



Otheris
and the
Serpents of Qhudrus

Richard Shekari

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By Richard Shekari

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DEDICATION

To Felix Ikani.

THE GREAT WITCH OF MOUGHDUG

“Let go of me Otheris!” cried the old witch in her black cloak as she struggled to free her neck from his grip, he kept walking and didn’t care to look back as he dragged her down the village, “Let me go!” she barely choked struggling with mucus all over her face and his hand. Other than her creaky old voice, only the chirping of the crickets and the hooting of the owls could be heard. Otheris uttered no words as he tugged her.

“Please Otheris son of Delial, have mercy and free me,” she pleaded, “I shall not come near thy household again!” still struggling for air to breathe.

“You shall be free. I have no plans of taking your life oh great witch of Moughdug. You should know that by now, the village folk need to see you in your true form,” replied Otheris.

“I beg of you. Heed my words son of Delial; neither I nor my prentice shall fly near thy domain from hence. Spare me,” she entreated.

The village was as mute as a graveyard. They passed some houses and arrived at a place that seemed to look like the market place, with his fingers still clenched to her wrinkled neck. Otheris threw his sword on the ground as he approached a big bell hung to a barren old tree at the centre of the village.

“Otheris No! No Otheris!” she cried out.

Otheris picked a mallet that was kept on top of the big bell and struck it three times, and the old witch turned in dismay as a dreadful horror usurped her senses.

“Why do you worry? The village folk said that the oracle had foretold your fall in the hands of the one who is pure in heart,” he said, “not that I am an ardent follower of such ridiculous asinine way of thinking, I am just fed up with your vileness!”

“Your tongue reeks of pride son of Delial! No one is burning anyone tonight, you’ll see!” she vaunted.

The village folk began to light up their lamps and their voices were heard. The witch didn’t want them to see her as she was, and for every time Otheris banged the big old bell more lamps would be lit and more chatters heard.

“You have really put up a good fight,” he threw the mallet on the ground. “I’ve got to admit, you’ve got skills even the serpents of Qhudrus lack,” he said smiling as he lifted her up above his head with his left hand, leaving her legs dangling in the air, “for years no one believed me” he heaved a deep sigh, “but today....the truth shall come out!”

The old witch managed to turn around to see if anyone was coming, she then stared down into his eyes and made few attempts to kick him with her legs but he lowered her down hard.

“You fool,” she grumbled, “no one burns tonight! You hear me son of Delial? No one!” she bit his left hand almost ripping a lump off of it.

Otheris screamed but didn’t let go of the witch.

“Mark my words son of Delial; I shall bring dusk on you gullible lad!” bragged the witch.

Otheris quickly released his left grip and squeezed her neck harder with his right hand.

“*Shiek mukth quevieth!*” chanted the old witch as she shape shifted, and began to shrink right before his very eyes.

“You beldam! You bit me!” He cried out. Otheris was astonished seeing that she could shape shift into a smaller being.

She again locked her powerful teeth to his thenal and the excruciating pain sent Otheris to his knees.

“I rule this filthy lands you and these wretched people call home and all of Qhudrus as well, and there is nothing you can do about it boy!” boasted the witch as she shrank small enough in order to escape his grip. Otheris still refused to let her go, he wanted to make sure her true identity was exposed to the villagers.

The villagers started to come out as they headed toward the old tree.

“You fool! Today you shall know why they call me the great witch of Moughdug!” she maniacally bragged, opened her mouth wide once more and went for his flesh.

“To hell with it!” Otheris said as he opened his mouth and swallowed her head.

“No!” shrieked the old witch, but it was too late; Otheris had ran his teeth through the tissues around the bones in her

neck, he felt the sound of her flesh ruptured as his incisors pieced through her bones ripping her head off with one bite.

Otheris fell to the ground and spat the head out, he could not bear the unpleasant taste of blood in his mouth and began to puke still holding to her miniature body in his hand. Otheris then fell to the ground panting, and as he lay facing the full moon, the villagers arrived.

“What now son of Delial?” asked one of the villagers.

Otheris lifted his head to look at them, spat again then rested his head on the ground.

“Have you come to parade your folly again Otheris!” said another who was holding a torch.

Otheris stood up, “Here!” He suspired as he raised his right hand up for the village folk to see what he held, Behold! The great witch of Moughdug! I have caught her and brought her to you my brothers, to see, and to know that I lied not to anyone!”

The village folk began to laugh at him, Otheris then threw the headless miniature body of the witch at the one holding the torch.

“You must be mad!” said the one holding the torch as he jumped off. The village folk gathered around to see it as Otheris stood up in search for the head. Astounded by what their eyes beheld, they all left their jaws open.

“This can’t be true!” said the one holding the torch, baffled as he lowered the torch down to shine light on the body. Otheris found the head then threw it near the miniature body, as it landed, the villagers moved a few steps back quickly.

“You have to take this to the third palace! We have to alert the king! Otheris! Otheris?” said one of the villagers who looked around but sighted Otheris walking home, wiping his mouth with his garment.

OTHERIS

“Otheris! Otheris!” a woman voiced out, “wake up Otheris!”

“Oh come on, can’t a man just have a good rest in this house?” he grumbled.

“Yes he can! Of course he can...if he sleeps like normal people do and not go about hunting crones and fays every night. Get up!” commanded the woman.

“Alright! Alright! I am up already,” he said as he stretched, “what’s for breakfast? I am hungry!”

“Of course you are! But first, the king has sent for you, the guards are outside!” she said.

“I have to eat something! I don’t want to die of hunger, and I know you won’t be happy if your precious Otheris dies either!” joked Otheris as he yawned.

“Well, I promise you by the time you get back son I’d have your favourite meal on the table! Now go before the villagers have another reason to start spreading silly rumours about you again dear!” she pleaded.

“Okay aunt Zeenah!” he said as he stood up and walked out of his room, “off I go!”

Otheris met the guards outside and tried to keep up with them as they walked to the third palace, but he was too weak so he spoke to one of the guards to please run fast and have food be made ready for him at the palace.

On their arrival, he met most of the village folk standing and some men seated near the king.

“Aha! Otheris! You have earned a place amongst men, my friend. Here!” said the king to Otheris as he pointed his finger at the seat next to him.

Otheris walked through the crowds, “I am hungry my liege!” he said.

“Oh no,” exclaimed the king, “if the great village of Moughdug lacked no food, it would be an insult for its king to have half of what it owned in the storehouse my friend,” he laughed, “what would you like to eat?” asked the king as he smiled gleefully at Otheris.

“Anything with bread would be fine your majesty!” replied Otheris.

“I like you!” said the king, “Ha-ha! Bring him the finest of the wines and make sure the finest of the soup and meat is brought along with the loaf.” ordered the king as he tapped Otheris, “You know, when I was your age my father taught me a lot of things. He even taught me how to woo a woman my friend,” he laughed, “my father, before he died advised me to try and make every village under my rule look like the capital, and do you know what I did?” he smiled, “well, I built a palace in all the seven villages, just like this one! This way I can spend time with my people and understand them better and of course, this requires I spend about a year or so in every village I visit,” he tapped Otheris on the shoulder, “now, you! I see that you have hidden gifts which will be of benefit to these villages, and my entire kingdom as a whole,” he lowered his hand and pulled out a small crown from underneath his throne and said, “could you believe I have crowns like this one under all my thrones, in all the seven villages under this kingdom? With all that I have known and with all the wives and concubines I have, my friend, not a single male child!?” he simpered, “however, I believe I need not worry anymore,” as he returned the crown where he pulled it from.

Three maids walked in with trays.

“Ah! You! Bring the table here!” ordered the king as one of the guards quickly brought a small table and kept it before the king and Otheris. The maids placed some bread, a bowl of soup, roasted turkey and a jar filled with wine on the table.

“Today you eat with your king! Today this kingdom celebrates and honours you Otheris son of Delial! Eat!” said the king as he pushed the table in front of Otheris, “I shall soon organise a feast in your honour my friend!”

Otheris cut a piece of bread from the loaf and dipped into the soup before him and then he swallowed it.

“Ha-Ha! I can see you are a man of action my friend! I like you!” added the king, “Okay! Everybody out!” he clapped, “Karim, you stay!” pointed at one of the well-built men among his guards.

“I like his beard!” referred Otheris to the one called Karim as he turned to the king, “I really would love to have a beard like that!”

“It’s easy Otheris, grow it!” answered the king laughing.

The guards, the maids and all the men walked out silently leaving only Otheris and the king.

“I will not waste your time my friend. We both know how precious time is, don’t we? Now, you have proven wrong all the village folk after all these years and you have gladdened my heart. But I am not happy about a few things; one, I don’t like the way these witches wrapped their chains around the feet of these young men in my kingdom, amongst other things! Otheris, I need to ask you for a favour, just one!” the king said, “You look like a young man who has got too much to do! Ah! Too little time!”

Otheris cut more from the loaf and dipped it in the soup nodding his head as he ate.

“There is also a rumour long dispersed in the kingdom which appears tangible; they say that my loins lack the seeds to yield a male child...which also, typically means I would not have any heir. I want it to remain a rumour!” he stood to his feet and began to walk gently, “you know, the oracle said that there lies a finical hag and serpents that are working against my throne,” he stopped, “however, the oracle made it clear months back that this hag’s identity would never be known and that if or when known and killed along with the serpents, then I can bear even many sons!” the king turned to

Otheris, “I do not expect you to understand the importance of this thing-of you not only capturing the great witch of Moughdug but delivering her headless body! It’s also very important to deliver to me the heads of all the serpents...of Qhudrus, for anytime these serpents feed destinies are stolen Otheris, serpents do not chomp their meal they swallow it whole so when you encounter them do not only bruise them, decapitate them all even when they appear to you in dreams!”

Otheris sipped some wine and went for more bread, “Mmm!” expressed Otheris as he nodded.

“A quarter of my gold and silver all for you if you can locate these serpents and bring to me their heads!” said the king.

Otheris swallowed the bread in his mouth and grinned, “I’ll need something more palpable!”

“You can carry the oracle along with you on your journey; the best guide and protection together with seven of my best men!” said the king, “in the end you’d find out that my offer is more staggering than any reward a man in this kingdom could ever gain.” The king returned to his throne, “Question is, do you have what it takes to earn it?”

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