

The Blacksmith: Part 2

The carriage clattered outside the next morning and Lana was waiting for them there. She was wearing her finest dress of blue wool and had her hair arranged in an artful braid. She wore only a silver chain for ornamentation, with a silver pendant of a dove. It would pale next to anything the ladies of court wore, but she felt put together for a blacksmith.

The carriage was a work of art, both in design and construction. Lana knew these axle designs were to reduce the jostling of the passengers inside the cabin pulled by four white horses with fine tack. It was deeply practical, unlike the rest of the carriage design. A pattern of leaves that looked vibrant and real adorned the door and blended into a single handle. Gold leaf around the window made the lone inhabitant of the carriage look like a framed portrait rather than a person.

“Lana Occor?” The man asked, opening the carriage door and greeting her. He was tall with a beard that covered his square jaw and eyes like stone. His hair was brown and dappled with streaks of grey at the temples. He wore a dark blue tunic with gold buttons and a silver pin of an owl on his chest. “My name is Devron Dorric. I am here to escort you to the castle.”

“My lord,” Lana curtsied and lowered her head. She had heard of the master bard before, a former wanderer whose charm won an audience with the king and remained a loyal friend ever since. In Lana's town, his raunchier drinking songs were regularly bellowed in the early hours of the morning. He was as well known as she was, but people knew his face rather than his final product.

“Just a simple bard, my lady,” Devron smiled. “A friend of the king, nothing more. If I were to escort any member of the court, I’m afraid it would have been a grave insult. Alas, I was available and the king has a matter of some urgency.”

“Of course,” Lana bowed again and stepped into the carriage by taking Devron’s hand. “And I take no insult to pleasant company.”

“Ah, then I shall be on my best behavior,” Devron chuckled. He closed the door and knocked twice on the roof of the carriage. With a quick click from the driver, the horses lurched forward and pulled the cart onwards. Devron took out a small, silver flask from his pocket and held it out to Lana. “I’m afraid this may be the most I have to offer for refreshment, should you need it.”

“I graciously accept,” Lana said. She took a long sip from the flask and let the whiskey sit in her mouth for a moment before swallowing. “It’s not often I get a royal invitation and my nerves are getting the better of me.”

“Ah,” Devron nodded. “Rest assured, there is nothing you’ve done wrong. Only that he has a special project in mind.”

“The king has any number of capable blacksmiths, why not consult one of them?”

“The king has hundreds of blacksmiths,” Devron said, “and when it comes to arming the soldiers, he can rely on them to make the best short swords. But this is not a matter of ability, it is a matter of craft and talent.”

"The king has trouble finding talent?"

"Well, it's not only talent," Devron explained. "It's a question of renown."

"Renown?"

"There is a reason I am a good friend of the king, despite my relatively humble status," Devron said. "The king could easily have someone tell him that he has the greatest smiths and masters of the arts. Who wouldn't want to flatter him? He and I became friends because he had heard of me without having to find me."

"So he's looking for me because I'm famous?"

"Who wouldn't want a true, legendary blacksmith to aid them?"

“Can you tell me what he wants?”

“It would be easier for him to explain it than I,” Devron said. “All I know is that he asked for you by name. And he mentioned a handsome reward to promise you, should you have any reservations about joining us on our journey. And, naturally, you're invited to dine with the nobility this evening.”

“Well, I’m already a day behind,” Lana nodded. “What’s one more?”

“You know, I must say,” Devron said, crossing his ankle over his knee with a grin, “I am a little starstruck, truth be told.”

“Of me?”

“I’ve seen your work. The armory is filled with items of your construction. The Sword of Lorad, the Spear of Tripolin, the Roddon’s Blade...heroes in their own right! And for each swing

of their mighty weapons, you were there as their guardian angel, their guiding light, their--ah, it is not so often that a bard must confess himself at a loss for words!”

“I didn’t know they were on display,” Lana said. “I should like to see them again if they are so easy to look upon.”

“Are you working on something new?” Devron said. “Surely the next great blade must already be warming itself by your fire; an ingot waiting to take shape!”

“No great blades,” Lana shook her head. “I haven’t for a long time.”

“Oh? You made swords and weapons for legends all around! Who wouldn’t wish to buy your blades?”

“That story will need some more whiskey,” Lana smirked.

Devron took the hint and passed his flask over with a knowing grin. Lana took another long drink and sighed. The liquor was smooth and warmed her throat, but it did nothing to loosen her tongue.

The town rolled by outside of her window. Townspeople stepped aside and peered at the window as Lana passed, making her feel like she was on display. A few people pointed and whispered, rumors about her absence already spreading as the horses' gear jangled in the street. Before long, Lana could only guess their distance by a lone, dark plume of smoke that she knew came from her forge.