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The Story of the Commander

Editura Ink Story
Pucioasa, 2024

Introduction

It was the beginning of an amazing Children's Day. For the first time, ice cream trucks decided to gather in one square in Essex and gift children with whatever flavour they wanted.

"Here, one mint with chocolate chips for you," the vendor smiled kindly at the child in front of him.

The girl took it with bright, eager eyes to her mother's enjoyment.

"What do you say, Zoe?" the elder woman asked, placing a warm hand over the girl's back.

Zoe stared for a bit at the ice cream, watching it melt into a corner. The light push from her mother urged her to look up at the vendor and mumble a faint thank you.

As they walked away from the truck and towards a bench for the girl to eat her dessert, Zoe caught glimpse of another child crying. He wasn't very far away; thus, Zoe could see it was a boy about her age who had a bowl-cut hairstyle. He was dressed in a red t-shirt, yellow pants and no shoes, which drew her attention immediately.

"Mummy, why is that boy crying? Did he lose his mum?"

Zoe's mother frowned before she looked in the direction Zoe pointed.

"Pumpkin, there's no one there." The woman told her daughter, bending to her short size, "Maybe he already found his parents and left."

But Zoe shook her head and kept pointing at the boy.

"He's there; I can see him. He's still crying. Maybe his

mummy is around. We should tell the cops.” Young Zoe stated firmly, ice cream melting down her fingers as her attention shifted on something else.

Mrs Lestrade’s frown deepened as she realised they were still close to the ice cream truck and other parents were watching. It was embarrassing more than anything, and Mrs. Lestrade hated attention.

“Zoe, look at me. There is no boy crying. Maybe it’s your imaginary friend, dear.” She tried to alter it so they could at least walk to a place where no one could see or hear them.

Zoe pouted and turned back to the boy but no one was there, just like her mother said. Even if she was three months away from turning six years old, she was sure that the boy was not an imaginary friend. Zoe already had one, and it was a white stallion that could talk, not another child.

Since the problem got solved, Zoe followed her mother towards the bench and sat down, a bit disappointed. On the other side, her ice cream was dripping down both sides, some falling on her shirt.

“Zoe~ you should be careful not to stain your clothes.”

Her mother sighed and searched her purse for a handkerchief. While the woman was busy wiping Zoe’s hands and shirt, muttering how she had to be more careful, Zoe caught a glimpse of the crying boy again. She jerked slightly when she saw him sitting on the bench next to her, staring ahead with his hands placed on each side as if he wanted to jump off.

Unlike before, it was a bit strange to stare so closely at the boy. But he didn’t seem to mind and even turned his face to her, shocking her with his white eyes. It happened incredibly fast, but the boy cried out so loudly that Zoe threw the ice cream cone at him, watching as it went right through his form and fell to the ground.

“Zoe...” Her mother was startled by the sudden action

and glanced around, afraid that someone else saw it too.

Zoe's ears were ringing with that awful noise, closing her eyes tightly and covering her ears in the hope it would stop or decrease, but it didn't. It amplified to the point she cried out in pain and felt her eyes sting.

"Zoe! Zoe, what's wrong?!"

Zoe could hear her mother yell and felt her mother's hands around her small back, but that was not all. She could hear more than that, voices that did not sound friendly or clear. When Zoe opened her eyes, she saw everything as it was before, but somehow, it didn't feel like before.

"Is it going to rain?" she asked innocently, turning to her mother with teary eyes. "No. Dear, are you alright? Should we go to a hospital? Zoe—"

No, it was not going to rain. The sun was not as bright as she remembered, and the sky was not blue anymore; it was a constant grey sight, and the ground was covered in a thin layer of mist. One woman turned to Zoe, her long black hair swinging over her shoulder, and she zoomed towards the child.

"*You can see me,*" the woman whispered in astonishment, "*You can see all of us,*" she added, seeing how Zoe's eyes flickered to other men and women who looked as colourless as the woman in front of her.

"Happy birthday, Zoe!"

On her tenth birthday, Zoe's house was filled with her friends, family and strangers. Everyone was singing for her; everyone was having a good time, and everyone was happy except the birthday girl.

"*Little girl, you can see me, can't you?*"

"*I really need to find my son. Can you ask your parents to look for him?*" "*Can you send a message for me?*"

Zoe could not even focus on the people that were invited to her party because the ones uninvited were distracting. There was so much noise and so many voices talking at once, most of them asking for favors as if Zoe had nothing else to do.

“I want you to leave me alone,” she mumbled, knowing they could hear her, “Please, leave me alone,” she added, her blue eyes tearing up at the amount of pressure thrown at her.

“Zoe? Zoe, are you feeling alright?”

Her mother’s concern was like the peak of an iceberg and Zoe did not need it at the moment. She was cornered by dead entities and living human beings, and they were suffocating her with questions and these worried looks that she really hated. She was ten years old now and could take care of herself up to some point. The room seemed to shrink around her, the air thickened, and her heartbeats quickened; she was having a panic attack.

It was horrible, and for the first time in her life, Zoe felt like she was going to die. It was intense and overwhelming, and she stumbled on her feet, feeling like she would fall.

But she didn’t. Someone grabbed her arm and helped her back to her feet before holding her hand tightly. Her heartbeats slowed down, the room became a normal size, and the noise was gone. Everything came back to normal, and it looked like no one even realized the pain she just went through.

Chapter 1: Zoe Lestrade

As Zoe Lestrade grew older, she also grew to ignore the things around her. They weren't people, she realized that. They were lost spirits connected to Earth or dark forces from Hell- she didn't know what was worse. These spirits were always coming to her for help or for entertainment. It was annoying, mostly because she grew up to hate human interaction because of them.

Most of her friends were ghosts or dark fairies if they could be called **friends**. According to theory, fairies are either earthbound unbaptized souls, guardians of the souls of the dead, ghosts of venerated ancestors, fallen angels condemned to remain on earth, or nature spirits. Fairies are said to have magical powers and consort with witches and other humans with supernatural powers. But what Zoe has wouldn't exactly be labelled as power but more of an ability that she developed as time passed by.

The dark fairies were these little spirits of what Zoe wanted to believe were unbaptized souls who preferred to follow their own rules. They were ubiquitous on Earth. People called them bad luck, but they were just a bunch of mischievous little bastards who love to mess with humans — especially her.

It was quite strange to be able to verify if one was paranoid or if he was really watched by something evil. Zoe would have preferred to live in ignorance just like normal people but she could affirm if something was following her around — and there was a lot. If in the beginning, Zoe

could only see souls of recently departed, as she grew up, fairies got closer and closer to her until they decided they should just stick to her side.

Her parents never really understood the difference between common imaginary friends and her imaginary friends. When she became a teenager, it was weird to have something so childish surrounding her. But Zoe never isolated herself and therefore blended in with the other students through high school.

The bad times began after she became an adult.

“You want to move alone? But aren’t you happy here with us? You have everything you need.”

Her mother was overprotective. Besides, she was a little skeptical in letting her weird daughter venture into the big bad world.

“I’ll be fine, Mom. I just need a place of my own.” Her mother didn’t seem convinced, “I’m 24 already. Don’t you think it’s time?”

Her father walked behind her mother and wrapped a hand around her waist.

“I think you’re right. You’re old enough to start your own life. You already have a job and a diploma. All you need is freedom.”

Zoe smiled gratefully. Her father had always been on her side. Even when she had her episodes, he was always against therapy and special schools. He had always trusted her.

It took another three hours until Mrs. Lestrade gave up. Zoe was so happy that she started to pack right away. Of course, not everything went well with her choice.

On the day she moved to her new apartment, ghosts barged in as if it was a party. They made a lot of noise and the neighbours weren’t happy at all.

“Please leave,” she mumbled, sitting at her desk with her laptop open.

Zoe was trying her best to ignore the party in the living

room and concentrate on work. She had been writing and drawing ever since she entered university so it had been a while now.

The noise got louder, and a slight breeze closed the door to her room.

“They are suspiciously joyful for such dark creatures,” she mumbled, aware that someone was standing behind her.

“That’s because you let them,” the voice of a young man started, his energy becoming more prominent as he walked closer to her. “You can’t fight them anyway. They are drawn to you,” he continued.

That was part of her day-to-day life: scolding and judgmental opinions that weren’t needed but were coming anyway. Zoe got used to them since she had been followed by familiars for as long as she could remember.

Anything could be a familiar, from mice to low ranking fairies. According to English witchcraft handbooks of the early seventeenth century, the name was given to spirits attendant upon witches and magicians. It is said that the familiar, in the shape of a small domestic animal, was given to the witch by the Devil as companion, helper and adviser, which could be used to perform malicious errands. However, Zoe doubted that last part because in her 24 years of life, the familiars she met did nothing but play with the human imagination.

The noise got louder again, and Zoe was forced to save her work and turn towards the door helplessly.

“You should use a spell or two to make them leave,” the ghost started, the wood cracking under his feet despite him being energy and not material.

A sudden knock made the whole apartment freeze and Zoe’s breathe hitched. She had to walk through the mess that was in her living room to get to the front door. The fairies lurking around the jukebox were slowly getting the hang of how it worked. They must have stolen it and

brought it in when she was working because Zoe didn't remember having something like that.

"Excuse me ma'am but we've received a complaint at this address," the police officer began as soon as she opened the door.

"Great."

She frowned and glanced over her shoulder at the mess that was in her apartment: fairies aside, she could see ghosts that she had never met before and familiars of all forms and sizes.

It only took a week after that complaint before she had to move again.

The second place was a little cramped, but that didn't stop the dark fairies from hanging around, though. They also found it necessary to bring bad luck to everyone in the complex. Zoe had to move again.

"You're making my life miserable," she mumbled to the perky fairy on her shoulder.

"You just didn't find the right place yet. We feel the danger around you. We're just trying to protect you."

"I need protection from you, not from my neighbours." The fairy rolled her eyes and pinched her cheek. Since she was on the street, Zoe had no choice but slightly slap her cheeks. That way, the fairy got squished.

Zoe entered the restaurant and completely ignored everything that didn't seem normal but she couldn't help notice the abnormal. There was a couple next to the window that had two dark fairies on the table, running around the food before literally plunging their small hands into the food. It was no surprise that the couple began arguing with how much negativity the fairies were emanating. A few tables down were a man in a business suit and his associates fighting over some stupid football game. It didn't look suspicious at a first glance but once she passed their table, she noticed little demons under the table. The Liars were tiny and theoretically harmless

demons that looked very much like cats with dragon-like ears and tail. They weren't a danger to humankind - they were just annoying.

Zoe sighed and sat at the table in the far corner. She couldn't see what was happening in the restaurant, but she could see into the kitchen, which was a lot better. Demons weren't fond of human food, finding it unattractive and overestimated, so they rarely lurk around kitchens.

She chose to eat spaghetti that day. It was better than the raw meat given by different acquaintances. What was supposed to be a present could easily guide her towards death; like unprepared snake meat.

"Shouldn't you help these people? They're being tormented."

The grumpy ghost appeared in front of her. Zoe sighed heavily.

One ghost that found it vital to act like a teacher was Andrew. He had probably been in his early twenties when one of his colleagues pushed him down the stairs. What was supposed to be an innocent joke transformed into murder. However, Andy wasn't a vengeful person. He was quite a nice kid, but had the evil glint of the other side. He didn't want to leave and move on because as he said, he wanted to keep a close eye on this particular friend. She didn't dare ask more, but she noticed just how much Andy missed that guy.

He was in his first year of college when he died. It had been two years already. Andy majored in music, and that boy majored in contemporary dance. It was quite the story, and Andy used to tell it every chance he got.

"You should do something. Don't you know a spell or something?" he continued. Zoe raised an eyebrow and leaned against her chair.

"No. I learned that some things are natural. You can't fight the usual evil; you have to let people fight in order to realize just how much they care for each other."

Andy leaned back in order to see the businessmen.

"I don't think that applies to them." He pointed at the group and shook his head in disappointment.

Zoe shrugged innocently. She wasn't allowed to create a better future. She could see the evil behind everything but she had to obey some rules.

"Who invented those rules anyway? If you can see it, you can react and do something against it."

"Never interfere, never involve the innocent, and never react against the wishes of a human who has given his soul to the hands of darkness; three rules that tie my hands altogether," she mumbled, leaning back and watching the waiters being followed by what looked like playful little spirits, about the height of a dwarf, that could morph into anything they wanted. Scaries, they were called, because most of them were lurking in the shadow of humans, making them paranoid.

"You have a mouth and can use it to warn them if what they see is dangerous or not. The rules don't say anything about helping people who need closure," Andy continued, his lifeless eyes staring at her intensely.

"That doesn't concern me," she responded, smiling when the waiter glanced at her.

"Of course not. I forgot how ignorant and selfish you are. A young woman who wastes her life on drawing a cartoon..."

"Strange, because I know this college boy who stayed on Earth after he died. Even stranger is the reason he did it." She stared at him with her big blue eyes. "You have been nagging me for two years about helping ghosts, and every time I give you a negative answer, you start rambling about that boy you liked so much. Who do you want me to help? Others or you?"

She felt the table vibrate. Andy narrowed his owlish eyes at her and scoffed.

"You're such an inconsiderate woman. How did you