The Crimson Dirks, v9

The Crimson Dirks
Book Nine

by

Gathers-the-Coin

Myra had forgotten which heist was her favorite. Perhaps it was the time they stole a wagon's worth of silks from the desert palaces of Dune. Maybe it was when they burrowed a tunnel into the warehouse of the East Empire Company, siphoning crate after crate while the wardens stood mindlessly at the door. Or it could be she preferred the more violent raids, like the sacking of the Argonian supply caravans, or the attacks on cargo ships leaving the Imperial City waterfront.

Or perhaps if she looked back far enough, her fondest memories would find her in the streets of Balmora, robbing travelers at knifepoint. For some reason it was this version of her, this long forgotten stranger, that seemed the most vivid now. Gone was the refined, thoughtful countenance of a leader, and in its place a hungry, ash-hewn child who had far more courage than sense. And if she closed her eyes, she could still feel the smooth, polished surface of the ruby the noble dropped in her palm, and how it felt like nothing of this world.

Yet it was not the price or the feel, but the color of the ruby that she remembered most; the blades of crimson burned into the glass, like the fire of the Red Mountain.

"Why do you think it is," she asked Aesrael, "that our thoughts turn to the past when are lives are so close to death?"

"I suppose because it's pointless for a dead man to look forward," replied the bandit, his Altmer frame filling the breadth of her doorway, "but I take it you didn't summon me to talk about old times."

"Ehlhiel says the city guard knows about the hideout. They plan to raid the place in

three days."

"So they will," Aesrael replied, his face unflinching, "What of the spoils?"

"We can't take it with us," Tyra lamented, "but I'll be damned if I let them have it. We give what we can to the beggars, and toss the rest into the bay before we leave."

"As you wish," said the High Elf, "and where will you go?"

"Our best chance is north," Tyra said, tracing her dagger up the map, "The Jarls are fractured. It's only a matter of time before the whole province is at war. But we'll have to move in small groups, and find our own way once we cross the border. No contact."

Tyra knew Aesrael would take to the news better than the rest. While Bjormund, Skjol, and Peladius were the muscle, they always made an effort to bond with the group. The High Elf, on the other hand, never felt at ease with the other bandits. If this were any other business, perhaps she would've tried to reach him, but tenderness was not a virtue for killers and thieves.

Aesrael nodded and took his leave, leaving Tyra alone in the quiet. If this exchange taught her anything, she still needed a moment before telling the others. She had always been an expert at masking her emotions, but the sadness wore plainly on her face. Perhaps this situation called for that girl from Balmora, and not the weary woman who sat in her stead.

Steeling herself, Tyra placed the dirk and the ruby in her pouch and stepped away from the map. They would head for the border tomorrow, leaving behind much of their past, but the future still unwritten.

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