

WHAT'S IN A NAME  
By Megumi Mandish

CHARACTERS:

- *CLOUD* (fae, early teens)
- *PEREGRIN* (automaton, early teens— resembles a metal doll with ball joints, with a human left hand)

*(LIGHTS UP)*

*(PEREGRIN and CLOUD are seated at the table. CLOUD is reading a book, while PEREGRIN stacks large coins.)*

*PEREGRIN:* We made thirty-four in bronze today.

*(CLOUD doesn't answer, continuing to read.)*

*PEREGRIN:* That's seventeen for each of us. We haven't made that much in tips since that time the theatre master bought his whole troupe pastries.

*(CLOUD, who has clearly heard PEREGRIN, continues ignoring him.)*

*PEREGRIN:* Cloud, I said I was sorry.

*CLOUD:* 'Sorry' doesn't fix it.

*PEREGRIN:* You can have my share if you want. I'll buy you raspberries, the fresh ones from that farmer's market down in the south plaza you like so much. Or we can go watch a show at the theatre, like we do every first Friday. Can you at least be nice and read the story out loud—

*(CLOUD slams his book down on the table, toppling the pile of coins, and glares at PEREGRIN.)*

*CLOUD:* Do you have any – any – idea how important the Starfall Shower is?

*PEREGRIN:* Well, no, but—

*CLOUD:* That's where fae get their purest magic. We live off the light of those stars. Mom finally trusted me to handle myself, to control my magic and be part of the Starlight Court like her— and you ruined it! How am I supposed to prove myself to her now?

*PEREGRIN:* It was an accident—

*CLOUD:* No one starts a fight with Geppeto's automaton patrol by accident.

*PEREGRIN:* I didn't start it!

*CLOUD*: You did! The only reason both of us didn't end up in the castle dungeon or killed is because Lampwick was able to distract them! The one rule of the underground fae network is to not get caught, and you did exactly that!

*PEREGRIN (flinching)*: I said I was sorry! I won't do it again, I promise!

*(LONG PAUSE. CLOUD sighs and starts stacking the fallen coins.)*

*CLOUD*: I'm sorry I yelled at you.

*PEREGRIN*: ...I'm sorry I ruined your chance at becoming part of the Starlight Court.

*CLOUD*: It's okay. I'll get other chances. I just... thought I could make a difference. Like Mom does. Leading the underground network, keeping the fae and runaway automatons safe, helping the rebellion in ways that matter— I want to do more than just... bake bread and relay messages.

*PEREGRIN*: But you do. You do more than that.

*CLOUD*: What do you mean?

*PEREGRIN*: When Lampwick first brought me here, you were the first person to make me feel welcome. You... made me feel like I belonged. That I was safe here. And you taught me lots of things, like how to bake bread, and how to count money, and how to make friends and have fun. You make me feel human.

*CLOUD*: Oh.

*PEREGRIN*: I think you deserve to be on the Starlight Court whether Miss Pea thinks you're ready or not.

*CLOUD (finally smiling)*: Thanks, Peregrin.

*PEREGRIN*: Are we okay now? You're not mad at me?

*CLOUD*: I'm not mad at you.

*PEREGRIN*: Oh, good. So will you read me the next story in your book? It's not the same when you don't read aloud like you do every other night. Which was rude of you to do silently in front of me, by the way.

*CLOUD*: I'm sorry. It was petty.

*PEREGRIN*: It's okay. What's tonight's story?

*(CLOUD opens his book back up.)*

*CLOUD*: Rumpelstiltskin.

*PEREGRIN:* Who's that?

*CLOUD:* He was an earth fae from a long time ago, before the town was founded. Mom always read me this story when I was little as a warning.

*PEREGRIN:* A warning for what?

*CLOUD:* To never speak my true name out loud. Rumpelstiltskin wasn't a nice fae in the first place, but he was too careless and said his true name out loud, and the princess he made a deal with heard it and used it against him.

*PEREGRIN:* Wait— Cloud isn't your real name?

*CLOUD:* It's not.

*PEREGRIN:* What? You lied to me? Are Lampwick and Miss Pea lying to me too?

*CLOUD:* Peregrin, we're not lying to you. Think of it as... a nickname. Having a nickname keeps us safe from humans like Geppeto. It's why he can't find us. We don't steal names or identities anymore, but our true names have to stay secret so people can't use it against us. There's a type of magic in our names. We have to protect that.

*PEREGRIN:* Oh. But you can trust me with your name, right?

*CLOUD:* Um... no, sorry.

*PEREGRIN:* Why not?

*CLOUD:* Mom says I can't give my true name to anyone.

*PEREGRIN:* But you can trust me.

*CLOUD:* I trust you.

*PEREGRIN:* So you can tell me your real name.

*CLOUD:* I can't. Really, I wish I could, but you almost got arrested today. If Geppeto catches you and he finds out my true name from you, he'll find Mom, and then he'll uncover the network, and then... I don't think many of us would survive. *(PAUSE)* Anyways, do you want me to read or not?

*PEREGRIN:* Can I at least guess your name?

*CLOUD:* Nice try, but no. I'll read *Elves and the Shoemaker*.

*PEREGRIN:* Hey, Cloud?

*CLOUD:* Yeah?

*PEREGRIN*: If Geppeto died, would you be able to tell me your real name?

*CLOUD*: I mean, there's still other people like him that exist out there, but yeah. I probably could. We'd be a lot safer with him gone.

*(PAUSE. PEREGRIN looks extremely serious. CLOUD starts to lower the book.)*

*CLOUD (cont'd)*: Peregrin, are you actually thinking about—

*PEREGRIN*: What story was it? Elves and shelfmakers?

*CLOUD*: Shoemaker.

*PEREGRIN*: You can read now.

*(CLOUD lifts the book closer to his face to start reading aloud.)*

*(BLACKOUT.)*