

A Brief Discussion

I had to duck my head as I entered the low-ceilinged room. It was small but well kept, with a small pot for cooking in the corner and a neat bed that had recently been made. There were also seven weapons that I immediately noticed and doubtless many more that I didn't. I raised my voice and called out, "You didn't tidy up just for me, did you?"

I saw Aves hop out of a side room, khopesh at the ready, then relax when he recognized me. "It's generally considered polite to knock," he told me as he sheathed his blade.

I smiled, "With a door that loud? Knocking seemed redundant."

He returned the grin and led me to the side room he had leaped out of before. Inside was a small table with the days news on it. He gestured to the paper as I sat down on one of the chairs, "Your trial's big news, you know. Lordship hasn't been granted outside the gentry for more than two hundred years."

"I'd gathered," I responded, "Still, if I lay low for a while, I should fade out of public view... hopefully."

He grinned at me, "You'd best be careful, or you'll end up a people's image, or worse, a martyr."

I mock shuddered and then decided it was time to change tack, "So," I asked, "how has your investigation been going?"

He shrugged, "Not as well as I would have hoped, but better than it could be."

I cocked a brow, "Oh? And how bad could it be?"

"I could be dead," he responded.

I laughed, "I suppose any alternative would be preferable to that, although that does leave quite a large margin for what you *have* accomplished."

He shrugged again, "I suppose it does, but given as how so few people are willing to give information to such a visibly wanted man, I have needed to turn to some of my harder to reach associates."

I nodded my head in assent, "But more to the point, what exactly have you found?"

"I appear to have an assassin after me, and a rather good one at that."

I glanced up at him from the paper I was now reading, "You should be flattered."

He inclined his head, "Of course. That does leave the problem of someone trying to kill me, though."

"Easily remedied," I responded.

"Oh? Do tell more."

"We kill him first." I flashed a smile.

"That would normally work just fine, but this assassin, as I said, is rather good. The best of the

best apparently, though I have my doubts.”

I frowned slightly, “The best of the best doesn't come cheap. Someone must really want you dead. Still-”

Aves suddenly held up his hand for silence. I stopped speaking and listened intently towards the front of the house. It was very faint, but I could just make out the soft, padding footfalls of someone who was trying to remain unnoticed. Aves and I glanced at each other, then quickly and quietly moved to either side of the open entrance to the room. We then waited as the footsteps got steadily closer to the room. After a short while, a hooded figure, doubtless the owner of the footsteps, entered the room and stood, back facing us, scanning the room as if looking for something. We slowly crept up behind the intruder and, after a quick nod to Aves, I tackled her to the ground. She was slight of build, though I detected a fair bit of lean muscle when I tackled her. Her hood also came down as she fell, revealing the face of a fairly young wolf, about my age, with a look of surprise on her face that made Aves chuckle.

She started struggling almost before she hit the ground, making it very difficult to hold her still enough to hold conversation. “If you would... kindly stop struggling... we have... some questions for you.”

I dragged her off the ground and deposited her in a chair while Aves looked for something to restrain her with. She tried to go for a knife, but I quickly unsheathed my katana and severed the blade from its hilt. She sat back in her chair then, and contemplated me until Aves came back with some rope and tied her to the chair.

I walked up closer to her, no longer blocking the doorway since escaping would be much more difficult. “Now,” I began, “let's start with who you are and what you are doing here.”

She remained silent a while longer, squinting at me before she said, “That's it! You're that bloke from the newspapers! What are you doing here?”

I shrugged, “That's my business, and you're the one being questioned. Now, once again, your name?”

“Why should I tell you anything?” she asked, and with no small amount of disdain, either.

I sighed, “Well for a start we have you tied up. Also, we both have weapons, while you are disarmed.”

“Don't count on it,” she remarked. She then closed her eyes momentarily, then flung them open again as I found a table thrown violently, pinning me to the wall. I tried pushing against it, to no avail though as it seemed firmly placed by magic.

“Bother,” I muttered as I unsheathed my blade and cut at the table. I wasn't able to put much force behind my strike, but, due to the nature of my blade, I got about a quarter of the way through the

table and, even more surprisingly, watched it fall to the ground as the magic on it was released.

I smirked, "Giving up so soon?"

She looked at me with wide, almost frightened eyes, "How did you do that?"

My brow furrowed, "How did I do what?"

Now she looked as confused as I felt, "You severed my magic from me. Cut through it, almost." She glanced at the blade in my hand, then at the one still on my back.

I noticed Aves was occupied with a chair that was assaulting him, doubtless under a similar kind of control. I walked over towards him, then turned and slashed at the air between the girl and Aves. The chair proceeded to fall lifelessly to the floor, and Aves joined in our confusion. He walked up to me and asked, "How did you manage that?"

I shrugged, "No clue, but it was certainly useful, so I'm not complaining."

He glanced at our captive, then back at me, "Neither am I, but what's to keep her from launching another assault?"

"I think she's just as confused as we are," I responded.

"Hey your lordship lizard-man, or whatever you're called, where did you get those swords?" the girl called to me.

I winced, "My name is Saranthos, and I acquired these blades by relieving a lord's collection of them."

She looked at me exasperatedly, "So you pinched them from some lord, then?"

I sighed, "Yes, they are stolen property, although the lord in question seemed to care more about his missing signet than the swords."

"Fine then, what are they made of?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," I responded, "though I have learned that they can cut through most anything, magic included apparently."

"Do they have names?" she asked. I noted that she seemed to be looking for specific answers from me, and had been so far disappointed.

"Oh most assuredly, though they have not seen fit to tell me them as of yet."

This response surprised her, as she sat back from her almost eager position and went silent.

I cocked one of my brows, "If you wish, you may call them Lefty and Righty, though that would hardly be a fitting name for either of them."

Something flashed across her face, perhaps anger, but she quickly relaxed and returned to her earlier nonchalance.

I walked back up towards her, blade still in hand, "Now that we've gotten that little spat dealt

with, let's return to my questions. Who are you?"

She remained silent, and if silence could hold belligerence, then this silence was absolutely brimming.

I sighed and brought my blade to a ready position, "I was quite serious when I said these blades could cut through almost anything. If your silence continues, I could demonstrate on you, perhaps one of your fingers would suffice."

She met my eyes calmly, "Something tells me that even though you may be willing to do that, you'd rather not. Am I correct?"

"You are," I responded, "but I do need to know your purpose here at the very least, or I'm afraid I will have no choice but to loosen your tongue with pain."

Still not breaking eye contact with me, she continued, "I can tell you that, though I will withhold my name until I find you trustworthy enough to know it. I came here to scavenge what I could, assuming the house was empty as it had been for several months. That one of you noticed me shows either a very precarious situation or very keen hearing."

Aves spoke up, "I am the one in the precarious situation, though not as precarious as yours, seeing as how you've been captured and I am still free."

She looked towards Aves, "For now. I'm sure you'll get what's coming to you for whatever you did."

Aves laughed at that, "You are very quick to judge, given as how you don't know me."

She looked at him with a stare that dripped acid, "To be hiding in a house that has been abandoned and dilapidated for months when you are so clearly a blue blood means that you are obviously in deep shit, else you'd be relaxing in some manse in the country."

He snorted, "Manse in the country? How stereotypical. While I may be a noble, I can assure you I have no friendship with any of those cockamamie fools that are commonly associated with the gentry, nor do I possess any sort of land, or a manse to put it on. I am a city lord, to put it simply. Our newly made Lord Inesius would be more qualified for your scorn, as he now has lands to his name, and no doubt a manse as well. Even taking none of that into account, my hiding was induced by some of the selfsame nobles you just described who hold grudges against my family for prior humiliations and without provocation from myself."

She looked slightly taken aback at his berating, but recovered quickly, "Even if what you say is true, this kind of thing is so typical of you nobles. You tread on the weak, not caring about who gets hurt until you're in their position, and even then you bitch and whine and pay your way out, and even then you learn *nothing* from that experience, reverting to your old ways as quickly as you please."

Aves raised an eyebrow, “You talk of the gentry as if they were one person, which I can assure you they are not. I'd have not been able to bear the simple, base thoughts if that were the case. Your scathing oratory makes me wonder, however, who in your family was taken advantage of by a lord, or if it was you yourself.”

She blushed at that, but didn't respond this time, so I broke in, “Well, this has been most... intriguing, but I think that, assuming you are not here to kill either of us, we should part ways. Unless there is something else you require of us?”

She glanced at me then, as if she had forgotten I existed, “No. No I don't have any business with either of you.”

We then all turned towards the entrance as we heard a loud crash and shouting as the door was knocked in. I jumped up and sheathed my sword as I prepared to head towards the back door of the building. The girl however went in the other direction, unsheathing another knife she had hidden and preparing to fight the oncoming guards. I quickly grabbed her arm and she looked back at me. “There is a time for fighting,” I explained, “and a time for fleeing. This would be a time for running, and fast too. We may be able to fight these thugs, but they have an almost inexhaustible supply, and it wouldn't do to be seen here, not right now.”

She hesitated a moment, then nodded and followed me as we dashed out the back of the house, just barely out of sight of the police. Fifteen minutes later Aves, the girl, and I were standing on a rooftop and watching as a figure cloaked in black set fire to the building after the police had left. I turned to Aves, “I hope you didn't have anything you were particularly fond of in there.”

He shrugged, “Nothing in particular. A few extra pairs of clothes, some overly dull weapons, nothing much. Speaking of weapons, I am now firmly convinced that we need to have those weapons examined. Cutting through magic is not a common trait for anything to have, and not many will be familiar with it, nor do I suspect is that the extent of their abilities.”

I nodded, “I agree. There is something about these swords that belies their true nature, and while it doesn't quite unsettle me, it's enough to make me want to investigate further.” I then turned to the girl, who was still staring at the fire, “I'm surprised you haven't gone your own merry way by now. It wasn't your house, and you appear to despise the person who was living in it. Why so obsessed with its destruction?”

She looked at me, “You could have killed me. You could have let me go fight those policemen and get captured. It probably would have bought you more time, too. So why didn't you?”

I met her gaze evenly, “Maybe I was trying to exert the small shred of compassion I have left. Maybe I don't like giving the police handouts to torture. Maybe I was bored. Whatever the reason, I

stopped you, and now you're here. Any other questions?"

"Yes, actually," she replied, "You tackled me when you captured me. How did you sneak up on me to do so?"

I grinned, "I'm very good at what I do."

"Which is?" she responded.

"Ah, you see," I said, "I may now be a lord by law, but I was originally a thief by trade."

She frowned slightly, "You must have been fairly good."

"I'm not sure of the exact number, but from what I had been blamed for, my bounty was a few hundred gold."

Her eyes widened, "But you're... done with that now, right?"

I grinned again, "Not hardly."

This time she grinned back, "In that case, I think I'll follow you around awhile. See what you can do."

I inclined my head, "How could I refuse such an offer? Very well, then. Follow me around if you wish, but keep in mind I have a nasty habit of getting into trouble, though never for what I do, it seems."

She smiled, "Danger keeps things interesting. By the way my name's Caliope."