

# New Home

*Written by "Ina Izumi"*

Things have been very difficult lately for Aime and Elise two young twenty years old, refugee sisters after the mutual destruction between the Empire of Nova Neustria, the country they come from, and the Commonwealth of Numantia-Thuringia. A year has passed since the mutual destruction of both empires when both emperors accused each other of having kidnapped the other's daughter, through their magical weapons of mass destruction, temples capable of launching large and powerful bolts of magic and energy from the tip from its obelisks to any location on the planet strategically built in every place on the earth's surface by Nova Neustria and then lost some after the conquest and expansion of Numantia in various strategic regions. Since both powers decided to annihilate each other, all that remains in the vast world after that is deserts that stretch to the horizon and thus, Ardeal the only nation that keeps standing thanks to its neutrality, being the only fertile place left in the planet it has received a lot of refugees of both empires, situation that keeps getting harder and harder to sustain

This is how the life of Aime and Elise, two refugees from Lutece, the capital metropolis of Nova Neustria, has become, as in the life of all other refugees, a very hard life. While their parents were important nobles of the Emperor's court, after the destruction of Lutece by various magic lightning, they have been the only survivors of a family of 10, and with no resources or anything else to do, now there are the two of them alone in this chaotic world and they only have themselves and their skills to survive. On the one hand Elise was previously an escort of the king, an elite warrior, who is now only in charge of protecting her sister Aime and herself while they trade with the other refugees and inhabitants of Ardeal while they travel looking for new opportunities, while Aime, the weakest, who was previously a teacher of young children in a school, uses her hobby as a puppeteer to make a little money and also to entertain the refugee children who have ended up orphaned during the war.

Aime has great faith in their attempt to survive and is very optimistic in her vision of the future, having traveled to all the refugee camps that there are in Ardeal giving shows with her puppets and making some and selling them at reasonable prices to other people during her trip, while Elise, more bitter and at the same time more realistic, sees the situation of both as extreme and hopeless, and believes that she should join some adventurer's guild to use her skills as a warrior to do missions for money, even though she can't because she fears that if she leaves her sister alone, someone could do something to her taking advantage of her innocence, her good heart and her physical weakness. That is why Elise, who blames herself for the death of her parents by not being able to rescue them in time to take them to a shelter, is not willing to lose the only person in the world that she has left and, despite the fact that she believes that her sister's ideas will lead her nowhere, has decided to permanently escort and protect her, while she travels and exhibits her dolls

One day while Elise went to get some food in the surroundings and while Aime was giving a puppet show in the Neamt refugee camp, a border town of Ardeal, a suspicious hooded person approached Aime and saw how she was playing with the puppets that hooded shadow found what Aime did with the puppets quite interesting, seeing Aime as quite a creative person, although he was even more impressed by Aime's beauty, who would certainly be a cute puppet if she were the one being pulled by threads, especially for her elegant way of dressing, her blond hair and her blue eyes, even though it

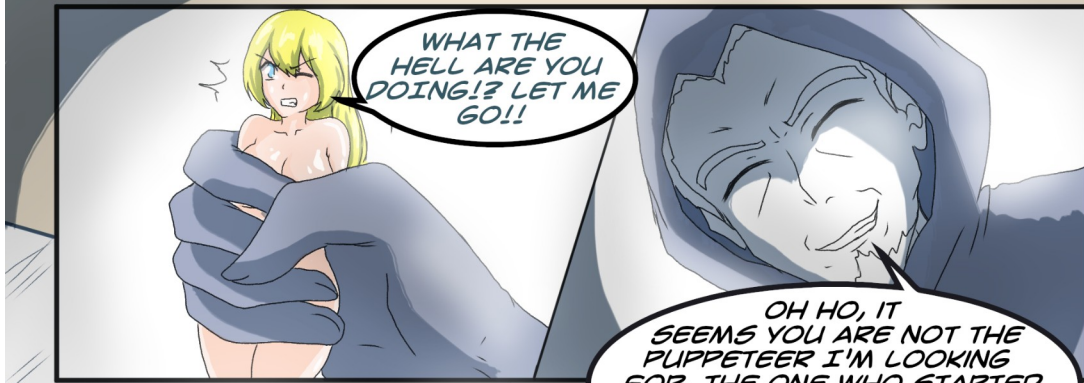
wasn't Aime that the hooded man was looking for.

Then the hooded man, with an old voice, asks Aime if she had seen a young, hooded woman with black hair and red eyes who was also doing puppet plays. Aime, puzzled, told him that she had not seen that person, even though she had heard about her. A strange thin shadow that wandered all over Ardeal talking about the story of the missing queen and the captured princesses, a story that has spread quite far and wide in Ardeal, to the point of leading to the myth of the missing warrior queen to the altars. So, the hooded man, annoyed at not finding the person he was looking for, thought that perhaps it would be better to look on the bright side and not leave empty-handed. Then that old man invites Aime to his hideout, on the outskirts of Ardeal, offering her some money and telling Aime that he has big goals for her and her puppets. Aime couldn't refuse such a generous offer, especially being in a situation of such need, so she leaves a note tied to a tree where they were supposed to meet at the end of the day, and proceeds to follow the hooded man

Some minutes later, when Aime had taken her things and left, Elise arrives and, after not finding her sister anywhere, nervously, she goes to the tree where they agreed to meet and sees the note. In said note, Elise reads Aime's message, which asks her to follow her magical trail, since they are both magic users. And all magic-using people leave a trail of their magic wherever they pass. Also in the note, Aime tells Elise that she left because she received an interesting job offer, so she saw fit to follow the person who made her that offer. In the note Aime seems very optimistic as always, while Elise has started to get very nervous, especially since Aime's magic trail leads to the outskirts of Ardeal, where there is supposed to be nothing but desert.

Elise's first thought was: what kind of person would live in the desert where there is nothing but destruction and death? And could that person be dangerous or planning to harm her in some way? So, Elise without hesitation set out on the trail of her sister. After several hours of wandering in the desert, thirsty and hungry, she finally reached what appears in the distance to be... a forest? A small forest in the middle of the desert? Elise wondered to herself if she has started to hallucinate, but either way, Aime's magical trail leads there, so she entered that place without hesitation. Finally, inside the small forest, which seemed to be genuine, Elise finds a lonely wooden cabin, so she draws her sword expecting the worst and enters the old man's hideout.

Meanwhile, deep inside the cabin, which is much larger than it appears on the outside, Aime is naked and shrunken, the size of a small doll that could fit in the palm of one hand. Standing at a small table facing the hooded man. She angrily tells him to let her go, but that old man, who turns out to be a powerful sorcerer, has other plans. Then the old man takes Aime with his hand and she, surprised, begins to scream for her life while she feels how her body little by little begins to become somewhat rigid at the first contact with the old man's hand, while a strange and pale material runs through her body.



WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING!?! LET ME GO!!

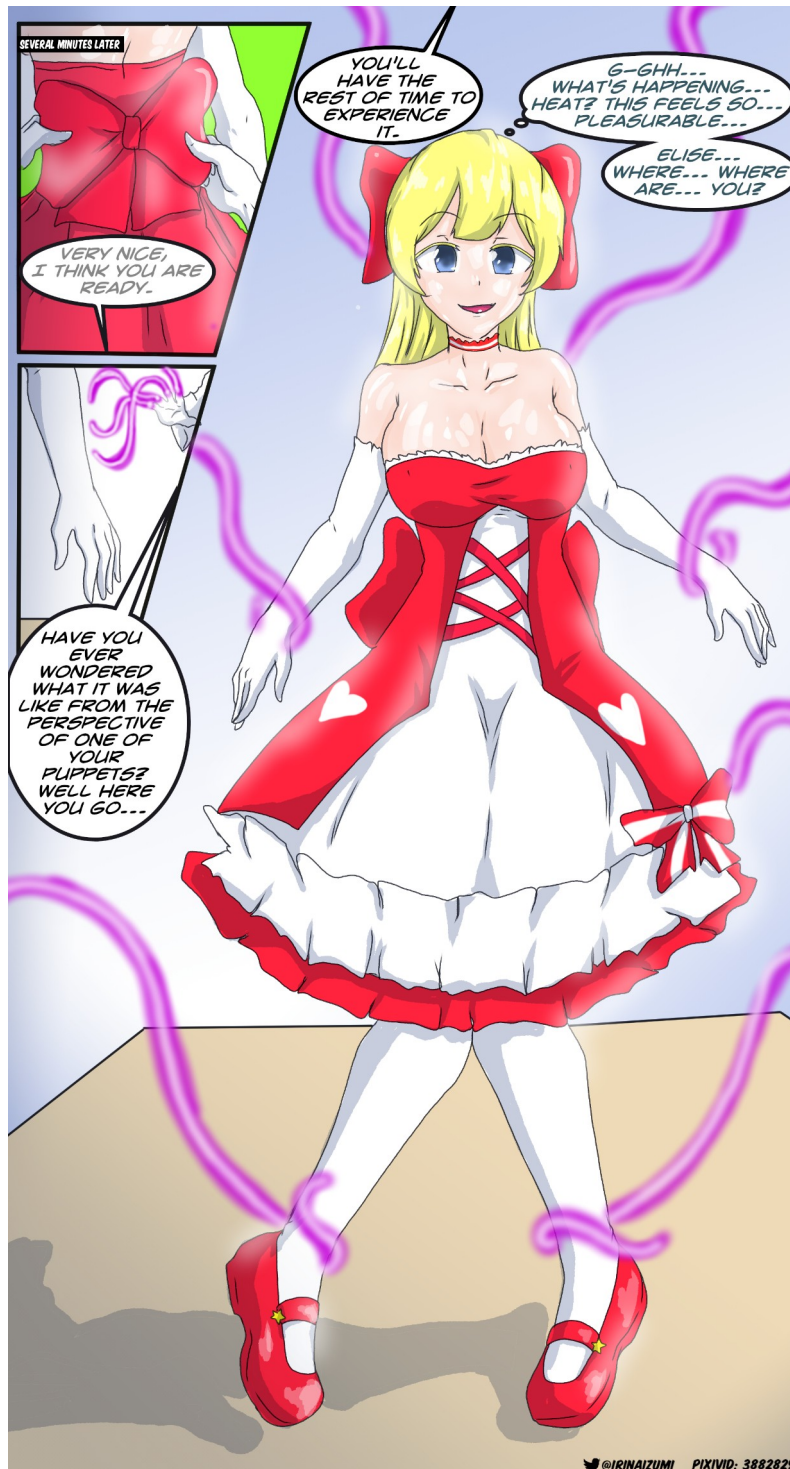
OH HO, IT SEEMS YOU ARE NOT THE PUPPETEER I'M LOOKING FOR, THE ONE WHO STARTED SPREADING THAT MYTH OF THE MISSING QUEEN...

WELL WHATEVER, I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW LIFE AND A NEW HOME. I PROMISE IT'LL BE A GREAT IMPROVEMENT OVER WHAT YOU HAVE NOW~

A-AAHH!! WHAT IS THIS!?! I-I CAN'T MOVE... JUST YOU WAIT UNTIL ELISE FINDS US!



Later, finally, Aime has been turned into a cute, small, defenseless puppet, which would shock anyone with its beauty and realism. Apparently, the substance that has covered her body has some flexibility even if it does not allow Aime's voluntary movement, if not only being moved involuntarily by the old man's threads. Aime, excited to see for the first time from the perspective of one of her puppets, on the other hand finds it hard to stop thinking about Elise, worried about what she will do next or if she too is headed to an uncertain destination if she follows the trail of her Magic.



Meanwhile, in some other room far away, Elise keeps passing door after door without finally reaching her sister. On the other hand, as she walks deeper into the cabin, Elise notices that the things around her and the very rooms she's walking through get bigger every time she walks through a new door. Elise, scared, finally and not knowing what to do after going through several doors, looks around her and it seems that the last door she has crossed has led her to some kind of flat wooden brown floor that seems to be, rather, the surface of a table surrounded by an immense abyss towards the real floor and, on the walls around the table, several shelves that house dolls of all kinds, as if it were a doll collector's house. There is nothing on that table but a strange, huge key and what appears to be a person. Elise speaks to that red-haired girl who is there, but she doesn't answer. Then Elise walks towards her and spins around her, realizing that this redheaded woman is...a doll?...the same size as Elise herself? Elise, scared and confused, runs to the door to try to get out of there.

However, suddenly the key that was on the table floats and, violently, fits into Elise's back, it seems that everything is over for her. Suddenly her clothes begin to disintegrate or rather magically transform as she takes on a purple luminous tint and her body has become motionless in the same position.

HUH? WHAT WAS THAT?  
THIS PLACE IS CREEPY... I'M  
FOLLOWING AIME'S TRAIL, BUT THE DEEPER  
I GO THE MORE I FEEL AN EVIL PRESENCE  
CLOSING IN, THAT EVERYTHING BECOMES  
BIGGER AROUND ME.

OH,  
THERE'S  
SOMEONE,  
MAYBE  
THEY KNOW  
SOMETHING

W-WHAT'S  
GOING ON!? I-I  
CAN'T MOVE.. W-WHAT  
IS HAPPENING TO MY  
CLOTHES?

HEY!  
WHERE ARE  
WE?

WHY THE  
SILENT  
TREATMENT?  
HELLO?

WHAT  
THE...? HER  
SKIN IS STIFF  
AND SHINY... IS  
THIS... A  
DOLL...? HOW  
STRANGE... I  
WANT TO  
RESCUE AIME,  
BUT I THINK I  
MAY NEED  
BACKUP.

LIWAAH!!

Then a hand, which appears to be the old man's, grabs his new wind-up doll, Elise, and begins to turn the key inside her. As she turns the key, Elise's mind begins to warp as she inevitably feels great excitement and warmth.

The old man finally leaves the doll on the table and watches as it involuntarily walks mechanically, while Elise's mind becomes more and more distorted with each step, as if her mind liquefies with each turn the key makes. Her back, as if something in her mind was destroyed or reinvented inside... With the little sanity she has left, Elise can't stop thinking about her sister and what will happen to her

The old man, who apparently reads her mind, comforts her by telling her that very soon she will be reunited with her sister and that they will be inseparable, as part of fulfilling Elise's last wish as a human. The old man then removes his hood and states that, since there is no other female puppeteer besides the one he is looking for, the red-eyed shadow, he will finally find her who is perhaps the real person responsible for the disappearance of his daughter, stating that, as the former emperor of Nova Neustria, Hermes, who has apparently survived the cataclysm, will find his daughter even if it's the last thing he does, and that puppeteer, after the destruction of Scipio and his commonwealth, is the next suspect.



ALRIGHT, LET'S SEE HOW YOU PERFORM.

W-WHAT'S... HAPPENING... I-I CAN'T... THINK... I-IT'S LIKE... EVERY STEP... LIQUEFIES... MY MIND... GGHH-



MAGNIFICENT. THEY SHOULD REALLY THANK ME FOR LETTING THEM LIVE AS MY DOLLS RATHER THAN THE HARD-UP REFUGEES THEY WERE.

ALL RIGHT, NOW THAT I'M BACK HOME THERE'S NO MORE NEED TO DISGUISE MY APPEARANCE.

WITH YOU IN HAND, I HAVE CAPTURED ALL BUT ONE OF ARDEAL'S PUPPETEERS. ONLY THAT ENIGMATIC WOMAN WITH THE RED EYES REMAINS, THE ONE WHO SPREAD THE LEGEND OF THE MISSING PRINCESSES AND QUEEN... UPON MY HONOR AS THE GREAT EMPEROR HERMES, I SWEAR I WILL FIND MY DAUGHTER IF IT IS THE LAST THING I DO.





WELL, AT LEAST I'M NOT ALONE NOW. I HOPE ELISE IS HAPPY TO BE TOGETHER.



G-GHH... I'M SORRY, AIME... I'M JUST... A PRETTY DOLL... AND I SPIN... AND SPIN... AND SPIN...

