
Fraternai

“TWINS can be identical or fraternal,” said the tutor, writing the words laboriously on the chalkboard. Edgar was copying them into his writing-book, so Sabin did too.

The old man went on. “Identical twins have a special connection. They look so alike that few can tell the difference between them. It is commonly believed that they share a particular bond, one that the rest of us can merely dream of. Some have even suggested that they are psychically bound to one another.”

He adjusted his glasses. “The two of you are fraternal.”



“It’s all codswallop,” said Edgar viciously, in their break between lessons. “He said so himself, there isn’t even proof. It’s just a theory. About identical twins and all that.”

Sabin hummed in agreement. Edgar had started on one of his rants: it was best not to stop him.

“We’re identical as far as I’m concerned,” Edgar went on. “Sometimes people can’t tell us apart.”

“From a distance,” Sabin supplied. “Or if they haven’t met us before, they sometimes think I’m you –”

“Yes, exactly,” said Edgar. “We’re just the same. Aren’t we?”

Sabin nodded.



They always grew at different rates. Sabin was taller than Edgar for a little while, but by the time they were ten, Edgar seemed to have the edge on his brother. It made sense to Sabin: Edgar was born first, so deserved to be the taller. But he didn’t miss the way Edgar seemed to stoop a little on official occasions, when their father brought his sons out to meet the public or to have the annual official family portrait painted.

Their lessons were turning more towards constitutional matters now. They had learnt to read and write, and to do arithmetic, and all about the basic taxonomy of the beasts that lived in the Figaro desert, with strict instructions not to go out there alone on account of the danger. Edgar had taken this as a challenge, and had sneaked out of the castle one evening leaving Sabin to wait anxiously in their quarters, but had

returned almost soon as he had left, a look of mingled terror and exhilaration on his face. “He was right,” he had informed Sabin breathlessly. “It’s full of those saucer things with the blue eyes. One of them bit me, look,” and he had raised his hand to reveal a small puncture mark and the smudged remains of a trickle of blood that trailed off towards his wrist.

Sabin had recoiled. “Did it hurt?”

“It hurt *awfully*,” Edgar had said with enthusiasm, and Sabin had done his best at tying a sock around his brother’s hand to act as a bandage.

But now, their lessons were about the kingdom. The line of succession that had led to their father becoming king, the exact relationship between the castle and South Figaro, the specific way a monarch was expected to liaise with his counterparts in the other city states. Their new tutor was even more ancient than the previous one, and insisted on wearing the full academic regalia of Vector University during their lessons, which Edgar poked fun at mercilessly when his back was turned. “He’d be sweating buckets in that if he weren’t so dried up. He’s like an old prune,” he whispered to Sabin not long after their lessons with the new tutor began.

“Don’t,” said Sabin. “That’s mean.” He couldn’t help grinning, though.

The man insisted on being diplomatic about the succession. “When one or both of you are king,” he always said, and Sabin found the phrase incredibly frustrating. One day, he could bear

it no longer, and spoke up.

“Edgar’s to be king,” he said firmly. “I’m not. He’s the older.”

Both Edgar and the tutor were taken aback. Sabin was certainly not usually the one who talked back during lessons. The tutor recovered himself within moments, and said, “That won’t necessarily be the case. It depends on your father’s wishes.”

Sabin scowled at him.

“Twins are very rare,” the man went on, “very special. It would certainly be prudent of your father if he were to divide the kingdom between the two of you. Now, to return to the fourth article of the constitution –”

The matter wasn’t raised again during the lesson, but when it was over, Edgar turned to his brother, wide-eyed. “What was that for?” he asked.

“I’m fed up with it,” said Sabin miserably. “Everyone pretending I might be king too. They all know you’ll be much better at it. And I don’t even want to be king. I hate all that stuff.”

“I hate it too,” Edgar commiserated. “But it’s our duty, isn’t it? We were born into it, like he always says.”

“You were,” Sabin insisted. “Not me. You’re the older –”

“We’re twins,” said Edgar. “You heard what he said. Twins are a good omen for any kingdom. There weren’t any in our family for hundreds of years, until us.”

Sabin shook his head. “No, Roni. How can we have been a good omen, when Mother died because of us? Bearing two children made her so weak. Don’t you remember?”

As long as they’d known her, their mother had been ill. Sabin’s only relevant memories were of visiting her chamber, where the curtains were always drawn. She used to let both boys join her in bed, one flanking her at each side, and ask what they had been up to in words that were slow and faint. Their visits had been short: she needed her sleep. When they were seven, she finally slipped away altogether, and their father had locked himself into his own quarters for two entire days and forbidden his sons or any of the servants to visit him.

He pushed the memory aside. “Besides,” he said, something heavy in his throat, “it’s not as if we’re identical. That would be special, maybe. But we’re fraternal twins, aren’t we? We’re just two brothers who happened to be born at the same time –”

He was cut off by a sudden sting against his cheek; Edgar had struck him across the face. It was not a particularly well-delivered blow – there was little force behind it, and it was somewhat off-target – but it was totally unexpected. They did fight physically sometimes, but it was usually out of boredom or when Edgar decided he wanted to show off to one of the maids. This was not like that at all.

“We’re not just brothers,” said Edgar fiercely. He wasn’t crying – Sabin couldn’t remember the last time his brother had cried – but his voice wavered with emotion. “We’re more than

that. Aren't we."

Sabin shook his head, hoping his brother didn't notice the tears springing to his own eyes, and ran to his chamber.



When they reconvened for dinner, everything was normal. They'd never had a real argument, never harboured lasting feelings of resentment for one another, and it seemed this was no exception. Sabin still felt a little tearful, but Edgar cheered him up marvellously without even meaning to, prattling away about some machine he'd been reading about. He seemed to have entirely forgotten the afternoon's events, or at least to have wholeheartedly put them behind him, and as a result, Sabin found himself able enough to do the same.

As they grew, though, their dissimilarities became harder to ignore, as Sabin saw it. Edgar began to dedicate more time to his oddly paired passions for engineering and ladies; Sabin had absolutely no interest in either. He wasn't sure exactly what he was interested in – nothing had really taken his fancy yet. The outdoor pursuits that their father's men were teaching them were enjoyable enough, but he hardly felt enthusiastic about them in the same way Edgar did about his own pastimes.

The two of them began to grow apart in looks, too. Sabin's jaw sharpened a little more than his brother's as they approached adolescence. Edgar acquired a small scar on his

forehead as a result of a fencing lesson gone horribly wrong, the other principal consequence of which was the firing of several courtiers. Every time Sabin looked at his brother's face, his gaze caught on the physical reminder that they were two different people.

They'd begun wearing unmatched clothes many years before, and while they both kept their hair long in the traditional style to please their father, they dealt with it quite differently: Sabin tended to twist his into a functional plait, or a bun if he wanted it out of the way altogether. Edgar, on the other hand, kept his loose, treating it with all sorts of products that ensured it remained impossibly silky, and festooning it with the various ribbons that he was given by his female admirers.

Sabin remained shorter than his brother, but the gap narrowed: by the time they were sixteen, Edgar seemed to have stopped growing, but Sabin apparently had a few inches left in him. They were exactly the same height for a short while, and then Sabin began to notice that when they stood close together, Edgar's features seemed to be on a slightly lower level than his.

By that point, it was a matter of weeks before the sudden deterioration of their father's health, and the fated coin toss. Edgar let Sabin go. They weren't identical; they weren't the same person. They had different paths to follow.



It took Sabin a moment to recognise Edgar when they reunited, but it was due more to the altercation with Vargas than any changes in his brother: he'd aged, of course, and had gained a little weight, but he remained essentially the same, still the brilliant older brother whom Sabin had always admired so much. Edgar seemed to know who he was immediately, but he must have been prepared for it. Sabin knew that his own appearance had changed – not quite beyond recognition, but quite considerably nonetheless.

They sat down on the mountainside to rest with the other two, but the younger man, Edgar's friend, must have been aware of the situation, because he said something to the girl about showing her where to find food and the two of them wandered off back towards the caves.

"Locke was surprised that we're brothers," Edgar remarked.

"Your friend?" said Sabin. "He's not very observant then, is he?"

"You think?" said Edgar, beginning to smile.

"Well ..." Sabin considered. "The eyes. The hair – mine's shorter, but –"

"Yours is thinner, certainly," Edgar teased him.

"Just because I don't use as many products on it. Do those two know your kit bag's just full of shampoo?"

Edgar laughed, buried his face in his hands, and then reached over to Sabin, enveloping him in a clumsily earnest

embrace. “I missed you so much,” he said into his brother’s ear. “So much that I had to make myself forget about you – I had to act as if you never existed. As if I wasn’t –” He hesitated.

“Part of a bigger whole,” Sabin suggested.

His brother let out a shaky breath. “Yes,” he said. “Yes, exactly, yes.”