

Nabudis and Selphius: A Romance

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Nabudis, an Elvaan adventurer escaping dark secrets of his past, heads to San d'Oria seeking redemption and revenge, but finds something completely unexpected. True Love.

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Chapter 1 - Into the Lion's Den

2

1 - Into the Lion's Den

It wasn't often that Nabudis felt small. Yet, as he stood on the drawbridge leading into the Elvaan capital city, small was exactly how he felt.

The majesty of the towering walls spoke to the power and strength of San d'Oria. The blackening of the metal portcullis precariously protruding from the slightly crumbled stones above his head told him the age of this city was counted in terms of millennia instead of years. The nobility of the knight guards, encased in sparkling armour, oozed the pride of an ancient race, perhaps even arrogance.

Suddenly self conscious of his own lack of worth, the tall elvaan glanced at his slightly tattered and weather stained leather and bronze armour. He turned the tarnished sword slowly in his hand, and then, embarrassed, re-sheathed it.

The wind gusted suddenly, howling through the tunnel in which Nabudis stood. Nabudis was forced to take one step back, his long auburn hair shifted its position. A leather wrap, tied firmly around his thick mane, stopped his hair from being caught fully by the assault. The elf bowed his head slightly, closing his eyes to protect them from any foreign objects which may have been taking a ride on the powerful gusts.

Turning his back to the stiff breeze, Nabudis walked slowly into the massive city. He looked around at the sights as a child might, his brown eyes full of awe and delight.

"Welcome to San d'Oria, citizen," A nearby knight said, noting the newcomer's somewhat stunned disposition. Nabudis turned, surprised, to face the unexpected voice.

"Was my naivety so obvious?" Nabudis asked with a wry smile.

"You are not the first to be overwhelmed by this city," the city guard said. "Nor will you be the last."

With a nod of the head, as large a gesture of respect a simple denizen of the realm might expect from a knight of the kingdom, Nabudis was given the clear indication the conversation was over. No questions would be entertained by this steel-clad guardian.

Nabudis, unsure of his next steps, paused slightly to watch others around him, seeking some clue of where to go next. A wise man, albeit a drunkard, once told him that each visit to a new city is best started at a tavern.

With this piece of advice in mind, the tall elf strode boldly forward, hopeful he would catch sight of a suitable drinking establishment before he again appeared to those around him to be a foolish tourist.

As he walked through one of the numerous arches which lead into the main courtyard area in the southern part of the massive city, he noticed a bustling crowd to his right. Slowing slightly, he peered through the crowd trying to ascertain the cause of the gathering. It only took a couple of seconds, and

the wood-against-wood clash of gavel on counter, to realize this was an auction house. His curiosity piqued, he stopped and watched the transactions. The process, while seeming chaotic, was actually a relatively well orchestrated affair. Warriors, attired in truly magnificent armour and fear-inspiring weaponry, handed in rare items they had acquired in their journeys. Local business owners, craftsmen and servants in the employ of other adventurers, were quick to place their bids on the desirable items. There seemed, to Nabudis, to be a number of odd items behind the auctioneers which were gathering dust.

Youthful elvaan children regularly ran up to the rear side of the auction house, taking small packages and scampering off. Though Nabudis knew not where they went, he assumed they were returning the proceeds, or perhaps unsold items, to previous patrons.

Nabudis smiled and turned his attention back to finding a suitable inn to acclimate himself better with the customs of a big city.

He headed east through the large courtyard area and passed vendor after vendor on his left. While some of the market stands were staffed, and the produce was plentiful, others stood empty and bare. The elf couldn't ascertain an obvious reason for this anomaly. It seemed to him that had these businesses simply shut up shop and gone under, new merchants would have moved in to take their place. Shrugging off the confusion, he continued on.

His surroundings became more oppressive as he continued his explorations. The buildings closed in on him from both sides as the streets narrowed. Instead of seeing pavilions of products set up on the sides of the thoroughfare, doors to larger, more established stores presented themselves.

Since his ears were unfamiliar with the bustling sounds of a busy city, the clamour of constant conversation surrounding him, his senses were particularly sensitive to the familiar. Even through the intense cacophony of crowded streets, the harmonious tones of falling water caught Nabudis' attention.

Seeking the source of the unexpected sound of nature, he spied, somewhat distant, a large fountain which gushed, geyser-like, a spectacular jet of water. Wanting the comfort of some familiarity, albeit in a form more majestic than he had ever witnessed, the red-haired elf made his way patiently through the throngs of people towards the fountain.

A number of San d'Orian citizens sat around the fountain on the low stone benches provided. A couple of children entertained themselves by tossing a gil into the bubbling water, retrieving it, and throwing it again. It seemed to Nabudis they were trying to hit a specific target, but he couldn't quite figure what that unfortunate spot might be.

In this rare moment of peace, Nabudis took a few seconds to catch his bearings and looked around the small square in which he now found himself. The sun had dipped below the artificial horizon of the city skyline and plunged the streets into darkened twilight. Smiling, he took note of a building to his north which looked quite a bit like an inn, freshly lit lanterns giving the entrance a warm, inviting glow.

Trusting his instincts, Nabudis walked towards the building. As he got close, he noted the weathered wooden sign hanging from a rusty iron rod which protruded from the stone. A painted lion looked less than regal as the rain and cold had de-saturated it and small vertical strips of colour were completely

removed. The words "Lion Springs Tavern" could still be made out, but had fared no better against the elements.

Nabudis pondered the meaning of the name. Perhaps those same Lion Springs were also the source of the fountain he had just been standing beside. Shrugging slightly, he walked through the door in to the inn and was greeted by the warmth of fires, and bodies, and the scent of spirits, wines and ales intermingled with the flavours of roasting meats and baking breads.

As he adjusted his eyes to the light, he looked around at the people already enjoying the hospitality of the landlord. Instantly, a young elvaan, with delicate features and fine black hair cascading on to her shoulders, caught his eye. She was dressed in the garb of an adventurer, a hand-worn weapon hung at each hip. Even at a distance, Nabudis couldn't help but notice her brilliant golden eyes flash as the light from the fire caught them, reflecting and glittering. There was a gentle smile on her lips as she listened to a massive behemoth of a man recant a tale of some kind, a harp in his huge hands. The instrument looked tiny in comparison to the fingers which cradled it. Nabudis marveled at the fact that this giant was able to get a single note out of the thing, let alone the beautiful melodies which were issuing from it.

The woman's eyes smiled much as her attractive lips did. She glanced in Nabudis' direction and noticed him staring at her. The eye-catching elf flashed a beautiful smile in his direction. Feeling the heat in his face as his skin flushed instantly, Nabudis averted his gaze. Waiting a few moments, Nabudis stole a glance in the dark-haired elf's direction. The woman's face was lit up with a big grin, but she had turned her gaze away from the embarrassed newcomer.

Keeping his eyes down towards the ground, Nabudis walked down the three steps into the sitting area, and took a seat as close as he dared to the elf who had captured his attention so quickly. It may have been his imagination, but the flustered new adventurer was sure he felt the gaze of the beautiful elf return to him once he sat down. He did not have the nerve to turn his head to find out for sure.