

The God of Jesters

Chapter 3: 1.02.2 Village in a clearing.

I might be sleeping next to a corpse on the branch of a tree. But let me tell you, it was one of the best sleep I ever had.

As for the little rat, when I opened my eyes, it was staring at me creepily.

"I don't know if you can understand me, but I won't keep you in bounds for long. It's just for my own safety."

Though that was just one reason, the other was that I liked seeing the struggling face of the Grifter that always waited to kill me.

Which sounded a bit bizarre if someone were to listen to my thoughts. But it was true, this rat was highly capable of killing a human being if it wished to do so.

I even wondered if I should open a killer agency with killer rats.

Then my name of Rat king might actually turn real.

"Let's go little one, we have a long journey ahead."

Taking the glass bottle I found in the corpse's stomach, I restarted my journey in these haunted woods.

As for why haunted?

If a corpse on a tree that scares savages was not a sign of something wrong afoot, then I didn't know what was.

But going back was also impossible. The only path left for me was forward.

So I walked, with the small rat in my pocket.

Though, there was one thing I noticed. The deeper I got into these woods, the darker the environment got and the sounds of the insects also dropped down.

Making me reassess my choices.

On my back, there were a bunch of savages looking to hunt me and on my front, there was something or someone that scared the savages.

"I was stupid." I truly was.

In my hands was a poison that scared those savages. Why do I not use it to scare them off and leave?

There was no need to come inside this place.

"I will just go back." even if a few hours of the journey have to be wasted, then so be it. I just didn't feel right.

And I was someone who never believed in ghost stories because I have seen humanity do worse things in the newspaper I used to read.

Making these ghost stories completely childish in comparison.

Though, after leaving this place, I noticed a problem.

A problem that was hard to find.

Making these ghost stories completely childish in comparison.

Though, after leaving this place, I noticed a problem.

A problem that was hard to imagine that it could even exist.

"When did this fog appear?"

This was an odd time for a fog, being midday with the sun at its peak. The fog that appeared on my back felt unnatural. There was neither any wind nor any cold.

I couldn't even hear the sound of any insects or birds chirping above me.

And this caused me to stop.

The only way to go back is to go through that weird fog, a fog that seemed to be following me, staying just fifty meters away from me.

If I go deeper toward the forest, the fog will follow me. But if I go towards it, the fog would just stay there, waiting for me to enter it.

And this creeped the heck out of me.

Though I will still say, I was never a believer in the occult or ghost stories. The advancements and discoveries I have read in the newspaper all lead to one thing.

That there was no god or any magical beings, it was just fear of the ignorance and paranoia of a simple event that was amplified by the hearsay from people to people.

That's how legends were born.

But now, I am not as sure anymore.

And fearing the danger that might be lurking in that fog. I knew what to do.

Climbing on the tallest tree I could find. I tried to map out the location and learn where I was.

And much to my surprise. I am lost.

"LOST... FUCK!!"

A hill that I was not familiar with nor had I seen before, a divide between the forest that signified a river. None of it was familiar to me. And I understood that I was far from those savages.

A bit too far if I might say.

"FUCK."

Though knowing how things were, I understood what I have to do now.

Follow the potential river I saw before and then find some human settlements. Even if it leads me to those savages, I would gladly accept that instead of walking into that accursed fog that seemed to have a mind of its own.

So I started to walk, though the river looked closer from above, it was a lot farther than expected.

But soon I arrived at the clearing formed by the river.

Or so I thought.

"A road?" Seeing the road, I was disappointed and somewhat happy.

Though there was no water for me to drink. At least the road signified that there was a population that frequented this road.

"Hah, little Grifter. It seems like we won't be lost for too long."

Rationing the water was a must. So I did just that, using the shade of the trees to walk along the road while admiring the architecture of this road.

"Seems a bit too gaudy for a road though." This thought came to my mind as the road I walked along was built using stone blocks.

Which was odd coming across in countrysides that usually just use dry mud roads on which they spread some oil to prevent the plant growth.

Unlike this road, that seemed to be something one would find in rich districts of a city.

'...'

Which made my suspicions heavier with time.

Turning back, I can see that the fog still followed me the same way it was following before. Its intentions are clear, "Walk or I devour you."

Pretty scary if I have to say it.

Though the existence of fear had long left my body. And only curiosity remained.

As I found the current circumstances an eye-opening experience for me.

I don't know if what I was experiencing was real or just a mirage after all the horrible experiences I went through.

Though I am certain the road below my feet was at least real.

And to further confirm if the things I was experiencing were real.

I saw a woman with a wooden basket over her head walking ahead of me.

"YES."

I shouted, causing the woman to turn her head and look at me.

She was a young girl, with freckles on her cheek and brown hair. To someone like me, she was a beauty. A charming and refreshing face that I haven't seen a lot in the city.

Guess this was the village charm everyone was talking about.

"Excuse me, is there a village ahead? I have been lost for a while."

"Village? Of course, there is. If there was not, why would I be walking in that direction?" Just like her face, I can feel that she is a fierce young lady.

I didn't know whether it was because I was tired or just frustrated. But her energetic voice felt heavenly to me.

Even though, when she said this, her mouth was soured up.

"Thank you for that. I was really losing hope." I said while walking closer to her. But in turn, she backed off from me.

Pretty expected, and smart of this young girl, if I have to say it.

The blood from the savage on me was still there and the damage to the clothes after I originally fell from the mule still existed.

It is making me look like a ruffian.

"Stay right there." She warned while taking out a sickle from her basket and aiming at me.

"No need for that, I just wanted to know the location of the village, that's it," I said while backing off from the woman.

"I was ambushed by some savages before and barely escaped with my life. So I was looking for some accommodations before leaving for the Christen City."

"I was wondering if your village can provide me with that," I said all the words that needed to be spoken to this woman.

Giving her a clear picture of the situation was better than keeping her in the dark.

"You can talk to the chief when you come there... just follow this road." She answered me with her sickle still aimed at me.

"Don't follow me." She said before trying to hurry away.

But my questions were not over yet.

They had just started.

"Before you go, can you tell me what the fog behind me is?" I shouted to the hurrying figure of the girl.

But all she shouted back to me was.

"What fog?" Before her figure disappeared on the bend of the road.

"Fast girl." It would be a lie to say that I was not disappointed with her leaving me in this place all alone.

But from her words, I won't have to be alone for long.

Which in turn meant I won't be bored for long as well.

'Hmm, the fog. She doesn't see it.'

I thought before turning my head back and looking at the fog once again.

'Hmm. And it was then I noticed it.'

The fog seemed closer than before.

Even though I have not moved back towards it.

It was probably a hallucination like everything was about that fog.

But I won't be too foolish to enter it, no matter what.

Though tired and thirsty from the long walk. I was finally able to arrive at a bigger clearing with some cattle grazing on the side and even the sound of rushing water not so far from me.

And the village the girl mentioned was also present in front of me. Which mostly comprised of moldy brick homes among which a singular house stood out. Probably their village chief's.

"Oh, a welcoming party is ready," I said while looking at the men standing at the front of the village one of them holding a large bamboo stick. Probably in an attempt to threaten me.

And among this group of welcoming parties. I found the girl I saw before.

"Stop right there stranger. Tell us your name and why you are here."

Those men asked me a basic question, which the second was easy to answer. But not the first one.

"I was attacked by savages on the road to Christen city and escaped to the forest," I explained the details of what happened and how it happened while removing any details that might make me seem dangerous to these people.

"So what Meena said was true. Those savages somehow still survived the purge."

"They have probably multiplied as well."

It seemed this village and those savages had some history and not just that. But I also found the name of the woman.

Meena.

Such a simple name.

"We believe you. But first, at least tell us your name." These men asked and I knew they wouldn't take no for an answer.

So I did what any sane person will do.

"My name is Mirage, I was a student learning more about rats. Sadly, most of my test subjects have been lost to those savages" I explained while bowing to the group, while taking out Grifter from my pocket.

"This is the only one I could recover from. Sadly, it was the most insane and dangerous of the bunch. Probably why it could survive those savages."

Of course, this name was fake.

I have long forgotten what my actual name was, as the only woman who knew it rarely called me by it and now she was dead.

So to me, names were nothing more than templates that I can change depending on the circumstances.