Memorabilia

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Abstract

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by
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Psychology 2

THE BELL chimes. Deep. Loud. It stomps into my dreams and rudely pries my eyelids open. Derelt crawls on my back and bounces up and down, chittering in my ears. His knees start protruding down into my chest; he has sharp bony knees.

"Yes," I mumble. "Coming. Get off." One of my hands reaches back and lightly grazes him. He goes flip-flop, rolls onto the floor and stays there, his duty fulfilled. I do a simple gratitude song for him. Derelt does not understand much, even though he’s been with us for many years—as long as I can remember, he’s been by my side. But he knows the feeling the song conveys and appreciates the thought.

The watery light slithers through the window and hits me in the eyes. I turn away and lie on my side.

"Today," I announce, "is the Day of Choosing." Derelt, nodding solemnly, agrees with this. His head creaks. It is the morning of the Day of Choosing, and I must prepare.

My tunic has been laid out for me, as it is every morning, but today instead of the usual brown, my tunic is white with a scarlet cape. And today there is a silver belt. The large clasp has our line’s emblem engraved on it, and together with my sword the belt is impressive but heavy.

Derelt watches me closely as I dress, rocking back and forth on his haunches. He makes soft cooing sounds.

"Well? Is my attire more befitting a Lord?" I ask him, smiling. But my heart quivers and the smile dies. I sink into a chair and Derelt comes over to brush my fingers. "Will I be Lord? Will the people have me? How will I dare to choose any other way than that of my father and his father?" Derelt signs in sympathy to my questions.
There is a soft knock on the massive wooden door. My father’s minister to his sons enters, his round face beaming. I rise to meet him and he does an elaborate greeting song praising me, my father, my ancestors and my descendants until he runs out of breath. I step in quickly before he recovers and greet him. Then Rada says to me, “Princeling, I bring greetings from your father on this, your Day of Choosing.”

“Ah, Rada, you still address me as Princeling. When will you call me Lord?”

“When the vote declares that the people have accepted you as Lord, and this hasn’t happened as of yet. But,” he hurries on, “I have no doubt that they will accept you after you have stirred their hearts with a song of the glory of the Aman line. Your father also expresses his confidence in your ability, and he is certain that when evening falls, Estar of the Aman line will be Lord.”

I bow my head in respect to my father’s words.

Derelt climbs on the chair I just vacated and chatters in a sing-song fashion, imitating Rada’s pompous speech. Rada glares at him and Derelt stops. I almost forget myself and laugh. Rada must sense the smile I hide, for he scowls, his eyebrows squishing his eyelids closed. “Enjoy his pranks now, Princeling. The little clown will be gone soon.”

“What? Surely you jest! Derelt has been with me all my life. Who will dare to take him from me?”

“No one will take him from you, Princeling. He will leave of his own accord.” Rada looks pleased with the idea. “All princelings have a Chadra like yours until the Day of Choosing. You see, legend says that the Elder People once lived on this side of the sea. Something drove them away, to where we do not know. But when they left, they gave the first Chadra to the Lord of the Aman line—your grandfather of ages past. When a princeling chooses his way, the Chadra leaves.”

“But where will he go?” I look at Derelt, sitting in my chair, dwarfed by it. “He has been with me all my life. Who will care for him?”

“He will return to the Elder people. It is a matter of
honor that you sing a brave song in the pavilion—a song to rouse the hearts of the people—that your Chadra may return to the Elder and say 'Estar is a Lord that will make the glory of the ancient days live again.'"

"And if I do not wish him to leave?" I ask.

"It is a sign that you are truly Lord," Rada says stolidly. "You cannot prevent it from happening."

I look at Derelt. He sits quietly, listening to us and scratching the curly hair on his head. I wonder how much he understands. I wonder: If I have the courage to break with tradition, will he?

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The wind from the sea is cool here on the cliffs. I sit, watching the waves ripple into small eddies below. Derelt, sitting beside me on a boulder, is quiet. Perhaps he senses my unrest, or perhaps he knows the grief that creeps into my stomach and makes it throb when I think of the days ahead without his chattering and antics.

Suddenly he gives an excited squeal. I look up and see Tia coming towards me, her black hair wisping around her head. On her brow she wears a silver circlet with a small Aman emblem on the forehead. She too is dressed in white and scarlet, for if I am made Lord of Aman today, she will be the Lady of Aman soon.

"Greetings, Princeling!" She no longer does a greeting song. Such formalities are no longer necessary between us.

"Tia! Even you will not call me Lord?"

"Why should I when you will not call me Lady?" she counters. We smile. But then Tia sobers and as she sits down beside me, her eyes are troubled. "Estar, how will you choose today?" Her voice is anxious.

I cannot meet her eyes. "How have all princelings chosen as far back as history tells?"

"That is no answer. Rada says—"

"Rada! You listen to the prattlings of—"

"Rada says," she continues firmly, "that you are upset that your Chadra will leave when you choose. He
Sketch

says you may even be tempted to be foolish in your choice to keep him by you. Tell me you will not do such a terrible thing! I too am fond of Derelt, but he is not worth a kingdom! How will you choose?"

"How should I choose?"

"As your father did, and your father's father," she answers without hesitation. "The people will respect only that choice." Her voice softens and she touches my hand. "Then we will rule together, my Lord."

I rise, and take a few steps facing the sea. Trying to keep my voice light I say, "You know, the legends tell that in the ancient days the mightiest of the Elder kings were those who chose the way of the mind instead of the way of strength, and sang a song of the glory of building instead of triumph on the battlefield."

She is beside me in one swift cat-like motion. "How will you rally the people with songs of building?" she demands. Her voice is urgent. "Songs of war and victory achieved over our enemies will speed their hearts and make their blood fiery. Only in this way will you claim their allegiance and command their respect!"

I turn to her. "Will I also command their love, Tia?" Fury gathers in her face. "What a fool you are, Estar!" She snatches my sword from its scabbard, strikes it against a boulder and flings it at my feet in contempt. It is the ancient symbol that the sword is useless and so is the owner. She leaves and I make no move to stop her. Perhaps I couldn't, even if I tried.

My temple throbs. I return to my boulder and Derelt is by my side almost instantly. I stroke his brown head and he makes sympathetic noises. "Are they right?" I ask. "How can I sing of peace that will stir their hearts and bind them to my side when for generations they have heard the princelings sing only of the terrible glory of the battlefield? If I should fail to rally them, I will never be Lord—my father's line is broken, and," I look at the distant white and scarlet figure disappearing down the backside of the cliffs, "I lose Tia." My head droops. "I stand to lose everything."

When I look up, Derelt is intently watching something
out over the waves. Impatience overwhelms me that Derelt too should turn from me. "What are you looking at?" I demand, turning to face the sea.

Out over the moving deep green surface, the morning mists are being scattered by the growing sun. But now vague shapes are taking forms. I can see a golden sun shining on white towers with blue and silver banners flapping in the breeze. There are people gathered, but one man towers above them, not so much in height, but in sheer magnetism. He draws the eye. There is wisdom in his countenance, grace in his movements as he walks among his people. Even if he wore no crown, he would be recognized.

Then the whirling mists brush the scene away and another slides into its place. It is night and the moon coats the trees with silver. When the sea wind blows, the leaves shimmer as in a dream. A song rises from unseen voices, clear and low, a bitter-sweet song filled with longing for life as it once was.

I turn to Derelt. "The Elder people. Of course! I understand now." A soaring feeling grips me. "The glory of the ancient days was not in their victories on the battlefields—it was in the victories of their hearts that made them the Elder." I clutch one of Derelt's thin arms. "It is time to return to the ancient ways. My choice is made."

Derelt turns his bright eyes on me and nods. I have the feeling that if he were a person he would be an old man, wise with the passing of the years, and nodding his approval at a young pupil's decision. But the feeling passes and I hug him close in joy.

When I look back out over the water, the mists have disappeared and only the sea is there.

From my window, I can see the crowds gathering around the marble pavilion below. My throat and lips are dry.

Rada enters without knocking. "The people have gathered. Your father awaits you in the courtyard." I nod and start for the door. As I pass him, one stumpy arm reaches out to my shoulder.
"Estar, you know what you are doing?"
I find I can look him in the eyes. "Yes Rada. I know."
He smiles and releases me.
My father is waiting by the wrought-iron gate in the courtyard. Tia is on his right arm looking cold and distant and incredibly beautiful. I avoid looking at my father for fear that I will compare him to the Elder king I saw this morning and find him wanting. I take my place on his left side and we proceed to the pavilion where the people wait. Their faces are eager, yet wary, withholding approval until they have heard my song.
I take my place. I cannot look at the people. Silence bores into my ears. My mouth opens and the song begins.

"My people! Hear my words and let your hearts rise. For the ancient days are upon us again, the glory of the Elder before your eyes."

It is the traditional opening lines. The princeling then goes on to sing of the Aman war trumpets—making fear coil like a cold snake around the hearts of their enemies, and recounts the legends of the greatest warriors.
But mine does not, and I see a stirring among the people. Mine tells of the splendor of peace, of the wisdom and grace of the elder kings. I sing of the joy of white towers gleaming in the sun like beacons. And as I sing, my voice becomes stronger, clearer. I remember the song of the vision and I sing of the longing of the Elder for this— their homeland—and how they are unable to return until all is as it was:

Those of us who dwell beyond the seas still remember well the silver trees of our homeland sighing in the breeze. We may still dream of golden days, of silver nights with blue-white haze wafting across the heaven’s lights with songs of kings’ undying mights. Caught forever in the net of what once was, and yet,
we still do not forget
those of us that leave our side,
nor the promises they beget
by forsaking our golden dream
for something more than memory
beyond the circles of this world
that bind us to this time.
Yes, we still remember well,
remember us, as legends tell—
We who live beyond the seas
and dream of nights with silver trees,
and cry for those that won't have these—
Remember us, the past.

The last note hangs in the air until a wind comes up
from the sea, fresh and clear as though it was unbreathed
by any man, and then it fades.
I step down off the pavilion. The people look dazed.
There is no cheering.
My father is too stunned to say anything and Tia too
confused. But Rada is there and he is seething. His face is
almost purple and his pudgy fingers are curling and un­
curling. I return to my rooms. My choice has been made.
Now it is the people's decision.

It is the evening of the Day of Choosing. I watch the
sun sliding towards the edge of the fields. Soon it will be
time for the vote to be taken, but I fear I know the result
already. And Derelt is gone. When I returned to my room
from the pavilion, he was gone. So now, I stand and watch
the sun sink and feel that I'm falling into darkness with it.
The door opens. It is Tia, and as she comes closer I
cannot speak.
"Estar, I have been with your father," she begins
slowly.
"And he no longer wishes my presence in his house." I
turn back to my window, bitter.
"No, Estar that is not so." She brushes my shoulder
as she stands beside me. "Your father is upset. He . . . he
has told me something you should know." She takes a
deep breath. "Your father told me about his Day of Choosing. About... about the vision of the ancient days that he saw."

My head reels. "You mean, my father saw what I saw?"

"He says he did. The song brought it all back. He asked me to tell you that he believes your decision to be one of courage, if nothing else."

"After what he saw, he would still have me follow tradition?"

"He is the Aman Lord. He wishes to see his line continue. It is his life's purpose."

"And you?" I ask. "Do you think I did the right thing?"

She lowers her eyes. "It was a good song. While you sang I felt something stir in me—I have a feeling of a beginning. The sweetness of it still lingers. I..." she raises her head. "It was a good song, Lord." She surveys the room. "Your Chadra is gone?"

I nod. "No one has seen him."

There is a loud knocking on the door and Rada arrives, his back stiff with disapproval. "It is time," he announces. "Your father is in the tower. He has the book in which the tally will be recorded."

My arms hang limp. My head feels wooden. But I start for the door, and as I do, Tia takes my arm. When I look at her she says simply, "We are bound."

The tower has four large windows facing the four directions. It is the largest tower in my father's house and from here the entire valley can be seen. It has been the tallying place for generations.

My father looks haggard. I never noticed the lines around his eyes until now, and in the light of the torch Rada carries the lines are deep—they have brothers and cousins down around his mouth. He turns to Rada and nods, and Rada leaves to chime the huge bell in the next tower. It will signal the beginning of the vote.

We are silent as we wait. I look down on the valley.
The lights in the houses look like the lightning bugs the children chase on summer nights.

Then, something small and warm brushes against my legs. Something climbs up on the window sill in front of me and makes low sighing noises.

Tia clutches my arm. "Your Chadra!" she hisses. My father's eyes widen. "No! This cannot be!"


"Quickly, we must act!" My father comes to my side. "It is forbidden for the people to look out their windows to see the vote. We will ensure the continuation of our line even if we must falsify the vote. But the Chadra—it must disappear! The legends must be fulfilled!" He makes a shoving motion towards Derelt, but Derelt turns his bright eyes on my father and all motion stops.

Tia's tense whisper breaks the spell. "Look!" She points out over the valley. There are a hundred thousand columns of smoke rising out of a hundred thousand chimneys. "It's white! The smoke is white! There's no red, not one!" She turns to me astounded. "Estar, you are Lord!" She is in my arms.

My father tears his eyes from Derelt and looks out over the houses. "I . . . don't understand. How could it be? I don't understand." But I look at Derelt who is watching the sea. Then Derelt turns towards me.

"I understand," I tell my father, for in Derelt's eyes I see white towers, gleaming in the sun.