

## Part 5. Jeremiah



"First day, and you're muckin' it up."

Jeremiah collected leaflets from the floor. He glared at the girl sauntering by. It was the second time she had spoken to him out turn.

She was older, marme-age for sure, but just. Her reason for being there was unknown. Women weren't archivers. Women weren't anything.

His arched to be outside the archiver's walls. All he wanted to watch was the enforcer training he had passed on his way in. Two of his neighbors had been chosen as enforcers, and he swallowed the lump of jealousy at the thought of them. Their muscled trainer looked much more capable than Jeremiah's.

Quentin was slight of build, balding, with a greasy nose. Wherever he went, he carried leaflets or an archiver's tech pad. He was no one to emulate. Jeremiah preferred an enforcer's stick or a groundskeeper's tools over leaflets.

"You hate 'em?" The girl was staring down at him.

"What?"

She nodded at the sheets in his hands. "Leaflets. You hate 'em. Your face was naked a sec ago."

"Don't hate 'em."

It wouldn't do to let anyone, especially a woman, know that he disliked his assignment. If Da got word, he'd get a whippin'.

"Glad of my assignment." He thought on it. "Honored."

She chortled. "Dunna seem it."

Before he could ask her what she was doing in a man's domain, the archiver bustled in with an armful of leaflets.

"More for copyin'." Quentin laid them carefully on Jeremiah's work space, noting the mess on the floor. "No droppin'. These leaflets can't take much."

Jeremiah flushed red. "Sorry, sir. Won't repeat."

He piled the last of the fallen stack next to the new arrivals.

"Name's Evangeline. Eva for short." The girl crouched next to him, smiling. She began picking up leaflets.

Jeremiah neglected to o er his name. When Eva handed him leaflets, the tension in him subsided. Her mischievous smile reminded him of Kilah, and despite the alarms sounding in his head telling him not to, he returned the smile.

"Jeremiah," he told her.

"Hello, Jeremiah." Her smile persisted, bolstering the shine of her black hair and rosy lips set against smooth mocha skin. "I'm the archiver's assistant."

At that information, a small explosion went o behind his eyes.

For the rest of the day, he couldn't look at her. He couldn't speak to her. The position of assistant anything was especially unorthodox for a woman, and she was yet-to-be legitimized with marme-hood. How had she attained an honorable position reserved for men?

What was most confusing was her position itself. Assistant archiver was to be his assignation, once he earned the title. Then he would move on to journeyman, and finally, Archiver. However, it would be hard to reach the top with Eva in the way.

She strutted around, confident, playfully smug, and she knew what being an archiver entailed. Her presence diminished him. He wondered why his father had helped assign him to a dead-end position. Jeremiah wished she was a man instead. It would be easier to be near her if she were a he.

Somehow, he managed to not drop any more leaflets, but he couldn't stop tripping over his quads. The archiver threw him disappointing looks, while Eva seemed to pity him.

"My first day, I was jumpin' too."

Jeremiah pictured her with shorter hair and a hairy face.

"Not jumpin'. Need new quads."

It was half true, so no bells rang in his head about ordinance. The answer didn't hold with Eva. But, she was kind enough to not press him anymore.

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