

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.

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