

MIRACLE IN RYBAA

Renate Dove was staring out at the Zalm hills passing by through her window lost in her own reverie, barely even registering the rather boisterous mood of the train. The redhead sitting across saw the woman in front of her with the straight brown hair pulled back to reveal a fresh face with clear green eyes as the sort to turn heads not for her beauty, but the unflappable confidence she projected. But this was all just a façade, a mechanism to deal with the recent failures of the business she had invested the last 5 years of her life in.

She was travelling South down the river to the much talked about and sublime town of Risjenwyn to seek some much deserved tranquility and escape the turmoil of having failed herself.

The reason for all the gossips and rants about this town in those travel magazines was quite evident to her now as she ambled past the milestone into Risjenwyn. Yet, there was a strange melancholy set in the eyes of all the locals she passed by. Pondering upon that, her feet subconsciously traced her steps towards a familiar scent of daffodils that were a reminiscent of her past.

“Do you like these?”

An old woman asked her stepping out of a shack into the sunlight that enunciated her wrinkles even more. Renate smiled politely at her, noticing for the first time the adorable beanie tied around her head.

“I am Agnes.” she said introducing herself and catching her gaze she added, “You remind me of my daughter, she is from the city and is fond of daffodils too, you know.”

Renate’s mouth curved into a smile as she withdrew her fingers from the plush yellow petals. After a pause Agnes enquired meekly, “You don’t speak much, do you?”

“Oh! No, I just have a lot on my mind right now... I am Renate, by the way.” I replied.

Feebly putting a hand on her arm, Agnes asked, “What’s troubling you dear?”

“Nothing I want to talk about” Looking at the hurt expression on the old lady’s face and realizing that it was perhaps a bit too harsh she quickly added, “Your town is lovely ma’am. Yet some people were looking sad as I was walking down the road, why?”

“Well, the horsemen from Risrial set fire to many fields in our town, but thank Heavens! Our soldiers were less sloppy this time.” She said, matter of factly. Renate became appalled to see the tiny sweet old lady who was just talking about Daffodils now narrating this horrific incident so dryly.

“Risrial is the neighboring town, right? Why on Earth would they do this?”

“It’s not like our town is the victim here, really. Our troops will probably create a turmoil there within a week’s time, I bet. This cat and mouse chase happens almost every month.”

Seeing the wide eyed woman gaping in front of her, Agnes smirked, “Seeing that look, I can tell that you don’t know much about the Rybaa’s history now, do you? Why don’t you come inside my home, it’s not large but it sure is cozy.” And without waiting for a reply, she turned and strolled away towards her home.

The floorboards were creaky, the walls needed a lick of paint and the flowers in the vase on the dining table they were sitting around seemed long neglected, yet it was all *wonderful*. Maybe it was owing to the friendly crackling from the fireplace or the collage of family photos mounted up in the most beautiful wall.

“Did you like the tea? I added cinnamon.”

Brought back to reality, Renate responded promptly, "It's delicious! And your house is lovely." Agnes's eyes twinkled and after a couple of sips as if reading her mind, she told Renate the Legend of Ris that led to the rivalry between the two towns of Risrial and Risjenwyn.

The towns of Rybaa and Ingraahs had never had a diplomatic relationship. There was a frightening amount of animosity between the both. Right after King Jerome's unsuccessful attempt to claim rights over the waters of River Ris flowing across Rybaa, Queen Camille ordered a war on the Ingraahs in reciprocation and hence started a gruesome and the most horrendous war ever seen near the Zalm.

Those who witnessed the Zalm War say that the ground literally trembled as the armies advanced. There was a constant roar of steps after steps that even the dead could hear. The field was splattered with blood and red and black were the new colors of what was once a green luscious field. The folk of both the towns became more and more deprived and impoverished, a scenario not much different from today. As they say, every fight is an awful sight.

According to the legend, just as the Rybaa's army called The Gravadors, were crossing the River Ris to reach the battlefield, an angel was said to have emerged from Ris with a ruby, the size of a fist, and gave it to the Gravadors saying "Seek aid of the Ruby in times of crisis. The ruby shall guide you." And so it miraculously did. The Gravadors won the battle and took over the Aluminum mines of Ingraah.

Unfortunately, while returning, as the Gravadors were about to cross Ris, the bridge collapsed as an aftermath of the war. The army along with the Ruby sunk into the River.

Immediately, Queen's men were sent to Ris and the Ruby was extracted. But an irrational notion crept into the Queen Camille's mind.

'What if the powers of the Ruby are limited to a certain radius of the town?'

Hence, her palace being situated to the West of Ris, she declared that part of Rybaa as independent from the eastern part and selfishly placed the Ruby in the center of her new kingdom. On the other hand, the eastern part of the town was left disregarded and immersed in an air of melancholy.

21 days later, a fisherman named Shetty, became the center of attention of the Eastern Rybaa. Turns out, as he was fishing in Ris, he had discovered another replica of the Ruby of Ris, or perhaps the Ruby of Ris itself, who knows. Taking the benefit of the doubt, the Eastern Rybaa celebrated to its fullest and renamed the E. Rybaa as Risrial – actually meaning Ris *real*- much to the spite of Camille. In a futile attempt at vengeance, she renamed her part of the town, the western Ris as Risjenwyn – actually meaning Ris *genuine*.

Despite these immature tactics played by both the towns which were once the part of Rybaa, the question still remained- *Which ruby was the real Ruby of Ris?*

The spite grew too strong that on one unexpected night Camille and a few soldiers were found murdered. The Ruby was transferred to Void Rocks- A holy sanctuary built for the folks of Risjenwyn, and the eternally living Ismaiah, aka Dark Saint became the beholder of the ruby. Ismaiah was said to have been cursed with an eternal life when he misspoke a verse at Camille's funeral.

This forlorn mystery and both the towns' perpetual spite developed a strong hatred between Risrial and Risjenwyn resulting in constant acts of aggression. The worst thing was that in this affair, both of the towns' poor became more and more deprived and remained in constant anxiety and distress.

"So why hasn't the Ruby been used for the betterment of these distressed farmers? The ruby surely would be worth quite a lot..." Renate asked perplexed.

"So many years of animosity with Risrial has developed a conceit within both the towns. I wouldn't be surprised if the whole town goes bankrupt and still no one touches the ruby. The Saint who is in possession of the ruby, his beliefs about the Ris legend are firm as a rock and so he preaches. But alas! I am afraid, many people's life will be lost in the bargain." Agnes told grimly.

"But he can't just use people's beliefs against them!" Renate practically shouted exasperated. What struck peculiar to her was the occurrence of a ruby exactly like the former 21 days after the Ruby of Ris was found. Then after a moment, her eyes widened in realization and then regaining her composure she decided that this needed to be stopped.

Renate walked with a purposeful gait towards Void Rocks with a plan orchestrated in her mind. Ismaiah, the saint present at the temple at that time smiled pleasantly at the out-of-the-town woman who had just walked into the sanctuary.

"Why did you plant that ruby in river Ris?"

Taken aback by the unexpected question posed to him he shouted, "WHAT-How dare you impose such a shrewd and baseless blame on a pious man like me?"

"Baseless, huh? You were the one who is responsible for all this turmoil in Rybaa based on your baseless desire."

"YOUNG LADY! YOU-"

Unflinching, Renate interrupted and nonchalantly continued, "I am guessing that probably jealous by the fact that the angel approached the non-pious Gravadors and not you and perhaps, afraid of the prospect that the blessed Ruby would be used to better the devastated families who lost their homes in the war and not be kept safely in a sacred place like this, you hatched your plan."

"I have had enough of this non sense", Ismaiah said and turned to walk away.

"It takes courage to speak up when needed, but it also takes courage to listen" She said raising her voice. Her words did have effect on the Saint as he stopped facing his back at her.

Renate continued, "After the Zalm War, all the Aluminum mines of Gravador were given to this holy sanctuary as an offering to the angel of Ris. You were the priest of the Rocks at that time which means that you had total control over the mines. By melting powdered Aluminum oxide dissolved in Lead Oxide in a porcelain vat for 20 days rubies can be synthesized. And that is exactly what you did."

“Then, you threw this new ruby into the eastern side of the river because you were aware what this was going to lead to - Camille would refuse to sell her ruby because of her ego.”

“But it still posed one little problem. The ruby will be in her possession, not yours. So you decided to get your hands a little dirty after all. Who would suspect the silent priest who came to visit the Queen had an ulterior motive. Now, with the queen dead and no heir, according to the town laws, the ruby would solely be the sanctuary’s possession. The curse for your eternal life is probably because of your sins and not for some misspoken words at the ceremony!”

Ismaiah just stood there his eyes darting aimlessly in panic.

“Due to your selfishness, thousand others are suffering. Yet you call yourself pious? Confess when there is still time.”

“Great demands for little hands.” The priest smirked cocking his head.

“Didn’t the angel say ‘*Seek aid of the Ruby in times of crisis*’. This is crisis. We need the ruby. Some people are barely able to feed their children while others are living in tatters. Confess to your sins. Hopefully the angel will forgive you. Even the folks of both the towns are sick and tired. They understand the value of this ruby in this time of crisis and wouldn’t disagree if I told them the truth...looks like you are not really left with a choice now.”

Realizing the gravity of the situation, the priest sighed and nodded his head.

It was a happy ending.

The two towns reunited once again to form the great town of Rybaa. The ruby aided significantly in uplifting those affected by the wars.

Before departing Rybaa, Renate went up to Agnes’ house to bid a goodbye.

“Whatever you were anxious about when you came here, remember that you don’t need a special ruby to achieve what you want. It all lies in self-belief. Sometimes, I think that our Victory in the Zalm war was not due to the powers of the ruby, even if they exist. It was the mere self-belief of the Gravadors that the victory was theirs because an angel had blessed them. Oh! I almost forgot...” She rummaged in her large bag slinging down her shoulder and handed out a tiny carefully wrapped bouquet of yellow daffodils.

She smiled and hugged Agnes. The once miserable Renate Dove departed the town determined to start afresh filled with a surge of inspiration. It was indeed a miracle in Rybaa.