious and she’d die before she admitted they were right.

-----

Tobiah made it to the New Crown City with just a day to spare. The Palace itself about a half candlemark down the main road. The City itself was amazing as Tobiah rode the down the streets feeling very much a country boy awestruck with sights, smells and sounds.

Most of the Inns were already full with hopeful musicians and Tobiah found one of the last beds available in a very shady looking tavern. It had a bed and a bath and that's all he cared about as he washed off road grime and ate a simple meal of stew and bread before getting an early night. He wanted to be up early and in line first thing in the morning.

This was his only chance and he wanted to try his best and that meant getting a good night's sleep and resting his voice.

-----

The line was massive and stretched as far as the eye could see practically. Tobiah was glad he had gotten up very early and staked out a place somewhere in the middle of the line. Some folks had even slept outside in line all night, Tobiah wishing he'd have had the presence of mind to do that himself. The anticipation was agony. He made it into line behind a jovial and tall blond elf and his raven haired mate. They were laughing and talking and Tobiah was shamelessly eavesdropping.

"I'd pull rank and get us up the queue, but I think Eran would kill us." The dark one said and the blond one laughed.

"Not fair to pull rank dearest. Besides, we get a day off this way from work. I certainly don't mind sitting in line with my lovely."

"Flatterer. You already got some last night, you can't butter me up." The dark one winked and flashing a beautiful smile.

Tobiah racked his brain, the only raven haired Enf' Tuvalu male he'd heard of was Lord Dragonwise Calum of the Six and surely it was ludicrous to think that a lord of his stature would be standing with peasants in a queue.

"Ah Cay, you wound me love. Who was it however that started it hum? I was half asleep when you got the itch."

"Technicality Rocky. You weren't complaining if I remember correctly."

"Until Abaisha threw a pillow at us to go feck on the couch and let him sleep!" Rocky laughed and Tobiah's jaw dropped. The names, a triad bonding mark on

their foreheads, this was Lord Dragonwise and Lord Rocky Master Healer of the SIX!

Calum smiled at Tobiah and nodded his head for Rocky to turn. "What's the matter mate? You look like you've seen a ghost." Calum asked and Tobiah stuttered.

"Y-y-ou. Yo-ou're... Maker Mercy! Lord Dragonwise Sir, Lord Rocky Jeansai! I never in my life... Thank you my lords for everything. You saved us with your houses. Mama and my sister and I. Thank you so much!" Tobiah gasped kneeling and Rocky reached down and pulled him up.

"None of that mate. It's over and you're welcome and all but we rather hate pomp and circumstance when we're just two blokes trying out ourselves. What's your name?" Rocky asked and Tobiah smiled.

"Tobiah sir. Tobiah Tobka Wrensong."

"Wrensong, apt name. Singer or Musician?" Calum asked changing the subject smoothly.

"Singer, I hope. I don't know any human songs."

"Just sing anything. Uncle Eran picks based on what he hears, not the words or the tune." Rocky winked and Tobiah smiled.

"I'm woefully unprepared. I've been riding hard for a week just to get here in time. I do so hope I can get in, it will be a dream come true for me." Tobiah looked on cloud nine and quite high on life.

"Some folks can prepare a lifetime and never be ready. If music is in you it will come out prepared or not. That's what Uncle Eran always says." Rocky said grimacing as someone was practicing loudly and well off key. "See?" He added and Tobiah hid a smile behind his hand.

"At least he's trying, no shame in trying even if you get sent home." Tobiah said and Calum nodded.

"Exactly!" Calum said and the conversation fell into a comfortable discourse and made the time move faster as they inched slowly forward.

Finally they were in the Concert Hall and it was Calum's turn as he walked up on stage. From the third row Tobiah heard a bright tenor laugh.

"Oh for Feck's sake! CALUM! I already bloody know what you sound like!" Eran said and Calum grinned picking up a lute from off the stage.

“Aye Uncle, but only fair I sing like all the others. Shall I sing solo or do you want Rocky and I to Duet?”

“Oh spare me from you two idiots. Nevertheless, do give me a tune since you went through all the trouble. Rocky get up there too! You know I love when you two sing together even if you WON’T record for your dear uncle who will never stop begging.” Eran said as Rocky joined Calum on the Stage.

“We know you Uncle Eran. A personal recording for you ends up on radio stations in the human realm and we don’t find out about it until we hear it playing in an elevator! You get us live only!” Rocky said sitting on a stool.

“Just sing you louts!” Eran hollered from his seat and closed his eyes to listen smiling.

Tobiah was in awe. The close knit harmony of a Tenor and Baritone set of brothers sent chills down Tobiah’s spine, they were incredible and he suddenly had no desire to follow them.

The entire room applauded as Rocky and Calum finished and Eran shoed them off the stage with orders to come back the following day for second round auditions. Because if they were going to be sticklers for the rules he’d make them follow each one until the end. They bowed and left the stage, but hung back to listen to their new friend as he walked up on shaking knees and faced the dark auditorium.

“Name?” Came a thickly accented voice from the darkness. A Human accent of sorts, this was probably Willem, the shacah of Eran, Rocky had mentioned was stage manager.

“Tobiah Wrensong.”

“Age?”

“One-eighty.”

“Range?”

“Tenor or Alto.”

“Really? A you’re a high one then?”

“Aye sir.”

“What will you be singing?”

"If it pleases you sir, I'd like to sing one I wrote if you mind not."

"You write too?"

"Aye sir."

"Then delight us Master Wrensong." Came Eran's voice and Tobiah took a deep breath and just sang.

Everyone held their breath spellbound as a crystal-clear high tenor that rang like church bells cascaded out a frame that did not suggest the power of voice that issued forth. Bright, clear and pure tones that could be heard in the back balcony unaided rang throughout the room.

Singing of freedom, of peace, of the Six and their journey, of love, of hope, of sorrow and of joy and Calum and Rocky stood together, holding hands as Tobiah sang a song he had written for them and of them. They were more than touched and listening to the most beautiful voice they'd ever heard in their lives.

As the last note drifted away into the rafters the entire room erupted in praise and Tobiah blushed as he stood there on the stage coming down from a natural high that singing always made him feel.

Eran and the entire row of judges were standing and applauding and Tobiah was shocked to see them all giving him a standing ovation.

Finally the clapping died and Eran cleared his throat, "I don't need you to come back for another audition. I daresay everyone here would think me daft if I made you carry on when you are obviously immensely talented. I've been waiting to hear your voice all damn day. I want you to meet me tonight at dinner hour to talk Master Wrensong, I have a score I've written years ago, just waiting for your voice and I want you to start learning it immediately. You are the exact tenor soloist I need. I've heard your voice in my head going on fifty years! Calum will you take him to the palace and show him around until dinner?"

"Aye!" Calum cheered going up to retrieve a stunned Tobiah off the stage.

"Are you serious? Me? Really?" Tobiah finally found his tongue and Eran laughed.

"Aye lad! I don't fool around when I find a gem!" Eran said as Calum took Tobiah's elbow and led him off the stage.

Tobiah was weeping for joy as they made it outside and he didn't think twice and just hugged the nearest person, who happened to be Calum, who laughed with him.

"Congratulations Tobiah! That was indeed amazing and I know Uncle Eran, he never lies, he's going to make you hoarse singing." Calum said and Tobiah just nodded.

Rocky was smiling and his empathy was tuning into Tobiah's sheer joy and elation. "You're making me high with happiness. Come on mate, let's get you inside and perhaps we can convince you for an encore for the others? That song was beautiful and I think the other four would like to hear you wrote a song about us." Rocky said and Tobiah came back to earth.

"Was it alright? I mean I never asked if I could and I should have thought to ask you first if it was alright to sing about you, I didn't offend did I?"

"Are you daft mate? You made us Cry!" Calum said as both he and Rocky took an arm and led him to Willow's garden where the Six assembled for a private version of the song.

All of them in tears as Tobiah finished and he was shown a seat of honor and fed lunch and learned that the Six, the REAL six were no different than anyone else.

Maybe he wasn't such a nobody after all if the Six were just normal young men just like himself when it came right down to matters of the heart.

-----

## **“Yuletide Harmony”**

*A Short Fable of The Second Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **II - Bardic Gifts**

-----

Rocky and Calum showed a very nervous Tobiah to Eran’s quarters at dinner and Willem answered the door. “Come in, Eran is most anxious to hear you again” Willem said as he led them inside.

Eran had his dinner propped on top of his piano while he chewed and played and smiled brightly as they entered. “Welcome Tobiah! Have you eaten yet?”

“Aye sir. They fed me a wonderful lunch in the garden earlier. Thank you.” Tobiah said and Eran winked.

“I meant dinner and no ‘sir’-ing is allowed. Eran is just fine. This is my shacah Willem and My good friend Roger Winters will be joining us shortly. He’s my bass soloist and my choral director. Young but immensely talented. Known him since he was a boy soprano singing for me on my recordings and the minute he got out of university he was working for me full time on my various projects.” Eran said with a smile as another knock came to the door and Willem let a young human in who looked to have just arrived in Xanadu.

Tobiah’s eyes nearly fell out of his head and his heart began to race and pound in his chest. Roger Winters was an extremely handsome youth in his mid to late twenties. Tall and lean with a fit figure and strong features. He was all hard angles of face and jaw with large brown eyes and chestnut hair that looked windblown and mussed and his bright smile transformed his entire face.

Tobiah clamped down on his stirrings of extreme attraction and just fidgeted nervously on his feet as Roger set his bag down and greeted Eran like a long lost friend. “Yo! Sorry I’m late man. I got hung up at the gate crossing border. They thought my moving papers were forged it was a bloody nightmare of red tape.” Roger said rolling his eyes and Eran laughed.

“I know, I heard. But you’re here now and I have you a nice house in the city all set up.”

“Already been shown to it and have my things being moved in now. Jack is there now getting us settled. Damn Eran you didn’t need to blow all that cash on me, a little apartment would have been just fine. It’s just me and Jack.” Roger responded and Eran grinned.

“I know, but I wanted to thank you for moving here permanently for me, just my way to say thanks to an old friend. Now I have a special treat. I found our tenor at last!” Eran said indicating Tobiah who was staring a hole on Roger.

Roger looked up and smiled and his eyes took on a gleam as he took in Tobiah's face. "You must be something if you have Eran this excited. It's a pleasure to meet you..." Roger began holding out his hand waiting for a name to finish his sentence, Tobiah tentatively took it and nearly passed out with shock as the touch sent electric pulses up his arm.

"T-Tobiah. Tobiah Wrensong, Master Winters sir." Tobiah said taking his hand back and clenching his fist to shake off the sensation.

"Its just Roger." He said also seeming out of sorts a little after the handshake.

Rocky raised his eyebrows where he and Calum sat off to the side and they shared a look. Rocky was immediately suspicious, Tobiah was hiding his emotions suddenly and he looked ready to faint dead away. It was either extreme nerves or there was something one certain Roger Winters brought into the room with him, the handshake alone made Tobiah look in pain.

"Can you read Music Tobiah?" Eran asked handing Tobiah a sheaf of parchments.

"Aye." He said turning his gaze and attention to the music.

"Good, I'll sing it once through so you get the feel. This is the second act of the Opera where King Wenceslas, the role Roger will sing, is talking with his faithful page and manservant Percival, your part. They are worried over the poor harvest and a harsh winter his people are facing. The King is a passionate and strong and kind character and Percival is his gentle quiet counterpart. I took massive liberties with one of my favorite old human Christmas Carols and wrote them a story basically, It is based on fact but I love a good old fashioned feel good yuletide tale of love and peace and showing the best side of man's nature when faced with the worst. Let's have a sing through." Eran said and Tobiah got lost listening to Eran and Roger sing together. Eran had a high range tenor like Tobiah did and Roger shook rafters with a great booming bass that made every hair on Tobiah's head raise on end.

Tobiah's hands were shaking as the song finished and he finally managed to catch his breath just as Eran turned to him and tapped the pages with his finger. "Think you can wing a run through?" He asked and Tobiah smiled.

"Oh Aye. Such a beautiful song." Tobiah said as Eran began the intro again and he took a breath and sang, perfectly without looking at the music once.

Rocky and Calum just sat watching in wonder, it was if Tobiah had been born for this part, he delivered his part flawlessly and Roger seemed enthralled as he sang duet. He was already familiar with the music himself and he got truly into

his role as they sang and Eran looked like he was in sheer ecstasy as the last notes faded.

“Maker Mercy that was better than I dreamed it could be. Tobiah, do you have a photographic memory?” Eran asked and Tobiah tilted his head.

“A what? I’m sorry I know not what that means.”

“Do you only have to hear something once to learn it or remember it perfectly?” Eran asked and Tobiah nodded.

“Aye. I forget not music. Forget my own birthing day I do, never a song I like. Papa always used to say I was bard born, Mama just said I was a sponge of frivolous nonsense.” Tobiah said and Roger was grinning as he leaned on the piano.

“Bard born indeed. I agree with your father. That was beautiful. I am very anxious myself now to practice more with you, we have more duets and I am dying to hear him sing his solo passage in act one Eran.”

“Oh aye. Let’s give it a whirl.” Eran said flipping pages. “It’s pretty pointless I suppose, but your solo Tobiah is on page four of your score, I’ll give it a go once and then I want to see how you interpret the music and sing from your heart.” Eran said going through the number.

Tobiah was crying by the end, moved to tears with the mournful ballad of a bleak winter and his beloved master and King was suffering with worry of his people.

When Tobiah sang through his tears, there was not a dry eye in the room. He almost made it sound like a lover lamenting over his beloved and aching to ease the sorrows that plagued him.

Calum stood. “Hold on a minute, I fucking felt that. I think His papa was right and there’s a bardic gift in you beyond a voice that makes me sinfully jealous.” Calum said going over to lay a hand on Tobiah’s.

“I need a fucking tissue.” Rocky sniffled coming over with Calum.

“Empathy projection. I fucking knew it, Bards can always create emotion and make you feel whatever they want you to feel. Tobiah, you were indeed born to be a bard and I am going to teach you how to keep that in check. You can influence moods and it can be dangerous when you’re unaware you’re using your gifts.” Calum said taking his hand back and wiping residual tears with a tissue Rocky passed over to him.

“I am sorry.” Tobiah lowered his head in shame. “I just was feeling the song, I’m am so sorry, I didn’t know I had gifts. I don’t sing much, Mama never allowed it.” Tobiah said and Rocky took his hand.

“Whoa, we’re not angry with you Toby-mate. Quite the opposite. Bards are rarer than healers. Which also explains why you remember music and are just a normal bloke everywhere else.” Rocky said, worried over Tobiah’s fragility. One moment he was high as a kite and the next riddled with guilt and shame.

The conversation was derailed when another human showed up at the door and came in looking irritated and stood next to Roger. “You’re right, no electricity.”

“I told you Jack, it’s not like New York here, and only the palace is under generator power and the Concert Hall. No phones, no computers, no TV.” Roger sighed and Rocky’s attention was divided. Tobiah almost shrank to nonexistence, not even breathing as his eyes held very real pain as he watched Jack with interest and sadness.

“Aye. Too hard to get a generator in the city on such short notice. Eventually we’ll get your house wired for human habitation and amenities, sadly it’s gaslight and fire until then. Sorry Jack.” Eran said and Jack sighed.

“How do we cook? I’ve never seen a hearth so big and I’ve no clue what to do that does not involve an oven preset or a microwave.” Jack asked and Roger grinned.

“We eat out a lot. Sort of like we do every night in New York. I’ve never seen you use the oven or microwave in the apartment either grouch.”

Jack frowned and gave Roger an icy stare. “Whatever, how long you going to be?”

“Late probably. There are a lot of things to go over. I told you that.”

“I won’t wait up then. Goodnight.” Jack said leaving as frozen emotionally as he had come.

“Sorry about that, Jack was not keen on leaving New York as you can tell.” Roger apologized for Jack’s behavior.

“I can see that. No offense Roger, I have no concept of what you see in him, he treats you foully.” Eran snorted, he never had liked Jack.

Roger shrugged. “Not all of us get Shacahs Eran. He should get a medal for sticking with me as long as he has. You know I can’t keep a boyfriend and he’s lasted two years now.”

“I think you settle for pretty faces and naught much else. But that’s an old argument and I’m not in the mood to worry over your choice in mates again.” Eran said and Rocky was still half listening and watching Tobiah crawl deeper and deeper within and every warning bell was going off like a siren internally.

Tobiah softly cleared his throat. “Might I ask a question?” Tobiah asked and Eran nodded.

“Surely.”

“I cannot stay much later. I must pay the inn for my room another night and since I didn’t expect to make it beyond auditions, I had much poor foresight in consideration. I don’t even have enough marks to get home when it comes down to it, I really had extremely poor foresight when I left. Can anyone suggest a place I might seek employment? I will have need for wages to continue to pay my room.” Tobiah said and Eran just stared at him.

“You’re serious? Maker mercy, Tobiah, you honestly thought we’d send you home?”

Tobiah nodded.

“Did you think you would be singing for free?”

“Aye. Aren’t I? I mean isn’t the joy of music enough?”

“Maker love you Tobiah! I’ve not seen anyone so un-jaded and humble in two hundred years!” Eran laughed and once again everyone was taking a completely new look at Tobiah. His simple honesty was wholly refreshing.

“Tobiah, this IS your job. I am going to pay you to sing for me. This is professional music, not singing around your fire at night lad! I’m auditioning musicians who seek it as a profession. This will not be the only concert we’re doing, just our first. With a tenor like you in my troupe I am inspired to write you a dozen or more arias to thrill us with nightly. Willem love will you bring over the contract?” Eran asked and Willem smiled as he handed his husband the parchment, which he then in turn, handed to Tobiah, whose eyes bugged out of his skull as he read the paper.

“Two-thousand marks a week? I’ve never seen a thousand marks in my LIFE! Surely this is incorrect!” Tobiah gaped and Eran laughed.

“Nay lad, and that’s standard pay for my soloists. That’s pretty standard musician’s guild pay for headlining soloists for a concert hall. Guild pay scale based on experience and this is no pub we’re building lad. In the Human realm

you get much more than that for concert hall settings. We're new and revenue will be limited until we get a regular performance schedule lined up. Willem and I are funding the initial capital and will take back our investment a little at a time from ticket sales. Trust me, I know my way around music in both realms. This is peanuts in comparison to what you'll be earning eventually with that golden voice of yours." Eran said and Tobiah sank to his knees stunned.

"I don't know what to say." Tobiah said staring at the paper in his hands that shook with shock.

"Say you'll sign on that dotted line at the bottom lad and welcome to your new life as a professional tenor."

Tobiah happily signed and was once again in shock when Eran tossed him a purse of coins. "That's about five hundred for now lad. Go pay your rent and eat, I can hear your stomach from here. For the rest of the week just enjoy the city, I've still got auditions to finish and rehearsals start promptly at ten in the morning and End at six in the evening, Monday through Friday. Be on time, on stage Monday morning."

"Aye, Eran Sir. Oh AYE! Thank you! Thank you so much!" Tobiah said rushing from the room and Eran laughed and did a little arpeggio on the keys.

"I love that boy. That is what music is all about. Soul. Soul he is not lacking." Eran said and Rocky nodded.

"Aye, but be careful Uncle Eran. I picked up a few warning signals. He's in shock, you've taken a little country boy with absolutely no self confidence and made him a star. He's fragile, mind his ego which is nonexistent. It will bruise easily."

"Even without gifts I can see that. His mother didn't help I think. I can bet you twice what I gave him, that he's going to spend about twenty marks on himself, if that much on bare necessities like food and board and the rest will be finding their way back home out of guilt. I'd bet my entire concert hall that boy ran away to come here." Eran said and Calum nodded.

"Aye, spot on. We were talking to him in line today. He did run away to come here, urged by the others in his village except by dear old mom. He lost his dad years ago, long before the war and I've seen a dozen or more cases of the eldest son becoming a replacement for father and mothers not wanting to let go, long past the time they should have, and resort to becoming the mistresses of the guilt trip to keep sons from straying far. He's walking on emotional eggshells. I want him in my office once a week Uncle Eran. On the rouse of a friendly chat, he's going to need counseling and adjustment time." Rocky stated and Eran nodded.

“You are the healer Rocky. I trust you as much as I trust Staven. Do whatever you feel is right, I want to keep that boy here and let him sing to his heart’s content. Friday afternoons are all yours for throat check ups and mental health.” Eran winked and Rocky grinned.

“Good. I’m starting now however so I’m bidding you all goodnight.” Rocky said and Calum left with him.

“What do you suspect?” Calum asked as they walked down the halls and toward the city.

“Undatta on top of everything else which he verily squashed the instant he felt it and further buried never to be found when that Jack fellow showed up.”

“NO!”

“Oh Aye. Over the human Roger, I felt an empathic jolt and then feck all. Toby clamped down on his emotions better than you do. He’s terrified, alone in a big city, a ruggedly handsome human trips his trigger and he’s gaining a dream of a lifetime. You tell me he’s not a time bomb on a hair trigger emotionally.”

“I cannot, you’re absolutely right. You’re never wrong about these things. Where do you suggest we find him?”

“Some hell hole tavern that’s cheap. We get him out of there too. With five hundred marks he’ll be mugged and country bumpkins never know how to hide a fat purse from thugs.” Rocky added and Calum chewed his lip.

“Aye. Who’s Dragonwise again?”

“You dearest. You break my brain with logic puzzles, I just point out simple facts of life.” Rocky winked as they entered the city and sure enough found Tobiah sitting outside at a table eating stew hungrily and several more men eyeing the purse on his hip, who stopped eyeing it when Calum and Rocky joined him.

“Hello again! What brings you out here?” Tobiah asked and Rocky grinned.

“You mate. We wanted to make sure you were settling in alright. Thought we might help since you’re new and don’t know this place as well as we do.” Rocky said and Tobiah smiled.

“Thank you. Do you know of a way I can send my horse home? We only have the one for the whole village and I’m pretty sure they all thought I’d be bringing him back with me.” Tobiah asked looking sheepish and Calum winked.

“Where is your horse? I can take him back and return before your stew grows cold.” Calum said and Tobiah led him over to the stable, a tired old horse greeted Tobiah affectionately and Tobiah fed him a fresh carrot.

“He may be old, but he got me here on swift hooves he did. I think even he wanted me to run.” Tobiah said and Calum gave the horse a good pat on the rump.

“I’ve no doubt. Now if you’ll just let me into your brain a moment I can see where you lived.” Calum said and Tobiah shut his eyes and before he knew it Calum was gone, he rejoined Rocky at the table shocked with the strange turn his life was taking.

Calum walked the horse up a path and a woman came rushing out followed by half the village. “OH MAKER! Tobiah! Is he hurt?” She asked seeing Tobiah was not with the old gelding.

“Nay madam. I am just returning his horse for him, he was worried you’d be suffering without him. Tobiah will be staying in New Crown City. He is quite talented and is the new Tenor Soloist for the Royal Philharmonic Choir and Opera House. He has done you proud he is quite remarkable. A true Bard in gift and gifts I will be training when he’s not practicing.” Calum said handing over the reins to an Elderly Enf’ Tuvalu male.

“I knew it! That boy was a bard! Felt it in me bones I did! He’d done alright then?” The old man asked and Calum nodded.

“Oh Aye, we’re all happy to have him with us never fear I’ll make sure he settles in alright.” Calum said turning to face a tearful woman.

“He’s not coming back then.” She stated rather than asked.

“Not for the foreseeable future, but you have my vow, I will come fetch you all personally so you may see him perform on his opening night.” Calum said and a small girl of around twelve and who looked exactly like Tobiah tilted her head in query.

“Do we know ye sir?” She asked and Calum winked.

“Your brother wrote a song about me I had the joy of hearing today. He had my mates and I in tears. So Aye, in a way I guess you know me lass.” Calum winked and Yorinda gasped.

“Lord Dragonwise!?” She asked finally realizing much as Tobiah had who he was by his black hair a triad mark on his brow.

"I prefer Calum, but aye. Now I must be off, I left my mate Rocky and Tobiah over stew with a bet I could be back before his stew grew cold. Goodnight Madam Wrensong, you have my vow I'll make sure Tobiah is safe with us." Calum said kissing her cheek and vanishing.

"Lord Dragonwise! I don't believe it! Tobiah is going to be trained by Lord Dragonwise himself!" Tobiah's sister squealed dancing around her mother. "I told you mama! Tobiah is special, I knew he'd make it!"

"Aye." Yorinda gaped and Gabberth took her hand.

"He's quite special, always was. Leave it to our Toby to gain friends in high places with just his pretty voice! Not gone a week and already he's drinking in a pub with Lord Dragonwise and the Master Healer of the Six! Bust my buttons I say this calls for a celebration! Break out the Ale and wish the lad luck!" Gabberth bellowed and soon everyone was singing Tobiah's praises, including Yorinda who wept more into her ale than she drank. Pride swelling in her breast. Tobiah was his father's son without a doubt. Tobka had never let a dream go without chasing it to fruition.

-----

Tobiah was just finishing his stew when Calum returned, "All set. I promised your village I'd go back and fetch them for your debut. What's a performance without family and friends in the audience?" Calum winked sitting back down.

"Did Mama look unhappy?" He asked and Calum smiled and shook his head.

"Nay. She looked proud. Never you fear Tobiah, everyone was thrilled for you. Your little sister the most jubilant."

"Tori is always full of joy. I will miss her much. Papa died before she was born, he would have been proud of her, very smart she is." Tobiah said beaming with pride over a little sister he more than likely helped raise.

"Visits are not impossible Toby. Once you're settled, it's no trouble for Rocky or I to transport you home for a weekend visit." Calum reassured and Tobiah visibility relaxed.

"I cannot thank you both enough. I am most eternally thankful I was behind you both in line today. I will never be able to repay your kindnesses to me." Tobiah said honestly and Rocky just slapped his shoulder.

"Buy as a round and we'll call it even." Rocky winked and Tobiah laughed.

"Aye!" Tobiah cheered ordering a pitcher and three pint mugs.

They sat drinking rich amber ale and laughing like good friends and learning about Tobiah's sheltered life when the barkeep came outside finally hearing that he had quite prestigious guests outside his pub.

Rocky rolled his eyes at the preferential treatment and turned to Tobiah after he left them to their conversation again. "That gets old quickly. Sadly Tobiah you'll face the crowd too once they hear you sing. You'll have fans and hopeful lovers around every corner." Rocky said and Tobiah visibly blanched.

"I hope not, that would be most awkward." Tobiah said with a sigh and back again was the emotional wall. Rocky however carried a convenient verbal sledgehammer and if he could get Calum to crack and confess secrets he could win Tobiah's confidences.

"Tobiah, I like not beating around the bush so I will be blunt. I am a healer and I notice many things you probably wish I did not. It's unwise to deny undatta." Rocky said and Tobiah gulped.

"Also unwise to say anything to a human who understands not and is already bonded to someone else. I'll live, undatta will not kill me. My shacah belongs to another I know when I must only look." Tobiah said sadly and Rocky snorted.

"Dragon dung! Undatta is a soul bond, which means he will be matched better with you!"

"He's human. He feels not what we do. I want not to be the cause of hurt to Master Jack. I will mind my business and not interfere. Please this is my choice Rocky. Do I like it? Nay. Is it proper? Aye, very much so. I would not be the first to forgo becoming shacah to spare a match already made. Please, I know you just wish me well, I will be fine. I have lived this long without, what I taste not I miss not." Tobiah said and Rocky looked sad.

"You're a decent bloke Toby, you've a good heart and soul and I pray you get all you deserve for being as you are, even if I vehemently disagree with you. But I'll not press the subject, come to me Friday afternoons for check ups on not only your throat, but I'll make you an herbal drink that will help keep you healthy if you're so bent on denying your instincts. It's the least I can do." Rocky said and Tobiah nodded.

"Thank you. Just speak not of it again please, I'll be fine, I will keep my mind on other things. I daresay I have enough to keep me busy now. One of them finding a new room. The Innkeeper didn't think I'd be staying more than one night and already rented my room to another. I must find other lodgings tonight or bed down in hay somewhere and it's getting late." Tobiah said and both Calum and Rocky looked stunned.

“You’ve got no room?”

“Nay. It’s why I have my sack with me. This is all I have at the moment counting the clothes on my back.”

“Dragon’s Balls! I am going to have to teach you to be more forthcoming of troubles when we’re keeping you from taking care of yourself! You’re far too accommodating of others Toby damn it!” Rocky said just as a familiar deep voice hailed them.

“Yo!” Roger winked coming over to their table. “We meet again! How’s the food here? I’m hungry as hell.” Roger asked taking up a chair next to Tobiah who was white as a sheet but smiling as if nothing was troubling him.

“Cheap, but good if you like lamb stew that was made with just the beastie standing next to the pot.” Tobiah replied and Roger laughed.

“No meat eh?”

“None I could find in it. But good enough for a tenth mark.”

“I’m still learning the money here. I’m used to Dollars and my credit card. Fuck all good it does me here. I can never convert Dollars to Marks.” Roger chuckled and Rocky smiled.

“Our money system is old and inflation moves at a substantially slower rate when a typical lifespan is centuries long. There are twenty marks to your American dollar. Five to your quarter, Two to your dime, One to your nickel and anything smaller you’re doing fractions. Which you’ll get good at calculating in your head here eventually. Our coins are many and very simple to learn, you won’t find paper money in Xanadu.” Rocky winked.

“Aye. You have a ‘bit-mark’ which is like your penny. One hundred bits makes a mark. “Tenth-mark” is ten bits, pretty simple. Most things cost bits and ten bits like food and beer. Carry a lot of those small coins, most simple folks like Toby don’t carry higher marks with them.” Calum said explaining the monetary system.

“Next up after a tenth-mark is a forth-mark, can you do the math? It’s very much like your coinage, based on tens and quarters.” Calum said laying out the different coins. A “bit-mark” was a small blue hued chip of silver the size of a small fingernail. The “tenth-mark” was the size of a thumbnail and held a bronze hue to the silver. The coins were obviously measured worth by silver weight and the hue Roger knew came from special dye stain added to the semi-molten metal. A forth-mark was a diamond shaped coin with a green tint to the metal. The half-mark was a red octagon shaped coin about the size of the quarter he

was used to but a little thicker. A full mark was a beautiful coin, perfectly round and pure silver about two inches in diameter and stamped with the royal crest. From there was the Five Mark Coin, five times as thick, same size and shape with the same stamp but it was an amber color instead of silver. The Ten mark coin was also the same size, twice again as thick and a vibrant purple.

“Those are all the silver coins. From there the coins are gold and you’ll probably never see a normal, everyday person on the street carrying gold coins. You can’t spend them anywhere really unless you’re making a large purchase.” Calum said laying out examples. The Twenty-mark coin was a square brilliant gold coin stamped with the royal seal like the others, the coin gold but the seal was silver. Fifty marks followed suit like the silver coins, a thick square coin of gold with a red crest stamped on it. The hundred mark coin was the most dazzling. A rectangular shape and pure gold with a prismatic crest in a rainbow of colors stamped on it. Calum quickly made that vanish wherever he got it from. Very few people even saw a hundred mark coin let alone own one.

Tobiah looked spellbound. “Prettiest coin we have that one. Never saw one before.” Tobiah sighed as the coin vanished.

“See what I mean Roger? Most folks don’t have those.”

“I see. Then I’m screwed, I converted my money before I crossed over and my bank gave me all big denominations.” Roger sighed and Rocky chuckled.

“All human banks do that to convert. Its just numbers to them, usage is far different. Take your marks to the town treasury, they cash them into smaller marks for you. They’re used to human tourists here not able to buy squat cause vendors can’t make change.”

“Do you need some now Master Winters sir? I have small marks.” Tobiah said digging into his pouch of five hundred given to him only in ten-mark coins and lower.

Roger dug into his pocket and pulled out a twenty-mark. “I’ll trade you, and for goodness sakes it’s just Roger.” Roger said and Tobiah smiled and counted out two five-marks, five full-marks, four forth-bits, thirty tenth-bits, and one hundred bits. “That should last you a while until you can change yours Roger sir.” Tobiah grinned trading Roger’s coin for his smaller ones.

“Thanks Toby. I appreciate it and knock of the ‘sirs’. I know it’s polite and habit but I’m just a ruddy musician, Eran’s the knight of the realm, I’m just some kid he took off the streets of Brooklyn when I was a kid. I didn’t have much growing up either.” Roger said hailing a barmaid and ordering stew and more ale for the table.

Tobiah nodded and Rocky slapped his forehead. "You let us do it again! You let us run off at the mouth when you need a room!"

Tobiah just smiled. "It's alright. I have slept under stars many times in much colder weather. I'll be fine."

"What? Don't you have a room?" Roger asked as his stew arrived.

"I did, he gave it to someone else, it's my fault I told just a bar maid I was staying more than one night, she didn't pass it on, I should have told him. I'm alright, worry not over me."

"Like hell. Crash at my place man. Eran got me a fucking huge house I have no idea what to do with. Jack and I will be lost in it, I've got probably a dozen spare rooms in it. I'm sure there's a bed, the whole place was furnished like a mansion." Roger said and Tobiah's eyes widened.

"Oh, nay. I couldn't. I would never intrude on you and your mate. Unthinkable." Tobiah said aghast and Rocky wanted to hit something, hard. Here was Tobiah's perfect chance to be near his Undatta and his good manners and misplaced sense of propriety was getting in the way. Jack was an asshole, Roger was his soul mate and he was letting Roger slip through his long delicate fingers.

"Don't be silly. It's no trouble at all. We're going to be working closely together anyway, saves time and trouble to practice together. Trust me, its not any trouble at all Toby, honestly." Rocky was silently cheering Roger on at this point. Begging him internally not to take 'no' for an answer. He knew humans felt SOMETHING, he did have a mother and several aunts of human heritage who all felt mild undatta from their Enf' Tuvalu counterparts. Love was love, soul mates undeniable regardless of race or gender. Tobiah was going to need a strong push from his undatta in the right direction.

"Just for one night, I would not dream to take advantage further. Thank you for your kindness to me." Tobiah said and Rocky smirked into his brew. It was a start at least.

-----

## **“Yuletide Harmony”**

*A Short Fable of The Second Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **III - Choices**

-----

The house was dark, Jack was already in bed by the time Roger and Tobiah stumbled into the house, tripping over Jack’s shoes by the front door, and Roger chuckled. “No light switch, sorry.” Roger said and Tobiah went to the table near the door and picked up a candle and lit it from the matches in the drawer beside it.

“You don’t have many candles in the side drawer, you may want to purchase more.” Tobiah said handing the candle holder over to Roger and lighting a second.

“I have to get used to living in a blackout.” Roger said with a chuckle as he led the way inside and up a beautiful stair case. “I’ll show you around downstairs in the morning. One of these rooms up here has to be a spare bedroom. Aha! Yes, here.” Roger said finding a beautiful little suite near his own bedroom and thankfully it had a private privy en suite was well.

Tobiah gasped, it was palatial in comparison to his small little room with a straw bed box and raw fleece. “I am almost afraid to sleep in such finery, never even saw a feather mattress let alone sleep in one. This will be most heavenly. Thank you again for your kindness to me.” Tobiah said setting his candle down on the nightstand.

“Think nothing of it and stay as long as you desire. I daresay I have plenty of room and I still think it’s more convenient if you stay with me. Goodnight Toby.”

“Goodnight Mr. Roger Sir.” Tobiah replied and Roger just shook his head as he left Tobiah to get ready for bed. Some of Tobiah’s formal habits would be very hard to break it seemed.

-----

Tobiah was used to rising quite early and he was up with the sun and just lay in bed a while listening to hear if anyone else was up yet. It was rude to wander about someone else’s home while they were still abed and even ruder to leave without saying thank you. Therefore, he got up and washed and dressed and made up his bed and just sat waiting, opening his door to watch the hallway outside for any signs of life.

Finally he heard a floorboard creak and the sound of movement then a rumbled Jack walked passed the door and stopped. “He said he brought you home last night when he came to bed.” Jack snorted not looking pleased.

“Aye. Thank you for letting me stay Mr. Jack Sir. I am most grateful and you have a beautiful home.” Tobiah said meaning it and he was shocked by Jack’s reaction.

“Don’t get used to it, I didn’t invite you here Roger did, he’s a fucking bleeding heart and he may like living like we’re in the dark ages but I certainly do not. Nor do I like strangers in my home. You’re welcome to leave anytime.” Jack said and Tobiah nodded and stood taking up his bag.

“Aye. I am sorry I offended you Mr. Jack. I tried to refuse and Mr. Roger was most insistent I will leave now.” Tobiah said, his insides aching with jealousy. This rather foul tempered man had what Tobiah so desperately wanted.

“See that you do, and don’t get any ideas. Roger is mine is that clear?” Jack added as Tobiah moved to pass him in the hall. Tobiah’s heart sank. He betrayed no outward emotion and just nodded and made his way downstairs and out into the town immediately, utterly heartbroken but knowing he was doing what was right in his heart of hearts.

Jack was a mean spirited youth, but he was right, Roger was his and Tobiah would never intrude between them, even if his heart was breaking piece by piece knowing he would never have his soul mate and he’d have to watch him grow old and die in the arms of another. At least Roger seemed happy and to Tobiah that’s all that mattered. His beloved’s happiness.

The market stalls were just being set up with fresh baked goods hot from the ovens and Tobiah paused to buy a strong frothy cup of strong bitter coffee laced with chocolate and a special treat. He couldn’t resist the sticky bun pastry that smelled of cinnamon and looked divine. He’d never had anything of the kind and he knew he’d better be careful in the future or he’d grow fat with indulgence.

The sweet pastry lifted his mood a little and he washed his hands free of sticky sugary confections in a nearby horse trough and dried them on his pants as he carried on down the market and gawked at the beautiful homes that lined the streets in this section of the city. The homes of the Lords on the council, homes of the Prefecture nobility when they traveled to the Crown City for festivals, the ruling class certainly tried to outdo each other with their stunning mansions and high gates and manicured lawns. Their servants in colorful uniforms denoting which house they worked for bustling about the market.

The farther he walked from the palace, the closer the homes became as he crossed from high class into middle class. Powerful merchants and trade guild homes lay in this section of the city. Multistoried townhouses lay side by side with lace curtains and bottles of milk sitting on doorsteps for house maids to collect for their employer’s consumption.

He was nearing the section of the city he had been staying in the night before last, lower class, and his class of people. The majority of people in Xanadu made up this class. Simple folk who made do with simple things and were happy just having a hearty meal and warm fires to keep them in comfort.

Tobiah was looking at a fairly old but in good repair townhouse. Obviously it had once belonged to middle-class merchant who had either fallen on hard times or had moved on in the world. In the window next to the door was a small sign that read 'Ms. Benderiddle's Boarding House. VACANCY' and Tobiah turned and headed up the stairs and gently knocked on the door.

A Plump and kind faced elderly Drow woman answered the door. "Aye. Can I help ye lad?" She asked her kind eyes crinkled with wrinkles as she smiled.

"Aye Missus. Sign says Vacancy. Can I see the room please? I am in much need of a place to stay in the city more permanent than the inn." Tobiah asked and the old woman stepped aside and gestured him inside.

"Just put that sign up, you're a lucky one, I don't normally have vacancy's. I run the best boarding house in the city. Follow me lad." She said leading him through a lovely large parlor where two elder fae males were drinking wonderful smelling coffee and playing a game of chess with each other.

The stair case lay between the parlor and the large dining room with a massive table with twelve chairs. "Third floor attic room just became available. It's the largest room I have, got it's own privy. But it is a bit hot in summer if you don't leave your windows open and a bit cold in winter if you don't keep the stove burning." She said climbing the stairs slowly and leading Tobiah into a room which indeed was the entire attic space, a section curtained off for a bathing room and private privy with a rainwater flushing system. At least he wouldn't have to break his neck down three flights of stairs to use the outhouse in the middle of the night Tobiah mused to himself as he inspected the tidy little room.

A double bed with a tarnished brass headboard was against the far wall, and the feather mattress had seen better days, but it was feather and the linens immaculately clean and fresh flowers were on the small table in the middle of the room making the space smell like honeysuckle and lavender. Along one wall was a wardrobe and a chest of drawers with a mirror.

It was perfect for a single man to have a little peace. "This is a lovely room. I mind not heat or cold. I was a shepherd, spent many nights outside year round I have. What is the rent?" He asked and the woman smiled.

"Four full Marks a week. Five full Marks for three meals a day included. Master?"

“Tobiah, Tobiah Wrensong.”

“I’ll be, you’re the lad everyone is buzzing about in town. Heard you a bard come from the north?”

Tobiah was shocked she already knew his name. “Aye Ma’am. I am most unexpectedly here to stay indefinitely. Might I rent the room the price is more than fair and I do not need anymore than is already here and if meals included I will be most happy not to have to cook myself. I am one sadly who can ruin boiled water.” Tobiah grinned and the old lady laughed.

“Most lads your age are. The room is yours if you want it Master Wrensong. Call me Mama Mae. That was Rugger and Bevis in the parlor. Brothers and both widowed and retired carpenters, they live on the first floor. Second floor is Old Man Firbin, a grouchy old coot. You’ll only see him at dinner, he runs a tannery booth in Market and won’t retire until he drops. Across from Firbin is Gadia, she’s a barmaid over at the cock-n-bull, she sleeps during the day. We’ve also got Timony on that floor, he works livery for hire and that’s everyone. I need one week in advance and one week deposit.” Mama Mae said and Tobiah reached into his pouch and handed her a five-mark and the twenty-mark he’d gotten from Roger the night before.

“One week deposit, and four weeks in advance please, I’d like to pay monthly if I may, much easier for me to remember, I can be absent minded.” Tobiah said and Mae pocketed the coins and winked.

“Never knew a bard that wasn’t too wrapped up in the songs in his head to remember to eat without being reminded. Breakfast is always available from eight to ten in the mornings. I make pastries and fruit and just set them out on the table. There’s some left so help yourself when you get settled. Lunch is sandwiches and soup also always out between noon and two in the afternoons. Dinner is a sit down meal and I have it on the table by seven sharp. If you miss it, you can help yourself to leftovers out of the kitchen later. Whenever you’re hungry the kitchen is open, I know young men I do. Welcome Master Wrensong.” Mae winked and Tobiah smiled.

“Tobiah or Toby is just fine. Most people call me Toby.”

“Well then Toby, enjoy your stay and do see about some new clothes, those are a bit threadbare lad. If you need mending done I can do it for you at a bit per garment.”

“Thank you Mama Mae. I’m sure I will be in need. I cannot sew either.” Tobiah grinned and Mae winked.

"I can tell lad." She said heading back downstairs and Tobiah set about getting his meager possessions put away. He found a convenient loose board in the wardrobe bottom and realized it was a hidden money drawer. He stowed away all his money save for about thirty marks in small coins. He did not like carrying all of it on him and he felt much safer knowing he had a place to hide his money before he could find a way to send it back to his mother and sister safely.

Once his belongings were put away, Tobiah decided Mae was right, he did need some necessities like clothes and a hair and tooth brush and various other small items. So he headed back out to the market to make a few purchases before lunchtime.

-----

"I cannot BELIEVE you threw him out!" Roger growled, dressed in his favorite pair of ratty sweat pants and was shirtless and disheveled as he got ready to go to work that morning to help Eran with the rest of auditions.

"I can't believe you brought him HOME without ASKING ME FIRST!"

"You didn't bother sticking around did you? Toby's room was yanked out from under him for Christ's sake! What did you want me to do? Let him sleep on the street?"

"YES! He's not some stray cat to bring home, he's a stranger who could have killed us and robbed us blind!"

"Hardly. This isn't New York Jack! He's a really nice guy, he's just come here from some rinky-dink farm, he's lost in a big city and he's just had his whole world changed overnight. Bloody Hell Jack, he's the starring Tenor, I really don't think he's going to resort to robbing us blind, murdering us in our sleep and running when he just got the job of his dreams. Fuck I remember what it felt like when Eran gave me my first real job in music, the last thing on Toby's mind is blowing it!"

"Whatever! I am so done having this argument. Just don't bring him home again, he creeps me out with all those Master's and Sir's and such."

"Niceties creep you out? Holy fuck Jack, that's insane. He's polite! I think it's refreshing. I'm sick of New York and having to fight just to get a cab! I'm sick of people cutting you off mid-sentence and rushing you through life. People here are a lot different and I for one think it's a damn great chance of venue. People say please and thank you here, there's a lot worse things than getting used to people being fucking friendly!"

"Who pissed in your cereal this morning?"

“You did! Tell me you at least fed him before you tossed him out?”

“With what? I can’t cook in that sorry excuse for a kitchen. I went out for breakfast.”

“You can be a real asshole sometimes Jack. Your manners suck.”

“So do yours, you should have asked me first.” Jack said storming off and Roger raked a comb through his hair livid. He was getting really tired of Jack and very quickly.

No wonder he never kept boyfriends long, they all ended up pissing him off eventually and pushing all his hot buttons. Jack was dancing on all his hot buttons recently. From complaining about everything from lack of electricity to the soap in the bathroom to being rude to everyone without a care or thought. He’d been mortified the night before the way Jack was treating not only his friend but his BOSS. Eran was responsible for Roger’s pay check and friend or not Jack was abusing the relationship Roger had with Eran and Willem.

Then the last straw was how he’d treated Toby. Toby didn’t have a rude or mean bone in his body. He was genuine, honest and sincere. A breath of fresh air on Roger’s senses. He had a voice that made every hair on his body come alive with wonder. He had a smile that transformed his already beautiful face into something almost ethereal to behold. His whole make-up was stunning. From his long white hair, to his dark suntanned golden skin, to his eyes which were startling to look into. Such a unique shade of palest blue. His frame was used to hard work yet still retained a lithe and willowy and exceedingly graceful presence. He even moved as if he was listening to internal music and was waltzing to it as he walked.

Everything from the tips of Toby’s toes to the end of his long eyelashes was what Roger would have deemed incredibly edible. Toby was exactly his type. Slender, not too tall and not too short and as pretty on the eyes as he was on the senses. Roger could never imagine Toby raising his voice in anything but song. Unlike Jack who shrieked and ranted at the least provocation and couldn’t sing a note if his life depended on it and could never understand Roger’s love of music.

Another thing desirable about Toby. They both shared a passion for music as well and Roger was looking forward to working with him on a professional level as much as he was looking forward to just shamelessly raping him with his eyes every chance he got. He wondered where Tobiah had gone that morning and hoped to find him later to apologize for Jack’s abominable behavior.

Roger pulled on his jeans and a nice shirt and shoved on his loafers and slammed the door behind him as he left. He paused on the way in and bought

coffee and a cinnamon roll on the way into work. Thanking Tobiah mentally for making change for him the night before. Those smaller bits were coming in handy. In the Human realm a coffee and bun that nice would have cost about ten bucks, he paid four bits here.

He was positive he could get used to the standard of living here his paycheck afforded him, whether Jack liked it or not. If Jack needed electricity and television so badly he could just take his ass back to New York for all Roger cared that morning.

He smiled at the long line of men and women waiting to audition that morning as he walked passed them and reached the hall just as Eran and Willem turned up.

“Morning! Ready to sort out gems from stones?” Eran asked and Roger chuckled.

“Aye. Gotta listen to Geese honk in order to find the Wren.”

“We already found the Wren. I’ve been waiting for him for years. I can’t wait to start practicing.” Eran said as they took up seats in the third row behind a folding table.

“Tell me about it, I nearly creamed my jeans last night when he sang and I thought you were my favorite tenor. I’m sad to say Eran, while I still love you, I am in ecstasy with Toby.”

“Aren’t we all Roger? Bards are magic on the senses, quite literally. Such a sweet boy too, I hope we don’t scare him off. I’d cry and then crawl on my hands and knees begging for him to come back.” Eran said as the doors were opened for the crowd and they began filing into the auditorium.

“You and me both buddy.” Roger said sipping from his coffee as they halted conversation as the auditions began again for the day and they began making cuts and call backs.

-----

Toby had just finished buying three new shirts and trousers, new soft low boots in a suede leather soft as butter. Boots he’d have ruined in a day at home working but were lovely and soft just walking from the city to the concert hall daily. A new brush and toothbrush, soap and various other tidbits. He was headed back to his new room when a whistle caught his attention. It was Rocky with a small little girl holding his hand with one of hers and the other held a cinnamon bun like Toby had eaten a few hours earlier. He walked over and smiled, the little girl looked remarkably like Calum but her nose was definitely Rocky’s.

“Morning Toby! You’re out and about early.” Rocky said as Toby walked over.

“Aye. Needed more clothes than the two changes I had. Who’s this beautiful lady?” Tobiah asked squatting down and smiling.

“I’m Kaisha! Daddy bought me cinnamon bun! Wanna bite?” She asked holding the spit covered and mutilated bun out to Tobiah who chuckled.

“I had one this morning, no thank you dearest. Those are lovely aren’t they?” Tobiah asked her and she grinned.

“Aye! Daddy always buys me one on Fridays when I’m good. They’re my favorite!” She caroled and Rocky chuckled.

“She craves cinnamon and sugar just like I crave Nutmeg and Sugar. She’s got my mage cravings, unlike her Papa who craves bananas. Leave it to my daughter to crave things that make her hyper.” Rocky chuckled and Tobiah looked up.

“So it’s true then what we heard? This is babe of no woman?” Tobiah asked and Rocky nodded.

“Very true. Calum and Abaisha are both male and female now. Calum gave birth to our little Kaisha here. My son is due any day, Abaisha is sticking close to home as am I.”

“Fascinating, she looks much like Calum.”

“She looks like Cay’s twin Aveanna actually. She and I have our father’s nose. The resemblance is amazing, you’ll meet her eventually.” Rocky said as Kaisha finished her bun and held up sticky hands.

“Dirty daddy!” She whined and Rocky lead her over to a fountain where she plunged her hands in and then used Rocky’s pants as a towel.

“I washed mine much the same. Lovely but messy treat.” Tobiah laughed as Kaisha dried her hands.

“Aye. I’m used to being her napkin too. I’m always covered in something from her hands. She can’t stand to be dirty.” Rocky chuckled picking her up and setting her on his hip. “And I’m back to work, only took a break to feed my monster. How’s everything with you this morning?”

“Good. I have secured a permanent residence in a boarding house. Ms. Benderiddle’s.”

“I know the place, good choice. You must have been up early.”

“Aye. Master Jack was quite upset I was in his home so I vacated quickly. I am most unwelcome in that house, if you see Master Roger later please do pass on my thanks for letting me stay and my apologies for leaving without saying it to him directly. His mate wished me gone.”

“You’re his mate Toby I do wish you wouldn’t be so polite here.”

“I cannot be anything else. I am sorry my choices upset you.” Tobiah said and Rocky sighed.

“I know, I’ll try to quit harping about it, I can’t help it, a healer likes to fix things. Come see me after lunch, I want to give you a full check up anyway and make sure you’re in good health. A move like this can make one prone to colds.”

“I’ll be there. I’ll see you later. It was lovely meeting you Miss Kaisha.” Tobiah said to the little girl who beamed.

“Aye! Bye! Bye!” Kaisha waved as Rocky carried her back home and Tobiah returned home to his to put away his new belongings.

-----

Roger had a headache, and not just any headache. This was the kind that started at his toes, wrapped around his stomach for good measure before pinching his spine and ending like a dagger stuck between his eyes.

It began that morning when Jack pissed him off, it got worse gradually throughout the morning having to listen to more bad singers than good ones and then culminating during his lunch hour where he had fought again with Jack.

This time over the lack of food choices in town. Or rather just lack of things Jack wanted. There was no Mr. Ming’s Chinese Take-out on Fifth Avenue, No Tandoori Indian cuisine, no Thai, no French, no Italian nothing he was used to. There was plenty of variety however and Jack was just being difficult.

There was all manner of foods both exotic and then that which was recognizable as traditional fare, like stews, meats roasted or baked to perfection and in hearty portions ready to take a knife to or gnaw off the bone. Vegetables fresh from the fields steamed or mashed or in casseroles, soups or pies, baked goods from eratcho and raisin cookies, to scones and muffins, cakes and pies, it was a grandiose renaissance faire up and down the main boulevard and this was no faire, it was daily life. No preservatives, no MSG, no artificial flavorings or additives. Everything fresh and abundant and Jack turned his nose up at every

stall they passed. Roger was beginning to think it was just out of spite at this point.

Jack was making it quite clear he was more than put out over the move to Xanadu, regardless of the fact Roger was feeding him, clothing him, keeping a roof over his head and pandering to his every whim and need without so much as a smile of thanks or gratitude.

Even in New York, Jack hadn't needed to work, Roger had no qualms about Jack staying home and playing on the computer and being the typical 'house-spouse' even if they did have a maid who did the cleaning and they went out for meals and they weren't technically married either. They dated about six months before Jack had moved in and not moved out again.

Roger paid for everything and never batted an eye, if Jack wanted it, Jack got it. Perhaps it was partially his fault, he'd never told Jack 'no' before, he spoiled him rotten actually. The ski trip to the Alps, the tour of Italy, the Porsche for Jack's Christmas present last year. Everything under the tree for Roger, he had technically paid for with the credit cards he'd given Jack. It was Roger's paycheck that paid the monthly astronomical bills. Jack was not and had never been frugal when it came to expenses, at least when it came to things he wanted.

Roger's wants however were another thing entirely. Jack had thrown a fit over the piano Roger bought a few months earlier and was now lovingly set up in the parlor of their new and gorgeous townhouse. Four stories of beautiful craftsmanship and luxury and all Jack could say about it was there was no air conditioning or central heating.

Roger loved his suits too, he often bought a new suit just for the joy of having a new suit and Jack would always have something derogatory to say about Roger's tastes in clothes. Too expensive, too bright, too dour, too uptight, too extravagant and so forth and so on.

Yet Jack took up an entire walk-in closet all to himself back in the apartment with his clothes. Anything in fashion or trendy Jack just had to have. Roger was traditional. Out of work he liked his jeans and a nice shirt. For going out he liked a nicely tailored suit. Jack had to light up the whole room when he made an entrance. He always had, that's how they had met.

It was a Christmas Charity fundraiser for the New York Metropolitan. Roger was performing as the guest bass soloist for Handel's Messiah. Jack was a socialite attending with his disgustingly wealthy parents. It was during the after party they'd gotten introduced and ended up very drunk on Champagne and screwing in Roger's dressing room and waking up both naked and hung over the next morning.

They began dating and the rest was history. Roger took over spoiling Jack where his parent's left off. Jack had never had to work a day in his life, he had barely graduated high school, and he'd had a bad drug problem as a teenager and still to this day a slight drinking problem. Roger refused to keep alcohol in the house, knowing if Jack found it, Jack drank it all in one sitting.

Roger was getting really tired of being a sugar daddy and getting nothing out of the relationship himself but a drama king, complaints, more drama, more complaints, and denial of sex when Jack was really feeling like a put out prince of the world.

Great sex or not, Roger was just plain exhausted trying to both work and keep Jack happy. He had hoped getting Jack out of New York would show him how most people lived, but all Jack saw was the surface, he never tried looking deeper.

By the end of lunch Jack was storming off in another huff and Roger was rubbing aching temples as he went back to work.

Stopping first at the hospital to see if he could get his hands on painkillers and he met a woman by the name of Helen.

"Lordy honey, you look run over by a bus. Migraine?"

"Migraine, You-graine, In-pain-graine. Yes. I usually take Tindero 500 mg. I'm out."

"And you won't get prescribed drugs here love until you see a true healer first. Nine times out of ten they can cure them indefinitely. Rocky's in his office, come on I'll take you over." Helen said with a wink taking Roger over to a glass walled waiting room. A familiar person sitting and waiting himself.

"Mr. Roger? Are you unwell?" Tobiah asked as Roger flopped down beside him.

"Headache. I get nasty migraines about one or twice a month. I was due for one. Look I'm really sorry about Jack, Toby." Roger began and Toby just shook his head.

"Nay, think nothing of it. I am not offended. I was more worried you would be with me leaving without saying my thanks properly. My goodness you look in much pain. I beg you go in before me. I am only here at Master Rocky's request to see him to check my health. Is there anything I can get for you?"

“You can get over your aversion to just calling me Roger. I am tickled pink at your manners, but they are unnecessary, honestly. I’d really prefer you just calling me Roger.” Roger said and Tobiah smiled.

“I am sorry, it’s habit. I don’t realize I’m saying it. You did ask me last night and I will try to remember.” Toby said as Rocky led out an elderly patient and cocked an eyebrow at Roger.

“You look like hell man.” Rocky said coming over and he tilted Roger’s head back and looked into his eyes. “Light sensitive Migraines and up until now you’ve probably been taking some killer chemicals that only aid and treat the symptoms and not the cause. Tinderol or some other. AM I warm?” Rocky asked and Roger chuckled.

“Red Hot. How did you know?” Roger asked as Rocky pulled up a chair.

“Humans like chemicals which can do more harm than good sometimes. Sometimes you need the chemical when all other methods fail. Come inside Roger, migraines have many causes, if I can get to the root of yours, you’ll not suffer them anymore. Tobiah do you mind waiting?”

“Certainly not! I already told Mr... ah. I already told Roger to go ahead of me.” Tobiah said correcting himself and Roger chuckled.

“Better. Thanks again Toby.”

“Anytime... Roger.” Tobiah smiled as Rocky led Roger inside.

“Have a seat” Rocky said and moved behind Roger laying his fingers alongside both temples. Roger felt a warm glow tingle on his skin and the pain immediately receded and he let out an audible sigh.

“You’ve got a small tumor like growth on your brain, benign have no fear. You’ve probably had this little bugger in there since you were a kid. Did you ever fall as a child and hit your head hard?” Rocky asked as he went to work attacking the tumor.

“Yep. Off the slide in kindergarten. I cracked my skull a good one.”

“And this little blood clot turned into a mass over the years and is pressing on your brain. Once I get this cleared you should not have another migraine like this one again. I don’t want you taking Tinderol ever again, you’ve got liver damage from it, it’s not intended for continued long-term use and over time will rot your liver. I want you to eat at least one citrus fruit a day and drink at least eight glasses of water for the next month at the very least. It’s a good habit to always maintain, it helps cleanse your body of impurities and will help restore your liver

and maintain it.” Rocky said moving to sit behind his desk and Roger moved to get up and Rocky waved him back down.

“I’m not quite done with you yet. I’d like to talk to you a minute. You’re emotionally worn to a thread. I can guess at the trouble, but it’s better you tell me.”

“So it is true what they say about Healer Mages, they know pretty much everything?” Roger smirked and Rocky chuckled.

“Not everything. Just good at reading people and bodies. It’s our gifts and change not the subject. You are frustrated, angry and at an emotional dilemma that will give you an ulcer in no time if you don’t talk about it to a neutral party.”

“Let’s just say, It’s either my job or my boyfriend. One’s gotta give.”

“Which gives you more joy?” Rocky asked and Roger sighed.

“Would I sound heartless if I said my job?”

“No, you’d sound like a man in a relationship that is unfulfilling. In my experience Roger. When faced with a choice like this, you must only consider your heart. If your heart lies in your job you choose your job. If your heart truly lies with a person you choose the person. I will also say when it is a person your heart belongs to, this dilemma never arises. When you are truly mated well, there is nothing on the earth you wouldn’t forsake immediately for the other. If the next person to arrive in here told me I had to choose immediately between my Shacahs or the loss of all my healing magic. There would be no choice. I would choose my mates every single time. If you do not feel that strongly you must choose your own happiness for the betterment of your health. It’s just that simple. Health is not only of the body but of the soul and mind. When the soul suffers everything else suffers.” Rocky said and Roger nodded.

“I would add one more thing on a personal observation off the record. I can categorically state without question and ultimate surety. There is a much finer match out there for you. One who will share your interests as well as your bed and one who would even at this moment forsake everything for your happiness. Who would deny himself and his own health to support you. He is already doing so.” Rocky said and Roger jolted in his chair.

“Tobiah.” It was a statement not a question.

Rocky just nodded. “You felt it last night, I know you did, I saw your reaction when he touched you.”

“The shock was real then. Is that why I’ve been thinking about him non-stop all day?”

“Aye, and why you immediately offered a stranger sanctuary with utmost faith in his character. Humans feel undatta differently than we do, but it is very real. You know Willem, what has he told you?”

“That he loved Eran the moment he laid eyes on him.”

“I’m fairly positive Love was not the very first emotion, the first is instant attraction. Love is a close second.”

“Then I’m guilty as charged too. I’ve not got him out of my thoughts all day and it’s made me feel guilty as hell.”

“And gave you a migraine. You also only noticed all the things you do not like about your current mate today. They were magnified out of all proportion because your instincts, and yes humans have them too, were telling you your soul match was found. He’s sitting out there denying his own state of undatta because you are already mated and his politeness and his good manners over rule his wants and desires. He’d never willingly come between you and he has purposefully kept his distance. He’d also be furious to know I told you the truth. However, I am a healer and I mend things gone asunder. I want it to go no further, he will do himself very real harm eventually. I do not suggest you go out there however and act as if you know. That too will cause damage to more parties than just you and Tobiah. You should deal with your current mate first, only then do you move forward.” Rocky said standing.

“Thank Rocky. You just made my day! My year!”

“Your life Roger. Soul matches are beautiful things, they last and endure and fulfill what you are missing. They are happiness, they are sorrow, they are joy, and yes, they are also frustration. They are all things, they make a well rounded existence.” Rocky said with a wink as he opened his office door. “Don’t forget Citrus Fruit and water and mind that forming ulcer.” Rocky said and Roger smiled.

“Thanks again Rocky. For everything, I do feel leagues better already.” Roger said turning to Tobiah who looked anxious for news. His expression of worry suddenly crystal clear and unmistakable to Roger who smiled at him.

“I’m fine now Toby. No worries.” Roger said and Tobiah looked physically relieved.

“Maker, thank goodness. You looked frightfully in pain, I was most worried for you. I heard Mr. Rocky say you must eat citrus. Would you care for me to collect

some for you on my way back? I know you must go back to work and I have my afternoon quite free. It is no trouble, I will drop them at your home, it is on my way." Tobiah said looking like he desperately wanted to help.

Again, it was suddenly obvious why and it touched Roger and went straight to his heart. "That would be very kind of you Toby. I'd appreciate it. Anything but grapefruit, I can't abide grapefruit." Roger said and Tobiah chuckled.

"I think most would be agreeing with you." Tobiah smiled. "I saw some oranges and tangerines in the market earlier. Would those please you?"

"I love tangerines. Yes. Thank you. Need money?" Roger asked and Tobiah vehemently shook his head.

"Nay. Would not take it from you, it's my pleasure." Tobiah said his eyes so full of affection Roger wanted nothing more than to drown in them. How had he missed such blatant signals?

Rocky was right, lust was followed immediately by a love so strong it almost took his breath away and this young, handsome, talented man was his soul mate. Roger went from being irritated and surly to floating on cloud nine as it washed over him.

He could not however linger, Rocky was right, before he took advantage of his knowledge, Jack had to be dealt with and dealt with gingerly. The last thing either of them needed was drama and strife and the last thing Jack needed was to be dumped on his ear without warning. Even if the little idiot deserved it, Roger was not a cold hearted person. He'd do it over a dinner and not today. It had to be done in stages.

"Thank you Toby. Will I see you later? What are you doing for dinner?" Roger asked and Tobiah shrugged.

"I had nothing planned. I am staying at Ms. Benderiddle's boarding house. At the far west end of your street actually. She serves dinner, so I am told, as part of my rent and I can cook not. I had planned to just take one moment at a time today, besides, I wish not to intrude. Your mate would probably most enjoy an evening with you, there are many wonders in the city to be seen." Tobiah said and again Roger was touched at just how much Tobiah was hiding for his benefit.

"Jack hates it here, I doubt very much he'll want to sight see. However, thank you for the suggestion and I should be off, I'm late for work. Thank you again for shopping for me Toby."

"Never a chore. Have a nice afternoon."

“Same to you Toby.” Roger said almost skipping off and Rocky was smiling and leaning against his door, cupid’s job done.

“Alright you, my fine fellow. Get your ass in here and strip. I’m giving you a complete physical and not letting you out of here until I’m damn positive you’re in good health.”

“Aye.” Tobiah chuckled coming into the office and indeed stripping to let Rocky examine him head to toe, inside and out.

“Perfect health, you will have to find other ways to exercise now however or you’ll lose some of your tone.” Rocky said as Tobiah dressed again.

“Aye, I know. Any suggestions?”

“Running, long walks around the city, anything active will do. If you want to keep the definition in your arms, lift some light weights every night before bed and you should keep as fit as you are now. I’m jealous actually, you’re fitter than I am.”

“Get out in fresh air more. Sleep under the stars once in a while and it is not only pleasant but good for you to breathe fresh clean air.”

“True, very true. Well, off with you then Toby. I believe you promised to run chores for one of my patients.” Rocky said with a wink and Tobiah smiled.

“Aye and Thank you very much for healing him. He had me most worried.” Tobiah said turning to the door.

“I don’t doubt it friend. Seeing your beloved in pain is very hard. I believe you have seen the last of his woes if that puts you at ease.”

“Very much so. Thank you again, have a wonderful evening.” Tobiah said walking out of the office with a purpose and heading straight to the produce vendors and to the fruit stands.

Tobiah hand picked a large bag of tangerines and oranges for Roger and slung the sack over his shoulder as he headed home, stopping at the gorgeous townhouse in white with blue shutters. Number four Le Faye Lane and he climbed the stairs and knocked at the door and Jack threw it open.

“You again? What?” Jack asked and Tobiah just smiled.

“I am just dropping off fruit. Roger asked me if I would pick these up for him since he will not be finished with work in time. It was no trouble, I had the afternoon free.” Tobiah said handing the heavy sack to Jack who turned up his nose.

“Roger doesn’t eat fruit.”

“Master Rocky told him too, for his health. He had a much bad headache earlier, I saw him in much pain, it was dreadful.”

“It’s just a headache. He gets them all the time, it’s nothing. I can’t see how fruit will help a fucking headache. Just give him Tinderol!” Jack said and Tobiah was now angry and hiding it. Did Roger’s mate not care about him at all?

“Master Rocky said he was not to take it anymore. It hurt his liver, it’s what the fruit is for now. Chemicals help him not and did him harm. How horrible to know he has suffered many of these pains before. What I saw earlier I would not have wished on my most fervent foe.”

“Please! Just a headache and you all act like he’s dying. Whatever. Just give me the fruit then.” Jack said taking the bag and slamming the door in Tobiah’s face.

“Roger, I pray that makes you happy. I pray I am seeing only one side of the man and he has a more tender side he shows you beloved.” Tobiah said to himself as he went home in poor spirits.

There was nothing more than Toby wanted than to feed Roger his tangerines and make sure he never suffered again.

He had very little hope that Jack would show Roger the same gentle care Tobiah wanted to provide.

By the time he got home, his mood was more than melancholy and he paused in the kitchen to grab a few leftover lunch sandwiches off the counter. “What’s wrong pet, you look sad.” Mae asked coming into the kitchen to start dinner preparation.

“A little. I will be alright.”

“You sure love?”

“Aye. I am just getting adapted to the city and am tired. I think I’ll sleep a while. I probably will not have many guests coming by to see me. But if Master Rocky or Master Calum or Mr. Roger come, they are always welcome to disturb me.”

“Not His lordship Dragonwise or Lord Jeansai! They might come here?”

“Maybe, maybe not. Only they know where I live at the moment. Mr. Roger suggested dinner earlier and he might come by later, I don’t think he will but he might. I won’t have people calling on me much, I just thought it proper I tell you

they may and that it is alright to let them in if I am sleeping. They can disturb me anytime.” Tobiah said finishing his sandwich.

“Alright love. I’ll just send them up, saves my old bones from walking stairs.”

“That was my thoughts too. Thank you.”

“Sweet lad. You’re welcome.” Mae said setting out potatoes to peel. “Wash day is tomorrow. If you have laundry, drop it in the basket by the back door. It’s only a bit for a whole wash, I’m doing mine anyway. I only charge a bit-mark to keep us all in soap suds.” Mae winked and Tobiah smiled.

“Thank you, I’ll remember. I’m off to sleep a while. If I miss dinner I’ll go out later, I’m tired.” Tobiah said and Mae nodded.

“You look soul weary, go rest your head lad.” Mae shooed him off like a favorite grandson then went to work on dinner as Tobiah climbed the stairs and undressed down to just his linen underwear, his room was indeed warm in the afternoon and he lay down on the soft bed and just let his mind wander.

It wandered back to Roger, as it had been doing all night before and all day today. He was so envious of Jack he very literally wept bitter tears into his pillow until he was emotionally exhausted and fell asleep.

-----

## **“Yuletide Harmony”**

*A Short Fable of The Second Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **IV - Sing, O Mine Beloved**

-----

Roger was feeling quite good as he walked home and climbed the stairs into his home and had to duck as a tangerine came flying at him the moment he opened the door. “What the fuck was that all about?”

“I told you I didn’t want him back here! And how come HE knows more about you than I do?”

“Jesus Christ Jack! He was in the Healer’s office when I walked in with a belting headache. He let me go ahead of him and was there when I came out and he offered to stop at the market for me because he’s a wonderful person. I cannot believe you! I really cannot! I’ve had just about enough of this! It’s not like I can just pick up my cell phone and call you! Hello? We have no phones here!” Roger yelled losing his temper and Jack’s eyes rounded. Roger very rarely yelled.

“You could have come home!”

“What? Walk all the way back to tell you I’m sick and then walk all the way back to see the healer, then walk back to tell you I needed citrus fruit and then walk back to work? Are you nuts?”

“I hate it here!” Jack wailed and Roger felt a mundane headache starting. One brought on by Jack’s dramatics, again.

“Oh for fuck’s sake Jack! The world does not, nor ever has revolved around you! You seem to forget I have a life too and sometimes I need to take care of it or lose it. You don’t give a rat’s ass about me, just my money! Not once have you ever cared to ask how I felt! No! You throw shit at me the minute I walk in the door. You have NEVER asked how I felt come to think of it. Whenever I had a migraine all I got was you tossing Tindrol at me and telling me to stop acting like a baby and then whining about what you were going to have for dinner! I’m sick of it! Did you know I had a tumor in my head all this time? NO! I just found out today that was what was causing my very real pain! I wasn’t acting up just to stay at home like you so often accused me of and made me feel guilty enough to go out to dinner or wherever else you wanted to go even when all I wanted to do was curl up and die in pain! I’m done Jack. I’m not putting up with it anymore! You can hate it here all you like, you are under no obligation to stay, in fact at this point I’d prefer it if you just went back to New York so I don’t have to listen to this shit anymore!”

Jack’s eyes widened. “You’re dumping me? ME!? Baby be serious!”

“I’m deadly fucking serious. You only ‘baby’ me when you see yourself losing money. I am not nor have I ever been your cash cow! Your parent’s never liked me anyway, you’re free to go back to spending their money instead! We’re through! I refuse to let you treat me like shit on your shoes anymore. I’m sleeping elsewhere tonight, I will arrange a mover for you tomorrow and don’t you dare throw a tantrum and break shit in here! We don’t own this stuff, break your own shit or I’ll sue you for damages! Is that clear?”

Jack could only nod stunned.

“Good. Good Night!” Roger said turning and slamming the door behind him. His anger slowly fading as relief set in, he felt free. He should have done that a long time ago he thought to himself, as he picked up the tangerine off the ground and peeled it as he walked west down the street.

The tangerine Tobiah had bought was sweet and perfect. Roger smiled as he ate the segments, imagining Tobiah at the stall selecting it specifically for him. Thoughts of Tobiah had brought forth smiles all day, especially that afternoon. Roger found it difficult to concentrate at work all afternoon, he was very much in love now, there wasn’t anything about Tobiah that Roger didn’t love. His looks, his kindness, his friendship, his extreme talent and his soul. Tobiah was perfect and there was no denying humans could also feel what Elves called Undatta. Less potent but no less true. He loved Toby, every part of him for no reason whatsoever and for every reason in the book simultaneously.

Roger soon found himself in front of Toby’s boarding house and he climbed the stairs and knocked. An elderly Drow woman answered and smiled.

“A human! Bless me handsome man ye are. What can I do for you laddy?”

Roger smiled. “Is this where I can find Tobiah Wrensong? My name is Roger Winters.”

“Ah, Mr. Roger sir. Toby done said if you came you were allowed right in. He’s all the way up on the third floor attic room. He’s sleeping but said that he didn’t mind being disturbed at all of you or their lordships came to see him. Go right up.” Mae said and Roger nodded.

“Thank you.” Roger said heading up the stairs until they ended in a door which he gently knocked on and when he got no answer he quietly opened the door and saw Toby asleep. Roger smiled and went inside, gently closing the door behind him and walking over to the bed and he just stood there a minute looking down on perfection.

A sinuous and lean body was laid bare and vulnerable. A smooth tanned chest rose and fell with an even breath of sleep. He was half on his back and half on

his side. One hand tucked under his cheek, the other laying relaxed against his bare flat stomach. His long legs reed slender and as shapely as a woman's. One leg bent and a graceful foot was tucked under a knee. His white hair loose and tumbling over the pillow.

Roger didn't know which Toby was prettier, the awake youth with wintry eyes or the sleeping youth who looked so innocent in repose. Either way, he was beautiful. They were almost of a height, Roger was no more than an inch or two taller. He was much broader of shoulder and weighed probably a good thirty to forty pounds more.

Roger liked to work out and he had substantially more muscle than Toby, even if Toby looked to be no stranger to working. The muscles he did have were toned to complete fitness and were quite evident when he wasn't wearing anything save a pair of linen underwear.

Roger was human and unlike the bodily hairless Enf' Tuvalu, he sported the usual human body hair. Arms, under arms, legs, and a thatch of curly brown hair on his chest right between his firm pectoral muscles. Roger was quite proud of his broad chest, he worked hard to maintain his physique. He also had the beard from hell and if he didn't shave clean to the skin every day, by the end of the week he could be playing scruffy and scurvy pirates with ease. Come November he was under orders from Eran to stop shaving so he would grow a nice thick beard for his role as King Wenceslas for mid-December performances.

Toby thankfully would never have a whisker mar his beautiful face, Roger didn't like facial hair, even his own. He would be grateful come February to shave again. He called beards crumb catchers and they got in the way when one wanted to play.

Just as Roger was suddenly more than in the mood to play. He was grateful he already knew Tobiah was in undatta, he wouldn't complain with what Roger had in mind at the moment. In fact, Roger was pretty damn sure what he had in mind would be more than welcomed.

Roger undressed to his own underwear and carefully crawled into bed beside Tobiah. Just as his arms wrapped around Tobiah he awoke.

"Roger?" was all Tobiah was able to gasp out. He was silenced from speaking further immediately by Roger's lips, which were firmly planted against his own and Tobiah resisted all of three seconds before he melted against Roger chest to chest. His arms wrapping around Roger in return as he fairly shook with shock and elation. His mouth opening to allow Roger's kiss more access and both men were gasping into the kiss as it grew more desperate. Roger could feel Tobiah almost crawling under his skin his kiss was that potent.

Roger broke the kiss and smiled down. "You are absolutely a drug on my senses Toby. The minute I laid eyes on you I wanted you."

Tobiah looked suddenly sad. "Roger... Jack. We cannot, oh it is wrong of me."

"Jack and I broke up. I've been wanting to end it a long time now, and I was too cowardly to do it, until I met you and I had a very good reason to end it. It's not everyday the love of your life walks into it."

Tobiah was suddenly crying and clinging to Roger. "Oon Mei Undatta. Never did I expect to find you. Then I did and you had Jack and I wanted you to be happy. I was never going to say anything."

"I know. You're a stronger man than I am Toby. I wouldn't have been so nice about it, I'd have gone in and stole you away. You'll have to teach me what undatta is, I don't know what happens next. I'm just a poor senseless human." Roger said and Tobiah leaned closer and smiled tenderly.

"Not senseless beloved. We could not mate otherwise as shacah. Just will your soul to me and I will mine to you. Our beings will naturally become one, it is a calling of nature and nothing more. You will feel it, you will know." Tobiah said softly, willing his being to Roger. Roger gasped as he felt his entire body become electrified with what he could only call magic. He willed a return feeling and it was Tobiah's turn to gasp and then weep as he threw strong arms around Roger's neck joyfully.

"Live as I live, Love and I love, my longevity I give to you as you give to me your fire and passion. Oon Mei Shacah!" Tobiah cried and Roger held him back tightly. Tobiah was now more than a friend, more than a colleague, but a lover, a soul mate and his husband.

It was just that simple and over without pomp or circumstance or ceremony. Just two people coming together in love.

Roger was familiar enough with fair folk to understand the connotations of becoming bonded to one. From here on out he would stop aging as a human. He would age with Tobiah and they'd have a long time together from this point onward. He'd have to get used to the much longer lifespan, just as Tobiah would have to get used to more intense emotions. He already was a passionate creature due to his being an elf, he now had human fire within him, whatever emotions he did have would be magnified due to their bond.

Roger felt Tobiah under his skin, he knew his thoughts, his feelings, his desires and his very real pain. "Love me, Oon Mei Shacah." Tobiah whispered into Roger's ear and Roger smiled.

“Forever.” Roger replied dripping kisses down a long swan like golden throat and Tobiah almost trilled in contentment as Roger paid loving attention to his body with his lips.

They undressed each other between kisses and pets. Tobiah’s fingers delightfully toying with the hair on Roger’s chest as they continued to kiss and touch. “I love human fur. So soft.” Tobiah purred and Roger chuckled.

“Not a beard sweetheart. Those itch and scratch.” Roger chuckled and Tobiah grinned.

“But most handsome on some men. You would look nice with one, you have such a nice strong jaw, it would look beautiful framed in fur.” Tobiah sighed and Roger grinned.

“We’ll soon find out my good page, as Wenceslas I have to grow one.”

“Good.” Tobiah purred running his tongue between Roger’s pectoral muscles making him shiver. “Less be talking now beloved. I need you. I am going into my need. Must mate you now, I am on fire.” Tobiah growled sitting up to straddle Roger’s erection and he impaled himself with a moan of joy.

Roger threw his head back into the pillows. “Jesus Fuck me! Toby! Holy hell!” Roger groaned. Not prepared for Toby to just take him in without any preparation, Roger knew damn well that had to have hurt.

“It does not hurt. I am not human Oon Mei Shacah.” Tobiah reassured as he began a languid tempo that steadily grew more rapid as his body adjusted to Roger’s length.

Roger was seeing stars and he could no longer stand it and flipped Toby over on the to bed. “I like to drive beautiful. Sit back and enjoy the ride.” Roger said hooking Tobiah’s legs under his arms.

Tobiah was panting with sensational overload as Roger abused the springs on the bed. They were groaning with strain and creaking loud enough to wake the dead before Tobiah choked back a sob. “Yes. Coming. Ohhhhhh.” Tobiah moaned as he came and through their bond attacked Roger with the electricity of his orgasm and Roger was swept into the moment right along with Tobiah and he was grunting Tobiah’s name as he came in staccato like thrusts of rigid release and then melted into Tobiah, laughing.

“Fuck me, that was incredible. I heard shacah bonds were the best sex ever and they meant it! I felt you inside my chest like a phantom.”

“Aye. As I feel you beloved. We are connected, we will always feed off each other when we mate. We cannot be incompatible, we are shacah.” Tobiah sighed melting into Roger as they lay sated in bed, covered in sweat in the stuffy room and neither of them caring as they came down from a sexual high.

Tobiah chuckled. “You are thinking evil things. Aye dearest, I will ever be the responsive ewe to your ram. I like it much, again we are mated, we mirror each other by design.” Tobiah said sitting up and stretching and then crawled out of bed on shaky legs and stood there in all his naked, perfect glory, not an ounce of shyness in his make-up.

“I am hot and sweaty and I wonder not why, expected a lover in my bed tonight I did not. Not ever actually. Come wash with me, we will cool off, then did you not mention dinner earlier to me?” Tobiah grinned and Roger stood and wrapped arms around Tobiah’s slender hips.

“I did, I did gorgeous. Good idea too, I see you get as hungry as I do after sex.”

“Aye, even if you are my first in many, many years and only my second.”

“What?”

“I have not had a lover in almost eighty years. He became shacah to another, I was most happy for him, but there were not many like I where I lived. It’s alright it never bothered me. Lonely yes, but understandable. Now don’t fret, I will nary be lonely again will I Oon Mei Shacah?” Tobiah asked leading Roger over to the tub and turning on the taps.

“Neither will I. Hallelujah! You’re not only fucking sexy as hell, you’re my golden throated angel voice! And all mine! Whoo Hoo! Hot damn!” Roger laughed and Tobiah grinned as they crawled into the bath together.

“Aye, all yours. I could not mate with another even if I wished too, which I do not. I am sure you know Enf’ Tuvalu once bonded cease to function with others. We are ever monogamous to our spouses. I will nary stray from my Shacah, I would rather die.” Tobiah said and Roger kissed the back of his neck.

“You’d better not die any time soon, I’m rather in love with you, you realize.”

“Aye. As I love you Oon Mei Shacah.” Tobiah said as they washed each other and then dressed again and headed downstairs.

Mae grinned from the parlor where she sat darning socks. “Congratulations lads. I take it I am either losing or gaining a tenant.” Mae said and Tobiah nodded.

“We’ll only be here tonight madam. I am taking him with me tomorrow.” Roger said and Mae winked.

“Aye. Aye. I’ll return your deposit and rent Toby. One night is nothing.”

“Nay, I am so happy right now I don’t want it back. Keep it with my love Mama Mae. I am celebrating tonight my good fortune and it is good luck to share the joy and fortune.”

“Maker bless you lad, Aye. Good luck indeed! Have a merry evening and may the maker bless your bonding!” Mae said and Tobiah smiled brightly.

“Aye. Thank you.” He said as he and Roger headed out hand in hand back to the main thoroughfare of the city.

They were walking the stalls and looking at the wares under bright and colorful lanterns and Roger paused at a jeweler. “Hold up love. It’s human tradition to wear rings. Humor me?” Roger asked and Tobiah nodded.

“Aye, I will happily wear your union ring. I know the human custom. I am touched.” Tobiah said as the jeweler came over.

“Did my ears hear a new bonding?”

“Yes. This handsome fellow is mine and I want to stick a ring on that naked finger. We humans like marking our territory.” Roger said with a wink and Tobiah laughed.

“Roger you’re terrible.” He said as he sat down on a pair of stools.

“What kind of rings? Matching I assume?” The jeweler asked and Roger nodded.

“Yes. In gold preferably. Again, it’s just tradition and a symbol. However, I’d like to be sentimental too. Simple bands are human, but if you have any etched with Enf’ Tuvalu patterns it will be a nice blend of us both.”

“I have just the thing then Sir!” The jeweler said bringing out exactly what Roger asked for. Simple wide bands of gold, tooled and stamped in an intricate knot pattern of elven design.

“Oh, those are lovely! Everlasting rings! The patterns mean eternity.” Tobiah said and Roger picked up one and slid it on Tobiah’s finger.

“Perfect. With this Ring I thee wed.” Roger said and he handed Tobiah a matching band and held out his left hand.

Tobiah smiled. "With this ring I thee wed too." Tobiah mimicked and Roger laughed.

"Close enough. How much my good man?"

"Forty-marks for the pair. Pure gold those and they got mage charms on them, no one will ever steal them." The jeweler said and Roger reached into his back pocket and tossed out two twenty-mark coins without batting an eye.

"SOLD!" Roger said and Tobiah was wide eyed at the expense but would not argue, he could feel how pleased Roger was and if he didn't care about the cost, Tobiah wouldn't trouble over it.

They carried on down the lane, Roger's arm around Tobiah's shoulders and Tobiah had his hand shoved in Roger's back jeans pocket as they wandered food stalls.

"What's really good? I don't know all the dishes yet." Roger asked.

"What meat do you like best? You'll be able to find anything if you look hard enough. I like lamb but I tire of it quickly, I always grew up with it so lack of variety kills joy sometimes. We had Chicken sometimes, I like chicken a lot. We could never afford beef, I've only had that a few times in my life."

"I'm a steak and potatoes man myself. I love beef, a thick juicy steak and a baked potato smothered in sour cream, butter and chives and I'm a happy man."

"You will need find a good serving Inn for a steak. Market sells mostly ground beef in pies. Unless you're after just the cuts of meat to cook at home."

"Is there a serving Inn here?"

"Aye, I saw one coming in, near the lordly houses. Only they and the merchants can afford those types of meals usually."

"Then lead the way. I am treating my new hubby to a nice steak to celebrate!" Roger said and Tobiah gawked but just nodded and lead the way.

As they entered the Inn, they saw Eran and Willem sitting at a table, looking as if they had just arrived themselves and Eran waved them over to join them.

"What's this?" Eran asked grabbing Roger's left hand.

"Damn you've got sharp eyes Eran! Now congratulate me properly. This handsome fellow is my brand spanking new Shacah thank you very much." Roger grinned.

“NO WAY!” Eran said shocked and Tobiah only nodded.

“Aye. We are bonded. Roger wanted me to wear a human ring and I am most pleased to do so. It is very pretty isn’t it?”

“Aye! Congratulations! Oh my God, what about Jack?” Eran asked and Roger snorted.

“We broke up right after work. I’m shipping him home tomorrow. He wanted to go back the minute he got here, I offered to speed up the process and left and walked right into something much, much better.”

“Much.” Willem said with a wink. “Elves are hard to keep up with, the need could kill a horse!” He added and Eran slapped his arm.

“You liar. I don’t hear you complaining when I’m in the need.”

“No, but you do make me work up a good sweat Eran.” Willem said winking and Eran chuckled.

“True.” Eran said turning to wink at Tobiah. “But he is awfully handsome my Willem and awfully fit, what ewe can resist eh?” Eran asked and Tobiah laughed.

“T.M.I. ERAN! T.M.I.!” Roger said as the waiter came over with menus.

“Like you didn’t already know? Please Roger. I advertise, it’s never been a secret.” Eran chuckled looking over his menu.

“We ate here last night, you’ll love the Filet Mignon cut Roger, it was divine and cut like butter. I’m having that again” Willem said not even looking at his menu.

“What’s that?” Tobiah asked and Roger grinned.

“The absolute best cut of steak there is. Should I order for you Toby?”

“Sure. I am game to try whatever you suggest.” Tobiah said setting down his menu.

The waiter came back and took four identical orders and brought back a bottle of champagne Eran ordered to celebrate the goods news.

Toby inhaled his dinner with joy. Making faces of ecstasy whilst eating and making Roger smile as he felt Toby’s joy in his very soul. “Like that Angel?”

“Oh Aye! Never had finer in my life.” Tobiah said laying his knife and fork down on a clean plate.

“Whenever you want it, just tell me. I plan to spoil you.” Roger said with a wink and Tobiah grinned.

“I’ll thank you properly later beloved.” Tobiah countered right back and Eran laughed and clapped his hands.

“Thank you maker! I’ve been waiting for this! Finally you have someone I approve of. I will never worry about your love life again!” Eran said leaning over to kiss Tobiah’s cheek.

“He likes back rubs, he spends a fortune on massages.” Eran said and Tobiah grinned.

“Thank you. I will thank him by sparring his wallet I see.” Tobiah counted and Roger smiled.

“Angel, you will turn me on.”

“Oh, good.” Tobiah said as the check came and Eran refused to let Roger pay.

“My treat! I insist. Happy bonding day!” Eran said tossing two ten-marks on the table and adding three more full-marks for a tip as the group bid each other goodnight and Tobiah and Roger headed back to the boarding house, taking their time and enjoying a wonderful evening in each other’s company and taking in the city night life.

----

The City was beautiful at night. Bright lanterns blazed in a multitude of colors. People were lingering over dinner, there was music and laughter spilling out of pubs and beer tankards were full and spirits lively as Roger and Tobiah meandered streets hand in hand. They were looking at the shops and the landmarks but mostly at each other and rather doe eyed on more than one occasion as they paused by the large center square fountain alive with lights that danced on the water. “I should have brought my digi-camera, remind me next time we come out, I want pictures of us. I’m a total sap, I love marking occasions with pictures.” Roger said as Tobiah sat on the fountain edge.

“What is a digery-cam?”

“Digi-camera. It takes pictures.”

“What are pictures?”

“Ah Toby, I forget most of Xanadu is still isolated from here. I’ll show you things you’ve never heard of let alone seen. Wait until I take you to New York sometime, you’ll be mind-boggled.”

“I already am. I have never been here before let alone the human realm.”

“We’ll I have to take you at least once, you will have to meet my mother. She’s crazy, I adore her, and she’ll love you. When I was little, mom used to work two jobs to keep us fed. She worked at a grocery store during the day and waited tables at night. My Dad left us high and dry when I was two. I don’t even remember him and haven’t seen him since he left. Mom is great, she never let me go without, not once. I started singing when I was four in church choir, mom never missed a performance. I was seven when I met Eran quite by accident or fate. He was passing by the church during one of our Christmas concerts and he and Narrish came in and listened. I’ll never forget, I was singing ‘O Holy Night’ and our lives changed forever after that day. The next thing I knew I was in a recording studio singing for Eran on one of his recordings after school. In between takes, Narrish was helping me with my homework. They moved mom and I into a nicer apartment and literally put me through school. I owe what I am today to them.” Roger said sitting next to Tobiah on the fountain and Tobiah listened with rapt attention.

“I love music, I feel alive. It’s magic to me. I was terrified for a while I was going to lose it forever. I was a boy soprano and then I hit puberty and for a year while my voice changed I sounded like a frog in a blender, it almost killed me. Eran however had faith and he encouraged me to have faith and sure enough when my voice stopped dropping like my balls I settled in nicely as a bass by the time I was a sophomore in high school. From there I went onto Julliard. I learned composition and arranging. Conducting and teaching. When I graduated I started working for Eran full time in his production company while doing guest performances with the Metropolitan in my spare time. Mom was remarried by this time, my step-dad was a great man. Bill died last year in a car accident, I’ll miss him, he was really good for my mom and very supportive of me. He may not have been biologically responsible for me, but he was my dad everywhere else that mattered. Like Mom he never missed my performances all through High school and college and then onto professional arenas. I should have listened to Bill when he warned me that Jack was a bad choice.”

“We all make choices beloved. Can you honestly say there were no happy memories?”

“No. there were in the beginning. Toby you are an angel of understanding.”

“Life is full of choices is all. My Papa used to say when I was little that a man counts his worth not with gold, but by his actions. One mark coin looks like the

next and you remember none more than the others. However, you remember the stranger who shares his fire with you on a cold night. You remember the friend who stands with you to be counted. You remember the man who gave you his last meal because you needed it more. That is true worth, it can not be bought it cannot be sold, it can only be given freely without thought of reward.”

“Your father must have been something. Very true.”

“Aye. My father was the best of men. I miss him very much I do. He was very ill at the end of his days. He was always ill my whole life. My father put up with much pain in his body for many years and still worked a full day every day to provide for Mama and I when I was little. He was very prone to catch colds that would just cause others a runny nose but to my Father they would lay waste to him and he’d suffer very much. The last winter he caught pneumonia and there was just nothing we could do to cure him. Mama was pregnant with my sister then and she was not born until six months after we buried my father.” Tobiah said misty eyed.

“I took care of them after he was gone and I feel most guilty being here eating steak when they cannot. I must find a safe way to send home my earnings.” Tobiah said and Roger took his hand and kissed it.

“Angel you are indeed Toby. You have a big heart and I love that about you. There’s not a selfish bone in your body. I bet if you asked Rocky he’d send home your earnings. From what I hear mages like him and Calum can transport things easily. I’m sure they’d do that for you.”

“Aye. Masters Rocky and Calum are most wonderful men. I will ask tomorrow.” Tobiah said smiling as a tune from a nearby tavern drifted over and Tobiah closed his eyes and began humming a counterpoint harmony. Roger smiled and added a lower harmony to Tobiah’s.

Their voices blended almost magically together. Tobiah’s bright and clear tenor and Roger’s deep and broad bass mixed and they were pulled like moths to flame into the tavern.

Before either of them knew it, they were standing on a tavern table surrounded by merry making listeners and the musicians in the tavern were accompanying them as they bantered back and forth in a bawdy mirth. Both of them natural performers and Roger belted out a cheer for buxom maids while Tobiah countered him, playing a role of the maid taunting him in song, a rolled up pair of bar towels shoved up his shirt like a pair of pendulous breasts as he swaggered swinging his hips across the table.

Berta! Berta! My Buxom wench come hither I pray  
There’s a lad a needing you over this way!

But good sir, what's this I see?  
A Tent pole behind me as I dangle on your knee?

Nay good lass, a bone for you is true  
And I must Giveth it you!

Roger and Tobiah had the tavern howling with laughter as they sang and chased each other around the long tables and over people. Roger ended up cornering Tobiah on the bar itself as the song ended and Roger kissed him soundly as cheers, cat calls, clapping hands and stamping feet and a ruckus of banging tankards on tables ensued as people begged for more from the pair of performers.

More musicians turned up, the city happened to be full of them at the moment, and the bar was standing room only as Roger and Tobiah lit up the night with an impromptu show. Thankfully both men had exceedingly large repertoires and Roger had an extensive knowledge of fair folk songs, it was his favorite study subject in college which helped since Tobiah hadn't learned any human songs yet. However, since the crowd was entirely made up of fair folk and the odd man out was Roger, he stuck to whatever tune the musicians decided to play next.

Clear amber ale flowed and mugs kept getting passed to them with free drink to keep them singing and Roger smiled as Narrish appeared with Eran and Willem, they too drawn into the tavern by the music and Narrish was happily playing an acoustic guitar with the musicians as Eran joined in the singing. A third Elf Tuvalu with them Roger did not recognize beyond a strong family resemblance. He too could sing quite well and there was a chorus in full barbershop harmony of 'O Come Sir Cecil the Strong'. Roger camping up a knightly role and Tobiah was grinning taking on the role of Kirdock the Fair. Which again had everyone howling with laughter by the end of the raunchy and ancient pub song.

No one noticed a human youth glowering in the open door at Roger who was holding Tobiah in his arms as they swayed to the music where they stood on the table singing until they were growing hoarse. Very much swept away into music and song, delicious ale and their own love for each other. Roger's hands were all over Tobiah unconsciously even when they weren't pretending to screw on the table during the Cecil the strong song.

They finally had to beg leave, they were getting far too tipsy and far too hoarse to continue and as they headed outside with Eran and the others they finally got introduced to the stranger who had been singing with them.

"Roger, Toby. This is my eldest brother Staven." Eran said and Staven reached out and shook both their hands smiling.

"I never had such a wonderful time. I am pleased to meet you both." Staven said and both youth's eyes widened.

High Lord Jeansai, the healer of all wounds, one of the most power mages in Xanadu was just standing on a tavern table belting out filthy music like a dime a dozen drunken bard.

"My lord!" Tobiah bowed and Staven just winked and made him rise.

"Not tonight, I shoved the lord in the closet. Tonight I am just Staven and having a great time with my baby brothers and assorted company." Staven said as a youth walked forward and slapped Roger, hard. Tobiah went from genial to feral in seconds.

"Hit him not again! I jest not!" Tobiah said stepping between Jack and Roger, his eyes flashing dangerously in very obvious warning to all parties present, except of course Jack. Any fair folk knew you did not threaten or even merely imply threat to an Enf' Tuvalu's shacah. That was asking for a fight and one justified according to Xanadu law. It was instinct for an Enf' Tuvalu to protect what was his even from an implied danger. They couldn't help it, it was biological and Jack just tripped Tobiah's trigger and he was instantly alert and suddenly very sober.

"You bastard! What the hell was that?" Jack asked ignoring Tobiah and screeching at Roger.

"Ah Christ not again! I don't have to answer you Jack, it should have been obvious. It's called a having good time idiot!" Roger snarled.

"It looked like fucking with clothes on to me!" Jack hissed right back and Roger rolled his eyes.

"So? This matters how?"

"You're my boyfriend!"

"No I'm not. I quite clearly remember breaking up with you and shouldn't you be packing to get out of my house?"

"You were not serious!"

"Oh yes I was. I'm not your personal punching bag and convenient wallet anymore and will never be again."

"Roger, baby. Come on, we can work it out."

"No, we can't."

“And why not?”

“Because he is my shacah.” Tobiah said and Jack’s eyes grew livid.

“Shacah my ass! He’s human!”

“Aye. Most wondrous joy my mate is human. I had not intended to tell him how I felt to honor you. However, honor him you do not, I will not allow you to cause him soul pain anymore. I will protect my Roger’s heart.” Tobiah said and Jack laughed.

“Bullshit!”

“Believe not if you wish. It is most true.” Tobiah said and Jack turned to Roger.

“He’s not lying. Toby and I are married. Bonded, Whatever you want to call it Jack. I found someone who loves me, who cares about me and who I love in return. You never gave a damn about me Jack and you know it, you wanted to go home the minute we got here, so go already. I’m staying for good and with Toby.”

Jack screeched and dove for Roger fists flying and Tobiah was pulled away by Eran, who knew how Tobiah would react as Staven stepped in and ended the fight before it began. Jack was frozen in mid-leap.

“Enough of this. Jesus Eran you were right, what a pissy lad. I can sense many emotions, none of them love. Hate, jealousy, anger, fear of loss, and what an ego!” Staven said turning to Roger.

“He must be one prima Donna to live with.” Staven said and Roger chuckled.

“And then some. I knew he never loved me, but you know how it is, you get into a rut. I did love him once, until I realized all he wanted from me was money and pampering. It took finding Tobiah to urge me to do what I should have done a long time ago.” Roger said and Staven nodded.

“Shacah bonds are like that. You see clearly at last when the love is real and returned. I suggest taking your shacah home, I’m sure you can feel how agitated he is and Eran will not be able to calm him, only you can. He’s agitated because he would have killed Jack to protect you from harm, quite literally. His healing can only be with your hands.” Staven said and Roger turned to see Eran holding a rage filled Tobiah, blinded and shaking.

“How?”

“Just love him. Simple as that. I’ll take this one back to the palace. Attacking a shacah bonding in this realm is a crime actually. One that will just get him deported permanently since he is human. I’ll gate him out and you can send his things.” Staven winked and Roger nodded.

“Thanks.” Roger said turning to Tobiah and opened his arms. Tobiah raced into them and held Roger close.

“Never have I been so out of my mind with anger. I like it not, but he wanted to hurt you, I felt it and I just saw red. I cannot bear the thought of you hurting my Roger!” Tobiah sobbed and Roger kissed his brow.

“No harm done Angel. Come on, let me take you home, Our home.” Roger said nodding goodnight to everyone and leading Tobiah to number four Le Faye lane and unlocking the door.

He picked Tobiah up. “Another Human Tradition.” Roger said carrying Tobiah over the threshold and kicking the door shut before setting down.

Tobiah smiled. “Aye. I know of it, Roger you thrill my heart.”

“Angel you have no idea how much I love you.”

“Perhaps you can show me?” Tobiah purred wrapping his arms around Roger’s neck.

“Angel, I’ll certainly try.” Roger said dipping his head to kiss his spouse.

They left a trail of clothing up the stairs and made love in a large soft feather bed without creaking springs and drifted to sleep very late that night entwined together and tangled in silken sheets that smelled of lavender and roses mixed with the musk of recent sex.

Roger overslept the next morning and was rushing to work with a roll sticking out of his mouth and sporting a mild hangover. Tobiah watched him run down the street still wrapped in a sheet and sipping tea incredibly happy with his good fortune.

Roger was all he had ever desired in a mate. They could share their musical passions as well as more mundane passions. Roger was a wonderful lover and a wonderful man and Tobiah was so in love he waltzed down the street to Ms. Benderiddle’s after he dressed. He packed his few belongings, collected his wages out of the bottom of the wardrobe, kissed Mae goodbye and headed home, his permanent home in the city with his beloved.

He couldn't wait to tell his mother and sister and introduce them to Roger. Tobiah thought as he hung up his clothes and began to carefully pack Jack's things for him. Most of them had not been unpacked yet, thankfully.

Even if he truly did not like Jack, Tobiah was morally decent enough to be careful and honest and no harm came to Jack's possessions, which were collected that afternoon and loaded on a wagon heading for a gate transfer to New York.

They left just as Roger came home for lunch and they spent it together at the market, eating chicken pocket pies at an outdoor café before Roger headed back to call-back auditions and Tobiah wandered stalls before heading home to wait for Roger. They'd have a whole weekend together next before they both went to work Monday morning, together.

Tobiah couldn't have been happier had he suddenly been made King of the World.

-----

## **“Yuletide Harmony”**

*A Short Fable of The Second Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **V - Family Warmth**

-----

Over the next few weeks as September rolled into late October life settled into a beautiful routine as Tobiah and Roger began their life together as a bonded couple. Monday through Friday they got up together and always stopped at Roger and Tobiah’s favorite pastry vendor on the way into rehearsal and grabbed a quick breakfast. Hot from the oven cinnamon rolls for each of them and a steaming cup of coffee, which they ate as they walked from Number Four Le Faye Lane down the main boulevard into work.

From there Roger usually spent most of the morning hours instructing the new chorale and teaching them their parts in the show, while Tobiah spent most of his morning with Eran learning his leading roll and practicing until afternoon when Roger joined them as King Wenceslas and they practiced together with the other leading characters.

A strikingly beautiful fae woman named Angharod and in her early middle years was the leading alto. Tobiah was in love with her voice, she too had a bardic gift she’d never known she possessed and would not have come to try out had her husband and her grown children not packed her up in the wagon and dragged her to the Crown City for tryouts. Her sons ranged from fifteen to one hundred and fifty-seven and all four of them walked her into work in the morning proudly before the youngest went to school and the eldest went to new jobs in the city. Her husband had returned to their fishing village in the far west and was selling their land and home to make the move to New Crown City permanently. He was due back well in time for the first performance and it seemed all the males in her life adored her as much as Tobiah did.

The leading soprano was a Dryad named Himonie from the southwest. She was the youngest of the main leading roles if you didn’t look at ages chronologically. She was barely one-hundred and one which in human years put her barely past eighteen. She was pretty in the “cute” sort of way as Roger described her. She had large blue eyes that matched her long blue hair and she always smelled like myrtle blossoms. She was affectionate and spunky and bounded into rehearsals everyday with a bright smile and exuberance.

Tobiah was the next youngest after her. At one-eighty he was in human years approximately twenty-two years old in comparison and still technically considered a lad wet behind the ears himself. Next came Roger at twenty-seven and then Angharod at four-hundred and fifty which put her in human years in her late thirties rounded out the primary four leads.

There were other minor roles that would be played by various members of the choir and they came in to practice with the other leads after main choir rehearsal in the mornings.

Himonie was playing the role of the Snow Queen who ruled winter with her icy hands and she was laughing during a five minute break saying it was a good thing she was only acting, because snow and a dryad normally didn't mix well.

Angharod was playing the role of the Palace Headmistress, Percival's boss in the palace and who had assigned him as personal servant to the King. Her role was matronly and kind and made Tobiah miss his own mother while they acted and sang and practiced hard to get ready for performances that would begin the last weekend of November and in less than four weeks.

Roger had already stopped shaving, much to the delight of his spouse. Tobiah thought Roger handsome before, he exuded power and stature naturally and when you added a beard to his strong jaw line Tobiah thought he was deliciously rugged. They were eating lunch at a small café near the Concert Hall, where orchestra members and the choir often frequented because of it's proximity to the Hall much to the delight of the owner who made sure he had enough grab and go meals ready for hungry performers.

Tobiah and Roger were sitting in a corner table with Himonie and Angharod and Roger was brushing bread crumbs out of his beard in annoyance "Damn crumb catcher!" Roger said and Tobiah laughed.

"True, but it brushes off and I've said before I think you look most handsome with a beard." Tobiah grinned over his sandwich and Angharod nodded.

"Aye. I'd have to agree with your shacah Roger. Most fair folk cannot grow facial hair, we find it fascinating that humans can. Only fae men have facial hair here and few of them can grow a nice full beard. It's usually just a little on the chin and lip." Angharod said sipping her coffee.

"It's... what is the human word I am looking for?" Himonie said tilting her head and Tobiah grinned.

"Sexy." Tobiah supplied and Himonie laughed and nudged his shoulder.

"No you silly goat! We already know what YOU think of him. 'Manly' is what I was thinking. It gives him that added boost of Manliness."

"You're all going to give me a complex." Roger laughed as they paid their check and the girls headed back out pacing them. Roger turned to Tobiah as they walked back to work. "Do you really like it that much?"

“Oh aye. Himonie is correct, you are quite manly and I like it much. It tickles nice when you, you know, play with me down there.”

“Really?” Roger asked his interest in the subject perking and Tobiah smiled wickedly.

“Aye. Your fur, as humans say, turns me on.” Tobiah winked and Roger snaked an arm around his waist.

“Really now. That’s news. Most folks get put off by it.”

“Not I. Your chest pelt is soft as anything and I like it when it tickles my nose when you hold me. Your new chin covering not only makes you look even more handsome to my eyes, but also delights my skin when it touches me. I would never complain if you never shaved again.”

“You’re serious.”

“Aye.”

“As long as you don’t mind me keeping it groomed short, I won’t shave it you like it so much.” Roger said and got a sudden and joy filled long deep kiss for his statement.

“I will show you later just how much that gesture pleases me my Roger.” Tobiah whispered in Roger’s ear, nipping an earlobe for good measure.

Roger smirked, Tobiah was a wicked man in their bedroom and Roger was pretty damn sure he was going to like Tobiah’s version of a ‘thank you’. He usually always was left boneless in sated sexual bliss when Tobiah wanted to ‘thank him’ for some gesture that made him happy.

Willem was right, Elven men had fearsome stamina when it came to sex and were indeed incredible in the bedroom and amazingly hard to keep up with but it was certainly a joyful ride.

They met Calum walking with Abaisha who was carrying a newborn in a sling on his chest and Kaisha was holding Calum’s hand and raced over to greet Roger and Tobiah.

Tobiah greeted her first and then her parents and then fawned over the baby in the sling. “So big he is! Hard to believe he is only three weeks old!” Tobiah grinned as the baby held his finger.

“He’s a pig that’s why. Rhain might look like me, he’s Rocky’s son without a doubt. He sucks down two bottles every feeding and if you don’t give him two he

throws a fit. He eats like Rocky if you give him spice cake.” Abaisha grinned and Tobiah laughed.

“My sister was like that. Eat and eat and eat then sleep then change horrible nappies.” Tobiah grinned and Abaisha nodded with mirth.

“True. Nappies thankfully only last a couple of years. Kaisha was potty trained by three.” Calum chuckled and Roger winked.

“But she’s a girl a lot easier to potty train than boys. Ready, Aim and Fire and miss.” Roger said and Calum rolled his eyes.

“He’s already gotten Rocky once. We’ve learned to toss a washcloth over him to change his nappies or you get pissed on in the eye.” Abaisha said with a laugh as Rocky came out of a nearby shop with a paper wrapped bundle tied with twine.

“Hullo! Are you both coming to the All Hallows Eve Masquerade tonight?” Rocky asked Roger and Tobiah as he joined the group.

“Aye. I’ve never been to one it sounds fun.” Tobiah said and Roger nodded.

“Already got our costumes ready. Even if Tobiah won’t tell me what his is like. I do have to say I will miss the human tradition of this holiday tonight. I always loved when kids came to the door trick-or-treating. I always spent a fortune on candy to give out and loved every minute of it.” Roger said and Rocky nodded.

“It hasn’t caught on yet like Christmas has. We always celebrated Holy Eve combined with twelfth night. There were no lights or trees or wreaths until a couple of hundred of years ago when Anna and Grace came and turned the palace into a Winter Wonderland. Now everybody has trees and lights to decorate and it’s not hard to convince people to give other’s presents and eat like pigs. Give Halloween time, eventually you’ll see our children out and about too once they learn it’s a night of free candy.” Rocky said with a wink.

“Do me a favor then? Before the mask after work, how about bringing Kaisha over? I can at least treat one this year that way.” Roger said and Rocky grinned.

“I can do one better. I’ll bring over my little sister and have Gawen bring his and Aveanna hers. We’ll parade them through town and perhaps next year you might see a little more. We do tend to start trends in my family.” Rocky said with a wink and Tobiah cheered.

“Aye! Much fun!”

“You got it. I’ll get treats on my way home then, we can leave from there back to the Masque.” Roger said and Rocky nodded.

“Sounds like a plan. Oh and Tobiah, I sent your box of wages home to your mother yesterday like you asked. When are you going to tell her you’re shacah?” Calum asked and Tobiah grinned.

“When I can introduce her to Roger properly. I want to see her reaction. I miss her and Tori terribly. I wish they were here.” Tobiah said and Calum nodded.

“Well you did tell her to be ready for me to pick her up on November Twentieth correct?”

“Aye. That’s a week before opening night and it gives me time to show her and my sister around and let them meet Roger properly. I am going to buy Mama and Tori fine dresses for opening night I cannot wait.” Tobiah bounced on his feet and Calum smiled.

“Those three weeks will fly by I’m sure.” Calum said and Tobiah nodded.

“Aye they will and do forgive we’re late getting back.” Tobiah said noticing the time. He and Roger ran back to work and Rocky smiled at Calum.

“Two of the nicest people I know. Are we that sappy together in public?” Rocky asked his mates who grinned at him.

“We’re worse, we have you! Come on let’s go get Kaisha a costume. I already sent a call to Mama, Ave and Gawen, They think it’s a great idea and will get the kids ready for trick-or-treating tonight.” Calum said as they continued down the path and found Kaisha a little black dress and slippers in order to make her a witch. Technically she already was more than a witch or would be when she grew into her powers, she had Calum’s gifts. But human’s tended to see witches as hags of green dressed in black and not pretty little four-year-old girls in red frilly ribbons who really were born ‘witches’.

They’d have to improvise a pointed hat and Rocky would be able to concoct green make-up for her face that would wash off and not hurt her tender skin. Kaisha was excited as they headed back home and Abaisha and Calum took her to dress her up while Rocky went to his herb storage and made up a batch of lotion compound he added pulverized spinach to in order to make it bright green.

It would easily wash off and he carried that up and applied it to Kaisha’s and Kira’s faces. They would both be witches. Fiala came in with Grace looking gruesome.

Grace smiled. "What's Halloween without a Zombie?" She asked as Fiala came in looking like she'd been dead a week and grinning ear to ear.

Sabu was wrapped in bandage dressings as Gawen and Grace turned him into a mummy and soon they were all back in the City walking the streets and answering questions about why the kids were all dressed up.

Grace explained the human tradition and by the time Roger and Tobiah were walking home from work, they saw dozens of kids dressed up and they raced to a confectioners stand and practically cleaned him out of candy before they raced home and waited for the knock at the door.

A crowds was behind the Jeansai's and assorted company and Fiala rang the bell. Roger opened up the door and beamed at the costumes as four children called out 'Trick-or-Treat' and held up sacks which Roger and Tobiah filled to capacity with candy.

Parents urged their children to follow suit from the crowd and Roger was happily giving out candy to children who had never enjoyed the tradition before and were trying hard to put together last minute costumes.

The whole of Le Faye lane joined in, people were calling from their homes and waving bags of sweets to get the kids to come to their doors and say, "Trick-or-Treat".

The buzz was alive and Rocky assured Roger that next year, he'd not be lacking trick-or-treaters at his doorstep. Fun human traditions caught on quickly, especially when it involved spoiling rotten children just for the fun of it.

It was over fairly quickly and about three dozen children went home with bags full of sugary delights and Roger was grinning like a fool as he got his costume on. The Phantom of the Opera came down the stairs and met his Christine at the bottom of the stairs. Tobiah had on a long brown curly wig and was in full Victorian dress and chuckling like a fool in drag. Which he was.

"Abaisha helped you didn't he?" Roger asked, now knowing why Tobiah had kept his costume a secret.

"Oh Aye! What is the Phantom without his Christine? Get not used to me in dresses. For a lark is one thing, I will leave wearing dresses daily to Abaisha. He looks far grander in them than I do!" Tobiah laughed twirling in his long skirt.

"He doesn't look like a bloke in drag, You do." Roger laughed and Tobiah grinned.

“Aye. I make an ugly woman!” Tobiah laughed as he took Roger’s arm and they headed to the palace getting cheers and laughter as they went. They did look grand and comical all at the same time.

It was a wonderful evening of dancing, food, wine and costumes and it was well past two in the morning before Roger and Tobiah stumbled home half drunk on apple cider wine and harvest grain ale and enough autumn food devoured to make them feel bloated with over indulgence.

They slept in most of Saturday morning and didn’t venture outside again until they got hungry and went to find lunch at a vendors.

Even though Tobiah new how to at least operate the kitchen hearth, actually cooking edible food was another thing entirely. They ate out every meal, it was easier than trying to learn to cook.

-----

November twentieth arrived and Tobiah was pacing the parlor with excitement. He hadn’t seen his mother and sister in months and had so much to surprise them with including a new shachah who was sitting in the chair by the fire amused as he watched Tobiah pace a hole in the rug.

“Calum said noon sharp Toby. You have fifteen minutes yet.” Roger said looking at the clock on the mantle.

“I know, I know. I cannot wait, I slept not last night.”

“I know. You tossed and turned all night.” Roger said soaking in the warmth of the fire. Snow was already falling outside and the fire was nice and warm and he was grateful Tobiah knew how to keep their house warm and was teaching Roger how to adapt to life without a thermostat or radiator.

At noon precisely on the nose the parlor room shimmered and Calum appeared in the middle of the room with two female guests and several sacks filled with clothes and necessities for an extended stay.

Tobiah squealed as Tori launched herself into his arms and he twirled her around the room giving as many joyful kisses as he received. Before setting her down and repeating the jubilant behavior with his mother.

“Mama, Tori... I have a surprise.” Tobiah said walking over to Roger who was standing there smiling and taking his hand affectionately.

“Mama, this is Roger. My Shacah. Roger dearest, my mother.” Tobiah introduced and Roger held out his hand.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Madam Wrensong.” Roger said to the wide eyed woman Tobiah resembled.

“Shacah? Really?” She asked and Tobiah nodded. Yorinda laughed and slapped Roger’s hand out of the way and embraced him. “Greet your bonded Mama properly then handsome.” Yorinda said hugging Roger tightly.

“I always knew my Toby would bring home a strapping one I did. He favors his Mama in what pleases his eye.” She grinned pinching Roger’s cheek and patting his beard. “What a handsome man indeed. Humans, so interesting. Whiskers are softer than I imagined.” Yorinda said and Tobiah nodded.

“Aye.” Tobiah agreed as Tori walked over and hugged Roger.

“I have two big brothers now!” She grinned and Roger laughed and hugged her back.

“Aye, that you do and we have such wonders to show you! But first, let’s get you both settled. We already have your rooms ready for you.” Roger said taking Tori’s hand and gleefully marching up the stairs. Truth be told he was looking forward to meeting Tobiah’s family as much as Tobiah had been looking forward to their arrival. The family resemblance was very strong and he just adored Tori immediately and Yorinda was a beautiful woman who obviously loved her son very much as she clung to his arm as they headed up the stairs. Calum was levitating luggage and pulling up the rear smiling. He too was a sucker for families and reunions.

“This is your house?” Tori asked finally realizing they were not in the palace but a gorgeous and luxuriant townhouse.

“Yup, and this is your room while you’re with us.” Roger said pushing open a bedroom door that he and Tobiah had decorated with a young pre-teen girl in mind. Rosy pink bed linens and curtains trimmed in white lace covered the soft large feather bed and tall narrow windows. Fresh pink roses from the hot house were on the table in a white crystal vase. White painted furniture adorned the room with matching pink cushions and her private privy had rose scented soaps molded to look like roses were on the counter. A lovely porcelain china doll in a pink dress sat in the chair and on the bed was a large stuffed bear in white. They were probably a little too young for her, but Toby had always wanted to give her those things and had never been able to before.

Tori squealed and danced around the room. “All this for me?” She asked and Tobiah smiled.

“Aye love. All yours for always and always. I would be a poor brother indeed if I did not spoil my only little sister.” Tobiah grinned as they set her bags on the floor. Tori raced into his arms crying.

“Thank you Toby! Oh Thank you!” she wept and Tobiah held her close and drank in her warmth and kissed the top of her head.

“You are welcome dearest. Later Roger and I are taking both you and Mama out so we can fill your wardrobes with brand new dresses too.” Tobiah said and Tori turned to repeat the grateful affectionate thank you hug and tears on Roger. Who just hugged her tightly.

“No tears sweetheart. Just be happy.” Roger said looking over at Yorinda who was also in tears of happiness for her daughter.

“Come, lets show Mama hers!” Tobiah said taking his mother’s hand and leading her across the hall into a room the same size as set up as Tori’s.

Hers had been decorated in rich sapphire blues, emerald greens and deep burgundy reds and all sporting brilliant gold trim. It was opulent and fit for a regal queen.

Dark cherry wood furniture and lush thick rugs on the floor to protect bare feet. Her soaps were scented of gardenias and a vase of the pure white blooms sat on a table in the center of the room.

“Tobiah... How? Why did you do this?” Yorinda gasped, stunned by all the luxury.

“Because I love you Mama and Papa would have given you all these things had he been able. I am now able and I will never see you or Tori go without again. Roger and I are hoping you will stay with us always. We have been talking and we would like it very much if you moved here with us to stay. You are all I have in this world besides my shacah. I would love for you to be here with me where I can take care of you as you took care of me once.” Tobiah said honestly and full of love and affection. Yorinda sobbed and clutched her son close weeping.

Roger stood with Tori by the door, his arm around her small shoulders. This felt so wonderful he was ready to burst. He could feel in his bond to Tobiah how much he loved his mother and sister and how desperately he wanted to make sure they never had to work a day in their lives again.

“Oh Tobiah, dearest you make me so proud. Your father is smiling in the heavens and busting his seams over you, I just know it. We’ll stay on one condition.” Yorinda said mopping her eyes.

“What’s that Mama?”

“I do the cooking, you can’t boil water!” Yorinda said and Tobiah threw back his head with laughter.

“Aye Mama. Neither can Roger. We eat out, a lot.”

“Did someone say cooking? What’s that?” Roger asked and Tori grinned and poked his side.

“Silly! You know what it is!” She teased and Roger smiled down at her.

“Yes I do, and like your brother I am hopelessly inept in the kitchen. Especially a Xanadu kitchen. I couldn’t cook in the human realm, I can’t even start a fire properly here.” Roger said and Calum laughed from the hallway.

“I can attest to that. Humans have a hard time learning our ways. But you’re doing well Roger, better than most.” He said and Roger laughed.

“Because I have Toby to keep me from freezing and walking around in the dark at night.” Roger said and Yorinda chuckled.

“I’m sure he manages to keep you warm other ways too.” Yorinda said with a wicked smile and Roger bellowed with a deep throaty laugh. Tobiah got his sense of humor from his mother.

“Ah God, I love you! Yes, he’s a good boy.”

“Good is probably relative.” Yorinda said hooking her arms through Roger and Tobiah’s. “Now please do show me the rest of this beautiful home. I would love to see it all. I do insist you allow me to keep it tidy, I won’t be spoiled idle no matter how much Toby wishes me to grow fat with inactivity.” Yorinda said and Tobiah practically danced out of the room to show his mother and sister around the house.

There were four stories in all. The first floor was the parlor, the living room, and the drawing room which Roger had turned into an office suite and then came the ballroom where Roger’s grand piano sat and where he and Tobiah practiced together in the evenings. The main floor also held the large expansive and unused kitchen and dining room. Large enough for twenty guests or more comfortably.

The second floor held a large library and game room a guest bedroom and a privy.

The third floor was simply five large bedrooms suites, each with personal sitting room entries and lavishly furnished. Two of those rooms which now belonged to Yorinda and Tori and the only two that had private privies, the other two guest bedrooms shared a privy and were unused and were available for overnight visitors. The last bedroom at the end of the hall opened with double doors and lead into the master suite. Their bedroom was decorated in dark colors, very masculine to look at with rich brown leather over stuffed chairs and a couch and dark walnut wood tables and dressers. Their sitting room was warm and inviting and was very much a male sanctuary from the outside world. Their bed was a large four poster in the same dark walnut and their linens were a rich dark burgundy hue complete with matching bed curtains to keep out the chill. Just like Tori's and Yorinda's rooms. They were all decorated in very similar layouts, but the textures and colors reflected the occupants. Brightly woven Persian rugs covered the hardwood floors and their marble bathroom had golden fixtures and large burgundy towels hung from the towel racks rounded out the room.

Whereas Tori's rooms were of light oak and pine and whitewashed and accented in shades of rosy pinks and Yorinda's rooms were dark jeweled tones accented in gold and Tobiah and Roger's rooms just dark natural walnut and red. Each room welcomed its occupant in sinful luxury while maintaining a comfort and warmth found only in a home that truly was 'homey'.

The fourth floor was the vast attic space. It was paneled in oak and just one large loft space with oak pillars and rafters that supported the roof. It was bare to the floors with just a few trunks and boxes of Roger's belongings from the human realm that had either not been put away yet or were just left in storage until needed.

Tori loved the attic and Tobiah suspected he'd find her playing in here occasionally when they couldn't find her in her room. Every child had hideaways from the adults and Tori was no different, she was still only twelve years old, she had a long childhood left in her and a childhood now free from work, cares or hunger. That alone made Tobiah happy and filled him with contentment as he watched her spin around the loft space carefree. Tobiah slipping his hand into Roger's and leaning against him lovingly.

"Thank you my Roger. This means the world to me."

"I know Angel. Me too actually. This house needed a family in it." Roger said as the group wandered back down to the main floor and Calum said his goodbyes.

The last room Yorinda was shown was the kitchen and it was her turn to spin around the room like a girl dancing under the moonlight.

"It's a palace! Oh the things I am going to make in here!" Yorinda squealed opening cupboards and china cabinets full of items that had never been taken out of the cupboards let alone used.

"What a waste! This is the finest kitchen I've ever seen and you naughty boys leaving it idle!" Yorinda said and then began clicking her tongue in admonishment when she opened the pantry to find it bare of anything other than a half eaten box of cookies. Just a bowl of oranges and tangerines sitting on the counter and nothing else edible was in the kitchen.

"I do hope when you take us out shopping you plan on buying food in which to cook!" Yorinda said and Tobiah laughed.

"Mama, you plan to feed us, my purse is ever yours to abuse as you see fit! We were hoping you'd say you'd stay and Roger and I already planned ahead. My wages are going right to you Mama to manage for the household. Buy whatever you think we need, when we need it. Roger's wages are for savings and for us. Between us we make more than enough to not ever have to worry about finances again." Tobiah said and Yorinda nodded.

"Love you almost made me faint when I opened the box you sent me. Just what you sent alone I could run a house on for a year!" Yorinda said and Tobiah smiled.

"I sent it, because I love you and really, I couldn't spend all that money if I tried. I'm learning to be a little less frugal and spend money on items that are normally frivolities. It's so nice to see something you like and be able to actually buy it if you want too. I had much fun buying your linens and such. No simple wool anymore, I got you the best down I could find in the softest silks. I felt like a king!" Tobiah laughed and Roger smiled.

"He was like a kid in a candy store. I had fun just watching him shop." Roger said before offering his arm to his Mother-in-Law. "I intend on enjoying the rest of the day watching the rest of you spend a fortune. I insist you don't look at a single price tag. If you want it, you are going to have it and I will not take 'no' for an answer. Between Tobiah and I we make more than enough to cover any whim you might have. Honestly, I want you both to never consider expense ever again. Is that clear? That's my condition for your living here with us." Roger winked and Yorinda took his arm and smiled.

"Some habits break hard, but I will try hard to honor you my son. Thank you so very much."

"It's my honor." Roger said offering his other arm to Tori. "Now my fine ladies, let's be off." He said and Tobiah grabbed their coats and they all bundled up and headed out into the city.

Their first stop was immediately to the tannery where Yorinda and Tori got their feet measured and both were given warm fleece lined boots in soft waterproof leather so their feet would not get cold since they were spending the afternoon outside shopping in the open air.

The tanner fitted the boots and then took orders to make them more occasional shoes. From house slippers to dress slippers and everything in between.

From there was a new coat for each of them. Warm brightly patterned fleece with matching gloves and scarves.

Once Tobiah was satisfied his mother and sister were warm enough they continued shopping.

Yorinda insisted they hit the food market first, she wanted to stock the kitchen so she could make dinner later. Roger and Tobiah were both holding Tori's hands as they trailed behind Yorinda.

First was the butcher's stand where Yorinda inspected every cut of meat and queried Roger on his favorites since she already knew Tobiah and Tori's tastes.

"Anything beef or chicken Yorinda and you'll make me a happy man. I'm very easy to please. Hearty, hot and stick to my ribs food I love."

"Good man! That I can certainly provide with ease. You eat like Tobiah."

"Aye he does. We care much for the same things." Tobiah said and Yorinda selected quite a bit of choice beef cuts she would roast and turn into all manner of stews and pies or just serve roasted or baked alone in thick gravy.

She also added chicken to the menu in her mind, knowing Tori and Tobiah both also liked chicken when she fried it in seasoned flour.

She also saw some fish steaks that looked heavenly and she always liked it when Tobka had brought home river trout for frying in lemon and herbs or battered and fried in a pan. Fish was also a good change of pace and good for a diet and if Roger and Tobiah were not going to look after their health she would.

After she selected a good two weeks worth of meat, Roger happily paid the butcher and arranged for delivery from the back alley. The kitchen had a delivery door in the back of the room that lead directly to the alley and was specifically for the purpose. The butcher nodded and began packing their purchases for delivery later on.

The scenario was repeated at produce suppliers. Several mixed bushels of a variety of vegetables were added to Yorinda's purchases and again Roger paid without blinking and set a time for delivery service.

Next came the staples. Flour, sugar, eratcho, oatmeal, rice and various other much needed necessities were purchased in quarter barrels. These bulk items were standards and once again paid for and were set aside for delivery.

The last shopping stop was for herbs and spices. This was where Yorinda looked like Tobiah had when he had been shopping for their linens. Yorinda inspected every small glass jar with a keen eye and Roger could see the wheels spinning in her head as she knew precisely which dish she wanted to make with each herb and spice that got added to her selections. Cinnamon, nutmeg, basil and thyme, rosemary and paprika, ginger and peppercorn, salt and various other things Roger had never heard of before but suspected he'd probably eaten a time or two.

Tori was standing at the booth next to the spice market with Tobiah and they were both eyeing barrels of nuts and Tobiah was holding open a large sack as Tori scooped a mixture of nuts into it from the various barrels, a large variety of Walnuts, cashews, pecans, almonds, peanuts, brazil nuts, hazel nuts and chestnuts. Tobiah paid for the sack and rather than have it delivered he carried it with him as he and Tori munched right from the bag.

"You two and nuts! You'll spoil your dinner!" Yorinda playfully scolded and both Tobiah and Tori grinned.

"We know." Tobiah said with a wink holding open the bag for Roger, knowing he liked nuts too. He chuckled as he took a handful and munched as they left the spice stand and headed to the clothier markets and shops further down the lane, pausing a time or two to point out landmarks to Yorinda and Tori who took in the extravagant city like the fresh from the country bumpkins they were.

They finally made it to a lovely dress shop that Tobiah had already scoped out the day before their arrival and the seamstress was waiting for them. "AH! Master Tobiah you made it at last!" She said coming from behind her counter to greet them.

"Aye, they got here at last." Tobiah beamed and the woman led Yorinda and Tori over to a pair of chairs.

"I already pulled a selection for you both. Master Tobiah insisted only my best." She said going behind the counter for a moment and pushing out a rack filled to bursting with girl's frocks.

"First for the young miss here. Your brother says you like pink?"

“Aye!” Tori beamed staring and gawking at the frills on the rack. Rich velvets and heavy brocades for winter dress.

The woman had Tori stand and she eyed her a moment. “You’re a willowy lass indeed. I have some wonderful items for such a frame. Already starting to get your curves too, I love this age in girls.” The woman said pulling off the rack a duty rose colored thick wool dress embroidered with white poinsettias and silver accents. Roger and Tobiah took up some stools and both men sat thrilled to their bones as they watched Tori’s eyes dance with wonder.

The seamstress sent Tori into the back to try on the dress and she came out looking beautiful. Rose hues really brought out her white blond hair and skin. Roger whistled low, when she hit womanhood, Tobiah was probably going to buy a large mastiff watch dog and a large sword to wear. She was going to be stunning as a woman, she was already showing drastic signs that she was coming out of being a little girl and turning into a young woman.

“Maker, preserve me. When did you grow up?” Tobiah gasped and Tori stuck her tongue out at him.

“I’m not a baby anymore Toby. I’m twelve!”

“Aye. You look lovely, she must have that dress certainly. That will be perfect for attending the opening night gala performance and after party.” Tobiah said and the seamstress nodded.

“Aye, that color definitely suits her indeed. Just let me mark it so it’s not quite so big on her and I’ll make the adjustments and have it sent over tomorrow.” The seamstress said marking sections to take in with tailors chalk and then sending Tori back to change into the next dress. The bell chimed and Tobiah and Roger both laughed when Abaisha swished inside from the cold.

“Ah! They’re here! Cay said he’d gotten them here alright and I see you found my favorite shop. Maevryn, is a wonderful seamstress, she makes all my clothes.” Abaisha said turning to Yorinda who looked stunned to see a man in such female finery.

“You must be Toby’s Mama. I’m Abaisha it’s a pleasure to meet you.” He said extended his hand which Yorinda shook stunned. First she’d met the Lord Dragonwise twice and now the famous Dark Seer from that triad, whom she had not known was a cross dresser too and he was standing there looking beautiful and in the flesh. Her son really had moved up drastically in the world.

“Nay, ’tis my pleasure Master Seer.” Yorinda said standing to curtsy and Abaisha just rolled his eyes.

"I'm just Aisha ma'am. Really, I was just poor farm boy too before. I'm like Toby, sometimes the city can be overwhelming to country folk. You get used to it and who can resist such pretty frocks?" Aisha grinned twirling his velvet skirt with a wink.

Yorinda chuckled. "These are beautiful."

"And I made it just in time to watch too I see." Abaisha said taking up the chair beside Yorinda and appraising the fashion show as Tori came back out with the second dress on.

"Oh maker what a pretty girl! Dearest you must let me do your hair for the gala! She'd look beautiful in pin curls and rose clips." Abaisha said clapping gaily. He loved dressing up girls as much as he enjoyed dressing himself.

"Her gown has silver and white poinsettias on it Aisha. Roses will clash." Maevryn said and Abaisha nodded.

"Ah good point, and even better, we can pull up those lovely locks in a poinsettia tiara. My she'll have every boy her age falling all over themselves to dance with her." Aisha said and Tobiah coughed.

"Boys her age are still chasing frogs, I fervently hope she doesn't attract those that notice more!" Tobiah said and Abaisha chuckled.

"Uh-oh big brother is getting protective. Stay calm Toby, you can attack suitors later." Abaisha winked and Tori giggled and spun her skirts in a glorious daze of happiness.

"I feel like a princess!" Tori said and Tobiah smiled.

"You are love. At least to me you are." Tobiah said leaning against Roger happily. He felt on cloud nine as he watched Tori come alive with attention and pampering.

Tori tried on ten dresses and Tobiah insisted she have each and every one. Along with the dresses Maevryn pulled out undergarments in her size, stockings and more every day simple frocks in her size to wear to school. Which she balked at but Tobiah insisted she begin attending. He had never attended school and with her sharp mind he knew she'd thrive.

She had a complete wardrobe fit for winter climes. The dresses would be tailored to fit her closely, but the everyday garments fit well enough off the rack and would come home with her today along with the undergarments and hosiery. Maevryn also added seven new night gowns in warm flannel, one for everyday of

the week in a rainbow mix of pastels, a fluffy pink dressing gown robe in fuzzy angora fleece, and a dozen or more mix and match shirts, sweaters and woolen pants for the days it was just too cold for dresses.

Abaisha was picking through accessory bins with Tobiah and into the growing pile was laid hair clips and ribbons, purse clutches and assorted whimsical costume jewelry fit for a twelve year old and that matched her new extended wardrobe everything in sight practically got added to the purchases. Tobiah was in seventh heaven being able to give her everything a little girl could possibly desire in abundance.

Attention then got turned to Yorinda and the process was repeated again. Her Gala gown was in a rich emerald brocade in a holly pattern. Gold rope trim and red glass bead berries lined the neck, cuffs and hem. A matching fur lined short cape came with hers since her neck line was open and she'd need covering for travel outside. She looked stunning and Tobiah thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world and he got misty eyed as he watched his mother stare in the mirror in shock.

"Mama you look so very beautiful." Tobiah sighed and Yorinda turned and smiled at him.

"Love in this dress I feel like a queen. My word but it is the finest thing I've ever worn." She said and Tobiah nodded.

"And of which you will always have from now on. I daresay I have two of the finest women in the city living under my roof now!" Roger said agreeing with Tobiah, they both looked stunning in their new clothes.

"Keep talking like that my new son and you will be made fat with my gratitude." Yorinda winked as Maevryn made tailoring marks on the gown fabric and had Yorinda change into the next dress.

Abaisha was already pulling out accessories for Yorinda's new wardrobe. For her gala gown he selected a gold tiara in a holly motif to match her dress and a gold clutch purse. Tobiah insisted that for her large open neck line, no costume glass jewel would do, not for his mother. A large marquis cut emerald surrounded in diamonds on a golden chain with matching earrings, bracelet and cocktail ring was secretly stashed away where she wouldn't see it until she unpacked her bounty. Abaisha wickedly smiled and agreed and buried the fine jewelry set at the bottom of the pile.

Abaisha was in his element and enjoying himself immensely and he couldn't wait to get his hands on these two before the show. "Better tell the tanner they need shoes for these gala gowns quickly. Silver for your sister and Gold for your

mama. They need to match, this is a formal affair.” Abaisha said and Tobiah nodded.

“Ah, good thinking. We’ll stop on the way home and make sure those are top priority. The gala is in week.” Roger said making note, knowing quite well how formal operatic and society elite galas were and how one dressed was just as important as the show itself. His tuxedo was already being cleaned and refit, he lost a little weight in recent months and he was just as vain as Abaisha was, his suits were always tailor fit.

Tobiah had already been measured and his tuxedo was being made. The measurements had been sent to Roger’s favorite tailor in New York, there was no one in Xanadu who made human style tuxedos and Roger desperately wanted to see Tobiah in one. He knew that gorgeous frame would look stunning in a nice suit and even better in a traditional tuxedo.

He’d go for a fitting in four days when he took all three of them on their first trip into the human realm. He was taking them all to his mother’s penthouse in the city for Thanksgiving. It was an American and Human holiday and one of his favorites apart from Christmas. He was an absolute fanatic over Christmas. No one would or could ever accuse him of being a scrooge.

His mother would join them in Xanadu for Christmas but for Thanksgiving she insisted they all come to New York for dinner in her last letter. She’d never missed a year where she hadn’t made a good old fashioned Thanksgiving dinner herself and didn’t intend to miss it this year.

She already knew Roger was now bonded but had yet to meet her new son in law and his family. She would not take ‘no’ for an answer. Therefore, Roger sent her back a letter saying they’d be there the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. That gave him time to get Tobiah to the Tailor for a fitting and final adjustment before they actually bloated up from over eating.

It also gave him a day to give Tobiah a quick tour of the city. If he thought New Crown City was opulent he was in for a surprise of a lifetime when he tasted New York.

He already had plans on taking them all to the centuries old tradition of the Thanksgiving Day parade before they had their meal. Then it would be another day taking them around the city in the Christmas shopping frenzy explosion the day after Thanksgiving before they headed back Saturday to rest and recover and go through their final dress rehearsal. The Gala would be Sunday evening and the first performance of “Wenceslas!” would kick open the holiday season and the Royal Philharmonic and Chorale Concert Hall would make its official debut at last.

Roger and Tobiah dropped five thousand marks in a single shopping spree and it felt incredible. It hardly made a ripple in their growing bank account. Tobiah made two-thousand marks a week and Roger, being more experienced and a director made eight thousand a week, they were quite wealthy men individually and combined even more so.

In the past few months neither of them had spent much other than on meals out and necessities. They'd been far too busy with rehearsals, so they already had most of their earnings just collecting and piling up in their joint treasury bank account they'd opened a few weeks prior. The box they had been keeping their money in was just overflowing and it was unwise to keep that much money in their home.

Tobiah had never needed a treasury bank account before and Roger was unused to not having one. Therefore, they had Calum help lug over their trunk with his magic and his protection and the treasury fell all over themselves getting them a joint account established.

Which also made it easier for Eran to pay them. He just set it up so that once a week monies from his accounts were transferred directly into theirs. Whenever they needed pocket money, they just went in and withdrew some. They had almost eighty thousand marks between them accumulated in the past eight weeks and that didn't include the five hundred thousand Roger had brought with him from New York and had converted from dollars into marks and that also did not include the money still in Roger's human back account which was still in existence and just collecting interest.

He had five million in the bank in New York earning dividends and feeding his mother's bank accounts once a month with automatic deposits. Every month he had his bank wire transfer his mother twenty-thousand dollars and he had an accountant that paid the rent and utilities on her penthouse. He also paid her credit card and car payments and insurance for health, home and car. She never saw a bill and he didn't want her to. The money in her accounts were for her pleasure only, he paid her bills out of his personal accounts.

Like Tobiah, Roger loved his mother and was adamant she not work and just enjoy life. He'd made good and was not about to let his only living relative work when he was more than capable of supporting her every whim, just like he was going to soil his husband and his mother and sister for the rest of their lives.

They didn't have children, yet. Roger was adamant that eventually he and Tobiah would adopt kids and then the spoiling would happen all over again. Roger thrived on family and he had always wanted kids of his own one day.

Naturally Tobiah and he would never have biological children, but they would have children they loved just as much and Tobiah agreed wholeheartedly that

adopting a child eventually was a certainty. He adored children as much as Roger did and Roger was already thinking of Christmas mornings with his future children and the multitude of toys and presents under the tree from Santa Claus.

What good was money if you didn't spend it on those you loved? That was Roger's way of thinking and he worked hard for his money so he could spoil those he cared about. Even if he did have to explain to Tobiah who Santa Claus was and Tobiah got a good laugh about his elves that magically made all the toys that got distributed to good little girls and boys on Christmas Eve.

Tobiah was certain he could never make a toy himself and was fairly positive he'd never met an elf under five and a half feet tall and that included those abnormally short like Gawen and Abaisha. Who were at least five foot nine inches tall.

Most Elves were always at least six feet tall and that included the women.

Tobiah himself stood an even six feet, an average height. Roger was barely an inch and half taller. Roger had explained it was an old human tradition that formed in the years the realms had been asunder and the poor silly humans had simply forgotten how tall elves were in those years.

Old traditions died hard and the magical one of Santa Claus, Kris Kringle, Father Christmas, Saint Nicolas or whatever else the myth was called was still alive for many children and would be for Roger's when he and Toby adopted them.

Roger was lost in his thoughts as Yorinda finished trying on her garments and they paid the astronomical bill that had Yorinda about ready to faint. Tobiah just kissed her cheek and reminded her not to think of money ever again.

Abaisha bid them all farewell as he shopped at last for his daughter and himself and Tobiah and Roger loaded up their arms with the clothes that were going home with them.

Maevryn assured them the Gala dresses would be done and delivered tomorrow and the rest of the finer occasion dresses by the end of the week. They were simple adjustments and would take her little time to complete.

Satisfied, they thanked her and Roger remembered to stop at the tanner and make sure to order rush gala slippers for both ladies. He promised to have them delivered in three days and he'd go over personally to the dress shop to match color so the shoes would be perfect.

Roger also ordered slippers for every one of their fancier dresses that were being tailored while he was at it, fur lined shoes to match every outfit. The tanner smiled and nodded and said he's pick up fabric swatches too and he'd have all

those and the mundane everyday variety of shoes done within a month. He'd have them delivered as he finished them.

Roger paid the bill and they continued home and arrived just in time to meet the first of the deliveries from the market.

Yorinda went right into the kitchen to direct where she wanted them all put away and Tobiah just laid her new clothes on her bed, knowing she'd want to put her own items away herself.

Tori was already dancing around her room, putting away her own new clothes and came back downstairs dressed in one of her new woolen over dresses in a dark rose and over a white linen shift. She looked lovely and warm and every inch a young lady as she went to help her mother in the kitchen and to show off her new frock.

Tobiah and Roger retired to the living room by the fire and were lost in warmth and good spirits when Tori joined them and curled up next to Roger on the couch. Chattering away gleefully as she was indulged by her brothers who simply adored her.

Yorinda called them to dinner not long after and they ate a simple but delicious pan fried fish steak dinner with mixed steamed vegetables and a creamy buttery sauce Roger had never tasted before and loved immediately. He'd never had fish he'd liked more and he inhaled his dinner much to Yorinda's delight as he praised her cooking while sipping a fruity white wine that complimented the meal.

After dinner Yorinda went to put away her new clothes and everyone relaxed by the fire talking until bedtime. Number Four Le Faye Lane was aglow with family love as the lights were extinguished and fires banked for the night.

-----

## **“Yuletide Harmony”**

*A Short Fable of The Second Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **VI - Giving Thanks for Simple Joys**

-----

The following Morning, Roger and Tobiah woke up to the smell of actual food cooking in the house and strong coffee brewing and grinned at each other as they got up and pulled their dressing gowns on and headed downstairs.

Yorinda greeted them all smiles. “Good morning dears. Coffee is ready and breakfast will be shortly. Have a seat. My I love this kitchen, this is heaven on earth.” Yorinda said as they sat at the small table in the kitchen itself. Tori joined them wrapped in her new pink robe, looking adorable all askew and Roger dandled her on his knee and got sleepy giggles for his efforts.

“Can I help Mama?” Tobiah asked and Yorinda shook her head.

“I want to be able to eat this dear, no. You can just set the table if you’re so inclined to help.” Yorinda said and Tobiah grinned and got up and found plates and forks and set the table just as Yorinda brought over fresh baked biscuits and bacon, thick bacon drippings and milk gravy peppered heavily, scrambled eggs with onions and green peppers and fried potatoes in herbs and butter.

Roger was once again singing Yorinda’s praises over a hot breakfast for a change as he and Tobiah went back upstairs to get ready for work and Tori helped her mother with the dishes.

Roger and Tobiah kissed them both goodbye at the door as they bundled up and headed out the door for work and Tori vanished upstairs herself to dress.

Rocky and Calum turned up unexpectedly not long after Roger and Tobiah left and were offering their unsolicited services to take Yorinda and Tori back home to collect the rest of their treasures and say goodbye to friends for the permanent move.

Yorinda was grateful and stunned at just how very nice and considerate and just plain down to earth the great legendary Triad of the Six were in real life and not in stories she’d heard. She’d expected them to be great Lords of somber character and like most lords, peasants were to be protected but not made into friends. Lord Dragonwise was on the council of lords and the most powerful mage in the history of Xanadu and Lord Rocky was the Triad patriarch and great Healer of men and Abaisha was the Dark Seer Oracle and Yorinda’s picture of them in her mind was drastically different.

Calum always had a tender smile and a kind word for everyone, and never acted like he had enough power to take over the entire realm if he wanted to. He was

just a young man, who dearly loved people and was as gentle in spirit as he was powerful. Rocky was always smiling and laughing and offering up jokes and making silly faces at children and giving them peppermint candy out of his pocket as they passed. Including Tori as he met her and complimented her on her new dress. She was instantly smitten as most little girls were over kind handsome men who paid attention to them and Calum was hiding his smile as he watched. Yorinda noticed and just chuckled as she wrapped up in her new coat.

“We got to meet Master Abaisha yesterday too.” Yorinda said as Tori got her coat on.

“He told us. You made his afternoon actually. Abaisha can be hard on a purse when he’s dressing up pretty ladies. You should see our daughter’s closets. Abaisha is always getting Kaisha new clothes, usually ones to match something he owns. Kaisha likes to play dress up with her Papa-Aisha and Abaisha never says ‘no’ seeing as he likes it just as much.” Rocky said as Tori got her coat on and the quartet vanished and reappeared moments later in Yorinda’s small house and farm.

They didn’t have much, but there were a few trinkets and mementos from over the years that meant more emotionally than they did financially. The pinecone wreath Tobiah had made for her when he was a little boy that always sat on the table and held candles as a centerpiece. The quilt she’d been given as a bonding day gift from Tobka’s mother, the blue river rock ring Tobka had made for her as a gift for their first anniversary, Tori’s first attempt at embroidery which looked horrible but meant the world to Yorinda. It was just a handkerchief edged in more knots than what were supposed to be roses. It was a birthing day present she’d given her mother when she had been only six years old. Things like that were irreplaceable and those went into the trunk that Calum and Rocky were packing in miniature.

Tori’s old and worn dolls went into the trunk before they both wandered into Tobiah’s old rooms and collected the items he wasn’t able to take with him before. The old silver hunting knife Tobka had given him which he had always kept lovingly oiled and protected on his nightstand table. His collection of fossil rocks he’d been picking up off the ground and pocketing since his youth. Tobka’s old tool kit he always kept under his bed in remembrance of his beloved father. Yorinda had lost count the number of times he and his father had been out repairing something together using those old tools. Tobiah had been very close to his father and he had taken his death as hard as Yorinda had.

Last came Tobiah’s squeezebox. A gift Tobka had scrimped and saved to be able to give Tobiah. They couldn’t afford a harp or a lute and Tobka had wanted to encourage his son’s love of music and he had walked twenty miles to a larger trade town to buy the simple little squeezebox that cost a grandiose half-mark. It had taken Tobka six months to save that much and Tobiah had been so joy filled

over his simple twelfth birthing day present he must have played for his parents for hours, until his little fingers were stiff and his throat sore.

That alone made the expense worth it to Tobka, his son had meant everything to him and Tobiah had always taken great care with his treasures that Yorinda gently set in the trunk as she told Rocky and Calum the stories behind each memento.

It really set in their minds just how simple some joys were. They had similar memories, but none that involved poverty. It really showed the depths of Tobiah's nature and how genuine he really was when he was showing gratitude over a simple dinner with friends or just a cup of coffee with Roger.

Rocky smiled at Calum, they were very blessed with their inner circle of friends, especially people like Tobiah and his family who never took anything for granted and lived life just for the simple joys to be found. These were the people they had fought so hard to protect and would do so again in a heartbeat if they had too.

People like Tobiah and his family made their efforts worth while and fulfilling to the soul because they were the heart and soul of Xanadu. They were the real people that lived day to day in harmony with the land around them and proved it wasn't wealth that brought joy and peace to the land, but love and honor and respect for each other above everything else.

Once they had the little house packed they escorted Yorinda and Tori around town to say goodbye and make sure the animals got divided up between the village equally. Their faithful old dog went to Gabberth since he really would hate living in a townhouse and was used to running wild in fields tending sheep.

Yorinda gave the house to the new young shacah couple that had arrived during harvest time in the village and settled and had been living in Gabberth's spare bedroom until spring until they could build their own house in the village. They were all joyfully tearful as they wished Yorinda and Tori well and soon they were back in the City and putting their treasures away as Rocky and Calum bid them both a fond farewell and returned to their own business.

Tobiah was in tears when he got home that night as he showed Roger his treasures and treated them all to a song in front of the living room hearth on his beloved squeezebox. Roger was curled up in his favorite chair, Tori in his lap as Tobiah sat on the arm of the chair and played.

Yorinda was in another chair and was happily embroidering a pair of Tori's new socks around the cuffs as she listened. This was home, it wasn't the house or the location or the luxury or lack thereof, it was her children and it was the love that filled the room. Yorinda could almost feel Tobka in the room with them, sitting in a chair and smoking his pipe and tapping his foot in time to the music.

“Do you smell that?” Tobiah asked shivering.

“Smell what dear?” Yorinda asked and Tobiah just shook his head.

“For a moment, I thought I smelled Papa’s tobacco. It must be my mind playing tricks on me. I think I’m overly tired I suppose. I think I’ll call it a night.” Tobiah said setting his squeezebox on the mantle and stretching.

“It is late, you should be in bed too young lady.” Yorinda said and Tori who had been dozing in Roger’s lap stood and yawned and simply nodded goodnight as she shuffled off to bed.

“I love her, my little lap warmer.” Roger chuckled and Tobiah grinned.

“She likes to cuddle, Aye.” Tobiah said and Yorinda chuckled.

“She got spoiled by you Toby. I don’t think she knew what a chair felt like the first five years of her life. She was always on your lap.” Yorinda teased setting down her project in the basket by the foot of her new favorite chair.

“Aye. True. I am not complaining.” Tobiah said yawning and crawling under Roger’s arm as he stood. “Goodnight Mama.”

“Goodnight dears, sleep well.” She replied as both Roger and Tobiah headed up the stairs and she followed them a few minutes later after banking the fire for the night and turning to the empty air and chair that was next to hers.

“I smelled it too Toby dear. Goodnight Tobka, you can rest now beloved, we’re all safe and sound just as you always wanted us to be you beautiful man.” Yorinda said smiling and then heading to bed misty eyed.

She almost felt his mint tobacco scented kiss on her lips as she drifted off the sleep.

-----

“MAKER MERCY! SO BIG!” Tobiah gasped as they headed out the palace gate into New York City’s Central Park mirror gate.

The massive skyscrapers had three elves standing in utter shock in the cold.

“Aye, welcome to the Big Apple. I love New York this time of year.” Narrish said as he, Eran and Willem also joined Roger for Thanksgiving at Candace Winters’ insistence.

“Aye, much fun and even more crowded and cold. Let’s get moving before feet freeze.” Eran said as the group walked the street looking at the horse drawn carriages around the park, the smell of hot dogs and popcorn and hot chocolate coming from street vendors.

Roger bought everyone a cup of hot chocolate and popcorn as they walked and they were barely out of the park when a group of teenage girls squealed and came racing over digging for paper and pens in their purses.

“Narrish and Eran Jeansai! WOW! Can we have your autographs please?” one asked and Eran smiled and took the pen and paper.

“Aye. My pleasure.”

“Wow, what are you doing in New York? There’s not a concert or something I missed hearing about is there?” Another asked and Narrish chuckled.

“Just here to spend Thanksgiving with friends, no concert.” Narrish said and Eran nodded.

“We’re not touring no, our next project is opening on Sunday in Xanadu.”

“That’s right! We’ve got tickets for the December fourteenth show! I can’t wait! Dad works for Variety and he’s been so excited since you announced you were doing a real Broadway style show!” The girl said bouncing on her tennis shoes.

“Aye. Eran here wanted to try his hand at being the next Rogers and Hammerstein. I can’t say I argued much.” Narrish said and Eran laughed.

“We’ve been writing projects together for years, we’ve just never had the chance to put them on the stage before. We wrote ‘Wenceslas’ probably fifty years ago and it’s been sitting in a drawer just as long. It wonderful to have the new Concert Hall, you can tell your father he can expect quite a bit more in the future. We have large plans ahead.” Eran said handing back her paper and pen.

“I will! Happy Thanksgiving!” She cried as she and her friends scampered off laughing.

“I do like this a lot more than touring. I like having roots down and not living in hotels and I can be a lot freer with the music when I’ve got an entire orchestra at my disposal.” Narrish grinned as the group continued down the road.

“Aye. I much prefer writing the lyrics than performing them. Truth be told, I don’t care to be singing, I want to sit behind my piano in my bathrobe writing the song to have someone else perform.” Eran said and Narrish nodded.

"You always did big brother. You only started singing solo when Staven went off and became a big shot lord on us." Narrish chuckled as they walked.

"I never knew that." Roger said and Eran laughed.

"Aye. I'm not a front man, I'm actually terminally shy on stage, and I always throw up before a concert with nerves. But I loved music so much I learned how to act calm and not betray I was in fact, scared shitless." Eran said and Roger laughed.

"I'll be damned and here I could drop my pants and prance around a stage in my birthday suit and not bat an eye." Roger said and Narrish grinned.

"Oh don't tell Eran that, he'll write you a part where you are naked as the day you were born to sing. He's evil to the core. Don't let his pretty face fool you. I know him better than that!" Narrish laughed and Willem chuckled but kept silent, he had to sleep with Eran.

"I am not that bad, but yes I have a lot of things in mind for my leads. Narrish and I wrote a great little score based on the real Arthurian Legend. The ones we have records on in the palace. Did you know Merlin was Enf' Tuvalu?"

"No. Really?"

"Aye, humans are not mages without some sort of fair blood in them, Merlin had not a drop of human blood in his bright blue veins and he was not some old man with a long beard either. He couldn't have grown a beard even with magic! It was just because he was two hundred years old humans assumed he was in fact old and bent, he was hardly older than Toby is now." Eran laughed and Roger's eyes widened.

"Sakes alive that blows many mental images in my head. Tobiah looks younger than I do!" Roger said and Eran nodded.

"Aye. He is technically much younger than you in elven years and I have every intention of doing this score next. I've even got it cast already!" Eran laughed and Roger grinned.

"Oh do tell."

"Obviously you're Arthur. Himonie will be Guenivere. Angharod Morgan Le Faye and yes she was related to the current ruling monarchy. She was Taran's father's eldest sister. She was not an evil woman as the legends have her to be, just misguided. Mordred was her son and he was not Arthur's son as rumor had portrayed him to be. He was a nasty little blood mage who just like causing trouble and rumor. Nimue however was a sadistic little bitch who ensnared Merlin and he is still sleeping under her spell to this day. Frozen for all time and not

even Staven could unweave those knots she placed on him. He tried when Willow asked him too. Willow has Merlin safe with Greeorg and Rashala in their caves. They all hope one day he can free himself from her spell.” Eran said and Roger stopped cold in his tracks.

“Really?”

“Aye.”

“Wow. So who’s playing Merlin?”

“Tobiah. It’s actually appropriate on several levels especially since Arthur and Merlin were bonded shacah lovers.”

“What!” Roger shouted and Eran laughed.

“It’s true. Arthur only married Guenivere because he needed an heir and queen and his people really rather forced him to take a queen. She was already Sir Lancelot’s lover and Lancelot and Arthur were very good friends. It was a mutual arrangement. On the surface she was the Queen; she spent her nights in Lancelot’s bed. Any child they had Arthur would claim as his own and he continued to share Merlin’s bed, they were already spouses long before he was forced to marry Guen in name only. Sadly though nothing came of it, Mordred uncovered publicly the arrangement and the people were the ones who wanted poor Guen burned for adultery, even though it wasn’t anything of the sort. It was a mess, to save her Arthur placed her in the convent and Lancelot was just as devastated as Arthur, they both loved her. Merlin was out trying to find away to sneak her out and into Xanadu when Nimue found him and stopped him on behalf of Mordred. Lancelot and Arthur were both broken men in the end. It’s really rather tragic and simply because Mordred was a bastard who ruined their lives on a lark because it amused him to do so. King Oberon finally punished him and had him executed but too little too late. Arthur, having bonded as shacah to Merlin never aged and sat constantly by Merlin’s side for almost a century until finally Oberon took pity on him and laid him to sleep beside Merlin. They are both with Rashala and Greeorg and Arthur will awake if and when Merlin does. His spell is designed to break in tune with Merlin’s. That is why the human legends say Arthur will return, He will, when Merlin does.” Eran said and Roger stood jaw agape.

“I don’t believe it! I mean I do, but wow is that different than what I grew up learning. How sad.”

“Aye. It is most sad. Since you and Tobiah are shacah I have no doubt you will bring beautiful life to the real tale and honor them. I’ll have Tanner take you to see them where they sleep. You’ll be amazed at the similarities I suspect. Roger really does resemble Arthur, even if he is a bit shorter than you and his beard

rather fuller. He's not as dark either, he's more Sandy blond on the verge of brown. Tobiah however, very much a dead ringer for Merlin. Merlin was and is very nice on the eyes with long white hair. That part of the Merlin legends were true his hair was always pure white and down to his knees. He is very beautiful." Eran said and Tobiah sighed.

"I heard he was, Papa used to tell me my Grandfather saw them once. I am surprised not I look like him, I'm sure you know Merlin's surname."

"Aye. Wrensong. You're related." Eran winked and Roger did a double take.

"No!"

"Aye. Same bloodline, not directly related. Merlin is a very distant cousin, Merlin had no children; we of the current Wrensong clan are of his brother's descendants." Tobiah grinned and Yorinda nodded.

"It's true. Mercy I thought all humans knew that tale." She said and Roger shook his head.

"No we do not, wow. My husband is related to Merlin, I'm speechless." Roger said in awe and Tobiah just shrugged.

"He was just a simple man. From what I was told, he was not an adept, just a normal Wizard master who accidentally stumbled upon Arthur when he was a youth of sixteen and being hidden with an old knight for his safety. He fell into undatta almost immediately but hid it for a few years, waiting for Arthur to realize the bond on his own. He just stayed and protected Arthur and helped him regain the throne. There was no sword in a stone but there was a sword. Excalibur was a gift from Merlin to Arthur; it had protective charms on it to protect him from a chaotic government and assassins. Arthur regained the throne of his fallen father by just being a good and decent man and fighting hard for the people. He and Merlin didn't bond as lovers until Arthur was twenty years old and into his manhood and he finally recognized the bond he felt for Merlin was much more than it seemed on the surface." Tobiah told the tale as he'd learned it from his father.

"Aye, it took Merlin getting sick from denial of undatta and worrying Arthur to death. That trait seems to run in the Wrensong family Toby. You would have done that to yourself too." Eran scolded and Tobiah shrugged.

"Aye. But that is past and I am happily mated to my Roger." Tobiah smiled dipping under Roger's arm and squeezing his middle.

"I want to read this legend, the real one. I am utterly fascinated now." Roger said as they reached the building his mother lived in and he rang the bell and she buzzed them inside the security door.

"That's really it, Arthur was just a very good king and an astute leader. It was Arthur who united Britain based on his leadership and wisdom. Merlin's magic was just to protect him from harm he wasn't powerful enough to seize a throne for his Shacah, just strong enough to keep the man safe and entertain men with tricks and fancy. The rest was mundane tragedy in a time when humans did not understand same sex bonds and refused to allow a King to reign without a Queen or heir. It was also a dark time for women who were property and had no say in their own lives. Guen was a pawn and Lancelot and Arthur tried to give her freedom of choice and in the end they all paid for it because of one man's warped sense of humor and one woman's adept powers that bested a mere wizard and trapped him when all he wanted to do was help those he loved." Eran said as they rode the elevator up and Tori was fascinated with the buttons and the sensation of movement.

"This should be a movie on the big screen!" Roger said and Eran's eyes lit up.

"Oh, now there's a thought! Let's give it a run through on the stage first. We'll see how it's received first, but you're right, this would make a lovely movie!" Eran said and Tobiah cocked his head.

"What's a movie?"

"I'll show you love!" Roger grinned as they arrived at his mother's apartment and everyone was ushered inside with joy and kisses.

A little Pomeranian dog bouncing with excitement at their feet and Tori was immediately on the floor playing with the small breed of dog she'd never seen.

"Oh I love her! She is so cute! I never saw a dog so tiny before! I love puppies!" she laughed as the dog licked her face wagging her tail.

"Muffin loves attention, she'll be your new best friend sweetie if you keep loving on her like that." Candace said watching the girl play happily with the dog and Roger grinned. He knew what he was getting her for Christmas now; she was having a ball playing with the dog on the floor with the ribbon out of her hair.

Tobiah noticed Roger's gaze and chuckled. He knew Roger was buying something in his head. "You're going to get her one aren't you?" Tobiah whispered and Roger nodded with a wink.

"Aye. Every kid needs a dog to play with, something that little is perfect for a girl and for in the house when we don't have but a small scrap of yard off the back."

“True. She’ll love you for it. She adores dogs and cats. She’ll miss our dog, but he was a working animal and not an indoor pet. I must say I miss our Braka too. He will be happier though staying at home than trying to live in a city. He’s old and would not have made the move well.” Tobiah said and Roger nodded.

“Let me just grab my coat and purse and we can be off. Roger said he wanted to show you all around first. I thought Rockefeller Center would be nice, can the little one ice skate?” Candace asked and Tori looked confused,

“What’s that?” She asked and Eran laughed.

“Maker, you’re all making me relive the first time I came to the human realm with Staven! Come on dears, the learning is just as fun as the doing! I could go for ice skating myself, I haven’t been in twenty years or more!” Eran said and everyone bundled back up for cold and headed out again. Stopping in Roger’s tailor’s first so Tobiah could have his fitting.

Roger was making faces of ecstasy as Tobiah came out of the dressing room in his new dove gray tuxedo. “God you look fantastic Angel! I am so going to buy you more suits. Hubba, Hubba!” Roger cheered and Tobiah smiled as he adjusted his coat and looked at himself in the mirror.

“These do fit nice. I always liked your suits, I never thought of wearing them myself.” Tobiah said taking in his reflection.

“Mr. Wrensong as a nice shoulder line which makes a suit hang nice on him. I won’t have to alter much; the measurements you sent me were most accurate. I just need to make the trousers dress properly.” The tailor said kneeling. “Which side do you dress on sir?”

“I have no idea what that means.” Tobiah said honestly and Roger laughed.

“He wants to know which side of the center seem you prefer to hang your tackle love.” Roger said and Tobiah laughed.

“Ah, I see. To my right.” Tobiah said and the tailor marked the fabric on the left to take in a little leaving more fabric on the right for dressing. Tobiah went back into the dressing room to put his breeches and tunic back on and came out and handed the Tuxedo back to the tailor.

“Give me fifteen minutes to make the last adjustment and you can take this with you.” The tailor said running to the back and coming out with the tuxedo nicely boxed and ready to go.

“Thanks.” Roger said paying for the suit and picking up his alteration at the same time and paying with his credit card and nodding his head to the blue Italian double breasted suit in the window. “Do you have that in his size?”

“I do. I have a dark wine colored one too.”

“Really? Think I can get you to tailor two more suits by Saturday?”

“For you Mr. Winters absolutely. You’re my best customer.” The tailor grinned and Roger smiled.

“The blue for Tobiah definitely. Wine is a good color for me. Please pick out nice matching ties, you have the nest eye for that and I’ll pick them up Saturday morning before I head back.”

“Done. What about shoes?”

“Shit, I forgot shoes. Toby needs some for both suits, he only has his boots.” Roger slapped his forehead and made Toby sit down while the tailor brought out a nice pair of Dove gray leather dress shoes.

“He’s a perfect size ten. The tailor said measuring Tobiah’s feet and then pulling out dove gray socks to match and had Tobiah try on the shoes.

“Oh these fit nice and feel good too.” Tobiah said walking around a little to try them.

“Good.” Roger said paying for the socks and shoes. “Match a pair of shoes to our new suits too please. I’m still a twelve wide.”

“Aye. Mr. Winters!” The tailor said grinning and handing Roger the bag. They door chimed merrily and the group was on its way again down the packed streets.

Candace was sitting with Yorinda babysitting the tuxedos on a bench as she watched her son try to teach Tobiah’s little sister how to ice skate.

“Your son is a wonderful man. He has made my Toby very happy and he treats us like his own. You should be most proud of him.” Yorinda said and Candace smiled.

“I sure am. He always had a heart the size of a mountain. I’m happy to see him happy for a change. His last boyfriend was disgustingly horrible and he used to make me so furious how he took advantage of Roger’s generosity. He had no respect for anyone, not even his own parents who turned him into the spoiled brat he was. All Roger ever wanted was someone to really love him and a family

of his own. He's alive at last. Not to mention I think Toby is just adorable! What a smile he has, his whole face lights up when he smiles." Candace said and Yorinda nodded.

"He has his Papa's smile he does. Given freely to all often, Tobiah as a baby was ever smiling and happy with cheer and he never cried unless he was hungry or needed changing. He was the light of his Papa's life he was." Yorinda said and Candace laughed.

"Roger was like that too when he was a baby. All bright eyes and laughing at everything. A sneeze would get him giggling."

"Toby was like that too. His Papa just had to belch and Toby thought that was the funniest thing the man could do. Needless to say, propriety was offended much in my home just so Tobka could make Toby laugh."

"What fun! Men will always deny being suckers for babies and they are the first to make themselves look like idiots to entertain them."

"Aye. Roger reminds me much of my late husband. He loves children as much as he did."

"Very true. Roger is always doing something for kids, especially around the holidays. Last year he spent Christmas Eve dressed as Santa and singing for the children at the hospital and telling them stories and bringing presents. He's a big softy where kids are concerned."

"Tobiah is like that too. We only had but a handful of children in our village, but Toby was always telling them stories and making time to play with them, his sister most of all. He spoils her very much."

"Looks like Roger is taking a turn at that as well. I can tell he adores her. She's darling."

"Tori is a bright girl and she never knew her father, Tobiah has always been a surrogate father to her and she has taken to Roger immediately. Their laps are ever full of her." Yorinda laughed and Candace chuckled.

"Nothing better for a little girl than cuddle up in a big strong lap. I think we all did that to our fathers growing up. I know I did, hell, I was twenty-seven before I stopped sitting in my father's lap and that was just because he got too sick. Poor thing, he died of Cancer about twenty years ago now. He was the male role model in Roger's life. Roger's father left us when Roger was two. We haven't heard from him since. We moved back in with my Father and Roger adored his grandfather. He took it really hard when Daddy died. Thankfully Eran came into

our lives right after and Roger had him as a role model to look up to. We are quite blessed.”

“Aye, we all are. Thank the Maker.” Yorinda said wincing as Tori tripped over her skates and took Roger down with her. He was laughing flat on his back as Tobiah skated over slowly, not used to skates either but doing better than Tori.

“That looked to have hurt. You alright?” Tobiah asked and Roger just laughed and grabbed Tobiah’s hand as he stood.

“Fine. Only thing bruised is my pride.” Roger said as they helped Tori up.

Narrish skated out. “You’re all pathetic! Here, give me the fair lass, I’m without a partner.” Narrish said taking Tori around the ice as Roger took Tobiah around.

It was a wonderful afternoon for all as they finished and headed out to dinner together before heading home.

Tobiah and Tori sat fascinated like children around the large television set watching an old movie enthralled at the images moving on the glass window.

It was magic to them. Eran laughed. “That’s my brother Rhain playing my brother Staven. They made this movie two hundred years ago right after the realms reunited. Staven complained they could have found a better looking bloke to play him in the movie.” Eran said smiling at the memory.

“Rhain was vain as a peacock. Even Abaisha can’t hold a candle to our brother’s vanity. He would have adored Aisha.” Narrish said smiling sadly.

“Rhain, that’s Rocky and Abaisha’s son’s name.” Roger stated.

“Aye, they named him after our Brother. The Tanaocktu sadly killed him during the last war. We still miss him.” Eran said sadly and Willem took his hand to hold.

“We all lost those we loved. Thank the Maker those dark times are over.” Yorinda said as they watched Rhain on the television and remembered lost loved ones as they enjoyed their first encounter with movies and television in general.

“Amen.” Was all Willem said wrapping an arm around the loved one he very nearly almost lost too. Eran had been very close to death when Calum and Rocky found him and it had taken many years for him to regain what he’d lost.

He still sometimes had terrible nightmares and he’d spend all night clinging to Willem for comfort.

Willem was glad Anatole was dead; he still wanted to kill that man himself for what he had done to his beloved Eran.

Eran still had scars on his body from his torture and it had been almost three years before he had been able to have sex again without being thrown into a nightmare memory and recoiling in horror from touch.

Thankfully those wounds were gone and only the nightmares remained and they too were becoming less frequent. Time healed all wounds eventually.

Willem kissed Eran's temple as they curled up on the couch together watching the movie with the others, comforted with love and family around them now that peace had returned again.

-----

Thanksgiving Morning was an event; They all bundled up at an obscenely early hour and headed downstairs with lawn chairs to stake out a place to sit for the parade.

Tobiah and his Mother and Sister sat eyes transfixed and enthralled and never blinked once as the parade passed by in front of them. Tobiah's favorite parts were the marching bands, Yorinda loved the beautiful floats and Tori kept going on and on about the huge balloons wondering how they stayed aloft and didn't carry the men away with them.

They kept talking about the parade all through dinner preparation as Tobiah was introduced to his first American football game on television. Narrish was a big fan and Tobiah just kept wincing every time a man got tackled.

"They must get hurt often. My it is a violent game." Tobiah mused as Narrish yelled at the set for his team to get off their lazy asses.

The TV was switched off for dinner and Roger began the traditional round of giving thanks. "This year I am thankful for my wonderful Toby who gives me smiles and love every day, I am thankful for my friends and my health and my fabulous job, my family, my home and wonderful food. I am truly blessed." Roger began and then his mother took her turn.

"I am always thankful for my wonderful son, my health, my home, my new son in law and family, our friends and that we can come together every year to share in a good meal and good times." Candace said and Eran smiled.

"I am thankful to be alive and to be surrounded by those I love and who love me. I am never lost with their light to guide me. I am thankful for music which lifts my

soul and brings me joy. I am thankful for my Willem who supports me everyday with love, I too am blessed.”

“I am thankful for many things too numerous to name them all. I thank God I get to wake up every morning next to you and to live every day with you.” Willem replied and it carried on around the table and ended with Tobiah.

“I am thankful to be given a chance to learn and to grow. I am thankful for the gift of music that I may share with others. I am thankful for my family and that I am able to provide for them as I have always wished too. I am most thankful for my Shacah who makes my every day new and an adventure to be embraced. His love sustains me in sorrow and fills me with joy. I have been truly blessed and pray I may give him as much as he gives me.” Tobiah said and Roger leaned over and kissed his cheek.

“Angel, you do. Now let’s eat.” Roger grinned and Tobiah smiled.

“Aye.”

Dinner was an event. Roasted Turkey and cornbread stuffing with raisins, baked beans in brown sugar, yams in cinnamon, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes with herbs, gravy galore, cranberry sauce, mixed peas and carrots, and sweet Hawaiian bread rolls filled the table to capacity and bowls clinked and chimed as the food was passed from hand to hand.

“Don’t forget to save room for dessert! I made baklava, mincemeat, apple and pumpkin pies!” Candace said and Tobiah looked green but joyful.

“I will attempt every one!” He said gleefully as he poured gravy over most of his plate. He loved gravy and so did Roger it seemed who followed suit and drowned his meal in turkey gravy.

“I am amazed this holiday has not made it into our realm! What a wonderful day. We should give thanks for our blessings occasionally and what better way than over a feast. My goodness I must have your recipe for the green bean dish. Marvelous!” Yorinda said and Candace grinned.

“You won’t get that in Xanadu. It’s cheap canned soup, French fried onions and tinned beans. All cheap store bought cans but put together they sure do taste good. I’ll make sure to hit the stores and send you a care package of the ingredients. It’s very simple to make.” Candace said and Yorinda nodded.

“I love the yams with the white things. What are those?” Tori asked and Narrish laughed.

“Marshmallows. Yet another wonderful human treat unavailable in Xanadu. I love them toasted on graham crackers with chocolate. S’mores should be a food group in and of themselves. Eran remind me to hit the store before we go home so I can buy some.” Narrish asked and Eran nodded.

“I want to stop and pick up some contraband too before we go home. I must feed my cravings for Cheese doodles and sour cream and onion potato chips. I’m all out.” Eran said and Willem groaned.

“I want peanut brittle and peanut butter cups. I don’t care what kind.” Willem grinned and Roger laughed.

“Pork Rinds and Salsa. I haven’t had a pork rind bender in ages.” Roger said and Eran smiled.

“Oh god, that sounds good. I never put those two together.” Eran said and Roger grinned.

“Salsa was made to be poured on Pork Rinds. It’s artery clogging heaven on earth.” Roger grinned and Tobiah just smiled. He had no idea what any of them were talking about but was learning that eventually he’d find out.

“I am fairly certain the foods you speak of are probably all quite unhealthy.” Yorinda said and Roger smiled.

“They certainly are and wonderful.”

Yorinda shook her head. “I thought as much. Men are just little boys with bigger stomachs.”

“That’s the truth!” Candace laughed as they chattered away happily over dinner.

After dinner everyone adjourned to the living room with Pie and coffee and Tori and Yorinda insisted on helping clear the plates and Yorinda was fascinated with the kitchen and a magical compliance known as an industrial dishwasher.

“Trust me, Roger won’t go forever without electricity. They make generators that will power individual homes in Xanadu who want to convert to electricity, I see them advertised all the time here. I know Roger’s been looking into it come spring. Remind him you want one of these baby’s. He’ll forget.” Candace said and Yorinda smiled as she packed the dishes in and turned it on.

“I will not forget. Such a marvelous invention!” Yorinda said turning to marvel at the refrigerator that Candace was stacking leftovers in. “As is this, no food going to waste and no milk spoiling.”

“Unless you forget it’s in here.” Candace said smiling as they turned to join the men in the living room and putting on old movies again to enjoy over pie and more conversation.

Friday was the shopping day blitz. From Fifth Avenue to Broadway, Roger was a buying fiend. He bought an entire array of Christmas decorations for the townhouse, including several small power generators to power his lights, all forty-seven boxes worth. He had garlands and tinsel, ornaments, wreaths, and a fake tree that looked sinfully real since real pine made him sneeze. He had everything crated and scheduled delivery for Saturday afternoon. From there he suddenly disappeared for about an hour and came back looking smug.

“Where did you vanish to?” Tobiah asked and Roger grinned.

“Buying you Christmas presents of course! Can’t have you with me now can I?” Roger laughed and Tobiah shook his head.

“I suppose not. You spoil me.”

“Of course I do. I love you.” Roger said as they hit the town like madmen and everyone spent money like it was going out of style.

They spent a final night with Candace and all headed back to Xanadu the following morning.

All of Roger’s crates arrived just after noon while he and Tobiah were going through a final dress rehearsal.

Yorinda had the crates stacked in the living room, not having a clue what most of the items even were.

Roger and Tobiah were home by three and Roger tore into the boxes like a boy into a cookie jar.

By the end of the night he had the generators installed and fired up. The tree was put together and he let Tori decorate it with all the ribbons and bows, garlands and ornaments and the beautiful crystal star in a multitude of bright colors.

She was having the time of her young life as Roger wound thick pine garlands and lights up the banisters on the staircase and placed another on the mantle. He put lights around every window and was dangling like a fool with a death wish from the attic window as he put lights on the eaves.

The house however by the time he was finished was a winter wonderland of festive color and joy. Roger was a man who loved Christmas time and wanted to

make it last as long as he could. The Christmas season for him started the Day after Thanksgiving and didn't end until well after New Years.

He had a crowd watching him from the street. All his neighbors coming out to watch the crazy and odd human decorate his house with magic lights that twinkled.

"So beautiful! We can get those lights in the human realm?" One asked as Roger came down the ladder as he finished hanging lights around the upper story windows.

"Yup. Power generators aren't too expensive; you'll want at least three or four little ones to run all the lights. I'm kind of excessive but I love lights." Roger grinned as he talked to his neighbor.

"But so festive and welcoming it is! It lights up the whole street with mirth and good cheer! You are going to start a trend Master Winters. I am going tomorrow I am for my house!" Master Weathering said, the shipping guild master that lived next door with his wife and four young daughters who were eyeing the house and giggling.

"Come inside and take a look at the tree. My shacah's little sister is decorating the inside, your girls would probably enjoy helping." Roger said inviting his neighbors inside and sure enough five young girls ranging in age from six to seventeen were all joyfully decking a tree in lights and color. While the adults watched and ate gingerbread cookies and drank coffee and tea.

Master Weathering was already jotting down notes of all he'd need to buy to deck out his home and the invitation to help decorate his in a few days was extended and accepted.

Number Four Le Faye Lane gleamed like a beacon of Christmas Cheer as the occupants finally called it a night and went to bed.

-----

## “Yuletide Harmony”

*A Short Fable of The Second Six from The Chronicles of Xanadu*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### VII - Peace on Earth, Goodwill Toward Men

-----

The Concert Hall was filled to capacity with men and women and lords and ladies all dressed in seasonal finery and splendor. Yorinda and Tori were seated in the royal box seat itself with King Taran, Queen Anna and the rest of the elite nobility by special invitation from Abaisha who wanted them to have wonderful seats to see Tobiah.

A hush fell over the crowd as the house lights dimmed and the orchestra came to life with a grandiose overture of music that filled the room and the curtain's opened to show a youth playing a minstrel, dressed in black and holding a lute. He was the narrator of the story and a young boy of about fifteen, he did not sing but spoke to those assembled in the audience.

“I am here to set the stage for a tale. The words to the carol ‘Good King Wenceslas’ were written by John Mason Neale and published in 1853, the music originates in Finland some three-hundred years earlier. This Christmas carol is unusual as there is no reference in the lyrics to the nativity. Good King Wenceslas was the King of Bohemia in the early tenth century.” The boy began nodding his head in time to the music.

“History has written that Good King Wenceslas was a Catholic and was martyred following his assassination by his brother Boleslaw and his supporters, his Saint's Day is September Twenty-eighth, and he is the Patron Saint of the former human Czech Republic. St. Stephen's feast day was celebrated on the twenty-sixth of December which is why this song is traditionally sung as a Christmas carol.

According to legend, the original Premysl was a plowman who married a Bohemian princess named Libuse during the eighth century. Their descendants eventually united the warring tribes of Bohemia into one duchy. The first known Premysl ruler was Wenceslas' grandfather, Duke Borivoy I, who made Prague Castle the family seat. He married a Slav princess named Ludmila, and both eventually became Christians. Borivoy and Ludmila tried to convert all of Bohemia to Christianity, but failed. When Borivoy died his sons, Ratislav and Spythinev, succeeded him. Ratislav was Wenceslas' father.

Wenceslas was born in the year Nine Hundred and Seven in the castle of Stochov near Prague. The castle is gone now, but there is still an oak tree there that was supposedly planted by Ludmila when Wenceslas was born. His nannies watered the tree with his bath water, which supposedly made the tree strong. The church Wenceslas attended also exists today.

At first Wenceslas was raised by his grandmother, Ludmila. Then, when he was about thirteen years old, his father died. Wenceslas succeeded him as duke. However, because he was too young to rule, his mother, Drahomira, became regent. Drahomira was opposed to Christianity and used her new power to persecute followers of the religion. She refused to let Wenceslas see Ludmila because she was afraid they would scheme to overthrow her. Not long after Ratislav's death, Ludmila was murdered at Tetin Castle -- strangled, it is said, at Drahomira's command. After her death Ludmila was revered as a saint.

However, the loss of his grandmother did not stop Wenceslas from seizing power. At the age of eighteen he overthrew his mother's cold regency, just as she had feared, and began to rule for himself. He was a stern but exceedingly fair monarch. He stopped the persecution of priests and tamed the rebellious nobility. He was known best for his kindness to the poor, as depicted in later verses of the carol we all know today. He was especially charitable to children, helping young orphans and slaves.

Many of the Bohemian nobles resented Wenceslas' attempts to spread Christianity, and were displeased when he swore allegiance to the king of Germany, Henry I.

The duke's most deadly enemy proved to be his own brother, Boleslav, who joined the nobles who were plotting his brother's assassination. He invited Wenceslas to a religious festival and then attacked him on his way to mass. As the two were struggling, Boleslav's supporters jumped in and murdered Wenceslas.

'Good King' Wenceslas died on September 20, 929. He was in his early twenties and had ruled Bohemia for only five years. Today he is remembered as the patron saint of the former Czech Republic." The boy set the history and then smiled.

"There is more to the story of Wenceslas, more you that you will not find in history texts but can be found archived in Xanadu. Wenceslas was more than a good man that was loved by his people. He was also just a youth who loved once too just as you and I do. His greatest love was not some great bastion of power but a simple orphaned lad who was Wenceslas' most steadfast companion. Percival was English and had been kidnapped and sold into slavery and then freed by Wenceslas not long after he seized the throne. This is a telling their story. One not told before. It is a Story of love, of hope, and of tragedy." The boy said as the lights came up on the stage.

Tobiah, dressed as a simple servant scrubbing pots and singing about his great King and how honored he was to be serving such a benevolent master.

*Oh what a lucky lad I am, taken from the cold like a poor lost lamb.*

*The king on his horse was just passing by  
And saved poor Percival from his slaving pig sty*

*Now I live in warmth, meat at every meal  
Boots for my feet and woolen blankets so nice to feel.*

*It is my honor to serve my King.  
For he treats each and every one of us as if we were He.*

Angharod was watching him and came over to sing Tobiah's praises.

*Lad I have been watching you since the King brought you hence  
Never a harder worker has come in from the forest fence*

*The King needs a servant to stand by his side  
I appoint you young Percival for your loyalty with Pride.*

*Go be off with you my fine young man.  
Report to the King and be readily at hand!*

Tobiah raced off the stage and the scene changed to show King Wenceslas standing by his window, looking out at the falling snow troubled.

*How long must my people suffer?  
Is there nothing I can do to buffer?*

*All summer long a scorching dusty plain  
A poor autumn harvest and now facing a Wintry bane.*

*I fear in my bones we face harder times.  
I fear I will not be able to provide.*

Percival was standing off to the side and stood.

*Sire, dearest Sire please worry not I pray.  
You trouble your soul each and every day.*

*I sit and I watch and my heart does pale  
There is naught you can do in the face of nature's gale*

*You sit and you fret and you weep in the night  
Sire please let me ease your blight.*

*Percival, sweet lad you do bring my heart joy  
Your faithfulness makes you my most loyal boy.*

*I worry for the others out there in the cold  
I wish to bring them all within the castle fold*

*I would build a thousand castles if it would do my people good  
I would plant a thousand fields if God wished that I should*

*I know not how to battle nature that is true  
And I cannot help but ponder my choices until I am blue*

\*

*You do yourself harm my Sire and much do I fear  
On your sheets every morning I find buckets of tears*

*Who comforts you when you comfort us all  
Sire, dear sire I would weep should you fall*

*Love you I do Sire from the depths of my Soul  
Please let your Percival help shoulder Woe*

\*

*Percival, you already do help ease my strife  
With just your simple presence in my life*

*Each morning I rise with your smile to mark my day  
Each night I am to bed with your words that hold darkness at bay*

*The tears only come when you must take flight  
I am lost now without you my Percival of light.*

\*

*Then Nary shall I leave you to face the night  
By your side I will stay to give you light*

*For a light to us all you are my Dearest Sire  
Your humble Percival will protect you from Ire*

*I will fight any Demon from the Queen of the Snow  
I will face any danger that winter can throw  
I will stand by your side and be thy shield  
For I love you my King and I am yours to wield*

\*

*The fight is mine, my dearest one  
But to have you by my side makes me feel I have won*

*Love you I do my Percival true  
I feel I can face now what makes me blue*

*Your strength and your courage gives me new hope  
Together we will face the night and stay afloat.*

King Wenceslas wrapped his arms around Percival and together they watched the snow falling outside the window of the castle as the lights dimmed and the scene changed to a wintry landscape and Himonie dressed in white furs pranced about the stage.

*Fools do you think you can best my power?  
Winter is my dominion under the star shower*

*Huddle by your hearths as my wind rapes your fields  
Shiver under blankets as my ice nips your heels*

*Demons of cold and of hunger and of pain are mine to make men fall  
They come at my bidding and tonight is a free for all!*

*King Wenceslas you will never beat my game  
Try as you might, your people are my prey to lame*

*Cling to your manservant your time runneth short  
Destroy you I will when his life becomes my sport!*

Himonie pranced about the stage cackling as men dressed as demons flew about the stage at her command like wraiths and specters.

Winter's chill gripped the stage and men and women huddled together in bleak hunger. King Wenceslas and Percival were keeping warm by the palace fire when Wenceslas stood and walked over to the window. The choir filed onto the sides of the stage.

*Choir: Good King Wenceslas looked out  
On the feast of Stephen  
When the snow lay round about  
Deep and crisp and even*

*Brightly shone the moon that night  
 Though the frost was cruel  
 When a poor man came in sight  
 Gath'ring winter fuel*

\*

*Wenceslas: "Hither, page, and stand by me  
 If thou know'st it, telling  
 Yonder peasant, who is he?  
 Where and what his dwelling?"*

\*

*Percival: "Sire, he lives a good league hence  
 Underneath the mountain  
 Right against the forest fence  
 By Saint Agnes' fountain."*

\*

*Wenceslas: "Bring me flesh and bring me wine  
 Bring me pine logs hither  
 Thou and I will see him dine  
 When we bear him thither."*

The scene changed to Wenceslas and Percival walking through thick snow, the wraiths dancing around them.

*Choir: Page and monarch forth they went  
 Forth they went together  
 Through the rude wind's wild lament  
 And the bitter weather*

One wraith gripped Percival and kept him back, slowing his steps.

*Percival: "Sire, the night is darker now  
 And the wind blows stronger  
 Fails my heart, I know not how,  
 I can go no longer."*

\*

*Wenceslas: "Mark my footsteps, my good page  
 Tread thou in them boldly  
 Thou shalt find the winter's rage*

*Freeze thy blood less coldly."*

Percival nodded and shook off the wraith and stood taller trusting Wenceslas implicitly. The Choir immediately burst into jubilant song.

*Choir: In his master's steps he trod  
Where the snow lay dinted  
Heat was in the very sod  
Which the Saint had printed*

*Therefore, Christian men, be sure  
Wealth or rank possessing  
Ye who now will bless the poor  
Shall yourselves find blessing*

They fed the man and his family and it was during the trek back to the palace Himonie appeared at Percival's arm.

*The night grows colder for you young Page by his side.  
My wraiths of death kissed you and marked you as mine.*

*The world is dark and grows darker still  
Your Good King has enemies growing bitter and chill*

*His own brother seeks his death with great zeal  
Come springtime the dogs will be nipping at his heels*

*He will be ripe for the picking and his young heart will be cold  
For you young page will be gone from the fold*

*Already thy breath grows weaker from cold  
Come the morrow thy fever will be most bold*

*You will shiver and quake and Poor Wenceslas will ache  
Blame himself for the choice tonight he makes*

*Left you behind he should have done and no mistake  
To save one peasant the one he loves most he forsakes.*

*Think not I care for mortal love torn asunder  
My duty is winter and balance and thunder*

*To the light I am night and we must ever take turns  
The light gives us you as the candle flame burns*

*The candle goes out when Wenceslas dies  
I give back to the light when Boleslaw flies*

*Each and every one of you dances to a tune  
Tonight the music comes from my moon.*

The crowd was on the edge of their seats weeping as Wenceslas and Percival sang their final duet. The one that Roger and Tobiah had sung together the very first night they met.

Roger was holding Tobiah in bed as he lay dying of fever and they were both fighting real tears as they sang Percival's soliloquy.

*Do not leave me love I pray.  
Only you keep my darkness at bay!*

\*

*Wenceslas, my love the night grows colder now  
Obey you I would if I knew but how.*

*To each there is a time and a love and a season  
We had little time but we had it for reason*

*Faith you must keep and you must not weep  
Waiting for you I will be when it is your time to sleep*

\*

*That gives me no comfort I failed you my love  
Warm I should have kept you now you are weak as a dove*

*If I could give you my crown to keep you safe  
I would cast it aside at the postern gate*

\*

*Aye, that I know and that I love most of all  
Your heart knows no bounds even in fall*

*Winter has come to me and I die in your arms  
Stay strong my love, bless thy people with your charms*

*Gone I may be from this mortal coil  
But every death brings new seed to soil*

*Spring comes to all faithful they say  
You are a saint among men, Seize the day!*

\*

*Even now you comfort me when it is I who should comfort you  
Percival my dearest you have ever been most true*

*I will honor you as I try to live on  
But Percival, it is hard to think of you gone.*

\*

*I know my love, but I will never be far.  
I live on in your heart and shine in the stars.*

Percival went limp in Wenceslas' arms and Roger was indeed weeping real tears as he clutched Tobiah to his chest.

Everyone in the audience had been captured by Tobiah's bard gifts and even if he hadn't poured out his soul into song with added magic he still would have had everyone sobbing with his rendition.

The show ended with Wenceslas' murder and the entire Choir came out on stage for a final number. Percival and Wenceslas dressed in white robes standing in the center of the stage.

*To each and all we say a prayer  
For Peace and Love to reign without care*

*The Dark does come to seize the day  
And the light this time must give way*

*But have faith one and all for the darkness never lingers  
Another will come and bring light to the singers*

*It is an ever changing season of Hope and of Hate  
It takes us all to dance the tune of Fate*

*Remember the ones who bring Light like a flame  
They are your beacon when Night comes to blame*

*Follow the light and the path becomes clear  
Peace on Earth, Goodwill toward men and to all good Cheer*

The room erupted in a standing ovation and Abaisha was blowing his nose and weeping and clapping and cursing his mates. Calum had been the wraith holding Percival and Rocky had been Boleslaw.

“Oh god they didn’t tell me they were the BAD GUYS! I’m going to kill them!” Abaisha wept and Yorinda laughed through her tears.

“I cannot watch my son die again even it is just pretend. That tore my heart out.” Yorinda said accepting a tissue from the Prince who was seated beside her.

“Tell me about it. Maker Mercy he ripped my heart in half!” David said blowing his nose too as he escorted his weepy mother out followed by Taran who shook his head.

“I am going to beg Eran to do a comedy next, just to spare my innards. My stomach was in knots most of that performance.” Taran uttered as everyone adjourned to the palace proper for a Gala night in celebration of the opening of the Concert Hall.

The Gala assembly cheered as the cast members, changed from their costumes and dressed in finery arrived.

Tobiah and Roger were the last to arrive, dressed in gleaming tuxedos. Roger in austere black with a single red rose on his lapel. On his arm was Tobiah, his white hair free over his shoulders and dressed in dove gray, a white rose on his label.

Everyone cheered and clapped and made a joyous ruckus as the stars of the show walked arm in arm down the stair case smiling.

Anna was immediately at their side. “Oh my word, I cried my eyes out! So wonderful I have never seen anything so magical in my life! I am utterly a fan now of you both. Oh I cannot wait until the next show now! I daresay I must see it again!” She cried and Tobiah bowed.

“My Queen you honor us greatly. I am humbled by your praise and I will remember to send you tissues to your box my lady if that pleases you your Majesty.” Tobiah said and Anna laughed.

“I will need them for sure! Oh mercy I’m going to cry again just remembering the show. Fabulous, just remarkable!” Anna gushed as Taran joined her.

“I must agree with my wife. Even I had to imbibe in the use of many tissues. I met Wenceslas as a youth, hardly more than ninety-five I was. You did him a great service tonight. Roger I could see him in you and Tobiah, Percival you are indeed. He was such a gentle man. We lost them both so young, but they live on

now in you. I am very pleased.” Taran said and Tobiah and Roger both bowed. It was hard to sometimes to remember Taran had lived a very, very long time. Even if his actual age was just under four hundred, for a thousand years he had been trapped under a curse that had frozen him in time as a wooden doll.

Taran had been born in the year eight hundred and twelve and if anyone knew the actual history of that era, Taran did.

Mab had frozen him in the year nine hundred and ninety-eight and he hadn't been released from his curse until nineteen hundred and ninety-eight when Anna had set him free with the birth of their son, David, over two hundred and five years ago.

It was staggering sometimes to be confronted with fair folk. Taran had a very unique perspective on things having lived in the dark ages as well as modern times.

He was just as good a monarch as Wenceslas had been if not infinitely more so and Roger was honored to be just standing in the man's presence.

“Oh thank you Sire. I am most joyful I could please you Your Majesty.” Tobiah said enthralled and Taran just smiled.

“I am too, I'm speechless.” Roger said and Taran winked.

“So long as you're both not song-less all is well. Please enjoy the Gala with my gratitude and do remind Eran I want a comedy next. I don't really like crying in public, it's bad for my image.” Taran winked and Roger laughed.

“Too true. I'll keep your secret Sire.”

“See that you do my good man, see that you do!” Taran said clapping Roger's shoulder and turning to talk with a group of nobility.

Calum and Rocky appeared with David and Abaisha carrying drinks.

“I see you live. You were worried about Aisha's reaction.” Tobiah grinned at Rocky who rubbed his arm.

“I live and have a welt in the arm to show for it.” Rocky grinned and Abaisha snorted.

“Serves you right for murdering Roger!”

“He's alive as you can see. It was a fake sword.”

"It's the principle! You could have warned me I was going to have a heart attack! Between Calum's kiss of death on poor Toby and you skewering Roger I was in tears! I hate you both for making me cry!" Abaisha moaned and David chuckled.

"Hey, I was crying too, I think everyone was sobbing great buckets of tears during that last duet. Feck me! Percival's death scene was bloody murder to watch!" David said and Tobiah laughed.

"It's supposed to make you cry Your Highness. I can hardly sing it myself and I know I am just pretending. It's Roger; he starts to cry and sets me off. It is most hard to sing with a tight throat." Tobiah said and Roger nodded.

"Sorry, I can't help it. I am right in front of the bard gift Tobiah I'm getting it full blast on top of having to look at my real life shacah looking like he's dying. You try not blubbering like a baby! I certainly can't." Roger said and Calum chuckled.

"But he's learned to tone it down with my teaching. He only lets rip during that number, imagine the rest of the show if he didn't keep his gifts down to a trickle. We'd need paramedics on hand." Calum said and Roger nodded.

"So true." Roger said as Tori ran over in tears and embraced both men hard enough to almost topple them over.

"So mean! You didn't tell Mama and I you were going to die!" She sobbed and Tobiah hugged her.

"It would spoil the show dearest. As you can see it is just pretend, Roger and I are most fine my love." Tobiah said as Abaisha handed her a tissue.

"I cannot watch that again. I am most thrilled to see you on the stage love, but my heart cannot take that scene again." Yorinda said hugging her son, just to make sure he was indeed still breathing.

"Aye Mama. I know. Did you enjoy it though?" Tobiah asked and Yorinda smiled.

"Oh maker aye! Both of you sing so beautifully and I am much in favor of the King's desire to see a comedy next. While this show leaves you with Peace and Hope in your breast, getting there is taxing to the extreme emotionally. I want to laugh next time." She said and Roger chuckled.

"I'll pass on the reviews. Eran must be pleased. He's been dying to see this show on stage, especially after he became bonded to Willem. Willem is Bohemian." Roger said and Yorinda gasped.

"Really? I wondered where his accent was from." She asked and Roger nodded.

“Yup. Willem was born in Prague and was baptized in the Church Wenceslas attended. The show took on a whole new meaning for Eran after he met Willem. Willem was instrumental in giving Eran details to add to the show, Willem wrote the opening narration. Originally it just opened with Percival in the kitchens. Willem thought giving an actual history first would help set the stage to remind people that what they were watching, while done fancifully in song, is based on a very real person.” Roger said and Yorinda smiled.

“Fascinating, truly inspiring.” She said as other people came by to congratulate the performers.

Musicians came in and provided music for dancers, wine flowed and food filled buffet tables all along the walls. It was a grand Gala and everyone of importance was there from both realms.

Roger and Tobiah had been interviewed during the Gala by every newspaper, magazine, music critic and gossip columnist before the night was over.

Eran was aglow as he came over. “Mark my Words Roger. Come morning the review papers are going to be covered with both your praises. The buzz is very good. I’d bet my last dime you both are looking at Tony nominations. You nailed it!” Eran said and Roger smiled.

“You should get the Tony Award Eran. Good God, you had everyone dying in there. I’m supposed to tell you from the King he wants a Comedy next.” Roger said and Eran laughed.

“Taran already cornered me and punched me good right in the gut. The fecker. I told him to suck it up.” Eran grinned and winked.

“You didn’t!” Tobiah gasped and Eran smiled.

“Oh Aye. Taran and I go way, WAY back. I can get away with telling him to piss off. Thank the Maker!” Eran laughed High as a kite.

“Are you gonna give him a comedy?” Roger asked.

“Of course. I only tease, if he wants a comedy I’ll write him one and he bloody well knows I will too. I also got word from the box office about ten minutes ago. The first show is a success we already knew that was sold out, but the best news is, right after we finished the board lit up with people booking a second showing and then the messages started coming in from the human realm. We are sold out until Christmas! Unbelievable! Even Narrish and I don’t sell out that fast. We are in the black lads! We made our investments back already! I’m stoked! We’re in business well and truly.” Eran said and Roger whooped.

“Hot damn, that is good news. I was waiting to hear that, come spring I’m renovating the house for electricity since I’m going to be here a while it seems.”

“Oh Aye. You two had better NOT be planning on going anywhere! You’re my stars I need you here damn it!” Eran said and Tobiah smiled.

“I am doing what I love most in the world with the one I love most, of course I am ever staying!” Tobiah cheered as they hit the buffet tables in bright spirits.

-----

December flew by with nightly performances Wednesday through Friday, two shows on Saturday and a Sunday matinee. Mondays and Tuesdays were the cast and crew’s days off and the days Roger and Tobiah spent shopping for presents for each other and the family.

Christmas morning Roger leapt out of bed and raced down the hall pulling Tori out of her bed and flinging her over his shoulder. “Let’s go see what Santa Claus brought you dearest!” Roger cried. He’d spent all night wrapping her presents to surprise her with the next morning. Heading downstairs with her special present he’d had in his room all night, it couldn’t be placed under the tree for long. Tori knew of course Roger was her Santa Claus beneficiary but she laughed brightly just the same as Tobiah followed them down the stairs in his robe laughing at his exuberant mate.

Roger sat Tori down and handed her a moving box with holes in the top, that gift had only been in the box a few minutes and needed to be opened immediately before the present inside got too scared.

Tori opened the box as squealed as a tiny white Pomeranian puppy made up of not much more than downy fluff with a red ribbon for a collar burst out the box into her lap.

“A PUPPY! OH MAKER, she’s so CUTE!” Tori cried picking up the puppy that was licking her face and wagging a little tail and barking sweetly.

“What are you going to name her?” Tobiah asked curling up with Roger on the couch sipping his coffee and watching his sister play with the puppy. Roger was filled with joy and it was making Tobiah drunk feeling it in their bond. Roger was intoxicating when he was this happy.

“Aleah! She so pretty!” Tori cried as Yorinda settled into her chair smiling.

“You mustn’t forget to feed her and give her water and make sure to take her outside to go sweetness. She’s not a toy.” Yorinda said and Tori nodded.

"I know. I never ever forgot to feed Braka. I won't forget my Aleah!" Tori cheered as the puppy began playing with a discarded bow on the floor.

"There's more from Santa under this tree too. Oh look, here's one for Toby." Roger grinned getting up and pulling out another present.

"Roger, you are most funny my Santa." Toby said opening up a beautiful pale blue Armani suit with matching tie and shoes. "Oh my, another suit how gorgeous! You are spoiling me Roger!"

"You look hot in a suit, I'm spoiling myself!" Roger laughed pulling out a box for Yorinda and handing it to her.

It was a picture of a brand new kitchen. "What is this?"

"Everything in that picture is yours. In March the whole place is getting renovated and Mom told me how much you liked her appliances I made sure you're getting only the best. The kitchen will be remolded top to bottom for you." Roger said and Yorinda cheered and got up and hugged her son in law.

"Candy you must come for a long visit to teach me all the gadgets." Yorinda said turning to Roger's mother sitting on the couch.

"Of course I will! We'll have a ball and feed the neighbors too while we're at it!" Candace said and Roger passed her a present.

"A Jaguar! You bought me a CAR?" Candace said taking out her picture and a set of keys from her box.

"You said you liked it over Thanksgiving when the commercial came on. I ordered it right from your phone while you were in the bathroom! It's sitting in your carport right now." Roger grinned and Candace threw her ribbon at him.

"You insane little piece of shit! You spend too much money on me baby. I love it, but Dear God a CAR?"

"I love you mom." Roger said leaning over to kiss her as Tobiah got up and dug a present out for Roger.

"Santa's turn. From me to you dearest." Tobiah said handing Roger a gift and he tore into paper and in his box was a beautifully embroidered tunic and breeches in intricate elven knot work patterns in deep reds and gold, crushed velvet and satins. "You are not the only one who thinks his mate is nice looking. I have been dying to see you dressed in clothes from this realm. You will look wonderful in that color. Dark reds very much suit you beloved."

“Angel, this is beautiful. The detail in this is fantastic! Who made it?”

“Maevryn makes more than women’s clothes. I had her make it for me.” Tobiah grinned and Roger kissed his cheek.

“I’ll put it on for you after presents.” Roger said as more gifts got passed around and everyone spoiled each other rotten with a myriad of gifts both large and small.

Christmas dinner was a feast that this time Candace had to pause and compliment Yorinda’s cooking. Nothing store bought or canned sat on her table. Each pea had been shelled from the pod, each potato peeled and mashed. The ham glazed with Yorinda’s secret honey recipe, the cauliflower in cheese sauce made from scratch, loaves of hot bread fresh from the oven. Yorinda had been preparing for days and it showed.

Dessert was plum pudding in custard, bread pudding, rice pudding, treacle and sponge cake. It was a heavenly cornucopia of delights that had made the entire house smell divine for days on end.

Tori was feeding bits of her ham to her puppy on her lap wrapped in childhood seasonal bliss. Tobiah was floating on cloud nine dressed in his new suit as he stared a hole in his mate who was dressed in his new fancy blood red tunic. Roger’s joy that was feeding his bond and mixed with his love for the man across the table shone in Toby’s eyes and Roger paused to smile at him.

“You look happy Angel.” Roger said and Tobiah nodded.

“Oh aye. I have never been happier in my life. I am blessed with a good meal, a wonderful family and a Mate I think is perhaps the most handsome man I have ever seen. You look wonderful beloved.”

“So do you. Where’s mistletoe when you need it?” Roger asked and Tobiah got up and walked over and kissed him soundly.

“You never need mistletoe to have me kiss you dearest.”

“Now that’s a Merry Christmas gift indeed. Come here Angel!” Roger said sweeping back Tobiah in a deep kiss that had the women at the table clapping and laughing.

Tobiah grinned as he was released from Roger’s kiss and he sat in his husband’s lap and reached for a goblet off the table and held it up in a toast.

“To family, to Friends to love that never fades. May we all be blessed and may the joy we feel today linger everyday!” Tobiah said and Roger raised his glass.

“Here! Here! Merry Christmas everyone!” Roger cheered.

“Merry Christmas!” Everyone replied in kind, even the puppy barked as they drank a toast and indeed shared a very Merry Christmas together as a family.

That night as they lay in bed, Tobiah wrapped around Roger and sighed. “I love you my Roger. You make life so wonderful. I need not ask to know you had a merry day.”

“I sure did Angel. I sure did. You know what would make it even merrier?” Roger asked and Tobiah grinned.

“Aye.” Was all he said as he blew out the bed side candle and proceeded to love his mate merrily and joyfully as the snow fell outside their window in peaceful counterpoint to the yuletide warmth being shared inside and under silken covers.

In Number Four Le Faye lane, Peace on Earth and Goodwill toward Men reigned supreme as masculine laughter could be heard softly coming from being closed doors while the rest of the house slept unaware and content.

END