

Ra'Kashár, Amadeus, Titus and Rook

Prompt: Turbulent Winds, ROT 2024

Word count: 1083

"I still do not understand why it is our responsibility to recover these lost items," Ra'Kashár grouses, floating alongside Amadeus, Rook and Titus as they make their way down the gravel path snaking its way up the mountain.

It's a beautiful and bright day, with only a couple of wispy clouds dotting the blue sky. The mountainsides around them are a vibrant green, the grass still going strong despite the rapidly approaching winter. A small brook has carved a way for itself down at the feet of the surrounding mountains, and the cheerful gurgling of it can be heard even higher up, where the group is currently walking.

"You mean you don't understand why it is *your* responsibility," Amadeus says, and shoots a sidelong look at Ra'Kashár. "I'm sure you're used to a far more hands-off approach to helping people."

Ra'Kashár scowls.

Trudging along a handful of steps ahead of the two, Titus groans. "Oh, don't start again. *Please*. I can't listen to any more of your bickering."

Next to him, Rook snickers, but cuts himself off into a cough when he sees Ra'Kashár turning his frown on them, instead.

"I simply asked a question - it was the *prince* who turned it into an argument."

Amadeus smirks and opens his mouth to reply, but Titus groans loudly enough to completely drown out whatever he might've said. "Come *ooooon*."

"Fine," Amadeus concedes, and promptly increases his pace to take up position at the head of the group.

Silently, Titus nudges Rook with a smile.

Rook rolls his eyes, but smiles back. "Yeah, alright. Thank you."

They've made their way quite far up the mountain when the first signs of activity begin to show. It begins with a dropped coin that has no place being where it is. The next sign is a half-empty sack of potatoes hanging from the branch of a tree. From there, they follow the trail of dropped items ranging from a collection of fancy shawls and an entire wagon with a broken wheel to a rusty chain and, somehow, the remains of a bronze statue of a human on a horse.

Amadeus spends several minutes looking the statue over, ostensibly to see if he recognises the ancient king it's apparently supposed to depict. Ra'Kashár not-so-subtly does the same, shooting glances at Amadeus as though to gauge who does it best.

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Rook and Titus leave them to it, and continue up the mountain path. They must be getting close to Quetzal's hideout, if the increasing frequency of these finds are any indication. Titus almost fears what they'll find once they get there; if Quetzal's hoarding tendencies so far are any indication, they're going to see something wild. A whole house, maybe? A giant tree? They've already been surprised by the sheer weight Quetzal must be able to carry in order to lug these stolen items all the way up the mountain, so anything is possible.

"There!" Rook exclaims not long after. He excitedly runs ahead, up the path towards a wide opening in the bare cliff face. There's a lamppost stuck into the ground outside it, which, clearly, is Quetzal's doing.

Titus leaps after him, for once the more cautious of the two as he almost calls out to Rook to be careful and wait for him. They only know Quetzal has been stealing seemingly everything he can get his claws on - he might not take kindly to someone coming to take those items back to their rightful owners.

Amadeus and Ra'Kashár must have heard Rook's shout, for it doesn't take long for Amadeus to come soaring above Titus, easily overtaking him and landing close to Rook. Ra'Kashár follows at a more sedate pace, floating soundlessly along beside Titus.

"About time," Ra'Kashár mumbles, but even he seems pretty pleased to have arrived at their goal. "Now, let's see what's—"

"Bahh!"

All four dragons freeze.

Without turning his head, staring into the cave, Rook simply says, "Uhm."

"Was that a sheep?" Amadeus asks, incredulous.

Titus pushes past him to see for himself, and—

Sure enough. Standing just inside the opening to Quetzal's cave, is a single sheep, its horns adorned with ribbons and a collar with a bell tied around its neck. It doesn't look at all concerned to be stared at by what would in most other circumstances be four giant predators. When Amadeus and Ra'Kashár also peer into the cave, it bleats again as though to greet them.

"Yep. A sheep." Titus tilts his head, though the change in angle doesn't offer any new insights.

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However, as he moves to approach, a shadow falls upon the group. A brightly coloured Ravager lands on an outcropping just above the entrance to the cave, scowling.

“Hey! The sheep is not for eating!”

Rook hastily steps back from the sheep, and squints against the sunlight as he looks up at the newcomer. “Are you Quetzal?”

The Ravager tilts his head. “I am - what of it?”

“Perhaps you can explain why you’ve been stealing all these things from the settlements around here?” Ra’Kashár joins in, floating up just a little higher to be closer to Quetzal’s height.

“Stealing?” Quetzal squawks. “I’m not stealing, I’m collecting taxes!”

A deafening silence falls.

“... Taxes.” Ra’Kashár repeats.

“What–” Amadeus starts, but gets no further as he just stares at Quetzal.

Rook looks just as confused, but then something clears in his expression, and he looks back at the sheep. “For the sheep?”

“Yes!” Quetzal sounds utterly delighted.

“I... see.”

Leaning in, Titus whispers urgently, “*How* did you guess that?”

Watching Quetzal hop down from his perch to fuss over the sheep - who looks on with as empty an expression as ever - Rook grimaces and answers, “I just had a feeling, based on what we found on the way.”

“Huh.”

Frowning fiercely, Amadeus tilts his head, still staring at the sheep. Then he sneaks over to Rook and Titus. “Do you want to steal it back?”

“The sheep?” Titus raises an eyebrow.

“Obviously. No sheep, no theft.”

Titus pauses to consider. “That *is* a pretty solid plan.”

“What?” Rook hisses. That’s no plan at all! We can’t just–”

“**HEY!**”

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They all three spin around just in time to see Ra'Kashár slinging the sheep onto his back and darting off back down the path, with Quetzal hot on his heels in a mess of green and red feathers.

“It seems the choice has been made for us,” Amadeus says, deadpan, as they all watch Quetzal tackle Ra'Kashár to the ground.