

The Fateweaver's Challenge

Sharn cursed, struggling against her chains. The fateweaver wasn't used to being manhandled like this. She wasn't the strongest orc around, but she mostly lived around humans and goblins, and she was more than a match for any of them, over six feet tall, with well-toned muscles under a fine layer of fat that gave her pleasing curves and some nice padding. But to the wiry, twisted old bodaks escorting her, she might as well have been a shrinking violet; the two of them were able to drag her like a child through the halls of Queen Morrigan's court. One held a chain attached to a collar around her throat, and the other a chain attached to a pair of thick bronze manacles on her wrists, and all of her struggles couldn't even slow them down. Her pale green skin was glistening with sweat from the struggle, her ponytail had come partly undone when she'd been captured and strands of blue-black hair were hanging across her face, and her well-sculpted chain shirt and leather garments were in disarray, one boot lost and her trousers threatening to fall around her ankles as she stumbled and spat and roared her defiance.

It shouldn't have gone that way. Armed with a tale of three gifts of gratitude, an iron hammer, and a collection of protective charms, Sharn had infiltrated one of the Queen's outposts, seeking to claim an even stronger tale for her adventures - one that, the whispers said, would let her always arrive in the nick of time. Unfortunately, her tales were less powerful than those of the fae. She had easily evaded two challenges, but the living rope given as thanks for aiding a serpent in distress, which should have let her evade the guards at the library door, had instead dropped her directly into quicksand and left her easy prey. Now, she was being taken to Queen Morrigan for 'sentencing', whatever that meant.

Sharn had always made her living stealing scraps of stories from minor fae courts; not for her the life of bowing and scraping to an Emissary and giving her best energies to a guild. For the first time, she thought uneasily she may have bitten off more than she could chew.

"Presenting the thief who would master time, the ungrateful recipient of fae largess, Sharn Jackspur!" The slender elf at the door called the words out, and the court grew silent as the bodaks pulled Sharn in. The court was massive, with dozens of fae nobles and servants at attention along the walls, and Queen Morrigan sat at one end on a throne made of feathers and bones, wearing a dress spun from starlight and the darkness between the stars. Her skin was pale porcelain, with tiny blood-red cracks running through it, and her eyes were pits of fire that looked down on the adventurer. "Another kin," she sighed. "Are the treasures of my realm so tempting, that you lust after them so?"

Sharn gritted her teeth, and growled, "Isn't that what treasures are for? To be taken?"

There was an audible murmur from the court, and Morrigan's lips curled up. "Spirited," she said. "You mortals usually throw yourself on my mercy, begging and crying."

Sharn straightened as best she could, glaring at the queen. "I don't bow to anyone, mortal or fae. If you plan to kill me, do it."

Morrigan laughed. "Oh, I would never. But I will give you a choice, as I do all of those who think to threaten my domain. You sought to steal the magic of time, so it is a tale of time that I will challenge you with. If you can escape my capitol before the bell rings midnight, you will be free, and I will give you the tale you sought as a reward. If you fail, you will be given to my trainers for the day, to amuse themselves as they will... and then you will try again. And again, until you escape, or you break."

Her smile faded away. "And if my terms are not satisfactory to you, oh mortal who does not bow, you will be thrown into the Well."

The shadows swirled in front of Sharn, and the ground fell away. She could see the stone, scarred and pitted, descending into the depths, and smell the fetid stench of rot. The faint sound of a garbled scream echoed out of the gap in front of her, and she took a step back quickly, only to have the bodaks grab the chains and hold her fast. Each took one step forward, walking around the well on opposite sides, and she felt her feet begin to drag slowly towards the pit.

"I'll take your challenge," she said quickly, before she lost the chance. Whatever was down there, she wanted none of it.

"Wonderful." Queen Morrigan snapped her fingers, and the ground closed up in front of Sharn, the smell dissolving into that of lilacs and blood. "You will be given ten minutes' head start. Then my vassals will pursue you, as much or as little as they like. Be wary, young Kin. Many of those in my realm enjoy a good hunt."

Sharn's guards stepped forward, unclipping the chains from her collar and manacles without removing them. She stepped back, looking suspiciously at them, and then turned and ran before the queen changed her mind. She couldn't remember the exact route she'd taken to get here, but her plan was simple. Get out of the castle, find a way up, and get into the tunnels. From there, she could make her way up to the surface at her leisure.

The first step was escaping the castle. Fortunately, Sharn still had a few tales up her sleeves. "Aim for something soft," she muttered, feeling magic wrap around her as she dove head-first through one of the throne room's tall stained glass windows. She heard shouts of both alarm and amusement behind her as she plummeted through the air, getting a brief look at Morrigan's domain laid out below her. It was a vast cavern, with

shining gemstones like stars embedded in the rooftop and a large, slowly dimming orb of molten gold to represent the sun. Below her, streets were laid out as though this was an ordinary cityscape, but with buildings grown from vines, carved out of single blocks of stone or even slowly breathing as they shifted positions.

And called by her magic, a cart piled high with cushions was sitting directly below her. She slammed into it harder than she would have liked, grunting with exertion as the breath was knocked out of her. The world spun around her, and by the time she gathered her senses the cart was trundling down the thoroughfare, pulled by a pair of hippogriffs. The cart's owner, a goat-man with lizard eyes, was looking suspiciously back at her.

"Just passing through," Sharn said, rolling off the cart and landing on her feet as she heard the bell sound ten minutes. That was fast. She must have actually passed out in the cart.

The goatman started to grin, reaching under his seat, and Sharn punched him in the face and smacked the flank of one of the hippogriffs. The cart picked up speed, and she ducked into an alleyway, catching her breath.

That was when she noticed that her chain shirt was gone, leaving her wearing only her leather jerkin and trousers.

Sharn frowned, mind racing as she made her way down the alley. She'd still been wearing it when she jumped out the window. Was this a new kind of fae magic? She ducked low, seeing a gaggle of laughing pixies go by, and shook her head. It was weird, but she needed to keep moving.

She took one step out of the alley and immediately felt her jerkin catch and tear. Sharn surged forward, hearing the mocking laughter of an ogre behind her. He'd gotten his hands on her shirt, and now it was in tatters, the back and one shoulder torn off. How had he gotten so close?

Fucking fae magic. Invisible ogres. What was next?

Next, as it turned out, was when Sharn came around a corner, and suddenly tripped over a long, low wire that she would have sworn wasn't there before. She fell forwards, and her shirt came apart completely as she landed face-first in a mud puddle. Which she also would have sworn wasn't there a moment before. Mud splashed up over her upper body, coating her breasts in foul-smelling gunk, and she coughed and rolled back onto her feet just in time to hear a chorus of mocking laughter. Three goblins were watching her, sitting on a porch step across the way. One of them waved. "Muddy girl want clean? Got good tongue here."

“Fuck you,” Sharn snapped, turning and hurrying away. The mud dripped off her as she jogged, feeling pain radiating through her leg. She’d never met fae powers like this. Yes, fae domains had a way of moving, but not so suddenly, or jarringly. She didn’t recognize the street any more; she must have triggered some kind of teleport trap. She had no idea which direction would lead to the edge of town.

She needed some height. Sharn grabbed a support pole and started to climb, keeping an eye out for any pursuers. The ogre who had grabbed at her was nowhere to be seen, and the goblins hadn’t bothered to get up. She was still in the clear...

... and then it happened again. Halfway up the pole, she felt a tearing sound, and looked down to see that her trousers had, impossibly, gotten their drawstrings tangled in a small, sharp bit of stone that was jutting out. She tried to wriggle free of it, and her waistband tore further.

There was another round of laughter, and Sharn looked down to see that there were over a dozen fae gathered around below her, watching her intently. She blushed fiercely, realizing that they had a perfect view of her breasts pressed tightly against the wall, and of her ass as the trousers continued to tear away. “Might as well give up now,” one of them called up. “Come on down, and we’ll give you a taste of your new life.”

Sharn didn’t have anything to throw, so she settled for cursing loudly and at length as she tried to disentangle her trousers. But then the first of the fae grabbed the pole, sticky fingers grasping on, and began to slowly climb up. With one last biting oath, Sharn yanked herself free, feeling her trousers fall down around her ankles. One leg fell off completely, but the other caught on her boot, dangling down as she climbed frantically ahead of the mob, not caring what the motions did to her shapely ass as it jutted out over the street.

Reaching the roof, Sharn saw that she was near the northern edge of the large buildings of Morrigan’s realm. The city had no walls; the walls of the cavern were considered good enough. She pulled off her other boot, shaking the trousers loose, and then threw it at the first fae to crest the rooftop. As he fell back to the street, accompanied by a chorus of cheering and jeering, she broke into a dash, leaping to the next building over and leaving her pursuers in the dust.

It was much darker now; she’d lost track of the false sun in her running, but it had been replaced by a silvery crescent that glowed against the roof. Past sundown. How much longer until midnight?

Sharn’s frown grew, as she shimmied down the final building and made her way into an elaborate garden, filled with trees that moaned softly in human voices and a bubbling brook. None of that seemed right. It had been almost sundown when she’d started, but she couldn’t have been at this for more than half an hour. And Morrigan had said

midnight. That was a firm time, not the flickering path of the sky. There was some trick going on.

And then she turned the corner, and saw the minotaur grinning in front of her as he looked her up and down.

Sharn took stock. Aside from her manacles, collar, and underwear, she was naked and defenseless. But she had one story left. A clear underdog always had an escape route.

She ran forward, falling to her knees and sliding across the grass. The minotaur's brow furrowed, and he swiped for her, but she slipped past him and rolled to her feet. The entrance to the caves was just ahead. She just needed to...

... everything spun around her. And she was back at the entrance to the garden, with the minotaur standing in front of her, now grinning with sadistic glee. "What the fuck??" The minotaur licked his lips. He lifted one hand, and opened it to show Sharn her own underwear. "Missing something?" he rumbled.

Sharn looked down, face blushing a dark green as she realized that she was now completely naked in front of this beast. The mud on her breasts was caked and dry, her nipples erect through it, and she almost covered herself instinctively. He's got some kind of teleportation magic, she thought. How was she going to get out of this?

"Don't think too long," the minotaur said, taking a step forward. "It's almost midnight."

"Like hell it is," Sharn laughed. She ducked to the left, and then dashed right as the minotaur responded.

And the next thing she knew, she was on her knees, staring down at herself in the water. Her underwear was lodged in her mouth, with the string from her ponytail tied around it to hold it in, and her face was covered in thick, stinking cum. She could feel the minotaur's hands on her, one holding her waist and the other pinning her arms against the small of her back, and she could feel his massive girth pressed against her. "Whhht?!"

"Foolish girl," the minotaur said. "Your escape was mere feet away, but you were never going to reach it. The queen challenged you with a tale of time, and time is what you have lost."

Sharn struggled against him, shaking her head. All of the strange moments, objects vanishing, even the minotaur. They weren't teleporting. She'd been losing minutes, frozen in place while the fae gathered around her and prepared her for their next trick. She screamed into her gag, glaring at the minotaur's reflection. It couldn't end like this. "Oh, don't worry," the minotaur said. "What the queen takes away, she returns in full measure. It is only fair."

And before Sharn could ask him what he meant, he shoved her face-first into the river.

The cold water exploded around her, and Sharn felt it soak into her open mouth as she tried desperately to push it away, feeling air bubbles rising. She was submerged up to her neck, and the only effect of her frantic thrashing was to let her hair slowly drift down on either side of her face, obscuring her vision as she struggled.

And then the minotaur pressed himself against her ass, and Sharn's desperate screams took on a new pitch as he entered her.

His girth was like nothing she'd ever experienced, nothing she'd ever imagined. There wasn't an ounce of pleasure in his thrusts, as her entire body rocked back and forth, feeling him press deep inside her in a slow, steady motion. She struggled, feeling her lungs screaming for air, feeling darkness spreading around the edges of her eyes. This couldn't be the end. The Queen had promised that she could try again. He wouldn't...

Gradually, through the pain transfixing her, through the desperate, overwhelming need for air, Sharn became aware that something was very badly wrong. She wasn't moving any more, wasn't struggling. There was a single bubble of air sitting in front of her eyes, mocking her with its closeness. The searing pain in her rear wasn't joined by movement.

What she takes away, she gives in equal measure.

Queen Morrigan's magic had stolen hours from Sharn. And now, at the stroke of midnight, those hours were being returned to her. But trapped in the minotaur's grasp, she couldn't use them. Even if she could, the water around her was as solid as stone, locked in a timeless moment. She wasn't drowning because that moment was stopped too. She was merely on the verge of it.

For hours.

Sharn desperately wanted to scream, but in the lost, frozen time, she couldn't do that either.

Finally, after an uncountable timeless struggle, there was a flurry of movement, and the minotaur yanked her head back out of the water just as he erupted within her. Sharn gasped, coughing out water around the gag as it continued to drip through her underwear and down her throat.

The minotaur tossed her to the ground, looking down at her with a vicious smile. "Understand now, little thief? Every night, we're going to chase you through the city, and whoever catches up with you closest to midnight gets to do something really nasty to you.

“Ffkky...” Sharn coughed out through the gag.

“You really do have spirit.” The minotaur chuckled, easily hoisted her over his shoulder as he began to walk back to town. “Maybe it’ll save you. I doubt it. But in the mean time, me and my boys have all day to play with you, and we’ll make sure you’re in the proper shape for your next hunt...”