

# Flash-fiction-a-day week 1

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## The Current Situation

“So, Cap, what do you think of the current situation?”

Jenyr was getting drunk, and was only somewhat certain that he had been paying attention. He was pretty certain he had heard the lieutenant’s question correctly. Knowing the question itself wasn’t terribly helpful; he hadn’t really been paying attention to what “the current situation” could possibly refer to.

But in the end, did it really matter at all? The Situation was...

He focused. He found it somehow remarkable that he *realised* he was no longer staring at the back wall of the tavern. He blinked and, for some reason, had a clear view of what was going on – sometimes he surprised himself when he was drunk. He *realised*, with alarming clarity, that he was sitting in the tavern with fellow guardsmen.

What was he doing here? It took some time for his brain to catch up with things. He had been patrolling the streets with a group of his men, and in the end of their shift, they had popped in this tavern for a bit to eat. And drink. Especially drink.

So what was going on? The clock in the corner – oh, this was a classy place – was ticking along and said it was moments past Evenbreak. Jenyr slowly woke up to realise he was in the Old Cellar. Yes, Bragen the Stout’s place. The basement windows, with their curious windows, were a big hint. Years ago, he had wondered about the thick glass tiles on the side of the street above, and had been curious about what was under the tiles. Memories...

He looked around, squinted through the blur. The tavern was relatively quiet, but the day was only now coming to an end. More people were coming in all the time. Someone – Bragen himself, probably, Jenyr wasn’t sure – was behind the counter, apparently readying another round for Jenyr’s men – or perhaps that other large group of people in the other corner. They seemed to have fun. Bragen seemed to be happy. Everyone was having fun.

And today, he had been patrolling. Everywhere he went with his men, the people had behaved themselves. Many were happy and even cheerful. Even the pickpocket they had arrested was very civil about the whole affair.

And that was not just that afternoon. The week had gone without any incidents at all.

No bad news from the countryside. No news, at all, that would have indicated some local lord had gone crazy. No news of crazy wizards kidnapping people for vile experiments. Just shipments of milk, grain and produce. No wars brewing; the Tachur fleet had not been seen and no corpses of spies hanged from the palace walls.

Life was good. Well, a bit uneventful, not really boring – but basically *good*. If the situation was this, what really could be said about it? It was hard to explain all this. . . and how come that lieutenant was sober enough to ask him any smart questions, anyway?

“Damn if I know”, Jenyr said.

## **The Little Box of Horrors**

“You know, I really hate bothering you with this thing, but I’m in a bit of a bind.” Grim Forsyn was apparently being his usual apologetic self. “My wife is really mad, but I hope she’ll be calm again if the damage is undone.”

“What damage?” Faira Ativel smiled. “I’m sure she’s just fine by now, *if* it’s really just about some mundane item and not the family jewels she needs for the evening ball.” She then looked at the box again. “And even so, she has the tendency to apologise later if she gets irate in a hurry. You’re sure there’s no key?”

“Well, my brother has a key, but he’s out of the town – with his keyring, I’m sure. Why do you ask? And could you *really* get it open before we have to leave for the ball?”

“This is a completely new lock type, and I’ll probably get a giant big headache, too, if I have to do this in hurry. No promises, but I will try.” Faira brought the lantern closer and squinted; the lock was fine and the keyhole small, so she couldn’t see much with or without the light. She sighed. “You’re right, it’d be shame to damage such a fine antique jewel box, but then again, installing a brand new lock on it probably won’t increase its value either. . .”

“Well, that too was my brother’s idea – he said it was too hard to find a fifty-year-old lock, and that this new one was safer anyway. He has no respect for beautiful old items, I’m afraid. . .”

“Ouch!” Faira cried.

“What now?”

“I just squished my fingers. A crowded situation. Tiny little lock on a tiny little box. I hate doing this. . .”

“I’m terribly sorry, I only asked because my wife. . .”

“Yep,” Faira said with a sigh, “I know. It’s all right. I suppose I just have too many fingers.” She grinned. “And the reason I still have them all is that I’ve been pretty careful. If you had taken this thing to some thief with fewer fingers, they might have had easier time opening this, but they might also be a little bit less careful. By the time those people actually *do* learn to be careful, they usually don’t have any fingers left *at all*. I just have to not think about this and go with the feeling.” She grinned again. “There you go! One unlocked jewel box.”

“Thank you!” Grim said, and smiled widely as he took the box. He opened it, took a shiny object from the box, and held it before Faira. “This is really amazing. A two-pronged implement that makes eating food a little bit less messy. I hear they’re the latest craze among the upper-class folk.”

“You’re a bit behind the times, you know”, Faira said and sighed. Maybe it was the time to rethink her policy of not asking too many direct questions; it was clear the indirect questions didn’t always work that well. “Oh well, at least this time I didn’t have to risk my *life* for retrieving a fork – I just risked my fingers. . .”

## Things Fix Themselves, They Do

“Don’t *scream* in my *ears*, man, I’m not deaf. And I could take some more coffee, thank you, but not right away. Oh gods. . .” Bert leaned back, closed his eyes, and looked more horrible than usual with his lower lip hanging low. Firt guessed this was one of those weirder days.

“All right then. All I’m saying we *probably* should get ready.”

“Ready for what?”

“Orcs, they’re coming. You know, I wouldn’t shout about orcs if orcs weren’t coming this way, you know?”

“Ye gods, this is stupid.” Bert groaned as he got up and tilted his head, stretched with an audible snap – Firt didn’t find the habit very pleasant – and calmly went back to sit by the verandah table. “Bah, orcs. . .” he said, as he reached forth lazily to take his coffee mug. He poured some of the night-black drink in it. “So what do you know of the orcs?”

“Well, there’s one of them running right at us!”

“Really, now. You’ve been screaming about that for a few moments already. I suppose it’s coming across the field.” Bert’s gaze was too blurry to see what was happening in the distance, but he was in the mood for guessing things.

“Right on! Across the field!”

“Waving sword and stuff.”

“Waving sword, yeah!”

“And not having any problems running this way, no.” The coffee *did* help; perhaps Bert would actually wake up properly this fine day. . .

“And I take it we should prepare for some sort of battle now?”

“Yeah! I mean, it’s coming this way. . .”

“ . . . very fast?”

“Well, it is stumbling a bit every now and then – I guess it’s difficult to run on a wheat field and all – or maybe it thinks we haven’t seen it yet and it thinks it’s some sort of clever way to approach. . .”

“Approaching really fast. In middle of the field. Sword raised.”

“Yep.”

Bert hesitated. “Like, now. This morning.”

“Yep.”

A terrifying noise.

“Oh, I see.” Firt grinned. Then he sighed, sat down and enjoyed the moment: Drinking morning coffee on a country manor’s verandah, having a certain feeling that he wouldn’t need to work until at least the afternoon, the distant fog up in the far-away hills, and the beautifully humid air just before a summer lightning storm.

## A Brief Lupine Encounter

“Well, *that* was odd.” Frelvelthan blinked and tried to keep his mind straight as the last bits of the magical forces dissipated.

“Hmm.” Thelivna seemed confused and looked around, not suffering as much from dizziness than her husband. “This was not exactly what I had in mind.”

“Yes, *if* you want to use a light expression. Remember what I was just saying about teleportation being risky? I’m lucky nothing worse happened. I would have rather walked.”

“Now, now.” Thelivna sighed. “Let’s not argue about this.” What is done is done.” She bowed her head in shame. “I promise to be a little bit more careful. You’re right, we could have ended up in a terrible accident.”

“Ah, it’s nothing. Let’s not worry about the past.” Frelvelthan smiled. “A nice day in the woods, and it’s not even raining!”

“Right!” Thelivna smiled widely, and Frelvelthan was happy that she could rediscover her cheerfulness as easily as usual. “So – we have to figure out where we are and how to get back home”, Thelivna said.

Frelvelthan gathered up himself – and his wits – and looked around. “We’re probably in northern woods somewhere. That looks like the Fangs—“ he pointed to the eastern mountains, “—and that there is Thonen-I’oten’s Peak. We might as

well walk. The road isn't far away, after all, and I'm sure someone with a cart will take us with them to Frathergren, and from there, it's an easy to get to Nothross."

"Oh! What's going on?" Thelivna stood still, suddenly worried. She was about to panic, but controlled herself well and looked around.

"I don't know. It seems like some sort of beast is heading this way." Frevelthan was a little bit worried to stay here without any weapons at all. But this creature luckily didn't seem harmful – at least it didn't seem harmful yet.

A lupine creature appeared from behind the trees. It streaked across the air, frolicked among the trees, rolled about as it flew, floating several feet above the brushes. It made no sound at all, but the two elves easily noticed it anyway due to the way it flowed through the magical field. Even if it had not been seen by folk attuned to magic, the creature was, either way, simply too cute to go unnoticed.

The creature flew to face Frevelthan, and an expression that seemed to indicate nothing but sheer happiness spread on its face. The creature floated before them and wagged its tail. It was all the creature had: a wolf's head and a wolf's tail.

"Oh!" Frevelthan gasped. "I have not seen these creatures for a long time. It is good to know they have not disappeared!"

The wolfiloid smiled and sped back the way it came, disappearing in the woods and left the two elves with a happy memory.

## **The Fall of the Supper Cauldron**

"Ivagn!"

The wizard's assistant lumbered up the winding narrow stairway, hunched under the enormous load, trying to not trip over his mismatched ankles as he strode forth in a wobbly course; his family's reputation of unending, unquestioning, unrelenting servitude always foremost in his mind as he humbly brought the celeries to his justifiably irate Master.

"IVAGN!"

The door groaned ominously as Ivagn stepped in his Master's lair. Distant eldritch flickering from the droopy candles on the rusty chandelier above lit his hideous form as he dropped the celeries, the very best, on the Dinner Table of the Eternal Coven.

"IVAAAAGN!"

Ivagn regarded his master with his timid haste. "Yes, Master?" he said, with a quiet snort. The storm lit the room in this very dead of the night, the tall arched windows acting as the searing portals of illumination for the service of the Thunder God.

The balding skinny magician in a black robe looked over his shoulder as he struggled to move the cauldron back in its proper position on the dais. "Catch the

wolfiloid! It's ruining everything!"

"Yes, Master", Ivagn said. The servant lumbered to the bookcase, and removed the ancient volume on the very edge of the bottom row. He took a good grip and pulled the shelf forth, careful not to disturb the rest of the books on the shelf. From behind the shelf, he extracted a fishing net with an old and battered wooden frame. He smiled as he held the net aloft; the device, with its ancient, thick, ragged strands, was illuminated by the nightly storm, casting a spine-chilling shadow on the tapestry-covered stone walls of the cathedral-like workroom.

The magician struggled with the cauldron, and finally managed to shove it, with all his corporeal might, back to its well-worn indentation. The necromancer heaved, then cast his gaze upward with contempt, *utter* contempt, in his gaze; but also *kind* contempt, reserved only for most worthy adversaries. He stumbled on the opened small pig cages; he did not know whose idea it was to put pigs in cages anyway – surely not his. He threw down the sack of potatoes that he, until a mere moment ago, was afraid to spend the rest of his inconvenient life with. The contents of this now very nostalgic sack were, no doubt, going to be his sole supper tonight. . . along with the celeries. He considered drawing his sacrificial knife and screaming, to whatever gods there were listening, an oath of revenge, but knew in his heart the creature's mischief could be easily forgiven.

The floating creature, consisting of a wolf's head and tail, smiled cheerfully as Ivagn climbed up the stairs. Then the wolfiloid flew playfully around the rotund servant and sped out of the small window far above, to the rain, night and freedom.

## **An Attempt to Explain a Myth**

(I'm trying to comment on this mess as best as I can. So this is what poet Blachausius managed to write before his untimely death:)

Hark! – This be the story of Tann's son / Facyr his name, his sign be the Wolf.  
/ Born in the townlet of all Teeth's Clackers / in the most strong-willed land of Grycia.

Esmir, his mother, be gold-smith by trade; / Sparing, this woman, what comes to the riches. / Tacur, his father, be warr'or most fierce / Stern but gentle, and son did he inspire.

(Fascinating – Even though I never asked Facyr what his mother did or where he learned all this gem knowledge, my guess was right. Warning – the following stanzas seem rather crude as of yet:)

Called to learn was he craft of a war-man; / Father's Blade was the Son's Blade also. / Soon did he find himself in those great Blades' halls, / Kicked and bowed, but never was beaten.

Fierce, oh, training! Harsh, oh, was training! / Trained to fight like beast that

he was, he. / Little did like it at all did young Facyr, / But in the end, his reward was certain.

(Facyr said his novicehood in Brave Blades was hard and disciplined but rewarding; He never really called it “harsh” nor he ever mentioned he was *kicked*. Some poetic license at work.)

Meek was the warr’or as he left home-land, / Fighter most fierce, but lacking ambition. / But did he fight and travel most gladly, / Wonders o’ world were truly most great.

Fought like a demon from depths of the Hells / in the Militia, and in the Caravans. / Loved by many and honour’d by trav’lers, / protecting roads, his Land and the Folk.

(Well, most Facyr’s friends seemed to like him, but Facyr himself doesn’t think he was particularly *revered* for his service there – he was just a decent soldier and a good caravan guard. I guess true fame came later on. Poetic license again. . . )

His exploits were many, and widely known be: / Slain was the Grumash, the Band of Horns. / Meet did he Temptress o’ East, and together, / Killed the Horde of Thousand Strong.

(This refers to Cassandra. They did meet briefly in a caravan ambush that did *not* have a thousand orcs; however, they were only “together” in that they happened to be in the same place.)

Toward ye Anchorfall did he then travel, / Guarding the City with Fellow Guards. / Many a craftier criminals, crooks, / did this Lieutenant meet and doom.

(I fancy myself as “crafty” and he did’t catch *me*, should I be offended?)

Fought in the Alleys and scoured the Northlands / came new Rulers and return’d Usurper. / Prove did wits and a capable lead-hand / the hero of North, a brave of Varm.

(This gets a bit cryptic here. Is “lead-hand” even a word?)

## Two Supposed Legends Meet

“Uh. . . hold on a bit, guys.”

Mere moments before, he thought, he was a fearless Lieutenant of the Guard, and now, he clearly had a case of butterflies in the stomach. Facyr Tann waved a bit at the other guards to make his command clearer. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He walked forward, dazed, confused; something that he didn’t expect at all had happened. He almost noticed that he opened the small gate and stepped aboard the coffee house verandah. He walked closer. It really *was* her.

“Did you really fight T’gak, the shadow beast?” he heard one of the youngsters on the other side of the verandah railing say.

“Yes, I did – though I was not sure if I could have done anything about it without the help of my friends”, the woman said.

She was beautiful, Facyr thought – just as beautiful in that day a long time ago. . . He hadn’t forgotten the face, and she was still dressing the same way.

“And the Horde of Thousand Orcs?” another one of the kids said.

“Are you taking of that time when the orcs attacked those two caravans years ago?” The woman laughed. “The bards have exaggerated that one. It was not a thousand-orc horde. And like before, I could not have succeeded nearly so well without the help of a warrior from the other caravan. Speaking of which. . .”

Oh no, Facyr thought. The blond, curly-haired warrior woman in grey tilted her head subtly as he looked Facyr’s way.

Facyr gasped. “C. . . Cassandra?” he said.

“Facyr Tann, in person!” Cassandra said with a gentle smile. “It is a great pleasure to meet you – again. I’ve travelled so far! Children, this is the guard of the other caravan from that supposed thousand-orc horde.”

“Uh-huh”, Facyr said weakly. “It was not thousand orcs, more like a few dozen. It seemed like just an ordinary orc raid to me.” Facyr shrugged, then shivered. This was not exactly the way he expected to meet Cassandra again. . . it almost felt *wrong*.

“But it is such a famous fight? I mean, it’s in that song about you, and in the song about Facyr here. . .” said one of the adults who had assembled to listen.

“Pure coincidence. Someone just noticed that two people had been in a same fight.” Cassandra smiled, and stood up. “Now excuse me, I’ve got to help Lieutenant Tann to further protect the city. At least if it is okay for me to give a hand?”

“Um. . . sure, you can come with us. . .”

“How wonderful! We’ve got a lot to discuss.”

Facyr smiled and swallowed. He had expected that meeting again with the woman of his dreams was going to be very very difficult, especially if he was going to be his shy self, but this. . .

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