

Slaves of Etheria

Faye Valentine

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Celeste sat somberly next to her mother and aunt in the lawyer's office. It had been a week since her grandmother's passing and the pain of the loss still bitterly stung. She was close to her grams – having spent every summer at her house from the age of five where she would sit and listen in sublime fascination at stories of another world inhabited by fanciful creatures while learning a language of her grandmother's making.

"And to my daughter Krista, I leave my main house and one-fifth of my monetary assets," the lawyer continued reading the will. And to my daughter Wanda I leave my summer home in Houston and one-fifth of my monetary assets. And finally, to my granddaughter Celeste I leave my house in Charleston, the contents of my safety deposit box, my collection of costumes that she so dearly loves and one-fifth of my monetary assets. The remaining forty percent of my assets shall be given to the charities outlined below." The lawyer say the will down on the desk and looked at the distraught inheritors. "Lidia lists five charities the remainder of her assets are to go to. Do you have any questions?"

"Yeah, I've got a question," Wanda said bitterly. Celeste closed her eyes knowing what was coming. "Why did my mother leave so much to more to Celeste? I'm her daughter I should have gotten more than her."

"It is not my place to speak for your mother's wishes," the lawyer replied.

"Maybe it's because you're an ungrateful cunt!" Celeste blurted out unashamedly.

"Celeste!" her mother gasped. "Now is not the time!"

"Tell that to your sister. She's the one that started it and I'm the one going to finish it once and for all." She turned towards her aunt with nothing but scorn in her piercing blue eyes. "Maybe if you paid any attention to your mother other than when you wanted something she would have left you more. I spent the last two years living with her, taking care of her every need while you visited her what, three times?"

"HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT!?" Wanda exclaimed, jumping out of her seat and looking as if she were going to pounce on her niece.

"I'll speak to an ungrateful asshole like you any way I want! Your mother is dead and all you can think about is who gets the lion's share of her money!"

"Ladies," the lawyer said holding his hands out. "Please calm down. I know this is a difficult time for you, but losing your tempers is doing no one any good. "The will has been verified, witnessed and scrutinized in every conceivable manner at Wanda's insistence and Lidia was of sound mind and body when it was drawn up. Now, you can wage a war and try to contest it further, but in the end all you're going to do is divide the family."

"Thank you," Celeste said with a forced smile. "I'll see you at home later mom."

"Before you go, you'll need this," the lawyer said holding out an envelope. "It contains a copy of the death certificate, the will and the key to the safety deposit box."

"Thanks," Celeste said taking the envelope. With another look of disdain at her aunt, she left the lawyer's office and drove to the bank.

After the teller verified Celeste's information, she led her into the vault where they safety deposit boxes were held and together they unlocked and removed the box. "You may use any of the side chambers for privacy."

"Thank you." Celeste carried the box into a small side room and sat it on a table. After taking a slow, deep breath she flipped the lid open and stared at the contents. Inside, on top of an

ornately carved wooden box covered with indecipherable symbols was an envelope with her name on it. With a shaky hand, she opened the envelope and withdrew the paper within.

Celeste,

If you're reading this it means I've passed from this world and into the next. But do not be sad. I've lived a long life filled with many great adventures and I am now in a better place. Wait until you are home in Charleston to open the box and all will become clear.

Grams

Tucking the envelope into her purse, Celeste removed the box and left the bank. Although she intended on going home to see her mother, she felt compelled to drive to her new home in Charleston. It was only after nearly five hours on the road that she thought to call her mother to tell her what was going on.

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Celeste opened the ornate box and found a folded piece of paper sitting on top of an ancient leather-bound book. Unfolding it, she read another letter from her grams.

Celeste,

Out of all of my friends and family I trust you the most to keep my deepest, darkest secret and to carry on where I left off. Ever since you were born I knew you were special, the way you seem to communicate with animals, your knack for magical tricks and the ease at which you picked up my made up language. Now that you are an adult you deserve to know the truth.

Etherian – that silly made up language I taught you to read, write and speak over the years, is not a silly, made up language at all, but that of another world. I know how crazy it sounds, but I speak the truth. And the truth is, I've been preparing you all your life for this moment – the moment where you leave earth behind and travel the dimensions to the world of our stories.

If you have not opened the book please do so now. Inside you'll find a hollowed out section where I've hidden a very special ring given to me by my grandmother and her grandmother before her. When you put it on you will not be able to remove it until your story is complete so if you are not willing to embark on the journey of a lifetime, do not put it on. If you are willing, then do so now, but be warned, you will feel a great deal of pain as it latches on in a symbiotic relationship that will grant you many wonderful abilities. I cannot say what those abilities are as they are different for each wearer, but know that it will never bring you to intentional harm.

Celeste opened the ancient book and found the ring alongside a small leather pouch. Holding it up in front of the light, she examined the golden band she had seen her grandmother wear all her life. It was simple with no markings or settings. Her hand trembling something fierce, she placed it over the tip of the ring finger on her right hand and slid it in place. At first nothing happened and she almost dismissed her grandmother's story as just that.

"Aahhghhhh!" Celeste wailed as a sudden, incredibly sharp pain erupted in her finger and worked its way up to the elbow. Her hand grew warmer and warmer, and began glowing with a

pale pink light that grew steadily brighter and darker. She grabbed hold of the ring and tried to yank it off, but it would not budge. And then the light vanished, taking the pain with it.

“Fucking hell, grams! What have you gotten me into now?” She said going back to the unfinished letter.

Also in the book you'll find a small bag of coins you may recognize from the many stories I've told you over the years. Use them sparingly on your journeys until you're able to earn your own. As for the costumes you loved to play with, they are in the spare bedroom and are the clothing styles of the world you'll be travelling to should you believe the ramblings of an old woman. I don't believe I need to tell you the name of that world.

“Etheria,” Celeste whispered. “It can't be! It was just a story... wasn't it?” Opening the pouch, she pulled out a handful of coins she recognized at once. The square copper ones with the rounded corners were ryna, the silver hexagons were drieks and the golden octagons were solars. They were the coins from her grandmother's stories down to the profile of Emperor Elion stamped on one side. From the many stories, she knew the ryna were the lowest form of currency used on Etheria, drieks were worth ten ryna and solars ten drieks or one hundred ryna.

I do not know where you'll end up on your first visit, or what manner of abilities the ring will grant, but I can tell you where to go. Find your way to the Sanguine Grove and the Tower of Argus and tell them you are the granddaughter of Lidia Bryant.

Once you've dressed and are ready to go simply say the following in Etherian: By the powers of the elder goddesses, take me to Etheria. And when you wish to return home say the same but substitute earth for Etheria. Good luck and may the goddesses favor you.