

FROZEN LAKE EXCERPT:  
LAO'S TREEHOUSE & FOREST

Written by

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INT. LAO'S TREEHOUSE, LIVING ROOM - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Lao bumbles through the room, tidying up his array of junk whilst laying a patch-work cloth over his tattered table.

Afon, stood by the door, sees Maya already sat at the table perched on several tyres with her own bowl of soup.

LAO  
Have a seat, have a seat.

Afon moves over to the table.

LAO (CONT'D)  
The wife will be furious to think  
we have guests when the place looks  
like a bomb's hit it.

He shoves his bow and arrow to the side before hurrying himself back to the table and placing a hand on Maya's shoulder.

LAO (CONT'D)  
More soup, sweetheart?

MAYA  
Hm, please!

He turns to Afon.

LAO  
Afon?

Afon raises a hand, shaking his head.

LAO (CONT'D)  
Nasty fall you had. Probably still  
feel a bit nauseous.

Lao turns to head to the kitchen but then twists back.

He extends an arm.

LAO (CONT'D)  
Lao.

Afon takes the hand, shaking firmly. Lao releases and dives into the kitchen.

Once gone, Afon stands, throws the contents of his bowl out the window and sits back.

MAYA  
What the hell?

AFON  
Do not drink that.

MAYA

Too late.

AFON

Drink no more. We must leave.

Maya glares.

MAYA

He saved us.

AFON

Yes but why?

Lao pops back in with a large pot under his arm.

He hurries over and ladles spoonfuls of soup into Maya's bowl.

AFON (CONT'D)

That is probably enough.

LAO

Nonsense, she's still growing.  
Needs all the grub she can get.

He places the pot on the table, sits down, produces his own bowl and helps himself.

LAO (CONT'D)

Got to be used up anyway as the family still hasn't come home.

MAYA

Family?

LAO

The wife and the kids, four boys.  
Been waiting three days now.

Lao cocks his head. Pause.

LAO (CONT'D)

Maybe four? I'll check the calendar later.

AFON

Should you not be looking for them?

LAO

Nah, be fine. Xiu's a tough cookie and she's probably hunked up with the boys in one of the other tree houses.

MAYA

Other houses? There's more of you?

LAO

Sadly not. We built several tree houses when we first ran, just in case we'd found anyone else. Now we just use them as safe spots.

Lao grins, stretching his arms out wide.

LAO (CONT'D)

But after all these years, I finally found another family.

MAYA

We're not--

AFON

You escaped the Sanctum?

LAO

Escape? Didn't even register. We ran when they started rounding people up for testing. No way was I going to live underground for the rest of my life, no way.

AFON

Even at the risk of radiation?

LAO

Was worth it. Didn't seem to affect us anyway.

Lao flicks his hand around his glowing blue eyes.

LAO (CONT'D)

Except for the weird colouration.

Lao drinks the last dregs of his soup.

LAO (CONT'D)

So what were you both doing in my forest?

AFON

Just passing through.

LAO

Travellers?

AFON

Of sorts.

LAO

Where are you heading?

AFON

We are--

MAYA

He's going to the Frozen Lake.

Afon glares a warning at Maya.

LAO

Frozen Lake?

AFON

Siberia.

Lao whistles.

LAO

Long way from here. What's the reason?

AFON

We--

MAYA

We're outrunning the Sanctum.

LAO

What? Why are they after you?

AFON

It is--

MAYA

We escaped from the Sanctum. The *first* to escape from that shit hole!

Lao slaps his thigh, roaring with laughter.

LAO

You are wonderful, Maya!

He smiles warmly at Maya.

LAO (CONT'D)

For years Xiu has been telling me that we made a mistake. That we should return to the Sanctum for the kids' sake. Can't wait to rub it in her face!

He laughs and jumps up.

LAO (CONT'D)

Putting one over on the wife is always a cause for celebration! Pass me that bottle behind you, Maya.

Maya stands and takes a step towards a shelf of dusty wine bottles.

Her leg falls through a floor board.

Lao darts across the room, grabs Maya's hands and stops her falling.

LAO (CONT'D)  
I swore I finished nailing that.

He lifts her gently, moves her away from the hole and places her back on the tyres.

He grabs the bottle for Maya. Then stops, staring at the hole.

LAO (CONT'D)  
Should fix that.

He eyes Maya's scraped knees.

LAO (CONT'D)  
Should fix that too.

EXT. LAO'S TREEHOUSE, BALCONY - LATER

Afon looks through the window, watching Lao hammer a plank of wood over the hole, singing loudly to himself.

He pulls away from the window to look at the view of the forest with Maya.

She sits on the edge of the wooden platform, her legs dangling 100 feet high.

She scratches at the bandage on her knee, a caricature of Lao and "get well soon!" scribbled over the fabric.

AFON  
We must leave tomorrow.

MAYA  
Still think Lao's a bad guy?

AFON  
Regardless of what I think, we are wasting time and are not safe here.

MAYA  
How much safer can you be than up in a tree?

Maya lays back, leaving her legs dangling to look at the stars. She frowns.

MAYA (CONT'D)  
Why has the sky gone dark?

AFON

It always does this at night.

Afon lays down next to her.

AFON (CONT'D)

Does the Sanctum truly teach you nothing?

MAYA

Nothing about the outside. Except that it's irradiated and full of Transformed.

AFON

What made you so interested then, child?

MAYA

Secret.

They face each other, eyebrows raised.

AFON

I do not play mind games.

MAYA

No mind games. Tell me your secret and I will tell you mine.

AFON

No deal.

MAYA

Why?

AFON

I am not *that* interested.

MAYA

Liar.

AFON

Rude.

They both look back to the sky.

MAYA

Maybe I'll live in one of Lao's tree houses.

AFON

You do not know Lao.

MAYA

Don't really know you.

AFON

Touché.

MAYA

You could stay here with me.

Pause.

AFON

I cannot. I must return home.

MAYA

But--

AFON

I must finally face her.

LAO

You're leaving?

Maya and Afon sit up and turn to see Lao holding a metal tray of hot tea and old biscuits.

LAO (CONT'D)

Stay a few days.

AFON

I must--

LAO

I could do with the company. The house feels pretty empty.

Lao thrusts the tray towards them.

LAO (CONT'D)

I've also made tea so there's no escaping.

He dances over to an upturned barrel to pour the beverages.

LAO (CONT'D)

I actually have a favour to ask.

Lao hands a mug to Afon.

LAO (CONT'D)

Before you leave.

Afon raises an eyebrow.

EXT. FOREST - MORNING - NEXT DAY

Lao strolls merrily through the woods, bow slung over his shoulder and Afon trailing behind him, hauling a small tree.

LAO  
 He'd call the cops all the time.  
 I'd just walk past his car and he'd  
 accuse me of harassing her - she  
 didn't even have to be in the car  
 for him to go nuts.

AFON  
 How did you convince him to let you  
 marry her then?

LAO  
 Knocked her up.

Afon raises his eyebrows. Lao bursts with laughter.

LAO (CONT'D)  
 He practically married us himself.  
 "No way is my first grandchild to  
 be a bastard!"

Lao shakes his head, chuckling.

LAO (CONT'D)  
 What a cock.

Lao eyes a small fallen tree. He tests the branches and kicks  
 the trunk before grunting. No good. The search continues.

LAO (CONT'D)  
 Oh but the miserable cow was worth  
 it.

AFON  
 Charming.

LAO  
 She's called me worse.

AFON  
 Again - charming.

LAO  
 All in good nature. She's a  
 wonderful woman.

Afon smiles.

AFON  
 She seems like a good mother too.

LAO  
 Hm?

AFON  
 I saw the photo of you and your  
 family.

LAO

Ah - beautiful, ain't she? Miss her eyes though. The boys inherited her lovely golden eyes but hers changed like mine did.

AFON

The mark of a Tainted.

Lao turns to face Afon, walking backwards.

LAO

A what?

AFON

One of the four categories the Sanctum assign to humans based on their radiation level.

LAO

Being Tainted is bad, I guess?

AFON

Transformed is worse.

LAO

The difference?

AFON

The Sanctum keep one but exclude the other. Tainted can break down radiation and render it harmless. Transformed cannot.

LAO

And the Transformed are those zombie-like creatures?

AFON

Not zombies. They are just no longer of sound mind due to the poisoning.

LAO

Why so grabby then?

AFON

They want help.

LAO

Huh.

Lao spots another small fallen tree. Testing it, he nods.

LAO (CONT'D)

Good. I can use this.

Afon steps forward, readying himself to pick up the second tree.

LAO (CONT'D)

Nah, nah, allow me.

He wraps rope around it and begins to drag the tree with him.

Afon stops.

AFON

I thought you needed my help?

Lao looks over his shoulder to Afon.

LAO

Well apparently I need a reason to save someone's life - so by making you think that you're helping me it becomes like a favour for favour. That way you won't be so judging and jumpy about me, right?

Afon blushes. Lao roars with laughter.