

## For The Gold

The morning air was cool and calm; but these men were not. They chased me all the way from the castle to the edge of the woods, swearing and hollering. They were the king's men and I already know that stupidity is everything about them. Their horses were no match for me either, they may be smarter than their owners but I'm faster on my feet and more cunning.

I've run deeper into the woods but before I could get any further, the land slipped from my feet and then next thing I knew I was on the ground, the satchel holding one of the princess's headpieces still luckily tight in my clutches, the strap still slung over my shoulder. My hair, dark, rich red plastered all over my face, but not so completely that I cannot see them.

These men crowded me, smirking and got straight into business. I may look terrified but inside, I was laughing. They have too few archers and many large, tall swordsmen. Not many swordsmen could surround me at once, for they are too big compared to my small size and they would end up tripping and fighting each other. Their archers would also be helping with the job for they are most likely to shoot their own side because of the mens' large build and besides, I'm not an easy person to shoot down.

Ha!

I could explain what happened afterwards but that's just time consuming so let's just say, I was right. I've stolen one of their horses as well- a white gelding- and I'm now traveling to my given rendezvous point, a couple of kilometres east. When I give this headpiece to Eoghan, I would get about a thousand gold coins in return, which are intended to be used for my future life in a new world. They say the sea is huge and strong, so blue and wild, but my travel through it would be worth it.

Ever since I was alone, but I guess I was persistent. I educated and taught myself by learning to read from the libraries, observing people and experimenting in the woods. I stole horses, food, clothes; anything to survive. Then that's when I guess he found me around thirteen years of age. I've been a bigger burglar ever since, participating in Eoghan's devious tasks for gold, which is stashed somewhere hidden in a tree trunk.

My name and face here is a disgrace to people, with so many robberies I've held and crimes committed, I have to be careful and alert. I now just want to relax, be something else for once. To be known just as a normal nineteen year old girl and not a prodigious wanted thief who's known all over the place. But now, I've got the gold to get away.

I arrived at our meeting point just around midnight, taking my time and being cautious.

'Psst...Cynbell, you alone?'

I turned around glaring. I hate it when Eoghan uses my name, my real name, the name written on my arm. Cynbell. I don't know how it got there, but it was always there. It reminds me of who I was before all this, so poor and quite vulnerable.

He was wearing a black cloak and a plain white mask, the one I've always seen him wear whenever we met. I've only seen him once without it, and that was when I snuck into one of the king's ball; where I learnt he actually was a nobleman. I held up the satchel and opened it, showing him the rubies that encircled a beautifully carved, silver headpiece.

He threw a bag at my feet and just as it hit the ground, the bag opened in sync revealing a hundred dozen gold coins. I grabbed it and handed him the satchel containing the headpiece.

'Always glad doin' business with ya.' I grumbled and with that, I mounted the horse and rode off.

Not much later on, I've collect all the gold coins I've earnt through these past six years and made my way quietly through the still-busied docks, the horse carrying my 'belongings' trudging not far behind. Inconspicuous right?

Well, I'm now going to travel over the seas, I'm going somewhere new. I'm finally glad that I could finally run away from all this. I'm so happy, so happy that I almost didn't hear their clank of armour behind me.

Just almost.

I whirled around just to catch a glimpse of silver, and then this heavy weight came in contact to my head. The pain was there for a second then the world went black.

I woke up dizzy to a foul smell, and a rat nibbling the toe of my boots. I shook it off and took in my surroundings. The place was dark, but not as dark to hide the bare, grey walls and the large, empty space. I knew instantly where I was. Through my secret sneak-ins and strolls for fun, this was the place I most wanted to avoid in the whole castle. The dungeons.

This means that if I was in the dungeons, I've been separated from 'my' horse and my gold. Anger built up through me. All these years I've been working hard for what I was going to get- receiving the so-worth results-and this is what happens? Back to square one? Why is it never fair?

Tears built up in my eyes and I shook my head. I never cry and I won't. I'll work for it again and this time, I'd get it. I'd be able to cross the water and be free of all this.

I looked around me once again and tried to take my mind off my loss and realised that this is the first time they've ever caught me. Ever.

I was the only one occupying this cell, but I guess from the smell they just took away the rotten bodies that were here before me. I looked through the bars of the cell and came to another realisation. Or maybe it was just the smell of bad liquor being drunk by already drunken guards.

*Well this is going to be easy.*

I stood up and quietly made my way to the door. I grabbed a random pin from my hair- the one I managed to take along with the headpiece- and quickly unlocked it. The guards didn't even notice what was going on and that's what I meant by stupid. I struck them at their necks and temples leaving them unconscious and then quickly made my way out.

At least I know where I'm going. I've been sneaking around here every now and then, stealing and learning.

At some point, around dawn, I came upon the portcullis, a brown mare by my side, a cloak hiding my face and small pouch of coins on my belt. That's what I managed to do during the night. It would probably last me a few days, enough time to decide what exactly I'm going to do next, now that my plan has gone off track. Life is too harsh.

The portcullis was up with about a pair of guards stationed on both sides, probably aware of my escape last night. Now the plan; the horse better run fast through it and head to the woods, then we'll cross a stream and hide our tracks.

I mounted the horse and whispered a few words to it. Then we were running for our lives. The guards reacted about two seconds later and chased us as well as informing the archers by the crenelated turrets but by then, we reached the border of the woods, which sort of encircled the white walls of the castle.

We crossed a stream and stopped for a rest a minute later. I could have just lingered on thoughts of my loss; of how close I was; how it was in my grasp but just then, the sound of horns blared in the distance, the types used to indicate a tournament.

Of course!

I need to join and win, it's much easier than stealing! Why have I never thought of this before? I could win numerous amounts of gold and never have to wait for years to get an amount enough.

First, I need to disguise myself... as a man? I cringed at that thought, how do I act and look exactly like a man? I'm still nineteen with a small build for heaven's sake! How do I win? I've no experience in this whatsoever and plus how could I cope with the infatuation and affections of women at my sight? Is the cost really that much?

Then the gold came flooding back into my mind. I really need it. Real bad. So the tournament better be worth it because I'm going to compete. Tonight, at the rising of the moon, I'm going start my transformation and at the rising of the sun tomorrow, a different me will be introduced.