

“And what about that one over there?”

“In the red and white?”

“Aye.”

“I’d keep my distance from that one were I you, sera.”

“Really? He doesn’t look that tough.”

“Ah, but appearances can be deceiving.”

There was a brief silence. The two peered through the smoke and dust of the square. The sun hid behind the fallen moonlet, blanketing the bustling market in a cool cover of calm shadow.

“Who is he?” The nord asked.

“That’s Aradren Gildreth. Former councilor of Great House Telvanni. I heard tell that he was excommunicated after some business with the Akaviri invasion a few years ago.”

The Dunmeri merchant whisked some baubles and wares to the side and rested on his elbows, hands clasped and draped over the front of his stall. The Nord watched expectantly. The two locked eyes briefly. The merchant sighed and returned his gaze to Aradren, who was focused on some intricate work at the enchanter’s table.

“Fine. Details,” he growled. “Back then he was in command of some sort of military arm of the Telvanni. ‘The White Nightingale,’ they used to call him. I guess he was pretty fond of white armor and the name sort of stuck.”

“What about the ‘nightingale’ part?”

“Something to do with his role as a tactician. Never made much sense to me. Anyway, sera Aradren over there was at a coral colony in Deshaan a stone’s throw from Ebonheart when the ice monsters came ashore. Aradren is a formidable spellweaver, being Telvanni, and all, but he couldn’t hold the line for long. His superiors in the Great House were intent upon showing their superiority over the other Houses-”

The Nord offered a puzzled look.

“Ehh, Dunmer politics, don’t worry your head. So Aradren is told outright not to ask for help, *especially* from the Indoril. But Ara is no fool, you see. He’s less interested in the prestige and more concerned with holding the Akaviri at bay. So he defies his direct orders and turns to... take a wild guess.”

“The Indorbill!”

“It’s not- ...you- ...yeah, the Indoril.”

“Is that how he got exiled?”

“More or less, as I’ve heard it. That was... oh, a decade or so ago? He left Morrowind to wander Tamriel, or some such nonsense. Friend of mine at the Lizard’s Head told me he fought vampires in Hammerfell and let’s just say he didn’t come out of it entirely the same.”

“Are you suggesting he’s a vampire?”

“More of an insinuation, but I sense the distinction is somewhat irrelevant here.”

“Eh?”

“Nevermind. Yes, rumor has it that he’s a vampire. Tell me, can you see a single spot of bare skin on that mer?”

“No, I can’t. Trying to block out the sun from the looks, eh?”

The merchant nodded.

“Does his mask have any significance?”

“Dunno. You’d be better off asking him yourself if you weren’t liable to have your heart teleported from your chest and fed to his familiar.”

“Where’s his familiar?”

“Probably hiding somewhere around his skirts. A banekin. A banekin named ‘Chad,’ so I’m told. Daedra names are something else, no?”

“What else do you know of him?”

The merchant cast a sidelong glance at the Nord.

“Honestly? Not much. Some would swear by the Three that he has been openly working against Great House Telvanni. He’s been seen freeing slaves, duelling prominent cogs in the Telvanni political machine, anything he can to upset the *status quo* the Telvanni enjoy. I’m of the mind that he’s out for revenge. Did you know I spoke to him once?”

“What was that like?”

“He was polite, if not arrogant. I couldn’t see, but I imagine he was sneering at me from beneath that stark white mask.”

“I wasn’t then, but I am now,” a new voice spoke. The Nord and the merchant jumped. An armored, robed figure stood before them, a red hood pulled up and a bone-white mask covering his face. His voice was like splintered ice.

“If you’re going to gossip about someone, it would be wise to be sure their magical talents don’t include sensory augmentation.”