

“Will you *please* let me get an uninterrupted night of sleep? Just one, that’s all I ask!” Magarius, dressed in his nightshirt and cap, stormed down the stairs to find what caused the cacophony a minute ago. His miniature carnivorous unicorn looked on with boredom. Something like this happened practically every night, after all.

“Yes?” Magarius snapped when he wrenched the door open. “What do you want *now*? What league do you think I’ve signed up for *this* time?” When he looked out into the storm, he didn’t see anyone.

“Alright, that’s it!” He called into the night. “If whoever rang the doorbell does not reveal themselves when I count to three, I’m releasing the unicorn!” It had been a bad day for him. Not seeing who his interrupter was just made his night worse.

“One,” he marched inside to his unicorn’s enclosure. “TWO,” his voice bellowed into the night. Thunder crashed in the cloudless sky as his hand rested on the latch. “THRE-“

“WAIT!” a young man’s desperate voice came through the doorway at the same time. Magarius turned, and watched with annoyance as a slight shimmer revealed a young man taking off an invisibility cloak. Another resounding crack of thunder rang through the night as soon as the lad was fully revealed.

Magarius crossed his arms and scowled. “What,” he said through gritted teeth, “are you doing here?”

“N-not being eaten by a unicorn, I hope.” The lad’s voice trembled. “May I come in?”

“That remains to be seen. If you don’t fully answer my questions, I *will* release Snuffles.”

Another crack of thunder resounded in the hall.

A flash of annoyance crossed his face. “Really,” he told the sky, “I *could* have figured out that was an ultimatum *without* your help.”

“What?” Magarius asked, the seeming non sequitur temporarily distracting him from his bad mood.

“Oh, sorry. My destiny seems to think I need to be told when ‘a particularly dramatic plot-point may or may not have occurred in my life’s story.’” He said the last in finger quotes. “I apparently had a fairy godmother with a sense of ‘humor’.”

“She blessed you with... *thunder*?” Magarius asked.

“No. She wanted me to ‘live an epic hero’s life.’ She therefore ‘blessed’ me with the external characteristics essential to all the heroes from stories, so that I might feel as though I am always living an epic story. That includes things like thunder at particularly dramatic times.”

Magarius winced. “Ouch. Sorry, kid. But,” the scowl returned, “that still doesn’t explain what you’re doing here.”

“I am terribly sorry, sir. I never meant to disturb you. I merely wished to find shelter from that blasted dark and stormy night that follows me around. Your porch looked like the driest place around for miles.”

“My house is the only real shelter around for miles. Why are you so far away from civilization? Running away from something?”

The lad let out another exasperated sigh. “Three weeks ago was my eighteenth birthday. The ‘blessing’ did the rest.” His tone indicated he thought that was the only explanation required.

“Lad, you’re starting to annoy me again.” Magarius reached for the latch to the unicorn enclosure. “What, *exactly*, happened?” His tone was clipped. The lad was observant enough to realize he had only a few seconds before becoming fresh unicorn food.

“Sorry, sir. My name is Lorius. I found out recently that I’m the lost son of the true king of Hadenelle, and therefore the rightful ruler.” He paused as the dark and stormy night outside once again thundered spectacularly. Both men glared upwards towards the noise. “Once I found out, who I was,” Lorius continued, “the usurper miraculously figured out who I was, and sent his guards after me. I’ve been running since, trying to stay alive.”

“Your curse again?”

“Yup. May I *please* come in?” Lorius looked up plaintively.

“Not until you tell me the rest. Maybe not even then.” The lad looked wet, and Magarius didn’t want any sort of trouble. “Now what’s your plan?”

“Stay alive. Collect companions when and where I can,” Lorius’s hopeful glance was met with a dark scowl, “and eventually take back my throne.” Lorius put his fingers in his ears just in time for an earthshattering clap of thunder to shake the house.

Magarius winced. That thunder was *loud*.

“Good luck, kid. I guess you can stay on my porch tonight. Leave by dawn, though. I let Snuffles out right around then, and some of his friends aren’t as well trained not to touch guests.”

Lorius’s shoulders drooped temporarily before he squared them again. “Thank you for your kind hospitality, sir,” his voice dripped with sarcasm. “I’ll certainly remember it when I regain my—”

“Shut up, boy!” Magarius called back, ignoring the sarcasm. “I don’t want any more thunderous pronouncements!” With that, Magarius slammed his door, and stormed back upstairs. With a wave of his hand, Magarius cast a spell of cloaking and shielding around his house. It would break shortly after dawn. That would hopefully give enough time for the current heir to the throne to leave, and not come back.

Dealing with dethroned royalty was trouble. Magarius did *not* want to deal with that nonsense. It was bad enough his sleep had been interrupted again. It would be worse if he got involved in some hair-brained scheme to reclaim a throne. He had enough trouble without volunteering for it. With a grumble, Magarius flopped back into bed. Within moments he was snoring.