

Augustus was sitting in his study, beside him an empty plate with a decent amount of grease still flowing around the edges of the metal dish. He thought the fish had been a fine meal; those cooks deserve some praise and decided he would mention them in his prayers, that ought to be enough. Dusk has been vanquished by the terrible night long ago and only a white candle supported on a plain metal holder burned righteously, Augustus found himself peering into the flames during these nights of his, he truly loathed them, but there was little he could do. The quill had been dipped into the inkwell and was more than ready to fill out the vast paperwork that had to be filled out before dawn, Augustus sat to work. *Name...Victor...Last name...Greydragon...to be buried...on the...16th...cause of...death...slashed...throat...expenses paid...* and it simply went on and all the paperwork by itself didn't require a lot of thought to fill out, but it fell to Father Bouchard to care for the dead that were brought to the cathedral and he felt he had a duty to Sir Greydragon, especially.

Hours and hours passed by and he was at long last done with his paperwork, *I wonder if I'll get blisters*, though that was a bit too silly a thought even for him. Father Augustus stood up and went to go for a morning stroll, he often wished to stretch his legs, he was more used to the paws he walked on for sixteen years, he was stumbling and falling almost every time he was bound somewhere in a hurry.

He pushed the heavy stone door with some struggle, the cold and the smell simply overwhelmed him as the door was opened. It smelled of death, the pure smell that he was all too familiar with, somehow death was pure, *if anything's pure, it is death*. He closed the door behind him and lit a large candle which helped him on his way down. First there were eight steps, reaching a long dark and moist hall. It was a rather uncomfortable journey and Augustus nearly slipped on some wet cobbles. Father couldn't see left nor right, all darkness around him, only his candle lighting the way forward. He knew that this particular room is very wide, with dead bodies on each end, but he couldn't see them and because of that he grew restless. The hall ended unexpectedly and Augustus faced another stone door, it was so cold that the frost bit through his velvet gloves. As soon as the door opened up, the cold smacked him in the face so hard that he thought all the breath was kicked from his lungs. He prevailed and moved into the room, made brighter only by his candle. By then the wax was melting over his black gloves, yet somehow the old priest welcomed that warmth.

He stood by the door for what seemed like a few minutes then, two white orbs shimmered in the dark beyond, those orbs drawing closer and closer before long those orbs let out a sound:

"Father Bouchard," they both said in a booming voice that stretched out like tendrils around the dark room,

"Why have you come?", Augustus frowned and rolled both eyes, stepping forward to the orbs in the dark.

"I've little time for this, truly.", Augustus said and stepped right through the white orbs, the two disappeared into thin air.

"Greydragon is dead, I didn't want Greydragon dead.", he said into the darkness, now he stood in the center of the room.

"I know Father, I know.", the voice replied.

"Then *why* is Sir Victor Greydragon dead?"

Augustus waved the candle about and spattered some wax onto the cold cobbles below, it must have been especially cold down here, the priest's breath showed itself in the air and the wax gave a hiss as it fell onto the floor.

"He knew, too much...too much."

That reply angered Augustus, *as if you decide when someone knows too much*, he thought and said as much but the only reply given was:

“Deepest apologies, I had not known the brute was still of use to you.”

Augustus felt his anger building up, but somehow he managed to keep himself calm.

“You would have known, this was the last mistake, I’m sure you realize this?”

“Yes Father.”, the voice said, not all too pleased

“What about the item?”

Augustus’s thoughts were instantly moved from this room to the one below the cathedral. *The item*. It appeared simple in truth, but it was anything but simple, there under the cathedral lay the most precious item humanity ever obtained and Augustus knew many more than Greydragon would die; sooner or later I will die because of it, he knew, but pushed those particular thoughts aside. *The item*...a finger, deed, bony, parted from the hand. It has been so many many years, eons even, but the flesh albeit rotten clung to that finger. Augustus thought it was a female’s finger, but it made no matter, it was blessed by the very Light itself, it was a relic, it could be a weapon. The holy energies he felt, the sensations when he was only near the item were miraculous. Augustus knew that with this, even immortality was not beyond reach. The only thing Augustus didn’t know, honestly the only thing he knew he did not know, was the item’s mysterious glow.

“The item is safe.”, Augustus replied to that.

»Is it, truly?« the voice asked. Augustus sighed out and cleared his throat, saying in a firm manner in reply:

“*It is safe.*” He didn’t plan on explaining himself or his actions to this man, so he broke in before this fool could get himself killed, Augustus had patience, but for cretins and imbeciles less than other folk.

“I’ve more work for you...work I’ve planned. Light the blasted torches.” As soon as he finished his sentence, the yellow dim light filled the room and the room revealed itself to be a narrow, but a long one. Augustus strode onwards with the torches blazing on each side of the wall, the room opened up a bit further on, a big hall that echoed back the words you said each time. A chandelier hanged from the ceiling, curtains blocked what seemed to have been windows, however, Augustus knew not what windows could serve for under the city, instead he focused on the scarlet red carpet in the middle of the hall and followed it faithfully with the candle in his hand. Then he saw it, the altar, upon it Sir Victor Greydragon, the slain. The priest in his white robes shook his hand and stepped towards the corpse, though someone might hurl from the smell of the man, he didn’t, instead, he placed his hand onto the corpse’s forehead and sighed.

He saw them come after him, the jester, the shield-maiden, the scholar and the thief. Four of them, and they couldn’t be more different from each other. Gianni clapped and skipped up the steps, jumped onto the altar licking the pale cold cheek of the mighty knight. Alas his five are now the four. *I have to find a damn knight again*, Augustus told himself and heard the shield-maiden mutter something that included the word “damn” and “shameful” and another curse. Augustus’ hand lunged forward and he smacked the jester so hard he fell on his back off the altar. At that point the maiden nodded, the thief laughed and the scholar remained silent, unmoved by either action. Gianni crawled back in line and Augustus turned to face the four:

“You best keep that jester inline or I’ll cut his throat like he did to Sir Victor here.”

Alliana stepped forward, always so disciplined and formal, saying:

“My apologies Father, I will keep the jester from killing.”

She had a plain face, not one that would draw much attention; she was clad in a silvery metal with her longsword and shield strapped to her back. Every part of her skin, save the face, had been covered in armor, one way or another. There was mail under the plate and Augustus found himself wondering how did she manage to move, she was taller and heavier, she much have been stronger, too. Augustus nodded and the maiden stepped back in line. The priest slowly stepped down the stone steps that lead up to the altar and said:

“I trust you’ve been acquainted with one another? Grand, you are the first, the five...rather now the four. We shall need another knight now, I shall tend to that. You are a sad bunch, Cyantor most miserable it seems, but you are the best, or so I’m told.”

Cyantor was the scholar completely robed in brown, clutching onto some papers and books, but it made Augustus somewhat uncomfortable that he could not see his face, this was the third time they met, but the only response he ever got was his nod of approval when Augustus recruited him to his cause. Honestly, he thought the man had no tongue, but others said he spoke so he didn’t put that much attention to it.

“The church is troubled; the council of the bishops is desperate. Our faith is no longer being practiced by the common folk; the nobles taunt the clergy even more. I will restore the faith in this city; the Light is where we need to kneel, not in front of false kings that think themselves gods. You will build me an army, all of you, an army is what I need, what the Light needs.”

Alliana instantly stepped forward:

“Father...do you deem this wise? An army...it shall take many a month...and even then, we may be deemed rebels...this may ruin ev-“

Augustus interrupted: “Yes, we shall be, but it shan’t ruin the church nor the faith I stand for. We cannot be defeated.”

Then the fourth said: “Ye pay everyone like ye d’ me and everyon’ we’ll stan’ fer ya.”

*Marcellus*, Augustus had no love for the man, he was filth, but he could get more filth and that was what was important. *Marcellus* the thief was a common face, like the rest, he had a blade sharp nose, and long at that, his lips were quite thin, but those eyes would made half the maids in the city fall for him with a single look, and the bastard knew that, the bastard used that every bloody chance he got. *If only Gianni had killed that one, Victor was a brute...but this man is filth.*

“Fortune you shall get, worry not.”, Augustus calms the thief down and carries on:

“More fortune lay before you, waiting to be grasped. This fortune you must seize for yourself Gentlemen...and Milady.”

Then the jester stood up and brushed himself against Alliana and yelled in a high pitched voice that made the maiden shiver, the thief wince and Augustus want to smack him again:

“And what does the great and noble Holy Father wish for himself?! Ah? Ah?! What? He doesn’t want gold...no no no no noooo! He doesn’t want power...he doesn’t want an army, not really, Gianni can see, Gianni isn’t blind, yes, yes, yeeees. The Holy Father wants peace, no, no? Yes! The Holy Father thinks Gianni fool, he is jester, but he is no fool!” *This one will be trouble.*

“No...I wish not force...but the people shall understand better that way.”

Alliana pushed the jester off herself just in time to cover her ears from the next scream: “What does my noble, my fair and good...yes, good, goooooood, Holy Father want?” Augustus sighed out and turned about, stepping up the stones and looming over the corpse, the smell was bad but Augustus didn’t seem to mind, there was much he could have told, lies, truths...*I want to be happy, I want to end my nightmares, I want her back...I want love, I want to see her alive, I want to be back, I want to be home, I want...I want...Elena.* He parted his lips and as he was peering down onto Victor’s dead body, he said only one word:

“Hope.”

TO BE CONTINUED...