

## THE SIMPLE THINGS

Zeke stared at the intricately carved crown molding of his bedroom ceiling. You would think that being taken through a portal to a magical land and finding out that you're practically royalty would be very exciting.

It wasn't.

There were no computers, no TV, and his guitar was back on earth. So far, this magical land was pretty boring. It reminded him of that wardrobe book he had read as a kid. You know? The one with the lion.

Zeke had his hands behind his head and his feet propped up as he tried to remember the name of the book but all he could recall was that the group of kids had been transported to a magical land too. Of course, there was an epic battle at the end, but that was only after he suffered through hours of them walking around and drinking tea.

Yeah, Zeke thought, magical lands aren't all they're cracked up to be.

The creaking of floorboards outside his door caught his attention but whoever it was walked past without stopping. Zeke stood up and paced his room a couple of times. He started towards his door, thinking he might explore the Jeong mansion but the sound of another person passing made him change his mind and he sat back down on the edge of his bed.

It was so tall that his feet didn't touch the ground. Pretty much everything about the Jeong mansion made him feel small. The vaulted ceilings, the marble entryway, the bed, even his mother, Ida, made him feel small.

Feeling restless, Zeke stood again, this time walking to the window and sitting at the desk in front of it. He cracked open the window and inhaled the fresh air. The night air was cold but Zeke ignored the frigid air to take in the thousands of stars that dotted the sky. It was never so clear from the city back in Seattle.

It took Zeke a moment to realize that the stars were all different than the ones back on earth. He couldn't pick out any familiar constellations so he just decided to make up his own.

After a few short moments of drawing patterns in the sky, Zeke was startled as the bushes below his window rustled. The grounds were very dark. And, being on the third story, Zeke couldn't see what was down there. They rustled again and this time he could hear giggling.

"Uhhh.... Hello?" Zeke called into the darkness.

There was only more giggling.

"Who's there?" Zeke called again.

"It's Antoinette," a voice hissed back.

Zeke sat for a minute. He had met so many people that day but he couldn't remember meeting an Antoinette.

"I'm sorry, who are you?"

"Just stand back from the window!" Called a second voice.

Zeke stepped back just in time to avoid being hit as a large metal

object flew through his window, knocking a fancy looking vase off the desk. It crashed to the floor and the laughter cut off. Zeke froze, listening. Down below he heard one of the women swear about breaking something but the other only suppressed another snicker.

Luckily, nobody else in the manor heard the noise, or at least nobody came to investigate.

As Zeke picked the Vase off the floor and inspected it for damage, fresh giggles erupted outside until one shushed the other. There were two large metal hooks attached to a bundle of ropes now hanging from his window.

Zeke turned to inspect them. He shook out the ropes and found that the whole thing was a ladder.

Zeke ran through the likely scenarios in his head. There seemed to be two girls standing at the bottom of his bedroom window. They had just launched a rope ladder into his room so it seemed that they wanted him to go with them without Ida finding out.

Could they be kidnappers depending on his ignorance to make things easier?

Zeke's compilation was cut short when one of them yelled out playfully.

"Get your ass down here, Zeke!"

Whichever woman yelled was immediately shushed by whoever else was with them and both laughed again.

They probably weren't kidnappers, Zeke decided.

With a shrug, Zeke anchored the ladder on his window sill and tossed the ropes out the window. He paused, staring down at the distant ground but finally took a deep breath and swung his leg out the window. The ladder swayed as he made his way down but the two girls did their best to keep it steady.

Zeke jumped down when he finally could, and landed in group of bushes.

"Ok, I'm here. Now, who are you?" Zeke asked, looking between the two girls.

They didn't look particularly threatening. In fact, despite how cold it was, neither of them were dressed appropriately for the weather.

"Duh, I'm your sister," Antoinette answered, teetering out of the bush on heels and brushing off a pair of fitted shorts. The ties that ran up the side of her bottoms were bright gold and gave the otherwise passe' looking shorts a modern flair. "And this is Shayliss Arsen. But keep your voice down. Mom would flip if she knew we were taking you out."

Shayliss gave him a dumb grin and waved awkwardly at him. The young woman had large horns. Zeke was still getting used to seeing people who were gifted with strange features from the advancement and found himself staring for a beat too long. Shayliss wore a bright white dress that would have made him blush, but luckily, his sisters friend was mostly obscured by a dark cloak.

Antoinette leaned in and jammed an oversized yellow beanie onto Zeke's head and pulled the rim down over his eyes.

# ZEKE CONTINUED

"I don't think that's going to fool anyone," Shayliss said skeptically, one finger resting beneath the same grin.

Antoinette just shrugged, pulling a dark cloak of her own around her so that her body was covered from the cold. Then, Antoinette marched off towards the front gate, gesturing to Zeke and Shayliss.

The three of them passed a couple of servants but no one challenged them. The Jeong Mansion sat on a busy street and even at night there were people about.

Antoinette led them down a handful of side streets until they finally came upon a line of people waiting. The line stretched through a courtyard and came to a stop in front a door at the base of one of two massive white towers near the center of the city.

Zeke paused, taking in the impressive sight of the gigantic towers that stretched into the sky. Antoinette laughed at the look on his face then tugged on his wrist pulling him to the front of the line. They walked right up to the bouncer who stepped aside for them, letting them inside without having to wait in line.

Zeke stepped into the dark club and stopped at the sight. Lights flashed, music blared, and dancing bodies filled the air with sweat. There was full-service bar and whole tables packed with drinks. The place resembled a nightclub from Earth with music that pushed what millennials could do with the technology they had.

"What's the matter?" Antoinette shouted, looking back.

"This is amazing! I never thought something like this would exist here!" Zeke couldn't help but feel a bit more at home seeing some of the magical instruments.

"You've been cooped up with Ida all day. You need to blow off some steam." Antoinette said, inches from his ear so he could hear. "Afterall, we own the place."

Zeke smiled in awe at all the dancing people. He wondered if being in a fantasy world was going to be as boring as he originally thought.

## THE AUSPICIOUS HEIR

The illustrious Jeong house of Elenia has done a much better job at producing long-living offspring than their friends, the Arsen's. While the Arsen family had given birth to multiple healthy children, most either left the kingdom, died, or disappointed their father enough to be ruled out as successors to the throne.

As a diarchy, the kingdom of Elenia needed to unify both the Jeong and Arsen houses through blood. Zeke and his cousin Tyrial were both conceived with the intent of merging these two powerful households. While his cousin had been born a full sixteen years before him, the family didn't want to take any chances, and a second child was a way of hedging their bets, with both births being conveniently timed alongside that of an Arsen child.

Shortly before his death, the powerful and revered Lo Jeong and his queen Ida gave birth to Zeke. This made Zeke the first and only child of Lo Jeong, and what many in Elenia see as the true heir to the Jeong family's fortune, lands, and duties. This has made him the center of attention amongst the ruling class.

Zeke's Earth life was supposed to be one of a strict household, rigid rules, and high education. However, due to an aging and borderline senile foster parent, Zeke got none of these things. Shortly after his arrival to Middara, Ida found that her son was disobedient, lacked etiquette, and was generally a nuisance in his classes. To make matters worse, the sudden death of Lo Jeong made Zeke go from being fatherless on Earth to being fatherless on Middara.

A Magical world was supposed to be full of adventure, but instead, Zeke found himself bombarded with all the things he hated most; Responsibility, expectations, and strict rules. Zeke took it all in stride, though. While he was told about his arranged marriage with Nightingale Arsen, deep down he knew he'd never marry her. The two had a great friendship, one that he'd never let go, but she was like a sister.

His mother, Ida, truly did love him. He could see it in her eyes each time he saw her. So he tried his best to become, if not the perfect heir, at least an acceptable son.

