

## Chapter 50 - No Wick for the Rested

Grugg did not sleep well that night. Not only were the stairs awkward to climb, but the bed in his chosen bedroom was human-sized and uncomfortable. It complained all night as he tossed and turned, wild dreams of shadows and hidden enemies lurking around every corner. He was pretty sure he could hear Bart murmuring to himself out loud during the night, something that usually wouldn't cause him to stir.

Eventually, the morning arrived, the sound of birdsong sliding in through the window to an unappreciative cyclops. Grugg rolled out of bed and sat on the floor, face in his hands as his singular eye ached and burned from the poor sleep. Perhaps if he stayed here, then he could avoid the rest of the day, and start again tomorrow. It was a tempting plan that was quickly shattered by a way-too-energetic wizard.

*Good morning, Grugg! Guess what I can do now?*

The Detective grunted and tried to force the world of sleep to take him once more.

*I can manipulate the Magic Lock on the safe-house by tapping into the arcane structural lines. Pretty neat, huh?*

Grugg looked up at the window, the sunlight streaming through and illuminating his contemptible bed. He couldn't tell whether it was locked or not, and the several beats of silence that followed did not seem to change this verdict. Any thoughts of telling the wizard this, or asking for a better explanation, were cut short as a voice yelled out from downstairs.

"Breakfast!"

The dark cloud of exhaustion melted away as the looming prospect of food brightened the outlook of the cyclops. With a grunt, he stood and threw on a clean shirt, having slept in his shorts only. Slipping through the narrow doorway, he tripped into the wall opposite - a resounding crunch of splitting wood fibres, an unfortunate cushion keeping him upright. Ignoring the way the wall now bent outwards slightly, he made the haphazard descent down the narrow stairway - his depth perception also making this a near-injurious task.

Barreling his way through the stairway door a little too fast, the smell of cooked meat immediately struck him, as a plate of steaming food lay waiting on the table for him. Gregor stood nearby, leaning on the doorframe to the kitchen wearing an apron and the fur on his whole right arm matted with blood.

"Is this..." Grugg began, staring at the pile of meat and vegetables before him.

"Goat meat, yes. As you requested, ser Grugg."

'Did you... kill it yourself?' Bart asked, slightly concerned at the appearance of the ratman.

"No." The Deputy followed up the curt reply by walking back into the kitchen. Gregor called out through the doorway as the sound of running water started up. "Best check the noticeboard and decide what you will do today. I'm going to look into Harold and see what he told the Guard, and what he has been up to."

‘Probably better if we cover different ground then.’

Grugg scoffed down the food with little ceremony and leaned back in his chair, satisfied. He turned to face the noticeboard with the labelled pages for each Nightshade boss. Frank was still in jail—no new information for Dogman and Silverfang. Don Kean apparently resided in a dungeon beneath the town, and they would try and pay him a visit in a day or two. And then Gregor would be tailing Harold, who they thought may be Gravestone.

“Hmmp.” The Detective scratched at his chin. “Who is Blackjack?”

‘The.. oh- the poison letter was addressed to him, right?’

A crash as unseen plates and cutlery clattered to the floor in the kitchen, followed by some growled cursing.

“Blackjack was Helpart boss between little bosses and Lord X.”

‘Correct, I wonder why Patson didn’t put anything up for them. Is there no notes sheet?’

The cyclops stood from the chair and lumbered over to where the case files had been kept. Taking the handful of papers in his large hand, he held them up one at a time in front of the hat for the wizard to scan through. After reaching the last page, the silence spoke for itself.

‘Nothing.’

“Nothing,” the Detective repeated, placing the pages back on the desk in a messy pile.

*I guess we have some plans for the day after all, then. First, we need to pop by the forge to collect your holders and pay what we owe. This evening we should be getting our delivery from Eleanor too.*

“Bart should go library now,” the Detective postured.

*Well, I suppose I did say I was waiting to do that until I could talk more out loud, and now I can do that - so no more excuses.*

“Maybe have fun books for Grugg too,” the cyclops nodded.

“I’m not sure whether it is weirder when ser hat talks, or is silent through your conversations.” Gregor had appeared back at the doorway of the kitchen, his arm all cleaned up and apron removed. “Just don’t get yourselves killed; we will need to be in top shape if we are going to be going into the dungeon soon.” The ratman made an exaggerated show of smelling himself and sighed, “I’m going to bathe before going out.”

“Okay, Gregor have fun. No getting cut up again, either,” Grugg smiled at his Deputy as Gregor returned a grimace and left the lounge heading towards the washroom.

*What do you say about grabbing your belt and heading out too?*

The Detective took one glance towards the narrow doorways and awkward ascent and sighed - he had left the belt upstairs.

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Despite the brush of sunshine in the early morning, by the time Grugg was fully dressed and ready to meet the world the clouds had rolled over the mountain, and it had become a drab overcast day. Nevertheless, he was thankful that there was no imminent rainfall and the chill breeze of the days prior had lessened further to just the occasional gust to remind you it was still Autumn.

They made their way throughout the town towards the forge with a much lighter coin pouch than the day before. He had not counted the amount of money at their disposal before or after the spending spree at Eleanor's emporium. Partly because he couldn't count that high but also because he just didn't like knowing. Once you got down to the gritty economies of knowing what things were worth and what you had to trade, the next thing is you'd have to start saving and budgeting - both wholly abhorrent ideas for the cyclops.

Grugg much preferred to keep things simple; he had things, or he didn't. Things were affordable, or they weren't, but beyond that, he had always been content enough to exist with the draw of accumulating wealth. It may have been part of the friction between him and his tribe. But by having little, he had been beholden to nothing or no one. Nothing left in the mountain couldn't be replaced, and other than Thud, nothing really had any value.

But now, in a populated town, he had to be a bit more cautious. The badge had value to him, but that was more for the prestige and authority it represented. But the food, clothing, and necessary items for fighting cost real money. It was only by their good graces that he had met people who had been a bit lenient on costs and payment terms. That, plus his faultless personality, he reasoned.

*Eleanor was right; I can definitely feel the presence of something big beneath the town now when I focus. It's a large, blunt kind of energy - I can't pick out any specifics at this range.*

Grugg grunted. Large, blunt energies were some of his favourite kind. Still, the knowledge there was some constructed den of criminality and danger right beneath his feet made him itchy. If he had the choice, he would be heading down there right now. Bart had explained to him at length, right before sleep, the importance of being as prepared as possible, as dungeons were dangerous places. On reflection, it was no wonder he had problems sleeping well.

*Here's the forge.*

So lost in thought, Grugg had almost walked past the building. He stooped down into the open area of the forge, blocking a portion of the overcast morning light. The forge was dim at present, with Marge sitting at the large desk while Vana stood over her shoulder. The red-haired dwarf appeared to be labouring over a small piece of jewellery, as her furrowed brow kept a round eyeglass device on her eye.

“Oh, Detective,” the dark-haired Vana nodded a greeting, slightly nudging her partner and causing Marge to mutter some dwarvish curses under her breath at the jostling.

“Hello,” Grugg half-bowed awkwardly. “Grugg here to pay.” There was something about the dwarven women that always put him on the back foot. On the other hand, it was a credit to the two smiths that they commanded so much presence despite being almost half the height of the cyclops.

“Whilst you’re here, you can arrest that one,” Marge jerked her thumb out as she removed the eyeglass and set it on the table.

The Detective started feeling around his belt for the shackles.

“Oh please,” Vana rolled her eyes with a smile. “An elven waif could break out of those awful things.”

*Maybe she is offering to make us some better ones?*

“Can make Grugg better ones?” The cyclops stopped the process of unhooking the iron restraints as the joking nature filtered into his head.

“Captain would have our hides if we made some without a proper writ,” Marge shook her head. “Looks suspicious if you start making imprisoning devices willy-nilly.”

“Not even for fun,” the black-bearded dwarf shot the other a quick glance with a grin. “But if you can clear it with ol’ Wanu, then sure. Can’t do the magic ones though, just some sturdy dwarven steel.”

*If that is the case, then we should probably pay for what we already have before thinking of new problems.*

“Understood,” Grugg nodded, answering them both. He looked slowly over towards the back room doorway, from where Gregor had seen the two ‘three-sword’ investigators when they had visited the day prior. It would be only a matter of time before they crossed paths again, and he was left wondering what they could be plotting.

“Here’s your invoice, Detective,” Vana waved a piece of paper out from her notebook. “Club repairs, new steel caps, magic item setting. Oh, also, the clasp you wanted for your communicative stones. Marge, be a dear and grab them for me?” She gave a wide grin to her partner, who muttered some further low curses as she fulfilled the request. Vana put her hand to the side of her bearded mouth in a mock attempt to whisper secretly to the cyclops. “Marge always gets grumpy when she is working on ring settings.”

“I always get grumpy when you stand over me like some strung-out vulture,” Marge spat back, returning with the metal clasps.

“Hey, when I say I’ve got your back, you can’t say those are empty words.”

Marge rolled her eyes and brushed her greased red hair away from her forehead. "These'll slip right onto your belt, and then you can stick the Message stones and what have you in them."

Grugg took the small objects, dirty iron metal crooked shapes that looked like a clawed abomination. The square, flat side would grip onto his belt, and the pronged side should hold the stones in place. "Thank you," he grinned and placed them in a pouch for later.

*Hold the invoice up a little higher- yeah, that's it. Look's like the Captain paid a good portion of it. With the clasps, we are looking at twelve gold to pay. Based on our spending yesterday, we should still be fine.*

Grugg felt himself relax at the reassurance and tried to casually lower the invoice from the odd angle he had held it for the wizard to read. Then, catching the odd looks from the dwarves, he shrugged and drew out his coin pouch. Twelve gold. That was ten gold plus two gold. And ten was the number of finger he had. Slowly, he counted out two piles of five gold and then two additional coins beside them. Despite needing a little prompting from Bart, he was proud of his accomplishment and beamed at Vana once the deed was complete.

"Thank you kindly, Grugg. And they say mountainfolk are as dumb as a sack of rocks." Her mouth clamped shut as she caught the flare of the red-haired dwarf. "Sorry, no offence, Detective."

Grugg slowly squatted down, getting closer to eye level with the dwarf as she paled, his electric-blue glowing beneath the brim of the wizard's hat. His mouth widened into an intense smile.

"Sack is actually efficient way of transport rocks."