Love, Blood, and Magic: The Star-Crossed Origins

*In the Beginning*

**AD 671, December 7**

 That day, the heavens turned black and fire rained from the sky.

 Perhaps this wasn’t the first time an event like this had occurred, and it certainly wouldn’t be the last. But neither boy could be held responsible for remembering what had come before they were born, and nothing that followed could compare to this.

 This was the day they found her.

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 Alexander dashed up the hill through the snow, hoping to get a better view of the phenomenon. His parents often told him that he was born on a day like this, when the sun went black, and teased him that it foretold a dark fate for his future (as if their race didn’t have a dark fate to begin with). Unfortunately, it was his parent’s fates which were darkest when the hunting party arrived thirty years ago and they were slain.

As much as Alexander loved his parents, he couldn’t fault the men that had killed them. He had seen the deep fear in their eyes. “Monsters! Demons!” they had shouted. Looking back now, Alexander wished he could have argued with them, explained that they were wrong, convinced them to leave peacefully…but what was there to say in defense of his kind? Not that it would have mattered. His mother hadn’t given him the opportunity to do anything of the sort: she grabbed his shoulders, shook him, and told him to go—alone, and to keep running. Which is what he had been doing ever since.

 Now, on a day when the humans were inside for fear of the wrath of their gods (or was it God here? Alexander sometimes lost track of the different religious theories; there seemed to be so many, and they changed so often), he was running up that hill for a better view, wishing just for the moment that he could see his family again.

 Of course, his parents were not at the top of the hill, not that he truly expected them to be. But he *had* expected to be alone. Instead, he found a boy: a towheaded rascal, whose size suggested that he was actually around eight years old, roughly the age Alexander appeared to be. (His race was always older than they looked, their lives being so long.) *He’s probably from the Norseman’s village nearby,* Alexander groaned to himself. He didn’t want to frighten the lad, so he slowed down, walking softly to avoid crunching winter footprints, and stood far behind, silently contemplating how to leave without being noticed.

 However, it was the blond boy who moved first. As Alexander decided on a course of action he suddenly turned, noted Alexander’s presence, and remarked, “Oh, hullo!”

 Alexander gave an inward sigh. *Why did this boy have to notice me? And why is he now walking over? Is it too much to ask for a few minutes of solitude in the mid-afternoon darkness?* He was so engrossed in his own woes, he nearly missed the question: “You’re one of the blood-drinkers, aren’t you?” The boy was practically in front of his face when the question ended.

Alexander took a step back, immediately on the defensive.

 “Oh no, I’m not here to kill you. See? I don’t have any weapons with me.” The boy spread his hands in a gesture of peace.

 Wary, Alexander inquired, “What makes you think I would be one of those?”

 “Well, you’re obviously not from around here,” the boy answered, indicating Alexander’s dark hair in comparison to his own golden locks, “and who else would be fool enough to visit the Viking woods in mid-winter?”

 “Indeed,” replied Alexander, frowning. The boy smiled, causing Alexander’s frown to deepen. Confused, he wondered, *Why is this boy not afraid*?Trying a new tactic, Alexander mentioned, “You know, most people are not very friendly with my kind.”

 The boy laughed—he actually laughed! Alexander was on the verge of calling him mad when the boy remarked, “I’m the son of the devil, so you really don’t scare me.”

 Having run out of excuses to leave, Alexander found himself rather curious. “Is that so?”

 The boy gave a curt nod, but the laughter disappeared from his eyes as he did so. *Hmm,* pondered Alexander, *probably NOT something he wants to talk about.* Shifting the conversation, he held out his hand. “My name is Alexander. May I have the pleasure of making your acquaintance?”

 “Sure. I’m Eri—er, Jesse,” the boy replied, shaking Alexander’s hand. Alexander raised an eyebrow, as if to ask why he had trouble remembering such a simple thing as his own name.

 Jesse sighed. “It used to be Erik, but I changed it after my mother died and I left home. I suppose it’s hard to get used to a new name when there’s no one around to use it.”

 “My condolences.”

 Jesse shrugged and looked back up at the black sky. “My mother once told me I was conceived on a day like this,” he murmured, then gave another sigh.

 “Your mother and…?” Alexander couldn’t help himself.

 “Satan.” Jesse filled in the blank nonchalantly, turning back to look Alexander square in the eye. “I really am the son of the devil!” He chuckled, but his smile faded at the sad, serious look on Alexander’s face. “See the village not too far off?”

Alexander nodded.

“That’s where he found her, on a dark day like this when it’s less likely people will see him for who he is. My mother was the most beautiful and sought-after girl in the village—until she bore me, her cursed son. We were outcasts for most of my childhood until my stepfather took pity and married her, but when she died giving birth to his first son, he blamed me for her death and had me thrown out of the village. So, I traveled here and there, from place to place, eventually changed my name. After more than twenty years of wandering I came back, hoping perhaps the fool was dead himself and I could get to know my half-brother. Alas, hardly anyone remains from the day I left. And I age so slowly that the few who *do* remember mistook me for my own son! The fact that I go by ‘Jesse’ now only added to the façade.”

 “Why Jesse?” Alexander blurted out, the first fully formed question that surfaced as his mind found itself tangled in the strands of a story being woven around him.

 “Oh, no real reason. I discovered a book my father hates with a passion while visiting one of the southern cities, so I pulled a new name out of there, just to irritate him.”

 “I take it the two of you are not close.”

 “He raped and abandoned my mother, leaving her near destitute and without options. Even after my stepfather stepped into the picture, he didn’t do a single thing to save her when she died. I’m not even sure I should call him my father because he’s never actually had anything to do with me, beyond giving me this cursed, half-demon life.”

The bitterness was unmistakable. Before Alexander could express any words of sympathy, Jesse sighed again. “Not that any of it matters now. What’s done is done. I’m cursed to roam the earth as an undying half-devil until I can find the supposed ‘elf-maiden’ who can allegedly save me.” He shrugged again, indicating his doubts on the possibility of that option.

“Elf-maiden?” Alexander repeated dumbly. If he been entertaining any notions of checking out and calling it a day—clearly there was no solitude to be found here—such thoughts now vanished as he found himself past the point of no return.

“It was a story, a legend really, that my mother used to tell me,” Jesse replied absently. “I wouldn’t have thought anything of it, if it hadn’t been for the dreams…” His voice trailed off, his brow furrowed as he stared at the dark sun.

“Dreams?” echoed Alexander.

“Every night, for as long as I can remember, I’ve dreamt of her: the elf-girl, the one from the story,” he answered softly. Then he shook himself and returned to the present, his gaze sliding back to Alexander. “Dreams don’t always come true though, so until then, I suppose I’m on my own.” He gave another shrug. “I was actually on my way out again, leaving the village—no reason to stay, anyway. I came up here to watch as the sun went dark, to say goodbye to my mother…and then I met you.” His eyes rested on Alexander, giving him a thoughtful look.

 Alexander wanted to tell him he was not alone, that he was cursed too (as were all of the blood-drinking race, for obvious reasons), that he had also lost his family and was doomed to wander the earth alone, living forever…but that conversation would have to wait for another time. Just at that moment the sky lit up, but not from the sun. Instead, a great sphere of fire appeared out of the black, then shattered into dozens of arrows of light that proceeded to rain down upon the earth. The brightest of them all shot directly over their heads and crashed into the rocks of a nearby hill, forming a small crater just down from where they stood.

 Stunned silence was followed by Alexander’s exclamation of, “What the devil…?”

 “I beg your pardon!” Jesse responded in a huff, his wits returning quickly.

 “I meant no offense!” Alexander swiftly apologized. “I just meant…well, you know!” He pointed at the tunnel in the rocks, now glowing faintly.

 Jesse nodded, a puzzled expression on his face. Then he grinned. “Alex, wasn’t it?”

 “Alexander,” came the immediate correction.

 Jesse laughed. “That’s too much of a mouthful. I’ll just call you Alex.” He started down the hill.

 “I would much prefer Alexander!” The retort was mildly angry, but Jesse took no notice.

 “Just think of it as the devil inside me!” He laughed gaily as he started to jog. “Come on Alex, let’s see what’s in that cave!”

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