

Chapter Three

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Arcor was the most unpleasant city in the world and it virtually took up the entire island. It was where the most dedicated criminals came to smuggle and trade, where the outcasts came to live and the bloodiest of pirates came to hire their crew.

Unlike Rein, Empress Renée was unmolested on her way there and she shored the same day as Rein was taken onto the pirate ship. The empress entered into a snowed-out wooded area away from civilization as all of the ports and beaches seemed to be in constant use by crazed Arcorians. She kept her cloak wrapped tight around her and put her hood on to hide her streaming hair and most of her face. She waited in the frozen air of the woods for a while and struggled to gain the courage to enter the city. Oh, how she wished with all of her heart that she wasn't alone! Arcor's screams of terror and shouts of rage reached her ears and kept her standing there in complete horror. The only solution she could come up with was that perhaps she could flow through the streets as a stream, but that would only attract more attention if someone were to see her. She began pacing in the crunchy snow.

"What should I *do*?" she asked aloud, pressing her fists against her temples. "Where should I go? Where do I even start *looking*?"

After a couple more minutes of pacing and speaking to herself, Renée tried once more to gather the strength to enter Arcor. She slowly approached the end of the wood and peeked out from behind a tree. She saw the townsfolk arguing, trading, stealing, drinking, fighting, vandalizing, anything and everything that would be lawless anywhere. She hesitated again, then conjured up some water and formed it into a dagger to keep with her for an emergency. Finally she entered the unholy city of Arcor.

Renée kept to the center of the street where there was less commotion happening. Every once in while she had to dodge people fighting, people stumbling drunk, people fleeing. Death and violence were everywhere and it filled the air with the odors of sweat, rust and decay. It was clear to the empress that no one bothered to rid the streets of the putrid bodies and rotting trash anymore. In fact, no one even made an effort to try and run the place. She had learned through a rumor that whatever rules existed were unwritten and they happened to be mainly trading rules, such as, "I'll give you something if you give me something." There was also one peace rule: "Don't bother me, I won't bother you." But since all who came to Arcor were narcissistic to say the least, these rules were completely disregarded.

To Renée's surprise, few of these people paid her any attention. Some took a moment from whatever they were doing to stare at her suspiciously, but no one bothered to approach her. Until finally, one drunken satyr stumbled into her and nearly knocked her over.

"Sorry, my lady," he slurred. "But you were too delicious to resist. Come with me and I'll show you how to have fun!"

"Get off me!" Renée demanded as she pushed him away.

"Oh! You're one of *those* types, huh?" the satyr laughed.

"Leave me alone!" Renée shoved the satyr to the icy ground.

"Hey!" he cried, enraged. "Nobody shoves *me*!"

Suddenly, a few of his satyr friends exited a nearby pub and waved their mugs around, slurring profanities at her.

"Hey! What are you doing shoving my friend?"

"Yeah! You come try shoving one of us and see what happens!"

"Go shove someone your own size!"

Renée ran away before the situation became worse. She turned a corner and peeked out from behind a building. She was relieved to find that the satyrs had already forgotten about her and were standing around their friend, pointing and laughing. The one she had shoved to the ground was still trying to get back onto his hooves. Unfortunately, this newfound relief did little to calm the fears that came with the city in which she was located. She looked around nervously and noticed a sign with a picture of a book above a door across the street. It was the city library, deteriorated and seemingly unused. Perhaps she could find some useful information on the Mystery Miracle Worker inside.

The empress entered the library and what she found was very discouraging. There were many shelves and bookcases, but there were hardly any books to be seen. The books she did find were poorly taken care of; they were dusty, missing pages, missing *covers*, and the bindings were falling apart. Plus, the librarian was nowhere to be found, which was fine with Renée. The last thing she needed was another quarrel to slow her down.

Renée walked up and down the aisles even though she didn't know where to look. Suddenly, she heard slow and steady footsteps coming from behind the bookshelf she stood next to. They crept to the end of the aisle and turned the corner to reveal the mysterious stalker. It was the librarian: an old, fat, clay golem. Golems were mainly used as slaves on land, and because the librarian was a golem, Empress Renée immediately felt great contempt

towards her. She almost decided to walk out of the library and forget about looking for the Mystery Miracle Worker there.

“What are you doing here?” the librarian asked. It was clear that she too felt disdain towards Renée.

“Looking for some information,” Renée answered.

“What kind of information?”

“The location of the Mystery Miracle Worker.”

“You ain’t gonna find that information here.”

Renée hesitated for a moment. She didn’t wish to speak to the librarian anymore, but her search was too important to give up. “Then would you happen to know where I could find it?”

“Well, what do *I* get out of it?” the librarian asked.

Renée took a moment to think. Her malicious feelings about this golem were only growing. “I can pay you.” Pay a golem? That phrase left a bitter taste in her mouth.

“How much?”

“How much would you like?” Renée asked through gritted teeth.

“How much do you have?”

The empress was about to explode on this slave material. The librarian should be thankful she was getting anything at all. Renée molded some gold coins out of the water particles in the air and showed them to the librarian. “I have... a full moon.” A hundred dollars.

“Crescents don’t do anything here.”

“Except the fact that they’re pure gold, which does something everywhere.”

The librarian’s eyes widened and she reached out for the money. Renée quickly pulled it back and made sure her words were comprehensible when she said, “Where can I find the information I want?”

The librarian glared at her and sighed. “There’s a merchant seadog several shops from here. I can’t be certain if he’s there at the moment since he *is* a seadog, but if anyone knows the location of the Mystery Miracle Worker, it would be him.”

“What’s the name of the shop?”

“Worldly Trade. There’s a picture of Xyntriav above his door.”

Renée considered her answer. She didn’t like how vague the information was, but what could she do? Perhaps this was all that this useless golem could provide. Reluctantly she handed the money over.

“If I find this information to be false, I will come back for this money. If it’s not here, I’ll take the payment in some *other* way, if you catch my drift.” With that said, Empress Renée left the library.

Renée looked up and down the street to avoid any trouble-seekers before rushing to find the little, “Worldly Trade,” shop, just as run-down as the library. When she found the shop open, she felt relieved to get off the streets again. Dealing with one or two rowdy people was way better than dealing with an entire chaotic city. She entered the shop and looked around for whoever might be inside but only saw a large desk, a bunch of maps and strange objects used for voyages and navigation.

“And what might someone like yourself be looking for?” came a voice from behind her.

Renée spun around to find a man standing by the door with his arms crossed in front of his chest. She looked at him directly and hesitated to speak when she saw his feet were on backwards. Unfortunately, she had never heard of an abarimon before, so she didn’t understand that this was only normal for his ethnicity.

“I’m looking for the merchant whom I was told works here,” she uttered.

“And what do you want from him?”

“That is between me and him.”

“Is he expecting you?”

“No...”

“Then you must go through me first. What is it you’re looking for?”

“The location of a certain someone,” Renée answered. “And that is all you’re going to get out of me.”

“And what if I told you that I’m the merchant you want?”

“I wouldn’t believe you for a second. Now if you would, I’d like to speak with him.”

The abarimon laughed. “I’m afraid, my dear, I am the person you wish to speak to. However, I’m pressed on time, so we must hurry with your business so that I can go.”

“Prove it to me that you are whom I search for.”

“I’m afraid that’s not possible. Now either you can ask me what you want or I’m going to leave.” The merchant began to exit.

“I’m looking for the Mystery Miracle Worker,” Renée said.

The merchant paused and closed his door. “What business do you have looking for her?”

“Now that business is between her and myself, and there is no way you could possibly convince me that you are her, so there’s no point in trying.”

“Right,” said the merchant as he crossed his arms again. “But I will ask for something in return for this information.”

Renée rolled her eyes. “Everybody wants something! What is it you’d like?”

“That key you so carelessly wear like a steel chain around your neck,” said the merchant.

Renée put her hand over the key and tucked it into the blouse of her light blue dress. “The key is off limits. What else do you wish for?”

“Nothing else. It’s the key or no information. Make your choice, and quickly please.”

Renée thought fast. “Very well, but you will only receive the key when you have told me everything I need to know. I can’t trust that you’ll tell me once I give it to you.”

“Well then we seem to be at a stalemate as I can’t trust that I’ll get the key after I reveal the location,” the abarimon replied.

“It seems as though we cannot reach an accord. Thank you for your time. I must go and find the information elsewhere.”

Renée began to leave the shop, but the merchant stopped her. “Hold on,” he said. “We’ll do this your way. Unfortunately though, the information you want is at my home on the other side of the city, which is a day’s journey from here. If you give me until tomorrow, I shall return here by noon with everything you need know. Then we can make trade. What do you say?”

Finally Renée was getting somewhere. “I’ll be here at noon.”