

THE VASSAL OF MAGIC by C.B. Lyall

EXCERPT

A scraping noise brought him out of his thoughts as chairs and tables moved out of Ermentrude's way as she paced. Small clouds of dust rose and then resettled with each step. Her doughy face, with its enormous wart on the end of her long, beaked nose, had been in a permanent scowl since Hywel had vanished with their daughter. Catcus, her cat, gave an angry yowl and jumped up onto a chair out of her path.

The knot in Ermentrude's hair bun tightened. Her lips disappeared into a thin line, and her brow developed extra furrows with each turn of the room. Etched into her every move was their lack of progress in discovering any clue about Katryna's whereabouts.

Wilf swung his chair onto its back legs. It banged into the bookcase behind him, and he let his eyes half close. Another day of Ermentrude and Captain Ingells squabbling for control of a hopeless situation. Their tempers simmered, ready to boil over at any moment.

Ermentrude stopped at her chair and collapsed into it. Her blackened fingernails tapped on the table's wooden surface. Grooves and a small set of sparks appeared with each tap.

"Ermentrude! You're going to set the place on fire." Captain Ingells sat at the other end of the table. His Wizard Guard's jacket hung over the back of his chair. The gray stubble on his chin was out of character with his usual clean-cut image and military bearing.