

City of the Lost God

Part 20 – Escape and Siblings

“How did you kill the un-killable ? He could smell the creature’s foul breath, see the blind hatred in its eyes.”



“You know I’ll never talk,” said Maya, “no Kveld has ever betrayed the confidence of a client.” She could have told him she wasn’t paid to spy on him, but she didn’t think that he’d believe her and if he did, there’d be no need for him to keep her alive. Bailig pulled over a chair and sat, keeping the spear inches from her face.

“I’ve always wondered about that Claim Maya. Are you really going to slowly bleed to death ? Tell me who you’re working for and you have my word that I’ll let you go.”

“Well.....I haven’t had my final payment yet.” She said.

She saw his eyes change from wary to cunning, thinking he was going to get the information he wanted.

“So if I paid you, then I’d be your client. Then you could tell me.”

“It seems an honourable solution for both of us.”

There was still no sign of his men, or the clamour of an alarm. For some reason Bailig had wanted to capture her on his own. What secret did he think she had ?

“How much is this final payment ?” He asked.

He was relaxing completely now, the spear barely held tight in his hands.

“Twenty five gold, imperial mind you, not local coins.”

He was looking very intense, almost impressed.

“They were willing to pay that much ? How much was your first payment ?”

His focus was gone now, the spear was aimed a good five inches to the left of her head and his fingers weren’t clenched. Bailig should have known the Kveld have far faster reflexes than humans, he probably did know and was distracted. Maya could react without using her conscious mind, and it made her at least fifteen times faster than him.

“I drove a hard bargain,” she said, “my first payment was.....”

She used her right hand to knock the spear out of his hands and right across the room, while she hit him hard on the forehead with her left hand. He wasn’t unconscious, but she had time to change and her wound would start to heal once she was in the form of the beast. Maya was on his chest, her jaws ripping into his face and pulling off one cheek. She didn’t want him dead, she wanted him to suffer. She knew that he must have hunted her kind to have collected the Kveld silver weapons and she wanted him to live in fear, even if only for a few hours. No one survived a deep Kveld bite, he’d die in agony before dawn the next day.

Maya had noticed an old leaded window with panels that looked loose and crooked. It was high on the wall and she’d need to climb onto a set of drawers and then scramble up a bookcase, all without human hands. As she started up the bookcase she heard Bailig get to his feet and begin heading for the spear. Maya crashed through the glass, several large pieces digging into her chest. She howled and kept moving, the spear narrowly missing her back, as she leapt for the roof and began running. She almost admired the metal merchant, it took courage to carry on fighting, with only half a face. She ran along the roof and then jumped down to the roof of the kitchen building, wincing as the glass in her chest seemed to dig in deeper. She used a precious few seconds to pull the glass out

with her teeth, hoping that no shards had worked deep into her flesh. Along the kitchen roof and it was a twenty foot leap to the ground, nothing for her in her four legged form. A lone guard was relieving himself against the wall as she landed and it cost him his life. Maya dragged his body into a weed filled ditch and quickly ate his soft parts. Now her body had the material it needed to heal and Maya began looking for somewhere safe to sleep for at least a day.

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The Roruss had pulled Sólí apart and turned most of the furniture in the room to matchwood, yet it seemed wary of Caspian and Vella. Their swords had come from the Dome and they were of the finest quality, but Caspian knew they weren't enchanted in any way.

"Is it scared of us ?" Asked Vella.

"I wouldn't bet money on it."

Caspian could see Merrick was using the time to treat Waide, so he gradually walked backwards, taking the mythic creature further away from that corner of the room. It was moving its massive claws from side to side, as if to keep them at bay, but it was only advancing on them very slowly. Caspian swung the sword he'd brought from the upper dome, connecting with the creatures massive front paw. Nothing, the blade didn't even seem to cut its thick fur.

"You try." He said.

"No, you take my blade."

Caspian took her sword, while being careful to never take his eyes off the gradually approaching monster.

"Give me yours Casp, I need something."

"Sorry."

He gave her his sword and then took a huge swing at the creature, landing a good and solid blow on its arm. Again nothing, no effect, he might as well have been using a wooden sword for all it did to the Roruss. Their heels were now among the broken furniture that had been pushed up against the wall.

"The other weapon, give it a try." Said Vella.

Caspian was trying to move the bits of furniture with his foot, anything to gain a precious few extra inches of space behind him. Still the monster moved slowly forwards, swinging a vast claw from side to side as it moved.

"That useless thing !" He said.

"What harm can it do ?"

There was the twang of a bow being fired and Merrick was at the side of his barricade and stringing another arrow. It did no good, the Roruss didn't even seem to feel the arrows bouncing off its back. Caspian drew the old and badly notched blade from its scabbard and it didn't give him a feeling of confidence. He ran his thumb over the edge of the blade and it felt blunt.

"Try to get around it !" Shouted Merrick.

It was no use, there was no space to get around the creature. Caspian felt his back come into contact with the wall and he realised Vella was right. What harm could it do ? As the Roruss swung its claw away from its body, he ran at it, the disappointing blade held out in front of him like a spear.

"No Casp, you'll die !"

He didn't care, they were going to die anyway. He'd read the books, he'd seen the accounts of whole armies being killed by a single Roruss. How did you kill the un-killable ? He could smell the creature's foul breath, see the blind hatred in its eyes. The blade hit its chest and went in, went in deep.

Caspian felt the claws begin to pull the skin off his back, but he didn't care, the disappointing looking blade had gone in, right up to the hilt.

"A sword with the ability to kill any mortal creature that flies, walks or crawls upon the ground."

Caspian remembered the ancient writings about the sword, but was the Roruss considered a mortal creature? Its eyes seemed to be still now, its breathing less frantic, even its claws were no longer digging into his spine.

"It's dying Caspian!" Shouted Merrick.

The monster was dying and falling backwards, taking Caspian with it. For a few seconds his own weight pushed him against the creature's jaws, but they made no move to bite him. He could hear Merrick shouting as he tried to pull the monster's huge forearms off him. Then the skin of the Roruss started to crumble and for an awful moment Caspian thought he was going to fall into the rapidly decaying carcass. Arms were pulling at him, several arms, even Waide seemed to have recovered enough to help.

"Get him clear of it."

He was pulled away, but some of the putrid flesh stuck to him.

"It smells like something that's been dead for weeks." Said Waide.

Caspian fell on his back and screamed. It felt like the entire length of his back bone had been opened up by the Roruss' claws.

"Vella, the scrolls in your pack, the ones on red parchment." He said.

He watched Vella digging through her pack and then he lost consciousness.

"I was going to cut off the skin. The hide of a Roruss, think how much that would be worth, but look at it!"

He was woken by Merrick complaining and pointing to the rotting remains the other side of the room. Everything was decaying, even the thick fur covered hide.

"He's waking up," said Vella, "I saw his eyes move."

Caspian pulled himself up, amazed as just how little pain there still was in his back. Waide seemed to be waking up and looking well too.

"You read one of the scrolls over Waide," he said, "good."

"Casp, we need to leave and you said you knew a way out?"

"I do, just let me rest for a while."

"There isn't time Casp. Merrick went back with a rug, to wrap up what was left of Sólí."

Caspian was becoming more alert and noticed the blade he'd used to kill the Roruss was by his side.

He picked it up and slid it back into the mottled green scabbard.

"Not so disappointing after all." He said.

"Make him listen." Said Merrick.

"Caspian you must listen to me!" Shouted Vella.

He felt well, almost too well. It was as if he'd drunk too much, but the feeling was far more pleasant. Rejuvenation scrolls could have that affect, but he tried hard to concentrate.

"Sorry Vella. So Merrick went back for the body. Did he get it?"

"No Casp, it had gone, been dragged off back the way we'd come. There's something else here, we have to leave."

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"There's been a lot of death here." Said Lilleth.

She was rubbing her hands over the stone floor of the room, her fingers picking up the blood stains of those who had entered the room, but hadn't left.

“Podd said the bag of silver items was right where you are now.”

Lilleth was feeling the floor, pushing her finger nails into the gaps between the floor tiles.

“Some fresh stains, some old,” she said, “not all from hybrids, some pure bloods have died here too.”

Muzzie walked over to the stairs that went down. Once a metal grill had covered the entrance, but it was now rusted and broken.

“Whoever killed them probably came up from here.” He said.

Lilleth looked concerned, which was rare and worried him.

“There’s a lot of nasty stuff below old town. Are you sure you want to do this Muzzie ?”

He nodded at her and finished off the job of wrenching the grill out of its fixings and throwing it to one side. There were occasions when his brute strength was useful. They lit their lamps and descended the short flight of stairs.

“It’s an escape tunnel,” said Lilleth, “a lot of the houses in old town have them. Somewhere to run to if bandits have smashed down the front door.”

Muzzie looked down the tunnel that stretched off into the distance, a good six inches of dirty water covering the floor.

“I was thinking of something like this myself,” he said, “for the extension at the back. Link it into the sewers. Just in case Silsk gets upset enough to want me dead.”

“The dark angels are still mad at you then ?”

“Oh yes.”

No need to mention his agreement to pass on information to Aeony, Lilleth might not understand. Or she might understand too well and leave him to explore the tunnel on his own. Muzzie looked in both directions down the tunnel and decided to head to his right.

“Careful ! These types of tunnels are often fitted with traps for the unwary.” Said Lilleth

Less than twenty feet and they discovered the trap with a skeletal foot and four inches of leg bone still in it. Muzzie bent down to examine the stone that had fallen away above the trap.

“Simple idea,” he said, “the stone falls away and your foot goes into the spring loaded jaws.”

“I wonder how long it took him to cut his own foot off ?”

They left their grisly find and continued along the passage. Muzzie kept in the lead, carefully testing any stones that looked loose. The water became deeper and the stones became slippery. Eventually with some relief they came to an entrance that had been cut into a main sewer.

“Smells like it’s still in use.” Said Lilleth.

Muzzie put his head through the opening and took a good sniff of the noxious air.

“No one has repaired the sewers properly in centuries,” he said, “it’s a miracle any of them still work.”

Someone had put in a few bricks as a step down to the path that followed the sewer water, as it gurgled along at a fairly slow pace. Muzzie shone his lamp over the foul smelling liquid and took a few more deep sniffs.

“Yes, it stinks of crap. What did you expect ?” Asked Lilleth.

“I have an idea what might be killing the people, Podd had the same idea. You may laugh at me Lilleth, but I think there might be a Revenant down here.”

Lilleth didn’t laugh, she swung her lamp around and checked the tunnel behind them.

“I won’t laugh. I once saw a whole village destroyed by two young boys. They’d been the children of a merchant passing through the area and officially they’d been killed by a wild creature of some kind. People knew though, they knew about the village healer and his thing for young boys.”

“They returned for him ?”

“They returned for the whole village ! I was with a group then, we’d take on any work if the price was right. The village elder tried to hire us to take care of the boys, but by the time we arrived there was no one left to pay our fee. They’d even killed the livestock !”

Muzzie had no idea why some dead returned as revenants, no one really did. Perhaps a wrong to put right, or simply unfinished business. But their return was invariably followed by violence and death. They trudged on in silence for nearly an hour, but there was no sign of any break in the tunnel or a side passage. Muzzie stopped and pointed back the way they’d come.

“Maybe I chose the wrong way,” he said, “a few more minutes and we should head back, try the other direction another day.”

A few minutes later they came to gap that looked like it had been torn out of the sewer wall. Loose bricks had fallen into the water and a narrow tunnel led into the clay beyond the wall.

“Smell that ?” He asked.

“I remember that smell from the village, everything stank of it.”

Muzzie breathed it in, the strange mixture of sweetness and decaying flesh that meant a Revenant lair wasn’t far away. He used his sword to remove a few loose bricks from the top of the hole and then he climbed into the tunnel.

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Galla heard the banging on her door and decided to ignore it. It was her day off, everyone knew it was the day she didn’t open for business.

“We all need a break, don’t we Missy ?”

Missy was an emaciated bird in a cage, which looked far too old to be enjoying its incarceration. The banging seemed to get louder, so Galla put a shawl over her light indoor clothes and descended the stairs to her shop. She waited for a gap in the rhythm of the banging.

“Who is there ?”

Galla had various powders and scrolls ready, just in case a band of cut throats ever thought she was worth robbing. One would simply put to sleep everyone in the vicinity apart from her. Galla put that powder back in its box and selected another, one with a black skull drawn on the box. She was an empath, probably the best on the rifts. She didn’t know who was at her door, but there were three of them, all male and all highly agitated. That called for the last resort powder, it would kill everyone in the room apart from her.

“They’ll learn not to attack helpless old ladies Missy.” She muttered.

Missy didn’t answer, she never did, even though the trader in exotic birds had told her the species were natural mimics.

“I’m not without defences,” she shouted, “who dares to bang on my door ?”

“I’m sent by Bailig, the metal merchant, you know him. Open the door.”

She knew the name, but she had no idea why one of his minions should be banging on her door.

“I’m closed for business today. Come back tomorrow, or I will visit your master.... For a fee of course.”

There was the sound of muttering outside her door and she felt the three male creatures becoming increasingly frustrated.

“My master has been bitten, you must come with us and you must come now !”

Bitten indeed, she wasn’t a physician or a veterinary. Galla tightened her hand on the powder of last resort.

“Bitten by what ? Perhaps I can recommend a remedy.”

More talking together and then the sound of a sword being drawn.

“Open the door so that we can talk in private. My master doesn’t want his affliction to be the talk of the slums.”

Affliction now, she was becoming curious about what had bitten him. The name was beginning to bring back memories too. Bailig, richest of all the metal merchants and according to some, the real ruler of the City. Galla carefully pulled back bolts and released chains and finally she opened her door. The hybrid guards entered her shop and were surprisingly respectful.

“Sorry, but my master doesn’t want everyone to know what bit him.”

“Well, you’re in my home now, so what did bite him.”

He looked around her shop, as if expecting there to be eavesdroppers.

“He was bitten by a changer, she bit half his face off. The master said to tell you it was a Kveld.”

Galla prided herself in knowing the major happenings in the City, the comings and goings of everyone important. Yet three times recently people had come to see her about the Kveld and she had no idea what was going on.

“How long ago was he bitten ?”

“An hour ago, maybe two. He was very excited and there was the wound to treat. I came as soon as I was sent.”

Galla began to collect a few potions and powders and put them in a bag. No scrolls, there were none to counter the bite of a changer.

“I’ll come with you,” she said, “but it’s unlikely I’ll be able to save his life. Most bitten don’t survive the bite and those that do die within the day.”

“He knows that, he’s studied these creatures. I am to tell you that you will be paid and given safe passage home again..... provided you try your best.”

He was smiling at her, but Galla knew a threat when she heard one and put a few more little tricks in her bag. She had the distinct feeling that if Bailig died, she’d need a few tricks and need to be out of the City fairly quickly. She put on her outdoor coat and picked up her bag.

“I’m ready.”

She left her home, locking the heavy door from the outside and following the guards as they headed for the lanes.

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Lagertha liked Winshin’s, it was light and airy and she trusted old Jonas. Yes the prices were high but she felt safe there. She looked around the gloomy store in a ruined part of old town and she didn’t feel safe at all.

“Spread your purchases.” Babaef had told her. “Don’t buy too much from one store and use lesser known suppliers.”

So she was in the worst part of old town with just two very nervous looking guards and an empty cart to fill.

“I can provide tents, enough to sleep a hundred guards.” Said Barus.

Barus was a fence, everyone knew it. That meant he tended to be cheaper than the few regular suppliers left in the City and he didn’t ask questions. Lagertha didn’t want to seem naïve about buying the equipment for such an enterprise, so she’d asked Barus a lot of questions, some he wasn’t too keen on answering. She could see he was beginning to think of her as a time waster.

“I have a list.”

He immediately perked up.

“Yes my establishment would be honoured to fulfil your requirements.”

Barus may have been a fence, but Lagertha had to admit, he was a well-spoken and polite fence.

"I'll expect good prices."

"Of course my lady."

She liked him now. Yes she knew it was insincere politeness, but it still made her view the store with more favour. The swords, some still blood stained, now looked antique rather than over used. The dark regions of the store were now places ripe for serendipitous finds, rather than places that might harbour a thug.

"Take your time while I browse." She said.

She did browse; she dug through a box of daggers, finding just the right blade to fit onto her belt. Babaef might be leading the expedition out of the City, but Lagertha was going to make sure she was ready for anything.

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Caspian jumped to his feet, but the room was still going round and he felt nauseous. Vella hung onto him and helped him across the room to where the terrible weapon had fallen off his shoulder.

"Quick, get it out of the bag." He said.

The Roruss had crushed the bag and twisted it into a strange shape, but she untied the bag and upended it, sending twisted and broken metal crashing to the ground. One part was sparking and smoking, causing Vella to jump back.

"It's destroyed," said Caspian, "we'll have to rely on the sword."

There was the faint but definite sound of something being dragged in the distance, or perhaps something dragging itself. The sound was faint, but it brought back unpleasant memories for Caspian.

"Collect anything you need," he said, "we need to find the portal room."

He pulled the piece of parchment from his pocket.

"Once we find it, I know the right portal to use."

A crashing sound in the distance added to the urgency and they began to put anything of value in their packs. There had been gold ornaments in the room that were now battered and spoiled, but gold is still gold and they crammed the precious metal into already bulging packs.

"I'll make sure Sólí's family are looked after." Said Merrick.

"And Amlethus." Said Waide.

"Yes of course, sorry, and Amlethus."

The noises seemed nearer now, the dragging sound being accentuated by the occasional crash as something hit the walls. Caspian was giving the destroyed weapon a last look when he noticed a mark on the wall.

"We're there !" He shouted.

Merrick had his sword in his hand and was looking down the ruined corridor, Waide by his side. Only Vella reacted to his shout and she just looked confused.

"The portal room, this is it."

Caspian brought the parchment from his pocket and there was no mistake. If that symbol was in that corner of the room..... then he could identify where the others were.

"Of course," he said, "the last room in the corridor, the one with no other exit. We should have realised."

The debris against the walls made things difficult, but he found another marking in the far corner of the room that matched what the parchment showed. He had the correct orientation for the map now, but which portal to use ?

“Activate it Casp, take us out of here.” Said Vella.

“The language is ancient, the wording is cryptic Vella.”

The sound of dragging was getting quite close now, Waide had drawn her bow and was stringing one of the three arrows she had left. Caspian read the description next to the portals again and cursed the poetry of the writer. Of course they had known where each portal would take them, but the flowery language wasn't helping him.

“This corner, under the furniture,” he said, “I will need everyone's help.”

He wasn't sure of the symbol and it was the one buried under several ruined and heavy pieces of furniture. He seemed confident to the others and he just hoped the two poetic lines about “returning to the square beginning...etc” would take them to where he expected. Caspian began pulling the broken wood away from the wall, throwing it into the middle of the room.

“I said..... I need everyone's help !”

Merrick began to help, digging into the pile of ruined wood, pulling at it, ignoring the cuts to his hands and his recent wound. Waide helped, but she kept looking back at the doorway.

“I saw something,” she said, “they're coming.”

“More reason to clear the portal quickly then.” Said Merrick.

By the time they'd cleared the corner a tentacle had come through the door and was tentatively feeling the rubble near the ruined entrance.

“Collect your things, we're going now.” Said Caspian.

He had an idea, if there was time. Caspian began digging in his pack as the second tentacle entered the room, quickly followed by two more. They seemed less gelatinous than the tentacles of the creatures in the corridor. One curled around the sparking piece of the terrible weapon, dropping it once it began to smoke and burn.

“Keep close to me, I'm activating the portal.” Said Caspian.

He ran his hand over the wall, marking out the character shown on the map and nothing happened.

“There are lots more of those tentacles Casp.”

He tried again, carefully and slowly moving his hand in the right way. It had to work, it had to, but it didn't. None of them said anything, but the look of disappointment on their faces spoke volumes. The long thin tentacles were now picking over the debris right into the centre of the room, but so far the creatures they belonged to had stayed in the corridor.

“Of course, what a fool. The poetic lines, it's the lines I need to say.” Caspian said.

He put his hand on the mark and looked at the words. He could read them, but the pronunciation and inflection on certain phrases would be guess work. He spoke the two lines in a loud and authoritative voice and a swirling purple portal opened in the wall.

“You first Vella and take my pack too, drag it if you have to.”

“You're not coming ?”

He held up a scroll with a black edging, a scroll from one of the forbidden floors of the library.

“I will, but I have a little surprise for whatever lurks outside the door.”

He almost pushed Vella through the portal and then he grabbed Merrick by the arm.

“We're staying,” said Waide, “we go when you go.”

“You've both been wounded. Go and I'll be following you very soon.”

Merrick was quite close to the portal, so Caspian tripped him and pushed him into the swirling hole in reality. Waide jumped back and drew her sword.

“I'll watch the door and go when you go.” She said.

“Just be ready to jump through when I say.”

The portal closed, leaving the room a little darker and quieter.

“What now ?” Asked Waide.

“We wait for them to come to us.”

“You’re sure they will ?”

“Oh yes, I’m certain of it.”

They waited while the tentacles grew in number, until over a hundred were rummaging and prodding at the debris in the room. Then without warning the creatures came, not just one, but a steady stream of them, a good dozen in number.

“By the eight great demon gods, what are they ?” Said Waide.

The abominations entering the room were quite clearly not of their world and probably weren’t of anyone’s world. The creatures in the corridor were almost normal by comparison. Caspian spoke the words to activate the scroll, watching it glow in his hand.

“It’s ready,” he said, “get ready to jump.”

There was no question of fighting the creatures. Waide picked up her pack and stood crouched in front of where the portal would appear. Caspian spoke the words and the portal opened again. He nodded at Waide and watched her dive into the portal, then he followed her, immediately after he’d thrown the scroll of hellfire at the abominations.

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“You haven’t even undressed him and put him in his bed.” Said Galla.

“He wouldn’t let us.”

Galla looked at the maid and noted that she wasn’t just pretty, but she seemed to have something about her, a bit more than the usual brainless hybrid.

“What’s your name girl ?”

“Deni.”

“You and I are going to do our best for your master, though I doubt it’ll do much good. Get hot water and soap and something to dress the wound on his face properly. Then we’ll need blankets and his night things, he can sleep where he is on the couch.”

“He won’t let you undress him.” Said a guard.

“I don’t intend giving him a choice in the matter.”

Once everyone was busy getting the things she needed, Galla knelt on the floor in front of Bailig and opened her bag. Others who practised her art used potions, but Galla had a thing about powders. Powders lasted longer, she could get more into her bag and people tended to view a small bag of powder as harmless. That had saved her life on at least two occasions.

“I’ve seen others bitten by a changer, “she said, “I’ll give you something for the pain.”

Bailig hadn’t said a word, but his eyes told the story and his knuckles, going white as he gripped the back of the sofa and fought the need to scream. She took a paper sachet from her bag, twisting it and shaking to mix up the contents. She put the open end into his mouth and shook out the contents.

“I brought several,” she said, “enough to last until you recover, or die.”

It took about a minute for him to start to relax and after three minutes he was actually trying to smile at her with half a face.

“Thank you.”

“I’ll do what I can for you, but it’s unlikely you’ll see another morning.”

He grabbed at her shawl, pulling her close.

“Do your best, that’s all I ask. My men have their orders; you’ll be paid and escorted home, even if I die. Just try your best.”

Galla felt more comfortable, but she was still glad of the deadly powder in her pocket. When Deni returned she started to remove his clothing.

“Don’t look so shocked girl, I’m sure it’s not the first time you’ve seen him naked.”

Deni blushed, but she lifted him while they removed his clothing, giving Galla a chance to examine his body. She pulled at the edge of the cloth that had been pressed over the wound. Bailig winced and tried to hold her hand, but she pushed his hand aside and pulled the top of the cloth back.

“Your guard wasn’t lying about half your face being torn off.”

“The bitch ate it !”

Galla looked under his arms and then at his toes, it was as bad as she’d feared. With Deni she dressed him in his night things and pulled a blanket over him.

“It’s gone too far to stop,” she told him, “you’ve dark areas under your arms and your toes are going black. I can give you pain killers so you won’t suffer.”

“How long until I die ?”

“Six hours, maybe seven.”

Galla looked at him and for a middle aged metal merchant he was in good shape. There was an option he might go for; he didn’t seem to be the usual soft merchant type. Galla dug in her bag and brought out one packet of powder and a bottle of milky liquid.

“I’m not a physician,” she said, “you had me brought here because you knew that no physician could help you. But I can help you in two ways.”

She held up the powder, waving the packet about.

“I’m not going to pretend the next six hours will be painless, even with my pain killers. This powder will give you a painless death in seconds.”

His eyes told her nothing, he just watched as she lifted the heavy bottle of liquid and showed it to him.

“This is rare and very old, I can’t even guarantee the contents are still active, though I do believe they are. It is the excretion of an elder Kveld, the milk they use to turn a human.”

He actually tried to sit up, but his arm muscles no longer had the strength to lift him up.

“Use it on me.” He said.

Galla was fed up with kneeling, it was making her ancient joints ache. She stood and dragged a chair over to sit on.

“I have never done this before Bailig, I have only seen it done by the one who taught me. She was very high in our order and far more skilled than I.”

He reached for her arm and gripped it.

“I don’t care, use it on me.”

She nodded at him and began to ease the cloth from his ruined face.

“I need a deep wound, and as there already is one.....”

Galla used hot water and soap to clean and soften the congealed blood, but he still screamed as she removed the covering from his wound. She could see his teeth and his lower jaw bone, the bite had gone deep into his face.

“It’s a deep wound Bailig, which is perfect for what I need. This will hurt, I need to use half the bottle and work it into the wound.”

“Just get on with it.”

Galla had several sticks in her bag with soft cloth wrapped around the end. None of them looked particularly clean, but she decided that infection was the least of his problems. She pushed the stick into the thick milky fluid and began to rub it deep into the wound, pushing it right into the where she could see bone. Bailig began to thrash, so she had one of his guards hold him down. He passed out when she began the third dose, so she could carry on for the next hour in peace. By the time she'd finished the sofa was covered in his blood and his breathing had become shallow and uneven.

"More hot water Deni, then we'll clean and dress that wound."

He didn't come to as Galla cleaned the inside of his ruined face and applied a clean bandage. Galla sent Deni to fetch the guard who'd brought her. Bailig no longer had the dark lines under his arms and his toes were now the colour of healthy flesh.

"Galla you silly old fool, what have you created?" She muttered to herself.

The guard returned and she was pleased to see he had coin purse in his hand.

"You tried your best," he said, "will he live?"

"Oh yes, he'll live. What happened to the bodies of the guards the changer killed?"

"She ate most of one, didn't leave much for his family to bury. Ugnor was one of our best guards and she just nibbled at him, we'll bury him tonight."

Galla pointed to the sleeping Bailig.

"He'll need to feed when he wakes up, bring the body here and leave your master alone until he sends for you. I will leave him a note..... You do understand?"

There was fear in the guard's eyes, he understood very well, but he nodded at her. Galla sat and wrote a very short note, it wasn't for her to educate a Kveld. Once she was finished she put the note next to Bailig and the guard escorted her back to her shop. The note simply said;

'Maya will be your friend now and your mentor
seek her out. - G'

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Part 21 will be posted at the end of June.