

Once it's rolling...

an Avarthrel tale by

Urpo Lankinen

first published

November 8th, 2009

Anchorfall, 14.VII.630 AR

IT WAS AN EARLY HOUR, and it was widely thought that early hours were the time when the City Guard would show its true colours. The last of the party-goers and tavern regulars had been sent home hours ago, and every good citizen was sleeping—except for the finest and bravest of the good citizens, who were to remain ever vigilant.

Two officers were about to find out just what these true colours, in fact, were, in the specific case of the Anchorfall City Guard. The first shift of Upper City Day Guard was supposed to go on duty at dawn-break. Now, as the great brass bell in the clock tower of Bela Harthgrove's Trading Post, a few blocks away, rang six harmonious notes, the late summer's night was still quite dark.

The guardsmen of various ranks arrived to the backyard of Athsterlis guard-house – named after Lieutenant Per Athsterlis, a famed detective who, a century ago, had caught six serial killers, apparently helped to unmask a group of Tachurian spies, and foiled a plot to assassinate the Mayor of Anchorfall. Yet, the assembled guardsmen, often easily inspired and encouraged by legends of old, looked like they couldn't give a damn about where they had been dragged to at such an ungodly hour.

The assembled guards were all united by their discontent and disoriented look, and crankiness over an early wake-up. Most wandered to the backyard with their shoulders sagged, then got a pained grimace as the bright, newly installed gas light ruined their night vision. As their sight returned, their shoulders sagged even more as they saw what kind of task was ahead of them.

Lieutenant Facyr Tann sat on the driver's seat of a carriage that bore the logos of Gadalan's Print-Works on its sides. Most guards present obviously knew their Captain's right-hand man; the skinny and fit young Lieutenant with short sand-brown hair, a battle-hardened Grycian with long mercenary career behind him,

was often a source of inspiration for them, and even when he wasn't particularly talkative, everyone knew how he could organise things. Yet, at this time, he wasn't inspiring anyone: When Lieutenant Tann looked brooding and sour, it was a sign of either bad and exciting things ahead, or unpleasant and boring things ahead. Most of the guards easily concluded the latter was more likely in this case.

On top of the carriage stood the Lieutenant's wife, Sergeant Cassandra Arthailia de Tai. Unlike the Lieutenant, she was actually attempting to cheer people up with her demeanour. She was a statuesque and buxom woman with curly blond hair, and everything in her looks, posture and cheerful smile said she had had a noble upbringing, and a true noblewoman's knack for getting her subjects to forge ahead no matter what; seeing her there, alert and full of courage to face whatever boring things were ahead, did give the guards some of their lost energy back.

The guardsmen also took solace in the fact that both officers carried their swords, were dressed in full plate armour, and most importantly wore their helmets, a rare occurrence among officers; a simple gesture that told the guards that the officers were going to be there with them in the trenches and doing their own part.

"All right, most of the people seem to be here," Cassandra shouted over the crowd's murmur, and looked at the assembled guardsmen. "Listen up! Will you *please* listen to me!"

"Sir!" said sergeant Emmett Emrann; when he had made his way to the front of the crowd, Facyr knew he was here to voice his concerns in his usual way. "Why did we have to wake up at such an ungodly hour? Not that I'm complaining, sir", he said with the most sarcastic grin he could form on his tired face.

"Oh, shut up, Emrann," Facyr said. "Nobody else likes this either. Besides," he said while trying to bring the most officer- and father-like expression to his face and failing somewhat, "sergeant Arthailia here was *just* about to tell you what an *interesting, straightforward and simple* job we have ahead." He then gave a quick smile to Cassandra and said, "Go ahead, Sergeant."

Sergeant Emrann didn't have any of that. "Well, it doesn't look like a bloody emergency to me," he said, frowning and crossing his arms. "Looks like another bloody poster job."

Facyr groaned and picked up two bundles of posters from the wagon, threw them at the loud-mouthed sergeant who barely managed to catch them, and then picked up another sheaf. "A poster job, yes – see?" he said, waving the sheaf of posters around to show it to the crowd and—it quite seemed—sergeant Emrann in particular. "*Anyone* who grumbles will get a nice extra bundle of joy to deal with. Maybe even *a few* extra bundles. Now", Facyr turned to Cassandra, "Go right ahead, Casy."

"Yes, sir!" Cassandra said, smiling a bit to him for forgetting the official titles, then turned to address the crowd. She held one of the bundles of posters in her

hand. “As you may have guessed, we need to spread these posters all around the city to alert the populace of the notorious burglar called The Bone Stealer. It's been a quiet night in Upper City, so this should be easy enough. The Bone Stealer has really struck the nerve with many of the nobles—”

“Yeah, I bet that's true—” said one of the guards, and was interrupted by a well-aimed sheaf of posters, sent forth with Facyr's steady hand—

“—and since they think we've not done adequate job catching this villain—a view which I tend to disagree with—they've ordered the Guard to spread the word.” Cassandra took a small pause and looked at the guards with a reassuring smile. “We are guards. We do more than just guard things. We must not just act; we must think of how our actions, and our presence, is seen. We must make people *feel* more secure. We must make the criminals *feel* that we're going to get them.”

“And that's basically the heart of the matter,” said Facyr. “This is the idea: The nobles are really mad. We're doing all we can, and we've apparently neglected this small part of our job of putting the fear in the minds of the bad guys – or that's what the nobles are saying. I know we've given everything we can, but now we're supposed to make the people feel better by doing what they think will help.” Facyr sighed.

“But we can do this”, Facyr continued. “Let's get this done. So here's what we do! I counted that we have eighteen patrol squads here. That's a nice three patrols per quarter of this district. The sergeants can decide among themselves which quarters they take. Every patrol gets three cans of glue, so that's about one can per pair. We'll divide the posters evenly. Go to your districts, split up in pairs, one carries the posters and one glues them on walls and lamp-posts and whatnot. Try to make sure there's poster in sight everywhere you go. It's as simple as that. Any questions?”

FOG HID THE BOTH ENDS OF THE LOWER CRAM STREET as Trinvnil was making its way above the horizon. The shadows of the houses grew starker and, between them, orange stripes of light bloomed across the street where the sun shone over the narrow alleys that separated the houses. The street was home to varied folk, mostly well-to-do families of hard-working craftsmen; the majority of the houses were timber-framed and built like small keeps with quaint, tiny spires. Here and there, one could see new brick houses, often bearing the business sign of lens-makers, architects or even a scissor-maker – Ajhedan's Safe Blades prided itself as a company that made the city famous, but most people were surprised to find the headquarters here, in middle of unremarkable residential area.

Many of the fences along the street already had posters of various kinds and colours, some faded, some fresh. As Facyr and Cassandra walked down the street,

with Facyr handling the brush and paste bucket and Cassandra carrying the sheaf of posters, Facyr looked for good spots to make their posters stand out from among the others.

Their progress was slow due to many kinds of resistance, but mostly, a surprising number of people wanted the streets and the fences surrounding their property to be clear of posters.

Many, predictably, did not bring that point up very delicately.

“Sir”, Facyr said to a red-robed plains elf who had stormed out of his house a moment ago. “the city ordinances specifically allow the Guard to—”

“The city ordinances tell that I can tell people to post no bills on my own fences”, the elf said.

“—*specifically* say that the Crown officials can post notices on private property, with or without any notices to the contrary”, Facyr continued.

“Sir”, Cassandra said, “we are concerned of the public image as much as all citizens, and while we intend the posters to be seen, we also try to make them as discreet as possible.” She pointed at the clash of colours on the poster-covered wall across the street. “We don't try to not cause that sort of things. People need to see the posters. They can't see them in middle of ugliness.”

“It is not just a question of aesthetics”, the elf said. “It is a business issue. A simple business issue.”

Facyr sighed, bowed his head and raised his hands. “All right, sir, calm down. I'm sure we can come up with a solution.”

“I agree, Lieutenant, sir”, Cassandra said. “Sir, do you have any specific good reason why the fence should be left clear? If I remember correctly, one can apply for exemptions...”

“Right!” Facyr said, quickly seeing where Cassandra was aiming. “Exemptions! Sir, if you can give us a good reason not to post these things on the fence, and then file the appropriate paperwork later on *at your own pace*, perhaps we can make an exception right here and now!”

“Yes!” Cassandra said. “In advance of an official decision by the Commander of the Watch!”

The elf smiled. “Well, my good Guards, this is my alchemy shop. As of last month, I manufacture and sell a rather potent solvent, a product of my recent endeavours. Perhaps you have even heard of my nascent product line already – Ghathaleth's Gone-be-Glue? Now, it wouldn't look very good if the fences around my shop were full of poster shreds, as you can imagine.”

“I see!” Cassandra said. “It definitely seems the City Guard's actions would be hampering lawfully conducted business! I'm sure the Commander can accept that explanation. We will leave your fence alone. Please visit the guardhouse at your own leisure and explain the situation – I'm sure they can help you file the petition.”

“Very well”, the elf said. “I’m glad we understand each other. And pardon me for my outburst. I mean no harm for the Guards, of course.”

“No offence taken. Good day to you, sir!” Facyr said as he and Cassandra walked off.

“**H**ERE’S ANOTHER POSTER”, Cassandra said as she handed the poster to Facyr when the two guards reached the next suitable fence, a stone’s throw away from the troublesome alchemy shop. “So, Facyr, who is this Bone Stealer fellow, really?” she asked. She idly counted the remaining posters; not many remained.

Facyr smiled a bit as he got to the work again. “I haven’t read most of the grimy details”, he said. “Jenyr said he’s just an ordinary burglar who likes to leave a card that says ‘The Bone Stealer was here’. No one’s seen a thing.”

“Have we gotten any help from outside?”

“Nobody has heard of this guy”, Facyr said. As he took another poster from Cassandra, he gave her a honest gaze, enough to tell her that every possible lead that he had been aware of had been taken care of. “I asked about this from Faira, and she swears she has never heard of this guy.”

“Oh, come on now!” Cassandra said. “Couldn’t she be covering for a friend?”

“You may not believe it, but she’s really trying to help us here”, Facyr said with a tinge of bitterness.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Cassandra said with a bit less accusations in her voice, “I trust her on all other things, except—”

Facyr sighed. “And you may not also believe that she doesn’t know every criminal in the city personally. Yeah, I know, she lies like a rug when she covers for her *friends*, but I’m pretty sure I can tell when she’s doing that. If she doesn’t know someone, why and how the hells could she cover for them, anyway?”

Cassandra frowned. “I know Faira is hanging out with the Torch folks all the time these days. Maybe there’s something happening within the Torch. She may know *something* and not tell us anything about what’s going on there!”

As he took another poster from Cassandra, Facyr gave her a grin. “I’m pretty sure the folks in the Order of Torch are just as puzzled as we are, and riddling each other about who this guy is.” Facyr smiled to Cassandra. “Faira also told me there’s thirteen of this kind of thieves in dozen. She said leaving calling cards with poorly-thought-out stage names is a phase most crooks here seem to go through.” Facyr shook his head. “Come to think of it, I think I can list a few cases like this...”

Cassandra sighed. “All right, all right, I think we can trust her on this. If you trust her, I trust her.”

“How many more posters have you got?” Facyr asked.

“This is the last one!” Cassandra said as she handed the last poster to Facyr.

“Oh, great”, Facyr said as he began brushing, somehow managing to leave a nasty crinkle in the poster, and he somehow thought that the crinkle didn't make the relatively featureless and generic sketch any more, or any less, recognisable. “Let's just hope that people in the other end of the street keep their eyes open when they come this way.” He smiled widely as he slapped the last stroke of paste on the poster. “Let's go back to the guardhouse.”

Cassandra smiled to Facyr as he took her hand and they began their journey toward the guardhouse. “So, would you be up to seeing Cassius Boronnius's new play tonight?”

Facyr coughed, took the paste bucket from Cassandra and stuck the brush in it, flipped the lid closed and slung it on his arm. He then smiled widely. “As you know, your father, the King of Aiecaerte, would not approve of you watching such badly written drama.” Facyr gave Cassandra a sly smile.

Cassandra grinned in return. “How about A. W. Igrelas's new opera, then?”

“Maybe. What's it about? Oh, and let's go through this alley here”, he said and pointed to the alley next to them. “Girran Street guardhouse is fairly near.”

“Well, I've heard a few very positive reviews about the opera. It is about long-rooted feuds, patricide and repentance of two border barons of Lesvoltnyr”, Cassandra said. “Come on – it's got wolves in it!”

“That doesn't sound too bad, then”, Facyr said. “All right, let's go see that. But can you get tickets in time?”

“Fredi Worromot always reserves a few seats for friends. Besides, the shows usually never sell out after the first week.”

“All right.” Facyr yawned. “Anything should be good after a hard day's work.”

Cassandra looked around the alley, the rain-soaked wooden fences, piles of trash and the smells of the streets reminding her that what she was supposed to be doing. “Speaking of work... what else do you remember about the Bone Stealer's habits?”

“Well, he supposedly wears green clothes, though I'm not so sure how accurate that is. They just took the statements from some drunkards who happened to be in the back alley behind the house. But if it happened twice in different locations, maybe there's something to it.”

“Anything else?”

“If I recall correctly, the Bone Stealer used...” Facyr stumbled a bit as he just happened to glance at the house across the fence right next to them, and saw what he was just about to describe. “...the yard-side second floor windows. Look at that!” he said, excited as ever when the situation turned dangerous, barely managing to lower his voice.

* * *

THIS TIMBER-FRAMED HOUSE, likely an abode of some well-to-do merchant family, was L-shaped, with its wings facing the streets on both sides. Behind the wings was a yard that was walled with a wooden fence that had seen far better days, and the alley, surrounded by other buildings, was behind the fence. It was obvious why the criminal had chosen this approach: While Facyr and Cassandra could see the second-floor window from the quiet alley, it could not be seen from the street.

“Oh, maybe they're just letting fresh air in”, Cassandra said.

“And climbing out of the window with a sack, just for fun?” Facyr asked as he pushed Cassandra against the fence, retreating with her out of sight. He peered from a crack between the boards of the fence and carefully examined the suspicious character who emerged from within.

The slim man wore a very deep green hood that obscured his face, a dark green tunic and trousers, and leather boots. He carefully lowered the heavy-looking burlap sack he was carrying on the ground with his rope, and then descended it silently. Facyr said nothing, and gave Cassandra a few gestures, pointing to the other end of the alley.

The thief hoisted the sack on his shoulder, and took off toward the gate on the other side of the yard, leaving his rope behind. Facyr grinned; the crook was unaware of the guards so he had an upper hand. “Hold it right there!” Facyr shouted as he ran toward the crook and saw the crook emerged to the street in front of him. The crook gave him a very quick glance, dropped his loot, and made a run for freedom. Already in quick-footed pursuit and not really knowing what *else* to do, Facyr threw the paste bucket at the criminal, who, with quick glances, held remarkable attention toward the events unfolding all around him and managed to dodge the bucket in the nick of time.

For a few seconds, it almost looked like the burglar could make it to the street. As Cassandra emerged from between the gap between the houses in the other end of the alley, to where she had anticipated the burglar would run, she distinctly noted how the burglar's confident smile gave way for a more disappointed grimace. The man tried to dodge Cassandra, but in vain; even he realised that officers of the Anchorfall City Guard were often not that easy to outwit.

Confident to catch the man, Cassandra made a great leap as he passed her, grabbing him from the shoulders in mid-pounce and made a soft landing right on top of him. She grinned triumphantly as she twisted the man's arms behind his back. “Bone Stealer, you're under arrest, in the name of the Regent, under suspicion for breaking in and entering and committing larceny!”

“Aah! Don't hurt me! My arms!” The Bone Stealer screamed. “Yeah, it's me! Just don't hurt me more, guard-lady!”

In seconds, Facyr caught up with Cassandra, and helped her restrain the man as they dragged him upright again. Soon, the docile thief looked at Cassandra

and Facyr with a downright depressed gaze, not making any effort to further embarrass himself as Facyr put iron manacles on him.

Facyr pulled back the man's hood, revealing a young man of maybe fifteen or sixteen years. Facyr was a bit startled to find out that the man looked almost like a slightly younger version of himself; he was slightly skinnier than Facyr at that age, however, and wore face paint – greenish-brown stripes across his cheeks and a vertical stripe on his forehead just above the nose. Facyr grinned, with a few puzzled thoughts running through his mind; the Bone Stealer was possibly born Grycian like himself, and the face paint was like a half-hearted imitation of the tattoos worn by some East Grycian barbarian tribes. What inspired a thief to wear such markings was a bit less clear to him.

“So here's the famous thief who's given my men headaches”, Facyr said.

“I'm really sorry, sir guard-lord”, The Bone Stealer said. “I just... I just did it for fun, that's all. That and a bit of money.”

“Yes, yes, that's what most thieves say. Now, cheer up”, Facyr said to the man and gave him a pat on the shoulder. “Every crook gets caught sooner or later. You were good, but that wasn't enough. You'll just have to stick to honest work from now on, kid.”

For the first time, the Bone Stealer offered Facyr a nervous smile, but he still said nothing.

“So let me get this straight – you admit that you are the Bone Stealer?” Facyr asked.

“Yeah, that's right”, The Bone Stealer said and smiled to Facyr, then turned timid again. “You're not going to hurt me, are you, sir guard-lord?”

“Look, kid, if you just stay nice, then we have no reason to hurt you. I much prefer dealing with criminals who won't fight back. Saves everyone's time.” Facyr smiled. “Now – you're really the Bone Stealer, and not some weird imposter?”

The Bone Stealer gave Facyr another brief smile, this time a bigger one. “I'm the real one!”

Facyr grinned a bit. “So, what the hells kind of nickname is The Bone Stealer, anyway?”

The Bone Stealer smiled nervously and blushed a little bit. “It's 'cause the first thing I stole was my sister's lunch bowl. And little did I notice she had already dined.”

Facyr chuckled. “Right! That explains everything! In a way, anyway. What's your real name?”

“Jactyr Artgann”, The Bone Stealer said. “Everyone calls me Jake. I'm from Vorshopolis.”

“Yeah, I figured you're from eastern Grycia”, Facyr said.

“So, what's going to happen now?” The Bone Stealer asked.

“It's simple”, Cassandra said. “Next, we'll take you to the guardhouse.”

You'll be carted to the prison today, and someday soon, you'll get your day in the court. If you keep cooperating and tell where all the stuff you stole ended up, you may be free again in maybe a year or two. Though that's up to the court to decide."

"Or it could be even less if we actually manage to track down all items you stole", Facyr said. "Though a few items in the reports sort of stuck in my mind..."

The Bone Stealer was stung. "Look," he quickly said, "I know they said I stole a stuffed moose. That's bollocks – begging your pardon, ma'am guard-lady. I know it was that guy's wife's doing. She had two guys cart it to the auction hall and told her husband that it had been stolen by me." He grinned and shook his head. "Though I can't say why anyone would buy the thing. Ugly bugger that didn't even look like a moose, much."

Facyr nodded. "Right. Right. I was wondering how you were supposed to get that through a window." Facyr scratched his head and straightened his helmet. "But let's leave these headaches to the detectives, shall we?"

"NO!" CASSANDRA SHOUTED. "You can't do that! Take it back!"

Not long after the two officers and the suspect started their journey toward the nearest guardhouse, the first drops of possibly the heaviest rain in recent months started to fall.

In the rain, the destination seemed twice as far as they anticipated. The guards found, once again, that their armours were not particularly comfortable in rainy weather. The Bone Stealer's good humour, however, seemed to be coming back as he found himself the one who wasn't inconvenienced by rain; the thief's heavy cloak certainly helped.

"Why, Casy?" Facyr asked. He adjusted his leaking helmet; the rain water, combined with his sweat and the clumsy baggage, made the helmet slip over his eyes. He took the bag from his briefly-appointed helpful assistant and, once again, swung the sack on his back, unhappy that the helmet was once again merrily obstructing his vision a bit.

"Yeah, why?" The Bone Stealer said. "I can carry the sack. It's no big deal!"

"Facyr!" Cassandra shouted. "Do you really want to give the loot back to the suspect? We just got it off him, are you sure you want all this to end up back in his hands?"

"Well, this guy can't really run away, now can he?" Facyr asked.

"Well, no... but if he *could* pull off some strange last-minute trick, handing the loot back to the criminal wouldn't look very good on the report, now would it?" Cassandra said.

"But I won't do a thing, ma'am guard-lady!"

Facyr groaned a bit, swinging the sack to side and quickly pushing the helmet to proper position, then took a little time to make the bag rest a bit more comfortably on his back. Some edges of the plates of his armour was pushing uncomfortably on his side. "I'm sorry about the earlier, Casy. I really need to check the newest official procedures. Yet, I'm still pretty sure you can just hand the loot back to the owner if the suspect is caught red-handed."

"Perhaps, but I'm thinking of what the nobles would be saying if we'd skip on the details at times like this", Cassandra said. "Besides, who knows who really owns all that stuff in the sack – he could have robbed several houses in row..."

"Now you're just being picky, Casy." Facyr chuckled, then sighed. "But I guess you're absolutely right. Better be safe than sorry. Everything by the book, even when my memory of the book is hazy!"

The guards and the Bone Stealer made their way through the rainy streets, cobblestones glittering in the morning's light in the heavy rain. They soon arrived to the guardhouse, and the rest of the arrest procedures seemed uneventful: despite of Cassandra's worries of feigned cooperation and clever last-minute escape attempts, Jactyr Artgann was put to the custody of the guards at the guardhouse, later the same afternoon transported to the Anchorfall Prison, and was checked in as the pre-trial detention prisoner no. 132 of Midsummer 630 AR, without any incident.

AS THE TWO GUARDS STEPPED OUT OF THE GUARDHOUSE, the rain was turning into a little bit of a thunderstorm. Facyr sighed as he stepped in the rain; at least he had gotten rid of the heavy sack.

"Right, what else do we need to do today?" Facyr asked.

"Nothing to do until the noon shift", Cassandra said. "We're supposed to go to sleep after... the posters are..." her voice trailed off. "Now that the Bone Stealer is caught, shouldn't we do something about our guards?"

"What? Eh..." Facyr tried to shake off his tiredness and was silent for a few eyeblinks. Then it dawned to him. "Damn! The posters! What did you tell our patrol again?"

"I told them to meet at the Athsterlis guardhouse at noon. Before that, they're free to do whatever they want."

"Okay. So now we need to tell the guys who are still at the field to stop spreading the posters..."

"Come to think of it, it can be tricky", Cassandra said. "Besides, if they had even half of the speed we had, they're probably almost done by now."

"Lieutenant, sir!" came the bright and clear shout from behind them.

Facyr turned to face Constable Kara Ertinton, from the 2nd patrol, a guard

who was definitely doing her best to advance higher in hierarchy – but right now, her enthusiasm seemed rather out of place.

“Ertinton! What is it?” Facyr asked.

“Sergeant Maxwell told me to tell you that the patrol is done spreading posters, sir!”

“Great! I don't recall ordering Maxwell to report to me once it's done, but that's good to know, anyway!” Facyr said with a slightly mocking tone. “The only problem is that we already have a suspect in custody and spreading the posters is somewhat silly right now!”

“Er... good to hear, sir! I think!” Constable Ertinton said. “Maxwell also said a few people had come forth and said they had seen the guy in a few places yesterday and this morning, sir!”

“A few places? Where?”

“Can't remember exactly, sir, there were so many of them! Elven Quarter, somewhere near the Docks University, and in the park next to the Silverquill End Hospital, at least, sir!”

“All around the city, then...” Facyr said and sighed. “And Maxwell has written all this down, right?”

“I suppose so, sir!”

Facyr squinted, and readjusted his helmet slowly. “Right. Reports and paperwork.” He sighed. “You're supposed to go off duty until noon too, am I right?”

“That's right, sir!”

“Then I won't keep you any longer. Good work, Ertinton. Go get some sleep.”

“I will, sir!” the Constable saluted and ran off.

Facyr had barely time to close his eyes, let his head droop and sigh deep, when he heard another voice. “Excuse me, Lieutenant?” an old lady asked. Facyr opened his eyes and saw an old woman with silvery-grey hair, wearing dark grey and black robes.

“What is it, ma'am?” Facyr asked.

“Lieutenant dear, I think I saw this Bone Stealer fellow that all these posters warned about.”

Facyr sighed. “I see. When and where this happened, ma'am?” he asked, the question rattling out of his mouth really fast. What she was going to say was not important; he just wanted to tell her that the situation had already been taken care of.

“There's no hurry, Lieutenant, there's no hurry”, the woman said patiently. “Just a moment ago, the man was standing in the end of the queue in front of Barnard's fish stall, in the corner of Fireslate Alley and Borgor's Avenue. You know Barnard, he won't let anyone buy anything without some proper haggling...”

“Ma'am”, Facyr asked, “Was there anything *specific* about this man that made you think this was the Bone Stealer?”

“Now, now, young man, do not hurry yourself”, the woman said. “He was wearing a green cloak. And a green hood. With really nice and intricate deep-green bands in the edges. I think he had a thief-like build; he was kind of not very fat and rather slim at the same time, know what I mean?” The old woman smiled. “And while he stood in the queue, he kept looking at Barnard's sign. See? He kept looking at the sign! The sign! I think that's why he's the Bone Stealer.”

“I... don't quite follow, ma'am.”

“But Lieutenant! Barnard's sign has *fish bones* in it! Do you see now, Lieutenant? *Do you see?*” The old woman waved her arms, looking triumphant. “A bone stealer must like bones!”

So we have a suspiciously fancily dressed individual, and a fish merchant with fish bones in the sign and long queues, Facyr thought. “I *see*. Don't worry, ma'am, I'll make sure someone will check that out right away.” But is it a case for the City Guard or the Anchorfall Health and Safety Office, that's another matter... “Come, Casy, we'll need to handle this *right away*...”

Cassandra was slightly surprised as Facyr grabbed her arm and pulled her back inside the guardhouse. As soon as he was out of sight of the concerned old lady, Facyr stumbled forward, and sighed hard as he slumped on the bench in the lobby, right next to some unruly and unshaven—however, due to Facyr's actions, not entirely unfazed—villain whom another guard had just dragged in.

“What's wrong, Facyr?” Cassandra asked.

“It's just that we didn't have any problems with the guy *until* we caught him.” Facyr said.

“One could say that.” Cassandra tilted her head and looked at Facyr with a compassionate, knowing gaze. “But that's how things always are. Do you still want to go recall the people from the field? It's not your responsibility – I could do it...” Cassandra said.

“No, no, no... I think it's pretty clear that things are rolling forward on their own weight.”

Cassandra smiled. “I suppose so!”

“For once, I *really* don't care what we should be doing right now. The Bone Stealer is in jail. The nobles wasted money on a poster campaign. The guy gets a free legal representation who have a really simple job since he's pleading guilty for a few minor thefts, while the nobles' expensive lawyers will be up their ankles with some conflicting guard reports and really outlandish claims that need to be proven. Right now, I just want to follow what we were supposed to be doing and go home and sleep until the noon shift.”

Cassandra smiled. “Somehow, I can't blame you if we just follow our orders as they were, dear. We can't always fix subsequent problems.”

“Yeah. So, let's go home. Our job was to go out there, spread the posters and then go to sleep. That's what the Guard did. And that's what *this* guardsman is

doing.”

Cassandra smiled. “We see here that everyone can ultimately do one thing at a time...”

“Yep”, Facyr said. “The more I need to do, the worse it gets.”

“...And it applies equally to all guardsmen individually, and the Guard as a whole”, Cassandra said.

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