

The Continuing Misadventures of Lionus and Freaky Foxe, Esq. The Misadventure of the Arbian Merchant

By Tallyhawk

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“All you have to do is distract the merchant, Lionus, and I’ll do the heist. It can’t go wrong.”

“Freaky, how many times I’ve heard that before?”

“I mean it, this time. Besides, we need money to eat. He’s a rich merchant and won’t really miss a couple of these jewels.”

As if on cue, a loud rumbling emanated from the lion’s stomach.

Lionus sighed. “I know I’m going to regret this, but, okay.”

“Relax,” Freaky said as he patted the lion. “You’re not going to regret this. Just give me a few minutes to work my way to the far end of the display.”

With that, the mischievous little fox left his lion friend and headed for the far end of the market like he was in a hurry to leave. Several tables past the jewel merchant’s table, he slowed down and headed back, stopping briefly at various tables and examining the merchandise as if he were interested in buying.

While Freaky was doing this, Lionus wandered over to the target merchant’s table and engaged him in conversation about his wares. Just as Freaky left the table next to the jewel merchant’s, Lionus looked off in the distance in the opposite direction and said “Whoa! Did you see that?”

“What?” asked the merchant as he turned to look in the indicated direction.

“A female wearing only a veil and a bikini. A very skimpy bikini. She looks like a belly dancer and she’s got amazing boobs.”

“Where? I don’t see her.”

“She went into that small crowd near the far end of the market. She should come out any minute. See. Just there.”

“He’s doing better than I expected,” thought Freaky as he began to pick up jewels and slip them quickly into a sack. He’d secured several when he got that odd feeling that

he was being watched. Concentrating, he heard breathing and smelled the scent of a tiger. Both were coming from behind him and to the left. Sneaking a glance in that direction, he noticed Nubis, Captain of the City Watch, standing behind him. The captain's arms were crossed and he had a scowl on his face. "Maybe if I ..." thought Freaky as he started to take a small step to his right only to have a heavy, striped paw grip his shoulder very firmly.

"Call your friend," said Nubis quietly.

"Ah, Lionus."

The lion looked around and thought about making a break for it. But, he couldn't leave his friend to face the authorities by himself.

"I believe these are yours," Nubis said as he handed the confused merchant the sack Freaky had been slipping the jewels into.

"What? Oh. Thank you Captain. Good work," said the merchant as it slowly dawned on him that he was being robbed. "I expect them to be severely punished."

"That's up to the magistrate. Let's go you two. I believe you know the way."

As they headed out of the market and toward the jail, Nubis spoke to Lionus. "I tried to warn you about hanging out with this little trouble maker. He's gotten you into big trouble this time."

"I know. But he's my friend. I do my best to keep him out of trouble but it's not an easy task."

"Yes," said Freaky, a thought coming to mind. "He tried to talk me out of this. If you could just overlook it this time, I'll listen to him next time. And, I'm sure we can make it worth your while, if you know what I mean."

"Are you trying to bribe a member of the City Watch?" grumbled the tiger most ominously?

"No, no. Who said anything about a 'bribe?' No. I'm sure it's just a misunderstanding."

"Then perhaps you should keep silent before we have any more 'misunderstandings.'"

They proceeded in silence for the rest of the short walk to the jail. Nubis lead them inside and to the office of the Chief Magistrate. The weasel, obviously annoyed at

being bothered, looked up from behind his desk as they entered. “What is it, Captain? Can’t you see I’m busy?”

“I’m sorry, sir, but I caught these two trying to steal from a jewelry merchant in the market.”

“A pair of common thieves, eh?”

“There is nothing ‘common’ about us,” began Freaky.

“Freaky!” whispered Lionus. “Don’t piss him off.”

“Professionals, then,” said the magistrate.

“Yes” and “No, sir” said Freaky and Lionus simultaneously.

“Hm,” said the magistrate who was obviously thinking about something beyond the case before him. “That will be all, Captain.”

“Sir? What about my prisoners?”

“I said you were dismissed, Captain. I’ll take it from here.”

Nubis started to say something but remembered the magistrate’s reputation for having a temper and thought better of it. He snapped to attention, turned on his heel, and left. After all, he had done his job and it was up to the magistrate and the jail guards to handle punishment.

“So. You are ‘professional’ thieves.”

“Why, yes,” replied Freaky, ignoring Lionus’ warning glance. “I’m the brains and he is the brawn.”

“Are you nuts?!” whispered Lionus.

“Leave this to me,” he whispered back to the lion.

“Hm. You are aware of the penalty for theft in this part of the world?” asked the magistrate. “On the first offense, it is the loss of a paw.”

“Ah. Well. Ah. I’m sure that’s just for ‘common’ criminals,” stammered Freaky. “Not professionals such as ourselves.”

“Actually, that’s true,” replied the little weasel with a gleam in his eye. “Multiple offenses, which I assume would apply to ‘professionals’ such as yourselves, are punished by hanging.”

Lionus just sighed and shook his head. “Nubis was right. He’s going to be the death of me,” thought Lionus.

Freaky's mouth just dropped open and his eyes grew large.

The magistrate snickered as he enjoyed their obvious discomfort. "However," he finally said. "I might just have a way out for the two of you. I have a little 'job' that could use the talents of a couple of thieves. If you do this 'little job' for me, I might just forget that any of this happened."

"Well," replied Freaky, a new plan already forming in his mind. "We're the thieves for you. But, we don't come cheap."

"Freaky!" whispered Lionus. "Not now."

"True," said the magistrate. "But, in this situation, most would consider their lives quite valuable and would leave it at that."

"What's this 'little job,'" asked Lionus, try to salvage the situation before Freaky made it any worse.

"My brother has something that is rightfully mine. The Eye of the Mustelid."

"The what?" asked Lionus.

"It is the symbol of our family's heritage. As the eldest son, it should be mine. But my father always liked my brother more and left it to him. I want it."

"A family heirloom?" asked Freaky. "Does that mean it's made of jewels and gold?"

"It's material wealth, which is substantial, is of no interest to me. It is the symbol that I want. I should be the leader of my family. Not my sniveling brother."

"And where will we find it?" asked Freaky.

"It's in the great hall of my brother's house. It is guarded only lightly because no one would dare steal from the sultan's prime minister. My clerk will take you to his house. You will steal The Eye and bring it to me. Then, you will be free to go."

"Hey, no problem for us," said Freaky, plans already forming in his head.

"Oh. And if you get the idea of double crossing me and simply running or taking The Eye and running, you won't get far when I tell the Captain of the City Watch that you assaulted my clerk and escaped. Nubis is distressingly honest but he is very good at his job. You will never get out of the city and then he will bring you back to me. Care to guess how long it will take me to have you hung?" The magistrate turned to the desk of his clerk. "Take these two out the back way and lead them to my brother's house" he

ordered. “By the time you get there, it will be getting dark. Wait for them to do their job and then bring them back here.”

“Yes, magistrate.”

The magistrate’s clerk led them out the office and down the hall to a back stairway. Since it was intended as an emergency exit, no one else was about and it opened onto an ally behind the jail. Using his keen knowledge of the city, the clerk led the two thieves through back streets and alleys until they arrived at a grand house in a part of the city near the palace where senior government officials lived.

“We are at the back of the house grounds. If you slip over the wall, you should be able to find your way to the house. The great hall is in front. It should be empty since it is dinnertime. I’ll wait for you here.”

Lionus boosted Freaky up and over the wall and then climbed over himself. They crouched down just inside the wall and had a look around. The grounds held a number of trees, a sure sign of wealth in this part of the world, but the lights from the house could be seen easily through the deepening dusk. As the magistrate had expected, there did not appear to be any guards patrolling the grounds. The two slipped through the trees and up to the house. They slithered along the outside of the house until they reached the front corner. They peeked around the corner and were surprised to see that the only guards were the two manning the front gate. And, their attention was directed toward the street, not back toward the house. Quietly, they slid along the front of the house stopping to peek briefly in each window until they found the great hall.

“Now what?” whispered Freaky, an all too familiar gleam in his eye.

“Okay,” Lionus whispered back. “The previous window was in a small study or library. We can try to force that window open and slip in that way. Then, we slip down to this room, grab The Eye, and slip out the same way we got in.”

“Sounds good.”

Surprisingly, the window was not even locked and swung open easily.

Freaky snickered. “These rich folks are so trusting,” he whispered. “Serves them right to get robbed. Maybe they will learn something.”

“Quiet!” whispered Lionus as they slipped through the window.

The room was dark but enough light came through the open window to allow the thieves to make their way carefully to the door. After listening intently for any sounds, Lionus opened the door a crack and peeked out into a well lit but deserted passage. Lionus slipped out the door with Freaky on his heels. Quietly, they slipped down the passage and into the great hall. On a pedestal in the center of the room was their prize. Unable to contain himself, Freaky rushed over to it, snatched it up, and began to examine it closely, evaluating its obviously substantial value.

“We don’t have time for this,” whispered Lionus as he took The Eye and slipped it into a sack.

They hurried back to the passageway entrance and peeked out, happy to see that it was still deserted. They slipped down the passage and back into the small library. But, as they quietly closed the door behind them, a lamp suddenly flared to life revealing a very annoyed weasel and several burly guards.

“Ooops.” said Freaky.

“Ooops, indeed” said the weasel. “Did you really expect to be able to just slip into my house and run off with a priceless family heirloom?”

“No, no, no.” said Freaky. “It’s not what it appears at all.”

“Then what is it?” asked the weasel as he took the sack containing The Eye from Lionus and placed it on a nearby table.

Before Freaky could answer, Lionus spoke. “Actually, sir, it is what it appears.”

“Are you nuts?” whispered Freaky.

“No.” said Lionus. “Our only chance is to come clean.” Turning to the weasel, he continued. “You see, sir, we were caught at the market trying to lift a couple of baubles from a vendor and were taken before your brother, the magistrate. He said if we would steal this heirloom that was rightfully his, he would let us go. If we refused, he said he would have us hung. We figured we had nothing to loose and, well, here we are.”

“That sounds like my brother,” said the weasel. “You two” he continued, pointing at two of his guards “go ‘invite’ my brother to visit me immediately.”

“Yes, sir,” replied one of the guards as they both hurried for the door.

“Actually,” said the weasel returning his attention back to Lionus and Freaky, “I’ve known for some time that my brother was planning something like this. When I

received word from my informant in his office that it was to be tonight, I withdrew all the guards and had them simply watch to see what happened. Now, we'll just wait for my brother and see what he has to say for himself. But, your honestly at the last in telling me this may have just saved your lives."

After several minutes of silence, the quiet was broken by the shrill sound of the magistrate's voice raised in protest. Suddenly, the guards burst into the room all but carrying the magistrate.

"Your 'guest', sir," said one of the guards.

"Thank you. You are dismissed."

"You've gone too far this time! I'll have you jailed for kidnapping!" yelled the magistrate to his brother.

"I think not since it was you who forced these two to try to steal The Eye for you."

"I don't know what you are talking about. I have never seen these two before. What lies have they been telling?"

"The same ones my informant in your office has been telling."

"Humph. Anyway, it was not stealing," said the magistrate, "since The Eye rightfully belongs to me as the eldest son."

"Father left it to me because he knew you would bring disgrace upon the family."

"Preposterous!" bellowed the magistrate. "He was an old fool and fell right into your trap. But, I am no fool and I shall have what is rightfully mine."

In all the commotion, Lionus and Freaky had been all but forgotten.

"Freaky," whispered Lionus. "I think it might be a good time to take our leave of this house and city."

"I think you are right," whispered Freaky. "But, I think we should have something for our troubles."

"What?! Let's get out while the getting is good."

Checking to make sure the two weasels were still busy arguing, Lionus started for the door only to realize that Freaky was headed toward the table holding The Eye, still in the sack they originally tried to use to carry it off.

Deciding that he did not have time to reason with Freaky, Lionus reached out, grabbed the little fox, and threw him over his shoulder. To stifle the inevitable protest, Lionus reached back and wrapped his paw around the fox's muzzle as he headed for the door, down the passage, and out the door into the night. Lionus did not release Freaky until they were well on their way to the city gate.

"Are you crazy?" asked Freaky. "We could be rich now. They never would have noticed that The Eye was gone any more than they noticed us leaving. What is wrong with you? You've cost us a fortune!"

"Well," replied Lionus, "they would have noticed eventually that it was missing and they would have a pretty good idea where to find it. So, we would have had both of them after us, and possibly Nubis and the entire City Watch as well. This way, The Eye is still there and neither of them is likely to want the events of this evening to become public knowledge leaving us free to sneak off into the night with our skins still intact. Although, I would suggest that we add this city to our list of places not to visit for awhile, which is too bad because this is really a pretty nice place."

Freaky sighed and said "Well, I guess you *might* be right. It is a moot point now, anyway. As to where we are headed, I heard that there is a city, not far from here, where the locals will pay good money for water diviners. We could set up a nice little business there."

"We don't know anything about picking a good place to dig a well."

"Who does, really? I'm sure it's guesswork no matter who is doing it. Some are just luckier than others. Of course, the fine print in the contract would have to state that we didn't guarantee anything but ..."

Lionus just shook his head and let the little fox ramble on as they headed out of the city gate and down the road to their next misadventure.

The End