

# The Golden Dagger

A sly grin crossed Bran's face as the bribed guard walked across the courtyard. A few gold coins was all it had taken, and now they had a perfect distraction, a small window, just enough to sneak into the palace. He glanced over at his companion, Jake, who was mirroring his grin, his prized golden dagger in hand, a small ruby glinting to the hilt. A small contract had been given to them the day before. Anonymous, of course, there were no names given in their business. There was a large sum of money at play, enough to supply them both for a year. Infiltrate the palace, kill Lord Torik. Far from simple, but it could be done. The bribed guard began leading the gate keepers away. "Come on, Jace" Bran muttered, running, crouched, across the courtyard, black cloak streaming behind him. The gate was open, no doubt to let in supply wagons. The palace's walls were white as snow, with gilded golden lamps lighting the hall. The fifth floor, the contract said. The halls were mostly unguarded, it seemed. It made sense; the city had been sending anyone who could wield a sword off to the war. "Bran, Jace whispered, Guards". Bran heard them, walking down the hallway, hands rested on sword hilts, moving with the grace of a wolf despite their armour. "This way", Bran replied, leading them around a turn. They faced an almost identical hallway. This palace was a maze. They trotted down the hallway, rugs muffling their footsteps. Suddenly, the door ahead of them opened, and four armed guards strolled into the hall. For a moment, they stopped and stared in shock at the Bran and Jace. Jace was first to react. Two knives came into his hands so fast it seemed magic. Spinning, Jace threw both in one swift motion. Spinning in the air, they lodged in two of the guards throats. Another



two knives followed from Bran, one hitting a guard's throat, the second splitting the others

head. The four crumpled to the ground like puppets without strings. No time to hide the bodies. Soon, they would be found, and the entire palace would be searching for them. Time was short. Cloaks whirling, they began to move once again. They reached the fifth floor. \* General Byrn walked among his ranks, hand resting on his sword hilt. The palace loomed above, a mountain of snow white bricks. A raven glided silently overhead, a bad omen. The unit of soldiers looked at him expectantly. Of course, they had just finished training. The fools were expecting some kind of speech. Byrn cleared his throat. He had never been much good with speeches. "My men, when the sun rises tomorrow, you shall... march to face the enemy, and serve your lord, your people. As the sun rises, you shall"- "Sir! Byrn whirled around to face whoever had interrupted him. He would give whoever it was a fine lesson about- He faced a soldier, a foot shorter than him. "Sir, four guards have been found dead in the palace!" the soldier said, panic lighting his eyes. Around Byrn, his unit began to shift their feet uncomfortably. "What do you mean found dead?" Byrn said. How could anyone have snuck into the palace? Why? There wasn't much in there

worth value anymore but...Lord Torik. Whoever was in the palace meant to kill Lord Torik, there was no doubt in his mind. "Unit: With Me: Now!" Byrn shouted. He unsheathed his blade, the unit doing the same. They ran towards the palace. \* Bran ascended the fourth flight of stairs. It had not taken long to find a way up. The fifth floor; Paintings of war scenes covered the walls, silver and golden carvings littered carefully designed tables. Jace followed, a knife in each hand, seeming ready to jump at any moment. They came to a set of carefully engraved doors. There was no doubt what lay behind them. Bran drew two knives of his own and kicked open the doors. The High Lord Torik sat at his desk, with only two guards at his side. Better trained it seemed. Unlike the last guards, they did not hesitate. They drew their blades and charged as Bran and Jace dashed into the room. Bran dodged the first swipe of the blade, using the momentum of the dodge to get around the guard. He planted the knife firmly in the back of the guard's neck, the only place not covered with armour. Clutching his throat, the guard slumped to the floor. The other guard already lay dead at Jace's feet. Only Torik remained. The balding man seemed unable to move. Mouth working furiously, he watched as Jace calmly walked over and in one swift motion, slit his throat. It was done. Now for the difficult part: escape. The bodies of the soldiers would surely be found by now. On the way up, they had had to slay another six. They began to quickly move out of the room, and were confronted by twenty guards with blades drawn another man leading. Bran recognised him. General Byrn. "A smile spread across Byrn's face as he drew his own blade. "Do not move, fools. Place your weapons on the ground and surrender to the custody of the Valdoni Legion". As an afterthought, he added "I'll have your heads on my desk, traitors". "Seize them!" He shouted. \* General Byrn strode

through the halls, gold clinking in his pocket. There was a large bounty on the ruffians he had caught, apparently. Ahead, the door to the interrogation chamber lay, and behind it, those two murderers. Despicable, he thought. He would find out who they worked for, and by the end of the day, their heads would be on pikes. He pushed open the door, composing himself. The room was empty. Empty. It was impossible, surely. It was... A golden dagger lay on the ground, with a ruby on the hilt, glinting in the candlelight.

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