

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss

Issue 29

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Welcome to another issue of the newsletter. This month I'm sharing a writing assignment that I recently completed. It is from a box titled, "A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words." Each assignment is a picture and a description of a type of writing focus one (for example a picture of an envelope and "Write the hook to a story.") When you finish this story see if you can guess what the picture was and what the writing challenge was. Send you entry to doug@douglasgclarke.com. The first person to guess both correctly will be featured in "The Key - Part II." Don't forget to sign up for the newsletter at <http://www.douglasgclarke.com/lists/?p=subscribe> so you'll be sure to get the second half of the story.

Doug

The Key - Part I

"Six hundred and fifty. Do I hear six seventy-five? Six fifty going twice"

The crowd was silent. No one moved a muscle less the auctioneer mistake it for a bid. The two women who had been bidding starred at each other. One had that I-dare-you look on her face, the other that it's-not-over-yet glare.

Her eyebrow rose ever so slightly as she thought about the value of raising the bid. Everyone held their breath waiting, then she cast her eyes to the ground in defeat.

With that slight signal the auctioneer knew the results of the auction. "Sold for six hundred and fifty pieces of gold to the beautiful young woman in the second row. You may pick up you item at the cashiers."

Without missing a beat he turned and picked up the next item and the bidding started again, but Annay wasn't interested in anything else. She quietly slipped out of her seat and headed out of the auction hall.

As she walk through the doorway, she cast a casual glance over her shoulder. Her fingers gripped the door-frame, fingers turning white, when she saw that the other woman was already gone. She turned fully around and flipped her gaze from face to face - studying each to make she it wasn't the face of the woman who was quickly becoming her nemeses.

It only took a few seconds for Annay to convince herself that the other woman was gone, but how. There were no other doors and all the windows were barred.

Annay moved her hand to her waist and felt the dagger there as well as her wand. She only hesitated a second before she slid the wand from its case. She took a deep breath and tried to calm herself. She focused and drew forth a ball of energy, forming it into a sphere around herself. Then she turned and continued down the hallway.

She handed a pouch of gold coins to the man sitting behind

the iron bars. He picked it up with his pencil like fingers and then tossed in the air, feeling it's weight. Then he counted out each coin, slowly.

Annay was sure she was going to die of old age, or a dagger in her back, before the man finished, but neither occurred. Satisfied, the man pushed a small box towards Annay.

A quick look at the box verified that it was the one she needed and then she put it into one of her many pockets. She opened the door and scanned the street - seeing nothing of note.

One step outside of the auction hall and the sphere of energy she had placed around herself lit up, making the street look more like noon than nine at night. Annay couldn't tell what kind of spell her protection was absorbing, but she could tell it was powerful.

As her eyes adjusted to the light she identified the woman standing on the far side of the street. Her dress danced in the gusts of wind

even as her eyes burned with a seriousness that Annay could feel in her gut.

The assault only lasted a few seconds and then the road was plunged back into darkness. Annay took advantage of the returning darkness to put some distance between herself and the mysterious woman who seems determined to dash Annay's plans into ruins.

Up ahead she heard the running footsteps of city guards coming to investigate the flash of light they had seen. Annay weighed her options quickly. There was certainly safety in numbers, but with them would come questions and delays.

Annay slid around a corner and then ran down the side street - leaving the guard's foot steps behind her and hopefully the woman as well.

Annay's heart was pounding and her breathing was rapid when she slipped into the Dragon's Breath Inn. She inhaled a deep lung full of smoke laden air and almost retched. Her body reflexively took a step back towards the street, but she forced herself to move through the crowded room.

The next two hours were spent studying each person who entered the inn, sipping a glass of wine, and with her hands under the table, fingering the intricate carvings on the wooden box she had fought so hard for.

Finally confident that she had lost her pursuers for the moment, Annay moved the box onto the table. She traced her fingers along

the now familiar gold-inlaid grooves that covered all six of its sides. She could feel the power in the symbols when she started tracing them in the order that should open the box. With each symbol the power grew - tiny sparks danced around her fingertips. Annay stopped with one symbol left to trace knowing that tracing it would either open the box or attempt to kill her with an electric bolt.

Her muscles tensed. Her fingers hovered above the next symbol. She made sure that her tongue wasn't between her teeth and lowered her finger. As she traced the symbol the sparks grew larger, illuminating her corner of the room. Completing the last symbol the room went suddenly dark.

She felt the power leave. The box popped open. Then another set of hands were on hers, ripping the box from her grip. She tightened her own grip and pulled the box towards her chest. Something smashed into the back of her head. The blackness all around her expanded into her mind. Her hands went limp. She felt the box snapping shut - being taken from her. As the blackness completed its assault, she slipped off of the chair and slid under the table. Everything was black. There was no smells, no feelings, no sound except a clinking of metal on stone.

Annay awoke with a start. It was dark, but not black. Her head throbbed and a quick check with her hand revealed a large lump. She pulled herself up onto a chair and looked around the

room. Everything looked normal - the smoke, the men and woman, the eating and drinking.

Annay dusted herself off and straightened her clothes. She heard it again, the clinking. She looked for its sources somewhere near her left foot. She saw it, but didn't stare. After checking to make sure no one was watching she bent down and picked up a key.

She held it tightly in her hand - felt its teeth bite into her fingers. Her stomach was as tight as her fingers. She had failed. Hilda had the box and its map. All the hard work was for nothing. Annay smashed her fist against the table, attracting a few stares.

A scream was building up inside of her, struggling to escape her well controlled mind. Instead she lowered her head to the table and just gave up - her body loosening - going limp.

Then she heard the clinking again. She reached down and picked up the key again.

The key. She hadn't failed. True without the box and the map she had not succeeded, but without the key, neither had Hilda. If she could get the box back, or even just follow Hilda, she could still be the one with the piece of the puzzle needed to open the vault.

Annay placed the key into her pocket and quietly slipped out of the Dragon's Breath into night's darkness - knowing this contest would be completed another night.