

## CHAPTER 1

It was a perfect spring morning, if you were born without a nose.

The sun had just begun to rise over the Isle of Sentia, sending tendrils of yellow across the cloudless sky. The light flickered off the still water of the bay. The surf would get choppy later, but for now, it merely lapped at the shore with a constant hush of sound. It was the kind of morning made for sleeping, and most of the inhabitants of the port town of Dumas were doing just that. Most of the wooden shutters on the simple single-story houses were still latched tight, and the cobblestone streets sat empty and still but for the flitting about of a few seabirds in search of scraps. There were a few exceptions, of course. A small handful of fishermen tested their lines, eager to get out while the fish still bit. The baker's chimney blew yeasty smoke up into the air. But otherwise, all was silent, peaceful, and, on this particular morning, extremely smelly. The kind of smell that nestled deep in your nostrils and settled down for a long nap.

Gicca Nummus also woke early, as befitting the Senior Ylark Handler. Nubsy, the ylark, didn't like to be kept waiting for her morning hay, and she'd start-bleating angrily if he didn't hustle fast enough. Most mornings, Gicca didn't mind. Frankly, he preferred the company of

**Commented [KT1]:** Wondering if this line would have better timing if it came after the next paragraph. Also I suppose because the fact that it stinks out isn't returned to until the next page.

**Commented [KT2]:** It's so tricky because the island is Sentia, all people in general are referred to as Sentians, this particular nationality is Elvorix, the world is Agaptus, which is also the name of the main Elvorix god, and the Elvorix capital city is Agapta. Bit of a mess, frankly.

**Commented [KT3]:** Are they on the southern tip of Sentia, on the west, or on the east and south of Ilnus? It doesn't necessarily have to be specified here, but it's important for later details about Matruga and also their route to Ilnus.

**Commented [KT4]:** What happens with these fishermen later, when the ships arrive? Perhaps throw in a small mention later that they had fortunately already packed up for the morning

**Commented [KT5]:** This doesn't compare to your level of figurative language, just an example of a hyperbolic description that could go here, before the "It was a perfect..." sentence hits as a punchline.

**Commented [KT6]:** If you wanted to put in a line such as "Senior—and only—Ylark Handler," that would work here. But perhaps that line is a bit overdone.

[Type here]

Nubsy, with all her weird tempers and strange phobias, to about anybody else in the village, even if she was just an animal.

But on this particular morning, he minded quite a bit.

He woke with a snort and a start, rubbing the back of his hand across the fur of his face. It was matted with drool and speckled with bits of hay. Nubsy had woken up in the ~~middle of the night~~ ~~wee darkest hours~~ after a nightmare. She was afraid of many things, including and not limited to candles, hand puppets, soft cheeses, pointy hats, and accordion music. The fact that she was big enough to crush all of those things without ~~really even~~ exerting herself didn't ~~seem to~~ matter; she was well and truly ~~afraid cowardly~~ and ~~had a tendency to try and would try to~~ jump into Gicca's lap whenever one of them presented itself. The fact that she could ~~also~~ crush ~~him~~ in the process ~~didn't seem to have~~ ~~hadn't~~ occurred to her either.

It really was ridiculous when one thought of it. ~~Nubsy stood about two stories tall when she stood on four feet, whereas the average Sentian buck such as Gicca could walk underneath her without grazing the fur atop his head. Sentians were small humanoid creatures as tall as your average~~ ~~[[comparable thing that occurs in nature]], whose soft fur and bright eyes gave them the average intimidation level of a stuffed~~ ~~toy animal. Nubsy had the intimidation level of an animal that could crash through walls—she practically served as a hairy, snuffling wall herself. Ylarks had the average intimidation level of a large animal that could walk through walls, because that's what they were. An~~ ~~Even a standard-sized ylark angry ylark could squish/trample a Sentian an~~ ~~Elvorix~~ into jelly, and its only problem would be how to pick the leftover fuzz from between its toes without the aid of opposable thumbs. Just by dint of her size, Nubsy had nothing to be afraid of, but she didn't ~~seem to~~ realize it.

Gicca didn't know what had set her off this time, but it had taken half the night and a

**Commented [KT7]:** Suggested rephrasing to avoid repetition of "night after a nightmare."

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**Commented [KT8]:** Need to modify that she's big for her breed, but perhaps still not *that* big? She'd be twice the size of a standard ylark, which seems excessive.

**Commented [KT9]:** Should also work in here (or somewhere soon) the difference between Sentian and Elvorix. Perhaps something like "Elvorix (they had dubbed their nation as such some centuries ago after a regime change from King Vidaarus to Scholar King Elvora Bibulus), were.... [etc etc]" That particular phrasing might be too much frontloading of information. At this point in history, there is the world Agaptus, the Isle of Sentia (and other islands as named on the maps), and the Elvorix people. They don't know that the Vidaar call themselves that, but King Vidaarus is in the history books.

**Commented [KT10]:** Ran into a bit of a wall here since it's hard to think of what to compare them to. I can't find anything that actually gives their height in terms of feet, and saying something like "5 hand-lengths tall" is relative. So perhaps comparing to a stalk of corn, or something else we could imagine them actually having in their world?

[Type here]

sizable ~~late-night~~ snack to calm her down. The lack of sleep accounted for the pounding of his head, but it did not in any way account for the stench that assailed his nostrils. It smelled like scorched offal topped with yogurt. And Gicca had never liked yogurt. Or offal, but that should have gone without saying.

He glanced around his room with one eye open, hoping in vain that he might locate the source of the smell, throw it out the window, and eke out a little more sleep. But he saw nothing that looked like it fit into the ~~same~~ category ~~as of~~ yogurty offal. Not that there were many places to store such a thing. His room was fairly small, and it hadn't been built with a scholar in mind. He had a rickety bed, a rickety table, and a bench that wasn't rickety so much as collapsible at odd moments. He kept intending to construct some kind of bookcase, but in the meantime, his books and papers formed tottering piles that threatened to overwhelm the few pieces of furniture entirely. At the moment, the place was particularly disheveled. ~~He'd stayed up late working on his diagram of the aqueduct in the city of Hunsilunus. If only he could figure out how it worked,~~ maybe he could talk Lukkus, the town Elder, into building one in Dumas. No more digging wells or lugging water from the stream that came down off the Tall Mountains to the north. Excitement about the project had kept him up well into the night, and he'd worked through latemeal, but he was fairly sure he hadn't left any ~~thing-yogurt, offal, or combination of the above~~ sitting out ~~that could be blamed for the current stench~~. And sure enough, there was nothing to be seen on the table but papers and nubs of charcoal.

The thought of nubs reminded Gicca that he had a hay delivery to make. He pushed himself blearily out of bed and washed his face at the basin, cupping his hand to take a drink. The water was cold and refreshing, but it didn't manage to wash the stink out of his nose. More's the pity.

**Commented [KT11]:** Perhaps add in something that the additional lack of sleep from Nubsy's nightmare afforded him even less sleep? As it stands it sounds like a continuity error as to why he didn't sleep much.