

Untitled

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This is a story plot that popped into my head one day, and I'm writing it. If I continue to post it here, the violence rating will go up... As will probably the sexual content. >D

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Chapter 1 - Chapter One - Meeting

2

1 - Chapter One - Meeting

"Alright, son, that'll be it for you."

"Thanks, ma'am. Good day."

"And a good day to you, my dear!" The old woman smiled good-naturedly as she waved him away. His bag of apples cut into his shoulder slightly; the bustle of the market rang in his ears, the crying of a little girl prevalent.

"You give her back! Daddy bought her for me and I need her 'afore I can go home!" Taking a swift look in her direction, he saw a young girl in a dirty dress sobbing and reaching for a doll held tauntingly above her head by a bully. The bully's friends laughed cruelly in the background at the girl's helplessness. Sighing, he walked over and snatched the doll from the bully's hands.

"Hey. You be nice. She may end up being your wife someday." Handing the doll back to the distressed girl, he handed her an apple from his bag. "There there, don't cry." She sniffed and smiled at him. With a swipe upside the head for the troublemaker, he continued on his way through the busy market.

"Oy, Gedric!" He turned, hearing his name. Running up was his best friend, August. "Hey, are those apples fresh? What? You say one's special, just for me? Why thanks, Ged! You're too kind, really," said the young man, helping himself to the juiciest looking apple. Gedric rolled his eyes.

The two talked animatedly about the day's events while heading back to their area of town. It was run-down and shabby, but the people were friendly and generous, though they lived on the edge of poverty. They ducked into one particular hole in the wall, brushing away the flap of cloth that covered the entrance. Inside it was dimly lit by the stub of a candle flickering slightly in their entrance to the cobbyhole and by the hot sun outside.

"August, how many times have I told you not to leave the candle burning when you've left? Now it's all stuffy in here. Besides, you know candles are expensive, what with that new tax and everything." August flashed a quick smile.

"I love how you don't care about burning the house down or anything." Gedric tried to resist letting the corners of his mouth twitch.

"You know what I mean." August laughed sheepily, scratching his head in apology.

"Sorry, I always forget. Besides, I was just so hungry and I knew that you would be out in the market, so I got a bit ahead of myself in my eagerness to find you."

"Ah, well," said Gedric. "I got paid today so it's not that big a deal, I s'pose. Just don't do it again otherwise *you'll* be buying the goods from now on," he joked.

"I buy things sometimes!" said August indignantly. "Just... Not as often as you, is all." Gedric rolled his eyes again, grinning in spite of himself.

"Mm-hm, whatever. Come on, let's go, market's closing soon and I don't want to have to be in the dark tonight." He blew out the candle, dumping the apples onto his bed, and throwing the now empty bag over his shoulder and pulling aside the flap to the room, August close behind.

They talked and joked as they walked through the market, selecting a dozen plain white tapers and paying for them with several bronze coins. Passing a jewelry stall, the owner called to them vivaciously and motioned to his gold necklaces.

"*Real* gold, boys! Worth a small fortune in the world market, but yours for only 20 shillings!" Gedric stopped and looked the greasy little man straight in the eye.

"First, sir, if that gold were really worth a fortune, being the greedy merchant I'm sure you are you would be selling it or that much or more. That makes me think that your goods are in fact nothing but cheap metals covered in gold leaf, hardly worth half your price. And second, I don't make 20 shillings even from a month's pay, and it's all I can do to get by nowadays anyway because of that damn tax the central kingdom has imposed. So I'm sure you'll understand when I say that we're not interested." He inclined his head and smartly turned on his heel, walking off. The man was dumbstruck. August laughed at his face, then turned to follow Gedric. Suddenly the merchant shouted.

"Thief! My best necklace has vanished! Thief!" As Gedric turned to face the despicable man, someone brushed by him. They apologised quickly and walked away even faster, their face hidden in a hood. Gedric ignored them and turned to face the merchant. "Why would I steal your third-rate product?"

"You said it yourself! It's more than a month's pay for you. You probably stole it to get some extra money!" The man snapped his fingers; from seemingly nowhere, two large, burly men appeared at his sides. "This boy has stolen my goods! He will be punished! Bring him to me!" The two bodyguards advanced menacingly.

"I'm telling you, I didn't steal anything!" said Gedric, taking a step back. The merchant sneered.

"Really? Check his bag." The burly men were upon him in a moment, the first wrapping a thick arm around his neck and wrenching his right arm behind his back. The second disentangled the straps of Gedric's bag from his left shoulder.

"What the hell?" yelled August, real anger in his voice. "He hasn't done anything!" There was another snap and a third man appeared to restrain August. Then entire market was quiet now, avidly watching the dispute. The second man rifled through Gedric's bag. Then, with a triumphant gleam in his eye, pulled out an ornate gold necklace.

"Thief!" cried the merchant again, perverse delight resonating through every syllable. "Arrest him!" The second man closed in, a greedy smile on his face. Quickly, Gedric elbowed his captor in the solar plexus with his free left arm, twisting around and punching the man as hard as he could with his left fist. It was not as powerful a swing as it would have been with his right arm, but it was enough to make the man release him for a moment, clutching his eye. The second man received a swift kick between the legs and

the heel of Gedric's palm thrust upward into his nose. The bodyguard howled. August struggled to pull his own captor's thick hand off his mouth.

"Run, Ged!" he shouted. Gedric did not need to be told twice; both men he had momentarily incapacitated quickly regaining their wits. Gedric bolted.

"Get him, you fools!" came the cry of the merchant. The thundering footfalls of the men were heard as Gedric darted between a group of villagers, ducking beneath a stall and taking a running leap onto the brick wall behind it. He alighted, cat-like, and looked behind him. The two men were closer than he'd thought. Quickly he stood and ran with the balance of a gymnast, leaping again to jump on the roof of a building. He could hear the men behind him. He leapt to the ground now, dropping to a crouch to lessen the impact. Shocks of pain ran through his legs, but he ignored it, sprinting past people with conused expressions.

I need a place to hide, annywhere--

He saw it. Looming ahead of him was a large, white house, very out-of-place among the run-down buildings of the village. He kept his pace even as he vaulted over the front gate, heading around to the back-- but then he was stopped dead in his tracks.

Damn it.

There was a young woman, probably 15 or 16, around his own age. She was seating gracefully upon a cushioned chair, hidden from the sun by a dainty white parasol. There was perhaps half a second's pause, and then she looked at him in surprise. Another half-second. Then Gedric could hear the men behind him. He had no choice. He was behind her before she knew what was happening; lifting her securely in his arms and clasping a hand over her mouth, he took another second to carry her up a leafy tree and hide them both within the foliage.

The girl began to panic. Kicking her legs and trying to yell, she was drawing far too much attention. Gedric would be found. He leaned down and put his lips to her ear.

"Please," he whispered desperately, "Please don't struggle. I promise not to hurt you." She stopped moving, but looked up at him. His face was as desperate as his voice. She stared at him suspiciously for a moment, then pulled his hand away from her mouth.

"Let me go and I'll get rid of them." Gedric looked at her again. Her eyes were strangely passive, but she looked serious. He bit his lip and, against his better judgement, let her go.

She dropped to the ground just as the bodyguards raced into her yard.

"Have you seen a boy around here? Tall, blonde, with green eyes?" Her eyes narrowed.

"And if I have?" The first man strode up to her angrily, grasping her upper arm tightly. She did not flinch.

"Then you'll tell us where he is or you'll match his punishment! The brat's been convicted of stealing, and by going against us you go against the law!" His grip tightened. She smiled; the effect was more

menacing than charming.

"I *am* the law," she said quietly. "Release me."

Suddenly, as if burned, the man's hand was off her arm and he was reeling backwards. Both men dropped into clumsy bows.

"Forgive us," said the second man weakly, his eyes averted from hers. She glared at them both, letting the tense silence hang.

"Get out of my house."

They stumbled in their haste to comply. She waited a beat, then looked up at Gedric with her odd eyes.

"It's safe. You can come down now." He dropped to the ground. "I'm going to demand that I know what you've done to provoke the wrath of those two men. And know that if you are guilty or lying I am turning you into them. They can have their way with you after that." She sat on the grass in the shade of the tree, all the while never taking her eyes from his face. "So," she said, staring at him. Her eyes were penetrating. "Did you?"

"I didn't steal anything." He sat as well, annoyed, though in the sun. "Not that they'll ever believe me. No one ever does." Her eyes softened a bit, he thought, although it could have been his imagination. "Well, then, tell me what happened."

"I was walking along, minding my own business when suddenly this madman merchant accused me of stealing from him. Then they tried-- forcefully-- to punish me, and I ran."

"They tried to convict you without any evidence?"

"Well, no..." he mumbled, irritated. He hunched his shoulders and glared to his left. "Someone brushed past me just after his precious gold necklace went missing, and it appeared in my bag. I was framed." She looked like she was mulling it over, a slight frown on her face.

"I must admit, there is insufficient evidence to condemn you." She paused a moment. "Truthfully, did you do it?"

"No!"

"Look me in the eye and say it." Gedric looked at her squarely, his own eyes hard.

"I didn't steal anything." The girl sighed. She closed her eyes.

"Yes, I suppose you're right." She stood. "Would you care for anything to drink?"

Gedric was confused by her sudden personality switch, but accepted her offer. Going into her house, she opened a cupboard and pulled out a glass, filling it with milk from a tin on the ground. Reaching into a cabinet and pulling out a jar, she dropped a dollop of honey into the glass and mixed milk and honey

together. He blushed a little, but accepted it; it wasn't often he had something like this to drink.

The house itself was very nice. Marble floors and painted ceilings astounded him. He was used to dirt floors and tents, or wooden beams and rough stone walls. Such luxuries seemed both alien and somehow comforting. However, and though it made his blush darken to admit it, the most beautiful thing in the house had to be the girl herself.

She was almost inhumanly pretty, really. She had long, wavy black hair which curled at ends and fell to the middle of her back; her skin was nearly as pale as the milk he drank. She was even paler in contrast to the plain black dress she wore, the hem falling to her knees. It was uncommon for women to show their ankles, but hers were quite lovely, he thought. However, her eyes were the strangest part of her. They were wide, with long, thick lashes, and her irises were pure black. No light seemed to reflect off them, even as she looked out to window (which had glass, uncommon in many households because of its worth) and into her sunny yard.

"What is your name?" she said softly, the first to break the awkward silence that had formed between them.

"...Gedric." He paused. "Yours?" She continued to stare passively out the window, suddenly listless.

"Bellatrix." Gedric's eyes widened, but then he laughed.

"How peculiar," he said. "I mean, to have the same name as--"

"--The princess?" she interjected.

Gedric swallowed. "Yeah. I mean, it's not a very common name."

"That's because I am the princess." She sounded bored. "How else do you think I made those men go away?" She laughed dryly, as if realising something. "*Obviously* you didn't know. I just thought you didn't care about social status... Rather bold on your part, to treat royalty as an equal, I thought. But of course. You didn't know who I am." She had a strange tone to her voice; she pretended to be inspecting her nails while she was actually watching him. Gedric was stunned; several things were falling into place in his mind. Of course she lived in this house. Of course she had been able to make those men go away. But if she were royalty, then made laws... He growled deep in his throat, his temper rising. Her expression did not change, though she did raise her eyebrows.

"Then it's your fault we live like this," he said, his voice quiet but trembling in his anger. "It's your fault that the taxes in our town are so heavy that we can hardly bear to buy enough food to get by." His voice grew steadily louder, and his fingers clenched tightly into a fist around the glass in his hand. "Do you know how hard we have to work around here just to get by? We have to break our backs working to feed our families! If our children are sick we can't afford to get them the medicine they need! Thanks to you and your laws *we're* out here dying while *you* sit in your nice, cozy castle without ever having to lift a finger!"

By now Gedric was shouting, his temper getting the better of him. He ended his rant, breathing heavily. Bellatrix hadn't even moved; nor, it seemed, reacted in any way at all. He growled in his frustration,

slamming his glass onto the table. A faint frown line appeared in between her eyes. He turned and stormed out of the house, but stopped at the door.

"Thanks for the drink," he mumbled, not all hospitality forgotten. Then he was out the door, leaping over the fence and running back home. His sudden outburst had pumped adrenaline into his system, heightening his senses and making colours overbright. He continued running if only to calm himself down. He was already feeling a twinge of shame for yelling at Bellatrix like that; not to mention the fact that should she wish to, it would be easy for her to throw him into prison for as long she liked. He frowned, trying to push that thought from his mind.

He took an extra lap around the village to burn off his energy. It was nearing dusk now; the sky had turned a royal blue, the clouds scattered across it varying degrees of oranges and pinks. Thick beams of golden sunlight cast the dilapidated buildings of the village into shadow. Gedric began to walk when he reached the market again, making sure the ill-boding merchant and his annoying henchman had already gone back to whatever hell-hole they'd spawned from. Everyone was having an early night, it seemed. The market was completely empty. Gedric let his feet drag as he walked the last hundred feet home, mulling over the day's events. He'd talked to the princess? She'd given him a drink? And then he yelled at her? Already it was beginning to feel like an elaborate trick his mind was playing on himself.

Pushing aside the flap to enter his house, the first thing Gedric saw was his best friend, sitting on his bed, his back to the door. August turned.

"Hey, Ged! I'm glad they didn't get you!" August was smiling brightly and his voice was cheerful, but Gedric groaned. There was a gash on August's forehead that was matting his blonde curls with blood, and a dark bruise was blossoming on his jaw.

"What the hell did they do to you?" he murmured, sitting on August's bed next to him and reaching for cloth and bucket.

"Ehh... Nothing, really. As soon as you got away I fought the big guy. He landed some punches--" he tenderly fingered his jaw, " --but he got off worse. I'm only mad that he tore my shirt." He motioned to the rip over his chest, sighing.

"You're lucky he didn't pulverise you." Gedric had gone outside to the well to fill the bucket, but August followed him.

"He couldn't get me if he tried! I was way stronger than he was."

"With muscles like that? Are you stupid? Did you even *look* at his biceps?" August rolled his eyes impatiently as they walked back inside. He wiped the blood out of his eyes with a quick swipe.

"Yeah, alright, but I was quicker. I could duck faster than he could swing. Plus, I'm a lot smarter and I could confuse him easily." Gedric sat August down again on his bed and used the moist cloth to sponge the boy's forehead, dunking it back in the water and wringing it out to rinse off some of the blood. August winced.

"Oww..." he whined, trying to brush Gedric's hand away.

"Stupid, it has be cleaned. If it isn't, then it could get worse, and I am not paying a doctor's bill when I could have prevented it," said Gedric matter-of-factly. He thought again of his anger at Bellatrix, and pressed a little harder than he meant to into August's wound.

"Ow!" exclaimed August, looking reproachfully at his friend. "I know you have a point, but sheesh, talk about tough love." August pouted.

"Sorry," apologised Gedric, a little sheepish. He pressed much more gently as he bandaged the young man's head with strips of cloth and gauze. Then, pulling out needle and thread, he took August's shirt and began to repair the damage. August looked at him curiously.

"Why are you so concerned about me?" he asked, cocking his head to the side. Gedric looked up at him for a moment, then looked back down to his work.

"Because, you shouldn't have to be hurt over my problem. It wasn't fair to you for them to do that. You're innocent."

"So are you."

"But *I* was the one accused, not you." August huffed and laid back on his bead, scratching his bare chest with his left hand.

"Well *I'm* the one who told you to run. And after you got away, I was the one guilty of assisting a theif." August grinned mischievously. "Besides, it was a good fight. I wouldn't mind having another, to be truthful." Frowning, Gedric looked up again.

"It'll be fun until you get hurt much worse."

"You just need to lighten up!" said August, rolling his eyes in aggravation. He patted his bandages gingerly. "Don't worry, I'm not stupid enough to *look* for trouble. I'm just saying, should trouble find *me* I'm going to enjoy myself. And I won't incurr their wrath or anything stupid like that." August smiled reassuringly. Gedric looked doubtful, needle poised over cloth, but then grinned.

"Yeah, you're stupid, but you're not that stupid." He looked down to his work again, still smiling. August huffed again, amusement clear in his voice.

"Gosh, Ged, you're so mean."