

As the irate Bosmer continued to stalk and forth in front of him like a restless senche, waving her arms in the air in frustration, he was forced to admit their reunion was not going according to plan.

Ever since the morning the young Breton had parted ways with the mysterious wood elf in Elsweyr he had idly daydreamed about the moment they would meet again. They would come upon each other unexpectedly in the street somewhere, strike up small talk. Yes, she was technically a spy but surely spies could still have innocent small talk on a random street in Tamriel.

He would then comment on the time she had saved his life in Reaper's March. Their brief—if terrifying—adventure together in Elsweyr months afterward. That whole business with the dragon. She in turn would be reminded of the time he had saved her...had saved her from ordering the sweet-stuffed duck in Riverhold. Bananas *and* cheese? With moon-sugar? In an otherwise perfectly acceptable and inoffensive duck? Horrendous.

Perhaps she would instead remark on the fact he had finally grown a beard.

He would tell her how much he had missed their time together. How she had the most bewitching green eyes he had ever beheld. And...

And she was *definitely* furious with him, the former tailor-turned failed knight errant-turned thief could tell as she turned to face him fully, hands balled into fists.

"How could you be so *unbelievably* daft!?"

No. The reunion was not going according to plan.

The two had met quite by accident in Reaper's March, in a small resort town that once upon a time had catered to the needs of the idle rich of Elsweyr. The Breton had come there for a night or two of sleeping in a properly civilized place with a properly civilized bed, a respite from the dust and grit of the arid roads crisscrossing the homeland of the khajiit. The Bosmer was there on the shadowy errands of her queen.

The Breton had (through no fault of his own, truly) run afoul of hired muscle paid for by the local strongman who oversaw Pa'alat (said strongman was apparently a former spy himself), and the Bosmer had more or less done the same except rather more intentionally than the Breton had. The two had practically collided while dueling with the thugs.

Well, the Breton had been frantically scampering for his life. If memory served the Bosmer had been managing a fairly effective fighting withdrawal, but she had surely still needed his help and had readily accepted it during the wild melee. The two had worked together to survive their now combined ambushes, and in the aftermath she had promised him coin if he could help her take down Pa'alat's petty tyrant. They had met as strangers, but shared adversity and victory had

made them friends.

She had actually pointed out they weren't friends before they had parted then, so, business associates perhaps. Friendly business associates though, surely. Friendly, occasional business associates.

The wood elf had departed with some ledger or bundle of documents or something papery and smelling vaguely of clandestine intelligence, and the former tailor had left the town with a modest but very pretty pile of coins and a slightly larger piece of his heart that was now making room for the beautiful but frighteningly dangerous mer.

They had crossed paths again in Riverhold as each had been drawn to Elseweyr. After various misadventures in and around the Pelletine caravanserai of Rawl'itt the Breton had set to the road again, having failed in his quest to transform himself from a tailor to a knight-errant but instead becoming a respectable thief. Or at least a thief with respectable ability. The Bosmer had journeyed there to assess the situation in a Dominion member state ravaged by a civil war and threatened by Dragons (and Divines above, that was an incredible story that...he had managed to more or less safely avoid).

As they encountered each other in Anequina she once again needed aid, and once again he was...the best available. He had been pleased to see her; she in turn had been pleased that if she found herself in a fight there was now a target besides her.

Friendly occasional business associates!

The Breton had—despite his pronounced inferiority to her in combat ability—managed to help her succeed in her tasks, and along the way learned a little more about who she really was, and who it was she really worked *for*. He had even managed to be competent enough to earn the possibility of further work for her later—and avoidance of a knife in the ribs for divining her ultimate loyalties.

It was, admittedly, a very curious thing for a boy from High Rock to be the some time hireling of a Dominion agent, but it was exciting. Sometimes in a 'bard's tale' kind of way, other times rather more in a 'bowel loosening' way, but *always* exciting. Unfortunately, the work wasn't something he could brag to his brothers about despite it being at long last a profession worthy of song, or at least several lyrics worth. Given both of them were full knights of High Rock and one of them a Covenant war hero decorated, as it happened, for action against the Dominion...

...*complicated* friendly occasional business associates! Very, very complicated.

"Did you seriously not notice the *daedric script* on the bloody painting?"

Yes. She was still very angry.

“No! Well, yes. Sort of! I thought it was just the artist taking dramatic license!”

“You gave a dangerous enchanted item touched by Oblivion directly into the hands of the cultists who will positively make the *worst* use of it!”

“Sold it.”

“Excuse *me*?” Her delicate eyebrows had now arched into her hairline. Her eyes, with their entrancing if also somewhat unnerving cruciform pupils and black sclera were now positively flashing with anger. The Breton began to wonder if perhaps she was about to use his sternum as a new sheath for one of her trademark daggers.

“I didn’t just *give* it to them! And I didn’t *know* they were cultists or that the painting was *magical*! I *sold* it to them—for a very tidy sum!—after a successful heist! My *first heist*!”

For a moment, the Bosmer was dumbstruck, completely and utterly silent as the Breton continued in a decidedly defensive tone.

“My first heist! I planned a good route, secured entry without breaking anything, I didn’t have to hurt or even threaten anyone, and *no one even saw*! It...it was a *perfect* heist,” he ended with a cross mutter. He then found himself leaning away from her, eyes wide, on the small, uncomfortable stool he was perched upon within one of the rented rooms of the Kaladas Inn, roughly in the center of Leyawiin. The Bosmer had tightly shut her eyes, hands still balled into fists, and the Breton got the distinct impression she was counting to ten.

“No one saw,” she finally growled, eyes still closed, “except for the *rutting cultists* who now have the painting, and you haven’t hurt anyone *except for however many people will suffer* because of your damned foolishness!”

“It isn’t my fault!” he sputtered then immediately clamped his mouth shut as the Bosmer hissed at him with eyes now barely slitted open.

“I...will thump you...into *insensibility*.”

The two faced each other in silence for several heartbeats, then both looked away, the Bosmer releasing her anger in a slow, gradual exhalation as she flexed and unflexed her hands whilst the Breton deflated, weighed down by the full knowledge of what he had done.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured, staring at the rough wooden floor of the rented room below him. “I just...it was a perfect heist. From some over wealthy stuffed shirt who would never miss it or be hurt by its absence. I didn’t want anyone to be harmed over this, Cari.” Grief tinged his words; he meant it. Thieving from some arrogant noble was one thing, giving dangerous power to a murderous cult was *quite* another.

The Bosmer gave an arch sniff, still looking away.

“My *friends* call me Cari, *you* can still call me Cariel,” she grumbled, the heat of her anger now faded to a campfires worth as opposed to city razing Dragon-breath.

She sighed heavily, then finally looked at him with a smirk as he glanced back up. For one heart fluttering moment the Breton thought there was something akin to pity or maybe even fondness mixed with the exasperation in her dark Valenwood-green eyes.

“And I believe you when you say you didn’t mean any harm. You’re a fool of a Breton...but not cruel. Nor wicked. And you know what? You ought to cheer up...you’re about to plan out *your second* perfect heist.”

The Breton blinked. The diminutive Eye of the Queen very much had ‘the cat who had just eaten the canary’ look about her.

“I...I am?”

“Yes, Jerrick Hennecart,” she chuckled, folding her arms across her chest as she leaned back against the room’s dresser. “Because now you’re going to help me steal it *back*.”

Completely *not* according to plan.