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Chapter 1

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single AiJalonian of pure blood is in want of a pure AiJalonian mate.

Though universally acknowledged, it was thoroughly rejected by one Mrs. Bennezon. She, though human, was able to marry a coveted pure AiJalonian and she was determined to secure the same illustrious fate for each of her five daughters.

“Honey,” she said to her husband one day. “Did you hear that someone rented the Isle of Netherfeld finally?”

Mr. Bennezon gave an indifferent shrug indicating either that he hadn’t heard or that he had and just didn’t care. Perhaps both.

“Well, someone rented it,” she continued. “Mrs. Long came by this morning and told me all about it.”

Mr. Bennezon shrugged again as he continued to trim his beautiful potted plant.

“Don’t you wanna know who rented it?”

“Not as much as you want to tell me, my dear. So, go ahead.”

Needing no further inducement, his wife said, “Well, if you must know, Mrs. Long says that it is rented by a young AiJalonian. Not a mistura. A pure AiJalonian. And by his markings, she thinks he is a direct descendant of one of the founding families.”

Mrs. Bennezon paused waiting for the import of that statement to sink in. When his emotion seemed unchanged she continued. “His name is Bilson, hun.”

“I didn’t ask, dear.”

“And he’s single, hun.”

“I don’t care, dear.”

“You don’t care? You don’t care! How could you not care? You have to see how important this is for our girls.”

“Our girls? How could it possibly affect them?”

“Come on, Mr. Bennezon. Don’t pick on me. You have to know that Mr. Bilson has to marry one of them.”

“Really? I had no idea that renting an island was the equivalent of purchasing ceremonial wedding garments.”

“Mr. Bennezon! I am not saying he is PLANNING to marry one of the girls. I am HOPING that he will see one of our girls and fall instantly in love with her.”

“Well, that is a grand hope indeed. You should try praying to Gaion about it. You will need all the help you can get to enact such a plan.”

“Gaion may not help me with this but you can.”

“Me? What ever can I do? Why don’t you visit him?” asked Mr. Bennezon.

“Oh, don’t be insane! I am human. I can’t go visiting single AiJalonian men. What would the neighbors say? Everyone already thinks humans are too forward. I don’t want to help prove the prejudices against me. But you, you are AiJalonian. You can introduce yourself to him. Speak your fancy language with him as you talk about family and stuff. Maybe the two of you are distant cousins or something. Then after some polite, boring AiJalonian-like introductions, invite him over for tea. That way he can meet the girls and fall instantly in love with one of them.”

“I find it highly unlikely. Though, if at all possible, maybe his love will fall on Ellore.”

“Oh, you always favor that one. You know good and well that Ellore isn’t half as pretty as J’ai and nowhere near as cheerful as Ly’dina.”

“Beauty fades and the cheerfulness you speak of can easily be mistaken for imprudence, frivolity, general silliness....” Mr. Bennezon said a few more synonyms but the words were spoken in ancient Ai. Mrs. Bennezon had never made an effort to learn that ancient dead language that only a handful of pure AiJalonians bothered to speak anymore so she really had no idea what he was saying. She just rightly assumed it was something she didn’t want to hear.

“How can you be so cruel to your own kids, Mr. Bennezon? Do you forget my humanity? You never think of the fragile state of my emotions.”

“You are mistaken, my dear. Your emotions have put me in quite a state these past twenty-three odd years. Mr. Bennezon added under his breath. “And my have they been odd.”

Chapter 2

Mr. Bennezon, of course, was among the first of the archipelago residents to welcome the new tenant, Mr. Bilson, to this side of the planet. This scarcely populated portion of the Western Hemisphere of the planet was a rather tight knit community, everyone having firsthand knowledge of the goings on of their neighbors.

Mr. Bennezon had always intended a visit to Mr. Bilson. He visited all his new neighbors. Of course, Mrs. Bennezon was only concerned with visiting if it was some sort of benefit to herself in the way of new gossip or a potential marriage mate for one of her five daughters.

“That is a beautiful song,” Mr. Bennezon remarked to his favorite daughter Ellore. “Your Ai is perfect. I am sure Mr. Bilson will approve.”

“How are we supposed to know what Mr. Bilson will like? By the time we meet him he will be married already. Likely to one of Mrs. Long’s nieces since Mr. Long has probably already met him and made proper introductions.”

“Well, if he is already married then there will be no objection to you meeting him yourself.” Mrs. Bennezon gasped in astonishment. “I can’t tell whether you are being stupid or cruel.” “Translation please, Ellore,” Mr. Bennezon asked.

Ellore thought for a moment trying come up with the best word in Ai to translate the human English words for stupid and cruel. When she came up with suitable synonyms, she shared them with her father.

“Ah, stupid yes, cruel no, my dear,” was Mr. Bennezon’s response.

“The point is that he must marry one of our girls. Waiting until he is already married defeats the point of all this. Oh, my heart,” she said clutching her chest. “For Gaion’s sake, stop that coughing Kibby. My heart!

“Don’t you think I would if I could?” Kibby responded with human rhetoric.

“Oh, mother, relax. Surely, there will be other young men to visit the Penuel archipelago,” Ellore said sensing her father’s joke. She had the feeling that the proper introductions had already been made. “My sisters and I will undoubtedly have our pick of men.”

“Girl, you are no better than your father. You will never have your pick of men because of the human blood running through half of your body.”

Marzi raised her hand desiring to correct the fallacy of her mother’s statement from a medical standpoint. J’ai gently lowered it adding a shake of the head meaning, don’t bother.

“No, you girls will have to take what you can get or else you will end up living in the paedors. And you will rarely get an opportunity like this to meet a single pure AiJalonian.”

“I heard that he is four generations pure,” Ly’dina said.

“Four generations! Gaion! Mr. Bennezon, don’t you see what an opportunity this is?”

“I do not see. But that may be because I have forgotten my glasses, this day. Marzi please fetch them for me.”

Marzi stood. J’ai grabbed her arm and shook her head in a way that said, just a joke. Ellore laughed. Now she knew for sure that her father had already met Mr. Bilson. He wouldn’t tease her mother so if he hadn’t.

“You find this funny, do you Ellore? It won’t be so funny when you are living in the paedors.”

The jocularity of the moment dissipated. Even Ellore, who could find humor in anything, couldn’t manage to even smile with the thought of living in the paedor floating in the air.

“Well, I don’t think Mr. Bilson will enjoy living in the paedors.” Mr. Bennezon said trying to bring a little levity back into the room.

“Oh, I am sick to death of hearing about Mr. Bilson,” Mrs. Bennezon exclaimed.

“Well, that is unfortunate considering I took the time to meet with him this morning.

All the women gasped in amazement. Even Ellore was surprised at her own excitement. It had been quite a long time since any eligible men had visited the islands. And now that an AiJalonian had been introduced to her family, it wouldn’t be inappropriate for her and her sisters to speak to him in public.

Chapter 3

Now it just so happened that the Penuel archipelago held quarterly gatherings for revelry and dancing called summits. No one was more excited when the next summit approached than Mr.

Bennezon. He had grown weary of the constant questions, suppositions, and theories posed to him from his wife and children about the appearance, disposition and even accent of Mr. Bilson. So weary he had grown that come the day of the summit, he reckoned himself too fatigued for revelries and retreated to his office. Once his ladies had left, he treated himself to a stiff drink and a soft cushion as he perused an antique book.

"I hear he brings a party of twelve ladies and seven gentlemen to the summit tonight," said Chai'loi Loomis as she rode in a covered tobulin with the Bennezon girls.

"That is far too many ladies," Ly'dina cried. "There are already too many women in Penuel. We shall have absolutely no one to dance with.

"Don't worry, my dear. I know you're gonna have plenty of guys to dance with," Mrs. Bennezon said.

The overabundance of women was felt even more sharply as the Bennezon party entered the grand ballroom at Penuel Court. All the men in attendance were dancing while several women sat in corners of the room chatting with each other. Elloree Bennezon wished that her father had come so at least she could have danced with him.

All hopes were lifted, however, when Mr. Bilson and his party entered the room. Altogether, there were only five- Mr. Bilson, his two sisters, the husband of the oldest sister, and another young man.

"Oh, there are only five," Kibby said gleefully.

"That is fourteen less than we thought," said Marzi.

"Thank you for that math lesson, Marzi," Elloree said. Her sarcasm was lost on her younger sister who smiled at what she perceived was a compliment.

Everyone in the Bilson party was obviously completely pure AiJalonian. They all looked regal and beautifully dark and had intricate braidings in their hair that probably took hours to achieve. Elloree could immediately determine that their long, colorful and lace-woven gowns were the latest fashion from the planet Lumerca. Elloree couldn't even imagine how much the gowns cost. She once ordered bought a Lumercan parasol that cost her entire month's allowance.

Mr. Bilson was especially handsome and had an easy smile that made him seem pleasant and conversational. His sisters, while fashionable and beautiful in appearance, did not seem quite as pleasant. Mr. Hurst, the husband of the oldest sister, though obviously pure AiJalonian and, therefore, relatively good looking, had nothing quite striking about his features. He almost blended into the background. And from the look of utter boredom on his face, that probably suited him just fine. Of all the party, Mr. Darkeny drew the most attention. His features were so sharp and beautiful that one could stare at his face all day and never tire. His long black hair was tied into a neat ponytail conveniently revealing the tribal markings on his neck which showed he was a member of the royal family. Within minutes, all in attendance spoke only of Mr. Darkeny and how handsome he was. But shortly their arrival, the initial infatuation with his good looks wore off and was replaced by disgust at his poor manners. He rarely returned civil greetings, dispensed with pleasant conversation, and only danced with the women in his party. Those features of his face that were moments ago beautiful, striking and intriguing were now proud, fierce and foreboding.

Mr. Bilson on the other hand had become the life of the party. He introduced himself to everyone. He laughed and smiled at every opportunity and he danced as often as possible which is the purpose of a summit after all. And his partner of choice, much to the delight of Mrs. Bennezon, was none other than one J'ai Bennezon.

Elloree Bennezon, due to the scarcity of partners had been obliged to sit for two dances and converse with her friends. It was during this time, that Mr. Darkeny and Mr. Bilson stood near

enough to her for her to hear their conversation. Darkeny and Bilson did not fear their proximity with others as they spoke in ancient Ai, a language only few people on the planet spoke.

“Darkeny, come now,” Bilson said. “You must have a dance. You look ridiculous standing there refusing to dance or even speak to anyone. I hate to see you like this.”

“I happen to not be in a good mood today. Besides, you know I detest dances, dancing and summits in general. You should not have brought me. If my manner of standing upsets you, look away.”

“How can you detest this? Look at all these beautiful girls here.”

“You are dancing with the only pretty girl here,” Darkeny said nodding toward J’ai. Elloree felt a swell of pride knowing that they spoke of her favorite sister.

“Oh! She is the most beautiful creature I have ever laid eyes on. But there is one of her sisters there behind you. She is quite pretty as well and very lovely to talk to.”

Darkeny glanced back at Elloree then said, “Pretty is a bit of an overstatement, do not you think? She is tolerable, but not pretty enough to tempt ME. You had better go back to dancing with your partner and enjoy her beauty for you are wasting your time with me.”

Mr. Bilson obeyed and went in search of J’ai. Mr. Darkeny walked off leaving Elloree to evaluate her feelings of what had just transpired. On the one hand, she was quite offended by Darkeny’s remarks. On the other hand, however, if Darkeny did find her pretty, that would mean she’d actually have to dance with him and, therefore, speak to him. Which, in turn, might make her violently ill. No, his feelings towards her were for the best and she made sure to make that sentiment known as she retold the story with glee and levity to all of her friends.

The rest of the summit went off without incident and was quite pleasant. J’ai danced several times with Mr. Bilson. Marzi was complimented on her playing of the ziln, an instrument that was an electronic combination of a piano and a Theremin. Kibby and Ly’dina were never without partners which was all they ever cared about at a summit. And Elloree had had several opportunities to give side glances to Mr. Darkeny and then chuckle disapprovingly. It was a very passive aggressive and, therefore, human thing to do. An action she was sure Darkeny wouldn’t understand. She took great pleasure in his certain confusion.

Mr. Bennezon’s ladies arrived home earlier than expected. Before he could turn off all technology and pretend he was asleep.

“Mr. Bennezon, we had such an awesome time,” Mrs. Bennezon began.

“Awesome?” Mr. Bennezon asked.

“Um, superb, amazing, wonderful,” Elloree said providing alternate words in Aijish.

“Ah, do proceed in giving all the details of the evening. Do not leave out a single thing no matter how trivial and insignificant. If Mr. Bilson lost an eyelash, I want to hear of it.”

Missing the mockery in his tone, Mrs. Bennezon obliged his request and didn’t give his ears a rest for next two hours.

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