

The Non-Human Society

#Chapter 3 - Two - Vim - Snowfall - Read The Non-Human Society Chapter 3 - Two - Vim - Snowfall

Chapter 3: Chapter Two - Vim - Snowfall

Lomi ran around me, huffing loudly as she wore herself out.

The snow was starting to get packed, especially this far up the mountain, so she wasn't running as quickly as she had been the day before. It took her many seconds to round me, and some effort to walk in the snow.

She tripped, most likely over something buried in the snow. She landed face first, and her hat fell off which revealed her auburn ears.

Watching her, I waited a moment before saying anything. Sure enough, her head popped up out of the snow and showed a happy face as she laughed. "A rock!" she said, as if it was a new friend.

With a sigh, I wondered how she had so much energy. "You alright?" I asked.

"Yup!" she returned to her feet, and grabbed her hat. Wiping the top of her head clean of snow, I watched the way her ears twitched. "I've never been this way," she said.

"I'd hope not. Over this mountain is a large forest, where our friends are... but this mountain is neither their territory or yours," I said.

"Whose is it?" she asked, jubilant. Was she going to return to running around?

"A large cat. Bigger than me. It's also very rude," I said.

"Oh? One of us?" she asked, excited.

"Ah... no. This cat is a real animal. Not like us," I said, I should have been more specific earlier.

"Oh..." she hesitated, and no longer looked as if she wanted to run around anymore.

"It will leave us alone. It doesn't like me much," I said to her, wondering if she was worried.

Lomi smiled at me, and stepped closer. I noticed the way she had to step high to walk through the snow. She wasn't used to it.

"Here," I stepped towards her, and she didn't hesitate in allowing me to pick her up.

Putting her on my shoulder, I huffed and picked up the pace. I was going to use this moment as much as I could. She had refused my offer of help not too long ago, which had slowed us down quite a bit.

"Why doesn't the cat like you, Vim?" Lomi asked, her voice sounded a little odd coming from above me.

"I chopped off a part of its tail once," I said.

Lomi stiffened, and I wondered if she related. She didn't have a tail, as far as I knew, but that didn't mean she didn't take offense to such a thing like many of our kind did.

"Why?" she asked further.

"To stop it from doing something bad. It was my last attempt to convince it to leave the group I was with alone. I'm glad it worked, or else I'd have chopped more than a tail," I said.

"Oh... how much of its tail did you chop off?" she asked, still intrigued.

"Uh..." I tried to remember. It was quite some time ago. "About half," I said, after a moment of thought.

"Wow... did you eat it?" she then asked.

"The tail?" I asked, glancing up at her.

She nodded with expectant eyes.

"No. Tails are mostly bone. At least, cat tails are."

Lomi giggled, and I wondered if it was because she found it odd I'd even consider such a thing.

Trudging through the snow, I was glad she had finally allowed me to carry her. We had made more progress in the last few minutes than we had in thrice as many. Though that wasn't just because of her inability to traverse through the heavy snow, but also because she had been playing around and got distracted often.

It was odd how she was so similar to a fox. Inquisitive and playful, almost to the point of annoyance.

Our kind weren't always so similar to what we resembled.

"Who are we meeting? The ones in the forest?" she asked a new question, abandoning the cat.

"Elks. Or at least that's what they call themselves. There's a family... or herd? Of a dozen in the forest south of Klantor. We'll stop there before heading into town," I said.

"Elks? The deers?" she asked.

"A type, yes."

"Do they have horns?" she asked.

"No. But their teeth are a little... odd. You'll notice and see, when we meet them," I said.

"Teeth? Of all things it's their teeth that are different?" she asked, amused.

"Sometimes it's something like that. Yours are just ears, Lomi. You don't even have a tail do you?" I asked.

"Mommy said her parents all cut off their tails, which is why we don't have any," she said. I noticed how easily she spoke of her mother.

"Did they?" I asked, and wondered how true it were. A part of me said it made no sense, nor could, yet...

Yet for us, maybe it could.

"That and your hair is a little thick, isn't it?" I said, remembering. Her hat couldn't cover it all up.

"Is it?" she asked, worried.

Choosing to switch conversations, lest I made her self-conscious, I pointed to the mountain in the distance before us. "See that mountain?" I asked her.

"The white one?"

"That's Snowfall. The highest mountain not just in these parts, but really anywhere for some distance," I said.

"Oh? How much higher is it than this one?" she asked.

"Probably ten times the size. The snow is just now starting to stack here, yet look at that one. Already entirely white," I said.

Lomi hummed as she studied the far off mountain, and I was glad the change in topics had worked.

It's only been three days since I had found her in that well. It took her only one to stop crying, and by the second she had smiled again.

Was it just because of her age, or was she simply doing her best, I wonder?

Even for our kind, children weren't usually so... capable. In fact I've known many children who remained so for much longer than a human would. There was a young boy in one of our societies villages in the south, who still looked and acted like a young child even though old enough to be a grandfather. Probably something to do with his heritage. Turtles were said to live a long time.

"Is it named snowfall just because it has snow fall on it?" she asked, and I was surprised she was still focused on that mountain.

"No. A long time ago a massive avalanche destroyed a huge city. Killed thousands of people. The snow fell so fast and hard, that it shook the world. It's been called that since," I said.

"Huh..." she went into thought, and I glanced at a nearby owl. There weren't that many trees up here, but it was perched on one of the biggest.

It glared at us in a way that told me that was its home. It wanted us away from it. Though it might just be because it smelled the one on my shoulder. Foxes hunted such things, after all.

"Hungry yet?" I asked her.

"No."

"Let me know when you get hungry," I reminded her again.

"Is that owl following us?" she asked.

Looking up, I watched the large wings flap as it flew around us. "For now," I said.

The snow shifted beneath me for a moment as I studied the bird. It looked far larger up there, in the sky, than it had perched on the tree.

"Can I stay with the deer people?" she then asked me.

Blinking, I turned my head enough to look at her. Her red eyes glistened as they stared at me, and I realized she was not as childish as I had thought her.

"No. Unless you desperately want to. To the west of here, a few weeks away, is a farming village. There is a family of your kind there, amongst a few others of our kind. I'll be taking you there," I said to her.

"A fox family?" she asks.

I nodded.

"Why didn't they live with us?" she asked, and I wondered if it was childish curiosity or something deeper. Something wiser.

"They are very good friends with another family, a pair of snakes. They chose to settle down together, in the same location. I'm sure they've met your family before, long ago, but they were... or are, just happier where they are at," I explained.

"Oh... Is it safe?" she asked.

"Actually it is. It's not far from a large city. They're far enough to be ignored and peaceful, but close enough that no humans ever doubt their existences. It's odd how it works, but it does," I said. I myself didn't care much for their methods, but honestly it was better than most.

If our kind wanted to survive... we needed to adapt. To become more than what we were. To be more than basic animals.

I wasn't going to say such a thing to this little girl though.

"I see," she whispered, and returned to staring up at the owl which continued to follow us.

Hopefully it'd not follow us for too long. I didn't fear any kind of hunter or pursuer, but anyone for miles could track us because of it.

"It will still be your choice, Lomi. If you don't like it there, I'll take you elsewhere... and again and again, until you find a place to call home," I said gently.

Lomi looked back down at me, and smiled. A sad one, which reminded me she had just lost her home in one of the most painful ways possible.

"I failed you once, Lomi. I'll not do so ever again," I promised her.

She blinked, and I noticed the single tear that fell because of it.

I nodded again, vowing it not just to her... but onto my soul. Or at least, what was left of it.

"I promise."

Chapter 4: Chapter Three - Renn - Coins

Human cities have grown larger again. We were getting rather close, and it was almost daunting how large some of the buildings looked. Just how did they build so much, so quickly?

I knew humans changed quickly. Their culture. Their homes. Their tools... yet...

Counting the windows on one of the buildings near the dock we were approaching, I wondered how long it took to make so many. How many people did it take? How much resources did it take to make a single panel?

I did like how the sun reflected off them, but...

"Ready to dock!" a young boy shouted behind me.

So much has changed, again.

As have their boats...

Glancing around, as people began to move about the boat. I watched those like me who were passengers ready themselves. Picking up their bags, and luggage. Workers going into motion, grabbing ropes or moving boxes in anticipation.

It took dozens of people, just for this single boat.

Looking back out to the large lake we had just spent most the day crossing, I counted the many dozen other figures floating upon it. Some weren't as big as this one, most likely fishing boats, but there were still several just as big if not bigger.

When I saw such a sight, I realized it was inevitable.

"They'll conquer the world," I said, accepting it.

I'd never seen so many boats at once. Never before. It had been such a shock, I had spent the whole day here up against the ledge, watching them. Yet no one else seemed shocked over the sight, or worried about it. Which meant it was now common. Did every large lake have this many people upon it? How did they not run out of fish?

Did the nearby oceans look like this too? I could remember years ago walking along its beaches for days upon days, never seeing another soul.

A part of me was going to miss the lonely parts of the world.

Maybe that little cabin would be found before it was absorbed by the world... I hoped if it did, whoever found it was kind enough to not bother Nory's grave.

"Ho!" a loud voice drew my attention to the front of the boat. I watched as the one who had shouted tossed a rope to someone on a wooden dock. A burly man caught it, and I knew we'd soon be tied and I'd be able to get off.

Bending down to grab my bag, I wondered if I looked like some dirty wanderer. My bag wasn't dirty, but it did look... a little different from everyone else's. Most of their bags were leather, like mine, but many had more extra flaps than mine. It made mine look simple in comparison.

It didn't bother me, but I hated standing out. Even if because of something as simple as that. After I secured my bag, I made sure my hat was firmly situated. Last thing I needed was for my ears to be seen.

"Please disembark! We need to load a shipment of pelts!" a man shouted, a little rudely. He sounded impatient.

Pelts... to where? Was there another city on the lake? Or maybe there was a river they could access, to elsewhere.

I was going to have to learn the local area. I planned to be here for some time, if I could afford to at least. I hadn't known there were other towns nearby. Last I knew this was the only real settlement for some distance... which was why I had come here first.

Humans really multiplied quickly.

It didn't take long to get off the boat. Although there had been several other passengers, only a few had chosen to get off quickly. Heading along the dock, I noticed that the wood was... fresh. Newer. There were no cracks, or holes.

The dock was rather large. There were dozens of boats, of varying sizes, and hundreds of people were working upon them. Loading and unloading. Talking to one another. Carrying goods, or giving orders. A pair of young boys were even dangling over a nearby ship's bow, tied by ropes, painting the boat just above the water.

I studied them for a moment, and wondered what they were painting with. Whatever it was looked oily, and wasn't actually changing the boat's color too much. Maybe it wasn't paint at all?

"Watch yourself," a man warned me as he walked around me with a huff. He was carrying something wrapped in twine, maybe the very pelts that would soon be loaded onto the ship I had just left.

"Sorry," I apologized, and hurried to leave the area. Last thing I needed was to get bumped into on accident, and have my ears or tail get revealed.

Chastising myself, I tried to control my curiosity. I wanted to look everywhere, at everything. So much was new, or different...

It was why I always struggled with living in human settlements. My own curiosity always got me in trouble.

Finding a large path, I noticed the brick and the fine details that made up the road. Staring down the road, and seeing the many people and carts coming to and fro, I wondered if the whole city had stone paths and roads. Would I no longer find the familiar dirt roads? Had they advanced to such a degree already?

I gulped a worried thought, and found an older woman. She was leaving a store but carried nothing noticeable, no bag or item...

"Excuse me, ma'am," I got her attention, and did my best to notice the way she studied me with her eyes. Not ones of concern or fear, but simple annoyance. I was bothering her, but she wasn't worried about me. A good sign.

"Sorry to bother you, but could you please tell me where I'd find the Moonlit Inn? Is it nearby?" I asked her.

"Moonlit? I'm sorry I don't know where that is. Most of the inns are near the center market. Just follow this road until you reach a large statue, they'll be there," she said calmly, seemingly losing her earlier annoyance.

"Thank you so much," I said quickly, and turned to leave her be. I didn't really like how she didn't know of the inn I spoke of, but I wasn't too worried over it. A local who lived here for years may not know each and every store, in a city this big.

I remembered the sign of the inn, from my memories. Nory had a friend who had worked there, long ago, so we had utilized it a few times. But that had been years ago... the odds of her friend still working there were probably nonexistent. If she was even still alive, she'd be too old at least.

"Just go get them boy!" a man shouted at a young kid, who with a startle ran off. I watched them for a moment, but recognized it was just a father giving an order. Or maybe even a boss, and the child a worker. He did look young, but sometimes the humans had them working early.

"The other day he said no!" a younger woman shouted in annoyance which made the friend she spoke to shake her head in disappointment.

Many conversations came and went as I followed the path, and I liked how most seemed... normal. Calm. Happy. Even the ones who spoke with anger, did so without following up said anger with violence.

This town wasn't bad, it seemed. Or at least, I didn't smell death in the air. I didn't smell depression. I didn't see ruin.

Though humans hid their evil well, sometimes.

It didn't take long for me to find the statue the old woman had spoken of. It towered over most of the buildings circling it, and was in the depiction of some kind of fish. It looked a little... silly, but I could tell someone had spent a long time on it. Each scale was crafted, and even little details like its eyes and whiskers were well done. Many smaller fish swam around it, attached by tiny little metal bars.

Although a little neat, it looked out of place. But I wasn't going to let it distract me. I'd study it further later and...

Scanning the buildings, I couldn't tell if any were the Moonlit Inn. There was one building that was obviously an inn, the large sign hanging off the second story balconies told me that it was one. But it was called the Harbor Inn. A good name for this place, but...

When none of the buildings seemed like the Moonlit Inn, I tried walking around a little more. Down a few of the connected pathways, that all conjoined into the circular center around the statue. Although I found many neat shops, that I knew I'd eventually spend time in, I didn't find my destination...

Eventually ending back at the center, near the statue, I decided to ask for help again. Humans were rude sometimes, but rarely did they deny giving directions to a visitor of their home. Picking a younger woman this time, I waved at her as I approached.

She was dressed rather modestly, and I noticed the stains of flour and other oils on her blouse. Either she worked in some kitchen somewhere, or was on an errand. "I'm looking for the Moonlit Inn, is it around here somewhere?" I asked her gently.

"Moonlit Inn?" the young girl frowned and shook her head. In a way that told me the truth, even before she continued, "I'm sorry I don't think there's any inn here called that. There's Harbor there," she said with a point.

"Is that a nice one?" I asked her. Since it seemed the inn my friend had enjoyed was no more.

"Probably the nicest here. There's one in the north of the city, near the main gate, that has larger rooms but it's near a pig slaughterhouse so it stinks," she said.

"Thank you so much," I said with a nod. Having the smell of pigs nearby would just make me hungry all the time.

"No problem!" she seemed happy to have been asked for directions. Rounding the statue to head for the Harbor Inn, I wondered if this had at one time been the Moonlit Inn. Or was that building long gone, rebuilt upon elsewhere?

Did anyone even remember it? Was I the last to?

While I entered the Inn, I pushed such thoughts aside. They hurt.

"Welcome!" a young man greeted me as I looked around. There looked to be two large rooms, one full of tables and another with counters.

Walking towards the counter where the young man stood, I sized up the many coats hanging on a nearby rack. There had to be dozens, of varying sizes and colors. It was winter, but it wasn't that cold yet, was it? Most people weren't wearing such heavy clothing yet... at least, not that I had noticed.

"Welcome, here for a room or just a meal?" the young man asked on my approach.

"A room, and a meal later if I can get one?" I pulled around my bag, to get to the coins within. I knew now that they were still accepted, thanks to having to pay for the boat... but a part of me worried over how much I had left. The boat had been five coins, which was far more than I had expected.

"It's five per night, which includes breakfast and dinner," the young man said, noticing as I pulled out the little pouch of my coins.

I hesitated for a moment as I did the math. Five a day. It was good that it included two meals, but...

Opening the little pouch, I didn't need to count the contents to know I'd not be able to afford more than a week here.

"Five days please," I said, digging out the coins. I was going to have to solve this issue, and quickly. But right now it was not something I could really panic over. If it got too bad I could always just go live in the forest for a short while.

"Twenty five renk. Your name, M'am?" the young man accepted the coins as I counted enough out.

"Renn."

The eleven coins left made the small pouch feel ridiculously light. I chose to worry about it later, and put the pouch bag into my bag.

"Dinner is an hour before sundown, so not too long from now. Breakfast is when the church bell rings," the young man put the coins behind the counter, and walked over to the wall nearby. I counted the keys hanging on the plaque, and wondered if ten meant most of the inn was empty. The building was large, three floors, but hadn't seemed so big that there were more than twenty rooms inside.

"Second floor. Last room on the right," the young man said, handing me the key. He pointed to our left, where a large stairwell was.

Checking the key, I was surprised to find how heavy it was. The heavy metal piece was freshly painted. It was blue. "Thank you," I said.

"If you checkout early, you'll get half your money back for every day early," he said before I could leave.

Although a little odd, I nodded. "Thank you," I said again, and hurried to the stairwell he had pointed at.

Climbing to the second floor, I found a single hallway. There was an unmarked door to the left, and the hallway to the right. Heading down it, I reached the last door on the right and stuck the key in.

There was no number on the door, nor the key, but I did notice the window next to my door. There was a small table beneath it, with a small... almost withered flower in a tiny vase upon it. The only decoration in the hallway. The window revealed an alley, and another building next to it. I recognized the wood and color as the building to the right of this one, what had looked to be a bar.

Opening the door, I quickly looked around the room. It was small, as the young girl earlier had hinted at, but the bed was big and there was a large chest on the wall next to it. Acting as both a place to store items, and somewhere to sit. Other than the bed, and the chest, the only other thing in the room was a small painting. It hung over the chest, out of place. There was nothing else in the room. Other than the small window on the opposite side of the room.

"Which means the bathroom is probably..." I peeked my head out into the hallway, to the door at the end of the hall. There was nothing on the door, but from here I could see that it had no keyhole like the rest did. Most definitely the bathroom.

With a sigh, I wondered if this place was really considered the best as the young lady had said. I had expected a little more... especially for five coins a night.

This looked like any other inn I had stayed in throughout the years. Even decades ago.

Closing the door behind me, I was glad to find there was not only a lock on the handle, but a large bar that I could place along the door. Last thing I needed was to be half asleep and for whoever cleaned the rooms to enter accidentally.

Checking the bed, I found it wasn't bad. Not full of straw, but something soft. Maybe feathers of some kind. The bed stunk a little, but I was used to such things. Most humans stank, so it was not surprising their stuff did too.

With a sigh, I took the bag off and my hat. For a small moment, I was free. Didn't have to be careful. Didn't have to worry. Laying back, I took a deep breath. The place did stink, but not so bad I wanted to leave. It was noisy, I could hear voices in a room near me. Footsteps not right above me, but nearby. Someone was banging something in a building nearby. Metal upon metal. Ironwork maybe?

Although noisy, not just because it was a city but thanks to my animal-like ears, I felt relieved. It had been a long... long time since the world had been so alive. The forest had always been noisy, especially during the day, but...

There was a certain joy in the noise of a human city. A certain likable quality, that I knew would eventually grow annoying to me... but right now I found comforting.

Maybe because it reminded me of Nory.

I knew soon I'd have to go downstairs, for my meal. I planned to eat both every day, especially since I was paying so much for them.

Hopefully it wouldn't always be fish.

Glancing to the wall nearby, I remembered there was a painting. Such a thing was neat. Even if small and...

Sitting up, I studied the little thing. The frame was small, and looked unpolished. And the painting was a little dirty, as if it hadn't been cleaned or dusted in a long time.

The scene was a shore somewhere. A beach, with yellow sand and...

Frowning, I stood from the bed and studied the painting closer.

Why did it look familiar?

It was obviously just a painted scene. Maybe not even a real one. The way the waves had been painted even told me that whoever had made it, had either rushed or had not been that good of a painter. Not that I could do much better... but comparing it to Nory's work, it was...

Touching the paint gently, I felt a layer of dirt upon it. And beneath that layer of dirt, old long dried paint.

Why did it seem so familiar? Was I just being emotional, or did this very scene exist in my memories somewhere?

"Hm..."

I found myself studying the painting for longer than I should have, and only stopped when my stomach complained. Leaving the room, to head downstairs to eat my dinner... I decided to ask about the painting. It was silly, but I couldn't get it out of my head.

After all, I very well could have seen such a place before. I've traveled the beaches around here, although not for many years.

And once I was curious, I couldn't help myself anymore.

Before I reached the stairwell, I cursed and hurried back to my room.

Glad that no one else had been in the hallway, I hurriedly put my hat back on.

"Pay attention, Renn," I warned myself.

Taking one last glance at the painting, I glared at it. It had almost gotten me in trouble. How scary it was. How dangerous it was.

With a huff, I once again headed downstairs. Now vowing to find out about the painting, if anything so I can blame the artist and not myself for almost getting me found out.