

Lea Monde

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Rated: R for Restricted

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Chapter 5: Alice and Jenny

I am Fellania Bloodclaw, and this isn't me.

It came upon me with a start as I stood before the mirror in my room, holding up yet another dress, and blinking, shaking my head with a start, suddenly I realized that I was playing... dress-up?!

What... the hell?

Tossing the dress aside and visibly shaking myself, I gripped my forehead and wondered where on Earth all that came from. It was like waking up from a drug, and right now I was beginning to believe that Madoushi guy about all this stuff about the air doing something to you. I had to get out of here.

I started looking for the White Oak staff, overturning things going this way and that, till I glanced in the mirror and stopped, seeing hair rods sticking out of my hair, and turning my head, feeling one of them, I realized that the thing was styling my hair!

Um... ok. I don't remember putting it up there, but ok. Licking my lips and then composing myself, mentally steeling myself against all this stupid girlish attitude, I reminded myself on who I was, why I was here and more, taking several long minutes of entering a mantra to remind myself of that.

It was then that I felt a tingling from the staff in my hair, realized that it was the staff that was steeling me against it. There was something in this castle trying to force me to be some... super feminine, busty... wench! The Staff was protecting me from that now.

"Something is wrong in Mister Rogers Neighborhood." I said aloud, and vowed never to let the White Oak out of my sight now.

Taking several calming deep breaths, my mind coming back like waking up after nearly drowning, the numbness in my head elevating my consciousness, I paced for a moment or two before I resolved to find out more about this place. So heading to the door, opening it and stepping out of my room, I made for the front door, stepped outside and into the misting rain.

I felt that I had to get out of this castle... right frigging now, and the moment that I did there was an additional alleviation of the affliction that robbed me of my mind in my weakened state.

Damn heat.

Getting my clothing in order, closing the drawstrings and replacing the shoulders of the gown for sensibility, I decided to explore this tower, climbing up the floors to find an added balcony above, more pipes for the organ, and then storage rooms filled with boxes and crates, and in the highest point of this tower, I opened up a creaking door and paused as I came upon something that I considered to be an improbable thing.

Here was a play room... for a child.

By the looks of it, it was for a little girl. Nice blue and white dresses hung in a wardrobe, pretty blue satin ribbons hung on hooks, a grand fluffy rug on the floor with lots and lots of toys that held tea sets and dolls with a dollhouse and a bright red ball with a white star on it. There was a grand mirror on a rolling stand on one side of the room that looked like it reflected nearly everything in the room.

“Hello?” I prompted as I slid into the room, looking about for its occupant.

There was a pretty bed by the window that was made neatly, the top sheet nice and smooth and free of wrinkles, with stuffed animals and dolls on the bed as well.

Stepping lightly into the room, the slippers I was wearing making nary a sound, I soon came to the book stands of books and more toys, and smiling at one of the pretty dolls, I tilted it up and down a couple times to see its eyes open and shut like a dolly I had when I was little, its lips pursed as if to suck on a bottle.

Suddenly I remembered what Pen suggested I do. To keep the bloodline going I needed to eventually become pregnant... and my first child would be a girl. Oh there were sons to the family line, but with the strength and power of the family line being mainly with the eldest female descendants – or so my researched family tree stated – the blood line needed another daughter after me to continue it.

I imagined having a little girl then, maybe like the little girl who occupied this room. Where I could hold her in my womb, and then birth and nurse her. Matriarchal instincts immediately began to rise in me in a rush as I cradled the doll close to my breast, fingering the doll's lips as imagined her as my own daughter... such a tiny little thing. And then suddenly my eyes lost their focus, and I saw through the eyes of a woman looking down at her daughter nursing from her fat breast, then another woman cradling her babe as she cooed and laughed, then another and another... over and over and over, faster and faster, back through countless generations, till one powerful woman with muscles that bulged like a goddess, laying on a bed of furs with her first daughter, still moist from the womb and her eyes shut tight as she cried for succor.

It was my lineage, tens of thousands of generations of mothers and daughters, our surnames and titles shifting between royalty and peasantry, Lycan and Human.

And then I heard a giggle of a little girl, a giggle that drew me from my reprieve and thrust me back into my own body immediately. Talk about flashbacks! Druggies get it from years ago. They're lucky! I get them from three hundred millennia ago.

“Hi!” a girl's voice said quickly, and I looked around, seeing no one.

“Hello?!” I ventured when I saw no one.

The girl's voice giggled again, and I turned and stopped. The girl to whom the voice referred to was caught in the mirror, kneeling prettily on the shag carpet, with all her clothes nice and new, bright and well made, with blonde

hair and a pretty round face. Looking down to where she should be kneeling with the doll in her arms, I saw that the space she should be at was empty, and looking at the mirror that I couldn't see straight when I'd entered the room, I found that I wasn't casting a reflection in it.

"Hello?" I ventured and again she giggled and rose, walking to the mirror and pressing her hand against it.

"Hi! My name's Alice! What's yours?!" she greeted and I knelt before the mirror and pressed my hand over her little one. "I've never met you before. You're pretty."

"Susan." I replied and she laughed gaily... so happy. Her world seemed to be brighter on the other side of the glass.

"Pleased to meet you." And she curtsied with a quick crossing of her ankles. She had pretty black shoes that'd been polished to a shine with metal buckles that were likewise shined to a mirror surface.

I palmed the mirror, reminded of the horror movie *'Mirrors'* for a moment, but this little girl was too spirited to be some evil entity that would pull my face apart by the reflection.

"How did you get on the other side of a mirror Alice?" I asked.

"I don't know. Master Drake comes and visits me here. He was just here too. Can't you come in and play with me?" she asked while hugging her dolly.

"I don't think I can." I said and pressed against the glass with both hands.

"Aww... I don't get many visitors here, and I'd like to have a lady play with me for once. Master Drake tries, but he doesn't know how to play tea or dolls very well. And the other women in the castle can't come into my room."

I looked down at the Doll I'd placed beside me when I knelt by the mirror just then and picking it up I waved it back and forth before her.

"Well Alice, I'm here." I mentioned. "We can just play dolly through the glass."

Her expression was overjoyed, and she panted in excitement and knelt quickly before the glass, resettling her skirts before her. "Then you can be the beautiful mommy doll, and I can be your beautiful child doll."

A smile crossed my face as a feeling I'd never felt before spread through my chest so solidly it was surreal. Instinctively I knew what this sensation was. I felt... motherly.

Blast it! That was frigging close.

As a rat, I was often seen as vermin, even when I was in my human form, but actually in a rat form... there were few places in the world where I wouldn't be killed on sight. Like now for instance. I had a run in with that big fat jiggly cook again, and this time his knives actually cut off my tail!

My precious... pink tail.

A rat wasn't a rat without his tail, and I was just glad that he wasn't using silver as I held my poor tail as it rapidly grew back.

"If that were in another place I'd have to gut that fat bastard." I said aloud... of course any casual listener to that would've only heard a load of squeaks and warbles as I twitched my whiskers and hurried along the tunnels back to that strange place in the bowels of the castle, finding that it'd modified a little more.

There were cables spanning across this place now, attaching to the devices and there were likewise more pipes. It was a fluid conveyance system. Copper tubes to make whatever it was flow smoother. It wasn't iron or lead pipes, so it was less of a contamination for whatever fluid it was that needed to be conveyed. The copper pipes spanned the entirety of the castle even, leading to this singular basin that appeared to be larger by several more deciliters, but then it was all supposed to be conveyed... up... to a central location. Judging by the way the castle seemed to be unfolding and growing perpetually with the growth of the town, I could only assume that wherever these pipes were supposed to lead to hadn't been created yet.

Using my nose to search out for any new clues, the only thing I could tell is that everything smelled new. There were no leaky oil spots, no ozone smell of electricity, all of this was a dead, unused monstrosity of old-age technology with no known purpose at the moment.

Perhaps eventually, but not now. Hmm.

Abandoning trying to figure it out, I decided to return to my room, finding an air duct that led to my room... or at least it did before. When it let out it let me out in the hall over my room, and now there was a vaulted ceiling there. I was about to crawl out from hiding when an apparition passed by beneath me and I scrunched down quickly, not making a sound.

A rat's stealth was absolute. We were the most silent things on Earth once trained. I slowed my heart, I laid dead so that the grinding of my muscles and bones couldn't be heard, I held my breath and slowed my heart till I would seem almost dead. All of this was done in a matter of seconds while I watched the powerful and enigmatic Drake walking by beneath me. He crept forward silently, quietly, never making a sound himself, as if his steps weren't even touching the floor, and the sounds from his clothes didn't make a single sound either. My ears picked up his slow moving heart beat, his slow and steady breathing and I smelt something else... blood? There was blood in the air.

But then Drake slowed to a stop, standing in the middle of the hall, lifting his head and turning it briefly, nostrils flaring as he smelt the air, and then turned and looked in my direction. His eyes moved about, looking for me, but I was back far enough where the shadows hid most of me, and I'd moved backward slowly so that I was hidden even more.

"Hm..." he managed and then turned and continued walking along, leaving this place and turning down the hall.

I waited for quite a long time, making sure he was gone. Some individuals who suspected that they were being followed would turn a corner and then pause before looking back to see if they were being followed. Drake didn't do that. Once I was satisfied, I still crept forward, still was cautious before I scurried forward and slipped beneath the gap in the door and changed back into my human form.

But I stood there for the longest time, just trying to control my breathing from a panic.

He sensed me! What sort of person could sense a stealthed wererat? This Drake, whoever he was... was supernatural.

It was clear that Alice wanted a mommy, and because of my experience with her I felt a heartache inside me that was quite palpable. I'd had a taste of what it meant to have a daughter, and now I wanted one. Badly. I wished that I could have Alice as my daughter... she so wanted a mommy at the same time, but other than adoption that sort of thing to really-really have her as my daughter was impossible.

I'd been able to steer our conversations using mommy tones while playing with the dolls through the mirror, and learned that Alice didn't remember how she got here. She just woke up one day and there she was. She said that she missed her sister...

I'd spent hours with Alice, playing and conversing, feeling that ache in my heart grow and grow before I excused myself, promising that I'd visit again. I had to tell Fellania about this. This place just kept getting weirder and weirder. But before I left I told Alice a story, speaking off from what I could remember of Alice in Wonderland. I was unsure as to whether or not anyone here had ever heard of Lewis Carroll, but Alice had yet to hear of the story and loved it immensely.

She nodded off in her bed from the story before I left.

The castle was indeed changing drastically. Using doorways that had last brought me up here instead brought me to other locations on my way back down to my rooms, and I soon got lost. At one time I wandered into a kitchen in which a big, fat and hairy cook was cooking dinner. Ew. I sort of lost my appetite knowing who it was that was cooking our meals. I'd heard terms that one should never trust a thin cook, but at least those cooks knew proper hygiene. Damn... put on a smock and a hat you sweaty piggy.

So then it was through what must've been absolute providence that I found my way into a ruined chapel. Thinking about it later, Serendipity was perhaps a better way of describing it. Things looked burnt, with pews broken apart and thrown aside, stone columns scarred and burned to a char and the religious iconology of Christianity, perhaps Catholicism, had been hewn down and scattered and partially melted. It might've been accident, but seeing the cross hanging upside down partially, sent a chill down my back given the surroundings.

When I first entered this chamber, providence or serendipity was absolutely the last thing I was considering and was about to do an about face and leave before I heard a girl laughing.

This was a mischievous laugh, like a little girl that was up to no good. It was full of humor but also of mirth.

Being a cat, curiosity had assailed me in much greater levels since I made the first change into my Calico Feline form, and as such any curious thing I just couldn't leave well enough alone. So venturing in between the vaulted columns of the scorched church, I found myself nearing a great etched symbol in the floor in red spell paint... or at least what I hoped was red spell paint. Memory served that red on the ground in the use of magical spells usually meant the worst kind of black magic there was. Blood Magic.

The lines glowed a subtle angry neon red, and as I approached the circle they glowed even brighter, which gave me a view of the little girl laying on the solid stone floor in its center. Her dress was red, the ribbons in her black hair to hold up a pair of pony tails were red, and she looked a bit dirty, like she'd been misbehaving and playing in the dirt in her pretty dress that was torn in a couple places, with runs in the stockings she wore beneath it.

She was giggling as she was drawing with colored pencils on a piece of paper, chewing on her tongue.

“Hello?” I prompted and tried to approach her, but the lines etched in the floor suddenly flared brightly, and I bumped up against a barrier.

“You can’t get passed the barrier, *stupid!*” she said without turning to look at me and I stepped back rubbing my nose.

“You could’ve warned me.” I replied gently and moved around the circle, stepping over varied debris in order to come to squat before her.

“But what would be the fun in that?” she giggled and then rose, lifting the picture she’d been working on and turning it around showed it to me. “See this?” she said and I squinted at the picture. It showed two monsters fighting each other; one with wings, the other with fur, and the violence of the gashes were remarkably great. Blood was everywhere... while in the background was a blood red moon.

“That’s a... wonderful picture.” I forced a grin as I looked at it.

True, for a little girl, it was surprisingly well made. Not a masterpiece mind you, but she understood how to blend colors and had a better concept of shapes other than the most general of shapes like other little children do, she actually had a concept of muscle. It was impressive, if not a little off color.

“Liar. You think it’s horrid, don’t you? You think it’s disturbing.”

“Why would I think that?” I asked, still forcing a supportive grin.

“Because everyone else does... except Master Drake. And anything he finds not disturbing... is disturbing.”

“Why would you say such a thing about Master Drake?” I asked, and she lifted her red eyes to me and smirked impishly.

“You really aren’t too bright, are you?”

“I’m ignorant, not stupid.” I replied sternly. “Why don’t you help me fill in the blanks then, starting with your name?”

She stared at me darkly for a moment, her eyes ringed by what looked like Kohl, the eye liner the ancient Egyptians used to line their eyes. It gave her red eyes a gaunt, hollow look, like she was partway dead.

“Jenny.” She replied curtly.

“Pleased to meet you Jenny, my name is Sue.”

“Really...” she rolled her eyes and head in exasperation, picking up several of her pictures.

“What exactly do you want to know then, Sue?”

“Are you Alice’s sister?” I asked after a moment and she turned to me immediately.

“You’ve seen her?” she asked with some excitement.

“I have. She’s in the tallest tower... behind a mirror.”

“You mean she’s *in* the mirror. Gosh! Can’t you say what you mean?”

“How do you know that?” I asked patiently.

“Duh... because Master Drake told me.” And she paused and held up a picture to me. “That... and I can... see her.”

Of the pictures in Jenny’s hand, this was perhaps the brightest, but Alice, in her blonde hair and single pony tail at the back of her head and her blue and white clothing; she was nonetheless surrounded by darkness. Other than the exact shape and contours of a mirror that Jenny perhaps had never seen, nothing was seen in the darkness outside that plane of light.

“Yes, she’s my sister.” Jenny replied, and looked at the image, caressing it with finger tips that were smudged with different colors.

“Do you want me to try and bring you to her?” I offered and Jenny snickered.

“There are two barriers that separate me from Jenny, and the castle keeps both of them. The castle would need to be sundered, or maybe the world itself broken before these barriers can be broken. One barrier separated my world from hers...”

“...The mirror...” I supplied and Jenny stared at me in annoyance that I’d interrupted her.

“Yes.” She replied tartly. “The other is this barrier.” And she gestured around her at the complex series of magic circles. “The more Master Drake and I think about it, the more we realize that probably both the world and the castle must be sundered to release us.”

“Sundered?” I prompted.

“Broken... if you can’t figure that out.” Jenny replied. “But there are complications. Too many complications. Too many selfish people trying to keep Alice and me separate.”

“Why are they keeping you separate?” I asked.

“I don’t know. The monster forces it, the castle keeps it and the master has been trying to break it. For countless cycles he’s tried to break it, he and the three wives.”

“Wives?”

“Yes! Women married to Master Drake. Jeese, are you so dense that you don’t understand that?!”

I blew a flock of hair away from my brow in annoyance and then leaned forward.

“Jenny... when I asked about wives, did it cross your mind even once that I wasn’t asking you about what a wife was, and was instead asking you several things at once?” Jenny blinked in surprise. “What man has more than one

wife, Jenny? Obviously Master Drake, but I was surprised that he'd have three wives. Normally one is enough for a man, and a man from the time frame I assume he's from should have only *one* wife and maybe one or more *concubines*, which are women bonded to a man but aren't that man's legal wives. Additionally, I'm surprised he even has a wife, being that the only women that I know of so far in this castle are myself and my friend Fellania. But you assumed that I was asking what a wife was. And like they say where I come from, to assume means to make an ass out of you and me."

"You swore. I'm telling." Jenny smirked.

"Go ahead. Who's going to do anything?" I smirked and Jenny crossed her little arms and pouted. "But master Drake must know something, somehow to get us all out. You and your sister are doubly trapped, and though I want to get out, I'm not going to leave two little girls behind me if I can help it."

Jenny's demeanor melted, and her lower lip trembled as she spoke in a cracked voice then.

"You promise?" she asked and I lifted a hand and pressed it against the barrier.

"I promise."

Jenny looked around for a moment, and then bending lifted and flicked a few pages of artwork out of the way and then rising hurried to me. "Then you'll have to know about the monster."

"The monster? What monster?" I asked and she straightened the crumpled sheet of paper and flattened it face first against the barrier.

"This monster." And I stared.

As a werebear, I was supposed to be strong and stalwart, a bulwark. The further away from the castle I went the easier it felt like to be strong and stalwart, and I remembered the strength and power that was due me. Remembering dispelled whatever spell it was that was affecting me... or at least kept it at bay.

The town of Deadwood was different at night. Lamplighters were walking along lighting oil lamps, and lights glowed from every window now. It was warm feeling... while at the same time leaving me with this creepy feeling like a tarantula creeping up my spine, brushing its fangs against my back every few steps that it took.

Wandering the town, I looked into what it had to offer. All sorts of displays of street vendors from old style eel and noodle stands from the orient to hot dog vendors with their push carts to actual open store fronts with benches for coffee and drink. Even a Wild West bar was here, with horses hitched to the posts even.

It was this place that drew my curiosity... how often does one get to see a real live old west bar?

Stepping inside, pushing the two swinging doors open and getting a face-full of bar swill smell, I smirked and lifted an eyebrow as the entire bar all of a sudden grew quiet and everyone turned toward me. Even the piano player stopped playing.

Stepping forward and scintillatingly walking toward the bar, the two doors swinging shut behind me, I sat down at one of the bar stools, crossing my legs and sitting side-saddle... like a lady. All this pish-posh earlier where I

thought I was not feminine enough? Proof that there was a spell on me or something. I was feminine, I was super-feminine. With the old confidence striking me, I felt more assured of myself.

“What’ll ye have, um... lady?” The bartender asked looking me from head to toe.

I smirked at him. He was obviously about to call me ‘little lady’.

“What’ll it cost me? I don’t really have anything to barter with.”

The bartender smirked. “I’m certain that we can find... something... to barter for.” And he reached for my neck and collar but I intercepted his hand.

“How ‘bout... the loser pays for my drinks.”

“What Looser?”

“The man or woman in this bar who cannot meet my challenge. And I challenge that I can drink anyone in this bar under the table. If they lose, then they pay for my drinks, if I lose. Well... I won’t lose.”

“Then I’ll take that bet.” A voice said and I turned, seeing a tall and burly man. “Yer a woman of me tastes! Big! Burly! Strong! And hair tough enough you can hang onto it! And boy do I love ‘dat coloring.” The bearded man said. “But if I win... I get to have ye.”

This was obviously a trick... but they didn’t need to know that. Lycan regeneration being able to take alcohol and all that.

So we both sat at a table, beer was brought up for us both in tankards, and several hours later, I drank that bull elephant under the table.

“Unreal... he was beaten... by a woman!” people were saying.

After everything is said and done, why are people more amazed that a man was beaten by a woman than anything else? But smirking at the poor brute as he crashed to the table in a drooling stupor, I even finished the tankard he was drinking – from the other lip of the stein – and hammered it down onto the table before getting up, giving a fake wobble and then strode to the bar stool amidst much amazement.

“I’ll take that drink now.” And I gave a fake hiccup. “Glass of wine with a nice hardy meal. Jeeze, the things a girl has to do to get a decent meal around here.” I laughed, and the bartender shrugged and brought me a plate of food with a bowl of hot stew and a nice glass of wine for me to sip and enjoy. All gratis thanks to the guy who couldn’t hold more than ten beers in him.

“So you’re the new visitor in the castle,” someone mentioned right beside me, and I blinked and turned. This person most definitely hadn’t been here a moment before.

He was a wizened man, and perhaps the most modern of all the denizens of Deadwood I’ve yet seen. His dark black hair that’d been combed over in one swooping direction against his brow was grayed over both ears. He wore slacks with a belt and a white shirt and a black tie with a lab coat on. A stethoscope even hung out of one of the pockets of his coat.

“Who are you?” *I blinked.*

“Victor, and you?”

“Fellania. Do you... work at the castle?” *I asked, and out of the corner of my eye I saw the bartender eye us both and then move slowly to the other end of the bar.*

“I do. I was about to head my way up there. But then... I wanted a last meal first.”

This brought me up short. “A last meal? What do you mean?”

“You’re in purgatory, Fellania. Judgment is approaching.”

“Shoot Victor! Will you please stop nagging the poor woman.” *Someone said and slapped the good doctor on the back, and I blinked up at Marshal Cal.* “We’re never going to get anyone back here in town if you keep frightening them away.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from a dog.” *Victor growled and then rose, visibly shaking Cal’s hand off.*

“Them’s fighting words, Victor.” *Cal responded with an air of warning.* “Best if ye take them back a’fore...”

“Gentlemen, please...” *I but in then, and they both remembered that there was a woman present.* “...No fighting please, lest you want me to get involved.”

However they took that, both men took a definite step back away from each other.

“The lass is correct, Victor. Now be on with you. We don’t need no troublemakers here.”

“When I’m done with my meal.” *Victor said back and turned.*

“I don’t think you git me, Victor.” *Cal mentioned and reaching to his hip pulled back on the hammer of his gun.*

“Managed to get some bullets for that thing yet, Cal?” *Victor smirked and ate several more spoonfuls of his of his stew.*

“I might’ve, yeh.”

“Then if you have gotten bullets... then let me put forth a philosophical debate for you. What would happen, pray tell, that you shoot Drake’s Chief Physician in the back? How do you suppose Drake would take that... hmm?” *and Victor went right on eating, and I looked between the two men.*

“You’re not worth the price of these bullets Victor.” Cal said and eased the hammer back down.

“Correction... your life isn’t worth the price of my head. Now leave me to my meal, dog. I’d rather not have a cur barking at my heels while I’m trying to enjoy a few moments of quiet reprieve.”

Cal grumbled and walked away, making the chink-chink-chink sound of his boots clomping and the spurs on his heels clanking together.

“Did you have to be so mean? He was friendly to my friends and me when we arrived.”

“He’s friendly to everyone who arrives, Miss Fellania, but he’s a dog that will eventually turn on you. Him and every other cur in this god-forsaken town.” *And he pointed at the meal cooling in front of me.* “Best if you eat that... it may very well be your last.”

I turned to the food in front of me, and taking up the spoon, savored each piece of the meal for what it was worth.