

## *The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed) as told by Draenimaullair*

### *Chapter 134: The Sting (3rd ride of Mirtul 1371 - Feast of Lanterns)*

**S**ilence was perhaps the biggest difference. The inn in which we stayed was a bustling place, but dinner with mister Wang was a quiet affair. My companion Reed had warned me to pay attention to the little details, even going as far to give me a little rhyme, *Look not where you listen, see not where you look, silence tells more than words, yet words are worth listening.* Had she spoken to my parents? It sounded like a draconic riddle! In any case things did not go as we expected! The demon human distrusted the properly appointed Wu-Jen Zo Chung, and insulted Yen Tsu Wang, the wife of the magistrate Li Sung Ming, by speaking to her directly. Of course the wu-jen kept secrets! It was his job! My companion and the half elf Felina talked sweetly and managed to keep things nice and proper. I saw one of the servants throw away a side dish. The cook clearly had been ill prepared for such illustrious guests. Master Wang's son Ju Juo Wang was dying to ask about me, but it was clear he did not recognize me in my current shape, and his father found the subject distasteful. Then the halfling did something odd: he offered our services. Had I missed him being appointed spokesman? I thought half-elven Felina was the nominated leader. They really needed to inform me better!

**I** was a bit ashamed when I found out that the orchid on my companions bed was an important signal. A black flower on your cushion was clearly bad – yet nobody had told me to that! The halfling Norbert had some skill in object reading. Why him and not the tainted elf? Very odd. The flower was handled by a selfish young woman, before it was stolen by her from an evil fifty-two year old human male, before he received it from a hundred and fifty year depraved old human who had planted the brush. Somebody remarked that the young woman could easily be my companion's sister. I scoffed at it: their family did not live in this city (didn't they?), but my companion shuddered. The elf insisted that my companion should stay in the stables, with him, as he and his bear were the best protection. Wasn't I good enough? ... No I wasn't. I would be, but I wasn't... yet.

**S**tables weren't my preferred abode, but they were more comfortable than I expected. The elf proved his point by spotting a scrying focus. It was gone by the time that I looked, but the magic smell was unmistakable. The halfelf Felina mumbled something along the lines of 'that one again'. The rest of the night was uneventful, so I considered my meager knowledge of the group. I ought to be ashamed of myself, so little I knew! My companion had a sister who clearly was her mirror image. Did she have more siblings? And somebody was hunting her. Why? The dwarf had no clan signs, the halfling has a hidden agenda, the halfelf was hidden, who was this Blade fellow anyway, I wanted to know which Tiger Eye too, and why didn't the elf know his lineage? Mummy told me life was complicated, but I never thought it would be this bad! I needed to talk with people, so I choose the form of a local girl, dressed in the most simplest of clothes. Now I could ask questions just like the halfling!

**T**he next morning there was some indecision, as there was an alternating day unarmed / archery combat at general's Tsuo's palace, and an armed contest at some field between the middle city and the high city. The half elf decided to help the demon human and the barbarian from the south (why did her name 'Efira' sound familiar?) with their lesser art of armed melee, while my companion, the dwarf, tainted elf and halfling accompanied me. I rather liked the palace. It was still defensible, orderly with attention paid to all details. There was an entrance exam and to my horror my companion about flunked her application. The dwarf, who, as a priest of Red Earth, had gotten an free pass, stepped forward and spoke for my companion. We continued and the first round was a show against several revolving practice posts. I could hardly understand what then happened: the dwarf executed a picture perfect range of hits: he broke things that needed to be broken, blocked staves that needed to be blocked. There was skill. But no Art. My companion got entangled in the whiling posts, tripped over staves, and put down an act that was impossible not to look at. Before I never understood why clowns were funny... Nobody applauded afterward, but such rapt attention... and a high ranking monk who almost exploded from anger as he thought she made fun about his art.

**E**ven before my companion finished her show, the monk came striding in, and started to berate her, and her faith, of lacking in usefulness, humility, dependability, and a whole lot other serious virtues. My companion Reed just countered with a few gentle remarks, enough that the General decided that a formal debate before him and interested listeners would be proper. I stepped forward as I found the monk's attitude more threatening than was proper and I heard some people whisper in agreement. Then the halfling stepped forward too, and I saw how people stared at us in admiration. Ah! It was good to know my draconic aura was still visible even in this form! The abbot, one Cho Fong, on the other hand was less impressed and stomped off. Before I could comment, the halfling remarked he saw what was likely Reed's sister going into one of the side buildings. He quickly sneaked away, and it took me valuable moments to find a quiet spot to change in the smallest, most unassuming shape I could think of. Quick as I was, I only heard the last words the halfling and the woman exchanged. Perhaps I could have been quicker, but some kind of fiery aura flew past me when I flew inside the building. Did it have anything to do with the burned corpse? In any case when we returned my companion had that aura around her like it had only been temporarily absent. How close was she bound to fire?

**R**eturning to my human form, I spend a few hours looking at other martial artists. Some of the were quite good, but none had the sheer artistry my clumsy companion projected. Or was it clumsy? By acting this way she made sure that many would underestimate her, yet at the same time making her the crowd's favorite. If this was planned she had a devious streak - devious but not evil. I was sure only a dragon could appreciate this play. It would have been uneventful except that a wall of flames erupted on the other side of the river. No doubt nobody else saw, but draconic sight beats everybody else's. I later heard it had been a wasp cloud attack stopped by that southern barbarian. Odd! I did not smell any magic on her. It must have been some item.

**A**bout three o'clock the debate between my companion and the abbot of the White Tiger monastery began. It was good that Grimwald told us that the abbot was Evil, because otherwise I might have reacted improperly. He followed an half-deity called Fa Kuan, who was said to stand for justice. I had to admit that he was better versed in religious matters than my companion, but the difference was compensated by the fact that my companion had a more pleasant address and better choice of words. I decided that this debate would likely be a draw, which I found proper in a comparison between religious matters of humans. However, the abbot decided differently!

**C**hoosing to change from the polite mode of speaking he became ever more forceful trying to get my companion to admit an error or defeat. If so he clearly had less insight than Mummy and Daddy: they would never choose a companion for me that fell to some verbal and implied threats. Instead of reciprocating like a dragon might have done, she instead gently pointed out that justice was not based on might, but instead on the calm and deliberate application of reason and compassion, both of which the monastery had been famous for. I saw some other monks look in sudden realization and the abbot left empty of words, yet still filled with unholy hatred.

**T**his was quite some day. Yet I suddenly saw in the way that the elf was watchful, and the dwarf prepared, that this day was far from over. Now I understand why humans live so short: they cram their lives too full!

*Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1, Naturalist/3, Ancestral Hierophant/2, Heartfanner/1, Sublime Chord/1*