

Part 20. Jeremiah



Reading Eva's recommendations cast her farther away, not closer.

The sentences didn't make sense, as Russ strung her prose together in a way unfamiliar to Jeremiah. Satire, as Naltag explained, was a common form of writing in the past.

"What's mean?"

Jeremiah poured halfway through the first Russ tome, but his brain resisted absorbing any of the words.

"A josh, a jest, to show truth."

Truth.

Jeremiah grasped at the word. Truth was rarely forthcoming from anyone or anything, and he was happy to come across some. If only he could ken the truth Russ was trying to give him, or shout at him, as some of her words did.

At q-time, Jeremiah ignored Ordinance. It was accidental, but as the situation progressed, he went with it, and couldn't say why. Later, he would blame Russ, Naltag, Eva, anyone. As events unfolded, he blamed only himself.

Marme served the standard. Jeremiah didn't mind it. On the contrary, her serving food was the natural order of things. And so the meal happened naturally, with everyone chewing stoically, each finding a spot on the table to focus on.

Kilah changed the routine. She was always anxious, but Marme would remind her to quiet the condition before sup-time. Tonight's chat hadn't helped, as she click-clacked her fork against the plate, not eating. A small smile played on her lips. Jeremiah could tell her thoughts from the smile. The excitement of visiting the Archiver's enclave remained. Q-time was far from her thoughts. What she must be seeing were tomes, and the letter "R."

"Ross, Robert Stevenson, Ron!"

She muttered each syllable, but in the silence of the kitchen, she was practically screaming.

"What words, child?"

Da spoke, with Marme waiting her turn.

Kilah's excitement was catching, spreading like a fire. Jeremiah's forehead beaded over with sweat. His sister seemed on the verge of spilling the entire tome adventure, and so he kicked her swinging legs. She barely registered the bump on her shin.

"R!" She forgot herself.

Da's frown deepened.

"What's mean?"

Kilah was only five, and couldn't help it. Jeremiah needed to protect her, and himself, before she exposed the day, her reading skills, Naltag, everything.

"More hydro!"

Jeremiah's voice boomed, low-pitched but panicked. It didn't sound like him. He cleared his throat.

"Hydro, please, Marme." He offered his cup for her to re-fill, but Da shook his head.

"Let Kilah fetch. Good practice."

Her excitement deflated when Da passed her the cup. "Da?"

She watched the cup as though it might explode.

Jeremiah was reminded of feminine training, of Eva's early training. Kilah was bound for much of the same, bound in a literal sense, but not all the way. Not yet. The dampened mood from his sister was all it took to push him to break ordinance. While her excitement had worried him, the lack of it scared him more. He bet Darden never felt excited anymore.

"Got it."

He plucked the cup from table. At the hydration dispenser, he filled the cup a er fumbling but once. It was his first time using the pneumatic device. The repercussions of his actions had yet to hit him. Until Da did.

The sharp cut at the base of his neck caused him to drop his cup. Water splashed his quads and legs. His head throbbed, and he couldn't think, couldn't move. Da never struck him. Never.

"To your dorm."

The words unfroze Jeremiah, and he rushed from his humiliation.

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