

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 84: Ella's Smile (1st ride of Hammer 1371)

Yesterday evening I said goodbye to Lasham. I wasn't exactly sure why I did so, but when he mentioned he could feel my fire burning brightly I just knew it was time to leave. I had learned a lot from him, but now I needed to stand on my own feet and discover how I could feed the flames in others without burning anybody. One thing I sensed deep within me: the power of sound could be used to enhance flames to an extent that even daemon would find hard to resist. I didn't like violence, yet this felt right and proper... why?

As I was writing about violence, I needed to consider the previous day's fight. Why did things get so out of hand? Part was definitely my fault, as my action was a bit rash. On the other hand, if just speaking to a person with no hostile intent could lead to violence, then that violence would very likely have happened anyway. With Grimwald talking to Kendalan, I needed to consider Nethander's actions: he only acted after I got attacked, and I was sure that their actions alerted him. But to attack with lethal force without warning... it tasted a bit like those thugs attacking me. Not totally without provocation, yet... On the other hand, his actions had him petrified again, so me speaking could be considered stating the obvious. This problem will haunt me.

Cuura returned to inform us that Nethander had managed to get us a free ride on a ship to Waterdeep. A ship would have no problem in lugging those metal doors, but we had to consider those wrappings. Spelljammer equipment was not to be exposed lightly... Suddenly I had to smile. While everybody was in flux to prepare to leave, I carefully put those wrapping inside the secret door into the sewers. What use for a secret if not hiding a secret. I won't tell Grimwald, but I was sure he would agree with my solution. I was sure getting it out if/when we needed it would be no problem.

Doing so made me realize we have numerous unsolved problems, and that it was easy to loose track of them. Therefore I decided to add an (incomplete) list here:

- x Return to the dwarf/elven underground place used by the orcs to attack those caravans;
- x See how things were with the ex-Ettin priest of Lathander;
- x Revisit the pool of the Twelve and the cave of the Twelve; Actually, that whole Twelve thing;
- x Visit the Glass City in the Woods of Sharp Teeth;
- x Give the remains of the ruined elven temple to that Elven princess;
- x Find out what attracted Felina and Nethander near the Cloud Peaks;
- x Revisit the Fortress of Light and see how things are going;
- x Learn from the Netherese underground halls and revisit the Deep dragon;
- x Find the remaining pages of the Elven Tome;
- x Find the lich Azatoth, convince him his world view is wrong (tricky), and learn about the Daemon;
- x Discover the background story of our lieutenant Tamara Landis and her 'aunt' Tamalandis.
- x See what we could do with the equipment of the Calishite rogue;
- x Discover what was going on with the elder medusa, and the Netherese floating city;
- x See how Rebecca was doing;
- x Prepare for the next assassin to make his move.

Packing our gear, cleaning the house (luckily easily done), a letter to the smith/priest of Tyr, all those little thing needed to be done when one left. It took remarkable little time, almost like we kind of expected to be off on short notice. Cuura explained that the captain had a cargo he had promised to ship, but that his ship's mage was AWOL, and that the other party party held him to his contract to leave *now*. I didn't quite get that, but it turned out the contract stipulated 'no passengers', so in a pique he decided to 'hire' us as extra crewmen, allowing us to take whatever 'personal goods' we had. Clearly huge metal doors and warhorses/bears were 'person goods'. I wondered how Cuura knew this man, but she said it was an acquaintance of Nethander, somebody he had met when Felina had her hiccup with the Law.

On board of the vessel – a well rigged caravel called the *Storm Rider* – another surprise waited for us. We were not the only 'extra crew' employed. A rather foppishly dressed gentleman with a nicely clad lady stood talking to the captain, two strong-and-silent types standing nearby. As the ship was reading herself to leave and we needed to get quartered, I did not have time to speak with them. This 'Count' Ailer seemed to be the head of the Feshall Guild of Waterdeep. For some reason I can totally believe him to switch from a pleasant host to a money pinching usurer. His secretary was a miss Ella, who had the captain almost eating out of her hand. She was quite charming, true, and quite evidently knew how yo make her wiles work. She reminded me of Rebecca.

Leaving port the westerly wind hit us, and the captain and crew were busy to 'beat up to windward'. Sailors had a vocabulary totally different from what I was used to. Most of us stayed indoors, trying to get our sea legs. Except for a lot of creaking, sudden shifts, and a total disregard for the fact the floor was often so angled that you needed to hold on to actually move, the only interesting thing was that an apelike (Hadozee?) member of the crew – first mate if I understood correctly – was totally elf crazy. He tried to help Kendalan with his baggage, which was almost funny, if it hadn't been so sincere.

As we left the estuary behind and set a course north west, the swaying took on a whole new dimension. There was less movement because of tacks, but waves and gust of wind made for a very rough ride. Nethander was busy getting to know the captain, while Cuura, of course, tried to become part of the crew by learning to become a sailor. Felina disliked the spray, wetness, and general discomfort, while Grimwald was impressively unperturbed. Our scouts found the special cargo, and it was a mystery indeed. It resisted all detect and scry attempts. I was sure Grimwald would probe deeper the next morning.

The captain and crew seemed more than capable, however, so we decided to go sleep. Kendalan, Grimwald, and I need rest so we can ask for more suitable spells than our current set.

I was awoken by a scream. We checked and the count told us that Ella had had a nightmare. Nothing other untoward had happened so we too went back to sleep. Thereafter my dreams were plagued by feelings of darkness and the pull of the Deep. I woke groggy and unfocused, and I did not feel well enough for a proper morning prayer. The rest of the day was uneventful, or did things happen? I wasn't quite sure. That evening Zhae and Kendalan almost got into a fight over me and the others discussed how things seemed not quite what they expected. Tomorrow we will set things right. Of course I had to pronounce a few predictions. Their meaning...

*Nothing will harm the elf queen
You can only ask for help thrice
Even gods are limited to their spheres of influence
Knowledge burns!*

*Ware the reflection of the largest mirror of all
Accept the grace of one who will be, one who is, and one who'll never be*

It felt like I hadn't slept a wink when Kendalan ran in, which resulted in Zhae and Felina reacting with lightning speed. I tried to gather my wits and healed Kendalan when a fireball blasted in, undoing all my work. I knew fireballs to well be be hurt by them, but Grimwald and Zhae were somewhat scorched. I prepared myself and when the next fireball arrived I was ready and counterspelled it. The fight in the door opening turned as the count and his henchman slowly lost from the superior skill of Zhae and Grimwald. Even Felina fought in the front ranks. Grimwald tried to break through to Ella, but I suddenly saw Nethander entering from deck and shield her. Charm Monster, if I was not mistaken. The mass of people made spell casting impossible, and I saw how Nethander attacked Grimwald with precision. Then Cuura barged in and forced Ella to stop the fight. A *Dispel Evil* from Grimwald broke at least some of the hold, but I could tell he still was somewhat affected. Then, from the corner of my eye I saw Kendalan aiming at Ella and I yelled for him to stop. To kill somebody who had surrendered was a horrifying deed. This time I was on time. We went on deck where Bear was playing with another henchman, and Grimwald broke most of the charms the crew and captain were under.