

Dealing with ~~Fools~~ Bureaucracy  
A Fairy Tale Enchantress Short Story  
By K. M. Shea

Clovicus leaned against the doorframe of Evariste's office door in the Veneno Conclave and stared into its darkened innards.

Even when Evariste had been free, the office was more a room used to hold his mail delivery and reports/documents than an actual workplace, given that the Lord Enchanter had created a permanent portal to his Torrens cottage inside his office, making it easy to skip between the two locations in the blink of an eye, even though his home was on the other side of the continent.

His desk had a layer of dust on it, and papers were accumulating on its surface. The air was a little stale, and a velvet armchair settled by the bookshelf had spider webs on it.

Sighing, Clovicus stepped into the office and sifted through Evariste's papers. He stacked updates on the various projects Evariste had been involved in before his capture in a neat pile, threw out the useless annual paperwork the Veneno Conclave sent to enchanters—as if Evariste, having been a Chosen captive for over five years, was going to be able to write an essay on the magical studies he had conducted this year, what idiots—as well as a number of personal correspondences that basically amounted to mages asking useless questions that they could easily get answered if they walked their carcasses down to the library instead of sending word to a lord enchanter who was known to be missing.

*Sometimes I can't believe how foolish—and selfish—people are.*

Clovicus used his robe to dust off his student's desk, shook out the heavy curtains to dislodge a few spider webs, and made the mental note to ask a servant to come clean the place.

He glanced at the permanent portal to Evariste's house. Magic swirled in the golden frame that stabilized the gate, but the portal's surface was clear like glass, allowing him to see the enchanter's darkened bedroom.

His quarters were tidy and undisturbed, holding no sign that anyone had passed through them recently—or had taken up residence in Evariste's house, given that no light leaked in under the bottom crack of the bedroom door.

*Angelique hasn't returned. Perhaps I should send word to her that I'd like to speak to her instead of watching for her? I could suggest she rest at Evariste's place. She needs a few days of respite, or she's going to burn herself out.*

Clovicus sighed and massaged his forehead.

Evariste's absence was a constant worry, but Angelique and her wild excursions were a nightmare.

She was a student. No matter how talented she was, the entire continent shouldn't be depending on her rushing back and forth, putting out all the fires the Veneno Conclave refused to address.

*I should be out on the field, helping her.*

“Lord Enchanter Clovicus?”

Clovicus bit back an oath that would have made the finicky Council and their glass-like sensibilities swoon in horror. He knew that starchy voice. It was Wallace, his supposed “assistant.”

The man was intolerable—not because he was a bore, though he was, but because he tried to rein Clovicus in like he was a dog that could be brought to heel. The worst part was he was an immovable force, and Clovicus had been unable to get him fired since the Council insisted Wallace was necessary.

*Probably so they have a method of spying on Angelique by spying on me. In their paranoia of Angelique, they miss the disastrous threat of the Chosen. What a bunch of fools.*

Clovicus slipped behind Evariste’s portal and crouched, the magic shielding him from view while the dimness of the room would hopefully discourage Wallace from closely investigating the place.

Clovicus was silent as Wallace ambled down the hallway.

“Lord Enchanter Clovicus?” Wallace paused momentarily in the doorway, casting a shadow in the patch of light that the open door shed into the room.

Clovicus narrowed his eyes and held his breath.

A long moment passed, then another.

Just when Clovicus’ knees started to ache from the crouched position, Wallace backed away and shuffled down the hallway.

“Lord Enchanter Clovicus? I know you came this direction,” he called, his voice growing muffled as he turned a corner.

Clovicus exhaled and scowled as he stood up and brushed his robes off. *It’s barely past sunrise—what does he want with me this early in the day? Certainly nothing I’m interested in.*

Shaking his head, Clovicus slipped out of Evariste’s office and headed in the opposite direction.

With a little luck, he’d be able to avoid Wallace for most of the day. In an hour he was due to bust in on a meeting between Tristisim, Crest, and a few Fairy Godparents—they were supposed to discuss new testing methods to sort students earlier according to their power levels, something Clovicus suspected was going to breed resentment and all kinds of emotional baggage among the brats. He’d seen the damage dealt to both Evariste and Angelique, who each stood on the opposite end of the spectrum when it came to Conclave reactions. He wasn’t going to let the Conclave raise a generation of them.

After that he planned to invade the offices of a few senior craftmages. Stil had sent word that the craftmages who’d taken up residence in Chanceux Chateau were starting to get messages requesting they return to the Conclave. Clovicus needed to distract the senior craftmages so they didn’t stop to wonder *why* all of the best craftmages were at Chanceux—or worse, wonder why they weren’t returning as instructed.

In the afternoon there was a public meeting about policies on using magic for various country governments that he intended to attend for the sake of shouting down any potentially

stupid ideas any of the Council members were sure to bring up. With a little luck, the meeting would stretch out until dinner, and the day would pass without Wallace being able to bother him.

Clovicus smirked to himself as he left one of the Conclave buildings and marched across a courtyard, intending to hide in Sybilla's unused office until the first meeting.

He was so busy mentally congratulating himself he nodded to any mages that called out morning greetings to him without really thinking.

"Good morning, Lord Enchanter Clovicus!"

"Good day to you, Lord Enchanter Clovicus!"

"—Since Firra and Donaigh refuse to come back, it's about time we take disciplinary action against them."

Clovicus stopped when his ears finally caught up with his thoughts, rotating until he found the source of the conversation—Sinèad and Alfonso of the Assignment and Appointments Department.

Although Sinèad ran the department, Alfonso was her right-hand man as well as her husband, and together the pair made most decisions regarding what mages were assigned to what missions, as well as deciding what lower-level cases the Veneno Conclave would respond to.

Clovicus casually stuffed his hands into the pockets of his robes, then meandered over to the pair, who were sitting on a stone bench by a gurgling fountain.

"Disciplinary action seems unnecessarily harsh," Sinèad said. "They haven't done anything wrong or against Conclave rules."

"They're *refusing* to return, even though we've sent them two notices that they need to check in for their new assignment now that Princess Rosalinda of Sole has outlived her curse," Alfonso said.

"They've been with Rosalinda since she was a child. Their reluctance to finish their assignment as her guardians is understandable." Sinèad touched a pink flower that floated on the surface of the fountain, making it spin.

*They're trying to pull Firra and Donaigh? Are they unaware the only reason Sole hasn't sent any magic knights to harass us after losing Carabosso is because Firra and Donaigh remain with Rosalinda?*

"Perhaps, but we have a number of assignments that could use a fire mage of Firra's power, and Donaigh should rejoin the war mages on guard rotation as he hasn't served in the Conclave since he graduated," Alfonso said.

"I suppose you're right..."

"Ahem." Clovicus cleared his throat, then smiled brightly when the couple twisted around on the bench to peer up at him.

"Lord Enchanter Clovicus!" Sinèad stood up, Alfonso a moment behind her. Together they bowed to him. "Good morning—can we help you with something?"

"Actually, I couldn't help but overhear your conversation regarding Firra and Donaigh."

"Ahh, yes, sir." Alfonso adjusted his glasses.

Clovicus put on his most mild smile. “I thought I’d save you two the effort and remind you that *you* cannot actually call them out of the field.”

Sinèad blinked. “I’m afraid I don’t understand, Lord Enchanter. We handle all assignments.”

“Ahhh, yes. But you forget, Firra and Donaigh were sent to Sole specifically by Lord Enchanter Evariste and Apprentice Angelique. Only they can rescind their orders—not any individual from the Assignment and Appointments Department.”

Sinèad snapped her fingers. “That’s right! I’d forgotten they’d been officially requested. That solves that matter—I’ll make a note of it to ask Apprentice Angelique the next time she drops in.”

“Apprentice Angelique rarely comes to the Conclave.” Alfonso frowned and folded his arms across his chest in a rare sign of pique. “It is unlikely she will bring herself to our department so you might ask her to release Firra and Donaigh in anything less than a year.”

“Then we wait a year.” Sinèad slapped her hands on her thighs and smiled sunnily. “Rules are rules, and sending mail after her is all but impossible given the speed at which she travels.”

Alfonso was not quite so easy going, rather the furrow of his brow deepened. “I suppose...”

“We might as well dwell upon matters we *can* control,” Sinèad continued. “Speaking of which, Blanche and Rein don’t have an assignment at the moment, do they?”

“No.”

Clovicus magnanimously smiled at the pair and backed away before they could think to ask his opinion on anything else—or worse, ask him to *do* something.

*I have too many things to do—mainly, avoid Wallace.*

Clovicus whistled a jaunty tune as he strode across the courtyard, keeping his gaze fixed in the distance—a key, he’d learned, in dissuading people from trying to stop him and talk or ask for favors.

If he never met anyone’s gaze and always looked busy, he was sure to be left alone! Mostly, anyway.

Clovicus strode into the building and paused just long enough to give his eyes time to adjust to the darker corridor.

He zig-zagged his way through the lower level of the building and only encountered the occasional patrolling war mage or Luxi-Domus students who gazed at him with bulging eyes.

He was about halfway through the building when he heard the distinct, high pitched voice of Lady Enchantress Primrose, who also happened to be a member of the Veneno Conclave Council, and impulsively detoured toward her voice.

Clovicus liked to avoid people who would give him more work—like stuffy Tristisim—but he’d also made harassing the Council something of a hobby.

*It’s good for them. They need dissenters, or they’ll get too comfortable. And pushy.*

Clovicus kept his footsteps as silent as possible—it was easier to pester the Council members when he could catch them off guard—as he closed in on the enchantress.

“...Perhaps, it’s time we consider taking drastic measures?” Primrose said as Clovicus drew into hearing range.

“She does persist in using her core magic. I received a report that she used it to wipe out goblins in Farset.” Clovicus recognized Felicie’s icy voice and poked his head into a hallway just in time to see the two enchantresses strolling up it, their backs to him. “Though I must wonder what goblins are doing in Farset.”

*Of course they’re talking about Angelique.* Clovicus narrowed his eyes and stalked after the enchantresses, irritation boiling in his belly. *She’s the only one doing any good for this blasted continent. Naturally that means she needs to be brought under their control.*

“Oh, a good thought! Between the clutch of goblins, and Apprentice Angelique’s stubbornness in using her core magic without supervision despite our orders, which do you think is most important to first address?” Primrose clasped her hands together and brightly smiled at Felicie.

“I’m not sure...” Felicie sighed.

“I suppose Apprentice Angelique’s actions are less notable, even if she’s flouting laws,” Primrose said.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Felicie said. “She needs to fall in line. We cannot have other mages taking her actions as an example. It will lead to disaster.”

Clovicus hunched slightly so his head was even with the two enchantresses’. “If you’re so concerned with laws, I find it is my moral obligation to remind you that it is *Evariste* who is responsible for reprimanding Angelique’s use of magic.”

Primrose shrieked and shot forward, slapping her hands over her chest. Felicie, the spoil sport, merely turned around and raised an eyebrow at him.

“Ahh, Clovicus. I should have expected you to pop out of the shadows the moment Apprentice Angelique is mentioned. You champion her more than she deserves.”

Clovicus wagged a finger at her. “This is not about championing—it’s about following the laws of the Conclave! Is that not what you just said?”

Primrose pursed her lips in disapproval, but Felicie just sighed.

“Yes, Lord Enchanter Evariste is responsible for schooling Apprentice Angelique,” Felicie confirmed.

“But given his absence, he obviously cannot,” Primrose said. “In the meantime it is too dangerous to let Angelique run around without any kind of rules enforced upon her, is it not?”

*Either Primrose is forgetful of previous conversations we’ve had, or she truly dislikes Angelique and believes that if she pushes long enough she’ll get her way. Too bad for her that it’s my mission to see the Council’s propensity towards idiocy is minimized.*

Clovicus smirked. “I see. In that case, Primrose, if you are so concerned with laws, might I remind you that I *have* offered to take Angelique on as a student—which I legally can given that her master was my student. I’d be happy to guide her on the proper usage of—”

“I would sooner give you more mage children to raise before letting Apprentice Angelique fester under your tutelage, Clovicus,” Felicieenne wryly said.

Primrose had turned white at the thought and looked moments away from swooning.

*Hopefully that will stop her from prattling on about Angelique for at least a few weeks.*

Clovicus gave a piteous exhale. “I see how it is. Your love of rules does have its limits. Very well, then Angelique shall remain free and unfettered, and I’ll just have to find a new way to fill my time. Perhaps I should attend even more Council meetings!”

“Clovicus, you are such a jokester,” Primrose laughed, swatting a hand at him. “Certainly you have too much going on for *that*. As Wallace tells us, you are very behind on your paperwork!”

“Yes, it is a shame,” Clovicus said. “It’s just that I find it *boring*, and useless.”

“And yet you act wounded that we won’t let you influence Apprentice Angelique,” Felicieenne dryly said.

“Teaching her would be a great deal more fun,” Clovicus acknowledged.

*And she needs some guidance. I love Evariste, but—bless his soul—he was a blind fool in the way he approached her magic. But I’m not going to try to tell her what to do when she’s been the greatest hinderance to the Chosen’s plans.*

“Regardless, Angelique becoming your student is not going to happen,” Primrose said. “It’s unnecessary.

“Good, I’m glad you realize, then, how pointless it is to discuss disciplining her.” Clovicus folded his hands behind his back and shifted—he needed to keep moving, or Wallace might soon stumble upon him.

Felicieenne narrowed her eyes at him, but grudgingly nodded. “I suppose there is a shred of wisdom in your words. Which then leaves us to discuss the goblins, does it not, Primrose?”

“I suppose—unless you’d rather discuss the agenda for our meeting tomorrow?” Primrose turned to face down the hallway again and straightened her gown.

Clovicus bowed his head to the two enchantresses, but they’d already begun to stroll off, leaving him to zip down the hallway and find a connecting hallway to dart up, hopefully before they noticed he’d left.

*As much as I hate all of this bandying about, this is exactly why I must stay. If I were to try to leave for an extended length of time, who knows what madness they’d talk themselves into—particularly when it comes to Angelique.*

Clovicus shook his head. *I’m sorry, Angelique. It’s unfair to ask you to carry the bulk of the burden, but your relationship with the royals allows you to stand with them, while my position in the Conclave means I can shield you—and the other mages reporting to Prince Severin.*

Clovicus sighed deeply. *Evariste...I hope we find word of you soon. I’m not sure how long this can go on, but I don’t know what the Council will do to Angelique when you finally do return. I can only hope we’re all up to the challenge.*

THE END