

The Company

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1 - 1. the whisperer and muderer

The Company

Tuesday, evening, somewhere in sector 34

"Tell me again why we are here," asked a man sitting in a little, not to clean room. He talked to the man next to him. It was a man with a rather untrustworthy look to him. Many say that you shouldn't judge the book by the cover but in this case you could. Seeing it the other way, maybe he wasn't the most honest man but he was loyal and that is all you need, really. Everybody both require the noble men that will kill you for an insult, and the men to do the dirty work. This was the second kind of men.

"You know it as well as I do, we are recognising the area." Answered the man with the untrustworthy look.

"Yeah I know what they said to us to do, but why?" Asked the first man. Now he leaned forward and in the flame of a torch you could see that he was a rather lean and almost handsome looking man. Even in the light it was hard to see anything more because he was a long way from clean and the shadows seemed to love to play over him.

The second man shrugged as to show that you couldn't know how a lord or lady thinks. Much less a

king. "We are here `cause we was ordered to be here and we do what we do `cause we are ordered to do it."

Some men don't need any more answer, but some do and the lean man wasn't satisfied. "And the orders come direct from the prince, I know that. That is all good and well but it doesn't *explain* anything."

"It is king now, not prince... some may say that you just committed treason my friend." The man said this with a calm even voice. It was clear that if it had been someone else he had been talking to, he would have been one of the men he talked about.

"Dell is still a prince in my mind. Troy the short had his crown on his head longer than our have had," the king he mentioned had lived over two hundred years ago. He had also been decapitated on his own coronation. So the statement wasn't completely true, but Deliam Haroldes the second was still young. He had just been king in two months and many still saw him as a prince.

"You are just a year older than he, aren't you? You surly look that way."

"Very funny," the first man answered dryly. They both knew his age, as if it mattered.

"You still haven't answered my question; *surely you* have some idea what this is all about. So I ask you one more time, why are we in this dump recognising, as you call it, in the heart of the damn capital? Not even Dell is going to lose himself in his own city!"

Now the other man also leaned forward and in the light you could see that he was several years older than his friend. How many years it was was a later question. It could be anything in between five and fifteen. "Hush boy, if someone find us they will cut our throats no matter how powerful our friends are so calm down."

The younger one settle again and his whole body seemed to relax. "Sorry I know better. I just hate to sit still like this. I am used to be in mortal danger, fighting it, yes. Run from it, absolutely. But just wait? It doesn't go very well with my personality." He smiled disarmingly and the older man couldn't help but to smile back. Slowly he shook his head. Think to have that kind of smile, with that he could have stolen the world and the gods would just be smiling back at him as he took it.

"But you still haven't answered me," now the younger man could have been talking about the market price for rice.

The older man nodded. "You are getting better on controlling your feelings; but still? Maybe we should have waited with this. If someone of the guards had been less than a block away they would have felt it. They are damnable but they know their job." He talked about the mindreaders, or mind leeches as the common people called them. They couldn't really read your mind, just receive strong feelings. From people that haven't trained their mind they could also recognize a lie from a truth. That was the thing that made them good guards. Right now the men wished that the system wasn't working as well as it was. After some silence the older man picked up where he had left of. "And you don't have to ask me again `cause I don't know anything except that we are to meet some people tonight. They didn't trust me on this one and usually it is you that know anything and everything before me; if it is to any comfort I feel the same as you on the matter of just sitting here and lurk in the dark until the moon is up."

“And our wants and needs don't matter to anyone anymore,” said the younger looking man with a sad smile.

“You are beginning to get it.”

“Started getting it a long time ago, now I am starting to accept it.”

A long quiet followed when they staring in to the flame. In the end the younger man spoke again. “At least it beats doing paperwork, eh?”

The older looking man let out a grunt of agreement.

In the following hours they slept a bit. They sat up in almost the same instant thought nothing apparent had changed they could both feel a difference in the air, and what kind of hunters would they be if they hadn't? The moon was up.

They didn't need to talk to know what to do now. Routine had set the drill. The older one put out the torch in the sand on the floor while the younger one got their cloaks. As the men swept the cloaks over their shoulders they opened a trapdoor in the ceiling. First the younger one heaved himself up and soon the older man followed. They opened a little door and they where out on the street. The cloaks seemed to warp themselves around them. The material that the cloaks were made of was called shadowspun and no one could deny the impression that especially the younger looking man was more shadow than man. The older one seemed somewhat more real and because of that all the more dangerous. They where both protected in their own way, the dangerous and the invisible one. No one would bother them tonight.

“Where are we going to meet this people?” The young ones voice was no more that a whisper in the winds between the roofs.

“In the old clock tower.” The old ones voice was dangerous; it was a voice that sliced throats.

“I see you there then,” the young one answered and without any more words he effortlessly climbed up on the roof on the nearest house. He was soon gone but the old one knew that he was moving over the roofs and that he would get to the clock tower first.

With a sigh the old one started to move along to street in the right direction. He would be there soon enough, there was no hurry.

The young one was already half way. Moving swift over the roofs he felt that he was in his right element again. As he felt the wind under and around him when he jumped between two houses that was especially far from each other he felt for laughing out aloud. He landed as well as any cat would have and continued. Sometimes it was almost like flying.

The older one walked the streets, felling each stone under his boots and felt that he was home after all. Surly he liked the palace well enough but while walking the streets during the night he felt a sense of rightness. He let the cloak blow behind him so that a thief that was closing in on him could see the great

sword that hung on his hip. The scabbard was well worn but the blade was still sharp. He could soon see the clock tower on the other side on the square in front of him.

The younger one sat on the windowsill in a window halfway up on the huge tower. His position was indolent and when the older one walked over the square the younger one almost threw himself over the sill. It was all a game to him and he could with ease catch himself long before hitting the ground. After that he climbed down fast.

Soon they entered the clock tower together. The invisible and the warrior. They walked up the stairs together, even if the younger one glided more than anything else, his steps were soundless on the floor. The older one walked as if he owned the place and his steps echoed up to the top long before they got there.

The top floor was as big as many halls the two men had seen and now five persons were waiting on them there. The younger one drifted without thinking on it into the shadows as the older looking man continued straight ahead. The people meet him halfway through the great room. The man saw that of the people that had come to meet them three were men and two were women. One of them stepped forward as to speak for them all.

"We were said to be meeting two men," even if they were more to the number it was obvious that the man was scared.

When the younger man of the two that had come stepped forward so that they could see him they all jumped visible and took one step back from the two men they had come to meet.

"Hey, we aren't going to hurt you if you don't hurt us," said the younger one and smiled against them. Even if it was hard to see anything in the all but clear light they seemed to relax a bit. Think what good a simple smile can do in a tense situation. Once again the one that looked older that the other wished that he could smile like that. If he had smiled they might have fled, somehow his smiles encouraged fear instead of anything else. At least with any other that the friend that now was smiling so calmly and friendly against the people they had come to meet.

"Wh.. what are your names?"

"Thinking that maybe someone other than us should have gotten lost and by chance wandered up an abandoned clock tower in the middle in the night? Very well. My name is Caleb Silvers and my friend is Derek o' the Sword I guess we don't need your names, guys and gals." All this the younger looking man said with a smile and now we have a name to call him by, Caleb. The little group began to whisper and Caleb understood that their reputations had gone before them, just as he had expected.

The older looking man that now was called Derek also had expected the persons they were to meet to know their names but not to accept it so easily. It was after all almost twenty years since he and his friend had gotten their reputation and fame.

Now it was a woman that stepped forward. "We were said to give you this and then leave, they said no one would hurt us," after this the two men that hadn't spoken stepped forward and you could see that both of them was carrying a heavy package in their arms. Derek nodded and took one of the packages.

Caleb now had a net in his hands and Derek couldn't stop to be amazed by his ability to hid things on his body.

Caleb easily took the package and put it in the net and swung in over his shoulder. He was remarkably strong for a so slender built man. "Going back?" Caleb asked with a slight raise of his eyebrows. Derek wasn't sure that anyone else would have noticed it but his friend was indignant and it was on him he was mad. Well, he had known that it would be like that and it wasn't much to do about it right now anyway.

"Yeah back, see you there," Derek and Caleb begun to walk down the stairs but by the first window they got to Caleb jumped out and continued his own way down. Derek stopped a while looking after his friend and wondered what he should do. Anything to regain the little part of trust he had just lost he guessed. It had been a necessity that Caleb didn't know about what they where to do, he is just too emotional, as all his people are.

Tuesday, night, moving over the roofs

Caleb was a real cat burglar and was soon on the rooftops of the city again. He didn't know what to think so he just continued towards the palace that had become his home. In twenty-five years he and Derek had done anything and everything together, there had been an absolute trust between them and if it hadn't been like that they both would have been long dead now. They had been like brothers but now something was happening and Caleb didn't know what. The problem was that he was sure Derek knew. When he was climbing up the facade of the royal palace he wondered over how easy it was to avoid the guards and as to prove this he decided to pay a little visit to his royal highness. Caleb climbed to a place where he was over the kings' balcony and jumped down. He landed softly without a sound and pulled open the long silk drapery that showed where the balcony ended and the room begun. The prince, no the king now, sat in a divan and ate a late diner. When he saw the dark figure that was Caleb gliding towards him he almost spilled his wine all over the floor. The newly crowned king Deliam had a bit of a puffy look to him and was nearly as tall as Caleb when he stood up. He was dressed in a crimson robe that was stiff with golden embroidery, Caleb couldn't even imagine what the thing had cost to make. The prince was seventeen and two months old, something that he was very proud of. As if it was a merit and he somehow had something to do with it. Caleb didn't really dislike Dell that much; the poor boy couldn't help what he had become. It had been all those court people that looked after his every need and watched out so that he wouldn't hurt himself some way.

When Deliam recognized who the dark person that was walking towards him was, he got up quickly as to greet him. Caleb just dumped the package that he had been carrying in front of his king and then sat down on his heels. He took an apple from a fruit bowl and silently begun to eat it. Caleb watched as Dell tried to lift the box and then gave up. When Caleb was finished with the apple he got up again.

"I hope you know what you and your councilmen are doing my loving king. `Cuz if Derek so much as spills a drop of blood doing your graces dirty work I am going to spill yours. With all respect for you person of course Deliam. I have watched you during much of your upbringing but don't trust that it will stop my hand if it comes to that. We will talk tomorrow and then about more pleasant things I trust. I will

never say anything more about this for I trust that you now are old enough to remember it, `cuz you better do that.” With does words Caleb gave a short bow to the chocked king and leaved. He went strait to his room only to find Derek already there.

“They have filled up two baths in there, come, we both need it.” That was all he said as he turned to a door in the room and Caleb couldn't think of an answer so he followed. Just as Derek had said it would be it was and Caleb was just too glad to slip out of the dirty clothes and sink down in the hot water.

Derek stood and folded his clothes as Caleb threw his on the floor. When Derek at the last got into the bath Caleb was already lying with closed eyes and you could see that he was enjoying it greatly. To Derek bathing always just had been an other duty, nothing special. That was only one of the many differences between the two of them. Derek was watching his friend and wondered if he would dare to disturb him, it looked as if he was almost asleep.

Just when Derek decided not to say anything for now, Caleb opened his eyes and looked at him. The eyes were deep blue right now but Caleb's eyes were one of the things that Derek never had seen on any other living being. The eyes changed colour between blue, black and a deep brown, orange colour, like good whisky. In the beginning of their friendship Derek had been scared to death of those eyes; but not now.

“I am sorry Cal but it wasn't my choice, it was the way it had to be, has to be.” Nothing in Caleb's eyes or position showed that he had heard and for the longest while he just starred at Derek.

It had always been his Derek and he couldn't be mad at his Derek, never could. When they had met it had been Derek that was the little scared boy. He hadn't known how to survive in the world and Caleb had helped him. Now it seemed it was the other was around.

“I can't be angry on you. Just promise me that you never will leave me, that you never will let anything happen to me and thus not happen to you, `cuz I don't know if I can live with out you, friend... brother.”

“I won't let anything happen to you but you will live with out me some day,” Derek smiled at him; how to make this man that looked like a nineteen year old kid understand something like this. “You know that you will over live me, we both know that Cal. I will die some day.”

“Everybody dies some day,” Caleb smiled and Derek knew that he tried to avoid the thing that made them so very different from each other.

“Yes but some before others. I will die and Deliam will die, even if we become one hundred years old, we will die. Your kind's lifespan are more that three times ours. You will live.”

You could see that Caleb didn't want to hear it. Derek was often surprised how immature Cal sometimes acted. Derek didn't know his friends age but was sure that he were more that seventy. Age didn't seem to mater; nowadays Derek was always been the older, the grownup.

“... much can happen, I never desired a long life, I would have been happier if I was a real human.” Now Caleb smiled and Derek could see it glimmer in those strange eyes. “Maybe I would be better of believing in your god. One god for everything, isn't that what your priests say, eh?”

"Yes one god, the God. He created the world and all living," Derek wasn't a very firm believer but he had like most kids hear all the tales at his mothers breast.

"He created it out of nothing? How do you do that?" Cal seemed sincerely confused by this.

"I don't know, he is God and almighty." That was the only thing Derek could think of answering to this sudden change of subject.

"But he must have used something; you can create something out of nothing!"

Caleb was indignant by this and Derek wondered what kind of answer would satisfy him. Maybe a question... "Cal, how did your gods create the world then?" This seemed to stop him in his track and think for a second.

"Well to me you are Brother so I guess that the gods don't mind if I tell you of them."

First he was quiet, then he started to talk and his voice was enchanting, like as if he was more reading a poem than telling a story.

"Long years before the earth existed, *Niflheim* was created, the fog-country. In the midst of it lay *Hverglemir*. It was from there the ten ice-cold venomous streams *Elivagar* had their origin.

Niflheim lay in the north, but southward there was a place called *Muspell*. There it was light and hot, always glowing and burning. At *Muspell's* border sat *Surt* with a great flaming sword as the defender of the country. This was the fire-world. Midway between the fog-country and the fire-world there was a yawning gulf, *Ginnungagap*.

Soon the frost and the warm air from *Muspell* met and from this the primitive giant *Ymir* was created. Once when *Ymir* fell asleep a man and a woman came froth from under his left arm and one of his feet got a son with the other. This son had in his turn a son named *Bergelmir*. The hot and the cold air continued to meet and from this the cow *Authumla* stood forth. From her utters there came four streams of milk, from this *Ymir* got his nourishment. The cow herself lived by licking the salt, frost-covered stones. After she had licked a day you could see a man's hair. By the third day the whole man stood there. He was named *Buri*, and was fair, tall, and mighty to look upon.

Later he had a son named *Bor*, who married the giant *Bolthorn's* daughter *Bestla*. Their sons where *Odin*, *Vili* and *Ve*. *Odin* was to be the first god.

The three sons of *Bor* killed *Ymir*, there was so much blood that all his descendants was drowned in it, with exception for his son *Bergelmir* and his wife that saved themselves in a boat made of a tree-trunk. And thus the race of the giants survived.

Bor's sons took the body of *Ymir* and brought it out into the midst of the yawing gulf, and formed heaven and earth from it." Caleb silenced, but then he sang softly.

~ From *Ymir's* flesh the earth was shaped
and from his blood the sea,
the mountains from his bones trees from his hair,
and from his skull the sky. ~

~ And from his eyelashes the kindly gods made
Mithgarath for the sons of men,
And from his brain were the forbidding
clouds all shaped. ~

“Of course there is much more to tell but this is how my gods tell of the creation of the world.”

Now Caleb used his usual voice and that seemed to break the spell and Derek came back to himself. He wondered how long they had sat there. The bathwater was cold and the candles were burning low. They got up from the baths and dried themselves on towels that the servants had brought up the same time as the bath. They said their goodnights to each other, Derek's mind was still on the strange story he had heard so he didn't notice that Caleb was rather absent too. Derek left for his own rooms and bed. It was soon dawn and whatever he had on his mind it disappeared as soon as he laid his head on the feather pillow.

Caleb's sleep escaped him for he couldn't take his mind of what he had just told Derek. Had he now deceived his own kind in some new way? Deceived his mother's heritage? But why should he care, really? He who had been betrayed by them as just a seven year old, what could a seven year old do to deserve that kind of treatment? The answer didn't escape him now as it had then, he could be born. It was with this thought that sleep finally caught up with him. As he fell asleep the sun was coming up.

2 - 2. The mission

Wednesday, early afternoon, in their own rooms

Derek woke two hours after the lunch hour and dressed in more appropriate clothes than those he had worn yesterday. This was one of the things he didn't like with living so close to a king. You couldn't wear what you felt like and Derek never felt at home in court-silks. He also didn't like the way everyone always stared on him and even as he was bigger than most their looks made him feel small. He always tried to fit in but even if he was clean-shaven and wore the right clothes he couldn't pull it off.

He met Cal in the breakfast hall which was empty for all but them now. Caleb was as usual dressed in fine grey wool. He had dressed the same way since they had met and probably before that too. It didn't seem inappropriate on Cal; he could wear anything with grace. Derek let out a sigh and sat down opposite his friend.

No one of them spoke during the meal; Caleb had never been a morning person; to Cal it was morning whenever he woke up. Derek also seemed to have something else on his mind so the meal was unusually quiet even for them. Cal felt better today and almost regretted what he had said to Deliam. Almost.

As they were finished with all they had to do they decided to report as the small council already would be gathered. The council always gathered in the east tower. They were in a tower for two reasons. First they needed somewhere safe since no guards were allowed in during the meeting. The second reason was that it was harder to spy on someone sitting in a windy tower. Actually, it was almost impossible.

But that both Derek and Caleb knew all the reasons for the meeting to be in the tower didn't help with their idea of it. It was a long walk up there, some days they also had to be walking up and down five times for various reasons. Besides that the whole tower was windy and on the winter there was even sometimes ice on the inside of the walls. That said you could also add that Derek had a fear of heights that sometimes showed itself then the tower gently started to swing back and forth. Deliam's grandfather had begun to renovate the tower, then Deliam's father king Gregory had continued. Now Deliam was working on it. Nothing seemed to work, the tower was still moving and the wind was still blowing right through it.

Anyway, now they were walking up the worn stairs. They could hear the tower crack as its foundations seemed to move. With a oath Derek held on with one hand on the wall as well as he could. Cal just laughed at him. For a person that loved heights this was easy enough.

"Laugh if you want, I am sure that I will find a reason to laugh at you before long." Derek grunted.

He hadn't expected Cal to heed his words but after that Caleb laughed the whole way up.

"You can stop now Cal, it wasn't all that funny."

“You would also have thought that it was funny if you had seen your own face. As if the whole tower was going to fall on your head, and yet you were holding on to the wall. And this after having been in this tower over a hundred times, knowing that it always shakes like this. I tell you Derek, it was funny, and to think that there are as many people in the world that don't think that you can be a funny guy.” Cal smiled at him and then continued laughing as if he hadn't stopped.

“That is enough for now Cal, I get your point. You think that I should laugh and joke more as well as not be afraid for this old tower to fall down on our heads. Well forget it, at least for now.”

With those words he counted to three and then opened the door. The three seconds had been enough for Caleb to compose his face. But as it was that didn't matter much since all who knew Caleb could see on the color in his eyes what mood he was in. Now Derek noticed that they were somewhere in-between a happy green and a shining blue. At least someone is happy he thought, for he didn't look forward to talking to the council.

“Caleb Silvers and Derek Johnson reporting,” Derek's real last name didn't have the same flare. With that he could have been anyone, and would have been if he hadn't meet Caleb.

“We hear that last night's assignment went as planned, in fact, we have the wares here.” It was Lord Jason that had spoken. He had been the late king's trusted friend and Derek had always rather liked the man. He was also responsible for international politics.

“But you could have been caught, that is unacceptable, to say the least!” This angry man was Lord Gaywaters, his area was police.

“Caught? What do you mean milord?” Cal asked, clearly confused with this statement.

“The police reported this morning that they had heard something in sector 34, exactly where you were! You can thank your own good luck that they were on their way back to headquarters and didn't have time to investigate further.”

“I didn't know that milord, but if they had found us we could have dealt with them. The mission would never have been compromised.”

“That is not the point! If we wanted publicity on everything we do, we wouldn't need you! We were going around the police because the police asks questions.” Gaywaters was high red now, leaning over the table. The men on his sides looked like they wanted to be anywhere but there.

“Now, now, I think that that is more than enough Sam. Sit down and behave as a gentleman should. And you two should sit down too, if I may be so bold your majesty.” Said Lord Jason. In the end of his speech he looked at Deliam who was sitting at the end of the table. The newly crowned king only seemed to be happy that everything was calming down again and that he hadn't had to do anything.

As Lord Sam Gaywaters sank back into his chair Derek and Caleb took one each between Lord Fisher, who was the master historian, and Lady Bronzer who was not just the only woman on the small council but also the only one except Deliam that had the key to the treasury.

As soon as they were seated the spy master Mr Jenkins started talking. "Now that everybody finally is here maybe we could move on to the next subject on the list." After a while when no one seemed inclined to answer him he just continued. "I have now gotten as much information as I can on the goblet that was stolen from our king's forefathers for exactly one hundred and four years ago this year. Our wise king has decided that he wants it back. Many attempts have been made on it before of course but we now believe that we can succeed. Would you like to tell them the rest your grace?"

Del nodded unsurely and seemed to steal looks on Caleb; Derek wondered why but decided to ignore it for now. "The last attempt to steal it back was made twenty two years ago by my great uncle. Not to this day do we for sure know what did go wrong. Just that his men never returned to us. Today many of my counsellors and I believe that we can succeed where others have failed. Lord Fisher, if you would be so kind."

The little balding man pulled out a map that was almost as high as he was. Carefully he rolled it out on the table and set out little weights in the corners.

"What we are looking at is a map from the year three-hundred and seven. Now you must understand that much has changed but some things remain the same. As I am sure you all can see this map shows the ancient city of Roxburgh. That has of course been in ruins for well over six hundred years. On top of the old city was New Roxburgh built in the twentieth year of the old empire. The one that ordered the building of New Roxburgh was general Fickels. To continue this also was the year that"

He was cut short by Gaywaters who didn't seem able to stay quiet today. Derek wondered what had gotten his temper so fired up.

"Get to the point, we all know our history old man." Even if the words were harsh many people around the table nodded. They all knew what had happened; this was common history that all children learned in school together with their letters.

"I am getting to it but you all have to know this to understand everything. One of the things this will show is how that map ended up here. Now where was I? Ah yes, the proud general. This year many things happened. The old emperor died and the new was just a boy. As the boy grew the empire changed, it was attacked from the east by savages and civil war after civil war tore the once great empire apart. When the boy was sixteen and came to rule the land in more than just his name he was a suspicious man. Some have even named him possessed or under the sickness of paranoia. Whatever was the case that doesn't matter now. What happened was that he condemned general Fickels for treason. It was at this point the general said that he had had enough and left. Much of the army followed him and they took the city of New Roxburgh as their own. There was not enough power left in the empire at this point to do anything about it. That was the last stroke to an already dying empire. The general and now king also ruled our then very modest town. It was in fact he who brought us the trade we now have. Without him we would just be a little village. But I am getting away from the subject at hand. After many years the general died as all men must and a leader was chosen by the people to rule them. This was in fact one of the first democracies in the world. Many hundreds of years have past but the city of New Roxburgh still stands and much is as it was when the general had just ordered it built. As the Deliam said, for one hundred and four years ago the great goblet of his line was stolen as some sort of vengeance for an insult. By this time New Roxburgh still had an council but the places in it was inherited

and had nothing to do with the people. It was the man, a certain Councilman Harrison, who processed what they call first chair that was responsible for the stealth. We are sure of this even if nothing official has been said.” Lord Fisher was looking very happy with himself but most of his listeners were still waiting for the point of the long involuntary history lesson they had just endured.

“And?” Lady Bronzer said at last. She was a big woman in her early forties that could count impossible numbers in her head but was without any people’s skills to talk about. It was no wonder that she couldn’t see anything important in any of this.

Cal on the other hand understood what Fisher had been trying to say so it was he who answered. “Well all know that the goblet is said to be kept behind the wall in the first chair’s bedroom which is the old royal rooms if I am not mistaken.” He found them easily enough and pointed on them for the rest of the company to see.

“But this map is from before general Fickels rebuilt the city. We have no way of knowing if it has anything to do with how New Roxburgh looks today. The first chair took the generals chambers.”

“But we can know. I have read some of the building plans written by the general when he started to rebuild the city. Both the palace and the council houses with all the annexes are on its original spots. Fickels wrote that the original aqueducts still worked and that it would have been too expensive to build new ones. Especially when there was no need for it. This also means that most of the cellars in the old part of New Roxburgh lie as this map shows.” When Caleb finished everybody was looking at him except Deliam, who still seemed insecure.

Most faces showed some sort of surprise. Lord Fisher looked as if he might have found a likeminded and was pleasantly surprised. Derek looked surprised in a sort of amused way. Lady Bronzer almost looked sad for as she saw this as one more other soul lost from the wonders of math. The rest of the men hid their feeling so about the only thing you could read on their faces was that they were surprised by this sudden burst of knowledge.

“So how did the map exactly come here?”

It was Lord Gaywaters that asked but Fisher didn’t answer until it was clear that Caleb wasn’t going to say anything else. He was clearly disappointed when he answered. “New Roxburgh never had a great library so when the general decided to make out town to a city he ordered our library to be built. We have of course made it bigger and greater during the years since then but even before it was built many books from New Roxburgh was sent here. It would seem this map was one of the things that we got from New Roxburgh. This also saved many great works from the time in one thousand and thirty seven when a guerrilla group managed to burn New Roxburgh’s royal library, which of course still was a great lose. Anyway, we also have charts over the aqueducts, if that would help in anyway.”

Lord Garcon who was sitting on the other side of Lady Bronzer looked as if he didn’t know if he wanted to kiss or strangle Lord Fisher. Lord Garcon was what you could call the master of information together with Mr Jenkins. They had surely been looking for this kind of maps for ages and now it turned out that they really hadn’t needed to look any further than in the city’s own library.

They all sat quiet for a while thinking on what this new info meant for them. It was getting colder and

darker outside as well as inside now and in the silence the tower was squeaking and groaning even more than before.

Caleb's mind was out and wandering in the cold night by itself. The wind was telling him that the winter was coming and that it was going to be a hard one. It also whispered to him that he was going to spend much of it outside and maybe alone. It had been a long time since he had had this kind of forebodings. His unease grew to the point that he was shivering before anyone broke the silence.

Derek was thinking on something else altogether. He who had hoped that things would be calm until spring. The night before had then felt like a onetime thing but now he was wondering if it wasn't building up to something big. And now all that talk about the goblet again. He never understood why it meant so much; it wasn't as if Del didn't have his own goblet. But anyhow, he knew that often when people sought the goblet it was war that was really on their minds.

In the end, and to Caleb's surprise, it was Deliam that finally broke the silence. "Derek and Caleb I want you two to train a band that will be capable to steal back the goblet. They must be ready a whole full moon before midwinter. We already have some volunteers. They will be gathered in first light tomorrow in the second garden. I hope that at least some of them may be sufficiently equipped with the right skills. Do you understand what your job will be?"

"Yeah I understand that we will have to be up before dawn to train some kids. We will of course do it but I felt that I have to remind you that neither Caleb nor I have any experience in training other people. I also have to ask if we are supposed to lead in that moment of stealth when the goblet is going to be taken." Derek said it all in a pleasant voice but they could all hear that he was more than unhappy about this new mission.

"You are of course going to lead them so I hope for your sake that you train your men good," said Lord Gaywaters with a all but pleasant smile.

After that it wasn't much more to be said and they all soon went on their way. On Derek's and Cal's way down the tower gave them a real shake but Derek didn't even notice it, his thoughts were on the coming months. For by this new order all their time had been taken from them for some months. On one hand he was glad that it wasn't anything permanent, it would be over soon enough. On the other hand he worried that they hadn't gotten enough time to train anyone in a way that could keep them alive on this fool's errand.

Thursday, at dawn, the second garden

Even though the sun hadn't shown its face yet both Caleb and Derek were standing in a corner of the garden. In a sense it was an actual garden. It had flowers and three trees in a corner. The floor was made of cobbles with grass growing between them. In the summer this was a real nice place but now it was just different shades of brown and grey.

Brown wines, brown grass, brown leaves and grey cobbles and walls. Cal and Derek were standing in one of the ports, trying to protect themselves from the wind.

The last fifteen minutes men and boys of different ages had been showing up and were now standing shivering in the wind. The youngest one looked about sixteen years old and the oldest twenty five.

"Looking at them I feel as an old man Cal," Derek said and Caleb thought that it may have been remorse in his voice.

"Youth is overrated Derek. If you ever got the chance to be seventeen again I don't believe that you would take it, and if you did you would just be longing to grow old again. I don't understand why so many people are afraid of death in a time when so many die young."

"Maybe it is a human trait," Derek said and started walking briskly towards the recruits.

Caleb stood still as if he had taken a blow in the guts. That comment had been a totally unnecessary evil. He didn't understand what he had said that had mad Derek so mad. It wasn't as if the wanted to be different. Rather the opposite.

Derek had almost reached the volunteers when Caleb joined him. Last night over dinner in the messes they had discussed how they where going to deal with the recruits, now it was the time to put their decisions to the test. Caleb seriously doubted that they were going to work.

"Line up so we can look at you, now!" Bellowed Derek with a voice that echoed between the houses on the bare yard. At that some of the younger ones almost ran to get a spot in the line. The older men walked a little more calmly but it still didn't take many moments before they where all where standing on a more or less strait line.

Derek counted them and found that there were twenty three persons there. He and Cal had decided that they didn't need more than twelve, which meant at least eleven had to go. When he looked a bit closer on the recruits he thought that they should be glad if they could get eight good men out of this bunch. There were thieves who had been pardoned of they joined in on this, there also were the soldiers no one wanted and two or three former polices that for some reason hadn't fitted in into their old apartments. He caught Caleb's eye for a second and from what Derek could get out of that Cal seemed to agree with him, but what could they do?

When Caleb was finished eyeing them he spoke. "I bet most of you don't even know why you are here today. The only thing I can tell you are that you are going to be a team so you might as well get used to each other. Those of you that don't cut it won't be here in the end but those who are left will be one of the best trained squads our king will have. After today the training will begin at sundown, you will be given appropriate clothes by mistress Aulander. Get them sometimes today. Since this is the first day we want to know what you can do. You will first get a chance to talk to either myself or Derek here alone. Use that time wisely and tell us everything you have some skill in. After that you will face one of us, first in melee and then in a obstacle course, give it all you got `cause we will match you up with a partner after what you show us today." Cal pointed on the man that stood first in line, "you come with me, and the next one goes with Derek. Everybody else can try to get to know each other; you will be spending a lot of time together form now on."

The man that followed Caleb when he turned around was maybe more a boy than a man. He looked about sixteen-seventeen and skinny. Cal was pretty sure that this was one on the thieves that had chosen this as his road to freedom.

Caleb opened a door and went up a small stone stair. He then entered a little room that since yesterday had been his. It had one window from where he could see down to the yard. Other than that all the little room contained was a big desk three chairs and on bookcase with out any books. Some old ruler had loved to organize things so the room even had a sort of name. Room 1 68 building B.

Caleb took the chair behind the desk and offered one of the other chairs to the boy.

“So I guess you know my name but I will introduce myself anyway and then you can do the same. I am Caleb Silvers former robber and general outlaw, now I am in king Deliam's service and have a place on the small council. You will call me captain. Now I don't want to hear your lives story, make it quick and try to mention everything you are good at.”

The boy was rubbing his hands together and seemed insecure if it now was his turn to speak. After some minutes when nether spoke he began talking. “I am Tim Jacobson and... hum... I... I have travelled the highway since I was ten.” Tim looked at Cal as if wondering if he had to explain what the highway was, Caleb juts moved for him to continue. He was more than familiar with the thieves' highway. “I also can... hum... juggle and...”

This time the silence grew longer and longer. “What were you going to say boy, we haven't all that much time. I do I have to remind you that all thing you have done before is forgotten when you joined us?”

“I am the best cutpurse in the lower part of town, or at least I was,” he looked at Caleb wondering if he had anything against this kind of information but Caleb just nodded.

“Have you ever held a weapon of any sort?”

“Yeah, I can use a knife rather good and when I got caught I was just learning how to use throwing knives. You can also count on me in a fight in town. I can use both hands and legs good enough.”

“Well I believe that this will be quite enough for now. When you go out send in one of the others, and remember that from now on you are supposed to call me captain.”

Tim smiled as he left, gave something that was like a mock salute and said, “Yes captain!”

When he had closed the door Caleb just shook his head, to make something that would even be remotely like a soldier out of this one was going to be a challenge of nothing else.

Soon there was a knock on the door. Caleb composed himself again. “Enter.”

The next one couldn't have been more different form Tim Jacobson. The first difference was that it was a girl and no man at all. Cal hadn't noticed that it was any girls out there but apparently there had been. But Caleb wasn't one to have any problems with training a woman. He just hoped that the rest of the

team didn't have any problem working with one either.

“Joanna Umber reporting for duty, sir!” As she said “sir” she seemed to scream the word as if someone was going to defy her right to use it.

“Easy recruit, take a chair and tell me something about yourself. As why you are here and what you can do.” Caleb had never liked authority and now he found that he didn't even like to be the authority.

She sat down but wasn't at ease, she rather seemed so wounded up that she couldn't stop her fingers from moving. “I am here sir because I asked for a transfer. Before today I worked in the thirty fifth police unit. The reason for the transfer was that my commander and I didn't agree in some things, but I am sure I will like it better here.”

“What sort of things?”

Umber made a sour face, “things like bribes sir.”

Caleb couldn't stop himself from grinning badly. As a former robber he had an odd sense of honour but he didn't break his word. As he saw it the police gave their word when they got the job to do the job. That meant taking money for not doing their job was something he didn't look nicely on.

“You won't find that sorts of troubles here so don't worry. Now, many cops have a bit of the mindgift, how is it with you?”

“I am an adept but I did just barley make it through tryout, sir. If you where furious or extremely happy right now I could have sensed it but that is just about everything. But as you know the gift may grow given time, sir.”

Cal nodded, “and what kind of weapon training do you have?”

“I am competent with swords and crossbows, sir. I have also broken up a fair number of beer brawls in my time as a police officer.”

“Any other skill you would want to add?”

Umber thought for a moment before she answered. “I am pretty good with numbers sir.”

As she left she made a salute that was as correct as the rest of her seemed to be. Cal wondered what her dark secret was, for everybody had one. Even him.

He was sure she was a great cop but wondered if her honour would allow her to do what they had to do. And he hoped that she could cope with it for she seemed like a good person to have in a tight situation.

Thursday, midmorning, room 1 62 building B

Derek had now met four of the recruits and to say the least, they had been one strange group of people.

The first one had been Marius who gave you looks that said that he would just as easy slit your throat and gut you as take a drink with you. He had given Derek the creeps.

Then there had been Leland Polson. Little more than a boy dressed in a silk shirt and tailored pants. He was apparently some rich tradesman's son who had gotten himself into trouble by climbing into some girl's bedroom. When her father had caught him she had denied to ever having seen him before. His only skill seemed to be to sweet talk his way into things; the things often being girls' underpants and beds.

After that Derek had met a twenty-something year old man called Gaston. He at least had seemed sensible enough. He had been transferred from the army because he had been found drinking on duty. The usual punish for drinking was a whipping so Gaston was at least grateful for this chance. Derek wondered if he was going to feel that way when all this was over.

The fourth person was a man called William, or Will which he preferred. He was long and lean with a short black ponytail. He had been an acrobat in a travelling group. He had also bragged with that he could climb any wall better and faster than any of them. Derek wondered if he would take up that promise against Caleb, in Derek's mind there was no question who would win.

Thursday, lunch, room 1 68 building B

The rest of the morning continued in the same way for Caleb and Derek. When they at last were finished it was time for lunch so they gave the voluntaries an hour to eat. For themselves they brought up the food to Caleb's room. They needed to talk in peace.

"So, anything promising?" Caleb asked between the bites.

Derek swallowed, "well one or two maybe. Some of them might work out with but only with some serious work on our side."

"That might just be what Del wants from us. Maybe he thinks that we have been eating from his and his father's table far too long with not enough to show for it."

Derek grunted to that but didn't say anything until they were finished with the food. He wiped his mouth with the napkin and leaned back with a beer in one hand. "Who do you want to face in melee? The fast, strong or the skilled?"

"Don't leave anything to fate, eh? Well, you know that I am not very skilled with the blade myself."

“Actually, not skilled at all might be a better description. Don't you think?”

“Mock me if you want, I have seen you climb a wall and will see it again. Anyway, since we can't afford to lose against anyone of them I guess that my best shot is against the strong. Maybe also those who are pretty fast but without any skill. Those would be in the same position as me but hopefully I am faster.”

“Then I will take the rest. In the obstacle course we will just switch. That means I will take on the strong and remotely skilled, this actually might work out, Cal.”

Caleb grinned, “it always work out of us. The Lady of Luck favour us, friend.”

“That means nothing to me, but maybe the good God is smiling at us sometimes.”

After that the real work of the day begun and even in the cold wind both Caleb and Derek sweated and the plan actually did seem to work.

3 - 3. Thursday night

Thursday, one and a half hour before sundown, at the Blind man's Joker

Joanna Umber was sitting in the almost clean room with most her new team mates. They had all sleep a while after the initial meeting with the captains but now almost all seemed to be up. Empty soup bowls were standing before them but everyone except a man named Kaled was finished. He was now on his third bowl.

Joanna rather liked the company of some of the men. There was Simon, a nineteen year old with big blue eyes and reddish hair. He was not very tall but one of his over arms was as broad as some men's thighs. He often had a sort of sheepish look on his face that made him look dim-witted, which wasn't the chase at all. He had may have been a blacksmith's apprentice but he had also spent all his free time at the common`s library.

Other than him the person Joanna liked best were Madison Servian. He had been some kind scientist. He said he had joined up by his own freewill but Joanna doubted it. This didn't seem the kind of company you just joined. Everyone seemed to have a past they for some reason didn't like to talk about.

She didn't really dislike anyone except Marius. He reminded her why she had become a cop in the first place, to keep people like him of the streets.

She looked out and saw that it was getting darker and darker. After looking out the window for some minutes she turned to face Madison again.

“So how did it go for you, who did you face?” She hadn't gotten time to ask before but found it rather interesting if anyone had succeeded in winning over either of the captains.

“Nay, no winning for me friend. First I faced the big one, Derek, with the sword. He was frighteningly good if you asked me, wielding that great sword as if it was a toothpick. After than came the obstacle course with captain Silvers who seemed to run upon the walls. I tell you, when he faced me he didn't even break a sweat, and I am not that bad. How did it go for you then? Any luck?”

Joanna shock her head, “nope, and I faced them in the other order. Captain Silvers with the blade, you know. He wasn't even that good, just so fast that you didn't have a chance of winning. On the obstacle course I was faster than Captain Johnson but I fell several times and he didn't fall once. At every obstacle he faced it calmly and continued in the best possible way. He never even picked up his pace nor slowed down.” Joanna slowly shook her head.

“Then I guess we do have something to learn here... not that I doubted it before but Silvers looked awfully young in my eyes.”

Joanna thought on that for a second. He had looked young but he had also had the sort of authority that only comes with age or great skill. Maybe he was older than he looked...

She said that much to Madison.

He nodded and then he leaned forward. Before he spoke he stole looks on the men sitting beside them but no one was interested in their conversation. "I have heard rumours about the Captain. They say that he isn't wholly human, I am not backing it up but that is what I have heard."

Now it was Joanna that tried to see if anyone was listening before she spoke. There might be persons in the group who would tell the captains what they said for advantages.

Even if no one was obviously listening she leaned as close as she could to Madison without seeming suspicious. "Why would he be anything but human?"

"Well, you know that they have been robbers before they joined the king."

"But all that was over long ago, so what... oh, I see." And she did see. It had been somewhere around twenty years ago Derek o' the Sword and Caleb Silvers had scared half the rich population to death with their impossible thefts. She also knew of many police officers that still could work themselves to tears over the fact that neither Caleb nor Derek had been caught. The Caleb Silvers she had met today had barely looked old enough to have been alive then. Derek had also been younger than she had anticipated. By his looks he had to have been nineteen tops when he joined the king. That of course might correspond with reality.

"He might of course just be some guy that took on a famous name after the real Caleb Silvers died."

"Sure," neither of them believed it but that didn't mean that it wasn't true. He could be an impersonator, a really, really good one.

Joanna leaned back from Madison again to put an end to their conversation; she had already gotten much to think about.

Even Kaled was finished now with the food and the sun was almost down. The Captains had said that they would meet them there so all they had to do was to wait. Only twenty two was there, Joanna absently wondered if the one missing was going to be late.

They were all dressed in dark grey clothes from head to toe. They had even gotten a scarf that could be warped around the face. The clothes felt too big after the tight police uniforms she was used to but she had been assured that she had the right size. One more thing that was different from what she was used to was the fact that they didn't have a cape. All copes had a short, bright coloured cape swung across their shoulders. They had it not only to keep them warm but also so that people could recognise them. Now Joanna was dressed in a grey overcoat. It went all the way down to her knees but could only be buttoned to the waist. They all looked as nameless nobodies and if anyone saw them they would be forgotten the next minute.

The only thing Joanna worried about was that they may demand that she cut off her hair. It was the only thing that made her special, at least in her own mind. It was chestnut coloured and when she kept it in a braid, as she often did, the braid went all the way down her back. But it put her out from the rest of the group and looking at them all in their grey clothes, standing out didn't seem like the thing they were trying for.

The door opened inwards and let in a great gust of wind. Caleb and Derek entered with one sack each over their shoulders. They were dressed in the same grey clothes as the rest but somehow they didn't look too big on them.

"The same as usual Cal?" Asked the bartender.

"Not today Jeff, we are going out with all your grey dressed customers."

"Knew you would be bad for business," the bartender answered and got a grin from captain Silvers in return.

Joanna was surprised that the bartender was so familiar with her new captains that he didn't use their whole names but mentally shrugged at the thought. It had after all been they that had told them to meet them here; of course they knew the owner.

Captain Johnson had now turned to the gathered recruits. "We will split you into two groups again, first group will go with Captain Silvers and second with me. You will also get a partner; with exception for extreme circumstances you will have the same partners the first weeks. Some of you may have noticed that you are only twenty two here, that means one has already been found wanting and have left. This person had to leave because he didn't obey orders and by that put both himself and everybody else at risk. You might think on that. Now, the names I say will go with Captain Silvers: Jackson, Miller, Swan, Polson, Jacobson, Umber..."

He continued for a while but after having heard her own name Joanna stopped listening.

Then he said who was going with him but Joanna didn't listen to that either. She was busy studying Captain Silvers, thinking on what she and Madison had said before. He didn't look any less human than any other men she had seen. He had dark hair that ended halfway down his neck, deep brown eyes and visible cheekbones. Other than that he was lean in a muscular way and taller than most. All in all he was a pretty good looking man; she thought and then reproached herself. Thinking like that about her superior wasn't appropriate and certainly no good way to start over, which was the point of the whole transfer.

Apparently all had now heard their own name now for Captain Johnson was leaving. Madison gave her a nod when he left, apparently they were in different groups. She felt a bit sorry about that but got over it; at least Simon was in her group and there no use being sad over a guy she had meet some hours before.

Captain Silvers waved them forward and made them sit down by the big table that stood along the left wall.

Self he took one chair and turned it around so that he sat with one leg on each side of the back of the chair. "Tonight we are going to try a little teamwork exercise to see if you can work together. We are going to travel on the highway. I understand of some of you don't know what it is so I will explain it as simple as I can. The highway, or the thieves' highway as it also is called, is a connection roofs. It is not a straight road like the ones on the ground but more like a spider's web. Some places are what we from now on are going to call hotspots and some places are homes. There are two types of hotspots, anyone who know which?"

Three hands were in the air when he was finished. He pointed at a man with a big beard that partly hid the scar he had. It ran from his right temple down to somewhere under the beard. "Yes Fickels?"

"The first it is the police houses and the secondly it means places that can be worth to rob several times. As the palace, the library and Lady Bronzer's manor." Even through the beard hid his mouth Joanna thought that he smiled as he said that. She had never known how organised the thieves world was.

"Very good and excellent examples."

Joanna could see that the Captain smiled as he said it.

"Homes are thieves and the like's hideouts and guild houses. During the coming week you will learn how to find the most important homes and hotspots, how to get in and how to manage when you are there. You will also learn how to climb walls in any circumstances. Questions? No? Good, then let's begin. You will do this two and two, here are the teams: Swan and Williams, Polson and Smith, UMBER and Jacobson, Landchester and Olin, Jackson and Miller. That is all. Team up and stand in a line."

They all found their partners and stood in a little crooked line. Joanna's partner was a onetime thief and about four years younger than her. He seemed a bit cocky and insubordinate, but most thieves were and she still felt lucky. If they were going to climb and run over roofs this was at least someone that had done it before. There was some mumbling and whispering by those who was first in line but then they were finished with what they were doing they went out so Joanna didn't get a chance to see in they had gotten something. When it at last was hers and Tim's turn Silvers pulled up handcuffs from the sack he had been carrying. They had a little bit more chain than normal, maybe two thirds of a meter, but besides that they looked as handcuffs should look. When he fastened it on her left and Nick's right hand it locked with a click just as it should do. Everything was right except who was in them.

"This exercise is quite simple, it is to take this map," Silvers said and gave the map to Nick, "and arrive at the red spot in two hours. The only rule is that you must keep to the highway, that is to say the roofs. You may see some of Captain Johnson's teams, their mission is to catch you. I will be around so if you get into trouble there is a good chance I will be able to solve it. But if I am not there take this sword and defend yourself." He gave the sword and belt to Joanna. She fastened it around her waist with some help from Nick; she was already cursing the chains silently.

Thursday, one hour later, somewhere in the city

“You said that this was going to be a shortcut! It was a way that only thieves knew about and now we are lost in one of the most dangerous parts of town!”

“I know what I said, you don't have to tell me,” Nick muttered back at her.

Joanna tried to pull a hand through her hair as she usually did when she needed to calm down. But not today it would seem. The chain stopped her halfway.

This whole operation had been a total failure, at least on their part and she hoped that all the others hadn't done much better. That would certainly put her and Nick in a bad light if they had managed. After three quarters of an hour had gone by without they seemed to get any closer to the target she had begun to curse Nick in her mind for he had been to one leading. Now she saw that maybe she should have taken the lead, but he had seemed so sure of himself.

A quarter later she had been cursing him out aloud. Now they only had an half hour left and she was even past cursing Captain Silvers for making up this stupid exercise. The last ten minutes they had been lost and as she just had pointed out, this wasn't the best part of town.

Joanna snatched the map from Nick's limp hand. She tried to make sense of it but it was too dark and she had to confess to herself that it wouldn't have mattered. She didn't know where they were. She turned around but the streets she saw didn't give any clue. All the shutters were closed and not a single light was showing. On top of all this it was now starting to rain.

It was a soft downpour that wasn't especially cold for this time of year. But the wind was picking up and Joanna's face and hand were already cold. The clothes were dry enough though so maybe the coat was impregnated by something.

“Well we can't just stand here, we have to go somewhere. Let's try that way,” she said and pointed to their left thinking that this may even have been the way they had come. If it was, she was sure that they would soon face some familiar sight that could point them in the right direction.

Nick just nodded gloomily and followed as she moved forward.

Travelling over the roofs in this part of town was easy at least. All poor people living here were packed like rats and that meant that the buildings were close together, often they were even the same height.

They had been moving for about ten minutes when the silence was broken and it wasn't by a sound Joanna wanted to hear. She recognised it as soon as she heard it; it was the sound of a sword leaving its sheath. She and Nick turned around as one man and for once the chain didn't get in the way.

Joanna couldn't really see the men facing them but she could count them. Five men, five men with what looked like sharp swords in their hands. She could easily enough decide not to pull her own sword with this kind of odds.

“So little rat, the word is that you got caught and now you are working for the pigs.”

Joanna didn't know which of the men it was that had spoken but she didn't like the tone one bit.

Nick was shaking frantically on his head. "I am not working for the pigs, just pretending a bit. Anyway, what would they do with one like me? I swear that I haven't done anything outside the rulebook!" He talked so fast that Joanna had problem understanding the words. She wasn't sure the men had heard all Nick had said but one thing was clear; Nick was only all too eager to please.

The men seemed to think about what he had said for a second but it was hard to tell in the dark and rainy night.

"Well we might let you go for now if you pay your tribute to the General."

Nick seemed to shrink when he answered. "The... they took all my money..." he swallowed in the middle of the sentence and that made his nervousness even more apparent. "We weren't allowed to keep any possessions."

One on of the men stepped forward and Nick seemed to shrink. "They took everything you say? What about the thing you have," he stole a shot on Joanna, "you know what I am talking about."

"Well they have it now but I am sure I can get it soon. They don't know what it is, don't worry."

"I am not worrying; it is you who should be worrying. I think you need a little lesson so that you don't forget so easily and I know we can fit you little friend into the schema, we don't want her to feel left out."

Joanna couldn't remember one time during her whole career that she had felt so hopeless. Sure she was wearing a sword but what was the point?

She thought about screaming but before she could even open her mouth there was a hand over it. She couldn't believe that they made it look so easy, these men where practically dancing over the roofs. They didn't take one wrong step. Joanna could never have done it even on a clear night, never mind the rain and the wind.

When the men saw that their hands were bound they laughed but didn't say anything more, not even when Nick started to plead. Joanna cursed her gift at that moment. She herself was terrified but because of the mind gift she could also feel Nick's feelings and now all she felt was fear. The men that held them felt... joyous.

Joanna tried to bite the man that held her but that only resulted in an almost casual slap over the face. But even after the slap the men seemed a bit unsure on what to do next. Then the man that held Nick freed one of his hands and hit the boy in the face.

Seconds later Joanna got what was her second punch in the face. She could feel the tears running down her cheeks but hoped that they couldn't see it, that way she felt that she kept some of her dignity.

The punches were raining over her; legs, arms, torso and face and soon the only thing that was keeping her up was the man that held her. Ironically enough she was grateful about it, without him she would

now be laying with her face in the dirt, possibly being kicked on. At least she didn't feel it all as keenly as she should have done. One part of the mind-polices training had been to shut out their own feelings, this technique could be used in many ways. As Joanna used it now she shunted out her own pain and fear. It only worked to a certain point but at least it gave some relief.

She floated in a kind of calm, only partly aware of her own body. The one problem with this state was that she had to focus outward. She could feel Nick as if he was a part of her and by that she could feel that she was getting the easy treatment. He was barely consciousness and there were nothing suggesting it would all be over soon.

Then Joanna begun to feel something else, or someone else. It was a rage travelling against them and it was two things that chocked her especially. Firstly her talent weren't very great so that she could feel anything from a person at the distance her mind was comprehending was incredible, just the thought that someone could be that mad...

The second thing was the speed with the person was moving. It wasn't normal to say the least.

Suddenly the rage was there and the man holding Joanna was ripped away. She sank down on her knees and when she hit the ground the calm she had felt escaped her. She could feel her brushed body with such a force that she almost let out a scream of pain; only stopping it in the last minute. When Joanna looked at their saviour again she saw that the men had let go of Nick and was to closing in on her rescuer. She could still feel his rage but strangely enough he didn't feel the least afraid. The next minute she understood why.

The man moved in fluid motions and spun around the men that had hit them; their rescuer wasn't even still for a moment. Mostly he seemed to kick and hit them, he moved so fast that it wasn't before one of the other men fell that Joanna realised that he has some kind of knife in his hand. It was almost over before it begun. Three of the men had fallen and with a kick their rescuer sent them rolling of the roof; the last two ran. Joanna didn't believe what she just had seen. One man, one man with a just knife, had beaten five men with swords!

When the man put away the knife and bended over her she didn't know if she should be grateful or scared, but she felt a bit of both.

He put a hand on her face and first she wondered what he was doing but then she understood that he was trying to see how badly hurt she was. He did the same to most of her body and even if she winched when he touched one of the brushes that were beginning to show he was very careful. She tried to protest when he pulled up her tunic, but soon stopped because she was too weak to stop him from doing anything he wanted. He pulled of a glove that she hadn't even realised that he was wearing and put his hand on her stomach.

The hand was cold but not uncomfortable, very soft, Joanna thought, to be a man's hand. He felt all over her stomach, sometimes just softly pulling it over it but often enough he pressed down to feel if anything was broken.

When he was finished with her he moved on to Nick. "How bad is it?" Joanna asked, not sure if she meant the question for her or for Nick.

The man shrugged, "you will both survive given a little rest."

She knew that voice but in her beaten state it took her a while to find the person it belonged to.
"Captain!"

He turned slightly on his head to look on her, "yes, recruit?"

He continued to look questioning at her, waiting for her to say something. In the end she said lamely
"thank you."

He just nodded and went back to Nick.

What strangely enough surprised Joanna the most in this moment was how different her new captain was from all her previous commanders. Some of them she at least thought had cared about their men but this was something else. They hadn't been Silvers responsibility for a whole week yet, actually not much more than a day and she could even now feel the anger burning in him, only partly smouldered. Continuing Joanna had heard of self-discipline but this was nothing but amazing. A person with the feelings that she felt in him shouldn't work with such easy gestures. Silver shouldn't be able to examine both her and Nick so methodically. There was nothing rushed about him and when she looked at him she saw that no-one without her ability could even tell that he was angry. None of this made any sense.

After that he locked up the chains and Joanna suddenly realised that she had forgotten all about them.

When he was finished he lifted Nick, carrying him over his back and neck. After that he helped her up.

One of Joanna's feet was hurting horribly when she tried to support herself on it. The attackers hadn't done anything to the foot so it had most likely been hurt when she fell. "Captain?" She said, uncertain of how to approach him. This wasn't really a rulebook-situation.

"Yes?" He answered. Listening to his voice you could believe that this was a everyday situation for him, in closer consideration, maybe it was...

"I don't think I can walk sir..."

"Well then you will have to lean on me, it won't be very far so we will manage. I know a place where we can try to wake Jacobson here." He stepped closer and laid a hand over her back. Joanna leaned as little as she could on Silvers and felt totally useless. Hadn't the captain found them they would have been as good as dead by now and how were they thanking him? By letting him practically carry them both. On the same time she was hoping that the place he had been taking about really was close by, because she didn't know for how long they could keep going. Even if Nick was not much more than a boy he must be heavy by now and Silvers weren't exactly what you would call a big man and she wasn't making it better.

As it turned out they hadn't been moving for a quarter of an hour yet when the captain stopped. He knocked on the roof in front of him and said something Joanna didn't catch, then a hatch opened and they went inside. She was momentarily blinded by a light.