

First Shave

This story is set well before the War of the Alliance series.

Fieran peered at himself in the mirror set in the wall of his water closet in his bedroom in Estyra. He was all gangly legs and legs, bumpy elbows and knobby knees, as if he'd been stretched too his height too fast as was just waiting for the rest of him to catch up. One of the changes he was experiencing now that he was hitting his half-elven adolescent years.

One of the other changes...he rubbed a finger over the scattered red bristles marring his cheek.

Facial hair. He was getting facial hair.

He blinked at the emotion rising within him, resisting the urge to punch the mirror. He wanted to be an elf just like his dacha. But elves didn't get facial hair.

He'd already come to terms with the fact that he hadn't inherited proper elven hair. Did he have to get facial hair too?

Worse, did he have to notice the hair while they were in Estyra? While staying in the suite of rooms connected to Ellonahshinel, the elven royal palace? The world was out to hammer into him just how far short he fell of being a real elf.

Blinking furiously, he picked up the large knife he'd sneaked out of the kitchen on the ground below. That adventure book he'd read hadn't made shaving sound that hard. The human adventurer had shaved by the campfire with a sharp knife. How hard could it be?

As he brought the knife toward his face, the door behind him opened, revealing Dacha standing there.

Dacha's eyes widened. He lunged across the room and snatched the knife from Fieran's hand. "What are you doing?"

The harsh, loud tone of his voice—the closest Fieran had ever heard him to yelling—made Fieran jump and leap back. A good thing that Dacha had already snagged the knife or he would have poked his own eye out.

"I...I...was trying to shave." Fieran couldn't meet Dacha's gaze, especially with the way Dacha's eyes were burning.

"Shave." Dacha's voice turned flat.

"Yes." Fieran clenched his fists, tears burning at the corners of his eyes again. Ugh. He wasn't sure what was with him lately. His emotions seemed to waffle between extreme highs, tears, and flashes of anger that he hadn't experienced before. "I...I..."

He couldn't get the words out. Instead he just pointed at his cheek where the handful of hair was sprouting. The tell-tale sign that he was not fully elf.

Dacha heaved a long breath, squeezing his eyes shut tightly for a long moment. When he opened his eyes again, something in his expression had calmed. He rested a hand—the one not still gripping the kitchen knife—on Fieran's shoulder. "Come, sason. Breakfast is growing cold."

With a sigh, Fieran trudged out of the room and down the stairs, following after his dacha.

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Fieran trotted after his dacha as Dacha led the way along the branch pathways of Ellonahshinel.

As they reached the branch that held Uncle Edmund's, Aunt Jalissa's, and Jayna's suite of rooms, Dacha glanced over his shoulder. "If anyone can show you how to shave, it would be your Uncle Edmund."

Something in Fieran's chest eased. Unlike his Uncle Julien, who'd had a full beard as long as Fieran could remember, Uncle Edmund was always as clean shaven as an elf. Apparently Uncle Edmund had spent a handful of years pretending to be an elf and spying on Tarenhiel.

It might not be as good as being a true, beardless elf, but perhaps Uncle Edmund could teach Fieran how to pass as an elf, at least when it comes to lacking facial hair.

Dacha knocked on the door. Moments later, Uncle Edmund opened it, his gaze sweeping from Dacha to Fieran. "Good morning. What brings the two of you by?"

"Fieran needs to learn how to shave." Dacha rested a hand on Fieran's shoulder and steered him forward.

Fieran felt his ears go hot as Uncle Edmund's gaze landed on him.

"Ah." Uncle Edmund gave a sharp nod. "Come in, you two. Let's introduce you to the straight razor."