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HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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PART ONE

SHADOW
BUSINESS



Joost had two problems: the moon and his mustache.

He was supposed to be making his rounds at the Hoede house, but for the last fifteen minutes, he'd been hovering around the southeast wall of the gardens, trying to think of something clever and romantic to say to Anya.

If only Anya's eyes were blue like the sea or green like an emerald. Instead, her eyes were brown—lovely, dreamy . . . melted chocolate brown? Rabbit fur brown?

"Just tell her she's got skin like moonlight," his friend Pieter had said. "Girls love that."

A perfect solution, but the Ketterdam weather was not cooperating. There'd been no breeze off the harbor that day, and a gray milk fog had wreathed the city's canals and crooked alleys in damp. Even here among the mansions of the Geldstraat, the air hung thick with the smell of fish and bilge water, and smoke from the refineries on the city's outer islands had smeared the night sky in a briny haze. The full moon looked less like a jewel than a yellowy blister in need of lancing.

Maybe he could compliment Anya's laugh? Except he'd never heard her laugh. He wasn't very good with jokes.

Joost glanced at his reflection in one of the glass panels set into the double doors that led from the house to the side garden. His mother was right. Even in his new uniform, he still looked like a baby. Gently, he brushed his finger along his upper lip. If only his mustache would come in. It definitely felt thicker than yesterday.

He'd been a guard in the *stadwatch* less than six weeks, and it wasn't nearly as exciting as he'd hoped. He thought he'd be running down thieves in the Barrel or patrolling the harbors, getting first look at cargo coming in on the docks. But ever since the assassination of that ambassador at the town hall, the Merchant Council had been grumbling about security, so where was he? Stuck walking in circles at some lucky mercher's house. Not just any mercher, though. Councilman Hoede was about as high placed in Ketterdam government as a man could be. The kind of man who could make a career.

Joost adjusted the set of his coat and rifle, then patted the weighted baton at his hip. Maybe Hoede would take a liking to him. *Sharp-eyed and quick with the cudgel*, Hoede would say. *That fellow deserves a promotion*.

"Sergeant Joost Van Poel," he whispered, savoring the sound of the words. "*Captain Joost Van Poel*."

"Stop gawking at yourself."

Joost whirled, cheeks going hot as Henk and Rutger strode into the side garden. They were both older, bigger, and broader of shoulder than Joost, and they were house guards, private servants of Councilman Hoede. That meant they wore his pale green livery, carried fancy rifles from Novyi Zem, and never let Joost forget he was a lowly grunt from the city watch.

"Petting that bit of fuzz isn't going to make it grow any faster," Rutger said with a loud laugh.

Joost tried to summon some dignity. "I need to finish my rounds."

Rutger elbowed Henk. "That means he's going to go stick his head in the Grisha workshop to get a look at his girl."

"*Oh, Anya, won't you use your Grisha magic to make my mustache grow?*" Henk mocked.

Joost turned on his heel, cheeks burning, and strode down the eastern side of the house. They'd been teasing him ever since he'd arrived. If it hadn't been for Anya, he probably would have pleaded with his captain for a reassignment. He and Anya only ever exchanged a few words on his rounds, but she was always the best part of his night.

And he had to admit, he liked Hoede's house, too, the few peeks he'd managed through the windows. Hoede had one of the grandest mansions on the Geldstraat—floors set with gleaming squares of black and white stone, shining dark wood walls lit by blown-glass chandeliers that floated like jellyfish near the coffered ceilings. Sometimes Joost liked to pretend that it was his house, that he was a rich mercher just out for a stroll through his fine garden.

Before he rounded the corner, Joost took a deep breath. *Anya, your eyes are brown like . . . tree bark?* He'd think of something. He was better off being spontaneous anyway.

He was surprised to see the glass-paneled doors to the Grisha workshop open. More than the hand-painted blue tiles in the kitchen or the mantels laden with potted tulips, this workshop was a testimony to Hoede's wealth. Grisha indentures didn't come cheap, and Hoede had three of them.

But Yuri wasn't seated at the long worktable, and Anya was nowhere to be seen. Only Retvenko was there, sprawled out on a chair in dark blue robes, eyes shut, a book open on his chest.

Joost hovered in the doorway, then cleared his throat. "These doors should be shut and locked at night."

"House is like furnace," Retvenko drawled without opening his eyes, his Ravkan accent thick and rolling. "Tell Hoede I stop sweating, I close doors."

Retvenko was a Squaller, older than the other Grisha indentures, his hair shot through with silver. There were rumors he'd fought for

the losing side in Ravka's civil war and had fled to Kerch after the fighting.

"I'd be happy to present your complaints to Councilman Hoede," Joost lied. The house was always overheated, as if Hoede were under obligation to burn coal, but Joost wasn't going to be the one to mention it. "Until then—"

"You bring news of Yuri?" Retvenko interrupted, finally opening his heavily hooded eyes.

Joost glanced uneasily at the bowls of red grapes and heaps of burgundy velvet on the worktable. Yuri had been working on bleeding color from the fruit into curtains for Mistress Hoede, but he'd fallen badly ill a few days ago, and Joost hadn't seen him since. Dust had begun to gather on the velvet, and the grapes were going bad.

"I haven't heard anything."

"Of course you hear nothing. Too busy strutting around in stupid purple uniform."

What was wrong with his uniform? And why did Retvenko even have to be here? He was Hoede's personal Squaller and often traveled with the merchant's most precious cargos, guaranteeing favorable winds to bring the ships safely and quickly to harbor. Why couldn't he be away at sea now?

"I think Yuri may be quarantined."

"So helpful," Retvenko said with a sneer. "You can stop craning neck like hopeful goose," he added. "Anya is gone."

Joost felt his face heat again. "Where is she?" he asked, trying to sound authoritative. "She should be in after dark."

"One hour ago, Hoede takes her. Same as night he came for Yuri."

"What do you mean, 'he came for Yuri'? Yuri fell ill."

"Hoede comes for Yuri, Yuri comes back sick. Two days later, Yuri vanishes for good. Now Anya."

For good?

"Maybe there was an emergency. If someone needed to be healed—"

"First Yuri, now Anya. I will be next, and no one will notice except poor little Officer Joost. Go now."

"If Councilman Hoede—"

Retvenko raised an arm and a gust of air slammed Joost backward. Joost scrambled to keep his footing, grabbing for the doorframe.

"I said *now*." Retvenko etched a circle in the air, and the door slammed shut. Joost let go just in time to avoid having his fingers smashed, and toppled into the side garden.

He got to his feet as quickly as he could, wiping muck from his uniform, shame squirming in his belly. One of the glass panes in the door had cracked from the force. Through it, he saw the Squaller smirking.

"That's counting against your indenture," Joost said, pointing to the ruined pane. He hated how small and petty his voice sounded.

Retvenko waved his hand, and the doors trembled on their hinges. Without meaning to, Joost took a step back.

"Go make your rounds, little watchdog," Retvenko called.

"That went well," snickered Rutger, leaning against the garden wall.

How long had he been standing there? "Don't you have something better to do than follow me around?" Joost asked.

"All guards are to report to the boathouse. Even you. Or are you too busy making friends?"

"I was asking him to shut the door."

Rutger shook his head. "You don't ask. You tell. They're servants. Not honored guests."

Joost fell into step beside him, insides still churning with humiliation. The worst part was that Rutger was right. Retvenko had no business talking to him that way. But what was Joost supposed to do? Even if he'd had the courage to get into a fight with a Squaller, it would be like brawling with an expensive vase. The Grisha weren't just servants; they were Hoede's treasured possessions.

What had Retvenko meant about Yuri and Anya being taken, anyway? Had he been covering for Anya? Grisha indentures were kept to the house

for good reason. To walk the streets without protection was to risk getting plucked up by a slaver and never seen again. *Maybe she's meeting someone*, Joost speculated miserably.

His thoughts were interrupted by the blaze of light and activity down by the boathouse that faced the canal. Across the water he could see other fine mercher houses, tall and slender, the tidy gables of their rooftops making a dark silhouette against the night sky, their gardens and boat-houses lit by glowing lanterns.

A few weeks before, Joost had been told that Hoede's boathouse would be undergoing improvements and to strike it from his rounds. But when he and Rutger entered, he saw no paint or scaffolding. The *gondels* and oars had been pushed up against the walls. The other house guards were there in their sea-green livery, and Joost recognized two *stadwatch* guards in purple. But most of the interior was taken up by a huge box—a kind of freestanding cell that looked like it was made from reinforced steel, its seams thick with rivets, a huge window embedded in one of its walls. The glass had a wavy bent, and through it, Joost could see a girl seated at a table, clutching her red silks tight around her. Behind her, a *stadwatch* guard stood at attention.

Anya, Joost realized with a start. Her brown eyes were wide and frightened, her skin pale. The little boy sitting across from her looked doubly terrified. His hair was sleep-mussed, and his legs dangled from the chair, kicking nervously at the air.

"Why all the guards?" asked Joost. There had to be more than ten of them crowded into the boathouse. Councilman Hoede was there, too, along with a merchant Joost didn't know, both of them dressed in mercher black. Joost stood up straighter when he saw they were talking to the captain of the *stadwatch*. He hoped he'd gotten all the garden mud off of his uniform. "What is this?"

Rutger shrugged. "Who cares? It's a break in the routine."

Joost looked back through the glass. *Anya* was staring out at him, her gaze unfocused. The day he'd arrived at Hoede house, she'd healed a

bruise on his cheek. It had been nothing, the yellow-green remnants of a crack he'd taken to the face during a training exercise, but apparently Hoede had caught sight of it and didn't like his guards looking like thugs. Joost had been sent to the Grisha workshop, and *Anya* had sat him down in a bright square of late winter sunlight. Her cool fingers had passed over his skin, and though the itch had been terrible, bare seconds later it was as if the bruise had never been.

When Joost thanked her, *Anya* smiled and Joost was lost. He knew his cause was hopeless. Even if she'd had any interest in him, he could never afford to buy her indenture from Hoede, and she would never marry unless Hoede decreed it. But it hadn't stopped him from dropping by to say hello or to bring her little gifts. She'd liked the map of Kerch best, a whimsical drawing of their island nation, surrounded by mermaids swimming in the True Sea and ships blown along by winds depicted as fat-cheeked men. It was a cheap souvenir, the kind tourists bought along East Stave, but it had seemed to please her.

Now he risked raising a hand in greeting. *Anya* showed no reaction.

"She can't see you, moron," laughed Rutger. "The glass is mirrored on the other side."

Joost's cheeks pinked. "How was I to know that?"

"Open your eyes and pay attention for once."

First Yuri, now Anya. "Why do they need a Grisha Healer? Is that boy injured?"

"He looks fine to me."

The captain and Hoede seemed to reach some kind of agreement.

Through the glass, Joost saw Hoede enter the cell and give the boy an encouraging pat. There must have been vents in the cell because he heard Hoede say, "Be a brave lad, and there's a few *krug* in it for you." Then he grabbed *Anya's* chin with a liver-spotted hand. She tensed, and Joost's gut tightened. Hoede gave *Anya's* head a little shake. "Do as you're told, and this will soon be over, *ja?*"

She gave a small, tight smile. "Of course, Onkle."