

Sands of War-The Captive Part II

Contributed by The Marquis d'Ascoyne
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The New Bodyguard had tried to kill the Marquis, who had always thought he was a good judge of Character until the attack

He went to where Zaid was kept. A cage made from strapped steel 12 feet on a side, all sides. She was on the ground, sleeping, the Damsel Lilly Christine was attending her.

'I could hear her snoring as I approached', he said chuckling, 'How is our little puppet today?'

'She was provided medicines to counter the poisons in her body and mind. The Arabian medicine folk are really quite skilled in such things,' she said. 'I will return within the hour, m'Lord.'

And she left him alone with Zaid, captive once more. She had been dressed in simple cotton fabric for modesty's sake and he noted her right foot was now collared and chained to a large boulder. She slept soundly and he remembered how he had survived the Prophetess' treatment when he had been poisoned years ago. 'Demmed Petains', he said, 'they are like Orcs, they do not surrender only fall back and regroup.' He had placed a 20 gold bounty on any Bretonnian Peasant who could discover the whereabouts of the Petains. A paltry sum to be sure, but to a commoner the Treasures of Babel.

He sensed Zaid was awake and therefore said 'Oh my sleeping assassin, I shall tell you about the Petains'. And he did. As he ended his narrative he noticed her cheeks marked by tears. Good, he thought, she heard the truth. Lilly Christine re-entered the cage with Friggs. Now Friggs studied the captive closely. Too closely, for the Damsel snapped his left hand with a wooden spatula and he stood back. 'By the Lady she is truly a magnificent specimen', the spy said admiringly of the captive.

'Friggs what brings your lecherous hands and eyes and self to me?' The Marquis tolerated Friggs more than anyone else in his service.

Again the skinny little man with the crazy eyes spoke calmly. 'Regarding the Petains. I have been afield since you were attacked by-' Here a loving look at Zaid. '-the prisoner and returned within the hour. I discovered that the Petains are in deed, in Araby. Both the husband, the wife and three nephews, plus two daughters, eight toadying companions and

their retinues.'

How he got the information the Marquis never knew. On every mission, Friggs went out and did his business and returned, seldom injured and always with accurate information. Friggs completed his report. 'The Petains are in the employ of one Abhorakh Solomar an officer of Haseems. They have embraced Chaos.'

That seemed fitting enough, thought the Marquis.. Friggs begged the Marquis permission to speak frankly. The Marquis granted the favor expecting to hear more on the Petains. It wasn't the Petains, it was the Arabian prisoner. For he confessed he was smitten with Zaid, in truth he was in Love and for the first time. How did he know this? Because he felt only compassion for her, not the lustful thoughts he had for others. Lilly Christine was hushed by the confession. The Marquis looked at the skinny little man with apprehension. These were things unheard of - Friggs in love, real love? Finally he smiled. 'Good for you, Friggs., but if she does not acquiesce, the-'

'I shall be as one dead in life' said Friggs in a whisper. He left the cage.

Now Lilly Christine had been attending Zaid and noted the trace of a smile on the young woman's lips as Friggs made his confession. She completed her duties and vowed that if Zaid was to trifle with the little man's affections, she would make Zaid pay dearly. She then stopped herself and reviewed what she had just thought and left the cage to rest a bit.

Zaid recovered fully and was forgiven almost all of her actions. Even AndreaLyn, that pillar of justice and also revenge, gave the young woman her blessing. Cobina never apologized for the macing of the Arabian woman. In truth, she was always polite in public, but kept her distance otherwise. Friggs lay about like a lovesick puppy. He was 37 years of age, 14 years senior to Zaid. He sighed whenever she passed him or when she entered a room, a tent or in town.

Lady Gandolfyn was in wonder about the change in the Marquis' spy. 'I feel for Friggs', she said over the table with the Marquis, 'He is so forlorn. I have told him to talk to Zaid, but he doesn't.'

'Perchance he is shy-'

The music of the Prophetess' laughter filled the awning and spilled out into the camp. She tried to gain her composure, failed and laughed some more. Finally, gasping for breath she looked the Marquis square in the eyes. 'Ascoyne Hercule Achille du Bois Guilbert, take no umbrage at my outburst. However if ye truly feel that Friggs is shyâ?!, ' She stifled more laughter, 'then please-' She started to laugh whn Cobina arrived. Waving her hands across her face she pointed to her patron. 'Your Papa thinks Friggs is shy'. Cobina exploded into laughter at these words, doubled over and fell to the ground. AndreaLyn strode by, made an inquiry and when told joined her sister on the ground. All three were laughing uncontrollably. The Marquis got up from the table and left the three alone under the awning.

'You are all ninnies.' He said and he left. It did not end there. For the senior d'Ascoyne knew the game that Zaid was

playing and he decided to intervene. He knew three things that were of importance to his strategy. First Friggs always followed orders, he never registered a complaint. Secondly the Arabian woman was a woman and prone to take for granted an interest by a man in love. 'Twas that sense of stability knowing that you were loved without obligation.

Finally, and key to his strategy was the new dancer at the Taverna in the village. He knew of her and her soiled reputation. She danced not in the classical style of Raks Sharqi, she danced to stir the loins of men. Her names was Dinar the Red, a skilled camp follower So he ordered Friggs to go to the aforementioned Taverna and listen for news of the Petains. He even supplied him with coins amounting to ten pieces of gold. He told Friggs to have a good meal, obtain a room if he required one and report back the next afternoon. Oh, take an extra day if you must he said.

Watching Friggs disappear across the camp made him smile. The bait is out, he thought, now to chum for a whopper! An hour later he encountered Lilly Christine and the other damsels in conversation with Lady Gandolfyn. Seated with them was Zaid. He went to the Prophetess and, apologizing for his interruption confided that her had sent Friggs into town for a few days, to the local Taverna to gather information. One of the Damsels gasped, 'That is where Dinar the Red dances,' and she looked aghast. Zaid responded, 'Oh really? I know of this dancer.' Lady Gandolfyn thanked the Marquis and returned to her jabbering.

The Marquis walked through the camp. He bumped into the Prophetess two hours later and they walked side by side a while. 'I must say I like good theater', he said.

The Prophetess replied, 'I thought the entire production was wonderful'

The old warrior inquired 'Who was the new Damsel, she was perfect in her role she was sincere in her carriage and her expression'

'That's old Warren's daughter, now she calls herself Yvonne.'Â Imagine that, he thought, my bowyer's daughter a Damsel of the Lady.

Zaid had made no reaction when told of where Friggs was. She yawned without any perceptible reaction when told of the dancer, Dinar the Red. And just after the afternoon meal. she ate lightly and left for the village to purchase some oils. Once free of the camp she stripped off her desert robes, rolled up the garments and tied them on her back and began to run to the village, some six miles away. She was not unseen in this venture. A certain Bretonnian Noble and his daughters watched from the safety of a copse of date palms. 'Papa, she could outrun wolfhounds with ease' said Cobina and AndreaLyn muttered, 'in a quarter mile she would outrun an Empirical Charger' Within moments Zaid had crested the far sand dunes and disappeared.

She returned at midnight. She was extremely happy and singing. She walked through the camp, singing. Hearing her voice (and a good singing voice it was) the Conspirators slept soundly knowing victory was theirs in the war for Friggs heart.

When Friggs returned he was unchanged. He gave his report. That morning, before the sun rose, they broke camp for Al Hadok. One hour into the march three riders approached, the owner of the Taverna. The mayor of the village and a bodyguard. The forces of d'Ascouyne did not stop or slow down. Anticipating what the visit was about, the Marquis ordered a small chest of gold brought up from the coffer caravan. When the three riders were presented as the armies moved forward, the Marquis listened with great attention the terrible fate of the dancer Dinar the Red, her bodyguards and manager, six regular Patrons of the Taverna and two large dogs (no owners).

Expressing outrage the Marquis thundered that no Bretonnian Knight would engage in such behavior and the owner of the Taverna and the Mayor scrambled an apology and stated that it must have been peasants, maybe bowmen. 'Oh them,' said the Marquis a pained expression on his face, shaking his head. He became as a man humbled by insubordinate rabble. He sighed with saddened eyes at the three riders and made a gesture. The small box of gold was brought forth. 'Tis but 200 pieces of Gold, I hope this will cover the restoration of damages and treatment of the injured.' The three riders began to raise their voices asking for more gold. Feigning ignorance as to what they were doing, the Marquis looked amused 'Gentlemen please, we Bretonnians are fighting to restore Tariq and preserve his rule, I cannot take the money back!' The three shut up and glared. Before they could renew their assault, he waved them off. 'I have arranged for a squadron of my scouts to escort you back to your village' and he rode away as the Ranger's d'Ascouyne arrived. Out numbered 10 to one the three shut up took their gold and left the column.

At Al Hadok the armies of d'Ascouyne massacred the Greenskins so quickly, the Marquis didn't even work up a sweat.