

Max's Big Day

When we'd first met, I had saved Max from a witch hunt. Mostly. As it turned out, she wasn't much of a witch.

"Sometimes things happen around me," she'd bawled sometime later. She had really been quite upset. About nearly being drowned as a witch; about waking up in a strange city well away from the village where she'd grown up; and evidently about actually being a witch. "I can't control it. I don't mean to do any harm. I swear, I am not of the demon!" She'd gone on for quite a while in a similar vein.

Later, after she had finally finished explaining how she was not of the demon for what seemed like the twentieth time, I explained to her that I did not for a moment believe she *was* of the demon. Despite my words, in all actuality I wasn't so sure. She very possibly could have been of the demon... just not in the way that the people of her village had thought. The fey who had been about to drown her could have arranged for our apparently chance meeting in order to get her close to me.

There were many possibilities. To him it all could have been a game. Or it could have been deadly serious. Demon blood had been his stated reason for trying to drown her.

If blood was truly the reason, even that offered no shortage of possibilities. He could have been trying to kill her because she had blood of a rival fey faction flowing through her veins. Possibly the blood of a demon or god. Or... the blood of one of the other great families. According to the royal library, sometimes there's not a whole lot of difference between any of them.

There were a whole slew of 'ifs'. 'If' was a road to paranoia with my family. I tried to look down those roads but I made it a habit not to walk them.

So, for the moment I took Max at face value. Windhaven was a nice town. There were pleasant amenities at the local inn where we now rented a small suite. We had bought new dresses. She had needed one that fit better. I needed a new riding dress because I had forgotten to perform a cleaning cantrip after a swim in a muddy little pond. Right now, the only cleaning spells I knew were more trouble than they were worth to cast. I needed some better ones for sure. Dress shopping done, we moved on to a more general clothing store where we spent a great deal of time shopping for her. Very little of the time was actually spent shopping though.

Most of the time had been spent giving her a broader view of the world. And waking her up after she passed out from getting snippets of that broader view. It happened several times and I was quite impressed with how gracefully she fainted. Despite this, she learned a lot. By the time we were through clothes shopping, she had learned her home was just one of countless worlds and world fragments that made up the Probability Maze. She had learned that witchcraft, sorcery, and other special abilities were not necessarily granted by evil beings; sometimes, generally even, they came naturally to a person from their mother and father. In her heart she had known she was different and I confirmed that she did indeed seem to have special abilities. Further, she learned that I had a number of special abilities including ones similar to what she seemed to possess. Many of these lessons was accompanied by a elegant slide to the floor. She truly fainted better than anyone I'd ever met.

A couple of days later found us sitting in a nice carnation garden. I hadn't added anything else lately to the list of revelations. She hadn't done much in the way of talking except to ask the occasion question. Most of those seemed to be aimed at clarifying or verifying previous revelations.

I asked her what she wanted to do. She didn't know. I asked her if she liked to travel. Asked if she enjoyed learning. She had never traveled before but she did enjoy learning. At least she did when the information wasn't of the world shaking variety.

Later that evening, while eating dinner, I asked her if she would be interested in learning to control the strange things that happened around her. Her answer was a cautious affirmative. I didn't bring the matter up again.

Instead, we traveled. Eventually, she became comfortable with my leading our way through the holes in the worlds that made up the Maze. It didn't take her long to pick up on some of my cantrips either. Soon she was duplicating the easy ones as though I had spent the time to teach her. A good sign for her potential as a sorceress.

While I wouldn't exactly say that she became cosmopolitan, after a couple of dozen different worlds and world fragments, she had learned her way around towns and cities pretty well. Arriving in each new place, I would assign her a task. At first the tasks were very small and easy. Unsaddle the horses. Pay the bill and make sure we had some money left when all was said and done. This last time, just as we had gotten into the city of Nimes, I had instructed her to get us rooms at an inn, get us traveling equipment for a cold weather expedition, and to buy herself a weapon. I hadn't bothered to mention that she didn't speak the language. I had gone to a temple of the Blessed Angel and had confiscated their holy water and the silver vessel it was stored in. There, using my confiscated wares, I watched her progress via scrying.

At first she was flustered. She became more so when she found out she didn't speak the local language. Neither did I, but since when did a little language barrier stop Andus Diamond's daughter? Soon however, she got her wits about her. Using a pantomime version of sign language, she quickly performed all the tasks assigned her. Her choice of a long knife as a weapon was atrocious but that was a different story. All things being equal, I was quite pleased with her progress.

After a good night's rest, we proceeded out into the colder climes she'd purchased us gear for. Eventually, riding through a heavy snow storm, we arrived at the edge of a gigantic glacier. By this time Maxine was more than puzzled. She had become upset and vocal about it. It was truly cold here and this was about as inhospitable a place as one could ever expect to find. Her complaining pleased me a great deal since I hadn't been sure how much fire the girl had inside her. Pleased as I was, I nonetheless calmed her down and assured her we were here for a good reason.

As I lead us along the edge of the glacier, I kept looking for something. Darkness began settling down on us and the storm had begun intensifying in a dangerous way when I finally found it. It was a rather large split in the glacier. I hopped down off Juji and began leading him and signaled Max to do the same for her mare.

The crevice was actually a short interworld trail. Within ten minutes of walking into the crevice, we walked into a well lit stables at the edge of a large, imposing fortress. Max

quietly asked where we were.

A woman's throaty voice answered from the shadow of a doorway, "You are at the Chateau Arcanorum. A place where magic is taught. Sometimes great magic if the student is capable enough." Max seemed stunned.

"Maxine," I called to the as yet unseen woman with a slight nod of my head towards Max, "Is here to enroll." For a moment I thought Max was going to faint again.

"I am Yvonne," the woman informed us as she walked down the steps and into the light. "Maxine, I welcome you." She then turned back to me, "And what about you? True, I sense power within you... but that power could be further strengthened."

"That is surely true," I answered with a quiet smile. "But that is not the power I currently seek." I drew a blue, glowing diamond in the air which hung there for a moment before fading away. "You cannot lead me down the path I have chosen. Only one of my family may lead me."

"Your family is of le Chataeu Diamant?" she whispered.

"Indeed, madam. Indeed." Turning to my stunned charge, I smiled, "This is your big day Max. You will look back on this day and know that this was when things started to make sense." I handed her a communication mirror and a sheet of paper with the combination required to reach me on my own mirror. "Keep this. It is strongly magical. If you are clever, you will learn how to use it. I will speak to you again at that time."

Max surprised me by giving me a strong hug. "Thank you, Clarissa," she whispered into my hair. "But you're wrong. I'll look back on that day by when I awoke in a strange inn and learned that you weren't a dream... that you were real. I'll look back on *that* day as the day the world finally began to make sense. That was my big day. This is just a continuance." If I didn't leave soon, I was going to start crying, so I used some of my skills to slip a real knife into the suddenly empty sheath where that piece of waste steel some shopkeeper had called a long knife had resided, hugged her back and promised to see her soon. A quick bow of the head to the sorceress Yvonne, and I was up and away on Juji. Later this evening, when she was unloading her saddlebags, she would find a formal gown and a bag of gold. More than enough to make it through the school year.

As for myself, riding out into a snowstorm alone for the first time in several months, I decided to go see Grandpa. Maybe I could convince him to teach me a new cleaning cantrip. Of course I'd lied to Yvonne. I was interested in learning other types of magic. But Diamond family magic was more powerful than the other varieties that were out there and I still had a long way to go before mastering it. Granpa was master of the machine that conveyed our powers to us. He was also king and therefore a very busy man. Hmm. Being one of his few granddaughters, I felt that I was more than up to the task of monopolizing some of his time.

That decided, I flicked away a few frozen tears and rode towards Regillus.