The Wolf, the Goat and the Cabbage

A man arrives at a river bank with a wolf, a goat and a cabbage. He finds a very small boat with room for only himself and one of the three things. If he leaves the wolf alone with the goat, the wolf will eat the goat. If he leaves the goat alone with the cabbage, the goat will eat the cabbage. How does he get all three of his charges across the river?

CHAPTER I: The Message

Wherein We Meet our Hero and Sad News Arrives

When the news came of his father's death in an overturned carriage on a country road, Franz-Karl was five years old as age was counted in the Kingdom of the Allemans, which preferred to be called the Holy Remoran Empire. Franz-Karl did not believe the news at first, when a palace official bustled into their apartments, struck a pose, and made the announcement.

He knew that the palace official – a middling Chamberlain called Ritter von Ostwald who claimed to be in charge of their wing of the Palace – was a fibber. Besides the many times the man had told them things that were not quite real, the Ritter did not properly fit into the shape of the World: he looked like someone had cut him out of a page and then pasted him back just a little out of place.

Besides, Franz-Karl knew that his papa hated carriages and wagons, and always rode horseback when he could.

But the Ritter von Ostwald (Ritter von und zu Ostwald, properly speaking – he was very fussy if he heard you say it the shorter way) handed Franz-Karl's Mama a sealed paper, and when she had

opened it and read it tears began to drip down her face and she began to take off her jewelry. So Franz-Karl knew that she believed it. Or at least she believed the dead part. The Chamberlain said loudly that Papa had been seeing to his country estate when he died. Mama, who was Elderkin and never lied out-right, had said that Papa was running errands for His Imperial Excellency Papa's Father, but she did not say out loud that the Ritter was wrong. She just looked at him until he fidgeted and looked away, then left to fetch mourning cloth from the Palace storerooms.

Mama took off her necklaces and all her bracelets and rings – she even hung her signet on a white ribbon around her neck where it would be hidden by her clothes – and she replaced her earrings with studs that were made of bone or ivory: something dead. She sent her chief attendant, the Itron Gwenlian, to unpack the clothes that were made of dull cloth in the yellowish-brownish-gray that the Elderkin of Traventi called color-of-sorrow.

Mama even unwrapped her hair from around her head. By the time the color-of-sorrow clothes were brought, she had unbraided it to let it hang loose, with just two ties at her neck and waist to keep the long hair from going everywhere. Usually, when she was not being the Ambassador from Traventi, the warm brown braids were arranged so that the green streaks were folded inside. Now the green was just there. And there seemed to be a lot of green, more than Franz-Karl remembered.

The mourning clothes for Mama to wear every day had been cut with wide seam allowances, but stored un-stitched. Measuring and marking where the seams should go went quickly. The ritual garments to wear at the funeral had been stored since the last funeral with the seams already stitched. Mama put them on, decided that they fit well enough, and just left them on.

Small children did not have mourning clothes already prepared – neither Traventi's color-of-sorrow nor the black clothes the Allemans used – because that would be asking to have someone die while the clothes still fit them. So Nurse Rosa changed Franz-Karl and Philip-Augustus and little Sophie-Alexa into the plainest clothes they had until their mourning clothes could be made.

The Palace was Papa's family home, so there was supposed to be cloth in the storeroom so the proper clothes for the children could be sewn in time for the funeral. Traventine custom said that mourning

clothes should not be fancy, and Allemanic custom did not officially disagree, so they would be quicker to make than most formal clothes. With enough people sewing all night, the clothes for all three children could be ready in time for the funeral.

Chamberlain von und zu Ostwald did not carry any cloth himself, of course. He was far too important to carry anything. He returned from the storerooms followed by four footmen, each carrying a few bolts of cloth, and some other Imperial officials. There was some color-of-sorrow cloth in the piles, but most of it was black.

There was an argument – mostly among the attendants and servants: the Chamberlain did not speak aloud, he just glared at people – about what color the children's mourning clothes should be. Of course. Mama's Elderkin attendants thought color-of-sorrow would be most proper, and the Imperial attendants wanted black, and the Palace servants who did most of the work wanted people to make up their minds so they would not get yelled at by the Chamberlain or blamed for causing delays. There were a lot more Imperial people, but Elderkin were famously patient and stubborn. The Palace servants shook their heads and spread out some of both colors of cloth ready to be cut. Mama pressed her fingers to her temples as if her head hurt.

According to the Marriage Contract between the Dukes of Traventi and the Lords of the Falkenburgs, Philip-Augustus was heir to Papa's titles and property in the Kingdom and Empire so he ended up with black mourning clothes. He agreed to one of the bolts of cloth from the choices that were offered, and the Chamberlain and some of the other senior attendants praised him extravagantly for it, but he made faces at them when they were looking the other way.

And then Chamberlain von Ostwald announced that since he was now the Count of Wolfsberg the clothes for Philip-Augustus should be made with breeches instead of the long, full-skirted robe customary for small children. Philip-Augustus made an even worse face at the Chamberlain's back, but he looked mostly pleased to be given grownup clothes. He was less pleased when they made him take all of his clothes off so that he could be measured all over.

Franz-Karl thought that it was all very well for Philip-Augustus to wear breeches for the very first time at their father's funeral. His brother did not have a tail – not even a flippy little goat tail buried in the

skirts of his robe like Franz-Karl's – and had no need to worry about people like the Chamberlain being mean about Elderkin if they noticed.

Mama and Itron Gwenlian had sorted through the bolts of cloth from the storeroom and found some cloth that was completely black: not all streaked with other colors like most of what the Imperial people called black, and that was the one that Philip-Augustus had chosen. The thread chosen for sewing the seams was more the color of the stripes on apple-blossoms than plain black, but at least it all matched, and seams did not show much.

The Ritter von und zu Ostwald had made a huge fuss about black clothes for Philip-Augustus, but that did not stop him from complaining about how expensive the good black cloth was once it was chosen. Franz-Karl's Mama looked at him, and said in the style of Remoran used by diplomats, "Master Chamberlain, the expense of dressing my children is no concern of the Imperial and Royal Authorities. It will be supplied by my own household resources and the late Count's, in accordance with the Marriage Contract." She sounded very tired, and her hand clenched where it was resting on some of the color-of-sorrow cloth.

The Chamberlain bowed stiffly, and said nothing. He was carefully looking at the other bolts of black cloth, not at the table with the color-of-sorrow cloth spread out on it, as if not looking at it could make it not be there.

Sophie-Alexa ended up with black mourning clothes because the bolt of good black cloth was meant for a full grown man's suit, not to make clothes for a seven year old boy, and breeches needed even less cloth than the full skirt of a child's robe. When the suit for Philip-Augustus had been cut out of the good black cloth, there was just enough left for his little sister's mourning robe. People were already sewing the clothes for Philip-Augustus, piece by piece, and they started Sophie-Alexa's as soon as the cloth was cut.

Even though she was tired and sad, Mama still insisted that the mourning clothes should be respectfully plain. When the Chamberlain brought out some pieces of black lace for Sophie-Alexa's collar and cuffs, Mama ignored them. Gwenlian said something about profanation and disrespect for Heaven and the Dead that sounded even more rude in Allemanic than it would have been in Elderic: two Allemanic ladies-in-waiting who were helping with the sewing turned pale and looked

twitchy. The Palace servants quickly hid the pieces of lace under some of the other bolts of cloth and pretended they had not heard.

Ritter von und zu Ostwald tried to suggest that for the Dowager Countess of Wolfsberg, black might be more appropriate than her own mourning garments of color-of-sorrow that had come from Traventi in her wedding chests, but he never quite finished the sentence.

Franz-Karl's Mama interrupted firmly, still in the Remoran used by diplomats. "I am called Silvia di Armorius, Recognized Heiress in my own right to the Sovereign Duchy of the Elderkin of Traventi and a Binder and full Notary of the Elderkin, and I shall dress properly and respectfully for my husband's funeral. We have already mentioned the Marriage Contract once this day. Shall we now invoke the Advocates and Justices? Or the ancient customs of the Elderkin?"

Everyone in the room could see that she was becoming annoyed enough to do something memorable: there was a spot of red showing on each tan cheek and her long hair was spreading out beyond its bindings and getting crackly. The room was starting to smell a little like lightning.

Chamberlain von und zu Ostwald bowed stiffly. He tried to make a polite answer in Remoran but he got lost in the formal clauses, and his accent was regrettable. Looking around a little desperately, he saw Franz-Karl standing by the table with the bolts of cloth, pointed at him rudely, said bluntly, in Allemanic, "That child shall wear black like the others."

Franz-Karl answered in Remoran, "I cannot. The cloth they wear is used up." He pulled a bolt of color-of-sorrow out of the pile that matched the thread and weave of the plain black cloth, and added, "This is the nearest match."

Three people started cutting out his clothes before the Chamberlain could do more than take a breath preparing to complain. Itron Gwenlian threaded a needle from a bobbin of color-of-sorrow and opened a box of the bone buttons that went with mourning clothes. Franz-Karl sighed. With the hemming begun piece-wise before the robe was fully assembled, he would need to tread carefully while wearing it.

He had chosen color-of-sorrow partly so his Mama would not be alone wearing the color, and partly because the remaining bolts of black cloth were all horrible in look or feel or both, no two the same, and none of them truly black. Also, being honest in Heaven's light, he chose it

partly because it would annoy the Chamberlain who was being mean to his Mama.

The Chamberlain glared at him: round-pupiled blue eyes drowning in the whites, snug against the narrow bridge of a narrow nose. Eyes that clearly did not work well. The so-called black clothes Chamberlain Ritter von und zu Ostwald was wearing were the best proof Franz-Karl had ever seen that Worldfolk were partly color-blind.

To his Elderkin eyes the garments were not plain black, but streaked and splotched with the colors that the Elderic tongue called 'forge' and 'apple-stripe' and 'heaven-bright' and Allemanic had no names for at all. The black cloth offered for Franz-Karl's clothes was even worse than what the Chamberlain was wearing, as if something nasty had happened to each bolt while it was in the dyer's vat. The lengths of color-of-sorrow cloth were all evenly dyed the same dull shade of color-of-sorrow, but the dye probably came from Traventi, and it was hard to get that muddy, middling color wrong.

Chamberlain von und zu Ostwald was not happy that everything had not gone his way. He scowled at the color-of-sorrow cloth and made a huffing noise and said, "Oh, very well. It is not as if any of these children are Initiates who could attend the full rites. Perhaps they should not come to the mortuary chapel, either."

Franz-Karl's Mama did not bother arguing about whether her children would attend the funeral to say goodbye to Papa. She did not send to His Excellency or the Hierophants, either, or talk about the Marriage Contract. She just said, "The children will attend their Father's funeral as required by due respect for the Household Guardians." She repeated it four times, then added "I call upon Heaven and the Living World to witness that the children of Leon-Alexander paying their proper respects is a thing that is Bound and shall happen."

The Chamberlain winced at the mention of the Household Guardians.

Franz-Karl shivered in a wind that did not ruffle a single candle flame nor thread of cloth in the room. He could not remember his Mama speaking a Binding before. Not in public like this. The stories and chronicles all agreed that when an Elderkin Binder made a promise or signed a contract... or said something four times with the right words... anyone who went against it would suffer so long as they tried to defy the Binding. So Franz-Karl did not worry that the Allemanic officials would

block him from the funeral: the Chamberlain and those who served him would obey what his Mama said, or else Heaven and the Living World would make them.

That did not stop some people from wanting to argue, as if even four times might not be enough for a real Binding, but the Chamberlain had sense enough to go away and take the others with him. Mama's hair had not gotten any less crackly after she made the Binding.

There were lots of stories about what happened when Elderkin decided to be memorable.

Franz-Karl's Mama ignored the remaining Imperial attendants, and fetched her own scissors and needles and other sewing tools to join the group of people sewing. She was going to sew most of Sophie-Alexa's robe herself.

Once the grownups were all busy working on the new clothes, Franz-Karl slipped out of the Wolfsberg apartments and went down the servants' stairs and across the courtyard to the stable where his Papa's horses usually lived. He was not supposed to leave the apartments alone, but he was too twitchy to stay still. Sneaking turned out to work even better without Philip-Augustus, who had been captured by his tutor. Franz-Karl was careful not to look anyone he passed in the eyes – being small helped – and did not move when anyone was looking in his general direction.

He went by way of the kitchen to get some treats for the animals. The kitchen was easy. Marna the baker and Frieda the nice cook were both sitting in chairs, at the same time, crying, and Clothilde the mean cook was on the far side of the room sort of quietly yelling at some of the kitchen maids and scullions. No one had attention to spare to notice him.

All of their horses were in the stable except his Papa's most favorite horse, and the one that was usually ridden by Ernst, Papa's aide. The Chamberlain had not mentioned Ernst, but Franz-Karl thought that meant he was probably dead, too. There were too many people crying.

Two horses that he knew had gone on the trip with his Papa were in the stable, and none of the carriage horses were missing or injured, and all of the horses were upset. Some of them were even too upset to want treats, which was more upset than he thought quiet horses could be. His Papa's carriage – the only carriage his Papa was usually willing to ride in – was sitting in the carriage barn beside the stable without a scratch on it.

Franz-Karl nodded. “Fibbers,” he said to the horses, and to the Living World. “Sloppy fibbers.”

When he returned to their rooms, he found his mother searching for him frantically. She hugged him so hard she nearly squeezed the breath out of him. “Where have you been, my love?”

“Giving our horses treats,” Franz-Karl explained reasonably, in Elderic. “Brownie and Blaze are missing, but Smoke and Red are in the stable, and the carriage is not broken, not even scratched. Those people talking about Papa –” He waved indignantly toward the central block of the Palace. “They aren’t just fibbers, they are bad at being fibbers.”

His Mama took a deep breath and asked quietly, “Franz-Karl, how did you get from here to the stables and back?”

“I walked, of course.”

“Did no one notice you?”

“Well, I was careful not to look anyone in the eyes, naturally...” He looked up into his Mama’s Elderkin ‘goat eyes’: beautiful golden-hazel eyes that clearly showed the broad oblong pupils, and showed only tiny triangles of white at the corners. People in the Palace said that Mama’s eyes were too far apart and creepy, but Franz-Karl thought they were beautiful and brave. His own eyes were sneaky ‘cow eyes’: such a dark brown that the shape of the pupils were hard to see even though they were just as broad as his Mama’s, and the bridge of his nose was narrower, so that his eyes were closer together.

“Dear Heaven bear witness.” His Mama shook her head slightly and sighed. “And you haven’t even begun losing your baby teeth! I had hoped we might have another year before you needed to deal with Gifts and Bindings... Very well, my love. Thank you for the news you bring, but please stay close to me this next while. And don’t speak of this to anyone else, not even to your brother.”

“Philip-Augustus is a blabbermouth,” Franz-Karl agreed calmly.

She smiled sadly and tapped his nose with a fingertip. “We are not all born old and open-eyed, my love. He does well enough for a child two years older than you in the flesh.”

As they walked out into the reception room of their apartments, Franz-Karl noticed one of the Imperial Chamberlain’s favorite assistants standing nearby. The man had seldom served as an attendant in their apartments because he always made a fuss about wearing extra badges blessed at the cathedral – he said that Mama’s Papa once turned one of

his relatives into a newt. Franz-Karl was glad that he usually stayed away: for some reason worrying about being a newt did not stop him from trying to poke or trip the children every chance he got, or make them look bad.

"Mama? If I have Gifts and Bindings coming in, will I start turning mean people into newts soon?" Franz-Karl asked in Allemanic. He was glad to see the man look worried. Maybe he would keep too far away to trip people.

Mama looked up toward the ceiling and then back down at Franz-Karl. She said firmly, and loudly enough for the assistant Chamberlain to hear clearly, "No, Franz-Karl. You will not be able to turn people into newts until you are grown up. Elderkin children are not allowed to use Gifts and Bindings against people. The Child Blessings will prevent it from happening by accident, so there is no need to worry."