

## An Honourable Profession

By: Katrina Kite

A young woman was dragged in front of the head jailor. She looked to him to be no more than twenty-one. She had black, shoulder length hair, which she wore up, revealing her slender neck. It set the precedence for the rest of her appearance. She wore tight black pants, a low cut white blouse with a deep slit, tight, black vest, revealing much of her fine figure. The most capturing thing about her though was her deep, sapphire blue eyes. Though she looked around at her surrounding and captors with bored indifference, the defiant, proud glint in her eyes could not be disguised. The jailor noticed it, and decided it was better to be extra precautious while dealing with this particular vixen.

Yevrin sighed as she went through the same old jailhouse tradition. She stood passively as first her sword and belt dagger were taken from her, then her thigh dagger. Obvious weapons seized, she had been forced to remove her boots, in which she had hidden, two long knives, two throwing daggers, and a lock-pick set. Then she was stripped of her vest, in which another lock-pick set and a small knife were stored. After her vest had been taken, the dagger hidden under it and worn on her lower back was discovered and of course removed. After a patting down, the two thin blades that Yevrin had strapped to her forearms were found and she was promptly relieved of those as well. Finally satisfied, the head jailor pronounced her 'safe' and instructed his subordinates to have her chained up by the wrists in one of the lower cells.

Yevrin yawned as she let herself be dragged away by the two men. She was slightly amused by how proficient they had been in searching her. But of course, a noble had accused her, so naturally the law had to be seen as if they were doing everything in their power to serve justice. Still, this seemed a little extreme for an attempted burglary.

'Well, they still have to let me send for someone to defend me. I'll simply have Xander buy my way out. Money is more persuasive than blood after all. All I have to do is lay low, don't make a fuss and—'

Her calculations of how to peacefully get out of jail were abruptly jolted when she saw a familiar form asleep on the floor in a cell she was being dragged passed. She swiftly swung up a leg and hooked it into one of the cell bars, bringing herself and her jailors to a complete halt.

"Xander?!" she exclaimed, startled by seeing him in the cell. "Oi, Xander, is that you?"

The heap on the floor stirred, and a young man sat up. Even while sitting, he gave the impression of being tall. He was young, in his mid-twenties, and obviously fit. He had a small amount of facial hair, but gave the impression that he was normally clean-shaven. Through dishevelled dirty-blond hair, he looked around groggily. He blinked a few times, eyes readjusting to the dim light of the dungeon and squinted up at her.

“Yevrin?” asked Xander, “What are you doing here?”

“That’s what I should be asking you, you idiot! You actually follow the law like an upstanding citizen. How in Fate’s names did you manage to end up in here?”

By now, Yevrin’s jailors were pulling roughly on her arms, trying to dislodge her. Ignoring them, Yevrin stared incredulously at one of the most moral men she knew, lying in a dungeon cell, bearing signs that he had been there for quite some time.

“It’s your fault,” he muttered, still unfocused from having just awoken. “That will *you ‘found’* was discovered to be a fake, and I got blamed and arrested for it.”

“Oh that’s just marvellous,” she replied, annoyed, just as her jailors managed to wrench her off the bars. “Do you realize how troublesome your arrest makes it for me?” she called out as she was forcibly dragged down the corridor.

“I didn’t realize, so sorry to have inconvenienced you,” he replied sarcastically.

“Go back to sleep. You’re useless right now,” she answered coolly as the guards rounded a corner and dragged her down a dark flight of stairs, the only light a faint, flickering torch, which gave the place a gloomy and forbidding feeling.

They reached a set of dungeon cells that were intended for those who had committed grievous offences and suddenly threw her in. Caught by surprise, Yevrin lost her balance and landed solidly on the ground. Before she could even utter a complaint, they had brutally seized her up again and forced her wrists into manacles that were dangling menacingly from the ceiling. Naturally, after receiving the shock of seeing Xander in jail and such ‘inhospitable’ treatment from her jailors, Yevrin was no longer as cool and accepting of her situation as she had been previously. One of the men was treating a bleeding nose –and in an hour or two would be wearing a black eye– by the time the two had managed to get her properly secured.

“This is no way to treat a lady,” she shouted indignantly.

“We don’t have to worry then, since your not one,” the abused man replied insultingly. A moment later, that same man was on the floor cringing in a ball, in acute pain. There were no manacles for her ankles, and with one foot braced against the wall, Yevrin had been able to deliver a swift kick to a sensitive place. However, this awarded her a harsh slap across the face from the other jailor. Before she could retaliate, the man had grabbed the front of her shirt and pushed her against the wall, using his body to prevent her from kicking.

“You aren’t popular with the girls either are you? If this is any indication of how you handle your women,” she stated coolly, disdain dripping from her tone and contempt piercing him with her gaze. The man glared at her and sharply slapped her again. Then let go of his hold on her and went over to help his partner.

“Just you wait an hour honey, just long enough for those things to start biting,” he replied, sneering, “Then you’ll be begging me to come back. We’ll see how badly you think of me then. Until then wench.”

With that the jailor turned his back to her and helped his partner limp out of the cell. Yevrin watched as he locked the cell and he and the other man hobbled away. She calmly looked over her situation. The manacles she wore could close to fit any wrist, and they had been set tightly. The chains she was hanging from were meant for a man’s height. Thus she was dangling at least three hand-spans above the ground. The manacles were already beginning to dig painfully into her wrists. There was nothing binding the rest of her, and the lock on the cell door appeared to be a regular, common-variety lock. Yevrin smirked.

“Amateurs.”

Gritting her teeth, Yevrin twisted her wrists and managed to just grasp the bottom link of the chain. Slowly, she managed to inch her grip higher to a point where she was holding herself up rather than dangling from her wrists. Then she lifted herself up, trying to bring her head to her hand level. For the guards had missed one thing in their search. Dangling from her hair tie was a thin piece of metal, something that at a glance could be mistaken for a bobble, just a piece of decoration. In actuality, it was a nail file.

She let go of one of the chains and with that hand, made an attempt to grab the file and yank it off the band. This attempt failed. She repeated this process three more times before she finally managed to get the file. She let out the breath she had not realized she had been holding. She turned the file in her hand until she had it positioned against the chain, and set herself to the slow task of freeing herself.

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Quickly but carefully, Yevrin made her way back to Xander’s cell. Picking the lock had been child’s play, though she had not managed to pick the locks of the manacles still clamped to her wrists. She arrived at Xander’s cell without incident and found that he had fallen back asleep.

The logical thing to do would be to leave him. First, it was easier to break one person out of prison rather than two. Second, his cell was earlier in the guard’s rounds than her cell was, meaning that their escape would be noticed sooner. Third... she was annoyed that he had actually gone back to sleep after finding out she had been arrested and watching her be dragged off to a cell. In his cell, Xander rolled over in his sleep, and let out a loud snore. Fourth reason: did she really want to be around a man who snored that loudly?

Yevrin sighed, placed her file in the lock, and quickly picked it.

‘He would never let me hear the end of it,’ she rationalized with herself, ‘If I escaped and left him here to rot. And besides, he could be useful for a fight if we’re caught.’

She completely denied to herself that she could be doing this because she felt guilty. Or that it was because she was somewhat in love with him.

She entered the cell and looked down at the sleeping Xander. She was about to give him a good kick in the side to wake him up when she paused, sighed, bent down, and shook his shoulder instead.

“Xander. Xander. Get up you lazy git. I don’t have to take you with me you know,” she whispered impatiently while shaking him, trying to wake him up.

All she got in response was an incomprehensible mumbling. Time was slipping by, and a guard should be doing a patrol soon. She did not have the time for this. She pinched his nose closed.

“Xander, you idiot, *wake up now*,” she hissed. “If you don’t get up this instant I’m leaving.”

Xander jolted awake, flailing and gasping for breath. Yevrin quickly let go of his nose and leaned back, effortlessly avoiding Xander’s reflexive punch. A moment later, he had acquired somewhat clear thinking and was staring at Yevrin incredulously.

“Are you trying to kill me?! What—” he yelled at her.

She quickly placed her hand over his mouth to stem the flow of any more shouts, and shushed him.

“Do you want to bring the guard down on our heads,’ she hissed, berating him. “You sleep deeper than an old drunkard and time is running out. Now shut up and follow me.”

With that she got up, turned on her heel, and stalked out of the cell. Xander, still not completely awake, had no other choice but to follow.

Yevrin briskly took off down the hall, keeping alert for the slightest sound. Xander’s footsteps sounded like thunder to her. When they stopped at the end of the passage Yevrin flicked him in the forehead and pointed at his feet. He rolled his eyes. She gave an exasperated sigh and started down the left corridor. Xander grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

“What are you doing?” he asked. “The guards’ room is that way. The exit is this way,” he gestured, pointing down the right corridor.

“I know. My things are in there.”

“Leave them and buy new ‘things.’ How much could they be worth?”

“Enough,” she answered simply. “And they’re *my* things. *My* blades. I won’t go anywhere without them. Besides,” she lifted a bare foot, “Do you really think I want to walk around with no boots for the rest of the night?”

“I’ll carry you if you want,” he said, trying to reason with her. “It’s a fool’s errand to try to get your stuff now. We need to get out of here before they start the rounds.”

“You go if you want,” she replied, pointing down the hall. “No one is stopping you. I possibly, maybe, might have been a bit responsible for your arrest, so now I’ve gotten you out. We’re even—”

“Hardly—”

“Alright, we’re even for *this* ‘occasion.’ So leave already. I don’t need your help.” She pulled out of his grip and turned around to go, but he caught her again. He gripped her arm, right under the manacle, and forced her to face him. She tried to pull free but he held her firmly.

“Do you really think that you could take on the guards with only a nail file?” His grip tightened as he said this; Yevrin visibly winced. She tried to pull free again, and he let her go, only to grab her arm in a different spot. He held her wrist in front of his face and shifted the manacle a bit. This revealed angry red welts where the metal had bit into her skin. He grabbed her other arm and checked that wrist too, to find the same thing, and even a bit of blood.

“Damned Fates Yevrin! We need to get these cursed things off of you. You can’t fight like this.” Yevrin had just looked at him silently the entire time he had been checking her wrists. She knew how bad they were. The burning feeling was hard to ignore. But she pulled her wrists out of his grip and looked him hard in the eye.

“Watch me,” she said coolly.

With that she turned around and walked away. Xander did not stop her this time. He stared after her, dumbfounded, and shook his head.

“Stubborn woman is going to get us both killed one day,” he muttered to himself. He could not let her fight alone. What kind of man would he be if he let an injured woman—especially one that had helped him escape from prison—go off and fight on her own? The fact that he was somewhat in love with her might also have influenced his decision. He quickly took off down the hall after her.

They came to the guards' room door and waited. They were there only a few minutes before one of the guards –the head jailor– came out of the room. Yevrin punched him on the nose, which forced him back, and then slammed the door closed on him. It hit him on the side of the head with enough force that he slumped to the ground unconscious.

The other two jailors were alert now and drawing their swords. Yevrin leaped at the closer man, Black Eye, and grabbed his arm, attempting to wrestle the sword out of his grip. Xander was left to fight Foul Mouth.

Foul Mouth came towards Xander, confident that he could take on the unarmed man. He made a lunge, which Xander quickly sidestepped. Xander bided his time, dodging the guard's slashes with ease until the man finally overreached himself. Then Xander reached and grabbed hold of the man's sword wrist and pulled the guard towards him. This placed Foul Mouth off balance, and he completely lost it when Xander kicked his foot out from under him. He still had his wrist in his grip and he twisted it, forcing the man to let go of the sword. The guard was trying to get up but Xander gave him a swift kick and then went down on his knees, placing one of them on the man's spine. He twisted Foul Mouth's arm behind his back and with his free hand pinned his shoulder to the ground. The man lay completely immobilized, cursing into the floor. Xander had previously been a very proficient bodyguard –until he had met Yevrin– and his specialty was barehanded combat.

“Yevrin, are you alright over there?” Xander called over to her while maintaining a firm grip on his prisoner.

During Xander's fight, Yevrin had successfully managed to get the sword out of Black Eye's hands by stabbing them with her nail file. He had immediately let go and recoiled from her, but she followed him delivering a solid punch to his already bruised face and then a swift kick to his gut. The guard had crumpled to the floor, clutching his bleeding hands to his chest. She quickly grabbed the hair at the base of his neck, yanked his head back, and placed the nail file over the rapidly pulsing vein in his neck, prepared to plunge it in if the man continued struggling. Fortunately, Black Eye had enough sense to know when he was defeated and stayed perfectly still.

“I'm fine,” she replied. “This nice man was just about to tell me where my things are and the key to the manacles. Weren't you?” She pressed the file harder against his throat. The man shook, looked as if he might resist for a moment, and then slumped, his will dissolved.

“Your weapons are in the cupboard over there; the boss has the keys for that,” he answered dejectedly.

“And the manacles?”

“He has them,” he said, motioning to the man pinned to the floor.

“Good boy. That wasn’t so bad was it?” she said mockingly, lessening her pressure on him, until she felt him stirring. She quickly reapplied the pressure. “You’ll sit here like a good boy as I go about my business right? You’re definitely not paid enough to deal with women like me so you shouldn’t even bother.”

She let go of him and started walking towards the unconscious jailor in the doorway. After a few paces, Black Eye found enough courage to attempt retaliation. Yevrin had her back to him, but Xander saw him.

“Yevrin!” he called out.

It was unnecessary though. Expecting the attack, she quickly retrieved the man’s lost sword and swung it around. Her swing barely missed Black Eye who drew back afraid; she quickly lunged after him, not with the blade but with the hilt. She slammed it into the man’s temple, and he fell to the ground unconscious.

“Idiot,” she muttered, and then continued to the doorway. She got the key to the cupboard, and then went to retrieve her belongings. She put on her weapons; the only noise in the room was the still-conscious guard’s continuous cursing.

“Xander are you going to get the key from him or do you plan to just kneel on him for the rest of the night.”

“Whatever,” he replied annoyed, “You could at least say ‘please’.”

“*Please* do the obvious thing and get the key from him. You were the one so anxious to get these manacles off me in the first place.”

Xander grudgingly began to search for the keys, releasing his grip on the man’s shoulder, but as soon as he did, Foul Mouth started struggling even harder to break free.

“Hey, stop that or you’ll dislocate your own shoulder,” Xander cautioned, pinning his shoulder again and tugging on the man’s twisted arm.

“I’ll be damned if I let that *whore* have her own way without putting up a fight!” Foul Mouth yelled.

Yevrin stiffened, turned, and glared at the man.

“Xander, just go ahead and dislocate it,” she coolly commanded.

“No! I’m not just going to do whatever you tell me to—”

“He called me a whore! Don’t you care about that ‘honour’ stuff—”

“Yes, but—”

“I’m only telling the truth slut. Women like you don’t have any honour *to* defend,” Foul Mouth interrupted.

Yevrin was gripping hard the dagger she had been about to put on, her knuckles white. She glared at the man as if she wished nothing better than to use that dagger to cut out his filthy tongue.

“I’m not a slut, or a whore, or any other type of loose woman. You might think that, you pervert, since probably every woman you associate with is one,” she stated coldly. Then she looked at Xander. “I wouldn’t have much sympathy for him. He’s pure scum. Do you know that when I was chained up and completely defenceless, he took that opportunity to grab my chest?”

“What?” Xander exclaimed, shocked and horrified. Unfortunately, he also jerked when he heard this, which caused him to apply the force necessary to dislocate the jailor’s shoulder from the socket. “He, he—”

“Well, it might have just been the front of my shirt, I can’t remember. It was a while ago,” she said, shrugging her shoulders.

She had finished strapping on her weapons and she walked towards the two of them. The guard was screaming and swearing even louder and worse than he had been before. Xander looked down, aghast at what he had done by accident, and realized that it was exactly what Yevrin had expected would happen if she said something like that.

“Sorry,” he muttered, releasing his hold and searching the man for the key. He found it, took it, got up and handed it over to Yevrin.

“Thanks,” she said, trying to placate him, realizing that he was going to make fuss over this. The last thing she needed was to have him angry with her for the rest of the night. She unlocked the manacles and let them fall to the floor. The welts and cuts were clearly visible against her skin until she covered them with her sleeves. Xander saw how bad they were in total, not just what he had been able to glimpse under the manacles when they had been on, and felt a little less guilty for what he had done. Then felt angry with himself for feeling that way.

“I hate it when you get me involved in one of your ‘jobs,’” he muttered.

“It was your choice,” she replied as she went back to the two unconscious men and relieved them of their purses.

“No, it wasn’t,” he said, shaking his head, looking at her grimly.

She stared back at him, then sighed.

“Maybe it wasn’t, let’s just get out of here, alright.”

“Fine.”

With that the two of them silently left the room, leaving behind two unconscious men, and another one curled up and cursing in pain.

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Yevrin led them half-way across town, going down several side-streets and alleyways until she was satisfied that pursuit would be impossible. Then she stopped, stretched, and looked back at Xander.

“Well, I’ll see you later I suppose,” she said and started walking again.

“What?” Xander said, startled at his sudden abandonment. “Wait! You can’t just lead me all over town and then leave me. Hey, where are you going?” He grabbed her and forced her to face him. Yevrin sighed, and slumped against a wall.

“Really, you get annoyed with me if I get you involved, and then you get annoyed with me when I try to leave you uninvolved,” she said tiredly.

“What are you talking about?” Xander asked, confused.

“I’m going to finish my job,” she said.

“What job?”

“The job I was doing when I was arrested. You’ve never really approved of my ‘profession’ so I assumed you didn’t want to come.”

“I hardly call ‘thief’ a profession—”

“Yes it is, a really good one—”

“Whatever. Are you saying you’re going back to rob a place you’ve already been caught in tonight?”

“Yes.”

“What in the Abyss do you think you’re doing? Have you completely lost your mind?”

Yevrin gave him one of her small, knowing smiles. “Do you not see the genius of it?” she said roguishly.

“No,” he replied flatly.

“You have no imagination Xander. See, they think that I am safely locked up in prison. Even if I broke out, they would never expect me to go straight back and try to steal from them a second time in the same night. Security will be lax. This is the best time for me to go.”

“Is it that important? Can’t we just leave town and forget about it?” He asked, trying to persuade her.

“No. This wasn’t a personal job. I was hired. I can’t just betray my employer like that now can I?”

“Dammit. Nothing I say will change your mind will it?”

“Nope. It wasn’t personal, but now I’ve got my reputation to uphold. I can’t just get arrested and not get back at them.”

“You were robbing them. You deserved to be arrested.”

“I was doing my job, or do you think I should be locked up in a dirty cell with men like those having power over me?”

Xander sighed, annoyed and exhausted.

“I hate reasoning with you.”

“You shouldn’t do it then,” she said teasingly, “You never succeed anyway.”

“I’m coming with you.”

“Fine. Do what you like. I won’t be responsible for you though. And don’t get in the way.”

“Whatever.”

With that the two of them continued through the town. They came up to a grand house, surrounded by an ironwork fence, then walked passed it, over towards the next house. She led them down the side path of this house, and stopped before a hanging rope. She turned and grinned at Xander.

“We can’t just use the front door you know,” she said. Then gripped the rope and started to climb up the wall.

“Are you going to be alright? Your wrists—”

“Worrying about them won’t make them better, and won’t get the job done,” she replied stiffly, gritting her teeth against the pain flaring in her wrists and arms.

Xander, grabbed her foot, and pulled her back down. Yevrin fell back to the ground, just managing to stifle a shriek. She glared at him, but before she could say anything he had grabbed the end of the rope and began tying it around her waist.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Being useful.”

“What?”

“I’ll pull you up,” he said.

He had finished tying the rope around her, and he took one of her hands and pulled up the sleeve. When she had started climbing the rope, she had pulled on the recently formed scabs and caused the bleeding to start again. He let the sleeve cover it again, and then started climbing.

“There’s no reason to for you to make them worse if you can avoid it,” he said nonchalantly as he made his way to the top.

She stared at the ground, tugging on her sleeves. She refused to look up at Xander. She did not care that it was dark and the moon was at quarter phase; she did not know what she would do if Xander realized she was blushing.

“Idiot,” Yevrin mumbled. “I could have done it myself.”

Xander made it to the top, not even winded from the effort. He got a firm hold of the rope and waited until Yevrin gave a tug on the rope to indicate she was ready. Xander then began pulling her up. A few moments later, she had gripped the edge of the roof and Xander was helping her get up. She quickly untied the rope and wrapped it up. Then she handed it over to Xander.

“Thank you,” she said grudgingly, and then walked to the other side of the roof. Xander smiled to himself as he followed her. The roof slanted down, over the fence onto the property of the house they intended to break into. The drop was at least a five-man height, but the very edge of the roof was only a one-man span to a balcony.

“Don’t tell me…” Xander groaned.

“You don’t have to come with me,” Yevrin reminded him.

“If we fall short, we’ll be lucky if we only break our necks.”

“Then the solution is simple, isn’t it?” she said impishly, backing up a couple of paces.

“What is it?”

“Don’t fall,” she said as she ran past him and jumped off the roof.

She cleared the distance easily, landing lightly on her feet. She looked back at Xander and smiled, daring him to follow her. Then she turned back to the balcony door, pulled out the lock pick set in her vest, and got to work on the lock. There was a loud thud behind her when Xander landed, falling to his knees. At almost the same instant, the lock gave way and she opened the door peering in through the curtain to make sure there was no one currently occupying the room. Seeing it clear, she turned back as Xander was getting to his feet, and put her finger to her lips, indicating that they should remain completely silent. She went through the door, went through the curtain, and disappeared from Xander’s sight. Xander hesitated for a moment then followed her.

They were in a sitting room. They walked walk quickly over to the door. Yevrin listened carefully for a moment, and then slowly eased the door opened, listening for a shout of alarm. Hearing nothing, she slipped out the door and into the hall, Xander silently following her. They walked down the hallway, senses on alert for any movement other than their own. At the end of the hall they paused, and Yevrin peered around the corner. No one was in sight. Yevrin smiled; she had been right. Security was nonexistent this night since the threat had already been neutralized and put in jail. She walked down the hall counting the doors, until she reached a blank section of what looked like solid wall, but after a bit of pressure on the moulding opened up to a servants’ stairway. After listening to ensure there was no one inside, Yevrin pulled Xander into the stairway.

“I’m going to complete the job now. It’s going to be very delicate and I don’t want you messing it up. Wait here; this will be our escape route. Deal with anyone you see in whatever manner you like, just don’t let an alarm be sounded. If you hear any shouts, make a run for it. Don’t come looking for me. I can take care of myself and I don’t need to break you out of jail twice in one night,” Yevrin instructed.

Xander looked as if he would protest being left behind, but then realized it was probably for the best. Yevrin turned to leave, but he caught a hold of her hand.

“I won’t run away,” he said, looking her dead in the eyes.

She returned his look for a moment, but quickly turned her gaze down to the floor.

“You should,” she said and paused. The silence stretched for a moment, and she let out an exasperated sigh. “I don’t think I’ve ever met a bigger fool than you.” She squeezed his hand then left down the hallway, refusing to look back. She counted three more doors and stopped. According to her employer, this was the lady of the house’s

bedchamber. She checked that it was locked, then took out the lock pick set again, and within a moment she had unlocked the door with only a faint click.

Slowly, she turned the knob and eased the door open. As soon as it was open enough to squeeze through she slipped in and pushed it almost shut. She looked around. It was a large room, expensively furnished. Rich green curtains hung in front of the window, matching the lush green rug that lay on the floor. An ornate three-way mirror stood in one corner, next to which was a large oak dressing table. On the opposite side of the room was a large canopy bed. Through the transparent curtains Yevrin could see the sleeping form of the lady of the house.

She crept across the room to the dressing table, and quickly scanned the top of it. The normal woman's toilette was visible, but taking up a considerable portion of the surface was a large jewellery chest. Yevrin quickly picked the lock, and opened it to find her treasure. Several pieces of jewellery stood out to her, containing a variety of precious stones. Emeralds, sapphires, rubies, diamonds all twinkled invitingly up at her. She quickly began putting them in her pouch, but even after emptying the chest, she had not found what she had been hired to steal.

She looked through the dresser shelves, but did not find it there either. She did find a small box, which contained a very nice pair of gold cufflinks. She pocketed them, and then looked around the room, trying to see where else the woman might keep her jewellery. She walked over to beside the bed and looked on the nightstand, but there was nothing there either.

'Where is it?!' she screamed internally, her eyes trying to see if there were any secret places in the room. Then her eyes rested on the sleeping woman next to her, and a shiver ran down her spine.

'The Fates really don't seem to like me tonight. Curse them, what did I ever do to deserve this!'

Yevrin carefully pulled the canopy away and stood right next to the bed. The woman's thick brown hair fell and covered her neck. As carefully and as delicately as she could, Yevrin brushed the woman's hair back, revealing a bare neck. She quickly retracted her hand and held her breath as the woman's nose twitched. She stood there motionless, hovering over the sleeping woman until she was certain she had returned to deep sleep. She knelt down next the bed, and slowly placed her arm under the edge of a giant pillow. Little by little, as gently as she could, she inched her hand further and further under the pillow. When her arm was covered up to her elbow, she finally felt the cool metal she had been searching for. She pulled her arm out carefully, and when she had she was awarded with the object she had been searching for. It was not a very grand work, and its previous owners may not have understood its true value. A large dark opal the size of a man's thumb hung from a bright, silver coloured chain. The links were fine and delicate, shaped into the appearance of vines, which was the true value of the necklace. Though to an untrained eye it may have appeared to be plain silver, to anyone

who dealt with metal or jewels, they would know it to be lunarium, one of the rarest and most precious materials in the world. It was as light as air, and given its name by how it shimmered in the moonlight. Yevrin stared at it for a moment before coming back to herself. Then she quickly got up and began to put it away. Just at that moment, the sleeping woman's eyes flickered half open. Yevrin was rooted to the spot for a moment, frozen, then let all caution go to the winds and moved as quickly as she could for the door. She just reached it when the woman on the bed suddenly sat upright and spotted her.

Yevrin was running down the hall at top speed as the woman's scream pierced the night. Xander opened the stairway door a moment later and saw Yevrin. He flattened himself against the wall as she rushed past him.

"Lock the door and run you idiot!" she yelled back to him as she made her way down the stairs.

The two went down and down, around and around the narrow, spiralling stairs and burst out of the bottom door. They could hear footsteps and yells from upstairs. They had come out onto a hallway and Yevrin ran to the left with Xander right behind her to the door at the end of the hall. She swung it open, and the two of them rushed into the kitchen. Straight ahead was the back door. There were sounds coming from the hallway they had just left, and they quickly unlocked the door and ran out. They made it to the fence, which they began to scale, when a guard who had been on patrol shouted an alarm and ran towards them, sword drawn. Yevrin hopped down, about to draw her own sword, but Xander stepped in front of her.

"Go!" he shouted

Yevrin did not waste time to argue. She quickly started to scale the fence. Xander waited for the man to come at him. After the man's first lunge, Xander stepped into the man's guard, chopped down on the guard's sword arm with his left, and with his right hand he jabbed at a specific place at the man's lower neck. The man collapsed and fell to the ground unconscious. Xander turned around and climbed over the fence. As soon as Xander landed on the other side of the fence Yevrin quickly led them through several twisting streets and narrow alleyways and quickly lost their pursuers. She did not slow down though until they reached a small, rickety building, more a shack than a proper house, in a rundown neighbourhood. Yevrin ran up to the door and knocked.

A small woman, not much younger than Yevrin, opened the door, peering blearily at the two of them. Her hair was dishevelled and her clothes were worn and hung loosely on her thin body.

"Yevrin?" the girl asked, looking at her nearsightedly. "Where have you been? You didn't come back for dinner—"

"Just let us in Endrien. I'll explain in a moment."

“Us?” she repeated confused as Yevrin walked in the door, bringing Xander in with her.

“Pleasure to meet you,” Xander said, bowing to the woman. “I’m sorry to intrude like this—”

“Don’t worry,” Endriien interrupted. “Just make yourself at home. Yevrin already has.”

Yevrin had helped herself to a glass of water and was seated in a wooden chair, her feet up on the small table. Xander shook his head at her behaviour and sat in the remaining chair.

“I have something nice for you Endriien,” Yevrin said coyly, placing her hand in her pouch.

“Oh,” Endriien exclaimed surprised. “What is it?”

Yevrin pulled the opal lunarium necklace out and held it up for the woman to see. Endriien had to walk closer to see what it actually was, but when she realized she gasped and reached out a shaking hand for the necklace. Yevrin stood up, and instead of just handing it to the woman, she reached around and fastened the necklace around Endriien’s throat.

“Mama’s necklace,” she cried, pressing the necklace against her skin. “How—”

“It looks lovely on you, doesn’t Xander?” Yevrin cut in.

“Yes,” Xander replied, somewhat confused with what was going on. “Yevrin—”

“Endriien, do you have some cloth that I can have. I got a bit cut up and I’d like to wrap the wounds.”

“Cloth? Yes. In my dresser...” she replied distractedly, staring into the opal.

“Thanks,” Yevrin said as she disappeared into the only other room in the house.

Endriien collapsed onto the vacated chair. Xander quickly stood up and walked over to her.

“Are you alright?” he asked. “Is there something—”

“I can’t believe she was serious,” Endriien muttered to herself.

“What?” Xander asked confused.

She looked up at him, tears glistening in her eyes, but she was smiling.

“I didn’t think she was serious. She said she’d get back mama’s necklace, but I just thought she was saying it to cover up the fact that she wasn’t paying for board and food. I never expected...”

Xander stared at her blankly, still not understanding the situation properly. Yevrin said she had been hired to steal something, which had turned out to be this necklace, but it was obvious that her ‘employer’ did not have the money needed to pay Yevrin’s exorbitant fees.

“Why do you call it your mother’s necklace?” Xander asked.

“Because it was,” Endriien replied. “It was her necklace, and her mother’s before for her and hers before her for I don’t know how long. It’s been in my family for generations, but when mama died...” she choked back a sob and continued. “She died last year from pneumonia. We worked as servants in a grand house, but the family we worked for was very unkind. They made mama do work that they shouldn’t have let an old woman do so... But if that wasn’t bad enough, that woman, the lady of the house, when mama died she claimed that mama had stolen the necklace from her and took it as her own. The authorities didn’t believe me, and none of the other servants spoke up for fear of repercussions. I was dismissed a month later. I never thought that I would see it again...”

Yevrin came out of the bedroom and walked over to the door.

“I hope you’re satisfied with that Endriien because you’re not getting anything else from me,” she said teasingly.

“Yes, of course. Thank you. I don’t know how I can—”

“That’s it. We’re even now. You don’t need to thank me. Come on Xander, we have to get going. We have to get out of this town by morning or else never at all.”

With that Yevrin walked out of the house and into the street. Xander quickly ran to the door after, turned quickly and bowed to Endriien again.

“Thank you for your hospitality,” he said as a farewell, then left, leaving Endriien alone in the kitchen, still crying tears of joy.

Xander caught up to Yevrin and smiled at her.

“It seems you do have a heart after all,” he commented jokingly.

“What do you mean,” she asked, slightly annoyed.

“You just did something nice for someone, putting your own welfare on the line, for nothing in return.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You lied. That woman didn’t hire you. You got that necklace back for her out of your own freewill.”

“She may not have exactly hired me, but I owed her money. I had to pay her board, food and an informant’s fee, and I was in a dry spell for coin.”

“Informant’s fee?” Xander asked puzzled.

“How else do you think I knew about the house and where the proper room was? True she didn’t realize when she was telling stories that that was what she was doing, but I figured I might as well pay her for it along with the rest.”

“Still, you didn’t have to go through all that trouble just for her—”

“I haven’t shown you what else I got have I?” she said roguishly. She took out her pouch and showed him its contents. “You can hardly call this job selfless Xander.”

“Still,” Xander persisted, “You could have just left town without returning to her and kept the necklace as part of your haul. You had to have cared about her situation if you went back to her.”

They walked in silence for a while. Yevrin had quickened her pace and was staring determinedly ahead. Then she finally broke the silence.

“I don’t like people picking on the weak,” she said in an annoyed tone. “I won’t put up with others doing it if I see it. That ‘lady’ deserved what she got. She took a sentimentally rich necklace from a poor serving girl, and now she has no jewellery at all.”

“See, you did something good,” Xander replied.

“No I didn’t,” Yevrin said, laughing. “If I were good I’d take the rest of the jewellery and give it to the Temple or something. I intend to do no such thing. These are mine now, and I’ll get good prices for them and make a tidy profit.”

“Well, at least you have half a heart then,” Xander said, defeated.

Yevrin turned and smiled at him. Then reached into her pocket and threw the cufflinks at Xander. Surprised, he barely caught them, and looked at them confused.

“Cufflinks? What are these for?” he asked.

“I got you a present to make up for the time you had to spend in jail,” she replied simply.

“When did you get these?”

“That lady, along with having no jewels, also has no gift for her husband.”

“I don’t want you stealing things for me,” he said sternly.

“It doesn’t matter to me what you do with them. Go return them, dump them in the gutter. I got them for you and they’re yours now, do what you like.”

Xander sighed and pocketed them. He knew there was no use reasoning with her, yet he always seemed to try for some unknown reason. They walked for a while in silence. Then Xander stopped.

“Yevrin, you said we have to leave town, but do you have any idea where we’re going beyond that,” he asked.

“Of course I know where we’re going,” she replied nonchalantly.

“Then where are we going?”

Yevrin smiled wickedly and fingered the hilt of her dagger.

“We have a meeting with a certain forgery artist in the next town over about a certain will that he made for me.”