

Advertisement

Tales of Ashandria

Von Lluvia

Advertisement

It was only a few days before Christmas when Alec Williams experienced the weirdest day on Earth he had had in a while.

Now, that didn't mean that his days were boring, but normally all of the exciting stuff happened far away from here, in a world he had discovered only recently: Ashandria. It was a little like your typical fantasy world, with monsters and everything, but it had grown on him during his travels...

Anyway, at first it had seemed to be a totally normal day, with him being a little annoyed at having to stay home at all, but he and the others were currently the most wanted people in Ashandria after a little... accident. Again.

Looking out of his window he sighed as he thought of 'the others'. Libra, Aurelia and Sahar - who all originally came from the other world - were his three... well, lovers. For other people it might have sounded weird, but they were a surprisingly happy quartet and did want to stay that. But as his parents still didn't know about this little detail regarding his love live his companions all lived with Libra, who had a small flat in the outskirts of the city, while he had to stay here, which was pretty annoying to be honest.

He was ripped out of his thoughts when he heard a knocking sound. Whirling around, he needed a moment to realise that it was just his door.

"Enter," he said, calming his racing heart. Having quick reflexes was all well and good, but sometimes they could be really annoying, bordering on paranoia - although they *had* already saved his life multiple times so he probably shouldn't complain. He was just glad that he didn't carry a weapon at the moment...

Just then his mother stepped into his room, looking a little troubled. Of course, these days she almost always looked troubled when looking at him, for he knew he had changed a lot since his first visit to Ashandria, but he couldn't help it and she had to accept that, even if it would need a while.

"Dear, can I ask you something?" she said, almost hesitantly, making him suppress a wince. There really had been a lot going on but hearing his own mother talk to him as if she was afraid he would explode any second - something that had already happened before - was to his embarrassment - wasn't very comforting. Especially not since Christmas was getting closer. And while he felt like he hadn't celebrated Christmas in *ages* - courtesy of the fact that time in Ashandria seemed to run differently from here, making time spent there seem much less when returning here - he still remembered

how he had loved the holiday originally for it was one of those rare times where both of his parents took their time at home...

"Sure, what's wrong?" he said as such, trying to sound cheerful.

His mother looked nervous, as if she didn't know how to say it.

"I know it's pretty close, but... Your father managed to get sick yesterday and he had promised me to help with an advertising campaign of my store, which... is tomorrow. Do you think you could maybe jump in...?"

Alec blinked in surprise. He hadn't expected that. But at the same time it somehow fit, his father managed to get sick when it counted often enough... Still, he wondered what it was about this time. His mother owned a small clothing store in one of the nearby shopping centre but she had never been one for big marketing.

"What did he say he would do?" he asked as such, frowning a bit.

"Uh... It's just a small marketing campaign... You know, dressing up as Father Christmas to promote the shop? The whole mall is doing stuff like that and it might actually be fun... I just need to be inside of the store so I can't advertise myself."

Alec thought about it for a moment. He wasn't totally sure if it sounded like fun, but at the same time... It would be mean to decline just because he thought it wouldn't be fun. His mother *had* raised him after all, he could show some thankfulness for that.

Damn, he began to sound like Sahar with his endless reverence of women...

Still, he knew he couldn't really say no, so instead he just asked: "How long?"

"I don't know, a few hours probably, the event would start in the early afternoon and go until the evening."

He sighed.

"Alright. But may I take a few friends with me?"

The last part was asked almost like an afterthought, but honestly... If he had to endure a few hours of advertising, why not make it a bit more fun?

His mother looked surprised, but also relieved.

"How many friends are we talking about?"

"Three."

"Well... Alright. But please make them wear something fitting and behave as long as they are nearby the store."

"Of course."

He didn't know about that behaving thing, but he would see what he could do.

It turned out, the first thing he had to do was a little bit of convincing.

"You agreed to do *what*?" Libra asked as he told the others about it in the evening, staring at him disbelievingly.

He rolled his eyes.

"Oh come on, it's just half a day. It might even be fun!"

She sighed.

"As if I hadn't better stuff to do in my spare time... Honestly, you and your helping complex. Why didn't we drill *that* out of you yet?"

"It's my mother!" He had already learned that helping everyone normally turned out to be a stupid idea after all...

"Same difference."

"Hey!"

"Oh come on..." Aurelia finally spoke up, making both Alec and Libra look over to her.

"Continue your fight in the bedroom if you want, but this argument is useless."

Alec stared at her, more surprised at her direct approach than at her suggestion - she

had always been very... sexual - before shrugging. He didn't have a problem with 'solving' their argument that way. Although it was kind of weird, as only a few months ago he would have blushed so horribly at that thought...

Before Libra could actually say something - be it to stop the argument or to add something - Sahar actually saved them from it with a simple question.

"Who is this 'Father Christmas' anyway...?"

Silence reigned in which Alec automatically looked over to Aurelia. Normally she was always able to explain whatever Sahar didn't know at the moment - for she read a lot and he wasn't even human but from a race with a completely different culture and language, so it was no surprise that he didn't know a lot of words. But Aurelia just shrugged helplessly, reminding Alec that both of them had been raised in another world. One that didn't even have winter.

He looked at Libra.

"Hey, I know about him. I've lived two years here before, did you forget?" she said, raising an eyebrow at him.

"Right, sorry," he muttered, frowning a little. Why was she in such a bad mood right now? Sure, she always was rather direct, but that was different in a way... Right now she was downright vicious, even if she sounded perfectly calm during it. He'd have to ask her about it later, but right now he was looking into two confused faces and had to concentrate on them. "Basically, Father Christmas is a creation by humans in this world. He's normally depicted as an old, bearded man with red and white clothes that comes once a year and brings presents to children that behaved well over the year. And this day is coming up in twenty-one days now. World-wide holiday, you know?"

Sahar nodded slowly, though still seeming insecure.

"I think I understand. And people dress up like him to honour the day?"

Trust Sahar to connect it to his much-loved honour somehow...

"Yes, basically. I know it seems like it's still far away, but... Well, we're strange like that, already celebrating the days before."

This led to a rather thorough question round from Aurelia, with Alec struggling to explain the concept of Christmas to her and everything that was connected to that, but finally she was satisfied and they could go and buy some clothes.

Which was the perfect opportunity to catch Libra alone, so as Aurelia was hidden in a fitting room and Sahar was looking through different costumes with a mixture of fascination and confusion Alec quickly walked over to Libra.

But before he could say something she held up her hand.

"Before you say anything... I know I was a bit rough before, sorry about that. It's just..." She seemed to hesitate, making Alec wonder what was going on that made her act so... well, human. She could be so stoic at times... "Well, I bought concert tickets for tomorrow."

Alec's eyes widened.

"Why didn't you say so before?"

Libra frowned, shrugging a little..

"It was supposed to be a surprise I guess. Maybe you wouldn't even have wanted to come at all, but... it's a violinist I like."

It needed a moment before Alec understood how she was actually feeling *insecure*. Something he hadn't experienced very often. But he didn't focus a lot on that, for he was actually beginning to feel rather guilty. Libra was a brilliant violinist herself and as such she had high standards, so if it was someone she liked they must be good...

Concert tickets like that couldn't have been cheap, especially regarding the fact that they had been here for a maximum of a week. That was too short for still buying them directly from the concert hall...

"Well... when is that concert? Maybe we can still go? I can also just do this Christmas stuff alone if you want..." he offered, but she shook her head, smiling a little.

"No way, you'd be lost without me. Sorry to say, but marketing is not exactly one of your strong suits."

He winced a little but knew she was right. He could stand around smiling, but he wasn't the type of person to actively try to convince people of anything.

"True enough... Still, when is the concert?"

"Starting at six, so we'd have to be there at least at five."

He hummed thoughtfully, letting his eyes wander through the store as he thought. If this shopping hall advertisement would go from twelve to four or something alike... Or maybe his mother wouldn't need them the whole day... He looked back to Libra.

"Look, I'll talk to my mother again, we'll work something out, alright? I'll make sure that at least you will be able to go to that concert. Don't worry."

She smirked a little, poking his forehead in a playful way.

"Now, who's worried? I'll be fine no matter if I can see the concert or not. I just thought it would be nice to do, but don't fret over it. I just wanted to apologise for my earlier behaviour, really, I was just... frustrated." She chuckled dryly. "And that even though I'm always telling you to stay spontaneous."

Alec smiled. She really was cute trying to stay strong - but he knew her by now, no matter how much she insisted it wasn't true, she *really* wanted to go to that concert.

"I'll find a way."

She just rolled her eyes, knowing that he knew what she was thinking.

"Thanks," she muttered, causing him to chuckle.

"You're welcome. Now, let's see about a costume for us too, right? We'll rock this shopping centre and afterwards the concert too."

Libra laughed quietly.

"Yeeah... sure. Let's go."

The next day Alec's mother drove him to the shopping centre where her store was located. As she needed to prepare some things in order to be ready they had arrived rather early but it gave Alec time to already change into his costume. It had ended up being a typical Father Christmas costume even though Libra had tried to get him into a reindeer one multiple times, insisting that Sahar would be able to manage as Father Christmas too.

Because with his dark skin and a size of over six feet he was totally what people thought of when they heard 'Father Christmas'... Not. Still, with both of them wearing that costume it would probably work out.

The girls had been a little more difficult, none of them had wanted to wear female versions of the Father Christmas outfit and as such they had looked around for a while until deciding that they might as well dress up as angels - at least once Alec had explained the concept of angels to Sahar and Aurelia.

"Alec, are those your friends?" his mother suddenly asked, staring out of her store. Following her gaze Alec could see the other three walking over to them, already in their costumes. And damn they were looking good.

"Yep," he said, grinning a little as he stepped out of the store, walking towards them. Once Aurelia saw him she quickened her pace before hugging him tightly.

"Hey there!" she greeted him happily before giving him a kiss on each cheek, making him rather glad that they had already established that she would not get overly affectionate in public. At least not around here.

It didn't stop him from grinning even wider though as he looked at her costume.

"Hi. You look... breathtaking," he finally said, meaning it just like that.

She wore a white dress that was decorated with hundreds of sequins, especially at the bottom, and her blonde, long hair was for once decorated with light curls instead of falling smoothly down her back. But the real eye catcher were the wings. Of course, Alec knew Aurelia had wings, for she also wasn't exactly human, coming from a race living above the clouds. Actually a little bit like angels. But normally she made them disappear when walking on earth so nobody would be disturbed by them. Not today though. Instead she had somehow managed to dye the grey feathers in a golden colour and they were reflecting the light in a beautiful way.

If one combined that with the fact that Aurelia herself looked like some sort of supermodel it was almost difficult to look away - thankfully Alec had some practice with that by now.

"Thanks!" she was just answering with a radiant smile. "It's such a nice costume I have to say! Only the bag is a bit annoying but if it's necessary to make people believe my wings are fake I'm alright with it!"

Her wings even flickered a little while she talked, but it was still true. She wore a big bagback that could easily house the technology necessary to actually make the wings move a little, so as long as she didn't fly nobody would notice... Or just think it was imagination.

Next in row was Sahar and they both just smiled at each other, glad to see each other again but not exactly in need of as much drama as Aurelia. Alec only had to curb his usual small burst of envy, for despite Sahar not being the ideal Father Christmas he was still more than handsome with his dark brown hair that fell to his shoulders, loosely tied together to not be in the way. Honestly, at times Alec felt that both Sahar and Aurelia in truth fell out of some fantasy model magazine and decided to stay...

Libra came last and with a similar dress to Aurelia's, even though hers at least covered her knees, barely. Also, as she actually was a human, she didn't spot as astonishing wings as the other girl, opting to instead use small, fake ones that glittered in gold at her back. Her red hair went smoothly to her shoulders and even if she might have paled in comparison to the two others in the eyes of most Alec still thought she was stunningly beautiful on her own.

Although he just got an eye-roll as he told her so - but Libra still smiled, so he counted it as a success in his books.

"Let's go to the store and greet your mother, I'd like to look around the centre to check the surrounding before we'll be trapped at the stand," she was just saying. Probably she already made plans on how to fight or whatever, Libra really liked to be prepared. Alec wouldn't even be surprised if she had a dagger or two hidden somewhere under her dress. That was part of what he loved in her.

Soon the shopping centre officially opened and the first customers began to trickle in. Although the beginning was a little chaotic it turned out that Alec's mother had prepared cookies and small voucher cards to give out to attract customers. And Libra also had come prepared.

At first it was barely noticeable, but soon she began 'suggesting' a few things and as such Aurelia was soon walking around with a bag of cookies and a pack of voucher

cards, giving the cookies to the children and the cards to their parents and other adults. And, unsurprisingly, this was quite effective with many male customers.

Sahar meanwhile was staying at the stand they had built in front of the store, mostly surrounded by girls. He was giving away gift cards himself and inviting them in, but he didn't seem quite as happy about his situation as Aurelia, which was why Alec soon helped him, making the big guy relax. For despite all of his looking like a strong warrior - well, *being* a strong warrior to be honest - he was rather shy when it concerned big groups of people. And while Alec wasn't exactly the most outgoing person either he at least knew the world and the people better than the other.

Libra then alternated between helping them at the stand, giving out more cookies and cards for Aurelia, and helping Alec's mother and the other employee in the store. One could say that the business was running more than smoothly, but of course, there had to be something strange happening to top it off.

Maybe an hour before they would be allowed to go - negotiated by Alec who had kept true to his words and managed to get them away in time for hat concert - Libra came up to the him, her gaze fixed upwards.

"Alec... How about giving the people a little show, hm?" she asked without looking at him. Confused he tried to follow her gaze but while he could easily see the second floor and people standing and walking around there, for they were standing just next to the hole in the ground of the first floor making people able to watch what was going on in the ground floor.

"What do you have in mind?" he asked warily, knowing that Libra's ideas weren't always... safe.

She snorted.

"Oh don't worry, nothing bad. But there is this guy up there who will soon steal something," she continued, making him raise an eyebrow.

"How do you want to know that?"

"Oh come on, remember that one time in Aquileia? I can smell that a mile off." Right... this guy who had tried to steal her purse only to end up with a bag of pebbles while she had in turn stolen *his* money... How could he forget that? So... she was probably right.

"And what can we do there?"

At that she smirked.

"Think about the mountain near Phynaris..."

His eyes widened as he realised what she was trying to say. He looked up himself now, judging the distance between the two floors.

"You think it will work out?"

"Perfect height, trust me."

Well, there wasn't much else he could do there, really... At least it would certainly attract some more customers. And maybe even catch a thief if it would work out.

Quickly the two of them informed Sahar who excused himself from his most recent group of fangirls to walk a few feet, stopping at a seemingly random place. Libra did something similar, while Alec just walked around the stand. It was perfect now.

Just a moment later a small shout could be heard from a store above. Damn it, Libra had been right once again...

So Alec began to run, as fast as he could starting from nothing and navigating through people who jumped away in shock and surprise, directly towards Sahar, who had begun to crouch down a little, forming some kind of leg-up with his crossed hands.

The second Alec stepped on it he pulled them up with a jerk, making it obvious that

his muscles weren't just appearance as he hauled Alec into the air with it. It wasn't actually high enough to get over the railing of the first floor of course, but enough for him to catch his hand in the space between the floor and the bottom of said railing, making a few people gasp and step away in shock. It wasn't exactly comfortable hanging there, but he didn't have to do it very long, for as he was still flying Sahar turned around a little, now facing Libra, who repeated his move. But when she went flying she instead reached out for Alec, who was just waiting for that.

As Sahar had basically hauled him towards the railing and was hauling Libra now parallel to it she came flying from behind him so to speak, so he could grab her arm and use all of his own strength and her remaining momentum to change her direction of flight, hauling her upwards as strong as he could. And *this* was making her fly high enough to get over the railing in a flash, jumping at the thief who hadn't managed to get far enough away to escape her.

Alec grinned as he could hear the man's cry of protest as Libra had surely managed to overthrow him.

"I think Father Christmas has to presents for you this year," she said cockily, making him chuckle quietly.

Sadly though all he could see from his point of view were lots and lots of shoes, and his fingers began to hurt, so he finally let go, concentrating on the fall so that in the end he landed on his feet, wincing a little at the feeling but after a second of checking himself if he was okay he decided that yes, nothing was broken or anything, so he stood up again, grinning at Sahar who had come over by now, frowning a little.

"Next time roll," he advised, making Alec shrug.

"But it wouldn't have looked as impressive then..."

"I think people are impressed enough."

And true enough when looking around Alec suddenly realised how almost everyone who had seen their little stunt was staring at them.

"H-How did you do that?!" a young woman asked, looking flabbergasted.

Alec just smiled at her.

"We're parkour runners," he said, lying through his teeth. "Sponsored by Williams' Attire, which is where you can find us if you have any questions."

They would have to lie a bit more then, but it should make some good advertisement for the store. Also, hey, they had just caught a thief, surely that counted for *something*.

That last hour was spent with answering endless questions about how they had done that and where they had learned to move like that. When Libra came back she had even more people in tow and as such they were more than busy for that time - but as a lot of people who got their questions answered or had to wait before they could ask away spent some time in the store Alec's mother at least didn't seem to have a problem with it for the time being. Only Aurelia was a bit miffed that she had missed all of the action, having been in another part of the shopping centre to advertise.

When it was time to leave Alec's mother looked stressed but happy, although her gaze told Alec that his little action wasn't over yet... But for the time being they were happy enough with actually going to the concert Libra had been talking about, without any care in the world except for beautiful violin music...

It was when Alec came home the next morning that his mother finally managed to catch him alone, making him suppress a curse.

"What was that stunt yesterday?" she asked with a neutral face.

"Um... Whaat are you talking about?" he asked innocently, but she quickly shoved a newspaper into his hand.

"Read that."

She pointed at a small article in the middle of the paper. He swallowed as he saw the headline.

Father Christmas saves the day!

Two people dressed as Father Christmas and one angel created excitement in the local mall.

The article then went on, explaining about their little stunt in surprising detail... And there was actually a photo attached of him hanging between the floors, taken after Libra had already vanished to somewhere.

Only then Alec realised how at least one of the people asking them questions must have been a reporter, for they were using quotes from them. But at least they hadn't gotten their identities, the only thing they mentioned was how they had been seen previously at the store of his mother and that this store certainly had been one of the most popular ones on the day before.

"Well... It's a good article, nice advertisement, isn't it?" he finally said, making his mother huff a little.

"And when did you plan on telling me that you were doing parkour training?"

"Um..." Well, whoops...

His mother shook her head.

"Nevermind. But please, the next time you do advertisement something less dangerous will do the trick too, alright?"

He grinned a little, glad that they had avoided this particular argument.

"I'll try to."

It was only much later that he realized how after this day the relationship between him and his mother had warmed up considerably again. It seemed like sometimes 'Father Christmas' still was the cause of miracles, especially during the Christmas season...