

Theft and Negotiations

Dusk was approaching and there was a steady drizzle coming down from the overfilled clouds as I neared the house I had marked out. I had been casing this house for days now, and I was confident, possibly overly so, that I knew everything that went on in the house. I knew so much about it, in fact, that I could have probably walked into the house in the middle of the night and have nobody notice me, though I certainly wasn't stupid enough to try. I was ready to get this over and done with, however, as I was tired of standing in the rain watching other people go about their boring, everyday lives.

And so, under cover of darkness, I sneaked up to the house and prepared to scale the wall. It was a nice, Tudor style, brick house; time worn but obviously well cared for. The garden that I was sneaking through was equally grandiose and picturesque, hedgerows and all. The building's architecture made it exceedingly easy to climb and I was at one of the top level windows in a matter of a couple of seconds, lock picks in hand. The lock wasn't too terribly difficult, but the fact that it was there at all got me worried, had they had trouble with thieves before? Not that it mattered at this point, anyway; the lock popped open and after a momentary struggle with the stuck window, I slowly climbed inside the house. Blessedly, I didn't find any more resistance inside the house as I worked my way up the floors. I did see a few guards, but they were already sleeping like babies. I would have laughed, but my professionalism reduced it to a mere snicker. I left the guard post behind as I traveled through the fourth story of the house towards my quarry, the "please admire my precious possessions" room that every noble with a brain not in his head and something he deserves to have stolen has. It was clearly marked with a big wooden door and a nice velvet rope. Lovely thing about velvet ropes, they stop anyone in their way, so long as that person doesn't know how to crouch. The huge wooden door was well set and well oiled, so I made much less noise than I had prepared to as I entered the room.

The room was dimly lit and covered in a nice mahogany siding that actually looked authentic. My quarry was across the room in one of the display cases: a solid gold ring with a set jewel that looked like a real diamond, or enough so that I could pawn it off as one. I crept through the room, the plush carpeting muffling my footsteps and sucking in my boots. The quiet was all enveloping and really rather disconcerting, so much so, in fact, that I didn't hear the low whistle of the thrown knife until it was nearly too late. Luckily for me, I have excellent reflexes and so managed to dodge the knife by not more than an inch. It sank into the wooden wall behind me with a dull thud and stuck there as a testament to my luck. The second knife wasn't long in coming, but I was ready now and so caught it as it flew past. As I examined the knife I noticed it really wasn't too much more than a piece of iron, maybe shrapnel of some sort, with some leather wrapped around it, which made the accuracy with which it was thrown all the more impressive. The third knife didn't really surprise me so much as

annoyed me. Why was this person repeatedly trying to kill me? Who were they? Why was I asking myself stupid questions when I should be looking for my mystery attacker? I quickly scanned the room and saw a pair of bright purple eyes watching me and possibly preparing another knife.

“Please refrain from throwing whatever you were planning on throwing at me next,” I whispered to the pair of eyes, which rather ruined the effect, “I’m rather fond of my face and I’d like to keep it as it is, which is to say, on my head.”

The eyes blinked twice in quick succession and then responded in an unmistakeably male voice, “Your face is none of my concern, and I’d sooner see it out the window than anywhere near me. Oh and you don’t have to whisper. The household is asleep for the night and the sleeping draught I gave the guards shouldn’t wear off for another few hours.” The eyes then stepped into the light, revealing a peregrine falcon, about 16 or 17 if I’m any judge. He was tall and rather thin, and his clothes hung off him in such a way that I couldn’t tell if he had them made that way or if they were made for a person of more normal proportions. His face was very serious, too serious for someone his age, though I can’t be any judge of that, and it was studying my face very intently. I’m certainly no looker and years of thievery have made me uncomfortable to have my face watched for any length of time. My tail moved to the other side of my body as I shifted my weight awkwardly under his gaze.

I coughed, “Staring is impolite you know, and I’d like to know what you’re doing here. This area is off limits.”

He laughed, “And I suppose you would know? You’re not supposed to be here either and I was here first.”

I smiled wryly at him, “Then why don’t we just get what we’re after and go our separate ways. I certainly won’t get in your way if you don’t get in mine.”

He frowned at me, “That would be a wonderful idea, but I’m not too terribly interested my face becoming known to others,” he held out his hand and a knife appeared in it, “so if you could just lie down, I’ll make your death quick.”

I frowned as well as I pulled out one of my katanas, “Now, let’s not do anything hasty. I’d hate for this to turn ugly, and you’re at a disadvantage against me.”

He realized it as well because his knife lowered and his hands raised, “I may have been slightly... hasty in my drawing of steel. I am, however, perfectly willing to continue our negotiations from the current point,” he smiled jauntily and looked at me.

I frowned more pointedly and drew my other katana, “The way I see it, we’ve crossed a line and I think I’ll be negotiating with my swords in hand from here on out, but you are free to continue talking.”

The smile left his face and he sighed, “Very well then. I propose a partnership. I would feel much safer trusting you with my identity if I knew we had a shared interest in keeping it secret.”

I stared at him, “And how would a partnership make me more interested in keeping your identity a secret?”

He met my eyes without flinching and responded, “For the simple reason that I am a wanted man, and I'm certain you wouldn't like any lawmen swooping down upon you, yes?”

I looked at him even more intently, “Now what would someone like you be wanted by the law for. I hope you know the guards can be bribed off of petty thievery?”

He cast me a scathing look, “Of course I know that. I would hardly still be on the streets if I didn't. No, my crime was ever so slightly more along the lines of stealing some very important jewels.”

I sighed, “That would do it, I suppose. Petty thievery is so much safer. There's less of a payout, of course, but you're less likely to make many enemies.”

He cast another glance at me, “I assure you, if it were only a matter of safety I wouldn't have even considered it but for a matter of honor.”

I sighed again, more deeply, “Honor is another troublesome thing. I certainly hope it wouldn't get in the way in any future partnerships,” I glanced up at him.

He met my eyes again before responding, “It wouldn't get in the way of business, though I may have to settle other things outside our work.”

I nodded, “Good. I wouldn't want to work with any man who would so quickly give up his ideals. I believe we may be able to work something out then.”

He started moving around back of me, collected his knife and put it in his belt, then reached out his hand, “Do we have a deal then? The details to be worked out later, of course”

I nodded and shook his hand. It was about then that the man of the house – some minor lord or other, I didn't recognize his insignia – burst into the room with a full complement of guards, more than I cared to fight at the moment. I reached into my coat and pulled out a pocket watch, looked at it and said, “Ah! Hello gentlemen. I'd love to stay and chat, but I've other appointments I simply can't miss, so, if you'll excuse me,” I smashed the display case holding the ring I was hunting, took it, and proceeded to the window, “Au revoir, gentlemen.”

I then jumped onto the sill and from there onto the roof. I glanced around and saw the falcon a few roofs away, and so gave chase. When I was about ten feet away he turned around and threw a knife at me, which I ducked under. I smiled and opened my arms, “Now is that any way to treat your new partner? I'm hurt, not physically of course, but you get the picture.”

He looked as if he was about to throw another knife at me, then straightened out and responded,

“Given the circumstances, it might be prudent for us to quit this rooftop and find a more accommodating environment.”

I smiled and bowed, “Of course. Let us be off then. I'd hate to spend one more minute than I have to in this damp. A man could catch his death out here,” I smiled knowingly.

He grinned in response, “Right this way sir. I'm sure you'd like to sit and compare notes, as it were.”

He then led me to an area where the row of buildings led down into an alley. It was quite a secluded spot too, very well sheltered from the rain. He could have tried to kill me there and no one would have ever found his body, at least not for a while. We then found ourselves a lovely inn with a fire in the hearth and cheap alcohol for purchase. Now I'm not much of a drinking man, but, given the excitement of the night, I felt entitled to a small glass of wine. And so I found myself, glass of wine in hand, sharing thievery techniques with a partner whose name I didn't know yet.

I decided to broach the subject, “Excuse me,” I said, “not that this conversation isn't stirring, but it has occurred to me that you haven't given me your name in all this time.”

He gave me an odd look and replied, “That's true, but as you haven't given me yours yet either, I feel no obligation to give you mine.”

I sighed, “Fine then, I am Saranthos Inesius, at your service,” I did a little half bow in my seat.

He smiled and returned the bow, “And I am Aves Cyanis, at your service. Now that we've gotten the business of introductions out of the way, let's continue with the matter at hand, the business of crime.”

I'll not bore you with the gritty details, but suffice it to say that many and various sordid affairs were discussed over the course of the night and well into the morning ending with Aves running off into the morning sun and leaving me with an address written on a napkin telling where I could find him.