

# AN ASSASSIN'S ANTHEM

## Chapter 12 - The Toad's Truth

The group crept through the foggy trees. Riley squinted as he tried to see through the fog. Then he glanced at the noble.

Hassan Mishra - 51. Duelist - 39. Soldier - 46.

Duelist has to be at least C tier. Soldier? Riley debated on it while following his dad through the mist. Clanking metal and footsteps arose from the surrounding group.

In contrast to the still forest, Riley quickly became bothered by it. He veered towards his father, who winked and flashed a signal. "Practice. Lie. Be a Bard."

With a grin, Riley moved closer and closer to the guards and the noble. "How old are yeh, sir?"

Hassan smiled proudly. "I turned sixteen three months ago. What about yourself?"

"Two months. I'm hopin' to get Death's blessing." Riley batted his lashes at the noble. "My pa's been trainin' me. He's very skilled."

"I can tell." Hassan's focus shifted. "What barony are you from?"

Roger smiled. "The duke is Celk? Somethin' like that. Town's called Chillfalls."

Hassan nodded to himself as he thought. "You should transfer here. We could use you both to defend the realm and territory."

Riley gasped, covering his mouth with his hand. "Really? That's mighty generous. Can we, Pa?"

“Dunno,” Roger replied with a shrug. “Buncha laws ‘bout all that. They’re all confusin’. I don’t get ‘em.”

Hassan’s smile turned predatory. “I’ll file the paperwork. We’ll do that when we get back.”

“Thank yeh,” Riley said chipperly, stepping closer. “Have you met the prince? I heard he’s handsome and so skilled, and he’s already C-tier with a special class to be king. An’ I was wonderin’ if it were true? Is he dreamy?”

Hassan groaned while a guard nearby snorted. A few began whispering and laughing.

“He’s overrated and far above your station,” Hassan replied, rolling his eyes.

“Course, sir. I was jus’ curious. Heard he got a skill from Beauty, like the princess. And I - well I was just curious.” Riley turned away and forced his laughter back down.

“Waste of skills and time,” Hassan said, shaking his head. “Your skills are better. Beauty’s skills are a waste.”

Mean. Prank him for me! ~Beauty

Get him dirty and rob him! ~Mischief

Quest: Beauty’s Burn! Make Hassan suffer without inflicting real harm on his person.

Sponsors: Beauty and Mischief.

Rewards: Our favor! Huzzah!

“Beauty, I apologize for any errant thoughts. I’d be happy to now help you. Revenge can be served hot.” Riley smiled and veered around the tree, watching some of the yellow and orange leaves flutter down as they passed. Then an idea hit.

Riley walked closer. "You think mah skills are better?"

"Of course. They have real use, like mine," Hassan replied.

"Thank yeh!" Riley beamed at him. "I should tell yeh 'bout our last hunt. There was a whole pack o' wolves. I, quick as a cat, climbed up a tree and then pulled out mah bow..."

Forcing down his desire to laugh, Riley began repeating his father's earlier performance, making up an elaborate story.

"So, I nocked an arrow. The wolves, what were taller than I was, growled and circled, biting at mah tree and tryin' ter rip it down. 'Cours I weren't havin' any of tha'. So, I fired off an arrow.

"My aim was true and it struck one right in the eye, dropped it dead in a single shot, it did. 'Twer an amazing shot, better than the best soldier."

"Aye," Roger added happily. "She can clip the wings off a butterfly."

Riley nodded. "An' so I began mah shootin, killin' 'em dead with naught but a single shot. 'Course, they got scared an' started ter run away. —"

"What level were they?" a guard interjected with a smirk.

"They were all over five hundred or Mischief smite me," Riley said with a grin.

"Where were I? Oh, right --"

"Mischief won't smite you for this," another guard protested. "He'd laugh. Swear on Death."

Riley looked at him in horror. "Sir, yeh don't believe me? How could that be? 'Tis true, I say. Pa, tell 'em."

"Aye," Roger said with a nod. "Tis truer than a toad's tongue."

"What?" the guard said, blinking.

"Truer than a tiger in a tree," Riley said with a grin.

“Truer than a toucan talking,” Roger added.

Riley giggled. “Truer than a Takin taking.”

“Truer --”

“Stop!” Hassan shouted. “What’s wrong with you two?” He shook his head.

Riley burst into laughter, sending the peals out into the mist. Then he nocked an arrow and sent it soaring at the goblin who burst from the nearby trees.

Other arrows sunk into it and the others. The group of six goblins crumpled and fell in seconds.

Hassan huffed. “Let me get a shot or two off. Come on now,” he grumbled angrily.

Riley patted his shoulder and retrieved an arrow while listening to the forest for others.

The group went quiet as they looked. Failing to find anything, they continued walking through the fallen leaves littering the forest floor.

A soldier interrupted it a minute later. “Truer than a toad’s tongue?”

Riley spun and grinned at him. “Aye, the legend of the toad’s tongue is an ancient one. And it’s said, that with a flick, an insect will be gone. You see they have abilities that Nature gave to them. It all started from a single toad. I believe its name was Sham...”

Hassan groaned out into the fog. Riley didn’t stop as he began making up a story about a toad who struggled to hunt food. Roger periodically made it worse by inserting his own lore for the hero toad.

After five minutes of nonsense about a toad, another group of goblins burst through the fog. Using Ambush, Riley slit one’s throat. He looked to see the

rest were already dead. Wiping his blade clean, he headed back to Hassan with a grin.

“No more, please,” Hassan said with a smile. “I can’t.”

Riley giggled, his laugh rolling out into the forest.

“I wanted to know what happened next. After Sham evolved his tongue, what happened?” a guard said with a wink.

Riley moved over next to him and started up once more. Hassan massaged his brow and moved closer to Roger.

“I can tell yeh a tale,” Roger said with a grin.

“No,” Hassan said instantly. “Your daughter is a strange one. She’s charming. She’d make a nice lady for a mayor. You should consider moving up here.”

Roger winked. “Aye. Every boy ‘round comes chasin’ after her. She has her mum’s charm, she does. An’ there’s a strappin’ young man waitin’ for her.”

“I’ll make it worth your while if you move. We can make it discrete,” Hassan replied.

“Well now. What we talkin’? She needs a dowry an’ needs a nice future, she does.”

“I’ll make it worth your while,” Hassan replied.

Roger tapped his lips as he appeared to think it over. “Terms and contrac’ then?”

“Yes. I’ll inform them if you lie.”

“Course. We’ll meet back in town?”

Hassan nodded and then took the outstretched hand. The two shook and then looked over.

“... And Beauty looked in outrage at the handsome hero toad. ‘Sham you’ll have a curse to bear as you wander on the road.’ And that is why they’re ugly. The ancient toad’s tongue truth. Beauty had to smite ‘em to give some others youth. But Sham was a great hero. He didn’t care a bit! —“

“Beauty did not smite the toad with ugliness,” Hassan interjected.

“Aye, she did,” a guard said as he laughed and wiped tears from his eyes.

“Have you ever seen a pretty toad?”

“No, but that’s because they are ugly!” Hassan replied with a snort.

“Because Beauty cursed them,” the guard said with a nod.

“Aye,” Riley said happily, patting the guard’s arm. “Tis said that the great hero worked and toiled hard. So, Labor stepped in to help him out. --”

“No!” Hassan interjected. “No more! We’re hunting goblins, not listening to made-up stories!”

Riley erupted into laughter and reached for his knife. Grabbing it, he went quiet and darted into the trees toward the faint outlines. The rest of the group did the same.

Bounding off a rock, Riley slashed a goblin’s throat and then stabbed another in the head, punching through the skull. Wiping the blade clean, he headed back to the group.

“I can’t, Maddie. It’s such nonsense,” Hassan said apologetically.

“Aye. Tis as false as a frog’s face,” Roger said with a wink.

Beaming up at his Dad, Riley launched into the story, introducing a new rival for Sham.

Hassan groaned and massaged his brow. He turned to his guards. “Why?”

“It’s funny,” Amir said as he chuckled. “Keep ‘em coming, Maddie.”

Riley did just that as they meandered through the trees. The sun rose higher in the sky, slowly burning off the mist around them. The fog slowly burned away as words and time blurred around the group, revealing the autumn forest.

Colored leaves fluttered softly. Footprints littered the ground, and in the distance lay the valley where the goblins had been. The group fell quiet, and Riley stopped the stories.

“What happened here?” Amir interrupted as he stared out into the valley. Hundreds of dead goblins littered the ground like vibrant red autumn leaves, and the smell of blood washed over the group.

“There are hundreds of them,” Hassan whispered. “Who and how?”

The guards began marching forward to investigate. Riley looked out to the valley of death and prayed. “Death guide their journey. Help them find the way. Do not let them linger. This, I humbly pray. Nature, I need guidance. What would you have me do? The path I walk leaves a mark. Help me clean it, too.”

Quest: Help purify the nearby place of power.

Sponsors: Death, Nature, & Beauty.

Rewards: Unknown.

An image of a mountain spring flashed into his mind. Riley looked off to the distant mountain beyond the field of dead. Then he moved to his dad. “I have a quest for the place.”

Roger nodded. “We all got it. Give them a moment.” He turned and studied the area.

“See any others?” Riley whispered as he looked out at the gruesome scene they’d created.

“A few, but ignore them,” Roger replied, walking towards the others.

Riley followed, carefully stepping through the meadow.

“I know where the place is!” Hassan exclaimed, pointing. “Let’s head towards the spring up there.”

The group began to gather and walk in that direction. Riley leaned over. “We have time, right? We’ll make it in time for the academy?”

Roger nodded. “Yes. You have three days. Do whatever you need to do to push it. That includes using the crystals so you push yourself further. Higher levels will only help you at the academy.”

“But the noble?” Riley signed.

Roger tapped out a reply. “Let him fail out early if he won’t be reasonable. This is not the time to carry dead, arrogant weight. Hide the result when you get out.”

Riley nodded and then followed the group toward the mountain, enjoying the autumn leaves as he walked.

Riley Milvsky

Level: 22

XP: 27367

Bard (C)

Level: 16

Inspiring Song F Bolster your allies with magic and music. Strength and Move Speed increased by 1 for one minute. Costs five Bardic Inspiration and impacts allies within ten meters. The radius of influence expands by one meter for each additional inspiration spent.



Psychic Spike F Wield your mana to cause psychic damage to a target. Cost varies based on allocation.

Conjure Water F Gather water from your surroundings or attempt to send it into the air. Cost varies based on amount.

Assassin (C)

Level: 16 + 12

Assume Disguise S +30 charisma. Enhance your current disguise by altering your displayed information and taking on the disguised form. Grants +5 levels to the assigned class. Perception and Insight suffer -250 levels against your disguise and -50 levels against your deception or stealth. Penalty applied: Gods' Oversight.

Dancer's Form B +10 speed. +2 levels to assigned class. You may use a charge of inspiration to boost your movement speed by an additional 5 for a minute.

Death's Cloak A Slain enemies will grant experience to your base level and active classes. +3 levels to the assigned class. Perception and insight suffer -25 levels against you. Penalty applied: Covenant.

Ambush B +10 speed. +2 levels to the assigned class. Costs one stamina to use. On use, you teleport to a shadow within 20 meters. Penalty applied: Covenant.

Ranger (C)

Level: 16

Pretty F Your appearance is so boring when it could be ever grand. Use 1 mana to get a little help from Beauty! (Seriously? Upgrade me already so I can give you rewards!) Penalty applied: Unequippable. Beauty may alter appearance.

Spell Thief (C) Level: 1 Inactive.

Dexterity: 104

Strength: 44

Speed: 64

Intelligence: 44

Charisma: 90

Stamina: 88

Mana: 92

Inspiration: 38