

Chapter 4: b'Zheouh

Kallwyn awoke in a cold sweat, yet his blood seemed to boil. He cried out in agony, waking Drall, who slept next to him.

“Hmmm– Kallwyn!” Drall said, shaking off sleep. “Kallwyn!”

“Aaarghhh!” Kallwyn screamed.

Drall shook Kallwyn, who awoke very frightened. But the boiling sensation in his blood passed quickly, within a few minutes, yet it seemed an eternity to Kallwyn.

“What’s wrong?” Drall asked, after Kallwyn had settled back down onto the hard deck where he had slept.

“I had– I had a–” Kallwyn stopped, realizing how childish it sounded to wake up screaming only to pass it off simply as a bad dream.

“A dream?” said a voice. Kallwyn looked up and saw Freidrich looking down on him. “What, what sort of a... dream?”

Kallwyn looked up again, pale. “There– there was a cave, and a tall man–” he thought. “Quatremaïne! That was his–”

Freidrich’s eyes widened significantly. “Quatremaïne!” he exclaimed. He made a strange sort of gesture with his left hand, moving it from his right temple to his heart and then forehead, leaving it there for a good two seconds.

“I don’t understand,” Kallwyn said slowly. “What does that mean, Quatremaïne?”

“Did yer parents ne’er tell ye about the Sorcerers of the Mask?” Freidrich asked, hesitantly.

“My mother died bearing me,” Kallwyn responded sullenly, “and my father was killed by pirates.”

“My apologies,” Freidrich said hastily. “I–”

“It’s okay, you didn’t know,” Kallwyn said.

“Quatremaïne is a sorcerer,” Freidrich began. “He came from the West, and almost overthrew the Overking thirty years ago.”

“The Overking?”

“The king of all the lands,” Freidrich said. “Anyways, Quatremaïne, the sorcerer, was defeated and banished to the lava flats for his treachery against the crown. But if he’s back–”

"It's all stuff an' nonsense, old wives' tales, Freidrich," Drall said. "Think nothing of it, Kallwyn." Freidrich made a noncommittal grunt and walked back to where he had been sleeping. "Better get som'more shut-eye, lad," Drall said kindly. "We'll reach b'Zheouh in the morning. Kallwyn needed no further urging. He rolled over on the deck's planks, falling into a thankfully dreamless sleep.

"Wake up, lad," Kallwyn heard Captain Turett say roughly. "We're nearly there." Kallwyn didn't want to open his eyes. But he did. This would be his first view of the outside world. He'd come this far – sleep could wait.

He rose gracefully, not affected in the least by the fact he had slept on the rough planks of the boat, which was tossed about by the sea constantly. For some reason, the sea-sickness didn't affect him as it did others – this according to Captain Turett.

He cast his eyes about, looking for some sign of a settlement, but saw nothing but the mountains to his left. "Are you sure, sir?" he asked. "I don't see anything."

Captain Turett let out a hearty, bellowing laugh. "Sure as you're standing behind me, my lad," he replied. "Ye just can't see it yet."

That was another thing. Kallwyn had learned that there was a sort of sailor-speak that Turett used often, replacing words such as "you" or "my", occasionally, and replacing them with "ye" or "me". Kallwyn supposed it was something to do with having to speak in a hurry at times. But he didn't know for sure – only two of the other sailors spoke Carikeinan, as Kallwyn did, and they didn't bother to use it.

"Here it be, boy," Captain Turett said reverently. "The port of b'Zheouh!"

They rounded the hilled headland and the port came into view. It was beautiful – in the predawn grey, the bright lantern-lights and fires gave a sort of ambience to the seaside city. The wharf, composed of jetties made of cobblestone and wooden buildings along the edge, practically glowed itself with the cries of gulls and the lights of taverns on their closing hours. The sea angrily swelled in waves along the jetties, causing boats to grate upon the cobblestone with a strange sort of humming noise. Kallwyn could hear merchants calling out to passerby from what looked like miniature restaurants along the pathways of the edge of the sea. The taverns, though drawing to a close of hubbub, were filled with the noises of barfights and senseless chatter. Kallwyn's mouth dropped and he got a mouthful of sea-spray in result, but he didn't terribly mind. He could smell, and indeed taste the salt in the air, for it was a strong sensation. As the *Gipling* sailed into port, Kallwyn wrinkled his nose at the all-pervading smell of fish guts – a smell, though prevalent throughout his boyhood in Sahmonvale, he had never gotten used to. But it was soon drowned out by the tongue-tingling and aromatic scents of food from the miniature restaurants – which Captain Turett pointed to, and called "food-stalls" – and Kallwyn's mouth watered in response.

"It's like..." Kallwyn said, at a loss for words. "It's... beautiful!"

"Always is," Captain Turett said. "But it takes ye by surprise every time."

"And all cities are like this?"

"The good ones are, lad."

Kallwyn adjusted the eyepatch that Captain Turett had given him. It worked a lot better than a piece of cloth.

The *Gipling* pulled alongside an open space next to a stone jetty.

"Go on, go to shore, lad," Turett said. "Explore! Just make sure to be back here by sundown."

"Really?" Kallwyn asked, incredulous.

“O’ course, laddy,” he replied. Then he held up a finger, and grabbed some coins from his satchel, and gave them to Kallwyn. “There ye go.”

“How much is this?” Kallwyn asked.

“Why ye askin’, lad?” Captain Turett said, puzzled.

“I’ll pay you back,” Kallwyn said. “Every last piece.”

“There’s no need for that,” Captain Turett said, smiling. “Tis’ a gift.”

“Thank you,” Kallwyn said. “Are you sure—”

“Get going, lad,” Captain Turett said, “and find your way. You can stay with us as long as ye’d like.”

“Thank you so much,” he replied. Then he set off into the port of b’Zheouh.

There was so much to take in; the aromas of the food—stalls and the sea—side restaurants were even stronger and even better on the shore; the distance between the food and the ship wasn’t that far, but the closer Kallwyn got, the better it smelled. The more he smelled, at that, and the less of the rotten fishguts he smelled. He decided that was a good thing.

He wandered off into b’Zheouh, down a side street that was labelled in four different languages; Kallwyn recognized Carikeinan, something that looked like Gormano, and two others composed of indecipherable symbols (he guessed these were from the Eastern Empires, which his father had told him about as a child). The street, which was called Ruth Lane, extended for a long while into the distance. It was lined with shops, as was the seafront, but they weren’t as populated. Kallwyn saw men in shady-looking clothing turning down into a back alley, and quickly crossed the street to the other side. He didn’t know what they were up to, but it didn’t look good.

Kallwyn went to a food stall and paid the man behind the counter for a steaming hot meat pie. The man said something in what sounded like Gormano, although Kallwyn wasn’t sure, and so he said, “Um, sir, Carikeinan? I don’t—”

At which point the man cut him off. “Oh, yes, you is a Carikeinan fellow, eh?” in sloppy Carikeinan.

“Um, yes, so what were you—”

“I was trying give you your change, no?”

“Change?”

“You pay too much to me, I give back—”

“Oh,” said Kallwyn, cutting him off and pretending to know what the food—stall man was talking about. “Let’s have it, then.”

The man handed him back three coins, two that were smaller and made of silver, one that was large and made of gold. Kallwyn didn’t understand the monetary system that b’Zheouh used, due to the fact that the settlers of Sahmonvale bargained with each other using polished rocks and occasionally a shell or two. This was mainly because Juin had embezzled the entire fund sent with the settlers by their king (which was a pretty sorry amount of money to begin with) and because the king had cut off contact with them shortly after the colonization attempt they had not regained any of the money. Occasionally they would find gold or silver whilst digging or attempting to raid the natives, but they usually just passed it off as just another polished rock.

Kallwyn, however, as he made his way through the city, saw Drall leaving a tavern and walking away, so he went to talk to him.

“Hey, Drall!” he called, running to catch up.

“Hey there, laddy,” he said, waiting for Kallwyn to catch up. “What ya need?”

“I’m confused as to the money and how it works,” he explained, slightly embarrassed.

“Ah, I forgot ye came from a small town,” Drall said. He pulled out a coin from his pocket, a large gold one.

"This is a courah," he said, "It's the basic unit of money." Then he pulled one of the smaller silver coins, like the two that the food-stall man had handed Kallwyn as "change".

"This is a welrik," Drall continued. "Three of these and you have a courah."

"Okay," Kallwyn said.

"This," he said, holding a rather large gold coin, "is a five-courah piece."

"Okay."

"And that's basically it. Five courah is this," he said, holding up the large coin, "and three welrik is a courah," and he held up the smaller gold coin.

"Hmm," Kallwyn said, pretending to get it, though he was possibly more confused than before; he wasn't sure.

"Anyway, I have to go find a tavern that won't kick me out," he said. Kallwyn looked at him quizzically, but had the general idea of what he was talking about. Sometimes the local tavern in Sahmonvale would shut people out for starting too many fights and the like. Not that Kallwyn had ever been into the tavern, but it was across the street from the blacksmith shop - or had been, he realized sadly, because now the village, tavern and all, was destroyed.

Drall walked off into the distance, and Kallwyn looked around, trying to find something to do. He sat on a bench, which was on top of a grassy knoll to the side of the street - a small knoll, but a knoll nonetheless. It overlooked a sand pit and an amphitheater, the latter of which had a fire-housing in the center with seats that rose twice as high as Kallwyn was tall. The area around the amphitheater and the knoll and sand pit was covered in grass, relatively tall.

He looked around at the city - he seemed to be in some sort of recreational area, he decided, and his suspicions were confirmed when he saw two men enter the sand pit and start circling each other.

A crowd began to gather around the sand pit, and the bigger of the two men, who was short, stocky, with nothing but a loincloth on and oiled skin, yelled something in a language that Kallwyn could not understand. The smaller man, who was girded about similarly but was tall and well-muscled despite his size, yelled in response. The crowd began chanting in various languages. At the fringes of the crowd Kallwyn could see people taking money from others, calling out numbers. One was speaking in Carikeinan and kept yelling, "Four to one on Gerald Greyhand! Best odds you can get!" and from this Kallwyn could tell they were taking bets.

"Fight! Fight! Fight!" chanted the crowd; or at least, that was what Kallwyn assumed they were chanting. He could hear the word being shouted in Carikeinan from various people and realized it was a wrestling match.

He made his way over to the bet-taker shouting in Carikeinan. "Four to one on Gerald Greyhand!" he continued to yell. Kallwyn looked at him and asked, "Who am I betting on?"

The man looked at him. "Gerald Greyhand; you think he'll win?"

"Um. Who's that?" Kallwyn asked. "I'm new in town."

"The big one," the bet-taker said, a slow smile coming across his face as he pointed to the short and stocky man. Kallwyn could see, now that he was closer, that the size difference between the two wrestlers was bigger than he'd thought.

"So..." he said hesitantly, "If I give you five courah on Gerald, then if he wins, I take ten courah?"

"Twenty, lad," he said, "it's four-to-one." He enunciated very carefully on the odds.

"And if Gerald loses?"

"I take your five courah and leave."

"Worth a shot," Kallwyn said, after a while.

"Five, then?"

Kallwyn smiled. "How about ten." He handed him two five-courah coins and the man smiled widely, showing off a his crooked teeth.

"It's a deal, then," he said, taking the coins and pocketing them, then pulling out a slate and a piece of chalk, he said, "Your name?"

"Kallwyn."

"There's plenty of Kallwyns in the world," the man said jokingly. "How 'bout a last name."

"Kallwyn Jameson," he said.

"Well, Kallwyn Jameson, come see me after the match – if you chose right." He offered his hand, which Kallwyn accepted and shook.

And the man was swept away by the crowd.

"Ready?" a man yelled. He was speaking Carikeinan and held a white piece of cloth in his right hand.

Both contestants yelled in the affirmative; or maybe at each other, Kallwyn wasn't sure. In any case, the man dropped the cloth in the sand and yelled, "Fight!"

The bigger contestant, Gerald Greyhand, charged the tall, muscular man opposing him. The tall man sidestepped just barely, allowing Gerald to plow by him. Gerald yelled something that sounded profane and charged the tall man again. Suddenly, instead of sidestepping, the tall man ducked. As Gerald looked down to attack the tall man, he was punched in the stomach by the tall man.

Gerald staggered back, spitting into the sand, and screamed with rage, extremely loud even above the roar of the crowd. He charged at the tall man once more, but the tall man kicked Gerald's legs out from under him with a sweeping motion, then stood upright and stepped on Gerald's back.

Gerald struggled to get up, but couldn't. The crowd chanted what seemed to be an ascending count of numbers, and then the man who had held the white cloth put two fingers in his mouth and whistled loudly.

"The winner!" he cried. "Jonas of Quinteria!"

Jonas waved to the crowd, then stooped low and helped Gerald stand. Kallwyn felt a sickening feeling as he realized that Gerald Greyhand had lost, and therefore, he had lost.

Jonas patted Gerald on the back, then shook his hand. He stepped out of the arena, and though he was relatively tall, he disappeared into the dispersing crowd. People were exchanging money; and it was only then that he realized that nobody else had bet with the bet-taker who spoke Carikeinan. It was at that moment that Kallwyn figured out that the bet-taker was probably a con man; maybe in league with Jonas or just knowledgeable of Jonas' tendency to win. It seemed like he targeted foreigners and used their incompetency to trick them out of their money with overwhelmingly tempting odds.

Kallwyn was, for the most part, right about the con man, whose name was Jack McClousky. That wasn't the name his parents had given him, but he had changed to his current alibi after a successful jailbreak. His parents had both died in a fire at the school they both worked at, and left Jack on his own. He began to pursue a life of crime and was still going strong at age twenty-seven when he tricked Kallwyn. He had been arrested three years earlier for stealing from the Overking's treasury and, upon his escape, had switched identities like a pair of shoes. At that very moment he was walking confidently down a narrow alley towards the back door to the small house he called home, but what he didn't know was that a certain Jonas of Quinteria was following him.