

Chapter 85 - Mayor, May Not

"What... is that a firearm?" Claudia almost dropped her fork as her eyes widened.

'These are very rare within Mubet, and I daren't ask where you got it.'

"What is 'firearm'?" Grugg looked non-plussed at the small but very pretty object.

"Running out of ammunition," Gregor scooped the mysterious weapon from the table and pocketed it inside his padded jerkin. "Who thought storing it with only three shots was a good idea?"

'What this is, Grugg is basically a small cannon. Using a small explosion built into the ammunition - usually a pointed bit of metal - it fires out at incredible speed.'

"Like a loud crossbow," Claudia added, "my mother said she saw one once and a longer one called a rifle. Dwarven made."

"Oh." Grugg was not a fan of crossbows. Anything that could punch him before he could get into punching distance was remarkably unfair. Something that was both louder and more expedient than a bolt or arrow seemed like something he didn't want to be on the wrong end of.

'In the spirit of our Udok sharing this fortuitous wedding cake, I will not chastise you for the why, how, or where you got this. As much as it pains me to ignore all that. But what do you plan on doing with it?'

"Last resort defence, of course." The ratman folded his arms across the concealed weapon. "Like I said, I only have the one pointy thing left."

"What happen to other two?" The Detective questioned between mouthfuls of cake.

'Let me guess; the Guard in the sewers when we were arrested and our wolveren guest yesterday?'

"Pft," Gregor turned away from the hat and raised his snout. "If you're so smart, tell me who the third is for?"

'Is it... for me?'

Before the ratman could answer, the sound of static came from Grugg's belt as one of the Message stones lit up.

[Detective, this is Patson speaking. I tried to find you at the safehouses, but your door was... unhelpful.]

Grugg panicked, his hands covered in smeared icing and soft sponge cake, as he looked for the stone. Claudia grabbed it up and held it closer to the Cyclops, stopping him from wiping his hands on his kilt.

"Uhh, Grugg here. Not in house. Have cake?"

[What? I mean, negative. Captain and the Mayor want to meet you all, in two hours time. Do you copy?]

"Two hour time, Captain and Mayor. Where?"

[Meet the Captain at HQ first; he will walk you to the Town Hall. Patson over.]

"Patson is over," the Detective repeated glumly.

"The Mayor is a grouch," Claudia put the stone back in the belt of the Cyclops, "the only people he seems to get along with are the richest ones who can line his pockets."

'Any indication that he could be working with Nightshade or taking bribes from them?'

Gregor shrugged. "I haven't seen ser Mayor previously or felt the need to spy on him."

"Remember," Grugg began, a scowl across his face, "today is resting day. If Mayor is Blackjack, then just go home to rest."

'I'm not sure it'd work out quite that well.'

"I am a huge fan of not almost dying for a whole day, though." Claudia placed her fork down and brushed out the creases in her dress. "I know I said the Mayor wasn't a barrel of laughs, but we should dress appropriately."

"Especially if we are going to get a telling-off for ser Grugg's midnight excursion," the Deputy added.

Grugg would have paled if not for the rush of sugar energy the cake had given him. He had somehow managed to get a pass from his friends and Lady Valoth, but the Captain would surely have sterner words for him. The Mayor too - what if the meeting was to Exile him from Helpart, or worse - arrange his execution or arrest!

"Are you okay, Grugg? You are sweating quite a lot. Let me get you a towel." Claudia moved away to the storeroom with concern across her brow.

'Probably a diet of coffee and cake has been an odd way to start the day.'

"Need to be more specific then," Gregor murmured to himself.

"Alright, boys. No more bickering," Claudia returned and flung an absorbed ream of fabric at the Cyclops. "Let's get everything back to the safehouse; I've said my goodbyes to the place."

Grugg nodded and finished cleaning himself off, then he and Gregor began taking the heavy stacks of fabric out from the shop to the small cart the ratman had acquired. It was little more than a large box shape with two wheels on either side; two worn wooden beams poked from one end - either for a beast of burden or, in this case - an unlucky cyclops to hold and pull the cart.

Between them, it didn't take too long to load everything to be saved into the cart, the majority of the work being done by the Detective as his Deputy complained all the way. With a last sigh after they manually extinguished all of the candles, Claudia locked the door, and Grugg started to pull the container off to their safehouse.

"Does Gregor have to return cart after?" the cyclops murmured to the ratman walking before him.

Gregor shrugged without looking back. "Only if you know who it belongs to."

Thankfully the previous owner did not spot them wheeling the goods around, although Grugg had a feeling that even if they did, they might not accost him given his size and reputation. The townspeople gave them wide enough berth as they trundled along - there were some untrusting stares still, but on the whole, people had warmed to them.

Hello again!

The wooden door flexed into a slight grin as Barry welcomed them back to the safehouses. The sentient barricade did nothing for the subtlety of their residence, but it was handy to know who had stopped by or tried to enter.

Patson was here after you left; I told him you weren't here.

"We weren't here," Gregor said plainly, reaching for the door handle.

Exactly, that's why I told him that.

Barry opened himself, the ratman's hand just inertly passing through the space where the handle had been. With a glare and a murmur to himself, Gregor went inside to open up the storeroom door in preparation for all the material to be moved across.

"Plenty of empty space in here," he called back to the Detective.

Grugg placed the heavy luggage bag in first, just to the side once he was in the door. Claudia would most likely want that in her room, he considered. Although he had few possessions when he had left his home in the mountain, he assumed that the clothesmaker probably had quite a few more - and leaving the shop for good was perhaps more of a big deal than his change of location.

"Claudia okay with move?"

"It's all come along so fast if I'm honest." She stood outside by the open doorway, looking up to the mountains on the horizon. "But... it feels right. The danger, the mystery, just being with you and the others. It feels like I am on the path I always wanted to follow."

Grugg stood beside her and looked up to the mountains too. "Grugg still promise to find Claudia father."

The clothesmaker turned to the Cyclops with a smile, resting her hand on his arm. "I know

you will. There doesn't seem to be much that you can't accomplish.”

“Except for moving fabric at a decent pace,” Gregor called from inside the house.

‘Yes, we'd best not keep the Captain waiting.’

With a grunt, the Detective took a wide arm full of the goods and stumbled through the house to the waiting ratman, who apparently needed to show him exactly where to place everything. With a slump that blew around a copious amount of dust, the first load was deposited, and Grugg returned for the rest.

Lots of stuff, huh?

Grugg grunted at the door, not his usually talkative self, as the weight of meeting the Mayor started burdening him. Why was that? Authority was a strange thing to him still. Here he stood, having just slaughtered a whole half-wolf gang of criminals, and yet he was getting nervous about meeting a singular old man.

“I'm going to get changed then... shouldn't take me long,” Gregor waved off the cyclops holding the last of the reams of fabric as he made way for the stairs.

Claudia narrowed her eyes at the vanishing ratman. “His normal outfit is sufficient enough; nice of him to help us out so much. Oh, Grugg. I have just about one last passable suit for you - it will need some quick adjustments, though.”

The Detective nodded and stored away the last of the clothesmaking goods. “Grugg not have very good luck with suits.”

‘It's a shame I can't change into something more suitable, oh- that's an idea.’

The pair paused and watched the rat, waiting with bated breath for something to happen.

‘Oh no, sorry, not right now. Just an idea for the future.’

Claudia huffed and popped open the metal clasps of her large luggage case. The slimmer lid was covered in tiny hooks and pouches that held all manner of needles, thread spools, scissors, and various tools and gadgets that Grugg had never seen before. Claudia withdrew a large suit jacket from the larger side, which was a dark grey colour.

“Claudia made all these for Jack?” he asked, removing his shawl for the inevitable need to wear a dress shirt.

“Originally, yes,” she smiled sadly, “but he never really wore them.”

“No taste,” Grugg murmured.

“Jack was... well, he wasn't like you,” she moved to lay the jacket across the back of a chair as she rummaged around for a shirt amongst the clothes in the luggage.

"No, was an ogre."

"Not only that but just his general demeanour. He was friendly enough but not as... genuine as you are, Grugg." She stood back up with shirt in hand and screwed up her nose at the cyclops. "Murderous rampage aside, you wear your heart on your sleeve and are kind-natured. Even if that is a conscious effort on your part, it shows strength of character."

Grugg grinned bashfully. He was not used to this amount of direct flattery.

'Then you said he left after he gained his memories back?'

"Hmm, yes," Claudia added the shirt to the chair and went back to the luggage for the trousers. "The more he remembered, the less comfortable he was with our friendship. It made me feel terrible, like I had been taking advantage of his vulnerability just to feel some kind of... emotional connection." She paused as she grasped onto the clothing before her.

"Grugg doesn't think Claudia bad. Just murderer, sometimes."

The clothesmaker laughed at the half-unexpected accusation and wiped a hidden tear from her face. "Well, in addition to being the murderer of *one man*, I might add, I suppose I have family issues I am dealing with too."

'Your father, the adventurer that didn't settle down?'

"Yes, thank you," Claudia rolled her eyes. "Did Eleanor give you something to make you a therapist too, Mr Memory?"

'Oh, I am truly sorry; I-'

"No, you're fine." She sighed and brought out the trousers. "Sorry, touchy subject. I do not want to trauma dump here, but the father who never came back to support his family, instead choosing to live a life of adventure as '*Krom Shieldbreaker*', holds a certain amount of ire in my heart. Especially after he disappeared from the public eye."

"Grugg sorry to hear that."

'Wait, what name did you just say?'

"Korm Shieldbreaker? That was just his adventurer name, though; nobody famous would use the name-"

'Clive Strollen.'

"-Clive..." Claudia furrowed her brow and clutched the held trousers close to her chest. "How do you know my father's name?"

'Krom used to be in my brother's adventuring party.'