

Gift Of Bones

Wren was squatting in a alleyway near a street vendor selling figs and dates. He hated the taste of the things, but figured everybody else did, so no one should mind if a few went missing. At least that is how his seven year old logic allowed him to feel okay about stealing them.

His stomach rumbled as he saw his opportunity arrive in the form of a young woman carrying a baby in a sling. The young mother approached the stall and began talking with the vendor; her back was to him but the babies face was just visible over her shoulder. It looked right at him and smiled. Wren knew that now was his opportunity to swipe some food while everyone was occupied, but he smiled back anyway. This made the baby open its mouth in a wide single toothed smile. So, promptly wren began to make faces at it. He started by screwing up his eyes or enlarging his nose. Sticking his tongue out and other nonsense. The baby was on the verge of laughing and Wren knew he would have it with this last one. He closed his eyes and concentrated slowly he could feel his hair standing up in a fan at the back of his head much like a peacock. Wren then made his hair change from the normal dark brown color of the locals to a bright green, then red then blue. The baby burst out laughing Wren smiled, it had been a while since he had felt a burning happiness in his chest.

Then the screams started.

Demon! Monster! Help call the Keepers! There is a Shifter Here!

Wren snapped his Eyes open. The Screams were coming from the mother who had looked over her shoulder to see the cause of her child's laughter. Upon seeing Wren change his hair color, she had known what he was. *Curses*, Wren thought, *why did I have to change my hair*. He knew that was always the easiest way for someone to identify his kind. The preachers in the churches often spoke of what to watch for to know whether you neighbor is a demon spawn. Changes in hair color was on the top of the list.

He had to run. The Street vendor had already taken up the cry and her husband was coming from the house with a club. Escaping into the street was no longer an option as the crowd of shoppers was also turning very hostile. That was the other reason Wren had chosen this fig seller's alleyway to hide in. It had a back exit and many narrow turns that lead to other alleyways.

Wren rushed into motion sprinting back down the alley, as he ran he changed his hair back to the normal dark brown and reconstructed his face to look like that of a girls. The process took time especially since he was asking his body to do so much all at once. Up ahead Wren saw a small barrier of old crates and barrels flung carelessly across the alleyway. He Stopped the changes to his face for a moment and instead began growing more muscles in his legs taking the mass from

his arms and other parts of his body. His speed increased and as he came to the barrier he leapt over it not even stumbling as he landed. A good thing too because his pursuers were full grown

adults and they were gaining on him. His young short legs just couldn't keep ahead of their longer fully grown ones even enhanced as they were with the muscles and tissues from his arms and less vital parts of his body.

He smiled at himself as he neared a side path in the alley his face now fully changed into that of a young girl's. Although structurally his bones were the same the face was definitely different. Around this corner was an exit to the streets and crowds beyond, and now that his face was ready he could blend in becoming lost in the crowd. His smile disappeared as he turned the corner and caught sight of the alley's exit and what had been his escape path.

Men and women in bright blue robes were standing at the alley's entrance many were holding crossbows with those wicked bolts tipped with barbs meant to pierce bones and lodge into place. The shafts would have strings attached. These fine cords were incredibly strong and light. Steel silk he thought it was called. *No time for that now fool run!* He turned back to run but saw the men from before coming around the alley's corner. His heart skipped a beat but his feet didn't. He turned towards the alley's wall years of grim and dust covered the sandy bricks that made up the wall. By the time he reached it his fingers and arms were ready. His fingers having grown longer and smaller with finer points were able to grip the cracks in the brick with ease and he quickly made his way up the wall. Though not before a bolt cracked the stone near his face lodging into it. He made it a little higher but then felt a stone strike his back. The men from the alley had caught up to him before the Holy Hunters. Otherwise he would be getting hit by crossbow bolts right now not stones.

Finally his fingers felt the top of the wall and with a final heave he pulled himself up swinging his legs over the edge with him. He lay there taking a breath for a second while returning his hands and arms to normal placing their strength back into his legs he stood up and turned around only to find himself facing a loaded crossbow. His body wouldn't move, his eyes were fixed on that weapon that meant his capture, torture, and death. And then he saw the hands holding it.

They were small, delicate, with trembling fingers. He looked up from the weapon to see the girl holding it. She was young maybe a little older than him but not too much. Wren wasn't at the age where he noticed girls the way older boys seemed to notice them, but he did notice that this one had a kind face and was trembling as she pointed the instrument of his death at him. He felt his face change back into its natural form. She startled as she saw the change, Wren noticed her trembling increase and she bit her lip. Wren continued to stare at her watching for any movement that would signal his death, but she just stood there. He couldn't see her eyes for they were shielded by her hair. Wren heard scraping down below in the alley as the men tried to gain access to the rooftops. The girl looked towards the sound and that was when Wren made a run for it.

He sprinted across the roof top passing the girl, who sidestepped freighted, and ran for the edge of the roof jumping for the next roof. Suddenly he felt the searing pain in his leg. The girl had shot him in the leg, luckily missing his bones. Wren discovered this as he landed on the next roof top and was able to eject the bolt and string from his body by having his flesh open up around the side of his leg as he pulled the sting sideways. He stood up straight holding the bolt in his hands and examining it. Steel silk was supposed to be incredibly expensive. Wren looked back across the roof at the girl who was retching onto the roof while somehow still holding onto the crossbow. Wren looked down at the cord in his hand and smiled. *Finally some luck.* He clutched more tightly to the bolt and ran as fast as possible across the rooftop he felt a jerk on the string then herd a yelp from the girl followed by a clatter as the crossbow hit the wall of the alley that separated them . Wren quickly began coiling the cord up into loops across his shoulder until he had the crossbow at his feet. He picked it up and ran away from the girl as fast as he could, not looking back.

Chapter 2

The Signs of a demon spawn



These creatures appear as any other of Gods creations. Do not be fooled they are of the Devil and will devour your soul and steal it's vessel for their own.

One must always keep a watchful eye for they lie in wait among us as friends, neighbors , even kin for they can steal the form of anyone. So be wary and watch for these signs!



- *Can change hair color at will.*
- *Able to change form or appearance of face and body.*
- *Endure pain or harm that no normal person could withstand.*
- *Can be far stronger or faster than a person ought to be.*
- *Do not age unless they desire to.*
- *These creatures bear no scars.*



If you are suspicious that someone may be one of these creatures contact the nearest keeper or inform the clergy right away do not confront them yourself!

May THE GREATEST always watch over you.



*~Arch Bishop Prath Yosemite
Greatest of the Holy Hunters*

That night Wren studied the length of cord by the light of a tiny fire he had built in one of his hovels. This one was near the river that flowed through part of the city and was made from old crates and leaves though in reality it was more mud and clay than anything else. In the light of the burning refuse he could see all the tiny strands tightly braided together that made up the steel silk. It was possibly the most beautiful thing he had ever owned. As he handled the cord he came to the end that was tied to the crossbow bolt. The bolt its self was mostly clean but the cord had been stained red by his blood for about a foot of its length. He could remember the pain of it perfectly the searing pain, the hot blood running down his leg before he closed the vessels around the wound. He brushed his hand across the part of his leg where he was pierced by the bolt, scratching away flecks of dried blood. There was no mark on his skin from its passing, there never was. Wren had suffered many wounds in his short life but he had never had a mark to show for it, no scars, not so much as a scab. His body just fit back together after an injury.

As he sat remembering the pain he picked up the crossbow. It was much smaller than an ordinary one, *sized for a child* he thought. He closed his eye and recalled the image of the girl pointing it at him. He saw the trembling the nervousness, saw her vomit after having shot him. In the moment he had only concentrated on his own fear, only now did he realize she must have been afraid. *Courageous*, he thought, she saw him as a demon yet still stood firm. He concentrated on the image of her standing before him watching his face change. Her hair had obscured her eyes, black hair, not the dark brown of most people, and freckles on the nose and cheeks, *how odd*. To have fair skin and freckles with black hair, *unique*, he thought. Wren rummaged around his hideout until he found one of his prized possessions, a mirror. He held it up to his face, and in the firelight he changed it into that of a young girls with fair skin black hair and freckles. *Thinner eyebrows, more rounded cheeks, curses why couldn't I have seen her eyes*. The result resembled the girl from the roof very closely, but even if she had been posing for him he could not have matched her perfectly. The bones of their faces were too different and Wren could not make his bones change.

Looking at his imitation of the girl's face made Wren sad suddenly, He stared into the reflection and bit his lip as she had, He started to tremble the way she did when she had been holding the crossbow. Wren bent down and picked it up, holding it before him imaging pointing it at an evil demon before him. Wren could feel his fingers start to shake as the creatures face changed before his eyes. Wren closed his eyes and felt it all, trying to understand the motivations and emotions of another person. He would not become the loathsome creature they hunted, and this helped, understanding made him care, made him feel. Knowing them let him forgive them.

He put the crossbow down as he sat back down by the fire. This had been a very hard day. Wren noticed that his hands were still trembling, *odd I'm not trying to mimic the girl, why am I still shaking*, he asked himself. Sitting there he looked into the mirror again seeing her face and remembering, *that's right!* This had only been his second run in with the blue robes, the Holy Hunters. He was still shaken by the whole experience himself. This had been the closest yet he had come to getting caught. That frightened him, they frightened him. With their wicked crossbows, their long handled gaffs, and those bright blue robes. Wren had wrongfully thought

those would slow them down in his first encounter with them. They hadn't, he had ended up gaffed by a pair of them in the shallows of the river. He had gotten away by flattening out his feet and adding lots of skin and muscle creating fin like things for his feet. After kicking really hard he had gotten them to slip and he had been able to swim away. He had later learned that their robes were actually tied at the ends to their ankles, making them look almost like a puffy sail connecting from their necks and shoulders to their ankles. Wren thought the things should look silly, but they didn't when you saw a blue robe walking towards you, you just felt fear. The robe had a hood that they always wore up over their head and it had a scarf or cloth mask that covered the face up to their eyes. Wren had seen those masks up close, they were scary. He had asked a preacher once why they wore them, the answer had been obvious, "so the demon spawn cannot copy their faces of course," whispered the preacher in a very stern voice, he had then lectured Wren for an hour on the Holy Rights before giving him some bread, *nice man*, Wren thought replaying the memory in his head.

He put the mirror down letting his face reform to normal. His stomach rumbled again, and he placed his hand to it rubbing gently, partly out of hunger and partly for the warmth of it. He picked up the crossbow again, *could I use this for something*, how to get food with a crossbow. Few would buy one made for a child, and Wren couldn't image himself actually using it to mug someone. He set it aside and again grabbed the steel silk. *This though, this is definitely worth something, but who to sell it to?* As he counted off the lengths of cord he had which was about ten arm spans, a thought occurred to him. Wren realized he could lower himself from nearly anywhere to gain access to otherwise secure places. *I'm going to eat so much delicious food now*, Wren thought, the beginnings of a plan already forming inside his head.