

Slowly the hall before them cleared. Two torches was all the two young men were carrying. Breathing heavily through the fabric of their surgical masks and sweating from the heavy work they made their way shuffling. They had to be careful anyway, because they already encountered four traps. The third man, their partner, had fallen into a pit and luckily appeared just to have broken his leg. He could easily have fallen on a spike, but was lucky. With great effort they had gotten him out. He could not walk anymore, but wanted to wait.

Now three traps later they had seen death often enough. Step by step, the two trudged forth. Through the dust and grit the tiles were hardly distinguishable. Each thread cobweb was carefully avoided, and every crevice explored.

After an hour, the two men arrived at a door. They examined it very thoroughly. There was nothing to look at. He was not locked, but even stranger. It was wooden with emphasis on was. A hearty thump could make it turn to dust. The men were cautious. Slowly, the door handle was pressed down gently and was pushed against. Gently the door gave way, and the handle disappeared into the door.

The man, who tried it, stopped. He stepped back and looked at the whole.

"Maybe we should just push out the hinges so the door comes off as a whole. Then we can step out of the range of possible traps or other trouble."

"Yes, Rob, do that."

The other man stepped aside and stood with his back against the wall.

"Yes, thank you, Fred! I'll sacrifice myself for you!"

Rob went to work. He pushed the first hinge through the door without difficulty. The second took a little more effort but went anyway. Then the door seemingly hung a desperate moment in his old place before with a sweep it fell into the room and there flew apart in dust and pieces.

When the dust had settled a little the room could be explored. It was clearly a vestibule. It was full of bookshelves with the remnants of books. In addition, there was a writing table with parchment, a quill and a metal inkwell. The whole thing was left as if the owner had just gone out. It had a bit of a disconcerting atmosphere. The feeling of arriving at someone's home while it was a tomb and not a house. But it all had decayed where it was left.

Quickly they searched the room, but apart from decayed papers and books nothing that was of any value could be found. So looking Fred found a mechanism in the wall opposite the entrance. A disc of gold appeared from under the dust. There were runes on it and a handle made to rotate it. With a brush Fred cleaned the disk.

"Look here, Rob!"

Rob came over and looked intently at the runes. "I can make nothing of it and you?"

"Nope, nothing." "Well, carefully then."

Fred grabbed the handle and twisted disk left. The disk came free off the wall which began to move. For a moment, the disk lit up blue, but nothing happened. The wall slid aside and revealed a large room full of shining gold and silver, diamonds and rubies and in the middle of the room a throne. The two men were amazed at all this wealth.

"We are rich!! Yahoo!! " Rob jumped around wildly. Fred put the gold disk in his pocket and looked stunned by the light of his torch at the wealth that they had found. His mind took a wild run. He tried to imagine how rich he was. And he thought of the problems they were going to have to haul it all out of here safe and to keep away from all the officials, who would want to take a piece of it.

Thus, gazing at all the two men walked through the room until they are at the throne.

Cautiously they approached the throne. There was a man, or rather the remains of a man. He was dressed in rich clothes. They shone their torch on the corpse.¹

¹ So on me

"Кґesiі!! Ғек :ё ыь ьчэёю !! Үүёёщ | Чшыяґ!" I think they did not expect it. As if struck by lightning they shot back. I lifted my arm to protect my eyes. I may be dead or perhaps not, but that does not mean that I have no feelings.

One tumbled over a mountain crates back and fell. The other turned around and had put a big sprint in. Unfortunately for him, he slipped on some golden coins and he flew with some speed, head first, into the wall. He slacked and slumped to the ground.

Cracking I stood up. That's what happens when you sit a thousand years in the same place. I walked over to the man who on all fours with his back to the ground crawled away from me. I shuffled over to him.

"Үүёёщ! Жёщ Гґяґйү²," I wanted to know. He stared at me wild with fear and seemed too clearly not know what I asked him. He froze knowing he could not get away. "Wwhatt?" He stammered. I tried to ape him. "Wwooadd" It sounded a little Germanic, but not quite. He needed to talk more, otherwise of course I could not learn his language. I grabbed his arm and, well, sometimes you forget something. While I pulled him to his feet, his life began to feed me. I saw his skin tightening. Decrease size. He opened his mouth to scream, but his tongue had no strength, his jaw already had no control. He fell to dust under my grip, making no sound.

"Кґяґй"³ I opened my hand to let the last crumbs slip through my fingers. The other man was still lying quietly on the ground. The new life energy made my body move smoothly. With two big steps I was with him. My body was too hungry to touch someone, but yeah I had to hear someone speak. I looked around to see if I could use something. I looked at the remains of my first victim in centuries. His body was ashes, but the stuff that had hung on his belt, had fallen to the ground. I had been so hungry that even his clothes had to pay for it. That was quite something. The dead man had a metal flask with him. Fine, I could hold that. I twisted the cap off, which felt very strange indeed. He was black and not as hard as metal, but no wood and no leather. Mmmhhh, weird.

I poured the water from the flask on the head of the unconscious man. He came to. "Wwwa?" Hey, that sounded different, but not coherent. I tried a few.

"Wwooadd maaktz doohiier"⁴ He turned around and stared at me puzzled. "What?" He crawled backwards along the wall towards the door. He was quite keen on escaping, but what was I to do. He should and could not escape. I should grab him if he would try.

"Quod anno est?" Perhaps some Latin Thankfully, my reaction ability was back a little. With a quick step forward, I caught his arm. I grabbed him and accidentally squeezed his arm to a pulp. Very annoying for him, but I was not happy. I was rewarded with a bright blue flash and a shock of like a thousand volts. With a bang, I was thrown back. Shit, he had the disk with him.

He vomited, and I had recover too. It had cost me a great deal of new energy. That fucking magicians did a good job. So many centuries had passed and still so powerful. When the stomach contents of the man had reached the ground, he was already moving toward the exit. It took me a little longer.

"Arrare" I called after him first. Then I was mobile again. I ran after him. Maybe I was lucky. He would not think in his blind fear about all the traps that he had to avoid on his way to freedom. I was in a rush, but not too much. He was only ten meters into the hall when he caught the first. Not an immediately fatal, fortunately for him, but nasty. A set of needles of a

² "Idiot, what are you doing here?"

³ "Shit!" Well,

⁴ "It was not really Germanic. That was a bit watered down. I at least wanted to know what they did here. Of course I could already know, but well, maybe they had noble intentions.

porcupine, I lost the species name, but with those little barbs was driven into his leg with great power. Ouch, that's not funny. He was not discouraged, but now aware of the hazards. However, he did not have a very strong ability to concentrate, because next fall was an instant hit and unfortunately somewhat annoying.

Swing! He just had two tenths of a second to realise it went wrong. "Waa ...!"

There went his head. With a bow flew through the air and rolled a few feet or so on. I stopped, a little disappointed, because how was I now to discover the world neatly. While I was thinking about that, I heard in the distance. "Rob!? Fred!?" Are you there yet?" I listened carefully to the words, the sounds and what I thought were the sentence and names. I once tried out the sounds.

"Say, stop messing around! I'm not really lying here for my fun!"

Quietly I walked towards the sound. Carefully avoiding the traps.

"Hey, are you there !?"

I walked quietly to the man lying down. As soon as I saw him I had already seen that his leg was broken and he was not going to flee anywhere. He went pale as a ghost. He was so quiet I just thought he dropped dead on the spot from fear. But no, he just was not able to make a sound. I stopped just before in front of the hole made by the trapdoor. There was a gap of three meters between us. He sat with his back against the wall and his good leg over the edge. I stood at the edge. I observed him calmly. A young man of about twenty-five with curly blonde hair with bright blue eyes and a well-built body looked smart to me. Slowly but surely he seemed to return to reality. He seemed to accept that he, crippled, was at my, the monster, mercy.

"Are they dead?" He asked softly. I focused and took the new sounds in me. I suspected that he inquired about his buddies.

"Mortuus." I nodded as I said it. "Alia jacta est"⁵ I shrugged my shoulders. A spark of recognition. "Latin, you speak Latin? Quod es?" What is was. What kind of question was that supposed to be. "Ego homo," I growled angry. Human of course. How stupid could you be. He was startled from my fury. "Parlare nun ... eh. Lateihn " Let's just hope he understands me.

"Why don't you want me to talk Latin. Not that I'm good at it, but still, you speak it." "I studio what lingua parles"⁶ "Ah, okay, I have a dictionary Latin-English with me." The young man reached into his pocket and pulled out a small booklet. I looked intently into his eyes. I would have had my hand around his neck in one second if he would have grabbed a weapon. So he picked up the book and threw it to me. I picked it up and opened it. What a thin paper and clear letters. Latin neatly written in angular letters; not nearly as beautiful as the monks did earlier, but very clear. I read the first page and the second and within a minute had consumed the book, literally and figuratively. As dust it fell out of my hands.

"Now I should have learned to make sentences. You talk!" "Have you already read and remembered everything?" "Yes, I learn quickly. What is English? The sound is Germanic."

"Yes, it is a Germanic language. England lies where the Celts lived. How old are you, anyway?" The fear for his life crept back into the face of the young man. He seemed to suddenly realize what kind of danger he was in. In his enthusiasm he had forgotten all about it. I did, however, not want to let the moment pass and continued to talk to regain the enthusiasm.

⁵ Yeah, I know that Caesar used a bit different, but I thought it was one of his better one-liners.

⁶ Well, a bit of a mess. I could start again in all kinds of old forgotten language but I guess I should have even less with range.

"The land of the Picts" I also began to master the sound and understood that the verbs were different in the sense than in Latin. How old I was. How many years after the assassination of Caesar were we now?

"How long is Caesar already dead?"

"Uh, let me see 2059 years or so"

"I was already 4000 years or something old then." I grinned a dead grin. I made a sentence like him. "So more than 6000 years." Pooh that was indeed a long time and this young man was only 25, I thought.

The young man had to think about it. With difficulty he shifted. Oh yes, his leg was broken. He could better watch out. He could have been pierced easily. I glanced into the depths. Wow, that looked nasty. What should I do? Take him, suck or throw into the pit. It all had advantages and disadvantages. I thought about it for a moment.

"You can probably use a guide," remarked the young man a little later. Ah, a clever young man! He might just have saved his life. You never know how it can go with monsters like me.

"Yes, that's useful." "I can't walk. How do we get out of here?" "I have something for that." I walked quietly back to my tomb⁷. There I looked in a hidden compartment of the throne for some concoctions that I have made in the time that I still was a respected alchemist. Some searching and I found Medusa's blood, Siren's song and bronze skin. I also filled a bag with money. That wouldn't have changed. Money makes people move.

I would probably have a problem, because those coins with the image of King Trigranes II would most likely not be used anymore. Then we had to explain how we came by them. That was in the time of Caesar also the case.

"Here I have something that can help you. It has a bit of a nasty taste and you will feel equally weird, but it will pass. What's your name by the way, young man?"

He looked up. "My name is Ronni. What is it?" "A medicine that I made, when I lived in the kingdom of Xerxes. It was popular to give a mythological name to your remedies⁸. It is Medusa's blood and helps well against fractures and the like. Drink up."

I threw the potion to Ronni. He took the cap off the bottle and grimaced.

"It stinks! Is it still alright?" I nodded and watched. Ronnie took a sip, not knowing what else he could do and waited. One minute he remained silent, but when he cried suddenly. He had to hold himself not to disappear into the pit. He was blinded by the extreme pain that went through his body, but otherwise he could see the wound on his leg disappear and even see his leg bent straight again. After nearly five minutes insufferable pain it stopped just as suddenly as it had come.

"Wha .. what was that?" Ronni stammered. "Better, with a little updating⁹." I shrugged my shoulders. "You should have told me?" "You'd taken it then? I do not think so."

Yes, he didn't think so either. He looked at me angry, but then looked at his leg and like snow in the sun the anger went away. A whole leg does wonders.

"Holy shit!!!" Ronni jumped up and looked at his leg again.

I jumped over pit and walked towards the exit. "Uh, sir? Are we going away?" I stopped and turned around. "Yes? Why?" "And my mates then?" "What about them? Do you want to drag him? It does not seem like such a cool idea. We just close the whole thing down and come back again later." "How do I explain that we arrived with the three of us and I came back alone?" "To whom do you have to explain that? To your lord and master? Or do you have a patron who paid for your journey?" "No, the friends of the two, their families and their

⁷ I'd rather say my room, but yes, it's obviously a tomb.

⁸ Yes, give fancy names, but also fun side effects.

⁹ And not the only one, but it makes you around.

employers, they expect them back. Just people who know that we have undertaken this trip."
"Yes, I understand."

I just kept walking. I didn't see the problem, but yes, some changes would likely have occurred in the family relationships. I thought I'd give some money to the paterfamilias for their loss and settle the affairs that way, but apparently that did not work like that anymore. "I suppose you'll get an idea before we get back to your homeland. How many months is it traveling? England, the land of the Picts, did you say? We are in Armenia. So do the math. That will take about three months or not?" "Uh, no, not really, not three months, but three days."

Now I had to stand still for a moment to process this. How could a magician who travels so quickly be such a nitwit? I turned around and looked at him questioningly. "How can you travel so fast?" He grinned and looked me for the first time in the eye. That was a little mistake on his part. He was again reminded of the fact that I was a monster.

"Uh, how are we going to travel when you look like that?" He was smart. "Boy, when you worry about your magic tricks, I'll worry about mine."

I walked away, and he followed. We left my shelter where I had been sitting for so long. I stepped briskly down the hallway and into the light. A small mistake of mine. I had forgotten that I still had no working eyelids. Well, that'll get fixed again some way. After seeing stars for a few minutes I could continue. Ronni walked past me and stood by the edge of the platter waiting for me. There was a rope over the edge, which was fastened with a strange kind of pen, which was beaten into the rock itself. Ronni stepped into a kind of underpants made of rope and straps and fastened it on to the rope, that hanging over the edge.

"What are you doing?" "I strap myself onto the rope for abseiling." "Can't you just hold the rope." Ronni looked with a look that said "fossil" and began his descent. I looked down over the edge and followed his descent. I saw two harnesses ready and briefly considered using it, but I was too proud to use his cowards material. I grabbed the rope with both hands and jumped over the edge. I made the same leaps and did everything the same, but had no gloves on.¹⁰

I was not down or my recent onset problem had gotten a solution.

"Put your hands up!" Shouted a man with a long black beard as he gestured with an object to me. Another man held Ronni and pushed a metal thing against his head. I looked a bit surprised at the¹¹ men, who were clearly unpleasantly surprised by my appearance. However, they were determined to do what they wanted to do.

"Do as they say!" Ronni called to me. "And that is?" "You have to put your hands up in the air!" "Why?" "Otherwise they'll shoot you!" Ah, those were weapons. A bit strange weapons, though. I took a step forward. The man who had been screaming, roared something again. Threateningly the other man pulled with his thumb a stick at the back of his weapon backward. It would mean something, but I could not imagine why I had to be afraid of it. Quickly I took two steps forward and with it set all kinds of things in motion. The loudmouth used his weapon. A bang and something shot through my body. If I would have been alive, I would have suffered from it, but, well, now it made no difference. I already had seized the man before he could use his weapon again. He was killed quickly and repaired therewith the damage he had inflicted. The other man was clearly not amused and used his weapon on Ronni, who did not enjoy that. Ronni was knocked over and lay still. The man realized that he had lost his shield and used his weapon on me. That was very interesting. It were small

¹⁰ They going to see that. Those skin flaps, which are hanging on, but it did not matter to me.

¹¹ I did understand them, of course, but they waved things that meant nothing to me. You can't blame me for my surprise.

bullets, such as are used in a catapult. Which of course also just went through me or got stuck, but did not stop my very rapid progress. The man wanted to even turn around to run away, but of course did not get that far.

Ten minutes later Ronni came to again. There was blood on the side of his head.¹² He felt the wound and felt it again. Then he moved his fingers together. He pulled the bullet out of the wound. The bullet was flattened. Surprised, he looked at it and then at me. I shrugged my shoulders.

"A small side effect of the drink. Your bones are turned into marble, but it does heal all wounds and fractures."

He looked at the bullet, then back at me. "Wha ..?" "Incidentally you change completely in marble, slowly but surely, unless I avoid it. Great isn't?" Delighted, I smiled at him, which now also looked as though I was enjoying myself.¹³

A bit unsteadily he stood up. He looked around, but saw only the weapons. The bodies with their clothes naturally perished when I took their energy. "You just tricked me!! I thought I would just be healed, but you killed anyway!! Bastard!!" Staggering he came to me and it was clear that he wanted to give me a blow.

"You'd better not touch me! You will not like it." Well, did he listen? No room for that. He lashed out and when his fist hit me, the sparks jumped off. His skin shriveled and laid bare his bones. Shouting, he withdrew his hand. Bewildered, he looked at the result of his anger. A marble skeleton's hand had become exposed.

"AAAAA!!" Holding his hand at the wrist he collapsed crying and whimpering on his knees.

"I warned you, didn't I. If you want to get out of here alive, you'll have to accept some things. Your life, but also your death are no longer yours. I own it and it lasts as long as I want!"

I had become a bit annoyed by the stubbornness of this young man. How could an intelligent man be so stupid? I leaned over and hissed in his ear. "Remember that! Mine!"

I straightened and studied the two weapons. One had a wooden handle, and the other was partially made of metal with a handle of that weird stuff. Maybe I could hold it. I picked it up and examined it. It smelled of fire. Mmhh, something was burned and so made the bullet fly forward. Probably something like Greek fire. Gee, funny.

"Come on. We go."

2

I could tell you about the rest of our trip and how I've dined on some rebels as the men were called. How I first started looking for our horses and then for a carriage which did not use animals but a motor. How we avoided all kinds of guards and how I slowly but surely became a bit smarter about the current world. Still a lot had happened, and I actually had not heard much. Of course I missed some fifteen hundred years. I had learned a lot about the world before that. I had read a library and even lived a bit, but because I accidentally locked myself behind that seal and had entered my torpor, I had missed the time in between altogether. I was getting in the three hours; we had to drive to get to Tbilisi, the capital of a country called Georgia, reasonably informed about the recent local history with of course some trips to other things.

¹² He must have a headache.

¹³ Just a pity that he did not enjoy himself, but, hey, you can't have everything.

Once in a hotel, as a tavern is now called, we had to attend over a number of problems. There was in this new age stuff called identity papers, which were required to go from country to country. I had of course none, but I would need them. My good friend Ronni was an absolutely ignorant and had no idea where he should be looking. In contrast, I was not even sure if this city already existed when I last explored these parts. I knew on the other hand where thugs gather and so trusted on my gut feeling.

It was not long before I came across a pub where I later certainly would find someone. But I had to make sure I spoke their language. I searched for something that I could recognize as a trader of books. It took me a short while to find a book trader with a large building at his disposal with large windows and lots of light.

I gazed at the number of books and the quality of those books. Now it was just a matter of finding a dictionary. After an hour I had a Georgian-English dictionary. So, just read fast and then quickly leave, because the book would not survive.

I could unseen read the book and lose the dust in a corner. Quietly and calmly I walked out of the shop again, but I had done something wrong. An alarm went off. Strange pillars next to the exit began to glow and make a dreadful noise. I stopped to look at the things and then saw men in what appeared to be an uniform come running. Not a good idea. I just had to make myself scarce. I wanted to do so, when one came in from the front. I hadn't seen him, but he had apparently been outside. He grabbed me by my arm, which he regretted instantly. His plan was his salvation though, because he had thought to turn my arm behind my back. Due to the rotating movement he made, he himself broke his wrist off, which had become brittle. He escaped certain death.

I ran away quickly using the total confusion that was created when the man fell over without a hand and his colleagues saw the result of his attempt to stop me. I ran very fast and skipped into the first alley. I ran into a tramp

who I grabbed not to fall. He cried out. I was a bit startled and didn't let him go. Quickly he stopped screaming, as he fell to dust.

Back in the alley, I stood for a moment, just pull myself together. I had realized that I still did not know very much about this world. I had to be on my guard. I could not afford to stand out too much. They would all do everything to catch me and even if they would fail a long time, I could not catch a break anymore. I did of course not want that.