

Neutral

While the party are distracted by something Thalassa has discovered you take the opportunity to skulk off. Your nose has caught the scent of blood, and you want to discover the source before any of the rest of them come and mess things up. You step deeper into the bush, the sound of combat growing quieter behind you - though Katrin's voice still carries clearly towards you.

The source of the smell reveals itself to be a corpse. Getting closer the large symbol emblazoned on its tunic reveals it to be that of a Paladin. His throat has been savagely cut - whether out of cruelty or necessity because of the paladin's holy protections you can't say, but either way it seems to have quickly finished him off as you see no other signs of injury. His blood is congealed so perhaps the Jackals Katrin and the rest of the patrol are fighting were finished with him some time ago... Whoever it was, they've taken his holy weapon and his coin pouch - but there's something far more valuable and in some ways far easier to fence they've left behind.

Listening to be sure no one is coming you begin by cutting the straps of his breast plate, then silently place it to one side so it looks like it has been casually tossed aside. Moving on to the padding underneath you carefully cut a couple of long slashes, making them look wild and savage, so you can pull it apart. You pause to check on the battle; from the sound of it the Jackals have got some reinforcements from somewhere as Katrin is loudly shouting to the patrol to reform. As long as no one bolts through here you should have all the time you need.

You kneel down, separate the remains of the padding, and cut a long line down from the nape of the paladin's neck to the belly button. Peeling back the skin you place your dagger in the centre of his breast bone and with all your strength drive it down. You feel the cartilage give slightly as it fractures. It takes two more of the same before it's completely broken; from there it just a matter of effort, and you soon have his ribs spread apart. Thankfully the uneven breaks add to your ruse. Reaching in you shift his lungs until you see your prize and smile.

It's huge - well it's true what they say, you need a big heart to be a Paladin. It takes a few deft cuts and before long you have it secreted carefully away. You stand and start heading back to the patrol - then think again. Carving a few ritual like symbols in the corpse's forehead and creating the rough shape of a circle in its own blood around it ought to throw the party off your scent nicely.

Looking down you realise you've got more blood on you than you hoped; your best chance will be to jump a Jackal from behind and hide the paladin's blood with his. It smells strangely strong as you push through the bushes, heading back towards the party, only to find it's Gerrard's stern face that greets you on the other side instead of Katrin's.

Ridiculous

The fight is over; you stop to wipe the blood off of your weapon, savoring the sweet metallic scent, watching the stain spread through the cloth. Refolding the cloth to get a clean side and wetting it once more in the bowl, you carefully wipe the last of the blood and dirt off the scraped knee. The little girl of only five tries to look brave, tears at the corners of her eyes, as you examine the wound.

“Just a scratch, sweetie”, you say as you begin to wind a short length of bandage around it. Once complete you lean forward and kiss the child on the forehead before adjusting her frock and lifting her off the chair to the floor.

“All better now” you say as you gently stroke her hair then shoo her off to play. You straighten up, brushing down your pink dress and straightening your floral apron, then turn to check yourself in a nearby mirror. The reflection is practically perfect but still, there is always room for improvement; carefully adjusting your ruffled bonnet to better show off the ringlets in your hair, you briefly admire your still flawless makeup then with proper posture make your way outside where the rest of the girls are still busy playing at being princesses rescuing each other from imaginary dragons.

As you step outside you carefully close the door to the mansion behind you to keep the noise of your wards away from their father busy working inside. One of the littlest ones runs up behind you, fleeing one of the elder girls, and climbs in under your petticoats. You pirouette away, reaching down to pick the toddler up in your arms. Cuddling her close, you notice that her bow has started to come undone. “I’ll have to tie that for you again, won’t I, Mary?”

“Ta, Lamie” the toddler replies.

You smile warmly at the children, and say, “Come children, it’s time for us to practise our song - do you all remember the words? I’ll start the first verse, and you can join me in singing the chorus.”

You start to sing, your voice full of joy:

“When growing into womanhood
Always striving to do good
You find the truth and snap!
You do no wrong.
In ev’ry task you undertake
No matter what’s at stake
A life! A world! It’s very clear to see that

A heart full of justice makes the kingdom grow strong,
the kingdom grow strong-ong
the kingdom grow strong.
Just a heart full of justice makes the Kingdom grow strong,
In the most delightful way.

A Marshal on a holy quest
Has very little time to rest
While chasing criminals and evil men
Though quite intent in her pursuit
The law she’ll stop to execute
She knows a peace will follow her along - for

A heart full of justice makes the Kingdom grow strong,
the kingdom grow strong-ong
the kingdom grow strong..."

As you and the children start singing the chorus for the second time you hear the Lord's huntsmen returning. A smell of blood carries in the wind from their direction and you turn, keeping the song going, planning to wave them off so as not to frighten the children with the corpses of whatever they are carrying. Instead you find yourself staring at Glamoria as the words of the song die on your lips.