

The task of thatching grew to be quite monotonous, and surprisingly uncomfortable; as the morning wore on and temperatures rose, I felt sweat begin to bead up beneath my fur. It didn't help that I had to climb on and off the roof every now and then whenever I needed some more materials.

With the passing of time, my mind wandered to various things—the way in which the Templis community worked together to recover from the raid; how somebody could be so cruel and selfish as to inflict such calamity; the way I had somehow been pulled into the relief efforts as well, even if for my own benefit; I thought about what seemed to be a coming storm, heralded by the blustery winds and clouded sky; and, naturally, how the heck did I end up in such a place as this, how the heck did I end up with such a body as this, and how the heck was I going to get things back to normal?

"I should be out there hunting down that book," I thought to myself irritably, wiping some sweat from my brow; *"not up here putting grass in someone's roof!"* I surveyed the village around me, seriously thinking about jumping down right then and there and starting my search. But, I shook my head with a sigh, deciding against it. *"No; not now. You have a deal to keep, and Bradley doesn't seem like the type of guy to let agreements fall through. That, and I have absolutely no idea where to even begin looking... Gosh, blast it..."*

As I continued working, it became apparent that I would indeed run out of thatch at some point; seeing as I had exhausted everything else I could think about, I tried to determine at what point I would deplete my supplies. After hoisting up yet another bundle, I set to work pulling it apart and counting how many units I got out of it. Once I got that number, I did a few calculations and managed to estimate that I would be able to finish about four of the remaining nine cross poles; meaning I would most indeed have to visit that jerk again at some point. I puffed out an angry breath of air, shoving some grass into place. I had mixed feelings about this place.

After a long while, I saw Bradley emerge from the side room, the one where he worked his trade, and walk across to the table with a cloth-wrapped bundle in his paw. Placing it down, he glanced up to examine my work, nodding slightly. "It seems as though you're not doing too badly. Make sure you're keeping each one good and tight; a few of them seem a tad too loose."

I clicked my tongue in annoyance, beginning a scanning about for loose thatchwork. I was unable to spot anything unusual, however; though whether this was from my vantage point or from my unfamiliarity with the task, I'm not sure. "Which ones?" I asked, giving up my search.

"Let me see..." Bradley said; he held up his good arm and started counting under his breath. "One, two, three rows down from where you are now and three, six, nine, twelve units over—tighten up that one."

I grabbed either end of the specified unit and pulled it taught, managing to leave the rest of the roof undisturbed. Bradley informed me of a few others, then expressed his approval for my work. "Very good; not overly difficult, now is it?"

"No," I said, allowing my expression to lighten up a bit.

"Good! Now come on down and eat something; you've been working for quite some time now. I myself am fairly famished, yet I wasn't even the one climbing on and off a roof all morning."

I was indeed rather ravenous, having only eaten an apple since waking up several hours ago; the invitation to eat was readily accepted. I slid down the roof, slightly turned to the side to avoid grinding my tail into the rough grasses, and fell over the edge, landing awkwardly on my toes but managing to stay upright with a few steps. "Gettin' the hang of this," I said with a little half-smile.

Upon stepping inside, I saw that Bradley had already unfolded the bundle, revealing the contents therein. An elliptical loaf of bread, dark brown and with a very textured look to it, sat next to a wheel of white cheese, which showed its contrasting smoothness as Bradley cut into it; along with these two items were an assortment of small, dried fruits, and even some wall nuts. The weaver set aside two slices of the soft cheese, each a bit bigger than my palm, then broke the loaf into three large chunks and laid them out. "Choose whichever portion appeals to you," he invited me, seating himself in a chair. I sat myself as well, quickly adjusting when I crushed down on my own tail. "*Getting the hang, but still learning,*" I thought with a grimace.

I examined my choices and took the hunk of bread that had come from the middle; the crust seemed rather thick and unpleasant to my twenty-first century tastes, so I wanted as little of it as possible. The cheese slices, however, had no discernible differences, so I simply chose one at random.

There weren't any plates set out yet, and when Bradley set his cheese and bread directly on the table, I realized that none would be provided. Even though the surface looked clean enough, I decided to hold my own food.

Bradley began eating, tearing off bits of his food and grabbing a shriveled piece of fruit here and there as he saw fit. I peered at the dense bread in my paw, then sniffed it, detecting a very earthy scent with a slight hint of sweetness, though nothing like the processed white bread I was used to. I bit into it cautiously, and soon recoiled from its potent taste. "Woah," I said, speaking around the lump in my mouth. "That's... that's powerful! What's in this bread?" Despite the fact that the stuff tasted as unpleasant as a whole grain bagel with no cream cheese, I finished chewing and swallowing, as I do with any food item that enters my mouth.

"It is but a simple barley loaf," Bradley said, laying back an ear. "What type of bread do you normally dine on?"

"Whi-" I was about to say "white bread," but then remembered that such a wonderful thing probably didn't exist in this world yet. "Wheat," I said instead.

“Truly?” Bradley asked, seeming intrigued for some reason. “That’s a valuable ingredient around these parts; the soil here isn’t quite right for it, I’ve been told. Come to think of it,” he said, popping a nut into his mouth, “where do you hail from, if not from here? I can’t recall seeing your face before today.”

I sighed, racking my brain for ways to dodge the question; I decided on a simple and straightforward evasion. “It’s a bit of a long story—I’d rather not talk about it right now.” This was a truthful statement on both accounts.

The grey-furred weaver nodded respectfully. “Very well.”

We continued our meal in relative silence from there onward. Bradley threw out the odd comment here and there; sometimes he mentioned his work, talking about how close he and a few others around Templis were to resupplying the village with necessary fabrics; he thanked me for what I was doing for him; and he asked me if I knew where I would be going after I finished work. This last one gave me pause to think. I recalled the inn, which I had seen sitting in the town square when I went to gather some thatch, and seeing as Ruth had said we’d meet there tonight, I told Bradley that I’d likely go there.

“Naturally,” the weaver replied. “I will say, it’s a good thing that building wasn’t destroyed, otherwise there would be few other places for the out-of-town relief workers to stay.”

Bradley had eaten as much as he desired by this point, and so had I; though I did not eat any more of the barley-bagel-bread stuff. All the same, I slipped it into my pocket, in case I got hungry later on, though I hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

A raspy scrapping was heard as Bradley pushed his chair away from the table. “Sated?” he said with a questioning tone.

“For the most part,” I nodded.

“Good. Now, as promised, I’ll go fetch you a shirt.”

* * *

The first drops of rain began hitting my thick neck scruff as I worked my way through the last bundle of grass. Looking out from my high vantage point, I saw a hazy gray wall approaching, advancing over the plains at an unsettling pace. I hurriedly set about finishing off the last of the bundle, glancing up every now and then at the ever-nearing mass of rain. In time, the drizzle I was exposed to worked its way through my clothes and fur, making a chilling contact with my skin like cold hands during wintertime.

With a nervously quick motion, I shoved the final unit into place before sliding down the roof. I hit the ground a bit harder than normal and fell, covering my forearms and clothes in moist dirt and sand. I disregarded this for the moment, righting myself and stumbling inside, brushing the soil off my fur and clothes at the doorway. Soon after, I heard heavy rain make its way over the incomplete roof, falling through the gap near the peak and splashing the wooden

floors with water. The newly placed thatch, marked by a noticeably brighter shade of brown, did not leak; I allowed myself to feel a bit of pride for this.

Bradley was walking about and lighting a few candles from an already lit stick of wax. The table was moved off to the side, and wisely so; though it did seem to cram things a bit, its previous location would have left it exposed to the downpour.

As Bradley lit one last candle that stood on the moved table, he noticed me. "I don't believe any number of buckets could catch that leak," he said drily. His tail hanging limply, he gazed down at the wet floor. "Oh, I dearly hope this water doesn't cause any permanent damage...."

I felt sympathy for the weaver, and almost began berating myself for not working faster. Then I realized that even if I had worked as fast as possible, I wouldn't have finished the whole roof before the rain hit; completing an extra four and a half cross poles, as well as a gathering another cart of thatch from the middle of the village, would take quite some time, much more time than nature had permitted me.

Bradley carried his candle stick over to the side room, nudging the door open with his foot and inviting me in. "Let's wait in a room that doesn't have rain pouring through its roof. Grab a chair, if you'd like; I only have one in here."

Candle light already flickering in the side room. I had passed through it earlier, but never stopped to get a decent look; now, however, as I set my chair down on the floor and carefully positioned myself in it, I was able to thoroughly examine everything within.

It was a workshop of sorts, specialized for Bradley's trade. A loom stood against the opposite wall, several closely-knit lengths of plain white string running across it horizontally, half of the setup already woven through with vertical strings. A counter was set against the wall to my right, with sewing needles, threads of various colors, and half-finished clothing strewn over it. Finished lengths of cloth rested on the shelves and hanging racks that lined each wall, like blank tapestries waiting for ornamentation. The only window in the room was tucked up under the roof, high enough to keep outside distractions away from sight and mind.

Bradley sat down at his loom, fitting his one-striped tail through a large gap along the bottom of his cushioned chair. Despite having a single paw to work with, the speed with which he weaved the vertical threads was impressive; several times faster than I could do with both my own paws, or even my own hands.

"I doubt this rain will be ending any time soon," Bradley said, throwing his voice backwards, "and I am still curious, so I hope you don't mind me asking this again: where do you hail from?"

I was surprised by this question, and my posture suddenly became very straight and upright. "Like I said, it's a long story," I said, trying to mask my nervousness.

"We've got time enough," Bradley stated, much to my dismay.

I hung my head and winced. "G- gimme' a second," I stuttered, trying to think of how to go about answering. "...Well, I'm not exactly sure where it is in relation to... Derya." I had almost

forgotten the name of this place, despite the image of the book's glowing calligraphy burning clear in my mind still. "But... it's a place called... America; I'm not sure if you've heard of it...."

"Can't say that I have," Bradley said, stopping his work and turning towards me with an inquisitive look on his face.

"Great!" I berated myself. *"Now you've gotten him interested!"*

"You say you're unsure of your land's location?" the weaver asked, turning back to the white threads before him.

"Yeah," I confirmed. "Not sure how to get back to it from where I am now, anyways."

"Is this your first time in Derya, then?"

"Yep."

"That would explain the odd manner with which you speak," Bradley chuckled. "What else is different in this 'America'?"

"Oh, uh..." I really didn't feel like explaining electricity, asphalt roads, concrete, presidents, T-shirt slogans, white bread, cars, trains, international trade, pencils, and too many other things to count. "Not much that's too terribly different," I lied.

"Well enough," Bradley said, mercifully accepting this dodgy response. "How did you end up here? As I said, I've never even heard of your land, so I can't imagine that you simply walked or rode a boat here."

"Well... I didn't...." I figured that if I could tell Ruth the truth about my teleportation, it would be safe to tell Bradley. "Some sort of magical book transported me here—just me; not my clothes, hence the 'right bloody shame' I was earlier today."

The weaver turned his gaze towards me, one eyebrow raised a single ear cocked backwards. "Indeed? That's strange; not impossible, but strange." He turned away again. "But it does make sense; originally, I thought you had come from some scarred corner of Templis and had lost your belongings in the raid."

Now it was my turn to be inquisitive; the mention of the raid caught my attention, and for two reasons: the first reason being that I was genuinely curious to find out more about the jerk face called Kaymeron, and the second reason being that he presented an alternative topic to the shaky one I currently balanced upon. "Speaking of the raid," I said, before Bradley could speak again, "what's all this I keep hearing about that Kaymeron fellow? He seems to be a pretty big deal over here."

Bradley stopped his work, slowly lifting his head to look straight forward at the wall ahead of him. He remained in this position for quite some time, silently allowing the sound of rain and thunder to fill the room. Eventually, he turned his head to the side and spoke; the little bit of his expression that I could see appeared pained, and his words sounded heavy, as if a burden had suddenly been placed upon the man. "I... never gave much thought to him," the weaver stated, "believing that a village as lonely as ours would never be worth his trouble. Because of

this, I rarely bothered myself with remembering any gossip I heard of him, so... I can only tell you that which I have experienced.”

He paused, exhaling heavily, then began. “He came in the dead of night...”