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Writing

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The True Daughter

The letter had come in that morning. The first carriage ride of the day delivered it along with other typical paper correspondents--wedding invitations, grant proposals, watchtower reports--but the flimsy nature of this envelope made it stand out among the rest. The tall, elderly doorman with hair like silver noticed its physical difference well enough, but what made him hand deliver it was the name at the top. Rather than the typical “Royal Federation of Lavanmar,” this envelope was addressed with a barely legible scribble he could make out to say ¨Nara.¨ This four letter word made his wrinkly hands tremble uncontrollably. The other golden envelopes slipped through his grasp as his eyes locked onto the navy blue arch of the cursive “N.” He had worked under the Royals for thirty years now and had never seen this name on paper.

His sleek leather shoes scurried up the stairs and into the main corridor. He tried not to crinkle the paper but his ancient hand muscles could not contain themselves. Towering oil paintings decorated the halls, creating a visual portal through time. Each portrait depicted figures in golden silks, ruby jewels, rose headdresses and lavender jewelry; all the beauty compensating for the violent scratches erasing their faces from the canvas. Stark white parchment blinded the senses from expressions that used to be. He remembered the day of the erasing. The king and queen wanted no trace of the facial characteristics of past royal children, so the king commissioned guards to destroy these masterpieces with kitchen knives. The doorman found these faceless beauties even more terrifying in the wake of this morning’s discovery.

He finally reached the door at the end of the hallway. The elegant bronze doorknob rattled as he frantically unlocked it with the keyring retrieved out of his breast pocket. This door opened onto three different entrances which he scanned for the hidden royal emblem. His eyes caught the symbol on the far left door and opened it with another key from his ring. He tripped over his own anticipation and almost face-planted as the gilded door slid open. The room was extravagant, filled with rich red tile and gorgeous murals of lavender and rose fields. A golden blonde girl sat at a modest desk in the corner and flipped her head towards the entrance, shocked to have company at this hour.

“Jay,” she spoke in a hushed tone, “Mind to knock?” A light giggle broke the morning somber and danced along the air.

The doorman, Jay, usually loved hearing the Princess’s joyful laughs, but this morning they stung like thorns. “Jane, I had to show you right away. I...I don’t know what to think.” He approached her with his head held low.

The envelope left his hands and entered the Princess’s. The golden complexion that constantly gave her so much youth and life vanished as she looked upon the message. She stayed still, did not shake, but Jay could feel a sense of terror and confusion radiating from her body.

“Where-” She sighed, looked down. “Where did you find this?”

“It was in with the morning correspondents.”

“And you think it came in the carriage with the rest?”

“I don’t see how it couldn’t have.”

She broke the seal of the cheap white envelope with her pointer finger. Bracing herself for whatever fate followed, she slipped out a handwritten letter on flimsy stationary paper.

Independent Scientific Research Union of Lavanmar

*Dear Nara,*

*I am writing this at my own risk and I hope it gets to you before it’s too late. Some of the younger scientists at the union have found files with instructions on how to make a DNA sequencing machine. I know the king and queen believe their staff destroyed all traces of these machines, but scientists have made one here and they have used it. I don’t know what they got, maybe it was trash or a hair from a gown or something, but they have sequenced your DNA and they know that you are not Jane.*

*The reason I am contacting you is because I know people will soon come for you and your parents. I may not agree with our current political situation, but I do know that it is not your fault. You did not choose this life.*

*My biggest recommendation for you would be to run. Never return to the palace, and join the revolution before it engulfs you. The federation will try to convince you that the people can be controlled and this will blow over, but one thing remains. They know who you are, they know there is no rightful heir, and they won’t forget.*

*-Dr. August Smith*

A tear rolled down her cheek and onto the paper, smudging his speedy signature. She looked around her room in hope for a sign of what to do. She had been living to these rose decorated walls since she was four. Her brain went back to that morning, thirteen years ago when she was chosen. That year, King and Queen Lavanmar’s only child, Jane, died of pneumonia. They knew without a heir to the royal family, the country would finally have a concrete reason to fall to democracy. Jay told her when she was young that the guards searched all of Lavanmar to find a girl who had Jane’s golden hair. When they saw Nara playing in her front yard that morning, they took her away and began to train her to take over the life of Princess Jane. They lied to her parents, lied to her friends, and told them all she was dead. Nara felt all these years of bittersweet memories crashing down on her in this moment. She wanted to be back at home, let her parents know she was alive and never see the palace ever again.

Nara looked up at Jay, her eyes brimming with tears, prompting him to embrace her. Jay felt bittersweet nostalgia to see her real name brought back to life in the form of this letter. He had always been a father figure to her and the only one in the palace to ever know anything of her past. His sadness transformed into hope as he held onto her.

“Nara.”

She sniffled and looked back up at the old man.

“Nara, you are free.”

The words seemed fake, like they opened a door to a new reality which she had no idea how to navigate. “But, how… what will I do?”

“You will go home, to your real parents Nara. You will get as far away from this wretched family as you can-”

“As far away as I can?” She looked at him in disbelief. “Jay I can’t… I can’t just leave! My parents… I mean the King and Queen… they wouldn’t let me. You know the moment I left there would be a guard on my tail ready to bring me back.”

“Nara you heard the letter, the people will know you are not the heir. They will know there is no heir. You need to leave.”

“Jay, I can’t just suddenly put that much faith in the people. I.. I don’t even know if this Doctor is telling the truth!”

“Nara...he knows your name….”

Her eyes closed as this reality sunk in. She knew the only other person in the kingdom who knew her true identity was Jay.

“And let’s say you don’t go. Let’s say you stay here. The revolution will come and you, in their eyes, will be an enemy. If you don’t renounce your ties with this family now, your innocence in the situation is gone.”

“And what of you, Jay? Will you come with me?”

“Oh no. There is no need for me now.” He gave a fatherly smile. “You will have your real parents to protect you. And anyways, I need to be here as an inside source for the revolution.”

Nara’s face lit up through the tears and he could tell she was ready. Jay took her hand and the pair sneaked silently out of the corridor and down the employee stairs. Even the more secrets parts of the palace were beautiful in every way. Nara soaked in every painting, swirled railing, and chandelier for she knew it would be the last she would see this luxury.

They reached the back door which entered onto the stables. About 20 steeds were lined up in a row of silver stalls covered by a rich crimson canopy. Jay continued down the stables until he reached the stall of a shining black mare. He slowly inched the gate open, careful not to make any sound but the friction from the metal let out an unnatural screech. The black mare sent hay flying as she let out a roar of discontent, awaking all the others in the stalls. Neighs raced out of the walls as the pair looked at each other in panic. A light from the palace dormitories clicked on above them, assuring them that their escape plans were jeopardized. Jay gave her one last hug and then quickly bridled the black mare and lead her out of the stable opening. Nara approached the mounting block, threw one leg over and was quickly whooshed away by the mares jump to a canter. Nara looked back, gave one last smile to her only companion, and rode off into her new life.