

Juryns motivering:

Vasst och originellt! Med ett djurs smidighet, och både språklig finess och uppfinningsrikedom, närmar vi oss med skräckblandad förtjusning hämnadens ögonblick.

Nasty, nastier, nastiest

My fondness for raccoons is irrelevant. It is true I am not innocent of all crime, but of this one I am not. You can accuse me all you want, it does not make me any less innocent. It was a fair exchange after all; something of value is traded for another thing of equal value. It must apply to deeds as well! Though I assure you we do not have time to debate such a philosophical matter. No, most certainly not. Leave that to the philosophers, as they say. It was never my intention, you see, for it to end that way.

His office was where it had always been, at the epicenter of that wicked manor — at least that was how I had planned my approach. I climbed the outer walls, the ones fools surround their homes with in naïve hopes of protection, and it took me minutes to reach the top. The cruel ivy had hurt my paws — dug right in, it did — so my pads were mercilessly sore. But I had reached my intended target at the very least. What was pain compared to that? Up there I stalked the darkness of the vast perimeter, high above the tallest flames the guards had set up earlier that evening. Men were posted on balconies along the red brown bricks that built the wall. I had no eyes for them though. None! I had only eyes for that manor with its dirty bricks and the man that hid inside. Of course, I would have to pass them to get to him, but I thought that no matter.

Nasty man, he was. Very nasty. He must have grown nastier since I last saw him, I thought. I imagined the most foul being I could: a bony thing nothing feasible on him to eat, with muscles so atrophied there was only a skeleton,

bare scraggles of hair on his scalp and teeth so yellow one might mistake them for the sun. It helped, you understand. It helped.

Still, there were others to contend with first. I spotted Jurgen's grey streaked coat float through the garden and along the fountain that marked the manor's eastern wing. I sat on top of the wall and watched him paw his way through House Mother's flowerbeds, digging at various odd spots throughout. He was a whiny brat that one. Always begging for food, always begging for attention. It surprised me House Father hadn't thrown him out already. I had declined to bring Jurgen with me for obvious reasons.

Next there was Lisbeth, who laid on an oak branch above the fountain's central statue. She swung her tail about lazily. Her spotted fur was similar to mine, except it was yellow instead of white, and my tail was a lot fluffier. I was always proud of that fluff, you know. So much bigger than everyone else's. Irrelevant, irrelevant. Or was it? I can't remember. Anyway. I watched them ever so carefully, moved not a muscle lest they spot me in the dark. Lisbeth could be a vicious foe. She'd torn my right eye out once. It had taken months to heal it, still only sees half-heartedly. I snarl just remembering it, do you hear? Listen, listen.

When their faces were turned or to the dirt, I padded a bit further along the wall. It was too high to jump directly to the ground and climbing isn't as easy when it's down. I watched the guardsman on the balcony that I now had below me. He carried an awful looking contraption in his hands, a crossbow with a sharp bolt already loaded. I suspected he looked at Lisbeth and Jurgen but was unsure because I could not see his face, even though I smelled his fear. Fear has a funny taste it does, vile but savory of sweat and ugly tears. He must've been a novice. A shame, a shame. House Father had made us after all, indeed he had. Oh, it can't be helped, it truly can't. Humans are afraid of

the most ridiculous things, like spiders! Ridiculous, I tell you, ridiculous. To be fair, the man could not have known what was coming, so I did not begrudge him the wee that ran down his pant leg when I leapt onto his back. I shoved the crossbow aside and snarled quietly in his face with my big teeth. It was near that he screamed, but my claws wrapped 'round his mouth before he could. Oh, I thought myself so clever! Lisbeth couldn't have heard. No, she couldn't have.

But she did. Oh, she did. When I sneaked myself a glance through the thick bars of the balcony, the spotted figure in the tree was gone. I nearly cried at the sight. She had heard, she had heard. Jurgen still stalked the roundabouts of the fountain, though his nasty yellow eyes were more to the sky now. He would not show me Lisbeth's location, for he couldn't see her at all. I didn't with cat eyes, so he definitely could not.

I slowly rose to my hind legs, the curved claws drained the guardsman efficiently, and peeked above the bannister. There were malnourished trees around, but none of them lush enough to hide her sleek body, and the bushes below were far too dense for her animosity. Where was that damned jaguar! Under me; no, right below me; no, above me — above me! I flung myself out of the way just in time as her weight came falling from the top of the wall. She'd copied me! The audacity! Her jaws were open in the nastiest snarl, ears flat against her neck. I responded with my deepest growl yet and threw myself at her. We were a flurry of claws and teeth as each of us grappled for a hold of the other's neck. I tore at her side but bounced off when her back paw cut my stomach. She ripped off an ear with her teeth and I yowled and fell backwards right past the railing. Lisbeth jumped after me as I twisted in the air and landed on both paws, blood in my eyes. It hurt, it hurt, it hurt. I roared at her a challenge she could not resist. I was angry, oh so angry.

Jurgen came like a whirlwind from the bushes and threw himself at me, his long muzzle wide open. I swatted him away like a human does a fly, ha! He was light as a feather, I thought. But he was resistant, for when me and Lisbeth tore into each other once more he returned. A streak of grey fur he was as he dashed back and forth and swiped his teeth at me from the shadows. It infuriated me! I hated him, I dreaded him, I was disgusted by him! He had me so mad that I pushed off of Lisbeth and grabbed him as he went past. My jaws around his neck I shook him and shook him until he stopped his ratty pestering. Equal exchange, ha!

Lisbeth, however, was so mad at me for Jurgen's sake that she got stupid. She was yowling and yowling so it hurt my ears, bunched up and whipped her tail ready for the hunt. I was ready for her. When she struck at me, I twirled and let her teeth brush harmlessly past the fur of my fine tail. But I had become stupid too, because she was on me fast as a hummingbird and pinched my tail at once. That wonderful fluff, oh I cry about it yet, for she ruined it! It was torn off so viciously it will never heal, not even wonky like my eye. I cried and cried, not just because the pain was deafening but also because I would never feel my wonderful tail again. After I cried, I became mad. Maddier than I had ever been. The fury was hot red in my veins! I saw her with my beautiful fluff in her red mouth and I lost all sense. She was gone before the blood came out her throat. I nuzzled my ripped tail for a while, licked it and then said farewell. I had business to contend with, even if I had to sacrifice my own body for it to be dealt with. Give thyself, give thyself.

I left Jurgen and Lisbeth where they laid and scuttled for the manor. House Father would be in his chambers, he had to be, he always was. I padded up the stairs, leaving a trail of damnation behind. I no longer cared if the guards saw me, if they cared to see me at all. It was House Father I needed, him I

desired. The others mattered not. Where they came from, where they lived, where they died. The ones at the doors were easily disposed of, dumped in a couple off bushes to seize being a hindrance. I had to revert to my human form, a disgusting perversion of nature he had called me once, to open the doors. I was quick back on four paws, the best form that had ever been created, and feasted my eyes on the inside of the manor once more. It had been so long, so very long since I had been home last. The marble pillars and floors were the same as ever, clean on the surface but dirty underneath, and the staircase with its patterned rug was as tall as I remembered. I shudder at the thought, at the memories. It was a filthy place. Filthy, filthy, filthy.

I shot through the vacant hall as I wished not to linger. I passed all the rooms I had once known. Hannes' room was just past the dining hall in an alcove to the right. It stood empty. It would forever be empty. My fault? Maybe. No, it was his fault. Hannes was gone because of him. I was gone because of him. Everything was his fault. Yes, it was all his fault. He had done it to us. Made us, forced us.

My claws striped the floors beneath them, shoveled the stone out of place. I saw red, only red. The steps of the staircase I took in leaps, giant leaps that brought me ever closer to my desire. The bannisters looked freshly cleaned. What had happened? I didn't care. It was irrelevant. His door was so close now, just a few corridors away. My mind spun with each step that I took, each time paw touched the ground. Then it was there, the door. The door, the door, the door. Made out of oak wood, it was, tinted dark red. A fraud. Yes, a fraud. Just like him. Just like he had always been. He had promised — promised!

But I stopped before the door. I don't know why. I became human again, one that breathed so hard its lungs hurt. I heard him scuffling inside and

listened to it for a bit. Then my hand touched the iron handle, oh so cold, and I hesitated only half a second. I pressed slowly, very slowly, so that the metal would make no noise. He was not to hear. Not to hear at all. My glance through the gap revealed that he had indeed not heard, for his back was turned onto me. He fiddled with something, some device. It was then I saw the fox.

This little orange thing laying on the table next to him, exposed to the wicked device. Its visible eye was wide open, its pale pink tongue out. It was frightened, you see, terribly frightened. I stared and stared and stared until I at last took a step across the threshold. He turned after the third step. As nasty as I remembered him. Nastier. I meant to ask what he was doing, but all that came out was a roar. He begged for my forgiveness, pleaded, even as the fox lay on his table. As if he had changed, as if I had. I became what I had always been, that monster of spotted white fur and unhinged jaws. He weed, he cried, he bled.

House Mother screamed when she saw me. She was in her nightgown, I remember that. It was white, a slip edged with lace. The guards came, their mouths agape. I sat in the puddle, rocked back and forth, back and forth. I was laughing. Yes, I laughed. Shrieking, loudly, beautifully. I laughed and laughed and laughed 'til the fox joined in. Together we had a marvelous time.

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