

Epilogue 2: Found Family

Six years had passed since the death of Legacy.

The world was healing, and so were we. All of us agreed to keep a house together. It made regular board-game nights a lot easier. And Beth loved it when she visited. Plus, whenever someone's family caused trouble or infringed on our hospitality too much, it was easy to crack down on that.

Not that it happened too often. People knew to behave these days. We were pretty clear on our boundaries, and there was a wonderful independence that came from having enough money to have all our worries covered.

We weren't uber-rich. There was no point in holding onto that much cash, but we could all live comfortably for the rest of our lives, probably. Plus, it wasn't hard to make more at this level of power. Frankly, these days, I didn't really need to eat or sleep anymore? It was a strange feeling, to see those needs disappearing.

Of course, we still all did it, just to remain human. We cooked, we ate, we played, we slept. We all even got jobs! Normal, every day jobs.

"How's the thesis going, love?" Ann asked, peeking over my shoulder at the laptop.

"Meh," I said, clicking my tongue. "I hate theses. They suck."

She laughed a little, then ruffled my hair. "They sure do. The worst, huh? All about proving what you know, rather than putting it to use. What a shame," she said. There was a smile on her face throughout. She'd put my thoughts into words, but I still rolled my eyes at her.

"Yeah. They suck," I replied.

By now, I was writing my master's in "Ecology and Environmental Protections". I still had my bachelor's in dietology, but wasn't using it much these days. Instead, I was putting my conservation knowledge to good use while working with Foundational Exchange.

In fact, the topic of my master's was "the reintroduction of magical plants into polluted ecosystems and their knock-on effects", which had involved three solid years of monitoring for seasonal changes. My bachelor's had been planning and putting the first steps of it into practice, and now my results should net me another title.

Was I gonna get a PhD? Absolutely not. Maybe an honorable one, but I had most certainly had my fill of academia. There was nothing freeing about being in a stuffy room full of old people and explaining to them what my job out there was. They knew their stuff, and I learnt a lot about the science of it, but at the same time, they didn't have my intuition for Qi or Echo or any other type of magic.

Amusingly, Ingrid was one of the people who'd most closely worked with me on this. Rae had retired from all the fighting again, and his wife, who had somehow maintained a garden when the air quality was entirely horrendous, was rather skilled at helping me with reforestation work.

Of course, we'd fed her a few elixirs and natural treasures from Eden to make it easier on her old bones, and she now cultivated a bit of nature-Qi and a touch of magic. Which was rather funny, since she occasionally didn't know her own strength these days.

It was a nice life. Getting to see my master, who I now called "gramps" more often than not, so frequently. Working in the field with my brother and my girlfriend and my pseudo-grandma. Feeling like I was doing something for this planet. It was good.

Then, the door to my room flew open. "Yoyo!" Matt called excitedly, his hair dishevelled, wearing an oversized rabbit-print shirt. "Come on! My new episode's airing!" he said, full of excitement.

I snickered slightly, and took Ann's offered hand, pulling myself out of bed in my pajama pants. "Right now?" I asked Matt, making my voice languid on purpose.

"Yes, now, sleepyhead!" he called, full of excitement, then quickly grabbed my shoulder, and the world spun. We appeared downstairs with the scent of plum blossoms, and I gave a faint snicker.

"Rat. You're teleporting us to the dang couch?" I asked with a harmless smile.

Matt gave me an unrepentant grin. "And I'll heccing do it again," he said. "Now let me fetch the others." Then he vanished in a puff of petals.

With a laugh, I sat down on the couch, and Cass quickly appeared behind me, sitting on the armrest, leaning her head against my shoulder. "What're we up to, Bell?" she asked, innocently, even though she knew very well.

Ann reached down gingerly, and patted her head. Cass had changed, these days. Her body was far more realised, and far more human. She was still cast in monochrome, but she had

eyes, a nose, lips, and was fully articulated. Glassy hair pooled down her head into a simple braided ponytail at the back of her neck, and she gave Ann a radiant smile.

“Matt’s newest show is airing,” she explained cheerily.

Cass had been basically adopted as something in between a sister and a kid to me. She was as much part of the family as Ann was. She’d also grown taller, now looking like she was in her early teens, though she hadn’t yet hit her rebellious phase. Which, knowing that she was a little like me... well, I suspected she’d want a lot of freedom - which I’d happily grant her.

The Rat bastard had, somehow, become an actor. In minor tv shows. Mostly as an extra or episodically visiting character. He also only took roles when he felt like it, but this was a show he’d had a hand in producing as well, so he was excited to show us. He even choreographed the fight scenes - I knew, because I’d helped him demonstrate. As rusty as I was with a sword, I was still far better with it than almost anyone else on Neamhan, given my ridiculous amount of talent these days.

A moment later, with the sound of a faint breeze and the smell of plum blossoms, Matt dragged in Liam, Reya and Marie. Emilia took a while longer, since she first had to come in through the front door and dust off her hands as well as toss aside her high-vis vest.

She’d picked up a job in construction. With her earth-Qi she could throw up fully completed houses in minutes. She’d even picked up a minor amount of metal Qi with a few tips from me, and could now create the equivalent of concrete-rebar from scratch with little to no effort.

Which made her critical for expansion and maintenance of infrastructure. She’d torn down and rebuilt entire houses in minutes, replacing dilapidated, run down walls with brand-new ones in an instant. Still, as she came home, she smiled.

“Oh? Movie eve?” she asked, and when Matt gave her an excited nod, she spread her arms wide. “Alright. Ann, blast me.”

“Phrasing,” my girlfriend distantly noted with some amusement, then cast a spell. An instant later, half a tsunami washed over Emilia, and then a miniature sun spawned, drying her off in moments. It took all of three seconds for the grime of the entire day to be washed away, and for her to plop down on the couch, pristinely clean. “So, what are we-”

“Shh! It’s starting,” Matt called excitedly.

And then the show came on. It was an oldschool type drama-action flick, with a good bit of modern tech and a good bit of actual magic being used to make the fights look real.

“Did they add CG-petals in with your actual ones, Rabbit?” I asked him quietly.

He snickered, then nodded. “Yes,” he replied. “They thought my storm was too calm. There were going more for a raging-typhoon kinda deal, and if I actually went that far, I might’ve hurt someone.”

I laughed at that, then we kept watching. It was fun. The show was exaggerated, but in a funny way, and it was clear that Matt had enjoyed working on it. It had his humor all over it. In the banter, in the shenanigans, in the fighting. It was fun, and it was something he was proud of.

So, we watched it all the way through, and when the episode was done, we all had a little celebration. Marie had even made him a cake. Matt cried a little, which made all of us laugh. It was a good day.

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“A little shorter than that,” I told Liam, showing him a picture of what I wanted.

He smiled as he draped the towel over me, clipping it shut at the back of my neck. “Sounds good to me,” he said. “Any special wishes?”

“Can you braid the side? And make sure I got long enough bangs to do the fun parting, please?” I asked.

“Of course, Fio,” He said, grabbing a spray bottle and gently wetting my hair as he manifested scissors from liquid darkness. Mundane metal did not cut nearly as well as what he could create himself these days, and the combs he made were so fine and flexible it was rather amazing.

Seeing his hairdresser shop was funny though. He did keep a bunch of mundane materials around - mostly for decoration. All the utensils he used were made from shadow, and he maintained ones that he manifested for anyone else working there, too. He’d opened the little shop himself with the money we got from saving the world, and he’d thrown himself into it.

Of course, there had been some pushback from his family, but well, they couldn’t do anything about it. He didn’t want to be a chef, not anymore, and had since transitioned to this new career and taken to it like a fish to water.

All his skill with knives easily carried over to scissors, and there was a lot one could do with superhuman senses and the ability to manifest additional limbs when needed.

With swift, deft motions, he cut my hair - the fibres were too tough for normal scissors to sever these days if I didn't withdraw my Qi, but Liam sheared through them effortlessly. He'd condensed edges so sharp on the scissors that they'd probably stab right through a piece of steel without resistance if he dropped them.

Of course, he didn't do so. Instead, he simply took care of my hair, cutting it to length where it had gotten too long, and making sure it was well maintained with a smile on his face. The shop around us was alight with the small talk people usually made with hairdressers. Talking about their kids, about work, about the world and the weather.

"You were telling me about the book you've been reading," Liam noted calmly. His voice had gotten a little deeper since he took more testosterone, and had taken on a comfortable baritone.

"I was!" I replied with a smile. "It's a romance-"

He nodded sagely. "I imagined."

"Jerk," I laughed, and he took a moment to make sure he didn't accidentally cut me until I sat still again. "It's about a girl who loses a bet and has to try on outfits with another girl from her class. The 'bully' then falls in love with the bet-loser. And proceeds to request they go shopping more often."

Liam snickered at my explanation. "And the girl goes along with it?"

"She does! Under threat of having her lunch money stolen."

At that, he laughed, then shook his head. "Amazing," he said, "tell me more."

The minutes passed easily, and at the end, he held up a mirror for me to see myself. Of course, since I could see through the air, I already knew what I looked like. "Perfect," I praised happily. "Thank you, Liam."

"Any day," he said happily.

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Reya had opened a school. It was completely free, covered from her own pockets, though Eric and Ann had pitched in and signed on as teachers - which did mean Ann had had to get

a degree first, which was amusing. She'd chosen maths, which made sense to me, and history of all things.

So, in a few years, she'd crammed the entirety of the history of Neamhan into her prodigious brain, proceeded to ace her exams, and was now teaching at the school. Eric and Reya had an easier time getting into it, though Reya specifically taught a class for deaf students, doing her lessons in sign language and working with disabled kids in regular lessons.

Marie occasionally came in to do guest lectures - though she mostly worked as a vet these days. She'd learnt a bit of healing using her nature-Qi and Mana and a tiny hint of Divinity she acquired from her belief in herself, and with it, she patched up animals like no one else.

She also worked with me sometimes, to rehabilitate wild places and conserve species by making sure they didn't die from injuries in the wild. It was slow going - finding the few animals that still lived out there, not choked by smoke or hunting, was tough. And she did have to break some poachers' bones a few times. But we were making progress.

And she loved the work. She loved the animals so dearly. Seeing her send pictures of "swamp puppies" into the group chat was very funny - especially when said 'puppies' were busy trying to chew her hand off very unsuccessfully. She was far too tough for that these days.

But somehow, some way, we'd all found our places in the world. Cass got to go to school and live a reasonably normal life. We were even working on making Astraeus a somewhat humanoid body - though the spear seemed not particularly excited at the idea of it. He was perfectly content just being a weapon, and so, that is what he remained, for now. It was an option if he ever wanted to take it.

We lived normal lives, like normal people. We went on holiday, we rested, and even the other versions of myself got to do what they wanted. We played video games, read books, watched shows, played sports, went out together, cooked, and ate.

Somehow, somehow, our lives on Neamhan had become normal. A pleasant, calm kind of normal, where we got to do what we wanted to do, and become who we wanted to be.

And, of course, occasionally, we visited Eden. That world, too, was kind of our home, these days. Chris and Iryel were there to greet us each time, and the world was becoming better, too. Echo got integrated. Plants flourished. The wilds were pushed back.

Eden was recovering. The war was won, the keepers no longer ferried usurpers over, and they'd given up on that world. We got to see Saif as she put down her war-magic and

learned to make flowers blossom. See the archmages return to their own ideals, becoming hermits and healers and political figures.

We saw cities recover, people learning to feel safe again for the first time in decades. Houses being built, kids playing outside city walls, Trichtera recovering from her wounds, and Rufus becoming a wandering warrior.

It was nice. There are no other words I have for it except... nice. After everything I'd fought for, I got to live a good life, making a difference in the world, with no worries about my existence or my death.

No threats. No worries. Just... living, with my friends, in a place we were making better.

I loved it all.