

Fate's hand

"Grab that ankle there. No. Not like that, like this."

"Yeah I think I know how to carry a body around. Thank you."

"Well clearly you don't. I bet you haven't even seen a body before."

The stout dwarf dropped the ankle he was clinging onto. As it flopped to the floor he shot the scrawny looking wizard a stare.

"I've seen hundreds of bodies, thousands, all strewn out on the battlefield. The crowd started to peck at the ey-"

"Yeah yeah, here we go." The wizard interrupted.

"We all know you weren't at the battle of Stormguard, so don't even try to pull that one."

The dwarf looked coy. His gaze fell down to his feet and his hands started to clasp.

"I was there, just, late." He said meekly, looking up to the wizard.

"Oh don't give me that. You know I know."

The wizard dropped the severed wrist he was holding and gestured to his bag, poking slightly out of it was a crystal ball. The sunlight bounced through it and shot out onto a nearby tree.

"Yeah well, I still consider that cheating." The dwarf said, picking up the ankle from the floor and throwing it into a nearby bush.

"Its not cheating, it's a divine power." Sovoris proudly exclaimed, looking towards the dreary, overcast sky.

"Mmm divine power my..." the dwarf mumbled as he searched the ground for anymore body parts.

"Besides..." Sovoris continued, hoping for a rise out of baldar. "I'm sure you were more than happy to stay down in those mines."

baldar stopped and turned towards Sovoris, he began to sprint at him, and jumped before Sovoris could even react, landing a punch right in the side of the smug wizard. They began to scrap, clawing and biting before a voice broke their petty squabble.

"Hey!" They heard from the trees as they began to shake. Both of them turned their heads towards the noise as a tall, lean elf emerged from the forest. She was carrying binoculars and a piece of parchment.

"What did I tell you two?" She asked, with a tone of an angry mother. "Well?" She asked again, looking for an answer.

"We were just about to finish up. Then crystal ball here started piping up." baldar said, climbing off Sovoris.

"Well if you didn't-" Sovoris began.

"Ah, ah. I dont care, get this fucking body off the road before someone comes round. It's your fault it's here in the first place." She gestured down at the few remaining limbs and bones around the edge of the road. They both stood for a moment.

"Well?!" She shouted, prompting them to hurry. They began to scamper about, collecting random pieces and disposing of them in the nearby foliage. The bushes began to become stained and worn with the viscera dropping from the nearby trees where fingers and skull fragments had been thrown. The road itself still caked with slowly drying blood.

The sun was beginning to wane as the duo cleaned up the last pieces of the body from the road. The orange hue of the now clear sky stretched out across the dusty path, weaving through the trees in front of them as it bathed them in its warm glow. The elf sat on a nearby rock polishing and sharpening an ornately crafted knife. She glanced up at the sweaty dwarf who was holding one of the forearms of the victims.

"Finally." She sighed as she dropped down from the rock with a small thud on the grass below.

"Yeah well we could have got this done a lot quicker if you hadn't had just been sitting on your arse, Ashena" groaned baldar.

"Maybe true, but where is the fun in that?" She quipped back at him, just as the sound of horses and horns came rushing over the mound behind them.

"Quick!" Shouted Sovoris, gesturing wildly towards the still leaking forearm baldar was clutching. He looked around nervously and eventually decided the best course would be to hide the limb behind his large back. Sovoris then cleared the ground around him, kicking dust over the now dried blood and leaned against a withered tree. He began combing his long wiry beard and looking around in an attempt not to look conspicuous.

"Say nothing. OK?" Ashena ordered the others as black and green banners appeared on the horizon. The sound had become almost deafening as the stream of soldiers on horseback came riding up. There were at least 10 of them, led by an officer with a long, shining silver helm. An unmistakable crest adorned the helmet along with the frills that joined the side of the helm to the

guard in front. The group started to slow down on command of the officer in front. He lifted his gloved fist and the company stopped in unison. The din of the hooves with them. The slender man climbed from his horse and took off his helmet, revealing jet black hair underneath. Slathered in grease and slicked back to within an inch of its life.

“You folks alright out here?” He said in a calm, almost welcoming voice. “Almost sundown. Can’t be out here on your lonesome these days. All sorts of nasty creatures about.” As he finished that sentence he shot his eyes towards baldar, who still had his hands behind his back.

“Thank you for your concern.” Ashena responded, which broke the officer's attention from the glistening dwarf. He turned his attention towards the dark eyes of Ashena and squinted slightly. Holding his helmet out for one of the other soldiers to grasp from his hand.

“Can I ask what such a beauty is doing out here at this hour?” He looked her up and down. Quite clearly taking more time than he needed to do so. Ashena looked him directly in the eye and ignored his attempt at flattery.

“Were on a job. Got a couple of bandits that been houndin’ the locals. Clearly you boys seem overstretched.” She reached into the pack slung around her left shoulder and took out a piece of parchment. The officer broke his trance to look down and took the paper from her.

“Hmm.” He said, scanning the crumpled warrant up and down, checking for legitimacy. “Says here these bandits were seen on lone ridge. Looks like you’ve got yourself turned around.” He rolled up the warrant and handed it back to Ashena.

“Yeah, these shitheads took us down the wrong path. Dwarves and their sense of direction am I right?” She joked, looking back at baldar, his face as white as a sheet. The party behind the officer chuckled in unison. He looked less than impressed himself.

“Hmhm.” He laughed slightly. Still staring at Ashena. “Must be all the dark and dust of those mines. Eh, dwarf?” He looked over her shoulder towards baldar, who remained silent and dropped his head.

“Anyway, best leave you to it. You’ve got a fair ride if you are gonna make lone ridge before sunrise.” The officer turned and grabbed his helm from the soldier next to him, reaching up for the spurs of his armoured horse.

baldar was beginning to shake. He could feel the blood from the arm he was holding dripping down his hands, splattering onto the floor behind him. The blood behind to pool around his leather hand straps and his building arms were aching from the work to clean the scene before them. The officer climbed onto his horse and was about to ride off when the soldier alerted him. He rode along the side of him and whispered in his ear.

“Hang on!” He then ordered the group as he climbed off his horse. The officer turned towards baldar and quickly jumped off his horse. Looking inquisitively as he slowly began to walk to the

side of the road. Ashena began to delicately reach around to the dagger strapped to her back, her hand pulsating and ready for the moment to strike.

The officer slowly continued on, baldar looked in horror as he approached. His hands were drenched and no doubt started to stink. The officer stopped a few feet in front of him.

“Wizard!” He then shouted. Much to the relief of baldar who was ready to pounce and run. “Have you got a permit for that wand?” He said, pointing his large curved sword towards the slender figure that was leaning against the tree.

“What, me?” Sovoris said, nearly losing his balance.

“No, the other wizard that is here. Yes you!” The officer claimed, now marching towards Sovoris with intent.

“B-But of course.” He said, reaching into his deep pockets that were sewn into a dark brown cloak. He seemed to be searching for an age. As Ashena and Baldar stared at each other. Moving their gaze back and forth, subconsciously attempting to come up with a plan. Eventually Sovoris removed a glowing piece of paper and handed it to the officer. He sheathed his sword and snatched the permit from Sovoris.

“Ok. Here.” The officer gave the permit back to the wizard. “Sorry about that. Can’t be too careful these days. These rogue wizards are everywhere. The Gods only know how I would string up the lot of ‘em.”

“Thank you. Yeah everyone at the Academy is in arms. Just Ahhh.” He made a gesture and shook his head. The officer looked at him for a moment.

“Y-Yes. Well, best be on our way. If you do need a place to stay before you head back. Consider Wainsport. Just down the way. Cracking ale at the tavern there.” The officer climbed up on his horse and spurred it. The entire platoon then rode out in unison, creating a cloud of dust that completely covered the group.

Once the soldiers were out of sight Baldar immediately dropped the forearm and released his arms from the lock they were in. He rubbed his calloused hands together and tried to remove the blood with the dust from the road.

“Shit. That was way too close.” He said, patting down his clothes as he collapsed beside the road, removing his dark iron helmet and rubbing his sunken green eyes.

“Yep. Let me just, grab...” Sovoris took the forearm and disposed of it for Baldar. Ashena walked over to them and sat with Baldar.

“Well done mate. Couldn’t just have chucked it away could you?” She said. Nudging him in the side. He looked up at her, beginning to chuckle. “Now. We should get moving. It’ll only be a matter of time before that officer finds out that warrant was bogus.”

“Where to then?” Baldar asked.

“We carry on. All we can do. He told us not to mention this mission to anyone. So we can’t” She replied, seriousness in her voice.

“We could always just not do it though? It is a bit of a ridiculous request.” Sovoris interjected, rubbing his hands with a leaf he had found.

“Maybe, but what choice do we have?” Ashena replied. “Let’s go and we can set up camp somewhere out of sight.” They began to grab their belongings from the pile next to a large pine tree on the edge of the sprawling forest. “And Sovoris. By the Gods no more waving that thing around if you don’t know how to use it.” She snapped.

“But why? I never owned a wand before.” He replied, in a whining voice.

“Because you blew the fucker up that’s why!” She shouted, as the crows flew from out of the trees at her booming voice.

“Alright, alright. Gonna hang onto it though. Not like he needs it anymore anyway.” Sovoris responded. Wiping the blood from the wand and placing it in his pocket.