

The Executioner



A short story written by Dominique Garay
Illustrations by Marita Sanchez
Cover Judah Dobin

Based on characters from the
fantasy adventure boardgame Thieves Guild

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THE EXECUTIONER



There was a big boy down by the brook. His back was to them. Three youths stared and then began to sneak up on the large boy who knelt by the waters edge, round pockets of soft fat hanging from his sides as he leaned back on his haunches. Armed with sticks and a few choice stones they inched forward, careful not to disturb the thick weeds whose noise might give them away. It was a windy, bright day and Cheengon, now twelve, liked nothing more than to spend it outdoors, looking at things, living and dead. He was busy cleaning his lovelies in the cool water and then stringing them through a length of leather strap when he heard something. Felt it more like it. The three would be assailants with sticks held high, rocks at the ready, stopped in their tracks. Cheengon was standing up. His large back rose. They crouched. He *was* a big boy, bigger than they had imagined. He tied something around his neck and turned around, smiling, grinning. There on his chest was his fresh necklace of dead frogs, strung up through the eyes. A large toad hung in the middle. Cheengon had both fists set on his hips as he looked towards the freighted boys. He said nothing. They screamed. They ran. Cheengon liked to kill things. And sometimes he liked to hang them around his neck.



It was a day not unlike that one long ago where Cheengon was busy doing what he liked to do. Except that now he was paid to do it. On a rivers edge he waited patiently, testing the softness of the wet earth with his thick leather boots. He walked back up to dry land and through a bunching of small trees he stared over at the large Sunburst tree he had chosen as a meeting place. It was a rare tree and at this particular time of year, sweet yellow-orange flowers would emerge and cover its branches. Spotting a sparrow as he looked up into it, he recalled the sensation of holding a small bird in his palm and then squeezing its warm bug infested body just to the point of popping its squealing little head off, before letting it go. Although sometimes he just couldn't help himself. Someone was



approaching and Cheengon tightened the grip on his battle-axe, a large two-handed weapon that he was able to wield with one. Cheengon had grown to be a hulk of a beast of a man. He wore thick leather armor, top to bottom and a mask that covered only half of his stubbly unshaven face. No one knew why, as he was as unmistakable as the tree he had selected to lure his unsuspecting prey to.



Pops was a mean ole man. But he ran a clean place. Owner and manager of the Orange Pony Inn, the largest and busiest inn in the city of Ladroness, Pops didn't mess around. And he didn't like anyone even getting the notion of messing around with his three daughters who helped him run the place. Merissa being the youngest at fourteen had to deal with kitchen duty. She would cook, wash dishes and clean up late into the evening, just to have to return in the early morning to begin food preparations. Only when the inn was really busy was she allowed to go out and serve food and drinks. Pops didn't want her showing her pretty face around.

"Leave that to the lazy girls!" he would say and then put her to do some other work like potato peeling. But Merissa did like to smile and in those rare occasions that she was out on the

floor, that smile, along with her slender figure was more than noticed.

Brianna had just turned sixteen; she was blond, beautiful, shapely and deadly. She was the only daughter who had taken to Pop's combat and self-defense training. Brianna was in charge of the cleaning of all the rooms at the Orange Pony Inn and she ran the cleaning crew of four other girls. She carried a riding stick and she used it with a passion on any of them she found to be slow moving or lazy. She had earned Pop's trust one day when a young man had attempted to corner her in one of the rooms she was busily cleaning. Brianna took the broom she was using and stabbed it into the young man's groin. He fell to his knees. She then promptly began to thrash him with her riding stick until guards came rushing to the screaming man's rescue. Blood spattered and sweating she smiled at her father and said,

"He wanted to touch me father and I did to him first what I knew you would do to me if I let him".

"Ah, my Brianna, my sweet, sweet girl. Ya done your Pops proud".

Yvette was the oldest of the girls at eighteen and though they were all beautiful, she was arguably the most. Yvette loved animals and her charge was the stables. Weary travelers staying at the inn would hand over their tired horses, pack mules and even cows sometimes and she would tend to their needs. She was a happy young woman and her singing would attract many a man who would stare at her from their room's window at the inn. But not a man dared touch one of Pop's girls and you were asking for trouble just to speak to them.

Thanius Derven, son of Duke Rothen Derven of Cather came to visit Ladroness. His father had sent him to acquire flasks of poison, which were an illegal commodity but could be acquired on the somewhat hidden black markets just outside the city. It was a dangerous task. He would have to deal with thieves, rival guilds and avoid informants of the City-Guard. It would be work. And that was something Thanius on a regular basis saved for later if at all. Right now his posterior was sore, he was sweaty and tired from travel. He reigned in at the Orange Pony and there a pageboy ran up to take his horse.

"Boy, will you be caring for my horse?"

"No sir, I just take them to the stables and..."

"Then let me speak to the person who does for I have specific instructions on how she is to be treated and cared for".

And so the boy took Thanius Derven to meet Yvette. Upon noticing Yvette's thick, curling brown hair, ripe bosom and curvy hips, (not necessarily in that order) he made an exaggerated bow. His hat with a flamboyant yellow plume that dragged through the mud was removed as part of the gesture.

"Well good day, my lady. Thanius Derven of Cather at your service. I must say that you are a lovely site for someone who has been on such a dreary long travel."

Yvette had had words of this type thrown at her before, but Thanius was young, handsome, and the son of a Duke. She blushed.

"Why thank you sir. I am Yvette and will care for this beautiful mare of yours."

Thanius returned his hat to his head; feather sagging from the bit of mud it had acquired and continued to pour honey onto his words.



It took Thanius three days to acquire the poison that his father had ordered him to get. He had sent Thanius alone for he was a skilled swordsman, of age and if he had sent men along with him he knew his son would just have had them do the work. No, he wanted to test his son and have him do some tasks on his own. Though Thanius had spent most of his time trying to woo Yvette, she would not give in completely to his advances for fear of her father. So though he had his poison, he was not quite ready to leave Ladroness. He was having too much fun in the stables. Though he pressed, Yvette insisted on not doing anything further than holding hands or a quick kiss on the cheek. She insisted that they must slip away to a safe place, away from the inn, peering eyes and more importantly her father. Brianna had grown suspicious of Yvette and Thanius. She had spied them on more than one occasion talking to each other and she had seen Thanius leaving the stables a bit too often under the pretense of checking in on his horse. So she thought she might indulge her curiosity. In the late afternoon she climbed up into a loft in the stables and waited. It must have been an hour or two later when she awoke to the sounds of movements and giggling. Brianna lifted her head and snuck on over to the edge of the loft. Hearing voices and murmurs, she looked down and caught her breath, as there before her eyes she saw Thanius and her little sister Marissa entangled in each others arms. She was unsure of how long they had been at it but Marissa's hair was a mess. Thanius began to take off his shirt while Marissa stared wide-eyed. Early in the game Thanius had realized it would not be so easy to conquer Yvette so he began flirting with the younger sister of the three to increase his chances. Brianna, now quite furious, grabbed her whipping stick and began to climb down the loft. Thanius leaned in to kiss Marissa. At that moment Yvette entered the stables, saw her sister with Thanius, let out a gasp and promptly began to cry. Marissa tried to fix up her hair and slinked away. Thanius went over to Yvette, who tore away from him and ran off towards the inn. Then he felt a whipping sharp pain across his back as Brianna swiped her riding stick as hard as she could.

“Aaaahhhh!” He screamed as he turned to face her and she whipped him again across the chest. A long red welt rose upon his skin. She struck once more for his face but he grabbed her hand and pushed her aside. He picked up his sword and was about to grab his shirt when a bel-



lowing roar came in, making everyone and the horses start.

“Stand were you are you dry lump of dung!” Pops had arrived, Yvette at his side and morning star in hand. Pops was an old school mercenary and he was about to teach a lesson in manners. Brianna went over to her father’s side; Marissa was nowhere in sight and Thanius looked to where his horse was, thinking of escape. He drew his sword and Pops came at it him full on. He brought the morning star down over the man’s head with a fury. Thanius attempted to block it with his sword but that was to no avail as the heavy mace came down and rocked his head, making his knees buckle. It was enough however to prevent the blow from killing him. Pops then kned him in the teeth and Thanius fell back. Pretty face broken and head swimming he tried to beg for mercy but the only thing that came from his mouth was a spittle of blood that ran down his chin. Pops pulled a long dirk from his boot.

“I got this beauty in Fangara. It belonged to a desert man out there. Long time ago, but it’s still sharp as a pups tooth.”

“Father, no!” Cried Yvette. Though angry she could not bare to see violence inflicted on another. “Please father, let him go, do not kill him”.

“Well, then let’s just make sure he doesn’t get the idea of doing this type of thing again.” Pops reached down and began to remove Thanius’ trousers. It was then that Thanius realized what Pops intended to do. He grabbed a handful of straw and dirt and threw it into Pop’s face, blinding him. He forced himself up and staggered to his horse. Pops, wiping his eyes looked for his enemy who was now on horseback and about to flee. Brianna grabbed Pops’ morning star,



but could not lift the darn thing as Thanius rode by knocking her over.

“You’re as good as dead you little piece of snot!” Pops yelled after him.

Thanius was down the road at a quick pace and then pulled right into Cheuy’s Tavern. He couldn’t leave Ladroness just yet. Some of his belongings were in his room back at the Orange Pony, but most important was his father’s flasks of poison. He could not return without them or the gold coins the Duke had given him for the purchase. He dragged himself on up to the bar and asked the goblin bartender for a mug. He got one. Sulking, with his head still throbbing from the blow he had

received, he rested it on a fist, and tried to think of a way to retrieve the poison.

A couple of hours and about 6 mugs later Thanius felt a light hand on his shoulder. He reached for his sword but upon looking up he noticed it was a young woman. Thanius recognized her as one of the serving wenches from the inn. She placed a note in his hand and scurried off. Fumbling to open and then read the note he saw it was from Yvette!



She wanted to meet him in

“Excellent!” He shouted as he went to rise and then quickly slumped back down into his chair, dizzy from bitter frothy mugs but at least his head had gone numb.

Thanius Derven, son of Duke Rothen Derven of Cather looked as best he could that morning. Bright and chipper despite the thumping he had received from Pops and the mugs of ale for he was about to collect his belongings, his father’s poison and a sweet young flower’s kiss. Yvette had asked to meet him by the edge of the Sangrean River. It was a popular place frequented by sweethearts and couples, as its light forest provided privacy. It was through these trees that Thanius now led his horse, and approached a large one with bright yellow-orange flowers in bloom, a Starburst tree. He saw a bundle by the trunk and hurried his pace to recover his goods. Grabbing the sack he gave a quick look around, where was the girl?

“Yvette?” he called out. No answer. Maybe she could not stay, no matter. He opened the sack and looked inside. Aghast he stared at the contents, his stomach churned as he looked into the bloodied sack with what must have been more than a dozen decapitated frogs and toads. Placing one hand against the tree to hold himself up, he lifted his head to take a deep breath. And it was his last. He never even saw it coming. Cheengon’s huge battle axe blade swung swift and clean. The blade stuck into the tree and Thanius stood there a moment, then his body sagged and fell forward. Cheengon reached out and grabbed the falling body by the shirt and dragged it to the river’s edge. There he stood on top of it and buried it somewhat in the mud. His enormous

Thanius' head rested right on the battle-axe blade that had stuck into the tree. His face still held the disgusted look from what he had seen in the sack. Cheengon walked over to it and placed the dead man's head in the sack along with the other decapitated once living things. He dislodged his weapon, swung the sack over his shoulder and grinning and smiling, he began to make his way to the Orange Pony Inn to collect his pay.

