

Interviews With Character

Storm Walker

I drive the fifteen miles it takes to reach the large collection tents that mark the current resting place of the Freed Peoples. The idyllic valley and quiet morning air belies the grim purpose of the camp. It is surprisingly silent. Few appear to be moving about the camp, other than the armed sentries, one of whom escorts me to a small tent next to a large pavilion. He directs me inside, hard eyes following my movements as I duck under the tent flap.

Inside I meet Storm Walker, a centaur slave of Alan Eagleheart, the leader of this army. She is lying down on a soft rug of animal hide and brushing her hair with a tortoise brush. I ask if I should come back later, and she tells me to sit, directing me to a chair near the wall. I wait patiently for her to finish, and then begin the interview.

I take out my pen and paper and begin. "Miss Stormy, our readers were wondering at your past. Were you born and raised in the Eagleheart home, or were you sold there only recently?"

She tilts her head and chuckles slightly. "Of course not. I was born out in the wild herds of the Plains. I was captured when I was very young, two or three years old I think, and forced marched to the city of Hell's Gate, where I was practically dead of exhaustion and malnutrition. I was told I was worth only a handful of coppers. I woke up on a barge with Wild Weed, another wilder like me, who took care of me and tried to nurse me back to health. Our destination, I learned, was much farther down the river at one of the big human settlements, but the barge got stuck on some rocks, and we were offloaded to lighten the craft. We were sheltered at Sandytown, a small village in the swamp a short distance away, where I was sold to the Eaglehearts."

I look up. "Doesn't it make you angry to be treated as property?"

She laughs. "A little, I suppose. However, I don't feel like property. If anything, Alan and his family treat me as one of their own."

"But what about having to obey the slave laws in the towns and cities that you pass?" I press.

"What would you have me do?" Stormy asked quizzically. "It's the way you humans operate. The laws are created by your folk. If you think they are so unfair to others, why don't you change them?"

"What are you trying to accomplish on this journey, however?" I change the subject.

Stormy tilts her head slightly to look at me. Her grey eyes rivet me to my seat. "What am I trying to accomplish? To save Mary's life, and to remove the Pa'Grund from the world. They are monsters even worse than trolls, taking what they please and eating people alive and whole! They torture them for the sheer pleasure of the act. They are *evil*!" Her tail lashes in suppressed emotion, similar to a cat's. The long horsehair makes a cracking sound in the air.

“But what about Inspector Alla’Mareen?”

“What about her?”

“Hasn’t she helped you in the past?”

“Yes. That’s true. She’s the rare exception to that rule, however. She’s considered a bit odd for her respect to the other races, though.”

“What can you tell me about her?”

She smiles a bit sadly. “She’s the most courageous soul I’ve ever met, daring to defy her own culture to help us.”

“Can you tell me anymore?”

“No.”

“I see.”

We spend a few more minutes exchanging pleasantries before I take my leave of Stormy. As I’m escorted out from the tent city, I look back for one more glimpse of this most remarkable young woman. I see her striding across the face of the pavilion to a much smaller and plainer tent pitched next to it. This tent could belong to a simple soldier or one of the craftsmen that follows the army. A moment later a tall man leaves this tent, and I experience a jolt of surprise. It is Alan Eagleheart, the leader of this army himself, blinking in the bright light and staring down the hill at me.

As I get into my car and drive along the long and bumpy road back to the portal that will take me back to my civilization, I can’t help but ponder what I’ve learned about the irrepressibility of the spirit and the cheery disposition that I have seen. I eagerly look forward to the next time I come back, and talk to these remarkable people.