

Chapter 2

After a few exchanges, Colin felt spent. As a former soldier he rarely have mental exhaustion. After all, he was trained to deal with stressed battlefield and dangerous mission. However, this female elf was the first mission that he felt tiresome. In just 2 hours after meeting her Colin concluded that she talk a lot, tend to detract a lot, making dirty joke a lot, quite clumsy and very unguarded toward stranger. Right now, Colin and the female elf somehow manage to come to an agreement that the need to get to the nearest settlement, Aomori Town.

“Hey greeny, my name is Lunaria,” said the female elf as she introduce herself. “What’s your name?”

“...” Colin try to ignore her while maintaining his straight face. The last thing he needed was an extra luggage that will attached to him. He was pondering on his option after he reach the village, should he ditch this girl and go a separate way or remain together.

“Come on, gimme your name,” insisted Lunaria.

Couldn’t held his position after getting more bombardment, Colin gave his answer, “it’s Colin. Colin Anthony Burke.”

“I see, that’s a long name. Which part is your your name? The Colin, the Anthony or the Burke?”

“The Colin one. That is my name. Burke is my family name and the Anthony is my middle name.”

“Is it normal for your kind to have a long name?”

“I don’t know. Maybe? Never actually have thought of it.”

“Really, so Mr. Colin where you’re from?” Asked Lunaria again.

Knowing that she will keep nagging for an answer, Colin just give a straight answer, “I’m from Texas, Miss Lunaria.”

“Hehehe, no need to be so formal. Just call me Luna. Can I just call you Colin?”

“Alright, Luna.”

“Texas, huh. Never heard of it. You know you are the first Orc that I meet.”

“Really, so where are the other of this ‘orc’ race?” Colin asked back.

“Most of them are either serving as a mercenaries in an army, become a bodyguard or just stayed at their tribe secluded from the civilized world. That’s from what I read,” answered Luna. This is the first time in their conversation that Colin actually give a question and Luna answered it.

Colin controlled his paces so that he matched Luna stride. He estimated that being around 147 cm, Luna was quite a small stature girl.

“So Colin, from which tribe you come from?” Luna continued.

“I’m not sure. Can’t remember it,” Colin answered. He look at the sky and notice that it is almost dusk.

“Really? It’s a shame. I wish to learn more about your kind.” Luna answered.

“I’m sorry. However, I’m much more concerned with your unguarded attitude, Luna. You should be more careful around a stranger like me. Sooner or later, you are going to get yourself into trouble,” said Colin.

“When that happened, please protect me-uncle,” said Luna with unconcerned eyes.

“This prick... I’m actually a former felon you know. Don’t you feel scared with that?” Colin asked.

“Kya~~ Help me... We have a criminal here and he going to do unspeakable stuff to me...” Luna said while hugging Colin side. Her eyes were shining with ‘*excitement*’.

Ever since saving her, Luna have been harassing Colin with her weird sexual innuendo. Whenever Colin manage to hold a proper conversation, Luna always detract from it. Couldn’t keep up with Luna antics, Colin decided to shift the conversation topic. “Luna, it’s almost dusk. How far is this ‘*Aomori Village*’?”

Sensing Colin annoyance, Luna let go her hug. “We’re almost there. After one more road turn, we will see the village. Usually the guard will let us in even though it’s late,” answered Luna.

“Huh, does the guard usually don’t let people in during the night?” Colin asked. As usual, he scanned around for any possible threat.

“Lately, a lot of thing happening in this country. Civil wars, banditry, devil spawn... Now there even a dragon or two probably roaming around. So the settlement militia are ramping up their alertness,” answered Luna.

Colin suddenly put his hand on Luna shoulder. The wind are blowing toward him so he could faint smell an unnatural smell. He scanned intently toward the bushes in front of him.

‘Two. No, four of them.’ Colin pulled his bayonet out from his cleaning kit bag. He plug the bayonet at the his rifle.

Sensing Colin tension Luna asked, “what’s wrong?”

“An ambush. Four dogs. Two near the bushes there and another two are slightly behind them. Do we have any alternative route?” Colin asked.

"None that I know. This is the first time I took this route," answered Luna. She then pull up her 'magic wand'.

"I see. Then we need to get past them. Stand back, I try to intimidate them, but if they attack come closer so that I can protect you."

"Okay."

Colin moved up the road while making a bark toward the ambushing dog. As he moved closer, he could feel the tension rising. From the looked of it, the dog seem not being intimidated by his provocation.

'Damn it, just go away for god sake. I don't want any trouble,' thought Colin. He then stood still, trying to convey his 'negotiating' stance to the ambusher.

It was at this particular moment that the dog suddenly attack Colin. Sensing that Luna vulnerability, one of the dog try to break off and run toward Luna. Annoyed by this development, Colin kicked the offending dog at their hind leg causing it to fly toward the side.

"Don't you dare." Colin uttered under his breath. He move closer toward Luna to ensure that he was the one that being targeted. Using the bayoneted equipped rifle, he carefully calculate his step as he is on the defensive side. Using his peripheral vision, he scan for an opening and escape.

"It's not a dog but a feral black wolf, Colin," shouted Luna.

"What's the difference, they both can bite," Colin remarked back.

One of the feral wolf decided it had enough, it attacked with a frontal assault. Sensing the attack, it's friend supported the attack and move to strike Colin from the flank. Colin focused his entire sense to counter the attack.

His time seems to slow down. In his vision he could see the attack pattern and their direction, he could also see some of the wolf body part like glowing. He don't understand why it glow but instinctively he felt that if he could deliver any force toward it he could stop the wolf from continuing the attack.

Colin hold his rifle across his body and let the frontal attacking wolf bite it. As the wolf bite it, Colin slid his hand near the bayonet lug and detach it. In one motion, pull out the bayonet and stab under the jaw of the left flank wolf before making another stab at the neck from the side. He took a step back causing the right flank attack to miss and exposing it's neck toward Colin which Colin gladly stab on. Sensing that it's ambush failed, the lead wolf release it's bite and run toward the bushes. The whole skirmishes took 10 second to finished.

Colin took a deep breath. Somehow he survive again. He walked toward the kill he made and stab his bayonet at them to ensure that the wolf receive enough fatal damage. He then wiped the bayonet at the wolf fur before putting them back in their sheath.

"Oh my Maker. That was super cool, Colin. Three strike, you took just three strike to defeat them. Very efficient," said Luna.

"This is nothing. Let's move. The smell of the carcasses will attract other animal," Colin remarked. He wipe his rifle stock to to clean up the wolf saliva. Fortunately the wooden stock was sturdy enough to stand a wolf bite.

It is almost at night when both of them reach the village. Aomori Village was a small settlement consisting of around 70 settler. The entrance were guarded by 2 soldier and an archer. While they let both Colin and Luna into the village, Colin notice that his shabby apparel probably attracting too much attention. He decided that he need a new clothes, some money to settle down and a steady honest job. Maybe even owning a house and get some land to build his ranch, build a workshop, make some 'DLC' ammo for his rifle, a shooting range perhaps... A man must dream big.

Colin train of thought broke when Luna suddenly stop walking. "Shizuka Inn, we're here. Colin, let me do the talking okay. Since you 'looked' like penniless, I'm going to rent a room for us." Luna said.

"Sure... Wait, what did you just said??? Penni..."

"Great, let's go." Ignoring Colin response, Luna pushed the door and a disgruntled Colin followed behind. Near the door Colin could hear some laughing and some singing coming out from the inside. Perhaps a bard was entertaining the inn guest. When Colin and Luna entered the inn, the interior went silent for a while and there were a lot of judgmental eyes looking at them. Even the singing bard stopped and only restarted when they both reach the reception table. The noise restarted again later, but Colin could still feel the cautious eyes. The combination of Colin apparel and his race causing them to be alert toward Colin and his partner.

The inn was quite small. There are a long table in the middle and some smaller one at one side of the inn and a stair leading to the second floor. The reception were directly to the left of inn door and were attended by a woman with a cat ear protruding from her hair.

'Cat ear?' Colin thought. He tried to maintain an interested face but his eyes couldn't helped but to kept glancing the receptionist ears.

"Welcome to Shizuka Inn, customer. How may I assist you?" The receptionist ask Luna.

Luna looked a little surprise for a while. She then immediately recomposed herself, "I need a room for 2 person for 4 days," Luna responded.

"Ah, I'm sorry. All of 2 bed room already taken. We only have single bed room left. Would you like to rent that?"

Luna then look at Colin and went silent for a while. She then looked back at the receptionist and said, "I take one single bed room."

"Sure, that would be 80 Mons per night, the meals are also included, once per days," said the receptionist with a smile.

"Do you accept Union currency?" Luna asked.

"Yes, that would be 84.80 Eris including tax," the receptionist answered.

"Alright, can I pay the deposit first?"

"I'm sorry, we don't do that here."

"It's alright. Here you go, 85 Eris. Keep the change," said Luna while handling the money to the receptionist. Colin could observe that the "Union" currency were in paper. Though he couldn't discern what written on the money, he could use the common sense that the bigger the paper size then the higher value the money hold. Luna took out one blue colored, one orange colored, one red colored and one green colored cash.

'That's quite a variety of high quality paper money. This girl must be foreigner, perhaps from a well-established nation,' note Colin in the back of his mind.

"Thank you madam customer. Here's your room key. Your room are at the upper floor at the end of corridor. You can have your meal here every dinner and any extra meal would be charged separately."

"Okay. This is the first time I come here, can you give me a rundown of the shop and adventurer guild nearby?" Queried Luna while taking the keys from the receptionist.

"Sure, there are a Ryugo Blacksmithing across this inn, right behind us are Satou General Store, if you have problem you can always report it to the guardhouse near the gate entrance. As for the adventurer guild you can find a branch here at the Village Hall," answered the cat-eared receptionist earnestly.

"I see, thanks for the information," said Luna. She then signaled Colin to follow her upstairs.

While walking toward the stair, Colin could still felt the stare until he was just out of sight from the crowd. The most intense stare come from the 3 man wearing a leather armor around their chest. Colin took note of their appearance and marked them as a possible threat to him and Luna.

When Colin and Luna entered the room, Luna suddenly fell silent. She just stood frozen near the bed.

"What's wrong?" Colin asked. His old habit started to kicked in and thus he do a round of search in the room, checking every nook and crook ensuring there were nothing that can harm or spy them while using the room. The room is quite simple, there are a simple single sized bed, a small stool and table and a wooden window. The window were facing toward the main road. Colin didn't notice this when he was outside due to distracted in his thought but he could see the furnace of the blacksmith workshop right across of the inn.

"Thi... This is the first time I bring a men into a hotel..." Luna answered shyly. Her face are red from her apparent embarrassment.

"What?? You just realize that now," Colin remarked. "Plus, it's technically an inn, not hotel."

"No, I know it since I made the decision but I didn't expect that I feel as nervous as this." Luna close her face.

"Really this kid..." Colin face-palmed. "Anyway, you take the bed I take the floor. So, what we're going to do now?"

"Now... Now, we're..." Luna started to unbuttoned her armor and clothes.

Colin got panicked at Luna action. He pinch Luna cheek and said, "For god sake. I didn't mean it like that. I'm asking you what we are planning after this?"

"Ahh..." Colin release his pinch when Luna come back to her senses. "Sorry, I got lost in my fantasy." She rub her cheek that got pinched by Colin.

"What kind of fantasy is that..." Colin reacted.

She then walked and took a seat at the bedside. Noticing that, Colin pulled the sitting stool and before sitting on it near the bedside.

"Firstly, we really in need of money. To do that we need to register to an adventurer guild. For now we will be a freelance adventurer, taking odd-jobs here and there. However, before we can register, we need to get you a new look. Your shabby appearance might deter any possible employee. Then we need to get you some sort of weapon. Do you know to fight Colin?"

"Yes I do. Didn't I told you before, I was a former soldier. Plus I do have a weapon, just I don't have any ammo for it." Colin answered while pointing at his rifle.

"Then do you have any experience fighting a monsters?" Luna asked back.

"What? No. I have hunted a dangerous games before but fighting a monsters, no. To be honest Luna, define a monsters." Colin said. He don't understand what Luna meant on monster. In his world, hunting an animal usually done for their meat as food or their body part as hunting trophy. However, very rarely the animal might be taken out as a self-defense.

"Monsters are non-humanoid being that bring threat and destruction to the environment. So, anything that are maybe alive or not and also being destructive to the livelihood of people are technically fall under "monster" description," answered Luna.

"Is it normal to fight this monsters creature?"

"Yeah."

Colin fell into a deep thought. He look intently at the floor and started to rearrange his common sense.

“Have you fought a Golem, Colin?” Luna asked.

Colin give out a straight answers. “No.”

“A chimera?” Luna continued.

“No.” Colin answered again.

Luna started to look at Colin intently. “How about a twin headed wolf?”

As expected, Colin give his honest answers. “No.” He then try to query on the animal that Luna have just mentioned. “What kind of animal is that?”

Ignoring Colin question, Luna continued her question, “A death knight?”

Sensing that Luna were not interested in taking question, Colin decided to just answer any question that Luna asked. “No.”

“An undead?” Luna asked.

Colin smile. “Undead. Yeah, I did manage to kill a few of them. Virtually...”

Luna maintain a straight face. “Virtually, so you never actually kill one?”

“Of course.” Colin answered.

Luna fell into silence. She look Colin again and asked “You said you are a former soldier? How could you never fought any of the aforementioned monsters?”

“I never fought one because a monster or animal you just mention don’t exist at my place. If they do the weapon of freedom will rain upon them,” said Colin proudly.

Luna look Colin with a face of disappointment. She then suddenly smile and said, “Oh well. Any journey started from a small step. I’ll teach you then. On how to become an adventurer. Are you okay with that?”

“Yeah sure,” Colin answered. Although he save Luna as part of a random messenger quest, at very least Luna currently seem like a reliable person. Colin didn’t trust her 100%, but he acknowledge that having her with him were better than being alone.

Luna stand and undo her armor before hanging it near the bed-frame. “Hehehe, great. Now let’s get some meal down stair and after that we get some rest. Tomorrow we going for a little shopping and then we registered ourselves at the village hall,” Luna said.

“Okay.” Colin answered.

After that, Colin and Luna went back down and took their meal. The stare was still there but not as intense as the earlier incidence. 3 man that Colin noted earlier wasn't there anymore. While eating, Colin relive his conversation with Luna. He really need to start to change his common sense so that it fit for this world. He may never be able to change his entire view but at very least he could adapt and improvise.

After having their meal, they retire back to their room and rest. Lying on the floor, Colin in particular was quite exhausted. Within this one entire day he manage to escape his execution, met an angry dragon, found an elf that got stuck on a tree, get a judgmental stare from a crowd and met a cat-eared person...

'Oh yeah, cat-ear??' Colin suddenly remember his earlier curiosity. He decided to ask Luna about it. "Uhm, Luna. You still awake?"

"Yeah, why?"

"The receptionist earlier have a cat-ear? What is that?"

"Ahh, that is a Phanterian race. It is not exactly easy to find one. I kind of surprise too that there are one here at this remote place," said Luna lazily. She then turned toward Colin side so that they could converse much easier.

"Why?" Colin asked again.

"Due to their inherent female dominant species, they are quite small in number and disperse a lot. They don't particularly live in their own racial group like your race, Colin. Most of the Phanterian that you would met live in a city, particularly at castle dungeon or as a covert government agent." Luna remarked.

"Dungeon? Like a jail or something?" Asked Colin.

"Yeah. A well trained Phanterian is a big asset for any organization and because of their natural agility. They are quite a good saboteur you know. Assassinating, stealing, sabotage, seduction-any dirty job that you could think off, they can and will pull it off. I have heard that even among noble lord, male or female, a Phanterian are highly sought after," answered Luna.

"Oh I see, so that's why you quite surprise at seeing one here," said Colin.

Affirming Colin, Luna said, "yeah, either this inn owner is an important figure or that girl is the inn owner wife, and from the look of it I think it's the latter one." At near the end of her sentence she yawn.

"I see. Okay, thanks for the info. We continued our conversation tomorrow, Luna. Have your sleep, good night." Colin said before shutting his eyes.

"Good night, Colin." Said Luna while smiling. Colin is the first person outside her family that actually saw her as an equal. He even talked to her normally and react like a friend would. That night, she fell asleep with a small warm fuzzy feeling swirling on her chest.