

## The Warehouse

"Get the f--- out!" screamed Vor of Megrin and started throwing rocks.

Obrecht sat up naked and took two small stones to the shoulders before he rolled behind the crates. Tatianna bolted for the other side, paused, and tried to go back to the sheets. Vor caught her in the back, which was a shame because he was aiming for her head. Tatianna forgot about whatever she had left in the sheets and fled.

"Get out!" screamed Vor.

Obrecht shot a hand out for his pants. His face peaked beyond cover to see where they were, and Vor caught him on the forehead. Screaming, Obrecht got his pants and ran, trying to hide behind stray crates as he hopped into his trousers, ducking away from Vor's arm.

Tatianna couldn't even do that and wrapped herself again in the old sheet. She dashed after Obrecht, and Vor hurled stones, catching her in the shoulders and back. The dockworker bolted out the tiny hole and she followed, Vor coming after with yet more rocks.

"Damn kids!" yelled Vor, kicking the wall.

He turned around and his helpers beamed at him with smiles wrapped around their faces. One of them pantomimed grabbing butts. Vor had no time for that. He set on the five of them with more curses and shouts, but even his yelling couldn't subdue their smirks. They threw the doors open and heaved great boxes from wagon-back, putting them on runners and sliding them up skids to the warehouse.

Outside clouds blotted out the sky, a thick overcast that veiled the sun. Inside the warehouse was indistinguishable from twilight even with the doors open wide. Vor yelled a few more times, which the laborers ignored, and stomped through his warehouse to the lover's nest to see if they'd stolen anything.

A quiet voice spoke behind him. The laborers roared, shouting in their native tongue Jesbana. The quiet reply answered in the same, and they roared again.

"Je te! Je te!" said the one voice with false impatience that couldn't hide his smile in the words, and the laborers laughed. Half continued heaving large boxes down onto two wooden rails and sliding them up a partial ramp to the warehouse, the rails mounted to steps instead of ties. The other half began heaving other crates from inside down another set of rails, and staging them by the wagons.

Bleys in gold and red walked through the doors, laughing and calling out for the Megrindin. "Vor! I had a feeling I needed to come here, and I see the call was right! They tell me you found two birds in their nest?"

"Two pigeons in my warehouse! Look! They cut a hole in the back. I bet they're thieves." Vor replied. He had passed the makeshift bed with little more than grumbling. Now he stood at the back wall, glaring at the hole and the manner in which it had been concealed.

"Truly, this is the first time in all of history two lovers went someplace they shouldn't to sleep together. We shall write of you in history, Vor," said Bleys.

"Laugh if you want, but if they stole your merchandise, I'm not paying for it!"

Bleys picked up Tatianna's shirt, thrown aside some time before. He drew his court sword, a rapier of silver and adamant with jewel-studded hilt and filigree of gold, and with the point picked up Obrecht's small

clothes. They had lain under a very short skirt.  
"Somehow, I doubt they escaped with much."

Bleys and Vor talked in Thari, and Vor used a pidgin mixture of that and Jesbana to talk to the crew. The crew largely ignored him. The stock manager didn't believe Bleys and began a visual inventory, checking this and that. Bleys looked bored and called something to the workers. They waved him off.

"Go back to bothering lovers, prince! Leave the real work to real men!" They laughed.

"My goodness," said Bleys under his breath. "Why I don't think those men meant prince with any respect at all."

Chuckling, he poked through the lover nest again. Something urged him on.

"The shingles at least are all right. But we need a carpenter to come and fix the wall," reported Vor.

"Uh huh," agreed Bleys. He threw the blankets and sheets aside. There was nothing there. For some why he kept looking.

"They had sex on my chair!" yelled Vor.

"Just making subjects," murmured Bleys and kept looking.

He didn't notice but Bleys began pawing through boards and stacks of loose knife-blanks faster, shoving things aside. Unsharpened metal clattered, and crates banged. Bleys grabbed a farrier's anvil by the carrying boards, strapped on wood to keep the spike sharp, and heaved it aside. It fell with a boom.

Where it had been, under the bedding where only a small hand would be able to reach, Bleys found a small cashmere bag. He knew that bag, because he'd dropped it before. He picked it up and poured six rings out onto his palm. For a moment he sighed and smiled, and breathed deep of relief.

Then he counted, and his face went flat. His eyes narrowed. He thumbed through the rings again. One, two, three, four, five, six, he counted again, and a terrible fury crept into the prince of Amber's heart. He squeezed the rings in a fist until any reasonable gold would be crushed into a non-shape and glared at the holes in the ceiling above.

One ring just happened to slip over his right pinky finger. It fit like it was made for him.

Bleys turned to Vor, who watched him with wild eyes. The laborers did as well.

'Te shan,' they whispered. 'Te shan.' The anvil.

"Where did they go?" demanded Bleys.

"Out the back?" said Vor, but uncertainty made it sound like a question.

"Lock this place up and fix that wall."

The prince ran to the back and ducked out the small hole.

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The back of the warehouse abutted a low spur of rock that came from one of Kolvir's feet and ran to the bay. Between warehouse and rock wound a small alley. The building made a square but the rock didn't run straight, so a grassy aisle ranging from less than a foot to twenty feet wide separated the wall from the ridge.

Obrecht stopped in a medium opening just before the corner of the building. Here a road terminated at a small construction site. A baker was having a cellar quarried into the rock, but right now it was just a partially erected building and piles of gravel. Obrecht checked that no one was watching, and fixed his pants. He'd put them on backwards.

"You asshole! You left me!" swore Tatianna as she arrived, holding her sheet on.

Obrecht didn't have anything to say, so he didn't.

"What do we do now?" asked Tatianna.

"We run."

"We run? That's your plan? I thought you were a great thief who—"

"Hasn't died yet!" interrupted Obrecht in a yell and hissed to himself. He peaked around her and the aisle behind them was clear. He put one hand around her and the other over her lips.

"Yes, Tatianna. Yes. You know why I came to Amber? Because I know when to run. That isn't the mark of a coward; it's the mark of a thief who doesn't want to die. Because we left the wallet, and you know what that means? They're going to figure out we stole that from the navy woman. They're going to find the loot and the rings except the ones we're wearing. And they're going to find anything you brought with you. Your keys, your wallet, your purse if you carry one, everything. We're naked. We have nothing. So I'm going to run. And Tatianna," He looked over her shoulder again and back into her eyes. His fingers still covered her mouth. "Good luck."

Tatianna went from impatient to angry to scared in rapid order, and Obrecht leaned around her to check the aisle again. She spoke through his fingers.

"Baby, baby I need you," she said, but Baby wasn't listening.

Bleys had stepped through the hole in the wall, and Obrecht saw his foot as the prince bowed to get around the mulberry bush.

Obrecht ran. Tatianna whirled around and saw Bleys. Bleys saw her. For an instant they locked eyes before she ran after Obrecht, lifting the sheet up high on her legs.

She was fast, but Obrecht ran faster. The streets formed rough blocks with the edges marked off by ridgelines of the mountain. Obrecht out distanced her along the dead end that traced the wall of the warehouse, and as soon as he hit the main road, he turned left, away from the front of the warehouse and dashed ahead, weaving around crowds of people. The laborers by the wagons paused to see him go and sent up a cheer when mostly naked Tatianna appeared after him. She snarled but followed Obrecht. Other people stopped to gawk at her as she ran, bottom hanging out on the high-street with pedestrians halting. She turned into the first alley with a backward glance.

Bleys followed, running with both hands pumping and hands flat. She was naked in public. Everyone was looking at her, and she couldn't hide. Obrecht had gone.

Tatianna gave in to old fear and ran like the wind.