

The trials

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Submitted: February 16, 2011

Updated: February 16, 2011

A really long short story for creative writing class.

A Queen and her Heir are holding a tournament and Gala. Not everything goes according to plan.

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Chapter 1 - To Be King

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1 - To Be King

The day had started out like any other. Bereavement Castle was a buzz with life. The maids and servants were about cleaning everything. The dance halls and dining halls needed to be spick and span for tournament. The ruler of Bereavement Castle, her majesty and Ladyship Queen Rookery Nouvelesse III, had, on a whimsy, decided to throw a Gala and Sporting event.

She was met with replies from the other kingdoms that a playful competition was what they needed. The five kingdoms of Underveldt were in a continuous peace, their last war was with the lands North of their borders, and over three hundred years ago. Something to excite the masses every once in a while would be fun.

Queen Rooke paused at the sight of her polished and adorned dining hall. The long black wooden tables held close to a hundred seats each. 46 down one side, 46 down the other and three at both the end and head of the table. There were five of those long tables that were spread out evenly in the dining hall. Along the front where the massive fireplace was, was a table that would seat ten. One seat for each state leader, and their heir that they were presenting for the tournament.

Each table held candles, unlit and in colors of winter. Silver and white swirled candelabras with black candles, tied with pale blue ribbons to match the table settings. From hanging metal chandeliers, silver and white ribbons were streamed and tied in butterflylike bows. Queen Rooke inspected each length of candle personally weeks before, and found everything to her satisfaction.

"My Lady!" a lady in waiting came running up. She was a young woman, but hired because of her get-it-done attitude and snappy wits. Dark blue hair, purple eyes, and ivory white skin, she seemed to fit in this scheme of white, and silver.

The Queen was smiling, inspecting a knife by hand, holding it up and checking to see if it was straight. "Yes? What is it Mia?"

"Urm..." Her pale hands rung anxiously at her deep rose skirts. "Chancellor Emery." Mia finally managed. "Seems he has lost his head again Milady." The Queen turned to look at the woman fully, making her more nervous. "And... W-well... The Princess... she's missing... again."

The beautiful metallic-green scar on the Queen's forehead was now knit with her brows in a frown. Her lime green eyes studied the furnished and almost finished room. They had another day for finishing touches and food to be done. All that could be undone if her little princess wasn't ready to play her own part in the show

She sucked in a breath, and let out her words in a low, irritated hiss, "Have my riding leopard ready."

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Princess Bonafacia Connar Savant'e-Nouvelesse was bored out of her mind in Bereavement. She had a pleasant time hiding the old crone Emery's head in the well, it was easy. He was like a Cadaver and an Equin'e. All bones held together by magic and will, and all you needed was an enchanted knife. It didn't hurt him one bit, but he sure would be angry when he managed to direct the rest of his skeletal body to find his antlered head.

Bones giggled, and adjusted her winter covers of Manticore leathers and furs. The only thing showing in her red and brown get up were her fingers of her right hand and exposed flanges of her left.

"Come on Djin." She said to her spider-cat. Djin responded with an angry meow-hiss and bounded after her. "We're almost there... Equin'es in winter... could there be anything more... Divine?" They trudged over a few more hills, getting farther and farther from the castle, and closer and closer to the Forbidden Forest.

Bones knew better than actually to go into the forest, so she just dug out some of the thick snow and made a perch. As soon as she was in her little burrow, the Equin'es seemed to know.

The massive alpha male standing close to eight feet tall, frame as white as the polished marble in the castle's dancing hall. There were horns on his head, like that of a moose or great elk. And in those great antlers, were notches gained from battles won and defending his herd. The rest of his frame had ribs and small bits of vertebrae missing, but that did not hinder his beauty.

He searched around with his empty sockets, empty yet knowing, and let out a few short bellows for his herd.

Females with their skeletal calves and younger males came out into the snowy clearing to find food and sharpen their hooves or antlers on exposed rocks.

Bones sighed softly. "Djin... It's like... The Gods are smiling at us! Look at how many there are!" Bones giggled. Djin simply shivered and sneezed on her face. "I'll name him... Oedipus Rex." She noticed a large notch missing from one of his back ankles.

The watching continued for a little over six minutes, before a low roar echoed throughout the meadow. The Equin'es lifted their heads, scanned with empty eye sockets, then turned tail and ran. Bones knew the sound, and crouched lower into the snow hole. Skeletal horses and elk ran away, their steps sounding like a lady's heels striking marble. Then, the powerful earthshaking momentum of the beast came. It sniffled around the snow, and with a massive paw uncovered her.

Bones was rolled out of her hole, onto her back before the Queen. "...Hi."

"Hi." Queen Rooke said, warm manticore furs pulled up to muffle her nose and mouth from the biting cold. "You can't keep doing this Bonafacia."

She tried to get up, but the Queen's riding Leopard held her down. The giant animal was a rival in size to Oedipus. The Queen reached down, grabbed Bones' coat and yanked her up so she was eye to eye. "Where'd you hide his head? I know it's in the castle. Everyone can hear his bletherings for help," said the Queen in an annoyed tone.

".....In one of the wells." Bones squirmed. Despite her height and size, she was very light.

"...Come along. You need to be bathed, primped and dressed for tomorrow." The Queen opened a large basket she had strapped to her leopard's back. She pushed Bones in, the Princess grumbling and calling her a slave driver the entire time. She locked it for safekeeping and then turned and rode back to the castle.

"You are such a handful sometimes."

"Nah nah nah!" Bones replied, blowing a raspberry. Djin sat in the Queen's lap, purring softly.

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When they returned to the castle, they had almost finished. The Queen dismounted, and grabbed the basket. She carried it over her strong shoulders, and perked a brow when she saw people rushing. Queen Rooke frowned and saw the cause of the maids' fluster and the servants' agitation. Queen Georgette Farrisio of Svan and her Heir Matthieu had come early.

"Sister!" Queen Georgette hugged her, kissed both cheeks and smiled grandly, showing off her pearly whites and sharpened fangs.

"We weren't expecting you for another day." Rooke smiled just as warmly.

Georgette smiled, shrugging her delicate pale shoulders. Her black hair bouncing and moving like water it was so silky. "There was a report winds from the coast would bring more snow. We decided to come early so not to arrive late." She turned her head slightly and eyed the basket. "Back from another hunt?"

Queen Rooke chuckled softly. "In a manner of speaking." She carefully handed the basket off to two maids. "Return this to the Princess' room." They nodded and disappeared.

Matthieu stood back, at attention and vigilant for the Queens.

Georgette smiled. "Come. Let us retire by the fire, exchange stories while we wait for little BonBon to join us for tea."

Rooke nodded and went to sit by the fire with her sister.

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The basket was delivered to the Princess' room, and the maids left to do more of their chores. Bones was able to pick the lock with one of her fingers. She tumbled out and landed on her face. At the feet of her lady in waiting, and best friend, Zumei.

She had her arms crossed, and eyes looked puffy from crying.

"I was in so much trouble because of you." Zumei said, dark hair askew, bangs flopped over the small alicorn sticking out of her forehead.

"I would have brought you with me... but..." Bones tried to talk but Zumei grabbed her coat and ordered her into the bathroom.

"You're covered in mud and smell like sulfur from the wells. Get in the tub. Now. So I can bleach the rebelliousness out those bones." Zumei wasn't as strong as Mia, but she knew how to make the princess listen.

"I'm sorry," Bones said as she sat in the tub, getting her blonde knotty hair doused with soaps, shampoos, and mountains of conditioners.

Zumei smiled. "I know you are." She took out combs and brushes and began making Bereavement Castle's resident Wraith into a real Lady.

Her hair was pulled free of tangles and cleaned repeatedly. Everyinch was washed, exposed boned scrubbed and the hard places blushed with small bristles and towels.

A few hours later, she was put into corset dress, the gown ending just above her knees. The collar was up to her chin and tied with silk ribbons and tiny buttons carved from chimera teeth. There were tiny buttons up the back and the front, which had taken most of Zumei's time and Bones' patience to finish. The sleeves covered her entire hands, except the tips which the fabric showed like fingerless gloves. Her blonde hair was curled and came down on her shoulders nicely. Her legs had thick stockings and knee high leather boots.

The entire outfit were various shades of greens (limes, forest, ivy, etc) and small bits of white and black. Georgette motioned the Princess to sit with them. Zumei bowed and turned to leave, but Georgette told her to join them too.

They had sweets and teas and traded stories. Bones tried to sound interested. Rooke enjoyed the conversation with her sister. And Matthieu's eye seemed to roam to Zumei from time to time.

At some point in time, Georgette stood up, long courtly gowns almost knocking out a china set. "Let's our Princes have a dual!" she said, sounding oh so excited.

Bones looked interested now, "But the others aren't here. That wouldn't be fair."

Matthieu smirked quietly that she was a coward. "Scared those bone fingers might snag and break a bowstring?"

Georgette looked at Rooke. "Just a little fun, before the big big fun." Georgette begged. Rooke sighed. Now she remembered. Georgette wasn't to have too many sweets.

"sister--" Rooke began.

Georgette's voice boomed. "We're holding a little contest! My Heir Matthieu, and the House Queen's Heir Bonafacia, will have three trials!" Everyone within earshot had turned to look at them.

Rooke growled, "Alright. Fine. Archery."

"Sword play," Georgette grinned.

"And Equin'e wrangling," Rooke said, standing to tower over the smaller woman.

Bones and Zumei still sat on the furs, Zumei the only one enjoying the sweet bean jelly buns. She sighed and frowned.

“All my work.” She touched the Princess’ hair. The curls bounced back into place.

Bones looked at Matthieu, and he looked at her. There had always been a clash between them since they were both very young and Chancellor Emery talk them grammar together. They were always competing and challenging each other, knowing someday, one of them would be high ruler of the land. “Don’t worry Zu. I won’t even break a sweat.” Bones smiled, which irritated Matthieu more. “I’ll still look like a Princess when I mop the floor with little Matty.”

Georgette giggled. “Challenge set.”

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After much battling with the buttons, the only change Bones could make were the boots which were exchanged for thick, heavy hided Minotaur leather with sturdy grip to deal with the snow. Chimera teeth buttons were such a pain to unfasten.

The first trial was archery. The first to hit all three targets was the winner. The first mark was set at twenty paces. Matthieu knocked his bow, readied, aimed, and fired. He hit a bull’s eye.

Bones walked up, adjusted the thick furlined collar of her dress, then readied herself. She knocked her bow, readied, aimed and fired. Her arrow hit a bull’s eye also. Right next to Matthieu’s.

The next mark was fifty five paces. Same results for both. This irritated both Bones and Matthieu to no end. It intrigued the Queens. And Zumei and the others who were finished with their chores cheered for Heirs.

Last mark was at a hundred paces. They were given three arrows each for this one, since the distance was so great. Bones struck the ring out the bull’s eye, then two bull’s eyes. Matthieu struck all three bull’s eyes.

The crowd went wild.

He seemed to puff up with pride.

Georgette wagged her fingers in Rooke’s face. “One.” She giggled. Rooked tried to take away her sweets, but the vampire Queen smiled and pointed to the other part of the snowy meadow ready for them. “On to the second trial!” For a fully dressed Queen of the Bloodsuckers, she sure ran fast.

Zumei went to Bones, collecting her gear and ordering around the game masters to collect the targets, arrows and bows. Zumei was a very high level person, being the Princess’ right hand woman.

Bones thanked her, and then rushed to get to the fencing field. Zumei followed as soon as everything was collected.

Sparring armor was fastened over Bones’ and Matthieu’s dress clothes, then they were given their choice of wooden weapons. Bones chose a heavy, sturdy wooden claymore. It reminded her of the High King’s sword that hung above the mantel in Bereavement. Matthieu chose a wooden spear.

“Three rounds. First hit win’s the point. Two out of three hits got the point,” said the referee.

Bones went at him with two wide, well calculated strikes. Matthieu dodged them both, and sent a counter at her legs. She jumped and stepped on the head of her weapon, then jabbed at his shoulder. He yanked the spear from beneath her and then pushed forward.

Matthieu was able to hit her, but Bones got him the other two times.

Rooke looked at Georgette. She grinned. “One.”

Georgette pouted, “Tie breaker.” She pointed to the stables. “To your faithful steeds!” She ate one last sweet, threw the empty bag at Rooke’s feet, then ran. Rooke slapped her hand to her forehead.

“Sweet Gods of Engora... please let this end soon.” Rooke murmured.

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Bones was readying the saddle and stirrup of her bobtailed zebra, Patchouli. Zumei held out her ropes and unicorn horn knife. When Bones was loaded onto her zebra’s back, she sheathed her knife along her back and put the rope on the handhold on the saddle.

“This doesn’t seem safe.” Zumei finally said. “The other ones were fine but this last trial...”

“Zu, don’t worry about it.” She smiled. “we won’t hurt you Skelly cousins.” Bones clicked her tongue to her teeth and Patchouli turned to step out the stables.

Zumei’s pointed ears twitched. “It’s not the skelly’s I’m worried about.”

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Matthieu rode a horned lion. A massive animal with a dark brown mane, and giant ramlike horns protruding from his head. He pat and rubbed his beast’s head. He growled and purred loudly.

“You have to find, and capture the reigning Alpha Male.” Georgette said, sitting upon her grizzly bear as he half slept.

Rooke looked at her, incredulous and irate. “Georgette,” she said, “You can’t ask them to do that, Equin’e are different here then they are for you in Svan.”

“Are you afraid your heir is not strong enough for this test?” Georgette pressed, not even phased. “I’m sitting on a grizzly dear Sister. A little Equi is nothing compared to Usidris.” She pat the sleeping bear’s head. He snored.

At the sound of the chimera’s horn, Bones and Matthieu disappeared into the forbidden forest.

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Almost two hours had passed, and no sign of the herd. Bones tried to remember from earlier. She had seen at least a hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty Equin’e, males, females and calves. She rubbed Patchouli’s head. The Zebra made barking like noises at her, wanting to return to the stables for sweet hay and warmth.

“Not yet girl.” She said. “Where could a hundred and fifty Equin’e have disappeared to?” Bones yawned, then reached in her pocket for an apple for Patchouli. At the zebra ate, she climbed down and followed what looked like fresh tracks. The tracks circled around some places, then down some slopes, around the pines, back up the slopes, and—

“Back towards the castle?” Bones cursed softly, mounted her steed and sped off back to the castle.

Matthieu met up with her, and both felt the thunder in the earth of the stampede. Which direction it was heading from, was the real kicker. The closer they got to the castle, the more they saw Equin’e running, flitting between the trees.

“They’re circling us.” Bones shouted to Matthieu.

“They see us as a threat to their alpha.” He responded.

“Maybe we should pull back.” She said.

“You wish.” He urged on his beast and jumped over multitudes of Equin’e to find their beloved Alpha. It was a bad move on his part, because at the site of the horned lion in close quarters, most of them scattered. Bones moved to try and contain them.

“We can’t let them leave this area!” she screamed. “They’ll hurt the people outside the forest if they’re forced to scatter.” Bones was able to urge to herd back into sync. “Maybe even kill them.”

Matthieu grit his teeth, fangs visible. The aspect of loosing was bad, but the aspect of having inadvertently been the cause of innocent deaths weighed heavier. He nodded. “We’ll move them closer to on of the slopes, make them go down hill, farther away from the castle or the villages.”

“Right.”

And they did as they planned. Too bad the Equin’es didn’t feel like listening.

They turned the opposite directions, broke apart repeatedly, even tried to lash out at the two riders. A pair of sharp hooves struck Patchouli sending Bones and her Zebra down into a snowy ditch.

Luckily, it was just a scratch, but the fall had shocked them both, and as they tried to get up, Equin’e used the opening to run. Bones was pinned as the entire herd ran jumped, flitted and dashed over her. None of them actually trampled her or her zebra.

Matthieu cursed and turned his lion. He needed to head them off, before they got to the castle! He got to the head of the herd, and surpassed them.

They weren't stopping. They weren't even slowing down! The people stood in the fields for a moment, then began separating, then scurrying, then running and screaming to get back inside the castle or at least to find shelter from the stampede.

Bones or flesh, with this many Equin'es, their sharp hooves and repeated numbers could slaughter well into the number of half the people there. Matthieu saw the Alpha, leading the charging creatures. He grabbed his bow and an arrow and began to knock it—

When he saw her. Standing stark still in the middle of the field, fear filled doe eyes staring at the sight in front of her. Zumei was just... standing there.

"That! Idiot!" he screamed. He tossed his bow and knocked arrow aside and went for his new objective. Matthieu forced his lion to run much fast, bounding across the field like a god. When he reached Zumei, he managed to grab her and speed away. Then the thunder had stopped. He pulled his reigns and turned to look. The entire herd had stopped.

The Alpha was down, struggling to pull his head up. Bones stood there, standing next to the fallen Alpha, looking a little beat up and head bleeding from a small cut on her brow. She grinned triumphantly. She looked at the Alpha, bowing her head apologetically; she removed the blade from the large notch in his back ankle. The flow of magic was returned, and his skeletal form came together again. He snorted, pawed the grounded. He eyed Matthieu, Zumei, and lastly Bones. He bowed to them then led the herd back into the forest.

Georgette grinned, "Bones Wins!"

Everyone was in an uproar.

Bones swayed a bit, then ran to Matthieu. "Zumei! A-are you alright?"

The woman shook, eyes shut tight, her hair was out of it's neat braid again. "I-I think so." She mumbled. Zumei swallowed, and without opening her eyes, asked if Matthieu could put her down. He nodded, breathing a little hard from the chase. He climbed down, and extended a hand to Bones.

"Congrats. You won."

"I think it was a tie." Bones said as she used some of Matthieu' torn shirt as a bandage. Before he could argue, she pointed out, "When you're High King, you can marry whoever you want."

Zumei was already stumbling back to the castle, mumbling how she needed some tea and to lie down.

Matthieu blushed, "Fine. A tie." And he grinned. "But it's the only tie we'll ever have ever again." He held out his hand to shake, still.

She accepted, giving him a firm, tight shake.

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The night was celebrated with whatever they wanted. More food could be made, drinks bought from the villages. It was only a small portion of what they really ordered anyways. People danced, and Bones was once again in another chimera button dress. This one longer to prevent her from running away.

Zumei watched quietly as all the others danced in the sequential patterns with their partners. Bones nudged Rooke. Rooke nudged Georgette. Georgette nudged Matthieu. He looked at them. The three women looked back at him.

He stood up gracefully, moved around to where Zumei was, and held out his hand. Body bowed slightly, offering a handsome vampire grin, he asked, "would you care to dance?"

A little flustered, she accepted.

The night was lovely, and wonderful. And tomorrow would be just as amazing.

They never did figure out what well Emery's head was stored in. So they just left it to whoever drew the water in the morning.

THE END.