

Elussa

By: Katherine Massengill

Even as Melissa taught her class about the People's Revolution, she had to work to keep her focus. The twenty-eight nine year olds in her class could barely sit still. They whispered and nudged each other, or stared out the window at the unending rain. The Ellusa festival began tonight and all of them, including Melissa and her teacher's aide Rhian, were looking forward to the celebration.

Melissa looked for a child to call on. Suzy Chipeta was whispering in Kaylin Anders' ear. Two desks down, Evan Tarrant leaned forward to pull Jocelyn Elyas' hair.

"Evan," Melissa said sharply.

The boy looked up, his face full of guilt.

"Yes, In-Instructor Corbel?"

"Misbehave one more time, and you'll lose recess privileges for a week. Stop bothering Jocelyn."

A startled shriek made Melissa spin around. Kaylin and Suzy were up out of their seats, pressed against the wall, eyes wide with terror and astonishment. Warren Nichols, who sat beside Kaylin, was covered in flames, staring at his own hands in shock. Raissa, a young naiad, acted before Melissa could even process the scene. She waved her hands, and a wave of water materialized and splashed over Warren.

Several children screamed. Rhian swore. Hopefully the kids didn't hear.

"He's a freak," Evan yelled out. "We've got another fae freak in the class!"

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"Better a freak than a moron," Raissa yelled, clenching her hands into fists. Melissa felt a surge of power, and hastily muttered a dampening spell.

"All of you, sit down!" Melissa hated using voice-command, but sometimes it was necessary when dealing with rowdy children. Every one plopped into a seat, unable to resist the compulsion in their instructor's voice. Even Rhian perched herself on the top of an empty desk.

"Warren is not a freak. None of you are freaks."

"My brother says everyone at this school is a freak," Suzy Chipeta announced.

"Your brother is wrong, Suzy," Melissa said. "The students of this Academy are important. You are all here so you can learn to safely use your gifts. Remember, children, in Corvalle we don't discriminate on bloodline, species, or place of birth. The fae, the dragon-kin, and humans are all on an equal level. Understand?"

"Yes, Instructor," the children chorused.

Melissa told the children to put their books away. They gaped at her even as they obeyed.

"Can anyone tell me what today is?"

Raissa shot her hand in the air.

"It's the Ellusa Festival," she announced when Melissa called on her, a huge smile lighting up her face.

"Yes. Kaylin, can you tell us why we celebrate the Ellusa festival?"

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Kaylin scrunched her round nose as she thought about it. One finger twirled soft blond curls. "Since we're one people, we're supposed to celebrate the same holidays?"

"Festivals unite us," Melissa explained. "How many of you like laughing with your friends?"

Most of them put their hands up, grinning.

"So do I. Having fun together reminds us of the ways in which we are the same. Our leaders wanted the different races to share celebrations, so we could learn to laugh together."

It had been fifty years since the remaining fae and dragon-kin had been made full citizens, and they hadn't really made much progress. The two not-quite mortal races disliked each other, and they hated the humans and their mages even more. Even children as young as these students held prejudices.

"The Ellusa festival was one of the first celebrations that all three races shared. We are all dependent on water," Melissa said. "So today, we're all going to begin the festival a little early. Get your jackets and umbrellas, please."

Melissa's orderly classroom dissolved into chaos at the unexpected treat. They managed to form a wavy line as Melissa led them out to the muddy playground, with Rhian walking at the end to prevent stragglers.

Some of the children crammed themselves under the awning. Others looked eagerly at the slides and swings, but obediently waited.

"Kaylin, how does your family celebrate the Ellusa festival," Melissa asked.

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"We get to play in the rain. Mama doesn't even tell us to stay out of the mud."

"Suzy?"

"We don't celebrate it. And I don't want to get wet!"

"What if I gave you an enchanted umbrella that would keep you dry?"

Suzy thought about it. "That would be cool."

"Ask Rhian if she will enchant one for you."

Suzy looked up at the aide. "Can you enchant my umbrella? And can you make it fly?"

Melissa blinked, not sure where that one came from. Rhian grinned. She was half-sylph, and could probably make the whole building fly if she chose. She curved her hands around the umbrella and concentrated. Unlike mages, the fae didn't need words for their magic. Rhian handed it back to Suzy. The minute Suzy opened it, the umbrella lifted into the air, carrying Suzy on a dizzying circle around the playground. She shrieked and laughed the entire time. Soon enough, everyone was clamoring to go. The entire class rode flying umbrellas. They rose into the air as a group, and whirled around in wild patterns. Rhian whipped the wind around herself and formed a small column of spinning water, much to everyone's delight. Jocelyn, Evan, and Kaylin began a rather aggressive game of air tag that left Melissa hoping nobody broke a bone. All three were laughing, though, so she didn't stop them. Melissa tried to fix the memory in her head. She didn't know if their war-torn Homeland would ever have peace, but this wasn't a bad start.