

INTRODUCTION::

Hello, I'm the records keeper, Theocritus. You can call me Theo. How can I help you?

Oh, you want to know more about our history? Well, our history got lost with most of our ancestors. But I've gathered some intel over the years, and I was able to put some parts of the story back together...

You sure you want to hear it?

I must tell you this story has some pretty sad parts in it so, if you're not ready, I would advise you to turn away now.

I suppose there are happy parts too... Well, if anything, our pack was always known for always being joyous.

PART I::THE OASIS

So, you're still here? Well, I guess I should get started then. This may take a while, so you should get comfortable.

If you do not already know, our people are known as the Court Jesters. That wasn't always our name, but those were in ancient languages no one speaks anymore, and not even I can decipher it.

Yes, we are a pretty ancient people. The records shown we've been around for a couple millennia, but at the beginning we lived as nomads and were mostly hidden away from civilisation. Also, we live for a pretty long time. Our life-span is generally about 1000 years old, although the oldest Court Jester I have records of died at the age of 50,015 years. Yes, that's quite a lot isn't it?

I'm not really sure why we got such a long life, but the most popular story is that our first ancestor, that waja I just told you about, was blessed by a god a long time ago. He was the leader of a nomad pack that lived in a desert. They had a deity they prayed to and always relied on to get through the tough times.

The story begins during one of those hard times. The pack was facing the worst heat wave they'd seen in a very long time. It was the worst: the oasis were drying up quicker and food was getting harder and harder to be found. Our Ancestor couldn't bear to see his pack suffer, and so he made the decision to go meet this deity himself, to understand why they were suffering so much. But he couldn't take his pack with him, so he took off alone.

His travel wasn't easy. He had only heard of the oasis this deity lived in the stories that went down the pack through every generation. He had to endure days, weeks, without eating or drinking any water, but he never lost hope. He couldn't afford to, his pack was counting on him, and so he kept going forward.

It is said that once he was in the brink of death, he prayed to the god:

"O, Deity! Please allow my suffering to be an offering for my pack's happiness. I do not care if you abandon me, but please take care of them and make sure they'll never suffer like I am." and so he closed his eyes, not sure if they were ever going to open again.

But they did. And once he was awake, he found himself in a beautiful oasis, the biggest he'd ever seen. He was greeted by a strange figure, a creature like no other. It's said that it was radiant as the moon and it's wasn't easy to look at it for too long, as it shined so brightly.

"You're awake, my son." It spoke to him. "Don't be afraid. Come closer."

He couldn't say a word, but did as the figure said.

"I'm truly sorry for all the misfortunes your people is enduring." It said with a kind voice.

"Are you the deity that protects us?" He gathered the courage to ask .

"No, my son. The spirit you speak of is gone. I'm afraid that is the reason why you suffer as you do. But fear not." They gently touched his fur, and it instantly comforted him.

"The truth is, the spirit that took care of you wasn't from this world, but they took great interest on your kind, and decided to come to your aid a long time ago. You came to know them as Joy, I believe?

But our kind can't keep their form here for long, and each day Joy helped you, their energy was being drained.

I believe you can understand how painful it was for me to watch their decay. And even though I couldn't be with them for a long time, I was with them in their final moments.

But his final words weren't even about themselves or our kind. No, they were about you. How they were worried about your future. I couldn't take it.

So even though Joy begged me to come to your aid, I was too angry to honor their wishes. And so I left you.

But I couldn't stop thinking about Joy's words...

I have been watching you since you left your pack. I have seen how much pain you've endured, and how you never lost hope. I saw how you were willing to sacrifice yourself for your family.

I was sincerely moved by your actions. I can finally understand why my sibling liked your people so much.

That's why I changed my mind, and decided to honor his last wishes."

Our ancestor had no idea about the cost of the deity's aid. And he couldn't bear to be the reason why such kind creatures would cease to exist, but he also couldn't abandon his pack.

"O kind deity. I am truly sorry for your loss. I did not know that by helping us, Joy would suffer. And I sincerely can't ask you to do the same for us. If you could please just grant me a wish, I would be forever thankful, and you can consider Joy's last wishes as granted."

The deity smiled at him.

"I admire your compassion and I thank you deeply. I can grant you two wishes, but on one condition: You may never reach out for any of our kind again. From now on, you'll be on your own. What would be your wishes?" it asked, gently

"First, I want to have a safe haven here, where food and water would be bountiful for as long as we live there." Our ancestor said after some thinking.

"It can be done" The deity calmly replied "What is your other wish?"

"I want my people to be able to live long, joyous lives."

The deity nodded. They materialized a bottle from thin air. It was said to contain what was described as a star, and they said:

"From Joy's last breath, I shall grant you a long life and the ability to bring happiness wherever you go."

As the star was fused with our ancestor's body, a tear rolled down the deity's face

"And from my tears shall bloom the most beautiful oasis this desert has ever seen, and for as long as you live there, your people will need for nothing, as it'll supply you with anything you may need. But once you leave, the magic will run out."

And as the tear fell into the sand, a beautiful lake was formed and near it, the most green grass and trees and flowers, unlike anything our people had ever seen, started to grow.

"Before I take my leave, I shall reunite you with your family. You will be able to remember me and Joy, but will lose the ability to ever reach us again."

The deity turned their backs, ready to leave

"Wait!" Our ancestor yelled "and what should we call you?"

“You may call me Kindness” it said as it disappeared in thin air.

Once our ancestor took it all in, he found his pack not very far from him, waiting for him, looking puzzled but admiring the beautiful oasis they found themselves in.

I understand that they lived there for a few millennia. But there wasn't much about that time. I only know that they'd settle in and built the most beautiful village and a wondrous palace. Where they would hold multiple celebrations to honor and thank Honor and Kindness. That's where most of our traditions came from.

You ask where is it now? Well, look around you. I know it doesn't seem like it but these graceful but old ruins are all that is left of that place. You may be asking yourself what happened, then. Well, Kindness words were true. The magic from the oasis would only last while the court jesters lived here.

Our ancestors never cared much about it, since they never thought of leaving, but we did. Not because we wanted to, but because we were forced to. But that is another story.

PART 2::THE FALL

Our kind lived in isolation in that oasis for a very long time, enough time for generations to have passed. The desert had been retreating year by year, until it was but a story our parents told us, a myth.

Of course, there were travelers who found us from time to time. We never hesitated to offer them shelter. We'd always celebrate when someone new arrived, and would treat them kindly. I believe they would tell tales about us once they left, stories about a joyous and kind people living in a bountiful land.

But those stories ended up in a far away kingdom's court, and their ruler took great interest in it. Virginia was her name and her rule was ruthless. She had a hunger for war and conquest, and every time another kingdom fell into her command, her hunger would only grow.

At that time, our leader was Angus. You'd probably use the 'king' title to describe his position, but it was quite different. He didn't have any different status or life-style. He was just someone we could count on to protect and guide us. He was the descendant of our great ancestor, and just like him, he was kind and compassionate. Everyone loved him deeply.

But one day, a different traveler came by. They didn't look different, mind you. But the reason he ended up at our home was way more somber than what he'd told us. But we didn't mind, Angus and the others offered them everything, just like always.

But he'd ask questions, questions no other travelers ever asked before. "Why don't you have walls surrounding the village?", "don't you have soldiers?", "how come the king allows peasants to live in the palace with him?".

Of course, most of the terms were alien to my people back then. We'd never had confrontation with anyone, there wasn't need for a wall to separate us from the outside world or soldiers to protect us. We had no reason to not share what we had with whomever came our way.

But soon the questions ended, the traveler thanked for the hospitality and left. My kind didn't think much of it, nor did Angus. What came next was something they'd never dreamed of.

Some time later, we received new 'visitors'. This time there were hundreds of them, all wearing armour, bearing weapons: stuff we'd never seen before. For the first time my people felt uneasy, afraid. Two of those visitors stepped forward.

"We came here to speak to this kingdom's ruler, Angus." one of them spoke. The one beside him was a female, and she did not speak a word.

"I am Angus, who are you and for what reason are you here?" our leader said after stepping forward, concerned about the intents of those new travelers.

"Pay your respects to Verginia, Queen of the North." he bowed and made way for the other waja with him, the female that was quietly observing before.

"I couldn't really believe it, you know? That a kingdom with no walls or army existed." She said. There was some excitement in her voice, but her cold gaze was carefully analyzing everyone and everything around her.

"That's how we have lived for generations." Angus replied.

"Curious. Very curious indeed. I have to thank you for making my job really easy. But I guess that's unfortunate for you." Verginia said, now completely cynical.

"What do you mean-" Angus was interrupted, Verginia had made a nod with her head and two wajas were now holding Angus down to the ground. Our people was frozen, they'd never seen anyone act that way, they didn't understand.

"I'll give you two choices, Angus. Surrender to me peacefully, or your people will suffer the consequences."

“Why are you doing this?” Angus screamed, angry but confused.

“I’m Verginia, the conqueror. That’s what I do. I’m sincerely surprised that I didn’t hear of such a bountiful land before. Otherwise we’d be having this conversation a long time ago.”

“You can take whatever you’d like, we don’t want to fight.”

“Oh, I plan to take it. I plan on taking everything.” Verginia stared deeply into Angus’s eyes, her cold gaze chilling his bones. “Enough of small talk. Here’s how this is going to go. Since you’re so pathetically unguarded and I’m feeling quite generous today, I’ll give you until nightfall to reach your decision. If you don’t surrender until then, by break of dawn there will be no one left in this town of yours.” She continued to stare at him for a minute before finally yelling at the soldiers to release him.

And then they left our city, but never our field of view. In fact, their camp surrounded us almost entirely. Angus was terrified, and as confused as everyone else, but he was the leader and he had to come up with a solution, very quickly.

He asked for everyone to meet at the palace and soon almost everyone was there. I haven’t told you that, but we were there too: my sister Euphemia and I. But we were too little to understand anything that was happening. Still, I remember how sad Angus looked that day. Everyone was talking at the same time, very afraid about what was happening, confused as to why those people wanted to take our city, when we never denied anything to anyone.

“My people, quiet down please. I need you to listen very closely.”

Angus was afraid, but he wouldn’t let that show, always assuming a wise and strong pose. By his side was Mara, his mate, with tears in her eyes, but still compassionate.

“I will surrender to Queen Verginia at nightfall, but I don’t know if that will be enough for her to show us mercy. For that reason, I’m giving you a choice: Stay and face her and her army, or flee now.

I’m not going to force you to stay, but you need to be prepared: none of those two choices are easy and from now on, our lives will never be the same. We’ve got a taste of how cruel the world can be today, and while fleeing might be safer, life won’t be easy outside our city.

So, I need you to consider both choices carefully. For those of you that decide to stay, I can’t guarantee your safety, for I don’t know what that cold queen has in store for us. For those who decide to flee, meet with Mara at the west part of the city. I’ll make sure a path is secured for you to leave. I’m really sorry this day has come, and that I’m not able to protect you. You’ll have three hours to decide.”

We were in shock. No one ever considered having to leave our home. But there we were facing this cruel situation, left with unreasonable choices.

In three hours, a considerable number of us was meeting Mara at the west part of town. My family was one of them. The others who decided to stay were mainly in shock, in denial, or simply didn't believe that the Cold Queen would ever hurt them after surrendering. Yes, that's how naive my people was.

For us who decided to go, the plan was fleeing through the woods, where there seemingly wasn't any soldiers from Verginia's army, while Angus officially surrendered to her, on the other side of town.

What comes next is what I've pieced together from various accounts from different Jesters I met and documents I found here at the city once I'd returned:

As soon as Angus surrendered, the queen murdered him. At that time, we were fleeing through the woods, but there were soldiers there waiting to ambush us. Some of us made it, others weren't so lucky, either being killed or captured. Meanwhile, in the town, chaos ensued. My people, unarmed, afraid and confused, tried to hide, flee or were frozen by shock. Some went through the forest and had the same fate our group did, others tried to hide but were captured, and the ones who attempted to fight were killed.

As I said, not a happy story.

For us that managed to escape, life wasn't easier: We lost sight of Mara in those woods, some say she tried to serve as a distraction for others to make their escape. All that we knew was that our big group had been separated into several smaller ones, and we all ended up in different places.

Our markings always made us stand out wherever we went, we were always recognized. Sooner or later, most of us ended up as slaves too. That's how we learned to live hidden away. Most lived in the shadows of the cities, others decided to make their own home and live off what the earth could provide. There were even ones who became nomads, staying in one place just long enough to catch their breaths and move on. Point is, we were never safe again.

The ones who were captured became slaves. We were treated like things made for other's entertainment, after all, we were known as the joyful people from the south. They were sent all over Verginia's kingdom, and not a single one of us were allowed to stay in the city we called home.

And you remember, don't you? The myth had said that once we left the oasis, the magic would fade, and all that made it so desired by Verginia, ended months after she had claimed it. Nothing would grow, the lake had dried. The land was bountiful no more.

She abandoned the place one year after the slaughter happened. She used it as a prison of sorts, where she would send prisoner wajas from the other places she conquered. But it didn't make it any easier for us, in fact, her rage was so strong, she directed it at the Jesters she held captive.

Most of them were killed during that time, just to please 'her majesty, the queen', who had seemed to take quite a liking to watching us suffer. They would offer us as gifts to her, but none of them would last longer than a few months. That's when we first earned the name "Court Jesters".

But of course, there were those who were sympathetic towards us, some would try and save us from slavery, but it wasn't pretty when they got discovered.

Anyways, soon there wasn't enough Court Jesters around to satiate the queen's rage, so she went after her own subjects; That's when they started to realize things needed changing, and soon the queen was overthrown. But when that happened, there was but a few of us left, and most of us lost contact with the each other. You could say that our traditions pretty much died, but my parents never let my sister and I forget.

PART 3 :: THE RETURN

After we fled, my family and I lived in some woods. We built a house there and simply lived of what the earth could provide. We would be without food for weeks sometimes, but we learned to live like that.

One day though, someone came to our doorstep. Someone who seemed to be needing help, my sister and I were weary, but my parents couldn't say no to them, so we offered them shelter, just like we used to do. But they were really nice, and treated us like any other. It was from them we'd learned that it had been quite a while since Virginia was dead. And the Court Jesters were nothing but a faint memory for the others. So when this traveler left, we came to the decision that it was about time we left those woods. And so we gathered our things and moved.

The city we came across wasn't very big, but it wasn't small either. It was full of other wajas, and we realized they didn't seem to recognize us at all. We managed to buy a little house and lived there for a long time. Time enough to make my sister really uneasy.

She'd always dream of coming back to our first home, the oasis. And now that there was nothing to stop her she would always be begging me to come with her. But I was pretty happy at that city. I didn't feel like having to go back to that place at all.

Not to mention, our parents were getting old and we needed to take care of them. But soon my dad passed away. My mom wasn't all that good either but one day, she said she needed to talk to us.

She gave us these silver cuffs and said that it was something that we used to wear back in the day, when festivals were held. And well, what came next wasn't exactly what I wanted: she asked us to go back to the oasis. She wanted us to bring the Court Jesters back again, restore our traditions.

Of course Euphemia was super excited and I, well... I couldn't say no to mom. So the next day we began this big quest to find our home again.

Yes, we had no idea where it was. The place was abandoned by the queen and it was never included in any maps at all. We just had this general idea of where it should be.

But well, long story short, we found it. And the closer we got to it, we noticed more wajas started to recognize us. They didn't do anything mean though, on the contrary, they were really sympathetic, and offered us shelter (like we used to do for them) and were very kind to us.

Once we got there, it was nothing but ruins. The palace was still standing, but time wasn't very kind. We were surprised to find no one there.

At first we noticed that the earth was really barren and nothing seemed to grow. But it looked like our presence brought some life back to the land, and Mia got plants to start growing again. We even found there was still a water vein under the dried up lake. So, we moved in.

There were some neighboring towns that we would visit to get provisions and stuff like that. Towns that didn't exist back when we were little. They'd always offer help and slowly we started rebuilding the place. I guess somehow word went around that the Oasis was back, because soon after we got our first visitors, and some even decided to stay around for good. But it was a long time before we got our first Court Jester visitors.

Well, spoiler: it was Vincent. Then he brought Magia and Quinn, then came Sora... and then a bunch of others. I was surprised to see there was so many of us left. I started working as the Court Jester's Archivist, trying to piece together our past and such. Euphemia decided she would take care of the grounds, make sure it was thriving again, though most of the time she just wanders around pretending to be working. And well, the rest do their own thing.

I guess you can learn more about them if you ask them yourself.

And that's it. That's all I can tell you about our history, I hope you found it interesting. Now, if you excuse me, I've got some work to do.