

A New Home

Adaega knocked on the door to Ernard's room. She had just come from her lunch meeting with Elodie and Lady Reinhart, feeling positive about where things were going. Checking on the knight who had helped her so much thus far just felt right before proceeding to accomplish her tasks for the day.

Perhaps the man would want to join her.

The dark-skinned sun elf opened the door and his beautiful eyes—hazel with gold flecks—looked at her. His short, sponge curls looked great as if he had just done them. They really framed his soft, almost unnaturally perfect face. *Sun Elves... Why do they gotta be so damn pretty? Elodie too... that girl...*

“What are you thinking about?” Ernard asked, amused. He held a cup of water and drank from it as she responded. *Why must he look so cool and collected?*

Adaega tilted her head. “Just considering everything I need to do for Lady Reinhart and the Center.”

The man smiled and raised his brow. “You *did* knock on my door, you know.”

She frowned. “I am aware of that.”

“You *can* just call her ‘Sloane’, you know.”

She huffed. “Ernard...”

Adaega knew that she could and *did*, but only when in her presence because the woman specifically requested it, but it felt wrong. Adaega came from a nation where nobility didn't just intermingle with the commoners. In fact, *everything* was different. It was taking her so long to come to terms with it all, and losing herself in her work was an *excellent* distraction. *That and looking at Ernard's beautiful face...*

A face that gave her a *look*.

Adaega blushed. “I know. It just feels off. It’s simply a cultural thing.”

Her—The knight did not look convinced. “You call her Sloane when you’re talking to her and call me by my name just fine, Adaega.”

“Yes, but that is at her insistence and in her presence. She has a title and is my boss. It’s respectful when describing her in a professional setting. I do not wish to become overly informal with her.”

Ernald sighed, mumbling something before he drank some of his water.

“Will you be able to join me in meeting Elodie and the others? We’re going to move everything to the Center today. Perhaps you can bring the guards to tour the area as well.”

“I haven’t finalized the roster of guards, yet. I am still working with the ones I have.”

Adaega gave Ernald a bemused look. “Really, Ernald? You told me the requirements you thought we needed. You have that many remaining.”

“I do have a list of more.”

“Yes, and if they are needed you can hire them. Tell you what, why don’t you bring them along? We can put them to work helping us unload what we have. Then they can spend the next week getting familiar with the campus.

“You are my head of security, after all. I think you need to be familiar with what you are *securing*.”

“You have some valid points, but we have to *own* it first,” he said.

Adaega gave the man a victorious smile. “But of course. Elodie is going to go meet with the city official shortly. You ready?”

Ernald turned up his cup and drank the last of his water before wiping at his face. “I am now.”

“Good. Let us go, kind knight.”

They walked back to her room so that she could grab her cloak and put it on, followed by her gloves, having taken them off when she had returned earlier in the day with Sloane and Elodie. The weather was getting colder and colder, and she was happy to not have to travel when winter came. She did not envy that of the other knights and her fellow human.

The city was nice—like something out of a fairy tale, and Adaega was excited to explore it.

Adaega and Ernald made their way out of her room and down into the inn's main area. She noticed the raithe, Kemmy, with her dark purple skin, speaking with Elodie by the back door. The sun elf woman looking perfect as usual. She sighed.

"You are doing it again," Ernald whispered.

She turned and scowled up at the man. "Doing what?"

"Being self-conscious."

"*I am not!*" She hissed at him.

"Adaega, you are a beautiful woman."

She felt her cheeks flush, forcing her to look away. "Fine. I cannot help but feel this way around all of you perfect elves and your perfect looks. I do not know how *Sloane* does it." *Probably because she's gorgeous as hell. And tall. Damn it.* Unlike Adaega's own one-hundred sixty-five centimeters.

"Adaega."

"Fine. I am done."

"Good. Now let's talk to them."

Adaega nodded.

The two turned toward them as they approached, the younger sun elf perking up as she did.

"Adaega! You caught me just in time. I was about to leave for the city clerk. It may be a few bells before we are ready to move everything over," Elodie said.

"That is no issue, we will have everything ready for when you return." She turned her head toward the purple woman. "It is a pleasure to see you! Is Rel around or are you down here solo?"

Kemmy and Rel had mostly kept to themselves since arriving, but Adaega did know that they had registered with the local Alchemist Guild so that they could continue their trade along with sourcing supplies to get started on their work. Unlike Koren, the two women did not like to join in with the rest of them as they ate or relaxed. Which was fine, but Adaega did want to get to know them a bit more.

The raithe smiled. "Hello, Ms. Adaega. Rel is actually loading our things into the wagon. Ms. Elodie was just telling us that we have found a location, finally. We wanted to be ready when you called upon us to move everything over."

Adaega nodded. "That is good! Does she need any assistance? And have you seen Koren?"

"I think Koren may actually be outside already, Ms. Adaega."

"It sounds like you all have a head start on me. I will go get the guards; can we meet you back here?" Ernald asked.

Adaega nodded. "That will work."

"With that, I will leave as well. I believe we are heading along the same route, may I join you, Ser Ernald?" The firey-eyed beauty asked.

Adaega narrowed her eyes, but Ernald gave her a quick look that made her roll her eyes. *I am not jealous!*

Maybe a little.

Ugh!

Ernald turned his head to face Elodie, but kept his body toward Adaega. The unconscious gesture made her feel good. "You said you were going to the city clerk's office?" he asked.

"I am, yes. I need to file the paperwork and authorize the transfer of funds from the Banking Guild. Then we will receive the deed and take ownership of the *campus*, as Sloane calls it."

"We will be awaiting your return, Ms. Romaris," Adaega said, instantly regretting her tone.

The sun elf looked slightly taken aback.

Adaega winced. "Sorry, Elodie. I did not mean to be rude. I mean, we'll be ready for you when you are done. Lady Reinhart is finally taking a break, so it would be nice to have everything done by the end of the day."

Elodie gave a strained smile. "Yes, of course. I will see you soon, Adaega."

Ernald sighed and bid her goodbye, followed by Elodie giving her another hesitant look before they started walking away.

Kemmy whistled. "You have got it *bad*, Ms. Adaega."

Adaega whirled on the woman. "That is enough out of *that*."

Kemmy smirked. "Oh, don't worry. I won't hold it against you. He *is* a handsome man."

Adaega sputtered.

* * *

With one last bag, they were finally done packing the wagons. Koren heaved the rattling sack up and handed it to Rel, who took it and placed it off to the side, straining as she bent awkwardly at the waist to lift it.

"You should lift with your legs, not your back. You will be less prone to long-term injury," Adaega stated, looking over at the orkun woman as she moved a crate of smithing tools to the side, ensuring it wouldn't fall off the wagon.

The orkun woman looked up in thought, before shrugging. “That makes sense, thank you, Ms. Adaega.” She looked at Koren. “What is *in* there?” Rel said, rubbing her back.

“Some test metal for Lady Reinhart. She inscribed a rune called **[Amplify: Mass]** which takes something that would normally be quite light—”

“And increases the weight and density of the material. I can see the benefits of that in many situations. However, having a way to trigger the rune would likely be far more beneficial,” Adaega opined.

The orkun smith nodded. “That is *exactly* what I said the first time I tried to lift it when she wasn’t around.”

She chuckled. “Yes, I can see that as an immediate benefit. This is an interesting subject. I can’t wait until we can explore it further.”

Rel coughed, still standing in the back of the wagon. “Are we done?”

“Yes! Sorry, Rel,” Koren apologized.

The woman hopped down and Adaega looked around. Both wagons were loaded up and ready. She had even made them put some of their personal items into the wagon; the campus would have much better security than the inn. Having a safe place for their belongings would be welcome.

For the next half hour or so—she still struggled with the whole bell system—the group sat around the wagons and waited. Rel was quite talkative, but Kemmy was pretty reserved and often only spoke when directly addressed. One thing Adaega noticed was that the woman wasn't too eager to discuss her projects in public when they came up, which was good, because so much of the Center hinged on her.

Adaega would need to spread awareness of the value of information and invention secrecy. Something she had learned was quite important post-war, especially with the threat of communist spies back in her world. The cold war constantly threatened to go hot. She had faith in her nation though, after all, the war would have been lost if not for institutions such as the one where she had been the operations director.

I wonder how they are doing without me. We had many government research projects running.

As they waited, Adaega took the time and spoke about some of the broad ideas for the Center and promised to discuss more when they arrived in a more private setting. Kemmy caught on to her intentions quickly.

The sound of a large group of people approaching assaulted her ears, and she turned to see Ernard and the entire House Guard prospects, all in mismatched equipment and armor. *That is something that we will need to rectify. Need to talk to Lady Reinhart.* She sighed when she considered her own appearance. *That is something that I will need to rectify. I need proper clothes and to see if there are any sun elves that can help me with my hair.*

She had so much to do.

Ernard greeted them and it made her feel better to be in the man's presence again. Elodie had indeed gone to work on purchasing the property and would meet them there. Adaega took a moment to introduce herself to the guards and spoke briefly to the two senior guardsmen.

Stefan also came out of the inn and seemed surprised to find them all out there. "Always a pleasure to be invited to such gatherings," the man said, his voice dripping with sarcasm, once he joined Adaega and Ernard.

A glance at Ernard and she realized that they had forgotten about the raithe. *Sloane did mention he should stay with us.*

"Sorry, Stefan. We are preparing to head to the campus. I assume you are joining us?"

The man shrugged. "I suppose. Lady Sloane is out with the knights." He glanced at Ernard, then raised a brow. "The rest of the knights, I suppose. They're all out drinking while you're here with us commoners working."

Ernard chuckled. "It is no bother. While I still may be a part of the order, I am currently under contract with House Reinhart."

Adaega jerked in surprise. "You finalized a contract?"

The sun elf smiled. "Sloane gave Elodie authorization to do so. We completed it last night while you were walking around the market. It still needs to be filed, but that will require the House esquire to do so."

She narrowed her eyes, ignoring the jealousy that desired to emerge from its cavern like a dragoness on the hunt. "We do not have a House esquire, currently."

Stefan laughed. "Looks like something else for the minions to accomplish... Ah, damn. I'm a minion now, aren't I?"

He seemed oddly content with that statement as he tapped a finger over his lips.

Ernald shook his head. "Weren't you always a 'minion', *Blade*?"

Stefan scoffed but did not take the bait, instead, he snapped his fingers.

"I actually know an esquire here. She is fairly reputable, so she may be out of our ability to fund... that is if she would even consider joining a House. At the very least, she may be able to point us in the right direction," the suave raithe explained.

Adaega nodded. "We can pass that on to Elodie when we meet her at the Center. For now, is everyone ready?"

A smattering of nods came in response, to which she smiled before hopping up onto the wagon, calling Ernald to join her.

The knight gave out orders to the two senior guardsmen who then split the twenty guards into two groups. The other members of the House mounted up, with Koren taking over as driver of the supply wagon and Stefan seated next to him. It wasn't long until they were ready to depart.

Ernald hopped up and sat on the bench to her left, giving her a look filled with kindness and empathy.

Adaega took a deep breath. Her circumstances had changed drastically since the man seated to her left saved her life. Saved her from that *torturer*. The memory of that day was still vivid. That crazy woman had just finished another session of questioning with her when they

heard shouting and signs of fighting. The crazy raithe torturer had produced a long, narrow dagger and stood waiting, gesturing to the sole guard in the room to prepare as well.

Ernald had been the first knight to enter the room, blood was splattered on his otherwise gleaming armor, the blue fabric torn in places, and a look of pure determination. The guard had acted quickly, but it wasn't nearly enough. The sun elf had run the moon elf through after only two loud clashes of their blades. Adaega remembered how that woman had rushed at Ernald with the dagger, attempting to take him by surprise when he was looking down at the guard that had collapsed.

Adaega remembered how she cried out in fear, thinking how this knight in shining armor would be another victim to die right in front of her. The blade had come so close, but it was as if Ernald had simply lured the woman in with a false sense of hope. A belief that she would be able to overcome him. In hindsight, it was laughable. Ernald had moved with such speed that Adaega could not even see his hand blur as it grabbed the wrist of the woman. He glanced at Adaega and then down at the instrument of her pain, terror, and hopelessness.

Ernald had yet to tell her what he said to the woman, but the terror that overcame her torturer was *satisfying*. The resounding crack of the raithe's wrist as he broke it and the clattering of the fallen dagger? Icing on the cake. Adaega stared in awe as the man dispatched the evilness in the room with a cold efficiency that had surprised her.

She had begun to hope. She could still taste the tears when the dark-skinned elf told her that 'Giallo is the color of the sun,' followed by asking if she was Claire.

The simple and sincere question brought a rueful laugh out of her, only because it reminded her of the moon elf that had come and promised that someone would save her. Adaega hadn't believed the man, for no one else from this world had been kind, especially not the moon elves. So she lied and told him another name when he asked. She remembered her flash of fear as she thought that it would make the sun elf suspicious of her, and reluctant to help her because of the lie.

The look of compassion and understanding Ernald had given her in response was all she needed. He had carefully helped her out of the straps that were tightened around her wrists. He gave her his cloak and wiped away the blood from her face, and told her everything would be alright.

When the other knights entered, she nearly collapsed in fright, but Ernald was there speaking softly, helping her to calm down.

The red-headed telv, Ser Maud, had taken one look at her before rushing over and with the gentleness of someone who knew how to heal and care, used magic to mend her wounds. *It's too bad it only worked for the physical ones.*

She had sobbed, frozen and overwhelmed, but Ernald carried her out of those dungeons. They had made their way through a city that was under attack. They had risked their lives to save her.

Then she met Lady Reinhart. Another human, but from another Earth. The woman was intelligent, kind, and determined. A woman who was on a mission, and Adaega could only hope that she was able to succeed. The noble had been so understanding and accepting, with a willingness to provide whatever Adaega needed. That night, after the Lady had accepted Adaega into her House... Ernald had held her as she cried. She could find a new home and finally be safe.

Later, when Ernald made the decision that he would stay with her, she was filled with such feelings of happiness and acceptance she could not remember ever feeling before. He had *saved* her and then he had *chosen* her. They would make a home together in Marketbol. She would help make the Reinhart Center into something he would be proud of and show that kind knight her worth.

Her thoughts came back to the present as Ernald gently grasped her hands before taking the reins from her. She looked up into his eyes and smiled, her heart full. Ernald smiled back and gave her a wink.

Adaega felt as if she could have melted right then and there.

She smiled even as a tear slipped down her cheek.

He's perfect.