



The Sword

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One of these days I'm going to forget to breathe. That would be the most logical step given the state of my forgetfulness. I should have been halfway to the Evertree Inn by now, yet here I was riding around the forest trying to find my saddlebag. It was ridiculous how often I had to double back to collect something I'd left behind. At least I was alone now. If I had a companion with me, I doubt they would be pleased. Then again, my companions are rarely pleased with me. Isn't that why decided to ride alone?

Perhaps I should preface this with some information about myself. I am known as Feeang Yalak, and my work is that of a courier. It is my duty to ship sensitive parcels from one side of the Empire to the other. You can be sure there would be chaos in the empire if the parcels fell into the wrong hands. Of course, I am not as inept as my first-class memory suggests. I speak five languages and can decipher ancient runes as well as any scholar at the citadel. My alchemy and magicka are more than serviceable. On top of that, there are few who can challenge me when I have a sword in my hand.

Unfortunately my sword happens to be inside my saddlebag. So at this moment I would be very easy to challenge. With this on my mind, I hasten to try and locate the blasted bag before something goes amiss.

A while later as I brush through a particularly prickly bush, I spot my bag. My sword too. In my hand. But not my hands. I see myself. Standing. With the sword. This is very confusing.

I blink a few times. Try to clear my mind. Then my confusion is replaced with a sinking feeling as recognition washes over me- I've seen him before. And let me tell you, even though physically we are identical we are nothing alike. He is the cruelest creature you will ever face. It feels strange to talk about myself like this. Well not myself, exactly; but you know what I mean.

I get the feeling it would be better to elaborate. Many years ago when I was a young, foolhardy worker of magic, I did what no magician should ever try — I erased my reflection. You see, most people see themselves when they look

into the mirror. But not magicians. Our reflections are actually another being in the shadow realm. For the best of magicians their reflection is a valuable ally who gives advice when it is needed most. Mine, however, was nothing of the sort. He had me convinced he was my staunchest ally and persuaded me to release him from the shadow realm. Once outside he wasted no time in putting me down and leaving me mortally wounded on the

this monster. He takes his sweet time, turning over my sword in his hand. I wait for him to finish his examination. Finally he speaks—

"You sicken me".

"I sicken *you*?" I try to keep my voice from rising. Getting him angry would hardly help my cause.

"Of course you do. I hate you for every single day I had to follow you around, passing from mirror to mirror. You are so worthless. You have never done anything

"Well I don't know if anyone told you but you're not so great yourself."

"Of course I'm not. How could I be, being the reflection of a weakling like you? But not to worry. Once I take care of you, for good this time, I will be able to release my full power. Nothing personal, princess."

The 'princess' threw me off a bit, but I am able to react in time as he lunges towards my midsection, Elvish steel cutting through the air. I side step and try to put more distance between us. What he doesn't know is that Elvish steel is like an elephant, in that it remembers. The sweat and tears I poured into the blade when I forged it made it mine, and mine alone. It wouldn't hurt me any more than a thin stick would. Of course a thin stick would hurt, so not getting hit would still be the more pleasant alternative. There is a fire in my veins and I am caught up in the thrill of the fight. Even without the faulty blade he could still rip my flesh to the bone if he got close enough to me.

We proceed with our dangerous dance, and he nearly hits me a few times. I have my dagger on me, though it isn't likely to block hits anytime soon. He seems to be enjoying himself, and isn't pressing as hard as I know he can. When I realise he's waiting to tire me out, I decide to go on the offensive. Instead of twisting around his next thrust I walk straight into it, grabbing a hold of the blade with both hands. I pull with all my might and he tumbles over as shock registers in his face. It doesn't even break the skin of my palm. I make my move while he is in a scramble to get up. I slash at the hand that reaches for my ankles. It detaches in a shower of blood and the air is thick with his anguished screams. I stand over him and raise my arm to deliver the final blow. The blade he meant to use to kill me is being turned on him. Poetic. Kind of.

The deed is anything but, and I wipe the blood on the trousers as the disfigured corpse becomes covered in an ever-growing pool of blood. Recovering my saddlebag, I find my mare and prepare to set off. Before that, however, I recover a belt from the depths of the saddlebag and fasten my holstered sword to it. Fastening it tight over my waist, I grin ever so slightly. Just another screw-you to my ever-so-dead acquaintance.

floor of my shack. That I had an extra vial of phoenix tears is the only reason I am still standing. Ever since that day I have had no reflection (and this has actually helped me get out of a few tight situations involving vampires, but that is a story for another time).

Yet here I am now, face to face with

meaningful in your life. You make remembering to take a saddlebag seem like an achievement. You can't even wear your sword on your hip, you bloody pansy."

The words cut to the bone. Of course my reflection would know of my insecurities, all my worst fears. I try to keep my face neutral.

