

VENGEANCE IS MINE

Kat Brokaw

She walked in the door, a crisp autumn's eve breeze tagging along at her heels to draw angry, shivering glares from the tavern's patrons. I turned slightly on my stool to watch her, excitement pounding with my heart. Was it really her? It had to be, dressed in fine, black hide armor and impossibly thin, she made too extraordinary a picture to be duplicated. Had she actually done it? No, it must be a trick of some kind; damn thieves. But what choice had I given her? Die trying, or rot in prison.

I know she saw me, sitting at the bar, staring at her; yet she turned away and stepped loudly to a corner table. She slid onto a bench, wiping at the travel-dust covering her well-oiled leathers. Still I waited, watching as she ordered her ale from the serving wench, my mind a whirling mass of hopes and doubts. After a moment, I calmed myself and approached her, swirling my majus robes about me ominously; a trick I learned from years of intimidation.

She didn't seem the least bit impressed, merely glanced up with a lancing hatred and a sour face. "Gall," her young voice snapped at my name like the popping of a fire. Her black eyes scorched me, racing a thrill of danger through my veins.

"Don't you mean Master Gall?" I inquired imperiously, flipping crimson velvet about me as I sat on the bench opposite her.

“Not from what I’ve heard,” she snorted mildly, a cruel version of a smile twisting her narrow mouth. “Do they let you keep your title, even after they denounce you?”

My soul froze at her reference, and I wondered how much she knew. The Order had sought to silence tales of my disgrace, embarrassed at Lord Batair’s charges against such a high member of the Coven. Evidently, my expression betrayed my thoughts, for a cackling laugh left her puckered lips.

“Oh, I know about it all,” she hissed, leaning toward me over the rough wood table. “You’re not the only one able to find things out. But I need no cauldron for my information.”

“Sky demons, street demons; is there really any difference?” I dismissed lightly. “Enough of this petty banter. Do you have it?”

“Do you?”

“Of course.” I glanced around the bar, marking any who gave us heed, noticing with mild curiosity the lack of Guards patronizing the establishment. The Sheriff must have them on some mission that night; and the thought left me. Slowly, I pulled a thin, black leather glove from a secret pouch within my deep sleeve, and placed it on the table.

She snatched it up, looking it over closely, suspiciously. "And to destroy it?" Her glance as hard as before, but suddenly I sensed a bit of urgency hidden within the ebony depths.

"Not until I have mine," I denied with a shake of my head, leaning back, patient. Time played at my leisure, if she'd actually done her job.

A tiny bundle of rawhide-tied-cotton landed in the middle of the table with a careless sweep of nimble fingers, so fast I didn't even see from where she'd drawn it. I reached out to it, hesitant. "How do I know this is really his?" The demand left my lips as I observed her through narrowed eyes, knowing somehow it could not be this easy.

"As soon as you tell me how to destroy the glove," she assured me with a wicked, skeletal grin.

I paused, knowing she played a trick somewhere. But where? What had I missed? My hands trembled as I worked the knot. Thick, blond cornsilk brushed my fingers and I looked up, slightly disappointed. "Only a lock of hair? Nothing else?"

"You said a lock of hair, a splash of urine, or a drop of blood. And I wasn't about to go digging through his chamber pot. What would you have me do? Slit his throat?" Her expression casual, almost too much so. As though she enjoyed this whole deplorable scene.

“No! He must be alive for the spell to work,” I gasped, horrified at even the thought of him escaping my vengeance. Damn Lord Batair, he who caused my disgrace.

“This is none of my business. All I care for magics is how to destroy the glove.” She stared at me, a shiver of revulsion sliding down her body, betraying her superstitious doubt. Common folk always did fear magic, and I curled my lip at her lack of breeding.

“Go to a cemetery. Cut some wood from an elm growing there. Make a fire of it. Burn first two handfuls of dandelion, then the glove, then two handfuls of maiden’s bell.” I gave her the instructions with only half a thought. “Now, my proof?”

She shook her head, her eyes squinting in disbelief. “Then the glove will be destroyed? Nothing more connecting me to the robbery of the Lord’s coffers?”

“Not even the strongest demon will see it,” I promised with a snap to my tone, weary of her. “Now, my proof?”

“Here,” she shrugged, sliding another cotton bundle across the table as she stood.

I grabbed it, watching her leave. The thin material fell away from my touch, revealing the thick, heavy gold of Lord Batair’s ring. Two griffons flew over a crescent moon across the bold square face. His personal seal! My glance swung wildly to the

door. She stood there still, a wolfish grin spreading across her face, and she turned to walk out.

How?...Where?...Why?...My mind stumbled to grasp all the implications.

A strong, metal-shrouded hand landed heavily on my shoulder. I jumped, looking up into the stern, solid face of the Sheriff, seeing his Guards suddenly crowding the small, smoky common room. "Gall of Longsbrook, you're under arrest for the murder of Lord Batair."

THE END

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