

[Adam C. POV]

As we arrived at our destination, I walked off the train station and made my way east along the cobbled streets of the old town.

Sending Lilia to gather information in the opposite direction I was taking and leaving my familiar to scout the entire town for anything suspicious.

As I made my way through the town, a chill descended on the air as the sun started to set on the horizon.

The street seemed oddly deserted, and I couldn't help but wonder if this had anything to do with my purpose here. Pushing those thoughts aside, I continued forward, looking for my favorite place to gather information, a bar.

It wasn't until I had passed several streets that I finally came across what I was looking for, the local pub. It was an old-fashioned, ramshackle building, with a door that had long ago seen better days, much better days.

A lantern hung limply over the entrance, casting its feeble light on the otherwise gloom.

"With how much people drink in this world, one would think the bars would have enough money to keep everything tidy," I chuckled to myself, pushing the door of the pub open before stepping inside.

The noise of conversation and laughter hit me immediately, as well as the smell of booze. Inside the room was full of people gathered around tables, seemingly engaged in merry drinking and conversation.

But it was... missing something.

Violence.

...

It seems my time in the guild has affected me more than I imagined.

Smiling at the thought, I looked around at the faces, trying to decide who might be the most informative without drawing undue attention to myself.

After all, there was no one more knowledgeable about the events of their town than the local drunks, and the old ladies without anything to do but... watch everyone else.

Scanning the room for a moment, I found a small group of men sitting in the corner, passing a huge flask between them as they conversed in low tones.

There was something about them that... made me feel like they could help, so I decided to approach them.

As I made my way across the room, I heard snippets of conversation as people mused over various subjects. There were stories of missing persons, of strange creatures lurking in the woods, of mysterious disappearances, and of people cheating on their partners.

That last one didn't seem to fit the genre of the others.

Quickly, I reached the corner table and greeted the men in a polite but firm voice. "Is there room for someone else?"

They seemed to be taken aback by my presence, and for a moment there was an awkward silence as everyone stared at me.

The man furthest to my left cleared his throat. "As long as you pay for the next round, sure!"

I chuckled lightly, already having expected that response. "Of course, I wouldn't have it any other way."

I took a seat at the table and the man nearest to me handed me the flask.

Using magic to clean the flask, without them noticing of course, I took a swig, feeling the fiery liquid burn down my throat.

They were drinking some weak shit.

But I wasn't about to tell them that.

"So, what brings you to our small corner of the world, kid?" One of the men asked, his gaze carrying a friendly level of curiosity.

I took a moment to consider my response, knowing that I couldn't reveal my true intentions. "Just passing through," I replied with a small smile.

The group nodded understandingly, and the conversation soon continued with them sharing stories of their own travels and adventures.

Eventually, as the drinks kept coming, and the men kept getting drunker and drunker, the subject I had been waiting for came out.

"Have you guys heard of the... disappearances near the mill?" One of them asked, his voice hushed as if afraid of being

overheard, his words slurring as one would expect from a drunk person.

"What disappearances?" I asked, taking a sip of a whisky I had ordered a few moments earlier.

The men exchanged a look before one of them leaned in closer.

"Nobody knows exactly, but people have been going missing near the old mill outside of town," One of the men whispered, his breath reeking of alcohol. "Some say the place has a curse that makes everyone who enters kill themselves, others that... there's a beast hidden in the shadows."

That's a lot of information, too much if you ask me... the scroll had stated no one had ever managed to get any kind of info of the target.

There's something off about this.

"That sounds scary," I said, playing along with their mood. "I think I'll stay away from that place."

The men nodded, clearly relieved that I was taking their unspoken warning seriously.

"That being said," I continued. "Has anyone investigated it yet?"

The men shook their heads, all looking slightly uneasy.

"Fuck no, the locals avoid that place like the plague," One of them said, a small shiver running down his spine. "No one wants to be the next to go missing."

They didn't mention any wizards coming to check the place.

How... odd.

Nodding at them, I finished my drink and stood up, leaving a pouch full of coins on the table. "Well, fellas I'm done for the night, thanks for the company."

As I made my way out of the tavern, my mind was already working on a plan. If no one had truly investigated the mill, then that was exactly what I needed to do.

Based on their words alone, it was likely the place my target was using to hide, that or a... very similar killer.

Either way, I would find out soon enough.

Taking a deep breath, I turned my gaze to the direction of the mill.

"Long time no see, kid."

I froze in place.

That voice was unmistakable, deep and resonant, like the rumble of thunder across a darkened sky. Calmy, I turned around to confirm my suspicions, and there he stood, a few feet away, a recurrent figure in my life so far.

Odin. The All-Father himself.

"It has been a while," I replied, wondering what the motive of his visit was this time. With him, I had learned that it was never just a simple visit.

He always had something to say.

Odin smiled, a wry grin that hinted at both wisdom and mischief. "Ah, don't be like that! We're friends!"

"I'm flattered, but we both know you don't just visit," I replied, chuckling. "So, what is the real reason behind this pleasant visit, old friend?"

At this, Odin's chuckled softly as he leaned casually against a lamppost. "You're very perceptive. So, I'll go straight to the point, there is great danger on the path you are taking right now, detective. The enemy you're hunting, it's not one you can defeat with overwhelming strength alone."

Of course, he knows who I'm hunting. "Care to share any details then?"

Odin's gaze became indifferent. "That is not for me to reveal, otherwise you wouldn't learn a thing, would you? But know this, even though you're stronger than your prey, you will lose your life if you only rely on your power as you have so far. The threads of fate intertwine, and your choices from now on will shape the outcome of your upcoming battle."

That's quite an ominous bit of information. To lose against someone weaker than me. "So, I'm stronger than my target, but destined to lose if I approach the situation as I normally do? "

Odin straightened and took a step back, the distance between us growing. "You're not destined to lose, destiny is ever changing, only a fool would think otherwise. All I can say is, trust in your wit, your tenacity, and the strength of your convictions. But be swift, for time is not on your side."

And with that, as quickly as he had appeared, Odin's form began to fade, his image dissipating like smoke carried away by the wind. "Good luck, kid."

An enemy weaker than me.

But somehow, still being strong enough to defeat me.

I guess I'm up for a challenge.