

The Fortune Teller

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The Fortune Teller, as she preferred to be called, lit a candle and placed it upon a table in front of her. She sat down, taking in a deep breath. She exhaled and the Soldier, the Alchemist, and the Merchant sat down in a row on the opposite end of the table. They waited for her to speak.

Her green eyes and red hair forced a raunchy grin on the Soldier's face. She looked at him, grinning back as a greeting. He put his hands together and placed them in his lap to cover his crotch, hoping the Fortune Teller would not realise what he was feeling.

The Alchemist realised and lowered his eyebrows, frowning at the Soldier before looking at the Fortune Teller. She smiled at the Alchemist, picking up on his inquisitive mind. The Alchemist sat still, not smiling nor frowning. His lips were two straight lines, and his eyes fixated on hers.

The Merchant noticed the Alchemist's intrigue and scoffed at him. The Fortune Teller then turned to smile at the Merchant, but the Merchant did not look at her eyes, nor her hair, nor at any part of her body. Instead, a little cluster of gold and silver trinkets on the desk behind her caught his attention. There was a silver teapot, a gold set of scales and weights, and a variety of precious stones including emerald rings and diamond necklaces. The side of the Merchant's lip curled up, forming a half-smile. He kept his eyes on that desk of trinkets the whole time. Then, finally, the Fortune Teller spoke softly.

"Gentlemen," she began, "tonight I shall tell you of the fall of our Empire. So, where shall I begin?" The Fortune Teller stood and stepped over to her desk of trinkets and lifted the silver teapot to pour tea into three small silver cups. She placed the cups in front of her guests and the Merchant was the first to drink the tea. In one quick gulp, the Merchant drank it all, leaving only some tea leaves in the bottom of his cup. The Fortune Teller returned to her seat to begin her prophecy. "The Gövirian Empire will fall on the same day our cities are reduced to rubble. A terrific earthquake shall split the ground, dividing the city of Kovikshire down the middle," she said, "This shall be the first of three travesties in the city of Kovikshire."

"There's a clocktower in the middle of the central market, and it's in dying need of repair. It'll almost certainly fall! Imagine the casualties! Why Kovikshire of all places?" cried the Alchemist.

The Soldier threw in his opinion, giving no time to the Fortune Teller to respond. “Casualties?” he yelled, “Thousands of men die in battles each year. Why should we waste our time thinking about the casualties of city folk and not warriors?”

The Alchemist was about to respond in a fit of anger, but the Fortune Teller stopped him. “It is in Kovikshire where the greedy rich give nothing to the needy poor. Kovikshire is now cursed because of you!” she pointed at the Merchant. His gaze immediately met the Fortune Teller. He took a deep breath and crossed his arms. The Soldier and the Alchemist stopped bickering and stared at the Merchant with their mouths agape.

“Why? What curse? You’re babbling, woman!” the Merchant snapped.

The Fortune Teller, took a deep breath to calm herself before replying, “It was revealed to me, on the fourth day of this lunar cycle, that you would be responsible for a curse that befalls Kovikshire.”

“And you just expect me to take you seriously? Come on, men. Let’s leave this crazy hag and get back to our carriage,” the Merchant said. However, the Alchemist was unimpressed by the Merchant’s manners and the Soldier was still captivated by the Fortune Teller’s beautiful figure. The Merchant, who read the room at that moment, realised that they weren’t going anywhere. “Very well! I’ll go myself. Alone! Don’t expect me to send the carriage back to you,” he spat.

The Fortune Teller waved her hand and through this simple gesture locked the door just as the Merchant was about to open it. The Merchant tried but couldn't get the lock undone. "I'll have you know that I am a patient person, but I have a short tolerance for disrespect for my prophecies. Sit down, now!" she snapped. The Merchant, now glaring at her, reluctantly stepped away from the door and sat back in his seat.

"What have I done?" he asked quietly.

The Fortune Teller began to question him. Simple questions to the ears of the Soldier, and the Alchemist but to the Merchant, it was a violent, guttural interrogation. "You live in Kovikshire, yes? In the manor house that overlooks the market?" she questioned.

"Which one?" he asked.

"There's only one in Kovikshire market. You know perfectly well which one I'm referring to. Just answer my question!" she said.

"Yes, I live in the manor house overlooking the market in Kovikshire. What of it?"

"And the houses surrounding you? What are they like?" she asked and sternness in her voice made the Merchant sweat.

"I don't know. Poorer folk live there, they're mostly dirt or manure houses," he answered.

"That you own. That you bought. What else do you own?" she asked. Her inquisition went from being embarrassing to enraging for the Merchant. He knew exactly

what she was trying to point out. And with that rage, he stood up and laid everything out on the table.

“I own... and control the Monkon river in the East Kovosch province! But, what’s it to you? I don’t owe you anything! Not a single drop! You are not in that part of the empire!” he shouted, pounding his fist on the table. She stood up.

“I’m not the one dying of thirst. Most of the water in that river goes directly to your home before it reaches those manure houses you rent out to your neighbours. They pay you for water and the water comes in minuscule amounts after it’s been in your bathtub,” she snapped back.

“I have a question for you,” asked the Soldier.

“Yes, what is it?” The Fortune Teller had quickly suppressed her rage and switched back to her calm, collected tone. She sat back down and so did the Merchant.

“If these crimes are solely his fault,” he pointed towards the Merchant, “then why do the people of Kovikshire need to suffer and die in the collapse of a clocktower? The work involved in moving all those people out of the way will be backbreaking for people like me!” he said.

“As tragic as it is, you will not be able to save them. The spirits have already told me what is to happen, and this is final. I do not like to see innocent blood spilt but the spirits, who burden me with this prophecy, say it is a necessary sacrifice,” said the Fortune Teller.

The Soldier looked surprised and asked, “what? What do you mean I won’t be able to save them? Where will I be?”

“In Douvigrad. This brings us to the second tribulation in the fall of the Gövirian Empire,” She opened her hand and conjured a folded sheet of parchment from thin air. She opened it to reveal a map of the empire. More specifically, it showed markings for a military campaign that the Soldier enlisted in five years ago.

“I haven’t seen this since my first days in the guard. Where did you get this? This is classified!” he said.

“My means of obtaining this are beyond your comprehension. What matters is that you recognise this. It’s the campaign to take Douvigrad from the Ecchidian Empire,” she said.

The Soldier didn’t take long to realise what this was about. His face became pale when she opened the map and his stomach ached. However, he kept up his calm appearance and crossed his arms. He maintained his eye contact with the Fortune Teller. He had completely forgotten about covering his crotch to hide his stiffness.

“It has come to my attention, noble sir, that you had another campaign of your own going on while serving on this campaign,” she chimed. Indeed he had. The Merchant smirked at him. The Alchemist broke his silence.

“What’s this? What is she talking about?”

“I don’t know, but it’s nothing but shit! Don’t believe her. I never... I wasn’t...” the Soldier stuttered.

“You never *what?* You’re as good at lying as you are at concealing your erection!” the Fortune Teller said. Both the Alchemist and the Merchant let out a small chuckle.

“I was going to say,” the Soldier began. He unfolded his arms and rested his forearms on the table, hands together. “I was going to say that I never meddled with any women who weren’t my wife. I’m an honourable man, not a scoundrel,” he said. The Fortune Teller, unimpressed, lowered her eyebrows and sighed. “I never... did whatever it is you are about to... accuse me of,” he was stuttering and pausing again. Neither the Alchemist nor the Merchant was impressed by his lying either. The Alchemist’s head was tilted towards the table, his eyes shut, while the Merchant turned his head away, rubbing the back of his neck. Both were cringing as if they had just smelled a pigsty that had not been cleaned in sixty moons. The Soldier, a little embarrassed, didn’t say anything else after he saw the Merchant and the Alchemist were not too convinced by him. He felt as though they had read him like a book and figured him all out, even though they had just met today.

“You are neither truthful nor noble. And you are a scoundrel. You took seven-hundred-and-seven women to Douvigrad,” she said but was interrupted when the Soldier, in a fit of anger, tried to shut her up like a barking dog.

“I was never in Douvigrad! And seven-hundred-and-seven? Are you being serious? What man could handle seven-hundred-and-seven women?” the Soldier spat.

“You can, clearly. Douvigrad, where you keep your harem, shall have its own contained rapture. Nobody can

leave and nobody can come in until all in the city lie dead in the streets from the plague,” she announced.

“This is outrageous! My services would be most needed in Douvigrad when that time comes. I must go there at once!” said the Alchemist, standing up to head for the door. Forgetting that the Fortune Teller locked it, he tugged and pushed on the door. It wouldn’t budge. And the Fortune Teller called him back to his seat.

“Please, sir. Sit back down, I have much to ask you,” she said. The Alchemist returned to his seat.

“What do you want to know? Have I committed a sin? Please, anything I’ve done, please let me hear it!” he begged.

“I’m sorry, but you cannot save Douvigrad. You will be dead before the Gövirian Empire begins to fall. You already know what that means, don’t you?” she questioned. The Alchemist recoiled back and thought about this question for some time.

“I think I have it!” he said.

“You do?”

“Yes. I think I know what you want to hear, and I’m really sorry for what I’ve done,” he paused to take a breath, then continued with a confident tone. “Seven years ago, I travelled to the mountains in Corrán in search of something. A plant of which only one specimen exists. It was named after the province, so it was called Corrán’s weed. I was curious about its properties in reviving people close to death. For three months, I climbed until I found it, but I had also been doing my research.”

At that moment, he paused. The Fortune Teller had poured him another cup of tea and she asked him, “You had changed your plans at some point, yes?” He took a sip of the tea and she proceeded to fill the Merchant’s and the Soldier’s cups.

“I had. I didn’t intend on doing this, but my curiosity got the better of me. While I was camping during my climb, I brought with me tomes of other Alchemists who had studied or even used the plant. They had claimed it made them immortal, or at the very least had extended their lifespan far beyond its natural end. I wanted to know if that was possible and use myself as the test subject for... selfish reasons. I reached the plant and harvested as much as I could fit in my satchel.” He gulped down the rest of his tea. The Soldier and the Merchant were stunned by how calmly the Alchemist confessed to his crimes. The Fortune Teller was also very calm.

“Corrán will not survive the fall. Corrán’s mountains will erupt and the empire will be destroyed at that point. But, because you have shown remorse for your actions,” she looked straight at the Alchemist when she said this, “the spirits will spare you of any suffering you would face. You will die tonight and that will set this end in motion.”

After that, the Merchant, the Soldier, and the Alchemist returned to their homes.