

The Stranger and The Eldest Son

The first time I met him I was a young, just a man of ten summers but I had hunted and helped my father and his brothers and their sons plow the fields and take in the animals. I had drunk the mead and thought I had seen much until he arrived.

He was heralded by two metal birds that hovered with an unearthly, though quiet, hum. My father and his brothers and cousins and other members of the village all stood silently. They did not bow or kneel as they did to the chief and this I found strange, as the chief bowed to this stranger, sinking as low as he could and pressing his muzzle to the ground.

The chief was new, he had inherited the post on the death of his father but three summers previously. He had forced the men and women of the village to bow to him and pay homage to him as his father had not. When the stranger arrived, clad in gleaming metal from the neck to his claws and with a cloak of the brightest red I had ever seen, he did not look pleased.

"Great warrior, hero of our people, welcome. I bid you great honour in the name of our ancestors and our children and for your defence of us." The chief held out a sword of bronze, his own tail tucked between his legs; a feat to do since he was already on his knees.

I had sought to kneel as well but my mother kept a hand on my shoulder; her claws dug into it and she kept me upright. She had had me early in life but despite her fairly young age she was one of the wisest women of the village. "I have met the stranger many times." She whispered in my ear, "And never is he to be greeted like this."

The stranger's voice was clear and cold and his posture radiated menace. "I knew your father, boy. He was a proud man, and honest. He knew his place in the world and what needed to be done. I see you do not follow his ways and do not heed his advice." He pulled something from his belt, a tool, I supposed. "Stand and greet me as an equal. I do not need or want your gifts. They would be better used serving your own people."

The response was staggered, halting; as if the chief did not know what to say. "But, my lord..."

"I... and not your lord. Stand, and show me you are worthy to lead these people." He raised the tool. My mother did not cover my eyes, as she had first done when I had first witnessed the slaughter of a fowl when I was four. I instinctively knew that the new chief was but an inch from death.

The chief's demeanour suddenly changed and, gripping the hilt of the bronze sword, sought to strike it deep within the stranger's stomach. The blade, though, bent with the most awful sound as it was turned

aside. The stranger did not move much, but there was a crack; like a clap of thunder, and a spray of blood erupted from the chief's chest and back. The eyes were cold before his body had finished tumbling to the ground. With a heavy sigh the stranger put the weapon, it was clear to me now that it was a weapon, once more into the hilt on his belt.

"Are Aelthred or Beomere here?" The voice was suddenly soft and distant. A few of the youngest were crying as Gormir had been their only chief but the rest of the village looked with a grim satisfaction at the body on the ground.

My father stepped forward. "I am sorry, Gordon. They were slain five summers ago by Gormir's hand. None of Alfred's blood remains."

Gordon, as I now knew his name, though I would still call him The Stranger, looked down in great sadness. "They were great men, I will miss them. I'm surprised by their passing." He stared, now, at my father. "Aldwyn..." I was surprised by the name he used for my father. "Can you take care of your people? Keep them safe and help them grow strong and wise? Can you do the same with your sons and daughters and keep them from the temptations of power and steer them to wisdom in its wielding?"

"Aye, Stranger, I think I can." Father's voice sounded far away as mother led me back to the house. I knew our world had just changed.

The second time I met the stranger was exactly ten summers later. My father was older by then, as was I. Now tending my father's fields with my brothers while he saw to justice and law among our people. The stranger came again and this time my father greeted him as a friend with outstretched arms. The stranger embraced my father as would a brother and stayed this time the whole night.

The time I was to speak to Gordon by the fire while the mead was passed about and the minstrel played.

"You're Gareth, yes? Aldwyn's son." He had removed his armour but wore clothing that stuck tightly to his body and shimmered in the dim light of the fire. I had snuck looks at it all night, to have it beside me unsettled me, drawing me to it.

"Y-Yes, I am." My ears burned as I looked upon him; a fine muzzle, long, full tail and very well defined musculature underneath the impossibly tight material. I didn't know what I was feeling but he looked at me and, it seemed, right through me, and gave me a playful grin.

Men flashed that grin at women they fancied. I had never given that grin to anyone and to have it used on me by this striking person felt at once embarrassing and deeply infatuating. I was a conflicted, then

and there, by the idea of being attracted to a man. Was I? Was this what all the men with wives had felt, and their wives as well?

"Still single, yes? I'm surprised you don't have a wife, yet. Eldest son of the chief and all. You've a lot to live up to." His muzzle was buried in his cup but I could see the grin.

"No, I mean, yes I'm still unmated. I'm sorry, I have to go for a walk..." I rose but he rose with me and I opened the door to the main hall and we walked out under the stars. Part of me wanted to stop him, it's true, but part of me wanted him with me. That latter part was almost my whole being. It wanted this dangerous stranger with me, close to me.

We stood behind my house, beside the fowl pens. He did not press himself against me, but let me come to him. When I did his hands upon the back of my head were gentle and encouraging, while I nuzzled at his chest and felt the warm muscle underneath his clothes. I drank in his scent, the musk, the alien smell of his clothing and our mutual arousal. It took no time at all before he had my belt off and his mouth was around my penis. I speared his muzzle but unlike the sword so many years ago I found my mark and suppressed my own cries of pleasure only with some effort.

I knelt to reciprocate but he knelt with me and brought my muzzle to his, kissing me deeply instead. I could taste my own seed on his lips and tongue and he smiled. "Not tonight..." and instead we sat and talked with my head on his chest.

It was an hour before we returned. He smiled to my father and my father to him. The next day my eldest brother was pronounced as the heir to the chieftom, much to my relief. The stranger departed soon after. Our meeting would be much sooner than the ten years it would take for the rest of the village.

It would be another year; a year of helping my youngest brother and his new bride till the land and arrange the household before I met Gordon once more. I had walked out north, past the village boundaries onto the fens I had only trod across a few times before, before I pressed the button on the box that he had given to me.

It wasn't long before the giant craft; fat sort of boat-bird-craft, landed in front of me. I raced up to it but he met me half-way and we embraced as lovers and held each other, crying softly. Whenever Gordon would visit my village I would accompany him, but now I would do it as an advisor to The Stranger and agent of my eldest brother.

Now I write this I am returning home an old man, to pass and be buried with my people having served them well. I will admit I served my own passions, too. My lover cries over me but I try and tell him not to. His place is to carry on with his eternal task but my time is at an end and it has been so much richer for his gifts. I only hope mine

came close to matching what he gave me; knowing who I am and knowing his love for me.