

Mirla's Dagger

The small town of Gallads Market was surrounded by a stone wall, more boundary than battlement. Persek and Karbris rode to the front in their princes' colours and we cantered into the town unquestioned. There was no market in the market place, and we reined our mounts there. Merdrad looked around sharply, and I saw his shoulders relax as a young assassin and a teenage lad hurried from an inn. We all dismounted. As I did so, I scanned the workshops carefully, and located what I wanted.

'Dorrak, can you hold Mirla's horse and mine?' I asked nicely. 'We have a little shopping to do.' Dorrak nodded unquestioningly, Mirla looked mainly puzzled, but Vordan looked annoyed.

'We have no time to waste!' he complained.

'Mirla has no weapon,' I pointed out.

Vordan grimaced. 'Ah! Adrell? Will you choose a blade for Mirla?'

'Surely,' Adrell replied, with a negligent shrug.

'I will pay,' offered Thales.

Adrell shook his head and smiled charmingly at Mirla. 'No, tis my turn to gift our newest companion.'

'If we had the time there would be a gold bangle to be had from him too,' I hissed to Mirla conspiratorially.

'I have no skill with weapons,' Mirla whispered back, taken aback and clearly rather perturbed at what this might portend.

'Tis but a precaution, and, if naught else, it will be useful for digging up breadroots,' I reassured her.

Thus Adrell, Mirla and I set off for the armourer's workshop while the others listened to the young journeyman's news. In truth, the walk across the square did none of us any harm, but stretched our legs and relieved our backsides some.

'Had you aught in mind?' Adrell asked Mirla.

Mirla gulped and shook her head blankly. 'I fear I know nothing of weapons, Warrior. Something cheap?'

Adrell snorted. 'Tis Adrell, Mirla, and you will have naught 'cheap' lest it also chances to be good.'

'Oh,' said Mirla, blushing twice over.

'I had thought something vaguely ceremonial looking?' I suggested.

Mirla simply looked puzzled. Adrell grasped my intention.

'Ah, to look the part when she is assisting Thales at his art?'

'Precisely,' I agreed.

'It might be difficult to find aught of that sort that is not all decoration and polish,' Adrell warned us both, 'but we shall see.'

The armourer had a reasonable selection of daggers, as one might expect. The sight of two young female customers had raised an avaricious smile upon his face, but Adrell's obvious expertise

quickly wiped away that smile. Adrell totally ignored the selection of ladies pretty, ornate, eating daggers, and inspected the more lethal blades closely, then turned to study Mirla.

‘A full fighting dagger would seem somewhat superfluous and unladylike,’ he observed. ‘If you want something useful but slightly ceremonial looking this is the best blade.’

He held up a simple craft knife with a plain wooden hilt, and a gently curved, single edged blade, a handspan in length and tapered to a useful point.

‘I wager this is designed for coppicing, or wood turning or suchlike, but, if I get a carved bone hilt and a proper cross guard fitted at Highcastle, it could be mistaken for a Ryaduran priest’s ceremonial dagger. In the meantime it will be a useful tool.’

‘Can I feel the blade, please, Adrell?’ Mirla asked.

Adrell looked puzzled but handed the dagger to her. I knew what was coming and watched intrigued. Mirla held the blade in both hands and closed her eyes.

‘Three strands of iron, heat welded then folded a dozen times, and the edge well hardened,’ she pronounced, her eyes still shut, ‘the tang is not much worked, and is flawed, but is wide and strong enough. This is a blade designed not to fail when worked hard.’ She opened her eyes and refocused upon Adrell. ‘It is indeed a good blade, Adrell.’

If Adrell was staring at her in awe, the craftsman looked all but terror stricken.

‘She does that,’ I comforted him, ‘for the Learned Lady Mirla is a magician.’

Mirla looked daggers at me... er... it was definitely appropriate.

Oops! ‘I mean a Thaumaturge,’ I quickly corrected myself.

Mirla inclined her head. The bargaining was brief, and notably successful. Plainly magicians with unknown powers get a discount.

There was no sheath with the blade, but the armourer hurriedly directed us to the leather worker who produced a simple sheath and a belt with commendable speed, and for a most reasonable price. Oh, well enough, I did accidentally chance to use the word ‘magician’ again.

By the time we returned to our company - with Mirla fiddling uncomfortably with the dagger unaccustomedly set upon her waist - a snack of bread, cheese and cold meat had been purchased from an inn, and both the journeyman assassin and the apprentice had disappeared. We took our share of the food, and sat ourselves upon the edges of a stone horse trough to eat while Vordan explained what had been discovered.