

Only a Slight Delay

Onas wasn't sure what he was expecting, but when he and Keston brought the wagon to where Taenya and Raafe were, a young telv girl was not it. As they got closer, Onas started to get a clearer look at the girl.

While at a distance she looked telv, now he could see she was different. For one, her ears were *rounded*. Her clothing was most unusual, it looked of high-quality material and craft, and he would love to know how it was made. They stopped the wagon and Onas got down and walked toward the group.

Walking up, he heard Taenya talking to the girl, "Gwyn, you said you were, what was it, a human?"

The girl nodded; her face still flushed from tears. Her chocolate-colored hair was pulled up into a messy bun on the back of her head and the top looked frizzy and loose as if she had been rubbing her hands through it. He could see that the chocolate color turned to bright pink at the ends of her hair, and wondered how that happened. She was tall for a child, about one-hundred forty-five centimeters. She was thin, with long legs that accounted for an appreciable portion of that height. As she spoke to Taenya, her intelligence was exposed through her piercing blue eyes as she calmly absorbed and analyzed her surroundings, remaining wary of the telv in front of her.

"Yeah, I'm human. You're an elf? Right? Like from TV? You're not going to hurt me? You're gonna help me find my mom?" The girl, Gwyn, was trying to be brave but he could see she was on the verge of tears again and very scared. It was a testament to Taenya's personal skills that she had helped the girl calm down and talk.

Taenya looked over to Onas as he walked up, raised an eyebrow, and gave him a slight nod in the girl's direction. She looked back to the child and then crouched down in front of her, "Gwyn, of course, we're not going to hurt you. We want to help you. My people are called the telv. The others with me are of the Loreni, but more specifically, they are high elves and Raafe over there is a sun elf."

She raised her arm toward Onas, "This is Onas. He's a really good friend of mine and he owns that big wagon over there. What do you say? We set you up on the bench behind the horses and you can explain to him what happened to you and your mother." She glanced over at Onas then back to the girl and added, "Is that okay?"

Gwyn nodded again, "Yeah, okay." She turned toward him, raising her hand in a small greeting. "Hi, Onas. I'm Gwyn Reinhart."

He was impressed with her ability to stay in control of her emotions, it wasn't common for one so young. There was something about her that he couldn't quite pinpoint, almost an aura about her.

He got his best, as his wife described it, customer face and voice ready. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Gwyn! I am Onas Fenren, the owner and patriarch of the Fenren Merchant House. I am very glad that Taenya here was able to help you. One your age shouldn't be wandering the roads in between towns by themselves, it's very dangerous." He smiled as he glanced over to Taenya, and his smile faltered a bit when he saw her hand over her face.

Gwyn seemed to instantly take on a look of fiery defiance, "I'm not wandering around! My mom picked me up from school, and maybe I was in *my* town with her, we were walking to get gelato. On the planet, Earth! I'm human! Not a elf! There's only one moon. Not two like here." she said, pointing up at the Sister Moons. She lowered her hand to her hip, "Then boom! Everything went blue then I felt dizzy and then I woke up here!" taking a second to catch her breath, she seemed to think of something else to say. "And, and... our roads are better!" she stated with finality.

Onas was taken a bit aback by her spark, but perhaps he should have let her start. Taenya's reaction seemed to make more sense now. Trying a different tactic he added, "That is quite the journey, what do you say we get you over to the wagon where you can rest. Then you can regale me with your tale little miss, and perhaps you can explain what a planet is."

"You don't know what a planet is? Ugh! Fine. Let's go." Gwyn said with an exasperated tone throwing her hands up and starting to walk toward the wagon. She mumbled something as she passed in what appeared to be a language other than Common that he didn't catch. He looked at Taenya one more time, noticing her suppressing a laugh, likely at his expense. No, he thought, definitely at his expense. He would definitely be the focus of some joke later.

This child was much more headstrong than his own two children, and they were older. Perhaps she was a noble from wherever she hailed from. He considered the evidence thus far, mentally ticking them off as he went. Her clothing was certainly high quality. Her speech was more refined without any noticeable accent that he was aware of, and her education level was high. She looked well-fed and fit for what he assumed was eleven years old or more due to her height. The ability to speak a second language. While he wasn't sure if she was fluent, the fact that she had smoothly shifted to it led him to believe she was. Her control over her emotions, and that she wasn't afraid to speak her mind to him, a stranger and an adult. She had even added extra emphasis when she described *her* town. Yes, he would undoubtedly need to change tactics. She was clearly a noble.

Onas rubbed his hand through his hair, then started heading toward the wagon with Taenya. "She's something else isn't she boss?" Taenya was undoubtedly getting at something. "She's going to need help. Raafe is out looking for her mother, but we didn't see any evidence of well... anything except Gwyn. She's all alone, Onas."

"Let's have her tell her story again, it may just be a flight of fancy for her. She's young, and the young have quite the active imaginations."

"Onas, she's not a telv. She is not one of the Loreni. I guess she could be some weird-looking dwarf but I highly doubt it. We're pretty far from Dirn Loduhr, and her build isn't the same as theirs. Plus, she's young and already taller than most of them."

"I get the hint Taenya, but we can't just abscond with her. She's likely a noble. None of us have the clout to handle that kind of situation if they want to try and say we kidnapped her." He looked up to see Keston talking to Gwyn, showing her the horses and how he would drive the wagon.

"I don't know boss," Taenya chuckled, "you may be outnumbered in the end."

Keston looked over to them as they stepped up to the wagon, "Hey bosses! Can we keep her? She's great!"

Onas sighed again, "Keston, let's have Gwyn tell her story again for us, shall we?" he gestured to her, "Gwyn, could you kindly repeat your story for me? I'd like to make sure I have all of the facts as you present them."

“Right, right. Okay, Mr. Onas. This is what happened today. First, mom and I got ready for school...” Gwyn started telling him all about her day. He had to ask her many clarifying questions. Like, what were her mother’s name and profession? What was a watch? What was a car? What was this science subject she was learning about? On and on it went and they talked for over two hours as Gwyn told him all about her day and tried to explain everything she knew about her world. She mentioned what she called an Aurora, which when questioned further, seemed to be what Gwyn’s people called what he knew as Sky Lights. She talked about how there was a flash of blue light that surrounded her and then she woke up here.

As she was finishing up, Raafe returned from his search, looking at Taenya with a solemn look and shaking his head. Onas watched as Taenya’s shoulders dropped and she took a breath. She seemed to force a smile on her face and stood up and looked at Gwyn, “Gwyn, what do you say we take a moment to go clean up. It’s getting a bit late in the day. Come along, I’ll assist you.” Taenya reached out her hand to help Gwyn get down.

“Thank you, Taenya.” She reached out and grabbed Taenya’s hand and climbed down from the wagon. As they walked away Onas reflected on all the girl had told him. It was quite a tale and filled with material she couldn’t possibly have fabricated. Some of the things were frankly almost too fantastical. A wagon with no horses? That went far faster than any horse could run? A location to teach children her age subjects more advanced than many of the Academies that the larger nations hosted nearby. His own Kingdom of Avira’s Royal Academy came to mind. He supposed the girl could have embellished some of the facts, but when she talked about what a planet was? That seemed almost too much, but if she really did come from another one of these...worlds. It made sense. How the blue flash had done such a miraculous feat, he wasn’t even close to qualified in making a guess. His own experience with the event was to simply pass out. At first, he had thought it was just him, but he learned from Keston that everyone had. He supposed now he should feel lucky that he wasn’t taken somewhere else.

Keston and Raafe walked to the wagon with some stew and bread. Onas wasn’t even sure when they had started a fire or began to cook anything. He looked around, noticing the sun was already going down. Raafe handed him and Taenya some food while Keston handed Gwyn hers.

Gwyn immediately started to eat as if she hadn’t in days. Keston smiled, “You look pretty hungry there Gwyn. How is it? Is it similar to what you’re used to?”

She took a moment to consider her response, “This is good, but it’s a bit bland. Needs more seasoning.” She went back to eating, clearly, the taste not inhibiting her.

Onas started, “Seasoning? Do you mean herbs? Spices are expensive Gwyn. Are you telling me your mother has food cooked for you with them often?”

Gwyn took a second to look up from her food, “We have herbs that we get from the store. I know what herbs are, Mr. Onas.” She admonished. “Mom has lots of seasonings, something for every type of food we make. Stuff for when we have beef and rice, different ones for when we have pasta. Oh, there’s the really good seasonings she puts on steak and lamb, and not only salt. Mmm, I love lamb. Mom has an entire cabinet just for spices. It’s right next to the rack where she keeps her wine. But,” she quickly looked at Keston, “you cook well too Mr. Keston, maybe you just need to tell Mr. Onas to give you more spices and herbs.”

Keston instantly got a smile on his face, “Yeah boss, I think she’s right. We need more spices for our food. And Salt!” His smile then grew even more, “An entire *cabinet* full, Master Onas.” He added with a flourish.

Onas couldn’t help but chuckle, “Fine, Keston, absolutely. Anything for my most loyal and respected employees.”

Keston seemed to perk up a bit in surprise, “Wait, really boss?”

Onas got a glint in his eye, “Most assuredly Keston. However, due to us not having the same level of means that Lady Gwyn’s mother has, I will simply have to deduct the cost for the seasonings from your pay.”

“Boss, that is a most glorious idea and we thank you for your contribution to the rest of us Keston. What do you think, Raafe? Maybe we can even have *lamb* if you contribute your pay as well.” Taenya obviously didn’t want to be left out of this japing session.

“Oh, I am quite fine with bland, stringy stew and bread boss. Don’t put me down for any type of pay cut.” Raafe quickly added.

Gwyn laughed, “I’ll show you what you need to cook Keston, it’s okay.” She giggled again, “You guys are funny.” She paused and stopped smiling, her face taking a grave expression. Looking between the three of them, she asked them what they all knew she wanted, “Will you help me find my mom?”

Keston, Raafe, and Taenya all looked at Onas, expectant looks on every one of their faces. Onas sighed; he'd known this was coming for hours now. He looked to each of his people one more time before settling on Gwyn. "Gwyn, I am unsure of where to start exactly in searching for your mother, but—"

Gwyn opened her mouth like she was going to say something, but he raised a hand to stop her, "but, you can join us on our journey back to my home in Strathmore. We will ask in every village and town we pass through if they have seen or heard anything about your mother.

"I'm sure my wife would be honored to have you stay with us until we can find her for you. Once we get back to Strathmore, we can determine a plan to assist your search. In the meantime, I request your aid in the journey, if there is anything you could contribute, it would be greatly appreciated. Taenya will be here to assist you in anything you need. She and the other two will keep us all safe. Please do not hesitate to ask for anything you may need."

Onas took a deep breath; he wasn't quite sure he *really* wanted the answer to this question. "I do have one question I believe I must ask, however. Gwyn, are you and your mother members of the nobility?"

Gwyn seemed to get a mischievous look in her eye, "No, Mr. Onas."

He felt his small tension ease ever so slightly, just before Gwyn performed a curtsy and exclaimed, "I'm a princess!"

Onas' breath caught in his throat as his eyes bulged. He heard Taenya's breathing also hitch. *This was definitely going to cause a delay.*