

FUTILE FANTASY CREATIONS PRESENT...

THE WORLD STAGE

Tifaeris was a beautiful, thriving city. A peaceful city; loved by all who dwelt there. A city led by people who were deeply protective of it. They were willing to do whatever it took to help the city flourish and grow, whilst maintaining a laid-back ambience. This included the removal of any and all undesirables. Such ne'er-do-wells were simply not welcome. Nor were those whose intentions didn't include the betterment of one and all. Anyone looking to turn Tifaeris into yet another settlement where the rich get richer and the poor don't matter would instantly be ejected. The selfish and the greedy were cast aside and the benevolent were welcome with open arms. This policy had made Tifaeris the perfect place to live.

Naturally, many of those ejected from this sunlit haven had an axe to grind. They wouldn't dare try to wield that axe, however, because the leader of Tifaeris, Sir Flaxley was reputed to be the world's greatest swordsman. Taking him on would be immensely foolhardy. Any thugs arriving, looking for trouble, would receive quite the pasting. If they brought weapons with them, they'd receive death. It truly was a beautiful irony. Sir Flaxley thought nothing of violently slaughtering wrong-doers, but only in the name of peace.

Since Sir Flaxley had taken charge of the settlement, Tifaeris had transformed from being a tiny, rundown village to a major city. His style of governance had worked wonderfully well. A man who didn't believe in bureaucracy, he made all the decisions himself; assisted by a small team of trusted advisors. He made the laws, he partook in the building work and he was literally the first line in military defence. The people wouldn't have had it any other way. After all, as far as they were concerned, he was the best man for every job.

The tactic of letting Sir Flaxley deal with the running of the place by himself while the people went about their lives in peace had been a major factor in the city's success. How long it could continue to be run this way, however, remained to be seen. Tifaeris was growing at such a rate, it had finally been recognised as a player on the world stage. Unfortunately, on the world stage, there were rules. Having a one-man government very much contravened these rules. As such, if Tifaeris ever wanted to truly become a global player, it'd have to make several dramatic adjustments.

Chapter One – Unity Comes Not With Impunity

At nine o'clock, on yet another fine Tifaeris morning, Sir Flaxley's wife, Kritzeveltia, Kritz for short, was outside her house watering her pot plants. Having learned how to use water magic, it was a job she thoroughly enjoyed doing. Humming to herself as she shot a small jet of water into the earth beneath some flowers, she couldn't have been more cheerful. Before she could remark on that fact, however, a man's voice rudely rose up from behind her.

ASCOT: You there!!! Woman!

(Kritz turned around and glowered at him coldly.)

KRITZ: Woman?

ASCOT: Yes! You! *You're* a woman, aren't you?

(Kritz flinched.)

KRITZ: What? I am?

(She cupped her breasts then gasped.)

KRITZ: Oh, my god! I am!!!

(She quickly glanced down herself.)

KRITZ: Holy crap! I'm even wearing a skirt!

(She shrieked.)

KRITZ: Does this mean I don't have...

(She tapped the front of her short leather skirt then staggered sideways, as if trying not to faint.)

KRITZ: No penis... not even the beginnings of one. Why didn't anybody tell me sooner?

(She then rolled her eyes at him and resumed watering her plants.)

KRITZ: Pillock.

(Somewhat taken aback, Ascot blinked at her for a moment then furrowed his brow.)

ASCOT: Hey!

KRITZ: Bugger off, you rude bastard. I'm busy!

ASCOT: I beg to differ!

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: How very scary!

ASCOT: That's right! I am! And as such, you should show some respect.

KRITZ: No, thanks. Like I just told you; I'm busy.

ASCOT: Well, you're not too busy for *me*!

(He stood tall.)

ASCOT: I demand to see your leader!

(He sneered coldly.)

ASCOT: And by that, I don't mean the leader of your church group or the local symphony orchestra! I'm talking about the leader of Tifaeris! I demand an audience with him right away!

KRITZ: I see.

(She then continued what she was doing, humming as she did so.)

ASCOT: Hey!

KRITZ: What now?

ASCOT: I said I demand an audience with the leader of Tifaeris!

KRITZ: I know.

ASCOT: Then tell me where I can find him!

(Kritz turned to him and smiled.)

KRITZ: Right. So *that's* what you're after. You want me to *tell* you his whereabouts. Why didn't you say so?

ASCOT: I...

KRITZ: Politely!

(Ascot scowled at her for a moment then relented his anger.)

ASCOT: Fine. Please. Tell me where can I find your leader?

KRITZ: Who wants to know?

(Ascot flapped angrily.)

ASCOT: That's none of your business!

KRITZ: Actually, you'd be surprised.

ASCOT: Listen, woman, if you don't tell me where I can find him, there's going to serious repercussions!

KRITZ: I'm trembling in my boots as we speak.

ASCOT: As you damned well should be!

(He shook his fist at her.)

ASCOT: Your lack of respect is starting to grate my last nerve! And when I'm angry, I tend to hurt people.

KRITZ: I can relate.
 ASCOT: What?
 KRITZ: You heard me.
 ASCOT: You...
 (He released an exasperated sigh.)
 ASCOT: Why won't you just tell me where I can find him?
 KRITZ: Because you won't tell me why you want to see him!
 ASCOT: Because it's got fuck all to do with you! I'm here on important diplomatic business! I'm not going to share what I have to say with some random housewife, am I?
 KRITZ: Of course not. But you could share it with *me*.
 (Ascot scoffed.)
 ASCOT: Why, what makes you so special?
 KRITZ: I'm *Sir Flaxley's* wife.
 (Ascot's jaw dropped.)
 ASCOT: But... no... then... why are you watering some poor person's plants?
 KRITZ: They're *my* plants!!!
 ASCOT: But this is just an ordinary house.
 KRITZ: And?
 (Ascot gaped for a moment then gritted his teeth.)
 ASCOT: Oh, I see. Very funny. *You're* not his wife. You're half his age, for a start!
 (Kritz fluttered her eyelashes and pushed at her hair.)
 KRITZ: Thanks. I get that a lot.
 ASCOT: Yes, well, you'll get a black eye to go with it in a minute.
 KRITZ: Excuse me?
 (She raised an angry eyebrow.)
 KRITZ: Are you threatening me?
 ASCOT: Yes!
 KRITZ: I see.
 (She then spun around and high-kicked him in the head; knocking him out cold.)
 KRITZ: Well don't.
 (She then resumed watering her plants without a care in the world. As she did so, her eldest daughter, nineteen year-old, Anoka, stepped out of the front door. Upon spotting the unconscious man, she grimaced at her mother.)
 ANOKA: Who's *that* bloke?
 KRITZ: I have no fucking idea, love.
 ANOKA: Right.
 (She then shrugged it off and stepped over him.)
 ANOKA: I'm off out for a bit then. See you later, mum.
 KRITZ: Bye, love.
 (She exhaled then went straight back into humming her tune.)

Down at the seafront at this time, the town's leader, Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris was pacing across the sand with his three most trusted advisors. This team of trustees, which doubled as the local council, consisted of the town's main benefactor, Ashton Grainger; the retired former head of Ashrin University, James Warbury; and a thirteen year-old genius by the name of Cayley Severen. On the previous afternoon, Tifaeris's builders had finished the town's most ambitious project to date. A stone dock. With this new innovation complete, imports and exports would now be able to flow in and out of town with ease. Rather delighted with that fact, as he strode forth across the sand, Flaxley gestured towards it and exhaled.

FLAXLEY: Look at it, chaps. It's a thing of beauty.

GRAINGER: Isn't it just?

WARBURY: Indeed. Business is going to flourish now.

(Cayley forced a nervous smile. A shy girl by nature, she didn't like speaking up in front of people much, but she felt the moment warranted some kind of mention. The project, after all, had been her idea.)

CAYLEY: It's going to be a game changer.

FLAXLEY: Indeed, it is. We can be proud, chaps.

(Cayley sighed. Sir Flaxley's insistence on using the word "chaps" when addressing them made her feel somewhat ill at ease. Unaware of this fact, Sir Flaxley stopped walking, glanced across the dockside then turned to face the sprawling township.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, this place has come a long way since the day Kritz and I came back here, twenty odd years ago. It was just a broken shell of a place. Now look at it.

GRAINGER: Breathtaking.

WARBURY: Stunning.

CAYLEY: You did a wonderful job.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well.... I can't take *all* the credit.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz helped.

GRAINGER: Quite. I hear she funded the entire project.

WARBURY: That's right. By winning at cards in Azagotse. This town would be nothing without her.

(Flaxley ruffled his neck.)

FLAXLEY: Like I said. She helped.

(He shook his head then glanced across the town again.)

FLAXLEY: You know, not so long ago, if a warlord, or a wannabe invader had sailed along the coastline here, he'd have considered Tifaeris fair game. An opportunity. A small town with easy access, just waiting to be invaded.

(He smirked.)

FLAXLEY: If such an invader was to sail past now, he'd sing an entirely different song.

GRAINGER: He would indeed! Before him, he'd see a sprawl too *large* to conquer!

WARBURY: A powerhouse of a settlement that an entire *army* would have to think twice about transgressing upon.

(Cayley grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Actually, looking at it, there's a fair chance he'd see nothing more than a fire hazard and burn the place down.

(All eyes slowly turned in her direction. In that moment, Cayley seemed to shrink where she stood.)

CAYLEY: Um...

WARBURY: A fire hazard?

GRAINGER: Are you insane?

FLAXLEY: Explain yourself.

CAYLEY: Well...

(She grinned nervously.)

CAYLEY: All the houses are made of wood and they're really close together, so... um... an invader could just set the place alight then come back and plunder everything in the morning.

(For several moments the three men in her company just glowered at her, making her whimper fearfully. Their silence was broken shortly after, however, by Flaxley pointing up the beach.)

FLAXLEY: Grainger? Warbury?

GRAINGER: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Be gone!

GRAINGER: Right...

WARBURY: Agreed.

(They then scuttled away. Left behind, Flaxley threw his hands to his hips then scowled at Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: Why? Why, Cayley? Why must you crap all over everything I do?

(Cayley's bottom lip quivered.)

CAYLEY: I don't.

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: I was just saying what I see.

FLAXLEY: Yes... you do that a lot, don't you?

CAYLEY: Um...

FLAXLEY: Like when I showed you my development plans. Three months it took to draw those things up and what were your thoughts?

(Cayley shrunk a little further then whimpered.)

CAYLEY: I...

FLAXLEY: Every builder's nightmare *you* called it!

CAYLEY: Um...

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: But it *would* have been. You wanted to build the houses *before* putting in access roads.

FLAXLEY: Even the original plan for our new dock was a disaster in *your* eyes!

CAYLEY: It would have sunk!

FLAXLEY: My plan for a new park, my plan to expand the brewery, you name it; you criticised it!

CAYLEY: The park plan said it was one metre wide!

FLAXLEY: I meant acre!

CAYLEY: And you were going to expand the brewery into a swamp!

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, that was...

(He stood tall and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Point is, young lady, why do you do that?

(Cayley looked at him through big, tearful eyes.)

CAYLEY: It's my job.

FLAXLEY: What?

CAYLEY: I'm the town planner. It's my job to scrutinise the plans and tell you about any anomalies. I've saved the town a small fortune by finding these faults. And what do I get for my efforts?

(She forced back further tears.)

CAYLEY: When I do, you tell me off.

(She then burst into tears and raced off down the beach.)

CAYLEY: You're mean!

(Flaxley watched her go then grimaced uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: Right... well... that's...

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: Actually a good point.

(He scratched his head.)

FLAXLEY: Well made too.

(In that moment, a deep sense of foreboding washed over him.)

FLAXLEY: Bugger. In fact, make that double bugger. I'd better make things right before *Kritz* finds out. Yelling at my wife's favourite orphan is *not* going to do me any favours in the marital department; that's for certain.

(He then headed off up the sand, shuddering with discomfort.)

FLAXLEY: I just hope Cayley didn't run straight my place and tell her.

(A chill suddenly ran down his spine.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck! I need to get home! And soon!!!

(With that, he raced towards the beach road as quickly as he could possibly move.)

Five minutes later, having returned from the beach, Sir Flaxley approached his house, stepped over the unconscious Ascot then headed through the front door. Trying to appear as innocent as possible, he spotted his wife through the kitchen door then smiled warmly.

FLAXLEY: Hello, darling.

(*Kritz* glanced through the door then smiled.)

KRITZ: Welcome back, my love.

FLAXLEY: Thank you.

(He nodded then spoke up, calmly and innocently.)

FLAXLEY: Say... you haven't seen a crying child, have you?

KRITZ: What? No. Why?

FLAXLEY: Doesn't matter.

(He then about turned in a hurry.)

FLAXLEY: I just need to pop out again.

KRITZ: Wait a minute, you!

(Flaxley froze and cursed under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck. Shit. Bugger it.

KRITZ: *What* crying child? Who have you upset?

(Flaxley slowly turned and smiled at her angelically.)

FLAXLEY: I wasn't referring to any crying child in *particular*, darling. It was just making conversation. Like when I ask how your day is going. Or when I ask the kids if they had a good day at school.

(*Kritz* raised a disapproving eyebrow.)

KRITZ: Flaxley? How old do you think I am?

FLAXLEY: Forty something. Why?

KRITZ: Forty *something*?

(She flinched.)

KRITZ: Are you saying you don't know my age???

FLAXLEY: Of course I do! Sort of. I can make a half decent *approximation* anyway.

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: That was not a good answer.

KRITZ: No, it's wasn't! And we'll come back to that.

FLAXLEY: Oh, goody.

KRITZ: First you need to tell me about this crying child.

FLAXLEY: I already explained that.

KRITZ: Oh, yeah. Making conversation.

FLAXLEY: Exactly.

KRITZ: Like asking about the weather.

FLAXLEY: Precisely.

(*Kritz* threw her hands to her hips.)

KRITZ: Flaxley! Nobody in the history of the spoken word has ever asked someone if they've seen a crying child, just to make conversation!

FLAXLEY: Wrong! I literally just did.

KRITZ: I see. You're quite the innovator.

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: Stop talking bollocks! People don't go up to one another and say, "*Hi, nice to see you; have you seen a crying child?*", unless they're *looking* for a crying child.

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz... please... you're not the goddess of conversation! You don't know every little detail of what *other* people talk about. Everyone's different. I mean, Woodbridge from the pub...

KRITZ: Who?

FLAXLEY: You wouldn't know him.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: He very often comes in and says, "Evening all, have you seen a dancing old lady." It's just something people say.

(Kritz nodded acceptingly.)

KRITZ: I see. You make a good point.

FLAXLEY: I do? I mean, yes...

KRITZ: At least it was *almost* a good point. There were, however, a couple of flaws in it. One, there *is* nobody called Woodbridge, is there?

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: And if anyone did ask if they'd seen a dancing old lady, it'd be because they were *looking* for a dancing old lady!!!

FLAXLEY: You don't know that!

(Kritz gritted her teeth.)

KRITZ: Flaxley!

(Flaxley gulped.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, dear?

KRITZ: What crying child?

FLAXLEY: There's a crying child?

KRITZ: Don't insult me!

FLAXLEY: Right...

(Kritz furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: It's Cayley, isn't it?

FLAXLEY: Why would you think that?

KRITZ: Because *our* children are playing in the garden. That just leaves the child you work alongside every day.

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: And what makes you think I haven't befriended *other* children recently?

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: Ignore that! That was a ridiculous thing to say.

(He sighed in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. You win. Yes. I'm looking for Cayley.

KRITZ: And why was she crying?

FLAXLEY: Well... somebody upset her.

KRITZ: And that somebody was *you*, wasn't it?

(Flaxley stood back and feigned taking offence.)

FLAXLEY: What? Why would you assume such a terrible thing?

KRITZ: Because you wouldn't be acting all defensive if *someone else* had upset her. You'd be growling like a maniac and promising them a gruesome death.

FLAXLEY: Well...

(He groaned inwardly.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. It was me.

KRITZ: Right. Now we're getting somewhere.

(She then headed through the kitchen door and made her way to the table.)

KRITZ: That's quite a lot to unpack.

FLAXLEY: Well... not really.

KRITZ: Oh, it is.

(She took a seat at the table then smiled.)

KRITZ: I learned quite a lot there. Such as, when you ask how my day's been, you don't actually give a shit how it's been. You're just *making conversation*.

FLAXLEY: Um...

KRITZ: I feel so loved.

FLAXLEY: Darling...

KRITZ: And you have no idea how old I am. Which makes me think you've probably forgotten when my birthday is as well.

FLAXLEY: No, I haven't.

KRITZ: When it is then?

FLAXLEY: That's...

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: Soon? Is it?

KRITZ: Wow.

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: This does not end well for you.

FLAXLEY: No... I don't suppose it does.

KRITZ: And the best part is, you could have *avoided* telling me all that, if you'd just told me you were looking for Cayley.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: Instead, you ducked *around* the truth and ended up accidentally confessing to not caring about my how my day went, or when my birthday is.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... maybe getting out of bed this morning was a mistake.

KRITZ: You think?

(She rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: So come on. How did you upset her exactly?

FLAXLEY: Who?

KRITZ: Cayley!!!

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: See... I may have suggested that a foreign invader would take one look at Tifaeris these days and think twice about attacking. You know, because it's so big.

KRITZ: Okay...

FLAXLEY: Then Cayley suggested that, because all the houses are wooden and close together, they'd just come in and set fire to the place.

KRITZ: I see.

(She flinched.)

KRITZ: Good god, that's a really good point!

FLAXLEY: I know!

KRITZ: Then what's the issue?

FLAXLEY: I... well... I may have...

KRITZ: May have what?

FLAXLEY: Erred.

KRITZ: Right...

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: You took offence, didn't you?

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: Like when she pointed out how bad your town expansion plan was.

FLAXLEY: I worked hard on that!

KRITZ: Yes, you did! And it was rubbish!

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

KRITZ: It was!

(She shook her head.)

KRITZ: Luckily, Cayley was there to share her thoughts on it. You know, like we pay her to!

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: Like we pay her to!!!

FLAXLEY: I suppose.

KRITZ: She politely pointed out a few massive flaws. Politely! Almost apologetically, in fact. And you went ballistic!

FLAXLEY: And I apologised profusely afterwards! And gave her a pay rise!

KRITZ: I know. I insisted, remember!

(She shook her head.)

KRITZ: Why are you like that, my love? Why?

FLAXLEY: Because...

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: *We* rebuilt this town, Kritz. You and I. And we did a great job. We turned it from an empty shell into a metropolis. And I'm very proud of that fact. So... when I hear someone criticise and say they can do a better job... well, it stings.

KRITZ: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes?

KRITZ: She *can* do a better job.

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: That's why we *pay* her to do it. Because she's great at it. She's a genius, for fuck sake.

(She released an exasperated sigh.)

KRITZ: You're a swordsman. I'm a hand-to-hand combatant and a thief. Cayley, on the other hand, is a clever beyond words. So getting her to do it was a masterstroke.

FLAXLEY: I'm aware of that!

KRITZ: Then shut up and let her do it!

FLAXLEY: Right.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: You make a fair point, my love.

KRITZ: Thank you.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: Now we need to find her so you can apologise.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: Where have you looked so far?

FLAXLEY: I came straight here.

KRITZ: What?

FLAXLEY: I came straight here. I thought maybe she'd come running to *you*.

KRITZ: I'm the last person she'd come running to, Flaxley! She's under the mistaken impression that you're her father, remember? As such, she sees *me* as a jilted and scorned woman; bitter about her existence!

FLAXLEY: You exaggerate.

KRITZ: Do I? Last time I tried to ruffle her hair, she leant backwards a full forty five degrees. It almost defied physics! She tilted backwards, away from me, like a plank of wood! With terror in her eyes.

FLAXLEY: Really?

KRITZ: Yes!

FLAXLEY: So...

KRITZ: So, if you'd used your bloody brain, you'd have looked somewhere else and saved yourself from confessing that you don't care about my birthday or how my day went.

FLAXLEY: Fuck.

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: I really *should* have stayed in bed.

KRITZ: Yes, you should. Now go and find the poor little bugger. Getting in a strop with a cute little orphan for merely performing the job *you* asked her to do, isn't on!

FLAXLEY: I know.

(He shook his head then turned to face the door. Before advancing, however, he turned straight back around.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, by the way, who's that unconscious fellow?

KRITZ: What?

FLAXLEY: There's an unconscious chap outside the front door.

KRITZ: Oh, yeah.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: He was looking for you.

FLAXLEY: And who is he?

KRITZ: He wouldn't say.

FLAXLEY: Really?

KRITZ: Yeah. So I refused to tell him where you are.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: So he threatened me with violence.

FLAXLEY: Well that was a mistake.

KRITZ: As his current incapacity will testify.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I'd better wake him up and see what he wants.

KRITZ: No! You can go and apologise to Cayley!

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: *I'll* find out who he is.

FLAXLEY: Without further violence?

KRITZ: Well, that's up to him, isn't it?

FLAXLEY: Yes... I suppose it is.

(With that, he headed for the door, yanked it open then stepped outside. Moments later, he stepped over Ascot's prostrate body then headed off down the road.)

FLAXLEY: Today is a shit, shit day.

A short while later, feeling somewhat uneasy, Sir Flaxley stepped up to the front door of the large, seafront property that Cayley shared with her older sister, Kyrie. Hoping he could get

the apology over and done with quickly and effectively, he puffed out then hammered on the door. A few seconds later, Kyrie swung the door open and smiled.

KYRIE: Hello. Is Anoka home?

(Flaxley looked straight through her.)

FLAXLEY: What?

KYRIE: I said, is Anoka home.

FLAXLEY: I don't think so. Why?

KYRIE: Because I've come to see her.

(Flaxley blinked in astonishment.)

FLAXLEY: Kyrie...

KYRIE: Yes?

(An enlightened expression then crossed her brow.)

KYRIE: Oh, shit! This is *my* house, not yours. My mistake. *You're* visiting *me*!

(She chuckled.)

KYRIE: I'm so used to *you* answering the door to *me*, I got confused.

(She mused to herself.)

KYRIE: Which was silly really. Anoka's *here*.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well...

KYRIE: I'll just get her for you.

FLAXLEY: Wait! I haven't come to see Anoka.

KYRIE: What? Why not?

(She gasped.)

KYRIE: Did you two have a falling out? That's not good. Families shouldn't argue.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: I tell you what! I'll fetch her anyway, so the two of you can talk things over.

FLAXLEY: Anoka and I are fine, Kyrie. It's Cayley I've come to see.

KYRIE: Cayley?

FLAXLEY: Yes. Your younger sister.

KYRIE: I know who she is, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Well, that's a start.

KYRIE: Trouble is, she's not in. She went to work, you see? Hours ago.

FLAXLEY: Right...

KYRIE: Don't feel bad though. *I* thought she was here too. Someone came running in a few minutes ago, charged up the stairs then slammed her bedroom door; crying their eyes out.

FLAXLEY: Ah. Then...

KYRIE: It wasn't her though.

FLAXLEY: What do you mean, it wasn't her?

KYRIE: Well... I went upstairs and knocked on her door. There was no reply. So I knocked again and called her name.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: She said, "Go away, I'm not in."

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: So, she's probably still at work.

(Barely able to get his head around just how dim-witted Kyrie was, Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I tell you what, why don't *I* come in and knock on her bedroom door? You never know, she might have changed her mind.

KYRIE: Hmm... that might work actually. She can be very fickle, you see? That girl just can't make her mind up sometimes. Last week when I went out with no clothes on, she had a go at me. Apparently, I'm not allowed to go around naked. But that night when I got in the bath fully dressed, she changed her tune entirely. Apparently, I *was* meant to be naked!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KYRIE: That girl just can't make a decision and stick by it.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: She's an odd one, Flaxley; she really is.

FLAXLEY: Yes...

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, if you'll excuse me, I'll just go up and see if Cayley's back yet, shall I?

KYRIE: Righto. Bye.

(She then closed the front door in his face. Left standing there with his nose against the wood, Flaxley groaned despairingly.)

FLAXLEY: Really?

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: Is this the kind of nonsense Phisele had to deal with every day?

(He then shrugged it off.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, I tried. I'll just nip back to the office and...

(Just then the door opened up and his daughter stepped out.)

ANOKA: Dad?

FLAXLEY: Anoka! Hello, love.

ANOKA: What are you doing here?

FLAXLEY: I came to see Cayley.

ANOKA: Oh.

(She winced.)

ANOKA: She ran in crying a few minutes ago. What did you do?

FLAXLEY: Don't. I've already had this lecture from your mother.

ANOKA: Oh. Okay.

(She shrugged.)

ANOKA: I'll leave all the nagging in her capable hands then.

FLAXLEY: Please do. She is the professional, after all.

(They shared an amused chuckle then Anoka pushed open the door.)

ANOKA: She's in her room. Go up the stairs then follow the landing around. Her room is at the front of the house.

FLAXLEY: What? That's the master bedroom, isn't it?

ANOKA: Yeah.

(She grimaced.)

ANOKA: She managed to convince Kyrie that having the room closest to the sea would damage her complexion, so she insisted on making Cayley have it.

FLAXLEY: Clever.

ANOKA: No. Sneaky. You don't have to be clever to fool Kyrie, you just need to be dishonest.

FLAXLEY: Fair point.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, I'll see you at home later.

ANOKA: Righto. Bye, dad.

(She then headed away. Having watched her go, Flaxley smiled then walked inside the house. Having closed the door, he then made his way up the stairs. As he did so, however, a voice rose up from the living room.)

KYRIE: Is that *you* going up the stairs, Cayley?

FLAXLEY: No!

KYRIE: Right...

(A few seconds later, Kyrie then spoke again.)

KYRIE: Who is it then?

FLAXLEY: Take a guess.

KYRIE: Anoka?

FLAXLEY: Do I *sound* like Anoka?

KYRIE: No, but then it didn't *sound* like Cayley wasn't in her room earlier either. Sounds can be misleading.

FLAXLEY: Yes... I... I suppose they can.

(Shaking his head in disbelief, he reached the top of the stairs then followed the landing towards the master bedroom. Upon arrival, he knocked on the door then stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley!

(A pathetic voice rose up from behind the door.)

CAYLEY: What?

FLAXLEY: I've come to apologise.

(Silence ensued for a moment then Cayley's soft voice rose up again.)

CAYLEY: You're mean.

FLAXLEY: I am, yes. Sorry, Cayley.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: What can I say? I apologise. Pride got the better of me and I lashed out. There was no excuse for that, and I hope you'll do the mature thing and forgive me.

(He then allowed himself a satisfied grin. He'd chosen his words perfectly and forgiveness was now guaranteed. Cayley was a prideful person and the very thought of *not* doing the mature thing would be too much for her to bear. Sure enough, within a few seconds, her door crept open and she peered through the gap.)

CAYLEY: Do you mean it?

FLAXLEY: Absolutely, I do.

CAYLEY: And you won't be mean to me if I come back to work?

FLAXLEY: Perish the thought.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: It was just a moment of foolish pride, Cayley. Your words stung because, quite frankly, they were spot on. This town *is* a fire hazard.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Luckily, my town planner is a genius and I have no doubt that she'll figure out a way to make it not so.

(Cayley ruffled her neck.)

CAYLEY: I may have *a few* ideas.

FLAXLEY: Then why not come back to the office and put them down on paper. We can review them together later.

CAYLEY: Well... okay.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: But I want a slice of cake for lunch; supplied by the boss.

FLAXLEY: Chocolate or...

CAYLEY: Chocolate.

FLAXLEY: Consider it done.

CAYLEY: Okay.

(Cayley slowly opened the door then blushed.)

CAYLEY: I'll come back.

FLAXLEY: That's my girl.

(He ruffled her hair and smiled. Instinctively, she nestled her head into his palm. If anyone else had tried to ruffle her hair, they'd have felt the full weight of her scorn, but seeing as she genuinely believed Sir Flaxley to be her long-lost father, she simply revelled in the moment.)

FLAXLEY: Shall we?

CAYLEY: Yes, please.

FLAXLEY: Excellent. I'll just grab that slice of cake for you, pop home then come and meet you at the office.

CAYLEY: Okay.

FLAXLEY: Good girl.

(They then headed for the stairs.)

CAYLEY: So... why do you need to pop home?

FLAXLEY: I just need to let Kritz know you're okay then deal with a mystery visitor.

CAYLEY: Um... why would Kritz want to know if *I'm* okay?

FLAXLEY: Because she thinks the world of you, young lady. You know that. It was her idea to give you this house.

(Having *blackmailed* Kritz into giving her the house, Cayley glanced away innocently.)

CAYLEY: That was nice of her.

FLAXLEY: Uncharacteristically generous, some might say...

CAYLEY: Right...

(Sensing it would be a good idea to change the subject, Cayley raised an enquiring eyebrow.)

CAYLEY: So... this mysterious visitor...

FLAXLEY: There's no need to worry about that, young Cayley. Some bloke came to see me and got on Kritz's wrong side; that's all. I'm sure it's nothing. I'll find out when he regains consciousness.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I'll tell you all about it when I get back to the office.

CAYLEY: With my cake.

FLAXLEY: That's right.

(They shared a smile then Flaxley headed down the stairs with Cayley just behind him. Just as they reached halfway, however, Kyrie popped her head out of the living room doorway.)

KYRIE: Did you find her?

FLAXLEY: She's right behind me.

KYRIE: Oh. Cool.

(She then looked to Cayley.)

KYRIE: Sir Flaxley's looking for you, Cayley.

CAYLEY: I know.

KYRIE: I see.

(She then ducked back into the living room.)

KYRIE: Then my work here is done.

(Flaxley and Cayley just shared an amused grin then headed for the door.)

A short while later, when Flaxley returned home, he found Ascot tied up and gagged on the sofa. Extremely woozy, he could barely lift his head. Watching the barely conscious stranger struggle to remain awake, he allowed himself an amused grin then glanced to the large table that dominated the main room. His thirteen year-old twin daughters were sitting there, attempting to do a jigsaw puzzle.

FLAXLEY: This fellow...

(His daughters looked up.)

EMMA: That fellow?

JADE: What about him?

FLAXLEY: Doesn't matter. It's more a question for your mother really.

EMMA: She's in the garden with Sika and Sophie.

JADE: Teaching them how to groin punch.

EMMA: You don't want to see that.

JADE: Nope.

(Flaxley wagged his finger at them.)

FLAXLEY: On the contrary, there are some horrible bastards in this world. I'm glad she's teaching your sisters how to protect themselves.

EMMA: Well, yeah...

JADE: But our point was, *you* don't want to see it.

EMMA: Like you couldn't watch when she taught *us* how to do it.

FLAXLEY: Well...

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Good point. No bloke wants to see *that*.

(He then headed over to the table.)

FLAXLEY: And I'm not sure seven year-olds *need* to learn it yet, but if your mother feels they're ready, then who am I to argue?

EMMA: The bloke they inevitably decide to practice it on.

JADE: Just like we did.

EMMA: You were livid.

JADE: There was steam coming out of your ears.

FLAXLEY: Girls...

EMMA: There was. You were writhing on the floor, cursing like a Bonson.

JADE: It was really scary.

EMMA: Yet reassuring.

JADE: Yup. Mum's teaching's work.

FLAXLEY: Look! We're not going to sit here discussing the time you two punched me in the chappy-me-lads, okay? That...

(Just then, he heard the back door open and Kritz call out.)

KRITZ: Keep practicing, okay? But remember what I said, don't go practicing on your father when he comes in! Okay? Or any other man who happens to be passing!

(She then about turned, headed through the kitchen and stepped into the living room.)

KRITZ: Ah, welcome back, my love.

FLAXLEY: Darling.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: So... what's the story with this chap?

(He gestured to where Ascot sat slumped on the sofa, struggling not to pass out.)

FLAXLEY: He's taking an eternity to regain consciousness.

KRITZ: Yeah...

(She scratched the back of her head nervously.)

KRITZ: He's not been out *that* long, actually. He already came round once, you see? It ended badly.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: He gave you lip again, didn't he?

KRITZ: He called me a tart.

FLAXLEY: Oh. Well that was never going to end well.

KRITZ: I know, right? Clonk! And down he went. *Again!*

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: And yet there was no need for it. And all I did was bring him inside and prop him up on the seat. Then I sprayed water in his face to bring him round. He opened his eyes, shook his fist at me then launched into a tirade of verbal abuse.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: In that case, he's clearly lacking in wisdom. To threaten you once is an education. To threaten you twice is an education *failure*. I'm betting he's from Guevina.

KRITZ: Why would you assume...

FLAXLEY: Because *everyone* from Guevina is a dumb-dumb.

KRITZ: A dumb-dumb?

FLAXLEY: I don't want to air my *actual* thoughts, darling; there are children presents.

KRITZ: Right...

FLAXLEY: Anyway, we know what he isn't. Intelligent. The question is, what *is* he? *Who* is he? And where is he from?

KRITZ: Let's find out, shall we?

FLAXLEY: That *is* what I was getting at, yes.

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz!

KRITZ: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Pass me the water jug.

KRITZ: Oh. The water jug.

(She gave him a condescending glance.)

KRITZ: You say that like I keep a special water jug in my knickers for special occasions or something.

FLAXLEY: I...

KRITZ: And since when did *I* need a water jug?

(With that, she paced up to Ascot then sprayed water magic in his face. At once, Ascot sat up and glanced about himself in horror.)

FLAXLEY: A-ha! Now we're in business!

(He stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: You there!

(He then furrowed his brow at the sight of Ascot scowling at Kritz whilst struggling to free himself. It was abundantly clear that, had he not been gagged, he'd have been digging the foundations for another beating.)

FLAXLEY: Well that's no good.

KRITZ: It really isn't. He's just lucky I can't lip-read when people have gags on. I doubt he's trying to say something pleasant, after all.

FLAXLEY: Hmm...

(With that, Flaxley stood in front of Ascot and scowled down at him.)

FLAXLEY: Keep still!!!

(Ascot froze in fear then stared up into his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Now... I'm going to remove your gag, okay? But if I hear one bad word out of you, you'll be feeling the pointy end of my sword! Understood?

(Ascot nodded nervously.)

FLAXLEY: Very well.

(He then removed the gag from Ascot's mouth and stood over him again.)

FLAXLEY: Right then... state your business!

(Ascot licked his lips to put some moisture into them then scowled up at him.)

ASCOT: I demand an audience with your leader!

FLAXLEY: My leader?

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: I have a leader? Since when?

(He looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: *You* like telling me what to do, but I wouldn't say you were my *leader*.

KRITZ: Yeah...
(She smirked.)
KRITZ: You keep telling yourself that.
FLAXLEY: What?
KRITZ: Nothing, dear.
FLAXLEY: Right...
(He looked to Ascot again.)
FLAXLEY: What leader? What are you on about, man?
ASCOT: Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris!
FLAXLEY: Yes?
ASCOT: I seek an audience with him.
(Flaxley looked enlightened.)
FLAXLEY: Right, yes. That makes sense. Kritz said as much, actually. Question is, who the hell are you?
ASCOT: That's none of your business!
FLAXLEY: Yes, it is!
ASCOT: Since when?
FLAXLEY: Since it's *me* you seek an audience with! I'm not going to grant one if I don't know who the hell you are, am I?
EMMA: You tell him, dad!
JADE: Yeah! Tell him well!
KRITZ: Not now, girls.
EMMA: Aw.
ASCOT: Wait! Are you saying *you're* Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris?
FLAXLEY: Yes!
ASCOT: Oh.
(He grimaced.)
ASCOT: It's an honour to make your acquaintance, sir.
FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. Well... never mind that. Before we go any further you can apologise to my wife.
ASCOT: Wife?
(Flaxley gestured to Kritz.)
FLAXLEY: Wife!
(Kritz gestured to the table.)
KRITZ: Plate!
FLAXLEY: What?
KRITZ: Not now. I'm busy.
(She then gestured to the window.)
KRITZ: Curtain!
(Finally getting the message that his introduction had been somewhat curt, Flaxley sighed.)
FLAXLEY: Fine. Yes, Ascot, my wife.
(He gestured to Kritz again.)
FLAXLEY: Meet the beautiful Kritzeveltia.
KRITZ: Hello.
ASCOT: She's a thug.
(Kritz blushed then played with her hair.)
KRITZ: Thanks. I get *that* a lot too.
FLAXLEY: Yes, well, getting back to the point. Why do you seek an audience with *me*?
ASCOT: Because I'm a representative of the Leathrock government.
FLAXLEY: Is that so?

ASCOT: Yes! I'm the advanced party.

KRITZ: Nope! You'll get nothing from us. We don't interfere in foreign politics.

ASCOT: What?

KRITZ: Go and fundraise somewhere else.

ASCOT: Fundraise?

KRITZ: You heard me! We don't care *what* party you're from; we're not taking sides!

ASCOT: Are you stupid or something?

FLAXLEY: Easy, chummy!

KRITZ: What he said!

ASCOT: But it's true. I'm not campaigning on behalf of The Advanced Party! *I'm* the advanced party! The president of Leathrock is on his way and *I'm* here to let you know!

KRITZ: Oh. Right. Well...

FLAXLEY: Understood!

(He then furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: But that's no excuse for insulting my wife!

ASCOT: Right. I apologise.

(He flinched.)

ASCOT: But in my defence, when I came here earlier and asked for an audience with you, she was extremely rude!

KRITZ: I just asked who you were!

ASCOT: Which is information I wasn't at liberty to divulge!

KRITZ: Like *I'm* not at liberty to divulge my husband's whereabouts to any bugger who happens to ask.

ASCOT: Then... it seems we were at an impasse.

KRITZ: We were, yes. Then you threatened me with violence.

(She ruffled her neck.)

KRITZ: After which, only *you* were at an impasse.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: I used that word completely wrong, but I'm okay with it.

ASCOT: Right...

(He rolled his eyes then looked to Flaxley.)

ASCOT: Anyway, now you know. The President is on his way here as we speak, so you'd better get ready to welcome him.

(Emma and Jade groaned despondently.)

EMMA: Aw. Not another state visit.

JADE: Back to Phisele's mum we go.

KRITZ: No, no; you're old enough to behave in front of dignitaries now. You can stay.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: Sophie and Sika can go though.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, never mind that. Now we've finally established who you are, we can untie you and let you be on your way.

(Ascot sneered.)

ASCOT: There was no need to tie me up in the first place.

FLAXLEY: You threatened my wife with violence!

ASCOT: She was rude!

FLAXLEY: And who's fault was that? All you had to do was tell her you were a representative of Leathrock and that you wished to speak with me! That was all! She'd have come and got me!

KRITZ: Yup!

FLAXLEY: You made a very simple task extremely complicated and got knocked out twice in the process. And it was all down to your own foolishness!

ASCOT: I see.

(He allowed Flaxley to remove his binds then stood up.)

ASCOT: And that's your take, is it?

FLAXLEY: Those are the facts.

ASCOT: Then you have your facts wrong.

(He ruffled his neck.)

ASCOT: Not that it matters anymore. My work here is done, and I shall now take my leave.

FLAXLEY: You do that.

ASCOT: I will. Gladly.

(He scoffed.)

ASCOT: If I have to spend another second around you or that tart of a wife of yours, I might just go insane.

(In that moment, the air became extremely thick and a deep sense of foreboding sweep across the room.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, boy.

(He threw an urgent glance towards the table.)

FLAXLEY: Outside, girls!

EMMA: Yup!

JADE: Gladly!

FLAXLEY: Good girls.

(He then patted Ascot on the shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: My thoughts and prayers are with your family at this difficult time.

(He then shot out of the back door with his daughters, leaving Ascot staring directly down the barrel of a loaded Kritz.)

ASCOT: Um... where are they going?

KRITZ: Big mistake, mister!

ASCOT: Mistake?

(He watched Kritz pound her fist then swiftly drew his sword.)

ASCOT: Stay back! I'll have you know, I'm a highly trained swordsmen; affiliated to the elite Leathrock blade unit!

KRITZ: And I'll have you know, nobody calls me a tart twice and lives to tell the tale!!!

(Sixty seconds later, following a series of pained screams and disregarded pleas for mercy, Ascot's battered and bruised body flew out of the front door. Pounded to within an inch of his life, Ascot was out for the count. Satisfied that she'd made her point, Kritz stood in the doorway and clapped her hands across one another.)

KRITZ: That told *him*.

(She then smiled and went back in the house.)

KRITZ: Now... we'd better get prepared to meet that president, I suppose. I'll wear that nice new top I bought, I think.

(With that, she skipped across the room like the very embodiment of all things feminine and sweet, before ducking into her bedroom.)

KRITZ: Good times.

Shortly after an hour had passed, a cavalcade of five carriages rolled onto the streets of Tifaeris. President Herman of Leathrock and his party had arrived. They received nothing by way of a special welcome. No banners were erected and there wasn't any sign of a ceremonial band. The cavalcade simply rolled forth until it came to a standstill outside Sir

Flaxley's house. Only now was their special guest afforded any kind of courtesy. That courtesy came in the form of Flaxley and Kritz stepping out on their porch to greet him. Sir Flaxley had sheathed his best sword at his sword and Kritz had reluctantly put some underwear on. That was the full extent of their efforts. The president, however, had expected nothing more. As he alluded to as he alighted his carriage, this was very much what he'd anticipated.

HERMAN: They're keeping it informal as always, I see. I like it.

(With that, he bypassed his entourage, stepped over Ascot then paced up to Sir Flaxley.)

HERMAN: Good to see you again, Sir Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Welcome back to our humble abode, Mr President.

(They shook hands then the president reached his hand out to Kritz.)

HERMAN: Always a pleasure, Kritz.

KRITZ: Likewise.

(They shook hands then the president gave her an impressed nod.)

HERMAN: And may I say, you look as beautiful as ever.

KRITZ: Thank you. I get *that* a lot as well.

HERMAN: So what's your secret?

KRITZ: Ah... if I told you that it wouldn't be a secret, now would it?

HERMAN: Playing your cards close to your chest, I see.

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: With a chest as big as mine, you have very little choice.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, on that note, shall we head inside?

HERMAN: Absolutely we shall.

(He then glanced behind him.)

HERMAN: But first... what happened to Ascot there?

FLAXLEY: He called Kritz a tart.

HERMAN: I see.

(He shrugged.)

HERMAN: That'll do it.

KRITZ: Yup.

(He then called over to the carriages.)

HERMAN: Tito! Come!

(At once, a scholarly-looking fellow came racing over from the second carriage, carrying a bag full of papers. Very much the sort of person who looked uncomfortable in his own body, he stepped over Ascot then scuttled towards the steps up to the porch.)

TITO: Coming, sir.

HERMAN: I can see that.

(Upon Tito reaching them, the president nodded him towards his hosts.)

HERMAN: Tito, meet Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris and his beautiful equal, Kritzeveltia.

KRITZ: I love how you put that!

HERMAN: I knew you would.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Nice to meet you.

KRITZ: It's a pleasure.

TITO: No, no, the pleasure's all mine.

(He then performed a curtsy.)

HERMAN: Tito...

TITO: I did it again, didn't I?

HERMAN: Yes, you did. And I have to tell you, it doesn't create a very good first impression. Honestly, if other world leaders fluster you so much that you forget you're a man, I'll have to find someone else to do the job.

TITO: Yes, sir. Sorry, sir. It won't happen again.

HERMAN: Yes... you said that after you curtsied to the King of Ashrin.

TITO: Quite. Forgive me.

HERMAN: No.

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: Anyway, let's head inside, shall we?

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(With that, Flaxley held open the door and gestured inside.)

FLAXLEY: After you.

HERMAN: Why, thank you.

FLAXLEY: Delighted

(The president then passed him and spoke in a lowered voice.)

HERMAN: Don't be put off by Tito's demeanour, he's actually very good at what he does.

FLAXLEY: Curtsey?

HERMAN: I meant the other things he does.

(They shared a chuckle then Flaxley watched as Tito and Kritz walked past him.)

TITO: Thank you.

KRITZ: Thanks, babe.

FLAXLEY: You're welcome.

(Once inside, the president headed for the table in the centre of the room then glanced to where Emma and Jade were standing to attention by the far door. Having been asked to put on nice dresses and make themselves presentable, they were taking their roles extremely seriously.)

HERMAN: Hello, there.

FLAXLEY: Mr President, these are two of our daughters, Emma and Jade.

HERMAN: I see. Very pretty they are too.

EMMA: Thank you, Sir.

JADE: Thank you, Sir.

HERMAN: Now, now. There's no need to be stuffy. Stand at ease. Better still, pretend I'm not here.

EMMA: Result!

JADE: Yay!

(With that, they both sprinted into the kitchen then vanished into the garden.)

KRITZ: Don't you dare get those dresses dirty!!!

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: They've gone.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, never mind that, let's call this meeting to order.

KRITZ: Right.

(She gestured to where a teapot was resting atop the table.)

KRITZ: Please be seated. There's fresh tea in the pot.

HERMAN: Ah. My favourite kind.

FLAXLEY: Locally grown tea at that.

HERMAN: I see. Got any coffee?

FLAXLEY: You cheeky...

HERMAN: I'm joking, Flaxley. Tifaeris's tea is one of the best around. It's the local beer you need to worry about.

FLAXLEY: Yes... we hear that so often nowadays, I'm starting to think there might be something in it.

KRITZ: Hmm...

HERMAN: Still, we're not here to discuss beer.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Which begs the question, why *are* we here?

HERMAN: Well, Flaxley, as soon as we're all seated, I'll tell you.

(With a shrug, everyone then sat down at the table. Flaxley and Kritz were on one side, Herman and Tito were on the other.)

HERMAN: Now...

KRITZ: Tea?

HERMAN: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

HERMAN: Okay. Why not? Having tea first sounds like an excellent idea.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: On the contrary, having tea sounds like something we can do afterwards.

KRITZ: Fine. Be like that then.

FLAXLEY: I will.

KRITZ: Yeah, you do that.

FLAXLEY: Excellent idea. President?

HERMAN: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Begin.

HERMAN: Right...

(He sat up and nodded sternly.)

HERMAN: I have a proposal.

(Kritz sucked her teeth.)

KRITZ: Aw. I'm afraid we're going to say no.

HERMAN: What? But you haven't even heard it yet!

(Kritz gave him a sympathetic smile.)

KRITZ: We don't have to. You're not Anoka's type, love.

(Flaxley winced.)

FLAXLEY: I pretty sure he's not talking about *that* kind of proposal, Kritz.

KRITZ: What?

(She growled.)

KRITZ: He'd better be! Our *other* girls are thirteen and seven!

HERMAN: No. No, no, no. It's not a marriage proposal.

KRITZ: Oh?

HERMAN: I'm proposing an alliance.

KRITZ: That's just another word for marriage!!!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Can you just hear the man out, Kritz? His meaning will become abundantly clear, I'm sure. And I'm willing to bet it doesn't involve any form of matrimony!

HERMAN: It doesn't!

KRITZ: Then what *does* it involve?

HERMAN: I'm proposing a strategic, military alliance.

(Flaxley raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: I'm listening!

HERMAN: Well, as you no doubt already know, last year, I brought together the heads of several sovereign nations and formed an alliance with them. The Union of Sovereign Nations. Or The USN for short.

FLAXLEY: Actually, I *didn't* know that.

KRITZ: Nor did I.

HERMAN: Oh.

KRITZ: So how come *we* weren't invited?

HERMAN: You were. You just didn't attend the meeting.

KRITZ: We didn't get an invite.

(She looked to her husband.)

KRITZ: Did we?

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: We *may* have done. That was before young Cayley started keeping my diary.

We were constantly losing track of dates and appointments back then.

(Kritz glowered at him.)

KRITZ: So, what's changed? Even *with* Cayley, you still can't remember my *birth* date!

FLAXLEY: Seriously? Are you ever going to let that go?

KRITZ: We'll see on my birthday, won't we?

FLAXLEY: Kritz...

HERMAN: Anyway...

(Having got Flaxley and Kritz's attention, he ruffled his neck.)

HERMAN: There's no harm done. I'm here you offer you membership of the union in person. You may be late to the party, but you'll still be a welcome addition. The fact you missed the initial meeting is neither here nor there.

FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. So this union...

HERMAN: Yes?

FLAXLEY: What is it?

HERMAN: A strategic military alliance.

FLAXLEY: Yes, you said, but what does it *mean* exactly?

HERMAN: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

HERMAN: Well, put quite simply, it means that if a rogue nation attacks *one* of us, it attacks *all* of us.

KRITZ: Really? So if, like... Anoseta or somebody attacked us...

HERMAN: *All* the member states would come and fight them off alongside you.

(Flaxley raised a questioning eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: And who would that be? Who else is a member?

HERMAN: Leathrock, Ashrin, Wendigo, Tang Yul, Guevina and Port Shehi. Azagotse's application was rejected on the grounds that it didn't meet the expected criteria.

FLAXLEY: Right... I see...

(He sucked his teeth.)

FLAXLEY: To be honest, if Anoseta *was* to attack us, I'd much rather Guevina was on *their* side rather than ours. That place is full of idiots!

KRITZ: Come on, my love; be fair. Kurik and the boys are an elite force; trained by *you*.

FLAXLEY: And they'd be *welcome* to come to our aid. The *rest* of the Guevina army on the other hand... hopefully they'll get lost on the way and end up being eaten by cuddyfinkles.

KRITZ: Yes, but putting your disdain for them to the side, for a minute... nay, forever... having the Tang Yul and Leathrock armies on our side would be a game changer.

(Flaxley mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: True. True.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Where do we sign up?

HERMAN: Steady on, Flaxley. It's not that simple. Tifaeris would need to meet certain criteria first. If it can, it'll be a fine addition to the union. But... it's a big if.

KRITZ: Why? What *is* this criteria?

HERMAN: Well, I'm glad you asked me that, because it *could* be quite the sticking point.

FLAXLEY: In what way?

HERMAN: Well, an agreement was reached that each member state must have free and fair elections, at least every five years. It must also have a justice system where the accused is entitled to a fair and robust defence; independent of the state. With an impartial judge. There must also be a regular army, comprised of at least three hundred men.

KRITZ: Men?

HERMAN: Or women.

KRITZ: Oh. That's alright then. It wouldn't be fair otherwise. I mean, Anoka, Kyrie, Phisele, Zanne and I are stronger than ninety nine *percent* of the men in this town.

HERMAN: You exaggerate!

FLAXLEY: She doesn't.

HERMAN: I stand corrected.

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: But yes, that's the problem. You don't have free and fair elections, your justice system literally consists of *you* deciding if someone's guilty and punishing them as *you* see fit and your army is only voluntary; and *way* too small.

FLAXLEY: So we don't meet the criteria?

HERMAN: Unfortunately not, no.

FLAXLEY: Then why waste our time by coming here and telling us about it?

KRITZ: Yeah. That'd be like me offering you tea then telling you, you have to get a haircut and a tattoo or you won't be allowed to drink it.

FLAXLEY: Yeah!

(Herman wagged a finger in the air.)

HERMAN: Calm down, Flaxley. This is why I brought Tito here.

TITO: That's me!

KRITZ: We know.

HERMAN: He can help you match the criteria by overseeing elections, helping overhaul the justice system and aiding you in implementing a military recruiting program.

FLAXLEY: You can do all that, T-Bone?

TITO: Tito.

FLAXLEY: Shit.

TITO: Yes, I can.

(He smiled.)

TITO: Would you like me tell you how?

KRITZ: I don't see what harm it'll do.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

TITO: Very well. To begin with... elections.

FLAXLEY: What about them?

TITO: You need to have them.

(Flaxley and Kritz glanced at him emptily for a moment then turned to face each other.)

KRITZ: Helpful bugger, isn't he?

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Thank god he came.

(He looked to Tito.)

FLAXLEY: And what do they entail?

TITO: Voting.

FLAXLEY: Right.

KRITZ: Shall I pour the tea? We're going to be here for a while, I feel.

FLAXLEY: Apparently so.

(With that Kritz reached for the teapot then proceeded to pour the contents into four cups.)

FLAXLEY: So, Tito... did you get your degree in human communications from a *local* university or...

TITO: What?

HERMAN: He's saying you need to give him *details*, you idiot. They've never had elections here in Tifaeris, so they wouldn't know how to go about it.

TITO: Oh.

(He nodded.)

TITO: I apologise. I had no idea. I thought you were educated.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz?

KRITZ: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Pour the tea over his head for me, would you?

KRITZ: Don't tempt me.

TITO: Hey! There's no need for hostility. I was just saying that as a world leader, I thought you'd at least be educated on the subject of *democracy*.

FLAXLEY: Well, I'm not.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: I *should* have taken the time out to study these things, I suppose. But I never quite got round to it. I was too busy rebuilding a desperate, derelict town and defending it from hostile enemy nations to give it a second thought, you see?

KRITZ: A rookie mistake, my love. You should have *left* this place derelict and let everyone get slaughtered by invaders while you knuckled down and got your diploma in political niceties instead.

FLAXLEY: You're right. I've been such a fool.

TITO: Yes... well... I detect a mild hint of sarcasm in there somewhere.

HERMAN: A mild hint? It was laced with it. And deservedly so. Do you even know what Tifaeris is, boy?

TITO: Well...

HERMAN: It's a town, literally built from scratch by *these two*! From an empty wasteland to the sprawl you see today! There hasn't *been* any time for education! They've had to work their arses off and learn on the fly!

(He then turned his entire self to face Tito.)

HERMAN: So show some bloody respect. You went to a leading university; well so fucking what? You couldn't even *begin* to achieve what these two have achieved! *They've* built one of the biggest towns on the continent! All *you've* ever done is collect certificates and read books.

TITO: I...

HERMAN: Don't interrupt. Those certificates of yours are nothing more than awards for memorising things *other people* discovered then passed on. And the same goes for all those books you love. You're just absorbing the achievements of others. So get your arse off that pedestal you've put yourself on and be in suitable awe of two people who've actually contributed something to this world *other* than regurgitation!

(Tito hung his head in shame.)

TITO: Quite.

(He looked to Flaxley nervously then pouted.)

TITO: Please accept my humblest apologies.

(Flaxley looked to him coldly for a moment then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. Apology accepted.

KRITZ: Seeing as you just got told off like a six year-old.
FLAXLEY: Right? It's certainly made *me* feel better about things.
HERMAN: It was no more than he deserved.
KRITZ: Agreed.
(She then put down the teapot and nodded to four cups.)
KRITZ: Help yourselves. Milk and sugar are on the table.
HERMAN: Why, thank you, Kritz.
TITO: Thank you.
FLAXLEY: Sterling work, my love.
KRITZ: Like it was difficult.
FLAXLEY: But it was. We're uneducated, remember?
KRITZ: Oh, yeah.
(They chuckled together, forcing Tito to wince in embarrassment.)
FLAXLEY: Anyway...
(He nodded sternly.)
FLAXLEY: These elections. Tell us what we need to know.
HERMAN: And do it well.
TITO: Right. Absolutely.
(He took a deep breath then sat up.)
TITO: First, you'll need candidates. There must be at least two of them. The winning candidate will be elected to lead Tifaeris for a term of five years.
KRITZ: Winning candidate? So an election is a contest.
TITO: Very much so.
KRITZ: And how exactly does one go about winning it?
TITO: Well... in short... the candidates will all state their case as to why *they'd* be the best leader, then the people will get to vote for their favourite.
KRITZ: I see.
(She grimaced.)
KRITZ: That's not gonna work.
TITO: It will.
KRITZ: It won't.
(Tito's nostrils started to twitch.)
TITO: It's a system that's worked, the world over!
KRITZ: Yeah, but it won't work *here*.
(She gestured to her husband.)
KRITZ: Sir Flaxley will stand as a candidate.
FLAXLEY: Of course.
KRITZ: And that'll be the end of the matter.
FLAXLEY: She's right. Nobody's going to stand against *me*.
TITO: That's a bit conceited, isn't it?
(Herman grimaced.)
HERMAN: Actually, no. He's right. This man has a god like status around here. Expecting anyone to stand against *him* is ridiculous.
TITO: Hmm...
(He nodded.)
TITO: Actually, there *is* a way. You can ask someone to stand against you purely for *the* sake of democracy.
FLAXLEY: What?
TITO: You know, like when an unpopular murderer goes on trial. *Someone* has to be his defence counsel or he can't get a conviction.

KRITZ: Yes, he can.

FLAXLEY: I'll just *declare* him guilty then throw him off a cliff.

KRITZ: See?

TITO: Right... yes... that's another thing we need to address. But sticking with the theme of elections, if nobody stands against you, it won't be a *free and fair* election. And without a free and fair election, you can't join the union. So by standing as your opponent, your opponent will actually be doing Tifaeris a massive favour.

(Flaxley and Kritz shared a thoughtful glance.)

FLAXLEY: Sounds plausible.

KRITZ: Right?

FLAXLEY: That should work.

KRITZ: But who should we ask?

FLAXLEY: Well... *you* could do it. Or Anoka, perhaps.

(Tito bit his lip.)

TITO: Actually, that wouldn't work. A free and fair election needs to be *seen* to be a free and fair election. If the only two candidates are you and your wife, it'll look like an attempt to install a family dynasty rather than a democracy.

FLAXLEY: And that's bad, is it?

TITO: Yes.

FLAXLEY: I see.

KRITZ: I guess that rules out Anoka then.

TITO: Who's she?

KRITZ: Our daughter.

TITO: Oh, that's right. You mentioned her earlier.

(He nodded.)

TITO: Family members are definitely out of the question.

FLAXLEY: Then who...

TITO: It has to be someone viable.

KRITZ: Viable?

TITO: Someone who'll be capable of doing the job if they win.

KRITZ: But they won't win.

TITO: It doesn't matter. For it to be a free and fair election, both candidates have to be qualified to lead.

HERMAN: There must be a number of those here, Sir Flaxley.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: There might have been at one time, but unfortunately, every time someone emerges with a bit of talent in this town, Leathrock officials come along and whisk them away.

HERMAN: The talent pool is open to all, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Yeah? Well, so is my fist!

HERMAN: Flaxley...

FLAXLEY: Right. Sorry. It's just annoying that's all. You keep stealing our best people!

HERMAN: What can I tell you? We can offer better wages. It attracts people.

FLAXLEY: Hmm...

(He raised a defiant eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: It makes me reluctant to *find* a second candidate, to be honest. If I *do* find someone capable, you lot will be in like a shot, spiriting the buggers away again.

HERMAN: Nobody forces them to leave, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well...

(An enlightened expression then crossed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Actually, there is someone.

KRITZ: Yup. I'm thinking the exact same thing.

FLAXLEY: Someone who'd make an excellent leader some day. Someone *immensely* capable. And more importantly, someone who'd *never* leave Tifaeris for Leathrock, no matter how much you beg!

HERMAN: I've never *had* to beg.

FLAXLEY: Shut up, you.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Yes... she'd be perfect. And she'd be happy to do it.

KRITZ: Absolutely. She'd do anything for *you*.

(She glowered at him.)

KRITZ: As long as you apologised to her properly this morning.

FLAXLEY: I did!

KRITZ: You'd better had!

FLAXLEY: I bloody did.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, we know just the person.

KRITZ: Wait.

(She bit her lip.)

KRITZ: Is age an issue?

TITO: God, no. Our last president was eighty-seven when he was voted in.

HERMAN: And eighty-seven when he died!

TITO: It was a brief presidency, but no, age is no obstacle.

KRITZ: Good, because she's only thirteen.

(Tito scoffed.)

TITO: Thirteen? No, no, no, no, no. You can't enter a child!

FLAXLEY: Don't make the obvious joke, Kritz!

KRITZ: Aw.

TITO: Flaxley, the election has to be a serious contest between viable candidates for the post of leader. A child is not a viable candidate.

FLAXLEY: Why not?

TITO: Because children have no life experience. And what does a child know about running a town?

(He furrowed his brow.)

TITO: And why are you both giggling at me?

FLAXLEY: No life experience?

KRITZ: She was hunted by assassins and summoned beasts for two long years! She's experienced all kinds of hellish misery in her lifetime that you couldn't even begin to imagine, library boy!

FLAXLEY: As for saying what does she know about running a town; she's our town planner.

KRITZ: And she's been a revelation.

FLAXLEY: Yup. She's a genius!

KRITZ: And absolutely prodigy of a girl.

FLAXLEY: And what's more...

(He sneered at Herman.)

FLAXLEY: She loves Tifaeris. So don't even think about trying to poach her.

HERMAN: Flaxley...

FLAXLEY: I mean it. If you even try it, you and your bloody union of nations will have *me* to face. Because I *will* attack you!

HERMAN: Fine. She's off-limits.

FLAXLEY: I want that in writing.

HERMAN: Fine. That'll give Tito something to do this evening.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: So? Two candidates... then what?

TITO: Then you both campaign.

FLAXLEY: And how do we do that?

TITO: Well, I can arrange a couple of rallies in the town square, if you like. You can take it in turns to state your cases.

KRITZ: Okay. Then what?

TITO: Then, we'll go to the ballot.

KRITZ: Do we have to? He can't dance.

FLAXLEY: He said ballot! Not ballet! And, yes, I can.

HERMAN: You can do ballet?

FLAXLEY: No! I meant I can dance.

KRITZ: Badly.

FLAXLEY: You...

TITO: That's irrelevant, anyway. A ballot is when people go to where the election is being held and write their favourite candidate's name on a piece of paper then put it a box. That evening, when it's over, we'll count the votes and the winner will be declared the leader.

KRITZ: Hmm... what if people can't write?

TITO: They can get someone they trust to write it for them. Witnessed by an independent adjudicator of course.

FLAXLEY: That shouldn't be much of an issue, to be honest. Literacy has improved a lot in the last five years.

KRITZ: Ever since the inns started writing their tariffs on a blackboard, in fact.

(She exhaled.)

KRITZ: People here do enjoy a tipples of an evening.

FLAXLEY: Anyway, that all sounds straight forward.

KRITZ: Albeit an unnecessary load of extra work.

HERMAN: It'll be worth it though. The alliance is a wonderful thing.

FLAXLEY: Well, it certainly sounds like it. A defence network would make this continent impenetrable to outside forces.

HERMAN: That's the plan, old chap.

FLAXLEY: And it's a plan I can definitely get behind.

HERMAN: Excellent.

FLAXLEY: There is one thing that's bothering me though.

HERMAN: Oh?

FLAXLEY: Why do we have to go through elections when the others don't?

HERMAN: What?

FLAXLEY: Guevina and Ashrin are kingdoms; *they* don't have elections. So why do we have to have them?

HERMAN: Tito!

TITO: Yes?

(Herman gave him an exasperated glance.)

HERMAN: Explain it to him!

TITO: Oh. Right.

(He nodded.)

TITO: Ashrin and Guevina had to install prime ministers. They basically made parliaments that work one rung beneath the sovereign.

KRITZ: Really? Who did Guevina elect?

TITO: A chap named...

KRITZ: Lefiat? As recommended by the queen herself?

TITO: No. He's Queen Mandika's husband. She wasn't *allowed* to do that.

FLAXLEY: She wanted to though, didn't she?

TITO: I'm not at liberty to divulge that information.

HERMAN: But *I* am. She did, yes.

KRITZ: Classic Mandika.

TITO: She needed someone independent, so she put forward two unrelated candidates.

FLAXLEY: Was one of them called Bonson?

TITO: Yes. How did...

FLAXLEY: And did the other one run a campaign so terrible, it was almost like he was *trying* to lose?

TITO: Well... yes. We couldn't prove that was the case but...

FLAXLEY: Say no more.

(He chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: She rigged it.

KRITZ: One bloke paid to look like a tit, and Bonson, who *has* to do as he's told or he'll get kicked out of the castle. Thus, maintaining absolute rule for herself.

FLAXLEY: She never changes.

TITO: Like I said, we can't *prove* that was case.

HERMAN: So the result has had to stand.

KRITZ: Priceless.

(Herman nodded.)

HERMAN: Anyway... that's elections. The other two obstacles were justice and the military. Would you like Tito to go over those now, or wait until the elections are out of the way?

FLAXLEY: We'll wait.

KRITZ: One upheaval at a time.

HERMAN: A wise choice.

(He sat forwards.)

HERMAN: Okay, so here's what's going to happen next. I'll be returning to Leathrock, but I'll be leaving a team here. They'll oversee the election to make sure it's fair. Then they'll oversee the overhaul in the court process and assist you with a military recruitment campaign.

FLAXLEY: I see. And will Ascot be one of those staying?

HERMAN: No. I think he's overstayed his welcome already. He can come back with me. I'll transfer him to a job that doesn't require talking to people, I think.

(He then glowered at Tito.)

HERMAN: And if I hear you've been disrespectful to my friends here again, you can go and work with him.

TITO: Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

KRITZ: He'll be fine, I'm sure. Clean slate.

FLAXLEY: She says that, but if he makes one more mistake, every other thing he's ever done wrong in his entire life will suddenly come up in conversation again.

KRITZ: I only do that to you.

(He shrugged.)

KRITZ: It's a wife's privilege.

FLAXLEY: Yes...

HERMAN: Anyway... I'll leave you to it, Tito. Once I've finished my tea, I'll head back.

TITO: Very well, sir. I'll start by visiting this other candidate to check that she is indeed viable.

KRITZ: He's at it again! Already! Doubting us again!

HERMAN: No, no, Kritz. That is literally part of the process.

KRITZ: Hmm... so you claim.

FLAXLEY: Let's give him the benefit of the doubt, shall we, my love?

KRITZ: Maybe.

(Flaxley nodded then offered Tito a smile.)

FLAXLEY: You'll see. Cayley has wisdom beyond her years. And she takes the concept of being highly intelligent to brand new levels.

KRITZ: Plus, she's really cute.

FLAXLEY: But more to the point, she's extremely mature.

KRITZ: That too. Mostly that, in fact. She's very grown up.

TITO: Well, if that's the case then I can't foresee a problem.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

A short while later, at Tifaeris's administration offices, Cayley was sitting at her desk, writing up some notes of a piece of paper. Having been asked to find effective ways to make Tifaeris more resilient in the event of a fire, she'd set to work immediately. She hadn't got as far as she'd have liked, however, because Kyrie had turned up fifteen minutes into the job. Needless to say, her ever chatty sister was proving quite the distraction.

KYRIE: I'm not sure I'm getting this, Cayley.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: It's not difficult, Kyrie. I can't go to lunch yet because I'm waiting for Flaxley.

KYRIE: Because he's bringing you some cake?

CAYLEY: Yes.

KYRIE: For lunch?

CAYLEY: That's right.

KYRIE: But that makes no sense.

(She scratched her head.)

KYRIE: If you have cake for lunch with Flaxley, how can you also go for lunch with me?

CAYLEY: Easily.

KYRIE: But how? That'll be *two* lunches!

CAYLEY: So? It's not illegal to have two lunches, you know?

KYRIE: Isn't it?

CAYLEY: No!

KYRIE: Then why did you tell me it was?

CAYLEY: What? When?

KYRIE: When I took a liking to really expensive steak and decided to start going for lunch twice a day. You told me it was illegal!

(Recalling telling her sister that in order to stop her from spending all their housekeeping money, Cayley grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Aw, poo. I *did* say that.

KYRIE: See?

(Cayley then offered her a warm smile.)

CAYLEY: You misunderstood.

KYRIE: Oh?

CAYLEY: The law is, that you can only buy *yourself* lunch once a day. If someone else is paying, it's fine.

KYRIE: Oh.

(She nodded acceptingly.)

KYRIE: That makes sense.

CAYLEY: I know, right. Common sense, some would say.

KYRIE: I'm reliably informed that I don't have any of that.

CAYLEY: Is that what Phisele told you?

KYRIE: She yelled it at me a lot.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: She was a mean boss, but I really like that job. Captain Kyrie Severen of the Tifaeris police force, at your service.

CAYLEY: Um... you didn't make it to Captain, Kyrie.

KYRIE: Then what rank *was* I promoted to?

(Cayley offered her a loving smile.)

CAYLEY: You weren't.

KYRIE: Really? So she *started* me as a high-ranking officer?

(Cayley just smiled. Where her sister had got the idea from that she'd been a high-ranking officer, she had no idea. At times like this it was easier to just smile and agree, to spare her any further confusion.)

CAYLEY: Yup. She absolutely did put you straight in at the same rank you ended up as.

KYRIE: Awesome.

(She then nodded excitedly.)

KYRIE: So. This cake. Chocolate, is it?

CAYLEY: Yup.

KYRIE: Of course, it is. You wouldn't accept any other kind.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: Can I have some?

CAYLEY: That's up to Sir Flaxley.

KYRIE: Shit. What if he says no?

CAYLEY: Then you can't have any.

KYRIE: Really? That doesn't seem very fair.

(She then shrugged it off.)

KYRIE: Not that it matters, as long as *you* get some. You're really excited about it, I can tell. I know my sister face. Your face lit up and you practically bounced in your seat when you told me about it. You really like cake.

CAYLEY: I do.

(She exhaled.)

CAYLEY: And I'm really looking forward to sharing one with Sir Flaxley.

KYRIE: Well... he is your hero, after all.

(She smiled lovingly.)

KYRIE: It means a lot to you, doesn't it?

(Cayley blushed.)

CAYLEY: Yes.

KYRIE: Because you think he's our dad.

CAYLEY: No, I don't! Not anymore!

(She then pouted and glanced away. She was one hundred percent *convinced* that Sir Flaxley was their father, but had taken to denying it to spare herself from Kyrie's mockery.)

CAYLEY: I realise now that that was folly.

KYRIE: Right...

(Just then, the door opened up and Sir Flaxley walked in, accompanied by his wife and a bookish fellow she'd never seen before.)

KYRIE: Cake time!

CAYLEY: Yay!

(Cayley then sat there beaming with childish excitement as the three visitors approached her desk.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley.

CAYLEY: Hello.

FLAXLEY: Kyrie... for some reason.

KYRIE: Hi!

FLAXLEY: Allow me to introduce you to someone.

KYRIE: Okay.

FLAXLEY: I was talking to Cayley.

KYRIE: No need. I've already met her.

(Flaxley gave her a sideways glance then looked to Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley, I'd like you to meet an acquaintance of mine. This is Tito.

TITO: Charmed, I'm sure.

CAYLEY: Hello.

(She then beamed at Sir Flaxley.)

CAYLEY: Which cake did you get?

(Flaxley looked to her emptily for a moment then spammed his forehead.)

FLAXLEY: Aw, fuck. I forgot all about the cake.

CAYLEY: Oh.

(Tears instantly started to well in her eyes. Watching her, Kritz couldn't help but wince.)

KRITZ: Are you alright, sweetie?

CAYLEY: I'm fine.

(She then burst into tears, jumped to her feet and charged out of the door at the back of the office. Having watched her go, Kyrie could only shake her head bitterly.)

KYRIE: You're horrible. Why she adores you, I just don't know. Oh, yes, I do. She thinks you're her dad.

(Realising what she'd said, she flinched then raced out of the door after Cayley. Left behind, Flaxley could only cringe. He could feel an intense heat rising up from behind him, and could only assume it was his wife's rage.)

FLAXLEY: Darling...

KRITZ: Care to explain???

FLAXLEY: Um... not really, no.

KRITZ: You promised her a cake, didn't you?

FLAXLEY: Well... I may have *mentioned* one.

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: You did, didn't you? Having shouted at the poor bugger for nothing, you promised her a cake by way of an apology, didn't you?

FLAXLEY: That... well... that is what happened, yes.

KRITZ: You didn't bother *getting* her one though, did you? Making the poor kid feel lied to and disrespected by the one person she worships and adores above all others!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow at her.)

FLAXLEY: Really, Kritz? Upgraded from laying it on with a trowel to piling it on with a bloody shovel now, have you?

KRITZ: I haven't even *started* yet!

TITO: Which is great an' all... just let me just get out of your hair first.

KRITZ: What?

TITO: I'm leaving.

FLAXLEY: But you haven't met Cayley yet!

TITO: Nor am I going to. She's quite clearly not viable.
FLAXLEY: Excuse me?
KRITZ: How can you say that when you've never even met the girl???
TITO: She just ran out of the room, crying like a little girl because you didn't buy her any cake! I think it's fair to say that someone who does that is *not* world leader material!
FLAXLEY: Now you listen to me, Tito...
TITO: The decision is made!
(He gave an exasperated sigh.)
TITO: It was just a bloody cake, for pity's sake. How's she going to fare when a rival world leader criticises her economic policy? By throwing a tantrum and sulking in the corner until someone makes her some cocoa and reads her a bedtime story? The answer is no. She's not a suitable candidate.
(Flaxley snarled then grabbed him by his collar and pulled him close.)
FLAXLEY: Shut up!
(Tito whimpered fearfully.)
TITO: You make a fair request, sir.
FLAXLEY: She wasn't simply crying about a cake, you tit. We let her down.
KRITZ: We?
FLAXLEY: Fine. I let her down. Badly.
(He nodded then let go off Tito's collar.)
FLAXLEY: Now wait there while I fix it. Trust me, you *will* be impressed by her.
(He then strutted out of the door at the back. Left behind, Tito glanced at the other exit then mused to himself.)
KRITZ: I wouldn't.
TITO: What?
KRITZ: Make a dash for it.
TITO: I...
KRITZ: You saw what happened to Ascot.
(Tito bit his lip then sighed despondently.)
TITO: I wasn't going to make a dash for it anyway.
KRITZ: Yes...

In the courtyard behind the offices at this time, Cayley was sobbing in Kyrie's arms. Unable to stop her tears from flowing, she was the picture of sadness. For most people in this situation, having their beloved sister there would have been greatly comforting.
Unfortunately for Cayley, her sister was Kyrie.
KYRIE: If I'd known you were craving cake that badly, I'd have brought one with me.
(Cayley whimpered.)
CAYLEY: It's not about the cake, Kyrie; it's what it represented.
(Kyrie was instantly flummoxed.)
KYRIE: Right...
(She bit her lip.)
KYRIE: Chocolate?
CAYLEY: Kyrie...
KYRIE: Well, that's not a good sign. If you're craving chocolate at this age, there's only going to be one outcome. You're going to grow up to be fat. Like a religious person's wife! That's no good. We're going to have to put you on a strict no-food diet!
CAYLEY: No food?
KYRIE: That's right. No food until you stop being fat!

CAYLEY: But I'm *not* fat.

KYRIE: What?

(Kyrie leant back and looked at her.)

KYRIE: What? You're skinny again! Nice work, Cayley! Job done.

(She puffed out.)

KYRIE: That was quite the scare.

(Just then, Sir Flaxley started to approach them. At once, Cayley pouted then looked away.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley!

(Cayley ruffled her neck.)

CAYLEY: What?

FLAXLEY: You must feel horribly let down.

KYRIE: Probably because you let her down horribly.

FLAXLEY: I did, yes.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: The thing is, something important came up.

KYRIE: More important than Cayley?

(She scoffed.)

KYRIE: Such a thing doesn't exist.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: Though a nice pair of stilettos does come close.

FLAXLEY: Kyrie, would you mind letting me talk to Cayley for a moment?

KYRIE: Fine. Just don't be mean.

FLAXLEY: You have my word.

KYRIE: Like when you gave your word about getting her some cake?

FLAXLEY: Touché. Now be quiet.

KYRIE: Right...

FLAXLEY: Cayley?

CAYLEY: Yes?

FLAXLEY: While I was at home, a foreign leader came to visit. The President of Leathrock.

(Cayley slowly turned to face him, wiping tears as she did so.)

CAYLEY: Really?

FLAXLEY: Yes. That's why I forgot the cake. He came with an important proposal!

(Kyrie gasped.)

KYRIE: She's thirteen!

FLAXLEY: He wasn't going to propose to *Cayley*!

(Kyrie gasped again.)

KYRIE: Not my Anoka!

FLAXLEY: No! He wasn't proposing marriage, he was proposing a strategic military alliance!

(He grimaced to himself.)

FLAXLEY: That can't be good. Kritz thought the same thing *you* did. I hope that doesn't happen too often. She'll have to go into a home.

KYRIE: She has a home.

FLAXLEY: Kyrie...

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I want to talk to Cayley.

KYRIE: Oh. Carry on.

FLAXLEY: Thank you.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: You see, Cayley, it's a massive deal. This alliance would be a game changer for all of us. But in order to join the alliance, we need to meet certain criteria. Such as holding general elections.

(Cayley glanced at him in astonishment.)

CAYLEY: You can't do that!

FLAXLEY: What? Why?

CAYLEY: Nobody would stand against you!

FLAXLEY: Actually, that's what I'd like to talk to *you* about.

(An idea then sprang into his mind.)

FLAXLEY: At my house. Over tea and chocolate cake. A chocolate cake with black cherries, cream and chocolate sauce.

(Kyrie and Cayley gasped.)

KYRIE: You mean...

CAYLEY: Are you talking about...

BOTH: A Dark Forest Gateau?

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I am, yes.

(Cayley instantly jumped to her feet.)

CAYLEY: Let's go now.

KYRIE: Can I come?

(Flaxley looked to where she was treading the spot, almost in tears at the thought of him saying no.)

FLAXLEY: Of course.

KYRIE: Score!

CAYLEY: That's our favourite kind of cake!

FLAXLEY: And you deserve it.

(He then placed a firm hand on Cayley's shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: And I mean that. You do. You've been a wonderful servant to this town, Cayley, and I cherish your friendship. Even if I do get frustrated with you sometimes, I want you to know, I think the world of you and any fallings out we've had in the past have been entirely my fault.

KYRIE: We know.

CAYLEY: But still, thank you for saying that.

(She then marched to the door.)

CAYLEY: To the cake shop!

(Kyrie chuckled then looked to Flaxley and frowned.)

KYRIE: Don't hurt her like that again.

(She then beamed with fiendish delight.)

KYRIE: Yay! Cake!

(With that, she took off like a rocket after Cayley.)

Within thirty minutes, Sir Flaxley found himself sitting at his table, grinning with amusement at the sight before him. Kyrie and Cayley, along with Emma and Jade were shovelling cake into their mouths with gleeful delight. It looked like they hadn't eaten for weeks.

FLAXLEY: Priceless. It's like feeding time on a farm.

KRITZ: Right? Gross, yet adorable.

(She chuckled.)

KRITZ: And it's a bloody good thing we bought *two* cakes really. Look at them go.

(Tito rolled his eyes.)

TITO: Yes, well, can we get on with it now, please? The rest of my party are at the hotel, and I'd like to join them at some point.

KRITZ: Fine by me.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: If you resent doing your job that much, then go for it.

TITO: It's not my job to watch children stuff themselves with cake.

KRITZ: It's not your job to sit in your hotel room either.

FLAXLEY: She's got you there, T... something.

TITO: Tito!

FLAXLEY: That's the chap.

(Tito sighed.)

TITO: I just want to get started on the young lady's candidacy, that's all.

FLAXLEY: Then talk to her! She won't bite.

KRITZ: Unless she mistakes you for a slice of cake.

FLAXLEY: Which seems unlikely.

KRITZ: But we'd be fools to rule it out altogether.

(They chuckled together, much to Tito's disdain. With a roll of his eyes, he sat forwards then looked to Cayley.)

TITO: So... Cayley?

(Cayley glanced up at him with chocolate all round her mouth and a happy grin on her face.)

CAYLEY: Yes?

TITO: Nothing.

(He shook his head.)

TITO: Sorry, but it has to be a no. *She's* not a viable candidate. Look at her! She eats like a child.

KRITZ: She *is* a child.

(Kyrie glanced across the table, also with a mouth covered in chocolate.)

KYRIE: Fact.

FLAXLEY: But as Kyrie just demonstrated, you don't have to be a *child* to cover your face in chocolate whilst eating a Dark Forest Gateau.

TITO: But still... she's all tiny and cute.

KRITZ: So?

TITO: So an election is a serious matter and has to *look* like one. You can't put a little thing like *her* up there and expect to be taken seriously; you just can't!

(Cayley grimaced across the table.)

CAYLEY: Put me up where?

FLAXLEY: For election.

(Silence descended as Kyrie, Cayley, Jade and Emma stopped eating and stared at him in bewilderment.)

CAYLEY: You want me to stand for an election?

KYRIE: That's insane! She can't even do a handstand!

FLAXLEY: What the hell has that got to do with anything???

CAYLEY: Leave this to me.

(She then smiled at Kyrie.)

CAYLEY: There are different kinds of elections, Kyrie. They're not just for choosing the captain of the gymnastics club.

(Kyrie looked enlightened.)

KYRIE: Ah. That's alright then. You'd have looked a right wally. I didn't get *any* votes when *I* stood for election and I was bloody good at gymnastics.

(She mused to herself.)

KYRIE: What *is* the election for then? A book club, right? Has to be something a nerd would be good at.

FLAXLEY: It's the election for the leader of Tifaeris.

KYRIE: What? But it already *has* a leader. You!

(She gasped.)

KYRIE: Did you forget?

(She whimpered at Cayley.)

KYRIE: It's starting, Cayley. Just like grandad when he lost *his* marbles.

(Kritz smiled across the table.)

KRITZ: Kyrie, love, the best thing you can do for Cayley right now is leave the conversation alone and focus on eating your cake.

KYRIE: Well, you won't hear any arguments from me on that score. It's also the best thing I can do for Kyrie.

(She then resumed stuffing her face. With her sister no longer in the way, Cayley nodded then looked to Flaxley.)

CAYLEY: So... you want me to stand in a general election. Against you, right?

FLAXLEY: That's right.

CAYLEY: Because nobody else in town would be willing to do it.

FLAXLEY: Partly. But also because not many have the intelligence to run a campaign.

KRITZ: So, we're basically asking you for a favour. Of all the people who *might* be kind enough to help out by running in the election, you're the only one smart enough to put up a realistic fight, you see?

FLAXLEY: And it *has* to be a realistic fight. In order to join the military alliance that I mentioned, we need to hold free and fair elections. It can't be a farce. If it could we'd just ask the biggest idiot in town to do it. I'd win at a canter then.

(Cayley bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: You will anyway. Everyone loves you here.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. That's why I'm not worried about asking the *best* qualified person in town to stand against me. You. I'm bound to win regardless.

KRITZ: The *real* victory being that the world will know that he won a fair election and that Tifaeris *is* a free and fair democracy.

FLAXLEY: Well said.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: So? Are you in?

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: But... if I stand against *you*, people will start picking on me again.

FLAXLEY: What?

CAYLEY: I'm a nerd, Flaxley. People used to pick on me just for poops and giggles when I wasn't even doing anything. And if I threaten your leadership, it'll happen again!

KRITZ: What? You got picked on?

CAYLEY: Yes!

(Jade sighed.)

JADE: It's true.

EMMA: Even *we* picked on her once.

KRITZ: You did what???

JADE: We feel terrible about it now, obviously!

EMMA: We were weak.

JADE: But we're all friends now; right, Cayley?

(Cayley glanced at them briefly.)

CAYLEY: I guess.

JADE: See?

(Cayley then looked to Flaxley with terror in her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Please don't ask me to do this. I don't like having my knickers pulled half way up my back! And getting stuffed in cupboards really sucks. I can't go through all that again!

(Tito scowled across the table.)

TITO: Nope! I've seen enough!

FLAXLEY: No, you haven't!

TITO: *You* don't get to make that decision!

(He gestured to Cayley.)

TITO: We *can't* have a world leader who'll get chocolate all over her face at major international dinner events, Flaxley! We just can't! And we *certainly* can't have one who whimpers and cries about bullies! How's that going to look when the alliance is on a war-footing??? Picture it, Flaxley! She'll say we should send a second unit to the front line because the enemy generals are big, fat, mean poop-heads! Then she'll blow a raspberry!

(He scoffed.)

TITO: Unless, of course, it's a late-night meeting, in which case she won't be able to attend because it's way past her bedtime! This is a ridiculous idea and I'm pulling the plug on it!

FLAXLEY: I don't like you very much.

TITO: Why? Because I pointed out the obvious flaw in your bloody stupid plan?

(He threw a dismissive hand in Cayley's direction.)

TITO: A child for pity's sake. I mean, what the hell does she know about global affairs? Or politics for that matter?

(At once, a darkness seemed to descend over Cayley and she sat bolt upright.)

CAYLEY: Quite a lot, actually!

TITO: Oh, yeah?

(He scoffed again.)

TITO: Then riddle me this, smart girl. How would you deal with an economic slow down that's threatening to lead to a recession? Hmm?

(He then smirked at her, expecting her to whimper and shy away. Rather than doing so, however, she just scoffed at him.)

CAYLEY: That depends on the *causes* of the economic slow down, obviously. The variables are infinite.

TITO: Wrong! Regardless of the causes, the answer is quite *obviously* a round of austerity. (Cayley was horrified.)

CAYLEY: Austerity? Austerity??? That's economic suicide! Austerity is *guaranteed* to turn the slow down into a recession!

TITO: No, it isn't!

CAYLEY: Yes, it is! Haven't you *heard* of the paradox of thrift? Under austerity conditions, companies tighten their belts in order to save money. That means redundancies. And without jobs, people have no disposable income. Therefore, sales plummet and other businesses go bust, causing even *further* job losses. And the government will struggle to invest their way out of the mess because people without jobs don't pay tax!

(She scoffed.)

CAYLEY: Austerely indeed. Austerity can quite literally cut the size of an economy in half! And national banks borrow against the scale of their economy to fund the nation's existence. If that amount halves, they'll have to lose parts of their army and quite likely close schools and hospitals. Yet more redundancies!

(She wagged her finger at Tito.)

CAYLEY: Investment is the cure for recession. It's a basic tool for wealth creation, fuelled by its knock-on effects, such a full employment. Austerity has the opposite effect.

(She looked to Flaxley and grimaced.)

CAYLEY: And he's says *I'm* not fit to lead? *He'd* bankrupt the country in two seconds flat.

(She then resumed stuffing herself with cake. As she did so, Flaxley and Kritz sat there wearing elongated smiles, defying themselves to laugh. Tito was sitting there with his jaw on the floor. Having just been schooled by a little girl, he wanted to floor to open up and swallow him, chair an' all. His cause wasn't helped by Kyrie smiling at him from across the table.)

KYRIE: Don't feel bad. You're not the first smart arse she's put in his place and you definitely won't be the last.

(Unable to hold it in any longer, Flaxley and Kritz started to laugh.)

FLAXLEY: Brilliant.

KRITZ: Right? I'd *pay* to watch that again.

(Still chuckling, Flaxley then looked to Tito.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, I think you'll agree, she's more than capable of running a country.

KRITZ: More capable than you, anyway.

(The two of them started giggling again. Tears were rolling down their cheeks and their shoulders were bouncing up and down in time with the laughter. Humiliated, Tito sighed then glanced nervously in Flaxley's direction.)

TITO: I suppose... I mean... it could be argued that... you know... she *does* know a thing or two.

FLAXLEY: Then do you approve her candidacy?

TITO: Well...

FLAXLEY: Or will I have to write a complaint to your president, telling him how you turned her down on the grounds that she schooled you at economics?

(Cayley raised a nervous finger.)

CAYLEY: I still don't want to do it. People will spit at me on the street.

FLAXLEY: No, they won't. Because I'll make it abundantly clear from the off that I *asked* you to run a campaign.

TITO: Um... no. That'll sound like you've asked her stand against you, because you're such a great guy. It'll just win more votes for *you*!

FLAXLEY: More than the one hundred percent I'm going to get anyway?

KRITZ: Not quite a hundred, my love. Kyrie will vote for Cayley.

KYRIE: On the contrary, Kyrie will forget to vote; just like I did when I stood for the leader of my gym club.

KRITZ: Then I stand corrected.

(Flaxley bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: How's this then, Cayley? I'll arrange for Anoka and Phisele to stay at your house for the duration of the election as your personal security team.

KYRIE: Yum. Anoka. I approve.

(She smiled at Cayley.)

KYRIE: I'll protect you too, of course.

CAYLEY: Well...

(Kritz winced.)

KRITZ: Wait a minute, Flaxley. Phisele will resign from the force, jump on a horse and flee Tifaeris forever if you try to make her suffer Kyrie again.

FLAXLEY: Will she? Or will she just say no?

KRITZ: Well...

(She blushed.)

KRITZ: Probably the latter.

FLAXLEY: See? Then it's agreed! Cayley will stand against me; and Anoka, Kyrie and possibly Phisele will protect her from bullies! Sorted!

(Tito sighed in defeat.)

TITO: Fine. If that's what you want then... she's viable.

KRITZ: Result!

TITO: If you say so...

(He then climbed to his feet and headed for the door.)

TITO: I'm going to the hotel. I'll start arranging the election tomorrow.

(Ignoring him, Flaxley and Kritz shared a high-five.)

FLAXLEY: We did it, darling.

KRITZ: Yes, we bloody well did.

(Sitting there with an exasperated expression on her face, Cayley was the very picture of dismay.)

CAYLEY: But... I didn't even agree to it.

(Her shoulders slumped.)

CAYLEY: I hate being a kid. Nobody listens.

That evening, Flaxley was sitting out on his porch, relaxing with an ale in the company of his good friend, Derek, the three-foot tall green alien from the planet Tryme 17. Reflecting on the events of the day, he exhaled then glanced up at the starry sky above.

FLAXLEY: Times are changing, Derek. And they're changing for the better.

DEREK: At least that's the hope.

FLAXLEY: Well, yes...

(He flinched.)

FLAXLEY: Hope? It's the *reality*, isn't it?

DEREK: Is it?

FLAXLEY: I'd say so. This is progress, Derek. We're about to become a global player.

DEREK: Sure. Either that or you're about to become a district of Leathrock.

FLAXLEY: What?

(Derek shrugged.)

DEREK: Just saying. Keep an eye on it, Flaxley. History is full of nations buddying up with their most powerful neighbour like that. Quite often, alliance turns into dependency. At which point, the biggest one will simply absorb the other.

(He nodded.)

DEREK: Not that I have to tell *you* that. Tifaeris used to have an alliance with Trepe Village until recently. Now Trepe Village is just a district of Tifaeris.

FLAXLEY: They *chose* to become part of Tifaeris!

DEREK: Yes, and in time, the people of Tifaeris might choose to become part of Leathrock.

(He shrugged.)

DEREK: It's classic. The big fish always absorbs the little one.

FLAXLEY: In that case, Leathrock is about to become a district of Tifaeris.

DEREK: Right... if you're just gonna say *stupid* things...

FLAXLEY: I'm not. I mean, sure, Leathrock is wealthier and thrice the size of Tifaeris, but you're forgetting something.

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Tifaeris is stronger militarily! Because it has *me*!

DEREK: Right... well... all fantasies aside, Flaxley... just be careful. Make sure to keep trade even. And whatever you do, don't gamble the future of this town on a resource you can

only buy from Leathrock. As soon as you do that, you become dependent on them. And that could spell the beginning of the end.

(Flaxley nodded thoughtfully.)

FLAXLEY: Interesting. Remain independent resource-wise. I'll have to tell Cayley that.

DEREK: Independent would be ideal, yes. Being co-dependent on each other *also* works. Just don't make yourselves dependent on them.

FLAXLEY: Noted.

(He gave him a questioning glance.)

FLAXLEY: And that will secure our future, will it?

DEREK: I'd say so.

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Thanks, Derek.

(He then flinched as a memory came to mind.)

FLAXLEY: Wait a minute. Tifaeris's future is *already* assured. We know that for a fact. We've *been* to the future, remember? This town was alive and well. And it smelt funny.

DEREK: The town was alive and well, yes. But was it still an independent nation state or was it just a town in Leathrock? We had no way of knowing.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... shit. You're right.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I'll definitely keep a close eye on that then.

DEREK: Good, good.

(He grimaced.)

DEREK: So... elections, eh?

FLAXLEY: Yes. Stage one of the three point overhaul plan. To be followed by changes to the legal system and further military recruitment.

DEREK: Sounds tedious.

FLAXLEY: I'm sure it will be. Worth it though.

DEREK: Absolutely. The place is *due* an upgrade on the political front. And the judicial front.

(He nodded.)

DEREK: And you managed to convince young Cayley to be your opponent, did you?

FLAXLEY: I did, yes.

DEREK: I see. You must really hate that poor girl.

FLAXLEY: What? No! Why would you even suggest such a thing?

DEREK: Because she's going to become a national hate figure; that's why! She'll have to live out the rest of her life as the horrible little bugger who had the audacity to think she could dethrone the people's hero. A man held in almost saintly esteem. People are going to throw things at her!

FLAXLEY: I'd already thought of that actually!

DEREK: Oh? And how are you going to prevent it?

FLAXLEY: Well... I hadn't thought *that* far, obviously.

DEREK: Flaxley...

FLAXLEY: Oh, relax, will you, you fault-finding, extra-terrestrial midget.

DEREK: Charming.

FLAXLEY: It'll be fine. I'll just make sure people know that *someone* had to do it and she kindly volunteered in order to do this town a favour.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: If I word it right, she'll come out of it looking like a hero.

DEREK: Just make sure you *do* word it right.

FLAXLEY: I will!

DEREK: Good man.

FLAXLEY: Yes. I am.

(He then sat back and exhaled.)

FLAXLEY: This is really happening, Derek. Once we've got the democratic, legal and military issues cleaned up, Tifaeris will finally make an appearance on the world stage.

DEREK: Indeed.

(He smiled.)

DEREK: Excellent work, Flaxley; I have to say. In a short space of time, you've transformed Tifaeris from a field full of shacks into a global player. That's impressive.

FLAXLEY: Well... like I always say... Kritz helped.

DEREK: Yes... you do, don't you?

FLAXLEY: I do, yes.

DEREK: Never ends well for you though, does it?

FLAXLEY: No. No, it does not.

(He smirked.)

FLAXLEY: That's why I'm always careful *not* to say it when she's in earshot nowadays.

DEREK: I see.

(He winced.)

DEREK: You didn't notice her standing in the doorway then?

KRITZ: Apparently not.

(Flaxley glanced at her in horror then groaned in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: Aw, fuck. The sofa tonight for me, is it?

KRITZ: Yes! The sofa at Derek's house!

(She then stormed inside. Left behind, Flaxley could only wince.)

FLAXLEY: Why? Just... why? Why did that have to happen?

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: I don't know, old chap. But from the look on Kritz's face...

(He smirked.)

DEREK: You won't be getting one hundred percent of the votes after all.

FLAXLEY: Derek!

DEREK: Yes?

FLAXLEY: You're a cold, cold alien.

Chapter Two – Polling Comes Not Without Cajoling.

Three days after his arrival in Tifaeris, Tito found himself standing at the side of a makeshift stage in the town's main square. He'd spent the last three days putting up fliers and spreading the word about a general election looming. He'd done an excellent job in getting the word out, but now the real work was about to begin. Today would be the first day of campaigning; starting with speeches from the two candidates.

Curious, not to mention baffled, as to why the town needed an election, over half the population had descended on the main square in that hope that they could make sense of it. It was an excellent turn out and Tito was delighted with it. As was one of the candidates, Sir Flaxley. Confident of an easy victory, he couldn't wait to get out there and state his case. His opponent, however, wasn't so eager. Cayley was terrified. Speaking to a large crowd would be horribly daunting. Especially when her job was to tell a town full of people that she'd be a better choice than the incumbent; a man who was hero-worshipped by one and all. In very little doubt that she was about to face a tsunami of hatred and get bombarded by

whatever the crowd could throw at her, she was trembling all over. Getting her to calm down would not be an easy task. Kritz and Kyrie were, however, determined to try.

KRITZ: Don't worry, sweetie. Flaxley has a plan.

(Kyrie nodded.)

KYRIE: He's going to hold them off while we flee the country.

(Kritz furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: Why would you tell her that?

KYRIE: Because she needs to be prepared.

(She smiled.)

KYRIE: Don't worry, Cayley. I'll be coming with you, obviously. I've packed all our stuff and left it in a carriage at the edge of town, so we can escape quickly.

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: There's no need for that. Tito is going to explain that you're doing the town a favour and that he wants them to listen to you, okay? And more importantly, that they're not to pick on you.

(Cayley pouted.)

CAYLEY: Really?

KRITZ: Really.

CAYLEY: And will they listen?

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: I don't *want* to be butchered by an angry mob.

KYRIE: She really doesn't. She hates that kind of thing.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: We had to flee from an angry mob in Castaria once.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: In hindsight, offering the town's holiest priest a blowjob was a mistake.

KRITZ: Kyrie...

KYRIE: But in my defence, he was quite the hotty; wasted on the priesthood really.

KRITZ: Yes, well, never mind that, we need to focus on Cayley here.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: Listen, love; you'll be fine. After Flaxley does his speech, you'll go up there to be greeted with total silence, probably. Then you can say your bit and leave. If anyone boos, either Flaxley, Phisele, Anoka or myself will put a stop to it.

CAYLEY: Well... as long as you're sure.

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: But if they throw things, I'm done!

KRITZ: They won't.

CAYLEY: Um... okay.

KRITZ: Good girl.

(Kyrie mused to herself.)

KYRIE: Phisele's here, is she?

KRITZ: She's in the crowd, gearing up to slap anyone who boos.

KYRIE: That hypocrite!

KRITZ: What?

KYRIE: Just yesterday when I walked past the police station, *she* came out and booed *me*!

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: Yes, well, don't worry, she won't boo Cayley. She likes Cayley.

CAYLEY: Since when? She used to yell at me all the time for telling fibs.

(Kritz shrugged.)

KRITZ: Don't tell fibs then.

(She then glanced to the stage. Tito had started his walk to the lectern.)

KRITZ: A-ha. It begins.

(Sure enough, Tito reached the tall, solid lectern in the centre of the stage then cleared his throat. In that moment, the crowd fell silent and stared at him emptily.)

TITO: Ladies and Gentleman, welcome to the inaugural Tifaeris general election rally!

(He paused for applause that never came.)

TITO: Right...

(A townsman raised his hand.)

CHAS: Why the fuck do *we* need to hold an election for a leader? We've already bloody got one!

TITO: Well, I'm glad you asked me that, old chap; because that's what I'm here to explain.

(He nodded sternly.)

TITO: Your leader, Sir Flaxley wants this fine nation to join a strategic defence alliance. In order to so, however, Tifaeris needs to match a certain set of criteria. One such criterion is free and fair elections.

(Upon spotting a thousand baffled eyes staring back to him, he sighed dejectedly. They had no idea what words like criterion meant.)

TITO: He wants to join a defence union with other nations, but he can't do that unless Tifaeris becomes a nation that holds elections.

(Before him, everyone in attendance nodded with enlightenment. It was clear to see that this was a town of working-class people with little in the way of education. Pondering that thought, he glanced skywards then bit his lip.)

TITO: On second thoughts, letting you lot vote might well be dangerous.

OLD LADY: What? Speak up, man!

(Tito flinched then glanced to the audience again.)

TITO: Sorry. I was just thinking out loud.

(He nodded.)

TITO: Anyway, in order for free and fair elections to count, you, the people of this fine town must choose between the two candidates for the leadership.

OLD LADY: Two? Sir Flaxley and... who?

CHAS: Yeah! Who's the other one then?

(Several other townspeople then joined in.)

ERIC: Yeah! Who'd be daft enough to go against Flaxley?

DAISY: And why would they *want* to?

CHAS: He's making it up, surely!

(He glowered at Tito.)

CHAS: You are, aren't you? There's no second candidate; you're making it up!

TITO: No, I can assure you, there are two people campaigning for the leadership.

CHAS: Well, I'll be buggered.

RALPH: So there's a traitor in our midst!

DAISY: Must be!

ERIC: Then we'll find the bugger and kill him!

DAISY: Or her! Women can be traitorous scumbags too, you know?

(She grimaced.)

DAISY: Why would I say that?

(One of the town's former war heroes, Thin Alero, then stepped forward.)

THIN: I don't know, Daisy, but you weren't wrong. Whoever the miscreant is, we'll have to put paid to the bugger as soon as possible. Let's go home and sharpen our pitchforks.

TITO: Wait!!!

(Everyone stared up at him.)

TITO: There's no traitor in town. The person standing against Sir Flaxley is doing so at Sir Flaxley's request.

CHAS: Eh? That makes no bloody sense.

DAISY: Why would he ask someone to threaten his own role?

TITO: He isn't.

(He rolled his eyes.)

TITO: He just needs someone to stand against him in the election.

GRAHAM: What for?

TITO: Because for an election to be free and fair there has to be more than one candidate.

ERIC: So he asked someone else to compete against him?

TITO: Yes!

ERIC: I see.

(He frowned.)

ERIC: And they agreed???

(He shook his fist.)

ERIC: Who is this traitorous bastard and where can I find the bugger???

GRAHAM: We, Eric! Where can *we* find him? This is a job for all of us!

DAISY: Yay! Lynch mob!!!

(Much to Tito's dismay, the angry crowd then cheered in solidarity.)

TITO: Stop! You're not getting this, are you? There's no traitor! The other candidate is doing Flaxley a *favour* by standing!

RALPH: So he claims!

DAISY: Or she!

RALPH: Yeah!

(Tito sighed.)

TITO: Listen...

(Backstage at this time, Kyrie was extremely unsettled. Her sister had taken great exception to what she'd heard and she wasn't sure how to handle the situation.)

KYRIE: Kritz?

(Kritz glanced over to her from where she'd been chatting to a stagehand.)

KRITZ: Yeah?

KYRIE: I think Cayley might be having second thoughts.

(Kritz could only grimace uncomfortably. Cayley was desperately trying to sprint for the exit, but was being held back by an outstretched palm to the forehead.)

CAYLEY: Let me go, Kyrie!!!

KYRIE: I'd love to, Cayley, but Kritz told me not to.

CAYLEY: Pitchforks, Kyrie! A lynch mob! They're going to kill me!

KYRIE: Yeah... now you mention it, that's not good, is it?

CAYLEY: See?

(She stopped trying to run and looked imploringly into Kyrie's eyes.)

CAYLEY: We should go to where you left that carriage and start a new life elsewhere.

KYRIE: But I like it *here*.

CAYLEY: We could go to Leathrock.

KYRIE: Why would I want to go there?

CAYLEY: There's more men in Leathrock.

KYRIE: I'm listening.

CAYLEY: You could get a job as a prostitute there and being smart, I'd find a new job in no time. One where my boss won't turn me in a national pariah; wanted by a pitchfork-wielding hate mob!

(At this point, Kritz stepped up to her and placed an arm around her shoulder.)

KRITZ: You're not a pariah, sweetie, and there's not going to be a mob with pitchforks.

CAYLEY: But they just said...

KRITZ: I *heard* what they said and you're worrying about nothing. Flaxley will tell them categorically to leave you alone. And you know as well as I do, the people of this town won't defy *him*.

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: But...

KRITZ: Just wait and see how it pans out. I promise you, by the time you're due to go on stage, the crowd will have been well and truly pacified.

(She then glanced to where Tito was remonstrating with the crowd.)

TITO: Now you listen to me, chummy. I'm *not* talking out of my arse. There *is* a second candidate and she *is* doing it as a favour to Flaxley!

DAISY: She?

ERIC: So it's a woman???

TITO: Well... yes, actually!

(Daisy shook her fist.)

DAISY: I knew it! I told you women were evil!

RALPH: Yeah! Down with women!!!

GRAHAM: Yeah!

(He flinched.)

GRAHAM: Wait. What? *All* women?

RALPH: Well... no... just the traitorous one.

ERIC: We should string her up!!!

(A cheer echoed around the square. As it did so, Thin Alero folded his arms defiantly.)

THIN: Hanging alone isn't *good* enough, people! We need to introduce this treasonous shrew to the executioner's axe!!!

(Another cheer then echoed across the square.)

TITO: Are you cunts for real??? There is no traitor!!!

CHAS: Says *you*!

(He gasped.)

CHAS: You're in on it!

TITO: What??? In on what??? There's nothing to be in *on*!!!

(Tito shook his fist.)

TITO: Just listen to me, you dim-witted throng of lesser primates!!! Nobody mentioned anything even remotely treacherous! Flaxley needed someone to compete against him, so he asked the poor girl to do him a favour! It's as simple as that! Where the hell are you getting treason from???

(Silence descended for a few moments until a single voice rose up from the crowd.)

GRAHAM: You said...

(Tito sighed despondently.)

TITO: Look... let's just... I'll start again...

(Backstage in the meantime, Kyrie was getting more than a little fed up.)

KYRIE: Kritz! She's doing it again!

(Kritz turned around and sure enough, Cayley was trying to sprint to the exit again; defeated by Kyrie's outstretched palm.)

KRITZ: Seriously, Cayley?

CAYLEY: Yes! I don't *want* to be strung up! *Or* decapitated!

KYRIE: Which isn't unreasonable, in my view. Maybe I *should* let her flee.

(Kritz sighed with frustration.)

KRITZ: Cayley, stop struggling.

CAYLEY: Shan't!

KRITZ: Cayley...

CAYLEY: Let me go!

(Kritz sighed with frustration then shouted.)

KRITZ: Cayley!!!

(At once, every single person in the entire town froze. Kritz's shouting voice was notoriously loud. It was so loud, in fact, it even made the local wildlife come a halt. Some had even suggested that her raised voice *could* stop the tide from rolling in. It was a statement only used by people who were prone to exaggeration, but nevertheless; this was a woman who knew how to make herself heard. At once, Cayley stopped struggling and stared at her with wide-eyes.)

KRITZ: That's better...now, listen.

(Kyrie furrowed her brow.)

KYRIE: How can she? You just deafened the poor girl.

KRITZ: Don't exaggerate.

KYRIE: I'm not! You deafened everybody! Look!

(She pointed to where everyone around them was staring at them agog, including Tito up on the stage.)

TITO: Is everything okay, back there?

KRITZ: Yes! You carry on.

(She then turned to face Cayley and smiled.)

KRITZ: Look... you need to calm down. I know Tito is failing miserably to reassure you, but once *Flaxley's* been on the stage and explained everything, you'll be fine.

CAYLEY: But what if *he* explains it badly too?

KRITZ: Then I'll go up there and do it. Just relax. I'm not going to let you go up there until I'm sure you'll be safe, okay?

(Cayley pouted then hung her head.)

CAYLEY: I suppose.

KRITZ: That's my girl.

(She then glanced to where her husband was limbering up to go on stage.)

KRITZ: Darling?

FLAXLEY: Yes, my love?

KRITZ: I just told Cayley she's not going up there until I'm satisfied she'll be safe.

FLAXLEY: Damned right too!

KRITZ: So you might want to go and start your speech, because Tito isn't getting it done.

(Flaxley glanced onto the stage and bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Yes... so I see. He's really quite the tit.

KRITZ: I concur.

(She grimaced.)

KRITZ: Um... darling?

FLAXLEY: Yes, my love?

KRITZ: Why are you doing stretches?

FLAXLEY: Because, my love... I'm about to go into battle.

(With that, he strutted onto the stage and headed for where Tito was arguing with the crowd.)

TITO: No, she's not a Trepe spy!!! There *are* no Trepe spies, you cock! Trepe Village is now part of Tifaeris for a start!

KEVIN: Then why is she trying to sabotage our leader?

TITO: She's doing no such thing, you brain-dead turnip!

CAROL: But you *said* she's trying to oust him!

TITO: No, I didn't!!!

(He shook his fist.)

TITO: You people must be the dumbest that ever walked the face of this planet. All I'm saying is...

(He was then bundled to the floor by Flaxley.)

FLAXLEY: Show some respect, sonny boy. Guevina folk are the dumbest that ever walked the face of this planet! By far!

(He instantly received an ovation from his adoring public.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you.

(He then glanced down at Tito.)

FLAXLEY: Get off the stage, feeble bloke. I'll show you how a *real* man controls a crowd. (More than a little humiliated, Tito just sighed then trudged away. Without even waiting for him to leave, Flaxley nodded then leant against the lectern.)

FLAXLEY: Great people of Tifaeris! Allow me to clarify things for you.

(A small hand rose up from near the front.)

ROGER: What about us mediocre people of Tifaeris?

ERIC: Yeah! And what about us hopeless cases?

ROGER: It doesn't seem fair that you're only going to clarify things for the *great* people.

(Flaxley blinked at them nonchalantly.)

FLAXLEY: Every citizen of Tifaeris is great. Nobody here is mediocre *or* useless.

ROGER: But my wife says...

FLAXLEY: Your wife is wrong.

DAISY: No, I'm not! He's adequate at best!

FLAXLEY: Wrong! He's a citizen of Tifaeris! By merely being so, he's part of something great.

DAISY: A *faulty* part maybe.

FLAXLEY: Enough!

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Tifaeris is great! Why? Because every *citizen* is great! *Every* citizen!

DAISY: Let's just agree to disagree.

FLAXLEY: You...

(Deciding she wasn't worth it, he shook his head then stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, allow me to clarify what that other fellow was trying and failing to tell you.

(He folded his arms.)

FLAXLEY: We, that is, you and I, need this election to be successful. Why? Because if we can make this work, we'll be able to join a military alliance. A military alliance that will guarantee our safety for the next hundred years.

THIN: A hundred years?

GRAHAM: We'll all be dead by then!

FLAXLEY: Then it'll guarantee you a *lifetime* of safety, won't it?

(Everyone looked enlightened and nodded excitedly.)

DAISY: Good point.

FLAXLEY: Thank you.

(He leant against the lectern.)

FLAXLEY: Now... like I said, this election needs to work. And it needs to work well. In order for it to do that, there has to be more than one candidate.

ERIC: Why?

FLAXLEY: I have no fucking idea!

(Kritz then yelled out from the back of the stage.)

KRITZ: Democracy!

FLAXLEY: That's the bugger. Democracy!

ERIC: What's that?

FLAXLEY: It's when the people *chose* a leader, rather than muddling on with the one they were given.

KEVIN: But we *like* the one we were given.

FLAXLEY: Then vote for me in the election!

KEVIN: Oh... well, if you say so, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: I do.

(He then stepped forwards and pounded his fist.)

FLAXLEY: Now, listen well, people. Having a *chosen* leader is imperative. We can't join the military alliance *without* one! That's why I *asked* someone to be the second candidate! Not just as a favour to *me*! But as a favour to *all of us*. This alliance benefits us all, remember? Luckily, she agreed! So when it's her turn to come out, you'll treat her with the utmost, respect!

(He sneered.)

FLAXLEY: And if you see her about the town afterwards, I *demand* that you take care of her! Do I make myself clear?

(Several people in the crowd gave him knowing glances and pounded their fists in time with his.)

THIN: Don't worry; we'll *take care* of her alright.

(He winked.)

WILFRED: Some rope, a large boulder and a little trip on my boat ought to do it.

FLAXLEY: What? No!!!

(He growled.)

FLAXLEY: That's not what I meant!

(Backstage in the meantime, Kyrie was rolling her eyes with frustration.)

KYRIE: She's at it again, Kritz. And to be honest, I can't blame her.

(Sure enough, Cayley was once again desperately trying to sprint to safety.)

KRITZ: Oh, for pity's sake. Why, Cayley? I already told, you won't be going out there until I'm satisfied you'll be safe!

(Still charging into her sister's outstretched palm, Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: Wrong. I'm not going out there until *I'm* satisfied I'll be safe. And I never will be! I just want to go home!

KRITZ: Cayley...

CAYLEY: That man wants to tie a boulder around me and throw me in the sea. That doesn't make me feel safe!

KRITZ: *That* man is going to get a pounding once this is over, love.

(She snarled.)

KRITZ: Believe me.

CAYLEY: I don't care. Pound who you like. Pound *me*, if you want. I'm not doing it. I want to turn fourteen some day and that's looking less and less likely by the minute.

KYRIE: She's right, Kritz.

(She grimaced.)

KYRIE: I'm not even sure why I'm keeping her here.

(She flinched.)

KYRIE: In fact, why *am* I keeping her here? A *good* sister would help her flee!

(She gasped.)

KYRIE: Oh, my god, am I a bad sister???

KRITZ: No, Kyrie. A *bad* sister would help a flee. A *good* sister would keep her here.

CAYLEY: No, she wouldn't.

KRITZ: She would!

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: Because Flaxley's about to turn the tide in your favour.

CAYLEY: What?

(Kritz lifted her up by the midriff then plonked her down in front of her, facing the stage.)

KRITZ: Just watch.

(On the stage before her, Flaxley drew his sword then pointed into the crowd.)

FLAXLEY: Let's get something straight, people. My opponent in this election is standing against me because *I* asked her to. She's doing it as a favour to *me*! Why? Because she's a friend of mine! A *good* friend of mine. Why, she's almost like a sixth daughter!

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: One who comes with a tragically quirky sibling of her own, but nevertheless, she's like family to me!

(Cayley's heart skipped a beat and she sighed adoringly.)

CAYLEY: Daddy acknowledged me.

KRITZ: What?

CAYLEY: Nothing.

(She then exhaled at the sight of Flaxley raising his sword.)

FLAXLEY: So, bear that in mind, will you? If any of you so much as *look* at her funny, I'll take it as a personal insult. Disrespecting her, will receive the same punishment as disrespecting one of my children. I *will* attack you with my sword and you *will* be a foot shorter because of it! Understood?

(Everyone mumbled uncomfortably.)

FLAXLEY: I said, understood?

(A conceding mumble of agreement rose up from the assembly.)

DAISY: So... she's off-limits then?

FLAXLEY: Yes! Just like *everyone* I care about.

GRAHAM: Right...

(He smiled.)

GRAHAM: Why didn't that other fella say as much then? He made it sound like she was a bloody interloper.

ERIC: Yeah! We all thought someone was trying to steal the town from under our feet.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well... he's not the best communicator in the world; that's for certain.

(Backstage, Tito could hardly believe his ears.)

TITO: I made it abundantly clear...

KRITZ: You didn't though, did you?

(She rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Anyway... happy now, Cayley?

CAYLEY: Well... happier, I suppose.

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: I still want protection though. Night and day.

(Kyrie beamed.)

KYRIE: That's one thing you've always had, sister face.

CAYLEY: Yeah. Thanks, Kyrie.

(She then glanced out onto the stage again, where Flaxley was sheathing his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Right... now I've made it clear that certain death awaits anyone who even *thinks* about harming my opponent, let's get on with the campaign.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Apparently, both candidates have to make a speech, and seeing as I'm up here, I might as well get started.

(He then stood behind the lectern again.)

FLAXLEY: People of Tifaeris! Friends! All of you! Every last one of you! This is a momentous day. The election trail begins.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: An election I have no doubt I'll win. Why? Because I know each and everyone of you will turn up to vote for me.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: *How* can I be so sure, you might ask.

GRAHAM: No.

FLAXLEY: Shut up, Graham!

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: I'll tell you why I'm so sure. Because right now, each and every one of you has a better life than you had before.

(Everyone nodded in full agreement.)

FLAXLEY: That all *happened* under my watch. From those who were here when Kritz and I first came back, to those who recently arrived; you've all thrived under my leadership. So I'm going to ask you to vote for me, so that I can carry on my fine work. And why wouldn't you, when you know what I can deliver?

(Everyone cheered with delight. Flaxley acknowledged them with a wave then stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: You know... when Kritz and I first returned to this town, there was nothing but a series of shacks and broken down ruins. People farmed or fished for their food; they gathered firewood to heat what was left of their homes; and their clothes were nothing but rags. There were but fifty inhabitants.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: A far cry from the thriving town that I grew up in.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: But you know, I realised straight away that this town *could* be rebuilt. Why? Because those who'd remained still had that drive. That desire to make things better. Times were hard, but they hadn't given up. That spirit... I call The Tifaeris Spirit.

(Everyone cheered.)

FLAXLEY: It inspired my wife and I to crack on. To build! To set up home. And once our home was complete, we set about building *another* home. They thought we were insane. Why do you need two houses, they asked? And I told them I'd keep building until *everyone* had one!

(Many clutched their hands to their hearts at this point.)

FLAXLEY: And you know what inspired me? What motivated me every single day? As soon I told them my plan, the people got on board. They spent every second of what little down time they had, aiding us in the rebuild. The Tifaeris Spirit was flowing from each and everyone of us.

(He clenched his fist and held it aloft.)

FLAXLEY: We become organised! Unified and efficient! Pulling in the same direction! Nobody slacked and nobody complained! We toiled night and day and together... we built something. We created a town again!

(Everyone cheered with jubilation.)

FLAXLEY: Tifaeris was back! And before long, others started to move here.

(He chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: *Some* of them tried to set up business in order to exploit the people of this growing town for their own personal gain. That was a mistake! We ejected them without hesitation. No, wealthy aristocrat, you *cannot* build a brewery, pay your workers a pittance

then charge a fortune for the ale, just to line your own pockets! Where do you think this is? Leathrock?

(Everyone scoffed in full agreement with him.)

FLAXLEY: No, my friend. This is Tifaeris! We'll build *our own* brewery! The workers will earn a fair and decent wage, and the ale will be affordable to all. And every single lig of the profits will go towards making this town even greater! And we've kept it that way ever since!

(Everyone cheered.)

FLAXLEY: Because we've worked so hard to keep the selfish and greedy at bay, the money this town generates has always landed in the pockets of those who worked for it! You; the people! As a result, the market square is always bustling and those with small businesses have been able to thrive. And the town itself has managed to accrue the funds to build and expand way beyond its old borders! Tifaeris is wealthy! Tifaeris is happy! Tifaeris is great!!!

(A loud, impassioned cry of delight rose into the air from the enthralled crowd. Watching them cheer and punch the air, Flaxley nodded then stepped around the side of the lectern.)

FLAXLEY: We've achieved so much together, people! We've surpassed every goal and thrived beyond our wildest dreams!

(Everyone cheered again.)

FLAXLEY: Now tell me this! Do you want to *keep* thriving?

(Everyone cheered even louder.)

FLAXLEY: Then vote for me in the upcoming election and that's *exactly* what will happen!!!

(As the crowd upped their joyous response to his speech, Flaxley bowed then strutted off the stage. Feeling rather pleased with himself, he marched past Cayley and smirked arrogantly.)

FLAXLEY: Beat that! If you can.

(Kyrie grimaced.)

KYRIE: You might as well go home, Cayley. I mean, you're a clever girl, but there's no *way* you're beating that.

CAYLEY: Good. I don't want to win anyway.

KYRIE: What?

KRITZ: She didn't come here to win, Kyrie. She's just making up numbers.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: But still... do your best to be competitive, sweetie.

CAYLEY: How can I possibly?

(Kritz could only shrug.)

KRITZ: I don't know. You're the smart one.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but I'm not a miracle worker.

KRITZ: Yeah, but... doesn't matter.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: Anyway, seeing as that husband of mine forgot to introduce you, I'll just pop up there and do it, shall I?

(Tito stepped forwards wearing a miffed expression.)

TITO: That's *my* job!

KRITZ: You're fired.

TITO: You can't fire *me*!

KRITZ: Whatever. You're still not going up there. Your attempts to explain the situation ending up with the entire town plotting the poor girl's assassination.

TITO: You...

(He sighed.)

TITO: Like it's *my* fault your town is full of idiots.

(Kyrie was incensed.)

KYRIE: No, it's not! I've been here for almost a year, and I've never even *met* an idiot! In fact, I can honestly say, everyone in this town is *at least* twice as intelligent as me! So there!

TITO: Right...

KRITZ: Anyway...

(With that, Kritz trotted onto the stage. As she did so, Cayley bit her fingernails and leaned against Kyrie.)

CAYLEY: I'm scared. Everyone's going to be staring at me.

KYRIE: You'll be fine, just picture...

CAYLEY: I'm not going to picture myself naked! That's not even how it works! We've discussed this!

KYRIE: Whatever. Grumpy.

(She then spun Cayley to face her.)

KYRIE: Right. Final check. Cute white top... adorable. Airy skirt... just the right length to be neither slutty nor reserved... and cute, girly shoes. Your wardrobe manager is a genius.

TITO: Wardrobe manager?

CAYLEY: I had to involve her somehow.

TITO: Did you?

KYRIE: Silence, you. I'm talking to my client.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: You'll be fine up there, you hear me? Just be yourself, Cayley. You're a sweetheart. But if you *do* make a mistake, don't worry. *I'll* still love you, no matter how ridiculous you look.

CAYLEY: Kyrie, that's...

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Thanks, Kyrie.

(She then glanced onto the stage where Kritz was approaching the lectern to a torrent of applause.)

KRITZ: Hello, everyone!

(Everyone cheered.)

KRITZ: Just a quick reminder.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: If any of you are even *remotely* discourteous to the second candidate, I'll come down there and punch you right in the face. Thank you very much.

(She then started to walk off, accompanied by an uncomfortable silence. She didn't get very far, however, before racing back again.)

KRITZ: Whoops! Almost forgot! Please welcome to the stage, our second candidate, the wonderfully adorable... Cayley Severen!

(Silence ensued. Not about to stand for it, Kritz raised her voice angrily.)

KRITZ: I said welcome her!!!

(With a flinch, everyone started to applaud desperately.)

KRITZ: That's better.

(She strutted off the stage and patted Cayley on the head.)

KRITZ: Off you go, cherub.

CAYLEY: Um...

KRITZ: You'll be fine.

CAYLEY: But... lots and lots of people... nervous.

KRITZ: Don't worry, love. I'll help.

(She then took Cayley's hand and headed for the stage, pulling her along behind her. Cayley was *trying* to resist, but being decidedly lacking when it came to physical strength, nobody

would have guessed. Moments later, they both appeared on stage and the applause started to subside. One furrowed brow from Kritz, however, and it started up again. Delighted with her handiwork, she then pulled Cayley to the centre of the stage before walking away again. Left behind, Cayley stared at the crowd with horrified eyes and whimpered fearfully.)

CAYLEY: I want to go home.

(In that moment, the crowd fell silent.)

ERIC: What?

GRAHAM: We did quite catch that.

(Cayley could only gulp. She felt ridiculous but she knew that running away now would make her look twice as silly. As such, all she could do now was make her speech and pray it went well. With this in mind, she ruffled her neck then stepped behind the lectern. An amused giggle from the crowd ensued. The lectern was so tall, she'd vanished from sight. Watching from the side, Kritz furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes, my love?

KRITZ: That lectern is bigger than she is.

(Flaxley beamed.)

FLAXLEY: I know. Why do you think I picked that one?

KRITZ: You did it on purpose?

FLAXLEY: Yes!

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: This is my town, Kritz. I won't have the girl disrespected in anyway, but I *am* going to pull out all the stops to win this thing.

KRITZ: Oh, like you even need to!

(She rolled her eyes then glanced to where Cayley was slowly stepping from behind the lectern. Blushing, she looked at the crowd and spoke in a small voice.)

CAYLEY: Too big...

DAISY: Speak up!

CAYLEY: Oh.

(She shuddered for a moment then stood tall to project her voice.)

CAYLEY: Hello.

(A very audible cry of "aw" rose up from those in attendance.)

ERIC: She's adorable.

GRAHAM: I know. That's the little sweetheart who plays the piano in the pub.

CAROL: Oh, I know her. She so talented.

THIN: That she is, but you wouldn't want her running the town, would you? She's just a child.

KEVIN: Good point.

(He glanced to Cayley.)

KEVIN: You're a child.

CAYLEY: Um... I know.

ERIC: What good's a bloody child?

DAISY: A child can't run a town.

CAYLEY: Well...

ROGER: My wife's annoying, but she's right! I mean what can a child offer us that Flaxley can't?

DAISY: Who are you calling annoying?

ROGER: Never mind that, woman.

(He pointed at Cayley.)

ROGER: We've got a real issue here. She's just a kid. What if we get invaded again? I bet *she* couldn't train an army and use it to win the battle like Flaxley did!

ERIC: He's right. We'd be defenceless.

CAYLEY: Actually...

DAISY: Actually?

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: We wouldn't be defenceless. Sir Flaxley will still *be* here, whether he's the leader or not. And there's *no way* he'd allow invaders to enter the town.

WILFRED: So what are you saying?

CAYLEY: I'm saying Sir Flaxley will protect us, no matter what. He doesn't need to be the leader to do that.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: In fact, when you think about it, if he *wasn't* burdened with being the leader, he'd have a lot more free time to *work* on our defences. If anything, keeping him on as leader is *distracting* him from the important job of keeping us all safe.

(She blushed.)

CAYLEY: So, in that sense, maybe voting for *me* isn't such a silly idea, after all. Flaxley could concentrate on his fine military work then.

(At this point, she couldn't help but allow herself a smile. In order for the election to look like a valid contest between two people *capable* of leading the town, she'd needed to put forward a reasonable argument. She very much felt like she'd done that. The people would now go away, say nice things about her campaign but vote for Flaxley anyway. The perfect scenario.)

ERIC: She's right, you know? By voting in a new leader, we *would* be unburdening Flaxley.

GRAHAM: Leaving him free to get on with the important stuff.

WILFRED: Very true.

DAISY: Yes, but you're forgetting something.

ROGER: And what's that, know all?

DAISY: If we vote for *her* rather than Flaxley, she'll end up being our leader. A child! We can't have a bloody child calling the shots. Can you imagine?

ERIC: Crikey. There'd be a sweet shop on every corner.

GRAHAM: And rope swings hanging from every tree.

DAISY: Unicorns and teddy bears, painted on every house.

(Cayley raised a baffled eyebrow.)

CAYLEY: No there wouldn't. Town leaders don't get to decide what shopkeepers can sell. And they don't tell people how to paint their houses either.

DAISY: Oh, what do you know? You're a little girl. You don't know *anything* about how governments operate.

(Cayley pouted indignantly. Having her knowledge doubted was her biggest pet peeve.)

CAYLEY: Yes, I do.

DAISY: Oh, yeah? Then give us one good policy. Just one thing you'd do differently in order to improve the town!

(Everyone mumbled with interest then pinned back to their ears to listen to her reply.)

CAYLEY: Okay. I'd introduce a one percent social charge.

DAISY: What's that?

CAYLEY: It's a tariff levied on wages.

ROGER: A tax???

(At once, several people started to boo.)

CAYLEY: Um...

DAISY: You just cost yourself an election!

ERIC: Not that we were going to vote for you anyway.

CAYLEY: But it's a good idea!

ERIC: How???

CAYLEY: Because the money raised will be spent on free healthcare.

(Silence descended.)

ROGER: Free?

CAYLEY: Yeah. We'd fund free hospitals with it. That way, whenever you get ill, you can pop in and see a medical professional. No more expensive medical appointments.

(Everyone cooed excitedly, except a gentleman at the back.)

EDWARD: Boo! That's a terrible idea!

(He was then slapped around the head by the chief of police, Phisele.)

PHISELE: Put a sock in it, Doctor Wilson.

EDWARD: But I like the fact that medical appointments are expensive!

(The rest of the crowd then proceeded to boo him.)

EDWARD: Hey!

ROGER: Money gauging bastard!

(He then looked to Cayley.)

ROGER: This idea is workable, is it?

CAYLEY: Yes. They have the same system in Castaria *and* Tang Yul. Getting ill *there* doesn't cost you anything.

ERIC: Because you already paid via this tariff?

CAYLEY: That's right.

DAISY: But what if we *don't* get ill? We'll be paying a tax for nothing.

CAYLEY: But you'll know that if you ever *do* get ill, you won't have to fork out for treatment. Plus, you'll know your families are protected too.

(Daisy gave her a suspicious glance.)

DAISY: How do you know all this?

CAYLEY: I read.

ERIC: Really? But you're too pretty to be a nerd.

(Kyrie then appeared on the side of the stage.)

KYRIE: That's what I keep telling her.

CAYLEY: I'm not a nerd! I just like to read. *Like* a nerd.

DAISY: Hmm... I have to say, it's an interesting proposal.

CAYLEY: And it gets better. The same tax can *also* fund free schools.

GRAHAM: Free schools? Who needs free schools?

CAYLEY: We do. The more educated citizens we have, the greater our future will be.

Educated people invent things. They innovate. That's why Leathrock has free schools. And it's also why Leathrock is more advanced.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: We'd catch them up eventually if *we* had an educated population as well.

ERIC: She's right, you know?

GRAHAM: I do know.

(Daisy smiled.)

DAISY: I take back what I said. You know your stuff.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

(She then smiled and stepped to the front of the stage.)

CAYLEY: Thank you for listening to me. You've been very kind and I hope, maybe, at least some of you will vote for me. Thank you, everyone.

(She then performed a curtsy.)

DAISY: What a sweetheart.

CAROL: Adorable.

CAYLEY: Anyway...

(She then made a dash for the side of the stage.)

CAYLEY: Bye!

(As if they were children watching a panto, the crowd all called out and waved to her in time with one another.)

CROWD: Bye, Cayley.

(They then started to disperse. As they did so, Tito raced back onto the stage and stepped up to the lectern.)

TITO: Thank you for coming, people. I now declare this stage of the campaign closed.

(He then hung his head and sighed.)

TITO: Not one of them turned to face me.

(A bitter voice suddenly rose up from the dispersing crowd.)

DAISY: He's back.

ROGER: Who?

DAISY: That horrible bugger who tried to get us to assassinate young Cayley.

ROGER: I see him!

(He shook his fist.)

ROGER: Shame on you! Bastard.

(They then headed away, leaving Tito staring ahead of himself in astonishment.)

TITO: I... I did no such... thing.

(With that, he trudged off the stage to where Flaxley, Cayley, Kritz and Kyrie were waiting.)

FLAXLEY: Sterling work, Cayley. Perfect. You said just enough to make it look convincing.

KRITZ: More than enough. Those were extremely good ideas. And some wonderfully valid points.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. *Nobody* will be able to accuse us of putting a lame duck up against me in order to make sure I win. Not after that display. You were superb.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

(Kyrie beamed.)

KYRIE: It was the outfit that did it.

KRITZ: Or was it her intellect?

KYRIE: Intellect can only get you so far. Not very far at all in my case. A girl needs to look the part. And she did.

(She nodded proudly.)

KYRIE: And we didn't even have to show off her cleavage.

(She nodded knowingly.)

KYRIE: Which is great news. It's still a secret weapon we can unleash, if we're losing the male vote later on.

CAYLEY: No, we can't! I'm thirteen, Kyrie; I don't want to flaunt myself like that.

KYRIE: But you'd be a fool *not* to! You're blessed.

KRITZ: She doesn't need to do that, Kyrie. She's *already* blessed where it matters.

(She pointed to her cranium.)

KYRIE: Good point. She *does* have nice hair.

KRITZ: I meant her mind.

(She sighed in defeat.)

KRITZ: Oh, never mind.

KYRIE: Right. Now I'm lost. Is it her mind or not her mind.

KRITZ: Just... forget it.

(At this point, Tito trudged past, sighing miserably.)

TITO: I want to go back to Leathrock. Why can't I go back to Leathrock? I hate it here.

FLAXLEY: Ah. Teapot!

KRITZ: Tito, dear.

FLAXLEY: Correct.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: What happens now?

(Tito looked to him emptily.)

TITO: My team are canvassing people as they leave. Asking them who they're going to vote for.

FLAXLEY: What on earth for?

TITO: To create an opinion poll.

FLAXLEY: Right...

CAYLEY: It's a poll they do to help them predict the outcome of an election.

FLAXLEY: Okay, but what's the point?

TITO: It helps the parties understand whether their message is landing with the public or not. If it isn't they know they have to tweak things. And if it is, they know they just have to keep hammering it home.

KRITZ: So it's a helpful tool for campaigning parties?

TITO: Correct.

(He sighed.)

TITO: We'll tot up the result of the poll and deliver it to your house in an hour.

(He then trudged away, kicking his heels.)

TITO: I could be stuck in this stupid place for weeks.

(As he headed away, Flaxley turned and smiled to Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: Well, my valued opponent... shall we go back to my house and wait for the opinion poll result?

(Kyrie scoffed.)

KYRIE: Why would she want to do that? She's only going to get one vote in this election. Mine! And they didn't even *ask* me. You'll get *all* the votes. That's sixty percent.

KRITZ: A hundred percent.

(Kyrie scoffed.)

KYRIE: There's only sixty minutes in an hour, Kritz. Even I know that.

KRITZ: An hour?

KYRIE: Yup. And you only have fifty nine minutes left before Tito goes to your house. You'd better get going.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: Cayley and I are going... where are we going?

FLAXLEY: Back to ours for lunch?

KYRIE: Interesting. Will there be cake?

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: I'm sure that can be arranged.

KYRIE: Then lead the way.

At Sir Flaxley's house, a short while later, the atmosphere was a jubilant one. The speeches had been a great success and Flaxley was certain that his election victory would undoubtedly be confirmed as free and fair by Tito and his team. Delighted by that fact, as he sat around the table in his living room with Kyrie, Cayley, Kritz and Phisele he couldn't help but exhale merrily.

FLAXLEY: That went perfectly. Nobody can claim I pitted myself against a useless opponent just to ensure myself an easy victory, that's for certain. Cayley, you were fantastic. (Cayley smiled across the table at him.)

CAYLEY: Thank you.

FLAXLEY: No, no. Thank *you*.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: That performance of yours might just get us past the free and fair elections stage of our application to join the strategic alliance. Excellent work.

CAYLEY: Happy to help.

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: But for a minute there, I feared for my life.

FLAXLEY: After Tito accidentally convinced the crowd to bump you off?

CAYLEY: And before! But that bit was particularly scary.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Some of them could see me from backstage. They were glowering at me like Phisele's glowering at Kyrie now.

(Phisele flinched.)

PHISELE: I am?

(She then sat up and grimaced.)

PHISELE: I am! Sorry, Kyrie. I didn't even notice I was doing it.

KYRIE: *I* did! And it's absolutely fine. I'll do it!

PHISELE: Do what?

KYRIE: Help out.

PHISELE: What? What on earth are you talking about?

(Kyrie scoffed.)

KYRIE: Don't be coy. We both know why you were staring at me. There's a crime you can't solve and you need my help. You're just too shy to ask for it.

(Phisele was flabbergasted.)

PHISELE: Are you fucking serious, right now?

KYRIE: Absolutely. I never joke about crime! Do I, Cayley?

CAYLEY: You don't know any jokes.

KYRIE: See?

(She nodded sternly.)

KYRIE: So? What are we up against? A murderer? A blackmailer? A bugler?

PHISELE: A bugler?

KYRIE: Yeah. Someone who steals bugles. I think. Or is it? Doesn't matter. Tell me what you need me to solve and I'll get right on it!

PHISELE: Kyrie, there *is* no crime!

FLAXLEY: Really? You solved them all already?

PHISELE: I meant there's no crime for *her*!

FLAXLEY: Gotcha.

PHISELE: I got rid of you for a reason, Kyrie! Why would I ask you back to help out?

KYRIE: Because I was your best detective. And even though you sacked me purely out of spite, I'm willing to give you another chance.

PHISELE: I didn't sack you out of spite! I sacked you because you were fucking useless!

KYRIE: That's not what Cayley told me.

(Cayley rapidly started to shrink.)

CAYLEY: Oh, boy...

PHISELE: Is that so? What *else* did you tell her, Cayley?

CAYLEY: Um...

(Kritz offered Cayley a warm smile.)

KRITZ: I'm sure she just told her sister a few things in order to cheer her up.

(Kyrie sighed.)

KYRIE: No, she didn't. She told me the truth and made me feel *worse*. Kicked out of my first real job because I was so good at it, I made my superior jealous.

(Phisele glowered at Cayley.)

PHISELE: You're a fibbing *machine*!

CAYLEY: I just wanted to cheer her up after you made her sad!

PHISELE: I'll make her even sadder in a minute. Losing a younger sibling can be extremely traumatic, apparently!

(Kritz furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: That's enough. You're better than that, Phisele. Threatening the poor bugger with violence? She's thirteen.

PHISELE: Chronologically, maybe! Mentally, she's like a wise elder!

KRITZ: You shouldn't threaten wise elders with violence either!

PHISELE: Fine! But the point still stands. There's no case for Kyrie; and Cayley *does* tell fibs!

CAYLEY: No, I don't.

(Flaxley chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: Please. Everyone tells lies now and again.

KRITZ: Like when you pretended to know when my birthday is?

FLAXLEY: Not now, Kritz.

KRITZ: Yeah, we'll see.

FLAXLEY: Do you mind? I'm trying to make a point here.

KRITZ: And what's that?

FLAXLEY: I'm just saying... *everyone* lies occasionally; even you, Cayley.

(He smirked.)

FLAXLEY: Like up on stage earlier. You fooled everybody good and proper there.

CAYLEY: I did? When?

FLAXLEY: When you spouted all that nonsense about a one percent tax being able to fund free healthcare. Priceless. The townsfolk fell for that, hook, like and sinker.

CAYLEY: Um... that wasn't a lie.

FLAXLEY: An exaggeration then. Same thing.

CAYLEY: I wasn't exaggerating. They really *do* have systems like that in other countries. And the people love it. They pay a small monthly fee in exchange for knowing that if they ever fall ill, they can afford treatment. And so can their family members.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: It's a safety net that both reassures the public and keeps the townsfolk healthy. Which in turn, increases productivity.

(Flaxley chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: Brilliant. You say it so convincingly. No wonder everyone fell for it.

CAYLEY: But it's true!

FLAXLEY: Priceless.

(Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes, my love.

KRITZ: She's not demonstrating her fibbing skills; she's serious.

PHISELE: You never know with her.

KRITZ: Phisele, no.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: You mean every word, don't you, sweetie?

(Cayley blushed.)

CAYLEY: I do.

FLAXLEY: Really?

(He raised an inquiring eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: That's a workable policy, is it?

CAYLEY: Absolutely.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... then maybe we should consider implementing it.

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Why haven't you suggested it before?

CAYLEY: I was going to. It's actually next on my list of things to consult you about.

FLAXLEY: I see...

(Just then, the door opened up and Tito came strolling into the room.)

TITO: Afternoon, everyone.

FLAXLEY: Ah, it's... um...

KRITZ: Tito.

FLAXLEY: Yes, him.

(He waved him over.)

FLAXLEY: Join us. Have some tea. And maybe some cake.

(He glanced at the empty space where the cake used to be and sucked his teeth.)

FLAXLEY: Just tea then.

TITO: No, thank you, Flaxley. I've just come to deliver the result of the opinion poll, then I'll be on my way.

PHISELE: No need. I'm sure Flaxley won by a hundred percent.

KYRIE: Sixty!

PHISELE: Shut up, halfwit.

(Tito raised his finger nervously.)

TITO: Um...

PHISELE: Oh. Sorry. Carry on.

TITO: Thank you.

(He nodded.)

TITO: Now, *before* I deliver the result, I just want you to know, we've brought things forward. There'll be a second chance for you both to address the crowd at ten o'clock tomorrow, then we'll open the polling station.

KYRIE: I thought that was Phisele's job.

PHISELE: He said polling station, not police station.

(She rolled her eyes.)

PHISELE: And you wonder why I let you go.

FLAXLEY: Never mind that. Where is this polling station?

TITO: At the police station!

KYRIE: Result! Detective Inspector Kyrie solves another one!

PHISELE: You...

KYRIE: I should start my own detective agency.

(Cayley's eyes bulged.)

CAYLEY: You really, really *shouldn't*.

KYRIE: Too late; the decision is made.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

(Tito furrowed his brow.)

TITO: Anyway...

(Everyone glanced up at him.)

TITO: Speeches to the crowd at ten, remember? Then the people can vote.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough.

(He nodded knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: I'll look forward to it. If there's one thing I'm good at, it's winning over a crowd.

TITO: Yes, and you're going to *have* to win them over. According to the opinion poll, seventy percent of the electorate plan to vote for Cayley.

(He then about turned and left, leaving behind an eerie, uncomfortable silence all around the table. Deeply unsettled by it, Cayley immediately started to sink beneath the table. Flaxley on the other hand, sat there, slowly but surely boiling over with rage. It was a rage, he couldn't keep to himself for long.)

FLAXLEY: I'm losing???

(He glowered at Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: Why? What is it with you? Why must you shit all over everything I try to do???

(Cayley's bottom lip instantly started to quiver.)

FLAXLEY: Seriously, what is it with you???

KRITZ: Um... darling?

(On the verge of bursting into tears, all Cayley could muster was a series of "mi" sounds. She then upped and bolted out of the door, bawling her eyes out.)

FLAXLEY: Don't run away while I'm scolding you!!!

(Greatly incensed, Kyrie jumped to her feet.)

KYRIE: Idiot!

(She then charged after her.)

KYRIE: And yes, that *is* rich coming from me!!!

(As she vanished out of the door, Flaxley thumped the table then growled.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck sake.

(He then glanced into Kritz's eyes and reeled backwards.)

FLAXLEY: Evil eyes!!!

KRITZ: That's right! And if they could kill, we'd be burying you tomorrow! And nobody would go to your funeral!

FLAXLEY: Excuse me!

KRITZ: You did it again!!!

FLAXLEY: Did what again?

KRITZ: Asked little Cayley to help you out then yelled at her for doing a good job!

FLAXLEY: I didn't ask her to do *that* good of a job!

KRITZ: Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: What?

KRITZ: That girl idolises you!

PHISELE: You mean, she *used* to.

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

KRITZ: Just go and find her! Apologise then buy her the biggest cake in the entire universe! (She ruffled her neck.)

KRITZ: Which according to Derek is fucking huge.

PHISELE: The cake?

KRITZ: The universe!

FLAXLEY: Why should I? She's ruined the entire bloody plan! She wasn't supposed to *win* the election!

KRITZ: You...

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: Sit down for a minute, will you? Sit down and think for a minute.

FLAXLEY: About how to turn the election around?

KRITZ: About what you just did! Go on! Sit.

(Flaxley sat down then furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: What I did? I merely registered my displeasure, that's all. As her boss, it's my *duty* to chastise her for a job gone wrong.

KRITZ: Sure. That's *one* way of looking at it.

PHISELE: But in the real world...

KRITZ: You asked a shy little girl to stand in the election against you. Despite being terrified, she agreed. And even though she was subject to death threats, she *still* went through with it. For *you*! Because she adores you and would do anything for you. And her reward?

FLAXLEY: Lunch!

KRITZ: You yelling at her for doing her job *well*. Even though, you specifically asked *her* to do it, because you *wanted* someone to do the job well!

PHISELE: Appalling behaviour.

KRITZ: The worst.

(Flaxley glowered at them.)

FLAXLEY: Stop ganging up!

PHISELE: Fine. I'll butt out then.

(She nodded.)

PHISELE: In fact, I'll go and look for poor little Cayley.

(She then headed for the door. Kritz watched her go then scowled at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Pass me an empty plate, would you?

FLAXLEY: Fine.

(He passed her an empty plate then shook his head. Upon receiving it, however, Kritz barked at him.)

KRITZ: Not like that!!

FLAXLEY: Excuse me??? Not like *what*? I merely passed you the plate, like you asked me to!

KRITZ: Sucks, doesn't it?

FLAXLEY: What does?

KRITZ: Getting yelled at for merely doing what you were *asked* to do.

(Flaxley scowled at her.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz...

KRITZ: Just listen! You were seriously peeved when I yelled at you! I could see it in your eyes. All you did was politely fulfil my request and I bit your head off for it!

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: So imagine how Cayley feels right now after getting yelled at by her hero, her idol; the man she mistakenly thinks is her daddy; for the non-existent crime of doing what he *asked* her to do.

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: She must be devastated; the poor thing. I mean... you know she only took part in that election because she wants your approval, right? She craves your acceptance. You are aware of that, right? It must have meant the world to her when you told her she'd done an excellent job earlier. Then you pulled the rug out from underneath her and smashed a chair over her head!

(Flaxley glowered at her.)

FLAXLEY: You seem to have found an even *bigger* shovel than the one you used last time.

KRITZ: It's the perfect size.

FLAXLEY: No, it's...

(Just then, his eyes bulged and he sat bolt upright.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck! I did it again!
KRITZ: Finally, he sees the light.
(Flaxley grimaced at her.)
FLAXLEY: I bellowed at the poor bugger for doing her job right!
KRITZ: Uh-huh.
FLAXLEY: She didn't deserve that! Good god. Why would I do that to someone who looks up to me? She must be heartbroken.
KRITZ: Yup.
FLAXLEY: Shit.
(He then jumped to his feet.)
FLAXLEY: I'm going to find her, apologise profusely then...
KRITZ: Buy her a cake?
FLAXLEY: I think this goes beyond mere cake, don't you?
(He nodded.)
FLAXLEY: She can have a new outfit from that boutique stall at the market.
KRITZ: Ooh, she'd like that.
(She nodded.)
KRITZ: Go, my love. Make it right.
FLAXLEY: You're damn right I will.
(He then stood there nodding sternly.)
KRITZ: Today would be preferable.
FLAXLEY: What?
(He flinched.)
FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. Sorry.
(He then marched towards the door like a man on a mission.)
FLAXLEY: Leave it to me, dear!
KRITZ: Of course, I'll leave it to you. *You're* the bugger who upset her. It's no good anyone *else* apologising to her, is it?
(She then rolled her eyes, before upping and heading into the kitchen.)
KRITZ: Husbands.

Out in the streets of Tifaeris at this time, Kyrie was frantically searching for Cayley. Desperate to find her and cheer her up, she marched past the open air market with her head down, nodding determinedly.)
KYRIE: Stupid Flaxley. Making my sister cry! Again! Not on!
(She clenched her fists.)
KYRIE: I'll be having stern words with him later on. But first I need to find...
(She then spotted a shoe stall and her eyes lit up.)
KYRIE: Ooh. They have shiny new heels!
(She then charged over to the stall and completely forgot all about her little sister. Mercifully, Phisele had been a whole lot more focussed. Having asked a few passers-by if they'd seen a crying teenage girl, she'd managed to track her down in no time. Sobbing relentlessly, Cayley was sitting on a rock on the road down to the beach, looking like her entire world had fallen apart. Taking pity on the poor girl, Phisele sighed then slowly walked over to her and sat on the rock a little further down the slope.)
PHISELE: That was rough, wasn't it?
(Cayley ignored her and continued to sob.)
PHISELE: Yeah... you absolutely didn't deserve that.
(Cayley just pouted at her.)

PHISELE: Flaxley did a terrible, terrible thing there. He really did.

(She shook her head.)

PHISELE: It's true what they say, you know? You always hurt the ones you love.

(Cayley glanced at her through tearful eyes.)

CAYLEY: What?

PHISELE: You know how it is. If you're going to lash out at *anyone*, it'll always be those closest to you. Those you care about.

(She smiled.)

PHISELE: Because you know they'll forgive you. They'll understand. That's what happened with you and Flaxley I reckon.

(Cayley shook her head.)

CAYLEY: He doesn't care about me.

PHISELE: How can you say that?

CAYLEY: He asks me to do things then shouts at me for doing them right. People who care about you, appreciate you.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: He just *uses* me because I'm clever. Then berates me for being *too* clever. That's not caring. That's just mean!

(She folded her arms indignantly.)

CAYLEY: Well, forget *him*. I'm moving to Leathrock!

PHISELE: Oh.

(She sighed.)

PHISELE: Okay. You won't be happy there, but if that's your decision...

CAYLEY: I *will* be happy. Because *he* isn't there. Shouting at me.

PHISELE: You don't mean that.

CAYLEY: Yes, I do! He's stupid and he smells!

PHISELE: Right...

(She smiled.)

PHISELE: Back here in the adult world, meanwhile, the truth is very different.

CAYLEY: No, it's not.

PHISELE: Oh, but it is. You'd be really sad if you left Tifaeris.

(Cayley scowled at her with bloodshot eyes and tears glistening on her cheeks.)

CAYLEY: Oh, no, whatever must sadness be like?

PHISELE: It's like what you're experiencing now, only ten times worse.

(She nodded.)

PHISELE: You see, Flaxley obsesses over improving this town to the point where he sometimes loses all sense of rationale. Only briefly, but still. A minute or so later once he's calmed down, however, he feels terrible about it. And he apologises, profusely.

(She sighed.)

PHISELE: But if you run off to Leathrock, you'll never *get* that apology. And that will make you *really* sad.

CAYLEY: Maybe I don't *want* his apology.

PHISELE: Maybe you do.

CAYLEY: Maybe I don't.

PHISELE: Yeah, but you do, don't you?

CAYLEY: Leave me alone.

PHISELE: Thought so.

(She exhaled heavily.)

PHISELE: Cayley, I've been on the end of Flaxley's rants more often than I care to remember. He expects perfection from those he entrusts with important tasks and he gets

frustrated when it all goes tits up. He blows up for a moment then he calms down. After which, he couldn't be more contrite. You just have to withstand the explosion then give him a condescending glance until he realises he's made a tit of himself.

(She stood up then approached Cayley and placed a kind hand on her shoulder.)

PHISELE: Trust me. He's probably looking for you right now. Desperate to apologise for his hot-headedness. And liberally chastising himself for, once again, hurting someone he cares about.

(Cayley shook her head.)

CAYLEY: Knights aren't meant to be hot-headed.

PHISELE: I know. And he never *used* to be. That's what all these years of obsessing about Tifaeris's wellbeing has done to him, unfortunately. He's surrounded by idiots half the time, you see? That'd be enough to try anyone's patience.

(Cayley pouted.)

CAYLEY: I suppose.

PHISELE: Good girl. Now wipe those tears, missy. You're too pretty to go around looking miserable.

(She then headed away, beaming arrogantly to herself.)

PHISELE: Yup. That ought to do it.

(Cayley watched her go then furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: That ought to do what? Does she think she cheered me up?

(She scoffed then glanced towards the sea.)

CAYLEY: I might have fallen for it if I thought Flaxley cared about me, but he quite clearly doesn't.

(She then started to sob again.)

CAYLEY: I wish I'd never come to Tifaeris now.

(Suddenly remembering that the alternative to coming to Tifaeris would have been dying at sea or being murdered by an assassin, she furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: I'm rubbish. I can't even sulk properly.

(Just then, she heard a voice from over her shoulder that made her whimper in fear.)

FLAXLEY: Ah! Cayley... there you are.

(Not about to entertain him, Cayley turned her back to him and furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Go away.

(Flaxley stepped up beside her and offered her a rueful smile.)

FLAXLEY: I can't do that, I'm afraid.

CAYLEY: Can!

FLAXLEY: You're right, I can, but I'm not going to.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Not until I've apologised.

CAYLEY: I'm going home!

(She went to stand, but Flaxley placed his hand on her shoulder and pushed her back down, so she was firmly stuck there.

FLAXLEY: You can go home afterwards.

CAYLEY: Maybe I won't *want* to.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but maybe you will.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley... I've done you a horrible misjustice.

CAYLEY: That's not even a word.

FLAXLEY: What?

CAYLEY: You mean *injustice*.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Then I've done both you *and* our language an injustice.

CAYLEY: Yes, you have.

FLAXLEY: Such a misjustice cannot be allowed to stand.

CAYLEY: *Injustice!*

FLAXLEY: That too.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Young lady, I've treated you terribly. I asked you to help me then, once again, berated you for doing so. There can be no excuses. You didn't deserve that. If anyone deserves to be berated, it's me. I should have known you were smart enough to make an impression on the electorate. Instead, I just assumed that my victory would be guaranteed, merely by turning up. It was quite the in judgement on my part.

CAYLEY: *Misjudgement!*

FLAXLEY: Shit. I thought it was, but I changed it because of what you said about *mis*justice and *in*justice.

CAYLEY: *Another* misjudgement on your part.

FLAXLEY: Quite.

(He sighed ruefully.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, the point is, I asked you to speak to the electorate and make an impression. Well, you did that. And the fact, you made a better impression than *I* did is entirely my *own* shortcoming. To yell at you for it was unforgiveable. Utterly unforgivable.

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Forgive me?

CAYLEY: How can I? You said yourself, it was unforgivable.

FLAXLEY: I misspoke.

CAYLEY: Really? Are you sure you didn't *inspoke*?

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I see. Mocking me now, are you?

CAYLEY: Yes.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough. I deserve it.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: And *you* deserve nothing but praise. Hell, you actually deserve a medal! Without exaggeration, what you've done for this town is immeasurable. You've solved a murder, you've revolutionised our planning system, you've cut wastage by a third and even put yourself up for election, despite being threatened with allsorts of violence, just to help us join a strategic alliance. Not bad for a thirteen year-old. And to be rewarded with castigation... well... I'm deeply, deeply ashamed of myself.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: You, young Cayley, deserve tributes and rewards, not rebuke and reprimand. So... just know, even if you *can't* forgive me, it's okay. I won't hold it against you. Whether you're talking to me or not, I'll do my damndest to let the people know what a wonderful asset to this town you are. A heroine; nothing less.

(He then removed his hand from her shoulder and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, Cayley.

(Cayley ruffled her neck.)

CAYLEY: Whatever.

(She then bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: So...

FLAXLEY: Yes?

CAYLEY: When you say I deserve tributes and rewards...

FLAXLEY: Hmm?

CAYLEY: Chocolate cakes are nice.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... they are, yes.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: So are the outfits at Sheila's market stool.

(Cayley glanced up at him nervously.)

CAYLEY: What?

FLAXLEY: Would you like one? As a reward?

CAYLEY: From Sheila's stall?

FLAXLEY: That's right.

CAYLEY: Um... maybe... I mean it's not a *bad* stall, but...

(She blushed.)

CAYLEY: The outfits at Laura's Boutique are nicer.

FLAXLEY: Laura's...

(He raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: That's expensive, isn't it?

CAYLEY: True. Only heroines deserve clothes from Laura's.

(She then glanced away innocently. Staring down at her, Flaxley shook his head then chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. You deserve it.

(Cayley stood up excitedly.)

CAYLEY: Really?

FLAXLEY: Sure. Why not?

CAYLEY: That's...

(She then sighed to herself.)

CAYLEY: Actually, that's no good. A new outfit would be wasted without new shoes to go with it.

(She then glanced up at him innocently.)

FLAXLEY: Are you serious?

(Cayley replied in a small voice.)

CAYLEY: I was only saying.

FLAXLEY: Well...

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. I do owe you, I suppose.

CAYLEY: Awesome.

(She then paced past him.)

CAYLEY: Let's go. We can stop at the cake stall on the way.

FLAXLEY: Cakes as well???

CAYLEY: Yeah. Like you promised.

(She beamed.)

CAYLEY: Thanks, Flaxley. You're forgiven.

FLAXLEY: Yes...

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Your forgiveness doesn't come cheap, does it?

CAYLEY: Of course not. Priceless things *never* come cheap.

FLAXLEY: Priceless?

CAYLEY: Yeah. What would Kritz say if I *didn't* forgive you?

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: I'd end up sleeping in the shed for a week.

(He chuckled then hurried after her.)

FLAXLEY: In that sense, your forgiveness is worth every lig.

CAYLEY: See?

FLAXLEY: But...

(He offered her a warm smile.)

FLAXLEY: So is your happiness. I really am sorry about before, young Cayley.

CAYLEY: Well... just don't do it again. It really hurts my feelings.

FLAXLEY: You have my word. Never again.

(He cringed.)

FLAXLEY: Sleeping in the shed is bloody uncomfortable.

(They then headed onwards chuckling.)

A short while later, once Cayley and Flaxley reached the market, Flaxley stopped and gestured to Sheila's market stall. It was a desperate gesture, made in the hope that Cayley had forgotten about going to Laura's Boutique. The way she strode past it and didn't even look, however, very quickly destroyed that fantasy.

FLAXLEY: Shit.

(With a sigh, he caught her up then the two of them headed onwards towards Laura's Boutique.)

FLAXLEY: It was worth a try.

CAYLEY: What was?

FLAXLEY: Nothing.

(He ruffled his neck then quickly changed the subject.)

FLAXLEY: So, yes, as I was saying, I'm glad the vote is tomorrow.

CAYLEY: Same. I'd hate this thing to drag on.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Trouble is, we need me to win and there's not much time left to change people's minds.

CAYLEY: I wouldn't worry about it.

FLAXLEY: Wouldn't worry about it? My future as the leader depends on me making a good speech tomorrow. And *you* making a bad one.

CAYLEY: I'm not gonna do that.

(Flaxley glowered at her.)

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

CAYLEY: I don't need to do *that* to lose the election.

FLAXLEY: Oh? You have an idea?

CAYLEY: I do, yes.

FLAXLEY: Care to tell me about it?

CAYLEY: Nope. That would be electoral corruption.

FLAXLEY: Is that so?

CAYLEY: Yes. It's called collusion. We're not allowed to plot my defeat *together*. I'll have to lose it *my* way. It won't be free and fair otherwise.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: And you know how do that, do you? Lose, I mean.

CAYLEY: Absolutely. Easy peasy.

FLAXLEY: And you're certain, are you?

CAYLEY: Absolutely. Losing an election is easy.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: We just need you to focus on winning.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... and do you have any idea on how I might...

CAYLEY: Kritz and Anoka.

FLAXLEY: What?

CAYLEY: You're not the only hero in your family. Let Kritz and Anoka go up there too. They can speak on your behalf. Or you could merely invite them onto the stage with you. The townsfolk love those two; Kritz especially. Remind them all you're a true Tifaeris family and all of you are working tirelessly for the town. That'll win people over.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That's good. Very good, in fact. What else?

CAYLEY: Nothing. That ought to do it actually. As long as you go up there first, it'll be easy for me to throw *my* campaign.

FLAXLEY: How exactly?

CAYLEY: I can't tell you that.

FLAXLEY: Cayley...

CAYLEY: Do you trust me?

(Flaxley glanced at her distrustfully.)

FLAXLEY: Yes?

CAYLEY: Then just leave it in my capable hands.

(She beamed.)

CAYLEY: I'd never do anything to get on *your* wrong side. You're my childhood hero, remember? Knowing you're proud of me makes me happy.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: See? Everything will be fine *as long* as you trust me.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Very well. I trust you.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

FLAXLEY: You're welcome.

(He chuckled heartily.)

FLAXLEY: I mean, trusting you isn't even a gamble, is it? Not really. Betraying me and winning the election would be a massive *own goal* for you. I'd throw you out of your house and fire you from your job. Then eject you from the town.

CAYLEY: Actually, you wouldn't.

FLAXLEY: What?

CAYLEY: You couldn't. *I'd* be the president if I won. You wouldn't have that right. In fact, kicking me out would be a coup of state; making you an illegal usurper to the presidency. Nations ruled by usurpers instantly become pariah states. Other nations would be obliged to end all international trade with us and the economy would collapse. Tifaeris would be ruined.

FLAXLEY: I see.

CAYLEY: But that's academic really, isn't it? I'm going to lose tomorrow anyway.

FLAXLEY: As long as you're sure.

CAYLEY: I am. And I'm glad.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: Running a town is a scary prospect. I'm not ready for that sort of responsibility yet. I'm only thirteen, for heaven's sake. Leaders have to make big decisions and those decisions can hurt people sometimes. I couldn't live with myself knowing I'd done that.

(She shuddered.)

CAYLEY: Nope. Even if by some fluke I *did* win, I'd immediately resign.

FLAXLEY: I see.
(He smiled.)
FLAXLEY: I'm delighted you feel that way.
CAYLEY: And *I'm* delighted that you're going to remain in charge of Tifaeris.
(She beamed.)
CAYLEY: I'm also delighted that we've arrived at Laura's Boutique.
FLAXLEY: Whereas my wallet is absolutely devastated.
CAYLEY: Let's go inside.
FLAXLEY: My wallet?
CAYLEY: The shop.
(She then paused and looked to Sir Flaxley uneasily.)
CAYLEY: Don't judge me for what I buy.
FLAXLEY: Why would I?
CAYLEY: Because... well...
(She sighed.)
CAYLEY: I have to buy something *Kyrie* approves of.
FLAXLEY: Oh?
CAYLEY: Yeah...
(She scratched her head.)
CAYLEY: A few months ago, while I was at work, she threw all my clothes away. She'd threatened to do it several times, but this time she went through with it. She said I dressed like a nerd. So she chucked everything away and replaced it all with clothes *she* likes. Things that are... less conservative, shall we say?
FLAXLEY: Less conservative?
CAYLEY: More liberated, so to speak.
FLAXLEY: I'm lost.
CAYLEY: Revealing!
FLAXLEY: Right.
(He looked enlightened.)
FLAXLEY: That would explain it. Kritz did *say* you'd started dressing more like a barmaid and less like a librarian. That's why, is it?
CAYLEY: Yes. So... no judging.
(She then glanced at the shop door and nodded.)
CAYLEY: Let's go.
(With that, they headed into the shop and Cayley immediately started to flick through the clothing racks.)
CAYLEY: Hmm... choices, choices...
(Flaxley grimaced.)
FLAXLEY: Prices, prices...
CAYLEY: My happiness is worth it though, right?
FLAXLEY: Well... yes.
(He grimaced.)
FLAXLEY: Even if it *is* at the expense of my own. When Kritz finds out how much this apology is about to cost us, she's going to make my life a misery.

A short while later, Cayley returned home, struggling with a basket under one arm and a box under the other. Having performed miracles in managing to open the front door, she staggered into the living room then hurriedly plonked her things down on the table. She then flinched and stepped back. Kyrie was down on her hands and knees, peering under the sofa.

CAYLEY: Kyrie?

(Kyrie gasped as she continued to stare into the two inch gap between the floor and the sofa.)

KYRIE: Oh, my god. Anoka was right. You really *are* hiding under the sofa.

CAYLEY: What?

KYRIE: How did you even get *under* there?

CAYLEY: I'm not...

KYRIE: Don't worry, I'll have you out in a jiffy.

CAYLEY: Kyrie, I'm not under the sofa! I wouldn't *fit* under the sofa!

KYRIE: You *are* under the sofa, I can hear you.

CAYLEY: That's because I'm standing behind you!

(Kyrie glanced behind her then gasped.)

KYRIE: How did you get out so quickly?

CAYLEY: I didn't. I was never under the sofa!

KYRIE: You were. I heard you speaking.

CAYLEY: I was here!

(She released and exasperated sigh.)

CAYLEY: That sofa is a few inches off the ground, Kyrie. There isn't a human being alive who'd be able to fit under there.

KYRIE: Are you sure? Only when I asked Anoka if she'd seen you earlier, she told me to look under the sofa at home.

CAYLEY: She was joking, obviously.

KYRIE: Joking?

(She grimaced.)

KYRIE: But how is that funny? I was frantic with worry after you ran away.

CAYLEY: I don't know. You'll have to ask her.

KYRIE: Good idea. I'll...

(She then spotted a basket on the table and flinched.)

KYRIE: That's a carry home basket from Laura's Boutique.

CAYLEY: I know.

(She beamed.)

CAYLEY: Flaxley bought me an outfit by way of an apology.

KYRIE: Blimey. That's far better than a cake.

CAYLEY: He bought me one of them too.

KYRIE: Really? Result!

(She nodded sternly.)

KYRIE: But first, let me see this outfit.

(She wagged her finger at her.)

KYRIE: You know I won't have you dressing like a dork anymore!

CAYLEY: Don't worry, it's actually really cool.

KYRIE: *Your* idea of cool, or *actual* cool?

(Cayley threw her hands to her hips.)

CAYLEY: My idea of cool *is* really cool!

KYRIE: This is no time for jokes, missy!

CAYLEY: Kyrie, it's cool, okay?

KYRIE: Hmm...

(She raised a questioning eyebrow.)

KYRIE: Did you choose it yourself?

CAYLEY: Yes!

KYRIE: I see. That's concerning.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

KYRIE: Fine. Let's see it then.

CAYLEY: Fine.

(With that, she plucked a dress from the basket and held it up against herself.)

CAYLEY: See?

KYRIE: Wait!

(She glanced the dress up and down then bit her lip.)

KYRIE: Long. Very long. All the way to your feet! Not a good start.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

KYRIE: I haven't finished. Figure hugging... low cut... no sleeves...

CAYLEY: It's...

KYRIE: Wait!

(She glanced it up and down again then beamed.)

KYRIE: You chose well.

CAYLEY: See?

(She beamed.)

CAYLEY: I love it.

KYRIE: It's nice. You can wear it next time you do your piano gig at the inn.

CAYLEY: Maybe.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: I'm glad you like it, Kyrie, because we'd have argued otherwise.

KYRIE: Argued?

CAYLEY: Yes. I'll never let you throw *this* dress away.

KYRIE: Why would I? It's adorable!

CAYLEY: I'm just saying. Even if you'd *hated* it, I wouldn't *let you* throw it away.

KYRIE: You didn't *let me* throw away your old, geeky stuff either. I had to do it sneakily.

CAYLEY: Yes, and if ever throw *this* away, I'll move out!

KYRIE: I'm not *going* to throw it away!

(She gasped.)

KYRIE: And you wouldn't!

CAYLEY: I would!

(She beamed.)

CAYLEY: I'm going to cherish this dress forever.

KYRIE: Until you grow out of it, you mean.

CAYLEY: Forever!

(She exhaled adoringly then stared at the ceiling.)

CAYLEY: It's a present from my daddy.

(Realising what she'd said, she gasped in horror then stared at Kyrie with wide-eyes. Kyrie was staring back at her, defying herself to laugh.)

CAYLEY: Don't!

KYRIE: What?

(She then burst out laughing, causing Cayley to throw her hands to her hips.)

CAYLEY: You're such a child!

KYRIE: Nope. You are! And with any luck, you'll never be anything else!

(She then stepped up to her and pulled her close for a hug.)

KYRIE: I love you, sister face.

CAYLEY: Aw. I love you too, Kyrie.

KYRIE: Yay!

(She smiled.)

KYRIE: Cayley?

CAYLEY: Yes?

KYRIE: Why is there a pair of sexy heels in the basket?

CAYLEY: I bought them to go with the dress.

KYRIE: I see. They're gorgeous.

(She exhaled.)

KYRIE: Cayley?

CAYLEY: Yes?

KYRIE: It seems I have nothing left to teach you.

CAYLEY: Aw, Kyrie...

(She chuckled.)

CAYLEY: I figured *that* out when I was six.

Over at Sir Flaxley's house at this time, the atmosphere wasn't anywhere near as loving. Sir Flaxley's attempt to sneak in unnoticed, had immediately got him noticed. Now Kritz wanted an explanation.

KRITZ: Well?

FLAXLEY: Very. You?

KRITZ: Don't be a dick.

FLAXLEY: Darling...

KRITZ: Why were you trying to sneak in unnoticed?

FLAXLEY: I...

KRITZ: You didn't find her, did you? The poor thing's still out there, sobbing and wondering why life is so cruel.

FLAXLEY: On the contrary, darling. I found her in no time.

KRITZ: Is that so?

FLAXLEY: Yes. Now let's say no more about it and go about our day.

KRITZ: No. Not until you tell me why you were trying to sneak in.

FLAXLEY: I see. Still on that, are we?

KRITZ: Yes!

FLAXLEY: Fuck.

KRITZ: Well?

FLAXLEY: Very. You?

KRITZ: Do you want to sleep in the shed???

FLAXLEY: *Want* to? No. Will I be? I believe so.

KRITZ: Flaxley, I need an answer.

FLAXLEY: To why I was sneaking in?

KRITZ: Yes! What went wrong? It has to be something. If it'd gone smoothly, you'd have marched in, pretending to be a hero.

FLAXLEY: I am a hero.

KRITZ: I'll be the judge of that!

FLAXLEY: You judge harshly! And dare I say, indiscriminately.

KRITZ: No, I don't!

FLAXLEY: You do. You're judging me now!

KRITZ: Because you won't explain yourself.

FLAXLEY: I...

KRITZ: She refused your apology, didn't she? She was so devastated, she just couldn't forgive you.

FLAXLEY: Wrong. I apologised hard and I apologised well!

KRITZ: And did she accept it?

FLAXLEY: Yes.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Mostly because I apologised *too* well.

KRITZ: How can you apologise too well?

FLAXLEY: Well... you see... I pulled out all the stops to make her happy again.

KRITZ: Okay...

FLAXLEY: And, um...

(He scratched his head.)

FLAXLEY: It ended up costing a lot more than I'd anticipated.

KRITZ: What? How?

FLAXLEY: The outfit you said I should buy her...

KRITZ: What about it?

FLAXLEY: Well... she wasn't really interested in Sheila's market stall.

(Kritz raised a questioning eyebrow.)

KRITZ: So where did you end up taking her?

FLAXLEY: Somewhere... else.

KRITZ: Yes, but...

(She then winced with trepidation.)

KRITZ: Don't say Laura's Boutique.

FLAXLEY: I wasn't going to.

KRITZ: So, it *wasn't* there?

FLAXLEY: It was, I just didn't want to say it.

(He then offered her a cheesy grin. It had no pacifying effect whatsoever.)

KRITZ: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes, dear?

KRITZ: How much did you spend?

FLAXLEY: Well...

(He scratched his head nervously.)

FLAXLEY: You know how you go to Azagotse once a month to make enough money to tide us over?

KRITZ: Yes?

FLAXLEY: You might want to go a day earlier and come back a day later next time.

(Kritz blinked at him nonchalantly.)

KRITZ: What the fuck did you buy her?

FLAXLEY: Just a dress.

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: And matching shoes.

KRITZ: Matching shoes???

FLAXLEY: And a dark forest gateau.

KRITZ: You...

(She staggered to the sofa and sat down.)

KRITZ: Why the hell would you spend that much?

FLAXLEY: Well...

(He gave an exasperated sigh.)

FLAXLEY: If you must know, I was overcome with guilt. That poor kid has been to hell and back in her short life. I mean, absolute hell. So the last thing she needed was the man she believes to be her father screaming in her face. Especially when she'd hadn't done anything wrong. Actually, it's worse than that. I was screaming in her face for doing everything well!

(He kicked the floor.)

FLAXLEY: That sweet little orphan has done nothing but serve this town with enthusiasm and a smile on her face, and I rewarded her with cruelty.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I felt so bad about that, I pretty much indulged her every whim.

KRITZ: Yes, you did, didn't you?

(She then started to chuckle.)

FLAXLEY: What's so funny?

KRITZ: That sweet little orphan.

FLAXLEY: What about her?

KRITZ: She'll go far.

FLAXLEY: What?

KRITZ: I won't go into detail, my love, but that girl knows how to negotiate. Nay, manipulate.

FLAXLEY: Manipulate?

KRITZ: Yes. How do you think she got that nice house?

FLAXLEY: You offered it to her.

KRITZ: Yup. Because she knew just what to say to me.

FLAXLEY: And what was that?

KRITZ: I said I *won't* go into detail!

FLAXLEY: Right...

KRITZ: Point being, that's one savvy little girl. She's only thirteen and she already owns a large house overlooking the ocean, and now she has an expensive designer dress and shoes.

FLAXLEY: Right... so what are you saying?

KRITZ: I'm saying we need to watch her like a hawk.

FLAXLEY: I see.

KRITZ: That girl is all cuteness and innocence on the outside, but she has a cunning way of getting what she wants.

(She chuckled again.)

KRITZ: I like her. I do. She's like me only smarter.

FLAXLEY: Infinitely so.

KRITZ: Do you want a black eye?

FLAXLEY: Darling...

KRITZ: Right. Sorry.

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Are you saying she faked her sorrow in order to manipulate me?

KRITZ: No. You could quite literally see her heart break. The poor thing was devastated. You crushed her like an autumn leaf.

FLAXLEY: Yeah... that wasn't my finest hour.

KRITZ: But in your remorse, she spotted an opportunity and she took it.

FLAXLEY: I see. So what are we saying here? Is she good or bad?

KRITZ: She's a little angel. She really is. She's a lovely girl, but she's also worldly wise. When she saw the chance to get a nice house to live in, she took it. Who wouldn't? And in your remorse, she saw the opportunity to get an expensive gift from the man she believes to be her daddy. That's what *that* was all about. She'll cherish that dress. Wearing it will make her feel like daddy's little princess.

FLAXLEY: I see. So we can trust her?

KRITZ: I reckon so.

FLAXLEY: Good, because my success in the election tomorrow depends entirely on her executing *her own* failure plan. If she doesn't, she'll win the election and take the entire town from us.

KRITZ: Hmm...

FLAXLEY: But we can trust her *not* to do that, right? I mean, she *said* she didn't *want* to be the leader.

KRITZ: Then I believe her.

FLAXLEY: So do I.

(They shared an uneasy glance.)

FLAXLEY: I think.

KRITZ: Hmm...

(She scoffed.)

KRITZ: No, that's ridiculous. She'd never do that. *This* town isn't big enough for *her*. One day that little bugger's going to rule *the entire world*. And look cute doing it.

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Starting with Tifaeris.

KRITZ: I...

(She sneered.)

KRITZ: She'd better bloody not!

FLAXLEY: Yeah...

KRITZ: No. That's just silly. I'm sure she'll throw the election, just like she promised.

FLAXLEY: *How* sure?

KRITZ: Well... I wish I could say I'm *entirely* sure, but... she's a crafty bugger.

FLAXLEY: Shit.

KRITZ: We just need to trust her, I guess.

FLAXLEY: Well, yes... what else *can* we do?

(He mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Although it makes me wonder, how *does* she plan to throw the election tomorrow?

KRITZ: She didn't tell you?

FLAXLEY: That would be collusion.

KRITZ: Right...

(She grimaced.)

KRITZ: I guess we'll find out in the morning then.

The following morning, just before ten o'clock, the citizens of Tifaeris had once again gathered before the stage to listen to the two presidential candidates speak. Before the speeches could take place, however, Tito had an announcement to make. Having inadvertently left the crowd with the impression that he'd been advocating for young Cayley to be killed during his last address, however, he was having trouble getting his point across to the sneering public.

TITO: I suggested nothing of the sort! I was just trying to get you to *accept* the girl!

MORLEY: But you're supposed to be impartial! I know these things, because where I grew up we had elections all the time. The leaders kept getting assassinated, you see? The electoral commission *must* remain impartial!

TITO: I *was* being impartial!

MORLEY: By advocating for us to accept Cayley?

TITO: As a candidate, not as president!

(Thin Alero scoffed.)

THIN: Well, that's not very impartial. How can you say we shouldn't accept her as president?

DAISY: This bloke talks in riddles!

VERO: He talks bollocks, more like!

ROGER: Yeah. One minute he's saying we *should* make her president the next he's saying we shouldn't.

TITO: What? I did neither of those things!

KEVIN: Yes, you bloody did!

GARMAN: Still, it's an improvement on yesterday. Yesterday, he told us to *kill* the poor little bugger!

TITO: I did nothing of the sort!

DAISY: You lying bastard!

(Tito growled.)

TITO: Look. Who you vote for is up to you! I don't care either way! I'm only here to let you know that the polling station is going to open as soon as we're done!

(Thin grimaced.)

THIN: The polling station?

TITO: It's at the police station!

THIN: But don't the police need that?

ROGER: Yeah! Where are they gonna go in the meantime?

(Tito's shoulder's slumped.)

TITO: Give me strength.

(Backstage in the meantime, Flaxley, Kritz, Anoka, Kyrie and Cayley were watching events unfold with varying levels of amusement. Having taken quite the disliking to Tito, Flaxley and Kritz found it hilarious. Anoka and Cayley were also mildly amused by his failure to communicate. Having failed to spot the joke, on the other hand, Kyrie just giggled in the hope that nobody would realise.)

KYRIE: So funny.

FLAXLEY: Isn't it, though? The man's bloody useless.

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: If he's an example of Leathrock efficiency, it's no wonder they have to poach all their talent from other towns.

CAYLEY: Right?

(Kritz chuckled some more then looked to Cayley.)

KRITZ: Nervous? This speech is a big deal.

(Cayley bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: A little bit.

KRITZ: Don't be. You look stunning.

(She gestured to Cayley's new dress.)

KRITZ: Is that the one Flaxley bought you?

(Cayley blushed.)

CAYLEY: It is; yes.

KRITZ: Couldn't wait to wear it, huh?

CAYLEY: Well... sort of. And I figured... you know... this *is* a special occasion, right?

(Kritz raised a distrusting eyebrow.)

KRITZ: The day you become president?

CAYLEY: The last day of campaigning.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: But there's more to it than that.

KRITZ: Oh?

CAYLEY: Wearing it makes me feel special. And I'm gonna *need* that today. This is gonna be rough.

KRITZ: What is?

(She snarled under her breath.)

KRITZ: Throwing the election or the fallout when you don't?

CAYLEY: What was that?

KRITZ: Nothing, sweetie.

(Just then, Tito's voice rose up from the stage.)

TITO: Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris!!!

(Having been listening in on Kritz and Cayley's conversation, Flaxley glowered at him.)

FLAXLEY: What???

(Tito blinked at him nonchalantly.)

TITO: I'm announcing you!

FLAXLEY: What?

TITO: Come out here!

FLAXLEY: Oh. Right.

(With that, he marched out onto the stage to a tumultuous round of applause. Allowing him to get on with it, Tito headed for a chair at the back and sat down. Interested to hear how Flaxley might turn his polling deficit around, he then leant forwards to listen.)

FLAXLEY: People! *My* people! All citizens of Tifaeris! I thank you.

THIN: *You're* thanking *us*?

FLAXLEY: I am, yes. Because together we've been on an amazing journey. From a shanti town to a metropolis; we've worked together every step of the way. And it hasn't always been easy. There have been some truly difficult times, but, as one, we worked our way through them.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: You know, some say our success was all down to my fine leadership. Well, I say that's not the case. Yes, I'm an excellent leader, but I couldn't have done it without having excellent people to lead. *Yourselves.*

(Everyone cheered.)

FLAXLEY: Also... it's important to know that I did not lead alone. At my side throughout, helping me make decisions, boosting my confidence and spurring me on, was my beloved wife, Kritzeveltia.

(The crowd cheered twice as loud.)

FLAXLEY: Also, my beloved children. Like you, I wanted to create a place where my children could grow up and thrive. They inspired me to stick at it through thick and thin. They made it easy for me to keep driving us forwards.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: So, I'm not going to stand here and beg for your vote today. Instead, I'm going to introduce you to the people who've driven me to succeed. A vote for me is a vote for them, after all. So, I'll let them explain why a vote for Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris is the only vote that makes sense.

(He then called to the area beside the stage.)

FLAXLEY: Come on out here, Kritz. You too, Anoka. Come and meet the wonderful people of Tifaeris.

(In that moment, Kritz and Anoka marched out onto the stage to a torrent of cheering and jubilation. Milking the moment, they both waved and pointed to various sections of the crowd, whilst flicking their hair and fluttering their eyelashes.)

DAISY: We love you, Kritz!!!

THIN: Aye, her daughter's tasty too.

DAISY: That's not what I meant!

(Moments later, they arrived at the lectern then Kritz gestured for the crowd to quieten. They immediately obliged.)

KRITZ: Wow. That was quite the reception.

(She chuckled.)

KRITZ: I hope you don't start cheering like that whenever we walk into the pub or go to the meat stall in the market. That would be embarrassing.

(Everyone laughed obligingly.)

KRITZ: So... here I am, before you all. With nothing planned. I really don't know what Flaxley's expecting me to say, to be honest. All I can tell you is what little I know. And that's that, if you vote for Flaxley, our town hero, I'll continue to keep pushing him forwards, like I've always done. And not just out of a sense of duty as a wife. But out of a sense of duty to the town I love. Tifaeris.

(Everyone cheered.)

KRITZ: You see, I was born in this fine town. Then I was torn away from it and raised as a Trepe Warrior. They made me forget my past and even tattooed these symbols on my arm.

(She pointed to her upper arm.)

KRITZ: They tried to make me one of *them*. They failed.

FLAXLEY: Bloody right too!

KRITZ: They were always *going to* fail. It was fated. That's my belief. I was always destined to come home. Always. And when I did, I came home with the symbols of what used to be a hated enemy etched on my arm for all eternity.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: But you all saw past that. You paid no heed to how it looked. Instead, you looked into my heart, understood my sincerity and made me welcome. You embraced me. Thank you, Tifaeris.

(Everyone cheered.)

KRITZ: So I owe you all a debt of gratitude. One I intend to keep on paying for as long as you'll have me. We have a bond, Tifaeris. An unbreakable bond. A bond that someone from a different continent could never understand. No offence to the other candidate, but, as much as I love the girl, she'll never truly understand what it means to be from Tifaeris. To belong. She'll never truly be one of *us*, no matter how hard she tries.

(Backstage Cayley whimpered and tears formed in her eyes.)

CAYLEY: That was just mean.

KYRIE: Right? Cheap shot, Kritz.

CAYLEY: Yeah.

(She growled.)

CAYLEY: I'll show her! She's not the only one who can be mean.

KYRIE: Oh, boy.

(Upon the stage at this time, oblivious to Cayley's annoyance, Kritz continued her speech.)

KRITZ: So please, do the right thing. Vote for Sir Flaxley. Vote for someone *from* Tifaeris. Because only someone from Tifaeris can truly understand what this fine town needs.

(She then stepped back and received a deafening ovation.)

FLAXLEY: Nice work, darling.

KRITZ: Right?

(She then stepped forwards again.)

KRITZ: People of Tifaeris, while I'm here before you, I'd just like to take the opportunity to introduce to my eldest daughter. A master swordsman like her father, and a first class hotty like me. The next generation of your founding family!

(She then gestured to Anoka. Anoka nodded then stepped forward, accepting much in the way of adulation.)

ANOKA: Thank you, everyone.

(She smiled.)

ANOKA: You know, I've been blessed. My parents are the greatest people on earth.

(Everyone cheered.)

ANOKA: They've done so much for *all* of us. So much! And growing up here in Tifaeris, I've borne witness it all. And it's inspired me to be just like them. To strive like them, to share the same level of commitment to this town that they have. To live to serve the people. (She nodded.)

ANOKA: It's the Flaxley way. A way that I intend to pass on through future Flaxley generations.

(Kritz whispered to her husband.)

KRITZ: I don't see how; she's a lesbian.

ANOKA: My younger siblings' future children will all grow up to continue this legend!

KRITZ: Gotcha.

ANOKA: That way you can be sure that whenever this town needs a Flaxley; a Flaxley will always come running! And that's why you should *vote* for a Flaxley in this upcoming election. Thank you.

(Everyone cheered then Flaxley stepped forward again.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, friends! I'll see you all soon.

(He thrust his fist in the air.)

FLAXLEY: Vote, Flaxley!!!

(Much to his dismay, half the crowd cheered, but the other half grimaced and scratched their heads.)

FLAXLEY: Right... well, that can't be good.

KRITZ: No...

(She cringed.)

KRITZ: It really is down to Cayley to throw it, isn't it?

FLAXLEY: Hmm...

(He then trudged away with Kritz and Anoka at his side. As he did so, Tito hurried back to the lectern.)

TITO: Ladies and gentlemen, that was Sir Flaxley!

DAISY: We know!

THIN: We've known him for years, you daft bastard.

KEVIN: Who is this fella anyway?

TITO: Never mind that! Please welcome, your second candidate; Miss Cayley Severen!

(At the side of the stage, Cayley nodded defiantly.)

CAYLEY: Right! I'll show Kritz!

(Before she could step up on the stage, however, Kyrie grabbed her arm.)

KYRIE: Wait. Before you go...

(She handed her a box.)

KYRIE: Wear these.

(Cayley took the box and opened it. At once, her eyes bulged.)

CAYLEY: Mum's earrings?

KYRIE: Yeah.

CAYLEY: But... you love these. They're your prized possession. You won't let me near them normally.

KYRIE: I know.

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: You just look so beautiful in that dress, I feel like you *deserve* to wear them.

(She smiled.)

KYRIE: If mum's watching from the afterlife, she'll be so proud.

(A happy tear appeared in Cayley's eyes.)

CAYLEY: Thank you, Kyrie.

KYRIE: I want them back afterwards though!

CAYLEY: I know.

KYRIE: Oh, and what Kritz said was bollocks, by the way. You *do* belong. You belong with me.

(Cayley threw her arms around her.)

CAYLEY: You're the best sister ever.

(She then stepped back.)

CAYLEY: But don't reassure me about that. I'm going to use it to my advantage.

(She then stomped towards the stage, fastening her earrings as she did so. Coming the other way, Kritz smiled.)

KRITZ: Good luck, love.

(Cayley made of point of audibly snubbing her as she passed.)

CAYLEY: Hmph!

KRITZ: What? What's that all about.

ANOKA: Well, mum, at a guess, I'd say it's got something do to with you telling everybody she doesn't belong.

KRITZ: I never said that.

FLAXLEY: Actually, you did.

(They then gathered at the side of the stage with Kyrie, to watch her speech.)

KRITZ: I don't remember saying that.

FLAXLEY: Well, you did. And now the person who we're relying on for a favour has the almighty hump.

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: I won't lie to you, my love. I'm worried.

(He then glanced to the stage, just in time to see, Cayley step beside the lectern.)

CAYLEY: Hello, everyone.

LISA: Hey, cutie.

CAYLEY: Um... hi.

DAISY: You look adorable.

KAREN: That dress really suits you, sweetheart.

CAYLEY: Right... thank you.

(She then sighed despondently.)

CAYLEY: Well, that was disappointing.

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: I thought this was going to be a civil and respectful election campaign.

(She sighed again.)

CAYLEY: I was wrong. For the wife of my opponent, someone I always considered to be a friend, to say I'll never belong in this town... that was hurtful beyond words.

(She pouted and allowed a tear to form.)

CAYLEY: I'm an orphan who had to flee from oppression. I had to go somewhere, right? Or should I have just stayed there and died? Is that what she's saying? Those words really stung my heart.

(She shook her head solemnly.)

CAYLEY: I mean, if I don't belong here then where *do* I belong? I've worked so hard for this town. I've solved crimes, improved the infrastructure, entertained the people; I even revolutionised the budget. I've worked so hard for this town... only to be told I don't belong.

(She sighed deeply.)

CAYLEY: Was it personal? I mean, is it just *me* or is she saying *all* orphans fleeing from repression aren't welcome in Tifaeris? I don't know. I just know I didn't deserve that.

(Watching on from the side, Flaxley and Kritz were gobsmacked.)

KRITZ: She's using it against me!

(Kyrie smiled.)

KYRIE: Yeah, she said she would.

FLAXLEY: What? Why? Why would she do that???

KYRIE: Why would you tell her she doesn't belong? That was just mean.

(Kritz winced.)

KRITZ: Yeah, but still...

(She then scowled at the stage.)

KRITZ: Why do I get the feeling that little bugger's *glad* I said it?

FLAXLEY: So she could use it to win the election!

(He then joined his wife in scowling at Cayley, as she continued her speech.)

CAYLEY: Anyway, let's not dwell on the first lady's malicious racism towards uprooted orphans. Let's move on.

KRITZ: That little...

CAYLEY: Having worked hard and *earned* the right to consider myself a citizen of Tifaeris, I understand your concerns. Because I'm just like you. This is my home, and I'll do anything it takes to improve it. For all of us.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: In fact, that's exactly what I *have* been doing. For example, the new concrete dock. That was *my* idea. Just another example of my efforts, *alongside* solving crimes, cutting wastage and saving the town money.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Improving this town brings me joy. And if you vote for me, I can do it even more efficiently. For a start, I won't have to spend weeks convincing Sir Flaxley to implement my brilliant ideas.

(She wagged her finger.)

CAYLEY: That wasn't a dig at him, by the way. I'm just saying, he's a swordsman, a hero, a leader of armies; not a civil servant. And it's a civil servant we need. So vote for me and we can get things done, whilst leaving the great Sir Flaxley to do what he does best. Defend us. Thank you.

(In that moment, the loudest cheer of the morning, rose into the air. Watching on in horror, Flaxley was distraught.)

FLAXLEY: They're eating out of the palm of her hand.

KRITZ: This is bad. Very, very bad. We never should have trusted that little shit!

FLAXLEY: I concur.

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: But... maybe it's not as bad as we think.

(Anoka then spoke up from where she'd been peering at the audience.)

ANOKA: Actually, it is.

FLAXLEY: What?

ANOKA: Half the people who cheered for you after your speech, were in tears after what Cayley said about being an orphan fleeing oppression. Now they're all cheering for *her*.

(She winced.)

ANOKA: You really dropped the ball there, mum.

KRITZ: It was just a turn of phrase.

ANOKA: Yeah... and it's cost us the election.

FLAXLEY: Stupid wife!

KRITZ: Hey! How was I to know she'd use it against me?

FLAXLEY: Well... you... I... oh, I don't bloody know.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck sake. We made a massive mistake choosing *her* as my opponent.

(Kyrie shrugged indifferently.)

KYRIE: Yup. You were destined to lose from the minute you suggested it.

ANOKA: What do you mean, Kyrie?

KYRIE: Cayley wins contests. It what she does. Unless they involve physical activity then she comes dead last. Anything else, however, she *always* wins.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: She's awesome. Why you thought you could beat her in a debating contest, I just don't know.

KRITZ: She was supposed to lose *on purpose*.

KYRIE: Oh.

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: Maybe she forgot.

FLAXLEY: Or maybe she's angry because Kritz told her foreigners don't belong.

KRITZ: That's not what I said!

FLAXLEY: Unfortunately, it was.

(Kyrie nodded.)

KYRIE: That would explain it. When people are mean to her, she punishes them with her superior brain. Sorry, Anoka, your parents are well and truly f...

(On stage at this time, Cayley allowed the applause to naturally subside then nodded.)

CAYLEY: Anyway, before you all go off and vote for me...

(She smirked at Flaxley then looked to the crowd again.)

FLAXLEY: That horrible...

CAYLEY: I'd like to take a leaf out of Sir Flaxley's book.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: But before you do, I just need a moment.

(She then hurried to the side of the stage and pouted at Kritz.)

CAYLEY: Seeing as I've got this election well and truly in the bag already, for what I'm about to do, you'd better be extremely grateful.

KRITZ: What?

CAYLEY: You'll see.

(She then hurried back to the lectern and took a deep breath to psych herself up.)

CAYLEY: Sorry about that. Anyway... as I was saying, I'd like to take a leaf out of Sir Flaxley's book.

(She winced.)

CAYLEY: Oh, boy.

(She then looked to the audience and forced a nervous smile.)

CAYLEY: It's time you met *my* family. Kyrie! Come on out here!

(Backstage, Anoka, Flaxley and Kritz all threw a glance at Kyrie.)

KYRIE: What?

FLAXLEY: Your sister wants you on stage.

KYRIE: She does. Oh? Sorry. I wasn't listening. She's cute, but her speeches are really boring.

(She then hurried out onto the stage. As she did so, a series of hisses and snarls rose up from many of the women in the crowd. Taking it as a compliment for some reason, Kyrie responded with a cocky, showbiz wave then stepped up to her sister.)

KYRIE: What?

CAYLEY: You need to make a speech.

KYRIE: Since when?

CAYLEY: Kyrie, just make a speech, please.

KYRIE: About what? And to who?

CAYLEY: Whom!

KYRIE: That's what *I* want to know.

CAYLEY: Tell the crowd why they should vote for me.

KYRIE: And why *should* they vote for you?

CAYLEY: Kyrie... just... say nice things about me.

KYRIE: Oh.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: Now that I can do.

(She then turned to face the crowd.)

KYRIE: My sister...

CAYLEY: Introduce yourself first.

KYRIE: Right.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: I'm Kyrie Severen; elder sister of Cayley here. A lot of you know me from our many arguments about me trying to get in your menfolk's underpants!

(A mumble of discontent rose up from most of the female crowd members.)

DAISY: You're related to that brazen hussy, Cayley?

(Cayley could only shrug.)

KYRIE: Of course she's related to me! We're sisters. Awesome sexy sisters from a land far, far away.

(She paused.)

KYRIE: What was I meant to be saying?

CAYLEY: Tell them about *me*.

KYRIE: Oh.

(She pointed to her sister.)

KYRIE: She's Cayley.

CAYLEY: They know. Tell them *nice* things about me.

KYRIE: Right.

(She smiled.)

KYRIE: Cayley's awesome. Smart too. And thanks to my intervention, she *dresses* nicely.

DAISY: I can't believe you're related to *her*.

FRANCESCA: You're an almighty slut, yet Cayley's so cute and innocent.

KYRIE: I know, right. Not that's she's *entirely* innocent.

(Cayley braced for impact.)

CAYLEY: Aw, crap; here we go.

KYRIE: Last week, I caught her snogging that boy over there!

(She pointed to a young lad in the crowd, who instantly received a clout from his mother.)

KYRIE: You should have seen them. All over each other they were. Which surprised me a bit, to be honest, because she's *meant* to going out with that boy over there!

(She pointed to another young lad who was sobbing in his mother's arm.)

CAYLEY: Oh, boy.

KYRIE: Priceless it was. I thought for a minute they were trying to eat each other. Cayley's little tongue was going like the clappers. It was awesome. She looked just like me in that moment. I've never been so proud.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: Not that I *wanted* her to be like me, but I guess you can't fight the inevitable. I tell you, it won't be long before it's *her* slipping her hand down your husband's trousers when you're not looking. We'll *both* be at it. Lock up your menfolk, ladies; the Severen sisters are out and about and nobody's dong is off-limits! We're gonna have so much fun together.

(By now the entire audience was appalled. Having never heard such a horrific speech, they were staring at her agog.)

KYRIE: But that won't be for a few years yet. She's far too young for all *that* sort of thing. She's child, for heaven's sake. Very much so, in fact! She's still scared of the dark! It's so cute, I can't stand it. She runs up to me, shivering in terror and clings onto me like a barnacle every time our lanterns blow out. Adorable. Like a big baby sometimes. She's scared of horses too. And she's beyond feeble in a fight. But despite all that, you should definitely vote for her. *I'm* going to. Flaxley's nowhere near as cute as she is.

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: Not that she'll want to devote much time to running *this* place. In a few years from now, she'll be too busy gallivanting about town, putting herself about, to give a crap about boring political stuff. She'll have to get Flaxley to do it.

(She mused to herself.)

KYRIE: So when you think about it, it'd make more sense to vote for *him*.

ROGER: We're going to!

DAISY: Bloody right, we are.

(Kyrie flinched.)

KYRIE: Why would you do that? Cayley's adorable. She'll be an amazing queen! She's very trustworthy, you see? Unless you're the poor boy dating her, then you'll need eyes in the back of your head. Other than that, you know what you're getting with Cayley. A good, honest girl with a heart of gold.

(She exhaled.)

KYRIE: It'll be great. More than great, actually. As the queen's sister, I'll be a princess. I'll be able to do what I like. And whoever I like. If anyone's mean to me, I'll get her to sling them in jail. Exciting. I'll finally have power. Power!

(She cackled maniacally.)

KYRIE: I'll come for Phisele first...

(At the side of the stage at this time, Flaxley and Kritz were watching on agog. The crowd were growling and poor little Cayley was shrinking further and further into herself with embarrassment.)

KRITZ: Well, well... I think we owe Cayley a massive apology, my love.

FLAXLEY: I'll say, she's thrown herself under a carriage out there.

KRITZ: I know, right? She really could have taken the town from us. She was winning by a clear country mile... so she brought her sister into play, knowing she'd turn everyone against her.

FLAXLEY: That's quite the sacrifice.

KRITZ: Yup. She's excelled herself there. She's gone up and above the call of duty.

FLAXLEY: And then some.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: And she's going to ask for a little more than an apology, you know that, right?

KRITZ: I do, yes.

(She gave him a knowing glance.)

KRITZ: And I know the perfect reward.

(She then looked to the stage again, to see Cayley sinking even deeper into herself. Kyrie's latest choice of topic was like a form of crucifixion.)

KYRIE: Yup. She's such a good girl. She really is. She tries her best to be really polite, like, all the time. She won't even fart outdoors. It's funny actually. She holds it in then as soon as she gets home, she lets rip. It's like being welcomed home by a brass band. God love her.

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: Can we end this hell now, please?

KYRIE: What? Oh. Okay.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: I have to go, apparently. Don't forget to vote for Cayley! She might be an almighty slut in the making who farts like a champion and trembles in the face of danger, but out of the two candidates, she's easily the cutest. Cayley Severen for queen!!!

(She then marched off the stage with a joyful smile on her face, oblivious to the booing and jeering. Left behind, Cayley stepped forward and attempted to speak. Thinking better of it, she then trudged off the stage, feeling about two feet tall.)

CAYLEY: Humiliating.

(As she trudged away, Tito returned to the stage to announce that the polling station was now open. Caring very little for that fact, Cayley walked up to Kritz then sighed in defeat.)

CAYLEY: Happy now?

KRITZ: Very.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: That was quite the sacrifice you made.

CAYLEY: I'll never be able to walk down the street in peace ever again. Branded a slut. And I've only ever gone as far as kissing!

KRITZ: Yes, well... chin up. I've got a nice reward for you, love.

CAYLEY: Is it an invisibility cloak?

KRITZ: Not quite.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: I have to go to Azagotse soon. A prolonged visit to pay for your dress.

(Cayley gave a condescending glance. She knew for a fact that Kritz had a hoard of stolen cash stowed away and wasn't about to fall for it for a moment.)

CAYLEY: Okay...

KRITZ: So I figured you and Kyrie might enjoy a weekend away.

KYRIE: I'm in!

CAYLEY: Wait. A weekend away?

KRITZ: Yup. With me. In Azagotse.

(Cayley threw her hands to her hips.)

CAYLEY: Are you planning on dumping me there, because I don't belong in Tifaeris?

KRITZ: Right... still miffed about that, are you?

ANOKA: Wouldn't you be?

KRITZ: You make a good point. Sorry, Cayley.

CAYLEY: Sorry isn't good enough.

KRITZ: Hence the weekend away. In a nice hotel. With Kyrie.

KYRIE: Exciting.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Fine. And if you leave us there, I'll get the message.

FLAXLEY: She won't do that. You have my word as a knight. I'll even swear on Louise, if you like.

CAYLEY: Your beloved sword?

FLAXLEY: The very same.

CAYLEY: Wow. You *are* serious.

KRITZ: Do you accept?

CAYLEY: Well...

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Okay.

KRITZ: Good girl.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: Now let's all go home and rest. Apparently, the election result won't be announced until tonight.

CAYLEY: Okay.

(With that, they all headed out of the backstage area and into main square. Within seconds, Cayley found herself subjected to sneers and numerous mumbles of the word 'slut'. At once, her shoulders slumped.)

CAYLEY: So *this* is my future, is it?

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: I'm so glad you roped me in to help. Thanks a bunch.

That evening, Flaxley was once again sitting on the veranda outside his house with his good friend Derek, the three foot tall green alien from the planet Tryme 17. Satisfied with how the day had gone, he took a sip from his whisky glass then exhaled.

FLAXLEY: You know, Derek, I always considered my position as the leader of Tifaeris to be a rigid certainty. Even when we agreed to hold elections. It just seemed obvious that I'd win and we'd carry on as normal. I never even thought for a moment that something might threaten that.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I'm a wiser man today. Even though the people voted overwhelmingly in my favour, I learned that *no* position is carved in stone.

DEREK: Indeed. Yours is barely written in sand.

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

DEREK: You only got sixty-eight percent of the vote, Flaxley. Meaning almost a third of the population voted for Cayley, *despite* her being related to Kyrie.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but...

DEREK: And yet, if there'd been a poll three days ago, you'd have got a one hundred percent approval rate.

FLAXLEY: Point being?

DEREK: Everybody was delighted to have you as their leader...

(He smirked.)

DEREK: Then you spoke.

(As he sat there chuckling to himself, Flaxley shook his head at him.)

FLAXLEY: It wasn't my speech that ruined things! It was Cayley's.

DEREK: Oh, that's right. A child made a superior speech.

FLAXLEY: Derek...

DEREK: Relax, Flaxley, I'm not mocking you.

FLAXLEY: It *sounds* like you're mocking me.

DEREK: I'm not. *Nobody* can beat a genius like Cayley in a debate, and let's face it, that's what elections are. You hold a debate then everyone votes for the candidate who appealed to them the most.

(He shrugged.)

DEREK: So be careful who you decide to have run against you next time. Had this election *actually* been free and fair, Cayley would have won by a mile. And that's no slight on you, my friend; she'd have beaten anybody. Next time, choose Phisele or somebody. Somebody who *isn't* intelligent to the extreme, knowledgeable on every subject and beautifully eloquent. (Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: You're right, of course. I just thought that my heroic reputation would *guarantee* my victory, no *matter* who stood against me. So much for that. Cayley had that thing won. Thank god she did the noble thing.

DEREK: Ah, yes. That. Sullied her own reputation to the point of becoming a hate figure among large swathes of the female population. I can't believe she took it that far.

FLAXLEY: She didn't *intend* to, old chap. She knew Kyrie would make a speech so detestable it'd cost her the election, but she had no idea what the *content* would be. Kyrie's unpredictable, you see?

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: The fact she chose to paint her little sister as a future home wrecker, devoid of morality and fated for sin, was as much as a shock to her as it was to the horrified crowd.

DEREK: I see.

(He grimaced.)

DEREK: Her reputation shattered into a million pieces, and all because you asked her for a favour. I have to ask you *again*, old chap; why do you hate that poor kid?

FLAXLEY: I don't!

DEREK: So you claim.

FLAXLEY: So I *know*. And so do you, you can read my mind.

DEREK: Right. Yes... rumbled.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: You know as well I do, it was never meant to be like that. I expected her to make a speech, get a polite round of applause then go home. Everyone was supposed to appreciate her efforts, but vote for me. I merely forgot to factor in how capable she is.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: And I feel like she may have underestimated that too.

DEREK: Clearly.

(He shook his head.)

DEREK: But the fact remains that her reputation *is* in tatters. You most definitely have to make amends.

FLAXLEY: I will. I already made it perfectly clear that if anyone harms her, or even threatens to, they'll have my fist for breakfast. And Kritz is taking her and her sister away for a nice weekend break tomorrow. I'd say we're *more* than making amends.

(Derek chuckled.)

DEREK: Flaxley, Kritz is taking Cayley to Azagotse to count cards.

FLAXLEY: What?

DEREK: I read her mind when she came in earlier.

(He shrugged.)

DEREK: Her feeling is, seeing as Cayley manipulated you into buying her that nice dress, she can help pay for it.

FLAXLEY: What? Tell me you're joking, Derek.

DEREK: I'd be lying if I did. Sure they'll stay in a nice hotel, but both evenings will be spent in the casino, with Cayley memorising the deck then cleaning up at the poker table.

FLAXLEY: Why, that...

(He groaned in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: And she had the cheek to say Cayley's crafty.

DEREK: Indeed.

(He held up his palm.)

DEREK: It'll be fine though. She has Kritz and Kyrie there to keep her safe. They'll have some fun, make a pile of money then come back happier, I'm sure.

FLAXLEY: I hope so, Derek, I really do.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: You're probably right. And going away for a few days is definitely what young Cayley needs after her sister accidentally character assassinated her.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: She actually thought she was making her look good.

DEREK: Indeed. She's quite the dipshit, that girl.

FLAXLEY: Very much so.

(He then exhaled merrily.)

FLAXLEY: Still, no harm done.

DEREK: Apart from Cayley's *reputation* being obliterated to kingdom come.

FLAXLEY: Stop bringing that up! The point I'm making is, the election was a great success and now we can move on.

DEREK: To stage two of the plan to join that alliance, you mean?

FLAXLEY: That's right. The legal system. Not that there's anything *wrong* with ours.

DEREK: Apart from the fact that you don't have one.

FLAXLEY: Yes, we bloody do.

DEREK: Flaxley, you deciding someone *must* be guilty because it's the sort of thing they *would* do, then kicking them in the bollocks as a punishment, is not a legal system.

FLAXLEY: Yes, it is. A greatly efficient one too.

DEREK: No, it's...

FLAXLEY: That's irrelevant now anyway. Let's not argue about that. It's all set to change.

DEREK: Good, good.

FLAXLEY: To what, I don't know. I *like* doing things the old-fashioned way. Like you described. If you know he did it, wallop the bastard.

DEREK: Yes... an *actual* legal system is going to be quite the departure from that, isn't it?

FLAXLEY: I expect so, Derek. And I'm excited about putting it into action.

DEREK: Are you though?

FLAXLEY: No. I like the old way.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: But what can you do? Times are changing, Derek. And we're just going to have to get used to it.

Chapter Three – Litigation Comes Not Without Irritation

Tifaeris. Late afternoon. Sir Flaxley was standing on his veranda with his daughters, Jade and Emma, watching on with a smile on his face as a carriage approached the house.

Looking forward to being reunited with the occupants, he rubbed his hands together then beamed with delight.

FLAXLEY: I can't wait. Three nights without getting my leg over is three nights too long.

(He then stared ahead of himself in horror, having just remembered who he was talking to.)

FLAXLEY: You didn't hear that!

JADE: Correct. We didn't hear a thing.

EMMA: Not one disgusting syllable.

FLAXLEY: That's the spirit, ladies.

(He then watched as the carriage pulled up in front of his house.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(With that, he jumped down then hurried to open the carriage door. Moments later, Kyrie jumped out followed by Anoka.)

FLAXLEY: Kyrie.

KYRIE: Yes?

FLAXLEY: I was greeting you.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Welcome home, Anoka.

ANOKA: Thanks, dad.

FLAXLEY: Did you have a nice time?

ANOKA: It was awesome. On the first night we...

FLAXLEY: Never mind that.

(With that, he stepped forwards and caught Kritz as she leapt from the carriage and into his arms.)

KRITZ: Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Behold, my beautiful Kritz returns.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: May I take you inside then... take you from behind?

KRITZ: I insist that you do.

FLAXLEY: Your wish is my command.

(He then started to head for the house with her.)

FLAXLEY: Anoka! Look after your sisters for a bit.

KRITZ: They can help you unload the carriage!

(Just then, a scream rose up, causing everyone to spin around and look towards the carriage.

Cayley was laying flat on her face having fallen out of the carriage.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie! You said you'd help me!

KYRIE: I was staring at Anoka's bum!

CAYLEY: Well, thanks a bunch.

(She then climbed to her feet, ruffled her neck and started to head for home, sighing repeatedly. She looked thoroughly despondent.)

FLAXLEY: Is she okay?

KRITZ: Hmm... I think she's still traumatised.

(Kyrie grimaced.)

KYRIE: I'd better go after her.

(She then hurried away, hand in hand with Anoka. Left behind, Flaxley grimaced then looked into Kritz's eyes.)

FLAXLEY: There's a story here, isn't there?

(Kritz grinned at him innocently.)

KRITZ: I think it's fair to say that, yes.

(Flaxley placed her down then glanced to where Cayley was trudging away.)

FLAXLEY: She's not still angry at *me*, is she?

KRITZ: No. It's not you.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: She just didn't enjoy herself as much as I'd anticipated.

FLAXLEY: How come?

(Kritz shrugged.)

KRITZ: Too much violence and bloodshed, I expect. She likened it to the bad old days when she was on the run from deadly assassins and summoned beasts.

FLAXLEY: What? You only went to play cards!

KRITZ: No. I went to *win* at cards. By cheating.

(She grimaced.)

KRITZ: People in Azagotse do not like losing, my love.

FLAXLEY: I remember. The day we meet, you tried to kill me for beating you.

KRITZ: Yeah... it was similar to *that*, really.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: I got Cayley to stand behind my opponent, you see. We'd play through the pack *once* then things got serious.

FLAXLEY: In what way?

KRITZ: She'd memorised the order of the cards by then.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: So she could *see* my opponent's cards, while also knowing exactly what cards *I* had. If she scratched her ear, I had to fold. If she didn't, I knew I had the winning hand.

(She then chuckled heartily.)

KRITZ: It was hilarious. They all knew I was cheating but had no idea how. They didn't even begin to suspect the innocent little girl, quietly watching them from behind. Priceless.

FLAXLEY: Okay...

KRITZ: Unsurprisingly, once I'd cleaned them out, they all kicked off. Tables got smashed and chairs flew across the room. She was terrified.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: It was fine though. Kyrie protecting her while Anoka and I beat them all to a pulp. Funsies. We had such an amazing time, until I got banned from all the casinos. That was hardly fair.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: Still, I had the last laugh. I broke into the biggest casino's offices on the final night and stole the contents of their safe.

(Flaxley palmed his forehead.)

FLAXLEY: For pity's sake, woman...

KRITZ: Don't judge me. You know as well as I do, our income comes from those trips. But now I've been banished. Meaning no more income!

FLAXLEY: Fuck!

KRITZ: So I just made sure we were covered until I can find some other way to make money.

FLAXLEY: And how *long* are we covered for exactly?

KRITZ: About fifteen years.

FLAXLEY: What???

KRITZ: What can I say? They had a *lot* of money in the safe.

(She then glanced away innocently. She couldn't help but allow herself a crafty smirk, however. She'd added the bag of money that she'd spirited away after the recent bank robbery to the haul. It would now go back into the bank in her own account and nobody would be any the wiser.)

KRITZ: Now where were we?

FLAXLEY: You made fifteen years worth of money???

KRITZ: Yes. Don't act surprised, Flaxley. I took a mathematical genius with me to every casino in Azagotse. A statistical genius too. Even *without* cheating, that girl knows the odds and plays them very well.

FLAXLEY: You let her gamble???

KRITZ: It was *her* choice.

FLAXLEY: Kritz...

KRITZ: Oh, stop complaining. It's done now and we're covered financially; that's what matters.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: And Cayley's recovered from traumas several times already, so she'll be fine.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but...

KRITZ: She spent two years being attacked by things, Flaxley! Then *we* traumatised her all over again when that flasher came to town, remember? And just a few days ago, the townsfolk threatened to murder the poor kid. She used to trauma, my love. She'll be fine.

FLAXLEY: I suppose.

KRITZ: Now take me to bed. I need some loving.

FLAXLEY: Then it's my duty as your husband to provide.
KRITZ: Yes, it...
(She gasped.)
KRITZ: But first, we might want to unload all the money from the carriage.
FLAXLEY: Oh, god, yes.
(Kritz then winked at him knowingly.)
KRITZ: Once that's done, however... I'm going to do naughty things to you.
FLAXLEY: I see. In that case, fuck the money!!!
(He then scooped her up and charged into the house with her.)
EMMA: Right...
JADE: Yeah...
EMMA: Welcome back, mum.
JADE: It's awesome to see you too.
(They rolled their eyes.)
EMMA: Shall we go to the beach or something?
JADE: Might as well.
(They then stepped down from the veranda and headed away. Moments later, Kritz came back out of the house again and headed straight for the rear compartment of the carriage. It was, after all, a lot of money and she wasn't about to leave it there.)
KRITZ: I love you, Flaxley, but... come on.

The following morning, rejuvenated after catching up on his love life, Flaxley strolled into Tifaeris's admin building then headed for his office. His smile couldn't have been much wider.

FLAXLEY: Grainger!
GRAINGER: Morning, Flaxley!
FLAXLEY: Warbury!
WARBURY: Good morning, Flaxley.
FLAXLEY: Cayley!
(Silence ensued.)
FLAXLEY: Um... Cayley?
WARBURY: She hasn't come in yet, Flaxley.
FLAXLEY: What? It's not like her to be late.
GRAINGER: Indeed.
(He grimaced.)
GRAINGER: She didn't play her set in the pub last night either. The landlord said, she'd decided to go home and re-evaluate her life. Whatever that means.
FLAXLEY: Hmm... Trauma.
GRAINGER: What?
(Flaxley grimaced.)
FLAXLEY: Disrespected *repeatedly* by her hero, threatened with murder by a crowd several hundred strong then involved in several bloody casino brawls... that's a lot for a thirteen year-old girl to stomach.
GRAINGER: That happened to her, did it?
FLAXLEY: Yes. In all the space of a few days.
WARBURY: Crikey.
FLAXLEY: I should go and see her.
(Just then, the door opened up and Cayley trudged in wearing the world's most forced smile.)
CAYLEY: Sorry, I'm late. I was... contemplating.

GRAINGER: Suicide?

CAYLEY: Relocating.

(She then trudged into her office. Having watched her go, Flaxley bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Yes... I'd better go and um... have a little chat.

(He then paced into Cayley's office and took a seat opposite her desk.)

FLAXLEY: So...

CAYLEY: I don't *want* to die, Flaxley. I just don't *want* to.

FLAXLEY: What?

CAYLEY: And yet, I've come *close* to dying so many times I've lost count.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Tifaeris was meant to be my sanctuary from that. A safe place to live. A refuge under the governorship of my hero; a man who *claims* to have dedicated his life to protecting people.

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: But all he and his family have done lately is put my life in danger again.

FLAXLEY: That's not true!

(He ruffled his neck.)

FLAXLEY: I've also bought you several cakes!

CAYLEY: Right...

FLAXLEY: And a dress.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: And it's lovely. Maybe you can bury me in it when the inevitable happens.

(Flaxley raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Was the Azagotse trip that bad?

CAYLEY: Yes!

FLAXLEY: Hmm... why do I feel like Kritz only gave me half a story? What *really* happened?

(Cayley sat back and sighed.)

CAYLEY: On the first night... I thought we were going out to dinner.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: Kritz promised me big steaks, the likes of which I'd never seen before. And I got all excited because steak is yummy.

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: Turns out she was talking about an entirely different kind of stakes. Gambling.

FLAXLEY: Well... that *is* why she went there.

CAYLEY: Nobody told *me* that! I wouldn't have gone otherwise. I was looking forward to going to a posh restaurant, but the next thing I knew we were in a casino. She made me count the cards.

FLAXLEY: Made you?

CAYLEY: She pressured me. And so did Anoka.

(She furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Don't let the side down, Cayley. Don't be a wet blanket, Cayley. Stop spoiling our fun, Cayley. They made me feel really bad about it, so I caved. I did what she asked me to.

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: There was blood everywhere.

FLAXLEY: Hmm...

CAYLEY: People take defeat really badly there. And when *one* of them started a fight, all the other people she'd beaten joined in. Fists started flying and all sorts of weapons appeared. It was terrifying.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: I hid under a table at one point, only for Anoka to pick it up and throw it at someone. I've never been so scared. I thought I was gonna die. Again!

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: I was so relieved when we got back to the hotel. I thought it was over. But, no. She wanted to go to another casino the next day. I refused. Fat lot of good it did. They badgered me again. You're perfectly safe. Kyrie will take care of you. Nobody even suspects *you*.

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: I felt intimidated, so I caved again.

FLAXLEY: I see. And another fight broke out, did it?

CAYLEY: Yes! Second casino trip, second terrifying brawl. And that was the *last* thing I needed after what happened to me that morning.

FLAXLEY: Why? What happened that morning?

CAYLEY: I went down to the hotel lobby and someone kidnapped me.

(Flaxley's hair stood on end and he jumped to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: Kidnapped you???

CAYLEY: For ransom! They saw me leave the casino with Kritz the night before and decided to take me hostage in return for getting their money back.

(Flaxley thumped the table.)

FLAXLEY: She'd better have paid it!

CAYLEY: You have *met* your wife, haven't you?

FLAXLEY: Of course, I... oh, you mean that sarcastically.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: She didn't pay it, did she?

CAYLEY: No! She went to the meeting and beat them all up again! Three hours after I was kidnapped!

(She sighed despondently.)

CAYLEY: I sat there tied to a chair being teased and taunted by this gang of big, horrible men; all by myself. For three hours!

FLAXLEY: Maybe it took a while to deliver the ransom message and everything.

CAYLEY: They sent the ransom message five minutes after taking me!

(She furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Apparently, they went for breakfast first!!!

FLAXLEY: What??? No! That can't be right.

(He wagged his finger at her.)

FLAXLEY: Kyrie would never allow that. *She'd* have gone looking for you.

CAYLEY: She *would* have, yes. If they'd told her what happened! Instead, they told her I'd gone to the museum,

FLAXLEY: Azagotse doesn't *have* a museum.

CAYLEY: How was Kyrie to know that?

(She furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: They went for breakfast because Kritz thought making them wait would make them nervous and prone to mistakes when she finally attacked.

(Her shoulders sunk further.)

CAYLEY: It was hell. I sat there sobbing and whimpering for *three hours*! Then, all of a sudden, while this big oaf was threatening to do naughty things to me, Kyrie, Kritz and Anoka burst in and started beating everybody up. It was mortifying.

FLAXLEY: Being rescued was mortifying?

CAYLEY: No! Being tied to a chair while fists, swords and axes were swirling about around my ears. They were having so much fun, none of them gave untying me a second thought. So I had to sit there, bound and gagged while a massacre broke out before my eyes.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: I thought I was done for.

FLAXLEY: Right... but... it worked out okay, right?

CAYLEY: The right people won, if that's what you mean.

(She sneered.)

CAYLEY: Only then did Kyrie untie me. And you know what? Before I could even get to my feet, Kritz said, "Job done; come on, let's get to the casino!" She didn't even bother to ask if was okay!

FLAXLEY: Oh. Well... that's poor form. I'll be having words with her later.

CAYLEY: What's the point? You can't make it un-happen.

FLAXLEY: No, but I certainly see to it that it never happens again.

CAYLEY: I already took care of that. How do you think the authorities found out about her cheating?

FLAXLEY: I don't know...

CAYLEY: I *told* them! After a second night of getting embroiled in a bar brawl where literally nobody guarded me, I decided it was never going to happen again. So I got her banned from the town.

FLAXLEY: I see. And does Kritz know that?

CAYLEY: Are my legs broken?

FLAXLEY: No.

CAYLEY: Then no.

(She ruffled her neck.)

CAYLEY: I told them stealthily. While she was in the hot spa. I had to. Because we both know, having me there means she can make a small fortune. So I'd have been dragged along every single time. Nope! Never again!

FLAXLEY: Right... just... let me process this a minute.

(He mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, that... wait! Kritz said you did some gambling *yourself*. So you couldn't have been *that* horrified.

CAYLEY: I played an old lady in the hotel lobby for one lig per hand. And I gave her the money back afterwards.

FLAXLEY: Right... she made it sound like... oh, dear.

(He raised a peeved eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: My wife is quite the embellisher.

CAYLEY: Yeah... we call that a liar where I come from.

FLAXLEY: Was it really that bad? I mean, nobody guarded you when a fight broke out?

CAYLEY: No!

FLAXLEY: Not even Kyrie?

CAYLEY: No. Probably because Kritz said that in the event of trouble starting, *she'd* be the one to protect me!

FLAXLEY: But she didn't?

CAYLEY: She was enjoying the violence so much, she forgot!

FLAXLEY: Hmm... that sounds like my Kritz.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Honestly, Flaxley, there's only so much a thirteen year-old girl can take. First you embroiled me in an election that resulted in me getting death threats and now this.

FLAXLEY: And have you had any death threats *since* that day?

CAYLEY: No. I've just been called a harlot. Three times. All of them this morning. My first morning back in Tifaeris. So that's me labelled for life. And yes, I know that was my fault for letting Kyrie make that speech, but still. If you hadn't made me take part in that bloody election...

FLAXLEY: I didn't *make* you, you agreed!

CAYLEY: I said no! You just wouldn't listen! In the end, I just got swept along with it and found myself standing backstage. Listening to people threaten to behead and drown me.

FLAXLEY: Right... well, if that's true, I can only apologise.

CAYLEY: No, thanks. No more apologies. Not from *your* family! Your last apology came in the form of an offer of a weekend away. If I'd known I was being loaded into a carriage bound for Armageddon, I wouldn't have gone.

(She hung her head.)

CAYLEY: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes?

CAYLEY: I could have gone anywhere in the new world after washing up here. Leathrock, Ashrin, Guevina, you name it. I could have been a success anywhere, but I wanted to stay here because of *you*. But now... you and your family are making me miserable.

(A tear rolled down her cheek.)

CAYLEY: If I *wanted* to get killed, I would have stayed in Anoseta and let Axion murder me. But I wanted to live, so I fled. And I ended up here. My Sanctuary. A place where I thought I'd be safe, but... I'm not, am I? Not with you and Kritz around.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: So I'm thinking about leaving. I don't like this town anymore.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: It's affected you that badly, has it?

CAYLEY: Yes. And I know you think I'm just being weak...

FLAXLEY: Far from it! Being subjected to death threats and getting embroiled in violent brawls with no means of defending yourself would be too much for any thirteen year-old girl to handle. You're not being weak at all. In fact, if you were to take *all that* in your stride, I'd start to suspect you had a horrible dark side.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: No, no... your stance isn't just understandable; it's sensible.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: But, there is a way out.

CAYLEY: Is there?

FLAXLEY: There is. And it's quite a simple one.

CAYLEY: Oh?

FLAXLEY: What if I promise not to involve you in any more schemes? To assure you that if I ever need help with anything, I'll look for it elsewhere? After all, you've done more than enough for this town as it is. Asking for *more* from you would be taking liberties.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: So how about we agree that'd you've *done* your service to this town? Done more than your fair share, actually. And from now on, I'll exonerate you from any schemes this town gets involved in.

(Cayley forced half a smile.)

CAYLEY: And I can go about my life in peace?

FLAXLEY: With my blessing.

CAYLEY: Well... that would be nice.

FLAXLEY: No more than you deserve, young Cayley. You're an asset to this town and I can't afford to lose you, so if that's what it takes to keep you here, consider it done.

CAYLEY: No more involving me *any* schemes or policies?
FLAXLEY: Unless *you* 've devised them yourself.
CAYLEY: Promise?
FLAXLEY: I swear on my standing as a knight; I'll no longer involve you in *any* schemes.
(Cayley exhaled.)
CAYLEY: Thanks, Flaxley. That's reassuring.
FLAXLEY: You're very welcome, Cayley.
(Just then, the door crept open and Tito strolled in.)
TITO: Ah, Flaxley, there you are.
FLAXLEY: Tea-tree. Come on in.
CAYLEY: His name's Tito.
FLAXLEY: Ah, yes; well remembered.
CAYLEY: Like I'd forget the man who tried to get me lynched.
TITO: I did nothing of the sort.
FLAXLEY: Never mind that. How can I help you, Tito?
TITO: What do you mean, how can you help me? You know damned well why I'm here.
We arranged a meeting to discuss the new judicial system.
FLAXLEY: That was today, was it?
TITO: Yes.
(He rolled his eyes.)
TITO: Who keeps your diary?
FLAXLEY: Cayley does!
(He then glanced away innocently.)
FLAXLEY: Looking at it, however, is down to me. It's in there, is it?
CAYLEY: No.
FLAXLEY: Why not?
CAYLEY: I had no idea there was going to *be* a meeting.
TITO: I arranged it with you in the inn last night.
(Flaxley looked enlightened.)
FLAXLEY: I remember.
(He nodded.)
FLAXLEY: Shall we head to the conference room then? I want my team in on this.
TITO: You have a team?
FLAXLEY: Yes. Grainger, Warbury and Cayley.
TITO: And what do they do?
FLAXLEY: They're my trusted advisors. They formulate ideas and make plans for the improvement of this town.
(He smiled at Cayley.)
FLAXLEY: Young Cayley here has been especially invaluable.
(Cayley blushed.)
FLAXLEY: I want them in on it so they can help me figure things out. What you were describing in the inn yesterday sounded complicated.
TITO: The law *is* complicated.
FLAXLEY: Then it's a good job I have my best *minds* present. To the conference room!
(He then upped and headed out of Cayley's office.)
FLAXLEY: Grainger; Warbury; Conference room!
(Grainger and Warbury shared a shrug then headed after him. A short later once the five have of them had taken their seats at a long table in a room at the back, Flaxley leant back then glanced to Tito from the head the table.)
FLAXLEY: Begin.

(Tito nodded to him from the opposite end of the table then leant forwards.)

TITO: Right then, judging by reports from my team and having spoken to yourself, Flaxley, I realise that we really are starting from scratch here. You have no legal system whatsoever.

FLAXLEY: Yes, we do.

TITO: No, Flaxley. We discussed this. You deciding if someone is guilty or not then administering the punishment yourself is not a legal system.

FLAXLEY: It's a system of justice though.

TITO: Yes, but not at acceptable one.

FLAXLEY: Says who?

TITO: Me! And you need *me* to approve this before you can join the coalition.

FLAXLEY: Shit.

(He grimaced at his advisors.)

FLAXLEY: He's got me there.

TITO: Quite. So... first of all, you'll need courts. Are you familiar with courts?

FLAXLEY: Of course. I was a member of the royal court of Guevina for years.

TITO: I'm referring to *law* courts.

FLAXLEY: Then it's a no.

(He glanced to his advisors.)

FLAXLEY: Chaps?

WARBURY: A court is a building dedicated to the purpose of putting criminals on trial.

GRAINGER: Trials adjudicated by an independent judge.

WARBURY: In lesser cases, a judge listens to evidence from the defence *and* the prosecution before deciding whether the accused is guilty or not. In the more severe cases, a jury made of *citizens* decides whether the criminal is guilty or not.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He nodded knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: Like a military-discipline proceeding?

GRAINGER: Exactly like that.

WARBURY: Only the accused are civilians not military personnel.

FLAXLEY: I see. Then I *am* familiar with it.

(He glanced to Tito in bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: That's nowhere near as complicated as *you* made it sound!

CAYLEY: He always was a poor communicator.

TITO: Excuse me?

(He gave an exasperated sigh.)

TITO: I'm nothing of the sort! Flaxley, what I was describing to you yesterday was the judiciary.

FLAXLEY: The Jew who?

TITO: The judiciary. The people who preside over such hearings.

FLAXLEY: Right...

TITO: When you, as a government prosecute somebody, you bring in someone to state the case as to why the defendant is guilty. That person is called the prosecutor.

FLAXLEY: I recall. I played that role many times during military trials.

TITO: Then you know.

(He nodded.)

TITO: The fellow on trial is called the defendant. And in a proper and just legal system, that defendant must have someone speaking out in his defence. He can choose to represent himself, but he stands a better chance of a successful defence if he's represented by a legal professional.

FLAXLEY: I see. Well, that's simple enough. What you described last night wasn't. In fact it was wholly bewildering.

TITO: Yes... I realised it went over your head last night, that's why I decided to describe it in simplistic terms this time.

FLAXLEY: Are you saying I'm an idiot???

TITO: No. I'm just saying that I've realised using legal jargon to a layman is a waste of time.

FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. You're right. *You're* the idiot.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, so what happens next?

TITO: You need to set up a courtroom and hold a trial.

WARBURY: Sounds simple enough. The old meeting hall has been empty since... well... since we built a bigger one. We can make a courtroom in there.

GRAINGER: Indeed. All we need is a dock, a bench and a well. Malvo the carpenter could knock those up for us in no time. Then all we'll need is seats for a viewing gallery.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: I know the dock is where the accused has to stand. And the judge sits on the bench, right?

GRAINGER: Yes, an elevated area.

FLAXLEY: Just like a military court then. But... what's a well?

(Grainger growled.)

GRAINGER: It's where that cunt of a lawyer my wife hired...

(He ruffled his neck then spoke in a calmer voice.)

GRAINGER: Excuse me. It's where the prosecutor and the defence lawyer sit.

FLAXLEY: Right.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: In the Guevina military, that's called the battleground. Bloody drama queens.

(He then clapped his hands together.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Piece of piss, we'll have this done in no time. Grainger?

GRAINGER: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Go and see, Malvo. Get him to build those things as soon as possible. And don't overpay him.

GRAINGER: Roger.

FLAXLEY: And don't *underpay* him.

GRAINGER: I know the drill.

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Warbury?

WARBURY: Yes?

FLAXLEY: We need seats for this viewing gallery. See what you can arrange.

WARBURY: Will do.

FLAXLEY: Good man. Off you go then.

(With a nod, Grainger and Warbury instantly climbed to their feet and left the room. Left behind, Flaxley exhaled then looked to Tito.)

FLAXLEY: Leave it to me... um... blokey. I'll give you a shout when the trial's ready to start.

TITO: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

TITO: Flaxley, I think you're jumping the gun a bit there. There's more to a trial than simply building a courtroom!

FLAXLEY: I know. It's just like a military proceeding. And like I told you, I'm more than familiar with those. I'll prosecute and the bloke on trial... well... he can choose his own defendant.

(Tito groaned.)

TITO: The person on trial *is* the defendant. He gets to chose a defence *lawyer*!

FLAXLEY: Semantics.

TITO: But if he can't *afford* a defence lawyer, the state must provide one free of charge.

FLAXLEY: What?

TITO: See? You jumped the gun!

FLAXLEY: Hardly. I mean that's not even an issue. Finding a lawyer will be a piece of piss. Alfred James from the inn used to be a lawyer.

(Cayley raised a nervous finger.)

CAYLEY: He got disbarred.

FLAXLEY: He got what, sorry?

CAYLEY: Disbarred.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but you can't hold *that* against him. Over the years, I've seen hundreds of people get ejected from the pub.

(Tito looked to him in dismay.)

TITO: Disbarred means he was banned from practicing law!

CAYLEY: He let female clients pay him the naughty way.

TITO: That would do it.

FLAXLEY: Right. Well... not him then... but there has to *be* one.

TITO: Yes, but even if there is, you'll *still* need a qualified judge.

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, I'll do that.

TITO: You're the prosecutor.

FLAXLEY: I can do both.

TITO: Flaxley...

(He furrowed his brow.)

TITO: In that military court of yours, did you ever see a case where the judge and the prosecutor were the same person???

FLAXLEY: Don't be ridiculous. The poor fuckers would have been found guilty every time.

(He then looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. I see the problem.

TITO: Well, that's something I suppose.

(He sighed.)

TITO: Look... Flaxley... I do have a judge on my team.

FLAXLEY: You do?

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Then why ask me if *I* had one???

TITO: Because you'll need one going forward. You can use mine for the test trail, but you won't be able pass this stage of the alliance's requirements unless you commit to appointing one full time.

FLAXLEY: I see. Cayley? Put that on the to-do-list.

CAYLEY: Okay.

TITO: Superb.

(He nodded.)

TITO: Now, Flaxley, here is where you're about to come unstuck. And this is the *main* reason why I said you'd jumped the gun. The alliance nations have all adopted the international basic legal statute. The IBLS.

FLAXLEY: Right...

TITO: The judge, I can provide you with for now. And the good news is, *any* judge you try to appoint in the future, *will* be trained to act within the parameters of *that* statute.

(He smiled.)

TITO: The bad news is, to join the coalition, you'll need to *adopt* that code of laws and conduct all your trials within it. Your own laws will have to be abandoned.

FLAXLEY: Great. Now it sounds complicated again.

TITO: It is. But that's not your problem! You're the head of state. And trials are meant to be *independent* of the state. *You're* not going to be involved.

FLAXLEY: I'm not?

TITO: No!

(He rolled his eyes.)

TITO: Yes, you can be the prosecutor for the test trial, but going forward, all trials will be handled by legal professionals. Not you!

(He nodded calmly.)

TITO: You'll have to appoint a prosecutor to work directly alongside the police force. And appoint some state-funded defence lawyers. There's no such thing as a fair trial without one. Then, you'll have to let them get on with it. By that very code of law you're adopting, the head of state mustn't interfere with the legal process in any way.

(Flaxley mused over what he heard and slowly started to nod.)

FLAXLEY: It's complicated... but legal professionals know what they're doing... so I can leave it to them and get on with running the country... is that the shape of it?

TITO: That's the exact shape of it.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... I can live with that.

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Though... just out of curiosity... can we amend any of those laws to suit Tifaeris?

TITO: No.

FLAXLEY: Shit.

TITO: But you can add your own, *new* laws. They're called bylaws.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Your terms are acceptable. Now let's hold this trial. Grab your judge, and I'll find a defence lawyer.

TITO: Wait!

FLAXLEY: Wait?

TITO: You need a little bit more than a judge, a prosecutor and a lawyer, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: What? Ah, yes. The courtroom. We'll wait until it's finished then get going.

TITO: Um... no. There's also one *other* vital ingredient that you're forgetting.

(Flaxley mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... I can't think what.

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: He's referring to a defendant.

FLAXLEY: What?

CAYLEY: The accused. You can't hold a trial without one of them.

FLAXLEY: Oh, yes.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That's fine. It's only a test. You can do it, Cayley. What shall we pretend you were arrested for?

(Cayley furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: *I'm* not doing it! Knowing my luck, someone will see us and think it's a real trial. Before I know it, it'll be all over town that I'm a bank robber or something!

FLAXLEY: Cayley...

CAYLEY: No more schemes! You promised!

FLAXLEY: I...

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: I did, didn't I?

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I'll ask Anoka.

TITO: No, you won't. Flaxley, this will be a *real* trial. A pantomime isn't going to get you accepted to the coalition. I need to see that you're capable of hosting a genuine and fair trial for a *real* criminal.

FLAXLEY: Really? Fuck.

(He grimaced at Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: Do we have any of those?

CAYLEY: No. The cells are empty.

(She beamed heartily.)

CAYLEY: Crimes stopped getting solved after Kyrie was fired.

FLAXLEY: And that makes you happy, does it?

CAYLEY: Well... kind of. Phisele made my sister cry. She never cries normally. So it's nice to see her struggle.

FLAXLEY: I see...

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: So you *do* have a dark side.

(Tito shook his head at them.)

TITO: Look, just build your courthouse and find a defence lawyer. If it comes to it, you could always give an existing prisoner a retrial. That'll count.

FLAXLEY: Do we have any of those?

CAYLEY: We do. We have the people *Kyrie* arrested before Phisele took over and crimes stopped getting solved.

FLAXLEY: Cayley...

CAYLEY: Right. Um... well... there's Galton the murderer, for one. The one who used to be a policeman.

FLAXLEY: He'll do.

CAYLEY: Will he? If you lose, he'll have to go free. You know that, right?

FLAXLEY: Shit. Who else is there?

CAYLEY: The international art thief?

FLAXLEY: Not him. We're not taking any chances there. Who else?

CAYLEY: I'll find out.

FLAXLEY: Good girl.

(He then stood up.)

FLAXLEY: Leave it with me, Tito. I'll let you know once everything's arranged.

TITO: Very well. Please... be quick about it.

FLAXLEY: Why? Is there a time limit?

TITO: No. I just hate this stupid town and I want to go home.

(He then strode out of the room. Left behind, Flaxley could only furrow his brow.)

FLAXLEY: What a wanker.

A short while later, Flaxley returned to his home to find Kritz sitting at the large dining table, enjoying a freshly made cup of tea. Watching her, Flaxley shook his head then strode over to the table.

FLAXLEY: Darling?

KRITZ: Oh. Hello, love.

(She nodded towards the teapot.)

KRITZ: There's freshly made tea there.

FLAXLEY: Thanks for the tip.

(With that, he picked up the teapot, put it well out of her reach then sat down.)

KRITZ: You might want to grab a cup before you sit down.

FLAXLEY: No need. I'm not stopping for tea.

KRITZ: Then put the teapot back where I can reach it.

FLAXLEY: I won't be doing that, darling. I feel it'd be far safer to leave it where you *can't* reach it.

KRITZ: Oh?

FLAXLEY: You see... there's an important matter I'd like to discuss with you and I'd rather you weren't armed.

KRITZ: I'm *always* armed.

(She showed him her fist and beamed.)

KRITZ: These bad girls never sleep.

FLAXLEY: Right... anyway...

KRITZ: So what is it? What do you need to discuss with me?

(She furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: What have you done this time?

FLAXLEY: *I* haven't done anything! It's you!

KRITZ: Me?

FLAXLEY: Yes, *you*!

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Tell me the truth, woman. What *really* happened in Azagotse?

(Kritz nodded slowly.)

KRITZ: I see. You've spoken to Cayley, haven't you?

FLAXLEY: I have, yes.

KRITZ: Right...

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: She tells fibs, you know?

FLAXLEY: Then let's hear *your* side of the story.

KRITZ: You already did. We had a wonderful time. She just got a bit scared when a fight started.

FLAXLEY: And that's all you're going to tell me, is it?

KRITZ: There's nothing else *to* tell you.

(She glanced from side to side, shiftily.)

KRITZ: Why? What did *she* say happened?

FLAXLEY: Kritz, just be honest, will you? She didn't leave out the bit you're *hoping* she left out. She told me everything. So you won't incriminate yourself by *telling* me about it. I already know.

KRITZ: Right...

(She sucked her teeth.)

KRITZ: She mentioned the kidnapping then, I assume.

FLAXLEY: Oddly enough, yes.

KRITZ: And she's still miffed about it, is she?

FLAXLEY: Also oddly enough, yes.

KRITZ: I see. Well...

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: If you ask me, she's being a bit of a drama queen there.

FLAXLEY: A drama queen?

KRITZ: Wholly unreasonable. *Everyone* gets kidnapped.

FLAXLEY: No, they don't!

KRITZ: No, but a *lot* of people do. It's all part of growing up.

FLAXLEY: What? Are you seriously saying these words???

KRITZ: Yes!

(She furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: It was just one unfortunate episode in an otherwise fun weekend away.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(Flaxley glowered at her sarcastically.)

FLAXLEY: A fun weekend away... and yet, as bizarre as it may seem, *Cayley* didn't regard the traumatic experience of being tied to a chair for three hours to be an amusing holiday caper in a sea of whimsy that she could just giggle about then forget.

KRITZ: I know, right? She needs to lighten up!

FLAXLEY: Lighten up? Kritz, what was a weekend of fun and frolics for *you*; a jolly jaunt to Azagotse with the girls, was a living nightmare for that poor little bugger!

(He scoffed sarcastically.)

FLAXLEY: Though, personally, I don't know what she's so upset about. Being trapped in a warehouse with a snarling gang of criminals would be water off a duck's back to *most* thirteen year-old girls. And yet, for some *outrageous* reason, she hasn't forgotten about it already. Madness.

(He rolled his eyes.)

KRITZ: Really, Flaxley? Sarcasm?

FLAXLEY: Really, Kritz? Denial?

KRITZ: Denial?

FLAXLEY: Denying that you spent the entire weekend traumatising a little girl on what she mistaken thought was going to be a fun trip away to the seaside.

KRITZ: I didn't traumatise her!

FLAXLEY: Kritz!

KRITZ: Not *intentionally*.

(Her shoulders then slumped.)

KRITZ: Oh, who am I kidding?

FLAXLEY: Literally nobody!

(Kritz looked to him through troubled eyes.)

KRITZ: She didn't want to *go* to the casino, you know?

FLAXLEY: I know!

KRITZ: But I thought she'd enjoy herself once we got inside, so I kind of... persuaded her.

FLAXLEY: Badgered her and made her feel like she was a stick in the mud. Like she was ruining it for everyone.

KRITZ: Yeah... that was bad. I see that now.

FLAXLEY: And she didn't enjoy herself at all, did she?

KRITZ: Not in the slightest, no.

FLAXLEY: And yet you made her go back the following night!

(Kritz grimaced.)

KRITZ: Yeah... that really *was* bad.

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: I'd realised by then that having *her* there was currency, you see? And I kind of...well... I got blinded by the thought of all that cold hard cash.

FLAXLEY: Yes... well... I can see how *that* might happen.

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: What I can't fathom is, what happened *in between* those two nights. Why did you go to breakfast instead of rescuing her???

KRITZ: Well... I just thought... you know... if we took our time, they'd get anxious.

Nervous. They'd start sweating. Worried we weren't going to show. They'd turn on each other. Then, while they were at each other's throats, we could just tear in there and batter the lot of them whilst they were in disarray.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: It seemed like a good tactic in my head.

FLAXLEY: A good tactic? Leaving a little girl crying, in fear for her life, tied to a chair, surrounded by violent thugs is a good tactic, is it?

KRITZ: She wasn't *surrounded*!

(She grimaced.)

KRITZ: There were only four of them.

(She winced.)

KRITZ: Turns out it would have been really easy to just pop over there and get her straight away. In my defence though, I didn't know that. I thought she'd be with an actual gang.

With fifty or so.

(Her head flopped onto the table.)

KRITZ: I feel horrible.

FLAXLEY: Well, you're not alone in that, at least. Cayley thinks you're horrible too.

KRITZ: No doubt.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: She came to work late this morning, you know? With no enthusiasm whatsoever. She looked like she'd simply had enough.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: She was actually thinking of relocating.

(Kritz glowered at him suspiciously.)

KRITZ: Relocating? You didn't, did you? Tell me you didn't feel *so* guilty, you gave her an even bigger house than the one she conned out of *me*!

FLAXLEY: Conned?

KRITZ: Never mind that. Tell me you didn't give her a new house.

FLAXLEY: I didn't, no. She wasn't thinking of relocating to somewhere else in Tifaeris; she was thinking about leaving town forever!

KRITZ: What???

FLAXLEY: As she quite rightly stated, this continent was her sanctuary; a place she could feel safe. And she *could* have gone anywhere on this continent, but she chose to stay here, because of *us*.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: But now... she's started to feel unsafe here... and it's all because of you and I.

KRITZ: Me, you mean. What happened in Azagotse wasn't *your* fault.

FLAXLEY: No, but getting her embroiled in that election was.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Luckily she agreed to stay. But only because I promised not to involve her in my schemes anymore.

KRITZ: Well... that *some* good news.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: I'll make it right with her when I see her. I will. I was having so much fun making all that money this weekend, I lost sight of what's right. That's poor form. She really did have a torturous time, Flaxley. And at the time... I didn't care.

FLAXLEY: That's not like you, my love. You're excellent with kids.

KRITZ: Normally.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: But I was overcome by greed. I'm ashamed of myself.

FLAXLEY: Right. Well... make sure you tell her that.

KRITZ: I will. Now pass me my teapot.

FLAXLEY: And you won't throw it at me?

KRITZ: No. You were right to bring it up.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: So if you bring me a cup, I'll pour one for you as well.

FLAXLEY: Righto. That I can do.

(He then slid her the teapot.)

FLAXLEY: I married a good'un.

KRITZ: You married the best one. Now go and get that cup.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: And tonight, we'll head for the inn.

FLAXLEY: Excellent, I could use an ale.

KRITZ: Yes, but more to the point, Cayley's playing the piano there tonight. I'll use the occasion to make amends.

FLAXLEY: Outstanding.

(He then upped and headed into the kitchen.)

Over at the prison at the edge of town, a short while later, Cayley found herself standing at the prison entrance, waiting for the door to be answered. She did so patiently. She knew there was only ever one member of staff on duty, and that a lengthy wait might well be inevitable. Fortunately for her, however, within a minute of her ringing the bell, the door cranked open and the prison officer stepped out before her. It was the daytime guard, Horatio Brooks; a former military man with an air of authority about him. He was a no-nonsense fellow who always spoke abruptly and forcefully. A shy girl by nature, Cayley had always found him deeply intimidating. Knowing she had a job to do, however, she tried to see past her unease and engage with him confidently.

CAYLEY: Um, hello. I'm...

BROOKS: I know who you are. You're Sir Flaxley's child.

(Cayley beamed. How she wished that were true.)

CAYLEY: That's right.

BROOKS: And by his child, I don't mean his offspring, obviously. I mean the child who works for him.

CAYLEY: Aw.

BROOKS: Sorry?

CAYLEY: Um... nothing.

BROOKS: Nothing? Then why did you ring the bell? Not that you can *call* it ringing. It was such a weak ring, I thought I'd imagined it at first.

(He nodded.)

BROOKS: Good thing I came to check really.

CAYLEY: Right. Sorry. That bell's really stiff and that's as loud as I could ring it.

BROOKS: Really?

(With that, he pulled at the bell cord and rang it forcefully; creating a dozen loud chimes.)

BROOKS: It's not even remotely stiff. Clearly, you're just weak.

CAYLEY: Well...

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Yeah.

BROOKS: Chin up, young lady. Young girls are *meant* to be weak. That's no slight on you.

What are you? Fifteen?

CAYLEY: Thirteen.

BROOKS: What? With *those* boobs?

(Cayley covered her chest and pouted.)

CAYLEY: Yes!

BROOKS: I see.

(He nodded.)

BROOKS: Anyway, what can I do for you?

(Cayley lowered her arms then stood tall.)

CAYLEY: I've come in my capacity as a member of the town council.

BROOKS: Okay.

CAYLEY: I need to see what prisoners you have.

BROOKS: I see. Is there not a record at the town offices?

CAYLEY: Well... you'd *think* there would be, but no.

BROOKS: Right.

(He smiled.)

BROOKS: Why am I not surprised? Flaxley is an excellent soldier, but he's most definitely not a good record keeper!

(He then stepped back from the door and allowed her to pass.)

BROOKS: Come in.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

BROOKS: You're welcome.

(He then closed the door behind them and locked it. The move instantly set Cayley on edge.)

CAYLEY: Um... why have you locked it?

BROOKS: Because this is a prison!

CAYLEY: Oh.

(She blushed.)

CAYLEY: That makes sense.

BROOKS: Why? Did you think I had something perverted planned?

CAYLEY: Well... no...

BROOKS: Yes, you did!

CAYLEY: No, I... well... you did notice my chest.

BROOKS: In that skimpy top, it was hard not to.

CAYLEY: My sister *threw out* all my...

BROOKS: Don't fret, young lady. All I did was use it as a visual guide to guess your age. Poorly. I wasn't staring or anything.

CAYLEY: Well... okay.

BROOKS: Thank you.

(He sighed.)

BROOKS: But, you know, you're not the first young woman to get the wrong idea about me.

(He shook his head.)

BROOKS: It's the moustache, you see? It looks like it's competing with my eyebrows to see who could do the best broom impression. Apparently, it makes me look creepy.

(He smiled.)

BROOKS: The old, groomed eyebrows and moustache look. It was an image I cultivated during my time as a major in the East Edea Guards. I felt it made me come across as authoritative. A serious fellow who you shouldn't trifle with. But these days, well... it does me no favours.

(He then started to laugh.)

BROOKS: Who am I kidding? I didn't do me any favours back then either.

(Cayley managed a smile.)

CAYLEY: I think it looks fine.

BROOKS: Then you, young lady, need glasses.

(He nodded then gestured down the corridor.)

BROOKS: Shall we?

CAYLEY: Oh. Yes. Good idea.

BROOKS: Indeed.

(He then marched away down the corridor, very much underlining his military background.

His back was straight and his gait was very much regimented. Cayley had to jog to keep up with him. Luckily, she didn't have to run far. Physical exertion was not her strong point.

Very soon, they came to a second door and Brooks pulled some keys from his pocket.)

BROOKS: This is the cell block.

CAYLEY: Cell block?

BROOKS: That's right. You wanted to *see* the prisoners, didn't you?

CAYLEY: Well... no. I just wanted to know what prisoners you have.

BROOKS: I see. Well, we're here now, so I might as well show you.

(With that, he opened the door then passed through it, holding it open behind him. Somewhat daunted, however, Cayley didn't follow.)

BROOKS: Are you coming or not?

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: Prisoners!

BROOKS: Yes. Prisoners locked in their cells. You'll be fine.

(He smiled.)

BROOKS: And besides, even *you* could take these clowns in a fight. They're not exactly the most *hardened* blaggards you'll ever come across.

CAYLEY: I'm pretty sure I couldn't.

BROOKS: Just come. I'll protect you.

CAYLEY: Please do.

BROOKS: You have my word as a military man.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She then crept through the door with her eyes on stalks. Before her was a long, poorly lit corridor with twenty cells; ten on each side. It sent a chill down Cayley's spine.)

CAYLEY: Scary. We don't have to go far down, do we?

BROOKS: Nope. They're both at this end.

(He pointed to the cell on the left.)

BROOKS: One in there.

(He then pointed to the cell opposite.)

BROOKS: And the other in there.

CAYLEY: There's only two prisoners?

BROOKS: Yes. How many were you expecting? This is Sir Flaxley's town. Being a criminal here is asking for trouble.

(He rolled his eyes then gestured to the cell on his left.)

BROOKS: This fellow here is...

(Standing at the bars, the prisoner furrowed his brow.)

GALTON: She knows who I am!

BROOKS: I see. Well... he's in here for...

GALTON: She knows that too.

BROOKS: Right...

(Galton pouted at the whimpering Cayley.)

GALTON: Why did you get me thrown behind bars?

CAYLEY: I didn't!

GALTON: Yes, you did. You figured out that the murder weapon was my knife! Why would you do that? I had a perfectly good career in the police force and you ruined it!

BROOKS: *You* ruined it when you murdered a man!

GALTON: Yeah, but she didn't have to go and tell everyone.

(Cayley scoffed several times; several times too many to be convincing.)

CAYLEY: I did nothing of the sort. I'm just a kid! I spend *my* days skipping and playing with dolls like all the *other* children. It was my sister who solved the crime. I just happened to go to the police station with her.

(A bitter voice then rose up from the cell opposite.)

LEWIS: That's bollocks, Cayley!

(Cayley shrieked then turned around.)

CAYLEY: Who are you?

LEWIS: You know damned well who I am!

(Cayley grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Mr Lewis. Also known as The Black Squirrel. International art thief.

LEWIS: That's right. And I'd have got away with it too, if it wasn't for you meddling!

(He scoffed.)

LEWIS: Kids!

(Cayley shook her head desperately.)

CAYLEY: Nope! Wasn't me! My sister solved *that* crime too! At the time, I was on the beach, making sandcastles. I remember it well, because I grazed my knee on the way back and cried all the way home; like children do.

(She then looked to Brooks urgently.)

CAYLEY: Can we go now?

BROOKS: We can indeed.

LEWIS: I'll never forgive you for this!

GALTON: Nor will I!

CAYLEY: Aw, crap!

BROOKS: Shut up, you silly prisoners! It doesn't matter if you forgive her or not! You're not going to be able to do anything about it!

GALTON: Until we're released.

LEWIS: Yeah! Then she's for it.

BROOKS: Noted. I'll put that on your custody records. If you're ever released, you'll go after Cayley in revenge. Happy lifetime in jail, buffoons!

(He then led Cayley out of the cell block. Left behind, Lewis and Galton shared an uncomfortable grimace.)

GALTON: Did we just...

LEWIS: Extend our sentences indefinitely?

GALTON: Yeah.

LEWIS: Yes... yes, we did.

(They then groaned in defeat. In the corridor outside, at this time, Cayley was jogging after Brooks as they headed for the exit. His walking pace was something quite ridiculous.)

BROOKS: Are you okay?

CAYLEY: They scared me.

BROOKS: I thought as much. Well, don't worry. After that outburst, they'll never be getting out. And even if they do, they'll be too old and frail to do anything.

CAYLEY: Well... that's reassuring, I guess.

BROOKS: Good, good.

(He then stepped up to the gate and nodded.)

BROOKS: Okay, so now you know. We have two prisoners.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(Her shoulders slumped.)

CAYLEY: That frightened me. And it was all for nothing. I already *knew* those two were in there. I just wanted to know if there were any others.

BROOKS: I wish you'd said. I could have told you no, right here at the gate.

(He shrugged.)

BROOKS: I only took you to the cells because you said you wanted to *see* what prisoners we have.

(Cayley could only sigh.)

CAYLEY: Yeah. Like I always tell Kyrie... one poorly chosen word, really can have consequences.

BROOKS: Kyrie? Is that the local trollop?

CAYLEY: Yeah. My sister!

BROOKS: I see. Your sister's quite the slut. She'd sleep with anybody!

(He glanced upwards and exhaled.)

BROOKS: And what an evening it was.

CAYLEY: Yes, well... on that note...

BROOKS: Ah, yes. I'll let you out.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

(He nodded.)

BROOKS: So... did my info help?

CAYLEY: It did. Thank you.

(She smiled ruefully.)

CAYLEY: Just two prisoners... I guess Flaxley is just going to have to pick one.

(Brooks then opened the door and gestured towards it. With a smile, Cayley walked past him then headed away.)

CAYLEY: Bye, bye! Thanks again.

BROOKS: Farewell, young lady.

(Watching her go, Brooks couldn't help but smile.)

BROOKS: What a nice kid.

(He then closed the door and locked it again.)

That afternoon, following an extensive search, Sir Flaxley strode down to the beach then started to approach an elderly gentleman who was sunbathing in the sand. Allowing himself an affirming nod, he then strode up to him and opened his mouth to speak. The old man beat him to it, however.

RIDLEY: You're blocking my sun, you big oaf!!!

(Flaxley stepped to one side quickly.)

FLAXLEY: I do apologise, old chap.

(Ridley squinted at him.)

RIDLEY: Flaxley? Is that you?

FLAXLEY: It most certainly is.

RIDLEY: I see. That's different then. *You* can block my sun. It is your town, after all.
(They shared a barely amused chuckle then Flaxley sat down in the sand beside him.)

FLAXLEY: How's life treating you, Ridley?

RIDLEY: Well, you know. I can't complain. Unless some oaf blocks my sun!

FLAXLEY: So I see.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, this isn't a social call. I'm looking for a lawyer and you used to be one.

(Ridley sat bolt upright.)

RIDLEY: Oh no. Tell me you didn't succumb to temptation and doink the town trollop.

FLAXLEY: I...

RIDLEY: Kritz must be livid!

FLAXLEY: Relax. It's not that. Of course it's not. I have Kritz; why would I want to gamble that on sampling the town trollop?

RIDLEY: Because she's very sexy, that... Kyrie, is it?

FLAXLEY: It is, yes.

RIDLEY: Thought so.

(He grimaced.)

RIDLEY: So if it wasn't her, who *did* you doink?

FLAXLEY: Nobody!

RIDLEY: Not even Kritz?

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, but I'm allowed to do that!

RIDLEY: You make a good point.

(He raised an enquiring eyebrow.)

RIDLEY: So what do you need a lawyer for?

FLAXLEY: A case.

RIDLEY: I gathered that.

FLAXLEY: A test case.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I asked around and did my research, and it turns out there are only three lawyers in this entire town. The other two are a retired divorce lawyer and a civil litigator. Well, they're no use to me. I need a criminal lawyer.

(Ridley smirked.)

RIDLEY: If by that you mean a lawyer who's also a criminal, I can introduce you to dozens.

FLAXLEY: I'll bet.

RIDLEY: I can't say I know any criminal lawyers though.

FLAXLEY: Were *you* not a criminal lawyer?

RIDLEY: I was.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

RIDLEY: It's been a while though.

(He furrowed his brow.)

RIDLEY: I was one of Port Shehi's finest legal minds. Then they changed all the laws.

FLAXLEY: All of them?

RIDLEY: Pretty much. They dropped the age old Port Shehi statute and adopted the International Basic Legal Statutes. The IBLS. Well, I couldn't be bothered to relearn all the laws again, so I quit.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck. So you're not familiar with the IBLS either then?

RIDLEY: Familiar with it? Flaxley, if it bought me a pint and shook my hand, I *still* wouldn't recognise it. That statute and I are complete strangers.

(He shrugged.)

RIDLEY: I just wasn't interested, you see? I spent five long years training to be a lawyer; learning the law off by heart. And in a heartbeat that knowledge became useless. The statute I knew was gone. So I said fuck this and retired.

FLAXLEY: Bugger. I need a criminal lawyer who knows the IBLs.

RIDLEY: I see. Sorry, old chap. I can't help you.

FLAXLEY: Right.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, well. Thanks for your time anyway.

(He then climbed to his feet.)

RIDLEY: Are you off?

FLAXLEY: I am.

RIDLEY: Then don't block my sun.

FLAXLEY: You make a fair request.

(They shared a chuckle then Flaxley headed away; shaking his head.)

FLAXLEY: Bugger.

That evening, at the inn in the centre of Tifaeris, Flaxley and Kritz were watching Cayley perform a song at the piano. Like everyone else in the bar, they were hypnotised by her talent. Sitting at the table next to Flaxley and Kritz were Anoka and Kyrie. Extremely proud of her young sibling, Kyrie watched her with a heart full of love. Tito was at a table further down with two members of his team. Having never heard her perform before, they were utterly astonished. They never could have imagined that someone so young would be capable of putting in such a flawless performance. The landlord and landlady loved these evenings. When Cayley sang, people came from all over town to listen. Needless to say, sales rocketed.

KYRIE: Isn't she amazing?

ANOKA: Shush.

KYRIE: Agreed.

(She exhaled adoringly.)

KYRIE: That's my Cayley up there.

(Watching the performance from the next table, Kritz clutched her hands to her heart.)

KRITZ: She's amazing. Can we adopt her?

FLAXLEY: She comes in a package with Kyrie.

KRITZ: Right. Let's not do that then.

(Just then, Cayley sung the prolonged last note of the song and started to play the final crescendo on the piano. Knowing the end was nigh, everyone in the bar climbed to their feet and started to applaud. Moments later, she struck the final chord, before getting up and curtsying to her grateful audience.)

CAYLEY: Thank you. Thank you very much.

(She was then bombarded with commentary from the townspeople.)

DINO: Outstanding as always, young lady.

REG: You're so talented.

CLAIRE: You never fail to move my heart.

FRANKLIN: Bravo. You were fantastic.

GLENDIA: Stay away from my son! I've heard about you!

HILDA: You can stay away from mine an' all!

GRAHAM: Ignore *them*! You can marry *my* son!

CAYLEY: Um... I'll just go and sit down, I think.

JULIAN: Why not? You *deserve* a break; that was an excellent show.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

(She then scuttled away, desperate to get to the safety of her sister before any more angry mothers rounded on her.)

EDNA: You're a wonderful talent!

CAYLEY: Thank you!

EDNA: But if I ever catch you with your tongue in my son's mouth again, I'll...

CAYLEY: I get it!

(She then raced to Kyrie's table and threw herself down beside her. She instantly received a smothering hug.)

KYRIE: Sister face!!! How awesome were *you*?

CAYLEY: Um... thank you.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Honestly, Kyrie. I got caught kissing *one* boy that I shouldn't have, and all of a sudden, every mother in town hates me.

KYRIE: You'll get used to it.

CAYLEY: No, I won't. It's not fair. I'm a teenage girl. Teenage girls *like* kissing teenage boys. Since when was that a crime?

ANOKA: It isn't.

(She shrugged.)

ANOKA: But when the boy you're kissing *isn't* the one you're going out with...

CAYLEY: Oh, what do *you* know about going out with boys?

ANOKA: I...

(She chuckled.)

ANOKA: Touché. Absolutely nothing.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

(She ruffled her neck.)

CAYLEY: Anyway, I'm done with that. I'm never going out with a boy ever again.

ANOKA: Leaving you free to kiss as many as you like without any consequences?

CAYLEY: Shut up.

ANOKA: Thought so.

(Kyrie chuckled.)

KYRIE: Who'd have seen that one coming a year ago? My sister; a compulsive boy kisser. A serial snogger.

CAYLEY: I make no apologies for enjoying kissing.

ANOKA: And nobody expects you to.

(She smiled.)

ANOKA: But just out of interest, how many *have* you kissed?

(Cayley looked to her, slowly turning redder and redder.)

CAYLEY: I don't have to answer that.

ANOKA: You've lost count?

(She giggled.)

ANOKA: You trollop.

CAYLEY: Anoka...

(She then started to scooch across the seat towards Sir Flaxley.)

CAYLEY: I don't have to listen to this. I'm going to sit over here.

(She then arrived at Flaxley's side and nodded.)

CAYLEY: Hello.

FLAXLEY: Hello, young Cayley.

KRITZ: Hello, love. That was such an adorable performance. You were amazing.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

KRITZ: No, no. Thank *you*. You were *so* good, all the mothers of teenage boys stopped scowling at you for a moment there.

CAYLEY: It didn't take them long to get started again though.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Why do they all think I'm going to chase their sons? Have you *seen* some of their sons? Please. And besides, *boys* chase *me*. *I'm* not the predator.

(She folded her arms and pouted.)

CAYLEY: It's so unfair. There's only one mum in this town with a right to be miffed at me and she's not even here. So what are this lot so angry about? I'm innocent, damn it.

FLAXLEY: Yes... but, unfortunately, the speech Kyrie made at the election made you sound, how shall I put this...

KRITZ: Like you're working your way through the teenage male population.

FLAXLEY: Yeah.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Being Kyrie's sister must be hard work.

CAYLEY: It has its rewards.

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: Anyway, that's enough of that. Tito's over there, Flaxley. Should we update him?

(Flaxley nodded thoughtfully.)

FLAXLEY: It would save us seeking him out tomorrow, I suppose.

KRITZ: Wait, what? Update him?

FLAXLEY: Yes, like I told you earlier. We're struggling to meet the requirement for this trial case of his.

KRITZ: Oh, yeah.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: I'll fetch him.

(She then called across the bar.)

KRITZ: Tito, get your arse over here!

FLAXLEY: That's fetching him, is it?

KRITZ: As good as, yes.

(She nodded in the direction of Tito's table.)

KRITZ: See?

(Sure enough, Tito was heading over to them, wearing a miffed expression.)

TITO: That was you, was it?

KRITZ: Yup. Sit!

TITO: I'm not a basset hound!

KRITZ: And I'm not a squirrel.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: And now the irrelevancies are out of the way, you three can get down to business.

(She then sat back. As she did so, Tito took a seat at a table and folded his arms.)

TITO: So... what's this about?

FLAXLEY: Bad news, old chap.

TITO: Oh, god. Don't tell me there's a delay. I don't want to be stuck here forever.

FLAXLEY: There's a delay.

TITO: I said, *don't* say...

(He sighed.)

TITO: Go on then. What's the issue?

FLAXLEY: There are two, really.

TITO: Bugger.

FLAXLEY: Firstly, those two prisoners I mentioned earlier are literally the only two prisoners we have. There weren't any others and there's still nobody in custody. So we'd have to give a retrial to one of *those two* prisoners.

TITO: And that's fine.

FLAXLEY: I disagree. One of them is murderer and the other is an international art thief. And I don't particularly like the idea of giving *either* of them a second trial. I mean, if we lose, they'll go free.

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: And seeing as they've both promised to *get me* if they're ever released, neither of them deserve a second chance.

(Tito sucked his teeth.)

TITO: I see. Hmm... they *said* that did they?

CAYLEY: Yes!

TITO: Oh, dear.

(He grimaced at Flaxley.)

TITO: I visited the jail earlier, Flaxley. I just wanted to make sure your prisoners weren't being mistreated. You see, such a thing would *also* exclude you from joining the coalition.

FLAXLEY: Really? You never mentioned *that* before.

TITO: Of course, I didn't. If I forewarned a candidate, they might have a quick tidy up before I can complete my inspection. But don't worry, I was satisfied with what I saw.

FLAXLEY: Then why do you look so troubled?

TITO: Because any prisoner with a good friend who happens to own a sledgehammer, could free them in two seconds flat. They'd just have to knock the cell wall down. Bang. Gone. And Cayley here is done for.

(Cayley screeched then clung onto Flaxley.)

CAYLEY: Why?

TITO: Because they said they'd get you.

CAYLEY: I mean, why do these things always happen to me?

FLAXLEY: They haven't yet!

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: And they never will! I'll get the builders on it first thing in the morning.

TITO: Good. There's needs to be a guarded outer perimeter. With barbed wire!

FLAXLEY: I'll tell them.

TITO: But it mustn't block out their sunlight. That would be a cruel and unusual punishment, which is banned under the statutes.

FLAXLEY: Fuck.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: That'll take up space.

CAYLEY: There's room. Get it built.

FLAXLEY: Fine.

CAYLEY: Tonight! I'm scared!

FLAXLEY: They'll start tomorrow.

CAYLEY: Fine. But I'm sleeping in Kyrie's room until it's complete.

FLAXLEY: I have no objection to that.

(Cayley glowered at him.)

CAYLEY: Your thoughtfulness is appreciated.

KRITZ: Really, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: What?

TITO: Look, let's stick to the matter in hand, shall we?

CAYLEY: The matter in hand is my safety!

TITO: You'll be fine! Just get someone to patrol outside for now.

CAYLEY: Starting tonight.

FLAXLEY: I'll speak to Phisele.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

TITO: Great. Now that's established, we can get back to the issue of the two prisoners.

(He nodded.)

TITO: How confident are you that they're guilty?

FLAXLEY: One hundred percent.

CAYLEY: One of them confessed, the other was caught red-handed. *Then* confessed.

TITO: And you can prove that, can you?

FLAXLEY: Absolutely. Their guilt was never in doubt.

TITO: Then what are you worried about? If their guilt is *that* obvious, they're bound to be found guilty again.

CAYLEY: And get longer sentences?

TITO: That would be up to the judge. But, seeing as there's been death threats, I should imagine they'll *never* get out again.

FLAXLEY: I see. Well... that's reassuring.

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Question is, which one do we put on trail?

CAYLEY: Galton the murderer.

FLAXLEY: Why?

CAYLEY: Because Mr Lewis is a cunning genius. A conman. He evaded capture for years, remember? If either of them is capable of finding a technicality with which to get themselves exonerated it's him.

FLAXLEY: I see. So we'll retry Galton then.

CAYLEY: Yes, please.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That's one of the two issues put to bed.

TITO: And what's the other?

FLAXLEY: There isn't a single person in this entire town who's familiar with the International Basic Legal Statute.

(Tito's shoulders slumped.)

TITO: You're kidding.

FLAXLEY: Do I look like I'm kidding?

TITO: But there has to be *one*, surely.

FLAXLEY: Nope. Not a one. I consulted *all* the former lawyers in this town earlier and none of them know it.

TITO: Really?

FLAXLEY: Yes!

TITO: But surely, there has to be at least *one* person! One person! This town has a population of literally tens of thousands. Somebody has to be well-versed in the IBLs, surely!

KRITZ: He already told you there isn't!

(Kritz then glanced towards Cayley and immediately raised a suspicious eyebrow. She was glancing away innocently, trying to appear like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.)

KRITZ: But maybe he was wrong.

FLAXLEY: Oh?

TITO: Please tell me that's true.

(Kritz nodded them towards Cayley.)

KRITZ: Look.

(Cayley was grimacing into the distance, determined to avoid making eye-contact with anyone.)

FLAXLEY: I recognise that innocent act.

KRITZ: She's as guilty as sin.

TITO: I concur.

FLAXLEY: Cayley!

(Cayley continued to look away and pretended to not to hear him. She was however, starting to whimper and sweat.)

FLAXLEY: You know it, don't you? You know in the international statute.

(Cayley gulped.)

CAYLEY: Um... no?

FLAXLEY: Yes, you do!

(Cayley swiftly glanced at him with puppy dog eyes.)

CAYLEY: No more schemes! You promised me!

FLAXLEY: But this is different!

KRITZ: No! Stop!

(She looked to her husband.)

KRITZ: If she doesn't want to do it, that's fine.

(She smiled at Cayley.)

KRITZ: You've had a torrid time lately because of my husband and I, haven't you, love? He was rotten to you during the election and *my* treatment of you in Azagotse was horrendous. I can't apologise enough for that. We've put you through a lot.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: And I'm not prepared to put you through anything else.

(She then looked to her husband.)

KRITZ: Find someone else.

FLAXLEY: I tried. There isn't anyone.

KRITZ: Then try harder. Cayley's helped us out a million times already. And it's always been to the detriment of herself. She's had death threats, she's been kidnapped, she's been stuck in the middle of bar brawls, *and* she's become a hate figure among mums with teenage sons. *We* did that to her. And it's not fair to ask her to do more.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: I see what you're saying, but I'm not asking her to do anything risky. I'm just asking her to take part in a trial. A trial where the guilty party is bound to be convicted.

CAYLEY: Then blame me forever!

FLAXLEY: Which is irrelevant, because he'll be stuck in *jail* forever and won't be able to do anything about it.

CAYLEY: You don't know that.

(She shook her head defiantly.)

CAYLEY: I won't do it.

FLAXLEY: Cayley...

CAYLEY: I won't! I refuse!

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He smiled ruefully.)

FLAXLEY: Well... if that's your decision then... I'll happily abide by it.

(He then looked to Kritz and spoke up, very much making sure Cayley could hear him.)

FLAXLEY: Maybe I'll get Anoka to learn the statute. *She* wouldn't let me down. *She'd* be only too happy to help. Like a good daughter *should*. A *good* daughter will *always* help out her father if he asks.

(Convinced that she was his daughter, Cayley whimpered.)

FLAXLEY: It'll take a while and we'll have lost all *hope* of joining the alliance by the time she's learned it, but what can you do? I'm just happy to have a daughter I *can* rely on.

CAYLEY: I'll do it!

(Flaxley turned to face her and raised an eyebrow, casually.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, what was that?

CAYLEY: I said...

(She sighed in defeat.)

CAYLEY: I said I'll do it.

FLAXLEY: No, no. Not if you don't want to.

CAYLEY: But I do.

FLAXLEY: Oh. Well... if you're sure.

(Cayley pouted.)

CAYLEY: I'm sure.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He smiled warmly.)

FLAXLEY: Why, thank you. You're one of the good ones, you are. I'm so glad you ended up here in Tifaeris, Cayley. You're truly are a welcome addition to our family.

(Cayley instantly went starry-eyed.)

CAYLEY: Really?

FLAXLEY: Absolutely.

CAYLEY: Do you really mean that?

FLAXLEY: Of course.

CAYLEY: I'm so happy!

(Kyrie then leant towards her.)

KYRIE: It's getting late, Cayley. We need to get you home.

CAYLEY: But, Kyrie, I...

KYRIE: Sore bum!

CAYLEY: What?

KYRIE: Sorry. I was just predicting your future if you don't get off your arse right now.

CAYLEY: Aw.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: Why did you have to wait until now to start making clever remarks?

KYRIE: I didn't know I had.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She then climbed to her feet and turned to wave to Flaxley and Kritz.)

CAYLEY: Bye, Family.

KRITZ: Bye, love.

FLAXLEY: Goodbye, Cayley.

(Cayley then headed away, clutching Kyrie's arm. Left behind, Flaxley nodded to himself then looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Looks like...

KRITZ: How do you sleep at night?

FLAXLEY: What?

KRITZ: She's a welcome addition to our family???

FLAXLEY: That's right.

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: I was, of course, referring to the *Tifaeris* family.

(He smirked at her knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: I was wonderfully cunning there.

KRITZ: You were manipulative and cruel, you mean?

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

KRITZ: You played on her yearning to be recognised as your daughter!

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(He pointed to his cranium.)

FLAXLEY: It's not just a plinth for a helmet, you know?

KRITZ: Wow.

(She shook her head.)

KRITZ: That was contemptible.

FLAXLEY: That was inspired!

KRITZ: Most crimes *are*!

FLAXLEY: Crimes???

(Kritz gave a contemptuous sigh.)

KRITZ: Yes! Moral ones! Flaxley, that was akin to saying, "If you *don't* help, you're no daughter of mine!" And you know how much she wants to be your daughter.

FLAXLEY: Of course, I do. It wouldn't have worked if she didn't.

KRITZ: Wow. Okay. Fine. Do what you want. Just remember, the *consequences* of your actions will yours alone to face!

FLAXLEY: What consequences?

KRITZ: The obvious ones! You made her do something she absolutely didn't want to do, in exchange for the gift of parenthood.

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: Now you're going to have to *live up* to that promise and start *being* her parent!

FLAXLEY: What?

KRITZ: You heard! It's either *that* or pretend you never said it and shatter the poor girl's heart into a million tiny fragments.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Yes. I see. Shit.

(He then shrugged it off.)

FLAXLEY: It'll be fine. I'm sure it won't be that hard to fake paternal feelings for her.

KRITZ: No! You did not just say that! You're horrible!

FLAXLEY: I'm lovely!!!

KRITZ: I'm going to pretend you didn't say that as well!

(She then shook her head.)

KRITZ: Just... forget it. This is going to end badly, and you know it. And when it does, don't come crying to me.

FLAXLEY: When have I ever come crying to...

KRITZ: Don't push it, fart stick!

FLAXLEY: Fart stick?

KRITZ: It was the first insult that came into my head.

(She ruffled her neck.)

KRITZ: Probably because Tito here is *built* like a stick and I'm pretty sure he just farted.

FLAXLEY: Really?

(He puffed out.)

FLAXLEY: That was *him*, was it? Blimey. That's quite the talent he's got. I've never known such a stench. Is he pregnant and farting for two?
(Tito looked to them with a miffed expression on his face.)
TITO: Do you mind?
FLAXLEY: What?
TITO: I'm sitting right here!
KRITZ: Sitting or sh...
TITO: Sitting!
FLAXLEY: Yes, well, never mind that. I'm glad you've piped up, Tito.
TITO: Piped up?
FLAXLEY: That's right.
(He nodded.)
FLAXLEY: Good news. We've found a defence lawyer, well-versed in the IBLS.
TITO: Yes... I know. I was sitting right here, remember? Sitting here; watching. Watching as you subjected that poor, unfortunate orphan to the cruellest form of emotional blackmail possible. One that's bound to backfire.
(He nodded sarcastically.)
TITO: But that's okay, it's only the *child* who'll end up being hurt.
FLAXLEY: Would you like a punch in the face?
TITO: I'm going to say no.
FLAXLEY: Shut up then.
TITO: I will. In fact, I'm going back to my team.
(He then climbed to his feet.)
TITO: Assemble everyone at the courtroom at noon tomorrow. Including the accused. We'll hold the trial then.
FLAXLEY: Excellent.
TITO: Yes... it is.
(He then headed away. Having watched him go, Flaxley exhaled then looked to Kritz.)
FLAXLEY: It's on. We're finally getting somewhere.
(His face then dropped.)
FLAXLEY: Right. Um... don't scowl at me like that, my love. You're making a scene.
(Kritz just shook her head at him, slowly and contemptuously.)
KRITZ: This is all gonna blow up in your face; you realise that, don't you? By this time next week, Cayley will have moved to Leathrock to get away from you, and we'll have lost the best planner this town ever had!
(Flaxley could only shrug at her.)
FLAXLEY: Well... if she does then... I'll find her and persuade her to come back.
KRITZ: And *how* will you find her?
(She nodded.)
KRITZ: Oh, that's right. You can simply follow the trail of tears she leaves on her way out of town!
FLAXLEY: Don't be a drama queen!
KRITZ: I'm not!
(She sighed.)
KRITZ: You've really fucked up this time, my love. And I mean *really*.

The next day, Flaxley arrived outside the town's old meeting hall at ten minutes before noon. Giving the building the once over with his eyes, he couldn't help but afford himself a smile. It didn't seem so long ago that the townsfolk had held their first ever meeting there. A

population of just over two hundred people had gathered within, to discuss the idea of building a protective town wall. They'd voted unanimously to do so. That was well over twenty five years ago. The wall had long since been completed. It hadn't remained standing for long, however. As the town expanded, the wall very quickly started to get in the way. It ended up being demolished just five years after it was completed. Delighted that the old meeting hall hadn't met with the same fate, Flaxley couldn't help but exhale.

FLAXLEY: This old building served us well over the years. I'm glad we've found a use for it.

(Just then, a gleeful voice spoke up from behind him.)

CAYLEY: Hello, family!

(Flaxley froze. This was a sign. Kritz was right. She'd called him family, which was only a stone's throw away from calling him father. And that was only inches away from calling him daddy. He needed to talk her down and talk her down fast.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley...

(He then turned and glanced down into her loving eyes. At once, his eagerness to let her down vanished entirely. Staring at her cherubic face, he couldn't help but feel that reminding her that she was *not* his child would be akin to throwing her off a cliff and laughing at her. Unable to continue looking at her, he sighed then glanced at the building again.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz gave you the message then?

CAYLEY: Yup. She came to the office and told me you wouldn't be in today; and that I had to meet you here for the trial before noon.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

CAYLEY: She also said a few weird thing things that I didn't understand.

FLAXLEY: Oh?

CAYLEY: Yeah.

(She grimaced.)

CAYLEY: She told me not to worry; and that she'd throttle you for me when the inevitable happens.

FLAXLEY: Yes... she said a similar thing to me before I bedded down on the sofa for the night.

CAYLEY: But what does it mean?

FLAXLEY: Well... she... she was just saying that if I upset you again, she'll be cross.

CAYLEY: Right.

(She beamed.)

CAYLEY: You wouldn't do that. We're family.

(She then strutted towards the door.)

CAYLEY: Are you coming?

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Yes... I suppose I should.

(He then followed her inside the hall. Upon entering, he found Tito in discussion with a gentleman in a black cloak. At the far end of the room, the defendant Galton was handcuffed to a small wooden dock, glowering at the seat next to it; upon which Phisele was sitting down, eating an apple. There were also two strangers, sitting on seats at the back of the hall. Happy to note that everyone was present, he then glanced around the room again. The room was very much set out like the military courts in Guevina. At the far end was an enclosed platform for the judge; the bench. Next to it was the dock. And opposite it there were two tables; one for the prosecution and another for the defence. Flaxley approved.)

FLAXLEY: Fair play to the lad. Malvo did a splendid job with the carpentry.

(Cayley glanced up at him and mused to herself. It seemed strange to her to hear him refer to Malvo as a lad. He was a grown man with children her age.)

CAYLEY: Lad...

FLAXLEY: Yes. Malvo. I known him since he was... well... younger than you.

CAYLEY: Gotcha.

(He chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: He's not exactly a lad anymore though, is he? He's got a son your age. Perhaps you know him.

(Cayley instantly turned red.)

CAYLEY: Um... no.

FLAXLEY: Well, that's a lie.

(He raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Didn't kiss *him* as well, did you?

CAYLEY: We should get on with the trial!

FLAXLEY: That's a yes.

CAYLEY: I just want to get the trial started, Flaxley. It's an important step in Tifaeris's acceptance to the alliance. Therefore, I refuse to confirm or deny any rumours.

FLAXLEY: That's definitely a yes.

(He then headed over to Tito, leaving a grimacing Cayley in his wake.)

FLAXLEY: T... something!

TITO: Tito!

FLAXLEY: Flaxley; nice to meet you.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: And who is this fine fellow?

TITO: He's going to be the judge at today's hearing.

FLAXLEY: Really? I'd never have guessed. You see, I saw the black cloak and instantly assumed he must be a court jester.

TITO: Well, he isn't.

(Flaxley blinked at him nonchalantly.)

FLAXLEY: I was being sarcastic, you... never mind. Are you going to introduce us?

TITO: Very well.

(He nodded.)

TITO: Sir Flaxley, this is the judge.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: You...

(The judge then reached out his hand to Flaxley and stopped him in his tracks.)

JUDGE: Hello there, my friends call me Julian. Julian Judge.

FLAXLEY: Nice to meet you, Julian the Judge.

JUDGE: No. Julian Judge. Judge is my surname.

FLAXLEY: So... you're Judge Judge?

JUDGE: Ridiculous, isn't it?

FLAXLEY: Yes, but who am I to judge?

(They shared an amused chuckle, much to Tito's disdain.)

TITO: Spare me.

(He shook his head.)

TITO: Look, do you want to get started?

(He pointed to the seats in the corner where two of his team were seated.)

TITO: Those two are observers. They're going to be assessing the trial to see it was handled correctly. The result is irrelevant. All they want to see is the prosecution offer an honest account of the evidence, and for the defence lawyer to put up a robust defence.

(He looked to Cayley.)

TITO: Do your utmost to clear the defendant's name.

CAYLEY: Um... I'll try.

TITO: Make sure you do, because if you don't, he won't get a fair trial. And if he *doesn't* get a fair trial, Tifaeris can kiss goodbye to joining the coalition.

CAYLEY: Understood.

FLAXLEY: Good girl. Just do your best, Cayley.

TITO: You too, Flaxley. Do your utmost to be *honest* with your evidence.

FLAXLEY: Now that I can do.

TITO: Jolly good. Because if my team are satisfied that the procedure was handled properly, you'll pass and be one step closer to joining the alliance.

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, I'm sure your team will more than merely satisfied, bloke. They'll be impressed!

TITO: I hope *so*.

(He sighed.)

TITO: I really do. I hate it here so much, I'm even starting to miss my wife.

FLAXLEY: You have a wife?

TITO: Yes.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: I guess there really *is* somebody out there for everyone.

TITO: You...

FLAXLEY: Yes?

TITO: Doesn't matter. Just... take up your positions so we can get the ball rolling.

FLAXLEY: Righto.

TITO: The prosecution sits at the desk to the right as you enter the court. The defence to the left, obviously.

(He nodded.)

TITO: Now who's going to prosecute; you or Phisele over there?

FLAXLEY: That would be me. Seeing as I've done prosecution work before.

TITO: Okay then.

(They then watched as Cayley headed to the defender's table and sat down.)

TITO: Maybe you should join her in the well.

FLAXLEY: Seems unlikely. That place closed five years ago. It's the Riverside Tavern now. And besides, we've got work to do.

TITO: The well is that area with the two tables in it.

FLAXLEY: Oh.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: The battleground.

TITO: No, the well. It's not a military court.

FLAXLEY: We'll see.

TITO: What?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that. I have a job to perform.

(He then headed to his table and sat down. As he did so, Tito gave the judge the thumbs up, prompting him to head for the bench. Moments later, once he'd sat down in his seat, he cleared his throat then addressed the court.)

JUDGE: Silence in court, please, ladies and gentleman. Tifaeris criminal case zero, zero, zero one is now commencing. Case subheading: The people of Tifaeris versus Mr Galton.

GALTON: That's hardly fair. All that lot against me?

JUDGE: Shut up, you buffoon!

GALTON: I'm just saying.

JUDGE: Well, don't! I said silence!

(He ruffled his neck then resumed.)

JUDGE: The accused is being tried on a charge of murder in the first degree in the case of Victor Baker. Speaking on behalf of the prosecution is Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris. And Miss Cayley Severen will be acting on behalf of the accused.

GALTON: Aw, crap. I wish I hadn't threatened to kill her now.

JUDGE: Silence! One more outburst from you and I'll hold you in contempt!

GALTON: Um... what does that mean?

JUDGE: You'll go to prison!

GALTON: But I already live in prison!

JUDGE: Yes, but shut up anyway.

GALTON: Right...

JUDGE: Now where were we?

(He nodded.)

JUDGE: Oh, yes. Case zero, zero, zero one, Judge Judge presiding. Sir, Flaxley, would you like to call you first witness?

(Flaxley stared at him blankly.)

FLAXLEY: Witness?

JUDGE: Yes, witness.

FLAXLEY: Um... no.

JUDGE: No???

FLAXLEY: I was just going to tell you what happened.

JUDGE: That's not how a criminal court works. You need to question witnesses.

FLAXLEY: Since when?

JUDGE: Since forever!

FLAXLEY: Not in my experience.

JUDGE: Oh? Prosecuted criminal cases before, have you?

FLAXLEY: No.

JUDGE: Then what experience?

FLAXLEY: Court martials.

(The judge sighed.)

JUDGE: None then.

FLAXLEY: Well...

JUDGE: Look, you *can* give evidence as a prosecutor but you'll have to stand, and the defence *will* be able to cross-examine you.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He sucked his teeth then started to wrack his brains.)

FLAXLEY: Cross-examine...

(Cayley whimpered then spoke from the corner of her mouth.)

CAYLEY: Flaxley, just call Phisele as a witness and ask *her* to explain events.

FLAXLEY: What?

(Cayley glanced away innocently.)

CAYLEY: Don't ask *me* to help, that'd be a flagrant perversion of the course of justice.

FLAXLEY: Why, you little...

(Cayley then spoke from the corner of her mouth again.)

CAYLEY: Call Phisele.

FLAXLEY: Phisele?

(Phisele glanced up.)

PHISELE: Yes?

FLAXLEY: What?

PHISELE: You called me.

FLAXLEY: No, I didn't.

(The judge furrowed his brow.)

JUDGE: Are you calling her as a witness or not?

FLAXLEY: I don't know.

(Cayley winced.)

CAYLEY: Say yes.

FLAXLEY: Yes, then!

JUDGE: Thank you.

(He rolled his eyes.)

JUDGE: Can the witness make her way to the...

(He then glanced around the room and frowned.)

JUDGE: Where's the witness stand?

(Flaxley scratched his head.)

FLAXLEY: Were we meant to provide one? Nobody said anything to *me*.

PHISELE: Can't we just call *this* the witness stand for now?

(She gestured to where her seat was located.)

PHISELE: Seeing as I'm already here.

JUDGE: I guess we'll have to.

(He ruffled his neck.)

JUDGE: Miss Phisele, please be upstanding.

PHISELE: Okay.

(She climbed to her feet.)

JUDGE: Now raise your right hand and repeat what the clerk of the court tells you.

(He then glanced around the courtroom again before hanging his head.)

JUDGE: You don't have one, do you?

FLAXLEY: I don't even know what one is!

JUDGE: Oh, for...

(He looked to Phisele.)

JUDGE: Just repeat after me. I swear upon all that's holy, that I shall tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help my soul.

PHISELE: I swear upon all that's holy, that's I shall tell the truth, the half truth and nothing but the truth so help me I will.

(The judge groaned.)

JUDGE: Close enough. Any half truths though and I'll hold you in contempt.

PHISELE: And send me to prison? Fuck that! Find someone else, Flaxley.

JUDGE: Phisele, you'll be fine as long as you tell the honest truth.

PHISELE: Right... well... I'd better be. If I get slung in jail, I'll come for you, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, if that happens, you'll be wasting your time coming for *me*. Kritz will have already killed me *long* before you get out.

PHISELE: Good. Then you know where you stand.

(She looked to the judge.)

PHISELE: What do you want to know?

JUDGE: Nothing! I just want you to answer Flaxley's questions.

FLAXLEY: I have questions?

JUDGE: Well, you'd better bloody do, or this'll be a bloody short trial.

FLAXLEY: Shit...

(He sucked his teeth then leant his ear in Cayley's direction, hoping to hear her whisper.)

CAYLEY: Ask her about the arrest.

(Flaxley looked enlightened then nodded towards Phisele.)

FLAXLEY: What the about the arrest?

PHISELE: What about it?

FLAXLEY: That's what I'm saying.

PHISELE: What?

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: We might as well go home *now*.

FLAXLEY: Don't be ridiculous! We're not going anywhere!

JUDGE: We're not *getting* anywhere either! Ask her a question.

FLAXLEY: Fine.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Is Galton guilty of murder?

PHISELE: Yes!

FLAXLEY: Result. My case rests.

CAYLEY: No, it doesn't. The judge needs the details.

JUDGE: Silence, defence counsel!

CAYLEY: I apologise, your honour.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. Phisele?

PHISELE: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Give me the details? Is that the right question?

JUDGE: We shall see?

PHISELE: Well... acting in my role as the chief of police, I attended the scene of a murder. The victim's name was Victor Baker. After an extensive investigation, we found out that Galton killed him.

FLAXLEY: A-ha! Now my case rests!

CAYLEY: No, it doesn't.

FLAXLEY: I stand corrected.

JUDGE: Wait!

(He furrowed his brow at Cayley.)

JUDGE: Prompt him one more time and you'll be held in contempt young lady.

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: No! Please don't send me to jail!

FLAXLEY: Quite! I'll beat you up in you do!

JUDGE: Excuse me???

FLAXLEY: She's thirteen!

JUDGE: I see. *She'll* be getting a fine then. But if you threaten me with violence *again*, you *will* be going to jail! *You're* not thirteen!

FLAXLEY: Yeah? I'd like to see you...

JUDGE: Silence!

(He looked to Phisele.)

JUDGE: I need to know *how* you're one hundred percent sure that Galton was the guilty party. I need to know what *led* you to that conclusion.

PHISELE: Right. Well...

JUDGE: Wait!

(He looked to Flaxley.)

JUDGE: I need you to ask her questions to that effect.

FLAXLEY: Right... well... that makes sense...

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: What led you to that conclusion, Phisele?

PHISELE: Well... it was pretty obvious really.

FLAXLEY: And that's good enough for me.

JUDGE: But not for me!

FLAXLEY: Shit.

JUDGE: Why was it obvious?

PHISELE: He was employed in my department at the time. He was my subordinate. I asked him and another particularly dim-witted officer to search the area around the murder scene for a bloody knife. The victim had been stabbed, you see?

JUDGE: Okay...

PHISELE: He tricked the dim-witted officer into searching everywhere except where he'd thrown the knife.

(She nodded.)

PHISELE: Unfortunately for him, we searched again. It was a police issue knife. Sadly, it the most common kind. It wasn't much of a clue on its own, but there were other factors.

FLAXLEY: Keep going, you're doing splendidly. Tell him about the other factors.

PHISELE: I will. You see, Galton had just happened to keep turning up to work without his police knife, right at the time of the murder.

(Cayley stood up.)

CAYLEY: Objection. Co-incidental.

PHISELE: Why, you horrible...

JUDGE: Phisele!

PHISELE: But it was vital part of the investigation! Because when challenged about it, he panicked and tried to flee. One of my officers managed to restrain him and he confessed. He said it was an accident at first. Mr Baker ran into the knife he was holding. Angered, Mr Baker called him a rude name, so he stabbed him several times then cut off his head to make it look like a suicide.

JUDGE: A suicide???

PHISELE: He's quite genuinely that dim.

JUDGE: Right.

PHISELE: But yes. He gave a full and frank confession.

JUDGE: Then the defence's objection is overruled.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

JUDGE: Flaxley? Any *further* questions?

(Flaxley looked at him blankly.)

FLAXLEY: Um...

(He glanced at Cayley.)

JUDGE: She can't help you.

FLAXLEY: I'm sure she can, she's very smart.

JUDGE: She's not permitted to.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: In that case, I have no further questions for now.

JUDGE: Thank you. Please be seated.

FLAXLEY: Gladly.

(He then sat down and puffed out. As he did so, the judge looked to Cayley.)

JUDGE: Would you like to cross-examine?

CAYLEY: Yes, please, your honour.

(She then climbed to her feet.)

CAYLEY: Miss Phisele, can we see this knife you claim to be the murder weapon?

PHISELE: No.

CAYLEY: And why would that be?

PHISELE: We binned it.

CAYLEY: I see. Then maybe we can see the signed confession from the accused.

(Phisele furrowed her brow.)

PHISELE: You know damned well we didn't get one. You were...

CAYLEY: Your honour! I move to strike Miss Phisele's testimony from the record. Without any physical evidence, her whole statement is entirely uncorroborated. It's just her word against that of the accused.

JUDGE: Hmm... do you have *any* physical evidence, Miss Phisele?

PHISELE: Um... no. We don't keep...

JUDGE: Then your statement is stricken from the record in its entirety.

PHISELE: Oh, Cayley, you've really done it this...

JUDGE: Next witness, Sir Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Um... I don't have one.

JUDGE: Then maybe you could question yourself.

FLAXLEY: I can only confirm what Phisele said.

JUDGE: I see.

(He nodded.)

JUDGE: Well... unless you can come up with a good reason to the contrary, you'll leave me no choice but to find the defendant not guilty.

FLAXLEY: Meaning?

JUDGE: He'll go free.

FLAXLEY: What???

(He glowered at Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: You little...

(Before he could go any further, Cayley mumbled from the side of her mouth.)

CAYLEY: Call Galton.

FLAXLEY: What?

(Cayley just glanced away, innocently.)

FLAXLEY: I...

(An enlightened expression then crossed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. Good thinking. Judge, I misspoke.

JUDGE: Oh? So you *do* have another witness?

FLAXLEY: I do, yes. I call the guilty party. Galton.

JUDGE: He's *the accused*! Not the guilty party!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: I think you'll find he is. We wouldn't have jailed him if he wasn't!

JUDGE: Hey! I'll be the judge of whether he's guilty or not!

FLAXLEY: Is that so?

JUDGE: Yes! That's literally why I'm here! To judge whether he's guilty or not.

FLAXLEY: Right... good point.

(The judge nodded.)

JUDGE: Thank you. Now call your next witness.

FLAXLEY: I did! Then you picked me up on my semantics.

JUDGE: It wasn't semantics, it was mislabelling.

(He rolled his eyes then looked to Galton.)

JUDGE: Please be upstanding.

GALTON: What?

JUDGE: Stand up!

GALTON: Oh. Right.

(He climbed to his feet then nodded.)

GALTON: Now what?

JUDGE: Answer Flaxley's questions.

GALTON: He hasn't asked me any!

JUDGE: He's *about* to!

GALTON: Right... gotcha.

(The judge then nodded to Flaxley.)

JUDGE: You may now address the witness.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(He then stood there with a blank expression on his face.)

FLAXLEY: Um...

JUDGE: Are you okay there, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: I'm thinking.

JUDGE: Then think faster, because if I start to suspect you've got nothing to add, I'm going to bring this trial to a close.

FLAXLEY: Favourably?

JUDGE: Not for you, no.

FLAXLEY: Fuck!

JUDGE: Now ask him a question.

FLAXLEY: Right... yes.

(He wracked his brain frantically for a moment then asked the only question he could come up with.)

FLAXLEY: Galton? I've always wanted to know... what made you think that cutting someone's head off after stabbing them on numerous occasions would make it look like a suicide, for pity's sake?

CAYLEY: Objection. Calls for self-incrimination.

JUDGE: Sustained!

FLAXLEY: Well, of course it's incriminating, he's a bloody criminal!

CAYLEY: Objection!

FLAXLEY: Nobody asked you, madam!

JUDGE: Flaxley! Do *not* address the defence counsel in such a manner, ever again!

FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. Sorry, Cayley.

(Cayley pouted.)

CAYLEY: It's fine.

JUDGE: Now ask something else.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He ruffled his neck.)

FLAXLEY: Galton? Did you, or did you not, try to flee from Phisele when quizzed about your missing knife?

GALTON: Um... objection?

JUDGE: *You* don't get to object! *You* have to answer the question!

GALTON: Oh.

(He sighed.)

GALTON: Fine. Yes, I did.

FLAXLEY: Excellent. And did you, or did you not, confess to the murder afterwards?

(Galton gulped.)

GALTON: Um...

(An enlightened expression then crossed his brow. He'd only just realised that he could lie.)

GALTON: Nope!

FLAXLEY: You lying...

JUDGE: Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: But he's lying!

GALTON: No, I'm not. *You* are!

FLAXLEY: What? That's torn it! I'm gonna thump him!

GALTON: Abuse! Now do you see? That's why I confessed! Flaxley was going to beat me up if I didn't!

FLAXLEY: You cunt! I wasn't even there!!!

JUDGE: Enough!!!

(As the court fell silent he rolled his eyes then looked to Galton.)

JUDGE: Just for clarification. *Did* you confess or didn't you? You just *denied* confessing then told us you confessed under duress. Which is it?

GALTON: Um... I don't know. I was confused, you see? Concussion from all the abuse.

JUDGE: Right...

FLAXLEY: He's lying, your honour.

JUDGE: Clearly. First, he *didn't* confess, then he *did* confess in order to stop you from beating him. Now he says he can't remember which because you *did* beat him. I've never heard such twaddle.

(Flaxley beamed with delight.)

FLAXLEY: Then you agree.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: In which case, I rest my... case.

(He then glanced at Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: Right?

JUDGE: That's not up to her!

FLAXLEY: Shit.

JUDGE: But, if you have nothing else to add, you should indeed rest your case.

FLAXLEY: Very well. Seeing as I'm clearly winning, I will.

(He then sat down and exhaled with satisfaction.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Some of my finest work, that. Even the judge knows he's a liar.

JUDGE: Silence in court.

FLAXLEY: Right. I apologise.

JUDGE: Now... Cayley, would you like to cross-examine the defendant?

CAYLEY: Yes, please.

FLAXLEY: What for? We've got him right where we want him!

JUDGE: She has to! If she doesn't, I'll declare a mistrial! His defence lawyer *must* offer up a robust and zealous defence. Justice won't be done otherwise!

FLAXLEY: If you say so.

JUDGE: I do say so!

(He shook his head.)

JUDGE: Miss Severen... if you will.

CAYLEY: Yes, your honour.

(She climbed to her feet.)

CAYLEY: Mr Galton, you seem a little confused. You just gave three accounts of what happened after you were caught fleeing. Why was that?

GALTON: Um...

CAYLEY: Could it be that, you *did* confess, but only because you were afraid of a beating? Then Flaxley beat you up anyway?

FLAXLEY: What??? Cayley!!!

JUDGE: Silence in court!!!

(Galton beamed.)

GALTON: That's exactly what happened! Yes! That!

(The judge rubbed his chin.)

JUDGE: Hmm... sounds plausible.

FLAXLEY: What???

JUDGE: You rested your case, Flaxley! Let Cayley speak.

CAYLEY: Thank you, your honour.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: Mr Galton, have you ever been arrested before?

GALTON: Yes! I wouldn't be here if I hadn't!

CAYLEY: I mean, had you been arrested before the incident with Mr Baker?

GALTON: Oh. No.

CAYLEY: So you were a person of good character?

GALTON: Well... my mum always liked me.

CAYLEY: In fact, you were of such good character, you even managed to get a job as a police officer, correct?

GALTON: I did. Yes!

JUDGE: Interesting.

(Flaxley raised a troubled eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Interesting? What do you mean, interesting?

(He snarled.)

FLAXLEY: You're not going to find in her favour, are you?

(He then gasped in horror.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, my god! You are!!!

(He then glowered at Cayley. He was going red in the face and he virtually had steam coming out of his ears.)

FLAXLEY: Why???

(He shook his first at her.)

FLAXLEY: Again!!! Seriously??? Why??? Why do you shit all over everything I try to achieve??? Were you sent here from hell just to annoy me???

(Cayley whimpered tearfully.)

CAYLEY: Why are you being horrible? We're family!

FLAXLEY: No, we're bloody not! I'm Tifaerian, born and raised; whereas you're nothing but a bi-product of some cunt who stole my identity then fucked off on a trollop-shagging tour of some far away shithole!!!

(Cayley's heart instantly shattered.)

CAYLEY: *Too* mean!

FLAXLEY: So is fucking up everything I try to do!!!

CAYLEY: I didn't!

(She looked to Galton, desperately trying not to cry.)

CAYLEY: Mr Galton?

GALTON: Yes?

CAYLEY: Tell me...

JUDGE: Um... do you need a tissue, young lady? You seem upset.

FLAXLEY: *She's* upset?

(He pointed to his chest.)

FLAXLEY: She's about to cost us the trial and let a murderer go free!

JUDGE: That's enough, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I'll say it is!

(He then allowed his head to fall onto the desk. Happy to let it go, the judge gave a frustrated sigh then looked to Cayley.)

JUDGE: Continue.

(With heavily watering eyes, Cayley nodded then struggled to force out her question in a tearful voice.)

CAYLEY: Mr Galton, tell me... would you consider yourself a powerful man, physically?
(Galton cringed.)

GALTON: Not really, no.

CAYLEY: Then would it even be *possible* for you...

(She sniffed back some tears.)

CAYLEY: To cut off someone's head with a tiny knife?

(Galton laughed.)

GALTON: Oh, god no. I had to get home and get an axe.

(He then gasped in horror.)

GALTON: It's a lie! I did no such thing! I don't even *own* an axe! I had to borrow one from a neighbour! I mean...

(His shoulders then slumped and he could only mumble despairingly.)

GALTON: Fuck sake... your honour?

JUDGE: Yes?

GALTON: I'd like to change my plea to guilty.

(The judge rolled his eyes.)

JUDGE: So noted! And by noted, I mean accepted! Mr Galton, you are hereby found guilty of the murder of Victor Baker. Therefore, I sentence you to a lifetime of imprisonment.

GALTON: Bugger it.

JUDGE: Here endeth the trial!

(He then stepped down from the bench and headed away. The trial was complete. Flaxley's misery, however, was just about to begin. Utterly devastated, Cayley looked to him with hurt oozing from her every pore.)

CAYLEY: How could you be so vile? I was only doing my job! A job you *asked* me to do! To mount a robust defence. I just did as I was asked!

(She started to sob harder.)

CAYLEY: And I was on your side from the start! A defence lawyer *not* on your side would have won that case. You had no evidence. So I decided to trick him into confessing like the idiot he is. And he did! He was always *going* to. See? I knew what I was doing! He was *never* going to go free.

FLAXLEY: Oh, come off it. You couldn't have *known* he'd confess.

CAYLEY: Yes, I could! You seem to forget, I have a lifetime's worth of *experience* when it comes to conversing with an idiot. You just have to make them comfortable, keep them talking and they *will* end up saying the wrong thing! And that was my plan all along. That way I could mount the robust defence required against a prosecution with no evidence and *still* get you the verdict you wanted. And what thanks did I get???

(She then charged out of the courtroom in tears. Watching her go, Flaxley winced with discomfort. Cayley's words made perfect sense. She had indeed been on *his* side all along. Realising this, he was overcome with guilt. Once again, she'd produced results for him, and once again, he'd bitten her head off. That guilt, however, was soon replaced by fear.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, boy... Kritz is quite literally going to kill me this time.

(Furious with himself, he kicked the table then glanced at the two observers in the corner.)

FLAXLEY: You can leave if you like. I won't even bother asking how it went. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that *that* was a disaster! I had no evidence and he only got convicted because he foolishly confessed.

(The observers, a male and a female, approached him.)

DAVE: Actually, it wasn't a disaster at all. Far from it.

FLAXLEY: Not *that* far from it!

DAVE: It was fine, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: How? I barely had a case to present!

DAVE: And yet you won anyway.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: And better still, you now know what you'll need to do in order to secure a conviction in the future. Provide evidence.

LISA: Exactly. And that was just *one* of several valuable lessons you learned.

(She smiled.)

LISA: You now know that you need to build a witness stand, for example.

DAVE: And employ a clerk of the court.

FLAXLEY: Um... a what?

DAVE: A court admin.

LISA: So, yeah. All in all, I think it went well.

FLAXLEY: Well? What part of that shit show went well???

LISA: The result mostly. The judge gave a guilty verdict.

FLAXLEY: No thanks to me.

DAVE: Yes, but it wasn't about *you*. It was about justice. And justice was done. And *seen* to be done. That young defence lawyer did a superb job. It wasn't her fault the idiot confessed. She couldn't *possibly* have seen that one coming.

FLAXLEY: Actually...

(He flinched.)

FLAXLEY: Nothing.

DAVE: So there it is. You did your best to prosecute him, albeit poorly, and the defence was robust and fair. Job done. Now you just need to implement what you learned from this test trial and put it into future ones. So, Lisa and I will be staying on to observe.

LISA: Just to make sure it's done properly.

DAVE: Right. So, yeah. You've got the gist. That's the main thing. You suck at it, but you will improve with our guidance.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Therefore, you pass.

FLAXLEY: I see. So, that was all you needed, was it? Justice? No minimum level of competence from the prosecution?

LISA: No. *Normally* we'd expect that, but... Tito asked us to set the bar low.

DAVE: *Really* low!

LISA: He wants to go back to Leathrock as soon as possible, you see?

DAVE: So, yeah... congratulations.

LISA: We'll now be on our way.

(They then headed out of the door. Flaxley watched them go then scratched his head, mumbling to himself as he did so.)

FLAXLEY: We passed. Miracles do happen.

(He winced then allowed his shoulders to slump.)

FLAXLEY: And her name is Cayley. She knew the idiot would confess and secure us a conviction right from the bloody start. So she did her job professionally and waited for the dipshit to drop *himself* in it. And I crucified her for it.

(Phisele then appeared at his side.)

PHISELE: Yup. That was a horrendous thing to say.

FLAXLEY: Don't rub it in, Phisele.

PHISELE: I wouldn't dream of it. It's not like *she*'s completely innocent either.

(She furrowed her brow.)

PHISELE: The little bugger used that trial to make me look silly!

FLAXLEY: Yes...

PHISELE: Anyway... let's get you back to prison, Galton.

(Flaxley looked to Galton and whimpered.)

FLAXLEY: Can I come to prison *with* you?

(He gulped.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz is bound to find out what I said to Cayley, and when she does, I'll be a lot safer in there!

(He then trudged out of the door, sighing repeatedly.)

That evening, Flaxley found himself sitting on a bench, just outside his good friend Derek's house. With a whisky glass in one hand and his forehead bowed into the other, he couldn't have looked more fed up. At the other end of the bench, Derek, a three foot tall green alien from the Planet Tryme 17 was offering him little in the way of sympathy. Astonished to hear about the events of the day, he could only shake a despairing head at him.

DEREK: You actually said those words, did you?

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I did.

DEREK: Flaxley...

FLAXLEY: I didn't *mean* them, Derek. I've grown rather fond of Cayley, as you well know.

DEREK: Yes, well... it's a fat lot of good *me* knowing it. You need to convince *her*.

FLAXLEY: And how do I do that exactly?

DEREK: Well... it won't be easy.

(He sucked his teeth.)

DEREK: You wanted her help, and to get it you promised her the one thing she wanted more than anything else in the world. A place in your family. She'd have been floating on cloud nine; delirious with joy. She'd finally been accepted by her daddy.

(He grimaced.)

DEREK: Then, you took it back and told she was nothing but the spawn of a thieving cunt!

FLAXLEY: I know...

DEREK: She'd have been crushed. Devastated. Hurt beyond words.

(Flaxley scowled at him.)

FLAXLEY: I'm aware of that, Derek. I chastised myself all the way home. Then Kritz came in and chastised me ever harder. I've never seen her so angry.

(He then offered Derek a grateful nod.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks for putting me up for the night, by the way. You're a good friend.

DEREK: Yes, well, just make sure it's only one night. The last thing Zanne and I want is a giant oaf moping about for days on end.

FLAXLEY: Right. You're not *that* good a friend apparently, but still. I appreciate it.

DEREK: I hope so too. Zanne never puts out when we have guests staying over. I'm missing out because of you.

FLAXLEY: And I'm grateful.

DEREK: Good.

(He ruffled his neck.)

DEREK: Now what are you going to do about young Cayley?

FLAXLEY: I really don't know.

DEREK: Then get your thinking cap on. The sooner Kritz forgives you and let's you back in the house, the sooner I can get my jollies.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: What can I tell you, Derek? The only thing I can realistically do is apologise to the poor girl. But this time, I'm not sure she'll accept it. Like you said, I crushed her.

(He gave an exasperated sigh.)

FLAXLEY: I'm so annoyed at myself, Derek. It just came out in the heat of the moment, you know? In that moment, it looked like she'd used the trial just to make Phisele look stupid; freeing a murderer and scuppering our chance to join the alliance in the process. I was furious and... I lashed out. Said the most terrible thing I could think of.

DEREK: By far.

FLAXLEY: Shut up.

DEREK: Right...

FLAXLEY: But... once again, I'd got it all wrong. She had it all figured out from the start. She only made Phisele look stupid in order to complete the trial successfully whilst keeping the prisoner in jail; despite the prosecution having literally no evidence. It was pure genius.

DEREK: It was. You've got it hand to her. She's as smart as Bonson *thinks* he is. And Bonson *thinks* he's a certified genius of international repute.

FLAXLEY: Doesn't he just.

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: But you know... that might be my way in. Cayley's intelligent enough to *know* that people sometimes lash out and say things they don't mean. So maybe she *will* forgive me.

DEREK: She might, yes. But she's not *just* a genius, is she? She's also a child. A sensitive young girl who's just had her heart broken. It's possible she may *never* forgive you for that.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: You know, Derek, you're not very comforting.

DEREK: Well...

FLAXLEY: Why I came here to confide in you, I'll never know.

DEREK: You didn't come here to confide in me. You came here because Kritz threw you out and you know I have a spare room.

FLAXLEY: Well...

DEREK: When if you had any sense, you'd have gone to Cayley's house instead. She has several spare rooms. *And* you could have used that time to make it up to her.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, right, that'd look great, wouldn't it? Sorry I took a shit on your hopes and dreams and killed you inside earlier; got a spare room I can borrow?

(He shook his head then stared down at his feet.)

FLAXLEY: That'd just be adding insult to injury. I couldn't do that to the poor kid. The best I can do is let her have a good cry with Kyrie this evening then grovel in the morning. I just hope she can find it in her heart to forgive me.

(Derek nodded then performed a double take at a carriage that was passing by on its way out of town. At once, he sucked his teeth then scratched his head uneasily. Kyrie was at the window making obscene hand gestures at Flaxley; and Cayley was sitting opposite her, staring at the floor with an empty sorrow in her eyes.)

DEREK: Well, that can't be good.

(Still staring, shame-faced at the ground, Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: No. You're right. It can't. But that's the current state of play. The best I can do is still nowhere near enough. I'm ashamed of myself, Derek. For the first time in my life, I'm truly disgusted by my own behaviour.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: I'm a knight. A man of the people with an ingrained desire to do right by the people. To be their champion. Offering an innocent orphan a place in your family then calling them a cunt just isn't how a knight should behave.

DEREK: Not that you called her a cunt.

FLAXLEY: No, but I might as well have.

DEREK: Yes, well, never mind that. If you'd just pull out of that shame spiral, I have an update for you.

(Flaxley gave him a baffled glance.)

FLAXLEY: What?

DEREK: Kyrie and Cayley just went past in a carriage!

FLAXLEY: A carriage?

DEREK: Yes. It's a horse drawn box that people use for transport.

FLAXLEY: Don't be a Bonson.

DEREK: Right...

FLAXLEY: I wonder where they were going.

(He glanced down the road and saw the rear end of a carriage as it turned to head north.)

FLAXLEY: Was it *that* carriage?

DEREK: Yes.

FLAXLEY: Should I go after it? I should, shouldn't I?

DEREK: No, you shouldn't.

(He grimaced.)

DEREK: For the first time ever, Kyrie's thoughts were clear and audible. Sex and shoes didn't pop into her head once. Just thoughts about how if Cayley wasn't with her, she'd beat you death with her shoes.

FLAXLEY: Really? But she loves her shoes.

DEREK: I know. That's how pissed off at you she is!

(He sighed.)

DEREK: Cayley, on the other hand, her thoughts were miles away from that. You've broken her. She can't wait to get to Leathrock and...

(He grimaced.)

DEREK: Start looking at real estate prices.

(Flaxley's hair stood on end.)

FLAXLEY: She's emigrating???

DEREK: So it seems.

FLAXLEY: Fuck. I need to get after her.

DEREK: No, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: No?

DEREK: Think like a knight. Like a leader!

FLAXLEY: Derek, a knight is a man of the people. Well, Cayley's a person and I need to make it right.

DEREK: Yes, Cayley *is* a person. And so are the other people in this town. Thousands of the buggers. You need to stay here and service *their* needs. And by that, I mean you need to focus on stage three of your application to the alliance. Military recruitment!

FLAXLEY: Right... but Cayley...

DEREK: Think, man! Kyrie went with her!

FLAXLEY: Well, yes... that's a plus, I admit, but...

DEREK: No, I'm saying, if you're going to send *someone*, you should send the one person in this town who'll be sad to see Kyrie go.

FLAXLEY: Such a person exists?

DEREK: Anoka!

(Flaxley looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: Right. That actually makes sense.

(He then climbed to his feet and stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: You're right, old friend. I need to switch back to knight mode and do this right. I'll focus on the recruitment drive and do a bang up job of it, as always. *And* I'll despatch my best person to convince Kyrie and Cayley to come home.

(He looked to Derek then nodded.)

FLAXLEY: It'll all work out beautifully, Derek; you wait and see.

(Just then Anoka whizzed past on a horse, yelling frantically.)

ANOKA: Kyrie!!! Wait for me!!!

FLAXLEY: A-ha! See? It's *already* working out. Anoka's gone to get them.

DEREK: Yes...

(He grimaced.)

DEREK: Either that or she's decided to emigrate *with* them.

FLAXLEY: Don't say that, Derek.

DEREK: Why not? It's possible.

FLAXLEY: Because if that's what's happening, *I'll* have to emigrate too. Kritz won't be forgiving me if *that* happens; that's for bloody certain!

Chapter Four – Recruiting Comes Not Without Disputing

The morning after Tifaeris had held its first criminal trial, Sir Flaxley headed back towards his house, having spent the night in Derek's spare room. He'd received notification from Kritz that he was needed at home, via her angrily shouting through Derek's letterbox. As he headed for the door, he couldn't help but mumble anxiously.

FLAXLEY: Well... it's nice to be invited back into the house, but... judging by the tone of the invitation, I'm guessing it's not because Kritz wants to kiss and make up.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: There's going to be a lot of shouting, I fear. All of it at me.

(He then braced himself and headed through the door. Having done so, he saw Kritz and Anoka sitting at the table, scowling back at him.)

KRITZ: Sit!

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He then headed sheepishly to the table and sat down.)

FLAXLEY: Okay. Let the nagging commence.

ANOKA: *I'll* start!

(She shook her fist at him.)

ANOKA: Really, dad? Did you really tell Cayley she's nothing but the bi-product of the cunt who stole your identity???

FLAXLEY: Well...

(He groaned.)

FLAXLEY: I'm so ashamed.

ANOKA: Good! That was abhorrent!

FLAXLEY: I know.

ANOKA: Now she's gone to look at house prices in Leathrock with Kyrie because she doesn't want to live here anymore!

FLAXLEY: So I gather.

(She sneered.)

ANOKA: When I heard they'd buggered off in a carriage last night, I feared they were leaving for good there and then, so I chased after them! Luckily for you, they're just going to check the place out. They'll be back in a few days.

(She pouted.)

ANOKA: But for how long, I don't know. Cayley really, really wants to leave this town, and I mean forever.

(She sighed.)

ANOKA: I caught them up and we had a long chat. That poor girl is so despondent, I really don't know how we're ever going to fix this. I just don't.

(She growled.)

ANOKA: Now Kyrie's going to leave me and it's all your fault!!!

(Flaxley grimaced at her innocently.)

FLAXLEY: Well, you say that... I mean, *Kyrie* doesn't have to go.

ANOKA: If you're suggesting Kyrie can stay here and let Cayley go it alone in Leathrock, so help me, I'll get Louise down from the sword rack and kill you with it! She's not going to abandon the little sister she idolises! Even for me!

FLAXLEY: Well... I mean... maybe you could go with her.

(Kritz glowered at him furiously.)

KRITZ: Really? Not content with chasing Kyrie and Cayley away, you're now trying to fuck our daughter off to Leathrock as well!!!

FLAXLEY: I was doing no such thing!

KRITZ: You were! Well, forget you! She's not long returned from her training and I for one, love having her around. If you take that away from me, *I'll* get Louise down from the sword rack and kill you with it.

FLAXLEY: Yes... I mean... that's fair. I don't want her to leave either.

ANOKA: And I don't want to go. Nor does Kyrie, but... she'll go wherever Cayley feels happy. And thanks to you, that's not here!

(She sighed.)

ANOKA: She was really heartbroken last night. You obliterated her. So much so, she wants to break off all contact with you. She even went as far as to say, as far as she's concerned, she *has* no dad.

FLAXLEY: She *doesn't* have a dad.

ANOKA: Yes, but she meant *you*. You're dead to her now.

(She shook her head.)

ANOKA: She's really hurt.

KRITZ: And as a consequence, we're both really pissed off at you.

FLAXLEY: Yes... I was getting that impression.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: But what can I do? I mean, what do you *need* me to do? Apart from grovelling when they come back, what can I *possibly* do to make things right? What I said wasn't something a person can just forgive. It was vile beyond words.

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: I wish I knew.

ANOKA: Yeah.

KRITZ: But still, we didn't bring you here just to shout at you.

FLAXLEY: It *sounded* like you did.

KRITZ: No, that was just *opportunistic* shouting.

ANOKA: You were there and we're both very angry.

KRITZ: We actually brought you here because we need to discuss the next stage of joining that alliance. Military recruitment.

FLAXLEY: Ah, yes, I need to speak to fella-me-lad about that.

ANOKA: Who?

FLAXLEY: You know... that bloke. The shit one.

ANOKA: Oh, you mean Tito.

FLAXLEY: That's the bugger.

KRITZ: No need. He already came round this morning and explained everything to Anoka and I.

FLAXLEY: What? Why would he do that? *I'm* the leader, he's supposed to speak to *me*.

KRITZ: And he would have. In fact, you're who he came to see.

(She ruffled her neck.)

KRITZ: But I told him you were dead, so he spoke to us instead.

FLAXLEY: What???

KRITZ: Yeah... I was really angry with you at the time.

ANOKA: So was I, so I didn't correct her.

KRITZ: She's been very supportive.

ANOKA: Well, you know... anything for you, mum.

FLAXLEY: How touching.

(He rolled his eyes.)

KRITZ: Don't be flippant, Flaxley, you're skating on thin ice as it is.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: So what did he say?

KRITZ: That we need to start recruiting.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Well, I gathered *that*, darling. Question is, how many? And *what* do we need to recruit?

KRITZ: Soldiers.

(Flaxley stared at her coldly.)

FLAXLEY: Really?

KRITZ: Yes.

FLAXLEY: What *type* of soldier, I mean. Full time, part-time, reservist, what?

KRITZ: I don't know. I went in the kitchen to make coffee while he discussed it with Anoka.

ANOKA: We need three hundred, all willing to train three evenings a week.

FLAXLEY: I see. A part-time army then.

ANOKA: Yeah. That's the *minimum* requirement. They'd prefer that we had a full-time one obviously, but we're allowed to work our way up to that.

FLAXLEY: I see. Well, that's good then. We can't afford a full-time army anyway.

(He raised an enquiring eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Any other requirements?

ANOKA: Just the expected ones. All recruits must be thirteen or over. And nobody over fifty, unless they're in a command position.

FLAXLEY: I see. That's sensible, I suppose.

(He then nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Okay then, here's the plan. I'll go and speak to that artistic fellow about making some recruitment posters. Kritz, you go to the police station and tell Phisele we need a recruitment office. There's an empty storage bunker next door, we can use that for now. Anoka...

KRITZ: Wait!

FLAXLEY: What?

(Kritz just raised an impatient eyebrow at him.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, for pity's sake. Please.

KRITZ: Very well. Seeing as you asked nicely.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Anoka?

ANOKA: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Go to the main square and do a demonstration of your sword skills. Impress the crowd then let them know that they *too* can learn the way of the blade if they sign up to the new part-time army.

ANOKA: And that'll work, will it?

FLAXLEY: Of course it will. When you put on that display for the victory day celebration, you had everyone gasping in awe.

(Anoka bobbed her head arrogantly.)

ANOKA: Yeah... I was awesome.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(He then clapped his hands together.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, team; let's get this show on the road.

(He then upped and headed for the door. Upon reaching it, he then turned around and furrowed his brow. Kritz and Anoka had remained at the table.)

FLAXLEY: Today, people!!!

KRITZ: We're gonna finish our coffee first!

FLAXLEY: Oh... fine.

(He then headed out of the door. Left behind, Kritz quickly leant forwards and looked to Anoka.)

KRITZ: Sexy ponytail, white bikini top, white leather miniskirt and your white thigh boots.

ANOKA: What?

KRITZ: That's what you need to wear.

ANOKA: Mum...

KRITZ: Anoka, we're looking to attract men to the army. And what do men like?

(Anoka bit her lip.)

ANOKA: Um... beer?

KRITZ: Wow. No, look... you're a lesbian not an idiot.

ANOKA: Excuse me?

KRITZ: You might not like being in the *company* of men, but I know for a fact you've met a few in your time on this planet. And being a looker, it wouldn't have taken you long to figure out that men like scantily clad women!

(Anoka beamed.)

ANOKA: Me too.

KRITZ: Then dress like a tart and get out there. Look sexy and do all your best sword moves. Once they've adjusted their boners, they'll *sprint* to the recruitment office!

(Anoka furrowed her brow.)

ANOKA: Mum...

KRITZ: Yes?

ANOKA: Did you wait for dad to leave, just so you could tell me to go out and flaunt myself like a cheap trollop?

KRITZ: Of course. I wasn't going to say it when he was here, was I? He'd be mortified.

(She rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Don't worry. I'll throw on something skimpy and join you once I've been to see Phisele. I've been told my martial arts exercises are highly erotic.

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: Between us, we'll have them drooling down their tunics in no time.

ANOKA: Mum...

KRITZ: Please. It's been a while since we did something fun together.

ANOKA: We went away together this weekend!

KRITZ: Well...

(She pouted at her like a heartbroken child.)

KRITZ: I just wanted to enjoy some mother and daughter time.

(Anoka chuckled.)

ANOKA: There's no need for the Cayley face, mum. I'll be happy to do it.

KRITZ: You will?

ANOKA: Sure. Truth be told, I love doing sexy things for attention sometimes. I know I *hide* it well...

KRITZ: No, you don't. We've all seen you riding that white horse of yours, flicking your hair around, because you know you look gorgeous up there. You're just as much of an exhibitionist as I am.

(Anoka furrowed her brow.)

ANOKA: Am not. Left to your own devices, *you'd* never wear clothes!

KRITZ: They're restricting!

ANOKA: Yes, mum.

(She chuckled.)

ANOKA: Anyway... shall we?

KRITZ: Might as well. I finished my coffee long before your dad left.

(They chuckled, then upped and headed for the door.)

KRITZ: Um... what did you mean by Cayley face, by the way? I was going for sad. She's got an angelic little face.

ANOKA: Not the last time I saw her, mum. Sitting in that carriage. That girl was broken.

KRITZ: Yeah...

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: I'll punish your dad for that later. In the meantime, we have work to do.

(They then headed out of the door.)

In Leathrock, at this time, Kyrie and Cayley emerged from a guest house and stepped in the warm, morning sunshine. Having only had a few hours sleep, Cayley was more than a little bleary eyed. They'd only arrived in Leathrock four hours ago after a long, overnight carriage ride. Not about to waste the day in bed, however, she'd forced herself to get up. Kyrie, on the other hand, had had no such issues with tiredness. Looking forward to getting out there and exploring, she'd napped for a few hours then leapt out of bed with an excited smile on her face. She'd then badgered Cayley to hurry up and get ready. Now they were finally on their way, she couldn't have been more delighted.

KYRIE: This is awesome. I've never been to a foreign country before.

(Cayley grimaced at her.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie, we literally got *back* from a foreign country a few nights ago. Azagotse, remember?

KYRIE: Oh, yeah.

CAYLEY: Not to mention the fact that we *live* in a foreign country!

KYRIE: No, we don't. We live in Tifaeris.

CAYLEY: Yeah, and it's a foreign country to us. *We're* from Anoseta. And seeing as we passed through Castaria on our *way* to Tifaeris; this is actually the fourth foreign country you've been to.

KYRIE: I see. Okay... maybe I *have* been to foreign lands before then. But this one's easily the best. I mean, look!

(She pointed to the coast.)

KYRIE: That's the sea over there. You don't see *that* everyday.

CAYLEY: Yes, we do. Our living room faces the sea, Kyrie! It's literally the only thing you can see when you look out of the window!

KYRIE: No, silly. That's a different sea.

CAYLEY: What?

KYRIE: This one has loads of boats on it. You hardly ever see boats on the sea at home.

CAYLEY: Well... you do... maybe not as many, but...

KYRIE: Yup. This is the best country by far.

CAYLEY: Well... that remains to be seen, doesn't it?

KYRIE: What do you mean?

CAYLEY: It was dark when we arrived, so this is literally all we've seen.

(She grimaced.)

CAYLEY: It might turn out to be horrible.

KYRIE: Right...

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: You're such a sourpuss. Is this because Flaxley called you a bisexual book thief?

CAYLEY: No. That's not what he said. If he had, I'd have been confused rather than upset.

(She whimpered.)

CAYLEY: He said I was nothing but the bi-product of the rude word who stole his book.

Then implied that our mum was a trollop.

(Kyrie pouted.)

KYRIE: That's mean. He made you cry again. He's supposed to be better than that.

(She then beamed excitedly.)

KYRIE: But let's not allow his meanness to ruin our day. We should head down the seafront and have an ice cream or something. Then go man-spotting; my favourite pastime.

CAYLEY: But, Kyrie, we came here to look at house prices.

KYRIE: We can do *that* too. It's not hard. We just have to look at the price tags when we walk past.

CAYLEY: Houses don't have price tags on them, Kyrie. We'll need to find a bulletin board and see what's for sale.

KYRIE: I see. And where *is* this bulletin board?

CAYLEY: I don't know. I've never been here before.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Don't worry, we'll find one. And if there's a house for sale that we like the sound of, we can pop over there and have a look at it.

KYRIE: I see. And what do houses here sound like?

CAYLEY: I didn't mean...

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: I mean, if we see an advert for one that interests us, we can head over there.

KYRIE: Where?

CAYLEY: To the house that's for sale.

(Kyrie glanced down the street.)

KYRIE: There's a house for sale? Which one is it? Not that green one, I hope. The windows are really pokey.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

(She forced a weak smile.)

CAYLEY: Let's find the bulletin board, shall we? Then you'll know what I mean.

KYRIE: That's a great idea. Ice cream it is.
CAYLEY: Bulletin board.
KYRIE: Then ice cream?
CAYLEY: Sure. Why not? I do like ice cream.
KYRIE: Well, of course you do. If you didn't, I'd disown you.
(Cayley whimpered.)
CAYLEY: Why would you even joke about that less than a day after *Flaxley* disowned me?
KYRIE: Right...
(She grimaced.)
KYRIE: Did I say something insensitive again?
CAYLEY: Yes.
KYRIE: Sorry.
(She smiled.)
KYRIE: I didn't mean to. You know I adore you, sister face.
(Cayley smiled and took hold of her arm.)
CAYLEY: Thanks, Kyrie. You're the best, you are. I'd be lost without you.
KYRIE: Oh. Well, that's not a problem. The guest house is right behind us.
(Cayley managed a smile.)
CAYLEY: You're hard work, Kyrie; but I love you.
KYRIE: Yay.
CAYLEY: Now let's find that bulletin board.
(They headed away together arm in arm.)
KYRIE: This is exciting. Our first trip away together.
CAYLEY: No. Azagotse, remember?
KYRIE: That wasn't just us two though, was it?
CAYLEY: Good point.
KYRIE: So, what so shall we do first?
CAYLEY: Find a bulletin board.
KYRIE: Right. I feel like you may have mentioned that before.
CAYLEY: I did.
KYRIE: I see.
(She nodded.)
KYRIE: And what *is* a bulletin board?
(Cayley gave her an exasperated glance.)
CAYLEY: You should know that, Kyrie. When you were a police officer, part of your job was to pin notices on the bulletin board in Tifaeris.
KYRIE: Was it?
(She grimaced.)
KYRIE: I didn't realise that. I pinned them on the town's noticeboard instead. Whoops.
CAYLEY: No; that's right. A bulletin board *is* a noticeboard. Same thing, two different names.
KYRIE: Ah. Like me!
CAYLEY: What?
KYRIE: I have two names and they both refer to *me*.
CAYLEY: Well... yeah, I guess it's kinda like that.
KYRIE: So were actually looking for the bulletin board noticeboard, to give it its full name.
CAYLEY: Sure... if you like.
KYRIE: I do *not* like. That's a mouthful.
CAYLEY: Well... you're not wrong.

KYRIE: I'm not. Blimey. How often does *that* happen? Not *very* often, *I* can tell you. Why, only *yesterday*, I came home, stripped naked then made myself comfy on the sofa. The next door neighbours were not amused.

CAYLEY: You didn't do it in full view of them, did you?

KYRIE: I did, yes. But in my defence, it was kind of unavoidable. I'd accidentally gone into their house by mistake, you see?

(She grimaced.)

KYRIE: I did wonder why there were two old people staring back at me from the armchairs. Still, no harm done. They started hating me long before *that* happened.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She allowed herself a smile.)

CAYLEY: They're really not going to miss us when we move, are they?

KYRIE: Oh, I dunno. They seem to like *you*. I see you talking to them all the time.

CAYLEY: They only talk to me when they're making complaints about *you*, Kyrie.

KYRIE: But you talk to them all the time.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She then glanced to one side and flinched.)

CAYLEY: Wow. That's a stroke of luck. There's a bulletin board right there, look.

(She pointed to a bulletin board.)

KYRIE: Where?

CAYLEY: Right there.

KYRIE: Behind that noticeboard?

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

(She groaned in defeat.)

CAYLEY: Let's just go over there and read it.

KYRIE: Yeah... read...

CAYLEY: You'll do fine. Your reading's improved a lot lately.

KYRIE: Tell that to the pub landlord. I had a go at him for nothing last week. He put up a flyer advertising your gig, you see? It said 'Cayley is a total pianist'. I thought it said...

CAYLEY: I know! He told me.

KYRIE: Right. Well... the fact is that my point remains.

CAYLEY: What point?

KYRIE: Whatever point I was making, I dunno.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Let's just go and read the board.

KYRIE: That was it. I was going to say, don't expect much from *my* reading.

CAYLEY: I never do.

(With they headed over to the bulletin board then Cayley started to peruse all the notices. As she did so, Kyrie stared at one in the bottom corner and grimaced in bewilderment. She then leant closer to scrutinise it from close up. Oblivious to what her sister was doing, Cayley read the notices on the top row; mumbling to herself as she did so.)

CAYLEY: Topiarist wanted; cakes for sale; handyman offering his services; barmaids needed; horse for sale; boat repair service; apprenticeship available...

KYRIE: Um... Cayley?

CAYLEY: Farmhands wanted; lost dog; half priced lanterns...

(She flinched.)

CAYLEY: Exorcist required???

KYRIE: Cayley?

CAYLEY: I don't even want to ask.

(She then resumed scanning the notices.)

CAYLEY: Quarrymen needed; live music at The Fox Pub; private carriage for hire...

KYRIE: Ahem! Cayley?

CAYLEY: Accountancy firm now hiring...

KYRIE: Why is Sir Flaxley on here?

CAYLEY: Half price...

(She then stopped and gave Kyrie a sideways glance.)

CAYLEY: What?

KYRIE: Look. This notice. It says Sir Flaxley mystery volume eye, eye, eye.

CAYLEY: I'm pretty sure it doesn't.

(She then stooped to glance at the notice in question.)

CAYLEY: Sir Flaxley, My Story, Volume three.

KYRIE: Three? That's not a three.

CAYLEY: It's how you write three in ancient Kazooian numerals.

KYRIE: Right...

CAYLEY: Not bad, by the way. But that says *my story*, not *mystery*.

KYRIE: Close enough.

CAYLEY: Sure. Why not?

(She then stood up straight and grimaced.)

CAYLEY: That's weird. Flaxley only wrote two books.

KYRIE: Maybe he wrote another one afterwards. That'd make three, I think.

CAYLEY: I doubt it. He shudders with rage at the very mention of those two books for some reason. He's hardly going to write a third. He hates those books.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: And so do I now! He's so desperate to deny publishing them then going on a book signing tour and getting our mum pregnant, he doesn't care *who* he hurts. Hardly the act of a man of honour, is it? He committed the randy crime, so he should stand up and take responsibility. For his children.

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: I made a false idol of that man.

KYRIE: Cayley... Kritz says he didn't even *go* on a book signing tour. He's never been away from Tifaeris without her for more than a day.

CAYLEY: She lies!

(She scoffed then pointed at the notice in question.)

CAYLEY: And so does whoever published that book. It's quite clearly a fake.

KYRIE: Are you sure?

CAYLEY: I'm positive. When would he find the time? He's got a town to run... me out of.

(She shook her head to clear away her thoughts.)

CAYLEY: I mean, he has a town to run. And like I said, he really does hate those books.

KYRIE: Yeah?

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: Maybe it is a fake then.

CAYLEY: It is. I've got to know him quite well since we arrived in Tifaeris, and he really does despise those books. Any mention of them gets him all riled up.

(She sneered.)

CAYLEY: Probably because the consequences of his philandering have grown up now and he's afraid more people like *us* will show up.

KYRIE: Like us? Gorgeous?

CAYLEY: His illegitimate children.

KYRIE: Um...

CAYLEY: Point being; that's definitely a fake.
(She nodded.)
CAYLEY: Now where was I?
KYRIE: Standing next to me at the noticeboard in Leathrock.
CAYLEY: I didn't mean...
(Her face then lit up.)
CAYLEY: Look.
(She pointed to a notice.)
CAYLEY: Three bedroom, riverside dwelling for sale. Number 46 Eckersley Road. Visit for a viewing.
(She beamed.)
CAYLEY: We should look into it. It'll at least give us an inkling as to what we can afford if we move here.
(Kyrie smiled.)
KYRIE: We should *definitely* do that. It sounds really boring, but it seems to have to perked you up, so count me in.
CAYLEY: Thanks, Kyrie.
KYRIE: But we're going to get an ice cream *first*.
CAYLEY: That's fair. Let's go.
(They then headed away, arm-in-arm.)

In Tifaeris, a short while later, Sir Flaxley was marching purposefully towards the main square with half a dozen handwritten recruitment posters in his hand. Looking forward to placing them on the town's bulletin boards, as soon as possible, his stride was a long one. Just as he started to reach the square, however, he found himself slowing down. A crowd of menfolk had gathered there, blocking his path. Curious to know *why* they were there, he peered over the top of the crowd then his eyes bulged in horror. His daughter, Anoka, was performing skilful sword moves before striking sensual poses. She'd then lick her lips or wink to rile the men up further. To make matters worse, his wife was at her side doing the very same thing, but with her martial arts skills. The scantily clad duo had whooped the menfolk into quite the frenzy.

CHAS: This is a great day to be alive!!!

RICARDO: Right? I have no idea why they're doing it, but praise be to the gods for making it so!

(Just then, Anoka froze in a sexy pose and spoke up in a sultry voice.)

ANOKA: If you join the part-time army, you'll see moves like this three times a week.

(Kritz then pouted sexily.)

KRITZ: And more.

CHAS: Right! Where do I sign up?

RICARDO: Join the queue!

LEDLEY: I'm in!

(Standing at the back, Flaxley's nostrils started to twitch and his hands transformed into fists.)

FLAXLEY: I'm nipping this in the bud right now!

(Before he could take a single stepped forwards, however, three carriages started rolling towards the square. The people inside the carriages were leaning out of the windows yelling and booing.)

SHARON: Down with recruitment!!!

DARREN: War is evil!!!

(Recognising the chants straight away, Flaxley growled furiously. Instantly forgetting all about his wife and daughter's displays, he stomped over to the carriages, shaking his fists.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck off out of it! You're not welcome here!!!

(The inhabitants of the carriage scoffed then proceeded to boo him.)

FLAXLEY: Hey!!!

(Moments later, the carriages came to a halt then six people clambered from the back of each one. The last one to jump down, the one Flaxley had been waiting for, stood tall then glanced around himself. Upon spotting Flaxley, he sneered then paced over to him, before speaking up in an extremely effeminate voice.)

ARDEN: Father!

FLAXLEY: Twat!

ARDEN: Nice. How loving.

FLAXLEY: It's no more than you deserve, now piss off and take the rest of your Anti-Sword Coalition with you!

ARDEN: We're going nowhere!

(He scoffed.)

ARDEN: We've heard all about your desire to join that murderous alliance with Leathrock and we've come to stop it!

FLAXLEY: Murderous alliance???

ARDEN: A coalition of brutality and violence!

FLAXLEY: It's called a defence pact, arse face!

(Several gasps rose up from behind Arden.)

DARREN: Such language.

SHARON: What a horrible father.

ARDEN: Sadly, I'm used to it.

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Now turn around and get used to leaving!

ARDEN: Never! We know how that alliance works. You're required to hold elections, establish courts and recruit soldiers, right? And we heard about the election taking place already. Well, courts won't take long establish, so I'm guessing you've moved on to the recruiting now. We've come to stop it.

FLAXLEY: Then you'll be wasting your time, won't you? We're not *doing* any recruiting! (Just then, with truly terrible timing, Anoka's voice rose up over the crowd.)

ANOKA: Sign up now, boys. The army needs you.

KRITZ: And you need the army!

ANOKA: Because all the sexy ladies *love* a guy in uniform.

(Flaxley could only grimace and look away, unable to look into his son's unimpressed eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Right... so... is there any chance you didn't hear...

ARDEN: None!

FLAXLEY: Bugger.

ARDEN: Honestly, father; have you no shame?

(He then thrust an arm in the direction of the crowd.)

ARDEN: What sort of man gets his wife and daughter to flaunt themselves like that?

FLAXLEY: Hey! I didn't *tell* them to do it!

(He snarled.)

FLAXLEY: And besides, what do *you* know about being a man???

(Arden and his crew all gasped.)

SHARON: He's horrible!

FLAXLEY: It was a fair question.

ARDEN: Was it? What in your eyes makes you think I'm less of a man than you?

FLAXLEY: You're wearing a skirt!

ARDEN: I'm liberated!

FLAXLEY: Oh, you'll be liberated in a minute!

ARDEN: What's that supposed to mean???

FLAXLEY: It means, sonny boy, I'll liberate you from Tifaeris. On the end of my boot!
(Arden scoffed.)

ARDEN: Typical. Violence is your answer to everything. It's your first and final thought of every single day, isn't it?

FLAXLEY: Wrong. The safety of this town is my first and final thought every day.
(He ruffled his neck.)

FLAXLEY: Unless your mother and I are being intimate, obviously. In which, my mind is very much on...

ARDEN: We don't want to know!

FLAXLEY: Why? Jealous?

ARDEN: Of the fact you're doing my mother???

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He scratched his head.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that. You're banished!

ARDEN: Says who?

FLAXLEY: Me! The president.

ARDEN: I see.

(He smirked.)

ARDEN: Didn't you sign Tifaeris up to the international basic law statute recently?

FLAXLEY: What if I did?

ARDEN: Well, did you?

FLAXLEY: Yes.

ARDEN: Then I think you'll find you *can't* simply banish me. Under the statute, you'll need to apply for a court order.

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: What?

ARDEN: You heard me. In order to banish me, you'll have to apply to the court, and convince a judge that I pose an imminent threat to the safety and security of one or more citizens.

FLAXLEY: Um...

ARDEN: And seeing as we're only here to protest peacefully, I doubt there's a judge in the entire legal world who'd grant you that application.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: You're lying!

ARDEN: Am I now?

FLAXLEY: Yes!

(He ruffled his neck.)

FLAXLEY: Probably. I'll have to consult our only citizen who's *fluent* in the statute.

(His eyes then bulged.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck! She's in Leathrock.

ARDEN: Oh, dear, what a shame.

(He smiled.)

ARDEN: We'll just start our protest then, shall we?

FLAXLEY: No, you bloody won't! Fuck the statute! I'll throw you out personally, if I have to.

ARDEN: Please do. I'd like that.

FLAXLEY: You wouldn't! Trust me!

ARDEN: I would. Such a flagrant disregard for the statute would be the act of a despot. A tyrant. A dictator! Meaning instant disqualification from that murderous alliance you're trying to join. For me, that'd be job done.

(Flaxley gaped for a moment.)

FLAXLEY: I... but... you...

ARDEN: Checkmate.

FLAXLEY: You...

(His shoulders then slumped.)

FLAXLEY: I hate you.

ARDEN: And I don't care.

(He then glanced over his shoulder to his comrades.)

ARDEN: Okay, team; let's get our protests started. Alice?

ALICE: Yes?

ARDEN: Bring out the placards.

(His team all cheered excitedly.)

ARDEN: Well, father...

(He then hit the deck having been floored by a devastating right hook.)

FLAXLEY: Outstanding!

(Having thrown the punch, Anoka was now standing over her brother, snarling bitterly.)

ANOKA: I thought I told you never to darken this town with your presence ever again!!!

(Arden sneered up at her as he rubbed his paining chin.)

ARDEN: Well, well... if it isn't my least favourite sister. Daddy's faithful poodle.

ANOKA: You...

(Her words were then drowned out by a hoard of men, racing towards the police station.)

CHAS: I look forward to training with you, Anoka.

THIN: Wear that to all the training sessions!

LEDLEY: You were fantastic, Anoka; I can't wait to serve under you!

REG: I was thinking that same thing, but in a more perverted way! To the recruitment office, lads!

(A group of at least forty men all cheered then raced on ahead. Left behind, Anoka rolled her eyes.)

ANOKA: Men are shit.

(She then watched as Arden scrambled to his feet in disgust.)

ARDEN: Happy now? Are you *happy* that you've signed up more innocent souls to be a part of your war machine.

ANOKA: Quite happy, yes.

ARDEN: But why? Don't you see??? War is murder!

(Anoka furrowed her brow.)

ANOKA: No, it isn't! Being murdered by invaders is murder! Armies exist to *stop* that from happening!

ARDEN: No, they don't! If there *were* no armies, they'd *be* no invasions!

FLAXLEY: You cock!

ARDEN: Excuse me?

FLAXLEY: We don't *live* in a world without armies. We live in a world *full* of armies!

ANOKA: And a town without one *will* get conquered. Instantly! Without the enemy even having to break a sweat. Being defenceless is just *asking* to be wiped off the face of the map.

FLAXLEY: Because a rogue nation *will* attack you and they will kill people!

ANOKA: Yeah!

(She sneered.)

ANOKA: Why do you hate *people*, Arden? Why???

ARDEN: I don't hate people! People are the victims! It's world leaders I hate. They start all the fucking wars.

(He nodded sternly.)

ARDEN: And I won't stand idly by and allow that to happen here! Come on, team!

(He then headed deeper into the square with his crew of pacifists. Every single of them sneered at Flaxley and Anoka as they passed.)

ARDEN: Bloody warmongers.

(He then nodded at his mother who was coming back the other way.)

ARDEN: Mother.

KRITZ: Son.

(Kritz then paced up to Flaxley and Anoka, having had no further interaction with her son.)

KRITZ: We should have known Arden would turn up.

FLAXLEY: Yes...

ANOKA: Stupid, bloody...

KRITZ: No. None of that silliness. He might be a fruity pacifist and a nerve-grating annoyance, but he's still our son.

FLAXLEY: Only on paper.

ANOKA: And I'll indulge in as much silliness as I like. He's not *my* son.

KRITZ: Yes, but he *is* your twin brother.

ANOKA: I *have* no twin brother! Or any other kind of brother.

KRITZ: Right...

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: Look, I know he's been a nightmare. And I know he doesn't deserve anything other than your scorn, but please... go easy on him. He might be an almighty twat, but I can't just sweep my maternal feelings under the rug. Despite all his faults, I'll *always* love my son.

So, for me... please, don't be too hard on him.

FLAXLEY: You make a fair request.

ANOKA: A fair request that I shall disregard.

KRITZ: Anoka...

ANOKA: Mum, when I got my sword proficiency degree from Leathrock University, he and his clan turned up at my graduation ceremony and booed me!

KRITZ: Well...

ANOKA: I was a history maker. The first sixteen year old to pass the exam with a distinction. And I was five years younger than the next youngest in my year. It was a monumental achievement, and my own brother turned up just to boo me!

KRITZ: And it was poor form...

ANOKA: Poor form???

(She sneered.)

ANOKA: He also had a placard reading Anoka Flaxley Sucks!

FLAXLEY: What?

(He growled.)

FLAXLEY: How come you didn't mention that before?

ANOKA: There was no point. I dealt with it while you and mum were talking to my tutor.

(She ruffled her neck.)

ANOKA: I called him every name under the sun. So, he responded in kind, accusing of me being a violent psychopath.

(She beamed.)

ANOKA: So I took his placard and smashed him over the head with it. Good times.

FLAXLEY: That's my girl.

KRITZ: Right... well... that's in the past now, so...

ANOKA: It's not in the past, mum. He hasn't changed one bit.
KRITZ: Well... maybe. Even so, please try to be tolerant. For me.
FLAXLEY: For you.
ANOKA: I refuse.
KRITZ: I see.
(She shrugged.)
KRITZ: I tried.
(She then smiled.)
KRITZ: Anyway, let's get back to recruiting.
ANOKA: Happily.
FLAXLEY: Vetoed!
KRITZ: Excuse me?
FLAXLEY: I won't have my wife and daughter making exhibitions of themselves in the town square! I just won't.
KRITZ: I see.
(She smiled.)
KRITZ: So you're vetoing it, are you?
FLAXLEY: That's right.
(Kritz chuckled to Anoka.)
KRITZ: Like he has that power.
ANOKA: I know, right.
(Then they headed away, leaving Flaxley with a furrowed brow.)
FLAXLEY: Do you mind?
(He then sighed to himself despairingly, before kicking a stone.)
FLAXLEY: What a stupid question. Of course they don't.
(He then trudged towards the bulletin board, grumbling with annoyance.)

At the police station, at this time, Phisele and her assistant, Lucy, were extremely busy. A large throng of men had entered, desperate to sign up for military training. They were filling out forms quicker than Lucy could reproduce them. Needless to say, she was getting somewhat flustered.

LUCY: I wish we'd had some kind of advanced notice about this!
PHISELE: Just do the best you can. Kritz only told me about it this morning and by the time I'd finished the template for the recruitment form, randy men had started turning up.
LUCY: Right...
(She grimaced.)
LUCY: Why *is* that? Why *are* they all so... excited?
PHISELE: Why do you think? Kritz doesn't recruit; she entices.
LUCY: Right. Sounds like something she'd do.
PHISELE: Yeah. She was a trained Trepe seductress...
(She furrowed her brow.)
PHISELE: And she taught Anoka well.
LUCY: Right, well, that doesn't help me much right now. Can you delay them somehow? I'm getting swamped.
PHISELE: Well...
(She grimaced.)
PHISELE: I can try.
(She then fluttered her eyelashes at the throng of men in the queue.)
PHISELE: Patience, boys, we're going as fast as we can.

(One of the townsmen, Thin Alero grimaced.)

THIN: What was that? Did you just flutter your eyelashes at us?

PHISELE: Well...

THIN: Don't do that, Phisele.

(He sighed.)

THIN: You're a pretty lady, but let's face it. Sexy just don't look right on you.

PHISELE: Are you fucking kidding me right now, Thin?

THIN: Well...

PHISELE: One of my oldest memories of you is from just before the battle of Tifaeris. I was six! And you were a middle-aged, fat bastard even then! And you want to tell me *I'm* not sexy???

CHAS: I don't think he meant it like that, love.

PHISELE: Then how *did* he mean it?

CHAS: Well... you know...

PHISELE: No! Enlighten me!

CHAS: It's just... you're not really the sex kitten type, are you?

PHISELE: Meaning?

CHAS: You're more like a faithful Alsatian.

PHISELE: What???

LEDLEY: That's a good description, actually!

PHISELE: I'm a dog?

LEDLEY: Aye! Dogs are great companions. And they're adorable little things, that you just love to pet. But you wouldn't describe one as sexy.

(Phisele stared at him aghast.)

PHISELE: I can't believe I'm hearing this!

JAKE: Me either! That's really insulting.

PHISELE: Thank you.

JAKE: You're more like an angry nurse.

PHISELE: Excuse me???

JAKE: Bossy, likely to smack you down if you step out of line, but you don't mind because deep down, you know her intentions are good.

THIN: Exactly what I was getting at. You're a great lass, love, and you are indeed pretty, but you're about as sexy as a blacksmith's anvil.

PHISELE: Fuck off! I can be sexy!

(All the men immediately fell about laughing.)

PHISELE: Hey!

(She threw her hands to her hips.)

PHISELE: I'm sexy, damn it. Look. Cleavage. And how short is my skirt? What part of that isn't sexy?

CHAS: You!

PHISELE: Do you want a black eye?

THIN: Don't get upset, love. We're just saying that... you know... rather than being a alluring and glamorous, you're... well... functional.

PHISELE: Functional???

THIN: Aye! Practical, you know? You're smart and all your bits and bobs are in the right place. You'd made a great companion, you're just not very sexy.

CHAS: Like an Alsatian.

PHISELE: I can't believe you bastards!

(She then glowered at Lucy.)

PHISELE: Fuck this. I'll copy the forms and *you* can oversee recruiting these horrible bastards.

LUCY: Oh... okay.

CHAS: That's a great idea. Much better. Now Lucy, she knows how to be sexy.

LEDLEY: That she does. But you wouldn't want to take her out for a walk on the moors, like you would an Alsatian, would you?

CHAS: Oh, god no. You'd want to buy her flowers and chocolates.

LEDLEY: Because she's sexy.

THIN: Whereas...

PHISELE: One more fucking word, Thin, and I swear...

REG: Uh-oh. She's all angry now.

JAKE: Gnashing her teeth and growling

CHAS: Like an angry Alsatian.

(They then looked to Phisele and instantly clammed up.)

THIN: Um... I think we went too far, lads.

REG: She looks fit to explode.

PHISELE: I am!

CHAS: Right...

(They then hung their heads, resolved to completing the recruitment procedure without another word. It was a wise move.)

In Leathrock, a short while later, Kyrie and Cayley emerged from a beach front dwelling then headed down the path. Offering up one last wave to the homeowner, they then made their way back down the seafront.

CAYLEY: Well... that was enlightening.

KYRIE: Yup.

(She grimaced.)

KYRIE: In what way?

CAYLEY: At least we have a rough idea how much houses cost now.

KYRIE: Right.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: Do we?

CAYLEY: Yes. And that one is most definitely out of our price range.

KYRIE: Awesome.

CAYLEY: Awesome?

KYRIE: Yeah. That one was rubbish. I'm *glad* we can't afford it.

CAYLEY: Really? I thought it was quite nice.

KYRIE: Nice?

(She grimaced.)

KYRIE: There's an old woman living in it, Cayley. And all her terrible furniture is there. Where would we put *our* stuff?

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: Yup; that's no good. Sorry, Cayley, but I really don't want to live with some random old woman.

(Cayley gave her an exasperated glance.)

CAYLEY: That's not how it works, Kyrie. When someone buys it, she'll have to move out.

KYRIE: Really?

(She winced.)

KYRIE: Blimey. I wouldn't want to be the one who has to tell her. She'll be devastated.

CAYLEY: She already knows.

KYRIE: How?

CAYLEY: She just does. That's how it is, Kyrie. If you sell your house to someone, you have to move out.

KYRIE: I see.

(She bit her lip.)

KYRIE: But that still doesn't solve the problem with all her terrible furniture.

CAYLEY: She'd take that with her, obviously.

KYRIE: Right...

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: But still... *I* don't want to live there.

CAYLEY: Yes, well, that's irrelevant now, anyway. We can't afford it.

KYRIE: But even if we could. Nope. I didn't like it.

CAYLEY: What was wrong with it?

KYRIE: Everything.

CAYLEY: Oh? Name one thing?

KYRIE: I didn't like the door number.

CAYLEY: Forty Six?

KYRIE: Yup. That's my unlucky number.

CAYLEY: Since when?

KYRIE: I don't know.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: I just didn't like it, Cayley.

CAYLEY: Well... that's fair. I guess a place either feels right or it doesn't.

KYRIE: Yeah.

(She smiled.)

KYRIE: You know what sort of house *would* feel right?

CAYLEY: Go on.

KYRIE: One just like ours. In fact... ours. I like it there.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She then stopped walking and sighed.)

CAYLEY: So what you're telling me is, you don't want to move here.

(Kyrie stopped then turned to face her.)

KYRIE: Well...

CAYLEY: In that case, you're not going to like *any* of the houses we view, are you?

Nothing's going to cut the mustard.

(Kyrie wagged her finger at her.)

KYRIE: I can assure you, mustard has nothing to do with it.

(She then stepped up to the path-side railing and glanced out to sea.)

KYRIE: I just feel at home in Tifaeris.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She trudged up to the railing and pouted.)

CAYLEY: Then I guess it'd be a waste of time to look at anything else.

KYRIE: Well... no, actually.

(She pouted.)

KYRIE: I like Tifaeris, but being there makes you sad. I hate that. I don't *want* to be somewhere that makes you feel sad.

CAYLEY: Then...

KYRIE: So, I'll gladly move if you makes you happy again.

(She shook her head.)

KYRIE: Even though moving will make *me* sad.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: You see... I'm not well-liked, Cayley. My stupidity gets on people's nerves.

CAYLEY: That's not true.

KYRIE: Yes, it is. Back in Anoseta, how many times did you see my friends come to visit?

CAYLEY: Um...

KYRIE: Never! I didn't *make* any friends. You were the only person in my life who could stand to be around me.

(She smiled.)

KYRIE: Then Anoka came along. After eighteen long years, I'd finally made a friend.

(She pouted.)

KYRIE: If we move, I'll miss her.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

(Kyrie swiftly put her around Cayley.)

KYRIE: But it's okay. You're the most important person in my life. By far. So I'll go where *you* decide to go. It's just going to be hard, that's all.

(Cayley sighed emptily.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie... I'm not going to move here if it's just going to make you sad.

KYRIE: Cayley...

CAYLEY: No, Kyrie, listen to me. I'm a giant nerd. I haven't got any friends either... unless you include Fifi, but I haven't seen her since I stopped going to school. And possibly Jade and Emma, but I'm not sure that creepy pair are even remotely sincere in their friendship towards me. All I have is you. And I'm not going to make you feel sad just so I can be happy.

KYRIE: Then what are we saying?

CAYLEY: I guess we'll be staying in Tifaeris.

KYRIE: But you'll be sad. I don't want that.

CAYLEY: And *I* don't want to move here if *you're* going to be sad.

KYRIE: Right...

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: I hate this, Kyrie. We need to make a decision and whatever happens, *one* of us is going to be sad.

KYRIE: Yeah...

(Her face lit up.)

KYRIE: Not necessarily! Let's move back to Anoseta, then we can *both* be sad!

(Cayley struggled to keep a straight face.)

CAYLEY: Um... Kyrie...

KYRIE: What? It's the only fair way to handle this. Let's both be miserable forever.

CAYLEY: Nope. Let's not.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: Look... I can handle staying in Tifaeris; I can.

KYRIE: But you'll be sad.

CAYLEY: Yes, but I won't be devastated or anything.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: Because being there will make *you* happy. And I like it when you're happy.

KYRIE: And *I* like it when *you're* happy.

CAYLEY: Then it's settled.

KYRIE: We'll move here!

CAYLEY: We'll stay in Tifaeris.

(They then grimaced at one another uneasily.)

CAYLEY: This decision is going to be harder than I thought.

KYRIE: Yeah...

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: Let's discuss it over more ice cream.

CAYLEY: Sure. And then maybe we can view another house. Who knows? We might find one we really like.

KYRIE: But then again, we might not.

CAYLEY: That too.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Shall we?

KYRIE: Shall we what?

CAYLEY: Just...

(She then headed away.)

CAYLEY: Let's go.

KYRIE: Right.

(She then hurried to Cayley's side.)

In Tifaeris's main square at this time, the recruitment campaign was pressing ahead determinedly. Flaxley, Kritz and Anoka were doing an excellent job in selling the townsfolk the idea of a part-time role in the army. Their salesmanship was commendable.

Unfortunately for them, however, Arden and his crew were also doing an excellent job in sabotaging them. As soon as Flaxley, Kritz or Anoka had spoken so someone, they were making a point of speaking to them next. Their language was not subtle.

ARDEN: Hello, sir. I see you've just been chatting to Anoka.

(The citizen in question stared through him.)

WOODLEY: So?

ARDEN: Thinking of signing up?

WOODLEY: Yes, actually.

(He sneered.)

WOODLEY: And don't try to talk me out of it. You anti-sword bastards are ridiculous.

ARDEN: I see. Right. Well, I won't try to convince you otherwise.

WOODLEY: Good!

ARDEN: *I* just hope this town recruits more medical staff as well.

(Woodley gave him a baffled glance.)

WOODLEY: Why would it?

ARDEN: Well, you know... the inevitable war wounds. Someone needs to heal them.

WOODLEY: It'll be fine.

ARDEN: Yes, you're probably right.

(He smiled.)

ARDEN: And let's be honest, wheelchairs and wooden legs are a lot cheaper than they used to be.

WOODLEY: What?

ARDEN: Just saying... should you end up maimed, these things are readily available nowadays.

(Woodley grimaced at him nervously.)

WOODLEY: Why would I end up getting maimed?

ARDEN: Well... that's what happens to soldiers in wartime, isn't it?

(He sighed ruefully.)

ARDEN: Arms severed; legs chopped off; fingers ripped out; eyes lost; you name it. But still, if you're lucky enough not to bleed to death from those injuries, you can still go on to lead a *reasonably* happy life, I suppose.

(He smiled.)

ARDEN: It's the one who don't make it that I feel sorry for. Those who die on the battlefield. What an awful way to end up. I've seen it with my own two eyes, you see? Decapitated corpses, laying there with their bloody and exposed neck bones sticking into the mud. Their intestines spilling out across the grass; just waiting for rats to come and feast on them. Their testicles spiced in two by a battleaxe. Terrible.

(He then shrugged nonchalantly.)

ARDEN: But that *probably* won't happen to you. You'll be fine, I'm sure.

(Woodley looked to him with horror in his eyes for a moment then scoffed.)

WOODLEY: Fuck off, you.

(He then scuttled away in completely the opposite direction of the recruiting office.

Watching him go, Arden couldn't help but smirk.)

ARDEN: You're welcome.

(He then glanced to his side, where his comrade, Sharon was offering up a similar spiel.)

SHARON: Rats gnawing at their faces while vultures feed on their gaping wounds; gulping down their internal organs like hungry tourists at an all-you-can eat buffet. Tragic. There's often very little left for the family to bury. But if that's how you choose to go out...

(Arden couldn't help but smirk.)

ARDEN: She's brutal.

(Just then, Anoka came zooming into him, grabbed him by the collar and started frogmarching him backwards.)

ANOKA: You and I need to have words, mister!

ARDEN: Words? You know words, do you? I thought you only communicated through violence.

ANOKA: Oh, shut up, you massive bell-end.

ARDEN: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

ARDEN: Why do I get the feeling this won't be a *friendly* chat?

(Having finally dragged him down a side street, Anoka pushed him away then thrust her hands to her hips.)

ANOKA: Are you trying to get this town destroyed?

ARDEN: What?

ANOKA: Well? Are you? Only it seems to me, you'd *love* this place to be defenceless, wouldn't you?

ARDEN: No! I'd love to see this town take a stand *against* war and violence!

ANOKA: We *are* against war and violence! And there's no better deterrent than a capable army! People don't start violence against you when they know you can *defend* yourself.

(She scoffed.)

ANOKA: Left to you, we'd have no way of standing up to aggression whatsoever. Meaning any warmongering bastard could stroll right in and begin their reign of terror without reservation or hindrance!

(Arden just shook his head.)

ARDEN: Not if we took away *their* swords too.

ANOKA: Idiot! Only people *with* swords can take people's swords away!

ARDEN: Bullshit!

(They growled at one another coldly for a moment then Anoka sighed calmly.)

ANOKA: Why do you keep coming here, Arden?

ARDEN: I go wherever the anti-sword coalition are needed.

ANOKA: Bullshit. Leathrock has the biggest army on this continent by far, and I hear your coalition has never even been there. No once.

ARDEN: Well...

ANOKA: And yet this is your sixth visit to Tifaeris, by my recollection. So why? Why here of all places? Leathrock has ten times as many swords as we do!

(Arden looked coldly into her eyes.)

ARDEN: Have you ever thought that maybe, just maybe, I care about my hometown? And I want it to be free from the temptations of war? Huh?

ANOKA: You care about your hometown?

ARDEN: Yes!

ANOKA: Since when?

ARDEN: Since...

ANOKA: I'm not buying it, Arden. You made it perfectly clear, years ago, that you hate your family, and you hate this town!

ARDEN: Excuse me? I never said I hated this town!

(He then frowned coldly.)

ARDEN: And I *don't* hate my family! My family hate *me*! Always have!

ANOKA: Always have???

ARDEN: Yes! From as far back as I can remember.

ANOKA: Fuck off.

ARDEN: It's true.

(He sighed.)

ARDEN: I couldn't do anything right as far as that father as ours was concerned!

ANOKA: Bullshit!

ARDEN: No, it isn't! He realised very early on that I wasn't like other boys and he hated me for it. And mum wasn't any better. And nor were you! Homophobe!

ANOKA: Homophobe? I'm a lesbian, you cock!

ARDEN: Right... well... maybe not a homophobe then, but you still had it in for me, didn't you?

ANOKA: No!

ARDEN: Yes, you did. You loved being the favourite, and you bent over backwards to put me down in order to make sure you *stayed* the favourite.

ANOKA: The favourite???

ARDEN: Yes! The apple of dad's eye. The golden child. Daddy's precious sword-wielding princess. You revelled in that role and you revelled in watching me fall from grace. Seeing me relegated to the role of the family disappointment brought joy to your heart.

ANOKA: Arden...

ARDEN: Admit it! You loved seeing me cast aside because I failed to meet father's lofty expectations.

(He sighed.)

ARDEN: I was ostracised at the age of six because my father refused to accept that I'm different. And you loved it! That wasn't me hating my family. That was family rejecting me!

(Anoka sighed despairingly.)

ANOKA: That's how you're choosing to remember it, is it?

ARDEN: That's how it was!

ANOKA: It wasn't though, was it?

(She furrowed her brow.)

ANOKA: Do you remember our first sword lesson in the garden?

ARDEN: What's that got to do with anything?

ANOKA: Every-fucking-thing!

(She shook her head.)

ANOKA: Dad was focussed very much on *you*! He'd got it into his head that *you'd* be the one to follow in his footsteps. That was his dream. His son was to be the next generation of Flaxley to be knighted and make a difference. I just tagged along because hitting straw effigies with a stick looked like fun.

ARDEN: It wasn't!

ANOKA: Yes, it was! You loved it!

ARDEN: Anoka...

ANOKA: Don't even try to tell me I'm remembering it wrong, Arden. It was the day that changed my life and I remember every second of it.

ARDEN: Whatever.

ANOKA: We really enjoyed ourselves that afternoon, all three of us. And afterwards, when dad told mum you had a lot of potential, you smiled the happiest smile I've ever seen you smile. You were really pleased with yourself.

(She shook her head.)

ANOKA: Then mum asked how *I* got on. Dad said I did really well. Then he said I was a natural.

(She grimaced.)

ANOKA: Your face sank. Your smile turned upside down and you stormed off to your bedroom.

ARDEN: I don't remember that.

ANOKA: No? Well, I *do*. Because that was it for you. You were done. You flatly refused to take another lesson ever again. Not because you hated swordplay, but because dad said *I* had a talent. It was pure jealousy. You *wanted* to be next legendary swordsman in the family and it choked you to hear that you weren't better than me.

ARDEN: That's bollocks!

ANOKA: It's not though, is it? No matter what dad tried, you refused to pick up a sword ever again after that.

ARDEN: Because I hate swords! No other reason! And that doesn't alter the fact that he disowned me because of it!

ANOKA: No, he didn't. He'd give me sword lessons then come and ask you what *you* wanted to do. He tried desperately to find something the two of you could do together, as father and son, but you refused. You shunned him. Fact is, you weren't the one that he saw as a natural swordsman, and you hated him for it. So you disowned him.

ARDEN: Bullshit!

ANOKA: Truth! You did whatever you could to disappoint him after that. Petty revenge for the disappoint *you* felt when he said *I* was a natural with a sword.

ARDEN: Anoka...

ANOKA: I'm not finished! Mum saw what was going on, and she tried everything to make you see sense. To get you to give dad a chance. So what did you do? Shunned *her* as well! Then you went on a crusade to do whatever you could to piss them both off.

(She sighed.)

ANOKA: Then one day, you struck gold, didn't you? The anti-sword coalition. That was the fucking mother lode, as far as you were concerned. A chance to strike at the heart of everything that dad stands for. And everything *I* stand for.

(She scoffed at him.)

ANOKA: Face it, Arden. It's not swords you hate. It's your family. And it all stems from a compliment dad gave me when we were six! You're pathetic, you really are.

(Arden shook his head.)

ARDEN: Anoka, you're talking bollocks. Dad is a bonehead. A muscle-bound thug. A man's man who resents having a gay son. That's why he hates me; no other reason.

ANOKA: Oh, shut up. This hatred of yours started long before he knew you were a poof.

ARDEN: No! He knew. He fucking knew. Trust me.

(He then headed back towards the square. Left behind, Anoka could only shake her head.)

ANOKA: What a twat. I should beat him up.

(Her eyes the glazed over with merriment.)

ANOKA: At least that's the fantasy.

(She then shrugged it off and returned to the square.)

In Leathrock, one hour later, Kyrie and Cayley were strolling through the city centre, having just visited another house. Overjoyed by the number of shops there, Kyrie could barely contain her excitement. Cayley, on the other hand, was thoroughly dejected.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

KYRIE: I've never seen so many shoes.

CAYLEY: I think it's fair to say Leathrock is out of the question.

KYRIE: I wish we'd brought more money with us; look at all those dresses!

CAYLEY: That last house was terrible. Two tiny bedrooms and a living room with a view of a brick wall. And we still couldn't afford it.

KYRIE: Ooh, lingerie. Nice. I should buy something for Anoka.

CAYLEY: It didn't even have an indoor toilet.

KYRIE: A basque and a thong ought to do it.

(Cayley gave her a sideways glance.)

CAYLEY: You're not listening, are you?

KYRIE: And I'll get something lacy for myself while we're at it.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She rolled her eyes then spoke up, purely to get her attention.)

CAYLEY: I might buy myself a dildo while we're here.

(Kyrie instantly shot a fiery glance in her direction.)

KYRIE: What???

CAYLEY: That got your attention, didn't it?

KYRIE: It did, yes. Why would you want to waste money on one of them things, when can just borrow one of mine!

CAYLEY: What? No!

KYRIE: Fine. Let's go in the sex shop then; there's bound to be something in there you'd like.

CAYLEY: Kyrie, I don't *want* a dildo!

(She then hid her face as dozens of shoppers passed by, giving her evil glances.)

KYRIE: You don't? But you said...

CAYLEY: I just wanted your attention.

KYRIE: Oh.

(She chuckled.)

KYRIE: It did seem a little odd. I mean, considering the source.

CAYLEY: Of course it did.

KYRIE: But then, you are my sister, so we all know it's only a matter of time before you...

CAYLEY: No, it isn't!

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Look, can we just focus on the matter in hand, for once?

KYRIE: Your dildo?

CAYLEY: House prices!

KYRIE: House prices? I don't remember us discussing them.

CAYLEY: We weren't. I was talking and you were ignoring me.

KYRIE: I see.

(She bit her lip.)

KYRIE: Was I distracted by all these boutiques?

CAYLEY: Yes!

KYRIE: Makes sense. Look how many there are! So many shoes, tops, skirt and dresses. I could be happy here.

CAYLEY: You'd be permanently skint.

KYRIE: I'd *look* good though.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: I was just trying to tell you that we can't afford to live here.

KYRIE: No?

CAYLEY: No. That was the worst house I've ever seen. Anywhere! And we visited a lot of towns when we were on the run.

KYRIE: Yup. Dozens.

CAYLEY: And yet that was the biggest dump I've ever clapped eyes on. And it was *still* over budget!

KYRIE: Meaning?

CAYLEY: If we moved here, we'd have to sleep in a tent or something.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: I mean, obviously wages are far higher here, so we'd be able to afford something eventually, but... yeah... for the first few months, we'd be living in squalor.

KYRIE: I see. Well, that's ridiculous. If you move to Leathrock, you want to live in Leathrock. If you end up living in Squalor, you've *actually* moved to Squalor. Leathrock doesn't even come into it.

CAYLEY: Don't be dim! Squalor means we'd be living in poverty.

KYRIE: Is that that tiny village we passed through on the way here?

CAYLEY: That was Pumberly.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Look... doesn't matter... the point is, we can't afford to move here.

KYRIE: Right.

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: We might as well go home then.

CAYLEY: Yeah.

KYRIE: Let's go and collect our stuff.

CAYLEY: Wait. Didn't you want to buy something first?

(Kyrie looked enlightened.)

KYRIE: Oh, yeah! That's right. I was going to buy you a dildo.

CAYLEY: Kyrie!

KYRIE: What size do you need?

CAYLEY: I don't want...

KYRIE: I think we should go for a large. If you're anything like me, you've probably got a hole like a bucket down there, so it'd make sense to...

CAYLEY: No, Kyrie! No! Oh, my god! I don't want a dildo!

KYRIE: But you said...

CAYLEY: And believe me, I regret it!

KYRIE: I'm confused now.

CAYLEY: Look, let's just get the present you wanted to buy Anoka then we can...

(Her jaw then dropped and she went perfectly silent.)

KYRIE: Cayley?

(She bit her lip.)

KYRIE: I know that look. You've just realised that you *do* want a dildo, haven't you?

CAYLEY: Kyrie, no. Shut up.

KYRIE: Hey!

CAYLEY: No, look!

(She pointed to a sandwich board outside a large market tent.)

KYRIE: Yup. I see it. A green and red stripy tent. What were they thinking?

CAYLEY: No. Read the sign!

KYRIE: The sign?

CAYLEY: The sandwich board.

KYRIE: Ooh... I quite fancy a sandwich right now. We should go and buy one.

CAYLEY: Just read the board!

KYRIE: Oh... fine.

(She then stepped up the sandwich board and scrutinised it with her eyes.)

KYRIE: It's another advert for that book; Sir Flaxley mystery volume eye, eye, eye.

CAYLEY: My story, volume three.

KYRIE: Yeah, that one. So? We've seen that advert before, Cayley.

(Cayley shoulders slumped.)

CAYLEY: No, we haven't. It's not just an advert, Kyrie.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: It's a live book signing.

KYRIE: Right...

(She scratched her head.)

KYRIE: What's a live book?

CAYLEY: It means the author is in that tent, signing his books.

KYRIE: Oh.

(She then shrugged.)

KYRIE: Boring! Let's get and buy that sandwich!

CAYLEY: Stop!

KYRIE: What? Why? I hate books.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

(Tears welled in her eyes.)

CAYLEY: For once, please, just listen to me and try to understand.

KYRIE: Hmm... you're asking a lot there, I feel. I rarely understand the things that *I* say, never mind someone else.

CAYLEY: Just try. Please?

KYRIE: Okay. Seeing as you're clearly upset about something, I'll give it my best shot.

(She then stood tall and squinted at her sister. Apparently, this was her concentration face.)

KYRIE: Begin.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She battled away her tears then offered Kyrie a saddened smile.)

CAYLEY: As you already know, you were born nine months after *someone* came to Anoseta and did a book signing tour.

KYRIE: That's right.

CAYLEY: Six years later, that same person did another book signing tour. And nine months later, I came along.

KYRIE: Correct. Mum wanted both her children to have the same father. None of this is news, Cayley.

CAYLEY: I know, but keep listening.

KYRIE: Okay. And just for you, I'll squint ever harder.

CAYLEY: It's appreciated.

(She shook her head solemnly.)

CAYLEY: I did my research and found out that both Sir Flaxley's books came out not long before we were conceived.

(Kyrie giggled.)

KYRIE: And on the back of that, you convinced yourself that Sir Flaxley was our father.

CAYLEY: Don't mock me, Kyrie.

KYRIE: Sorry. Won't happen again. I'll concentrate ever harder, in fact.

CAYLEY: Right... thank you.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: I was certain that Sir Flaxley had come to Anoseta, signed them books then had a merry old time in bed with our mum.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: But he didn't, did he?

KYRIE: Nope.

CAYLEY: I was wrong.

KYRIE: Yup. It could have been literally any old author.

CAYLEY: No, it couldn't. The timing wasn't right. Only Flaxley had books out on both occasions, that's why I thought it was him.

(A tear rolled down her cheek.)

CAYLEY: But now there's a third book signing.

KYRIE: In that tent.

CAYLEY: Yeah. But Flaxley isn't *in* that tent, is he? He's back in Tifaeris.

KYRIE: Right.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: So what are you saying?

CAYLEY: I'm saying, there's a third book signing and Flaxley isn't behind it. So he probably wasn't behind the other two either. You know what that means?

(Kyrie mused to herself.)

KYRIE: Hmm... a third book signing...

(She then gasped with amazement.)

KYRIE: We're gonna be getting another sister!

CAYLEY: What? No!

KYRIE: Well, what then?

CAYLEY: Think about it, Kyrie. I was wrong and Flaxley was right. Flaxley's writings *were* stolen and the thief *did* hire an actor to pretend to be him. That actor then went around the world, signing books and procreating with lonely women!

KYRIE: Okay...

CAYLEY: That actor who signed all those books is our father. Not Flaxley!

KYRIE: Okay...

CAYLEY: And he's in that tent right now; signing more books.

KYRIE: Right. And?

(She then gasped in absolute and utter astonishment. The penny had finally dropped.)

KYRIE: Holy crap! Our daddy's in that tent!

CAYLEY: Yes!

(She then burst into tears.)

CAYLEY: And it's not Sir Flaxley!

(Kyrie swiftly pulled her close for a hug.)

KYRIE: Aw. Cayley...

CAYLEY: I've deluded myself all this time.

KYRIE: Yeah...

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: Don't cry, sister face.

CAYLEY: How can I not? I wanted Sir Flaxley to be my dad. And he's not.

KYRIE: I know love, but let's be honest here... we always knew you were being ridiculous.

CAYLEY: Don't be mean.

KYRIE: I'm not.

(She kissed the top of her head.)

KYRIE: Look... I know this is hard for you sweetie, but maybe it's for the best. At least now you *know* you were making a tit of yourself.

CAYLEY: That's not very comforting!

KYRIE: Sorry.

(She then released her from the hug.)

KYRIE: Look... let's just go, shall we? So what if that guy in there *is* our father? What difference does it make? I'm bound to be an almighty disappoint, so let's just leave.

(Cayley pouted at her defiantly.)

CAYLEY: Nope!

KYRIE: Ooh, feisty face!

CAYLEY: Yup!

KYRIE: You're about to do something hilariously silly, aren't you?

CAYLEY: Nope!

(She then stormed into the tent. Kyrie watched her go then chuckled.)

KYRIE: Yes, you are.

(She then paced into the tent after her. Upon arriving, she found Cayley scowling down at a bewildered, muscular man, who was seated behind a table full of books. Something of a man mountain, he raised an embittered eyebrow then scowled back at her intimidatingly. Far from fazed by his gesture, Cayley threw her hands to her hips and sneered.)

CAYLEY: You're not Sir Flaxley!

(The man scoffed at her coldly.)

ASCARDI: Yes, I am!

CAYLEY: No, you're not!

ASCARDI: Yes, I am!

CAYLEY: Liar!

ASCARDI: How dare you? I *am* Sir Flaxley, or my name isn't James Ascardi!

(He then shrieked.)

ASCARDI: I mean, shut up! I am Sir Flaxley, so there!

CAYLEY: Rubbish!

(She then gave him a doubting glance.)

CAYLEY: This book is fake and so are you. I've bet you've never even *been* to Anoseta!

ASCARDI: What's that got to do with anything?

CAYLEY: Everybody knows Sir Flaxley went there and did a signing tour once!

(Ascardi looked enlightened.)

ASCARDI: That's right. I did!

CAYLEY: Lies!

ASCARDI: But I did! And I had a merry old time, I can tell you.

(He exhaled then glanced upwards as he fondly remembered the trip.)

ASCARDI: I spent three lovely nights there, shacking up with a stunningly gorgeous black-haired prostitute. Amara Severen, her name was. By golly, did she know her way around a penis.

CAYLEY: Gross!

ASCARDI: But she did. She was a right goer. It was the best sex I ever had! So I went back six years later, for another round.

(He grimaced.)

ASCARDI: She'd had a kid by then. An odd young thing, that spent all day staring at the wall and eating crayons. Quite clearly not she sharpest tool in the shed. That was handy for me though, I just gave the dopey kid a stick to stare at then took Amara back to bed for yet more earth shattering debauchery.

(He nodded.)

ASCARDI: She was so magnificent in the sack, I was tempted to move there. Unfortunately, as I turned out that dim-witted child was mine. So I buggered off and never went back.

CAYLEY: Wow.

ASCARDI: Don't judge me!

(He ruffled his neck.)

ASCARDI: I have six children of my own to raise. With my wife, Kritz.

CAYLEY: Yeah? And what are their names?

ASCARDI: Um...

(He grimaced then mumbled quietly to himself.)

ASCARDI: You can do this, you practiced memorised their names for hours back in the day.

(He looked to Cayley nonchalantly.)

ASCARDI: Annika, Ardley, Jane, Emily, Sophia and Saki.

CAYLEY: Anoka, Arden, Jade, Emma, Sophie and Sika!

ASCARDI: Fuck.

(He then flinched.)

ASCARDI: I mean, what can I tell you, Sir Flaxley, that is I, always did struggle with names.

(He then thrust his hands to his hips.)

ASCARDI: But more to the point, I *am* Sir Flaxley, so piss off! Go on.

(He furrowed his brow.)

ASCARDI: I don't know who you think you are, but you can't come bursting in here...

CAYLEY: I'll *tell* you who I am!

(She then gestured to the bewildered Kyrie.)

CAYLEY: Who *we* are, sorry. Kyrie and Cayley Severen! Amara's daughters!

(Ascardi gasped.)

ASCARDI: Liar!

CAYLEY: I'm also the town planner in Tifaeris. Working directly under Sir Flaxley himself.

(Kyrie beamed.)

KYRIE: Whereas I took after my mother!

ASCARDI: You're a prostitute?

KYRIE: Only on weekdays. At weekends, I give it away.

ASCARDI: Right...

(He grimaced.)

ASCARDI: So you know *the real* Sir Flaxley...

(He then beamed with pride.)

ASCARDI: And scene! Just kidding. I've never been to Anoseta. And I'm only watching this tent for a friend. He asked me stand in and pretend to be Sir Flaxley while he's on lunch. I have no idea why.

(Kyrie clicked her fingers with frustration.)

KYRIE: Damn it. Looks like he's not our father, after all.

CAYLEY: He's lying, Kyrie; that's what he does!

ASCARDI: How can you say that?

CAYLEY: Because it's obvious.

ASCARDI: Oh...

(He then shrugged.)

ASCARDI: Fair enough. But... still... why don't you bugger off anyway? I'm not ready to be a father.

KYRIE: And we're too old to need one.

CAYLEY: And we're certainly not desperate enough to give *you* the job.

ASCARDI: Then we're agreed. Excellent. Off you pop then.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She looked to Kyrie.)

CAYLEY: I've heard enough.

KYRIE: Same.

CAYLEY: Let's go.

(She then glanced to Ascardi.)

CAYLEY: You know identity theft is a crime, right?

ASCARDI: I...

CAYLEY: Don't bother.

(She then headed out of the tent with Kyrie in tow.)

KYRIE: Well... that was most unexpected. Our father is rubbish.

(Cayley sighed then headed away with her sister at her side.)

CAYLEY: I'm the daughter of a prostitute and a conman. How is that fair? Yesterday I thought I was the daughter of a noble knight and a beautiful, yet unfortunate maiden.

KYRIE: Yeah, but look on the bright side. At least you have an awesome sister.

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: Besides, who our parents are makes no difference, does it?

CAYLEY: Well...

KYRIE: According to grandad, mum was a bit dim, like me. She was also an outrageous slut, apparently. And that guy in there, our father, is clearly a terrible person. And yet look how *you're* turning out. You're a genius *and* a really nice girl.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: Thanks, Kyrie.

KYRIE: I'm just saying, why you've been obsessing over who our father is, I'll never know. It doesn't even matter. We're doing great without one.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: A martial arts expert and a genius; and we're both stunners, like our mum.

(Cayley blushed and threw out a dismissive wrist.)

CAYLEY: I'm not a stunner.

KYRIE: Oh, shut up. You walked past the café the other day when I was having coffee with Anoka. All the teenage boys in the street stopped what they doing and stared at you.

Drooling! So was Mister Wilmore from the bank; we might want to keep an eye on him.

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: Point being, you're a hotty, Cayley. Those boys were smitten.

CAYLEY: Really?

KYRIE: Yes.

(She furrowed her brow.)

KYRIE: After you'd passed, they started making obscene gestures with their pelvises. Dirty little bastards.

CAYLEY: Right...

KYRIE: But yeah, you *are* gorgeous.

CAYLEY: Well...

KYRIE: No! Stop it! Enough of that modesty nonsense! You are a hotty and you know it! I've lost count of the times I've caught you posing in the mirror; gasping at your own beauty. (Cayley instantly turned bright red.)

CAYLEY: That's never happened!

KYRIE: Yes, it has! Just a few nights ago, you said, you were so damned gorgeous, you make goddesses blush! Then you kissed the mirror!

(By now, Cayley was staring at her feet, whimpering as she scampered onwards.)

CAYLEY: It was a joke. I knew you were watching.

KYRIE: Fibber!

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

KYRIE: Nope.

(She then grabbed Cayley and pulled her to face her.)

KYRIE: Look at me!

(Cayley slowly pouted upwards at her.)

KYRIE: Don't be embarrassed, Cayley. Ever again! About anything! There's no need for it. You're a genius and you're gorgeous with it. So what if you're a bit vain, and so what if our parents were nobody special. You *are*!

(She nodded.)

KYRIE: So bollocks to that guy in the tent, and you can forget Sir Flaxley too. You don't need them. You don't need anybody. Just keep being awesome and happiness is bound to follow.

(Cayley stared into her eyes for a moment then smiled.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie... you know... you're so wise sometimes, I barely recognise you.

KYRIE: Right... what does that mean?

CAYLEY: It means that was good advice. Thanks, Kyrie.

KYRIE: Well... okay. But I wasn't *giving* you advice. I was telling you stop having daddy issues. I've never understood it. You've never had a dad and you've turned out brilliantly. Why it bothers you, I just don't know.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She chuckled.)

CAYLEY: Nor do I now you mention it.

KYRIE: Good.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: Anyway, let's get off home. Or to the sandwich shop. Or to the hotel? Where were we going again?

CAYLEY: To the shops.

KYRIE: That's right. To buy you a dildo.

CAYLEY: Lingerie!

KYRIE: Oh, yeah. To buy you lingerie.

CAYLEY: No! Lingerie for Anoka.

(Kyrie looked enlightened.)

KYRIE: That's the one. Anoka's souvenir.

CAYLEY: That's right.

(She then smiled warmly.)

CAYLEY: I also want to bring something back for Sir Flaxley.

KYRIE: Cayley...

CAYLEY: A parting gift.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: I'll stay in Tifaeris, but I'm going to work for someone else. I just want to give him something as a thank you for helping us out when we first washed up in Tifaeris. Then I'll wash my hands of him. He's not my daddy, and let's be honest... after recent events, it's a bit of a stretch to even consider him a friend.

KYRIE: Right... well... that's fair. What shall we get him? I doubt lingerie would suit him. (Cayley just smiled sweetly.)

CAYLEY: Don't worry. I know just what he'd like.

KYRIE: Oh, cool.

(They then headed off towards the market stalls together.)

That evening, just as the sun was about to set, Sir Flaxley's daughter's Jade and Emma, made their way through the town, on their way back from a day out at the beach. They weren't looking forward to getting home. Their home lives had been more than a little strained of late and they'd found the whole experience somewhat deflating.

JADE: I hope dad's allowed to come home tonight.

EMMA: I know, right? What was mum thinking?

JADE: I have no idea. Just a few days ago, she leapt into dad's arms and the two of them started being all lovey-dovey. Now he's had to spend a night with that alien instead.

EMMA: On a tiny, alien-sized bed.

JADE: Well... he probably took a camp bed, to be fair.

EMMA: Right. That would make more sense.

(She sighed.)

EMMA: But still. I like it when dad's at home.

JADE: So do I. But mum was really angry.

EMMA: So was I. I like Cayley, and I can't believe he's made her want to leave town. But... I don't think mum should kick him out over it.

JADE: Me either.

(She nodded.)

JADE: We should tell her that.

EMMA: Definitely.

(Jade then pouted.)

JADE: I don't want Cayley to leave town, Emma.

EMMA: I know. Even if she does stare at us with horror in her eyes every time she sees us, I think she's nice.

JADE: So do I. She always gives us good advice.

EMMA: And we always get our homework right, when she tells us the answers.

JADE: Right? I'll miss her when she goes.

EMMA: Same.

(She then glanced towards a shaded alleyway to her left.)

EMMA: Wait. Is that Kyrie?

(She pointed into the alley where a young couple were kissing passionately.)

JADE: Making out with a guy in a darkened alleyway like that? It can *only* be Kyrie.

EMMA: We should ask her if she can convince Cayley to stay.

JADE: Good idea.

(She grimaced.)

JADE: But that'd mean interrupting her while she's... you know... doing that.

EMMA: They're only kissing, Jade.

JADE: Well... yeah.

(She nodded.)

JADE: Come on then.

(With that, they marched up to the smooching twosome then waved at them enthusiastically.)

EMMA: Hi, Kyrie!

JADE: Hiya!

(At once, the couple stopped kissing and stared at them in horror. As they did so, Jade and Emma both stepped back and shrieked.)

JADE: What the hell???

EMMA: That's not Kyrie!!!

JADE: More to the point, Emma; that's Arden!

EMMA: What? Holy crap! And that's a woman he's kissing!!!

(Arden and the woman in his company, Tessie, gaped at them uncomfortably for several moments, then Arden furrowed his brow and spoke in a manly voice.)

ARDEN: Shit.

TESSIE: Um... who are these girls, Arden?

(Arden winced.)

ARDEN: My sisters.

TESSIE: Oh. Whoops.

JADE: What gives, Arden?

EMMA: You're meant to be a gay boy!

JADE: Gays don't kiss women!

ARDEN: Um... she's not a woman.

(He then returned to using an effeminate voice.)

ARDEN: This is my boyfriend, Clive!

TESSIE: No! I'm not doing *that* again.

ARDEN: Tessie! I mean, Clive!

TESSIE: No, Arden! Like I told you last time, pretending to be a dude if we get caught is humiliating!

JADE: Not to mention ridiculous! You look nothing like a dude.

EMMA: You're quite pretty actually.

TESSIE: Oh. Thank you.

EMMA: Which begs the question, why would you want to kiss *him*?

TESSIE: Because he's my husband!

(Jade and Emma gasped.)

JADE: Husband???

EMMA: You're man and wife?

TESSIE: Yes.

EMMA: Gay men don't *have* wives!

(She then gasped with realisation.)

EMMA: Jade! He's a liar! He's not gay at all!!!

(Jade gave her a condescending glance.)

JADE: Really? What gave it away?

EMMA: He has a wife!

JADE: Emma...

(Arden then spoke up in a manly voice and interrupted her.)

ARDEN: Fine. My secret's out, I guess. I'm...

(He sighed with humiliation.)

ARDEN: Heterosexual.

JADE: Clearly.

(She then smiled warmly.)

JADE: But well done for admitting it.
EMMA: What she said. Coming out as straight can't have been easy.
JADE: But at least you're free now.
EMMA: Right? It must have been so lonely in the closet.
(They then started giggling together, much to Arden's annoyance.)
ARDEN: How is that funny?
TESSIE: Go easy on them, darling; they're just kids.
ARDEN: Kids? They're monsters!
TESSIE: Hardly.
(She smiled at Jade and Emma.)
TESSIE: Girls...
JADE: Arden, you need to explain yourself!
EMMA: Especially to dad! And to mum. And to Anoka. And to us!
ARDEN: Um...
JADE: You accused *all of us* of being homophobic towards you at some point. And you're not even gay!
EMMA: Yeah! So the least you can do is explain everything!
ARDEN: Girls, I'm sorry, but... I don't owe you anything.
TESSIE: Actually, you kinda do.
ARDEN: Tessie...
TESSIE: No, Arden. You do owe it them to come clean; and you *also* owe it to me! I'm sick of all this now. Having to pretend we're just friends whenever we come to this town hurts my feelings. And I don't want to do it anymore.
(She nodded.)
TESSIE: I want us to be a normal couple. And I'd very much like to meet my in-laws finally.
ARDEN: Tessie...
TESSIE: Please? For me.
ARDEN: I...
(His shoulders then slumped and he mumbled despairingly.)
ARDEN: Fine.

A short while later, a deeply embarrassed Arden found himself sitting at the table in his parent's house, wincing in shame. Seated opposite him, Flaxley, Kritz and Anoka were staring at him with their jaws on the floor. It was the most uncomfortable, he'd ever felt. At the table with them, Jade, Emma and Tessie could only grimace in discomfort for him. The silence was horrifying. Mercifully, after a full two minutes of hell, where it felt like the entire world was on mute, someone finally broke the silence.

FLAXLEY: So... you pretended to be gay... all this time... just to upset *me*?
(Arden scratched behind his ear.)
ARDEN: Well... yeah.
FLAXLEY: Just... what?
ARDEN: I wanted to hurt you, dad. And I thought my turning out to be gay would absolutely crush you!
(He winced.)
ARDEN: Unfortunately, you handled it really well. You were really supportive.
(He dropped his forehead into his palm.)
ARDEN: So, I started cross-dressing as well, but that didn't work either.
(He furrowed his brow.)
ARDEN: You weren't *supposed* to stand by me! You were *supposed* to be horrified!

FLAXLEY: Excuse me? What do you want, a fucking apology?

ARDEN: I wanted you to be crushed! But you weren't. But by then it was too late. I'd already committed to the gay act by then. There was no turning back.

(He then offered him an anxious cheesy grin.)

ARDEN: So I had to find a different way to piss you off.

FLAXLEY: The anti-sword coalition.

ARDEN: Yeah...

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Fair play... you struck gold there.

ARDEN: Yeah...

(Anoka shook her head at him.)

ANOKA: So I was right, wasn't I?

ARDEN: Um...

ANOKA: You don't hate swords, you were just lashing out at dad!

ARDEN: Well...

FLAXLEY: But why? What the fuck did I do wrong?

ANOKA: You told *me* I was a natural with the sword, and didn't say it to him!

FLAXLEY: I did? When?

ANOKA: When we were six.

(Flaxley slowly turned his neck towards Arden.)

FLAXLEY: Seriously?

(Arden sat back and scratched himself uncomfortably.)

ARDEN: Yeah... I may have taken it badly.

FLAXLEY: I'll say!

ARDEN: It's just... I wanted to be your successor with the blade. I'd craved it since I was two!

FLAXLEY: And you might well have been! You made a fantastic start.

ARDEN: Yes, but I wasn't a natural like Anoka.

FLAXLEY: Nor was I!

(Arden's face went blank.)

ARDEN: What?

FLAXLEY: You don't have to be a natural to learn a skill, you tit!

ARDEN: Um...

FLAXLEY: If anything, it can be a hindrance!

(Anoka nodded.)

ANOKA: I had to unlearn *several* things that came naturally to me, in order to do them more effectively.

ARDEN: You mean...

(Kritz then started to giggle.)

KRITZ: Yup, you'd have mastered the sword long before Anoka did.

(As she sat there chuckling, Arden hung his head.)

ARDEN: Why would you laugh about that, mum?

KRITZ: Because, sweetie, you tried to tear this family apart. So I can either laugh it off or...

(Her brow then darkened.)

KRITZ: Destroy you!

(Arden flinched.)

ARDEN: Right. That's fair. Giggle away.

KRITZ: Thanks. Don't mind if I do.

(Flaxley glanced at his giggling wife then allowed himself a smile. Having made a decision, he then looked to his son.)

FLAXLEY: Arden? This is how it's going to be.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Your coalition has slowed down our recruitment greatly. Send them away. The defence of this town is paramount and they're in the way.

ARDEN: Well... okay. I can do that, I guess.

FLAXLEY: You will then quit the coalition.

ARDEN: Father...

FLAXLEY: I haven't finished. Once you've left the coalition, you're welcome to join Anoka and I for training, if you like.

ANOKA: But he's a cock.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but he's still your twin brother.

ANOKA: My twin brother is a cock!

FLAXLEY: That's as maybe, but I'm too old to bear grudges. And in that spirit, I'd just like to say...

(He looked to Tessie.)

FLAXLEY: Welcome to the family, Tina.

TESSIE: It's Tessie.

FLAXLEY: I suspect you might be right.

TESSIE: I am. But... thank you. I'm honoured.

ARDEN: Yeah. Um... thank you.

(He then nodded.)

ARDEN: Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to return to my coalition and stand them down. Then return to Azagotse for a while. As you can probably imagine, I'm somewhat embarrassed.

FLAXLEY: Very well.

(Arden nodded then climbed to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: But before you go, hug your sisters and kiss your mother. Earn that forgiveness, son. Be a man.

(He then stood up and held out his hand.)

FLAXLEY: Can you do that?

(Arden nodded.)

ARDEN: Yes, I can!

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(They then shook hands across the table, nodding sternly.)

ARDEN: Thank you, father.

FLAXLEY: You're welcome. Now hug your mother and be on your way.

ARDEN: I...

FLAXLEY: *Before* she changes her mind about laughing it off.

(Arden shrieked then hurriedly hugged his sisters, receiving a dig in the ribs from Anoka in the process. He then kissed his mum on the cheek and bolted out of the door. Having watched him go, Flaxley nodded then looked to Anoka.)

FLAXLEY: How long do you think it'll take him to notice?

ANOKA: That's the question, isn't it?

(Just then the door crept open and Arden stuck his head around it.)

ARDEN: Um... are you coming, Tessie?

ANOKA: What a pillock.

TESSIE: You noticed that too, huh?

(She then upped and headed for the door, rolling her eyes as she did so.)

In Leathrock, at this time, Kyrie and Cayley were standing outside their hotel, watching the sunset over the ocean. Revelling in the view, Cayley couldn't help but smile.

CAYLEY: What a perfect end to a really weird day.

KYRIE: It's not the end of the day yet, Cayley.

CAYLEY: Well...

KYRIE: We're gonna have another ice cream before we leave.

(Cayley giggled.)

CAYLEY: I'm not going to fight you on that point.

KYRIE: Good thing too. Your fighting skills are... well... you don't have any.

CAYLEY: I just meant you won't get any arguments from me.

KYRIE: Now we both know...

CAYLEY: About ice cream, I mean.

KYRIE: Oh. Fair enough.

(She then turned and glanced to her side where a crate was being loaded onto a carriage.)

KYRIE: Flaxley had better appreciate his present, Cayley. Renting that delivery carriage wasn't cheap.

CAYLEY: I'm sure he'll love it, Kyrie.

KYRIE: Right. Well... you can ask him when we get back, I suppose.

CAYLEY: Nope. I put my resignation letter in the crate with his gift. I'll find a *new* job when we get back and never bother him again.

KYRIE: Bother him? Behave! I'm sure you weren't a bother to him, sister face.

CAYLEY: No... I was.

(She winced.)

CAYLEY: I thought he was our dad. Meaning I thought he'd been unfaithful to Kritz. Being accused of being unfaithful must be horrible, but there I was, every day, this young idiot, convinced he'd committed that very sin and betrayed his wife. That must have been really annoying for both of them.

KYRIE: Not really. They both *knew* you were living in cloud cuckoo land.

CAYLEY: How kindly put.

KYRIE: You know me.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: The delivery carriage is pulling away.

KYRIE: Awesome.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: Now let's get some ice cream then head to that carriage place to get a ride home.

CAYLEY: Now that sounds like a plan.

KYRIE: Rubbish. It sounds nothing *like* one of my plans. You didn't veto it.

CAYLEY: No, I mean...

(Just then, she was interrupted by a female voice from her right.)

LIRA: Hey! I know you.

(Cayley and Kyrie glanced at her awkwardly.)

KYRIE: Not guilty!

CAYLEY: Yeah, it wasn't us!

KYRIE: We weren't even there!

LIRA: You were. In Tifaeris!

CAYLEY: Um...

LIRA: You're that really intelligent girl!

KYRIE: Yup! That's me.

LIRA: Um... I meant your sister.

KYRIE: Yeah... I feared as much.

(She shrugged.)

KYRIE: Oh, well. I enjoyed the fantasy while it lasted.

(Lira gave her a sideways glance then looked to Cayley.)

LIRA: I can't believe I've run into *you* here. Cayley, right?

CAYLEY: Maybe...

(She then half hid behind Kyrie.)

LIRA: I was really impressed with how you handled that election a few days ago.

CAYLEY: What? You saw that, did you?

LIRA: Yes.

(She grimaced.)

LIRA: Sorry, allow me to introduce myself. I'm Lira; I was one of the election organisers, working under Tito.

CAYLEY: Oh. Hello.

LIRA: You were fantastic. And you're how old? Fifteen?

CAYLEY: Thirteen.

LIRA: Are you sure?

(Cayley covered her chest and pouted.)

CAYLEY: Yes!

LIRA: Then that's even more impressive.

KYRIE: Right? She has a cute butt too.

LIRA: I was talking about her mind.

KYRIE: Yeah... that's okay too.

LIRA: Okay? Your sister is a genius.

(She then looked to Cayley.)

LIRA: I was so impressed by what I saw, I was planning on recruiting you.

CAYLEY: Recruiting me?

LIRA: To a government position here in Leathrock.

(She sighed.)

LIRA: Unfortunately, the idea was vetoed. The president filled out a written agreement, promising *not* to poach you, you see? Apparently, Sir Flaxley's a bit paranoid about us swooping in and stealing his best talent.

(Cayley mused to herself. The idea of working for the continent's wealthiest government was indeed appealing.)

CAYLEY: That would have been awesome. I'd have loved the opportunity to work here.

LIRA: Yeah? You like Leathrock then, do you?

CAYLEY: I do. In fact, Kyrie and I *were* planning on moving here.

KYRIE: Then we changed our minds because it's too expensive.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: Come on, Cayley; let's get some ice cream.

CAYLEY: Wait, a second, Kyrie.

KYRIE: But I want ice cream!

CAYLEY: In a minute.

(Kyrie stamped her foot and pouted.)

KYRIE: Aw.

CAYLEY: Don't sulk. I just want to...

(She grinned an evil grin.)

CAYLEY: Make a suggestion.

KYRIE: Whatever. And for your information, missy; *I'm* not sulking. *You're* sulking!

CAYLEY: Grow up.

(She rolled her eyes then looked to Lira and blushed.)

CAYLEY: So... you can't *poach* me, right?

LIRA: Sadly, no.

CAYLEY: But, if I *applied* for the post of my own volition, that wouldn't *be* poaching, would it?

(Lira smirked.)

LIRA: No. No, it would not.

(Cayley beamed.)

CAYLEY: In that case, do you have an application form on you?

LIRA: No.

CAYLEY: Fiddlesticks.

(She then sighed emptily.)

CAYLEY: Oh, who am I kidding anyway? Even if I *got* the job, it wouldn't solve our accommodation issue. Property here in Leathrock is way too expensive for *our* budget.

LIRA: Actually, that wouldn't be an issue. Government jobs come *with* accommodation.

CAYLEY: Really?

LIRA: Yes. And I was thinking you'd be well suited to a senior position in the civil service; responsible for domestic policy. That comes with a spacious four bedroom apartment on the seafront.

(Cayley's jaw fell open.)

CAYLEY: Really?

LIRA: Yeah. That building there.

(She then pointed to a luxurious, mansion, akin to a palace.)

CAYLEY: Are you serious?

LIRA: Of course. That's the civil service building. All those who work there live above it. And the higher the position, the bigger the apartment.

(Cayley's face lit up.)

CAYLEY: When can I start?

LIRA: Patience, Cayley. Before you decided on anything, there's a something you need to know first. You *must* work a full working day, four days a week. And I mean a *full* working day. All five hours!

(Cayley stared through her blankly.)

LIRA: You can start and finish whenever you like, as long as you're in the building between twelve and one. That's when the daily meetings are. So you can start at eight and finish at one, if you like. Or start at twelve and finish at five. You can even start at half past ten then leave at half past three if you're feeling whimsical. But you must do the full five hours. Can you manage that?

CAYLEY: You know what? I think I'll be okay. I work five days a week at the moment; eight hours a day.

LIRA: I see. What's Flaxley trying to do? Burn you out?

CAYLEY: Well...

LIRA: So? What do you think?

(Cayley bounced excitedly.)

CAYLEY: I'm in! I'm in!

(She then froze.)

CAYLEY: Or am I?

(She sighed then looked to Kyrie.)

CAYLEY: You don't want to move here, do you?

KYRIE: That's right! I want ice cream!

CAYLEY: Kyrie, this is serious!

KYRIE: So am I!

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: So torn.

(Lira bit her lip.)

LIRA: I see. Well... here's a suggestion. Why don't you do a trial for a few days? You can stay in the apartment and come to work on one of the days to test the water, so to speak. If you like it, the job's yours.

(She smiled.)

LIRA: We don't normally *make* offers like this, but I really, really want you on my team, Cayley. You'll be a tremendous asset.

(Cayley looked to Kyrie and grimaced.)

CAYLEY: What do you think?

KYRIE: I think I'm going to throttle you if that ice cream place is shut when we get there.
(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: She really wants an ice cream.

LIRA: Then she's in luck. Senior civil servants have room service available, twenty four hours a day. If you check into the apartment this evening, she can have as many helpings as she likes. For free.

CAYLEY: What do you think, K...

KYRIE: Lead the way!

(Cayley chuckled.)

CAYLEY: She approves.

KYRIE: Yup! And you're taking that job!

CAYLEY: Because of the free ice cream?

KYRIE: Why else?

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Don't decide based on that. You're going to miss Anoka if we move here. So I don't *want* to move here unless I'm *certain* that you'll be okay.

KYRIE: Cayley, don't you know anything? Yes, losing Anoka will break my heart, but think. What do girls eat when they're heartbroken? Ice cream! I'll have an endless supply of heartbreak remedy on tap. For free! Now stop procreating!

CAYLEY: Procrastinating!

KYRIE: That's what I said.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She looked to Lira.)

CAYLEY: Forgive her, she's not... let's say we're at opposite ends of the intelligence scale.

LIRA: I know. I saw her speech at the election.

(She nodded.)

LIRA: Now. Do you want that trial, Cayley?

CAYLEY: Yes. Yes, I do.

(Lira beamed.)

LIRA: Then follow me!

(She then headed away. Beaming with delight, Kyrie and Cayley followed on. A brand new, life of luxury was opening up before them and they couldn't believe their luck.)

In Tifaeris, a short while later, Flaxley was strolling along the moonlit thoroughfare towards the recruiting centre. Well aware that his son's coalition had done the recruitment drive a great deal of damage, he was expecting bad news. There was no way they'd have recruited

enough people yet and he'd have to do it all again the following day. More than a tad miffed about that fact, he kicked a stone then grumbled to himself.

FLAXLEY: Bloody ridiculous. Scuppered by my own idiot of a son. I bet this sort of thing never happens to the president of Leathrock.

(He then glanced to one side where thirty or so teenage boys were playing with a football. Sensing an opportunity, he marched past them and offered up a wave.)

FLAXLEY: So? Have you signed up for the army yet, lads?

(Much to his annoyance, they all scoffed at him.)

LAD 01: Of course not!

LAD 02: We've got better things to *do* than prance about in a silly uniform all day.

(Somewhat miffed, Flaxley scowled at him.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah? Well... *you're* a silly uniform!

(He then stomped into the recruitment office opposite. Having done so, he found Phisele and Tito, deep in discussion at the desk.)

PHISELE: Well... it's better than I thought we'd do.

TITO: Yes, but still not good enough.

(He sighed.)

TITO: Looks like I'll be spending another day in this god forsaken hell hole.

FLAXLEY: God forsaken hell hole???

(Tito flinched, then immediately backtracked.)

TITO: Um... um... I meant the hotel!

FLAXLEY: Convincing.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: What's the story, Phisele?

PHISELE: Two hundred and seventy nine.

FLAXLEY: Right... what does that mean?

PHISELE: We recruited two hundred and seventy nine people.

(She sighed.)

PHISELE: Twenty one short of the target.

FLAXLEY: Bugger.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: But, still... I feared it'd be lower than that.

PHISELE: And it would have been, if Anoka and Kritz hadn't worked so hard.

FLAXLEY: We all worked hard, Phisele.

PHISELE: I know, but those two were immense.

(She sighed.)

PHISELE: Unlike some of us, they just *know* how to appeal to men.

TITO: Are you saying you don't?

PHISELE: Well...

TITO: You're wrong if you are. I find you *very* appealing.

PHISELE: You probably do, yes. It's the attractive ones I struggle with.

TITO: Ouch.

(He sighed.)

TITO: What is it with the people of this town? Why do they hate me?

(He pouted.)

TITO: I just want to go home. You can't recruit the other twenty one people quickly enough for me.

(Flaxley nodded knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: That sounds like a challenge.

TITO: What?

FLAXLEY: Fifty lig says I can have the full quota met in five minutes then you can be on your way.

TITO: You can?

PHISELE: Sounds fanciful to me, Flaxley. I love you like a father, but let's face it, you can't attract men like Kritz can.

FLAXLEY: Well... no.

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: But I can attract teenage boys!

(Phisele and Tito stared at him in horror.)

FLAXLEY: That came out wrong.

PHISELE: I should hope so!

TITO: Indeed.

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Right... so... now I've said that, I think I owe it to all of us to show you what I meant.

PHISELE: Undoubtedly.

(Flaxley smirked.)

FLAXLEY: Follow me.

(With that, he marched outside. Having shared a brief grimace, Phisele and Tito then followed him out.)

FLAXLEY: Okay... now watch and learn.

(With that, he stepped closer to the boys who were playing football then turned to face Phisele and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: You did a great job, signing people up for the army today, Phisele. Excellent work. I'm delighted. And so is Kritz. In fact, my entire staff are delighted.

(He grinned fiendishly.)

FLAXLEY: Especially, young Cayley Severen.

(At once, all the boys glanced in his direction.)

FLAXLEY: She has a thing for boys in uniform, you see? She likes kissing them.

(He then beamed with delight as all but one of the boys charged into the recruiting office.)

FLAXLEY: Happy, Tito?

TITO: Ecstatic!

(Phisele, however, just shook her head at him.)

PHISELE: Seriously, Flaxley? Did that poor girl wrong you in a former life or something? Once she gets back to town, she's going to be pestered, twenty-four seven by amorous boys now. Ones who think they're in with a shout and won't take no for an answer, because they have it on good authority that she's a bloody soldier groupie!

(She then headed back into the office, shaking her head. Left behind, Flaxley could only shrug.)

FLAXLEY: What's her problem?

TITO: I'm guessing, she's concerned about the fact young Cayley is going to get swamped and stalked by randy boys for evermore because of you.

(He beamed.)

TITO: But I don't care. I'm going to gather my team and leave pronto.

(He then went to walk away, but immediately stopped.)

TITO: Actually, this has worked out rather well for you. You've achieved the minimum recruitment number now, so you've passed this stage; in fact, *all* the stages of your application. Meaning I can report this to the president in the morning. And there just so happens to be a tri-monthly meeting of all the coalition heads in two days time. You should attend. You can put forward your case and be accepted immediately.

FLAXLEY: Really?

TITO: Yes. Just make sure you bring your best two people with you. Each nation must have three representatives.

FLAXLEY: Now that I can do.

TITO: Jolly good!

(He nodded.)

TITO: Just remember, you passed the initial three stages by the bare *minimum*. Going forwards, we need to see *better* elections, a *proper* court system and your army needs to work out.

FLAXLEY: I'm sure it will.

TITO: And I'm sure you believe that. Personally, I don't care.

(He beamed.)

TITO: *My* work here is done.

(He then skipped away, singing inside. Watching him go, Flaxley couldn't help but smile to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent. That's the hard part complete. Now all I have to do is impress the other nation heads and our security is ensured. Piece of piss.

(He then marched home with his head held high.)

That evening, Sir Flaxley found himself, once again, sitting on the porch with his good friend Derek, the three foot tall green alien from the planet Tryme 17. Relaxing with an ale in his hand, he couldn't have been happier.

FLAXLEY: We're living in a golden time, Derek. Did you know that?

DEREK: No, Flaxley. I did not.

FLAXLEY: Well, we are. These are *progressive* times, Derek. A time of great upward mobility.

(He exhaled.)

FLAXLEY: We're moving into a new age of safety and prosperity.

DEREK: I see. And what are you basing that on?

FLAXLEY: The fact that nations are learning to work together rather than fighting one another. It brings joy to my heart.

DEREK: Flaxley, I can read your mind remember? What's bringing joy to *your* heart is that Kritz has invited you back into the marital bed.

FLAXLEY: No; that's just one factor.

DEREK: It's the *overriding* factor!

FLAXLEY: You...

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Well, so what if it is? All that provocative posturing she was doing in town this morning, made her extraordinarily horny. And boy did I reap the rewards this afternoon!

DEREK: Say no more. If you say it, I picture it and I'd rather not recycle my dinner, thank you.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough.

(He took a sip of his ale then exhaled.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, old chap. I have a job for you.

DEREK: Denied.

FLAXLEY: I haven't even told you what it is yet.

DEREK: Yes, you have. Mind-reader, remember? You want to leave me in charge of the town's security while you, Kritz and Anoka head to Leathrock in the morning.

FLAXLEY: And that's asking too much, is it?

DEREK: Yes! You know how I feel about getting involved in these matters. If you put *me* in charge of anything, people are going to say, who's that little green alien bastard and what does he think he's playing at? I'll get accused of all sorts! Overstepping. Colonising! Trying to take over this planet. Then I'll get assassinated by an angry racist mob! You know what these lunatics are like! Well, not on your nelly, chummy. I'm going to remain a humble citizen and nothing more!

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: It's possible, Derek, that you may have overthought that.

DEREK: Which is better than under-thinking it!

FLAXLEY: Well... fine. It doesn't matter if you agree or *not*.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: If anyone from another nation *was* to try their luck whilst Kritz, Anoka, Kyrie and I are away, you'd be the *first* one out there, fighting to take the town back.

DEREK: Would I now?

FLAXLEY: Yes. And you *know* you would. You like this town and you'd defend it with everything you've got.

DEREK: Well... maybe.

(He wagged his finger at him.)

DEREK: But I'd do it from the shadows. There's no way I'd let people think I was in a position of trust.

FLAXLEY: Point being, you'd still do it.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: And besides, you wouldn't *be* in a position of trust. Officially, I'm leaving Phisele in charge of defence. I was just saying, that if anything happens, I'll be relying on you to help her out.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: And seeing as we both know you *would* help her defend this place from attack, you could have just agreed and made this conversation a hell of a lot easier.

DEREK: Bloody couldn't. I needed you know that should I ever fight for this town, I'm doing it as a member of the public; not your go to guy!

FLAXLEY: Fine. If that's how you feel.

DEREK: It is. And I know you think I'm being paranoid to the point of silliness, but I'm really not. Zanne and I are the only two aliens on this planet and as such, we'd rather not draw attention to ourselves.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Fair enough. The point is, I'll be relying on you to use that magic of yours to keep everyone safe, and we both know you will. So let's just move on.

DEREK: Good thinking.

FLAXLEY: These are great times, Derek.

DEREK: Yes, you said.

FLAXLEY: I know I did. And I meant it! We're going to be part of a strategic military alliance. That's a massive step in this town's development.

DEREK: Yes, well, don't get ahead of yourself, Flaxley, we haven't been accepted yet.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but we will be.

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: I mean, why would any of the other national leaders object? I'm the great Sir Flaxley; they'll be delighted to have me on board.

DEREK: Flaxley...

FLAXLEY: When I walk in, they'll be wowed by my presence then awed by my speech. Acceptance is just a formality.

DEREK: Is it?

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, you miserable doubting bastard!

DEREK: Flaxley, you seem to be overlooking something.

FLAXLEY: Do I?

DEREK: Yes. You need the approval of *all* the other nations.

(He cringed.)

DEREK: Including the delegation from Guevina!

(Flaxley blinked at him nonchalantly.)

FLAXLEY: And how is that a problem? Queen Mandika is a dear friend. Why, only last year we enjoyed a fun evening together, laughing about old times.

DEREK: Yes, well, socialising together is one thing, but joining a coalition with her is another thing entirely.

FLAXLEY: In what way?

DEREK: In what way??? You have met Mandika, right? She's going to make you jump through hoops, Flaxley! You know what she's like. She's going to demand all kinds of concessions before she lets you in. Then she'll remind you forever more that you're only in the coalition because *she* was kind enough to *let* you in.

(He sucked his teeth.)

DEREK: In short, she's going to be a dick about it, just to remind you that she's important and you're not.

(Flaxley laughed out loud.)

FLAXLEY: You worry too much. I'm sure I can win her over.

DEREK: I'm sure you can too, but at what cost? You know she's bound to demand to something unreasonable in order to get her vote.

FLAXLEY: Like what?

DEREK: I don't know. Cayley, perhaps?

FLAXLEY: What?

DEREK: This town's greatest mind. She'd be an asset to *any* growing nation and Mandika wouldn't think *twice* about pinching her.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, right. She'd have a job poaching her from *us*, Derek.

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: I've got a horrible feeling she's already left us for good.

DEREK: Yes, well, after what *you* said to her, I can't even act surprised.

(Flaxley glowered at him coldly.)

FLAXLEY: You know, Derek, I'm starting to wonder if these evening meetings of ours are worth the bother. All you do nowadays is snipe. It's like having a night out with a little green Bonson.

DEREK: You take that back!

FLAXLEY: No!

DEREK: All I was saying is, don't count your chickens before they hatch! Joining that coalition is *not* a foregone conclusion.

FLAXLEY: Well...

DEREK: As for Cayley, if you *do* have any ambitions about winning her back, you're going to have one hell of a job on your hands. Yup. You've got your work cut out, old friend. You really have.

(Flaxley nodded to acknowledge his words then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I'm not afraid of a little work, Derek.

DEREK: It won't *be* a little work.

FLAXLEY: Even so. Watch this space, old chap. I'll get us approval to join the coalition *and* I'll win Cayley back. You mark my words. It'll be a doddle.

(He then glanced away and grimaced uneasily. Things seldom ran smoothly, especially when Queen Mandika was involved and he knew he was in for a rough ride. He wasn't about to tell Derek that, however.)

DEREK: I can read your mind, you know?

FLAXLEY: Fuck!

Chapter Five – Alliance Comes Not Without Defiance

It was five o'clock in the morning on the day after Tifaeris completed its recruitment, and the streets of the town were silent. The sun was yet to rise and only one house had its lanterns lit. That house, was Sir Flaxley's house.

Having risen early in order to make the long trip to Leathrock, Flaxley, Kritz and Anoka had already eaten breakfast and would soon be setting out. Flaxley and Kritz's four youngest children were already with their babysitter, Phisele's mum; known to her closest friends as Phisele's mum.

The first to emerge from the house that morning, Sir Flaxley yawned then glanced up at the starry sky. Delighted that there wasn't a cloud in sight, he smiled then sat down on a chair to pull his boots on.

FLAXLEY: It's gonna be a long old trek.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I just hope our favourite hotel has some rooms available.

(He then grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: And that they've never figured out who stole all their cutlery. Honestly, that wife of mine.

(With that, he pushed his foot in his second boot then climbed to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, well. I'd better go and get the carriage ready, I suppose.

(Just as he was about to head down from the veranda, however, he noticed a movement in the corner of his eye. At once, he turned and glanced down the road to squint into the darkness.)

FLAXLEY: A carriage? At this hour?

(He bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: With any luck Cayley's back. And her sister isn't.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: No, no; that's not fair. Those two come as a package. If we're to accept one, we'll have to accept both... no matter how ridiculous Kyrie is.

(He nodded to himself.)

FLAXLEY: I'll wait until they pass then give young Cayley a warm greeting to let her know she's still wanted. It's the least I can do, after all.

(As the carriage neared, however, he could easily tell that this wasn't a passenger carriage. The horse was pulling a flat cart with a large crate on it.)

FLAXLEY: A delivery? At this hour? Must be for the baker.

(Much to his bewilderment, however, the carriage pulled up in front of him then the driver jumped down.)

DRIVER: Morning, matey. Is this the Flaxley residence?

FLAXLEY: That depends on what you're delivering.

DRIVER: What?

FLAXLEY: I jest. What have you got for me?

DRIVER: I don't know, mate. Some kind of livestock, I think.

FLAXLEY: Livestock?

DRIVER: I'd assume so. The box does say live animal in transit. And there's air holes in the top.

FLAXLEY: What? *I* didn't order any livestock!

DRIVER: No? Your wife, perhaps.

FLAXLEY: I didn't order one of those either.

(The driver chuckled.)

DRIVER: I like you, mate; you're witty.

FLAXLEY: Yes...

DRIVER: Anyway, fancy giving me a hand?

FLAXLEY: I suppose I should, yes.

(With that, he headed to the back of the cart and aided the driver in lifting the heavy crate down onto the grass.)

DRIVER: Lovely. I'll be off then.

FLAXLEY: Wait, a minute. What if it's defective?

DRIVER: Well... you'll have to sort *that* out with the sender.

(He then passed Sir Flaxley a slip of paper.)

DRIVER: Anyway... it was nice meeting you.

(He then jumped into the driver's seat and immediately set about turning around. Flaxley just watched on emptily as he made then turn then headed away. With bewilderment, he then glanced down at the crate.)

FLAXLEY: The sender, eh?

(With that, he squinted down at the piece of paper he'd been given.)

FLAXLEY: Bugger. Can't see a thing in this light.

(Much to his relief, the door then opened up and Kritz stepped out, leaving the door open. The light from the doorway was just enough for him make out the lettering.)

FLAXLEY: A-ha. Now we're in business.

KRITZ: Are we? Where's the bloody carriage?

FLAXLEY: I got waylaid by a delivery.

KRITZ: A delivery? At this hour?

FLAXLEY: It was an overnight courier. Time means nothing to those chaps. They arrive when they arrive.

KRITZ: True. So what is it?

FLAXLEY: Livestock, I think.

KRITZ: Livestock?

(She furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: Why would you order livestock?

FLAXLEY: I didn't!

KRITZ: Oh.

FLAXLEY: Did you?

KRITZ: No.

FLAXLEY: Anoka, perhaps?

KRITZ: Seems unlikely. She's not interested in pets and she's never cooked anything in her life.

FLAXLEY: No. Not well anyway.

KRITZ: Right.

(She chuckled.)

KRITZ: Let's not tell her that though.

FLAXLEY: God forbid.

(Kritz then nodded.)

KRITZ: Anyway, let's open her up.

FLAXLEY: Wait a second, there's a note here. It might give us some indication as to what it is. I'd hate to open the bloody thing and get savaged by a grendith.

KRITZ: Good point.

(Flaxley then glanced down at the sheet of paper again.)

FLAXLEY: Oh. It's from Kree Seven and Cayley Severen.

KRITZ: Kree Seven?

FLAXLEY: Two different sets of handwriting.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Clearly Kyrie tried to spell her own name then Cayley took over.

KRITZ: Makes sense.

(She grimaced.)

KRITZ: So what's in it then? What would those two send *us*?

FLAXLEY: Let's see, shall we? I doubt it's a grendith. I know I'm not their favourite person right now, but they wouldn't do something *that* dastardly.

(He then drew his sword, stuck it under the lid of the crate and flipped it open.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(He then peered inside the crate and grimaced with bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: Who the hell are you???

(Kritz gave him a sideways glance then stepped to his side.)

KRITZ: Who the hell is who?

(She then glanced into the crate and flinched.)

KRITZ: Who the hell are you?

(Inside the crate, James Ascardi was sitting bound and gagged, buried beneath dozens of copies of the book he'd been signing.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell are all these books? And...

(He then pulled a handwritten note from the side of the crate and proceeded to read it.)

FLAXLEY: Dear, Sir Flaxley. Meet my father, James Ascardi. His hobbies include posing as you and doing book signings all over the world.

(Flaxley then growled his way through the rest of the letter.)

FLAXLEY: I guess I was wrong about you being my father. I'm sorry for all the upset that must have caused. I realise now that I was being foolish. I hope you can forgive me. I shall now move on with my life and never trouble you again. Thank you for all the wonderful things you've done for Kyrie and I since we met you. Take care, and goodbye. Love, Cayley.

(Flaxley then thrust the letter at Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Hold that. I have a face to punch!

KRITZ: Wait. That read like Cayley isn't coming back!

FLAXLEY: Yes, and I'll process that as soon as I've finished with *this* bloke!

(He growled in Ascardi's terrified eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Prepare to meet pain!!!

KRITZ: Wait!

FLAXLEY: Stop telling me to wait!

KRITZ: But look.

(She delved into the crate then pulled out a book.)

KRITZ: Volume *three* of your book! Three! Like the first two weren't bad enough, they've made *another* one.

(Flaxley turned red with rage then reached into the crate.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, this does not end well for you, sunshine!

KRITZ: Wait!

FLAXLEY: What??? Why???

KRITZ: Let me just stand back a little so I can savour the moment.

(She stepped back then smirked menacingly.)

KRITZ: *Now* you can hit him!

FLAXLEY: Don't mind if I do.

KRITZ: Actually... wait!

FLAXLEY: For pity's sake, woman.

KRITZ: We're heading for an important appointment, Flaxley. You can't turn up covered in that fella's blood.

FLAXLEY: Why not? It's not like anyone's gonna *know* it's his.

KRITZ: You can't turn up covered in *anyone's* blood!

FLAXLEY: Oh... right. Good point.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I'll fetch my bathrobe.

KRITZ: Better still, Flaxley, dump him in the cells for now. Then you can deal with him when we get back.

FLAXLEY: When we get back???

KRITZ: Yes! That way, you can take your sweet time about making him suffer. Make an afternoon of it, if you like. It'll be a lot more fun than *hurrying* the deed, surely.

(Flaxley raised an impressed eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... you know... I landed on my feet when I married you, Kritzeveltia. Even after all these years, your dark-side continues to delight me.

KRITZ: I just want to make sure he suffers *properly*.

(Stuck there inside the crate, Ascardi was staring at Kritz with absolute terror in his eyes. It was bad enough having an almighty warrior like Sir Flaxley baying for his blood. To have his evil wife giving him dark and malicious ideas about prolonging his pain was mortifying. Not caring one iota about their prisoner's feeling on the matter, however, Flaxley gave his loving wife the thumbs up then yanked him out of the crate by his collar.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, you. Let's dump you in our least comfortable cell for a few nights. You can rest up in there while you contemplate all the vile and nasty things I'm going to do to you upon my return.

(He then proceeded to frogmarch him away. Watching them go, Kritz could only exhale adoringly.)

KRITZ: I'm so lucky. There's nothing quite as sexy as my husband when he's feeling vengeful.

(She then headed around the side of the house.)

KRITZ: Now for that carriage of ours.

A brief while later, Flaxley dragged Ascardi through the darkened streets, sneering bitterly while he promised the man a punishment that would redefine pain. Unsurprisingly, he was terrified. Desperate to flee, he was struggling determinedly. Having his hands and feet bound, however, he was completely and utterly powerless.

FLAXLEY: But that's too good for you. Too quick. Unless, of course, I use my bluntest blade. That ought to do it. Then we can move onto a more central part of your body. I'll have to make sure there are no ladies present for that bit, obviously. They won't want to see *that*, I can assure you.

(He allowed himself a devilish smile then glanced to his prisoner.)

FLAXLEY: What do you think of that, eh?

(Gagged, therefore unable to speak, Ascardi just stared at him through tortured eyes.)

FLAXLEY: No complaints? Maybe I was being too soft on you then. Perhaps I'll have to break out the spiked genital-clamps.

(At this point, Ascardi's eyes rolled into the top of his head and he passed out.)

FLAXLEY: Right... shit... I was enjoying that.

(With a sigh, he then scooped him up and made his way into the police station.)

FLAXLEY: That's odd? Why is the door open at this hour?

(He then shrugged it off and headed into the cell block. Having done so, he found a single lantern lit in the nearest cell and Phisele fast asleep on the bed.)

FLAXLEY: What's she doing there? Did she arrest herself by mistake?

(He chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: I joke, but that's the exact sort of thing Kyrie *would* have done.

(He then stepped into a different cell and chucked Ascardi down on the bed.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Now listen, you. I shall return in a few days. And when I do, you can expect to feel pain. A lot of it. But... if you're nice to the staff here, I might make it a little bit quicker. Four hours instead of five. Do you understand?

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Of course not. You're unconscious.

(Just then, Phisele's voice rose up from behind him.)

PHISELE: Flaxley? What are you doing here?

(Flaxley turned to face her.)

FLAXLEY: I could ask you then same question.

PHISELE: I dozed off.

FLAXLEY: Right...

PHISELE: After I was finished with all those forms, I rested my eyes for a while. The next thing I knew it was four o'clock. It didn't seem worth going home, so I decided to take a nap in that cell instead.

FLAXLEY: Ah, makes sense.

PHISELE: And you? Why are *you* here?

(Flaxley nodded towards Ascardi.)

FLAXLEY: Present from Cayley.

PHISELE: She's back?

FLAXLEY: No. She sent him here in a shipping crate.

PHISELE: What?

FLAXLEY: That's her father.

PHISELE: Really? I thought *you* were her father.

FLAXLEY: Don't even joke about that, you.

PHISELE: Right...

(She chuckled into her hand.)

PHISELE: Sorry.

FLAXLEY: You will be.

PHISELE: So... she sent you her father in a box, did she? Why would... I'm so confused. Why would she do *that*?

FLAXLEY: Because *he's* the bastard who did those book signings.

PHISELE: Really? That's the guy who stole your manuscripts, is it?

FLAXLEY: No. *That* was a chap called Venex. *This* fella is the one who travelled all around the world, *signing* those books whilst pretending to be me. And impregnating half the female population.

PHISELE: Ah, yes; I remember. That led Cayley to believe that *you* were her father.

FLAXLEY: That's right. Clearly, she's finally realised the truth.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: I'm not sure what happened exactly. But he arrived in a crate filled with copies of my third book.

PHISELE: *Third* book?

FLAXLEY: Yes. One's that he'd been signing, I'd wager.

PHISELE: I see.

(She nodded.)

PHISELE: So he was doing a book signing in Leathrock, was he?

FLAXLEY: Must have been.

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley must have figured it out then got Kyrie to knock him out. And here he is. A gift-wrapped punch bag, waiting for the stuffing to be beaten out of it.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Which I'll set about doing as soon as I return from Leathrock.

PHISELE: Righto. I'll keep him fed and warm until then.

FLAXLEY: If you would.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Make the charges for his arrest, identity theft and fraud.

PHISELE: Will do.

(Just then, Ascardi's eyes opened and he tried to sit up. Still bound and gagged, however, he simply toppled over then fell off the bed.)

FLAXLEY: Really?

PHISELE: Not an impressive fellow, is he?

(She nodded.)

PHISELE: I'll untie him. There are rules against binding and gagging prisoners.

FLAXLEY: Since when?

PHISELE: Since *you* signed us up to the international law statute.

FLAXLEY: Right...

PHISELE: If he tries to flee, batter him.

FLAXLEY: Happy to.

(She then cut the binds on Ascardi's wrists before cutting his ankles free. Then she untied the gag on his mouth. At once, he jumped down to his knees and adopting a praying stance.)

ASCARDI: Forgive me!!!

FLAXLEY: No.

ASCARDI: Fuck.

(He flinched.)

ASCARDI: But I was just the *face* of the operation. A puppet, if you will. Just an image for the true villain to hide behind. I'm nobody. It's Venex you want, not me!

(Flaxley's brow furrowed deeply.)

FLAXLEY: Venex!!!

ASCARDI: That's right. It was him! I was just a sales prop, really? I'm an actor, nothing more! *I'm* not the criminal here, sir; not me.

FLAXLEY: You pretended to me and made a fortune in doing so!

ASCARDI: And... that's illegal, is it?

FLAXLEY: Yes!!!

ASCARDI: Fuck. I had no idea. I feel terrible now. But still, there was no criminal intent on my part, so I'm free to go, right?

FLAXLEY: If you take one step towards that cell door, I'll separate you from all you hold dear!

(Ascardi swiftly covered his testicles.)

ASCARDI: I wouldn't dream of it, sir. Wouldn't dream of it. I won't leave until you've signed my release papers.

(He offered up a cheesy grin.)

ASCARDI: That should only take a couple of minutes, I believe.

FLAXLEY: You're going nowhere.

ASCARDI: Aw.

FLAXLEY: But I might consider offering you some degree of leniency if you tell me where Venex is. And don't even think of holding out on...

ASCARDI: He lives in a house called Rose Villa on Grosvenor Street in Leathrock.

PHISELE: Blimey, he gave that up quick.

ASCARDI: Of course, I did!

(He whimpered.)

ASCARDI: I want to get on Flaxley's good side, before his wife gives him any more ideas.

(Phisele chuckled.)

PHISELE: You met Kritz, huh? God love her. She's so delightfully psychotic.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... Rose Gardens on Gidley Street. Could you write that down for me, Phisele?

PHISELE: I *could*, but it'd make more sense to write Rose Villa on Grosvenor Street.

FLAXLEY: Why would it?

PHISELE: Because that's the address you were told.

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Do *that* then.

(He then sneered at Ascardi.)

FLAXLEY: And when I get back, the two of you can go on trial.

PHISELE: You're bringing Venex back with you, are you?

FLAXLEY: Yes!

PHISELE: You do realise that you'll have to fill out an extradition form to do that, right?

FLAXLEY: What?

PHISELE: All part of the new statute.

FLAXLEY: Fuck the statute, *he* can come here in a crate like *this* cunt did.

PHISELE: That would be easier.

FLAXLEY: Yes, it would.

(He then headed for the cell door.)

FLAXLEY: Lock him in, Phisele. I'm off to Leathrock. I'll find Venex this evening, ship him home then head for that meeting with the world leaders tomorrow and wow the buggers with my awesomeness.

PHISELE: Excellent.

FLAXLEY: But first, I need that address.

PHISELE: Ah, yes.

FLAXLEY: And I'd like you to do me a favour while I'm away. I need you send messages to my town planning team and to Wilbur the stonemason.

PHISELE: Oh?

FLAXLEY: I'll explain as we walk.

PHISELE: Righto.

(She then backed out of the cell and locked Ascardi inside.)

ASCARDI: Um... when's breakfast?

PHISELE: At breakfast time, silly.

(She then led Sir Flaxley out of the cell block.)

ASCARDI: Right... I fail to see how that's amusing, personally, but fine.

At nine o'clock that morning, Cayley found herself heading down a lengthy corridor within the Leathrock civil service building with her potential new boss, Lira, at her side. Greatly enthusiastic about the prospect of working for the Leathrock government, she couldn't wait to see what her new role would entail. Rather than making a display of her excitement, however, she'd opted to address an issue that could well stand in the way of her getting the position.

CAYLEY: I really can't apologise enough for my sister's behaviour last night, Lira.

LIRA: It's fine, Cayley. Don't worry your pretty little head about that.

CAYLEY: But I can't help it.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Ordering all those male escorts to the apartment was poor form. I'm so embarrassed.

(She furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Ordering dinner every hour *on* the hour wasn't exactly necessary either. She just wanted to feed her conquests.

LIRA: It happens, Cayley. She's not the first.

CAYLEY: She's not?

LIRA: No.

(She chuckled.)

LIRA: New staff member's families have abused the room service system more times that I can remember.

CAYLEY: Yes, but male escorts...

LIRA: They've had stranger requests.

CAYLEY: Oh?

LIRA: You don't want to know.

(She smiled.)

LIRA: Look... it'll be fine. Just like all the others, after a week or so the novelty will wear off and she'll get bored with it, trust me.

(Well aware that Kyrie would never get bored of having her every whim pandered to, day and night, Cayley could only grimace.)

CAYLEY: Well... let's hope so...

(She then tapped her fingers together nervously.)

CAYLEY: But what if she doesn't?

LIRA: She'll get a warning to reduce her usage.

CAYLEY: And when she doesn't?

LIRA: She'll be banned from using it.

CAYLEY: Right...

(She winced.)

CAYLEY: Maybe you should do that now before she bankrupts the government.

(Lira chuckled, very much under the illusion that Cayley was joking.)

LIRA: I like you. You're funny and smart.

CAYLEY: Well...

LIRA: Anyway. We're here.

(She nodded to a door at their side.)

LIRA: This is where you'll be stationed. The development department.

(She smiled.)

LIRA: You were the town planner in Tifaeris, right?

CAYLEY: That's right.

LIRA: Then this will be water off a duck's back to you. It's more of the same, really.

(She nodded.)

LIRA: I figured I'd start you off here and once you've shown the higher-ups how amazing you are, we can think about moving you up the ladder.

CAYLEY: Sounds good.

LIRA: Excellent. Now let's go and meet the team.

(With that, she led Cayley into a meeting room with several offices off of it. Inside the room, two grumpy old men and an unimpressed middle-aged woman were seated at the table, staring back at her. Greatly intimidated by the angry looking trio, Cayley half hid behind Lira.)

LIRA: Blimey. Who died?

(One of the old men then climbed to his feet.)

GORDON: Is this the child you're foisting on us?

LIRA: Gordon...

GORDON: Whatever. It's nice to meet you, I suppose.

(He then sat down and growled at her. The other two just scoffed.)

LIRA: Right... well... you'll get used to them. They're alright when you get to know them.

(The middle-aged lady shook her head.)

MAUREEN: Look, no offence, little girl, but this department is doing fine as it is. We don't *need* a fourth person, and we certainly don't want to spend our working day babysitting a child.

LIRA: You won't be babysitting her.

(The other gentleman raised a doubting eyebrow.)

WILFRED: Is that so?

LIRA: Yes!

(She rolled her eyes.)

LIRA: Anyway, Cayley, this is what they're currently working on.

(She drew Cayley's attention to a blackboard at the side of the room.)

LIRA: They've spent two days calculating how many houses of *this* specification...

(She pointed a flat schematic of a house and its gardens.)

LIRA: Will fit into a plot of this size.

(She pointed to a large rectangle with dimensions written on it.)

LIRA: In order to get the answer...

CAYLEY: Thirty six.

LIRA: What?

CAYLEY: It's thirty six.

(Gordon scoffed.)

GORDON: It's thirty nine!

WILFRED: Honestly; the arrogance of youth. Waltzing in here, second guessing the experts; whatever next?

(Cayley pouted.)

CAYLEY: But it *is* thirty six.

MAUREEN: Nonsense! We've spent *two days* pouring over the numbers. And I can confirm that it's thirty nine.

(She looked to Lira.)

MAUREEN: See the problem now, Lira? Kids these days think they know everything.

WILFRED: Like I said, the arrogance of youth.

GORDON: Indeed. First minute in the room. First mistake.

(He wagged his finger at her.)

GORDON: You need to take *all* the factors into account before making the calculation. Why do you think it's taken three of us two days? That's a *lot* of calculations! Calculations done on paper, by the way; not through guess work.

WILFRED: Exactly. And anyone with an ounce of common sense would understand why it has to *be* that way. Stupid child.

(He looked to Lira and shook his head.)

WILFRED: I thought you said she was intelligent?

MAUREEN: Clearly not.

(Not about to take that lying down, Cayley thrust her hands to her hips and pouted.)

CAYLEY: I *am* intelligent! If I was stupid, I'd have spent three days, wasting god only knows how much paper, in order to come up with entirely the wrong answer!

GORDON: Why you...

CAYLEY: I *know* you have to consider *all* the factors. And *all* the factors for a development plot are written on that board!

MAUREEN: So?

CAYLEY: So all you need to do is some simple, advanced mathematics. It's thirty six! The only way you could come up with thirty nine is if you forget to include the road and pathways!

(Gordon, Wilfred and Maureen growled at her, then Gordon quickly delved into his paperwork.)

GORDON: Wrong.

MAUREEN: You show her Gordon!

GORDON: I will!

(He ran his finger down a sheet of paper then froze.)

WILFRED: Go on, old chap; tell her how it is.

GORDON: Right...

(He gulped.)

GORDON: It's thirty six; we forgot to factor in the road and pathways.

(As the three of them sat there, burning red, Cayley sighed then looked to Lira.)

CAYLEY: It's not even that difficult. You just need to do a few quick sums in your head.

LIRA: Right... well...

(She then turned and hurried Cayley to the door.)

LIRA: Let's get you out of here, shall we?

CAYLEY: Oh. Um...

(She then bundled Cayley out of the room and gestured down the corridor. As she did so, an angry voice echoed out from the room.)

GORDON: Who the hell does that little shit think she is???

(Cayley winced as Lira ushered her forth.)

CAYLEY: I blew it, didn't I? Nobody wants to hire someone who has *that* effect on their department.

(Lira brought her to a halt then chuckled.)

LIRA: Blew it? Hardly. On the contrary, I'm going to offer to double your salary. *Those* three idiots blew it!

CAYLEY: Wow. Really? Double?

(Her shoulders then slumped.)

CAYLEY: That's a lot of money, but I'm not sure it's worth it to go in there and get growled at every day.

LIRA: *They* won't be there! If *you* take the job, we can move *those* three bozos to a department where their lack of talent won't be so costly.

CAYLEY: Really?

LIRA: Yes. They make too many mistakes for my liking. You just *witnessed* one.

(She beamed.)

LIRA: Then there's you! You figured out the right answer and spotted their mistake in two seconds flat. *You* could probably run that department single-handedly.

CAYLEY: Well...

LIRA: No, you could. Couldn't you!

(Cayley blushed.)

CAYLEY: In my sleep. I wouldn't *need* a five hour day to get things done.

(She looked enlightened.)

CAYLEY: But then again, I could use the rest of my time to be productive *elsewhere* in the government. The extra money I'd save us would help offset the cost of my sister's room service abuse.

(She exhaled.)

CAYLEY: I really want this job now.

LIRA: Then it's yours.

CAYLEY: Yay!

(She then sighed to herself emptily.)

CAYLEY: Sorry, that celebration was premature.

(She smiled ruefully.)

CAYLEY: Before I can accept this job, I need to convince my sister to give up on Tifaeris and move here *with* me, you see? She's kind of useless without me. A danger to herself, actually. She mistook sticks of dynamite for candles once. If *I* hadn't been there...

(She shook her head then glanced up.)

CAYLEY: Plus... people tend to bully me. I'm a nerd, you see? So, I kind of need her around to keep me safe.

LIRA: I see.

(She nodded.)

LIRA: Well, you have a word with her then come and see me in the morning. I'm sure she'll be delighted to move. The room service system seems to have won her heart.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but... someone else *also* has her heart.

LIRA: Oh?

CAYLEY: Yeah. So I don't know. As much as she's enjoying the free stuff, I'm not sure she'd be willing to give up Anoka and move here just for that.

LIRA: Anoka? That's a girl's name.

CAYLEY: So?

LIRA: Your sister likes men. Copious amounts of men, according to the room service staff.

CAYLEY: It's complicated.

(She grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Actually, that's a lie. It's not complicated at all. Kyrie isn't really fussy who she sleeps with. She just happens to really like Anoka.

(Lira grimaced.)

LIRA: Right... well... despite your sister... we'd love to have you, Cayley. We really would. So... see if you can convince her. You have a bright future ahead of you, young lady, and you stand a far greater chance of maximising your potential here in Leathrock than you do in Tifaeris.

CAYLEY: I agree.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: I'll see what I can do.

LIRA: Good girl.

(They then headed off down the corridor together.)

On the road in between Tifaeris and Leathrock, at this time, Flaxley and Kritz were in the back of a carriage, clinging onto one another in terror. The carriage was hammering forth, bouncing from side to side, almost as if it they were travelling through an earthquake. It'd nearly toppled over twice. It took a lot to strike fear into Flaxley and Kritz, but this carriage ride was a nightmare on another level. The source of their nightmarish experience was their daughter, Anoka. Having read Cayley's letter and convinced herself that Kyrie was leaving Tifaeris forever, she'd set off at a rate of knots and had flatly refused to slow down since. Whether there were cattle grids, molehills, cobbles or potholes in the road, she couldn't care less. She needed to get to Leathrock as soon as possible to talk Kyrie into coming back. As such, she cut a pitiful sight as she led the speeding carriage forth.

ANOKA: No!!! Don't leave me, Kyrie!!! Please!!!

(Inside the carriage, having just come back down from hitting the ceiling, Kritz growled furiously.)

KRITZ: You need to have a word with that daughter of yours!!!

FLAXLEY: I tried to, remember? As soon as I got close to the door, we hit a bump and I flew into the back wall!

KRITZ: Yes, but you've regained consciousness now, so have another go.

(Flaxley looked to her for a moment then grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Well... *looking* at you was a waste of time, you're just a wobbly blur.

KRITZ: Never mind that. Speak to your child!

FLAXLEY: Right. Yes. I'll give it a go.

(He then nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: But for future reference, she's *your* child too. You can't keep granting *me* sole custody of our children, every time one of them starts being a dick.

KRITZ: Just speak to the girl!

FLAXLEY: Right. Now that I can do.

(Just as he went to sit forwards, however, Kritz pulled him back.)

KRITZ: On second thoughts, leave it to me.

FLAXLEY: Seriously?

KRITZ: Her pain is a matter of the heart, Flaxley. Men are no good at that sort of thing. She needs coaxing down gently, and *that* requires a mother's love.

(She then bounced forwards and leant out of the window.)

KRITZ: Anoka, you daft cunt, stop driving like a twat!!!

(She then hit a bump and she was thrown back into the carriage. Seconds later, as she crashed down onto the floor, Flaxley blinked at her nonchalantly.)

FLAXLEY: So... that was a coaxing her down gently with a mother's love, was it?

KRITZ: Shut up.

FLAXLEY: Just saying, darling. I hate to see how you'd react if you wanted her to know she'd evoked your ire.

KRITZ: Don't mock me!

(She nodded then climbed to her feet.)

KRITZ: Besides, I wasn't finished.

(She then hurried to the window again.)

KRITZ: I mean it, Anoka, if you don't slow down this instant, I'll send your father out there to give you a thick ear.

FLAXLEY: Right. Great. Yet more motherly love, only this time, in the form of violence.

KRITZ: Stop being such an oversensitive sissy! Sometimes a girl needs her parents to discipline her!

FLAXLEY: I don't dispute that. But you said, this job required motherly *love*. All you've done is call her names and threaten her!

KRITZ: I know! It's called *tough* love!

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: Being all sweet and gentle *isn't* going to calm her down, Flaxley. She needs guidance in the form of a firm hand this time. And that's our job!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Then I'm back in the game.

(He sneered.)

FLAXLEY: Watch and learn.

(With that, he thrust his head out of the window next to Kritz and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Anoka! You're being very naughty and you're making mummy and daddy extremely cross!!! Now stop it, this instant!

KRITZ: Very naughty??? How was that firm? You might as well have given her a lollipop and a pat on the head!

FLAXLEY: Kritz...

(He then grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: You're right. That was pathetic.

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: I don't know what to say, Kritz. She's always been the obedient one. I've never had to tell her off before, so I don't know what to say.

KRITZ: Say what needs to be said! She's lost it right now, Flaxley and we need to bring her back to some semblance of sanity.

FLAXLEY: Right.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I'll try again then!

(He then raised his voice angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Now look here, young lady!!! Your mother and I simply won't tolerate...

KRITZ: You're bloody useless, you are!!!

(She then yelled in her angriest voice.)

KRITZ: Slow down before you get us both killed, Anoka! So help me, I'm gonna bloody wallop you if either of us get injured!

FLAXLEY: Yeah!!!

KRITZ: Wow.

FLAXLEY: What? I was backing you up.

KRITZ: Then use actual words!

FLAXLEY: Fine.

(He snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Slow down, Anoka!!! I mean it!!! Slow down before someone gets hurt!!!

(He looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Better?

KRITZ: Yeah, that wasn't bad.

(She then raised her voice.)

KRITZ: Anoka!!!

(Just then, the coach hit another pothole and they were both sent crashing to the floor again.)

FLAXLEY: You know... I'm not going to lie to you, darling. This is getting annoying.

KRITZ: Yes, well, at least you had me to break your fall.

FLAXLEY: Right... yes... sorry about that. I had no control over...

KRITZ: Just get off me so we can try again.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(With that, they scrambled to their feet then shared an affirming nod.)

KRITZ: Okay. Try again.

(She then hurried to the window only to be thrown to the floor again.)

KRITZ: Okay... I'm done. Forget it.

FLAXLEY: No, I won't forget it!

(He then hurried to the window.)

FLAXLEY: Anoka, if you don't...

(He then went flying backwards and landed on the floor next to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Right... yes... maybe giving up is the *right* thing to do.

KRITZ: Yeah. If we die, we die.

FLAXLEY: Agreed.

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: What a shit way to go. Killed by your own child in her overzealous attempt to be reunited with an idiot.

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: After all we've achieved in our lives, I really hope they don't choose *that* for our epitaph.

FLAXLEY: God forbid.

(They giggled together then Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I can't believe it's come to this, my love.

KRITZ: Sitting on the floor of a carriage, praying that we won't get hurt when it inevitably tips over? No. Nor can I.

FLAXLEY: Actually, I was referring to *why* we're sitting here. Anoka's lament. Or at least the source of it. The Severen sisters are leaving us.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Not that *Kyrie* buggering off is a bad thing. *She's* welcome to bugger off.

Cayley on the other hand... I can't believe we're losing *her*.

KRITZ: Yeah... I can't believe you did that either!

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

KRITZ: What? *You're* the one who drove her away.

(Flaxley glowered at her.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, but not without your help!

KRITZ: What?

FLAXLEY: *You* were the one who put the idea of emigrating into her head!

KRITZ: When?

FLAXLEY: What do you mean, when? Kritz, you told her she doesn't *belong* in Tifaeris, then took her to Azagotse, got her kidnapped and didn't bother to rescue her.

KRITZ: That's an outrageous lie! I *did* rescue her!

FLAXLEY: Oh, that's right. There hours later after you'd enjoyed a hearty breakfast and rested up for a while.

KRITZ: Well... yeah... admittedly, that was poor form. But I already explained that.

FLAXLEY: I know, you did. And so did Cayley. She was so traumatised, she came to work the next day, talking about emigrating. So don't even *try* to blame the entire thing on me!

(Kritz blushed.)

KRITZ: Right... well... that's fair.

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: I just feel so guilty.

FLAXLEY: So do I.

KRITZ: I'm not surprised. You basically invited her to call you daddy then disowned her half a day later.

FLAXLEY: I...

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: I did *not* invite her to call me daddy.

KRITZ: You implied it. And to her that would have been the same thing.

FLAXLEY: Right... yes... well... never mind playing the blame game. We *both* fucked up, Kritz. The question is, what are we going to do about it?

KRITZ: Find her and apologise, I suppose. There's not much else we *can* do.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: Hopefully, she'll accept.

FLAXLEY: Yeah.

KRITZ: But let's not get sidetracked by that. We can worry about the Severen sisters later.

Right now, you and I need to focus on how we're going to impress the other nation heads.

FLAXLEY: Oh, that'll be easy. I'll win the ladies over with my natural charm in no time.

And let's not kid ourselves, one look at your chest and the men will be putty in your hands.

(He smiled knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: Your boobs make a very convincing argument.

KRITZ: That they do.

FLAXLEY: So other than the fact that Mandika will probably be an awkward little shit, just to remind us of where we stand, I'm not even remotely worried about that meeting.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: I just hope we can get there in one piece.

KRITZ: One piece? If Anoka doesn't slow down, there's a fair chance we might not get there at all.

FLAXLEY: Hmm...

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: We should shout at her again.

KRITZ: Good idea.

(They then scrambled to their feet and yelled out of the window again.)

Following her eye-opening morning at the civil service, Cayley returned to her apartment at just gone noon. Delighted with how things had gone, and looking forward to telling Kyrie all about it, she threw open the front door then opened her mouth to speak. Alas, her mouth remained open, but no words came out. Before her, Kyrie was laying face down on a table, whilst being attended to by a shirtless Adonis and two young women. Mortified by the sight, Cayley whimpered several times then stepped forwards, having finally found her voice again.

CAYLEY: What are you doing, Kyrie???

(Kyrie lifted her head slightly and beamed.)

KYRIE: Cayley! Check this out! This is awesome.

CAYLEY: Kyrie, no. What the hell are you playing at???

KYRIE: What does it look like?

(She grinned her widest grin.)

KYRIE: I'm getting a massage, a manicure and a pedicure, all at the same time.

(Standing there aghast, Cayley glanced to where the male heartthrob was kneading her sister's shoulders, then glanced to one side where one of the women was painting her fingernails for her. She then looked to where the other woman was kneeling beneath Kyrie's feet, filing her toenails.)

CAYLEY: Why would you...

KYRIE: Have it all done at once? To save time, obviously! I've got big plans for this afternoon, you see?

CAYLEY: Like what? Getting me fired?

KYRIE: What? No. Why would you get fired?

CAYLEY: Because this sort of thing costs money!

KYRIE: No, it doesn't. It's totally free. All of it. And you can get anything, you like! You just have to tell room service what you want.

(She nodded towards a box on the table near the window.)

KYRIE: I even you ordered that dildo you wanted.

(At once, the disturbed glances of Kyrie's three attendees swung in Cayley's direction. Highly embarrassed, she shrieked then waved her hands about in front of herself.)

CAYLEY: I ordered no such thing!

KYRIE: I know! I ordered it *for* you.

CAYLEY: *I* don't want it!!!

(She furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie, you've got to stop ordering things! You're making me look bad!

KYRIE: How? How am I making *you* look bad? *You* weren't even here when I ordered them.

CAYLEY: No, but the room is in my name and...

(She then remembered what Lira had said about cutting people off from room service if they abused the system.)

CAYLEY: Fine. Go nuts. But don't come crying to me when they start refusing to serve you.

KYRIE: Why would they do that?

CAYLEY: Because that's what they *do* when people order too much!

KYRIE: Oh.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: It's a good thing I ordered us plenty of cakes in advance then.

CAYLEY: Cakes?

(She then looked to the coffee table where there was a fine selection of over a dozen large cakes. Cayley's shoulder's slumped.)

CAYLEY: You really don't care about creating a good impression, do you?

KYRIE: Yes, I do. Why do you think I only ordered *expensive* things?

(She exhaled.)

KYRIE: You're gonna love our new outfits,

CAYLEY: Outfits???

KYRIE: Skirts, dresses, tops, shoes, bags and accessories. Not to mention some top brand makeup.

(Cayley's eyes lit up with excitement.)

CAYLEY: Ooh!

(She then remembered herself and her brow furrowed.)

CAYLEY: No more, Kyrie! This has to end.

KYRIE: Whatever. I'm done for now anyway. Unless I think of something else I want.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie... we need to get you out of here. Shall we go for a walk or something?

KYRIE: I can't. Like I told you, I have big plans for this afternoon.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: There's an army barracks full of yummy men next door. I'm gonna pop over there and investigate. Then I'll pick the three I like best and invite them back here for a five course meal with me for dessert.

CAYLEY: Right...

KYRIE: You might want to make yourself scarce for that.

CAYLEY: I will.

(She sneered.)

CAYLEY: I'll be over at the carriage office, booking a taxi back to Tifaeris, because you're gonna get me fired.

KYRIE: No, I'm not.

CAYLEY: Yes, you are! It's bad enough you abusing the room service scheme. Now you plan to bring groups of soldiers in here for a bit of the other. This is a government building, Kyrie. Full of high-ranking officials. Upper-class types. Sophisticated and reserved! I can see it now...

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: Sorry, Cayley, as much as we like working with you, we're going to have to ask you to leave. Your sister is lowering the tone of the entire country!

KYRIE: Who was that an impression of?

CAYLEY: My boss!

KYRIE: I see.

(She grimaced.)

KYRIE: Your boss sounds just like you.

CAYLEY: I wasn't doing her voice! I was just telling you what she'll say.

KYRIE: Really? Wow. She sounds mean. She doesn't even *know* me. I hope you set her straight.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Forget it. I'm gonna lay down for a bit while I wonder why I bother.

KYRIE: Okay.

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She then headed away, mumbling bitterly.)

CAYLEY: Stupid sister.

KYRIE: Take some cake with you.

CAYLEY: I don't want any of your freebies!

KYRIE: Oh. Are you sure?

CAYLEY: Yes?

KYRIE: And you're certain, are you?

CAYLEY: Sure and certain are the same thing!

KYRIE: I see. So that's a no, is it?

CAYLEY: Yes!

KYRIE: Oh.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: Shame. I was going to get her to do *your* nails next.

(Cayley instantly paused; her mind going in circles.)

CAYLEY: Fine. I'll take the manicure, but after that I want nothing to do with your exuberant silliness, okay?

KYRIE: Well, that's sad to hear. Those cakes are all chocolate gateaus.

(Cayley immediately strode to the sofa and sat in front of the cakes.)

CAYLEY: Whatever, but it's definitely the last freebie I'm going to accept.

KYRIE: Okay. I'll send your new clothes back then.

CAYLEY: No, you won't!!!

KYRIE: Right...

(She then lay there giggling to herself.)

CAYLEY: Oh, shut up.

Early that afternoon, a speeding carriage raced into the centre of Leathrock. At the helm, the driver looked frantic with worry. In the back, the two passengers looked decidedly dishevelled; not to mention irritated. Desperate to make the driver slow down, they were bellowing at her furiously.

KRITZ: Enough, Anoka! It's a miracle we're all still alive!!!

FLAXLEY: Listen to your mother!!!

KRITZ: Yeah! Listen to your mother! And listen to your father when he *tells* you to listen your mother!

FLAXLEY: What? Why would you say that?

KRITZ: Well... she listens to you.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(Just then, much to the delight of her parents, Anoka finally started to pull on the reins to slow the horses down.)

FLAXLEY: About bloody time too.

KRITZ: Yeah.

(With the carriage still moving at a decent pace, however, Anoka leapt down from the driving seat then sprinted off into the town, crying her eyes out.)

ANOKA: Kyrie!!! Why would you leave me, Kyrie??? Why???

(Horried by his daughter's negligence, Flaxley swiftly leapt out of the carriage then sprinted forth beside it. Having managed to gain slightly, he then leapt up and clambered into the driver's seat. Without hesitation, he then brought the carriage to a halt. Having done so, he sat back and puffed out with blessed relief.)

FLAXLEY: Thank fuck for that. What the hell was she thinking?

(A somewhat flabbergasted Kritz, poked her head through the open window.)

KRITZ: She forgot we were in here, didn't she?

FLAXLEY: I bloody well hope so, my love. Anything less would be attempted murder.

(He then offered her a relieved smile.)

FLAXLEY: Still... it's over now. We've finally come to a halt.

(His relief, however, was to be short-lived. A few seconds later, a miffed stallholder from the nearby market, marched up to him and scowled.)

EDDY: You can't park *there*, mate.

FLAXLEY: What?

EDDY: I said, you can't park *there*!

FLAXLEY: I'm not parked!!!

(The stallholder raised a condescending eyebrow.)

EDDY: Right. Yeah. I see it now. Look at you go. You're like the wind.

FLAXLEY: Listen, you...

EDDY: You might want to slow down, mate; you'll run someone over going at that pace.

FLAXLEY: Don't get smarmy with me, chummy! I'm not parked! I just stopped for a moment!

EDDY: Yeah. Stopped! Or as we call it here in Leathrock, parked!!!

FLAXLEY: I was pausing!

EDDY: Like one might do in a layby? When you *park* to get your bearings.

FLAXLEY: No, you...

(Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Just go, Flaxley. There's no point arguing with this clown.

(Eddy sneered.)

EDDY: Yeah, Flaxley!

(His eyes then bulged.)

EDDY: Wait! Flaxley? As in... *Sir* Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: That's me.

EDDY: I see.

(He grinned the widest grin then proceeded to back away quickly.)

EDDY: Forget I said anything.

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He then rolled his eyes and set the horses in motion again.)

KRITZ: To the hotel.

FLAXLEY: As if.

KRITZ: What?

FLAXLEY: Nothing.

KRITZ: Right. And be quick. I need to lay down. Anoka's death-ride was more than enough excitement for one day.

(She popped her head back inside the carriage. As she did so, Flaxley mumbled under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: Actually, my love, the excitement hasn't even started yet.

(He then guided the carriage forth before turning right into the most exclusive part of Leathrock. Having visited the town on several occasions in the past, he was more than familiar with the layout. As was Kritz. As a result, when he rode straight past their hotel a few minutes later, she was not amused.)

KRITZ: What the hell are you doing, you blind bastard? You just went straight past the hotel!

(Flaxley offered no reply.)

KRITZ: Hey! Answer me when I'm shouting at you! What the hell are you playing at?

FLAXLEY: You'll see!

KRITZ: What?

(She sneered.)

KRITZ: Just take me to the sodding hotel, will you? I swear, if all the nice rooms are taken because of your pissing about, I won't be amused!

FLAXLEY: Who said I was pissing about?

(He then took a left turn into Grosvenor Road. Having noticed the road sign, Kritz looked enlightened.)

KRITZ: Right. Gotcha. Fair enough. As you were.

FLAXLEY: Thank you, darling.

(With a furrowed brow, Flaxley then rode onwards, reading the names on the gates of the houses. About halfway down, he then pulled up outside the gates to Rose Villa.)

FLAXLEY: Shan't be long, dear.

KRITZ: Righto.

(With that, Flaxley jumped down from the carriage, drew his sword and stepped up to the gate. Not even bothering to see if it was locked, he then put his boot right through it. He then entered the grounds of a plush looking villa. The garden was adorned with an immaculate display of flora and there were two fountains, set on either side of the path.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... interesting. There's good money in the theft of other people's intellectual property, it seems.

(He sneered.)

FLAXLEY: I hope he enjoyed it while he lasted.

(He then stepped up to the villa's front doors and treated them with the same disdain he'd shown the gate. With an almighty crack, they flew off their hinges and crashed into the hallway.)

FLAXLEY: Venex!!!

(Just then, an armed guard charged towards him from a room to his right. Barely even bothering to acknowledge the challenge, Flaxley merely thrust out a fist in his direction and knocked him out as soon as he was in range. He then placed his hands on his hips and called out again.)

FLAXLEY: Venex!!!

(Just then, looking somewhat miffed, a gentleman in an expensive smoking jacket, hurried past the bottom of the elaborate staircase.)

VENEX: What's all this noise about? I have guests!!!

(Upon spotting Flaxley, however, his eyes bulged and he screamed in terror.)

VENEX: Flaxley!!!

FLAXLEY: Hello, old friend!!!

(Not about to hang around and explain himself to the furious giant that'd he wilfully swindled all those years ago, Venex then tried to turn and flee. He didn't get very far. Still quick on his feet, Flaxley dashed forth then coshed him over the head, forcing him to crumble to the ground. He then picked Venex up by his collar.)

FLAXLEY: You're going on a little trip!

(Venex whimpered.)

VENEX: Anywhere nice?

FLAXLEY: No!

(He then head-butted him and knocked him out. Having done so, he exhaled with satisfaction, before glancing up and performing a double take. A well-to-do party of five were staring back at him in horror from the top of the stairs.)

FLAXLEY: Um... nothing to see here!

(The five onlookers just continued to stare.)

FLAXLEY: I said there's *nothing* to see here. Meaning, stop staring! Now bugger off or I'll have to head-butt you too.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, and um... if you know what's good for you, you'll tell no-one. That was both a threat and a promise.

(He then cast Venex over his shoulder and headed for the door.)

FLAXLEY: That went well, I thought.

(Delighted with himself, he then paced up to the carriage, opened the door and threw Venex down by Kritz's feet.)

FLAXLEY: Now let's find that post office.

KRITZ: Righto. You do that while I tie him up and gag him.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(He then pushed the door shut and beamed with joy.)

FLAXLEY: I married a good one there; I really did.

That evening, a good while after the sun had set, Kyrie and Cayley found themselves heading down the beachfront road, taking in the fresh sea air. Despite her worries about Kyrie getting her fired, Cayley was pacing along looking rather spritely. At her side, however, Kyrie looked somewhat pale. Having eaten way too much free food, she was now suffering the consequences.

KYRIE: Whoever thought that giving away free food was a *good* idea, was clearly an idiot, Cayley. Thanks to their stupidity, I feel really queasy now.

(Cayley gave her a sarcastic glance.)

CAYLEY: Yes... aren't they silly...

KYRIE: To put it mildly. I feel really ill now and all it's their fault.

CAYLEY: I know, right? The way they forced you to keep ordering food all day against your will was nothing short of reprehensible.

KYRIE: Exactly.

CAYLEY: Kyrie...

KYRIE: Yeah?

CAYLEY: You do *know* that all this could have been avoided by simply *not* ordering all that food, right?

KYRIE: How? How could I *not* order it, Cayley? Once I knew it was there it was impossible for me to resist. You know how weak I am against temptation.

(She pouted.)

KYRIE: Now I don't feel well and it's making me sad.

(Taking pity on her, Cayley placed a loving arm around her.)

CAYLEY: Don't worry, sister face. A brisk walk in all this fresh air will soon perk you up.

KYRIE: No, it won't. Nothing will. I ate all day to take my mind off Anoka. Now I feel sick and I *still* miss her. Life isn't fair!

CAYLEY: Aw, Kyrie. You know that's not true.

KYRIE: No, I don't. Life really *isn't* fair!

CAYLEY: I was referring to your claim that you ate all day to take your mind off of Anoka. You ate all day because you could. An endless supply of deserts and cakes was shoved under your nose and you dived in head first. Anoka didn't even come into it.

(Kyrie furrowed her brow.)

KYRIE: You don't know that!

CAYLEY: I do, Kyrie. Because I know *you*. You'd have gorged yourself like a lunatic even if Anoka was right there with us.

KYRIE: Well...

(She then started to chuckle.)

KYRIE: You saw right through that, didn't you?

CAYLEY: It wasn't hard.

KYRIE: For you, nothing is.

(She sighed.)

KYRIE: Fine. The truth is, I'm really embarrassed about overeating like that. And I thought maybe, I don't know, if I tried to justify it, you wouldn't think so little of me right now.

CAYLEY: Hey! I've *never* thought little of you, Kyrie. I *expect* little, granted, but I've never looked down on you. Ever! I love you to bits.

KYRIE: Aw.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: You're so sweet. That's perked me up a bit, that has. You're...

(She then bent forwards and held her stomach.)

KYRIE: Actually, hold that thought...

CAYLEY: Oh, god. Please don't vomit. Not here.

KYRIE: That's not a promise I can make, Cayley.

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: We're surrounded by upper class types, Kyrie. They'll be appalled if you chunder all over the esplanade.

KYRIE: Oh, like *they've* never been sick in public before.

CAYLEY: Well, yeah, but we're talking about the upper classes here, Kyrie; their lofty high standards don't apply to themselves.

KYRIE: Then they need to brace themselves, because I can't hold in it much longer. I'm gonna puke.

CAYLEY: Don't.

KYRIE: It's coming.

CAYLEY: Fight it, Kyrie.

KYRIE: I can't! You just need to accept that I'm about to outrage the gentry again.

CAYLEY: But, Kyrie...

(Just then, an excited voice rose up from the crowd.)

ANOKA: Kyrie!!! I've found you!!! Kyrie; my dear sweet Kyrie!!!

(Kyrie glanced up and the colour immediately returned to her cheeks.)

KYRIE: Anoka!!!

ANOKA: Kyrie!!!

KYRIE: Anoka!!!

ANOKA: Never leave me again!!!

(They then flew into one another's arms and immediately embarked on what can only be described as the world's most raucously erotic kiss. Their tongues were buried deep in one another's mouths, their hands were running all over one another's bodies and Kyrie had managed to wrap one of her legs around Anoka's midriff. Short of taking their clothes off, they couldn't have managed a more intimate embrace. Unsurprisingly, the well-to-do, much-reserved folk around them were not impressed.)

GILES: That's absolutely vulgar!!!

LYDIA: I object!

WILBUR: As do I! That's highly erotic!

(He shrieked.)

WILBUR: I meant inappropriate!

CYNTHIA: I'll say. Two women kissing? What is this, the bloody circus?

EDWARD: Disgraceful behaviour! Someone fetch the police!

GILES: And be quick about it! Homosexuality is an affront to all things descent and should remain hidden away in boarding schools!

ARTHUR: Agreed! Wait.... What?

GILES: Um... I don't know.

(Everyone gasped.)

WILBUR: Did she... she did! She just fondled that other girl's naughty bits!

HENRY: This is a freak show, I tell you!

ELIZABETH: And something needs to be done!

MARY: That's right, they need to be stopped! Won't someone please think of the children and intervene???

GILES: What? No. I'm not going anywhere near *that* horror show; it's disgusting.

(As the outrage continued to flow from the upper-class onlookers, Cayley whistled innocently then slowly back away, pretending she had no idea who Kyrie and Anoka were. People had often remarked that she looked a lot like her sister, but she could only hope they'd all left their glasses at home.)

CAYLEY: Oh, boy...

(She winced.)

CAYLEY: The idea of Kyrie vomiting doesn't seem so terrible all of a sudden.

(She then backed straight into a scowling member of the aristocracy.)

RUPERT: Do you mind, young lady! I'm trying to demonstrate my outrage with a suitable bout of scowling, and I can't do that with *you* standing on my foot.

CAYLEY: Sorry.

(He shook his head at her then flinched.)

RUPERT: Wait a minute. You're just like that black-haired deviant, only smaller.

CAYLEY: What?

RUPERT: You're a miniature version of that woman-kissing weirdo there!

(He shook his fist at her.)

RUPERT: *You'd* better not be thinking of putting on a similar display, young madam!

(Cayley was most incensed.)

CAYLEY: Of course I'm not!

RUPERT: Good! Make sure you don't!

CAYLEY: I won't. For a start, I'm not *into* girls.

(She pointed at her own chest defiantly.)

CAYLEY: I'm a hopelessly compulsive boy-kisser!

(She then froze in horror at herself.)

CAYLEY: And by that I mean...

RUPERT: Interesting! *I* have a boy about your age, maybe you could teach him a thing...

CAYLEY: Nope.

(She then marched off up the road, back towards her hotel.)

CAYLEY: I'm going home, Kyrie!

(Kyrie threw her a thumbs up then resumed ravaging Anoka, much to the horror of the general public.)

CAYLEY: What a ridiculous way to end the day. A wasted day at that! I didn't even get to convince Kyrie to move here with me so I can take that job. And now Anoka's here to talk her out of it, it's going to be even more difficult.

(She nodded sternly.)

CAYLEY: Fuck it. I'm gonna go back to my room, order a glass of milk then go to bed early.

(Determined to do just that, she then returned to the hotel. Her plan didn't quite come to fruition, however. She did return to her room, and she did indeed go to bed early. She didn't get a glass of milk, however, because her room service account had been suspended. She cursed Kyrie's name long into the night.)

The following morning, at just before nine o'clock, Flaxley, Kritz and Anoka arrived at the Leathrock Presidential Palace. Having made their presence known to the staff on the gate, they'd been warmly welcomed inside. They were met in the lobby by Tito, a man they shared a mutual, but mostly unspoken disdain for. Having offered them all formal greetings, Tito had then led them to a drawing room, adjacent to the main diplomatic chamber where they were due to meet the other world leaders. Once there, he requested for them to be seated, so he could explain the morning's order of events.

TITO: Right, so... before we start, would anyone like tea or coffee?

FLAXLEY: We would not.

TITO: Really? Nobody?

KRITZ: Nope. My husband spoke the truth.

TITO: I see. That's unusual.

(Flaxley was greatly incensed.)

FLAXLEY: How dare you?

TITO: No, I mean it's unusual for nobody to ask for tea or coffee.

(Flaxley looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: Right. I see. I'll let you off then.

TITO: Right...

(He nodded.)

TITO: Well, seeing as you don't require refreshments, we can move on.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

TITO: At this very moment, the president is opening the meeting...

ANOKA: Without us?

TITO: Yes. He's going to greet the other world leaders first. Then, as the first point of order, he'll inform them of your application to join the coalition. And of course, he'll inform them that you've passed the preliminaries. At which point, you'll be invited into the chamber to state your case for acceptance.

KRITZ: Okay...

TITO: It's simple enough. It's right through that door behind you.

(Flaxley, Kritz and Anoka all glanced over their shoulders.)

FLAXLEY: The one being guarded by that little fella?

TITO: He's six foot two.

FLAXLEY: And you're point?

(Tito looked to him blankly for a moment then resumed making his point.)

TITO: Once you go through that door, you'll come to a room with a round table. Make a few greetings, if you have to, then make your way to the three vacant seats on the left as you come in the door.

FLAXLEY: Gotcha.

KRITZ: And how long will we have to wait?

TITO: The president will call you as soon as he's informed the other heads of states about your application.

KRITZ: And? How long will it take?

TITO: Provided everyone turns up on time, it should be only a matter of minutes.

KRITZ: Right...

(She grimaced.)

KRITZ: But what if one of the heads of state is late because, say, I dunno, her idiot husband needed chastising, or her grumpy butler got on her nerves, so she decided to have a little sulk?

FLAXLEY: Or if the little shit just didn't get out of bed because she thinks she's too magnificent to attend the meeting on time?

(Tito sighed.)

TITO: Those were very specific examples, yet sadly, I know exactly who you're referring to. (He shrugged.)

TITO: It *could* happen, but it seems unlikely, to be honest. She did that last time, so the president started the meeting without her. She was *not* happy.

KRITZ: That's our Mandika.

TITO: Right? Not that I'm confirming it was *her*, of course.

ANOKA: You didn't have to.

TITO: I see.

(He nodded.)

TITO: So, just to double check, you're all set to go, are you? Do you have your speech ready?

FLAXLEY: I'm going to make it up as I go along.

TITO: Really? Are you sure that's wise?

FLAXLEY: Yes.

(Tito waited for an elaboration that wasn't ever going to come, then shrugged.)

TITO: Fair enough.

(He forced a smile.)

TITO: Well... best of luck to you. We all worked hard on this, so here's hoping it all works out.

(He shrugged.)

TITO: I can't foresee any reason why it *wouldn't*, at least. Not a one. No, no; I feel good about this.

FLAXLEY: Me too.

KRITZ: Yup. We're in buoyant mood.

(Anoka exhaled.)

ANOKA: And not just because I have my Kyrie back.

KRITZ: Not even *remotely* because of that. We're just buoyant.

(She then furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: And I'm not referring to my boobs!

TITO: I never said you were.

KRITZ: Stop staring at them then!

TITO: Shit. Sorry.

(He then averted his gaze.)

ANOKA: Don't stare at mine either!

TITO: Shit.

(He then turned his back entirely.)

TITO: I apologise. That was most unseemly of me.

KRITZ: Yes... it was.

(She ruffled her neck.)

KRITZ: Luckily for you, thanks to the fact we've finally caught that horrible Venex fella, I'm in a good mood. So I'll let it slide for now.

TITO: You're too generous.

FLAXLEY: Way too generous. If you do it again, however, *I* won't be!

(Tito could only shudder. Being threatened in such a way by the world's greatest swordsman was daunting to say the least.)

TITO: Um... allow me grovel for a bit.

(Just then, the door opened up and a dignitary stepped out.)

DIGNITARY: Tito?

TITO: Yes?

DIGNITARY: The president is ready for the party from Tifaeris now.

TITO: Excellent.

(He then about turned and nodded to Sir Flaxley.)

TITO: If you'd all just head through that door now, I can draw a massive sigh of relief. I mean, the heads of state await.

ANOKA: Cock.

TITO: You describe me well.

(He then hung a disgraced head and didn't even bother to look up as Flaxley, Kritz and Anoka headed out of the room.

Not sad to have left Tito behind, Flaxley, Kritz and Anoka followed the dignitary down a thin corridor in perfect silence. Moments later, they marched out into a large, circular meeting room. Inside the room was a round table, around which, all the heads of state had gathered with their two closest aides. It was a moment of personal triumph for Sir Flaxley. He'd finally arrived among the elite. His heart swelled with pride. The formality of the occasion, however, went right over Kritz's head. Upon spotting her old friend, Queen Mandika of Guevina, she hurried over to her and threw her arms around her.)

KRITZ: Good to see you, babe. How have you been?

(Highly embarrassed by her informality, Mandika furrowed her brow and tried to shrug her off.

MANDIKA: I've never seen this person before in my entire life!

(Her dim-witted husband couldn't believe what he was hearing.)

LEFIAT: Yes, you have. That's Kritz. She used to have perverted fantasies about you, remember?

KRITZ: That's not what happened, Lefiat!

(Mandika's other dignitary, the aging Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Does it surprise you that he's still getting things wrong? I mean, does it?

KRITZ: Well...

MANDIKA: Look, can everyone please shut up and sit down?

KRITZ: Fine.

(She then winked at Mandika.)

KRITZ: See you afterwards.

MANDIKA: I'm washing my hair.

(Taking her comment as a joke, Kritz chuckled then headed to the spare seat, next to her husband, at the other side of the table. Flaxley could only roll his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Really... darling? This is a *formal* occasion, remember?

(Kritz just scoffed then took her seat. She'd never been one for formalities, as Mandika had found out on her wedding day.)

KRITZ: If I see a friend, I say hello.

(The president of Leathrock chuckled.)

HERMAN: Well, that was interesting.

(Nobody laughed with him.)

HERMAN: Right...

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: Anyway, I'd like to formally propose that Tifaeris, under the presidency of Sir Flaxley, be admitted to The Union of Sovereign Nations. I will now hand over the floor to Sir Flaxley to make a speech on behalf of his nation.

(Flaxley nodded to acknowledge him then started to stand, only for an objection to come from across the table. Without even bothering to stand, President Roja of Port Shehi was waving a black card to signal his intention to veto.)

ROJA: I object! In fact I'm outraged and appalled!

FLAXLEY: About what? I haven't even finished standing up yet!

(His jaw then dropped.)

FLAXLEY: Wait... I know you.

(In that moment his heart sunk then he dropped back into his seat.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, boy.

HERMAN: President Roja, explain this interjection!

ROJA: Happily! Just yesterday, that man...

(He pointed squarely at Sir Flaxley.)

ROJA: Kidnapped Mr Venex; the host of the villa I've been staying in; then threatened to head-butt my wife and I. He even ordered me to remain silent if I know what's good for me!

(Flaxley winced.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah... about that...

ROJA: This man is a thug and there's no way in hell I wish to enter my nation into a coalition with him!

(Much to Flaxley's further dismay, Sir James Dimton, the prime minister of Wendigo then registered his disdain.)

DIMTON: Hear, hear! Not only is this man a thug, but he keeps extremely dubious company!

(He then thrust an accusing hand at Anoka.)

DIMTON: Yesterday evening, that woman, disgusted and outraged the entire town with a vulgar display of sexual filthiness with another woman, no less!

ANOKA: We were only kissing!

DIMTON: You were kissing a woman! And you weren't *just* kissing, you were fondling! Gratuitously. You madam, are a pervert! And I don't want you anywhere near this bloody coalition!

(Flaxley held his hand in his hands.)

FLAXLEY: So... this is going well.

(Things then got far worse. Incensed by what's she'd heard, Kritz jumped to her feet.)

KRITZ: Listen here, fuck face; nobody talks to *my* daughter like that and lives!

DIMTON: Excuse me!

KRITZ: You heard!

(She snarled.)

KRITZ: Let's take this outside! Right now! You and me! I'll rip your bloody balls off!

FLAXLEY: On which note, I'll just tell the hotel staff to prepare the carriage and we'll set off back to Tifaeris.

DIMTON: Yes, you do that!

ROJA: And don't come back!

(Just then, the representative for Tang Yul, the stunning beauty, Chyna Lee, climbed to her feet.)

CHYNA: I call for calm.

(At once, everyone in the room stared at her longingly, including all the women. A natural seductress, she had a way of pacifying people with no more than a smile.)

BONSON: She's lovely.

CHYNA: Thank you.

BONSON: I've had her, you know?

HERMAN: Please be quiet, Mr Bonson.

BONSON: Happy to. Now I've shared my glorious truth, I've got nothing to say anyway.

HERMAN: Shut up, then.

BONSON: Fine. Wanker.

(Chyna held up her palms.)

CHYNA: Everyone, please. Be calm and listen rationally. I know Sir Flaxley well...

BONSON: Intimately, actually. *He's* had her too.

HERMAN: Bonson...

BONSON: Right...

CHYNA: If Flaxley did indeed head-butt someone and spirit them away, there has to be a reason. A good, decent, honourable reason.

ROJA: Well...

CHYNA: And if his beautiful daughter did indeed get carried away in a moment of affection, I'm sure we can all relate.

(She then glanced to where Dimton was sinking his seat. Bonson was most amused.)

BONSON: He's had her too.

CHYNA: So I ask, please hold back your vetoes and at least let Sir Flaxley explain.

(She then sat down and nodded to Flaxley.)

CHYNA: If you will.

FLAXLEY: Right...

ROJA: Go on then, explain. Why did you kidnap my host then threaten me with violence?

FLAXLEY: Okay...

(Flaxley slowly climbed to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: The man in question, Venex... was a bad man.

ROJA: He seemed fine to me.

FLAXLEY: He was a crook who made his fortune from the theft of other people's intellectual property.

ROJA: How do *you* know?

FLAXLEY: It was *my* intellectual property he stole!

ROJA: Oh... that... well... that's pretty damning, I suppose.

(He shook his fist.)

ROJA: But why threaten to head-butt *me*???

FLAXLEY: Um...

KRITZ: For your own safety, obviously.

FLAXLEY: What? I mean, yes.

ROJA: Care to elaborate?

(Flaxley grimaced then mumbled under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: Couldn't if I wanted to.

KRITZ: We had agents waiting outside to take him into custody, so if you'd ran out to save him, they might have hurt you in the struggle.

(Flaxley looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: Absolutely. And I didn't want that. Innocent bystanders getting hurt? Not on my watch, chummy.

(Roja sighed.)

ROJA: Very well. Then... I withdraw my objection.

HERMAN: Noted.

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: President Dimton? Do you wish to pursue *your* objection?

(Dimton sunk in his seat. If he persisted with his objection, Chyna might say too much about his own deviant nature and it wasn't a risk he was willing to take.)

DIMTON: In light of Chyna Lee's intervention, I also yield.

BONSON: What a surprise.

DIMTON: But I stand by the opinion that such romantic moments *shouldn't* take place in public.

BONSON: I'm assuming *you* banged her indoors then?

HERMAN: Bonson!!!

BONSON: What now?

(Herman sighed.)

HERMAN: Queen Mandika, please control your aide.

MANDIKA: How? He's so old, he doesn't care anymore. There's very little I can do.

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: It's become a real problem.

HERMAN: Fire him then!

(At this point, the King of Ashrin, Mandika's cousin, Vidaku sat forwards.)

VIDAKU: She can't.

MANDIKA: Who can't? I can do what I like, I'm the queen.

HERMAN: Yes, well, never mind that. There's important work afoot.

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: Your speech, if you will, Sir Flaxley.

VIDAKU: Wait!

HERMAN: Wait?

VIDAKU: Under the coalition statute, section one, paragraph three, I have the right to raise a constitutional issue, which supersedes any and all other business.

(Herman sighed.)

HERMAN: Seriously? And what *is* this constitutional issue?

(Everyone glowered at Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: What have you done this time?

FLAXLEY: Me? I haven't done anything!

VIDAKU: Actually, that's not technically true.

FLAXLEY: Right.

(He groaned.)

FLAXLEY: I give up. Just veto Tifaeris now so we can go home.

VIDAKU: Veto you? God no. I need to thank you. You're the reason I'm in possession of the information I was looking for.

FLAXLEY: What?

(Vidaku climbed to his feet.)

VIDAKU: One of us here is a usurper and should not be acting as their head of state!

(Everyone gasped in astonishment.)

VIDAKU: As such, I propose a motion to remove Queen Mandika from her position.

MANDIKA: Excuse me???

HERMAN: That's preposterous!

VIDAKU: No, it isn't! Thanks to Sir Flaxley, I can prove that Mandika has no right be seated on the Guevina throne.

(Flaxley promptly sunk in his seat.)

FLAXLEY: Uh-oh.

KRITZ: What did you do, Flaxley???

ANOKA: For fuck sake, dad!

FLAXLEY: I didn't do anything!

MANDIKA: You'd better not have, Flaxley. I swear to god, if you've done anything to risk my position, I'll set my army on you!

BONSON: He'd win!

VIDAKU: And it's not *your* army anyway!

MANDIKA: Yes, it is!

BONSON: Does it matter? If her *army* can't attack him, she can just send her knight instead! (He beamed.)

BONSON: Go on, Lefiat, tear Flaxley a new one.

LEFIAT: You can fuck right off. If I ever get *that* order, I'm retiring!

BONSON: Yes. Spoken like a true champion of the people.

(President Herman thumped his desk.)

HERMAN: Enough!

(He growled.)

HERMAN: King Vidaku of Ashrin, please state your case.

MANDIKA: His case is rubbish!

HERMAN: We haven't heard it yet.

MANDIKA: And why should we?

HERMAN: Because we're legally bound to listen to him!

MANDIKA: Boo!

HERMAN: Don't boo me!

MANDIKA: I'll boo who I like, *I'm* the queen!

HERMAN: You're not the queen of *me*!

VIDAKU: Do you mind?

(Everyone glowered at him then sat back and sighed.)

HERMAN: Fine. Begin.

MANDIKA: Prick!

(Vidaku gave her a sideways glance then began.)

VIDAKU: Right then... when I first heard that Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris was a potential candidate for our coalition, I did some research. Who *is* this man? What makes him tick? I needed to know. So I read his books.

(Flaxley sunk in his seat.)

FLAXLEY: Yup... I think it's safe to say I know where this is heading.

VIDAKU: It was an enlightening read. Especially the part about Mr Bonson there.

BONSON: Obviously. Not only am I and fascinating fellow, but I was at my wittiest during that era. I'm sure you learned a great deal, and chuckled frequently.

VIDAKU: Actually, no. Although I did enjoy a few laughs at the expense of the hapless Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Eh?

VIDAKU: What interested me about you, Bonson, was your love for my aunt, Queen Anoka, god rest her soul.

BONSON: Uh-oh.

MANDIKA: It's a lie!

VIDAKU: It's not though, is it? *Bonson* is your father, not King Falbury!!!

(Everyone gasped.)

VIDAKU: King Falbury didn't spawn any children! Therefore, upon his death, his kingdom *should* have passed to his brother; not the illegitimate spawn of his philandering wife and her randy butler! Thus, Mandika is not a legitimate head of state! Therefore, I propose that Guevina is banished from the alliance until Guevina's rightful monarch ascends to the throne!!!

(Mandika growled furiously.)

MANDIKA: Why do you hate me, Flaxley???

FLAXLEY: Me???

MANDIKA: You wrote that book to sabotage me!!!

(She then burst into tears.)

MANDIKA: Kill him, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Right...

(He nodded then pulled an envelope from his pocket.)

LEFIAT: I think this would a good time to hand in my resignation.

BONSON: You should move out too. That'd *really* show her!

LEFIAT: Um...

BONSON: Please?

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: This is ridiculous! Mandika, I didn't even *write* a book! I wrote personal notes and someone stole them!

VIDAKU: What difference does that make? Your writings still prove that Mandika was never the rightful heir to the throne.

FLAXLEY: Yes, she was! Falbury very much loved her as his own!

VIDAKU: Which is irrelevant when it comes to a rightful succession. The truth is out and I shall move heaven on earth to see that the rightful monarch *is* installed in Guevina as soon as possible!

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He smiled at him warmly.)

FLAXLEY: In that case, it's my duty as Mandika's sworn knight and protector to inform you that any such move will undoubtedly end very badly for you.

VIDAKU: What??? Are you threatening me???

FLAXLEY: No. I'm just informing of you of my obligation as Mandika's protector.

(He gave Lefiat a condescending glance.)

FLAXLEY: The same obligation you're under, fuckwit. Say something.

LEFIAT: No, I'm alright; you deal with it.

FLAXLEY: You...

VIDAKU: Flaxley!!!

FLAXLEY: What?

VIDAKU: How dare you waltz in here and threaten me like that? I won't have it. There's no way you're getting *my* vote.

ROJA: Or mine. He claimed *not* to be a thug, then sat here and threatened the King of Ashrin right under our very noses.

MANDIKA: He's not getting mine either. Book-writing bastard!!! Vidaku never did like me, and you've given him all the ammo he needs to attack me with! I hate you!

DIMTON: I hate him too. Perpetrating thuggery against authors, threatening a king, writing malicious gossip about a queen behind her back; and they're only the things we *know* about. What else has he been up to? They clearly have no concept of appropriate conduct down there either. I'm picturing a lawless hell hole and I, for once, don't want to be allied with such a place.

(Chyna Lee held out her arms.)

CHYNA: Once again, I call for calm.

VIDAKU: We *are* calm!

ROJA: We're calmly saying no.

DIMTON: A resounding no.

FLAXLEY: But you haven't even heard my speech yet!

MANDIKA: There's no point, is there? You're vetoed!

(She then burst into tears again.)

MANDIKA: I thought you were my friend.

BONSON: Well, that was a mistake.

MANDIKA: What?

BONSON: Like I told you at the dockside at Azagotse, nearly thirty years ago, your staff are paid to give you that impression.

FLAXLEY: Stop shit stirring, Bonson.

ROJA: Now he's threatening an old man!

DIMTON: Is there no end to his depravity?

(Having heard enough, President Herman of Leathrock slammed his palms into the desk.)

HERMAN: Enough.

MANDIKA: I hate you, Vidaku. You're mean. Harboursing all this animosity towards me just because I pushed you down the stairs when we were six. Bastard! You've had it in for me ever since!

VIDAKU: That has nothing to do with it! Although the fact you didn't show any kind of remorse or regret, does speak volumes about your character!

MANDIKA: Nonsense! I'm full of regret.

(She sneered.)

MANDIKA: I *should* have pushed you harder!

HERMAN: I said enough!!!

(The world leaders looked to him with scowls on their faces.)

HERMAN: Thank you.

(He then grimaced at Flaxley.)

HERMAN: I'm guessing you don't feel like *giving* that speech anymore, do you, Sir Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Actually, I do.

KRITZ: He's ridiculously ambitious.

FLAXLEY: No, darling. I'm ridiculously misunderstood and the least I can do is clear things up for people.

KRITZ: Well... go nuts then.

FLAXLEY: I will.

(He then climbed to his feet, only to get roundly booed.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you. You've all been very...

(His face dropped.)

FLAXLEY: Childish.

(He placed his hands on his hips.)

FLAXLEY: My people and I bent over backwards to pass the preliminary tests to join this coalition. We wanted it more than we've ever wanted anything else. But now I'm here, having met you cunts, I don't even *want* to join.

KRITZ: Awesome. Way to win the hearts and minds of the people, my love.

FLAXLEY: I don't *want* to win their hearts and minds.

(He pointed at Dimton.)

FLAXLEY: He's from a place so backward thinking, two girls kissing is a crime on a par with treason. Get with the times, you fucking cave-dweller!

DIMTON: How dare you?

(Flaxley then pointed to President Roja.)

FLAXLEY: This twat witnessed me perform the arrest of a wanted criminal and started crying about bloody violence. What sort of leader is that? Not one I'd want to go into battle alongside, that's for fucking certain. What would your war motto be? Defeat them, but don't hurt them? What a pansy!

ROJA: Why, you...

(Flaxley then pointed at Vidaku.)

FLAXLEY: And what sort of cunt are *you*??? Guevina's constitution has fuck all to do with you. That's a matter for Guevina, not you! You only brought it up because you have a personal vendetta, for fuck sake! I don't want to be allied with a prick like that either! He'd drag us off to war over each and every petty grievance that comes his way. No, thank you.

(He then scowled at Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: I don't care if I get your vote either. After everything we've been through, you ought to know that I'm on your side by now. But if that's how you feel, then fine. You're a bad friend.

MANDIKA: I'm a great friend!

BONSON: How would you know? You haven't *got* any friends.

MANDIKA: Bonson!

FLAXLEY: Anyway, I'm done. I won't bother sitting down. Shove your alliance! From what I've seen here today, going into a military alliance with you lot would only make us weaker!

(He then bowed to Chyna Lee.)

FLAXLEY: It was excellent to see you again, Empress.

(He then nodded to President Herman.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you for your kind invite, Mr President. We'll see ourselves out.

(President Herman thumped the desk again.)

HERMAN: No!

FLAXLEY: No?

HERMAN: Please, Flaxley, humour me. Just be seated while I state my case.

FLAXLEY: Well...

(He took a seat.)

FLAXLEY: Okay.

ANOKA: Well said, dad.

KRITZ: Yup. You were great.

FLAXLEY: Yes; yes I was.

(He then watched as President Herman climbed to his feet and rested both his hands on the desk in front of him.)

HERMAN: Do you know why I started this alliance, people? Do you know what the catalyst was? The spark that created my vision?

BONSON: No, but I'm guessing it wasn't a burning desire to work alongside Lefiat here.

HERMAN: That's right. It wasn't.

LEFIAT: Aw.

HERMAN: Just like you, King Vidaku, I read Sir Flaxley's books. And having also read former President Micalov's journal, it got me thinking. That Flaxley fella is immense. Look at everything he's achieved. We're only sitting here now because of him. Why, if it wasn't for him, none of us would even *be* world leaders. This world *would* have been ruled by either Kajice, Aurora, Heiner or Everkei! He led a team to defeat all four of them. Four potential tyrants. His team defeated them all and spared us from a world of misery.

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: I have to meet this man, I thought. So I did. I visited Tifaeris on numerous occasions.

(He smiled.)

HERMAN: There's some real characters down there, I can assure you. But more to the point, there's some real warriors.

(He gestured to the Tifaeris contingent.)

HERMAN: At that table alone, there's enough might to defeat a hundred men. Sir Flaxley's reputation is not an exaggeration. If anything, it's an understatement. Many years ago, whilst on one of Leathrock's ships, a cannonball was fired in his direction. He caught it then threw it back and sank the enemy ship, for pity's sake. He's a powerhouse! And his sword skills are on another level.

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: A level he shares with only one other person. His chosen successor, his daughter, Anoka. That's right, people. The two best sword users in the world are at that table right now. Sir Flaxley needs no introduction, but allow me introduce *Anoka* to you. Her skills are so great, Sir Flaxley told me they're evenly matched in terms of ability. The only thing he has that she *doesn't* is experience. In ten years time, he said, her skill with the blade will surpass his own; even when he was at his peak. That's how talented she is!

ANOKA: Is that true, dad?

(Flaxley glowered at Herman.)

FLAXLEY: I did tell him that, yes. In confidence!

HERMAN: On the other side of Sir Flaxley is his wife, Kritz. A woman whose agility is such, she once out-manoeuvred a lightning fast mist that could travel through walls.

(Kritz fluttered her eyelashes.)

KRITZ: I did do that, yes.

HERMAN: She's the veteran of more battles that you can count, with hand-to-hand combat skills that have seen her end numerous men twice her size! And *they* had swords! She's a phenomenon.

(He stood tall.)

HERMAN: And that's just those three sitting there! Whilst down there in Tifaeris, I also met two Leramites!

ROJA: What?

HERMAN: Three foot tall green aliens from the planet Tryme 17!

ROJA: Right... and how many ales had you been through when...

CHYNA: I can confirm the existence of these beings.

(Knowing Chyna wouldn't lie about such a thing, Roja bit his lip.)

ROJA: I see.

HERMAN: Good. I'm glad you see, because Leramites are masters of magic! Masters! Not just people with a spell or two. Masters! I also met Phisele, the chief of police, a phenomenal hand-to-hand combatant very much in the mould of Kritz. There was even a young, dim-witted girl in her late teens, with martial art skills so fast, she can defeat cuddyfinkles without breaking a sweat.

(Anoka sighed lovingly.)

ANOKA: Kyrie...

HERMAN: People, let me tell you... I wasn't even in Tifaeris that long. But in that short time, I met so many people with fighting talent, I was genuinely stunned. I'd never seen anything like it.

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: So, the next move seemed obvious to me. An alliance of nations. In the event of an invasion, the talents of those from Tifaeris would be asset beyond priceless. And that was my goal. To get Tifaeris and Tang Yul involved. Three powerful nations.

(His brow furrowed.)

HERMAN: In the meantime, I let some lesser nations join. Yes, lesser! President Roja, your army strikes fear into nobody. Queen Mandika, *your* army is only passable because Sir Flaxley's mentee, Kurik is there, passing on his teachings. King Vidaku, if *your* nation was to be attacked, the alliance wouldn't come to help you *defend*; it'd come to liberate you, because *your* army would capitulate in five minutes. As for you, Prime Minister Dimton, *your* army's contribution would merely be a worthless token gesture. But I let you in anyway, because I figured an alliance made up of the entire continent would be beneficial to everyone.

(He sighed.)

HERMAN: But... if you weaker nations don't want to be allied to with Tifaeris, that's fine. I'll just dissolve the current alliance and create a new one with Tifaeris and Tang Yul only.

ROJA: You wouldn't!

DIMTON: Um... please don't.

MANDIKA: Do what you like! I don't care!

BONSON: Yes, you bloody do! We object!

VIDAKU: Fine. I'll vote them in then. But I'm still going to pursue Mandika's throne.

FLAXLEY: Then I *will* be forced to kill you!

VIDAKU: He's at it again!!!

MANDIKA: You tell him, Flaxley!

HERMAN: Grow up!

(He nodded.)

HERMAN: We're going to vote now. We can either accept Tifaeris into the current alliance or I can dissolve the alliance altogether and you can all apply to join the new one. Bearing in mind that Tifaeris will already be in it. Oh, and, you can drop the idea of going after Mandika, Vidaku. Do that, and my army will *join* Tifaeris in destroying you.

(Vidaku mouthed silently for a moment then hung his head.)

VIDAKU: Fine.

HERMAN: Okay. Who's in favour of admitting Tifaeris to the alliance?

FLAXLEY: Not me. I don't *want* to join the alliance anymore.

KRITZ: Yes, but *I* do.

FLAXLEY: Why?

KRITZ: Because you and I aren't getting any younger, and the next generation might *need* outside help.

(Flaxley absorbed her words for a moment then nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I'm in.

HERMAN: Which is great, Flaxley, but it's for the others to decide.

FLAXLEY: Right.

HERMAN: Well, who's in favour?

CHYNA: Aye!

HERMAN: Aye!

MANDIKA: Fine.

ROJA: I suppose.

DIMTON: Yeah, okay.

VIDAKU: Go on then.

HERMAN: Then it's unanimous. Welcome to the alliance, Sir Flaxley.

(Flaxley sat back and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, Mr President. Let's just hope it's not needed.

HERMAN: Oh, absolutely.

MANDIKA: Can I go now? Vidaku smells and I want to leave.

VIDAKU: *I* don't smell; *you* smell!

MANDIKA: I smell great. Unlike you. You smell rubbish!

VIDAKU: Well... *you are* rubbish!

BONSON: Impressive! Those expensive, royal educations really do create some fine wordsmiths, don't you think?

HERMAN: Yes, well, never mind that. Now we've taken the vote, we can move on to any other points and suggestions you may have.

ROJA: I just want to go home.

VIDAKU: I just want Mandika to go home.

MANDIKA: Good, because I plan to!

DIMTON: I don't have items for discussion either.

HERMAN: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes?

HERMAN: Anything you'd like to say?

FLAXLEY: There is, actually. Tifaeris will do its utmost to be an asset to this alliance and if any of you ever want to visit, please feel free to do so.

ROJA: We won't!

DIMTON: And you can take that to the bank.

KRITZ: And the good news keeps on coming.

CHYNA: I'd just like to welcome Sir Flaxley and Kritz to the alliance. They're two personal friends of mine and I was delighted to have them.

(She shook her head.)

CHYNA: I *am* delighted to have them!

KRITZ: Thank you.

HERMAN: Excellent.

(He smiled.)

HERMAN: Well, if that's everything then fine. Meeting adjourned. See you all in three months for the *next* meeting.

(He then slumped in his chair and groaned.)

HERMAN: And if it's anything like this one, I'm calling a general election. Some other bastard can have the misery.

Not quite sure how he felt about Tifaeris being accepted the alliance, Sir Flaxley headed out of the presidential palace with his wife on his arm and an uncomfortable grimace on his face. At least grateful to be outside, he stopped then glanced to Kritz emptyily.

FLAXLEY: Well... we succeeded.

KRITZ: Yes; yes, we did.

FLAXLEY: So why doesn't it *feel* like a success?

KRITZ: Well... *I* can think of two reasons. One, from what President Herman was saying, acceptance was actually a forgone conclusion. If we'd been rejected by *that* alliance, he'd have made a new one anyway. In that sense, we achieved nothing.

FLAXLEY: And two?

KRITZ: Like you inferred, being allied to *that* bunch of clowns feels like a step in the wrong direction.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: But, thinking long term, I have a good feeling about this alliance, my love. You know how this world is. Peacetime never lasts. Tifaeris *will* need allies somewhere down the line. It won't *always* be able to stand alone. At some point in the future, we'll probably need their help.

FLAXLEY: God, I hope not. How desperate would we have to be to need help from a whinging Mandika and that ridiculous cousin of hers?

KRITZ: Very! But they won't *always* be the leaders.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: Tifaeris might *need* Guevina and Ashrin a hundred years from now, and with any luck, their *future* monarchs will be less... what's the word?

FLAXLEY: Infantile?

KRITZ: Yeah.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Fair enough. Then we'll look at it as a good result in the *long* term. In the short term, it feels like hitching your carriage to a three-legged donkey, but like you say; it won't always be that way.

(He winced.)

FLAXLEY: You know, darling; I shudder to think what Ashrin must be like. There's a saying that, when a clown enters a palace, he doesn't become a king, the palace becomes a circus. So judging by what I've seen, that place must be even more ridiculous than Guevina.

KRITZ: Yeah... and that takes some doing.

(Just then, Mandika came stomping out of the palace with a sour expression on her face. Barely breaking her stride, she strode up to Kritz, gave her a brief hug then marched away again.)

MANDIKA: Can't stop; I'm storming out!

(Having walked out behind her, Bonson threw them a wave.)

BONSON: It was good to see you both again, Kritz.

(He went to walk away then paused.)

BONSON: I meant your boobs, by the way, not you and Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: We know!

BONSON: Excellent.

(He then headed away with a miffed Lefiat at his side.)

LEFIAT: I didn't resign. She never accepted it!

BONSON: Yes, but why not do the decent thing and fuck off anyway?

(Flaxley watched them go and started to chuckle.)

FLAXLEY: I miss those three sometimes.

(His brow darkened.)

FLAXLEY: It's a brief sensation which evaporates after ten seconds in their company...

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: But I do miss them sometimes.

KRITZ: Same. And yet the *best* part of their visits is when they leave.

FLAXLEY: By far.

(Just then, the president of Leathrock emerged from the building and headed over to them.)

HERMAN: Flaxley, Kritz, your daughter... wherever she went... it's great to have you on board. That meeting couldn't have gone better.

FLAXLEY: Couldn't have gone better?

HERMAN: Results wise.

FLAXLEY: I was going to say... four of the six parties wanted to veto me for stupid things, and only backed down because you threatened to expel them.

KRITZ: It certainly wasn't the dignified and diplomatic meeting we were expecting.

HERMAN: Well, no. But what can you do? Half the world leaders on this continent are fucking morons.

FLAXLEY: Well, you're not wrong.

KRITZ: In fact, you're... wait... where *did* that daughter of ours go?

(She then glanced over her shoulder and smiled.)

KRITZ: Kyrie and Cayley are on a bench over there. She's gone to join them.

(Flaxley looked to Cayley and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley... my biggest regret.

(He then scowled at Herman.)

FLAXLEY: Speaking of which, you gave me your word that you wouldn't poach her!

HERMAN: Poach who?

FLAXLEY: Cayley! Tifaeris's genius!

HERMAN: Yes, and I kept my word.

FLAXLEY: No, you didn't. Anoka told us, you've offered her a job!

HERMAN: I did no such thing.

(He gave an exasperated sigh.)

HERMAN: I swear, Flaxley, I didn't poach *any* of your talent.

FLAXLEY: Then why is she coming to work for you?

HERMAN: That's the first I've heard of it.

FLAXLEY: How can it *possibly* be the first... wait... let's hear it from the horse's mouth, shall we?

(He furrowed his brow then glanced over to the bench where Kyrie, Cayley and Anoka were sitting.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley!

(Cayley glanced up and whimpered.)

FLAXLEY: Come here a second.

(Cayley shook her head defiantly.)

KRITZ: We won't bite!

FLAXLEY: I just need you to clear something up!

(Cayley shook her head again. Not about to be denied, Kritz looked at her emptily for a moment then afforded herself a devilish grin.)

KRITZ: Never mind then. It's quite possible that you're not smart enough to know the answer anyway.

(It'd proved to be the perfect tactic. Cayley hated nothing more than having her brilliance called into question and swiftly upped then marched over to them.)

CAYLEY: How can I help?

FLAXLEY: I have a question for you.

CAYLEY: Okay.

(Flaxley gestured to the president.)

FLAXLEY: This bloke...

HERMAN: Excuse me?

FLAXLEY: I mean, President Herman here is trying to claim he didn't poach you.

CAYLEY: And your question is?

FLAXLEY: Why is he lying?

CAYLEY: He isn't.

HERMAN: See?

FLAXLEY: No, I don't see. If he didn't poach you, how did you get the job here?

CAYLEY: I met Lira.

FLAXLEY: Who?

HERMAN: She works at the home office here.

CAYLEY: She mentioned there was a job going, so I applied.

(She beamed.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie permitting, I start next week as the new town planner.

FLAXLEY: Shit. You applied?

CAYLEY: Yup. Nobody poached me. I wanted a new job, so I applied for one.

(She pouted.)

CAYLEY: My *old* boss was really, really mean.

FLAXLEY: Yes... well... I wish I could deny that, but I can't.

KRITZ: You *really* can't!

FLAXLEY: Put the trowel away, Kritzeveltia!

(He nodded to the president.)

FLAXLEY: It appears I was wrong. You didn't poach her at all.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Just promise me you'll take good care of her. She's only thirteen and it wouldn't be right to burden her with *too* much at such a delicate young age.

HERMAN: Wait. What? Thirteen?

(Cayley covered her cleavage.)

CAYLEY: Yes!

HERMAN: Then no. Sorry, Flaxley. I won't make any such promise.

FLAXLEY: What???

(He reached for the hilt of his sword.)

FLAXLEY: You bloody well will, chummy!

HERMAN: I won't, Flaxley. I can't.

(He looked to Cayley.)

HERMAN: There appears to have been a miscommunication, young lady. You can't *have* that job! You need to be at least *sixteen* to work in the home office.

(Cayley was understandably mortified.)

CAYLEY: What? Since when?

HERMAN: Since we banished child labour, a century ago.

CAYLEY: But...

HERMAN: Maybe Lira didn't know.

(Cayley's bottom lip quivered.)

CAYLEY: Can't you make an exception, just for me?

HERMAN: I'm afraid not.

CAYLEY: Liar! You're the president.

HERMAN: Yes, but I'm not a dictator. In order to change the law, I'd have to get a bill passed through the senate.

CAYLEY: Do it!

HERMAN: No. I think that's a terrible idea. We banned child labour for a reason.

CAYLEY: Mean.

HERMAN: Sorry. Maybe try again when you're sixteen, yeah?

FLAXLEY: Poaching!

HERMAN: I won't ask, but you can apply. No poaching here!

FLAXLEY: Shit.

(Herman offered Cayley a smile.)

HERMAN: I'm sorry Lira got your hopes up, little one. But don't despair. You've got your whole life ahead of you.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Yeah... have you *seen* my life?

(She then trudged over to where Kyrie and Anoka were talking on the bench. Her chance for a better life had been dashed in an instant, and she was truly devastated. Right now, all she wanted to do was sit down with her sister and have a good cry. Her sister, however, was somewhat preoccupied with her own sadness.)

KYRIE: I'm so torn.

ANOKA: I know, darling.

KYRIE: I love you so much and I really want to stay in Tifaeris with you. But... I love Cayley too... in a very different way! And she wants to leave. Whatever decision I make is going to be the wrong one and I don't know what to do.

(Having overheard, Cayley bit her lip then allowed herself a devious grin. She then headed over to Kyrie wearing a sincere smile. An opportunity to at least gain *something* good from the day had appeared before her, and she was going to take full advantage of it.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie, I've been thinking...

KYRIE: Of course you have, that's all you *ever* do.

CAYLEY: Well, yeah... but I've come to a decision.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: I love you too much to see you upset. So, even though this new job is the chance of a lifetime, and it's already mine if I want it, I'm going to turn it down just so you can stay in Tifaeris with Anoka!

KYRIE: What? Really???

ANOKA: Do you mean that?

KYRIE: But won't you be sad?

CAYLEY: Absolutely I will. Devastated, some would say, but it's a sacrifice I'm willing to make. For you. Your happiness is way more important than any job will *ever* be. So, even through it was my dream come true, I'm going to turn it down. Just for you.

(Tears welled in Kyrie's eyes.)

KYRIE: Cayley...

CAYLEY: Some will say I'm a fool for throwing away a bright future like this, just to make my sister happy, but to them I say, silence. This selfless and heroic gesture doesn't make me a fool. It just means I love my sister whole-heartedly and will gladly throw my dreams away just to see her smile.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: If that's wrong, sue me.

(Overcome with emotion, Kyrie leapt up and hugged Cayley with everything she had.)

KYRIE: You're the best sister ever, you are. The best!

CAYLEY: I try.

KYRIE: You've made me so happy.
(She beamed.)
KYRIE: I have to repay you right now.
(Cayley's face lit up. This was just what she'd been angling for.)
CAYLEY: Reward me? You don't have to do that.
KYRIE: No, but I'm going to.
(She nodded sternly.)
KYRIE: Starting with ice cream!
CAYLEY: Yummy.
KYRIE: And new shoes!
CAYLEY: Go on.
KYRIE: Clothes too.
CAYLEY: Ooh.
KYRIE: I'll even buy you another dildo!
(Cayley's hair virtually stood on end.)
CAYLEY: I don't want one!!!
(Anoka was astonished.)
ANOKA: Wait! *Another* dildo?
CAYLEY: I didn't want the first one either!
ANOKA: Yeah, right.
CAYLEY: I didn't!!!
ANOKA: Hmm...
CAYLEY: Don't "hmm" me! Just...
(She then sighed in defeat and allowed her shoulders to slump.)
CAYLEY: Let's just collect our stuff and go home.
(She then wandered away, kicking the cobbles.)
CAYLEY: Stupid Kyrie.
(Watching her go, Flaxley and Kritz chuckled. They'd heard the whole thing.)
KRITZ: It's fair to say that backfired on her somewhat.
FLAXLEY: I'll say. She emotionally blackmailed her way into public humiliation there.
KRITZ: And yet she's normally so *good* at blackmail.
FLAXLEY: What?
KRITZ: Nothing.
(She then looked to President Herman.)
KRITZ: Anyway, we'll see you in three months.
HERMAN: I'll look forward to it.
(He then groaned in defeat.)
HERMAN: Unfortunately, we'll see the others in three months too.
(He then wandered away, sighing despondently.)
FLAXLEY: Right... well... darling?
KRITZ: Yes?
(Flaxley's face lit up.)
FLAXLEY: Tifaeris awaits.
KRITZ: Yes, it does.
FLAXLEY: And I have some dramatic changes in mind.
KRITZ: Oh?
FLAXLEY: I'll tell you in the carriage.
(They then headed away, arm-in-arm.)

At lunchtime the following day, Sir Flaxley was standing at a lectern in Tifaeris' main square. Seated behind him were Kritz, Cayley and Anoka. He'd decided to overhaul the way the town was run, and now he was making his announcement to the public.

FLAXLEY: People of Tifaeris, this is a momentous day. A day of great change. A day when Tifaeris moves into a new era.

(A disgruntled voice then rose up from the front of the gathered townsfolk.)

THIN: Not another bloody election, is it?

FLAXLEY: Correct! It's *not* another bloody election. Now shut up and let me speak.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Today is the day that I, Sir Flaxley, will step down from my role as the head of development.

(His message was greeted with complete silence.)

FLAXLEY: Right...

DAISY: I didn't know you *were* the head of development.

THIN: Nor did any other bugger!

FLAXLEY: Well, I was! Of course, I bloody was. I was the one who oversaw the planning of new roads; new developments; new housing.

DAISY: Oh, you mean the building programme.

FLAXLEY: Yes. Development!

THIN: Gotcha.

ROGER: Who's taking over then?

FLAXLEY: I'll come to that. Now shut up and pay attention.

(He leant on the lectern then nodded.)

FLAXLEY: You see, development was never really my forte. It *went* well enough, but it was never my strength. All my *real* skills are military ones. I'm a knight. A warrior. A general. And generals need things to be done a certain way. They need to be on top of everything, so that those under their command know where they stand. In order to perform that role, they need to be blunt and forthright! They need to be forceful. And that's great when you're leading an army! But it's not so great when you're working in an office, overseeing two old men and a thirteen year old girl.

(He turned and glanced at Cayley.)

FLAXLEY: Young Cayley there was an asset to my department. All my best ideas were hers. And did I thank her for it? No. I barked at her like she was an unruly soldier every time *I* didn't understand what she was doing. It was *my* shortcoming, not hers. But the general in me lashed out. The general needs to know what his subordinates are planning at all times.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: An office manager does not.

(He looked to the townsfolk again.)

FLAXLEY: Cayley almost left us because of that. And I can't say I blame her. Thankfully, I've managed to persuade her to stay. With a lot of help from Kritz. And Anoka. Point being, she's going to remain with us, in her new capacity as Tifaeris' head of development.

(He then offered up his applause, demanding that everyone else join in by way of his fiercest glare. They immediately obliged.)

FLAXLEY: She'll be starting her new role tomorrow.

(He chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: I'm under oath not to interfere. And don't worry, I've told the two old men in her department that if they don't like the idea of taking orders from a child, they can quit.

(Everyone chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: So her first job tomorrow will be to appoint two replacements.

(Everyone chuckled again. Flaxley, however, could only wince.)

FLAXLEY: I wasn't joking that time. If you're intelligent and articulate, and you don't mind having a thirteen year-old boss, you can pick up an application form in the morning.

(He shook his head with disappointment then offered up a smile.)

FLAXLEY: As well as my heading up the army and Cayley's promotion to head of development, my daughter Anoka will be doubling up as the deputy chief of police and the deputy head of military training.

(He grinned.)

FLAXLEY: So she'll teach you to *use* a sword on Monday then stab you with one if she catches you thieving on Tuesday.

(Silence instantly descended.)

FLAXLEY: Um... that was a joke.

THIN: Was it?

FLAXLEY: Shut up, Thin.

THIN: Charming.

FLAXLEY: As for my beautiful wife, Kritzeveltia, she's going to be taking on a new role as the town's chief negotiator. We have a lot of new developments in the pipeline, you see, such as new schools, a hospital and stone cladding for all the houses. If your building company wishes to get involved, give her a quote.

(He snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Don't go and intimidate Cayley! That's not going to work! Cayley will work out the cost of each project based solely on the quotes given to *Kritz*. Try to intimidate *her* and she'll rip your legs off.

KRITZ: Minimum!

FLAXLEY: Minimum.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: So there you have it. I shall remain as head of state, as elected, and together we'll go on and thrive. With everyone doing the job best suited to them. So... any questions?

(Everyone just looked at one another and shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Then this meeting is adjourned.

(At once, a loud cheer rose up and everyone swiftly started to disperse. Flaxley headed back to Kritz and Anoka, and Cayley clambered off the stage and raced up to where Kyrie was waiting for her in the main square.)

CAYLEY: I got a loud cheer.

KYRIE: I know. Flaxley scared everyone into doing it.

CAYLEY: Yes, but... I think I deserved it.

KYRIE: I think so too.

CAYLEY: Then we're agreed.

(They then started to head away together.)

CAYLEY: Where are we going?

KYRIE: To the café. You deserve a slice of cake.

CAYLEY: Just a slice?

KYRIE: And some coffee, of course.

CAYLEY: I'll take it.

KYRIE: Awesome. Can you buy me one while you're there? I left my money at home.

(Cayley gave her a sideways glance.)

CAYLEY: So I'm buying my own reward?

KYRIE: For now, yes.

CAYLEY: Fine.

(She chuckled.)

CAYLEY: You know...

(She then froze on the spot.)

KYRIE: What do I know?

(She gasped.)

KYRIE: And how did I find out???

CAYLEY: Wait. Kyrie...

(She pointed to the town library.)

CAYLEY: Am I reading that right?

(Kyrie glanced at the building.)

KYRIE: The Cayley Severen Library.

(Kyrie gasped.)

KYRIE: You bought a library??? And *you* moan at *me* for wasting money???

CAYLEY: I didn't buy it, Kyrie. I don't even...

(Just then, Flaxley stepped up behind her.)

FLAXLEY: What do you think? Nice touch, eh?

CAYLEY: What?

FLAXLEY: After you sent that letter, we all thought you were leaving for good. So I thought, you know what, that girl deserves a tribute. You've done so much for this town and received nothing but grief in return. Why, you even captured that book signing bastard for us. *After* you'd left town! So naming the library after you was the least we could do.

KRITZ: What he's trying to say is, he was riddled with guilt about driving you away, so he decided to do something nice to make it up to you.

FLAXLEY: Kritz...

KRITZ: What? It's true!

FLAXLEY: Even so.

(He ruffled his neck.)

FLAXLEY: I hope you like it, Cayley.

CAYLEY: I love it!

(Just then, Phisele strolled over to join them.)

PHISELE: Nice speech, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Thank you.

PHISELE: Congratulations, Cayley.

CAYLEY: Thank you.

(Phisele then turned to Anoka.)

PHISELE: Anoka, we've had a breakthrough in the Jameson case. His stolen vase turned up this morning. Someone left it in plain sight outside the café. So you just need to return it to him along with a notice for him to sign, confirming that it's his. Then you can have the afternoon off.

ANOKA: Cool.

PHISELE: Sadly, we may *never* find out who stole it from him.

(In that moment, a deliciously evil grin appeared on Cayley's face. She was more than familiar with cases where a valuable stolen item would suddenly reappear in a public place. There was a common scam back in Anoseta involving such a tactic and she knew exactly what had happened. Rather than simply explaining herself, however, she'd decided to have a little fun with it at Phisele's expense. To that end, she beamed with delight then whispered in Kyrie's ear.)

CAYLEY: Repeat what I whisper and fun things will happen.

KYRIE: Ooh, I like fun things.

(Cayley then whispered to her again and Kyrie repeated her words.)

KYRIE: *Nobody* stole it from him.

(Cayley then whispered a third time.)

KYRIE: It's *already* a stolen artefact.

(Cayley then whispered again.)

KYRIE: He just wants proof of ownership so he can legally sell it.

(Phisele stared at Cayley in astonishment.)

PHISELE: Do you think so?

(Cayley then pulled the most annoying grin a child could pull.)

CAYLEY: *I* don't know, Phisele. I'm just a kid.

(At once, a deep sense of rage, swelled in Phisele's heart. When Kyrie was a police officer, Cayley had solved crimes on numerous occasions then lied about it in order to give Kyrie the credit. It had been infuriating. And here she was, doing it again, just to be annoying.)

PHISELE: Why you...

CAYLEY: Why you always pester me, I just don't know. What would *I* know about such things? *I* like doing little girl things, like playing with dolls and dressing up.

(She gestured to Kyrie.)

CAYLEY: Maybe you should ask the best detective you ever had, instead of constantly bothering an innocent minor like me.

(By now, Phisele was red with rage and steam was starting to gush from her ears.)

KYRIE: Yikes. Phisele looks fit to explode.

(She beamed.)

KYRIE: You're right, this *is* fun.

CAYLEY: Yup.

(They then stood there giggling together. Far from impressed, Phisele sneered then glanced to her right where a group of boys were playing with a ball. Vengeance was in order and it was going to be sweet.)

PHISELE: Look, boys. Hot lips is here.

CAYLEY: What?

(All of a sudden Cayley was swarmed upon by amorous teenage boys in army uniforms.)

LAD 01: Go out with me, Cayley!

LAD 02: No, go out with me!

LAD 03: I've got a boat we can go out on!

LAD 04: Let me buy you coffee!

(Absolutely terrified, Cayley cried out from among the herd of boys.)

CAYLEY: What's going on?

PHISELE: Flaxley told them you have a thing for boys in uniform.

FLAXLEY: Phisele!!!

PHISELE: Enjoy.

(She then skipped away, giggling to herself. Left behind, Cayley was distraught.)

CAYLEY: Why? Why do you hate me, Flaxley? Why???

FLAXLEY: I...

(Cayley then broke free and sprinted away.)

CAYLEY: Kyrie!!! Save me!

KYRIE: Um... yeah...

(She then raced after her. Left behind, Flaxley could only suck his teeth.)

FLAXLEY: We've been back for one day and already I'm going to have to grovel to her again.

KRITZ: Yeah... you and that girl are just *destined* not to get along it seems.

FLAXLEY: Yeah...

KRITZ: Come on. I'll make us a nice pot of tea.

(They then headed away with Flaxley sighing ruefully all the way.)

That evening, Sir Flaxley was once again, sitting outside on his porch with his good friend, Derek, the three foot tall green alien from the planet Tryme 17. Going over the events of the past week or so in his mind, he couldn't help but smile.

FLAXLEY: It's been rough, Derek, but in the end it's all been worth it. Even if I did have to give Cayley another pay rise this afternoon, it's all worked out brilliantly.

DEREK: Another pay rise?

FLAXLEY: As an apology for getting her chased all over Tifaeris by a bunch of amorous boys.

DEREK: Right...

FLAXLEY: Don't judge me.

DEREK: Too late.

FLAXLEY: It's never too late, Derek.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Just like it wasn't too late for me to accept that I'm a terrible office manager and step aside.

DEREK: Yes... what a seamless segue, that was. Smoothly cutting away from talking about your cockups to the one thing you've done right all week.

FLAXLEY: Derek...

DEREK: I'm not mocking, that was *actually* very good. Bonson would have been proud of you.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, never mind *him*.

DEREK: Actually, *do* mind him. I want to know all *about* your meeting with Bonson and the others. Which hoops did Mandika make you jump through in order to get her approval?

FLAXLEY: None, actually.

DEREK: No?

FLAXLEY: No.

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: It all fell apart long before she could get round to doing anything like that.

Honestly, Derek, it was like dealing with a bunch of bloody children. Actually, that's a lie.

I've never had any trouble dealing with children. It was more like interacting with a bunch of morons.

DEREK: Yes, well, if it makes you feel any better, Tryme 17 is thousands of years ahead of Tifaeris in terms of advances, yet our world leaders are still fucking morons.

FLAXLEY: Not as bad as this lot, surely. Mandika was the fourth least petulant. Out of seven!

DEREK: Good grief!

FLAXLEY: I know. Her cousin from Ashrin was an absolute bell-end.

DEREK: Sounds awful.

FLAXLEY: It was.

(He nodded proudly.)

FLAXLEY: But we got in anyway. It turned out that the president of Leathrock really only wanted to join forces with ourselves and Tang Yul. The others were only there to make up numbers. So he threatened to kick them out. As a result, we were accepted unopposed.

DEREK: Excellent.

FLAXLEY: It was. It's all worked out well, Derek. We've joined a strong military alliance, the two fuckers responsible for my books are both in custody, and thanks to Leathrock's laws on child labour Cayley is still with us.

DEREK: That one's a minor miracle.

FLAXLEY: Yes, it...

DEREK: Get it?

FLAXLEY: What?

DEREK: Minor miracle? She's a minor.

FLAXLEY: Right... Derek?

DEREK: Shut up.

FLAXLEY: You're about as good at telling jokes as you are at flying a spaceship.

DEREK: Low blow!

FLAXLEY: You're a low target!

DEREK: Hey!

(Flaxley chuckled then sat back.)

FLAXLEY: Seriously though, it's been excellent. I'm looking forward to going back to training an army. And I'm not sad to be out of an office environment. We went through staff pretty quickly there, and now I know why. I wasn't a boss. I was an angry sergeant major. I never got out of military mode.

DEREK: Oh, I know. You've always been a soldier type, ever since I met you.

FLAXLEY: And yet, I had no idea.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Generals need to know every detail of a military operation, Derek. Even minor detail. That way, they can switch tactics at the last second. And that's how my mind works. But I couldn't *possibly* know what Cayley was doing, could I? Her brain is a million times quicker than mine. She made me feel dangerously out of the loop. Threatened. And boy did I punish her for it.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: She's a nice kid, Derek. She didn't deserve that.

DEREK: I know. You've been saying that every evening for a while now.

FLAXLEY: True. But, I'm out of her way now. Forbidden by Kritz from ever interfering.

It's what we both need.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: This is going to work out well, Derek. I can feel it.

DEREK: Here's hoping, old chap.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(He then sat back and took a swig of his ale.)

FLAXLEY: Here's to Tifaeris, Derek. Our fine town.

DEREK: Quite.

(He then nodded to Flaxley's flagon.)

DEREK: Though it does seem odd to toast the town with the local ale. By all accounts that's the worst thing about the place.

FLAXLEY: Right... yes... well... fuck off, Derek.

DEREK: Right.

FLAXLEY: What I'm drinking doesn't matter. It's the *substance* of the toast that counts. And the fact is, Tifaeris has grown in stature this week. Levelled up, so to speak. We all did a superb job.

DEREK: Right... you mean *Cayley* did a superb job.

FLAXLEY: I...

DEREK: *Despite* you!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: You know what? I'm rapidly going off you, Derek.

DEREK: The truth hurt, did it?

(Flaxley ruffled his neck indignantly.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, it did.

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