

I am Xarjun, and I am a dragonborn from the nomadic Nelrac family. Our ancestors have traveled through the land of Grezlant for thousands of years, ever since the destruction of the grand kingdom that they shared with other dragonborn. We are descendants of the Frozt Dragonborn, who lived up north in the polar desert known as Arcziga. Though our scales are shades of brown and red, almost complete opposites of the blue and white that colored our ancestors, the icy wind that accompanies each breath we take is proof of our heritage.

Their culture continues to live on in us. Every day we pay our respects to the great god of battle, Kord, and we follow His way of life. We must be strong, and respect both family and history. But most importantly, we need to know what our own purposes are. As my 15th birthday drew closer and closer, a stress ate away at my heart as I thought about an upcoming trial. Every Nelracian that turns 15 is sent away from home to go on a rite of passage to adulthood. They must travel north into the depths of Arcziga in a bid to get closer to their ancestors, so that their spiritual guidance will help the young dragonborn gain understanding of themselves, the world, and everything beyond. Returning to home was forbidden until they understood what their purpose was.

That was how I found myself hiking forward through the foot-high snow, pushing hard against a bone-chilling breeze. I had taken great precautions against the cold by wearing thick wool clothing under my chainmail, a heavy fur-trimmed coat over it, thick gloves over my hands, and mocassins over my feet. The wind proved to be especially troublesome, as it kept blowing off my hood and causing the frills that hung from the back of my head to flap around all over the place. The weight of my gear also proved to be disadvantageous. When I started this journey, the armor I wore, the items in my backpack, and the mace and shield hanging off of it weren't too much for me to carry. But after countless days of hiking, the strain was getting to be too much. It didn't help that my snout was painfully frigid.

I stopped to take a breather. After freeing my backpack from my shoulders and lowering it to the ground, I peered off into the distance while raising a hand over my face to block the worst of the wind. I was in an incredibly flat plain, with the shoreline visible on both ends. There was nothing but snow all around me. I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that I was in Arcziga, but the journey was far from over. There was a city called Noam that was a mile or so away from the border between Arcziga and Gretzlant. I planned to stay there for the duration of my rite of passage, as it was the only decent civilization to inexplicably crop up in this frozen land (in fact, I believe most of the dragonborn who went on this journey before me had stayed in Noam). As I strained my eyes, I was just barely able to make out the distant town. The sight of Noam being so far away brought a subtle feeling of sorrow to me. There was still so much walking to do, I didn't know if I could handle it.

But then, as my eyes shifted to the right, I saw a large boat that was much closer to me. It was floating in a bay, next to a tiny set of docks. By the shore and close to the boat was a building that had smoke pouring out of its chimney. This sight delighted me. I put my backpack back on and took a detour towards the dock. Whatever that building was, whether it was a tavern, an inn, or a boating shop, all that mattered was the prospect of warmth and meeting other people. I had no money to give, but I didn't care, so I continued onward.

After what felt like an hour or so, I burst through the front doors, and was surprised to find that it was completely packed inside. It looked like a tavern in there, with people serving drinks behind a bar in the back and numerous tables placed throughout the room. There were more people than there were seats at the bar, and it seemed like each table had ten people sitting at it. A large fireplace all the way to the left served as the only light source in the room, casting the area in a warm orange glow that was balanced by numerous dark shadows.

Nobody noticed my arrival. I walked through the crowds of people toward the fire, in the hopes of finding a seat by it. As I did so, I took note of the great variety of people in the bar. There were humans, halflings, elves, dwarves, and even a few dragonborn. It was the first time I had seen dragonborn outside of my own family. After struggling to worm my way through the crowded floor, my eyes locked onto a chair right by the fire. In less than five seconds, I rushed to the chair, rested my bag down next to it, and sat in it with a relieved sigh. For a moment I laid back as I stretched out my aching legs. Then I noticed that there were other people sitting at the table, and they were all looking at me.

There were four of them. One was a skinny human man with grey hair that fell in bangs in front of his eyes, one was a little elf woman with freckles and orange hair tied into a knotted ponytail, one was another elf woman with loose golden hair and blue pupiless eyes, and the last one appeared to be a big pile of hair at first glance. It took a moment of staring for me to realize that was a stout dwarf that was almost entirely cloaked in his brown fuzzy hair. It was hard to see their expressions with the lighting so dim, and their continued silence gave me an awkward feeling. With my large stature, I must have stood out from all of them. "Am I interrupting something?" I asked.

The blue-eyed woman said "Yes-", but the human interrupted her.

"That depends." He said, as he leaned with his elbows on the table and clasped his hands together. "What brings you here?"

The orange-haired woman piped up. "Are you thinking of hiring him too? I've already found these two other random people for you, do we really need another one?" She waved her hand over to the blue-eyed elf and the dwarf as she referred to the two others.

The dwarf suddenly slammed his fist down on the table, startling all of us. I reached for my mace, just in case. "Don't call me random, pointy ears." He said with a growl, as he bared his badly crooked teeth for all the tavern's inhabitants to see. "I'm not something that you can easily replace."

"Okay, let's calm down." The man said as he waved his hands up and down. The dwarf took a moment to think it through, then with a deep breath he leaned back. Everyone else, myself included, relaxed after that. "Sorry about that." The man said to me, before he turned to the orange-haired girl. "This man over here may be very helpful for all we know. Let me talk to him." As he spoke, I noted how grainy his voice was. As my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I could see the wrinkles on his face. He seemed to be about 60 altogether.

"Fine." The orange-haired elf said.

The human looked back at me. "So, what brings you here?"

"I've been travelling to Noam." I said.

"Ahh. Do you have any accommodations set out for you?"

"No, and to be truthful, I don't even have any money on me."

The man put his elbows back on the table, and this time he rested his head on his hands. A big smile was on his face as he said, "That is indeed a problem." His voice took on a smooth tone. "Now, I can pay you enough money to keep you fed and sheltered for at least a year, you just have to do one odd job for me. But, I'll have to interview you on the spot. Not everyone can do this job." As he spoke, I noticed that the blue-eyed girl had been staring me with this look that, due to her lack of pupils, admittedly felt creepy to me. It never sat right with me how some elves did not have pupils.

After brushing her off, I said, "I'm ready."

"Where did you come from?"

"I left my family in the Kinley Plains, somewhere in Northern Gretzland."

"Wow, that's pretty far. Did you have a job or a role while with your family?"

"I'm a cleric of Kord, the god of battle." I said, before I reached into my coat and pulled out a necklace. I dangled it in front of the group to show them that Kord's holy symbol, a sword surrounded by thunderclouds, was engraved into a circular bronze medallion that was hanging from the bottom of the necklace.

Everyone stared at it and me for a few silent seconds. "Wow, I didn't expect to meet a cleric here." The blue-eyed elf said softly. Her voice left a lasting impression of innocence that eased my discomfort over her earlier staring.

The man seemed to be a bit dismayed. He let his forearms lower onto the table. "I don't think you'll be a good fit for this job." He said.

"Hold on." The blue-eyed elf said. "While most clerics would disdain this job, I'm sure he would make an exception if he knew what kind of person we're going after. Especially since he's a cleric of Kord, who

teaches His disciples to never shy from battling for a good cause." This peaked my interest. I was also impressed by how she knew the 1st Commandment of Kord by heart.

"You're bad at keeping secrets, you know that?" The man said, which caused her to sink back in her chair and look down. He then looked at me, and noticed my interest. "You seem eager." He said. After a pause, he looked back at the girl. "Forget what I just said, you were right on the money. He'll be perfect for this job." He looked back at me. "I'll order you a meal for your troubles, but while we wait for a barmaid to come by, please tell us what you're good at."

"I'm a well-trained fighter, and I can borrow tiny portions of Kord's power in order to heal wounds and perform other miracles."

"And it's safe to assume that you're pretty strong?"

"I am strong."

He clapped his hands together. "Very good! Everyone, tell him what you can do."

The orange-haired elf spoke first. "I can get us into any secured building without making a sound."

The blue-eyed woman said, "I know a few spells that can defend us."

The dwarf said, "I smash things." I couldn't help but smile, and I fought against the urge to laugh.

As everyone was speaking, the man had noticed a barmaid walking by, and called her over to order a meal for me. After a short while, I was chowing down on the first decent dinner I had in a long time. As I ate, the man was going into detail on the job. With his voice lowered to be barely audible over the bustling crowd, he said, "There's a reason why I was so careful about recruiting you. This odd job is a pretty dirty one, which we must be discrete about. It's also why I chose to hold this meeting outside the city." He looked around. "Your target is Prize. Have you heard of him?"

I shook my head while chewing on my food.

"I'm not surprised. Prize is a bard who's at the top of Noam. He's a blue-skinned human who wears Ozeanic clothing, and is often seen with a banjo. Now, I'm going to be frank." His mood soured, and I could feel a sense of outrage in his voice. "I don't like him. At all. While he gets to play music for the most powerful men in Noam, I'm stuck playing for the tiny taverns. He acts so cocky about his fame, so I think it's time he get dragged down."

I stopped eating as he spoke. With a look of confusion, I said, "I don't get it, what's so bad about him? He just sounds like a celebrity with a high ego."

"Oh, you have no idea." The orange-haired elf said. "I know about all the little secrets that Prizce tries to keep hidden." She looked at the man. "I'll take it from here." With that, she had begun a long explanation on just who Prizce really was. I cannot bring myself to repeat what she told me. I had sat there, an astonished expression slowly forming on my face that eventually ended with my jaw dropping wide open, as the girl told me tales of depravity that I could not have even imagined before. To put it politely, Prizce was a pervert, a drug-abusing pervert that did not care whether your answer was yes or no. Because of his connections with Noam's richest, the news of his horrible actions were suppressed. Sometimes they silenced news-tellers and messengers. Sometimes they bribed or threatened victims. Even murder, or as the elf called it, 'mysterious disappearances', was used to keep Prizce's reputation intact. When she finished what she had to say, I just sat there for several moments, trying to recompose myself.

I could hear the dwarf mutter, "What a disgusting man." The blue-eyed girl seemed to have gotten sick.

"So..." The man started to say.

"You were right." I said to the blue-eyed girl, before looking at the man. "After hearing that, I'm ready to take him down in whichever way you want us to. He'll deserve every minute of it."

"That's the spirit!" He said. "But try to keep your voice down. Now, let's get back to the job. What I want you to do is take Prizce and deliver him to me at this location." He discretely slipped a scrap of parchment towards me. On it was written 'Behind the Fitzgerald Inn (The red brick building)'. He continued with, "Tonight, Prizce will be playing in the glass dome atop the Arcziga View Tower. You can't miss it. Do you have any questions?"

"How secured is the tower?" I asked.

The orange-haired elf spoke up. "It's crawling with guards, though it's less to protect their celebrity and more to keep some secret something or another from being revealed."

"Yes," the man said. "It's really an unfortunate coincidence. I do believe there's a way to bypass the majority of it, however." With a devious grin, he said "I know for certain that Prizce always leaves out an unmarked back entrance by the old storage shack. That is where you can catch him." He kept the grin on his face as he rubbed his hands together.

"Seems like a simple job. A bit too simple, I'd reckon." I said.

"What do you mean?" The man asked. His grin disappeared.

"Nevermind that. I have no more questions."

"Alright then." He sat back and clapped his hands together. "Do any of you have any questions?" He asked the rest of the party. They all shook their heads or said no, so he said, "Good." He stood up. "I'll pay for the ride home. You'll be riding in a wagon that'll come after I leave. Don't want anyone to notice the connection between us, after all."

We said our thank yous and goodbyes, then he left. After a moment, I said, "He sure is generous."

The orange-haired woman said, "He became quite wealthy from a music career of his own when he was younger. Believe it or not, he used to be just as popular as Prizece."

"No wonder he wants to bring Prizece down, then." As I thought it over more, I felt that our client's enthusiasm to capture Prizece was misplaced. The way he mentioned Prizece's musical career first instead of all the horrible actions he's done left me feeling that he really only cared about their differences in popularity. I wasn't dissuaded from the job since I needed the money at the end of the day, but I wondered if it would be right for me to go through with it.

Suddenly, a light but rough voice caught us off guard. "Hey." We looked to see this little person, a halfling with orange frayed hair. He was standing by our tableside. He was so short that, even though he was standing, he was at eye level with everyone that was sitting down.

"What do ya want?" The dwarf said with a sudden jump in intensity.

"Hey, I'm just a passerby, one that has a simple offer for all of ya." The halfling said, but the sinister tone of his voice and the confident glare in his eye kept our suspicions from being dissuaded. My eyes glanced over his person to see if he had any weapons on him, but since most of his body was hidden by the table, all I could tell was that he was wearing a black coat with brown fur trims on the shoulders. He said, "I couldn't help but overhear some of your conversation-- forgive me for being rude, I just really couldn't help it." The vibes from this conversation made me stare at him hard, and I was sure that the dwarf and the orange-haired girl were also giving him a good staredown. He seemed to be getting more nervous as he spoke. I glanced at the blue-eyed girl, and noted that her body language had become much more withdrawn. The halfling said, "Let me get right to the point. Whatever that human offered you, I'll be willing to give you three times that if you forget about your mission."

I glanced at the party. The orange-haired girl, seeming interested in the offer, said, "Well--"

"YARGH!" The dwarf yelled as he forcefully grabbed the halfling by the jacket and stood up, lifting him into the air. He was a bit tall for a dwarf, and the frightened halfling in his hands looked like a child's doll

compared to him. "I don't care how much money yer givin' me, I'm not leaving that pervert alone!" The dwarf yelled as his spit sprayed all over the halfling's face.

We heard another voice say, "Hey, leave him alone!" We looked to see three more halflings standing up at the table right beside us. They all wore coats similar to their friend, and each of them were pulling out slings that had rocks inserted into them.

Without even missing a beat, we heard a shout from one of the men at the bar. "Hey! Take it outside!"

I stood up and kept note of the location of my mace on the floor. "Let him go." I said to the dwarf. "We don't need to start a fight."

"Hell no!" He shouted. "Are we really going to back down because of some goons?!"

"No we aren't, but you're causing a scene." I said. "Think things through."

The dwarf looked around with a frustrated expression. The whole bar had been stunned into silence, and all eyes were on him. The bartenders were frowning at him, the halflings looked ready to leap on him, and the two elf girls just looked at him with their eyes wide. He looked down and muttered something, probably a dwarven curse, then looked at me. "You've got a point, scaley, but I'm still gonna fight!" He looked at the halflings. "Meet you outside." He lowered the halfling to the ground and started to drag him out of the bar.

"Wait," The blue-eyed girl said. "Just-" She stopped when she noticed that I raised my hand up. I grabbed my backpack and moved over to her and the other elf.

"After what I heard from you", I whispered to the orange-haired elf, "I'm certain these are Prizce's goons. If we don't fight them now, then they can just fight us later when they have more of an advantage."

Both of them were about to respond, but the sight of the other halflings following the dwarf out of the door made it clear that there was no time to talk. As we made our own way out of the bar, I noted the looks on their faces. The blue-eyed girl seemed nervous, but the orange-haired girl seemed more disappointed than anything else.

We stepped out the door to see the three halflings with their backs to us, and the dwarf in front of them with their friend still held tight in his grasp. The halflings quickly turned to look at us, and we could see the confidence drain from their faces. "Alright." The dwarf said, before roughly tossing the halfling to his friends. He stumbled forward and was caught by them, who quickly helped him onto his feet. The dwarf then pulled out a large shield and slid it onto his left arm, before pulling out a large hammer that seemed almost as thick as him. In the dull winter light, I was also able to see the thick armor that he wore. "Are you ready, shrimp?!" The dwarf shouted as he got into a battle stance.

The halflings quickly retreated a few feet away from us. Me and the elves stood with the dwarf. I pulled out my own shield and my mace, the orange-haired girl pulled two knives out of her coat, and the blue-eyed girl had lowered her bag on the ground in order to pull an orb and a dagger from it. We and the halflings stared at each other for a few moments. I could see the unsure looks in their eyes. They seemed almost ready to run away.

But, with quick glances toward each other, they collected themselves together. The confidence in their stances increased, and after a few quick whispers to each other, two pulled out knives and lunged straight for us! With the snow shoveled and gravel poured on the ice, nothing was slowing them down. Caught off guard, I raised my shield to block a stab just in the nick of time. The other two thugs fell back, and started swinging their slings like mad, pelting the two elves with a rain of stones. I heard one of the elves cry out. As my opponent stepped back, the orange-haired girl suddenly dashed towards him. He swung his knife, and missed, then she plunged a knife in his back without even turning to face him. He screamed out and threw his hands up into the air, accidentally flinging his knife out of his grasp. Then, I smashed him into the ground with my mace. I looked at the orange-haired girl for a moment, and noticed that a stone had got her face real good. There was a gash right above her eye that was bleeding badly, though she hardly seemed bothered by it.

I glanced at the dwarf and the other girl; the dwarf was beating a still-standing halfling to smithereens with his hammer, while the girl was crouched beside him, crying her eyes out as one hand gripped a badly bleeding spot on her ribs and another gripped another bleeding spot on her shoulder. I put my mace-wielding fist against the magic symbol under my coat, and as it began to glow through the fabric, I muttered, "Kord, may her wounds be mended." A look of surprise came over her face as she glowed with a divine light. As the light disappeared, with tears still in her eyes she started feeling for her injuries.

Suddenly, the far-off halflings shouted, "How dare you?!" before hurling a rain of stones in our direction. Orange hair raised her arms while I raised my shield. As stones crashed against my shield, I heard her topple, while one stone got under my shield and hit me right in the kneecap. I lowered my shield out of reflex, and saw orange-hair lying unconscious on the ground, with two new gashes in her head and blood pooling onto the ice. Thankfully, she was still stirring. As the dwarf crushed his opponent's body into the ground and the blue-eyed elf fired a bolt of ice at the distant halflings, I kneeled next to orange hair and muttered another healing prayer. As the wounds on her head closed, I looked up to see the dwarf rush straight for the remaining halflings, so I stood and quickly followed after him.

The two halflings turned to run, but we were already upon them! We struck each of them once. My mace only glanced off of their shoulders (I suspect they were wearing armor under their coats), but the dwarf's hammer hit them so hard that they nearly fell to the ground. Both dropped their slings, pulled out knives, and lunged at the dwarf. He blocked the left one's stab with his shield, allowing the other to bury his knife in his side. The dwarf only let out a short gasp, before silently looking at his foe with wild eyes. He pushed the halfling back with his elbow and then swung wildly; the halfling just barely ducked under it. Suddenly, I heard the blue-eyed girl shout, "Cloud of daggers!". A bright light shone behind the halflings, which shattered into a swarm of fragments that spun like a twister. The deadly cloud expanded towards the halflings. They turned for the briefest of moments to look at the new hazard.



Orange hair dashed past me, one knife raised high. The halfling in her sights looked back at her and raised his knife to block, but suddenly orange hair ducked down, her knife going under his knife as she slashed his side. His face turned white, and he stumbled backwards. With both halflings distracted, I capitalized on the situation. I took a deep breath, then with a roar I launched a torrent of cold wind from my throat, which pushed them into the dagger cloud. Both quickly pushed themselves forward, with ice clinging to their bodies and glowing fragments sticking out of their backs. "Protect us, Kord" I muttered as I swung my mace into one of them, blowing them clean off their feet and knocking them unconscious. I felt my holy symbol become a little warmer, as a near-unnoticeable light shimmered on me. I touched orange-hair with my shield in order to deign some of this power to her. Though her face (which still had blood covering one of her eyes) was battle-hardened, a glimmer of astonishment shone through her visage.

"What did you do?" She asked.

"I have asked Kord to protect us." I explained before looking at the final halfling.

As more fragments cut into him, he tried to run. He ducked under the dwarf's hammer, but my mace caught the back of his head, and he fell to the ground.

The swarm of fragments soon faded away, and everything was silent after that. We looked around, and saw not a single halfling standing. They all laid sprawled out on the ground, covered in their own blood. I felt a slight sickness in my stomach, which only grew worse when I realized the halfling that the dwarf had smashed up was missing his head. I looked away from that body, but otherwise kept a stoic expression. The orange-haired elf and the dwarf also kept a stoic expression as they surveyed the results of the battle, while the blue-eyed elf covered her mouth and trembled as she looked around.

"If these are the kinds of goons Prizce hires, then it's a wonder that he's kept his secrets for so long." I said.

"Damn right." The dwarf said with a much calmer tone as he rested his hammer on his shoulder. The wild look in his eyes was gone, though he still looked pretty serious.

"What should we do about these people?" The orange-haired elf said as she looked at all the halflings.

At that point, a thought crossed my mind. Were there any witnesses? I looked over at the tavern. All of the shutters seemed to be sealed off tight, and the door was fully closed. If there was someone watching in the 15-30 seconds that we were fighting, they didn't stick around for long after we ended it. I looked down at the fallen halflings. Even with a glance, I could tell that the three halflings that were still intact were in pretty bad shape due to the head trauma I inflicted on them. I doubted that the one that I had hit on the back of the head was still alive.

The blue-eyed elf suddenly piped up. "Sh-shouldn't we bring them to a doctor?"

"Yes, and a jail cell." I said. "Any that aren't alive, we should throw them into the bay."

She seemed shaken by my cold assessment, but didn't speak against me.

Later, we were riding in the wagon, the four of us crammed together on one seat while the surviving halflings were tied up on the opposite seat facing us. I had dressed up their injuries to the best of my ability, using nothing but rags and scraps of fabric we happened to have on us. The one who had been hit in the back of the head was miraculously still alive, but likely would not wake up for a while, so he lay there along with the two other elves I knocked out.

"Are you okay?" I asked the blue-eyed elf.

She nodded her head a bit rapidly. "Yeah, I'm fine. My ribs and shoulder still hurt a little, but nothing feels broken." she said breathlessly.

"If it still hurts after a while, let me know so I can get that healed." I said.

She nodded. "Thank you."

I looked over at orange hair and asked, "Are you alright?" She looked at me. Several spots on her head were discolored slightly, including one right around her right eye. There was still a cut over her eye, which she was covering with a cloth.

"I'm doing fine." She said.

"If we get a needle and some thread, I could sew up that cut over your eye."

"No no, it's fine." She said, before she lowered the rag and looked at it. "It's not even bleeding that much." She showed it to me.

"Alright." I looked over at the dwarf, who had laid his head back and was staring at the ceiling. His breathing seemed slower than normal. "I don't think I got around to healing you."

The dwarf looked over at me. "I'm perfectly find." He said. "It's just a few scratches."

"Are you sure? I saw you get stabbed pretty good."

"Don't you dote on me. I'm a dwarf, we're made of rock."

I considered just leaving him alone, but something felt wrong. While we did have a couple of still-bleeding halflings in the wagon with us, the smell of blood seemed way too strong to be coming from them. I put two and two together. "Hey," I said to the orange-haired girl. "Can you lift up some of his hair for me?"

The dwarf said, "Huh-?"

"Sure?" Orange-hair said, before lifting up a lock of the dwarf's long hair, revealing his armor. I was astonished to see that coming from a stab mark in his armor was a shallow river of blood, which ran down the side of his armor and seeped into the wagon's wooden seat. Orange-hair dropped the hair in shock.

"Hey!" The dwarf shouted.

"You moron, you nearly let yourself bleed to death." I said, before I closed my eyes and clasped my hands together in prayer. I wasn't paying attention to what the dwarf was saying, but it sounded like he was getting progressively angrier as a divine healing light covered him. Once the healing was over, I opened my eyes just as the dwarf grabbed me by the collar and pulled me in front of his face.

"Never molest me with your magic again." He said. Then, he let me go, and I fell back into my seat. I was so astonished by his stupidity that I didn't know what to say.

"Hey, Mr. Dragonborn?" The blue-eyed elf asked.

I turned to her. "Yes?"

"Why didn't you use your healing magic on the halflings?"

"The powers I wield are scraps of Kord's power." I explained. "I can only borrow so much of it at a time, and He would despise it if his power was used to heal scum like them." We all looked at the halflings.

"I think we should try questioning them." Orange-hair said. "They might know some things we don't."

"Good idea." I said. She leaned forward and snapped her fingers in front of the halfling's faces. She then tried clapping, and then resorted to shaking, but the most she could do was get two of the halflings to moan as their eyes opened halfway. The one who was hit in the back of the head remained asleep.

"I don't think they're going to live." The blue-eyed elf said.

"Those two?" I pointed at the stirring halflings. "I doubt it. They will be bedridden for months, but they'll pull through. That one?" I pointed at the knocked-out halfling. "You're most likely right. People rarely survive a blow to the back of the head." She looked down with an uncomfortable expression. I felt bad for her. "Is this your first time doing this sort of work?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Me too." I said.

After a moment, orange-hair said, "You know, we should really introduce ourselves. I'm Rosa."

"My name's Gruzz." The dwarf said.

"I'm Pae." The blue-eyed elf said quietly.

"You can call me Xarjun." I said. "It's good to be working with all of you."

Suddenly, the wagon stopped. We heard the driver say, "We have arrived at Noam!"

"Looks like this is our stop." I said. "Here is where the mission really begins." Everyone nodded, and then we all got off with our prisoners in tow.

As we stepped out, I was blown away by what I saw. It wasn't the architecture that awed me. The buildings weren't exactly beautiful or out there compared to what I had really seen, it was just the usual 2-story buildings with taller ones being interspersed in the deeper portions of the city. What awed me were the size of the crowds. The streets were absolutely packed with people, horses, and wagons. The traffic was so bad that the horses could only move as slowly as the people. "Welcome to my home." Rosa said as she and the others stepped out of the wagon.

We made our way through the streets, myself and Gruzz carrying the knocked out halflings on our shoulders. Some of the passerby gave us weird looks, but nobody bothered us. "Which way is closer, the hospital or the law enforcer's building?" I asked.

"There's a guard outpost near her. We can bring them over there." Rosa said before taking the lead. As we walked onwards, we noticed that by one of the buildings was a clearing in the crowd. As we got closer, we

saw an old man on the ground, coughing his lungs out. A younger woman was kneeling down next to him, trying to talk him through whatever he was going through. Her eyes were wide in panic. There was a bag next to her; I saw her pull a medicine pouch of some sort out of it as she tried to steady the man. Just like everyone else in the crowd, we walked past them. It felt wrong to ignore them, but since we were on a mission and everyone else was doing it, it was easy to convince myself to just keep on going.

After we delivered the crooks to the guards, we stood outside the outpost. I said, "Well, it's going to be a while before nighttime. We should stick together in the meantime, in case more thugs are sent after us."

"What should we do while we wait?" Pae asked.

Rosa put her finger to her chin in thought, then flashed a devious smile. "I know what we can do." She said.

She led us through the streets for some time, until we found ourselves in front of a four story building. It was much cleaner and of a higher quality than the surrounding buildings, and on either side of the double-doored front entrance were two large hammer statues.

"Where are we?" Pae asked.

"This is the Mountain Home Inn. It's owned by the Beezle family." Rosa said.

"You live here?" Gruzz asked.

Rosa quieted her voice. "No. But I can talk our way up to the roof. It's much better than staying in the stinking streets for five hours. Just follow my lead." She turned toward the entrance, and took on a shyer and much more withdrawn body language as she approached the doors.

A tall Goliath guard in chainmail (he was at least 4 inches taller than me) stepped in front of her. "Name?"

"Rola." She said.

"What is your business here?"

"I just wanted to show the roof to my friends." Rosa said with her voice gaining an agitated tone. "...wait, do you think I don't live here?"

"I certainly don't recognize you."

She threw her arms up in the air. "Come on, why does this happen to me all the time?"

Realization crossed over the Goliath's face. "Wait a minute... I've heard of you. The other guards told me you bluffed your way in here several times before."

"But-"

"Their description fits you. Cute elf, freckled face, long orange hair, and a devious look in her eye. You can't fool me. Now git, or I'll throw you across the street."

We all made our distance from the inn. "Well, that hasn't happened before..." Rosa said in disappointment.

"I don't think lying is going to get us anywhere." I said. "Don't you have a home here?" I asked Rosa.

"I have a room in a long-term inn." Rosa said.

"Why don't we just stay there?"

"It'll be a little cramped, and I don't think my roommate is going to appreciate it."

"We'll figure something out."

Many hours passed by the time we had set out to meet Prizce. To pass the time in Rosa's cramped room, we brainstormed a plan together. During our talk, we had Pae tell us what sorts of spells she could perform. The one that stuck out the most to us was her Sleep spell.

It was deep into the nighttime, yet the streets were still incredibly crowded. The skies were dark and cloudless, and though the streets were kept well-lit by numerous streetlamps, the alleyways were disturbingly dim. Sometimes I swore I could see writhing movement coming from several alleyways we passed. The air had grown even colder, to the point that I couldn't help but shiver. And poor Pae was so cold that she was jittering all over the place. Rosa didn't mind so much, but unlike Gruzz, she did shiver once in a while. As for that stubborn dwarf, he didn't even seem to realize it was cold. He just marched straight on ahead like he owned the streets.

We eventually came within 10 or 20 yards of the tower's front entrance. There were four well-armored men standing guard. "Let's make a wide berth to the back entrance." Rosa whispered. We descended into a dark alleyway, and after a turn we soon came to the back of the tower. Just as our client told us, there was one unmarked entrance back there, across from an old wooden building.

"We should have some time before Prizce comes out." I whispered. "Does everyone remember the plan?" They all nodded. "Good. Get to your positions."

Unfortunately, as I looked, I soon realized there was a complication to our plan. The first step was for me, Gruzz, and Pae to hide somewhere close to the entrance, but there wasn't really anything we could hide behind. Hiding around the corner of the old shack wouldn't work, because we could be seen from the streets in those places. "Uh, where should we hide?" Pae whispered.

We all looked around for several moments. "We've made a terrible assumption." I grumbled.

"I don't think so." Rosa said. We looked over to her. She was standing in a spot by the door. Before I could ask what she was doing, she kneeled down, and lifted a wooden board that I initially was not able to see in the low light. She pointed at something under it, and I strained by eyes to look at it. It was a sewer grate.

"Ah, I see." I smiled. We both nodded at each other, then she turned and ran off after placing the board away from the grate. Her part of the plan was to be a lookout for the front entrance, in case Prizce decided to mix things up tonight. As she left, Gruzz removed the grate with little effort and climbed down into the manhole. I followed after him, and then Pae followed after me. She stayed at the top, and carefully placed the grate back over the hole.

She was at the top for one simple reason: we wanted her to use Sleep, a powerful charm for beginners that could knock out multiple people in a wide radius. We didn't know if it would be 100% effective. As Pae put it, "People can and have resisted the spell's effects. It's possible that it will only make them slightly drowsy for a few seconds." It was not too much of a concern for us, as we could just take him by force the normal way, but we preferred to make less of a scene (Well, Gruzz didn't really care.) With everyone in positions, all we had to do was wait.

After a while, I was getting real annoyed having to hang onto the ladder for so long. My arms were getting really sore. Still, Pae and Gruzz didn't complain, so I didn't either. Not to mention, it would all be worth it in the end if Prizce decided to come out here. And he did indeed. I couldn't get a good view of the alleyway while I was under Pae, but I was able to hear what was going on in it. The door opened, and several people walked out. I heard a woman giggling, while a man was going on about some story. "So that show was a huge disaster." he said, "Goes to show that all it takes is one jealous fan to rain on everyone's parade."

"That was funny." The woman said. "I always thought you stayed out of drama."

"That's cause I'm as slippery as a kobold. Cha cha!" The woman laughed some more.

I grew more and more disturbed by Pae's lack of action as the conversation continued. She seemed frozen in place. I tapped the back of her leg. 'Now's your chance, come on!' I breathed out. She glanced at me for a moment, then looked back into the alleyway.

"So... wanna go to my place tonight?" He asked.

"Oh, of course!" The woman said, before giving him a long kiss.

A kiss that was quickly ruined, as Pae finally lifted up the grate, stuck her orb out into the alleyway, and loudly whispered "Sleep!"

I could hear rushing wind, gasps of surprise, and stumbling as a purple mist floated above us and quickly disappeared. "I don't think that was enough!" Pae loudly whispered, while too scared to look away from the alleyway.

"Then we'll have to use brute force! Quick, go get Rosa!" I loudly whispered.

However, I heard footsteps approaching our hiding place. "Hey, we see you in there!" Some rough guy shouted.

"You better crawl out, you vermin!" Another yelled.

"Oh shit, we're surrounded!" Pae said.

"Don't just stand there, use your cloud of daggers!" I said. She immediately cast the spell, sending a twister of bright fragments hurtling all over the alleyway.

I heard "Oh shit!" and some yelling.

Then, I heard the man from earlier yell, "How dare you?!", before I heard a peculiar strumming of strings that echoed through my ears. Something suddenly struck Pae in the head; she cried out as she fell backwards, and her back hit the wall of the tunnel. I muttered a curse, then prayed for her healing.

As divine light washed over her wounds, I heard Gruzz say, "Damnit, when are we getting out?!"

"We just need to get the guards away from the hole! Pae, stay with me!" I shouted. She pulled herself back up. "Have they backed away?!"



"Yes!" Pae quickly crawled out of there, and Gruzz and I followed. Oh, the looks on those people's faces when we emerged out of there was priceless. It was obvious which one of the men was Prizce. He was blue-skinned, wore a seal coat with a large Ozeanic symbol etched into the chest, had on a funny hat with a visor, and held a banjo in his arms. He, along with two halfling guards on either side of us, were positively frightened. My amusement turned to dismay, however, when I noticed that on the ground behind Prizce was the woman he had been talking to. She was passed out, bleeding, and was covered in cuts. She wasn't armed, and had the most innocent expression on her face.

This discouragement lasted for less than a second. We had a mission to do! Gruzz went for Prizce and the guard in front of him, while Pae ran off and fired ice rays back at the guards. I turned to face the halfling behind us. He started to move, right as I blasted a wave of icy wind point-blank into his face. He screamed as one of his eyes froze over. He backed away, inadvertently dodging my mace swing which instead smashed a small hole in the wall. Before I could continue my attack, I noticed someone rounding the corner. It was Rosa! It wasn't a surprise she was alerted, we were making a ton of noise.

The guard suddenly started whipping a sling into a frenzy, sending several stones my way. I had not yet pulled out my shield, so I raised my arms in front of my face. Two stones bounced off my armor, but one hit me directly in the eye! I roared in pain. I felt blood leak out of it. In the corner of my eye I could see Pae's eyes go wide. Rosa hurried up her speed. The halfling smirked. I suddenly chuckled, and the halfling's eyes went wide. "An eye for an eye, huh?" I felt a deep anger go through me, which overrode the pain. I held my mace out in front of me as if it were a holy torch. "Oh Kord, lord of battle and the storm, hear the oath." My holy symbol shined brightly through my coat, shining a spotlight on the guard's face. I could feel waves emanating from me, causing the frills on my head to rise up the air and flap about. "I will not back down, no matter the odds. Whether its a hundred men against me, or a titan crashing onto the shore. The weapon in my hand; or the knuckles on my fist; or the fingers on my hands; or the teeth in my mouth; everything I own and all that I am capable of will be used by me, in battle, until my last breath!" My whole body glowed white, and then a blast of divine energy burst out of me. The halfling was singed but no worse for wear, and the one behind me was also likely in a similar state, but that didn't matter to me. Myself, and I assumed Gruzz as well, were healed by the divine blast. I opened the eye that had been injured, and focused it on the guard. He was so frightened that he failed to notice Rosa before she skewered him straight through his back. The blade burst out of his chest, and he fell down. She gave me a look, as if she acknowledged what she just saw and wanted to let me know that she was impressed, but her eyes quickly focused on the battle behind me. I turned around.

Gruzz was locked in a fierce struggle with Prizce and the remaining guard. The guard was backed against the wall, ducking and weaving around Gruzz's two-handed swings (he also hadn't had time to bring his shield out), while Prizce stood away from the battle and was playing and singing like mad. All three of them were covered in their fair share of blood. The halfling was on his last legs, and the injuries just made Gruzz wilder, but Prizce continued to stand tall. It was easy to see why, as Prizce suddenly delivered a soothing melody; purple power leached from his banjo and his voice, and this power seeped into the halfling, who suddenly became reinvigorated. He dashed to Gruzz's side and lodged a blade in his stomach, then jumped back in front of Prizce.

Rosa, Pae, and I dashed forward, but Gruzz? He was still for a second. Prizce played a more sinister tune, then suddenly a blur smashed into Gruzz. He stumbled back several paces, but then he stood up tall and shouted, "Is that really the best you can do?!" He leapt forward and swung his hammer downwards. The halfling jumped back. Gruzz immediately sent the handle towards his chin, but he backed away as Gruzz used the momentum of the swing to spin around a full 360 degrees and send the hammer head towards the halfling. There was a mighty smash as the guard's head was crushed into the wall. Prizce looked positively frightened, so much so that the ice bolt Pae fired caught him completely off guard. It froze his legs to the ground. He didn't even struggle, he just looked down for a moment before looking back at me and Rosa charging at him, all while Gruzz moved behind him to cut off his escape route.

He started to say, "WAI-", right before I slammed my mace into his shoulder. Something crunched, and he screamed. Then Rosa, as she ran around him to flank him, tossed a knife into his stomach. His scream quieted as he grabbed the knife.

"If you're giving up, toss the banjo away." I said.

"Why are you attacking me?!" He said with tears in his eyes.

"You should know, pervert."

His eyes widened. "Those rumors..." He started to sob. "I-I... how can you believe them... those rumor-starters are trying to drag me down, and this is the result... my poor girlfriend." I paused as pangs of guilt ran through me. He was right. The only reason we were doing this was because our client wanted to drag him down. Rosa and even Gruzz also seem affected, as they had frozen in place.

An ice bolt suddenly shot him in face, freezing his mouth shut. I looked back, and in surprise I shouted, "Pae!

"He's just crying crocodile tears." She said as she kept her orb pointed at Prizce. Her voice had suddenly darkened with anger, and her brow had furrowed deeply. "I've been looking at him since his fight started, and let me tell you that when his girlfriend was injured, he gave not one glance at her. Not to mention, I'm not going to forget about all the horrible things he's done just because he's crying."

I looked back at Prizce. He was hunched down, the hands holding his banjo were shaking. He looked up with a wild fury in his eyes as he suddenly lifted his banjo and swung it at my face, all while letting out a muffled scream of rage. I blocked with my arm, and the banjo itself got busted, but it still hurt like hell. The force of his movement broke the ice encasing his legs.

Gruzz charged at him. "Urgh, I hate crocodile criers like you!" He shouted before repeatedly swinging his hammer at Prizce, who ducked and weaved several times, the hammer only getting glancing blows off him. With a step forward, he managed to place his hand on Gruzz and shoved him back. I recovered from the blow and charged at him. I swung my mace downwards, but he sidestepped, and it only skid across his arm. He

pulled out a dagger, and in that moment I realized I was doomed. As I was in the middle of a swing, I had no time to raise my arm to block before he lunged the dagger towards my neck.

Suddenly, Rosa appeared behind him and hooked his knife-wielding arm with her knife. She twisted him, sending him off-balance as her knife dug into his wrist, then she pushed him down to the ground. He landed on the knife stuck in his stomach, causing a look of intense pain on his face. Prizce slumped onto his side. His eyes were open, but he was barely moving.

There was no time to celebrate. We had caused a lot of noise. Perhaps not enough to alert the apathetic passerby, but the tower's guards were probably wondering what the hell was going on. We looked around, saw nobody around, then we got out of there with Gruzz carrying Prizce on his shoulder. I took one last look at the girl on the floor as I ran. A guilt weighed in my heart, but there was no time to mull over what we had done. I looked forward and kept running.

After running through the alleyways for several minutes, we stopped to rest and mend our wounds.

"Don't do it." Gruzz said to me at one point.

"But you're bleeding out again." I said. "I don't get it, why don't you want me to heal you?"

"The more pain I go through, the more I can resist it. Thus, healing me just makes me weaker in the long run."

My jaw dropped. I shook my head. "Fine then, if you want to risk bleeding out, be my guest. But if you start to slow down, I'm healing you whether you like it or not." I looked over at Rosa and Pae. Rosa had her hand over her mouth and was trying to suppress her laughter, but Pae had a somber look on her face. "Alright, everyone good?" I asked. They all nodded. "Let's get going. Rosa, do you know the way to the inn?"

"Yes I do. Follow me." She said before taking off, and we did as she said. As I started to exit the alleyway, I heard something go bump. I turned and looked into the dark alleyway. For a moment, I swore that a figure was hiding crouched behind a wooden barrel, and it was staring at me with two glowing eyes. I quickly hurried onwards, hoping that whatever that was, it was only a figment of my imagination.

After what felt like an hour of ducking in and out of alleyways, we miraculously reached the inn without getting stopped by one person. Whoever did see us didn't seem to notice or care that we were carrying a famous musician around. We stopped and panted for a moment, then wordlessly walked around the building and ducked into one more alleyway behind the building. We saw a figure in the darkness. He suddenly waved, so we approached. It's not a surprise to say that it was our client. "Well done, well done." He said quietly, his hands rubbing and twisting together as a way-too-excited smile was on his face. He frowned slightly when he noticed the knife in his stomach. "He's already hurt badly."

"He wasn't easy to apprehend." I said, before pointing to my eye. Rosa had told me while we were resting that the scales around my eye were cracked, and my lower eyelid had swollen up slightly.

"Will he at least survive for long?" He asked in a way that felt wrong for me. Despite asking if Prizce was going to be alive, our client made it sound like a negative for Prizce.

Ignoring the feeling and eager to get this mission over with, I said, "The stab wound in his stomach and the cut on his wrist are the worst injuries on him. If both are treated, he has a good chance of surviving."

"Hmm... well, as long as he can survive up until sunrise, that's fine by me." Again, it felt wrong the way he was saying it, but I kept ignoring it. "Can you help me bring him down to the room?" He asked.

"Sure." I said. He nodded, then opened a door to the apartment before leading me and everyone else inside.

He took us to a floor hatch and opened it up, revealing a set of stairs that lead down into a basement. As we walked in, I looked around, which caused a terrible realization to hit me. I stopped in my tracks, inadvertently blocking the rest of the team from proceeding. In this dark room, the light from a single solitary candle sitting in a stand upon a table showed that a variety of wicked instruments lay upon its wooden surface. There were blades, pliers, whips, a bowl full of salt, and more. There was two chairs in there. One of them had iron links attached to the arms and the front legs. Though I was in the team's way, nobody voiced any objections. They understood my discomfort. "...let's keep going..." Rosa said quietly, and without confidence. I nodded, and continued walking.

Our client said, "Just put him in that chair right there, and help me shackle him." I complied silently. As I locked Prizce's right wrist and ankle to the chair, I considered asking what our client wanted to do to Prizce in some vain hope that this was not as bad as it looked. But, I held that question back. I couldn't bring myself to face the true results of my actions. Don't get me wrong, Prizce was a terrible person. But that didn't make it right to let another terrible person indulge in immoral actions of their own. As we worked on him, Prizce was barely conscious. Though the ice on his mouth had melted off, he hardly made a single peep. Once he was locked in place, the client said, "Thank you very much for your work. I appreciate it. I'll go hand you your payment."

As he placed a pouch full of coins in my hand, I said, "I should tell you that we were confronted by men working for Prizce at the bar. They tried to stop us from doing the mission by bribing us, but that just led to us putting them in the hospital."

The client's face dropped. "You let them live...?"

"Yes, three of them. But we beat them so bad that they can't speak to anyone."

His fears weren't dissuaded. "Do you think they saw me?"

"Yes, definitely." Rosa said. "One of them said he had been eavesdropping on us."

The client tore the pouch of money from my hand. "You idiots!" He said, before hurriedly pacing around the room. "Any dimwit who listens to their story can put two and two together and realize my involvement in this kidnapping!" He threw the pouch of money across the room. He looked straight at us, and something about the way Rosa was looking at him set him off. "Don't get any funny ideas about betrayal!" He said as he stormed right at her face. "You won't be getting away with this either if they're still alive! Argh, I can't believe you let them live!" He grabbed his hair and writhed around in anger.

At this point, me and the elves looked down with guilt written all over our faces. But Gruzz, he stormed straight over to the client. "Getch-yerself together!" He said as he grabbed the client's collar, who looked surprised. "We've still got time to finish the job! I promise ya that by sunrise, they'll be digging graves for those three halflin' fuckers!" He let go of the client.

The client took control of his breathing and brushed himself off, but only a little calm returned to his eyes. "Alright, where did you deliver them?"

"The south guard post." Rosa said.

"That place?" Our client said. "That doesn't have much room for a cell, so they must've moved the thugs somewhere else."

"Most likely to a hospital." I said.

"Yes." He said. "There is a hidden hospital where they keep injured and sick criminals."

"Do you know where that is?" I asked.

He nodded. "It's a little ways from here. Go right from the front entrance, take a right at the orphanage, take a left at the primary Beezle's Armor Company building, and after a bit go into the alleyway to the left of the rotting wooden shack. The trapdoor in there is the entrance to the hospital. I have no idea what it's like inside there, it's a well-kept secret. All I am willing to bet is that it will be well-guarded."

"I've heard a few rumors about the hospital." Rosa said. "They say that there's something wrong with the place. And it's very active."

"We can't really rely on rumors right now." Our client said. "All you can do is go in there and make sure those thugs take a dirt nap." Before anyone could respond, he suddenly shouted, "We're just wasting time! Go now, before it's too late!" With that, we turned to leave, Rosa pausing to pull her knife out of Prize before going. "Wait!" Our client added. "Before you go, you really need to wash that blood off yourselves." He gestured to a large barrel of water in the corner. We took turns rinsing the water off our armor without really doing a good job (we only looked clean at a first glance), then we hurried off.

As we strolled on the street, I said, "We've made a huge mistake."

"But we can still fix it!" Gruzz snarled.

"I regret getting involved..." Pae said.

"Well it's too late to get wet feet!" Rosa snapped. "Once you enter this life, you can't truly leave it!" I felt bad for Pae, but with the legal danger on my mind, I didn't even think of coming to her defense.

We soon stopped and looked across the street, into the alleyway that our client specified. There were people all around us, but nobody really noticed us. We stared past the throngs of people into the alleyway for several seconds. "It looks empty." I said.

"There might be someone hiding in the darkness." Rosa said. "Gruzz, dwarves can see in the dark like elves do, correct?"

"Yes."

"You take the first look in there. Pae and I will be on lookout."

Pae nodded.

"If only I could see in the dark too." I commented as we crossed the street and through the crowd. We walked into the alleyway while acting nonchalantly. Gruzz stopped after a few steps and looked around.

"I don't see anybody." He said.

"Me too." Rosa said. We kept walking forward, and soon came to a trapdoor. Rosa knelt by it and listened.

She stood up and walked backwards towards us, as she was unwilling to look away from the trapdoor. "I can hear people talking in here." She whispered. "I don't think we can just waltz in there."

"It looks suspicious for us to be standing around here. Let's back away." I whispered.

"We can try hiding around there." Rosa whispered, before pointing deeper into the alleyway, where we could go around a corner and hide. However, at that moment, three human guards appeared from behind the corner. They turned and looked at us. The guards were dressed in poofy winter gear that they wore a tight set of chainmail over. Each of them had a crossbow clipped to their belts and a giant poleweapon hanging from their backs. "Hey, what do you think you're doing here?" One of them asked roughly.

"Sorry, we were just lost!" Rosa said with her hands up as she started backing away.

"Well scram!" With that, we found ourselves rushing back onto the street.

"That could've gone better." Rosa said.

"It also could've gone worse." I said. "We're lucky not to be in jail ourselves."

"Now what?" Pae asked as we made some space from the alleyway.

"Let's back off a bit to let them lower their guard, then I'll try looking for a different way inside." Rosa said.

We made little progress for the next hour. Rosa searched around the shack, and even had Gruzz lift her onto the roof of a nearby building so she could see the shack's roof, and from this we determined several points of entry: a hole in the roof where a skylight was, a door that we presumed to be locked, and several windows that only had wooden shutters, not glass. From what Rosa could tell, there was an entrance to the hospital from the shack, but it would be very difficult to not be spotted inside the shack. We had a long discussion in a separate alleyway on what to do. In the end, we could only come to one conclusion: Rosa would sneak in there by herself to personally assassinate the halflings. Pae could assist her with some basic magic tricks, such as sound illusions, but it would be all up to Rosa while she was inside.

"I'm going to be frank. I don't like this plan." I said to Rosa as she began to leave. "It's too risky."

"Can you think of anything better?" She asked.

I shook my head.

"I hate having to sit back and do nothing. I want to help, damnit." Gruzz said.

Rosa smiled, though that smile couldn't hide the nervous look on her face. "That's the first time I've heard someone say that. Don't worry, I can handle myself. You two just stay back there and take a breather. I'll be back in no time." With that, she and Pae waved us off before they went to the shack.

I sighed, then leaned back against the wall. Gruzz sat on the floor with his legs crossed, his chin resting on his hands. We waited in silence for what felt like forever. Eventually, I looked over at Gruzz. My eyes scanned over the armor he wore. "Scale, huh?" I said.

"Wha?" He looked at me. "You got a problem with me wearing scale?"

"No, I--"

"I get it, yer a dragonborn. You don't like it when I wear your kind."

"I was just--"

"Well you can keep those thoughts to yerself. It ain't my fault dragonscales are so hard to pierce!"

"I don't care that you're wearing scales, Gruzz!" I shook my head in exasperation. "I just wanted to make a comment, but you had to make it into a thing. With--" I inhaled deeply, then sighed. There was no point in arguing with that stubborn man. I just leaned against the wall in silence, and Gruzz reassumed his waiting position.

We suddenly heard some shouting coming from the shack. I tried to locate Pae through the crowd, but I could barely see her. I heard Gruzz shuffle around. After a long pause, a louder shout came from the shack. "Help, there's a dragon-aaaagh!" The sound of rushing flames nearly overtook his voice as he screamed.

A newfound panic stirred through my chest. After I took a moment just to comprehend the shout, I said, "Oh shit!" Gruzz stood up, then he and I rushed into the crowd and scanned the sky. Many people had stopped, and were either paying attention to the shack or to the sky.

"Where is it?!" Gruzz said. Yet despite how hard we looked, we saw nothing but stars up there.

"We've got the worst goddamn luck." I said. "It might not be a dragon that caused that, but something's still wrong. We need to--" I stopped when I noticed Pae and Rosa running our way. Rosa had removed her hat and was covering her face with it. As they got near, I said, "What's happe-!?"

"No time, just go!" Rosa said before darting into the alleyway with Pae. Gruzz and I quickly followed.



After running deep into the backstreets, we stopped in an incredibly shady area. There were two humans doing a poor job of hiding behind a stack of crates, and they were giggling to themselves like a couple of madmen. Rosa paid no mind to them as she leaned against the wall and slowly slid down to the floor. She looked to be in pain, and the relief she felt from getting away seemed to be overtaken by the pain in mere seconds. "What happened?!" I whispered as I stood by her. Even in the darkness, I could see that something was wrong with the side of her head.

As I rummaged through my backpack, she took a moment to catch her breath. "I killed the halflings." She said. "But, I didn't get away clean. A guard saw me, and hurt me pretty badly. If Pae didn't magically create dragon noises, I wouldn't have been able to spin a lie to get myself out of there." She looked over at Pae. "I appreciate that you did that."

"Th-thank you." Pae said.

As Rosa spoke, I pulled out a magical sunrod and lit it up to get a good look at her injuries. She had a horrific injury on her temple that was bleeding badly. It looked like her skull had been cracked. I took a quick look around the rest of her, and noticed a long cut on her back that was practically bleeding like a waterfall. "This isn't good." I said, before I sat the rod down and then clasped my hands together in a healing prayer.

As my divine power mended the cut and reduced the head trauma to a bruise, Gruzz said, "So the fire breath was only an illusion."

"Yes, there's no actual dragon here if you don't count Xarjun." Rosa said as she felt her head. "Ah... you wouldn't believe what happened. I had just slain the last thug, and the guard had stormed in and was pissed at me. Then, when he heard that cry for help, his eyes turned into dinner plates. I knew then what I had to do. I screamed, then acting like a little damsel I claimed that these halflings had destroyed the dragon's egg, and I was only murdering them to appease the dragon before it destroyed Noam. He was so afraid that he fell for it, and even better, I convinced him to run out with the dead bodies in order to give them to the dragon that didn't exist. He's probably running all over the place right now. Hah hah!" Her laughter quieted, and she soon frowned. "Damn it, he saw my face... why did I have to be caught? Why didn't I cover my face?" She put her face down on her knees. "My life here is ruined, all just to keep our psychopath client out of trouble."

"All of us would have gotten in trouble if the thugs were able to testify against us." I said plainly.

She looked up. "They got goddamn concussed."

"But with healing magi-"

"Even with healing magic, they still got hit on the head. There's no way they could've remembered our faces."

"Better safe than sorry." Gruzz interjected.

"Oh shut up, you violent looney." She said. Gruzz started to walk forward, but I held him back. Rosa continued. "We had gotten away with everything up until we chose to kill these men. Now all of you are getting away with it, while I'm going to be wanted by tomorrow." She held her head in her hands and made pained breathing noises.

I honestly didn't know what to say. Neither did Gruzz or Pae it seemed, since they were silent after that. A long time passed where each of us were waiting for someone to speak, all while Rosa struggled to keep herself together. Eventually, I said, "Come on, let's go. You'll at least get paid for the job."

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We eventually met our client behind the inn. "Did you do it?" He asked.

"It's all thanks to her." I said, before gesturing over to Rosa.

He clapped his hands together and grinned. It was almost like he was never afraid in the first place. "Splendid! I've got your payment right here for you." This time, we were given our pouches of money.

As he started to turn away, I said, "By the way..."

"Hm?" He looked at me.

"She got unlucky, and was seen by one of the guards. Is there anything at all you can do to prevent her from becoming wanted?" I asked.

"No can do." He said without even stopping for a moment to think about it. "I'm not risking my reputation anymore. She should just skip town."

"Please..." Pae suddenly said. "She's gone through a lot to clear you of suspicion. The way it is right now, while you have given the money you promised her, becoming a wanted woman will make her worse off than if she hadn't taken your job. It won't be fair to her."

The client stopped, and thought. He sighed. "You're right. I'm sorry, that was cold of me." He looked at Rosa. "Lay low for a while. I'll see what I can do."

Rosa looked down, and gave a genuinely warm smile. "Thank you." She quietly said to Pae and I.

With that, we said our goodbyes and went on our separate ways. Our client went back into the apartment, while the rest of us scattered into the streets. I walked through the city for a little while, hoping to find a cheap apartment far away from the crimes I committed. Initially, I felt a burden taken off my shoulders, but that relief didn't last for long. A realization slowly crept up into my mind; I was not a good person today. I allowed someone to get tortured to death, I encouraged an innocent girl to cast a spell which injured another girl, and I sat back while another person murdered three defenseless people in their sleep. I made many excuses to myself. They deserved it, they were just thugs, we didn't have a choice, I wasn't the one that did those things, yadda yadda yadda. In the end, I shared the blame for these things happening. I could have stopped them.

Eventually, I found a half-decent place. It was some small long-term inn called the Dragon's Slumber, and it also doubled as a tavern. It was run by an old dragonborn couple who treated me well. Soon, I was in a small room by my lonesome. The exhaustion from today's mission, and my entire journey in general, came crashing down on me. One moment I was leaning against the door, the next I was laying in bed with all my armor and gear scattered across the floor. Unfortunately, I did not have a good sleep. I did not dream at all. In fact, I stayed awake almost the whole night. I felt Kord's gaze upon me. He wasn't mad, or upset. He was simply disappointed.