

The Rescuer

Brencis strolled through Augeas. It tore at his heart to see the city. It had been so beautiful when he'd been young. Before Dorjan took the mind of Lord Culain. Where once flowers had bloomed, now bare earth stood. A dead rat lay in the gutter. Even the rats had a hard time finding enough to eat.

He acted as though he hadn't a care in the world. No one knew he went to meet others of his kind, those that no one acknowledged existed.

His father had been an Ancient One, though Brencis had never known which magical powers his father had possessed. His mother had been a human with whom his father had a dalliance. When it had been discovered that Brencis was on the way, his father had left his mother, never to return. A great sadness had hung about her until the day she died.

He'd never known who his father was. He had grown up as any other young man of the working class world. Now he owned an inn, one frequented by the Lord's Guard. He knew most of them by sight and they knew him.

He smoothed the brown rope that signified him as an innkeeper. He held his head high. He feared no one, though those of the Lord's Guard didn't realize that.

Rayna had been furious with him when he hadn't stood up to the Guard when they ransacked his inn looking for her. There had been nothing he could do that wouldn't jeopardize his staff and he would not do that.

Rayna had ridden out three days ago. The Guard had appeared every night at the inn, but there had been an air about them that worried him. A frenetic energy flowed from them and squabbles broke out constantly. He knew Rayna had done what she'd set out to do. Dorjan was dead. Which meant no one was in charge of Augeas. War would break out between those of the Guard who thought they should take Dorjan's place. He couldn't wait for the announcement of Dorjan's death to be made public. Something must be done quickly.

Now he went to a meeting, not of the Ancient Ones whom he didn't trust, but of the half-breeds like him. Many had magical powers, which was a closely held secret.

As he rounded a corner, he saw a group of the Lord's Guard beating a young man. The lad had fallen to the ground and the guards were kicking him. One had pulled a dagger and looked ready to strike. His stomach twisted.

There were only three guards. He'd seen them, but didn't know them well. They were young and Dorjan's recruits, not disciplined as the older guards were. Not that it mattered much these days.

Brencis hesitated for a moment, focusing his mind. A tingle ran through him and he became invisible. Pulling a dagger from the folds of his robe, he strode forward. He didn't wish to inflict deadly harm, just enough to distract them. He slashed the forearm of the nearest guard, a man whose eyes gleamed with pleasure.

"Yeow!" he screamed, holding his arm. "Cythraul." He shoved the man next to him. "Watch what you're doing. You cut my arm."

The other man, a bit stouter, shoved back. "I don't even have my dagger out, you fool."

The third guard, a twig-like figure who could hardly be called a man, laughed. "Maybe the boy has more spunk than we thought."

The other two turned on the third, jumping him. "'Tis not a laughing matter!" yelled the wounded guard.

Brencis grabbed the lad's arm and hauled him up from the ground. "Run," he hissed.

The boy's face turned white as he searched for the force holding his arm and the voice.

Brencis pushed the boy. "Run." Then he sauntered down the road, turned the corner, sighed and became visible again. He wiped the sweat from his face as he continued

Berry Cake

Kayla dropped Kyle's hand as they landed within the room furnished in golds. Several pillows lay on the floor, undisturbed. A tiny bit of light peeked through the drawn curtains.

Where is he? Kayla asked Kyle with her mind as she peered around.

I don't see him. Kyle found a lamp and lit it. You'd think they could give him some light.

Kayla nodded. She listened for soft snoring. He was next to the slumber pad covered with a blanket. She pulled back the blanket and stared at the sleeping face. He looked so peaceful. She hated to wake him, but he was filthy and probably hungry.

"Sir." She shook his shoulder.

He stirred and turned pale eyes on her, blinking against the light. For a moment he didn't seem to recognize her, then a small smile played across his face and he sat. "Berry cake?" His voice was raspy.

I don't believe how they treat him. She smoothed back his blond hair. "I have berry cake, but we must wash your face first." He was someone important, though she didn't know exactly who. They would have asked their parents, but they would have been in so much trouble for coming to the castle. They'd been told it was one of the places they were never to go. Ever.

The first few visits, they'd found nothing interesting. They'd found rooms no one used. Once they'd ended up in a guard's quarters and had to phase quickly before they were discovered.

Then a couple of months ago, they'd found this poor man. No one tended him. Kyle, find water. He needs to be washed and a drink. She helped the man to his feet and to a cushion. There's no water here. I'm going to the next chamber. Kyle disappeared.

Be careful. Kayla knew who occupied the next chamber. Dorjan. The mean man. The twins had seen him in parades. Her parents had warned them to never attract his attention. Kayla figured it was because they were Ancient Ones. Everyone knew the mean man had tried to kill all of the Ancient Ones.

Kyle appeared in front of her, holding two urns of water. It's your turn to wash him. I'll see if he has a clean robe.

Kayla took the water and found a rag. She helped the man stand and removed his robe. He smelled of sweat and urine. Gagging, she washed him. The twins had decided to take turns with this terrible task, but she didn't mind so very much.

Kyle handed her a clean robe and helped her put it on him. The man smiled and touched Kayla's hair. She smiled and helped him to sit on a clean cushion. They kept one for when he was dirty and the others for when he was clean.

As he sat, he stared at them, a questioning look on his face. "Thirsty."

Kyle poured him a goblet of water. The man held it in both hands, gulping it down. He held it up. "More."

Kyle refilled the goblet. Those in charge treat him dreadfully. The mean man is probably behind this.

We don't know that for sure.

From what Mother says, I'm sure of it. Kyle set the water urns on a table.

"Berry cake?" The man held out his hand.

Kayla smiled and unwrapped the packet she had hidden beneath her robe. "Here's your berry cake." The look of happiness on his face made it worth the danger of coming to visit him. Mother and Father would have fits if they realized where she and Kyle disappeared to, but someone needed to tend the man.

Go and see if there's any food in one of the other chambers. Kyle wiped the crumbs from the man's chest.

Kayla stood. Which chamber should I try?

One other than the mean man's. Kyle rose and got the man more water. It's too dangerous to go back.

Kayla phased and stood in a chamber. They'd explored the castle enough to know how most of the rooms were arranged, and she could land safely near the curtains. The first room was dusty and empty. She phased to the next and found a guard with a unclothed women lying on the sleeping cushion. She closed her eyes and phased again, feeling heat stealing up her face. She could go to the kitchen, but she was sure someone would notice her, especially dressed in black. Sometimes she wished she had a blue robe so she could wander unnoticed about the castle.

She sighed. She'd have to go to the mean man's room. He always had food. She phased herself to his room, landing in the living area. A tray set upon the low table with meat and bread left. She wrapped the food in a cloth and turned to see if she could find anything else for the man.

She stopped. The door to the sleeping area was open and she saw a foot. She crept closer. The mean man shouldn't be lying on the floor. Was someone else there? Someone hurt?

Her heart thudded in her chest and she trembled.

Is something wrong? Kyle asked.

I'm not sure. She crept closer to the foot.

Come back now, her brother ordered.

In a moment. The foot wasn't moving. She peeked around the door and nearly screamed aloud. The mean man lay on the floor, his eyes staring at the ceiling, a large, bloody gash in his chest.

Something touched her shoulder and she did scream.

"Quiet!" Kyle shouted at her.

"You scared me." She picked up the package she'd dropped. Don't sneak up on me.

You screamed.

Sorry. She pointed to the body.

Kyle grabbed her arm and they were back with the man. Kyle collapsed on the floor and pulled her down. Do you think anyone heard you scream?

Does it matter? We're no longer there.

We should leave. Kyle looked pale.

Kayla thought she would be ill. She grasped Kyle's arm. First we feed the man.

The man stared at them. "More berry cake."

"No more cake." Kayla unwrapped the bread and meat. "Here, this is nearly as good and will make you feel better."

The man looked at the food, grabbed it and took large bites.

Kyle rose and Kayla took his hand. They were in their classroom. They plopped down on the black and gold cushions that denoted they were nobles. They sat, holding hands. Her heart raced and she could feel Kyle's race also. The staring eyes of the mean man stayed in her mind and made her shiver.