

TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES OF ENDERAL

(SURREAL)



The Butcher of Ark

Chapter 10: The Fall

For a moment I saw nothing. Then my view cleared up and I felt how the fire filled my veins. With one eye I saw reality, how I sat at the edge of the bed, the bloodstained dagger still sticking in the body of my victim, weakly twitching in death agony. His vision was blurred and limited, equal to that of a man peeking through a keyhole into another room. Yet what I saw with the other eye was clearer. His thoughts. His memories.

I saw a corridor which was covered with red carpets. It was the corridor I had just passed to get to Mitumial's room. From his room I heard sobs. I took a step toward him and heard a voice from nowhere. It was hard, cold, and without love.

"You are useless." I felt that it belonged to Mitumial's father who had just died a short while ago.

I went along. The sobs grew louder and mingled with screams.

A jolt went through the spectral version of myself and threw me into another memory. I saw him, seventeen winters old, sitting at a large table covered with all sorts of dishes. He had lowered his head. At the other end of the table sat his father, whose face seemed familiar to me. A woman was sitting at his side whose eyes looked dreamily and impassively into the void.

"This world is no place for weaklings. Why don't you understand?"

"I do, father." Mitumial's voice was monotonous.

"Apparently you don't, or you would not behave like a damn fishwife."

The image turned black, and I was back in the hallway. The cries now began to multiply. I took one more step toward his room. One more. And another one. Then: a new memory. This time I saw Mitumial standing at a door, with his back turned toward it. He

seemed to be listening. A man and a woman were shouting at each other behind the door, the man furiously and the woman pleadingly. The male voice belonged to Mitumial's father. Again and again the dull sound of an impact could be heard. I did not need to see the scene in order to understand it, and neither did Mitumial. His face was a grimace of disgust and anger. *He despised him for what he did to his mother.* He despised him for his deeds. I was back in the corridor, having arrived at the door to Mitumial's room. The fire burned greedily and glaringly in me, but the intoxicating feeling that it sent through my veins felt wrong. I was supposed to feel triumphant, but instead I felt ... guilty. Empty. "No", I whispered. *He had killed. He had allowed the demons to enter him, and this was going to be his rightful punishment.*

The door in Mitumial's memory swung open and I entered. The room was similarly devastated as the one in which my actual self was standing at his dying body, but this time the scattered sheets and books and the overturned table were the silent witnesses of an outburst of fury. Anger. Or despair? Mitumial was crouching on his bed, beardless and clean, completely unlike the man in whose throat I had just driven a dagger. Tears dried on his cheeks, tears – *I knew it* – that his father had despised him for, calling him a girl. Now his eyes were dried and reddened, and they seemed to stare into nothingness. He was broken. *Why do I see this?* I understood nothing of what was happening around me. What I was supposed to see were his sins, the moments in which he had allowed the demons to enter. The moments in which he was weak and had chosen sin and greed instead of fortitude and virtue. The moments that had made him the monster *that he was!* Determinedly I walked toward him. A lightning struck with a crash, illuminating the image. Then it returned to normal, and nothing had changed.

Almost nothing. I was still in Mitumial's room, and in his head. But neither had the shelves been knocked over nor was he crouching on

the bed. An open book lay on it. I knelt down and read. The ink on the first page was still fresh.

15th day of the Kraken, 6098 a. St.

Father says there is no place in the world for weaklings. But he is wrong. It took me a long time to realize this. But I feel the truth in my words while I write them down. First I hated him for his bad deeds; his shady dealings, his “trips” to the Undercity, the things he did to mother that without any doubt had contributed to her death. Why he only had injured me verbally instead of beating me is beyond me. Maybe because I was his son after all? I don’t know.

What he was unable to understand though is this simple truth: He is the true weakling. Despite wealth, status and the honor of his Path he is not much more than a desperate child inside, trying to use his power in order to gain acceptance and esteem. How easy it is to fall for this kind of pattern when we are not aware of it. I am ashamed at the thought of the things I’ve done. Little things they were, my mind tries to justify, but only now I realized how close I was to get into the very same cycle of violence and self-loathing as my father. Why did I beat up the noble boy? Back then I said to myself: Because he had treated me disrespectfully. Today I know that I only wanted to prove to my father that I’m actually a strong man. And I’m sure – if I had not realized it, one thing would have led to another, and harmless bullying would have led to much worse behavior. Quickly I would have been exactly what I feared.

My mind is made up: I will change. And once I am the upright person I am striving to be, my father will realize the perfidy of his deeds.

I have it in me ... and he has it as well. I believe it from the bottom of my heart.

Stunned, I stared at the open book in front of me.

He wanted to change.

Was it really possible? Were his intentions so noble? But how?, I

thought. *He was obsessed!* And once the demons have lived inside a human for too long, there was no turning back. A luring uneasiness rose inside of me, and with horror I realized that it was familiar to me. It was the feeling of being misguided which led me to leave Fogville, to betray my Path, and to join the Black Libra. And now it was back again.

I heard a dull sound behind me, like a body bag falling to the ground. It was Mitumial Dal'Joul. An older man who I identified as a servant of the house was standing in the doorway. Mitumial had fallen to the ground and had his face buried in his hands. The fire was raging wildly inside of me, but this time its intoxicating effect felt out of place, like an intruder.

"We came too late", I heard the servant say. He avoided the gaze of his master. "I am sorry." When he got no response, he turned around and left.

I felt how a jolt shot through my body. The fire had fed, it had seen the sins. Mitumial Dal'Joul was dying. The spectral world around me began to fade, slowly but consistently, like the ink on a letter in the rain. Irritated, I looked at the diary on the bed and then to the memory of the man whom I had judged. The man who had murdered three innocent people. *The man who had given in to sin.*

He had despised his father's actions. *He wanted to change himself and his father.*

Yet he had become a murderer. Why? What was the message brought to him by the servant?

A weak light began to glow inside of me, a shimmer of understanding. Who knows how things would have turned out if I had just closed my eyes in the last moment I had been in Mitumial's memory. But I watched. With a torturing slowness my eyes wandered from the clean marble floor to the shelves filled with ancient knowledge, and stopped above the opulent door frame which I had crossed to enter the room a few moments ago. A round shield in a golden frame was attached to the wall, painted with a

crest. It showed a bear.

My memories of the moments after I woke up are as pale and blurry as those of my escape from Fogville. I clearly remember, however, that I stood up from the bed with slow, calm movements which an outside observer may have misunderstood as a sign of serenity, or, in light of the act I just had committed, as a sign of cold-bloodedness. Mitumial Dal'Joul was dead; I did not have to look at him anymore to know it. My heart pounded wildly in my chest, intoxicated by the nectar of his sins. Yet I felt cold. I do not remember my escape from the building anymore. When I approached the city gate, I could still smell the smoke of the fire I had set. The gate was closed, but there was light in the guardhouse. I had no idea how to explain to the guards why I wanted to leave the city at such a late hour, but I did not have to. In case of necessity, if it were the only way to gain distance, I would simply turn the gate and all guards into ash. Again I felt this paralyzing fear in my stomach. Only this time, there was no way out. I had been following a lie, from the beginning to the end. There were no demons taking possession of people. There were no sins, no corruption.

There were only cause and effect.

I myself had sealed young Dal'Joul's fate by killing his father. *He wanted to change.* My eyes were burning, my limbs were hurting. My thoughts were not in harmony with the Fire anymore. It felt the dissonance and punished me for it. *Go back,* I heard its voice speaking to me from the blaze, *go back and do what you are meant to do.* Yet I ignored it. My fist was firmly clenched around my dagger as I walked toward the gatehouse. I saw the shadow of a man flicker. The small building was separated from outsiders by bars. I

swallowed, prepared myself for speaking. And I halted.

I knew the face that looked at me through the window, and I knew the smile luring on the lips. The man leaned back in the chair, he had his legs crossed and his arms behind his head.

“Where are you bound?”, Qalian asked. He spoke like a man who runs into a good friend after a long night in the taverns. I did not need the *Fire* to realize what was going on inside my mentor’s head. *He can feel it.*

I remained silent, unable to respond. The situation reminded me of my old self: secluded, with a heavy tongue and no life experience. Qalian also decided to remain silent so that we only looked at each other for a while. His body seemed to cast no shadow despite the bright candlelight in front of him, but maybe it was only a figment of my imagination.

Finally he broke the silence.

“I will not stop you. But they will come to get you.”

I remained silent.

“We all were where you are now.”

I was filled with a dull rage. “Were you?”

“Yes, my friend.” He let his gaze wander, as in many of our conversations before. “We were.”

“It is our fault, Qalian. It is not the fault of demons or sins. It is only our fault.” A word was formed on my tongue. First there was a tickle, then there was a clear shape, and before I knew, I had spoken it.

“It is a cycle.”

Qalian smiled like a master smiles at his student when he came to an understandable, but naïve conclusion. Then he shook his head.

“I will not stop you”, he repeated.

One day you will make a decision. And I hope it will be the right one.

My hands were shaking, and my fear was overwhelming. I felt tears tickling behind my eyes. *It was all in vain.* I had believed to be special,

to make the world better with my deeds, to find my destiny. But I had not found anything. I had joined a group of lunatics who made themselves judge over life and death with wild magic and unholy rituals.

“Open the gate.” My voice was merely a whisper.

Qalian nodded, with a hinge of regret. He had expected my answer. Three draws of breath later the machinery of the gate began to move and it rattled upward. I turned around and left without looking at Qalian again.

“No one leaves the Black Libra”, I heard his voice behind me. It was neither angry nor malicious, only sad.

“No one.”

I disappeared into the dark of night.

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My hand hurts. I feel that they come closer.

I want to end it myself. I would like to claim that my reasons are emotions like guilt or a sense of honor, but it is a lie. Pure fear is driving me. Fear of what the Black Libra does to traitors.

The place where I began writing this transcript will be the place where I will leave this world. Was it fate that my life was going to end here? The fact that I am hiding in an old, abandoned trading post in the middle of a forest makes this conclusion likely. I was not aware of the irony of my fate before I woke up between these cold stone walls yesterday morning. I had wandered all night, and I remember the strange figure walking thirty arms lengths in front of me all time. I followed it. Shortly before I found the clearing, she turned toward me a last time and smiled at me. The adornment in her hair sounded like wind chimes from Kilé. Then she disappeared like she had never been there.

I wish I had more meaningful words to end this transcript. But I

don't. As I have mentioned before, it is meant to be an account, nothing more. An account of what made Jaél Tanner's Son, the nameless one, the Butcher of Ark.

I am so tired that my eyes are filled with tears, and my hands are shaking in anticipation of what I am about to do. Several dozen people died by my blade, yet I am too cowardly when it comes to taking my own life.

I have a final plea to you. To find simple explanations, my story will not only be twisted by the heralds and the Order, but also by the Black Libra. It was born in the shadows, and there it will remain. Nowhere will you find traces of its deeds, and with artfulness and perfidy it will cover the traces I am going to leave behind. Besides simple explanations – I was straying from my Path, I was a monster – there will be other assertions which will satisfy scholars and philosophers. Do not listen to them.

They are nothing but lies.