

The Vampire 48

Chapter 48 48: Unleash the Hounds

In the villa, Owain stood fuming in the late Sir Kaefin's chambers, staring at the corpse of the man who had once been not only a loyal servant, but a close friend from his teenage years. Sir Kaefin had helped him to sneak out of the castle as a youth and even brought him to both his first tavern and his first brothel.

In many ways, Owain thought of his steward not as a servant but as the older brother he'd never had. One who had been both a confidant, advisor, and guide on the path from boyhood to becoming a man.

Some people around him had suggested that Kaefin was only using him for his superior wealth and status but Owain had shouted down anyone who dared say that more than once. While he could admit that he spent more of his pocket money when he spent time with the older man, what was the point of having it if he didn't spend it? And Kaefin had been the one to teach him how to use it to enjoy life.

Without Kaefin, he might very well have turned out like his dour and studious brother, eternally with his nose in a book and unaware of the joys that life afforded to people like them. In many ways, Kaefin felt like more of a brother to him than Loman ever had. And now, someone had taken that brother from him.

"Who dared to do this?" Owain growled, turning to face the two other men in the room. The sickly stench of death mingled with the metallic smell of blood and the sour fragrance of spilled wine to make everyone in the room uncomfortable but Owain's rage burned too hot to care about how uncomfortable they were when he rounded on the other men. "Someone will hang for this," he shouted.

Sir Broll, much like Owain, had a face that was dark with rage. He and Kaefin had followed Owain for so long that they'd practically become family. To find him here, dead in bed with his pants around his

ankles and his own knife in his chest, it wasn't just tragic, it was a humiliation that could never be forgiven!

Sir Cathal, however, wore a much grimmer expression as he looked at the fallen steward. He'd already asked a few of the servants who were drawing water to fight the fire if any of them had seen anything when he heard of Sir Kaefin's murder. The answers he received combined with the scene in the room painted a very clear picture of what had happened.

"Sir Kaefin did this to himself," Cathal said bluntly, returning Owain's burning stare without flinching. "I have yet to question everyone, but it's fairly clear that he dragged a serving girl into his chambers this morning."

"It doesn't take an Inquisitor to understand what happened next," the older knight said, pointing at the position of Kaefin's pants and the broken shards of pottery.

"The girl must have hit him in the face with the jug of wine," Sir Cathal continued. "Then, she took his knife and stabbed him to make her escape. He brought this on himself."

"You take that back," Owain said, crossing the distance to the older knight with powerful strides and pointing a finger at the grizzled man's face. "No serving girl has the right to do this to a knight!"

-SLAP-

Sir Cathal held nothing back when his hand flew, slapping Owain with all the strength his arm possessed. Old and retired he might be, but even after decades of service, his body still held the strength and

training to strike with enough force to split Owain's cheek and send the young lord sprawling on the floor.

"My lord, that strike is delivered on behalf of your father," Sir Cathal said calmly, as though he were a tutor disciplining an unruly student. "Since my lord is not present to discipline you himself, I will do so for him."

"You dare!" Owain began, only to be cut off as Sir Cathal continued speaking in a cold, clipped voice.

"I remind you, young lord, that you are not yet the Marquis Lothian. I serve your father and it is at his command that I've accompanied you here, not yours," the old knight said firmly. "Your father asked me to mind you until he can select someone to permanently replace Sir Tommin and I intend to do just that."

"Sir Kaefin might have been murdered by a commoner," Cathal continued in his lecturing tone. "But it happened because of his sordid actions. Actions that you seem to have no issue with. Perhaps you and he aren't so different in some respects."

"Sir Cathal," the other knight in the room said sharply, placing a hand on the hilt of the dagger at his waist. "You're overstepping. You cannot insult Lord Owain like that," Broll said, defending not only Owain but himself as well. He, Kaefin and Owain had been like peas in a pod for the past several years and to insult one of them was to insult them all.

"It isn't an insult to tell a young lord the truth to his face," the older knight said, reaching out to help Owain to his feet. "This is a lesson you must learn, my lord," he continued.

"A knight, a lord, a marquis or a king, none of these titles make a man impervious to a simple knife in the hands of a common servant," Cathal said, pointing at the knife protruding from Kaefin's body.

"If a nobleman abuses his power over the peasantry, the peasants will put an end to his abuses, one way or another," he finished, giving a pointed look at Sir Kaefin's corpse before looking back at Owain.

"Your point is taken," Owain said, rubbing his jaw. The words stung more than the slap had but arguing about them with a man his father had sent to 'mind him' would gain him absolutely nothing. He might not agree with Sir Cathal's words but he was smart enough not to fight a losing battle over them.

"But I cannot let the murder of a knight stand," Owain insisted. "Haven't both Crown and Church instructed that no crime against the clergy or nobility is to go unpunished, lest people feel that they can kill their betters so long as they can plead some justification? Whether Sir Kaefin shares some blame in this or not, we still have to see justice done."

"It is true that the king's justice must be upheld," Cathal said grudgingly. "But the cook Otis said that the girl responsible for the murder lit the fire in the kitchens to buy time for her escape. She has likely fled to the woods by now."

"That doesn't mean she's gotten away," Sir Broll insisted. "My lord," he said, turning to Owain. "Sir Kaefin brought several hunters, trackers and bloodhounds with him to hunt the woods for game during your stay. Let me take command of them to hunt this girl."

"You should stay here, Sir Broll," the older knight said, his bushy eyebrows lowering in a scowl. "A knight has just been murdered by a serving girl. Now is the time we should stay close to Lord Owain to ensure the same doesn't happen to him."

"No," Owain said firmly. "Sir Broll is correct, we need to hunt down the murderer. Sir Broll, take the hunters and don't return until you're dragging her with you. If possible, I want her alive so we can hang her before the other servants as a reminder of the fate that awaits any who commit crimes against their lords."

"If you must kill her, I still want her body brought before me," Owain said, his eyes smoldering. "Sir Kaefin was like a brother to me. His murderer's body must be burned to light his way to the Heavenly Shores or he will never know peace in the next life. Now go, find her before the day ends!"