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Rays of Curved Light

Written by BlueKittyTales on commission for SaltirePhoenix.
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Friday May 1st 2015, 22:14. Minutes turn to hours as Epsilon waits for Nova to return home.

Life had finally started to deal out good hands to Epsilon and his brother Nova, ten years his senior, now that they'd finally left the orphanage they'd had no choice but to call home. It was a period of their lives they were both eager to forget. Their parents had neglected them to the point that it sometimes seemed like they didn't know they existed at all, instead preferring the substances they were hopelessly addicted to. The orphanage they had spent the best part of eight years had only been marginally better than the home they had escaped from, for while they never starved, precious few privileges were offered to them due to the viciously repressive regime the nuns who ran it enforced. It was difficult for him to envision whether his and Nova's biological parents had shown the drive or determination to turn their lives around, for they hadn't once come looking for them, although this was something neither of them had thought about in years.

Nowadays, they sought to throw themselves into their new callings in their lives. Nova had begun his career at a private investigation division, and his boss Freya had very graciously given him the deed to the flat situated just above her business' offices to ensure they had a place to live. While it was small and dank, only having one bedroom and windows on only one side of the building, it was liveable, and they could both settle for having a comfortable roof over their heads. Even at eight years of age, Epsilon had plenty of aspirations. Although he didn't know precisely what he wanted to be when he reached adulthood, what he did know was that he wanted to learn as much as he possibly could in preparation, and in the hope of catching up on what he'd missed out on.

However, his tenure at school hadn't come without its ups and downs, for while he had several friends amongst his roster, some other cubs mocked him for not having any parents and not having very much to show for his life, and his teachers had been unsure how to handle a student who seemed to be maturing much faster than he was growing. This invariably meant that he had got into a number of physical fights, and whenever he ran out of money, he would play card games with his students to win their lunch money from them, resulting in a quite erratic school record. Sometimes he found himself wishing he had more family than Nova, but this feeling never lasted for very long.

Despite the long hours and lengthy travel his job demanded, Nova still came home every day he could to bring over food and some of his earnings for him. But that night, he had not come home at all. Hunger wasn't a problem, as Epsilon had learned how to make some of his meals, though despite Nova's promise that he'd return home in the early evening, the clock on the wall in the pokey and quite untidy living room read 22:14, a full two hours later than he'd stated. His mind was racing – just where could Nova be if he wasn't on a case?

"Do you know-ho? Everybody loves me!" cried the television as Epsilon watched *The Jack Bros. Show*. He sighed.

"I wish me and Nova could say that about ourselves." he said to himself, but by then he was struggling to pay attention to what was going on in the program, his eyelids starting to feel as though they were made of osmium. He was a bat whose purple fur and large green eyes allowed him to stand out from the crowd, though he lacked wings of his own. His older brother was much taller than he was and had a very similar appearance, and he often found himself looking up to him, seeing a brother in him one moment and a father figure in another. But before he could think about where Nova was any further, he felt his head slump into the tatty armchair and he drifted into a dead state of sleep.

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By the time Epsilon awoke, light was flooding into the living room. The room was still in the state it had been before, but it didn't take long for him to notice that the television had been turned off. He looked at the clock. He'd been asleep for a full nine hours. And then he glanced at the sofa bed on the other side of the room. It seemed Nova had come home after all, for while the sofa bed he slept in was still empty, it had been disturbed. What's more, he noticed his mobile phone on the end table was turned off. Given he always expected calls from his superiors concerning developments in cases he was called upon to investigate, this

wasn't like him. Was there something Nova hadn't told him, or had he simply forgotten to charge it and thus let the battery run out overnight?

Epsilon bounded off the armchair and headed for the bathroom, but once he'd returned to the living room dressed and cleaned up, the smell wafting from the kitchen set his nose twitching.

"Nova?" he called. He headed for the kitchen and grabbed a can of orange juice from the fridge, and once he closed the door, he spotted Nova at the stove adorned in his dress suit, which, if his memory served him right, was a type of clothing he had only ever seen him without when he was in his pyjamas.

"Epsilon, wait your turn." smiled Nova. "There's plenty of fried eggs for all."

"Eggs?" said Epsilon. "Peter at school said those were really expensive."

"Yes, well without a great number of hens willing to give their eggs these days, they are pricey." said Nova. "But, I think it's only proper we have ourselves a nice treat every now and again. We've earned it, you know." But this wasn't enough to distract him from the most pressing question.

"Doesn't this mean you'll be late for work? It's seven thirty already!" countered Epsilon. Much to his surprise, Nova grinned.

"Work?" chirped Nova as he dished out the eggs onto two plates, followed by several slices of toast with blackcurrant jam and one bowl of muesli each. *This looks pretty good!* he thought, feeling his mouth beginning to water. "Not today, brother."

"What?"

"Your ears do not deceive you, Epsilon. Freya decided to give me today off. She believes she's been working me a little too hard. So, she decided she would get someone to cover for me. I'm making sure this rewarding day off will not go to waste." As Epsilon followed Nova back into the lounge, he went to ask the question he'd had on his mind since the night before, but Nova beat him to the punch. "And I know you stayed awake waiting for me. I saw you dormant on the sofa. I didn't move you to your room because...well, you looked so peaceful there, and I didn't want to awaken you. I didn't get home until about half an hour before midnight, and I'm sorry for breaking my promise. I had to deal with an incident that got out of hand."

"It's nice to see you back, Nova." said Epsilon with a smile, downing his entire can of orange juice all at once. "I was getting really worried."

"I don't lament having returned. What is this all for if we don't have each other like obstinate and obtuse roommates Eddie and Richie?"

"Good point." said Epsilon. "What are you gonna do today?" Nova showed him a newspaper.

"There's a carnival taking place in the town centre today." said Nova brightly. "You've said you always wanted to visit a carnival, so I thought we could attend this one and indulge our obscured desires."

"Yeah, but...isn't that sort of thing just for cubs?"

"We are all cubs at heart, dear brother." smiled Nova. "I know you prefer being treated like an adult just like I do, and believe me, I admire that about you. But I dare say you could use a treat whose deliverance has already been too prolonged." *He makes a good case.* he thought. *But I still don't want someone trying to give me a teddy bear if I lose one of the games.* He realised Nova was watching him, awaiting his reaction. *Oh, what the heck. We might not get to do this again.*

"Okay, we'll give it a go." replied Epsilon with a smile. "We'll have fun, won't we?"

"Certainly we will, Epsilon." said Nova confidently, patting him on the shoulder. "Certainly we will."

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It didn't take long for Epsilon to find himself subconsciously drawn in once they reached the carnival, though when they'd bumped into Freya on the way out of the building and Nova had revealed to her where they were going, she was amused at his choice. Epsilon had been tempted to cut in and tell her he wasn't there to be treated like a cub, but had thought better of it, not wanting to risk getting Nova into trouble. Instead, he'd

tried to direct his attention to what he could expect at the event, and once Nova had paid for the taxi fare and the tickets, it was only then that a feeling of giddy excitement began to slip through his mask.

“So where shall we go first, brother?” asked Nova politely.

“I thought I got to ask that first?” chirped Epsilon, taking in the sights of the many stalls and brightly lit games and rides dotted all around the field.

“Touché.” said Nova. Epsilon looked around him.

“I suppose the first place we should go is the information kiosk over there.” he said, pointing at the stand next to the security office.

“For what?”

“It says on the sign they sell maps.”

“You’re an attentive lad, you are.” commented Nova with a smile. Epsilon noticed a teenage bovine couple staring at him as Nova paid for the map, but soon put them out of his mind, although he spotted Nova scowling at them.

“Don’t worry about them, Nova.” said Epsilon. “I’m not.”

“I saw the way they observed you.” replied Nova.

“What does it matter? They’re gone.” added Epsilon with a smile as he gestured to them. The sight of them getting their hands stamped as they left the carnival hand in hand was enough for Nova to relent.

“Okay, at least we won’t encounter them again.” he observed aloud.

“I wanna to see if I can win you a prize, Nova.” smiled Epsilon. “How about that stall over there?” He gestured to a stand that had a row of six water guns in front of various targets, where two young Dobermans, having already won their game, were laughing as they squirted each other in their faces, much to the proprietor’s irritation. Epsilon couldn’t help but snigger to himself when they ran away chucking water balloons at each other, one of the balloons narrowly missing Nova.

“Well, those two look like they had much merriment.” quipped Nova. “Alright, let’s give it a whirl. But you don’t have to procure anything for me. If you can, win something for yourself.”

“Okay, I’ll try.” said Epsilon, all of a sudden starting to feel nervous. He’d never expected the carnival to be so big, nor to be so crowded. Everywhere he looked, there were creatures of various species from the most common to the rarest, and he started to feel uneasy as he followed Nova through the crowd to the stall. Was it merely the presence of so many creatures? Was it his own lack of experience with large festivities? Was it him expecting some semblance of a calamity? These feelings quickly faded when they reached the stand and Nova paid the proprietor. Sharing smirks between them, he and Nova grabbed their guns. But then, another of the Dobermans’ water balloons sailed towards them and this time hit Epsilon from behind, spraying water all over him and Nova and drenching him from his head to his trousers.

“Oh, no...Epsilon, are you alright?” cried Nova, instinctively comforting him. In the air was the sound of the Dobermans laughing as they ran off, but Epsilon wriggled out of Nova’s embrace, and he had a feeling his next words greatly surprised him, because he looked like he was about to gasp.

“I’m fine, bigman.” smiled Epsilon, both of them shaking around to try and get some of the water out of their fur. “We’ll probably get wet in this game anyway.”

“That’s the spirit, gentlemen!” said the proprietor brightly. “Alright, so what you’ve got to do is fill the balloon in the middle of the targets in front of you. If you aim just right and the balloon bursts before you run out of water, you win one of the prizes on display! That’s all there is to it. Now start squirting!” And without any hesitation, they each sprayed their guns into the targets. Gradually their balloons filled up, with Nova’s seeming to fill up in a blur of speed. Epsilon had trouble aiming his gun’s water flow to the very centre, but got it in eventually. Soon, Nova’s balloon burst, spraying water all around, but Epsilon’s had just reached the size of a basketball before his gun’s water ran out, leaving him crestfallen.

"Aww, too bad, son!" said the proprietor. "Better luck next time!" He turned to Nova. "But you, my friend, are the proud winner of this – a plush toy of Katana from the TV series *Gargoyles*! Enjoy!" Next, he turned to the approaching crowd. "Step right up, ladies and gentlemen! Your chance to win has arrived! Make a watery mess for just two quid! Soak 'em silly while they're still itty bitty!" Epsilon couldn't help but feel envious as he clutched his new toy, showing a rare public smile. He bowed his head, but with an effort, looked up at him, and Nova was sure he'd seen this, for his smile soon faded.

"Well done, brother." said Epsilon.

"You did well too, brother." replied Nova, patting him on the shoulder, which still felt wet despite his leather jacket. "Maybe you can win something in the next sweepstakes."

"Maybe." replied Epsilon, managing a smirk of his own. Indeed, he wouldn't have to wait very long for his next chance, for the stand just to the left of a stall selling soft drinks caught Nova's eye.

"Hey Epsilon, you must come and see this!" he called, and Epsilon rushed over to a boat race stand.

"It's the game of all games, ladies and gentlemen!" bellowed the feline host of this stall, dressed in an off colour red and white suit. "Two or more racers duke it out for the title of greatest boat racer! And who out of you will step up to the pole?" Epsilon looked hesitant, but Nova's expression was one of encouragement.

"Go on, brother. You can win this one." he said reassuringly. Epsilon wasn't so sure.

"Bottom line is," continued the host, "if you don't enter this race, you can't win!"

"Okay, I'll do it." decided Epsilon, as Nova paid the host and grabbed the remote controller in front of him. "Let's go!"

"That's the spirit!" Nova said enthusiastically, although his facial expression was unchanged. He took his controller and, upon the host's signal, his boat began to charge towards the first turn, while Nova's boat trailed behind. However, when his boat came out of a hairpin left, it suddenly started to emit smoke. Epsilon thought nothing of it at first, but then it started to slow down, before finally, it stopped responding to the controls and then burst into flames.

"Oh, now that's not the way it's meant to be!" cried the host, his smile not fading at all. Nova stared. "Boat number nine looks to be in serious trouble here right from the start, which means that by default, the winner is boat number three! Because of that unforeseen circumstance, you gentlemen are each allowed another race for free. I don't know what on Earth went wrong with that boat."

"I don't think I'll run the risk." said Epsilon sourly.

"Great minds really do think alike, brother." replied Nova. "I want my money back." The host's tone suddenly shifted from chirpy to stern.

"What do I look like, a bank? No refunds." he said sharply, his tail's fur fluffing up.

"Giving my brother a defective boat isn't grounds for you to keep our money!" snapped Nova as the entire rear of the boat was engulfed in flames, leading the host to finally pull out a fire extinguisher and spray it down. Epsilon watched as the charred remains of the boat began to sink.

"Look, here's the money." said another patron next to them, a lanky teenage leopard who had a young woman of the same species in his arms. Epsilon turned to them indifferently, but he thought he saw Nova steal a glance at her. "My girlfriend here used to work at one of these stalls. We know how these things turn out, so don't bother."

"Thanks." said Nova, pocketing the money. His tone was appreciative, but his expression was stony. "That's very kind of you, sir."

"That's alright." smiled the leopard. "Just enjoy the rest of your day, you two." He looked up at the host, who looked at them as though they had just uttered a disgusting insult.

"Come on, Epsilon. Let's get away from here." said Nova.

"I don't need any prompting," replied Epsilon, throwing a dirty look at the stall's host, who by then had gone back to winning over further customers. *How gullible can you get?* thought Epsilon, showing a frown that he knew wouldn't be acknowledged as more creatures flocked to the stand, the burnt out boat not seeming to do anything to dissuade them.

"That was an experience we could have done without," said Nova, visibly irritated. "I'm sorry."

"Come on Nova, that wasn't your fault," countered Epsilon. "Let's just do something else." He followed him over to the soft drink stall, although he soon heard Nova grunt in annoyance upon looking at the list above the counter. But Epsilon was optimistic.

"Come on, bigman," he said encouragingly. "If the drinks are this expensive, they've gotta be good."

"Do you have any raspberry slush?" asked another customer in front of them. "My young son just asked me to get him some."

"Can't you read?" said the cashier pointedly. "The sign says the machine's out of order."

"Get bent," snapped the customer as he stalked off. Nova bought them a pair of *Ferrous Brew* cans, and as soon as he gave Epsilon one can, quickly downed the other one.

"I thought you said you didn't like being reminded of our roots?" commented Epsilon.

"I did. But I still enjoy the drink," said Nova, finally showing a smirk as they headed over to one of the largest attractions the carnival had to offer. Epsilon couldn't believe he hadn't noticed this before, although perhaps, he thought as he sipped his drink, it wasn't especially surprising, given it was tucked away at the opposite end of the grounds from the entrance and had plenty of other attractions near and far overshadowing it. When it finally did pop into view in its completeness, it resembled a small hotel like one from a cartoon in the early days of animation. *A haunted house?* he thought. *Not much to get scared about in here.*

"Fancy giving this a go?" proposed Nova. Epsilon drained the rest of his can as he watched several families emerge from the side exit, some looking unimpressed but some looking rather shaken. One small skunk, who Epsilon guessed couldn't have been any older than five years old, screamed and recoiled in his mother's arms upon spotting the duo. Nova scowled, but continued onwards. However, the skunk's mother had noticed him and Epsilon.

"It couldn't hurt," said Epsilon, not sounding especially enthusiastic.

"Don't mind us," said the skunk cub's mother, her huge bushy tail twitching as she walked. "He's just a bit scared from what he saw in the last room." But Nova looked unconvinced, and as he paid for the tickets, Epsilon began to look around him. Even though his expectations were low, he was still interested in seeing what it had to offer, even if just to take his mind off of what had happened at the previous stand. What could scare a young skunk cub had no guarantee of being able to scare him too.

As he went into the foyer and then into the first room, their surroundings looked unremarkable, with it looking just like the entrance to a real hotel. However, when he entered what was identified as the main lounge, the dimly lit surroundings began to take a sudden turn. While this didn't unnerve Epsilon, it was still enough to have him looking around him, and all of a sudden he felt something grab at his leg, making him scream...but he looked down to find that it was only an infant cub having grabbed hold of it.

"Get off!" he grunted, shaking his leg just enough to break the cub's grip.

"I'm so sorry, kid," said a large fox as he picked up the cub. "He's been doing that since we got here." *So much for that.* thought Epsilon, but then Nova bumped into him when he stopped at the entrance to the next room. He heard someone scream from in the distance, but paid it no mind. But it was only then that he realised how the cub's father had addressed him. *What does he mean 'kid'?* he thought bitterly.

After following a small crowd through a room filled with overgrown plants, he found himself meandering through a corridor that took him across a narrow walkway above bubbling water. All of a sudden, he felt a sense of vertigo when he looked down, a prickle of fear moving up his spine as a talking vulpine skeleton sailed above. *It's okay, Epsilon.* he told himself. *It was just the height above the water.* He soon forgot about it as he entered what looked like a woman's bedroom complete with a dressing table, and he couldn't help but stare at the beautiful vixen sitting powdering her face. That was, until the reflection in the mirror morphed into a ghoul that let out a roar coupled with wicked laughter, before suddenly lunging out at him. He recoiled,

and two creatures either side of him let out screams in unison, though Epsilon noticed that they were not looking at the dressing table. He looked at Nova to find him frowning at the creatures, a frog and a lizard slightly taller than he was who both seemed to be frightened by his appearance.

"Jeez, it's a bat!" cried one of them. "Run!"

"What is wrong with *me*?" he heard Nova ask, sounding surprised. *What, creatures still think he looks scary? What are they?* thought Epsilon, who by then was starting to wonder whether Nova was still enjoying the experience. Following the trail of fellow guests led him through a room with mirrors that gave the impression of there being many more doors and then a room with what appeared to be an opossum drowning in a murky bathtub, he found himself inside a large banquet hall enshrouded in darkness, with only a uniformed bell boy to be seen besides the other creatures. By then, he was losing interest and just wanted to find the next attraction. He looked behind him to find Nova looking quite annoyed, but without warning the room lit up with the sound of a scream from above, and they found themselves in the middle of a tagada ride, while several creatures winced when a model of a hanging sheep swung down from above. Epsilon remained unaffected, and was one of the many creatures who remained standing. He turned behind him again to find Nova looking around the walls, his expression remaining unchanged from before.

"A tagada ride?" he heard another creature say. "Screw this." He watched him walk off as a staff member opened a fire exit for him, and several more creatures left while the others began taking their seats. Although he went to sit down, he soon spotted Nova also heading for the exit, his shoulders squared and his stance guarded. Epsilon got up and followed him, looking back to see the ride beginning to spin up. He squinted his eyes as the sun hit his eyes, before Epsilon found Nova at a small tofu dog stall.

"One tofu dog, please." he said, before he grabbed it and quickly chowed it down. When he finally noticed Epsilon, there was no mistaking his expression. He looked rather fed up, and even quickly drinking another can of *Ferrous Brew* didn't seem to help his mood like it so often had in the past.

"Are you okay, Nova?" asked Epsilon. Nova sighed to himself.

"I'm fine." he said. Epsilon wasn't fully assured by this, although he thought it best not to argue. "I'm okay. Just wanted to get out of that ride." He sighed again, and they walked alongside each other. "Brother, I want you to please tell me something."

"Of course, bigman. Anything." said Epsilon. Nova moved closer to him in their stride, and he now looked very anxious.

"Do you think I look scary?" asked Nova solemnly. *Scary?* he thought, unsure what to make of this.

"Scary?" said Epsilon. "What are you getting at?"

"I want you to give me an answer that's as straight as a pencil, dear Epsilon." continued Nova as they made their way to a wooden roller coaster which thankfully had a rather short queue. They watched as the first car filled with creatures before it rolled out of the station platform and up the first lift hill, before the second car arrived and let its passengers off. "As I've divulged before, you're very mature for your age, and you aren't afraid to state how things are. Therefore, I feel I can trust you to answer my request truthfully."

"You know me, Nova." Epsilon said sincerely.

"I just met two creatures who were scared of me." said Nova, sounding irked just by the thought.

"Are you sure it wasn't just the props inside that haunted house?"

"One of them said outright they were afraid of me only because I am a wingless bat." he said curtly. "The other looked like he was about to wet his trousers. This wasn't a tiny cub like the one we saw outside. These were young teens." He hadn't wanted to say it outright, but he had witnessed this happening. He couldn't work out why the lizard or the frog had reacted the way they had, and he had recalled other creatures finding the sight of him intimidating earlier in his life. Some had found Epsilon intimidating at his school even on the day he began, and he had seen dragons feared in equal measure also. He knew that dragons were thought of as vicious and aggressive creatures in some circles but were admired and adored in some others, while bats, whether winged or not, were stereotyped as mysterious creatures of the night. And it struck him as odd that a belief so antiquated could still have a place in these times.

"You, scary?" said Epsilon questioningly. "You know I've never found you scary."

"You would say that." said Nova, bowing his head.

"That, brother, is because I mean what I'm saying." countered Epsilon. "I've never felt afraid of you. And it was only those two."

"This is not the only location where I have encountered this." he added. Epsilon looked up at the roller coaster for a moment to watch as the trains rose and fell as they raced through the tracks, while the riders cheered and screamed in equal measure. He felt his heartbeat rise as the first train finally arrived at the station platform and the riders dismounted, before Nova followed him into the very front carriage, seeming relieved that he didn't have to pay for this ride.

"Is that so?" said Epsilon as the restraints folded over them.

"It is." continued Nova. "I've seen some of my colleagues show trepidation around me. It's like...it's like a gunshot to my heart. I'd expect my actions to have an effect such as this, not simply my appearance." He could see that Nova hadn't lifted his head, and as well as he could, he reached out for him.

"Don't worry about it." he said. "You've also told me that there are a lot of creatures who respect you. You don't forget a thing like that. I know two dragon brothers at school who are twins, and they sometimes get that too. They're the only dragons in the school."

"We're bats." replied Nova as the vehicle left the station and climbed the lift hill. "We don't have the ability to breathe fire or summon the elements like a lot of them can."

"Actually, I can't say I've ever seen either of them do it."

"Regardless, I don't even try to be intimidating, and yet this still happens." Epsilon could feel himself becoming incensed even when their carriage neared the top.

"How stupid can they get?" he snapped. "This is the modern world! You're my big brother, Nova. And I wouldn't be here now if you were scary." Nova went to answer, but it came out as a scream when the vehicle dropped, bright flashes all around them as the on ride camera went off. The train rose and fell as it sailed along the tracks, and Epsilon found himself caught in the illusion crafted by the scenery, and as the train dropped, accelerating into a mine tunnel, he had to admit – he was loving every minute of the ride, and couldn't believe he hadn't thought to try it earlier. Then it began to slow down as it climbed up a hill and left the tunnel, before dropping down a sharp incline and ascending up a sharp bank.

It seemed that for once, something in their trip had finally gone the way it was meant to. However, it wasn't to be, and he heard Nova let out a roar in anger. When the vehicle stopped at the station, all of the restraints lifted up except the ones in their vehicle. They were trapped.

"Ladies and gentlemen," bellowed a voice from a loudspeaker above the station platform, "*Warning Sign* will have to close while our mechanic makes her way to it. The restraints in car 1 are stuck closed."

"What?" roared a patron at the front of the queue.

"I've had enough of this." growled Nova.

"Don't worry about it." smiled Epsilon. "We still got to experience the ride. Look, the mechanic's already here." He gestured to a dragoness in a blue uniform heading into the ride through the exit, and she opened the large toolbox she was carrying and pulled out a spanner once she reached their car.

"Alright gentlemen," she smiled, her golden eyes gleaming in the sunlight, "I'll have you out of here in no time." She approached them, but struggled to twist the bolts that held the restraints in place. Smoke poured from her nostrils as she breathed a small column of blue flames onto the bolts, allowing her to loosen them with ease and pull the restraints up.

"This is the third time today this has happened, and it's always been on this car." said the mechanic. "I'm sorry about this, but at least you're free now."

"Thank you." said Epsilon appreciatively. But when he turned to Nova's seat, he was gone.

“Nova?” cried Epsilon. Panic raced through him as he looked around the park for him, but there was no sign of him at all. What on Earth could have possessed him to run away like that? How could he have simply left his brother to the ride’s mercy? Moreover, how had he not heard or seen him escape from the ride? He had to find him as quickly as he could. Desperately calling his name again as he came through the exit, he hoped he could find him somewhere nearby. It simply was not like him to do this. Indeed, it was something others expected more of him than Nova.

“Nova!” roared Epsilon again. But there again came no answer at all, not even amongst the other guests who poured into the ride as it reopened. Without wasting a moment, he rushed as fast as he could to the information kiosk.

“Have you seen my brother?” he asked frantically, his breathing shallow.

“Just a few seconds ago.” said the proprietor. “He ran through the exit.”

“Did you see where he went after that?”

“I didn’t. But he pushed one of the attendants out of the way when he tried to stamp his hand.” *Nova did that?* he thought, very surprised. He tried to figure out where he would possibly go after this. Collecting his thoughts, he decided to try the first place he thought he would go to.

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After a thirty minute walk through the various districts of the city, Epsilon found himself back at his residence. He had only had the signposts on the footpaths and subways to guide him, and his feet ached from the journey. And he had barely stepped through the front door of the offices when Freya met him, her face looking stern.

“Your brother came back early.” she said. His words caught in his throat, half relieved half terrified.

“He did?”

“Yes. But it seems like something happened, because he didn’t speak at all when he came in. He didn’t even look up at me.” Instinctively he rushed upstairs and pushed the door open, which had been left unlocked. He looked around the flat and eventually managed to find Nova in the living room, and he was downhearted by what he saw.

“Nova?” he called. His older brother was face down on his sofa bed with his head buried into the pillows. And he could hear something that he had never heard from his brother for as long as he had lived – he was sobbing his heart out. Cautiously he approached him, reaching out for him.

“Brother, what’s wrong?” he said as tenderly as he could. Nova finally looked up at him, his fur moist with his tears. Epsilon had never seen him look so despaired.

“All I wanted was to give you the best day out I could.” said Nova faintly. “But instead, all we got was a day where everything went wrong.”

“What?”

“There was those pups who thought throwing water balloons at us was funny.” Nova said, his every syllable trembling with anger. “Then those stooges running the stands who tried to rip us off. Then I had those creatures who thought I was a terrifying beast. And then, just when I thought something was going right, the ride we’re on traps us on it. How do you ever expect to trust me to treat you to a day out when this is what we get?” Epsilon remained silent for a moment, studying his expression. “You must hate me for this.”

“Hate you?”

“Yes.”

“What on Earth are you talking about?”

“I just wanted today to be the best day I could give you.” sniffed Nova. “Instead, it was one of the worst days we’ve had since we left the orphanage. I wish I’d never taken you to that cursed carnival.”

“Nova, I know I’m stealing a quote right out from under your nose, but calm yourself.” said Epsilon, clutching hold of his brother by the shoulders. “Please, the day wasn’t that bad. I still had fun today.” Nova looked as though he couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“You’re just saying that to try and make me feel better.” responded Nova.

“I’m not.” said Epsilon with a tender smile. “It’s the most fun I’ve had for a while. Sure, it might not have been our most successful day ever, but I’ll remember today for a long time to come. In fact, I think it brought us even closer together.” Epsilon hadn’t thought this would work, but this was enough for Nova’s demeanour to lift immediately.

“You do?” said Nova, wiping his tears from his eyes.

“I do, bigman.” added Epsilon, stroking him on the shoulders. “Now I have some fond memories of my childhood just like you wanted. We’re family. And there’s nothing that can tear us apart.”

“You really believe that?”

“Yes I do.” said Epsilon confidently, showing him another smile. Nova looked up at him, first looking sceptical, then managing a smile of his own before they met in an embrace that they never wanted to end. Another opportunity would come, Epsilon surmised, but until then, he had plenty to remember of that day.

“You know, brother,” said Nova, “that’s a comfort. It really means a lot that this all wasn’t enough to dampen your spirits. I’ll take you somewhere better next time.”

“Nova, just spending the day with you is enough, no matter what happens.”

The End

