

# 08. The Ragged Flagon

- [Escaping Riften](#)
- [Confrontation with Delvin Mallory](#)
- [Reflection and Departure](#)
- [Camp in the Wilderness](#)

# Escaping Riften

As Gerdur and Sven slipped out of the alley behind Haelga's Bunkhouse, the dim light of a nearby torch flickered, casting long shadows across the damp stone walls of Riften's Ratway. They moved swiftly, blending into the shadows of the narrow alleys and dodging the occasional patrol. The air hung heavy with the scent of mildew, a stark contrast to the stale ale and wary gazes they left behind at the bunkhouse.

Sven led the way with purpose, his steps echoing softly against the damp stone. Gerdur followed closely, her heart pounding with a mixture of fear and growing skepticism about their path. The transition from the relative safety of the bunkhouse to the treacherous depths of the Ratway was abrupt and unsettling. Each step deeper into the dank tunnels seemed to plunge them further into uncertainty.

The tunnels twisted and turned, forcing them to squeeze through tight spaces and navigate slippery walkways. Gerdur's initial fear gradually evolved into a silent questioning of Sven's motives. Why had he brought her here? What did he hope to achieve in this dangerous underworld?

"Keep close," Sven murmured, his voice barely audible above the echoing drip of water. Gerdur nodded, her eyes wide as she followed his lead. Her hand brushed against the cold, damp walls, her fingers curling instinctively.

Hidden pits and sudden drops kept them on edge, each obstacle a reminder of the perilous environment they traversed. Sven's confidence in this treacherous place was unwavering. He deftly guided them past potential ambush points, moving swiftly and quietly as they descended deeper into the Ratway's depths.

The dim light of flickering torches cast shifting shadows around them, heightening the tension. Every corner turned held the promise of danger, and Gerdur's breath caught in her throat with each new obstacle they encountered. She stumbled once, catching herself on a slick, moss-covered stone, heart racing.

After what felt like an eternity in the oppressive darkness, they finally reached a heavy, nondescript door. Sven glanced back at Gerdur, his expression unreadable in the dim light. With a steady hand, he pushed the door open, revealing the dimly lit interior of the Ragged Flagon.

Gerdur hesitated for a moment on the threshold. The murky tavern air hit her, heavy with the scent of ale and sweat. Her eyes swept over the shadowed corners, where dubious figures huddled over whispered conversations. Instinctively, she stepped closer to Sven, seeking comfort in his familiar presence amidst the unfamiliar danger.

Sven led her towards the bar, their footsteps echoing softly on the creaking floorboards. As they approached, Sven's gaze locked onto a figure seated at a corner table—a man with a confident air

about him, surrounded by an aura of authority.

Delvin Mallory glanced up from his drink, his sharp eyes appraising the newcomers with a mixture of surprise and curiosity. Gerdur felt exposed under his penetrating gaze. Her fingers tightened around the edge of her cloak, a nervous gesture.

"Sven," Delvin greeted with a nod, his voice low yet carrying an air of authority.

Gerdur shifted uncomfortably, she glanced around the dimly lit room, catching glimpses of shadowed faces watching them with varying degrees of interest and suspicion. She had entered a world where trust was a rare commodity, and she wondered where she fit into this intricate web of alliances and secrets.

"I was supposed to receive information on the Trial of Ysgramor," Sven stated bluntly, his tone betraying a hint of frustration. "My contact within the Guild never got back to me."

Delvin raised an eyebrow, his expression thoughtful. Gerdur watched the silent exchange between the two men, her mind racing with the tension of the moment. Every word spoken, every gesture made, carried weight in this shadowy realm where survival depended on wits as much as steel.

"Well now, if you've got the coin, I'd say it's high time we discussed business," Delvin replied, his Cockney accent lending a streetwise charm to his words.

Gerdur's breath caught in her throat. She had ventured into Riften's criminal underworld, standing on the precipice of a new and uncertain chapter in her life. As Sven and Delvin delved into negotiations, she realized that her fate was now intricately tied to theirs—a realization that filled her with both apprehension and a strange sense of dread.

The Ragged Flagon had become their sanctuary, but whether it would offer refuge or entrapment remained to be seen. And as Gerdur stood amidst the flickering torchlight and murmured conversations, she knew that her journey with Sven was far from over—it was only just beginning.

# Confrontation with Delvin Mallory

Delvin Mallory lounged in a secluded corner of the Ragged Flagon, his sharp eyes appraising Sven and Gerdur with a mix of seasoned scrutiny and feigned interest. The dimly lit tavern buzzed with hushed conversations and the scent of mead, setting the stage for their uneasy negotiation.

"Sven," Delvin's voice cut through the murmurs of the tavern, his accent carrying the lilt of Riften's back alleys. "You've caused quite a stir with your latest 'acquisition.' Quite the talk of the town, I must say."

Gerdur felt a knot tighten in her stomach under Delvin's penetrating gaze, her fingers instinctively tightening around the edge of her borrowed cloak. She resisted the urge to fidget, her gaze nervously shifting between Sven and the notorious figure before them.

Sven, standing tall with a calculated calmness, met Delvin's gaze evenly. "I'm here because my contact never reached me," he stated bluntly, his tone betraying a hint of frustration beneath his usual composure.

Delvin leaned forward, his expression shifting to one of feigned interest mixed with subtle amusement. "Ah, your contact," he drawled, his eyes glinting with hidden knowledge. "Funny thing, those missing persons posters. Almost looked like your handiwork, don't they?"

Gerdur's breath caught in her throat at Delvin's pointed insinuation. She glanced at Sven, noticing the tightening of his jaw as he clenched his fists subtly under the table.

Sven's voice remained steady, though a flicker of annoyance crossed his features. "I don't know what you're talking about, Delvin."

Delvin chuckled softly, leaning back in his chair as if savoring the discomfort he stirred. "Of course not," he replied, his tone dripping with skepticism. "But tell me, Sven, what brings you to my humble establishment if not to discuss matters of... mutual interest?"

Sven's gaze narrowed slightly, his patience wearing thin. "I'm here for answers," he asserted firmly. "Answers you were supposed to provide through your contact."

Delvin's smirk widened into a knowing grin. "Ah, yes, my contact," he mused, tapping his fingers lightly against the tabletop. "A pity they never made it to you. But then again, I suppose that's the risk one takes in our line of work."

Gerdur sensed the tension mounting between the two men, the atmosphere in the tavern growing heavier with each passing moment. Around them, muted conversations continued, oblivious to the brewing storm between the trio.

Delvin's grin widened into a knowing smirk. "But let's not dwell on that," he continued smoothly. "Let's discuss more pressing matters. Like the items of interest that have recently come to my attention."

Delvin's tone shifted to one of narrative delight as he continued. "There's the Golden Statue, taken from a noble's mansion in Solitude. Our thief managed to slip past the guards, disable the wards, and escape without so much as a whisper."

Gerdur watched Sven closely, sensing the weight of Delvin's words settling heavily upon him. Sven's facade of composure wavered slightly, his eyes narrowing imperceptibly as Delvin recounted the theft.

"And then there's the Whispering Painting," Delvin continued, his voice taking on a storyteller's cadence. "Stolen from Dragonsreach itself, no less. Our thief managed to navigate the halls, evade the guards, and spirit it away without disturbing even the dust."

Each word seemed to hang in the air, punctuated by the clinking of glasses and the distant murmur of patrons, adding to the surreal atmosphere of danger and intrigue.

Gerdur could feel the tension thickening around them, a web spun by Delvin's words and Sven's unspoken guilt. She gripped her cloak tighter, her gaze darting between the two men.

"And last but not least," Delvin continued, his tone dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, "the Locket of Secrets. Taken from Windhelm, from the personal collection of a retired adventurer. They say it contains secrets hidden away, waiting for the right hands to unlock them."

He glanced at Sven, his gaze sharp and knowing. "Quite the collection, wouldn't you say, Sven? Each piece a testament to the skill and daring of our guild."

Sven remained silent, his jaw clenched as he absorbed Delvin's words. The implication hung heavy in the air, unspoken but undeniable.

"We can offer payment," Sven interjected, his voice cutting through Delvin's self-indulgent teasing. "But we need information. My business depends on it."

Delvin's gaze sharpened momentarily before he leaned back, fingers drumming thoughtfully on the rough wooden table. "Very well, Sven. If you're willing to pay the price, the Guild can provide."

He turned to Gerdur, a calculating glint in his eyes. "Payment upfront, naturally. Let's say... four hundred septims. A modest fee for the information you seek."

Gerdur's heart sank slightly at the mention of such a sum, but she knew they had little choice. She watched as Sven reached for his coin pouch.

"Here," Sven said tersely, pushing the pouch towards Delvin. "We have an agreement."

Delvin's smirk returned, a cruel twist to his lips. "Ah, patronage," he said mockingly, scooping up the pouch and weighing it in his hand. "How delightful."

He paused, his tone turning serious once more. "Now, about these items," Delvin continued, his voice lowering to a conspiratorial tone again. "Each one holds a clue to a greater mystery."

Delvin leaned forward, a smirk playing on his lips. "Right then, shall we?"

"The Golden Statue," Delvin began, leaning back slightly, "points to a spot deep in the Rift's eastern mountains. It's tucked away in some forgotten temple, guarded by old traps and magics left to gather dust."

Gerdur listened intently, the weight of their agreement with Delvin settling heavily upon her shoulders. The path ahead seemed daunting, fraught with challenges and uncertainties.

"Now, the Whispering Painting," Delvin continued, his voice taking on a storyteller's cadence, "shows a calm yet sorted scene within the Rift. It hints at a hidden valley swathed in mist, where a cave entrance guards the way to the Fang of Frostbite."

He shot a challenging glance at Sven, his eyes glittering with mischief. "And lastly, the Locket of Secrets," Delvin concluded, lowering his voice to a whisper, "holds a slice of a map with a twisty trail through thick pine forests and over a dicey ravine. It leads to a hidden plateau marked by an ancient stone monolith, where the Trial of Ysgramor's been lyin' in wait."

Delvin leaned back in his chair, his smirk widening. "Well, well, aren't you two a pair of brave souls," he remarked, his voice tinged with amusement. "Off to chase shadows and legends."

Gerdur couldn't shake the feeling that Delvin knew more than he let on, and that their alliance with the Thieves Guild might come with more than they bargained for.

# Reflection and Departure

"I paid a hefty price for mere breadcrumbs," Sven's voice cut through the subdued ambiance, frustration evident as he scrutinized Delvin's cryptic offerings. His brow furrowed in thought, grappling with the ambiguity that clouded their quest.

Delvin met Sven's gaze with a crooked smile, eyes gleaming with a mixture of amusement and veiled intent. "Oh, Sven," his voice carried a gravelly edge, a testament to years spent navigating Riften's intricate web of deceit and opportunity. "As you well know, information is more valuable than gold in these parts. You'll see the true worth of what I've provided when you stand at the threshold of the Trial of Ysgramor."

With a dismissive gesture, Delvin pushed a weathered map towards Sven. The parchment bore crude markings and a hastily drawn route, indicating a location not far from Riften. "There," Delvin pointed with a nonchalant air, "you'll find the entrance."

Gerdur, standing slightly apart, observed the interchange with a mix of apprehension and quiet determination. Her hands trembled imperceptibly as she clutched her cloak tighter still around her. The weight of their circumstances pressed upon her, a constant reminder of the uncertainty that now defined their journey.

As Sven collected the map, the decision to trust Delvin gnawed at his resolve. He glanced briefly at Gerdur, catching her eye in a silent exchange that spoke volumes. There was no turning back now.

"We should leave," Sven's voice was a quiet command, tinged with urgency as he gestured towards the shadows cloaking the Ratway's entrance. "Thank you, Delvin," he acknowledged reluctantly, the words heavy with unspoken doubts and the weight of their precarious alliance.

Delvin nodded curtly, his gaze following them as they departed into the labyrinthine passages of the Ratway. His expression betrayed a flicker of concern, a fleeting acknowledgment of the risks they faced beyond the safety of his domain.

But before they could slip away completely, Delvin's voice sliced through the tension-laden air once more. "Remember, Sven," he called out, his tone laced with a caustic edge that cut deeper than any dagger. "Stories ain't always what they seem. This trial... could hold more than meets the eye. Some who chase its secrets find more than they bargained for."

Sven paused mid-step, his back still turned to Delvin, muscles tensed with a mixture of irritation and unease. He had heard enough veiled warnings in his dealings with the Thieves Guild to recognize them.

Without another word, Sven and Gerdur melted into the shadows of the Ratway, their footsteps echoing softly against the damp stone. The weight of Delvin's words hung in the air like a specter, haunting their every stride as they ventured deeper into the heart of Riften's hidden dangers.

Outside, under the shroud of night, Gerdur and Sven moved with a cautious haste through Riften's twisting streets. Their footsteps echoed softly against the cobblestones, the only sound amidst the enveloping silence of the city. Each shadow held potential danger, each alleyway a potential trap, yet they pressed onward, driven by the necessity of their quest.

Finding refuge in the outskirts of Riften's boundaries, they finally stopped to make camp in a secluded copse of birch. The crackling fire offered a flickering respite from the chill of Skyrim's night, casting a warm glow upon their weary faces. Around its comforting embrace, they settled into an uneasy peace, the tension of their escape slowly ebbing away amidst the quiet rustle of leaves and distant calls of nocturnal creatures.

"I didn't expect it to be this complicated," Gerdur's voice broke the silence, her tone a mixture of weariness and quiet resolve. She gazed into the flames, her thoughts wandering through the twists and turns of fate that had brought them to this moment.

Sven nodded in agreement, his own gaze distant as he contemplated the map opened before him, studying it closely.

Their conversation drifted into contemplative silence, punctuated only by the crackling fire and the soft murmur of the night breeze.

# Camp in the Wilderness

The secluded grove near Riften cradled Gerdur and Sven in a quiet sanctuary, shielding them momentarily from the turmoil of Riften's treacherous streets and the uncertaining that still loomed ahead. The evening air was crisp and tinged with the scent of pine needles, a welcome contrast to the heavy atmosphere they had left behind.

"Sven," Gerdur's voice broke the stillness, her tone now tinged with assertiveness and frustration, "how do you expect me to explain all this to the Jarl? To our people? We're practically fugitives now, hiding in the wilds while missing persons posters go up with my face on them."

Sven turned towards her, his expression grave as he took in the weight of her words. He recognized the validity of her concerns, each one a sharp reminder of the stakes they faced.

"No one will question us once we have the artifact," he replied, his voice quieter now, tinged with a hint of vulnerability. "It will unite the Holds, just as intended."

Gerdur nodded slowly, her eyes never leaving his. She saw the turmoil in his gaze, the weight of their shared burden etched into the lines of his face. Despite her reservations, she knew they were bound together now, their fates intertwined by the quest they had embarked upon.

"But at what cost?" she pressed firmly, her voice carrying a mixture of frustration and sadness. She rose from her position by the fire, pacing a few steps away and then back again, her movements restless. "This isn't honorable, Sven. We've been through the darkness of the Ratway, dealt with that Mallory and his schemes, and now we're back out in the wilderness. Is this truly the path we should be on? It goes against everything I thought we stood for."

Sven remained silent, his gaze following her as she paced. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped together as if in silent prayer. The crackling fire cast flickering shadows on his face, highlighting the conflict etched in his expression.

He wanted to defend his actions, to justify the choices he had made under the guise of noble intentions. Yet, Gerdur's words brought forth a realization he had been avoiding—their quest, though spoken with lofty goals of uniting Skyrim, was built on a foundation of selfish ambition. He had embarked on this journey with the belief that what he was doing, what they were doing, would be proved right in the end. Now, her piercing insight into the moral ambiguity of their mission only served to highlight his inner turmoil.

Sven sighed softly, his shoulders sagging with the weight of their conversation. He ran a hand through his hair, lips parting to speak before he hesitated, uncertain of his own answer.

As the fire burned low, they remained in an uneasy silence, each lost in their own reflections. Gerdur finally settled back down beside the fire, her movements slower now, her gaze fixed on the dying embers. Sven watched her, his earlier smile now gone, replaced by a solemn determination.