

WHEN he reached the slums, Terence couldn't help dropping to his knees and muttering a quick prayer to Greagor. The place looked awful, and there was a terrible smell; he doubted that anyone with the skills for healing would really choose to live in such a place. He wished he could turn around and leave, but Dion had given him a job to do, and he had always followed his prince's orders.

He headed to the place and flagged down the nearest miserable urchin, explaining that he was seeking the girl with healing powers. Dion's directions had been characteristically thorough, but there was only so much one could do when the address was so inauspicious. Fortunately, the boy seemed to recognise the description.

"Yeah, er, sir," he said, looking at Terence's armour curiously. "Kihel. Lives over that way."

He tossed a few gil in the boy's direction as thanks; no doubt it was more than the unfortunate creature had ever seen. With that duty done, he headed in the direction of the excuse for a house that he had been pointed towards. He knocked on the flimsy door, and a girl appeared: Kihel, he supposed.

She looked him up and down; her eyes came to rest on the symbol of Bahamut on his breastplate.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, you've come!"

Terence frowned; he didn't think Dion had sent word in advance. "I'm sorry?" he said.

“You’ve come to adopt me,” said Kihel. “That’s right, isn’t it? Prince Dion sent you?”

“He sent me,” Terence confirmed, “but ...”

“You’re his husband,” she said triumphantly.

Terence shook his head. Quite apart from the fact that few beyond the dragoons’ inner circle were aware of their relationship, he and Dion had had serious discussions about marriage, and had concluded they would avoid it. It would have been a way of convincing old Sylvestre that they were committed to each other, certainly, but the disadvantages were more numerous. All the traditional Sanbrequois ceremonies were designed for a man and woman, and it seemed odd to expect one of them to play the latter part, even if it could be heavily adapted. More importantly, the wedding of a prince would necessarily be an extravagant affair. Neither of them was particularly interested in such spectacle, and it would be in poor taste to place strain on the empire’s coffers when times were hard. Their relationship had lasted a decade without any need to be formalised; that was surely more meaningful.

“I didn’t come to adopt you,” he said, deciding to ignore the latter point. “What gave you that idea?”

Kihel shrugged. “I had a feeling. I get them, sometimes. I think there’s something unusual about me.”

“You’re a Bearer,” he said.

“Yes,” she said, “but I think there’s more than that. If you adopt me, maybe we’ll know.”

“Why do you keep saying that?” said Terence. He was starting to get irritated. “How old are you? Twelve? We have boys training for the dragoons at that age. You’re too old to be coddled.” And it wasn’t as if they wanted children anyway, he thought; there were matters both more important and more interesting to be taking care of.

“But I think I’m a Dominant,” she said.

The absurdity of it almost made Terence laugh out loud. Nonetheless, he forced himself to consider whether it might be possible, if only as a way of defeating her claims with logic. There was no living Dominant of Ramuh, nor Garuda, nor Titan; the others were accounted for. But those three had all died within Kihel’s lifetime. That left only Leviathan the Lost.

“Which?” he said, to test her.

“Leviathan,” she replied.

She had done her homework, at least. “Why?” he shot back.

“That’s the only one, isn’t it?” she said. “You must know that.”

“I also know Leviathan always awakened among the Motes of Water,” said Terence. “Perhaps you weren’t aware.” She surely hadn’t received the same quality of education that he had. “The Motes of Water lived in north Sanbreque,” he explained, just to make it very clear. “They all had blue eyes and dark skin – darker than yours, anyway. And they were all executed for heresy, as they deserved; there’s no way anyone

could awaken as Leviathan now. Certainly not you.” Her unbelievable theory intrigued him nonetheless. “How could you possibly believe something so ridiculous?” he added.

“Something draws me to important places,” she said. “I met Jill Warrick in Kostnice – she’s Shiva’s Dominant, isn’t she? I didn’t realise at the time, but it was definitely her. And then I went to the dragoons’ camp. Then I came back to Twinside after Bahamut laid waste to it.”

“And?” said Terence.

“Don’t you think it’s a coincidence?” said Kihel.

“I think it’s completely unremarkable,” he said. “You’re a travelling physicker, aren’t you? Didn’t you just come to Twinside because it made sense to be somewhere you could help people?”

“But I met your husband here,” she said.

“We’re not married,” Terence hissed.

Kihel’s face fell. “Oh. Aren’t you?”

“No!” said Terence. “Why should we be? How did you even ... discover the nature of our relationship? That’s a state secret.”

“Well, you see, I’m special,” said Kihel petulantly.

“Lots of people are Bearers,” said Terence. “You should just be glad you escaped branding. Who’s been leaking official information to you? You need to tell me. I’ll have to have them executed.” He stepped forward menacingly.

“No one!” she shrieked. “I promise! I ... he ... he said your name a few times while he was sleeping. In my –” She made a strange, jerky gesture towards the inside of the house behind her. “I thought I’d heard there was a Terence among the dragon generals, so I asked around. A few people described you to me. It must be you – dark hair, they said, grey eyes, tall – you’re much taller than the prince –”

Terence frowned. “Not really. A few inches at the very most.”

“Oh,” she said, looking strangely disappointed. “But ... he has heels on his boots. Doesn’t he?”

“Mine are hardly flat-soled,” he pointed out, lifting one to show her. “Anyway – I didn’t come here to have this baffling conversation. I came to give you this.” He held out the gil pouch Dion had given him.

“You’re supposed to take me with you,” said Kihel. “And use the gil to build us both a new life.”

“Why should I need it?” he growled. “I have plenty of my own savings. Will you please put aside this ludicrous notion that I’m here to adopt you? I’m doing exactly as he asked: bringing you the gil, and no more. It’ll be enough to get you out of this horrible place – where you go is up to you. Just don’t come bothering His Highness.”

She folded her arms, refusing to take the money, so he left it at her feet, walked off, and returned to the chocobo he had left secured nearby. Breaking into a military gallop, he just

about noticed the horde of Akashic heading towards the slums as he made his way into the countryside. Dion had wasted his money, then, he thought. It had been a rare lapse in judgement.



Years later, when things had changed quite significantly, people started talking about a book. There was an author's name on the book, but nobody was certain whether he had really lived long enough to write it. There was another author whose pen had been used to write the book, it was said, but nobody knew much about him either.

At some point, somebody discovered that Terence had once had connections with both these people, and he started to receive visitors in the part of the continent once called Storm where he had made his home, a steady flow of callers who always asked him the same questions: Which of them wrote the book? Did they live? Are they alive now?

And Terence always said: Does it really make a difference? The book is written. The contents are the same. Why don't you just believe what you like? Would it really change things?

And they said: But we want to know the truth.

And Terence replied: What if there is no truth? What if the truth is different for everyone? What if the truth doesn't matter?

And, when they remained dissatisfied, he always added:

What if you were the one who had written the book? Would that make a difference? Would you be satisfied then?

And some of them – *some* of them – thought about it for a while, and then, at last, said: Yes.