



NOT YETI

A Never Realm Tale

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I was once a student of the mystic arts. I lived in a pampered world of luxuries. But I was not legitimately a student. Officially I had other duties. I was one of the luxuries. At the beck and call of others ... to pamper *them*. Cater to their every whim. It was pleasant enough surrounding, but even a jewel-encrusted cage is still a cage. When we were left alone, another girl and I bribed our way into the library to read the books on the arts and learn. It was through the mystic arts we hoped to make our escape. One of the books described a method to cast a spell to move someone from one place to another ... in the blink of an eye. Only later did I learn some slaves are not allies, but rivals. She had me cast into the dungeons, hands shackled behind my back. In the darkness and gloom of the dungeon, I lost all that I had left. She left me nothing to bargain with as men could take what they wanted from me at any time.

When I saw her creeping down the stairs, I thought she had seen the error of her ways and was about to release me from my torments. How could she not have pity? Yet, she was not an unwilling captive at all but found herself drawn to one of our owners. She blithely announced I was in the way. Could there be any more malice anywhere but in the heart of a jealous rival? Imagine my horror to find she intended to use me only as a test subject for the spell. She filled the room with red and blue smoke from a brazier. Yellow-gold glowing letters appeared on the wall. They cast a gilded light on the floor. Then there was nothing but white.

The world about me was a frozen landscape of snow and ice. I should have been angry and thrusting for revenge, but there was the whole matter of survival. Even though I grew up in the cold vastness of the fabled Ice Peaks, I was not prepared. You can survive almost anywhere if you are prepared. I would not last long here. It was so cold the snow had turned to hardened ice. I cast my eyes about in desperation. Through the snowfall, I could see some kind of dome-shaped hut. Seeing no other venue, I ran toward it. The wind bit at my exposed skin like a rabid dog.

As I approached, I noticed the hut seemed made from thick strips bark. They must have been carried a long way. There wasn't a tree in sight. The door was a ramshackle affair. Normally it wouldn't have presented a problem, but when your hands are shackled behind your back, it makes the effort unusually difficult. Desperation lent a hand and at last, I was able to get through the portal. Closing the entrance behind me, I was pleased to see a roaring fire heating the place.

My pleasure at my good fortune only lasted until I panicked. The fire meant someone lived here and would probably soon be returning. In my current state ... well, it presented somewhat of a problem. Yet, there seemed to be little choice. Remaining outside was out of the question but staying inside seemed a prospect littered with equal risks.

When the door opened again, I screamed. What wandered in was more of a nightmare than I cared to imagine. It was tall, perhaps seven or even eight feet in height. From head to toe, it was covered in white fur. Only its crystal ice blue eyes showed any color at all. The dreadfulness of those eyes was beyond measure. They seemed to exist without a soul. Now, I realize the worst thing for me to do in this situation would be to faint ... which is exactly what I did.

When I came to, I was sitting, propped up by the fire and the white creature was crouching across from me. His lips curled. "Are you going to scream again? I must say you're a loud one."

I could feel the blood rushing from my face. "You speak?"

The creature scowled. "That's a fine how-do-you-do. Break into my house and defame my character. Not very polite if you ask me. I admit I'm a bit out of practice in the art of conversation, but it doesn't seem worthy of genuine hostility."

For the next several minutes I was at a loss for words. The gentle voice didn't seem to belong to the rough creature who, even kneeling, towered over me. As time appeared to drag by, I noticed his face ... which at first had a horrifying countenance to it ... now seemed somehow sad. I tried to adopt a gentler tone. "I seem to be ... well ... could you help me to remove these chains?"

He grumbled. "Did you bring the key?"

I'm afraid I got a bit testy. "Does it look like I am hiding a key on my person?"

He was quick to gripe back in return. "Do you see blacksmith tools lying about? How do you expect me to remove iron chains?"

"Use your strength, you big oaf. Just look at the size of you. A monster such as yourself should have no difficulty rending a blacksmith's toy."

The hair above his lip curled. "Back to the insults, are we?" He pointed at the entrance. "There is the door. Feel free to avail yourself of it at any time."

"My apologies," I muttered. "I've been having a bit of a day. Let's start again. My name is Loni."

"Jengahl."

"I'm sorry. I don't understand. Are you saying something in your language?"

"Jengahl ... it's my name."

"I see." I found myself searching for the right words. "Would you do me the honor of helping me regain my freedom?"

He turned to the fire and pushed around the embers with the end of a stick. "I'm afraid it wouldn't be wise. It's true I have the strength of more than mere men, but I'd be much more likely to break your wrists than to have any effect on those irons you wear."

I was desperate. "Perhaps you could help with some clothes then?"

His frown returned. "As you can see for yourself, I carry all the clothes I possess." Jengahl ran his hands over his white fur. "I'd share, but I'm afraid they are not removable."

"Is there anything you can do to help me out?"

Jengahl pulled out a massive cauldron from behind the fire. I had not seen it before. He gazed at me with those cold, icy eyes. "I was planning on inviting you to dinner." He remarked in a low guttural tone.

"Oh, no!" I screamed. "You're going to eat me!"

"Well ... now that you mention it ... no." There was a wry smile between his cheeks. "As I was saying, I'm hungry; would you like to join me for dinner. I have a nice soup on the fire." I backpaddled away from him as he glared at me. "Perhaps it would help if you knew that yetis are herbivores."

I gave him a clueless glance.

“It means we only eat plants.”

“Oh,” I remarked, ceasing my back peddling. “I think eating might be difficult with my hands chained behind my back.”

Jengahl picked up a wooden spoon from the floor and dipped it in the soup. Then he held it up in front of my face. He kept one hand under the spoon, to keep the dripping hot soup from burning me. “I guess I have to feed you then.”

I didn’t open my mouth. “Believe me, it’s just as distasteful for me as it is for you.”

I finally opened my mouth. The soup was surprisingly tasty if a bit hot. We ate for a time. Jengahl taking one spoonful and I the next. “Do you live here alone?” I managed to ask between bites.

“Mostly.” Jengahl grinned. “I do have house guests from time to time. Oh, and on Wednesdays, we have a big party. All the local yeti drop by.”

I gave him quite the look.

“Sorry. I was trying to be amusing.” he paused and looked away. “You don’t generally live out here for sizzling repartee.”

“I must be lonely,” I remarked.

His eyes lost their sparkle. The light from within faded. “Conditions would have to improve for it to be merely lonely.”

We spend the rest of the meal in silence. It occurred to me, the reason why he was keeping me in chains was its ability to keep me from leaving. I felt bad for the creature. After all, it must be a private hell in this snowy wilderness. Yet, I wasn’t fond of the idea of him keeping me prisoner to alleviate his boredom. He seemed to be able to read my thoughts from my expressions. “Tomorrow,” Jengahl remarked, “I’ll make a journey to the nearest town. It will take some time before I can return. If there is a blacksmiths shop, I’ll see if I can scare them off and get away with the appropriate tools to release you.”

“Do all yeti know of such things?”

He frowned again. “Best not to ask too many questions. We yeti are a secretive lot.”

We lapsed into silence. I was uncomfortable with his eyes on me. Their gaze a quality to them which sent a shiver down my spine. At last, I could hold back no longer. “How long will you be gone?”

“It’s six maybe eight weeks journey to the nearest human settlement. Depending on the weather,” he explained. “Then the same amount in return.”

He saw I was glum at the prospect. My chances of survival in this place alone for up to three months or more was problematical at best. I have no way to collect food, nor to add wood to the fire. I couldn’t determine for myself if starvation or freezing would be my preferred alternative. “There is another solution,” he remarked. “But you won’t like it.”

“Oh?”

“It has a bit of permanence to it.” His face became twisted. “You’d have to find a practitioner of sorcery to undo it.”

My spirits perked up at once. “I might know a few of those. What do you have in mind?”

“You could come with me.”

I could see the reflection of my perplexed look in his eyes. “It might be somewhat uncomfortable to make such a journey in my present attire,” I explained casually.

He strode over to a corner and pulled out a horn that must have come from an animal. It had been hollowed out to form a drinking cup. Jengahl extended one hand. Dagger-like claws flashed from the ends of his fingers. I’m afraid I couldn’t hide my expression. He turned his back to me. I could hear the sounds of something tearing. It was a dreadful sound. The kind of thing one hears in the kitchens when they are slaughtering a lamb.

He turned to face me at last and held forth the cup. “Drink this.”

I let my hands peak around my back and wave to him. I could see he gathered my unspoken meaning. It would be difficult to empty a cup in this position, much less grasp it with any appropriate effect. He put the cup to my lips and poured. I couldn’t see the contents. I had a sweet taste to it, but with a metallic aftertaste. As if the horn was not grown from an animal but made of copper.

As he took the drinking vessel away, I spotted a long tear in his arm. Blood was slowly dripping down Jengahl’s white fur. I felt a strange tingling. As if I had been sitting on my leg for too long. I glanced over at Jengahl. He seemed to have shrunk from his former size. It was only when I glanced down did I reach an understanding of what had transpired. I too was now covered in a glorious white fur.

I stood up and Jengahl joined me. I stretched my arms wide. The chains fell away. They might as well have been made from paper. I rubbed my chin and wrists. They too were covered in fur.

Jengahl snorted. “We can leave in the morning. We should get some rest first. It’s a long journey.”

I smiled back at him. “Perhaps we could stay ... for a day or two.”