

Pastries and a Stolen Heart

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In the land of Etharia where things such as potions and faeries really exist, being a witch is stressful. Everyone knows witches to be ruthless merchants and heartless bargainers. Which makes business difficult. Specially for young witches in training.

Ursa Bolanus is the youngest in her family. Every witch at 13-years-old is to leave the family house on a full moon and purse their skill through training in a new town. By the time you reach sixteen, you're to establish a business in the chosen town, as is tradition. Typically, it's easy for a witch to find a new town for training, unless you're the youngest of a big family, that is. Being the youngest of five was the worst of luck for Ursa. As the years went by one her siblings left the family home and went on to make names for themselves. Theodora being the eldest went on to pursue Potions in a neighboring town. Later, Magne left and within two years became the personal fortune-teller to the Queen in a nearby kingdom. Luciana left for the north kingdom, where she became a renown charms blacksmith. Cassandra left their home and traveled to the

Forest of Old where she pursued Herbology, and her name spread across all four kingdoms as the most skilled herbologist in history.

On the night Ursa was to leave, her mom Osono was drowning in tears. Ursa and her siblings were quite infamous in their hometown of Alverton. They were known to wreak havoc everywhere as each grew up, learning their different skills. The whole town showed up to wish her good luck on her trip. Ursa took one of her sister's old brooms and with her parent's blessing left for the eastern kingdom, Arowshire.

It's been four years since Ursa first flew to the small town of Inmore in the eastern kingdom. She's come a long way since then, admittedly it took her some time to establish her trade and make somewhat of a wage for herself. Over time, she was able to make Inmore her home. Now Ursa was the owner of a small bakery with a loft on the second floor.

It wasn't much to brag about compared to her siblings, but Ursa had realized at a young age she had little chance to have an interesting future. Ursa sat in a little alcove in the back of the bakery, punching in dough, and baking cakes, frosting them with sweets and filling them with creams. She was very good at it. She liked doing it. But she felt lonely and a bit dull. The people who came into her shop were too old to be any fun, often coming in asking for better health, and besides they treated her as a wild beast that could gobble them up at any moment.

The townspeople were very superstitious, thus they had all sorts of weird beliefs. For starters, they believed a witch could do mind control with her unnaturally icy blue eye color. They also believed they would take people's voice or sight in exchange for their skills. Which wasn't totally true, like with anything, it's the bad one's that ruin it for the rest. Even so, a few of them still came in asking for healing, for wealth and good fortune.

Ursa was in the back of the shop pulling out cakes from the oven, setting some on the windowsill to cool. Outside her window were the old wives doing the washing by the river. She sat and enjoyed the breeze coming in and stitched. She heard the wives talk of a new girl in town. Apparently Barely's was packed with men from morning to night, each demanding to be served by her. The wives spoke of how she had the most hideously unnatural red hair. Ursa pondered what someone with red hair would look like, would it be the color of roses or tomatoes, or perhaps the color of mewberries. Her train of thought was interrupted by the chime of the front door.

"Be right there!" she called out as she quickly put the fabric away and shook flour off her dress. She walked up to the front only to find Erik leaning against the counter.

"Tsk, why didn't you just come in through the back door?" she remarked as she went to the counter. He shrugged his shoulders and kept his head low. "You're unusually quiet."

"How's business going?" he asked. Ursa knew he was changing the subject, but she obliged regardless.

"Pretty good, pretty good, same as always," she said dismissively as she looked at the stale breads from this morning.

"That's horseshit-"

"No, it's not-"

"You haven't gone by the market all week, and you barely have any ingredients left!" he said, exasperated. "I just wish you'd let me help you."

"With what? You don't make that much yourself," she retorted.

"I make more than enough," he said. "Ursa, you're far too clever and charming to be stuck in this shop for the rest of your life." Erik looked up at her, and she quickly averted her gaze to the wooden floor. "You can do better; I can give you better."

Ursa's heartbeat seemed to be in rhythm with the hammering coming from the blacksmiths forge down the street. She twiddled with the hem of her the top of her dress.

Erik cleared his throat as he pushed himself off the countertop and cast a shadow over Ursa as she stood up straight. He shoved his hands into his pant pockets and fiddled with his boots. "Are you going to the festival tonight?"

Ursa gladly took up the change in topic before he noticed her pink cheeks. "Yes, I have to deliver a few orders to the old wives and the farmers daughters while I'm there."

"Perfect, I can help you with those." he said, excited.

"I don't need your help, you know." she said as a matter of fact.

"No, but it's not up for discussion you're going with me to the festival," he said. "I'll see you tonight." With that, he walked out with a big smile on his face and left Ursa with tomato red cheeks.

Something was different that day, but whatever it was, Ursa begged it to never go away. After closing the shop early and packaging the orders, she went up to her loft and rummaged through her chest of drawers. She dug all the way to the bottom for one of her sister's old dresses. Only one of Ursa's sisters have gotten married and Theodora was a good seamstress, so when Ursa saw her wear the dress in which she got married, she begged her sister to make her

one just like it. After a quick fitting she adjusted the pattern to fit her figure tighter, as she stitched on her bed, she whispered small incantations she found in her grimoire.

Night fell, and the town was bright with lights. Music could be heard in every part of town and the loud chatter came through her bedroom window. Ursa was buzzing with excitement. She arranged the orders in baskets for them to carry and not a moment too soon she heard the chime of the door. Ursa walked up front to greet him but they both clashed as they walked right into one another. Laughing they both rubbed their foreheads.

"Wow."

Ursa looked up at him and found him staring at her with gaping eyes and a lopsided grin. "You look *stunning*," he said softly.

She looked away and could feel her cheeks heat up. Ursa could feel his glare on her, and she fiddled with her thumbs as she couldn't stop herself from smiling. "W-we should... you know, get going."

"Yes," he said absentmindedly. And walked toward the table with baskets. "This all of them?"

She nodded and they headed out the front door. They walked side by side along the street, children were running around, and people were strolling through the tents. Pennant banners and glowing lights hung over the street, laughter erupted from Barley's and the town square.

Ursa led Erik to a house by the river, where she delivered an order of healing scones. The man had beads of sweat on his pale face as he darted glances towards his family through the window. He slowly took the scones and with a trembling hand gave her two brass coins and a

golden one. When the last one hit her hand, he immediately ran back inside and shut the door.

Ursa gave a half-hearted smile towards the house and turned. She let out a pronounced sigh and walked away with her eyes to the floor.

They quickly delivered the rest of Ursa's orders of healing cakes, wealth tarts, fortune bread, strength rolls, and love scones. Once they gave away the last basket, Erik grabbed a hold of Ursa's arm and rushed them off. The pair laughed as they outran the children to reach the fountain near the center of town.

"Alright," Ursa breathed out, "you got us here, now what?"

"First I think we should get a drink," he said.

"Barley's?"

"Definitely Barley's."

Erik took off and ran into the mob surrounding Barley's. Ursa caught a quick glance of a head full of red amongst the crowd. She thought of the gossip she heard that morning from the old wives. Her thoughts were put off as she felt something tug at her dress.

"Excuse me?"

Ursa looked down to see a small child with light brown hair. She squatted down and met the little girl face to face. "Yes?"

"Miss W-Witch," she said with a stutter as she held up what seemed to look like a toy in the shape of a bird, "could you make this fly?"

"I certainly can little one, what's your name?" asked Ursa.

"Maggie."

"Maggie what a lovely name," she said as she brushed long hair away from the child's face. Ursa grabbed the toy, brought it close to her lips and began whispering a long incantation. When she was done, she pulled it away from her and the toy took shape of a wooden hummingbird. It looked at the little girl and flew out of Ursa's hands. The girl began to laugh and yelled a thank you as she went to chase the bird.

"Wow, enchanted objects, love potions, what can't she do?"

Ursa stood up and faced him. "I don't do potions, besides that was just another charm," she said as she went to grab one of the drinks from his hands.

"Ah, what's the magic word?"

Ursa rolled her eyes playfully and answered, "Oh, please, Erik, may I *please* have one of your precious drinks?"

"Yes, now kneel-" he joked, and Ursa slapped the side of his arm. They laughed as she grabbed her drink and took a sip.

"Yarbury, you remembered," she said with raised brows.

"Of course, I did, you'd nag at me anytime I got something else," he teased.

"Ha, you know you love me," she said casually before her cheeks flared pink at the realization of what she said. "Um, you want to walk around?"

"Sure," he said as he glanced the other way.

They came to a clearing in the center of town where there were couples dancing to a music band. The pair stood awkwardly watching the dancing couples. Ursa swayed slightly to the rhythm of the music.

"Do you... do you want to dance?"

She looked at Erik, he had his hand out toward her. Ursa looked down at his hand, and lightly placed hers on top of his. He grabbed her arm and led her to weave through a sea of bodies until they found a spot of their own.

He held his hand out to her and gave her a half bow. Giggling, she gave a small curtsy and placed her hand in his. Erik spread his fingers and entwined them into hers. He took her in his grasp and drew her close to his chest. Ursa tried to concentrate on anything but how his hand was on her waist and how good he smelled. His feet began to move and hers followed. It was slow, at first, and hesitant, getting to know each other and the way they moved together.

Erik took her hands and begun leading her in an Estherian waltz. They fell into a rhythm, letting the music control their movements. He hesitantly leaned closer waiting to see if she was going to push him off. Ursa leaned closer still. She felt the rush of the dance taking over her. The rhythm beat in her chest.

Her dance picked up speed and her dark violet dress flared out around her ankles. His movements began to match her own as Ursa's body bent and swayed in time with the music. She got close to him, leaned in and then spun out. Her skirts barely brushed the floor as the dance grew livelier and livelier. They whirled around the stone floor, allowing their bodies to twine in a different kind of dance. As they glided and whirled gracefully across the town square. Neither

noticed that the dancing crowd had all stopped to watch them. All the scenery and people around them had faded away.

Ursa was swept into his arms and whirled about as the band played another song. Erik's hands pressed hard against the dress covering her back, pushing her body against his. They glided together in perfect harmony. Ursa wished the song would never end. The pair made a dance of their own, one made up of surprised touches and hastily pulled away gazes. Only the music filtered through their bliss.

They danced until they were both breathless. She twirled into his arms, her dress spinning around her legs. Erik's hand slipped down her back. They danced the song away. The last note of the song played and abruptly broke their pause in time.

A round applause broke out around them. Ursa suddenly became acutely aware of how close he was. Her cheeks went red, and she abruptly broke off from Erik's hold. When she snuck a glance at him, he almost looked hurt, but he gave out a small chuckle.

"Come on, I'm thirsty let's get a drink," he said as he walked off towards Barley's.

Ursa looked at him for a moment before going to catch up with him. They walked down the street in silence. The crowds had dispersed into little groups who were dancing or drunk. A few couples had taken a seat by the fountain and talked quietly amongst themselves. All the children had gone to bed and their parents with. Only the streetlights and glowing pennant banners light the rugged stone street.

"Ariella! ... Ariella! ... Ariellaaaaaa..."

Barley's, however, was as busy as before. A horde of men all calling out for someone named Ariella. Rows upon rows of men all fighting to get to the counter. Ursa looked helplessly around for an opening at the bar.

Erik put a hand on her shoulder and said, "Don't worry I got this."

She looked at him doubtful, "How? Am I the only one seeing the swarm that's crowding the bar?"

"I know someone working tonight, I got us covered." With that he walked off towards the bar and seemed be yelling out to the bartender. Almost immediately the crowd parted and revealed a young girl, same red head Ursa had seen earlier that day. Erik walked closer to the bar and began talking with her. The men that were crowding the counter didn't seem please. Ursa could see their frowns and aggressive expressions.

"Come on, Ariella!... me instead... Ariella be my..."

Ursa guessed all the men were there for Ariella. Just as the wives had said, she actually had red hair. It wasn't like tomatoes or roses, nor was it the color of mewberries. She didn't catch what Ariella had yelled at the mob for them to back off. Some of them went away, others took a seat in one of the many barstools lining the bar and gazed her way.

Erik leaned on top of the bar and talked with her, and they kept talking. You'd think Erik had said the funniest thing in the world by the way she threw her head back in laughter. She leaned her head on her hand and looked up at him, batting her eyelashes. Their faces were a mere foot apart and less each time she goes up to move hair out of his face.

Ursa crossed her arms and rolled her eyes.

Erik came back to her and without hesitation she took her drink and down a good bit of it.

"Who was that girl you were talking with at the bar?"

"Oh, that was Ariella. She moved into town a few days ago; she really saved me the other day." he answered as he took a sip from his drink.

Ursa looked back towards Barley's and like clockwork the crowd of men returned.

"Looks like she's gotten quite popular in the short time she's been here."

Erik followed her gaze to Barley's and shrugged. "I guess."

"If you want to keep talking to her, don't let me stop you."

"What?"

"I'm just saying--"

"I think you drank that way too quickly," he said as he snatched the bottle out of her hands. "Honestly, what do they put in this stuff anyway."

Still looking Barley's, Ursa pointed at it and said, "I'm serious, you should go to her--"

Erik grabbed her chin and moved her to look at him. "I don't want to go talk to her; I like who I'm with now."

Ursa saw his eyes drift to her lips. Erik leaned closer, she slowly closed her with parted lips and... She opened her eyes and looked up at his. He let go of her chin and step back.

"Come on, let's get you home," he said looking to the side, "it's late."

As they walked side by side Ursa couldn't stop her mind from racing as to what she did wrong. They reached her bakery before she could come to any answer. Ursa muttered a weak

goodbye as she turned to walk in. She felt Erik hold her arm back. When she glanced back at him, he had his head hung low.

"It's not what you think... I wanted to... but I can't"

He pulled her close and softly kissed her forehead. "Goodnight, Ursa."

Ursa sat in her alcove as she did after a batch went into the oven. When a new piece of gossip came through the window. Ariella had had ten marriage proposal, ranging in quality from the son of the Captain of the Guards to the man who cleaned the fountain, and she refused them all, saying she was in love with someone else already.

"No surprise there," Ursa said to the cake she was icing.

Ursa talked to the pastries more and more each day. There was no one else much to talk to. Erik was doing his cordwainer apprenticeship much of the day. She got into the habit of flattering the pastries a bit because you should flatter customers.

"You will look forever youthful," she told a Bunbury cake. To a tray of scones she said, "You will come across a great fortune!" and to a mewberry pie she whispered, "You will catch the eye of the person you want most." This was because Ursa felt sorry for the pie. It didn't look all that appetizing.

To her surprise, Ariella came into the shop the next day. Not even acknowledging Ursa's presence, she went and looked at the pastries. Ursa peeked at her infamous red hair. It did look unnatural, Ursa thought, it was a scarlet red, but it was beautiful, and so was she. She had a young face and a curvy figure. She noticed she was wearing a pendant around her neck, it looked

familiar. Ursa understood now why Barley's was always crowded by men. She would make anything in Ursa's drawers look glammers.

"Perhaps... no... that's too sweet... maybe a..." She was mumbling to herself. Not wanting to be rude, Ursa waited patiently behind the counter. As she was lost remembering last night, Ariella appeared in front of her.

"I need a love charm," she decided.

"A love charm?" Ursa questioned, hunched over the counter taking note, "What kind?"

"The true love kind."

Ursa looked up at her. There was something unsettling about her eyes. They were a dull blue color, but there was no reflection, they were dry. She hasn't blinked since she walked in.

"Those come at a higher price than everything else, can you afford it?"

"Of course, I can," she insisted.

"Under what name?" asked Ursa, reluctant to continue this transaction.

"Ariella Seamoore," she responded.

Ursa's writing came to a stop. "Seamoore? As in King Seamoore? From the Arctic Sea?" Ursa understood where the pendant was from. It's the crest of the Selkie king.

"Aren't you smart? Yes, I'm Princess Ariella," she declared. "Listen, I need the love charm by tonight, I'll come to pick it up before then, make it a strawberry cake too," she turned and headed towards the door, "and I assume you can keep this between us, I'll only be here for a short while."

The princess walked out the door and left Ursa with so many questions. Why was she here? What did she mean by 'be here for a short file'? Why did she need a love potion? Who was it for?

She thought and thought and all that happened was that she became more confused and irritated. Ursa didn't like where her thoughts had led her, and she could only hope to be wrong. She looked through her grimoire for a possible solution.

Ursa had no time to collect herself. The shop bell clanged, and Erik called for her from the front. Sophie scrambled to put her grimoire away as well as Ariella's order.

"Are you upstairs?" he yelled out.

She quickly walked up to the front to greet him. Ursa took small breaths to calm down her heartbeat. As happy as she was to see Erik, he could always see right through her.

"How come you didn't hear me?" he asked.

"Sorry, I was... pulling scones out of the oven, " she responded softly. "Didn't want to drop them."

"Must be a big order then," he said as he went for the stairs, "mind if we lay down? My back is killing me."

"On my bed? Together?"

"We've laid under the trees together; I'm sure there's not much of a difference if we do on your bed," he retorted as he went up the stairs.

Ursa looked back at her grimoire in the alcove and hesitantly followed behind Erik. She joined him and laid at the very edge of her small bed. Erik laughed at his.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" she asked the ceiling.

"What makes you think there's something I want to talk about?" he responded. Ursa could feel him shifting on the bed.

"I mean... you're here and..."

"And?"

"Well, you don't exactly come over just because," she said.

"You're right I'm not here just because," he said. "I'm here because I wanted to see you."

Before Ursa even looked at him, she felt her cheeks heat up. When she turned, she found that he was already looking at her. Their shoulders touched and their faces were only a breath away. Ursa quickly got up and turned her back to him. Erik got up from the bed and walked to her side.

"Listen, Ariella wanted to see me tonight, but I want to come back afterwards, if that's alright with you," he said softly.

Ursa nodded rapidly, and strands of her hair fell and covered her eye. Erik brushed her white hair out of her face and stroke her cheek. "Until tonight."

As soon as Erik walked out the door Ursa went straight to the back and began to work. The sun's last light was almost gone. She frankly searched through her grimoire for any basic transformation magic. It was never something she excelled at, but she thought best to try it out regardless. She grabbed a bread from the baskets and placed it on the table. After taking one last look at the inscription, Ursa held both her hands over the bread and began the incantation. Since she was changing the components and overall structure of the bread, it strained her to continue.

After sweating out half her water weight, Ursa took the now strawberry cake and packaged it for Ariella. Ursa saw the last rays of sun light fade away and in the nick of the time shop bell chimed.

She grabbed the cake package and walked to the front of the shop. Ariella was standing in front of the counter. Ursa couldn't help but notice the silver embroidery on her light blue dress. She's never seen anything like it.

"Here you go," she placed a coin purse on the counter.

Ursa grabbed the purse and inside were money gold coins than she'd ever seen in her life. "Where did you even get this much money?"

"Those disgusting old men at the bar thought they could buy me," Ariella looked inside the box and gaged, "ugh, human food is so disgusting."

"Why do you want do love charm anyway?" Ursa asked.

Ariella looked up at her and something flickered across her face. Her brows formed the slightest crease. "I need to prove the King that love is real, or he'll wed me off to some old seal."

"But you're his daughter..."

"I'm only his daughter..." she said sneered. "If I go back with a husband who loves me, he'll give me my skin back and will let me marry whoever I choose."

Ursa remained silent.

"Anyways," she said as she closed the box and grabbed it off the counter, "it'll all work out, so no need for the leaky eyes." Ursa put a hand to her wet cheek. She hadn't even noticed her tears rolling down her chin.

Ariella turned and headed for the door. Just as she was about to walk out, she looked back at Ursa and said with a small smile, "Thank you."

Ursa paced in front of the counter, acutely aware of each passing second. The anticipation and impatience were getting to be too much to be bare. She didn't know who would come through the shop door first, would it be Erik or an angry Ariella? Ursa was more concerned with the latter.

A shadow fell on the window of the door and Ursa looked over to see Erik walking through. A sigh of relief escaped her lips.

"That anxious to see me?" he grinned.

"No- I... just thinking a few things over," she said softly.

Erik tilted his head to the side, motioning for the bedroom. She nodded in response and went upstairs. When they walked in Erik smoothly wrapped his arms around Ursa's waist and brought her close. He slid his head unto her shoulder. Erik turned her and rested his forehead against hers and whispered, "Gods, I couldn't wait to see you."

He held her face as they locked eyes. "We both know that this... what this is... it isn't friendship," he said softly.

"I... this is a lot Erik, I mean," she looked away, "you've never shown an interest in me before. Why now so suddenly?"

Ursa broke away from his hold and sat at the edge of her bed. "We've known each other for years-"

"And I loved you every day-"

"Then why didn't you say anything?"

"Because I thought we'd have more time!" he yelled, and he looked down at his hands,
"Ursa, I thought I had more time than this, but I don't-"

"What do you mean you don't have time?" she asked as she stood up to face him, her voice dripping with worry.

"I'm trying to make up for it," he said, exasperated. "Will you please let me have tonight? I promise I'll give you everything in the morning."

Erik held out his hand for her. She hesitantly placed her hand in his, and he interlocked their fingers. "You better tell me in the morning," she demanded.

He laughed and pulled her to his lap. Ursa sat on his lap and rested her forehead against his. She bit her lip and looked down at his eyes. His hand wrapped around her waist as the other slid up her back. Ursa breathed in shallow breaths; she couldn't stop her heart from pounding. The scent of sunflower seeds fills her senses. Erik cupped her cheek and leaned in, so carefully. Their chests pushed against each other and Ursa can feel his heart beating just as fast. Everything becomes faded. Breathing and not breathing and hearts beating between them. He was so close, and Ursa couldn't feel her legs anymore. She couldn't feel her fingers or the cold because she only felt him, everywhere, filling everything.

"Kiss me," she whispered.

His lips were softer than anything she'd ever known, soft like the first snowfall of the year, like biting into a plum, like melting and floating. It's sweet, it's so effortlessly sweet. Erik's hands stroke her back and her arms. He pulls her on top of him as he lays back on the bed.

The shop bell clanged. It smelled of sunflower seeds. Ursa opened her eyes to the sun shining through her window and an empty bed. A note folded on top of her chest. She gets up to get it and tears stained the letter as she read, *"I went with Ariella in exchange for the eight bags of gold coins you'll find downstairs. Sell this place, see the world, and find a place that you can call home. I wish we had more time; I promise we'll be together again. - I will always love you"*