

A good run today – word war in chat, and my 2000 +

By Holly Lisle

Thanks to my fellow Word Warriors. Good counts, good run.

Here's the snippet from today's stuff:

Lord Letrin nodded. "You're a bright child. And, yes, what you asked of me is simple. An easy thing, a nothing. Surely you could give me something more challenging. I'll do what you have asked, but you have asked for nothing for yourselves." He turned to Dan, who had been quiet through all of this, and who now bore a bruise below his right eye. "You must want something of me."

I could tell from the expression on his face that Dan wanted to see the high lord keel over dead. But he said, "My sister spoke for both of us. We want nothing more than what we have already asked for."

He turned to me. "Something ... just a little something. A chance for me to make things up to you both for my shameful behavior."

"Nothing," I said, "but what we have asked of you. If you do that, you will have done all that we need or desire."

Now he became very still. It was my Father's sort of stillness – the stillness that preceded beatings or locking in cellars or other awful things. He sat without movement, without blinking, seemingly without breathing, for a time so long I wanted to shift in my seat, or say something, or look to Dan.

But again, Father had trained us for this. Those who sat still

and made no noise suffered less than those who called attention to themselves.

"You will," he said at last, and his lovely voice had turned to gravel, "find for me a child named Doyati, and you will bring this child to me. Tell me not that this task is impossible, for I know it is not. And all the gods in the sky and beneath the ground help you if you fail in this task, for my wrath will consume you and everything you know and love. You want what you have asked for. Well enough. I will have what I have asked for, or you will live only long enough to wish with everything in you that you were dead."

I knew the face and the voice, and as long as I saw him as just another version of my father, I felt strong enough to deal with him.

"Very well," I said.

"You have a week to find the child."

He rose and vanished, leaving the two of us and a host of servants alone in the room. Neither Dan nor I had any idea what we might need to do next.

Then a tall nightling approached us. He said, "You will follow me out."

We didn't dare ask what had happened to our guide. Or our own clothes. Or how we were supposed to approach the high lord when we had accomplished his task. We meekly followed, because we did not know what else to do.

Back up the spiral we went, with the feeling all the while of eyes watching, of weapons trained on us should we do something; on we went, I in a dress worth more than the grand house my Father lived in, Dan in clothes too fine for any event we might have in our town, ever.

Up took longer than down, and felt harder, and felt scarier.

We had thought when we came to the forest by moonlight that when we returned home, we would be able to offer Mama some help. Instead, we could offer nothing – not even an explanation. We would not be going home. No child named Doyati lived in our town. Doyati was no human name.

So where would we go to find this child.

“Out,” this tall, silent guide said when we came at last to the vestibule that would take us back to the world above the ground. And then, in the softest of whispers, so soft I would have thought sure he said nothing save for the kiss of his breath on my cheek as he said it, “Luck to you both.”

And then we were outside the great stone doors, standing in shadows, with a task that was not impossible but that might as well have been, and a week to accomplish it lest we be the cause of the deaths of everyone we loved. And maybe Father too, but I looked at that as a possible benefit.

“So what do we do now,” Dan asked me.

“I wish I knew. I guess the first thing we need to do is get out of the forest – but we can’t go back home. Not dressed like this, not when we’ve been gone all night. If Father has been looking for an excuse to kill us, this would be one he couldn’t resist.”

“Then which way?”

“How many ways are there? If we try to find our way back to the road, we can walk away from home.” I looked rucked up my skirt and tucked the edges into the dress’s lovely girdle, and ruefully at the beautiful slippers, made for the glass-like beauty of the marble floors in Lord Letrin’s city, but not for the must and mess of a forest floor, or for muddy roads.

Dan said, “Well. Let’s go, then. I wish I still had my sword.”

“If you’d had it when we met with the high lord, you would

have run him through with it.”

“And a good thing for all of us if I had.”

We started walking, sighting on the sun that was already halfway up the sky. And I realized how tired I was. “Where are we going to sleep?” I asked Dan. “What are we going to eat? We have no money, no weapons, no food, no idea where we have to go, no idea how we’re to get there. We haven’t even decent traveling clothes! We dare not go home – but that’s the only direction we can safely rule out.”

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