

A Constable Inspector Lunaria Adventure

Myth of the Tenz River Troll



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Author's Note: This story is set eight months before the events depicted in *Wrath of the Fury Blade* take place.



Chapter 1

“You won’t catch me, badgers!” the thief yelled, as he ran into the study. He was heading toward the open window, from which he had gained entry to the home about fifteen minutes earlier. He carried a large leather satchel, which he slung over his neck as he climbed out onto the ledge. He gave a cocky salute as he started down the outside wall.

“I love it when they run,” Constable Inspector Reva Lunaria said, her turquoise eyes narrowing in anticipation. She blew a strand of her silver-red hair out of her eyes and gripped her longsword.

“Did he really just call us badgers?” asked Seeker Castanea “Cas” Rubus. She shook her head in disapproval, her chestnut brown hair bobbing with the motion. “How unoriginal.” She held her staff—fifteen hands long, made of stout ash, with silver and copper vines embedded in the wood—and said a short incantation, “*Tüy düşmesi*”. Her hand glowed with a soft green color, and she blew on her hand, the green glow wafting to encompass Reva as a fine mist. “He could have come up with something new.”

“Not everyone can be as clever as you,” Reva chided.

They were on the third floor of the building—a home in Merchant Grove that belonged to somebody who was

way more important than she was—and their thief was slowly making his way down the outside wall. In less than a minute, he'd be close enough to jump to the ground and run into the night. That had happened the previous night, and Reva wasn't going to waste time running down the stairs again.

This was the fourth home that had been targeted in the thief's crime spree. He was skilled, slipping in through an upstairs window before collecting the jewelry that he'd come for. He was never in the house for longer than twenty minutes, and his victims didn't know that anything had been stolen until they woke up the next morning. That had been the case for the first two burglaries. Reva had been able to piece together that the thief had been casing the homes ahead of time—the only way that he could have gotten to the jewelry so quickly, as it had been well hidden in the second home—by posing as a carpenter, of all things. Each of the homes had recently had carpentry work done (in the second home, it was even on the secret panel that had hidden the jewelry—*idiots*) and Reva had used this detail to set a trap to try to capture the thief at the third house. When Reva and Cas had sprung their trap on him, of course, he had run. They always ran. The thief had gone out the window in the third house, and Reva and Cas had also ran—for the stairs. They'd lost precious seconds getting down the stairs and out the door. By the time they had made it outside, the thief had disappeared. Reva was not going to make that same mistake twice.

"Why can't we ever deal with a creative criminal for once?" Cas' words chased Reva as she ran across the room. She jumped, put one foot on the windowsill, and then pushed off and leaped out of the window.

Reva dropped like... well, like an elf that had just crazily jumped out of a window, and a small lump of fear

knotted itself in her stomach. It was a natural reaction to what she had just done. Cas had tried to explain to her how the magic worked, but Reva still couldn't understand how a spell that the wizards insisted on calling "feather fall" didn't actually make her fall any slower. She'd given herself a headache trying to understand Cas' explanation, so she satisfied herself by just giving in and trusting Cas. Cas said that the spell would work, so then the spell would work.

The ground was rushing at her very quickly. *It will work, right?*

Reva's feet touched the ground as she landed, as light as... a feather, as if she'd just stepped off a stair. She let out a breath and smiled. Of course, it had worked. Reva hefted her sword as she turned and looked up at the thief, who was still trying to navigate the wood and plaster of the wall just below the second story window.

"You wanna hurry up?" Reva called. "I haven't got all night."

The thief looked down, gave a cry of alarm, and then tried to scramble back up to the window above his head.

"Oi! Knothead!" yelled Cas from the third story window. "Badgers? Really? You couldn't come up with something more original than that? I mean, just off the top of my head you could have said porters, stableboys, creepers, saps..."

The thief climbed onto the second story sill, but before he could reach the window, a flare of red light enveloped the frame. He pulled on the window, but it wouldn't open. With a frustrated cry, he grabbed it with both hands, trying to get the window to budge.

"We got us a real scholar here," Cas quipped. "Hey!" she called to the struggling thief. "How'd you manage to survive this long?" She stuck her staff out the window and

tapped his head. "We've got you surrounded! Give up."

The thief let out a startled yell that would have embarrassed a kobold, and then let go of the window. It was a second before he realized his mistake, but by then, he was already falling. His arms flailed uselessly, and he hit the ground like a sack of oats.

Reva stepped over and casually stuck her longsword in his face. "I thought thieves were supposed to be dexterous?"

The thief let out a moan, and Reva reached into the satchel at his side, pulling out several necklaces, earrings, and other jewelry. "My, my. You may lack the grace of a cat, but you do have good taste."

She grabbed the thief and hauled him to his feet, ignoring his protest of pain.

Cas skipped out of the building's front door and jumped down the steps. "You have got to be the dumbest thief I've ever had to arrest."

"Certainly, the cockiest, hitting this place after we had almost caught him the other night," Reva added.

"I didn't expect anyone to jump out of a window!" the thief complained.

"Oi, shut up," Cas said, smacking him across the back of his head, which elicited another moan.

Reva slung the satchel over her shoulder, and then pulled the thief's arms behind his back before locking manacles on his wrists.

Cas turned to Reva and asked, "Aavril actually brought you back a *parrot* as a present?"

Reva let a smile cross her lips as Cas had picked up their previous conversation as if they hadn't just spent the last quarter hour dealing with this thief.

"Yes. I've named her Gabii. And she has the most beautiful plumage."

"Oh. The *plumage*." Cas said sarcastically, giving a flick of her wrists and rolling her eyes. "Let me guess, all it does is swear. It came from a sailor, after all. You know your mom won't like that. It'll drive away her customers."

"Gabii doesn't swear," Reva replied, as she pushed their prisoner ahead of them. "Aavril isn't that sort of sailor."

"Uh huh. I still think I should have been scrying him for you. First the dress, now a pet. I don't trust his motives. And you shouldn't, either," she pointed the head of her staff at Reva. "His true nature will come out soon enough, trust me. I know how men think."

They reached Circle Road and turned to the left. Even though it wasn't yet midnight, the road would typically have been filled with people heading home from the pubs or an evening at one of the playhouses, but it was nearly deserted. Reva could feel the past few weeks weighing heavily on the night, and she was more alert than usual. If Cas sensed the same thing, she didn't show it, as she skipped ahead and turned to face Reva, walking backward as she asked, "So, what *does* the beautifully plumed bird say?"

Reva clamped her mouth shut and shook her head.

"Oh, come on, you *have* to tell me."

Reva inclined her head toward the thief, and shook her head again.

Cas gave an exaggerated sigh and paused, waiting for Reva to catch up, and then walked along next to her. Reva lowered her voice, and leaned over to Cas to whisper, "Reva is sexy."

"Oh, my gods, no!" Cas practically squealed, and she did a little hop skip.

"And she says it in *his* voice."

"I bet your mom just loves that."

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“Well, she hasn’t found it as endearing as I have, but once I get Gabii to say something new, I’m sure that Mom will come to like her.”

“How ‘bout we get a drink after dropping off this idiot,” Cas suggested. “I’m sure we can come up with something better than ‘Reva is sexy!’ for your new pet to say.”

Reva glared at Cas and gestured to the thief.

“What? Oh, like he cares.”

“Will it get me better treatment if I swear to not repeat it?” asked the thief.

Reva said, “Yes,” while Cas said, “No,” at the same time. Cas stepped up to the thief and waved her staff in front of him.

“If I ever find out that you repeated that, I’ll turn you into a newt.”

The thief shuddered, and then nodded, so Cas returned to walk next to Reva.

“Well, in Gabii’s defense, it *is* true,” Reva gloated.

“I’m worried about you, Reva,” Cas sighed and shook her head. “Now you’re listening to strange birds spouting lies.”

Cas dodged away from Reva’s hand with a laugh as Reva tried to smack her in the arm. Then Reva laughed as they continued up Poplar Hill to New Port, with the hapless thief leading the way. Despite the levity, Reva couldn’t shake the feeling of foreboding that seemed to have gripped the city.



Chapter 2

Reva pulled open the door to New Port as Cas said, “Maybe I could enchant something? Your hairbrush, maybe, or the mirror, so that it repeats a phrase over and over again? That might get Gabii to say something different.”

“Good morning, Constable Whitlocke,” Reva waved, as she and Cas headed up the stairs to the Acer Division Stable. They hadn’t been able to find a pub that was still open after they had dropped off the thief last night—something that had reinforced Reva’s feelings about how things had changed in the past few weeks—instead, she and Cas had gone to her place so that Cas could “inspect” Aavril’s present. Cas had thought Gabii’s phrase was cute for about the first five times, but then had declared it annoying. Of course, Reva’s mom had sleepily agreed with her, and then told them both, “Go to bed, some of us have to work for a living.” They spent the next hour quietly trying to get Gabii to say something different, but Gabii had stubbornly refused, continuing to say, “Reva is sexy!” in Aavril’s voice. Loudly. Reva’s mother finally snapped, and told Cas to go home. Reva had thrown a blanket over Gabii’s cage to shut the bird up, which allowed her to get a few hours of sleep. Reva was starting to admire the bird’s stubbornness.

“Look,” she said, as they walked to their tables. “I like what Gabii is saying. It will remind me of Aavril when he’s away.”

“Pfft. If you think that’s important.” Cas sat down and opened her spellbook.

Reva pointed a finger at Cas. “And don’t go behind my back to Mom and try to change it.”

Cas put on her best pious expression, her eyes looking at the ceiling, as she gave Reva a rude gesture.

“I see everything is normal in paradise,” remarked Senior Constable Willem Ghrellstone. He held a mug of tea and grinned.

Reva chuckled, and shook her head. “*Hoestii*, Willem. How’s our would-be thief?”

“Stiff and sore, but he’ll make it to the magistrate’s this morning. He can recover when he’s spending time in a cell.” He set his mug down and placed his right fist over his heart in salute. “Good morning, First Constable.”

Reva turned to see First Constable Malys Aescel walk up to their tables. The First Constable ran Acer Division, a job that he often likened to trying to herd cats. He was a decent boss, never one to micro-manage what the constables did day-to-day, and willing to give them the freedom to solve their cases in the best way possible. But he also had a temper, and he was known to lash out when constables took too many liberties with the freedom that he gave them. “Good morning, sir.”

The First Constable stood 18 hands tall, but Reva could see that he was slouching today, his shoulders slumped from discouragement or weariness. Based on how sallow his birch-colored skin was, Reva suspected that it might have been both. He had been under a lot of pressure lately, as had the entire Division, but it seemed to be taking more of a toll on Aescel. His posture and appearance reinforced

the feeling of dread that had been building in her for the past few weeks.

"You may not think that in a moment," Aescel said, by way of greeting. Reva knew that meant that somebody had died. But since he hadn't said, "It's a bad one," his usual phrase for a murder, that meant death by some other means. *Great, probably a floater*, she thought.

"We got a floater in last night. I want you and Cas to look into it."

Sometimes, I hate being right.

"Why are we being punished?" Cas asked, more vocal with her complaint than Reva. Floaters were dead bodies that either were pulled from the River Tenz or found washed up on the banks of the river. They were disgusting, often missing parts from animals having eaten the body. Usually, they were bloated, and it was nearly impossible to find out who the person was, or what had caused their death. Floaters were assigned to Senior Constables to handle because nobody wanted to deal with them. The constables documented what they could, and then the bodies were taken to Alnua Copse for burial as quickly as possible. On the rare occasions that a person could be identified, or a possible murder discovered, then the Inspectors might be called in to do a more detailed investigation. So, when Aescel assigned a floater out of the foliage like this, it was often seen as a punishment, or a sign of desperation.

"This is the sixth body found along the river in the past two weeks," Aescel pointed at Cas. There was an edge of frustration and anger in his voice, and Cas wilted a bit. "People are starting to panic, afraid to go near the river."

"Oooo... look out. It's the Tenz River Troll." This came from Constable Inspector Olwyn Pflamtael, sitting at one of the tables next to Reva's. Olwyn was a pain in the ass at

the best of times, and right now wasn't one of those. He was waving his fingers in an 'it's spooky' gesture. His partner, Seeker Norah Pfinzloab, held a hand to her mouth, trying not to laugh.

Aescel turned to them. "Don't you have your own cases, Constable Inspector? Or are you offering to give Reva *your* murder case so *you* can deal with this floater?"

Reva smiled as Olwyn and Norah quickly turned back to their own work.

"People are afraid," Aescel continued, rubbing a hand through his hair. "They do think it's the troll. LCI Gania told me this morning to get this resolved. Today."

"Come on, sir," Reva complained. "People die in the river all the time. Besides, the troll is a myth. It's just a story that parents tell their children to get them to behave. We can't arrest a myth." She hoped that the Lord Constable Inspector was aware of that fact.

"I don't give a damn about that," Aescel grumbled, more of his anger coming through. "I don't care if it's a myth, or if it's real, or if this is just a bunch of random deaths. I need you two to stop it before things get any further out of hand." He jabbed a finger at Reva and Cas, and then stalked back to his office.

Cas let out a loud sigh. "Great. Now we have to go chasing after stupid myths."

Reva agreed with Cas, but something *was* going on. People died all the time in the river, but these recent deaths *had* been unusual. The traumatic way that the victims had died, and the frequency of the deaths, had an impact on the city and its citizens. People didn't go near the river if there was any way that they could avoid it. The ferry traffic between Port Grove and the Grand March had practically dried up, as people went out of their way to take one of the three bridges that crossed the Tenz River

instead. And, like last night, people just didn't go out after dark. They weren't willing to risk their lives for a trip to the pub, or to the playhouse, or to any other place that would keep them out once the sun had set.

"Finish up," Reva said. "I don't need the Lord Constable Inspector blowing away our leaves as well."

Half an hour later, Reva and Cas headed out of the Stable. "Reva," called Inspector Pflamtael. She paused, and he tossed her a tightly rolled parchment. "You might want this." He and Seeker Pfinzloab started laughing.

Reva looked at the parchment, which had been sealed with wax. Written on the side was "Wand of Myth Detection."

Reva pointed the "wand" at Pflamtael and shook her hand, as if the wand was detecting something. "You spelled moron wrong," she said, eliciting a loud guffaw from Cas, and a few laughs from other constables. Olwyn's ears turned red, and Reva smiled. She tucked the "wand" on the inside of her bracer, and they went down the stairs.



Chapter 3

Reva looked down at the body that lay on Alchemist Thea Bromide's examination table. They stood inside the backroom of the Feedshed, a building that was separated from the rest of New Port, where the Alchemists plied their particular trade. The odor of death was thick in the air, and it wasn't just from this body. The smell permeated the room, having embedded itself so deeply into the tables, walls, and floor, that no amount of cleaning or alchemical concoctions could remove it.

The table was one of two in the room. It was made of stone, with gutters carved into the edges, and holes cut into the corners. Above the table hung a polished metal bowl with a light wand attached to it. It was the only place in New Port where these expensive magical wands were regularly used. Right now, the lamp was shining the bright, magical light down onto the body to illuminate the long, bloody gashes that traced down the victim's chest, stomach, and both arms. The victim's intestines poked out from the wound. The body reeked of blood, sulfurous mud, dead fish, and feces. Cas stood by the door, her finger and thumb clamped tightly on her nose.

"You'll see better from over here, Seeker" Thea called to Cas, as she poured water onto the body. Mud and blood

flowed from the body onto the table, and then down the holes, to be caught by buckets on the floor.

"But I can *smell* less over here," Cas replied. Thea chuckled, and shook her head.

"How does this victim compare with the other floaters?" Reva asked. She had a small, leather-bound book open, and she was taking notes. If Thea or any of the other Alchemists noted the grinning elephant that had been painted on the cover, they wisely chose not to say anything about it.

"Which ones?" Thea asked in reply. "I get a dozen floaters in here every month. Nobody gives them more than a cursory look."

Reva knew that Thea was right, but she didn't have time for pedantics. "I mean the ones that people think were killed by the troll."

"Don't tell me you believe in the Tenz River Troll, Inspector?"

"I don't," Reva replied, more forcefully than was needed. "The damn troll is just a legend. But *something* did this." She pointed at the body.

"This one is in better condition than the others. They were all badly decomposed or eaten by fish and crabs before we received them."

"You don't have any of the other bodies to compare with him?"

Thea gave Reva a cold stare. "Just where would I keep all of these bodies? How would I keep them from decomposing and stinking up the place any more than it is now? I'm lucky I can do even a basic examination. I don't have the luxury, or the space, to keep *any* bodies here. Certainly not *floaters*."

Reva frowned. She'd touched a nerve, and she knew that Thea was right, but it was still frustrating. "Do you

have any notes or descriptions of the bodies?"

Thea paused and stared at Reva. "As with the bodies, where would I store all of this parchmentwork? Better yet, where would I get the time to write my reports twice?" She shook her head and went back to cleaning mud off of the body. "I give everything I have to you and your fellow constables. What you all do with them after that is not my concern."

Damn it. Reva knew that. She didn't like being under so much pressure on a case. It was causing her to make stupid mistakes. She also didn't have the time to dig up parchmentwork that probably wouldn't tell her anything useful anyway. "*Ghelred*," Reva apologized. "The LCI wants this thing solved yesterday."

"Reva can't work under pressure," a nasally Cas added from the doorway.

"And my Seeker can't work with her mouth sewn shut."

"Ooo... my branches are quivering," Cas retorted.

"Inspector," Thea began, as she paused from washing the body. Her eyes softened a bit as she looked at Reva and continued. "From what little I remember, yes, this body has wounds that are similar to those found on some of the other victims: the ones that everyone is saying that the troll killed."

She set the bucket down and motioned Reva to step closer. "*These* wounds," she pointed to the wounds on the arms, "appear to be defensive." She held up her own arms to demonstrate. "He was trying to protect himself from his attacker."

"A lot of good it did him," Cas commented.

Thea gave a grunt of approval. She next pointed to the long gashes in the chest. "These wounds here are the likely cause of death. They are deep, and you can see that

they eviscerated him. None of the wounds were made by a weapon. Some kind of beast did this. Something with claws." She held up her hands, curled her fingers, and made a slashing motion.

"The other victims weren't this complete, unfortunately. I could only make guesses as to what had killed them, because too much of the flesh was either gone or distorted."

Reva studied the long wounds. The flesh was torn in places, not cut, clearly made by claws. They reminded her of wounds that she'd seen warhawks make, but they were wider, and more ragged, as if the claw wasn't very sharp.

"Any idea what sort of creature could have done this?" Reva asked.

Thea braced her arms against the table and stared at the wounds. "If you want me to tell you that a troll did this," she looked up, "I can't do that."

Reva sighed.

"There are too many creatures in the world that can do this," Thea said, apologetically, and gestured to the body. "This could have been from a warhawk, or an owlbear—"

"An owlbear? In the city?" Cas asked, nose still tightly clamped.

"I've heard there are some illegal owlbear pits in the port," Thea replied. "Hells, this could have been done by a regular bear, too. Or even a pissed-off varani."

"So, you're not ruling out a troll?" Reva asked.

Thea gave a wan smile and nodded. "Yes, if there is a troll roaming around the city, it could have done this."

Reva wrote something in her notebook, and then leaned closer to inspect the wounds. As she did so, a faint odor caught in her nose. She sniffed. "Do you smell that?"

Thea leaned over to smell the body. "It smells like

rancid fish mixed with marsh water.”

“It smells disgusting,” commented Cas, still holding her nose.

“It smells like vomit,” Reva remarked.

Thea made a quick inspection of the victim’s mouth. “It doesn’t look like he vomited,” she said. “Maybe it’s from the muck they found the body in?”

Reva nodded, but she wasn’t so sure. She wrote down the observation in her notebook. She looked over the body for a few more minutes, and then nodded. “Áeorias.” She turned and walked out of the Feedshed, and Cas gave an exaggerated sigh of relief once they stepped outside.



Chapter 4

It was after lunch when Reva and Cas climbed down the embankment to reach the spot where their floater had been found. The Tenz River was spread out before them. The river was about 800 paces wide at this point, between Queen's Bridge, which was upriver on their left, and King's Bridge, on their right. Reva knew they were within a stone's throw of Pfenestra's Playhouse and The Beehive; both were places that she knew well. It was a popular area, where a lot of people would congregate during the evenings. At least, that was the case before all of these mysterious deaths. Could that be what had attracted their mysterious killer?

The river flowed by at a fast walking pace, and there was a lot of debris still along the bank from recent flooding. She counted a half-dozen rowboats that had been pulled up onto the bank. Reva knew that many fisherlives and crabbers kept their boats here to avoid the congestion and graft down at the port, but at this time of day, all the boats should have been out on the water. The fact that this many boats were still here spoke to the fear that had started to grip the city over the "troll" deaths.

High tide had been that morning, but the ground was still muddy in places. Normally, that might have been

helpful to preserve tracks, but a quick glance showed that wasn't going to be the case. Too many people had walked over this area since this morning. Apparently, a mythical monster wasn't enough of a threat to keep *everyone* away from the river.

Cas took a couple of steps toward the river. She held her staff out in front of her, her cloak billowing in the breeze. She called out loudly, "*Bu saçma bir cümle!*"

Reva cocked her head. She knew most of the incantations that Cas used, but she had never heard that one before. "What the hells kind of spell is that?"

Cas turned and gave a mischievous smile. "I'm casting 'detect myths.'" She laughed hysterically at her joke.

"Here," Reva pulled out Olwynn's "wand" and tossed it to Cas. "You should use this instead of wasting a prepared spell."

Cas was laughing too hard and fumbled the catch, the parchment wand landing in the mud.

Reva rolled her eyes and started walking around the area. The only reason she knew that the body had been found here was that there were still some blood stains that had not yet been washed away or trampled over. She tried to study the ground, to get the tracks to give up their secrets, but it was just a jumbled mess to her. *I'm sure Gale would be able to make sense of all of this.* Her brother was a ranger in the Tenyl army, and he had boasted of being able to track *anything* over *any* terrain. She'd taken that for brotherly boasting, but she'd have welcomed having him demonstrate that skill here.

"Reva."

She looked up to see Cas waving her over to a spot that was several paces downriver. Reva walked over to her, and Cas pointed to the muddy ground.

"What am I looking at?" Reva asked.

Cas looked at her, a magical green glow haloing her eyes. "A track from our myth. As clear as day."

"Clear as mud." Reva grumbled, crossing her arms.

Cas crouched down with an exasperated sigh. "See? Right here." She traced a few indentations in the mud. "It's missing the toes, but it's a track. From something big."

Reva turned her head and squinted, but she couldn't make out what Cas was seeing. "If you say so. Does it lead anywhere?"

Cas stood up and looked around. After a moment, she shook her head, the glow from her eyes fading as the spell ended. "It's the only one I can find. It's heading toward the river, I think. But I don't see any others."

"What made it?"

Cas shrugged. "I'm a wizard, not a monster hunter."

"Apparently, you aren't any good at either of those."

"Hey! I found the damn track for you."

"Without a body to go with it, it's not any good to me." Reva looked at the river and the bank. She watched the water flow by, and she stuck a strand of hair into her mouth as she thought. She tried to picture what had happened to leave her victim here, at the river's edge. The body had spent some time in the water, but not enough that it had been preyed upon by the normal river denizens. Had it been deposited here by the tide, or had the creature dropped it here? If it was the tide, then where upriver had the person been attacked? Then there was the track. It had to have been made after high tide, so had the creature returned to feed? If so, then why hadn't it done that? There were too many questions, and no answers to any of them.

Reva continued to stare at the river. After a moment, she apologized, "Sorry. You did a good job. Now let's go see somebody who might be able to tell us something."



Chapter 5

The smell of dust and aged leather greeted Reva like a gentle caress as they walked into the pawn shop. Muted light forced its way through the dirty windows, but then found its way blocked by the piles of junk that filled the shop.

The pawn shop was located in a tucked away corner of Port Grove, and it catered to a diverse clientele who were either looking for a good bargain or to get a decent price for their junk. The shop was owned by an elf named Rhoanlan, who had a knack for having just the right item that you were looking for, or just the right tidbit of information. Reva had been using Rhoanlan as a confidential informant since the days when she had been a lowly Senior Constable. That Rhoanlan was also (probably) the city's biggest fence of stolen goods was an open secret that Reva usually overlooked.

Rhoanlan sat at his usual spot, his rotund body sitting behind a square, wooden table that sat near the entrance to the shop. He wore a sapphire and emerald striped vest that was pulled tight over a pale yellow shirt that seemed to strain against his bulk. All around him was the most eclectic collection of junk in the city, all of it stacked in an apparently random and haphazard way, with each pile of

goods seemingly on the verge of falling over.

An oil lamp burned brightly on the corner of the table. By its light, Reva saw a flash of metal, as Rhoanlan placed something inside a wooden box, closing the lid rapidly.

"Constable Inspector Reva Lunaria and Seeker Castanea Rubus," Rhoanlan smiled, and spread his hands in greeting. "To what do I owe the pleasure of such auspicious company?"

"Duping people out of magic items now?" Cas asked.

Reva knew that Cas' eyes were filled with a magical glow without having to turn around. It had become standard practice when they entered Rhoanlan's shop to see what magical contraband he might have acquired.

"Hey!" Rhoanlan exclaimed, pointing at Cas. "We agreed last time that you'd stop doing that! I operate a legitimate business, buying and trading in many unique items."

"If you are a legitimate businessself," Cas replied, "then I'm the King's heir."

"Princess," Rhoanlan said, giving a mock bow. "Would you care to see what wares a humble lombard can show you?"

Cas laughed and made a rude gesture to Rhoanlan.

"Your place or mine, dear Seeker?" Rhoanlan asked, giving Cas a lecherous smile.

"Are you two done flirting?" Reva asked. She could hear Cas make gagging noises.

"Spoilsport," Rhoanlan pouted. He laced his fingers together and rested his hands on his stomach.

"Careful, Rhoanlan," Cas warned. "She's got the LCI and First Constable pulling her roots today."

"The Tenz River Troll," Rhoanlan nodded his head sagely. The light from the oil lamp made his dark mahogany hair glisten. "I heard that there had been another death.

It's about time that Aescel put somebody competent on the case."

"Don't tell me you believe this hawkshit about the troll?" Reva asked. She'd given up trying to figure out how Rhoanlan got his information.

"The beast that dwells at the bottom of the river? As large as two grown elves, with razor-sharp claws and cruel, dagger-like teeth? Preying on any child foolish enough to swim in the river? Eating them up and using their bones to pick its teeth? *That* troll?"

"Yes," Reva sighed, as he recounted the story that had been told to every child in the city in order to keep them from going into the river. Her father had told a similar story to her and Gale, although, being a constable himself, his stories had been a lot more graphic.

"I *do* believe, Inspector."

"Oh, come on," said Cas. "Everybody knows that the troll is just a legend. It's just a convenient monster to scare kids from going to play in the river."

"Seeker, I'm surprised at you." He gave Cas an incredulous look. "As a practitioner of the arcane arts, you, of all people, should know that every myth and legend has a basis in fact."

"Sure," Cas scoffed. "What facts? Parents have been telling this story for hundreds of years, and nobody has ever seen one sign or clue that the troll is real."

Rhoanlan smiled, and held up a finger. He stood and walked nimbly through the piles of junk. Reva had no idea how he managed to not only navigate through the detritus, but also to keep any of it from falling over. She could hear the sound of a cabinet being opened and items being shifted around. Finally, there was a grunt of satisfaction. Cas and Reva exchanged a look as Rhoanlan returned, carrying a large wooden box. He set the box on the table and

resumed his seat.

"What's in the box?" asked Cas.

"Probably a mummified goblin hand that he'll pass off as belonging to a troll," Reva replied.

Rhoanlan put a hand to his chest. "You wound me, Inspector. I have never dealt in fakes. Everything in my shop is a genuine original."

"And probably missing from someone's collection," added Cas.

"Out!" Rhoanlan pointed to the door. "Out! I will not stand for such slander." He made as though he was going to pick up the box.

Reva glared at Cas. She shrugged, and mouthed, "What? It's true."

"Rhoanlan, please," Reva said, trying to hide her irritation at Cas. "If you have information about the troll that can help us, I would greatly appreciate it."

"Absolutely not." He shook his head. "My honor has been insulted too many times by the pair of you. I don't know why I have ever bothered to help you, since all I ever get is grief—"

CLINK. Reva snapped a Skip down onto the table, the silver glinting in the light of the oil lamp.

"—even though I have never given you wrong information—"

CLINK.

"—and I know that my assistance has helped you solve more than one case—"

CLINK.

"—so I think I deserve a bit more respect—"

This is getting too expensive, even by Rhoanlan's standards, Reva thought. She moved to pick up the coins, but Rhoanlan's hand appeared to teleport as it scooped up the three Skips.

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"I'm willing to overlook this little incident. For the greater good of the city, of course."

Reva heard Cas take a breath, so she turned and threw two daggers at Cas with her glare. This information was already costing enough, and she didn't need Cas' caustic tongue to rile Rhoanlan up any further. Cas rolled her eyes, but she kept her mouth shut for once.

"Back around the year 6220, or so," Rhoanlan started, apparently forgiving the insults. "King Dryas commissioned the building of King's Bridge."

Reva did the quick arithmetic in her head, *So, five hundred and sixty years ago.*

"He hired a crew of dwarves—"

"Dwarves?" blurted Cas.

"Of course. This was before they were driven out of the Kingdom, and well before the most glorious and patriotic Purity Laws were bestowed—"

"Does this look like a green cloak to you?" Cas asked, waving her muddy brown service cloak at him. "You don't need to suck up to us. Get to the point."

Rhoanlan gave a single nod. "King Dryas wanted the bridge to last forever, and he insisted on using granite that was quarried from the Smoke Highlands. The dwarves filled dozens of barges with the stone, and they shipped it down the river. They sunk deep piles into the mud, and started building the bridge. There was considerable excitement surrounding the project, and people would flock to the river just to watch them work. But something else also came to Tenyl, along with the stone."

"A troll," Reva stated.

Rhoanlan touched his nose. "Nobody knew how, but one of the barges also brought a troll. The two main piers were not yet completed, and the abutments on both sides were barely cleared, when the attacks started. The muti-

lated corpses of workers were found at the work site. Attacks occurred among the fisherlives along the river, as well as people in the city.

"The dwarves refused to do any more work on the bridge until the troll was killed. The King blamed them for carelessly letting the beast into the city. Work stopped, and the bridge sat, unbuilt, for months. People were afraid to go near the river, and the guilds started complaining. They were losing money because people were afraid to work."

Rhoanlan caressed the top of the box. "So, the King put a bounty on the troll. One thousand Sovereigns."

Reva and Cas both let out an exclamation. That was over 100,000 Skips. Maybe more, since this was over five hundred years ago.

"Of course, this brought every adventurer in the Kingdom out of the undergrowth. There were some quick boasts to try to win the bounty, but the attacks continued, and most of the charlatans and hucksters gave up."

"Someone must have succeeded," Cas stated. "Since King's Bridge was built."

"Obviously," Rhoanlan smiled. "A group of hardy adventurers managed to find the troll's lair near the work site and..." He paused, and then opened the box. "Killed it."

The inside of the box was lined with red satin. Within the folds rested a large, whitish thing that Reva thought was a rock, at first. Rhoanlan withdrew the object, and then placed it gently on the table. It was a large skull that had yellowed some from age, but the large teeth, thick brow, and knobby protrusions stood out.

"That's a troll skull?" Cas asked.

"*The* troll's skull, my dear Seeker." Rhoanlan patted the top of the skull.

"Wait," Reva said. "Don't trolls have to be killed by

burning them, or turning them to stone, or something?"

Rhoanlan shrugged. "How should I know? Do I look like an adventurer? If you are interested in specific troll biology then I suggest you go ask a follower of Brixbrix. What I do know is that this," he picked up the skull reverently, "is *the* skull from *the* Tenz River Troll. I had it authenticated by some fine wizards at Auros Academy. They verified the species, and they were able to provide an estimate for its age."

"About five hundred years?" Reva asked.

"Five hundred and thirty years, give or take a few decades."

Cas stepped forward and Rhoanlan let her handle the skull. She rotated it, looking at the teeth and eye sockets, and sticking a finger into the large foramen where the base of the neck would have connected to the skull. Meanwhile, Reva stuck a strand of hair into her mouth, and she absently watched as Cas made her examination. If Reva believed Rhoanlan, and she did—he was correct in the fact that he had never given her misleading information—then it was clear that a troll *had* been in the city. Rhoanlan was right about another thing: legends and myths had to start somewhere. Clearly, most people had forgotten about the real events, but the myth of the Tenz River Troll had lived on. After a few moments, she turned to Rhoanlan and asked, "If *they* killed the troll, then what's been attacking people along the river? Now? Over five hundred years later?"

Cas handed the skull back to Rhoanlan. "Maybe it had babies?"

Rhoanlan put the skull back into the box, and then spread his hands. "I don't know, Inspector. Based on what I've heard about the victims, not many creatures other than a troll could hide in the city and cause such injuries.

Maybe Cas is right, and it had babies. Or maybe a necromancer found the corpse and is having a spot of fun.”

“An undead troll?” Cas asked, shaking her head. “Oh, hells no, uh uh.”

“I am an expert on many things, Inspector,” Rhoanlan ignored Cas, “but troll biology is not one of them, I’m afraid.”

Reva continued to suck on the strand of hair. “Áeorias,” she finally said. “I don’t know how useful it was, but I know more now.”

“Always a pleasure,” Rhoanlan smiled. He patted the pocket of his vest where he’d put the Skips.

Reva and Cas walked out of the shop. Reva turned and started up the narrow lane. “Let’s get our stuff,” she said. “I want to be prepared if we’re going to hunt for this thing.”

“So, you believe in the troll now?”

“I don’t know. Something is killing people. Troll? Somebody’s pet owlbear? Based on the victim’s wounds, it was some kind of animal attack. A large animal. Rhoanlan’s never sent us down the wrong path before. And he’s right: myths do have their basis in fact. I can’t explain why a troll that was killed five centuries ago would be back now, but it’s the best explanation we have. Whatever it is, we need to stop it.”

“I guess tomorrow is going to be a fun day, then.”

“Tonight,” Reva stated.

“What? Are you crazy? You want to hunt an unknown monster? At night?”

“I want to put an end to the attacks. That means we go, tonight.”

“Fine. At least give me time to write my will first.”

“I thought you had one already,” Reva remarked.

“I want to remove you from it,” Cas said. “If you live, I don’t want you to have any of my stuff if you get me killed

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like this.”

Reva smiled and put an arm around Cas’ shoulders. “I’m sure it won’t be that bad. You’ll probably just lose an arm or a leg.”



Chapter 6

Reva stood at the southern end of King's Bridge, waiting for Cas. She wore her *ezustacél* armor under her official Constabulary armor and bracers. She also had her father's longsword—passed on to her after his death—instead of her constabulary-issued blade. Her father's sword was a much better quality weapon, and it had been magically enhanced. She figured that she'd need it if there really was a troll.

She'd been waiting for Cas for several minutes, and she wondered what was taking her so long. Reva saw several elves on the bridge turn and point, not bothering to hide their exclamations and laughs.

Cas crested the bridge, and Reva put a hand to her forehead. "We're going to fight a troll," she said, as Cas walked up. "Not go to war."

Cas wore her regular armor, but her constabulary-issued bracers had been replaced by a pair that gave off a soft glow. She had her staff and service longsword, plus a dagger, and a battle axe had been stuck through her belt. Two bandoliers criss-crossed her chest. One had several scrolls slid into custom loops, and the other was filled with potion vials. A small gemstone hovered over her head, and she had a tower shield strapped to her back.

“Hells, did you raid a magic shop on the way here?” Reva asked.

“I came prepared,” Cas replied. “I’m not planning on being killed by some myth.”

“Well, if we stay up here much longer, I might die of embarrassment.” Reva turned to head down the stairs that led to the river below. By the sound of creaking leather and jangling weapons, she was sure that Cas had just made a rude gesture at her back.

It was very dark under the bridge, even to Reva’s eyes. She only knew where the river was due to the sound of the water flowing along the bank. She pulled out a slender wand with a silvered disk and a quartz crystal set in one end. She activated the light wand, and a brilliant, magical light illuminated the area. First Constable Aescel had been reluctant to let her requisition the light wand due to the cost, but she was glad that she had put down roots on needing it. The magical light almost turned night into day and, unlike a torch or lantern, it wouldn’t be snuffed out if it fell into the water.

“What are we looking for, exactly?” asked Cas.

“Tracks. Based on Rhoanlan’s information, we know that the original troll came here with the stone that was used to build the bridge. It had to have built a lair near here, in order to get away from everybody hunting it. Whether it’s another troll or some other creature, that lair is probably still here.”

Cas nodded, and she cast a spell onto the end of her staff. Soon, it was giving off its own brilliant light. They split up, searching the riverbank. About a dozen paces downriver, Reva spotted something unusual. It wasn’t tracks, but a mudslide. Part of the riverbank had slid into the river and, mixed into the dirt, were several mud bricks.

She called to Cas, who came over. Reva’s wand traced

light over the slide. "Remember the flooding last month?" Reva asked.

Cas nodded. "Don't I? My apartment was flooded from all the rain." She shined her light up onto the bank. "It looks like the river tore away this section of the bank, exposing... what?" She let the light rest on one of the bricks.

Reva walked up and picked up the brick. "A seal." She turned to look at Cas. "They must have sealed up the troll's lair all those years ago, so that nobody would go poking their branches in it. They either covered it with soil or, in the past five centuries, stuff grew up and covered the seal over."

"Until the flood tore it away," Cas added. "That was one of the worst floods we've had in—"

"Centuries," Reva finished. She climbed up the pile of dirt and bricks. About five paces above the river, she saw a black hole in the bank. Remnants of bricks still clung to the sides of a stone frame. Tree roots and branches littered the area.

Cas shone her light on the trees and shrubs that grew along the bank to either side. "That explains why nobody could see this from the bridge."

Reva scanned the ground and quickly found the tracks. Several of them, going in and out of the hole. They were large, at least three times the size of her own foot. The tracks crossed over themselves, but she could see that they ended in four clawed toes. She pulled her sword.

"It's in there."

"Are you sure?"

Reva gestured to the tracks. "The topmost tracks go into the hole. Even *I* can tell what that means."

She gripped her sword. *I should go get help*, she told herself. *Who knows what this creature really is? But if I do, it might leave again. I won't risk Cas' life, or mine, to watch*

this hole alone. And I know it's in there right now. We can deal with it. It was a risk to go in with just the two of them alone, but she didn't want anybody else to die to this creature.

"Let's go," Reva said.



Chapter 7

Their light pushed back the darkness of the hole. The ground right around the entrance was littered with crumbled bricks, broken branches, and a few dead fish. Inside, the passage sloped down, and more debris littered the area. The ground was muddy and smelled of fetid water and rotting fish.

Cas clamped her nose shut. “Eww, this place stinks.”

“You’ll get used to it,” Reva said. “I don’t want to die because you were too busy holding your nose closed to cast a spell.”

Cas pulled her hand down, and she immediately made gagging and retching sounds. “Gods, why can’t somebody make a ‘protection from foul smells’ spell?”

“Why can’t you? Then people can cast ‘Cas is Such A Wimp When It Comes to Smell’ anytime they want to protect their delicate senses.”

Cas stuck out her tongue, and then made a face.

“Breathe in through your mouth, then out through your nose. That’ll help.” Reva headed down into the lair, placing her feet with care so that she didn’t slip on the mud. The smell got even worse as they descended, but she did her best to ignore it. She couldn’t show that it was bothering her after telling Cas to ignore it.

The walls looked to have been dug from the earth with powerful claws, not tools. It seemed big to her until she realized that it was dug out to the proportions of a creature that was taller and broader than she was. She estimated that the ceiling was over thirty hands high, and she hoped that the troll had liked a lot of headroom. After about ten paces, the passage leveled out to a shallow pool of stagnant water. The space was wider than the passage, but not by much. Reva moved her light wand about the small chamber and saw another passage heading off to her right, perpendicular to the pool. The entrance was at least three paces off the ground.

"Gods, we have to go through *that*?" Cas shined her light around the pool. The water was a sickly greenish-brown, and the remains of fish and other animals floated on the scummy surface.

"Unless you learned any teleportation spells lately." Reva knew that she hadn't, and waded into the watery muck. The water was cold, and her feet quickly sank into the mud. She could feel the water soak her puttee and her breeches.

Behind her, Cas complained, "I just had my cloak cleaned, too." She sighed and followed Reva into the water.

Reva approached the side. The water had come up to her waist, but it went no higher. Looking at the wall, she could see that somebody—the creature, or the long-ago adventurers—had hacked makeshift footholds into it. She climbed up, and then helped Cas up into the next passage.

Cas started to say something, and then froze, her eyes going wide. Reva whirled around and came face-to-face with the creature.

"Shit!"



Chapter 8

The creature stood in the passage, and it seemed to fill the entire space with its huge body. It towered over Reva, even as it leaned toward her. It bellowed a roar and brought a massive arm up, backhanding Reva. Its enormous hand hit her in the chest, and she staggered backward, into Cas, who gave a startled yell, which was followed quickly by a splash.

Reva sucked in a breath, and she felt pain in her chest. She had a cracked rib, at least, but there wasn't time to worry about that. Reva pointed the light wand at the creature's face, and it recoiled from the bright light. The creature's head resembled the skull that Rhoanlan had shown them, except that it was covered with a mottled green-brown skin. The skin on its head was unblemished, and it seemed newer than the rest of its body, which was covered in scars and looked weathered. Aged.

Reva jabbed at the troll with her longsword. The passage was large enough for the troll, which stood at least thirty hands tall, but it was only about twenty hands wide, so she couldn't fully extend her arms for a powerful strike. It was easy for her jabs to hit the creature, and she stuck it three times in the chest and once in the arm in quick succession. The strikes caused the troll to yell in pain, and

forced it to step back. Greenish-yellow blood flowed from the wounds, but as Reva continued to stab and poke, she saw the first wounds heal and close, as if a healer had just used their magic on the creature.

“Son of a succubus!” Reva heard splashes and spluttered cries coming from Cas. She kept jabbing at the troll, pushing it back. It lashed out with its claws, which were about as long as Reva’s hand and coated in the fetid mud from the tunnel, but Reva was prepared for the assault and blocked the attacks.

I just need to buy Cas enough time to get back up here. She couldn’t turn her attention from the troll in order to give Cas any help. She hoped that the heavy tower shield hadn’t pulled her Seeker under.

Suddenly the troll stopped trying to slash at her. It stood up a bit taller, and it scrunched up its face, as if it was about to—

“Oh, hel—”

The troll’s mouth opened, revealing long, yellowed teeth, and a flood of foul vomit spewed out, striking Reva fully in her face and chest. The stench was overpowering. She fell to one knee and dropped both her sword and the light wand. Her armor began to smoke, and Reva realized that her face was burning, the liquid eating into her flesh.

Her stomach threatened to discharge its own contents, and Reva bit her cheek in order to keep herself from adding her own vomit to the mess. She ignored the burning pain and grabbed in the mud for her sword. She lifted the weapon just in time to keep the troll’s claws from striking her. She had probably just saved her life, but the blow was hard enough that it had knocked her onto her back. The tunnel was cast in deep shadows as Reva’s body occluded the light from the wand. She struggled to find the troll, to see what its—

The troll's hand slashed down out of the shadows and struck Reva square in her stomach. The claws raked through the leather like it was parchment, and she could hear them scrape across the silversteel armor. Luckily, the armor held, which kept her from losing her intestines. The troll slashed again, but Reva saw this attack coming and she managed to bring her sword up and around. The parry cut into the creature's arm, just above the wrist. The sword sliced completely through, cutting off the hand, which bounced off of Reva's chest and fell to the ground. Green-yellow blood spurted from the wound like a fountain, coating Reva, and the troll cried out, but she could see that the wound was already starting to heal.

Reva started to get up, but froze when Cas yelled, "Stay down!"

The passage filled with red-orange light, and flames shot over Reva's prone body. The heat singed her hair, but the fiery blast struck the troll full on. The creature lifted its wounded hand in an attempt to shield it from the blast, but then it cried out in pain and retreated up the passage.



Chapter 9

Reva rolled over and saw Cas leaning over the edge of the passageway. Cas crumpled a piece of parchment—the scroll she’d just used to cast her spell—and tossed it to the ground.

Reva quickly stood up, ignoring the pain in her chest and stomach. The light wand was poking up from the mud and casting a spotlight against the wall. She stepped to the edge and helped Cas up into the passage. “Áeorias.”

Cas nodded and pointed at Reva. “I think you look worse than me right now.”

“That’s because you don’t have a mirror.” Reva laughed. She ran a hand through her hair and flung some of the mud that she’d pulled off onto the floor. The sounds of the wounded troll echoed off the walls. It wasn’t dead yet. She turned to head up the passage so that she could rectify that situation, but Cas tugged on Reva’s arm and handed her a potion bottle.

“What’s this?” Reva asked.

“Strength of the bull,” Cas replied. Then she scrunched up her mouth in thought. “Or maybe grace of the cat? The labels all came off in the water.”

Reva shrugged, *anything that can give me an advantage*. She drank the magical elixir. It tasted of peppermint

and grass as it went down. Before she'd finished the entire potion, a feeling of euphoria and awareness began to race through her body.

Meanwhile, Cas had yanked the tower shield off and jammed it into the mud in front of her. She knelt behind the shield and started pulling out scrolls, quickly looking at them, and then shoving them back into the makeshift bandolier. "Come on, come on. I know I brought it."

The troll's cries lessened, and Reva could feel a change in the air. Then she heard the soft squelch of mud. The troll was coming back.

"Whatever it is that you're doing, now would be a good time." Reva could see the massive troll lumbering toward them.

"I'm working on it! Just give me a moment," Cas yelled.

"We don't have a moment!" The troll filled the passage. Reva saw that the amputated hand had not regrown. Instead, thick scar tissue covered the stump where the hand had been. A few of the other wounds were also scabbed over and appeared to have not healed. The troll lashed out with its one good arm. Reva sensed the motion, gracefully ducked under the attack, jabbed her sword into the troll's exposed side, and then jumped back toward Cas. Her blade drew a long line of blood from the deep cut, but it healed almost as quickly as it had been made.

"Aha!" Cas exclaimed. Reva heard her utter an incantation, and then she felt Cas's hand touch her back. A comforting warmth traveled across her chest and down her arms. When it reached her hand, her sword ignited in red-orange flames. The troll's eyes widened, and it began to back away.

"Finally!" Reva smiled and darted forward, quickly getting in three attacks on the troll. The creature cried out and started to retreat up the passage. Then, just as quickly

as they had appeared, the flames on her sword were extinguished.

The troll stopped its retreat, cocked its head to the side, and gave what Reva could only describe as a derisive snort.

Reva turned to glare at Cas. “Well, *that* was effective! For what, six bloody seconds?”

“What in the hells? I’m gonna find that thrice-damned wizard and shove my staff so far up—”

“Save it,” Reva interrupted, parrying the troll’s renewed attack. “Until after we survive this.”

Cas continued to curse the wizard who’d given her the scroll as she cast another spell. An aura of red light covered Reva like a blanket, just in time to deflect one of the troll’s attacks.

Reva saw the troll scrunch up its face again. She dove forward, landing on her side and sliding on the muddy floor, just as the troll opened its mouth. The foul liquid landed right where Reva had been standing, and then splashed up and around the tower shield before cascading with sickening plops into the water below.

Cas was unharmed by the deluge, but she stood still for a moment, stunned by the powerful odor. Then she doubled over and emptied her stomach onto the ground.

The troll gave a snort and stepped toward Cas.



Chapter 10

Reva rolled into the center of the passage and shoved her sword up with all of her might. The blade dug deep into the troll's back, and the creature belated in anger and pain. It turned quickly, pulling Reva's sword from her grip, and slammed its fist down. Reva tried to roll away, hoping that the magic from the elixir was still working. Unfortunately, it also seemed to have worn off, but Reva succeeded in getting hit in her hip instead of her stomach. It was a powerful blow, and pain seared across her leg. She felt something give and she cried out.

Tears filled her vision, and heat flushed her face. *I'm not going to get killed by a fairy tale!*

The troll turned back to Cas. Reva fought through the pain in her hip to kneel and grip her sword. Her wounded leg threatened to collapse on her, but she yelled and pulled the blade free. Without pause, she then shoved it through the back of the troll's right knee. She collapsed from the effort into the muddy floor, but the blade erupted out the front of its leg.

"Heal that," Reva sneered.

The troll's leg crumpled, and it hit the side of the passage. At the same moment, Reva saw Cas stand up behind her shield. Cas spat, and then she wiped her mouth with

the back of her hand.

"You are, by far, the most disgusting thing I have ever seen. And I like to hang out at the Tattered Kilt, which has got to be the raunchiest pub in the city." She pulled a flask from one of the bandoliers. "And you made me throw up on my trousers. I just got pockets sewn into them, and now they're probably ruined!" She flung the flask at the troll. "So you can go burn in hell!" The flask burst open and oily flames covered the creature. The troll bellowed and slapped at the flames, but that only managed to spread the fire to its hands and arms.

Reva tried to grab for her sword, but the alchemical fire was spreading, and the troll was thrashing wildly. She just couldn't reach it. Cas whistled loudly, and Reva looked over just in time to catch the battle axe that Cas had tossed to her. Reva scrambled back from the troll as it collapsed to the ground. Sitting on the floor, Reva swung the axe as hard as she could, slicing deeply into its neck. The creature brought its burning hand up to the wound, spreading the flames even more.

Another flask struck the troll in the neck, and Reva had to scoot away as the creature flailed about, trying to extinguish the growing conflagration. After a minute, its movement slowed, and then stopped. Neither Reva nor Cas moved until the flames had finally burned themselves out, and all that remained was the charred corpse.

They looked at each other, and then they both started laughing at the relief of having survived.



Chapter 11

Reva and Cas sat in the muddy debris outside the Troll's lair. They each had thick cloaks wrapped around them as they stared at the river. The constabulary healer kept fussing as he tried to heal Reva's wounds while trying to keep from gagging on the stench. She'd already told him to suck it up and deal with it more than once, but he kept retching and had to turn away to keep from throwing up. The sun was just starting to creep over the horizon across Black Elf Bay, and a dozen other constables milled about the area.

"You two need to spend about a week in the baths," Senior Constable Ghrellstone commented, waving his hand in front of his nose.

The healer muttered something that sounded like "Hells, yes," as he finished up and walked as far away from them as he could get. Reva ignored Willem. Cas flipped him a rude gesture. Willem laughed and handed them two pewter mugs. Reva was surprised to see that hers was filled with hot cacao. She gratefully took a drink, and then gave Willem a questioning look.

"Complements of Ilium. I got him to open his shop early after I told him that you two had killed the Tenz River Troll. And I fortified them with a bit of Highland Whiskey."

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Reva took another drink, savoring the heat and flavor. "I take back everything I was just thinking about you." She closed her eyes and sighed.

Cas agreed, managing a "mmm-hmm" as she slowly drained the contents of her own mug in one long drink.

"Nice work, you two."

Reva and Cas both turned to see First Constable Aescel step out of the lair. He paused to suck in clean air, and then came down the embankment to stand next to them, though he kept his distance. "You both did a good job."

"Thank you, sir," Cas said.

"And the next time that you do something so stupid as taking on a troll by yourselves," Aescel said, with a sharp edge to his voice, "I'm going to stick both of your asses on gate duty for a month."

"Yes, sir," they both nodded.

Aescel glared at them for a moment more, but then softened his tone as he looked back up at the cave entrance. "Still," he admitted, "that was very good work." He looked back to Reva and Cas, "Just be more careful in the future."

"Don't worry, sir," Reva replied. "I don't plan on fighting any more monsters any time soon."

"Do we know how the troll got in there in the first place?" asked Willem.

"It was the original troll from five hundred years ago," Reva said. They all looked at her as if her head had just sprouted branches.

"The adventurers who got the bounty for killing it pulled a fast one on King Dryas. They managed to cut off the creature's head, but they didn't burn the body. Who knows why?"

"Incompetence," Cas responded. "They were adventurers, after all."

Reva nodded. "I could see that the troll's head had newer skin on it, like it had just been born. There wasn't a scratch or a scar on it."

"But how did it survive so long inside a sealed lair?" asked Cas.

"I think I can answer that," said a new voice. They all turned to see Alchemist Thea Bromide walk out of the lair. She hustled down the embankment, careful to avoid the bricks, and stood upwind from Reva and Cas.

"This was a river troll," Thea stated. "They are different from their mountain cousins. In times of hardship, a river troll will dig itself a hole and harden its skin until it's like stone. They can remain this way—a sort of hibernation, you might call it—within the stone cocoon for a long time, waiting until the time is right for them to be revived."

"Even centuries?" asked Willem.

Thea nodded. "I'd not heard of one surviving in this hibernation state for so long before our beastie here. Usually, a river troll does this to survive long droughts that might last a few years, maybe even decades. I think that, in this case, getting its head cut off triggered the same reaction. They won't revive until rains return and water soaks their body. The flooding that we had must have broken open the lair and revived the troll. I found a spot deep within the lair that had been hastily dug, and there was evidence that area had recently been impacted by the flood. I would agree with Reva that this was the original troll."

"Stupid adventurers," Reva and Cas said, simultaneously. They shared a look and tapped their mugs together.

Reva turned to Thea. "And how do you know so much about trolls?"

"It's a bit of a hobby, and part of my faith, to study up on monsters. I think I'll be able to put together a nice pre-

sensation on the Tenz River Troll at our next meeting. This changes so much of what we know about them.”

“Brixbrix?” Reva asked. Thea nodded. Reva shook her head; you never could tell by looking which deity someone worshiped. “And you didn’t think to tell us any of this to make our task of killing it any easier?”

“Well, you never asked, did you?” Thea shot back. “You didn’t believe in the troll, and honestly, we had no confirmation that it even *was* a troll. Maybe if you’d come to me before you decided to take it on single-handedly, I might have been able to help.”

“Double-handedly,” Cas retorted. She and Reva clinked their mugs together again.

“Regardless, the LCI will be pleased that the attacks are over,” FC Aescel said. “I’ll give her the basics, but I know that she’ll want to meet with you both to hear the details. Hells, she’ll probably want to have the Mayor and the King there as well.” He pointed up the slope, and they could see that several constables were carrying the charred remains of the troll out of the cave.

Aescel waved a hand in front of his face. “After you’ve cleaned up, of course.”

“But we don’t smell any worse than Bromide’s Feedshed,” said Cas. She had to jump to avoid the clod of mud that Thea kicked at her.

Reva turned to watch the sun rise over the bay. She finished her mug of cacao and smiled to herself. *Another case closed.*

About the Authors

The writing duo of Geoff Habiger and Coy Kissee have been life-long friends since high school in Manhattan, Kansas. (Affectionately known as the Little Apple, which was a much better place to grow up than the Big Apple, in our humble opinion.) We love reading, baseball, cats, role-playing games, comics, and board games (not necessarily in that order and sometimes the cats can be very trying). We've spent many hours together over the years (and it's been many years) basically geeking out and talking about our favorite books, authors, and movies, often discussing what we would do differently to fix a story or make a better script. We eventually stopped discussing other people's work and started developing our own material, first with RPGs and card games, and now we do the same thing with novels.

Coy lives with his wife and one cat in Lenexa, Kansas. Geoff lives with his wife, son, and two cats in Tijeras, New Mexico.

You can keep up-to-date with the latest news about our writing at our website **www.habigerkisse.com** where we encourage you to check out our blog and to sign up for our newsletter. Subscribers will get behind-the-scenes details about our mysterious writing process, advanced information about new books and projects, and other cool stuff.

If you enjoyed this tale, we would appreciate it if you would let others know about it as well. Leave us a review on your favorite place on the web where people review books (Amazon, Goodreads, etc.) Getting reviews really helps, and is a great way that you can spread the word about our books.

If you want to read more about Reva, you can follow her adventures in the books of the Constable Inspector Lunaria Adventures series. Here's what others have been saying about the series:

[Wrath of the Fury Blade](http://getbook.at/AmazonWrath) getbook.at/AmazonWrath

"In this marriage of fantasy and procedural thriller, the team of Habiger and Kisse (*Unremarkable*, 2018) gives fans of both genres a master class in worldbuilding."
- Kirkus Reviews

"*Wrath of the Fury Blade* is a masterful marriage of genres and a must-read for fantasy and thriller lovers alike." – US Review of Books

[Joy of the Widow's Tears](http://getbook.at/AmazonWidowsTears) getbook.at/AmazonWidowsTears

"A deftly crafted combination of police procedural and action/adventure fantasy novel..." – Midwest Book Review

"The suspense is well-balanced, the pressure is pal-

pable, and the action is very satisfying. In other words, it's a great fantasy detective novel that keeps you anxious up to the very end. *Joy of the Widow's Tears* is a strong sequel to an excellent first book." – Zachry Wheeler, author of the Immortal Wake trilogy

We also encourage you to follow us on social media. We maintain an author page on Facebook (**facebook.com/HabigerKisseeAuthors/**) and Geoff is active on Twitter (**twitter.com/TangentGeoff**). Drop by and leave us a comment.

Something is brutally killing Tenyl's citizens and it's up to **Reva** and **Cas** to stop it.

For centuries, parents in Tenyl have told their children not to swim in the Tenz River or the Tenz River Troll will get them. Now, several gruesome deaths have been blamed on the mythical creature, causing the citizenry to cower in fear. Constable Inspector Reva Lunaria and her partner, Seeker Cas Rubus, have been assigned to protect Tenyl from this threat, myth or no myth. But you can't arrest a myth. If the stories are true, then Reva and Cas will have to face down a monster of legend. But if the Tenz River Troll is just a myth, then who or what is murdering the people of Tenyl?

A new **Constable Inspector Lunaria Adventure** short set before the events of *Wrath of the Fury Blade*.

