

# Franch's Nightmare

By C. Jade Wyton

*After a magical interference by a minor god of chaos, poor Franch finds himself away from home in a world he can't even begin to understand.*

***Contains some mentions of sexual content and cults.***

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Franch squeezed his eyes shut, hoping —praying— that if he went back to sleep, he would wake up in his own bed. Away from whatever crazy place he was dreaming of.

It had to be a dream. It *had* to be a dream!

It didn't matter that it had been days upon days of journeying— If he refused to believe it was real, then it *couldn't become real!*

He just wanted to go home.

His chest hurt.

The air was too thick.

The sun was too bright.

Everything was a weird shade of green.

And the dirt was weird and soft and moist.

And the food tasted weird.

And.... And his side hurt from lying down so much.

He wanted to go home.

He just wanted to go home....

He heard the sound of talking outside, and slowly rose to his feet to poke his head out.

He saw Wonda and Cirrus carrying foraged herbs and settling down to cook, and wondered for a moment if he should help... but then he leant out of the caravan and paused.

It was bright out there. And the light from the sun was a hot yellow, instead of cold grey. And everything smelt weird and warm and new.

*He wanted to go home.*

Franch shifted in place as Wonda took a bucket and went to collect water from the nearby river.

The urge to go and help her was strong; but not as overpowering as the uncomfortable taste of the air and the weird thickness of the grass that grew on the ground.

So, instead of helping, he simply watched from the distance as that Cirrus man set up a makeshift little setup for their cooking. He wondered if that terrifying thing was aware of his presence watching them.... He couldn't help but duck his head down and back every time Cirrus' head turned even slightly in his direction. The satyr had defeated the entire family with nothing but a strange pipe and an unnatural amount of smoke. He'd somehow put God herself to sleep; passed out face-down in a bowl of some kind of pie.

Though Wonda had said otherwise, Franch wasn't half convinced that Cirrus hadn't been the one to create that realm, with how much control he seemed to have. How he'd been the only calm one.... Though maybe he was just being paranoid.

*Gods, he wanted to go home.*

Wringing his hands, Franch watched as Wonda returned and began washing the strange foods, and he tried to crane his ear to overhear their conversation; he was curious about this new food. And though he didn't actually *enjoy* cooking, it was still his job, and any new skills he could bring home to Egg would be worthwhile.

He watched them lay out the freshly-washed ingredients and slowly edged forward, the temptation to join them growing as Wonda began patting at her sides, no doubt looking for one of her many knives—

Then, suddenly, her outer vest was removed and her shirt pulled open so she could unstrap a knife from under her clothes; and Franch thought he might faint as he stiffened and blushed. He hit his head on the side of the caravan as he tried to hurry back in, and saw that Cirrus man glance at him, but he refused to meet his eye as he retreated back to the corner he had been sleeping. Covering his mouth as he curled up, Franch tried to shake the thought of the topless Wonda from his mind.

Egg had warned him many times not to pursue Wonda.

She was the daughter of God, for one. An unattainable beauty that deserved only the absolute best, and whose mother would make sure only the most worthy man would be paired with her.

And for another, she was too old for him; when he had been just fifteen, and Wonda twenty, Egg had told him outright that if he asked her out and she somehow returned his affections, the kitchen staff would not hesitate to treat the woman with the same scorn they treated Willard— The same scorn they treated *any* adult that pursued a child, her angelhood be *damned!*

And for a third, the few times he *had* tried to flirt with her, she'd barely even noticed him and treated him like she treated any of the children who begged for her attention. The humiliation of not even being rejected—but unnoticed— had been enough to embarrass him into giving up.

And now he had just seen her practically topless!

*'Don't think about it,'* he whispered to himself. *'Don't think about it. Don't think about shirtless Wonda.'*

Saying it aloud was a mistake, because it only made him think about shirtless Wonda even more.

*'No, no, put your clothes back on!'* he urged the Wonda in his mind— Though his words had much the opposite affect, and the Wonda in his brain started losing clothes. *'No! No! No!'*

He rolled over and smacked his forehead into the floor, begging his brain to *stop!*

*'Stop! Stop! She's not yours to think about that way!'* it didn't help, and he soon found himself laying face-down in his blankets, picturing a series of very inappropriate thoughts that he gave up trying to keep from his mind. *Oh, he wished a girl would like him back. Even just one. Even for only a few days....*

Something small hefted itself into the caravan, and Franch felt himself blushing deeper as Elegy entered; guiding that old man who claimed to be her great-grandfather behind her.

Franch went completely quiet as he side-eyed them, scared that if he moved they would spot him and his sinfully embarrassing lust. So he tried to pretend to be asleep again. Though, he didn't dare roll off his stomach; he couldn't bear another bout of jeers about how *tents belonged outside*, as he had received back when he had failed to hide himself from Strilleburg.

So he simply listened to Elegy speak gently to the blind old man as she settled him down to rest, and prayed that such a holy angel didn't see him in this state.

Luckily, she seemed to buy his act and, after pecking a kiss on Cadaver's cheek, jumped back out of the caravan and started calling for her father.

Quietly, Cadaver and Franch sat in silence. Franch didn't dare to move; though Cadaver was blind, he was clearly still a clever bastard. And Franch didn't like that.

Especially when the old man turned an ear to him and smiled.

'You don't have as many children and grandchildren as me,' he started. 'And *not* recognise a fake-snore.'

Franch felt his cheeks burning, and finally —against his instincts— rolled over to properly look to the gnome.

Though he didn't say anything, Cadaver definitely heard him shift, as he gave a knowing chuckle and tapped his hands together. 'You always seem so shy, around our dear Elegy.'

'Well, uh... she's...' Franch wasn't sure how to say it. *A beautiful angel. The niece of God. The most bright-eyed woman he'd ever seen in his entire life, with a gorgeous smile and magically bright orange curls.*

It wasn't enough to describe the beauty of the woman. So, he simply stayed quiet.

And Cadaver laughed, seeming to understand Franch's silence. He then tapped the floor at his side, beckoning Franch over; though Franch didn't move to join him. 'You seem like such a sweet young man,' Cadaver commented. 'Why don't we speak?'

'N.... No,' softly, Franch rejected the offer, and shifted back a pace. 'You're an outsider. A stranger. A danger.'

'A danger?' humour edging his tone, Cadaver grinned wide. 'My boy, I'm just a blind old gnome. How could I be a danger to someone like yourself?'

'I don't know,' Franch admitted. 'But... you must be. Otherwise God would not have reacted how she did to your family.'

'Ah, yes, *God*,' the humour left Cadaver's voice, and his smile fell. 'She tells you to call her God, does she?'

Franch shook his head, but then he remembered who he was speaking to, and tried to speak in an even tone. 'No. No, she's never called *herself* God,' he corrected. 'But, what else can she be? Only a god could save us all as she did.'

'Save you all?' Cadaver echoed. 'From what?'

'M... Many things,' deliberately coy, Franch looked away. 'Many terrible things. She saved us all, took us in, gave us autonomy and freedom. Brought us to a new land where we finally were able to escape the violence and the hunt, and

settled us to live in peace. Made us into a family, when before that we were lost souls with nowhere else to go. What else could do that but a god?’

‘I see,’ Cadaver’s voice was flat, though not unkind. Disbelieving, but somehow still empathetic. ‘You’re a family, are you?’

‘Yes.’

‘How many of you are there?’

‘It... changes,’ Franch admitted. ‘Sometimes people leave—we’re allowed to leave, God always makes that clear— but more often, people die. Especially the older members, when times get tough. God does her best to protect us, but.... Only forty-two of the originals are left.’

‘Originals?’

‘People who... weren’t raised by us. There used to be a lot more. But they were always sickly. That’s why God took them in; nobody else wanted them. She gave them a life worth living. And when they died, she gave them dignity and honour. They never would have gotten that where they’d been saved from— Slavery, and abusive parents, and controlling spouses. Leena’s mother— Leena’s mother was the first to ever join. She was a child bride, before God saved her. And Hayley. She was abandoned by her family. Left to starve in the woods. And Egg’s sister. She was sold by her parents, and Egg begged God to save her.’

‘And what about you, boy?’ Cadaver asked, gently. ‘How did you end up in this family?’

‘I... I’m told my mother had the family as guests,’ he admitted. ‘She lived alone in the woods. I’m not sure why my father wasn’t around, but... she died, giving birth to me. If God hadn’t been there to take me in, I would have died with her.’

‘I see,’ Cadaver acknowledged. ‘So, if there are only forty-two members who didn’t grow up in your family... how many did grow up with you?’

‘Um...’ Franch wasn’t sure he wanted to answer. Though, with the way Elegy and Wonda acted in this strange get-together of outsiders, he knew they would prefer him to do so. So, he took a deep breath. ‘Maybe... seven-hundred? Or perhaps it’s closer to eight-hundred, now. There were a few births last year, and only Willard died during... the winter....’

Franch trailed off, as he saw Cadaver’s fist tighten around his cane at the number of family members he had stated.

He got the sense that the man wasn’t happy to hear the family was so large, though he wasn’t sure why; from what he had learnt from God and Gwen, gnomes thrived best in big families....

Though, despite him seeming unhappy at the numbers, he did give a smile and a nod. ‘That is quite a large family, isn’t it? And to have all been raised together...’ a hesitation. ‘Did you have much contact with the outside world?’

‘A little, when we were travelling,’ Franch admitted. ‘Though not so much... after... we got to the castle.’

‘Mhm. And what did you think, of the outside world while you were in it?’

‘It’s horrible!’ Franch didn’t mean for it to come out as a cry, but the words blurted out of him before he could stop them. ‘We just wanted to live in peace, but we were hunted like *animals* by those paladins! And no matter where we went, there was always someone in trouble. Someone being taken advantage of who we had to save! The outside world— It’s rotten, and dangerous, and evil! All

it does is hurt people! Nobody outside is like our family— Nobody we came across cared about keeping the weak safe! Everyone is used, and the moment someone isn't of use anymore, they're discarded like a broken toy! I can't even imagine— When someone can't work in our family, we help them. We look after them! That's why it's so important that those who can work, do. So that those who can't work can survive, as well. Out here, nobody does that. They're all left to fend for themselves!

Cadaver listened, patiently, until Franch had finished his anxious rambling. Then, he gave a gentle cock of his head and motioned to his eyes.

'I'm blind,' he said, simply. 'And my family still cares for me. I'm still loved. And I'm still valued. I would never deny that you have met many scary, terrible people in your travels... but I can promise you, there are just as many good souls out there as well.'

Franch paused, thinking about Cadaver's words. 'Well... maybe your family is good, too,' he admitted. 'But I doubt there are just as many good souls as there are bad— The good souls are beaten down until they die. And the bad souls thrive. That's what everyone always says.'

'I have to disagree,' Cadaver said, softly. 'There are more good people than you think.'

'Or that's just what *you* want me to believe!' not actually sure what point he was making, Franch took on an accusatory tone. 'The worst people never admit to being awful; they always talk about how great a person they are! They trick you into thinking they're kind, so that you let your guard down! But— But you can't trick me!' he rose to his feet and made for the door. 'You can say whatever you like, but I know what you outsiders are like!'

He exited the caravan, then; for the first time since being helped inside, and felt like a deer stunned by a blinding spell.

But it was better than being trapped alone in a room with an outsider with a soft silver tongue!

Catching Wonda's eye, Franch hurriedly retreated underneath the caravan to hide from the people and the sun. He curled up, his tail slipping between his legs as he closed his eyes and started whispering to himself:

*'It's just a bad dream. It's all just a bad dream. You'll wake up soon. You'll wake up soon. And then you'll be home. You'll be home.'*

—END—

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