

Copal Jenness – A Prologue [Part 5]

By: FastWinger

In the pre-dawn, walking up to the massive doors at the Great Hall and Bar at the front of the Inn of Tamarind, Copal found them closed and a small crowd gathered, fronted by the barkeep, who was calling out “Gruff, open the doors!”, while he fitted a huge key into the heavy oak doors. Four of the Questors met on the Mountain on the previous day had arrived at the same time from across the open courtyard where the guests of the Inn of Tamarind had lodging. The Paladin was not with them.

“Gruff, the owner, is nowhere to be found. He never closes the Great Hall in the morning!”

The heavy doors swung open to reveal the familiar wide tabled hall. It should have been brightly lit, yet no light burned.

“Gruff!”

“It’s not like him to put the lamps out! He knows we’re here before the sun!”

The barkeep, the cooks, the townspeople and the guests did not seem that eager to push into the blackness of the Great Hall, and Copal, knowing no real darkness, strode across the wide hall until he felt rather than saw that his boots had begun to stick to the floor. The first cook and the Four Questors had followed close on Copal’s heels. That was when Copal saw the one severed and twisted leg, half out of sight at the far end of the long bar. His thoughts almost refused to accept what he instantly knew to be the truth. Gruff was dead and dismembered. The rest of the body was somewhere else in the hall.

As he turned to caution and hold back the group, the first cook struck a light and stepped forward. What Copal had seen was now visible to all, from the mangled corpse to the severed head.

There, on the blood soaked floorboards, lay one of the crests from the Paladin's tunic.

How the child Miyu, from the Tea Shoppe of the Sun, pushed through the crowd at that awful moment, to emerge and stand at Copal's knee, he never knew. The child looked at the sightless eyes of the dead man and cried out, "Second of three!"

Copal backed away from the terrible scene, herding the first cook and his lantern towards the door, but the Questors Four looked up from the bloodied crest, to Copal's face. Where was the Paladin?

Copal Jenness, Detective of Tamarind, drew back to the door and called for it to be locked to all but the Sherriff and his officers.

Copal turned from the place, his face set in grim determination, and walked purposefully down the rough street towards the Tea Shop of the Sun. The hour was early, but Copal knew that the kitchens would be busy, and he could find the Tea Traders gathering to do business early in the morning, with Dory, the Tea Shop owner.

As he strode around the corner, Copal saw the lights of the Tea Shop kitchens bustling with the many little ladies setting up for another busy day. The big kitchen doors were open with light spilling onto the street, yet strangely at the side of the big building, Dory's Offices were dark and silent in the pre-dawn. The Tea Traders were rapping on the doors to Dory's office, and calling out to him, but there was no light and no answer.

Copal quickly brought around Dory's old key from the key ring in the big kitchen and unlocked the dark and silent Office. The Tea Traders pushed forward with a small crowd that included the Questors Four. The Paladin was not with them.

Even in this crush of onlookers, no one ventured to be the first through the Office door as it swung open on total darkness, and Copal, aware of his position as Detective of Tamarind, readied himself for whatever he might find, and stepped inside.

Copal's dark vision let him take in the entire scene of a fight to the death, amid broken boxes of tea and coffee, and most horrible of all, the sight of Dory that Copal was unprepared to see. For the man would never greet any visitor to his Office again. Dory's hands were against the high wall behind his desk, and each had a long spike driven through it. His mouth was open and his face twisted, gruesome in death.

Copal hoped to spare the crowd of traders, and especially the little ladies from the Tea Shop from this carnage, and raised his hand to signal that they should step back. But by now the Questors had found torches in the lane by the kitchens, and carried them through the doors, closely followed by all of the Tea Shop ladies.

Ready for cries of grief and horror, Copal turned to see all of the little ladies were completely silent. Then they cried, but not tears of sorrow. They rejoiced. "He is dead! Dory's dead! Now we will have our lives back again!" Once more he was surprised to see the child Miyu step out from behind the group of ladies and walk directly up to the dead man's face. She looked at Dory and said, "First of three!"

On the blood soaked floor lay a crest torn from the Paladin's ensigns.

It was then that a shadow fell across the torchlight from the open door. The Sherriff of Tamarind stood there in the half-light, his hat pulled low over his face and the collar on his coat turned up. At his side stood half-a-dozen of his Guards.