

The Twelfth Century
by
The Dark Lord Insidious
(just call me Sid)

**A New Beginning:
Zombies
&
Skeletons
&
Not So Elvin Princesses,
Oh my!**

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**### Chapter 10 ###
Dinner with Ned ###**

As you may recall (from last night, last week, or just a few moments ago), Ned invited Abby over for supper (or maybe it was Abby who invited herself over for supper; personally, I don't recall, anymore).

And I don't know how familiar you are with Humans (of the time and place we're re-imagining), but they tend to do things their own way (those Humans). It can be a bit unsettling at times.

Take their houses, for example. Not having the prerequisite magical technologies, their houses were actually smaller on the inside than on the outside. Weird. Right?

And then, they're horde animals (or at least, many would argue that they are -- me, just as a for instance), so one might expect Ned's dad, Bob, to have multiple wives (or at least, a few concubines). But he

doesn't. And it's not like his wife (Carol) is all that good looking. I'm mean, she's hot, and all. She's fine. But she's not all that. No self-respecting Orc or Goblin Chieftain would be content sharing his bedchambers with only her.

So, let's see. What else might almost anyone find strange about pre-contact human behavior?

Well, rather than talking about what really interests them (gold, money, power, and sex; and really, isn't this what everyone is interested in these days -- and those), in social situations they go on about the weather and trivial bits of news, items of which they seem to hold higher in regard the more trivial, remote, and removed from their lives said information might be. It's as if they don't want to talk about anything important or real.

And this, I suppose, might tie into another peculiar behavioral pattern almost unique to those there Humans. Elves have their codes, their rules, their endless lists of social etiquette. While, as you may know, Dwarves are more of the opinion that (almost) anything goes. For a Dwarf, you're a friend, if you're a friend. And if you're not, you're not. And once one is either one or the other, and there's precious little one can do to change how one is regarded: least of all how one drinks their ale or fumbles over a joke. Humans, on the other hand, are an odd combination of the two. There are countless rules: *don't talk with food in your mouth, keep your elbows off the table, and no eating from the serving dish* (no communal bowl for these hordlings). But then, these rules are constantly ignored; and for every instance in which they hold, there is another in which they are broken. Eh, perhaps, I just don't understand. But I'm sure the intricacies of their etiquette patterns could bring a smile to even the most gnarled old Elf. But if you want to know the truth, personally, I think the odd rules and contradictions all boil down to a cross between good intentions and lack of follow through -- or as they say, good old fashioned laziness.

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Anyway, that's all me and has almost nothing to do with our current endeavor. For her part, Abby did not have any trouble navigating the bizarre set of contradiction social norms that compromises human society.

When Ned said, "This is my Mom," Abby said, "Hello Mom," as if she'd been adopted into the family without missing a beat (ditto for "Dad".)

When they skipped the nut course (or it appeared that they were going to skip the nut course), Abby caused a tray of nuts to appear, which were received with much delight. Enough delight that Abby did the same thing when the fruit, cracker, cheese, and pickle courses were about to be overlooked. And (to her credit), she didn't even raise an eyebrow when her human hosts proceeded to combine the last three courses into one. (How gouache? But humans will be humans, I suppose.)

Whatever. The point is, Abby took it all in stride. And when Carol (aka Mom) served a 'Meat Loaf' (a loaf of bread intended to resemble a choice cut of Grade-A beast, I am told), Abby didn't blink an eye and not only managed to gag it down, but managed to gag is down without looking like she was gagging it down.

(Who knows, maybe she's taking acting classes on the side.)

Or rather, maybe that's when I remembered that she wasn't caught under (her own) beguiling spell. So not only did she remember who and what she was, she was also able to draw upon her years of experience in the graveyard. And so, this wasn't a 'first meeting / clash of cultures' as I had (wrongly) anticipated that it would be, but rather, just another dinner at a friend's house. And I imagine that this knowledge added greatly to her enjoyment of the evening.

You see, under the enchantment as they were, Ned and the rest were actually able to taste the evening's repast; and so, they were savoring it, drooling over it, doing that 'Oh!' and 'Ah!' thing that Humans do, and simply enjoying themselves as much as is (or was likely) possible. And let's face facts, not only can such a display can be a pleasure to watch in and of itself (pleasure breeds pleasure, contentment breeds contentment, and happiness breeds happiness), it can

be highly rewarding to watch an enchantment one has had a key part in creating take hold so well. So well, that one may wonder why Wizards, Apprentices, and others of their ilk don't do a thriving business casting beguilements in the graveyard.

Well, part of that is easy enough to explain: (generally speaking) I won't allow it. What's the point of running a graveyard if everyone in it, doesn't know their fate? Answer me that. I mean, it would seem dishonest. Still, there are always a few (mostly new arrivals) who try and skirt the rules. But the real snag to the entire enterprise is that any Wizard, Apprentice, Sorcerer, Sorceress (or any of the others who might be able to pull off such an enchantment) are completely unable to benefit from such an enchantment themselves.

Here, let me try to explain this a bit further. Ned and his family are dead. Their taste buds aren't working. (The body dies but the soul lives on, don't you know.) However, they don't know this (that they are dead or that their taste buds aren't working), because Wally and Abby have cast a wide area effect enchantment removing such knowledge from Ned's (and many other's) awareness. In short, Ned and his family can taste the food, because they don't know any better (stupid enchanted Hordlings).

Now, it would have been a small matter for Wally to include himself (and/or Abby) in any such enchantment he made. (It's would simply be a matter of casting the net a little wider, if you know what I mean.) But if he had, well, to be beguiled (to not know the truth) one has to forget the truth (completely) and this can make finding one's way out (of the maze that is a beguiling enchantment) more than a tad difficult. So, it tends to be a one way trip. But then, if you're thinking what I'm thinking, you're probably thinking it just might just be a one way trip to Nirvania. (Well, it might be, right?) So, what's the problem with that? Well, the problem with that is that working magic is like riding a horse, coding a computer, or working on a little story like we have going right here and now, one never really knows what one is going to get wrong at the start or what type of corrections or fine tuning are going to be needed along the way. Say like in the computer coding example; we've all heard about those bugs and viruses and endless

loops, well to err is human (and Orcin and Wizardrian and Apprentician and even Dark Necromancerian, but if you say the later to my face, you just might -- yes, you just might -- regret it). So that means, getting it a little wrong or blown off course is inevitable. But then, any spell that includes aspects of personal delusion can't be fine-tuned on the fly. There's no way to correct it if things go wrong. (And they will, they always do.)

Still don't believe me? Well, all I can say is that there's a special corner of the cemetery where I keep the nut cases that go for this particular 'Out'. I call it the Catatonic Corner. And if you believe nothing else I say, trust me when I say, they turn to dust faster than anything or anyone else in these parts -- in the blink of an eye, if you know what I mean (or care to work that one out as 'statues' don't blink).

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Anyway, where were we?

"The wine course," Abby announces with delight as she pulls a glowing decanter out of the silk bag from which everything else (the fruit, cheese, crackers, and nuts) has come. The bag itself is your standard issue magical rucksack (perhaps a lot like your grandmother's purse). And the wine service is your standard issue Elvin number (silver this, silver that) all on a great big silver tray with a glass (see through) decanter in the center, which glows from the elixir of Pixie origin contained within (a sparkling swirling layered green-yellow for those who must know).

Yeah, Elf wine is good. But Elves don't take off their clothes and have an orgy in the must for weeks on end whilst crushing the grapes, so it's missing that certain something. I guess what I'm saying is, alcohol is the least of one's worries with this stuff (think Pixie dust, sweat, and tears, if you know what I mean). It's strong stuff.

And I do believe that is exactly why Abby has selected the vintage that she has (last weeks, the good stuff, the fresh stuff, once again, if you must know... or can't help yourself and read every aside I make, which it appears there shall be many). Anyway, I do believe Abby's thinking in

all this is that if Ned and the rest had enjoying the food as much as they had (which was a great deal), how much more would they enjoy a bit of wine? Especially after considering how long it's been since any of them enjoyed a glass of the stuff -- wine having precious little on your average run of the mill corpse. But then, a corpse that doesn't know it's a corpse, well, that's the sort of corpse (of the 'Mom' variety at least) that is probably sure to declare, "We don't drink," only adding the word, "Wine," after it's clear from Abby's incredulous looks that she doesn't understand. (Hadn't they just been drinking?)

Now, regularly, (a spell-free) Carol might have explained how, on account of their all having died in car crashes (and alcohol being such a contributing factor to so many of same) that they could no longer enjoy the stuff; but as it is, she merely says something about how it's morally wrong (to drink wine), something they just didn't do, and something Abby should not do either, especially considering, "You're not old enough."

Now, Abby can do strange things with her face at times. I don't even think it's magical. It just sort of happens. And 'What?' is up with her twisted features one might be saying right about now.

To which Carol might respond, "I don't know how you do it over there," wherever exactly there is (but somewhere on the other side, that's clear enough), "but over here, a person has to be twenty-one before they can drink."

And that settles that! Or would have, you know, if Abby wasn't Abby, and so insists, "I'm twice that," which is a terrible lie and wrong, but not in the way you might think.

"You're not forty-two," Carol insists, getting a little mad at this point, and suddenly remembering the crack Abby had made about how she wasn't all that good looking and wondering why Bob didn't have a few more wives. Of course, Abby had never made such a crack. (I did, off to the side). But magic works that way sometimes. (OK. Almost always, but that's exactly why you can't program it in advance -- one can never anticipate these misattributions -- or other glitches -- in advance.)

Anyway, back to the debate at hand, Abby has to agree, “No, not forty-two. Twenty-one, twenty-one,” she says again, which just sort of draw blank faces from her hosts. It being Carol’s turn to mimic her guest’s (Abby’s) prior look of confusion, leaving Abby to decipher this and try to explain what she means, “You know, that one where you take a square and add each of its sides...”

Which isn’t a very good description of what squaring a number is all about, but I guess fuzzy etiquette patterns are good training for something (fuzzy thinking and/or logic coming rapidly to mind), because in no time Ned is interrupting her and blurting out, “Four hundred and forty one,” solving the mathematical quandary before I even knew one existed.

But you can’t please all of the people all of the time or even some of the people some of the time, for Abby is quick to inquire, “Is that all? Maybe you have to square it again?”

“Nine-two-six-one,” Ned says enjoying the game. (He could do this all night.)

“No, that’s too much,” Abby concedes. “What would 868 be?”

“Almost, thirty squared,” Ned replies.

“So, OK. I’m almost thirty by thirty,” (or you know, would be if I was still alive), Abby says proudly.

“No, you’re not!” Carol begins; but then, she’s heard all the stories about Dwarves and Elves and the rest and how long they live; so instead, she says, “You don’t look like an elf?”

“I’m an Apprentice.”

“That’s what Ned said,” Carol recalls.

“I think she’s married to Wally, my Magic Teacher,” Ned offers as he jumps in once more.

“We’re not married!” (That’s Abby speaking just in case you didn’t recognize the sound of annoyance in her voice.)

A comment ignored by one and all, but especially Carol, as she says, “But you’re too young to be married.”

“I’m not too young. And I’m not married. I’m an Apprentice,” Abby explains once again.

“So, what does that mean?” Bob asks, quite reasonably. I mean, he wasn’t selected for advanced managerial training for nothing, you know.

“Um... it’s... I...”

“I think she looks after him,” Ned surmises for her, seeing as how it’s obvious that Abby isn’t going to get anywhere on her own.

“It’s more complicated than that,” Abby insists.

“But you’re always complaining about how all you ever do it clean up after him?”

To which Abby snaps her fingers and the table is cleared and the dishes put away, “It’s not like that takes much effort or time.”

“That’s handy,” Bob observes. “I’ll pay you five bucks to tidy up the lawn.”

And in a snap it’s done.

“A tenner to clean the garage?”

Snap!

“The attic...”

Snap! Snap! Snap!

There’s really no point in recounting the next few minutes, for (literaly) in a snap, it’s done.

Any-the-ways, while Abby is collecting her money (\$42.50, I believe in all; alas, it’s just imaginary paper script -- dollars, I believe they are called), Abby takes the opportunity to set the record straight vis-a-vie her relationship with Wally, “He’s a wizard. I’m an apprentice. You can’t have one without the other.” (Not technically true, but let’s just say the two tend to make better magic together than either would alone and leave it at that.)

“But do you have like little Wizards and Apprentices?” Carol finally asks, because, you know, she’s like interested, and truth be told, so am I, and didn’t someone say something about them being married before, which they aren’t, but that’s more because neither Wizards nor Wpprentice are the marrying type -- as you see, they have each other (so perhaps, I digress).

And this is likely all a little confusing, perhaps to Abby as much as anyone else. (I mean, it wouldn’t be the first time the one person who you would think would know something doesn’t know much about it at

all -- and if you start commenting about my graveyard here, I swear I will blast you.)

But whatever the case, all Abby can say regarding the possibility of her someday raising a brood of baby Wizards and Apprentices is, "I guess. I think. I mean, I don't know. I'm pretty sure most of us just have Dragons these days, you know, to save on the logistical difficulties. But he doesn't seem to want even that."

"Maybe he has commitment issues," Carol observes, which could just be right, Abby has to concede.

"I'm going to have to mention that. Thanks."

"Glad I could be of help."

"Oh, and I'm sorry I got a little flustered there."

"Happens to the best of us," it being Carol's turn to graciously concede. "Besides, who am I to say how old you are? If you want to be 842..."

"868," Abby corrects.

"Well, you are what you are. And you'll always be welcome in our house and at our table..."

"And, you know, next week when the grass needs trimming," Bob suggests, like only someone in middle management can.

"Um, thanks Mom, Dad."

"And now," with the business portion of our meal concluded, "What say we all take an evening stroll," Bob suggests. "Or, if you're not worn out from all that snapping," doing the dishes, mowing the lawn, and so forth, "maybe you'd like to go for an evening sortie."

"He's a World War Two buff," Ned explains. "I sort of told him about the flying we did the other night."

Needless to say, Abby quickly accents, saying, "I don't mind. I like watching you have a good time," that is, after all, why I brought the wine, "Though there is one thing you'll have to promise me in return."
(There's always the hitch, the rub, the catch.)

"Oh, what's that."

"If you see any Dragons, you'll have to tell me."

"It's a deal," Carol shouts from the hallway. "Just let me grab my scarf."

“I didn’t know we had any Dragons,” Bob says good-naturedly killing time as it were (aren’t we all), as he waits at the table for his wife to change. (I guess it was more than just a scarf that she needed.)

And at this point (as the scene is coming to a close and there really isn’t much else for Abby to say), why don’t we simply exit the chapter as Abby silently muses to herself, “I don’t know if there are any Dragons around here, either. But I’m hoping,” for that certain something, for the dream to come true, and to finally live the life.

Aren’t we all, Abby.

Aren’t we all.

{{{Chapter End}}}