

Star Bride

By Mary "Modesty" Stanish

Chapter 1: In Which a Prince gets his Inheritance

The parlor was emptied of mourning guests for the time being. They had found their way to food and drink where they could be distracted from their grief. It left him alone with the casket where lay the man he had once called 'Father'. It had been many years since he uttered that title. He had not the chance to call out to his father in fifteen years. There was little care or feeling left for the person that now slept for eternity. Needless to say, there was still bitter tension between the father and son. He had not yet forgiven the man for leaving him behind and subjecting his mother to grief.

He carefully paced with a dignified air around the casket half-tempted to begin talking to the corpse. It would do no good. Those ears were deaf to any voice of the living. It was an uncomfortable dissatisfaction.

"Excuse me, your majesty," came a taut, thin voice. He turned his gaze to the owner of the voice, a woman that was as taut and thin as she sounded.

"What do you want?" he responded without any regard to good manners or gentle tongue.

The woman stood up straighter, but kept her severe expression, "My condolences for your loss, dear prince. There is a matter I must discuss with you that is of the utmost importance."

The prince glanced lividly at the corpse and met the woman's gaze with an equally impatient look.

"What could this matter be? Does my father leave another debt to me? I can assure you, this is not the first request, Madame. So I ask that you make this a brief telling and get out of my sight before I lose my patience," he smiled darkly.

The woman faltered only for the slightest of moments.

"Your highness, your father owes nothing for the services of my school. He had paid in full. However, since he is no longer alive, he is no longer able to continue paying the tuition unless his highness, in his great generosity wishes to pay in his stead."

"What is this nonsense you speak of? For what need do I have to pay a school tuition? I do not attend school anymore."

At this response the woman became astonished.

"He never told you?"

"My father last spoke to me when I was but ten years old. He has told

me nothing. Am I to assume, based on your reaction, that I have an illegitimate sibling?"

The woman bowed her head, "Forgive me for jumping to conclusions, your highness. You have a sister. She has no other living relatives. Your name was the only one on record. For the past several years, I've had the delight of being her instructor at Morning Glory Boarding School for Girls. If you wish for her to stay there then..."

"Please," the prince cut her off. "I would love to meet this mysterious sibling of mine."

The woman nodded and excused herself. The prince turned to the body once more with a sinister smirk. "A sister. You roving bastard. I am sure your will leaves me with more surprises."

The door opened once more to reveal the woman followed by a young girl with light, golden curls and the strangest violet eyes. She was dressed in a blue velvet coat topped with a blue hat and matching blue handbag. Upon first glance, the prince thought that she looked very much like a porcelain doll. She looked nothing like his father in any way, which for the girl's sake was to her advantage.

The prince faced her with a stern, scrutinizing stare.

"Your Highness, this is your sister, Eris. Eris, this is your brother, Prince Donovan."

"How do you do?" Eris greeted in a sweet voice accompanied with an elegant curtsy.

Donovan bowed his head slightly towards her, "Miss Eris, it is a pleasure to finally meet you."

Eris looked past Donovan at the casket with an eager expression. She glanced up to her teacher as if for advice.

"You may go to him," the teacher encouraged.

In a flurry of curls and coat, Eris charged past Donovan and up to the casket in tears.

"Daddy! You promised you'd come get me!" she shouted hysterically at the corpse, shaking the casket.

The teacher moved to calm her, but Donovan held up his hand to prevent her.

"Let her grieve however she sees fit, Madame. Your work is done. Please leave her things here, I will take care of her until I can find someone more suitable. You may leave now," he commanded with a dark smile.

The woman bowed and left the siblings.

Donovan turned his attention to his now sobbing illegitimate sister. With his hand held behind his back, he approached the casket once

more. Several of the arranged flowers were now in disarray and the body looked unsettled. He rested his hand on Eris's back and clucked his tongue sympathetically.

"Poor, little Eris. Tell me, how old are you?"

"T-twelve," Eris hiccuped in reply.

"So young," Donovan sighed. "Tell me, who was your mother?"

"Sh-she's a star. I don't know where she is. Daddy said he would come get me."

"Of course he did...but he had a funny habit of not keeping his promises. That is, as you may well know, how he met his end."

This caused Eris to erupt into renewed wails which Donovan sadistically drank in.

After the funeral, Donovan sent Eris off in the care of a neighbor. He would have to deal with her later. Now, he had to stay and wait for the lawyer to arrive.

In the study of an old friend, Donovan waited with two companions who had also been summoned. One was his cousin, Crown Prince Barnabas, the son of the king. He was a tall, blonde man with a rather long nose set with spectacles. Donovan, surprisingly, had no ill feelings towards his cousin. It was Donovan's father's folly that allowed for Barnabas's father to obtain the throne. However, Barnabas was a clever man and a devious man who had often pitied his cousin's plight and came to his rescue.

Barnabas sat in an tall, leather chair swirling a glass of red wine idly while drinking in the contents of the room.

The other companion was a foreign man, Jamayan the Magi. He was a well-learned friend of Donovan's father. However, the two had a falling out around the time Donovan's father left. He remembered the older man visiting often to try and console his mother. His now grey hair was hidden under wrappings of clothe. His skin was sun-soaked and leathery with age. He was pulling at the ends of his thick beard and checking a pocketwatch with strange symbols.

Donovan continued to pace around with measured steps, occasionally sipping at the wine. No one had spoken for a stretch of minutes, but they were all thinking about the same thing. What would the will leave behind? Donovan feared ill news related to this matter, so he was ready to have it over and done with.

Jamayan cleared his throat. He stuffed his pocketwatch into his cloaks and announced, "He's here."

Moments after Jamayan uttered this, the door to the study parted. The lawyer marched in stiffly with his briefcase. With a noisy sniff, he set it on the desk and flipped open the latches. He did not open it right away

but looked meaningfully at the three men.

"You are the three summoned for the reading of the will?" the lawyer asked in a stringy tone.

Barnabas smiled and filled an empty glass with wine. He offered it to the lawyer out of courtesy. The lawyer accepted and sniffed the glass before sipping.

"Yes, that's quite nice," he remarked setting it on the desk beside the briefcase. "Shall we get started?"

There was no need for further permission, the lawyer opened the briefcase and removed the leather-bound folder that contained the will. Donovan fidgeted while the lawyer thumbed through the parchments with an aching slow pace.

"Ah here we go. Now...who is Sir Barnabas Longfellow?"

Barnabas lifted his glass to acknowledge his name.

The lawyer read the short cloud of text that described what had been left behind for Barnabas.

"To my dear nephew, who must one day bear the weight of a crown, I leave to you my enchanted sword and a portion of my wealth amounting to five thousand crowns."

"An enchanted sword?" Barnabas repeated quizzically. "What would I do with that?"

The lawyer ignored his question and read on, "To my dearest and wisest friend Jamayan. You have been my greatest companion on many an adventure and in my age I realize I had left you with many shortcomings. To you I leave my summer cottage which housed our old laboratory and library. I also leave a portion of my wealth amounting to two thousand crowns to help fund whatever you wish to study next."

Jamayan grunted with satisfaction and swallowed a large gulp of wine.

"To my son, Donovan Longfellow, I fear I have very little left to give you as has been true for most of your life. I entrust to your care your youngest sister and leave the both of you my remaining wealth amounting to seventy thousand crowns. I also leave you my estate where I hope you and your sister Eris can live in reasonable comfort."

Donovan released his breath. The blow had not been as poor as he expected. He already lived and owned his father's estate thanks to Barnabas. The sum of money left to him, however, was astronomical compared to what he expected.

The lawyer shut the folder and pulled out the checks from the briefcase. With a bow, he left.

"Well, well," Barnabas began, swirling his glass again. "I'd say that went a bit better than expected. Congratulations Donovan."

"It's enough to pay off some of his debts he also left to me," Donovan said bitterly.

"It is an interesting set of gifts to give. I wonder what he meant by them," Jamayan said with a knowing tone. The two younger men looked at him curiously.

"I think I better explain my idea after a bit of research," he yawned.

"I'd like to see the state of the old place and test my theory before wasting your time."

"Please give us a taste of what you are thinking," Barnabas pleaded.

Jamayan smiled, "By now you should know of a little secret. Your father stole a star and I think he wants us to as well."

"Steal a star?" Donovan asked quizzically.

"Yes, but I need to do some research first. I will send a letter to you when I have learned more."

The elder rose from his seat, took his check and with a swirl of cloak left the study.

"The old babler may have an interesting prospect," Barnabas said, retrieving his check. "I have heard rumors about these stars. Yes...it would be nice."

"What are you talking about?"

"There's business in it now. Capturing star brides. We've been having a bit of problem with them in the capitol. There's a witch who has gotten very good at it. So good in fact she has a hand in almost every pocket of any businessman and nobleman worth his salt."

"What would I want with a star bride?" Donovan retorted.

"They are much better than ordinary women," Barnabas exclaimed almost madly. "They stay young and beautiful. They're perfectly faithful and obedient. You can cheat on them and they won't leave you. They work without complaint and...and they're just gorgeous! Don't tell me you have never seen one?"

Donovan raised his eyebrows, surprised at his cousin's outburst.

Usually Barnabas was calm and collected. It was clear that his cousin had his heart set on marrying a star.

"It's an interesting prospect. Honestly Barney, I'm surprised that you would waste a fortune on one of these Star Brides."

"You know I'm intended to some foreign noble. It would make my life more bearable."

"I do not envy your wife," Donovan said curtly.

Barnabas glared, but his expression soften, "I can understand your feelings toward them may be tarnished. But think of your sister. Her mother was a star. Wouldn't it be nice to have a star look after her. You wouldn't have to marry the star."

"Still, it seems rather over-priced for a nursemaid."

"Well you can sell them both off as brides if it's money you're worried

about," Barnabas said wryly.

Donovan shot him a dark look.

"Well, in any case, it's just something we're thinking about. Jamayan may have a plan to get one without paying that over-priced witch," Barnabas said heading for the door.

He paused at the threshold and said, "You know Donny, I'd hate to think of you brooding over this and dying alone. You should find a filly to court."

While returning to the neighbor's house to pick up Eris, Donovan thought carefully about the proposition that his companions had set forth. After settling the debts, there was probably still enough left over to marry. Granted it would not be a fancy wedding, but a woman with a decent enough dowry would balance things out. There was no need for a Starry Bride or what have you.

A shrill shriek met Donovan's ears as he approached the neighbor's house. It was a mix of a child's screaming and an adult losing her wits. Donovan quickened his pace and rang the doorbell. A frayed butler answered the door, practically dragging Donovan inside.

"I will fetch the young princess at once," he announced without offering to take Donovan's coat or hat.

It took two adults to drag Eris to the door. Her face was nearly purple with the power of her yells. Donovan had never seen a mouth so large on a small girl. Against her will she was forced back into her coat and shoved into Donovan.

"Her ladyship says you owe her a debt for household damages," the butler shouted over the din.

Donovan could only nod and pull his sister out the door and into the carriage.

"Will you stop that shouting at once!" Donovan demanded once they were both in the carriage.

"I want my mommy! I want my daddy!" Eris shouted and punched Donovan in the arm.

Eris kicked and screamed all the way back to the estate. When she had seen the house, she calmed down a little. She seemed to have recognized it. Excitedly she ran with her bag through the gates and into the main hall.

She looked to the left and then to the right, before the smile disappeared from her face and she began her tantrum again.

"Where does she find the energy?" Donovan groaned. "What do you WANT? Can you not speak like a decent human?"

Eris sniffled and turned smartly to face him. "Mommy's not dead. I

want mommy. Where is she? She needs to take care of me!”

“Your mother is a star, is she not?”

“Yes...Mommy is a shining star. She promised to always look out for me. So where is she now?”

“I...I don’t know.”

Eris’ face began to crumple and turn red. Donovan feared that she would burst.

“Hey now...none of that. I tell you what. Some of my friends are trying to find a star for themselves. If you’d like, I will see if they can look for your mother. BUT,” Donovan held up a finger. “You can not break anything in this house. You must remain on your best behavior. Do we have an understanding?”

Eris nodded and put on a sweet, angelic expression before skipping away.

Donovan collapsed into an easy chair and rubbed his temples. This was a disaster. There was no way he would be able to afford a marriage at this rate. Perhaps it would be best to just marry a star to make Eris happy.

Chapter 2: In Which a Girl Finds a Job

For two days, Donovan shut himself in a study going over the long lists of debts with his accountant. So far, Eris had kept her promise of being well-behaved. She occupied herself by exploring the estate which was large enough to keep her occupied for about three days.

On the third day, Eris had sufficed her curiosity about the estate and now desired a playmate. Donovan ordered various members of the servants to care for her. However, this led to the loss of a gardener, a stable boy, and two maids. Deciding it was best not to further risk the loss of staff, Donovan arranged to hire a nanny for Eris.

This of course turned out to be a more difficult process than anticipated. Donovan’s accountant suggested a budget to spend on Eris’ needs. They could only pay a minimum wage for a nanny. It was not a problem finding available nannies, in fact there seemed to be a surplus of them in Capitol. Reliability and effectiveness were the key factors. Donovan learned that nannies over forty did not have the energy to keep up with Eris. Nannies in their teenage years did not have the sensibility to keep a close eye on Eris. What probably made things worse is that the nannies seemed to have a gossip chain so every potential employee knew about Donovan and his Eris.

The poor Prince was growing desperate so he wrote an urgent letter to

Jamayan for advice.

She was unceremoniously rolled off the cart and onto a street corner. Shortly after, her bag was heaped on top of her. The men from the cart called many warnings at her mostly filled with unholy language. The cart rolled away carrying the cursing men with it. The girl tipped back her straw hat and grinned after them.

"Just where I wanted to be," she said, dusting herself off. Traveling nowadays was difficult and quite expensive. If you did not have the money then you had to be creative. She now stood in the capitol city of the country of Gerth.

Gerth was a small to medium sized country. It's capitol city was simply referred to as Capitol. It had a name but no one bothered to call it by its true name. It was named after an old king with a reputation which by the modern morals was no longer honorable. The government, which consisted of a king and his council, managed things from here. It was convenient since Capitol was in the middle of the whole country. In the olden days, when kings ruled without a council, there used to be a dark castle. Black was more intimidating. For these new modern times, it simply looked out of place. The old Black Castle was torn down and the modern king built a new castle that also doubled as an art gallery. During the summer, when the king felt it was more effective to run the government from the beach, the public was invited to tour the halls and gardens to admire art. For a small fee of course. However, despite the best efforts of these modern times of brick streets, electric lamps, and town houses, one black tower remained of the old castle. It was said it was because of the witch who lived there. That was true. Rumor has it that the old hag had been there since the black castle was first built. That however, was not really true.

Capitol was the most modern city. One or two other towns were pretty modern. One of them had a factory. However, a majority of Gerth was pretty set in the old ways. The country was speckled with farming villages like a teenager with bad acne.

One thing that all the people of Gerth held in common, despite how modern some citizens became, they all believed in the Myths. This could range from old wives tales to fairies. Most people were pretty much agreed that there was only one God, although there were debates for there to be no god. No one really believed them. The one God created many strange things to make life more interesting. That's

what the Myths were, God's "spice" for the world. Pixies, Fairies, and Sprites were common sights in the countryside. Myths tend not to like big cities, except for vampires and werewolves. They really weren't much different than the human population, except for a few personality traits that tend to be considered poor manners in society.

"Now where's the time?" she muttered fishing around her bag. She pulled out a pocketwatch with odd symbols on it.

"Ah yes, this is the place all right. Now...where to first? Oh I know, let's get a bite to eat. Can't very well job-hunt on an empty stomach."

She gathered her bag and marched along the street towards a sweets shop.

While she was inspecting the rows of sugar coated delight, she heard the word 'pixie'. Her ear twitched. The very ears that would probably suggest a non-human pedigree. They were not pointed ears, or so she thought, but they were SHARP ears and that's how they were different.

"Oy! Yer a pixie ain't yeh?" said a newspaper boy, his face still flecked with leftovers of a delicious treat.

"That's my business. It's very rude to address a lady like that, young man," she shot back.

"So yeh are a pixie."

She sighed and turned back towards the rows of sweets.

"I can't sell cakes to the likes of you," the baker said. "Don't want you stealing any of my kin".

"Well how rude! I am a paying customer, how dare you treat me with such disrespect."

"Sorry. But you have the features of a pixie," the baker said.

"Ohhh...I'm only HALF pixie," she shouted and left the shop in a huff.

"Same here too it seems. People still scared of the folk tales. What utter nonsense! And I thought the education would be better here.

Oh...perhaps I'll have more luck at the soda fountain. No one will accuse me of luring children to the Fairy Kingdom with soda."

She managed to get a soda and sweets, but she was shooed out quickly. She gazed at her reflection in the mirrored window and wondered what really gave her away. She tucked the sharp ears under her hair. But strands of that rust red hair seemed never to want to stay in place. They were as wild and free as her mother's pixie spirit.

The mother that had left as soon as she was born. The mother that refused to be bound to one man for long. That was a pixie's spirit. It

was not to be bound by laws of man or held by men for very long. It was her own father's fault for cavorting with her anyway. He had given her the name Izetta, but found calling her Zetta was easier.

Zetta stayed faithfully with her father, but was apt to do things that

were more "free-spirited" than most other daughters. Such as what she was doing now. She had left a letter back at home explaining to her father that she had set off to find her fortune, but not to worry because if she did not find it she would come back home. She had also remembered to include in the letter a list of things she had taken, such as the pocketwatch, the straw hat, the travel dress, a coat, and boy's trousers just in case she needed to do something dangerous. She was certain that her father would still be upset but after he received another letter he might calm down.

Zetta fumbled through her bag again and pulled out a nub of pencil and scrap of paper. She wrote a letter explaining that she had arrived safely and would start looking for a job and a promise to send back a little bit of money to help out the farm. She folded the paper neatly and set off to find the Post Office.

The Post Office was a tightly contained space. The front of the office was about the size of a sidewalk which forced many people to wait outside the office to send their mail. Zetta passed the time in line sucking on the sugar marbles she had bought at the soda shop. She managed to make it to the clerk's desk before the office closed. The clerk looked over the letter and found an envelope suitable for it and asked for the address to send it to.

"Mr. Zacheas Wintry, green farm house down the south lane from Piggsworth Village on the edge of Gerth Kingdom," Zetta answered. That was how one gave an address to a house with no numbers out in the countryside. City addresses are much shorter. The clerk sighed and neatly penned the address on the envelope.

"That'll be 1 bronze crown and 3 halves leaflets," the clerk announced. Zetta hunted around her bag for her loose change. While doing so, she received a bump along her arm that sent her sideways a bit. Luckily she kept her balance, but her bag did not. The bag welcomed the ground with a clatter and its various contents spilled on the floor.

"I need to send an urgent message to a friend," said the man who had bumped her.

"Excuse me!" Zetta announced with her hands on her hips and her bag at her feet. "How could you knock a young woman aside like that? You've made me loose my marbles. Costs 20 leaflets you know."

"Terribly sorry, but I'm in a rush."

"Aren't we all?" Zetta shot back.

The clerk during this exchange became quite pale and started making funny faces. Zetta noticed this and exchanged glances between the clerk and the man.

"Miss..." the clerk sputtered. "It's the prince."

Zetta raised an eyebrow. She looked at the man critically.

"Well, if he's a prince, he'd have better manners. Pushing a lady without an apology. If he'd but ask I would have moved aside while fishing for me change. Prince or not, everyone needs to be decent to people. Then we'll all be getting along just fine."

The man returned to his business and rattled off an address.

The clerk muttered the price.

The man placed a large gold coin on the desk.

"This should cover the price of the young lady's letter as well."

Zetta felt her lower jaw slacken so that it hung loosely. It was not a very lady-like expression and when she remembered this she reminded her jaw to keep tight.

"Awful kind of you sir," she managed to say.

"Not a problem...may I ask where you are from?" the man said looking at the contents of the bag that were on the floor.

"You may ask. I would answer "out of town"," Zetta replied.

"I see," said the man picking up a few of Zetta's belongings off the floor.

"May I ask your business here in Capitol?"

"Again you may and I would answer, job hunting," Zetta said with a crafty smirk. With a sweeping hand she gathered the bags contents back inside and got to her feet.

"Now you have asked me two questions, if I may I have two. Are you really the prince and why are you asking so many questions of me?"

"I am Prince Donovan. Merely a noble's title, I do not have any throne to inherit. And I ask your business because I have a job to offer,"

Donovan replied with a hopeful expression.

"Oh," replied Zetta, not terribly impressed. "I've asked my two questions already so I am assuming you will tell me about this job you have to offer."

Donovan motioned towards the door, "I am in need of a nanny for my younger sister...so far the nannies that I have hired have not been suitable enough. Do you have experience caring for children?"

"Oh, interviewing me now...that's promising. Aye, I took care of several children. And I don't mean I've "taken care" of them," Zetta clarified by making a slicing motion around her neck.

Donovan smirked a bit, "Very well. May I ask your name and age?"

"You don't have to ask permission to ask me a question every time. It wastes words," Zetta said. "My name's Izetta Wintry. Everyone just calls me Zetta and I would recommend you do the same or I won't realize you're talking to me. And why would you ask my age? It's a rude question ask a lady."

"Perhaps, but for this job there is an age requirement. My sister is... high spirited. As I have learned through the several nannies we have already gone through, someone too young does not have the proper sense to keep her out of trouble. Someone too old does not have the energy to keep up. To make it simple, are you over twenty and under thirty-five?"

"Aye...somewhere between that. You can sit me at twenty-five if you like," Zetta grinned. bride

"Very well. Have you been involved in crime?"

"Who told you about that?" Zetta gasped.

Donovan turned to her with a surprised expression.

Zetta's face broke into mirth. Which means she laughed at him.

"Petty crimes with local farm boys that's all. Stealing pies from windows and the sorts of things that children do to get into trouble," Zetta clarified.

"You seem to have a bit of spirit yourself. That's good. I can offer you the job of taking care of my sister, Eris."

"That's a pretty name," Zetta commented.

"Yes. She has a pretty face to go with it...when it's not red from screaming. She's about twelve now..."

"Twelve! Isn't that a little old for a nanny. Perhaps a governess but a nanny?"

"Please...let me finish. I can provide you with room and board. Perhaps a few clothes as well. You will be given a weekly allowance of two silver crowns. Does that suit you?"

"Oh aye. Suits me fine. When do I start?"

"Immediately," Donovan said, seizing her arm and dragging her over to a red and white carriage.

Zetta normally would have complained about the rough treatment but resting her feet sounded good. However, she began to worry if she would lose the job if he found out she was part pixie.

The carriage rolled forward, carrying them off.

Zetta, during the carriage ride played with string to occupy herself. Or so it would seem. Really she was observing Donovan with a scrutinizing eye. His skin was terribly pale and his hair dark with loose curls. It was his eyes that worried her a bit. They were red. Not the kind of red from someone who has not had enough sleep, although they were bloodshot. The color of his eyes was red. Not rust brown, but true red. Zetta knew a few creatures that had red eyes and they were not pleasant. However, all things considered, he was not unfortunate looking. A few good night's of sleep and warm meals and walks in the sun might make a difference.

Keep steady, Zetta. You got to keep your wits about you, she told herself as her hair began to fray. Strands of her hair tended to do that and act with a mind of their own. Zetta always supposed it was her mother's spirit reacting to a situation. She could consult her hair about a few things at least.

The carriage pulled around the front of the estate. Zetta pretended not to be impressed. It would look bad to her employer if she gawked too much. Donovan looked up from the papers in the folder he had been reading once he realized the carriage had stopped.

"Oh we're here. Mind your step," he commented.

Zetta minded the step, "It's a nice house on the outside."

"What? Oh yes, thank you. The insides not too bad either. It's only..."

The prince's sentence was left unfinished because it was interrupted by a horrific crashing. Zetta watched the prince's face droop with an 'Oh not again' sort of expression.

"Eris?" Zetta asked with a wry smile.

"Eris," Donovan sighed.

He was terribly depressed about this. Zetta almost pitied him.

However, men were pretty helpless when it came to young girls. She knew that. She learned that from her father, who was pretty hopeless at raising her.

"Now is as good a time as any to meet her," Zetta reassured the prince who seemed to be debating.

Donovan moved quickly into the house to find the source of trouble. Zetta followed close behind, stealing glances at the various decorations in the house. The calamity originated in the kitchen which had become a room of chaos. Dishware and liquids littered the floor. The cook was in tears and threatened to leave at once. Eris was looking surprisingly innocent, sitting at the table with her hands folded neatly and her lips pursed tightly.

"Eris, what have you done now?" Donovan demanded impatiently.

"You always assume it's MY fault because I'm your HALF sister."

"Generally, it's safe to assume it IS your fault because of your actions since you have lived in my house."

"If you don't want me here then send me off to Boarding School," Eris snapped back crossing her arms over her chest.

Zetta wondered when it would be good to butt in. The tension of the room was thickening and she could see why nannies had not stayed very long already.

The two half-siblings glared at each other for a stretch of time before Donovan gruffly introduced Zetta to Eris.

"How do you do?" Zetta smiled uncomfortably.

"Where did you find her? In a gutter? She smells like pigs...no worse. She smells like the waste of pigs."

"Must be from the family hog. He is rather repugnant," Zetta replied, disregarding any insult.

"I will leave you two to get better acquainted. The lady of the house can show you to your room if you wish to unpack."

"That'd be awful nice, but I only got the one bag," she said tossing it to him.

He fumbled to catch it and sighed. Without a word he took it away to the room.

"He's well trained," Zetta sighed to herself and folded her arms. "So what happened to breakfast?" she commented looking at the floor.

"The same that will happen to you if you cross me," Eris said sharply. The girl marched out of the room in a huff. Zetta could only stand blankly and look to the disgruntled cook.

"Ought to sell that tripe to the slavers or the witch. No use in a brat like that. I commend you for taking the job miss, but won't be long until you're running out the door."

"I don't run out of doors unless they are opened," Zetta said cryptically. Zetta removed her hat and undid the bun her hair was in. "I earnestly pray you can help, but Eris is right about one thing. You aren't very pleasant smelling."

"Eh...can't argue with you there. Wouldn't mind a bath."

"You'll find a few over near where you'll stay."

After washing and redressing, Zetta surveyed the room. It was much bigger than the one at home. This would do nicely. The closet was full of clothes that had been left behind by previous owners of the room. Zetta rummaged through her bag and found a couple left over candy marbles. She was going to reintroduce herself to Eris.

"All right Zetta, let's show `em what you're made of."