

Dealing Death

Lisor moved easily through the midday streets of Akhshar, getting a feel for the city again. He had not felt completely comfortable in his home for the past three years, not since the night everything changed forever. Physically, he'd barely changed. The divinely gifted energy had dissipated long ago, and, outside of his new-found ability to step physically into the realm of the dead, it seemed that nothing much had changed. Though the ability to travel to speak with the dead was eerie, it wasn't the cause of his dissatisfaction. He knew that the changes he'd gone through emotionally were the heart of it. Death, and rebirth, changed a person in ways that couldn't really be explained.

So he spent afternoons regularly walking through the city, trying to reconnect with his past, trying not to chafe so much at mundane life. Especially as he'd done far more than merely die and get restored to life, if that could be construed as a merely. He'd been to the heavens, physically, spoken with the gods in person. He wasn't sure that the entire world was enough place to roam after having seen that. He knew that his place was here in the mortal world, but a part of him still ached at the memory of what he'd seen there. He hoped that time would make the experience fade enough that it would no longer dominate his dreams and waking thoughts.

There was a strange feel to the streets today, though. It pulled and prodded at his senses, as if he were missing something. He couldn't help but check at the daggers cross-girt at his waist, daggers that he'd never been forced to use in anything other than friendly practice. Even when he'd gone south to try to find the source of the curses that had killed his grandfather, and ruined many lives, he had never needed to kill anything other than small animals, kuhl, snakes, birds, nothing larger than that. He hadn't even been fighting in earnest when Arandel had killed him, that night. He had been intent upon destroying that cursed weapon, Ambition, that his brother was wielding, funneling his destructive blood-gift into it until it shattered. It had been the last thing he'd done in his first life.

Even as he tried to put the memories of that fight out of his mind, a motion to his left caused him to spin in that direction, and pain erupted in his side. The pain was no worse than many injuries he'd taken in practice, though there was a strange burning that changed into a tickling in his side as he pulled himself off of the blade in the assassin's hands. With his left hand covering his injury, he found one of his daggers in his right. *Why in the name of all of the gods was someone trying to kill him, here, in broad daylight?* Whoever it was, however, clearly was a newcomer to dagger work, or at least had nothing more than informal street fights to train him. He almost lost the blade as Lisor backed away from him, and didn't seem to have a good way to fend off the counter.

The pain in Lisor's side seemed to burn, but he had enough training to concentrate on the enemy at hand. Taking a moment to see how badly he'd been hurt would only offer his attacker another chance, and likely a better hit. Gritting his teeth, he used the back of his left forearm to push the enemy's blade-hand away from him, and brought his right hand in, cutting through the light jerkin with more force than Lisor had hoped. But the man seemed maddened. He didn't seem to realize that he could walk away from this if he would drop the weapon. Lisor could tell that he was losing blood, and couldn't continue this much longer without weakening severely. He had to end this, much as he didn't want to.

Stepping past the enemy, still pulling his dagger hand where it couldn't get a good hit, Lisor made a decision. He grimaced as he followed through with it, bringing the dagger up toward the unprotected throat of the would-be assassin. Somehow, the assassin seemed to sense that he was losing, and tried to ward his throat properly, but with a hand that held no weapon. Lisor's blow missed,

but nicked under the ear. He had to twist a bit, still holding the enemy at bay, but he could aim the blade back toward the man's jaw.

His foot slipped on blood that had begun to puddle under him. As he did so, his blade slid home far faster than he'd intended. It slid up under the jaw, imbedding itself in the man's brain. There was a sudden flurry of motion from the opponent, as if it were reacting like a chicken when beheaded. It had to have taken a moment to actually die. In that flurry of motion, Lisor was knocked sprawling on the ground, losing his grip on the blade that had saved his life.

He lost consciousness for a moment, not regaining his senses until there was a guard there, prodding at him. With a grimace, Lisor pulled himself to a sitting position and winced at the side. He was fairly certain that the injury wasn't likely to kill him, but he knew he needed to get it tended soon. "Guard, get my dagger, and get someone to help me to the Temple of the Risen One. One of the priests there will help me. I won't be able to help you much until then."

As another guard arrived, the first helped him up, still carrying the gore-covered dagger and allowed Lisor to lean on him as they walked toward the Risen One's temple. With luck, Lady Alezra herself would be free to tend her son. She had only recently gotten back from burying her father, Avatar Khimel, and was one of the best healer-priestesses the city had, if not the highest in rank. It was only two or three minutes until he was in the temple, being helped to a bed in one of the closest healing chambers. Two more minutes saw him relaxing under the tending of a healer-priest. And the guard did not leave him, likely for more reasons than merely that he had been the target of the attack. The fact of who he was certainly made it likely that the guard wanted to make certain he survived; to lose the son of the lord of the city on your watch would have been a dark mark indeed.

The priest seemed amazed by something, enough so that Lisor had to ask what he'd determined while sealing the injury. "Young lord, the cloth around the wound bears the taint of a poison, but there is none in your system, not a trace of it. I can't imagine how you took that wound and do not bear the poison in your blood."

Lisor decided quickly to bring it to a higher authority to find out, ~Lady, someone came to kill me, and they had a poisoned blade, but I bear no poison within my blood. Do you know how that is?~

The warm chakur voice that he remembered in person lapped gently at the edges of his mind, ~Thou have no need to fear poison, Chosen. It is a part of the gift known to thy grandfather as well, to be untouched by any poison after tasting of rebirth. As he could not be poisoned after Tyrmen remade him, it is clear that thou cannot be affected by it either.~

Lisor opened his eyes, grateful for the touch of the Goddess in his mind, even if he had to focus now on the world beyond. "Sir, it appears, according to my own Goddess, that when I was restored, three years past, that I was made immune to any kind of poison. They are instantly burned from my system by the nature of your God."

The priest's eyes widened, as he clearly had not made the connection before as to who he was treating. He knew it now, not only the son of the Lord, but someone whose restoration was as miraculous as his grandfather's was, though for different reasons. "I hadn't thought of that. Forgive me for my confusion," the priest mumbled.

"I didn't know this myself, until I asked it of my Lady. I will need to rest while I regain my strength, though your healing has repaired the damage, as far as I can tell. If the guard is ready, I can speak with him, to find out what has been ascertained about my deceased attacker."

The guard stepped forward, the now-cleaned dagger offered hilt-first to Lisor. The Calasti noble accepted the blade and sheathed it carefully. "Thank you, goodsir. I have no idea why the man attacked me, so perhaps you, or whoever relieved you at the site of the attack, have something to tell me why I was suddenly attacked. I had no idea to even expect danger, just a sense of uneasiness that may have saved my life."

"Not much from what I could see, but you needed healing quickly. The only thing that I saw interesting about him, though, I grabbed." He pulled out a small leather cord with a strange gemstone hung from it. The gemstone was nothing fancy, a piece of agate, likely enough. But it was carved in the shape of a theatre mask. Lisor took the pendant in his hand for a moment, questing to see if he could determine the provenance of this token.

It didn't take him long to realize that it had come from the Jester. As he realized that, things began to slip into place again. The last words that Lisor had heard in the heavens before Mikedel returned him to the mortal plane were the threat by the Jester to end his life, and his Lady's response that the Jester would have to work through intermediaries. It would seem that the dread god had finally acquired those. "That's a token of the Jester's. It has to be. So, he's decided to start trying to fulfill his promise. This man was sent by the sixth member of the godly council, the Jester. Search him for anything that might be dangerous, but the goods and coin that this man had should be spread among the poor. I don't need the coin, though it is mine by right. I'll present the story to my father myself, and commend you for your quick response, Erran, right?"

The guard seemed surprised to see that Lisor recalled who he was, and nodded eager agreement. Lisor leaned back against the pillows of the bed. "I need to rest, though I will mend quickly enough. I'll remember to cry your good work to my father." He didn't wait to see if the guard accepted the dismissal. He needed something else far more than he needed to know that the guard had gone. His mind was still reeling from what he'd done, and he needed to find some sense of balance before he faced his father.

~Lady, it would seem that the Jester has taken you at your word. The man who died trying to kill me served him, and would have succeeded had I been a bit slower. But it brings me no peace to know that he is dead, at my hand.~

There was a sense of comfort, almost like a hand running along his body, bringing comfort and ease to his being. But it did not ease his heart or mind. He could still see the man's look of shock as he died. His heart surged with guilt, and he wondered if this was even a little like how Arandel had faced killing him, three years past. It probably wasn't as personal as what his brother had experienced, but it could possibly feel similarly.

~Thou knew, when thou accepted my tokens, that the time would likely come when thou would have to take a life. And yet it disconcerts thee greatly.~

Lisor managed a weak smile, though he knew he wasn't in the physical presence of his Lady. He knew she'd sense it anyway. ~I did not wish to kill him. I would have let him live, even pressured Father to allow him to live, if he hadn't forced the issue. I do not feel clean, and I don't entirely understand why.~

~Thou have a high opinion of life. It is not surprising, considering that one of those who raised thee was a healer, and thy grandmother likewise held the gift of Tyrmen's heritage. Thou did as I would have thee do, in ridding the world of one who would strike against my own. There is no wrong in what thou did, saving thyself from thy attacker, even at the cost of his life.~

Lisor frowned. ~Does it always feel like this, dealing death?~

There was a hint of amusement to the Goddess' voice as she answered him. ~For those who serve me, yes, it feels much like that no matter how often one must cut life threads. I would not choose any who did not have that grasp of nobility within them to serve me. It will burn at thy soul, and thou will seek to expiate the deaths that thou must deal. And there is a way to do so, whether thou realize it yet or not. Thou have already started on that path. For each death that must be dealt, more good must be done to aid those who are oppressed. I have looked at the thread that thou cut short, and know that there were none who depended upon him. Had there been such, I could have granted thee an easy way to remedy the ill in thy soul, for offering mercy to those who depended upon him would have given thee more surety of thy goodness.~

Lisor managed a smile at that. His Goddess was correct. He would heal by doing things that promoted life, promoted a better way of living. He just needed to find a way to make each death dealt bring about some good, for more than just himself. ~Thank you, Lady. Your words inspire me, as always. I will doubtless need this knowledge for years to come.~

There was a feeling of warmth that came from his connection with the Goddess. He knew that somehow, even with him failing to avoid taking a life, he had not disappointed her. If anything, she seemed pleased with what he was doing. He focused on his breath until he found his strength had recovered enough for him to return home. Yes, he would see to it that the guards that had helped him were rewarded, and the priest as well. Then he'd go out to the poorer quarters of the city and see what good he could do over the next few days. Perhaps he could even keep others from following the Jester by showing them what benefits could be gained by other service. He doubted he'd have that much effect, but it was something to try.