

The Guys in 412

I was in the laundry room of our apartment building when Mrs. Finlay informed me there were now two knights living among us. I wondered if she had been watching one too many of her Monty Python marathons.

"Knights, you say?" I answered as I put my load in the washer, cautiously hiding my undergarments inside a sweater. Mrs. Finlay was known to have too much interest in other people's laundry when they weren't around. It was at this point I realized I had forgotten two of my work shirts under my bed but being as to how my apartment was on the fourth floor, they were going to stay there.

"I kid you not. Two of 'em. One tall, and well spoken, the other shorter and don't say much. They don't wear the heavy armour like you would see if they were jousting, though I don't want to presume they don't have it somewhere. I've only seen 'em wear cloth and chainmail. 'Magine, a coupla knights in a town in this day and age."

"Actors perhaps?"

"There's no acting that takes place around here, 'cept for Mr. Foler pretending he cares about us tenants. And they certainly wouldn't be students. They're much too old for that. Besides, they don't look like actors to me," she answered. "Why, Mr. Foler told me they wished to deal with him directly and paid him in gold crowns for two months, up front. Plus damage deposit. Coins so old there wasn't a date on them. And that I was to leave them alone."

“You were told to leave the coins alone?” I loved tormenting the old lady.

She stared at me. “The knights.”

“Mr. Foler told you all this?”

“Well, you see, I had to knock on their door a few days ago. The young couple in 308 had called me, complaining of a horrendous racket in the apartment above them. I don’t know how you didn’t hear them yourself. They’re on your floor you know.”

I had suspected as much once Mrs. Finlay had started talking, having heard enough of their comings and goings to know they weren’t typical neighbors. There seemed to be a constant argument with them on who had the key to let themselves back into their apartment.

Mrs. Finlay waited, hoping for me to confess I had seen them, but I wouldn’t humour her. She continued.

“Well, I called Mr. Foler, to let him know, and he didn’t answer. So, I did what I was supposed to, as super.”

“You left the people in 412 alone,” I said drily.

Mrs. Finlay never caught the sarcasm. “No. I went right up to their door and knocked. Even in the hallway, I could hear clanging like they were banging kitchen pots and steel together and hitting walls and such like there was a dozen men wrestling. There was no acknowledgement of me at first, but I knocked again, threatening quite loudly in no uncertain terms, that I’d let myself in. This time, the noise stopped, and they opened the door.”

She paused at this point to see if she still had my attention.

“Well, the tall one, Sir Henry the Good, as Mr. Foler called him, came to the door quite sweaty and panting like he had just ran up the stairs. Quite intimidating he was, being a giant of a man and in his chainmail and all. I just told him we had a complaint of noise and asked if they could consider the other tenants. I didn’t even mention about them cleaning up the horse manure that had only seemed to become a problem when they moved in. They apologized of course and were quite behaved from then on. Well, no complaints that I’d heard of, anyways.”

“Manure?” I asked as I put my quarters in the slot.

“Well yes, in the back, in the shared parking lot as building 3. Apparently, they cleared the horses with Mr. Foler. The front of the building is too loud, being on the street and all, and always has some kid whipping in and out. I’m near to the point of telling Mr. Foler I never signed on for shovelling horse dung. Rent discount or not. Why, it’s an environmental hazard, it is. Not to mention the fires they’ve been having on the lawn. They’ll end up having the fire department called on them, I swear.”

I nodded. As I was leaving, she called out after me, “Don’t forget, it’s a fifty-minute wash cycle. If you’re late, I’ll have to empty your washer and put your clothes in a basket. And rent is due.”

“Mmhmm,” I answered as I left the room. Joke was going to be on her and Mr. Foler, as I did not have rent money yet. Shifts hadn’t been plentiful lately.

The next day I headed to work and decided to leave the building through the back door. I didn’t expect any validity to Mrs. Finlay’s tale but went anyway.

I was surprised to see a few horse droppings on the asphalt. Not enough to be classified as an environmental hazard, but much more than I would expect to see in the parking lot of my apartment building. On the grass, in front of a parking spot, two fence posts had been driven in the ground with a third post placed horizontally to connect them.

Beyond the posts were a few charred logs and ashes from a fire, and several large grey beer cans were strewn about.

I left the parking lot intent to pay better attention in the future watching for the horses.

The next evening, through their arguing my floormates announced themselves to be in the hallway again. I crept to the peephole.

Sure enough, two knights stood at their door, carrying their horse's saddles. Large swords hung in sheaths at their waist. Sweaty and clean shaven aside from oversized mustaches, they did not look like actors. As Mrs. Finlay had attested, one, carrying a rolled-up tube of paper, was well over six feet tall, and leaner. The other looked to be a foot lower and was significantly wider. They accused each other of having the key to get in, and it was only when the taller knight threatened to kick the door down, the shorter man found the key and gave an awkward smile. They quickly let themselves in and I saw them no more that night.

Two mornings later, on a day with steady rain, I went downstairs to the laundry room with the work shirts I had previously forgotten. A tall man wearing an oversized shirt was there with his back to me, and it took me a moment to realize he was one of the

knights that lived on my floor. He was standing still, looking at a washer. When he heard me, he looked up briefly before moving over to the side to allow me to pass.

“Thanks,” I said as I shuffled by him. I lifted a lid and threw my shirts in, then a packet of powder before putting my quarters in the slot.

He tried to hide it but took larger interest than normal in the sequence of my procedure.

I nodded to his washer. “You get it figured out? These washers run a bit differently.”

“Tis a mystery,” he admitted, shaking his head.

I pointed to his washer as I talked. “Put your load in, set the dial to cold. I don’t usually separate whites and colors. That’s what I find works, anyways. Then, soap, four quarters, small or large spin, depending on how much you put in and how big of a hurry you are, then hit start. Takes forty-five minutes. And a heads up. If Mrs. Finlay catches your load finished with you not here, she’ll rifle through it.”

He looked like I had just explained how a combustible engine works.

I took the time to guide him through each motion. When it came time for him to install his quarters, he admitted with embarrassment he only had fifty cents and would need to go up to his apartment to get more.

I handed him the two quarters he needed, which I had to convince him to take. It was only when I told him he might be able to return the favor to someone else next time he agreed. “Thou hast saved me a walk up the steps, my lady. I, Sir Henry the Good, of House Nairn, am in your debt,” he said as he kneeled.

I raised my hand in protest. "Just Trish. And really, it's fine."

I left and made sure to come back before my load was done. Sir Henry's washer was still in his spin cycle when I left with my laundry, and I imagined how keen Mrs. Finlay would be to take his underdress out if he were late to retrieve it.

I don't consider myself nosy, but I think anyone would find two knights living next door intriguing. The next day I made an opportunity by watching periodically out my window for when they were returning with their horses, which I still hadn't seen yet. At length they arrived, their horses clopping along the parking lot. One was golden brown and the other black with white blotches, with flowing manes and added thick hair at their ankles. I then left my apartment just as they were climbing the landing to our floor.

The shorter knight was walking lead and without making eye contact gave me a wide berth. Sir Henry the Good recognized me immediately. "The Lady Trish!" he exclaimed with a smile. "I hope all is well. This, Sir Moronet, is the lady I told you rendered me assistance with the tokens yesterday at the washers."

The shorter man gave a curt nod and mumbled something I couldn't understand.

"Splendid idea. Sir Moronet suggests you dine with us tonight. We have lamb and lots of fine ale. In metal cans. We really must insist."

I had to admit the offer caught me off guard, which is saying something. But I accepted and asked what time I should come over.

"Half past eight, out back of the building on the grass," Sir Henry the Good answered. "You can't miss us."

I had little doubt of that and smiled as I made it look like I had business to attend to, so continued out for a walk. By the time I came back, the two knights were already outside, sitting on the lawn at a fire by the building.

Their horses, tethered to the cross beam I had seen before, were much larger now that I was up close. They were preoccupied with a pile of hay and pail of water that had been placed in front of each. Sir Moronet slowly turned a spit, the contents I wasn't familiar with but presumed was the lamb as promised. Sir Henry the Good studied a map unrolled on the lawn.

"Lady Trish!" Sir Henry the Good exclaimed as I got to them. Ale spilled out of his can and to the grass. Sir Moronet nodded without facial expression. They had left their chainmail upstairs, but still had their swords with them. Sir Moronet had a large cross bow at his side also.

"Hope I'm not late," I said as I sat across from them. Sir Henry handed me a large can of beer. "Simply pull the little metal tab on top, it will open the can right up," he explained. I nodded and smiled. Modern conveniences.

The smoke from the fire hazed about with the wind, floating lazily back and forth between the building and parked cars. It seemed to miss the horses altogether. At one point the wind shifted, blowing smoke into the basement apartment they sat beside. Someone closed their basement window with noticeable force and drew their curtains closed past the intended track. The knights seemed to not take notice.

"So, you guys don't seem like actors," I asked as I waved smoke out of my face. "Or if you are, you're pretty good at staying in character."

“Tis no stage we work, my lady,” Sir Henry promised. “We are both of the House Nairn, on a quest for our Lord.” He cut a piece of lamb off the spit and put it on a stick then gave it to me. It was charred on one side and undercooked on the other. I roasted that side a bit more.

“A quest?” I asked.

Sir Henry opened his mouth about to speak more, but Sir Moronet mumbled something that caused him to pause. “Apologies. It is classified to any of those not on our quest.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “That a local map?”

Sir Henry rotated it around to me. It was an old map with a distorted resemblance of the nearby counties, with a few locations of places on the other side of the province. None of it to scale. “Do you know of any mines within three days ride of here? We seek the Mabou Coal Mines of Oak Island.”

“Umm, Mabou is an hour away by car,” I answered, pointing to a corner of the sheet. “Not sure how long it would take you on a horse, but I could do it in four or five hours with my bike. Oak Island is much further, in a separate direction altogether. But that’s not drawn the way it should be.” I pulled out my phone and brought up Google Earth. “This is the actual scale of where you want to go. See, the water tower there,” I pointed to the other end of town, “is on this road, and once you make it all the way here, you take this road to that road then basically follow the shore. It’s sixty-two kilometers away. There’s no eta on the phone for horses I’m afraid, but if you walk, it says fourteen

hours and twelve minutes. Car is forty-five minutes, bicycle as I've said is about five hours, which may be a bit of a lie due to the hills."

Sir Moronet nodded and mumbled what may have been, "Hills on bikes are difficult."

I finger scrolled on my phone for them, enlarging and showing land markers. "Then this, way over here, is Oak Island. You're not making that in a day on a horse. Probably not even a week. I would suggest you look at taking a bus or something."

Sir Henry's eyes had opened wide and even Sir Moronet was perked up, interested in my technology.

"That map- where did you get such a thing?" Sir Henry asked.

"Data. But it's not cheap," I answered.

"Da-ta," Sir Henry looked at Sir Moronet. "Have you heard of it?"

Sir Moronet shook his head and shrugged. Then mumbled.

"I agree," Sir Henry the Good nodded. He handed me another can. "We shall buy your map."

I made a face and pulled my phone away.

"I think we can all agree it is a much-needed asset to our quest," Sir Henry explained. "We can pay," he added as he threw a pouch to me. "Whatever your price, Lady Trish.

I untied it and saw it filled with some quarters, dimes, and several of the non dated gold coins Mrs. Finlay had been going on about. There was no doubt I had what would be appraised as a small fortune in my hands. More than enough for rent.

The thought of steady work crept into my head. "What if I come along with my map as a hired hand. I mean, how dangerous is this quest once you find the mines you're looking for?" I asked. I didn't want to get myself killed or anything. Not that I expected anything to be more dangerous than travelling along the shoulder of Route 19 or the 100 series highways if we made it to Oak Island.

"House of Nairn isn't afraid of any danger, my lady," Sir Henry the Good scoffed. Then, with Sir Moronet's mumbled suggesting, he added, "nor would it have any intention of putting a maiden such as yourself or your map in peril. But I don't see your horse. Unless you have a motor carriage?"

"I can just bike," I said as I downed the rest of my can, then took a third for a night cap. I initially had plans to see if I could outdrink these guys, but I had to be ready for a substantial bike ride the next day. "Fine. It's resolved. Meet me down here at seven am. I'll take half payment up front tomorrow, the rest when I get you to where you are looking for."

The two men were still trying to decide whether to let me join them or not, when I tossed the sack back to Sir Henry. "See you at seven. And before we leave, I'm bringing a garbage bag for us to pick up these cans. It looks terrible and we can get money back for them." I said as I finished my lamb and went upstairs. I had to tune up my bike and call in sick for work.

