

# The Axnay Rejects

## *EPISODE TWENTY THREE – THE ULTIMATE WEDDING CRASHER.*

It had been ten days since The Axnay Elite had lost their duel against The Axnay Rejects and they were still extremely bitter about it. To be defeated by a fluke was hard to take. Having to accept a forfeit off the back of that fluke, however, was maddening. They'd come up with the idea of making the loser move to Ackfield because it was the worst place they could think of. The one place on Paprika Island they'd least like to live. Being legally bound to transfer there, therefore, had been devastating.

Such was The Elite's reluctance not to stay in Ackfield, on their first morning there, they'd headed out, taken part in their legal, weekly requirement of four battles then come back to Axnay again. It was a system they'd decided to implement permanently. As wealthy heirs and heiresses, they didn't need the income from the battling beasts, so they'd opted to go part time. They'd take part in four battles around Ackfield as their mandatory chore for the week then return home again for the rest of the week.

Turning the move to Ackfield into an inconvenient, once a week chore rather than a permanent life-changing event was a decision that Duke Thunder was especially proud of. Doing things that way felt like a minor victory to him. His teammates didn't see it that way. He was, however, determined to make them to look at it from his point of view. As such, when they met up for their early morning coffee, just outside a café in central Axnay, he laid his explanation on with a trowel.

THUNDER: They wanted us gone! Banished! Never again to darken their door! The hated Elites, exiled and sent away! Forever! And yet... here we are. Sitting in the centre of Axnay, enjoying a coffee in the morning sunshine together. That's why it's a victory!

MIGHTY: I think you're reading it all wrong there, Thunder, old boy.

THUNDER: Then you need to think again!

MIGHTY: No, *you* need to think again! The Rejects wanted us gone, yes. Gone from their *lives*! And that's exactly how it turned out. We're no longer allowed in the guild and we're not poor enough to visit *their* end of town, so the chances are they'll never see us again. They got their wish! We *are* out of their lives! So the only victor I can see is them!

BRILLIANCE: Plus... if we're being honest... in the end, it was *us* who wanted *them* gone. We planned it for weeks, remember?

VORTEX: And came up with nothing!

BRILLIANCE: Yes, but my point still stands. We wanted *them* gone.

(Thunder's face lit up.)

THUNDER: Exactly my point!

SHADOW: No, it isn't!

THUNDER: Shut up, you! It was exactly my point. We *wanted* them gone! Out of our lives! And now they are! So it's a victory for us, like I've maintained all along!

BRILLIANCE: You maintained no such thing, Thunder! You maintained it was victory for us because we're *still in their lives*! You can't now claim it's a victory for us because we're *out of their lives*! That's entirely contradictory!

THUNDER: No, it's not!

BRILLIANCE: Yes, it is! It's a contradictory and ridiculous! You can't just claim victories as and when you feel like!

THUNDER: Oh, can't I now?

BRILLIANCE: No!

THUNDER: And why not? Because *you* say so? Is that what you're saying? Well, enlighten me, Countess, who made you the goddess of what I can and can't consider a victory, eh? Who?

MIGHTY: Calm down, Thunder!

THUNDER: Or what?

MIGHTY: Or I'll chin you!

THUNDER: I see. In that case, consider me calmer.

(He ruffled his neck.)

THUNDER: Though I'd be remiss if I didn't remind the countess here, that she's not the god of my thoughts and should wind her bloody neck in.

BRILLIANCE: Charming.

(Velvet Vortex rolled her eyes.)

VORTEX: What a ridiculous discussion that was.

THUNDER: Actually, it was going fine until you all disagreed with me!

SHADOW: As is our right, isn't it?

THUNDER: Well... I suppose.

VORTEX: And besides, we didn't all disagree with you. Some of us thought your musings on the matter were so ridiculous, they didn't even *deserve* arguing with!

THUNDER: Excuse me?

VORTEX: I'm just saying... you're talking shit!

THUNDER: Listen, you...

VORTEX: No! You listen to me! When the duel results were read out, we looked like complete and utter twats, Thunder! We'd already bought everyone a drink to celebrate our victory, and bragged about killing a colossus! Then Chi tells everyone we'd actually shot a *dead* colossus instead! A colossus killed by that cunt Leila of all people!

(She grimaced.)

VORTEX: Throughout the guild, everyone was pointing and laughing at us like we'd just won first prize in the fuckwit of the year show!

THUNDER: Yes, well... admittedly...

VORTEX: Admittedly nothing! There is no victory here! We were reputed to be the best warriors at that guild by far! Now we look like clueless idiots! Our reputation shattered! And that reputation was the thing that made us thrive. That's gone and now we have to make weekly trips to Crapville or whatever it's called, as if it's a term of our bloody probation! There's no victory for us, Thunder! There just isn't!

MIGHTY: She's right! There are clouds, but no silver linings to be seen!

SHADOW: It's just a tunnel with no fucking light at the end of it!

BRILLIANCE: Exactly. Life is pretty fucking miserable right now! And the only thing we've got going for us is the fact that The Rejects aren't here to rub our noses in it!

(They then heard sniggering from just in front of the café. Fearing the worst, they slowly turned their necks towards the noise then sighed in defeat. The worst had been confirmed.)

MAX: Blimey. What have we got here!

TOMMY: Tourists, I think!

MAX: Day trippers from Ackfield?

TOMMY: *Somewhere* poor and unfashionable, yeah. I mean look at 'em!

MAX: Best not. They're rough sorts, these Ackfield folk. If you *look* at them, they try to fight you! Raised like wolves, you see? It's dog eat dog in that town; a real battle for survival out there in the slums. Speaking of which...

(He looked to Sir Mighty.)

MAX: When are you going back to *your* slum, tourist?

TOMMY: Soon, hopefully. Then we can all go back to leaving our doors unlocked again.

MIGHTY: This little skit of yours is meant to be amusing, is it?

TOMMY: It's not a skit, mate. Having Ackfield folk in town is a genuine concern.

MAX: Because you lot will nick anything that isn't bolted down.

(Duke Thunder scoffed.)

THUNDER: Seriously? Are you paupers actually going to stand there and lecture us on social standing? We could *buy* your life with loose change.

MAX: Yeah, but that's wealth; not social standing. Ackfield residents, such as yourselves, don't have any of that!

VORTEX: Oh, shut up!

TOMMY: Nice! A well thought out comeback for an Ackfield type.

VORTEX: It wasn't a comeback, it was a request, based on the fact that you're talking bollocks! We're not even Ackfield residents! We just have to go there once a week to perform a chore. Then we come back here, to Axnay, where we all own houses with more space in the kitchen cupboards than you poor people occupy between you!

MAX: What? Sorry? What did she say?

TOMMY: Dunno, mate. I can't understand her thick Ackfield accent.

(They then marched away trying not to laugh as Vortex snarled at them from behind.)

VORTEX: Ackfield accent??? Bloody Ackfield accent??? I've got no such...

(She growled.)

VORTEX: You did not say that! That's so... hey! Come back here when I'm defending myself!!! Hey!!! Turn around and come back here, you two!!! Oi!!!

(Having too much fun to appease her, Max and Tommy simply walked on.)

TOMMY: Whatever you do, don't look back! It's crueller that way!

MAX: I know that, mate!

TOMMY: Jolly good.

(He chuckled.)

TOMMY: Hark at her. She sounds furious.

MAX: Because she is. And that makes this moment a thing of beauty.

TOMMY: Yes. Yes, it does.

(He exhaled.)

TOMMY: Giving someone with so much say, absolutely no right of reply is a pleasure like no other.

MAX: Right? It's going to annoy the crap out of her all day.

TOMMY: All *week*. She's a female magic-caster, remember? Over the top, unforgiving and quite frankly ridiculous.

MAX: Like Leila!

TOMMY: Exactly like Leila, but I'd rather you didn't mention her name right now!

MAX: Good point. We only came out to get away from her.

TOMMY: Yeah...

(He growled then mumbled under his breath.)

TOMMY: But also because, whenever *you* say her name, I'm tempted to chin you!

MAX: What?

TOMMY: I said I'm tempted to chin you.

(His eyes bulged.)

TOMMY: Fuck!

MAX: Wait? Why would you want to chin me?

TOMMY: Um... I didn't. I... you know... I was just thinking about Vortex. What with her still screaming at us, an' all!

MAX: Oh... right. I thought you meant me for a second.

(Tommy glanced away innocently.)

TOMMY: Don't be ridiculous.

MAX: I'm not! It's a genuine concern. You see, sometimes, I get the impression that you're angry at me about something.

TOMMY: And what might that be, you think?

MAX: Not a clue, mate. Unless you're just angry because I made Leila squeal *louder* than you did. But I doubt it's that.

(Tommy glowered at him coldly for a moment then glanced away.)

TOMMY: I said let's not talk about her, didn't I?

MAX: That's right. On the account that she's been a nuisance all morning.

TOMMY: Yeah...

(He grimaced.)

TOMMY: Rico warned Sofia, you know? Last night. I was there. He told her she should go to the venue and get ready for the wedding there, but she insisted on doing it at home, by herself.

MAX: Rookie mistake. Like Leila was going to let her do it herself.

TOMMY: Right? That was *never* gonna happen.

MAX: Yup.

(He sighed.)

MAX: She's been getting on her tits all morning. Interfering. Overruling her.

Organising shit Sofia doesn't even need...

TOMMY: Or want!

MAX: Yeah. And Rico can't intervene because he's not allowed to see her until the ceremony.

TOMMY: Leaving *us* with a loud and overexcited Leila and a whimpering and flustered Sofia to contend with.

(He shuddered.)

TOMMY: Yup. Taking a completely needless walk, just to get out of the house was the best idea you've ever had.

MAX: Second best. I also said, “Let’s go this way” when we were duelling with The Elite. If I hadn’t said that, we wouldn’t have been where we were when Leila accidentally killed that colossus. We’d be six million coronas each lighter and living in Ackfield.

TOMMY: Good point. You made an inspired choice.

MAX: I did indeed. Though... speaking of Ackfield, don’t we know some people from there?

(They then turned to take a sneaky glance at The Elite. Vortex was jumping up and down on her hat, whilst shaking her fist furiously at Countess Brilliance. Shadow, Mighty and Thunder were all desperately trying to calm her down.)

MAX: Ah, sweet, sweet rage and disharmony.

TOMMY: Yeah...

(He grinned.)

TOMMY: Think. We did that.

MAX: Yes, yes we did. Good times, my friend. Good times.

(They then remembered that they had to go home and prepare for Rico and Sofia’s wedding.)

TOMMY: Bad times, my friend.

MAX: The worst.

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At Forty Four Whitley Street, at this time, Sofia was in her bedroom, standing in front of a full length mirror, staring into it with a tortured expression on her face. Leila was standing behind her, affixing her veil to her head with overenthusiastic delight. Her excitable behaviour was making Sofia nervous. It was a level of nervousness that she hadn’t felt for quite some time. A nervousness that she thought she’d been cured of. Leila, however, had quite the knack for crushing a person’s personal development, as she was now demonstrating.

LEILA: Yup. The veil alone simply isn’t enough, Sofia. We need flowers! That’s what we need! And not just white ones!

SOFIA: Um...

LEILA: We need some pink in there too! And a bit of yellow!

SOFIA: But...

LEILA: I tell you what, you wait there for a second. I’ll just go and send Rico to the florist. I’m thinking roses! Six of each ought to be enough!

SOFIA: Six???

LEILA: Hmm... you’re right. Eight seems more realistic!

SOFIA: No! My head will look like a thorn bush!

LEILA: Don’t be ridiculous! It’ll look a rose bush!

SOFIA: But I don’t want to look like...

LEILA: I’m gonna stop you there, missy!

(She wagged her finger at her.)

LEILA: Don’t keep telling me what you want all the time! The fact is, you don’t know *what* you want! One minute you want one thing, the next you want another.

SOFIA: That’s not even true!

LEILA: Yes, it is. Last week you didn't want to marry Rico at all; today you do! You're way too fickle for your own good.

(She nodded.)

LEILA: And that's why you shouldn't keep attempting to make decisions. We should leave all the decision making to me! Decisiveness is very much my field of expertise, you see?

SOFIA: That's not a field of...

LEILA: Hey! Pipe down. Enough! You're the bride, Sofia. This is *your* special day. And it'll go a lot better if you stop arguing and just let me do whatever I want!

(Sofia pouted.)

SOFIA: It's *my* special day, so it should be about doing whatever *I* want!

(Leila shook her head at her.)

LEILA: Wow. You are so selfish!

(She smiled.)

LEILA: But, seeing as it's your special day, I'll let you off and get on with it.

SOFIA: But I don't want flowers in my hair!

LEILA: Sofia, we've been over this. You don't know what you want!

SOFIA: Yes, I do. I want to look like I looked at the shop when I tried my dress on. And I didn't have half a shrubbery tangled up in my hair.

LEILA: I see.

(She shrugged.)

LEILA: That's a shame. Quite clearly the people in the shop didn't have a clue what they were doing. If I'd been there, I'd have *insisted* on flowers. And trust me, we wouldn't be having this conversation right now.

SOFIA: I know. We'd have dismissed the idea there and then, because it's rubbish!

(Leila stepped back and pouted at her.)

LEILA: Wow. Seriously, Sofia? That's so hurtful! I'm doing everything in my power to make you look gorgeous. Even though I know I'm flogging a dead horse, and that I can only do so much with so little to work with, I'm giving my everything for you! So why can't you just be nice?

(Sofia shuffled uneasily on the spot.)

SOFIA: Well... I guess... when you put it like that...

(Her brow then furrowed.)

SOFIA: What do you mean, flogging a dead horse?

(She gasped.)

SOFIA: So little to work with??? And you think *I'm* the mean one???

LEILA: Yes! I was merely listing hindrances. You were being cruel! You said my idea was rubbish! Which wasn't very nice! Not very nice at all!

(She ruffled her neck indignantly.)

LEILA: It makes me think you should maybe consider changing your surname.

SOFIA: I'm going to! I'm taking Rico's surname this afternoon!

(Leila stared at her hard and bit her lip while she tried to think of something clever to say.)

LEILA: Shit! You've got me there.

SOFIA: Thank you.

LEILA: Okay. You win that round. Now let's just get those flowers for your hair and say no more about it!

(Sofia flapped.)

SOFIA: No! No flowers! And no bloody sashes! I don't need six necklaces, twelve bracelets and foot long earrings either! I'm not interested in any of your absurd ideas! I just want to look pretty, okay? So, stop trying to make me look like a contender for the decorative tree of the year awards!

LEILA: Decorative tree?

SOFIA: Yes! I'm a woman not a bloody conifer! You can't just hang baubles off of me then sprinkle snow on my head! You need to be subtle! For pity's sake Leila, less is more.

LEILA: Rubbish! More is more! That's why it's called more!

SOFIA: Okay, point taken. More *is* more. As in more clutter is more clutter. And it doesn't take long to become too *much* clutter!

(Leila shook her head solemnly.)

LEILA: Sofia, Sofia, Sofia. You've got so much to learn.

SOFIA: Have I now?

LEILA: Yes. Do you think our nation won the war a hundred years ago because we had more soldiers or less?

SOFIA: We...

LEILA: Exactly. We had more! We had more and we won! Why? Because more is better! And on that note, I rest my case!

SOFIA: Then prepare to lose that case! We had less, we just deployed them better!

LEILA: What?

SOFIA: You heard! We had less resources and deployed them better; that's why we won. And that's the same approach I'm going to take to my hair, make up and wedding dress!

LEILA: Um...

SOFIA: And if you're not prepared to help me achieve my goal then I'd like you to leave!

(Leila gaped for a moment unsure how to answer.)

LEILA: Well... I... you see... I just want to help. To make you look pretty.

SOFIA: And I'm happy to let you do that!

LEILA: Awesome! I'll fetch the glitter and see if I can catch some fireflies!

SOFIA: I don't need any of that!

LEILA: Yes, you do! You said you want to look pretty! Well, if we're going to achieve *that* miracle, we're going to need all the help we can get!

(She then looked at Sofia's outstretched arm blankly.)

LEILA: What? Why are you pointing at the door?

SOFIA: Depart!

LEILA: What?

SOFIA: I'm relieving you of your duties!

(Leila gasped.)

LEILA: You can't do that! You won't have a bridesmaid if you kick me out!

SOFIA: Good! I never even wanted one! And I certainly never asked *you* to take the role!

LEILA: Yes, you did!  
SOFIA: No, you just assumed I was going to ask you and took over!  
LEILA: Lies!  
SOFIA: Leila...  
(She sighed.)  
SOFIA: Please... just leave. Let's not fall out. Just... go!  
LEILA: I see. Like that, is it?  
SOFIA: Yes!  
LEILA: Fine. Then I'm washing my hands of you! Forget you, Sofia! Forget you and forget your silly wedding! I'm not going!  
(She then stormed towards the door. As she did so, Sofia offered her a smile.)  
SOFIA: See you at the ceremony!  
LEILA: Fine! But only because it'll be a better wedding if I'm in attendance!  
(She then slammed the door behind her.)  
SOFIA: Right...

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At the East Axnay Temple of Matrimony, an hour or so later, Rico was sitting on a pew, watching Max pace up and down nervously. He'd never seen a man so nervous in all his life. Watching him pace to and fro, he couldn't help but grin.

RICO: Max!  
(Max looked to him anxiously as he continued to pace.)  
MAX: What?  
RICO: Calm down, mate. I'm the one getting married today, not you.  
MAX: And I never once claimed otherwise.  
RICO: No, but to watch you panic, anyone would think it was *you* who's getting a life sentence today.  
MAX: Don't be ridiculous!  
RICO: I'm not! You look like a fiancé with cold feet!  
MAX: Fuck off. My feet are fine. If anything, they're a bit toasty.  
RICO: That's not what I meant.  
(He rolled his eyes.)  
RICO: Look, just sit the fuck down, will you?  
MAX: No, I'm...  
RICO: Sit the fuck down!  
MAX: What? Oh.  
(He then took a seat next to Rico and proceeded to bite his nails, whilst allowing his leg to vibrate forcefully.)  
RICO: Mate! Pack it in! What are you so nervous for anyway?  
MAX: Aint that obvious?  
RICO: No!  
MAX: Well, it *should* be! Mate... I've never been a best man before.  
RICO: So?  
MAX: So it sounds complicated!  
RICO: It isn't complicated at all. And nor does it *sound* it, come to that!  
MAX: Well it sounded complicated to *me*. I'm bound to fuck it up, I know I am!

RICO: I doubt it.

MAX: No... I will. I'm so stressed, something's bound to go wrong.

RICO: Right...

(He sighed.)

RICO: Look... just to make sure, do you want me to go over it with you again? Like a dress rehearsal!

MAX: Um... yeah. I think we should, mate. Just to make sure I've got everything down.

RICO: Okay.

(He nodded.)

RICO: I'll be the holy man, you can be you.

MAX: Right. So who's gonna be you?

RICO: I'm not in this scene.

MAX: Oh.

RICO: Okay... I'm the holy man, yeah?

MAX: Right...

RICO: I'll say, who's got the rings. And you'll say...

MAX: Um... I have?

RICO: That's it. Then I'll say, can you please pass me the rings.

MAX: Okay. Then what happens.

RICO: You pass me the rings.

MAX: Gotcha.

(He flinched.)

MAX: Wait. In this scenario are you Rico or the holy man!

RICO: The holy man!

MAX: Right. So I give the holy fella the rings, right? Then what?

RICO: Then you sit down.

MAX: Okay. Then what?

RICO: Nothing. That's your involvement complete.

MAX: Really?

RICO: Yes! When he asks who has the rings, you tell him *you've* got them. Then when he asks for them, you give them to him. And that's it!

MAX: Really?

RICO: Yup. That's everything.

MAX: That's *nothing*, you mean! What a waste of time. Is that all the best man does?

RICO: Yeah!

MAX: Then what's the point in having one? I could just give the rings to the holy geezer before kick off, then save myself the trouble of sitting through the boring ceremony!

RICO: It's symbolic, mate.

MAX: Of what? How to waste a good man's afternoon!

RICO: No. *Your* afternoon!

MAX: You cheeky...

RICO: Look... I know it's stupid, mate. Realistically, I could just keep the rings in my pocket and hand them to the holy bloke myself. It'd be more a lot practical, after all.

MAX: And logical!

RICO: Yeah, that too. But that's weddings for you. Everything is ceremonial.

MAX: Hence why they call it a ceremony.

RICO: Yeah.

(He shrugged.)

RICO: And women love all that meaningless drivel, so for her sake, us blokes just go along with it! To make her happy.

(Max looked enlightened.)

MAX: Like cuddling after sex?

RICO: Yeah!

(He furrowed his brow.)

RICO: No!

MAX: Be honest!

RICO: Yes, then! But if you tell my Sofia that, I'll disembowel you with my sword.

MAX: I'll take that under advisement.

RICO: Yeah, you do that!

(They shared a smirk then Max climbed to his feet.)

MAX: Cheers, Rico. I had no idea it was that simple.

RICO: Evidently.

MAX: I tied myself in knots with worry for nothing there.

RICO: Yes, you did. And if you'd just asked me sooner, it wouldn't have happened.

MAX: Yeah, well... I didn't give it a second thought until...

(His jaw then dropped in horror at the sight of one of the wedding guests.)

MAX: Fuck!

RICO: What? What's wrong?

MAX: What's my former conquest doing here?

RICO: Former conquest?

MAX: Emmy! Why would you invite her? She's got a vendetta against me, remember?

RICO: A vendetta?

MAX: Yes! I promised her daily sex then didn't bother going, remember? So she embroidered the word "twat" on my new tunic!

RICO: Mate, we don't *know* that was her!

MAX: Well, who else would have done it?

RICO: Honestly? It could have been anyone who's ever met you!

MAX: Mate...

(He gave an exasperated sigh.)

MAX: Seriously... what did you have to invite her for?

RICO: She's an old friend.

(He shrugged.)

RICO: Well... a friend, at least. She was my landlady up until we all had to move into our base. In fact, she was my landlady when you met her! I've known her far longer than I've known you.

(He smirked.)

RICO: So if anything, she should be asking why I invited you.

MAX: I fail to see how that's funny, mate.

(He then gasped in horror.)

MAX: Fuck! She's coming over! Hide me!

RICO: How? You're a hundred feet tall!

MAX: Even so... you gotta do something before...

(He then cleared his throat, before speaking in a deep, manly voice.)

MAX: Emmy!

EMMY: Max!

(She smiled at Rico.)

EMMY: Congratulations on your imminent nuptials.

RICO: Thanks, Emmy. Yeah, I...

EMMY: Save it!

(She glowered at Max.)

EMMY: So... didn't fancy honouring our agreement then?

MAX: Um... well... the thing is, you see... I couldn't.

EMMY: Couldn't?

MAX: Yeah. See... something came up.

EMMY: And what's that?

MAX: The opportunity not to.

(He winced.)

MAX: Fuck. That was not a good answer.

EMMY: No. It wasn't! This does not end well for you, Maximillian!

(She then headed away, sneering. Watching her go, Max bit his lip.)

MAX: Rico?

RICO: Yeah?

MAX: This would be a really bad time to tell her that Max is actually short for Maxwell, wouldn't it?

RICO: It'd be a catastrophic time, mate.

MAX: I'll leave it then.

(He then shrugged it off before glancing down the aisle again.)

MAX: Oh... Leila's here. Isn't she the bridegroom?

RICO: I'm the bridegroom!

MAX: What? Oh yeah. I meant best woman!

RICO: Bridesmaid!

MAX: Yeah. So if she's here, Sofia must be outside. Mate... your wedding's imminent.

RICO: Mate, my wedding will start when it starts. And not because Leila's here. Sofia plucked up the courage to dismiss her from her duties.

MAX: Yeah?

(He puffed out.)

MAX: Blimey. That was brave!

RICO: No, mate. It was necessary!

MAX: Well... wait... if Leila's not her best bridesmaid groom...

RICO: Just bridesmaid!

MAX: Yeah. If she's not the bridesmaid, who's gonna walk Sofia down the aisle?

RICO: What? That was never the bridesmaid's job anyway!

MAX: Wasn't it?

RICO: No! That's a job for her closest male friend!

MAX: That's you!

RICO: Besides me! Usually a father would do it, but hers dumped her in a temple when she was five, remember?

MAX: Oh. So she needs the next best male friend then. But not you.

RICO: Yeah!

MAX: That's me!

RICO: Actually, she asked Chi to do it!

MAX: What? Why?

RICO: Because you're the best man!

MAX: Oh, yeah. Then why didn't she ask Tommy?

RICO: Well... she was going to, but... the day before we planned everything, she had a bit of an episode during battle. You know, an adrenaline rush. She told him he was as about as useful as a canoe made from old colanders. And that everyone who ever loved him was sadly mistaken. That one stung a bit. And something about not wanting to underestimate him, but starting to suspect that doing so was impossible. That didn't go down well either. Then she said the last time he had a brainwave, it was actually waving goodbye! Oh, and she said that his wooden carving of a dog looked like a goat having a stroke! And...

MAX: Say no more. After insulting his woodwork... well... there's no coming back from that.

RICO: Exactly. So Chi is giving her away.

MAX: Fair enough.

(Just then, Leila arrived in front of them and looked them both up and down.)

LEILA: Nice suit, Rico.

RICO: Thank you.

(She then looked to Max.)

LEILA: Yours is shit.

MAX: Hey!

LEILA: What?

MAX: You...

(He furrowed his brow.)

MAX: Haven't you got some bridesmaid duties to attend to?

(He smirked.)

MAX: Oh, no, that's right... Sofia fired you!

LEILA: Rubbish!

MAX: Is it?

LEILA: Yes! I quit my role because quite frankly, Sofia doesn't deserve me!

RICO: Yup. She deserves so much better.

LEILA: I mean, she deserves *less*! Much less! I'm sophisticated and awesome, whereas she's bland and ordinary. My extravagant ideas would have been lost on her, so when she begged me to take the role, I respectfully declined!

RICO: You lying...

LEILA: You don't know; you weren't there!

RICO: Of course I wasn't! It didn't even happen!

LEILA: Wow. You tell lies, you do!

RICO: *I* tell lies?

MAX: Just leave it, mate. You know arguing with Leila is a waste of time.

LEILA: That's right. Listen to Max! Terrible suit; awesome advice. Clearly what country bumpkins lack in dress sense, they make up for in wise words.

MAX: Leila...

(Just then, with truly terrible timing, Tommy bundled his way into the main temple from a door at the side of the room. Having arrived that way, he was immediately met by a scowling Leila.)

LEILA: Look what just fell out of the idiot cupboard!

TOMMY: Idiot cupboard? That's a corridor!

(He ruffled his neck.)

TOMMY: The corridor which leads to the toilets, if you must know.

RICO: Really? Cool!

(He then hastened away and exited via the side door.)

RICO: Won't be long.

(Left behind, Max couldn't help but suck his teeth. Leila was scowling at Tommy with such a piercing glare, he was afraid she might draw blood.)

MAX: Uncomfortable...

LEILA: Well, that's interesting. Look at you two. The best man and the worst man, side by side.

TOMMY: Worst man?

LEILA: Ever!

TOMMY: Right.

(He furrowed his brow.)

TOMMY: Can we just go back to you not talking to me, Leila? That was much less nauseating.

(Leila glanced skywards.)

LEILA: What an odd fellow! He seems to think I was talking to him. I was just amusing myself, by commentating on the fact that the best man is standing next to the worst man ever to tumble head first out of a regretful woman's vagina.

MAX: Ouch.

TOMMY: Yeah! Ouch! Stop quoting Sofia!

(Leila just scoffed then made a deliberate exhibition of snubbing him.)

LEILA: Hmph!

TOMMY: Stop doing that, will you? It's really annoying.

(Leila gave him a cocky glance then did it again.)

LEILA: Hmph.

TOMMY: Oh, fuck off. Go and sleep with Max or something. Go on, get out of my hair!

MAX: Dude!

LEILA: Yeah!

(She flinched.)

LEILA: I mean... Max, tell Tommy I said yeah!

MAX: Leila agrees! Out of order!

TOMMY: Didn't stop you though, did it?

MAX: I meant *you* were out of order!

(Just then, Emmy appeared with a dark furrow on her brow. She'd been hovering nearby, listening in and had hastened over to Max, angrily.)

EMMY: What's this? You slept with this Linda woman?

LEILA: Linda? Who the fuck is Linda?

EMMY: You!

LEILA: How dare you?

EMMY: I was talking to Max!

MAX: Um...

EMMY: That's a yes!

(She snarled.)

EMMY: Wow. So that's how it is, is it? You made an agreement to service *me*, then banged *this* trollop instead! Betrayal!

MAX: Betrayal?

TOMMY: Yeah! Your specialist subject.

MAX: Huh? What are you on about!

TOMMY: You had no right, you cunt!

MAX: To do what?

TOMMY: Bang Leila!

LEILA: Keep your voice down!

MAX: Yeah!

(He sneered.)

MAX: Besides... she wasn't seeing anyone, so what's your problem?

LEILA: He still liked me!

MAX: Oh.

(He winced.)

MAX: I wish you'd said!

TOMMY: I did! I told you when we were on Tarragon Island!

MAX: I thought you were joking!

TOMMY: I wasn't! And if you'd just checked with me first, you'd have found that out.

MAX: Why would I do that?

TOMMY: Because you *always* ask a mate before you bang his ex!

MAX: *I* don't!

TOMMY: And that's exactly the issue, you cunt!

EMMY: An issue that pales into insignificance when compared to how you betrayed me, Max!

TOMMY: Fuck off, you! Don't pale *my* issues into insignificance! Don't even dull them into *moderate* significance! My issues matter!

EMMY: Not to me!

(She snarled.)

EMMY: What matters to me is *my* issues! And Max, you need to pay for this betrayal!

(She then shook her fist at Leila.)

EMMY: And so does your accomplice here!

LEILA: Try it, fuck face, I'll break your legs!

EMMY: Not if I break you arms first.

LEILA: Even then! I'll break your legs with *my* legs!

EMMY: Not if I break you arms and legs at the same time!

LEILA: Um...

(She snarled.)

LEILA: That won't stop me head-butting you in the face!

EMMY: Yes, it will! You'll have to stand up to do that!

LEILA: So?

EMMY: Good luck doing that with two broken legs!

LEILA: I'll get one of them walking frames!

(She flinched.)

LEILA: What the hell am I saying? You can't break my limbs because your old and weak!

EMMY: Not as old as you!

(Leila was horrified. Emmy was at least ten years her senior.)

LEILA: No! You did not say that!

EMMY: Oh, but I did!

LEILA: Then prepare to die!

(The two of them then proceed to brawl, right there at the front of the temple. Normally, Tommy and Max would have been quick to break them up; unfortunately they were somewhat preoccupied.)

TOMMY: You're a walking fucking battering ram, you are! You just thunder through life, demolishing other people's happiness as you go! And you don't even know you're doing it!

MAX: That's not even remotely true!

TOMMY: Oh! So you *do* know you're doing it! That makes you an even bigger cunt!

MAX: I'm saying, I don't do anything of the sort!

(He dodged to avoid Leila's arms as she threw another punch at Emmy then continued.)

MAX: I don't know where the fuck you're getting that from!

TOMMY: No? Then allow me! First you stole Rico's accommodation! Then his harem! Then you stole his place in the Axnay Volley team! And you did so without a second thought! Just bludgeoned your way through and took what you wanted! And now you've banged the only woman I ever truly liked! Now she's gone from being the love of my life to merely being *your* former conquest, and I may never be able to see her as anything else!

MAX: Mate...

(He swayed to avoid Emmy's attempt to elbow drop Leila then resumed.)

MAX: *Your* perception is *your* problem! All I've done is accept all the kind things people have offered me!

TOMMY: You mean you took them because they were there!

MAX: Being offered!

(Just then, the side door opened and Rico returned. At once, his eyes bulged. Emmy and Leila were embroiled in out and out violence and Max and Tommy were squaring up, very much about to go at it, and knock Tommy out.)

RICO: What the fuck???

(He hurried over there and shouted at them angrily.)

RICO: What the fuck are you lot doing???

(He instantly received a round of applause from everyone else at the temple.)

RICO: Don't just applaud me, you cunts! Help me break them up! Like you should have been doing while I was having a piss!

(Reluctantly, a group of lads from the front upped then paced towards him.)

RICO: You lot stop the girls and I'll get in between these two idiots!

(Just then, a trumpet fanfare struck up outside and a church official called out from the back of the temple.)

OFFICIAL: Places, everyone! The bride has arrived!!!

(Growling, Rico grabbed Tommy and Max by the collar.)

RICO: Fucking shut up and sit down!!!

MAX: Mate!

TOMMY: Rico...

RICO: I mean it! Sofia's about to come in and I want her to see a harmonious temple! If you can't help her achieve that, you can fuck off home now!

MAX: You don't mean that!

RICO: Max, Sofia means more to me than the rest of the human race put together. I'd shit in your shoes then gleefully take the beating if I thought it'd make her happy. So throwing you out to help make her day isn't even something I'd need to think twice about.

(He then pushed them both away and headed for the front of the temple. As he did so, he pointed towards the attendees.)

RICO: That's goes for all of you! If *any* of you ruin today for my Sofia, you'll be getting my sword up your arse!

(An embarrassed silence ensued and everyone scuttled to their seats. Satisfied he'd said his piece, Rico nodded then cast a glance towards the temple doors.)

RICO: Ready when you are, Sofia. Let's get our marriage on!

---

A few short minutes later, despite Leila's complaints that the seats were too hard and that it was all Tommy's fault, Rico and Sofia's wedding finally got underway. It began with another threat from Rico for the guests to either shut up or get out. Mercifully everyone opted for the former and a few seconds later, Sofia appeared in the temple doorway, clinging onto Chi's arm. Her walk down the aisle had begun. It was an aisle that felt about five miles long. Everyone was staring at her. For someone who used to whimper orders to shopkeepers whilst standing side-on, unable to look them in the eye, being the centre of attention was horribly intimidating. With every step she took, she could feel the self-confidence she'd gained since being with Rico, slowly ebbing away again. Her former nervous wreck of a self was rapidly returning. So much so, that before she even reached then midway point, she was whimpering and sweating.

It didn't help Sofia that many of the wedding guests still had a grudge against her. Because of her affliction, she'd thrown many an indefensible insult their way and they hadn't forgiven her for it. Their cold scowls were the last thing she needed. Right now, she was in her own personal hell. Despite walking at her side, however, Chi hadn't even noticed Sofia's obvious distress. Her mind was very much preoccupied by one nagging thought. She was at a wedding, giving Sofia away. Therefore, would some of those in attendance mistake her for Sofia's dad. Would they assume Sofia came from one of those progressive families where the dad happily wears a dress, grows his hair long and minces his daughter down the aisle in high heels? It was a ridiculous thought. No such families even existed, but nevertheless, it was the only thing on Chi's mind right now. The fact that her generous cleavage more than gave the game away when it came to her gender hadn't even occurred to her.

Those not scowling at the whimpering bride in the temple that day included Leila. She'd spent most of the last year scowling at Sofia, but not today. Today she was happy for her. Despite being the world's most hateful person, Leila loved the idea of love. As such, even though she didn't like Sofia very much, she could see that Rico and Sofia belonged together and it delighted her that their love had found its way. Thinking it over for a few moments, she exhaled with happiness, then her brow furrowed. How was that fair? This vile-tongued nervous-wreck had found happiness when the man *she* liked had wiped his hands of her. Pondering that thought for a moment, jealousy took over then she found herself joining the ranks of those scowling at Sofia bitterly as she limped fearfully down the aisle. It seemed that the only respite Sofia would get was from those who barely knew her, and Max and Tommy. They just watched on blankly.

Mercifully, there was one person watching her with a smile on his face. That was Rico. It was a starry-eyed smile. Sofia was his goddess, his love and his very best friend. And here she was, making her way to him. Despite the fact that edging down the aisle felt like walking through a gauntlet of fire, she wasn't backing down. She was determined to make her way to him. This meant everything to Rico. He understood how hard the walk was for her. He could tell from her terrified thousand-yard stare that she felt tortured right now. And yet, she kept on coming. Because she loved him. Had Rico ever had any doubts that she was the one for him, he certainly wouldn't have them anymore. Watching as she neared the front, he could only exhale joyfully.)

RICO: She's doing that for me!

(The holy man gave him a sideways glance.)

HOLY MAN: Trembling and whimpering?

RICO: What?

HOLY MAN: She finds you that intimidating, does she?

(He bit his lip.)

HOLY MAN: You're not forcing her to marry you, are you? Only I won't accept that kind of thing in my temple!

RICO: What? No! Why would you even think that?

HOLY MAN: Because the poor girl looks terrified! Clearly the thought of marrying *you* is scaring the knickers off the poor thing!

(He snarled.)

HOLY MAN: You're not holding one of her family members hostage, are you?

RICO: Of course not!

HOLY MAN: Then why is she even here? It doesn't take a genius to figure out that's she crapping herself with every step! She quite clearly hates your guts.

RICO: Mate!

HOLY MAN: Holy man!

RICO: Fine! Holy man then! Sofia and I are in love!

HOLY MAN: Yes, but who with? *You* love *her* apparently, but it's abundantly clear to me that she thinks you're an arsehole and she'd rather be somewhere else.

RICO: Wrong!

HOLY MAN: Am I? Then why is she so bloody nervous?

RICO: Because... that's who she is.

(He smiled.)

RICO: And despite what you're seeing, she's come a long way since I first met her. Back then, she'd start every sentence by whimpering "um" then mumble the rest of it whilst staring at her feet.

(He gestured to Sofia.)

RICO: She'd never have been able to brave this walk back then. Yeah... she's come a long, long way.

HOLY MAN: I see. Well... that's one explanation. Personally, I'm more inclined to believe that you've taken her parents hostage and are forcing her to marry you against her will.

RICO: You're wrong then, aren't you?

HOLY MAN: Well...

RICO: And quite frankly, you're a bit of a cunt. Why, I've got a good mind to...

(Just then, Sofia sprinted up to him and buried herself in his arms. With twenty feet to go the walk had finally become too much for her, so she'd ended it as quickly as possible with one final push. It may not have been the most dignified way to arrive at the alter, but she'd made it. Mercifully, despite having been deposited on her backside when Sofia had spun free of her, Chi understood her actions and simply edged away to take her seat. The players were now all in place. The pieces were set and the wedding could begin.

The holy man, however, was hesitant.)

HOLY MAN: Young lady?

(Sofia nervously peered at him from where she'd nestled into Rico's chest.)

SOFIA: Um...

(She glanced at her feet.)

SOFIA: Yes?

HOLY MAN: I just want you to know that...

(He then leaned forward and whispered in her ear.)

SOFIA: Hostages? What? No.

(She blushed.)

SOFIA: We're getting married because...

(She hunched her shoulders excitedly.)

SOFIA: Love.

HOLY MAN: I see. Well... if there's anything you *do* want to tell me, my door is always open.

(He then gave Rico a deeply distrusting glance.)

HOLY MAN: I'm onto you!

RICO: Mate...

HOLY MAN: We've discussed this!

RICO: Fine! Holy mate then! Can you pack it in? Sofia and I are in love!

HOLY MAN: So you claim!

RICO: You...

SOFIA: Um...

(Sofia blushed. Being back at Rico's side was swiftly restoring her confidence.)

SOFIA: I don't know where you got that hostage situation idea from, Mr Holy Person, but you're very much mistaken. Rico loves me, and I love Rico. With all my heart.

He's the only one who's ever understood me, looked past my affliction and seen the person I am inside. He's my soul mate, my everything and...

(She then gasped in horror.)

SOFIA: Shit! They're my vows! Scratch that! Just know that Rico and I are awesome pals!

RICO: Pals?

SOFIA: Yes. For now.

(She smiled.)

SOFIA: I tell you how I really feel when the times comes.

(They glanced into one another's eyes then Rico nodded.)

RICO: That look told me everything I need to know even *without* words, Sofia.

SOFIA: Right? We don't even *need* vows; just a look!

HOLY MAN: Yes, but you're bloody well going to recite them; the wedding can't go ahead otherwise!

(Just then, a voice echoed out from the rafters of the temple. A booming voice, that exuded authority.)

VOICE: Good! This wedding must not go ahead anyway!!!

(At once, everyone in attendance glanced upwards, desperate to know where the voice was coming from.)

RICO: If that's your former temple pissing about again, Sofia...

SOFIA: Why would they do that?

HOLY MAN: What would *anyone* do that? What the hell was that voice???

(Just then, a panicked voice rose up from one of the female guests.)

GUEST: A ghost!!!

(Everyone shot a glance at where the guest had been looking then leant back in fear.)

MAX: What the fuck is that?

TOMMY: A floaty, white... fucking... transparent apparition!

MAX: Well, yeah, I can see that, you cunt! I meant why is it here!

(The voice then rose up again, projected from the mouth of the spirit.)

VOICE: This wedding cannot proceed!!!

SOFIA: Aw.

VOICE: The one you call Rico is unworthy of the goddess Sofia!!!

RICO: Goddess???

MAX: Goddess???

HOLY MAN: Goddess???

CHI: Hmm... that would explain a few things.

SOFIA: Um... I'm not a goddess!

VOICE: You *are* a goddess! I know, for I created you!!! I created all of you!!! For I am the supreme being!!! And I will not allow a goddess to marry a mortal!

SOFIA: Mean!

VOICE: I mean, he's not even a good one! Look at him! The scrawny twat!

RICO: Do you mind???

VOICE: I *do* mind!!!

(The spirit held its arms aloft.)

VOICE: The goddess Sofia will not marry this less than adequate mortal!

RICO: Hey!

VOICE: She will marry the god Alenzi! As decreed by myself; the supreme being!

Argue if you must, but you will fall foul of my divine wrath!

(The mist then evaporated, leaving everyone staring at one another in bewilderment.)

MAX: What the living fuck was that?

HOLY MAN: It was bollocks, that's what it was! Everyone knows god's a woman!

RICO: Really?

HOLY MAN: According to *this* temple's teaching, yes!

TOMMY: What if you're wrong?

HOLY MAN: Shut up!

TOMMY: Right! An excellent argument, sir.

HOLY MAN: Thank you! Now as I was saying... that was bollocks. A wind up, probably. I bet there is no Alenzi!

(Just then, the side door crashed open and a debonair gentleman in expensive finery stepped through it, striking a pose.)

ALENZI: Wrong! *I* am Alenzi!

(He smirked arrogantly.)

ALENZI: God tells me you have a fiancée for me!

(Silence immediately descended. In this moment, nobody knew what to think, let alone say. Before them was a man the supreme being had declared a fellow god. Being in his presence, therefore was terrifying. It was also somewhat confusing. From what most of those in attendance knew about Sofia, she was nothing but a meek, whimpering mouse who turned into a foul-mouthed anger machine during the heat of battle. Could she really be a goddess? It seemed ridiculous. At the same time, if she *wasn't* a divine being, why would the supreme being want one of his fellow gods to marry such a person? It simply made no sense. As such, the entire congregation just sat there and stared in either horror or bewilderment.)

ALENZI: Um... I believe I asked you a question.

HOLY MAN: No, you didn't. You simply stated what you believe!

ALENZI: Good point. Allow me to rephrase it as a question. Where's my fiancée?

(Whimpering and trembling, Sofia swiftly pointed to the exit.)

SOFIA: Um... she went that way!

ALENZI: You lie!

(He then swaggered up to her arrogantly.)

ALENZI: Your luminescent goddess aura tells me *you're* the fiancée I seek.

SOFIA: Um... no! I only came in to use the toilet!

HOLY MAN: You liar! She *is* the one you seek!

SOFIA: Why would you say that???

HOLY MAN: In case he's the real deal! I'm not lying to a god.

TOMMY: Seriously? You've changed your tune!

HOLY MAN: Indeed. And if Alenzi here is for real, I'll be changing my faith and my church too!

RICO: Yeah, but he's *not* for real.

(He stepped in front of Sofia then snarled.)

RICO: Bugger off and find your own wife, god boy! This one's mine!

ALENZI: I beg to differ!

RICO: Fine. Differ away. It doesn't make you any less wrong.

(He looked to the holy man.)

RICO: Holy bloke... you may proceed with the ceremony.

ALENZI: Except with me as the groom!

RICO: No! You may proceed as *planned*!

SOFIA: With Rico as my bride!

RICO: Groom!

SOFIA: Yeah!

RICO: Begin, holy bloke. This fella's just leaving!

HOLY MAN: Um... actually... that might prove to be a mistake. I mean, if he *is* divine and I go against the wishes of the supreme being... well... I hear there's a rather toasty, fire-based eternity downstairs and it's not the sort of place you want to visit, let alone dwell in for the rest of time.

ALENZI: A wise move! Come, Sofia; you and I shall become bound together and...

HOLY MAN: Actually, come to think of it, it might be a mistake to marry *you* off to Sofia too.

ALENZI: Excuse me? Why?

RICO: Because I'll punch him in the face if he even considers it!

HOLY MAN: And that's just *one* of the reasons. If you're *not* a god, and yet I *treat* you like a deity whilst in god's house... same problem. I'll be off to that sweat box of torture and misery down below.

(He sighed.)

HOLY MAN: It's hard to know whether you're doing right thing or not when you're a religious devotee like me! Sometimes it makes me wish I was an atheist!

(He then winced towards the ceiling.)

HOLY MAN: I didn't mean that, your holiness.

(Just then, the white apparition appeared again. This time, its booming voice was much louder.)

VOICE: Stop procrastinating! Holy man? I have spoken! Marry Alenzi to Sofia and may that scrawny Rico fella forever hold his peace!

RICO: You fucking...

VOICE: Easy, son. Supreme being, remember! Don't make me smite you!

(The apparition then vanished again.)

HOLY MAN: Right...well... I'm still not convinced, but...

(He blushed.)

HOLY MAN: I *am* scared, so I'm gonna do what the creepy ghost suggested.

SOFIA: Mean!!!

RICO: You can't do that!

ALENZI: He can and he will! You lose, Rico! And I mean that generally! Loser!

RICO: Bollocks. Not happening!

ALENZI: What makes you so sure?

RICO: The fact that you can't marry her if she's isn't here! Let's go home, Sofia!

SOFIA: Ooh, good thinking!

(They then joined hands and attempted to head for the exit, only to find it blocked by warriors.)

RICO: Excuse me, lads.

SOFIA: Coming through!

MAX: Sorry, mate. You're going nowhere.

KEVIN: God has spoken!

RICO: God? You don't know he's a god!

MAX: Yeah, but as gambles go, it's not a bad one to take, is it? I mean, if he's real and we let you go, we'll end up going to that underground hothouse the holy fella mentioned.

RICO: Mate... just fucking move.

TOMMY: We can't do that!

RICO: You can if I make you fucking move!

TOMMY: Yeah, but you can't!

RICO: Says who?

TOMMY: Max's fist!

MAX: And the fists of all the other Power Blades. Sorry, mate. I guess you and Sofia weren't meant to be!

SOFIA: Yes, we are! You tell lies!

MAX: On the contrary, Sofia... I repeat divine truths.

(Chi then stood up and added her two coronas.)

CHI: I agree with Max.

RICO: You cunt!

SOFIA: Meany! Is that because I called you a low budget milf that time? I didn't mean it!

CHI: Sofia...

SOFIA: It's true. I'm sure *loads* of men consider you a milf; not just the poor ones who have to take what they can get!

(She then winced at her own words.)

SOFIA: That's not gonna help!

CHI: You...

(She took a calming breath then nodded.)

CHI: Nope. Not gonna react. We've got far more important things to do. The gods have spoken and you'll have to marry Alenzi!

SOFIA: I don't want to!

CHI: Yes, but apparently god doesn't care.

(She then stepped up to Alenzi.)

CHI: But *you* have to understand that we have laws in this nation. Laws that need to be abided by.

ALENZI: I disagree. I'm a god. Your laws mean nothing to me!

CHI: And your ignorance of our laws cuts no ice with *me*. Therefore I must insist that you accompany me to the warrior's guild.

ALENZI: What the fuck for?

CHI: The law states that if you want to marry a warrior, the marriage needs to be registered at the guild in advance.

ALENZI: Yes, but I'm happy to overlook that.

CHI: Then you're a fool. Unless Sofia's marriage is pre-registered by her guild, her marriage won't be legal!

ALENZI: What? That's insane!

CHI: Nevertheless, that's the law.

(Alenzi sighed.)

ALENZI: Shit!

(He then stood tall and nodded.)

ALENZI: Keep her here, decent god-fearing citizens! I shall return in...

(He looked to Chi.)

CHI: Ten minutes.

ALENZI: Ten minutes!

(He then grabbed Chi's arm and proceeded to lead her down the aisle, through the throng of warriors. Sofia and Rico tried to follow suit. Alas their path was blocked.)

RICO: Max!!!

MAX: What?

RICO: You're a cunt!

(Max could only shrug.)

MAX: Yeah, but... at least this way, I'm not a cunt who's doomed to an afterlife of eternal torment!

(Rico and Sofia stared at him bitterly then turned to face one another.)

SOFIA: We need better friends.

RICO: You're not kidding!

---

Some ten minutes later, with all the doors blocked so they couldn't escape, Sofia and Rico sat themselves upon the alter table, looking decidedly glum. Sofia had her head nestled into Rico's shoulder. In front of them, stood Max, Tommy, Leila and Emmy. They claimed to be there for moral support, but it was obvious to one and all that they were only there as part of the congregation's efforts to stop Sofia from fleeing. Max, however, was especially eager to promote the supportiveness angle, just so he didn't look bad.

MAX: I'm not arguing that, mate. I *am* in favour keeping Sofia here! No denial here, son! Nope! If god has spoken, which looks like a distinct possibility, I don't want to go against him! And you can't really hold that against me!

RICO: No? Fucking watch me!

MAX: Okay, you can then. You can hold it against me forever. What you can't claim, however, is that I don't sympathise. As much as I'm part of the effort to make sure god isn't denied his wishes, I do feel for you both, and I am here to offer you my fullest support.

SOFIA: Well... good. I just hope your fullest support is long, abrasive and sharp, so it hurts like fuck when you shove up your arse!

RICO: Sofia...

SOFIA: Yeah... sorry... adrenaline spike.

RICO: It's okay.

SOFIA: It's not. I really hate everyone right now and I feel like I wasted that adrenaline rush. I've got far better insults than that I could have used. I'm so disappointed in myself.

LEILA: I'm disappointed in you too. Alenzi is a god, Sofia! A god! You're so lucky! In your shoes, I'd trade in Rico in a heartbeat!

SOFIA: That's because you don't *love* Rico!

LEILA: Rico doesn't love me either! What's your point?

SOFIA: That trading in someone you *don't* love is easy. I'll never trade in someone that I *do*.

LEILA: I see. Yes! That was quite obviously the point! Sorry. I was just a little distracted by the way Emmy is sneering at me.

EMMY: Damned right! As soon as this wedding's over, our punch up is going to resume! Big time!

SOFIA: Yes, well, don't hold your breath! You lot might be able to make me stand at the alter, but you can't make me say I do! Instead I'll say I do not!

RICO: Bad idea. He'll cut you off before you say "not"!

SOFIA: Oh, yeah. I'll just say no then! Or, fuck off, will I!

(She nodded.)

SOFIA: That'll show him! And I'll vow to hate him forever. A vow I intend to keep. I'll also vow to have an affair with Rico. Another vow I intend to keep! And when he asks if anyone knows of any lawful impediment as to why we shouldn't be wed, I'll put my own hand up and say he's a cunt!

TOMMY: That's not a lawful impediment, Sofia, that's just an observation!

LEILA: Just tell them you're already married! That's not even a lie. You had to marry a bloke at your former temple.

SOFIA: Hmm...

RICO: Didn't that get annulled? It's had *better* have been annulled!

SOFIA: It was, but the holy man doesn't need to know that!

RICO: Yes, he does! If he thinks you're already married, *I* can't marry you either!

SOFIA: Oh. I'll tell everyone I'm a lesbian then!

MAX: And if he asks you to prove it?

SOFIA: Um... Leila?

LEILA: You can fuck *right* off!

SOFIA: Aw...

(She sighed.)

SOFIA: You lot suck!

EMMY: I resent that! *I* don't suck! Max sucks, and does this Leila person!

LEILA: Seriously? Do you want to go at it again???

EMMY: Yes!

(Max sighed.)

MAX: Fuck sake, Rico, what did you invite *her* for?

RICO: She's my teammate!

MAX: Not her! Emmy!

(Emmy glowered at him.)

EMMY: What?

(Seeing Emmy distracted, Leila's eye lit up.)

LEILA: A-ha!!!

(With that, she pounced on her and the two of them proceeded to brawl on the floor on the temple.)

LEILA: Die, whore!!!

EMMY: No, *you* die!!!

(Watching them through defeated eyes, Rico could only sigh.)

RICO: I already explained why I invited her, Max. She's an old friend.

MAX: She's a thug!

(He pointed to where Emmy and Leila were yanking at each other's hair.)

MAX: And she quite obviously brings out the worst in Leila! That's the last thing we need! The best in Leila is horrible enough! You really dropped the ball on that one, mate!

(Rico scowled at him.)

RICO: Did I? Fucking, did I? Only it seems to me, you're overlooking something here, Max! Emmy's acting up because *you* made her a promise and didn't keep it! She's also angry because despite *you* making that promise to her, *you* slept with Leila instead! Which happens to be the same reason Tommy's got the hump with you! Meaning the one common denominator in all this bad feeling is you, you cunt!

MAX: How can you say that???

TOMMY: Why? Is he wrong, stampede boy?

MAX: Stampede boy?

TOMMY: Yeah! Stampede boy! Like a herd of fucking elephants, you charge through life, crush things into oblivion then keep going, completely oblivious to the chaos you've caused!

MAX: Do I fuck! I made a deal with Emmy, yes. A room in exchange for sex. I didn't need the room in the end though, did I? No room, no sex! A fair non-exchange of good and services! As for sleeping with Leila, that was a mistake! And it's also none of your fucking business!

TOMMY: Yes, it is! You took a shit all over the man code! You do *not* bang your mate's ex without his expression permission! For all you know, he might still like her! And I do! Did! Probably *do*! I don't fucking know! It doesn't make much difference, now though, does it, because the dual-tusked behemoth known as you, has already crushed any hope I had into the dirt!

MAX: Bullshit! You can ask her out again at any time!

TOMMY: And live happily forever after in a house with *you*, her former fucking conquest? That'd be fucking miserable!

MAX: That's just how *you* see it.

TOMMY: That's how the man code sees it!!!

RICO: He doesn't understand the man code, Tommy! He lives by the country bumpkin code! If he sees a goat unattended, he's gonna fuck it! He doesn't care what the owner thinks!

MAX: A goat? A fucking goat? Leila's not a goat! She was a willing participant!

RICO: So are some goats, I hear! Randy little fuckers, they are! But you should still ask the farmer before you bang one!

SOFIA: Um... I feel the conversation may have taken an odd turn there.

TOMMY: And you'd be right! Leila's a woman, not a goat. Max is the randy goat. And a stampeding elephant. And a one man swarm of locusts! He's basically a menagerie of all things shit!

(He then stepped over where Emmy and Leila were wrestling on the floor and took a seat on the front pew.)

TOMMY: Cunt.

(Max watched him go then shook his head.)

MAX: Wow. Can you believe that bloke?

(He then stepped over Leila and headed to the pews on the other side. Left behind, Sofia and Rico could only share a defeated glance.)

RICO: I'm not gonna lie, babe. This is not how I foresaw our wedding going.  
SOFIA: Well... no.

---

At the warrior's guild, a short while later, Chi led Alenzi towards her desk then gestured towards a seat in front of it. In no mood to hang around, Alenzi glanced at the chair then furrowed his brow.

ALENZI: Right... why are you pointing at a chair?

CHI: I was offering you a seat.

ALENZI: No, thank you. I have seats at home.

CHI: I wasn't giving it to you for keeps!

ALENZI: Oh.

(He grimaced.)

ALENZI: You expected me to rent it?

CHI: No, I just thought you might want to sit on it!

ALENZI: Then you thought incorrectly. I want to fill out this registration then go back to the temple to collect my bride.

CHI: I see.

ALENZI: Quickly!

CHI: Right.

(Chi smiled.)

CHI: The forms are over here in this alcove.

(She then paced over to the black marble. Anxious to complete the formalities, Alenzi followed her.)

ALENZI: Will this take long?

CHI: No. I just need to make sure I've got the right form.

(She then flicked through some papers on a shelf next to the black marble.)

ALENZI: Hurry!

CHI: Patience. It won't take a minute.

(She offered him a kind smile.)

CHI: While I'm finding it, check out the black rock there. See how smooth it is. It's actually a pleasure to touch.

ALENZI: No, thank you.

CHI: Humour me.

(Alenzi rolled his eyes.)

ALENZI: Fine.

(He then placed his hand on the marble. At once, a serene calmness washed over him.)

ALENZI: Oh, my. That is smooth. It's truly a delight for the fingertips. Lovely.

(With a finger placed on the other side of the marble, Chi nodded.)

CHI: Lovely indeed. And also very enlightening.

(With that, she picked up the papers she'd been flicking through and dropped them in the small bin at her feet.)

ALENZI: What are you doing?

CHI: That was just a pile of leaflets that I asked Kiki to discard. Apparently, she forgot.

ALENZI: I see. Then where's this bloody form, woman? Don't piss me about; hop to it! I swear, if you delay me any longer, god's wrath *will* be upon you.

CHI: I doubt it!

(She smiled politely.)

CHI: You see, I didn't get you to touch the marble just because it feels nice. I got you to touch it, so that I could read you.

ALENZI: Read me?

CHI: Yes! And now I have the undiluted truth from an infallible source. You're not a god. You're just an illusionist who's in love with Sofia. You've loved her from afar for months, but she's never even noticed you, has she?

ALENZI: What an outrageous claim!!!

CHI: It's not though, is it? She's never even given you a second glance. Because of that pesky boyfriend of hers.

(She shrugged.)

CHI: Frustrating, right?

ALENZI: Listen, mortal...

CHI: So you cooked up an illusion in a bid to trick her into marrying *you* instead of her fiancé. Very clever.

(She then held out her palms.)

CHI: But not clever enough. You've been busted, mister. Now leave this guild, go home and never darken Sofia's door again!

ALENZI: Blasphemy!!!

(He shook his fist at her.)

ALENZI: Doubting my divinity!!! Feel my fiery wrath!!!

(He then leant back, thrust an arm in her direction and growled.)

ALENZI: Hell fire!!!

(Chi just looked at his hand and grimaced.)

CHI: Seriously?

ALENZI: Um...

CHI: You weren't seriously expecting the fires of hell to shoot from your fingers and ravage me then, were you? You're not a god, Alenzi!

(Feeling quite the fool, Alenzi stood up and scratched his neck.)

ALENZI: Yes... well... I'm aware of that... I just hoped that maybe...

CHI: You'd suddenly become divine in the twenty seconds since I read you?

ALENZI: Um... yes! I mean... it was ambitious, but...

(He then thrust his hands to his hips and furrowed his brow at her.)

ALENZI: You read me! That's a violation of my privacy!!! I should sue!

CHI: You posed as a god and tried to trick a woman into marrying you. In fact, her peers are still holding her hostage at the temple as we speak. That's a criminal offence!

ALENZI: Hardly!

CHI: It is! It's fraud by deception! Not to mention kidnapping! You could get twenty years!!!

ALENZI: And you could get a ten thousand corona fine for violating my privacy!

(He flinched.)

ALENZI: Which, come to think of it, is nowhere near as bad!

CHI: Nor is it true. By law, I'm allowed to read anyone who comes in here.

ALENZI: Shit.

CHI: Now, would you like to leave quietly, or should I get the security staff to throw you out?

ALENZI: I'll leave quietly, thank you.

(He then glowered at her coldly.)

ALENZI: But you mark my words! You haven't heard the last of this!

(He then stomped towards the door, grumbling under his breath. Chi just watched him go then bit her lip.)

CHI: No... I don't suppose I have.

---

A short while later, Chi strode back into the temple and immediately caused a cease in hostilities and a blanket silence to descend. Every eye in the house was firmly upon her. Even Emmy and Leila, despite having each other by the throat, were staring in her direction. It'd gone from chaos to instant, inanimate silence the very second she'd stepped over the threshold.

CHI: Damn, you lot are creepy.

(Stirred by her words, every single guest then hurried into place for the divine Alenzi's wedding. Every single one of them feared evoking his wrath. Sofia and Rico, on the other hand, stood defiantly at the alter.)

RICO: Registered or not, Chi, that man is not marrying my woman!

SOFIA: Or mine!

(She flinched.)

SOFIA: I mean me! I want to marry Rico! And that's my final word on the matter!

RICO: And mine!

HOLY MAN: Then I pray your souls don't burn in an eternity of molten lava!

CHI: They won't!

(She then marched down the aisle, smiling.)

CHI: I read Alenzi while we were at the guild. He's a fraud! An illusionist with a crush on Sofia!

RICO: Cunt!

CHI: Correct!

MAX: Aw, fuck! We all held Rico and Sofia hostage because of that cunt! Now I look like a bad friend!

RICO: You *are* a bad friend!

MAX: See?

CHI: Yes, well, never mind that, guys. He's been exposed, so we can all put it behind us now.

RICO: Don't bank on it.

SOFIA: Yeah! When we get home, I'm going to drink ten cups of coffee and get all hyper! And when my adrenaline inevitably spikes, I'm going to tell you lot exactly what I think of you!

TOMMY: Uh-oh!

CHI: Whatever! Look... that can wait. Holy man?

HOLY MAN: Shaman woman?

CHI: Shag!

HOLY MAN: I'm not allowed to say that word!

CHI: Fine! The point I'm making is, the hoax has been exposed and we can get on with our lives now. And you can start by marrying these two!

(She gestured to Sofia and Rico.)

LEILA: Me and Emmy? You can fuck right off!

CHI: Your glasses have slipped up onto your forehead!

(Leila swiftly pulled her goggles onto her eyes then look enlightened.)

LEILA: Oh, those two!

(She shrieked.)

LEILA: Not that these are glasses or anything!

SOFIA: Shut up, Leila!

LEILA: Excuse me?

SOFIA: Stop delaying. We've waited long enough.

(She then turned to face Rico.)

SOFIA: Let's do it.

RICO: Definitely.

(He smirked.)

RICO: But let's get married first.

---

Delighted that the false god had been exposed, yet greatly embarrassed that he hadn't been a little more steadfastly supportive of his current faith, the holy man didn't delay in restarting wedding proceedings. He very much hoped that everyone would be so engrossed in the ceremony, they'd forget his comments about changing faiths and joining a new church. He needn't have worried. The ceremony was so boring, half the attendees dozed off just five minutes into it. Tommy was among their number. Max simply watched on, scowling; miffed that Rico had called him a bad friend. Leila watched on with an ever-changing expression. Delighted by the affection on display, she'd watch starry-eyed and open-mouthed for a moment then suddenly remember she was jealous and start scowling. The process would then begin all over again. Delight, anger, delight, anger. Chi, on the other hand, spent the entire time tapping her foot impatiently. She very much had something else on her mind.

Not caring one iota about how her teammates felt, Sofia stared into Rico's eyes throughout. She saw her future staring back at her. Her happiness. Right now, she felt light-headed. She was very much a woman in love. It was a feeling she elocuted beautifully when it was her turn to make her vows.

SOFIA: I love you!

(Silence ensued.)

HOLY MAN: Right. And that's it, is it? They're your vows? Not a single promise, just a statement!

SOFIA: Sorry. I got lost in his eyes. The eyes of the man who found a woman, hidden deep inside a broken shell. The man who lifted me out of a dark and lonely place and showed me the sun. That was a metaphor. He didn't *actually* do that!

HOLY MAN: Just finish your vows, woman!

SOFIA: Right... um... Rico... I promise to do better. I promise to live up to my maiden name and be nicer. I promise... never to lie. So I'll take back what I just said. I don't know how my affliction will affect us going forward.

(She smiled.)

SOFIA: I just know that I have hope. I believe I *can* get better now. And that's all down to you. Because of you, I feel loved and understood. I feel seen. And it makes me want to strive to be better.

(She shrugged.)

SOFIA: I don't know if I *can* be better. But with you at my side, I know there's a chance. You really are the person who changed my life. And in return, I promise to be there for you too. To support you. To cherish you. Unless you try to make me move to Ackfield, of course.

(Rico chuckled.)

RICO: Nope. Lesson learned.

SOFIA: Then our future will be bright.

(She looked to the holy man.)

SOFIA: I'm not good at public speaking, so that'll have to do.

HOLY MAN: And it was fine. Rico?

RICO: What?

HOLY MAN: Vows, you cock!

(He shrieked.)

HOLY MAN: I mean, please recite your vows.

RICO: Okay. Mine are simple. I'm going to promise to keep being exactly the same as I am now. I know I'm supposed to use this moment to talk about how great I plan to be in the future, but I don't want to do that. You see, Sofia, you saw how I am *now* and you fell in *love* with what you saw. And I really love that you did that. So I intend to spend the rest of our lives, *continuing* to be the man you fell in love with. It's really is a simple as that.

HOLY MAN: I see.

(He rolled his eyes.)

HOLY MAN: Spoken like a man who forgot to write his vows and had to make them up on the spot!

RICO: Fuck off! I spent ages thinking of what I'd say then I realised the best thing I can promise Sofia is... well... me.

HOLY MAN: You arrogant...

SOFIA: No, no... he's right. That was perfect.

HOLY MAN: In that case you deserve each other.

(He rolled his eyes.)

HOLY MAN: Now... who has the rings?

(The holy man flinched then caught a small ring box in his midriff.)

HOLY MAN: Why would you throw them at me?

MAX: It's what bad friends do!

HOLY MAN: Right...

(He then opened the box and passed Rico and Sofia a ring each.)

HOLY MAN: Now, do you, Sofia...

(Rico quickly slipped Sofia's ring on her finger, evoking an excited reply from Sofia.)

SOFIA: I do!

HOLY MAN: I hadn't finished.

SOFIA: My answer wouldn't have been any different if you had!

HOLY MAN: Well... I suppose not. So, Rico...

(Rico held up his ringed finger.)

RICO: I do!

HOLY MAN: Jolly good.

(He gave a stifled laugh.)

HOLY MAN: In that case, I now declare you man and wife! You may kiss the bride.

(Rico and Sofia didn't hesitate. Their lips met and their tongues instantly entwined.)

HOLY MAN: Oh, my!

CHI: Um... holy chap?

HOLY MAN: Yes?

CHI: Is that it? Is it official? They're man and wife, legally? No more steps?

HOLY MAN: None. Why?

CHI: Good!

(With that, she upped then stepped up to the alter to face the assembly.)

CHI: All warriors return to the guild immediately, there's an emergency! Do not hesitate! Do not delay! Do not pop home for coffee first! Do not sneak away on your honeymoon!

SOFIA: Aw!

CHI: This is urgent! Now hurry up! There's more to Alenzi than I let on!

(She then charged for the exit with a throng of warriors at her side. Watching her go, Rico and Sofia sighed.)

RICO: Looks like the honeymoon will have to wait.

SOFIA: Yeah... stupid Chi.

(They then headed off down the aisle, hand-in-hand, smiling lovingly at one another. Before long, only Tommy, Emmy, Max and Leila remained.)

MAX: Rico and Sofia... well... you've got to hand it to them... they do make a nice couple. Even if Rico *is* a cunt!

TOMMY: You certainly feel like their love will stand the test of time, don't you?

LEILA: Yeah.

(She scowled at him.)

LEILA: Like ours might have done if you hadn't accidentally taken Chi home!

TOMMY: And like it *still* might have done if you hadn't jumped into bed with Max!

(She snarled at him furiously.)

LEILA: Yeah??? Well...

(She then grabbed Max's arm.)

LEILA: Maybe it was more than just sex! Maybe Max and I are in love! What do you think of that?

MAX: Um...

LEILA: Well? What do you think of that, Tommy? And you Emmy?

TOMMY: Fuck sake!

EMMY: I'm gonna kill you!

LEILA: Ha! I knew you'd hate it! And so do I! This just feels wrong!

(She then let go of Max's arm.)

LEILA: Unhand me, you!

MAX: *You had hold of me!*

LEILA: Liar!

(She shuddered.)

LEILA: That felt horrible! Wrong! Gross, even!

MAX: Hey!

LEILA: It's you I want, Tommy! You! Why can't you just accept...

(Suddenly, Tommy zoomed forwards and took her in his arms.)

TOMMY: After we've been to the guild, I'm going to throw you down and bang you like a randy show-pony!

LEILA: I approve!

TOMMY: Of the sentiment, right? Not the terrible example?

LEILA: Obviously!

(Emmy's face lit up.)

EMMY: Excellent! Now bitch face has settled for second best...

TOMMY: Hey!

EMMY: Max and I can...

MAX: Go our separate ways?

EMMY: No, we can...

(She then paused as if frozen in time.)

EMMY: Actually... forget it. Why am I still pursuing you? That's just cruel.

MAX: I concur!

EMMY: Sorry. That was awful of me. From the minute I heard the rumour about you being gay, I understood why you wouldn't want me, and yet...

(She sighed then headed for the exit.)

EMMY: Of course, you don't want me. You want a man. I'm sorry, Max. Please forgive me.

(And having completely forgotten that she was the one who started the gay rumour in the first place, Emmy headed out of the temple, vowing never to bother him again. Max just watched her go then scratched his head.)

MAX: Um... what just... happened?

TOMMY: Despite you, I got my woman back! That's what!

LEILA: Everything else is irrelevant!

MAX: Right...

(He flinched.)

MAX: Apart from the fact that we're needed at the guild urgently!

(For a moment they shared a silent, empty glance. A split second later they then charged for the exit.)

LEILA: I'm gonna be late now and it's all your fault, Tommy!!

TOMMY: What?

LEILA: You should have accepted me back sooner!

TOMMY: Right...

(Max couldn't help but smirk.)

MAX: Good luck, mate. You're gonna need it!

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