

The Tale of Gwendolyn Gwilt: Chapter 1 - The Warning Given

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Later that night...

The public house was bustling with even more energy than usual. Crowds were more rowdy and the men who came into the pub swaggered everywhere. Even some of the wenches were having difficulty accommodating the massive amount of patrons. As far as they were aware, there was no festival to celebrate, but as long as they were getting business, they didn't need to complain. They were certainly enjoying their sweet time in the company of London's finest ale and prettiest women (for the most part). The men and women in the public house danced and yelled and whooped in revelry, even if some people were not certain what they were celebrating.

Deep in the corner, one soul clung to the edge of the pub table. His head rested on both of his arms and only looked up to gulp some of the remaining ale left in his cup. Normally he would have been more careful and observant of his surroundings. Normally he would have done something about how rowdy everyone was either by moving to a quieter place or by taking care of the problem himself. But considering his previous adventure, Talis Riverwind had just wanted a nice evening in the company of normal people. No magic. No demons. No adventure. He had just returned from a (literally) hellish journey and he desperately sought relief from it along with a nice mug of fine London ale to drown all the hardships he left behind. No other place in the world would suit his need better.

His eyes glazed over the revelry that was commencing before him. At times, some of the men seemed a bit more rowdy than he was comfortable with, but so far, a fight had not broken out yet. *Well, if they really are dangerous, then let them show it. Then I will act*, he thought to himself. He knew it wasn't what he would normally think, but he was tired. As long as they behaved, he didn't need to interfere. Talis somehow managed to find the strength to lift himself up to a sitting position, grasped his cup and swirled what was left of the ale inside. He could not believe all that had happened in just a year. He had lost part of his soul to Lady Tso, He banished a powerful Ifrit disguised as Her Majesty, and he had even managed to slay Souldrinker, the second most powerful Draco Disciple able to wield the powers of the spirit. He kept his prize from the fight, the Spirit Stone, close to him since his return. The gray stone fragment that fell from the heavens silently peered out from underneath his chemise. Slowly, Talis raised his cup and gave a silent toast to himself. He deserved it. Talis threw his head back and gulped the last of the ale.

"You must be exhausted," a voice chirped from behind him. Talis' eyes slowly opened and nodded his head.

"Well if you knew the Hell I went through, so would you." He turned slowly to face the chuckling form of another he knew well. It was hard not to notice her cheerful face and that dark hair underneath the hood, but at least the hood hid her ears well. She could brighten the darkest room and lift the lowest spirits with her smile and her ethereal beauty. It was a wonder she was from the Lunar Tribe. "Well met, Skylana."

“Well met, Talis.” She effortlessly took the empty seat across from Talis. “I see you’re well.”

“I’m alive, if that is what you mean. But other than that, I have seen far better days than this,” he replied, giving some semblance of a smirk. It was the first time he tried to smile in a while. “How fare you? And where is your bodyguard of a lover?”

“He’s outside. We figured it would be best for one of us to stand guard.” Talis looked towards the pub exit, but didn’t see anyone standing guard.

“Wouldn't it make sense for him to come in here instead of you? He does look more... well... human.” He tried phrasing it so it wouldn't seem derogatory, but he had to wonder.

“I thought it would be better if we talked. I know how you and him don't always get along. Plus, he's a much better scout than me.”

So like him to hide in shadows, he thought to himself. Skylana took a small sip of her flask as she found a comfortable position to sit in. “We’re taking a bit of time before we return,” she continued. “After all that happened in Bristol, we wanted to make sure that no Draco Disciples were trying to ravage the land. We’ve also been trying to find Lady Tso, but it seems she has disappeared off the face of the earth. No one knows if she's dead or otherwise.” Talis grimaced at the thought. His loyalty to the Paragons caused him to remain in London. He could not return to Bristol to assist the rest of the champions.

Eager to hear the whole story, he let Skylana continue to weave the tale of the summer’s events. She told him about Edana and how she chose the side of light, the defeat of Lady Tso in battle and her disappearance, the sealing the Gemstone of Souls, and the Paragon’s departure from the world.

“No wonder I feel stronger again. So does this mean my fire powers have returned?” he asked her.

“Possibly. All of the Gem’s power has been sealed along with the other elemental gems and the Paragons have taken the gems to the ends of the earth to guard them. No one can access their power anymore.”

Talis took his eyes away from Skylana and gazed at the table. The thought of never seeing the Paragons again was bittersweet. For one, he no longer needed to stay in London if there was trouble elsewhere. However, their departure left a sense of longing within him. “I will say,” Skylana continued, “this does allow us to seek out other adventures.” Talis let out a small laugh.

“If it is adventure you seek, often it finds you. Believe me, I know that lesson far too well.”

“So... is it true then?” Skylana meekly asked.

“Is what true?”

“What Lady Snowfire said? Did you really take out Souldrinker?” Talis groaned in exhaustion.

“I told her I didn’t wish to hear of it ever again! It was a difficult ordeal and I don’t want to re-enact the event! Can you even imagine the monstrosities I went through?!” Skylana leaned back lightly and let Talis rant for a while. Of course she already knew the whole story. She just wanted to hear it from him. It amused her greatly to watch Talis exaggerate every detail to make it seem worse than it truly was. At some points in the story, she wondered if he had acquired some of Talia's traits and added a few details just for the sake of embellishment. “... and to top it all off, I nearly lost a hand!” He slammed his head back down on the table. “All I ask for is some time with normal citizens of London. No adventures for a while.”

“Your energy must be wiped out,” Skylana replied as she closed her flask. Talis let out a small, tired noise of agreement without lifting his head. “No wonder you didn’t notice.”

Talis lifted his head and supported it with a hand while looking annoyed at Skylana. “Notice what?”

“The company. Look around you, Talis. Have you seen any of these people before?” He shot her a funny look before complying with her request.

“Skylana, I may be a seer, but it would be difficult for me to...”

Almost inadvertently, his eyes gazed around the public house as he was trying to make his point. However, after taking a second look at the revelers, the oddities became clearer to him. The drunken swagger. The foreign clothing. The scars. The slight reveal of a tribal-looking tattoo. Talis’ eyes widened. “Pirates,” he whispered.

“Aye,” Skylana chimed in. “They arrived this evening. There’s a group of them in other pubs as well.” Talis began to feel his fervor awaken as it melted away his fatigue.

“How long have they been here?”

“A couple hours... perhaps more.”

“There’s never been a group of pirates like this before? Why haven't the guards been alerted?”

“As far as I know, they have not caused any disturbances. They are not breaking any laws...”

“Yet.” Talis stood up, eyeing the scoundrels as he clenched the air in his hand. Skylana could feel the energy collecting in his fist. Immediately, she stood up and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Talis, no!

“I must, Skylana!”

“You shouldn’t expose your magic here!”

“They must be dealt with before someone gets hurt!”

“They’re not the ones you should be worried about!” she whispered harshly. Talis shot a glare at her for a moment. After several tense seconds passed, he finally let the energy in his hand dissipate and slowly sat down. Skylana followed suit with him.

“What do you mean, Skylana?” he asked the elf. Though his attention was nearly fixated on her, he occasionally let an eye wander to the pirates, just in case.

“This is the reason I came to you tonight. Talis, I had a dream a few nights ago.” Talis tried hard not to scoff at this, even though he knew better than to discourage the meaning of dreams. Nevertheless, he kept silent and let Skylana weave her story. “It doesn’t really have a beginning. I just see you running through darkened alleys.”

“Running? From what?”

“I’m not certain. I couldn’t tell if you were pursuing or being pursued... perhaps both.” Talis’ eyebrow raised at this notion, but asked her to continue. “You kept running and running. When you went down one path, there was always something blocking it. A few wooden crates. A pile of debris. As you keep going, the obstacles get bigger and bigger.”

“I’m not using my magic?”

“Nay. I’m not sure why, but I don’t think you could. Eventually, you came to a dead end. You turned around and all I could see was this shadow enveloping you...”

“What sort of shadow?” he asked impatiently, almost hanging on every word.

“It... was hazy at first... I’ve been having the same dream for a week now... but last night, I think I discovered what the shadow was.” She paused as if not wanting to say the next words. Talis’ eyes pierced hers, begging her to tell him. Skylana took a heavy sigh. “It was a wolf.”

A moment of silence came between the two mages. Talis leaned back into his chair. “A wolf?” he repeated. Skylana nodded meekly. “That’s what you saw?”

“Yes.” She tried taking Talis’ hand, who withdrew it quickly. She could tell he didn’t believe her. Or rather, he didn’t take her seriously enough to do so. “Talis. I came to warn you.”

“About a wolf? Honestly Skylana. Have I not told you that I’ve had enough frights for once? You made it seem the devil was after me... again!”

“Talis, please do not take this lightly! You may not believe it, but I fear for you!” Talis let out a heavy sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose. He had enough adventure and was looking forward to relaxing. However, deep down, he knew better than to take a mage’s words lightly, especially Skylana’s. Even if she was of the Lunar Tribe, he knew she meant well and if it was enough to frighten her, then he would at least be wary.

“All right, Skylana... If it makes you feel any better, I will be careful.”

“Thank you, Talis.” She took his hand gently and squeezed it. Talis almost took comfort in how warm her hand was.

“But I still think that you might be overestimating the situation,” he replied as Skylana stood up to leave. He expected to hear her pout again, but instead she only smiled and leaned in closer to him.

“If you think that, then you should ask that man over there. He seems to have a keen interest in you.” She pointed to a dark section of the pub to a tall thinner man with dark hair pulled back and covered. He wore a black mask that hid most of his face, but Talis could see that his emerald eyes were upon him. “Look at his hand,” Skylana whispered to him. Talis squinted his eyes to try and see what she meant until he spotted the dark ink on the man’s right hand. It looked somewhat tribal at first until the man took a swig from his mug and Talis got a better look at the design: a wolf’s howling head. Talis’ eyes widened. Maybe this was a bigger deal than he originally thought. He turned to Skylana only to find her gone. Though he couldn’t tell if it was out of fear or because she did what she came to do, he sighed heavily and raised his cup, only to remember he had already consumed the last of his ale.

“Why do they always come after me?” he asked some deity he hoped was listening. Talis rose out of his chair and slowly walked out. As he went for the door, he reached into his pouch and pulled out a small fragment of a mirror. The man reflection was quickly spotted and Talis only hoped that his reflection stayed there. He saw the man move along with Talis as he neared the exit. Skylana had the right idea. He had some questions to ask. Talis pulled his cloak over himself tightly to shut out the cooling autumn air and walked out into the night.

The darkened streets were nearly empty when Talis exited the public house. The mirror piece was held tightly in his hand and his breath quickened. He knew the man he saw was following him. Talis looked around to find a perfect spot to “chat” with him. He decided to walk down the streets until he could find the perfect alley to duck into. Behind him in the mirror, he saw the man, who never once took his eyes off Talis once he saw him, walking several long paces behind him. It was obvious that this man must have some idea of what Talis was. He knew that the longer he stayed behind him, the less subtle of an attack Talis could make upon the man. *Who is this man?* Talis thought to himself. *He doesn’t look like any Draco Disciple I’ve seen, but I’ve been wrong before.* Talis kept his guard up and his wits about. If this man really was a Draco Disciple, he knew how to deal with them, but then so would he. He had to do something unexpected.

No alleys seemed to suit Talis' purpose for a while. Suddenly, he chose one alley where the darkness seemed to envelop it. *Perfect*, he thought. He took one last look in the mirror and stopped moving forward. The man behind him did the same. Talis took one deep breath and darted into the pitch-black alley. The man followed with equal haste. Talis ran deep into the alley just far enough, murmuring a small incantation to himself.

“That which may cause my soul to flee from light,

Give me the way to see into the night!”

The world around him suddenly became a bright greenish hue, but shapes were clearly discernible to him now. With his darkvision equipped, Talis ran to the side of the alley and pressed himself up against the wall. He saw the man slow his pace down into a creep until he came to a full stop. Talis watched the man close his eyes and place his hand against the wall before he continued down the alley. From this action, alone, Talis learned so much about the mysterious stranger. *He knows how to navigate in the dark*, he thought to himself. *If he was a Draco Disciple warrior, a mage would be sure to accompany him. He's not even drawing a weapon. Still, he seems to know how to navigate in the dark without seeing.* There was no possible way to tell whether or not this man could be a Draco Disciple. But even if he wasn't, what did he want with him?

As soon as the man passed him, Talis released himself from the wall and slowly crept behind him. The man, now in front of him paused and turned his head towards Talis, cuing him to act quickly. With a silent, but swift motion, he waved his hands towards the ground beneath the man's feet as they soon melted. The ground soon began to swallow his feet, trapping him in place. The man tripped and spoke an oath as he fell to his knees. His hands quickly became enveloped in the muck, which hardened and sealed around his wrists tightly. The man was now helpless. Talis spoke a small word and an orb of light illuminated the alley. The man struggled to free himself, but the ground had already hardened. Talis moved in front of the man and knelt down to his level.

“Why are you following me? Are you a Draco Disciple?” he harshly asked the man?

“Let me up. I didn't come for a fight!” the man almost demanded.

“You can rise once you tell me who you are. And don't try to lie to me.”

“I'm not a Draco Disciple. I've only been tasked with sending you a message, sirrah!”

“You will find that I am not so easily disposed of, cur!” As Talis spoke, the orb of light suddenly exploded into raw energy. His fireball was ready to strike. Talis smiled at the fire, relieved to have it back again. The man looked up to Talis with a defiant glare.

“I know better than to challenge a mage like this! If I came to fight, I would be better prepared. I came to give ye a message! You can choose to believe me or you can kill me, but know that you will be striking an innocent!”

“Innocent?! How dare you insult me! You think you can make a mockery of my morality and call yourself a victim?!”

“Look closer, Seer. I am unarmed... and you are ready to strike. I've done nothing to you, save follow you. No wrong has come to you.” Talis paused for a moment and inspected the man closer. He saw no pistol, no cutlass or any other weapon for that matter. And for a man who almost spat in the face of powerful magic, Talis didn't believe this man had much experience with magic. This was a foolishly brave act, but also a novice mistake if one encountered the wrong kind of mage. Talis unbound his hands and feet and let the man rise. “Much better,” he scorned. Talis still kept the fire energy in his hand for light and for insurance.

“Do not think you are exempt from my fury. You still have questions to answer...”

“And I will gladly answer them. That is the only reason we are meeting here tonight, Talis Riverwind.” Talis eyed the man suspiciously.

“You know my name?”

“I do, as a matter of fact,” Talis let out an annoyed scoff. “Now, to answer your first few questions: One, you can call me Nemo. Two, as I've said quite a few times, I have a message for you, and three, no, I am not a Draco Disciple.”

“What sort of message?”

“My captain is asking for you,” The man called Nemo spat out quickly. Talis, clearly not amused, sighed heavily.

“I've had a long journey, pirate. What in God's name makes you think that I would even consider meeting with your lot?”

Nemo giggled when he was called a pirate, irritating Talis further. “What's wrong, Riverwind? You don't trust us poor sinners?”

“You're pirates!” Talis shouted. The energy in his hand grew twice its size and the smile faded away from Nemo. He almost began to regret confronting him without his weapons. Almost. “You cheat and lie and steal! How can I even be certain that you won't betray me and kill me!?” Nemo still managed to keep his demeanor. If there was one thing he was good at, it was calling bluffs. He had already done so with Talis by pulling the “innocent card” at the risk of his own safety. But even though he was confident that Talis would not do him harm, some fear began to grow.

“Think of it this way,” he continued, trying not to let his demeanor falter, “my captain's now roamin' the streets as we speak. You meet with her and “convince” her to leave, and then the rest of us will leave.”

“Why don't I just dispose of every one of you right now?”

“We ain’t ever been here before. Once again, I’m unarmed. People will only see innocents being killed.”

“Not if there’s no body left to find.” Talis closed the distance between him and the pirate. Quickly, Nemo remembered his captain’s words.

“My captain has something that you want! If you go to her, she will give it to you!” Those words stopped Talis dead in his tracks. The fire in his hand quelled down to a mere sparkle of energy. Nemo took a relieving sigh and looked Talis dead in the eye. “She said she has knowledge for you. Maybe something you’ve been looking for... or something you could use.”

“How does she know what I might want? I’ve never met this person before.” Talis was very indignant, but still curious as to what this mysterious captain had to offer.

“I’m not sure. She only told me she had knowledge for you. What that knowledge is, I can’t say. You’ll have to ask her yourself.” For several moments, Talis stood before Nemo, thinking to himself. Never in his life would he ever trust a pirate with any sort of knowledge. He was wondering why he was even debating on letting this pirate go free. But maybe there was more to this than he knew (as it always seemed to be the case for any of his adventures). Perhaps if he did speak to the captain, he could convince her to make her crew leave. Then he wouldn’t have to expend so much energy dealing with them himself. Talis took a long, exasperated sigh and glared back at Nemo.

“If I find her and you do not leave on your own, be assured that I will make you leave in a pine box if necessary,” he threatened.

“If you find her, we will be gone by morning’s light. I can promise you that,” Nemo replied as he reached his hand out towards Talis.

“How can I trust you on that?”

“I am not a fool, Riverwind. You are clearly more powerful than I. Only a fool would challenge your word.” *Or someone more powerful than me*, Talis thought to himself. “And if you do not believe that... then you can't trust us then, can you?”

A shiver went up Talis' spine when he saw that Cheshire smile. Everything about this man gave Talis every reason to kill him on the spot. But the thought of this "knowledge" intrigued Talis more than anything. Even if this knowledge didn't exist, he might be able to do some good by getting pirates to leave London. Even so, he couldn't believe he was making a deal with a pirate. Reluctantly, Talis extended his hand out and grabbed Nemo's

“Fine. Where shall I meet your captain?” he spat out, placing a disgusting emphasis on the last word.

“Captain Gwendolyn Gwilt wants to see just how good of a Seer you are. You can find her on your own.”

“Of course you won’t tell me.” Talis sighed. “Fine. I will find her and I *will* make sure you leave.” Talis tried to leave, but then noticed that Nemo still clutched his hand. Talis looked towards the devil’s smile running across his face.

“Trust me,” Nemo growled. “It will be fun.” Before Talis could try to interpret the meaning, he was jerked forward. Losing his balance, Talis tumbled downwards where a knee promptly met his stomach. Talis doubled over in the alley as Nemo darted off towards the light, cackling madly as he ran. Talis cursed himself as he slowly raised himself up. Nemo had already darted out of his sights, but something told him that they would meet again. Then he could give that scoundrel what he deserves.

Once again, Talis cursed the ill luck that he was having, even though he knew he should be used to it by now. He should be back home resting with his wife, not chasing after pirates. But Talis had learned to play the hand he was dealt. With a huff, he muttered a small incantation to himself and he was instantly teleported away from the alley.